

## The Initial Transitional Support (ITS) program: Implementation evaluation

Ofir Thaler, Paul K. Nelson & Mark V.A. Howard

### Aims

This study examines the experiences of stakeholders involved in implementing the Initial Transitional Support (ITS) program: Community Corrections officers, Gatekeepers and contracted Caseworkers. The study focuses on elements overseen by Corrective Services NSW, including the program's expansion from 19 to 32 sites.

### Methods

Online survey for supervising officers at all ITS sites (N=719; response rate 25%). Respondents from Original sites (n=100) and from Expansion sites (n=79) were compared using non-parametric tests. Interviews with Caseworkers (n=14) and Gatekeepers (n=14) at 15 ITS sites around NSW, analysed with a Framework Matrix approach.

### Results

Stakeholders gave predominantly positive feedback on the ITS, identifying benefits for a range of offenders and emphasising its coordinated delivery model. Survey respondents typically referred around 1 in 10 offenders under their supervision to the ITS, had referred both parolees and other offenders, and rated the program as helpful, unique, and impactful on case management. Interviews revealed facilitators of implementation including opportunities for informal stakeholder discussions, and the provision of brokerage funding; barriers included insufficient transport, and difficulty securing offender engagement. Interview and survey data revealed numerous indicators of implementation that were more favourable for Expansion sites than Original sites, and least favourable for Feeder sites (where the ITS was offered only by referral to other sites).

### Conclusion

Results from this mixed-method study show the ITS was well-regarded by a diverse array of stakeholders. Program features introduced or emphasised by the ITS expansion (including brokerage funding, stakeholder interaction, and capacity to accommodate Caseworkers) offer plausible explanations for these positive results, particularly in Expansion sites. The results reinforce both the challenging context and the value of collaborative effort in reintegration service delivery.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Recent corrections literature has increasingly recognised the challenges associated with offender reintegration and the importance of appropriate services, including welfare services, to its success (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Farabee, Zhang, & Wright, 2014; Kendall, Redshaw, Ward, Wayland, & Sullivan, 2018; Moore, 2012). Reintegration involves transitioning into the community from prison or community-based sentences (Griffiths, Dandurand, & Murdoch, 2007) and needs that may not be possible to comprehensively meet during routine offender supervision. For example, CRES research (Tran, Thaler, Chong, & Howard, 2019) suggests that Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) see supporting offenders' welfare as integral to the success of supervision but often outside their remit as a supervisor. This concurs with Community Corrections' advice to CCOs that their main role is to reduce the impact of crime on the community, and that supporting offenders' welfare is a secondary function of their work. Although this distinction is neither strict nor strictly enforced, it serves as a reminder that correctional supervision intersects with, rather than subsumes, the reintegration process.

As outlined in previous reports (Morony, Wei, Van Doorn, Howard, & Galouzis, 2019; Thaler, Nelson, Tran, & Howard, 2021), services aimed at supporting the reintegration of offenders have been run in many jurisdictions in correctional and community settings (Berghuis, 2018; Duwe, 2014). These services vary in complexity, including the number and type of needs that they target (Fox, 2014; Sotiri, 2016).

### The Initial Transitional Support program

As part of its Funded Partnerships Initiative (FPI), CSNSW introduced the ITS to help address offenders' needs in the community. Previous reports (Morony et

al., 2019; Thaler et al., 2021) have described the details of the service. In short, CCOs refer eligible community-supervised offenders with a medium-high or high risk of recidivism, as assessed by the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R; Andrews & Bonta, 1995), for support by ITS 'Caseworkers' who are employed by contracted non-government 'Service Providers'. Each referral should seek support with a small number of specific needs within one of ten domains, with Accommodation, Mental Health, and Alcohol and Other Drugs by far the most prevalent domains (see Thaler et al., 2021). The Caseworker assists the offender with these needs by identifying and coordinating services and support. The ITS is managed and coordinated at the office level by a Community Corrections staff member known as a 'Gatekeeper'. Participating Community Corrections offices are referred to as ITS sites.

The ITS was rolled out to 19 sites in 2014. These 'Original sites' included 6 'Feeder sites' in locations without a Service Provider; Feeder sites operated by referring offenders to an associated Original site in a location with a Service Provider. The program was then expanded in 2017 under the Department of Justice (now Communities and Justice) Strategies to Reduce Reoffending reforms, to support the then NSW State Priority reoffending target. The program expanded into 13 'Expansion sites' outside metropolitan Sydney, in recognition of the undersupply of post-release support for offenders in regional NSW. Sites were selected based on data identifying offices with the highest number of eligible offenders and consultation to ensure that they would engage and use the service. Expansion sites were restricted to locations with a Service Provider (no Feeder sites were added). The 32 ITS sites active at the time of our data collection in 2019 are listed in Appendix 1.

Along with the new sites, the ITS expansion made some modifications to the program delivery model. This included an explicit focus on Service Providers' ability to support disadvantaged populations,

especially Indigenous Australians and women. Consistent with the selection of Expansion sites noted above, CSNSW encouraged coordination between Service Providers and Community Corrections staff, and for Caseworkers to be colocated at their respective Community Corrections office where possible. Annual brokerage funding up to \$15,000 per site was provided for Caseworkers to make purchases for offenders to assist their pursuit of ITS goals, such as mobile phone credit to improve communication, or small household goods to improve stability.

## Research context

This is the third of CRES' projects evaluating the ITS, following analyses of recidivism outcomes and patterns of participation in the ITS. The outcome evaluation (Morony et al., 2019) compared offenders who had completed a period of support through the ITS at original sites between 2014 and 2017 (N=778) with similar offenders who had not. The evaluation did not find a general impact on reoffending or reincarceration. However, completion of the ITS did predict a small reduction in reincarceration for some subgroups of offenders, notably those who were supervised under community-based orders rather than parole.

A subsequent study (Thaler et al., 2021) examined patterns of task referral by CCOs, support provision by Caseworkers, and service use by offenders who were referred to the ITS. The study described the program as a 'viable channel for motivated offenders to access reintegration services' (Thaler et al., 2021), and identified implementation challenges including the extent of support that can be provided within the 12 week support period, and difficulties with offender engagement.

## Aims of this implementation evaluation

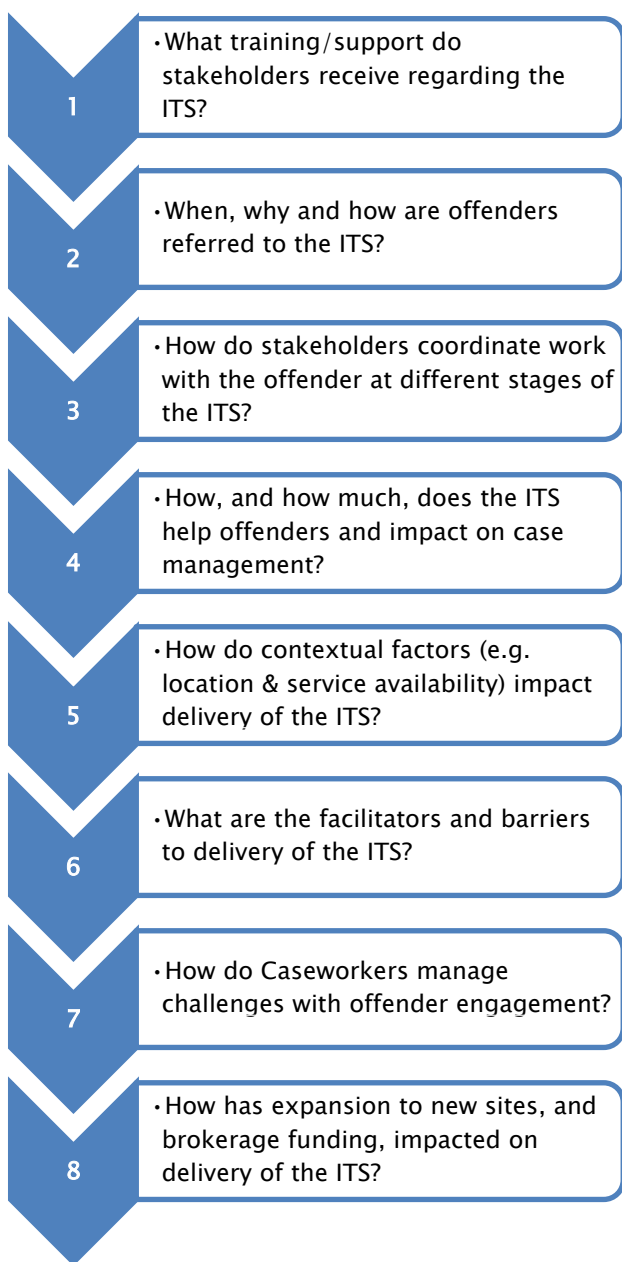
This study reviews the implementation of the Initial Transitional Support (ITS) program in all 32 sites

around NSW at which it is currently offered. In doing so, this study aims to develop insights about best practice implementation of the program, including process factors as well as program applicability to target offender populations and needs. In keeping with the coordination model of the ITS, whereby external Service Providers are encouraged to leverage their own practices and expertise to deliver outcomes for offenders, we focus on elements of implementation that are within CSNSW's remit rather than the specific services that these providers deliver to offenders (see Thaler et al., 2021).

This study examines the implementation experiences and perceptions of multiple stakeholders including CCOs, Unit Leaders, Gatekeepers, Caseworkers and the CSNSW Partnerships and Community Engagement unit (PACE). Information about the ITS was obtained through a review of program documentation as well as consultations with selected program staff and the CSNSW PACE unit. While we consider implementation factors from the time the ITS was introduced until the data collection date of November 2019, most research questions and areas of inquiry focus on current practice.

Additional analyses are also conducted to examine differences in implementation between original sites and ITS expansion sites. We considered this distinction important because ITS expansion sites were established several years after inception of the program, and are therefore expected to incorporate a developing understanding of best practice for the program. In this regard, exploring differences in ITS expansion sites relative to original sites may give additional insights about areas for improvement in implementation or the underlying program model as experienced by operational stakeholders. This approach is also in line with monitoring and evaluation priorities for the Department of Justice Strategies to Reduce Reoffending, which encompasses the ITS expansion.

Our main research questions are listed below.



## METHODOLOGY

Stakeholder data were collected via a survey of Community Corrections staff who supervise offenders who could be referred to the ITS, as well as interviews with staff involved in coordinating and delivering the ITS (Caseworkers and Gatekeepers). Information about the ITS was obtained through a review of program documentation as well as

consultations with selected program staff and the CSNSW PACE unit.

### Survey component

In October and November 2019, the research team implemented an online survey to collect data on perceptions and experiences of the ITS from Community Corrections staff. The survey consisted of 31 items including categorical questions, open-ended questions, and five-point Likert-type questions with labels for minimum and maximum values (e.g. 1 'Not at all effective' – 5 'Very effective').

### Sampling

The sampling frame consisted of the 719 eligible Community Corrections staff who directly supervise offenders at offices that offered the ITS (including Feeder sites; see Appendix 1) and could therefore refer offenders to the program. Completed surveys were received from a total of 179 respondents, including 100 in Original sites (of 494 eligible) and 79 in Expansion sites (of 225 eligible). Thus, the response rate was significantly higher for Expansion sites than for Original sites (35% vs. 20%,  $p < .05$ ). A further 11 surveys were received and excluded from the analysis due to their excessive missing data.

Responses were received from all 32 Community Corrections offices that offered the ITS. Most respondents were from offices in 'Major Cities' (49%) or 'Inner Regional' (46%), rather than 'Outer Regional' (6%) locations (see Appendix 1). Response rates were higher in Community Corrections' regional districts (Hunter, Northern, Southern, and Western; range: 26% to 29%) than in the three Sydney districts (13% to 24%).

Table 1 below breaks the sample down by role type. Nearly half (46%; 82/179) of the sample were in a regular Community Corrections Officer (CCO) role. Collectively, CCOs, Senior CCOs and Trainee CCOs comprised 73% of the survey sample; a further 18% were Unit Leaders, and the remainder included staff

in various eligible roles. The breakdown was similar to that in the survey population, with the exceptions of Trainees, who were over-represented in the Expansion site sample (19%; 6% in the Original site sample). Other survey data found that most respondents had been employed with CSNSW for 3 to 5 years (24%) or more (39%).

**Table 1.** Current role type of survey respondents

|  | n  | %<br>(N=179) |
|--|----|--------------|
| Unit Leader  | 32 | 17.9%        |
| Senior Community Corrections Officer                                 | 27 | 15.1%        |
| Community Corrections Officer  | 82 | 45.8%        |
| Community Corrections Officer Trainee                                | 21 | 11.7%        |
| Other: Case Manager, Coordinator, Client Service Officer, or Manager | 17 | 9.5%         |

### Survey analysis and reporting

Responses to open-ended survey questions were analysed in QSR NVivo 12 using a mix of theme analysis and content analysis approaches, depending on the nature of the data. Statistical analyses were undertaken in Stata 15.1. Responses were analysed descriptively for the full sample. Data for the final survey sample (N=179) indicated high rates of item completion. For each survey question described in this report, at least 87% of respondents provided a response to each question that they received. We include respondents who received a given question, including the small proportion who did not respond, in the denominator ('N' in figures and tables) for our percentage calculations (%). Deletion of observations with missing data may lead to serious bias in survey analysis (Rubin, 1987), and a more sophisticated treatment of missing data (such as multiple imputation) was out of scope for this study.

The primary analyses involved *a priori* subgroup comparisons of site type (Original versus Expansion sites) for all response variables using Chi-square tests. For these categorical data analyses, Likert-type variables were dichotomised, taking ratings of 4 or 5 as indicating a 'high' rating (versus 1 to 3 in aggregate, indicating 'not high'). Chi-square test results that were significant ( $p < .05$ ) are noted in the tables and described in text.

A second set of analyses was undertaken with the subset of Likert-type variables that, when dichotomised (i.e. high vs. not high), did not differ significantly by site type. These analyses used Mann-Whitney tests to compare ratings (range: 1 to 5) by site type and are reported where ratings from Expansion site respondents tended to be higher or lower than ratings from Original site respondents. These analyses ensure that variation by site type is more fully examined. Finally, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to assess whether ratings on one Likert-type response variable tended to be lower or higher than ratings on another Likert-type variable.

### Interview component

The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of 28 staff in specialist ITS roles (Caseworker or Gatekeeper) across 15 sites during October 2019. Interviews were conducted by phone using interview guides that focused on staff experiences of coordinating, managing and providing support through the ITS to offenders in their Community Corrections office.

### Sampling

A purposive sampling approach was used to identify sites that could provide a broad representation of the different types of Community Corrections offices where the ITS is delivered. A total of 15 ITS sites were included: 9 Expansion sites and 6 Original sites. In all, 28 interviews were completed, including 17 with interviewees from Expansion sites and 10 with those from Original sites. These interviews covered 6 of the

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7 Community Corrections districts: Hunter (8), Western (7), Northern (5), Southern (4), Sydney Central (2), and Sydney South West (2), and sites serviced by each of the contracted Service Providers.

Interviews included staff in specialist ITS roles: 14 Community Corrections staff members operating as Gatekeepers, and 14 Caseworkers employed by the Service Providers contracted to deliver support through the ITS. Both the Gatekeeper and Caseworker were interviewed in 13 sites. In two other sites, only one of these could be reached for an interview.

### **Interview data procedure and analysis**

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewee. Interview transcripts were analysed in QSR NVivo 12 using a modified Framework Matrix approach (Macfarlan, 2020) to identify common themes. This approach was used due to the small subgroups considered, which would make systematic quantified thematic or content analysis unreliable.

## **RESULTS**

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We now present the results of this study, divided into five themes: training and support; referral; coordination during the support period; perceived helpfulness and impact of the ITS; and, barriers and facilitators of implementation. Each theme is introduced with a list of the topics explored with survey respondents (supervising officers) and interviewees (Caseworkers and Gatekeepers). Subheadings are used to denote sub-themes, and italic text highlights major findings relating to each sub-theme.

### **Training and support**

Survey respondents were asked about their exposure to, and experiences of, ITS training and support for supervising officers, especially in relation to processes surrounding referral and service delivery.

Interviewees were asked for feedback on this training and support, as well as the training and support provided to Caseworkers and Gatekeepers to fulfil their specialist ITS roles.

### **Training and support for supervising officers**

*Stakeholders gave positive feedback about the training, support, and information on the ITS that supervising officers received. Stakeholders commonly saw it as frequent and helpful, especially in regards to understanding the program's eligibility criteria and referral process.*

As shown in Table 2, similar percentages of survey respondents noted that they had received documentation (74%) or training (72%) for the ITS; and slightly fewer (63%) reported that they had received both. Most survey respondents had received training or documentation for the ITS in the last 6 months. For Expansion site respondents this tended to be more recent, with half (49%) receiving training or documentation in the past month (compared with 28% for Original sites;  $p < .05$ ).

Survey respondents typically reported having monthly (or more frequent) discussions about the ITS as a means of support and information about the program, most prominently with Caseworkers (78%) but also with colleagues (usually the Gatekeeper) and in staff meetings. Expansion site respondents tended to report more frequent discussions about the ITS, including monthly or more often at staff meetings (62%, vs. 42% Original sites;  $p < .05$ ). When Feeder sites were excluded, the differences between Expansion sites and other Original sites were not significant.

The vast majority of survey respondents rated the training and information they received as 'helpful' or 'very helpful' for developing their understanding of the program. Training/information tended to be rated more helpful in explaining issues relating to client selection and referral, than for explaining the support available through the ITS ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 2.** Experiences of ITS training and support

|  | Responses | n   | %<br>(N=179) |
|--|-----------|-----|--------------|
| <b>Formal sources</b> (N=144)                                    |           |     |              |
| Documentation  | 135       | 107 | 74.3%        |
| Training   | 135       | 103 | 71.5%        |
| <b>Recency</b> (N=144)   |           |     |              |
| Past month   | 144       | 54  | 37.5%*       |
| 1 to 6 months ago  | 144       | 47  | 32.6%        |
| >6 months ago  | 144       | 43  | 29.9%        |
| <b>Monthly or more frequent discussions</b> (N=144)              |           |     |              |
| At staff meetings  | 139       | 74  | 51.4%*       |
| With colleagues  | 142       | 95  | 66.0%*       |
| With Caseworkers   | 141       | 112 | 77.8%        |
| <b>Training/information rated as helpful<sup>a</sup></b> (N=144) |           |     |              |
| Selecting clients  | 138       | 116 | 80.6%        |
| Referral process   | 135       | 121 | 84.0%        |
| Nature of support  | 139       | 107 | 74.3%        |
| Coordinate support   | 135       | 103 | 71.5%        |

*Note.* 'N' and % include question recipients who did not respond (range: 0–13). \*  $p < .05$  (higher for Expansion sites vs. Original sites). a. Rating  $\geq 4$  on 5–point scale

Interviewees (Caseworkers and Gatekeepers) noted there was high turnover in their roles. Many had been working in other roles or offices when the ITS was introduced in 2014 (or during its 2017 Expansion) and thus were unable to comment on initial efforts to provide ITS information or training to other staff. However, those who were there at the time commonly noted that they arranged training sessions to introduce the ITS to supervising officers and to other Community Corrections staff. They explained that these sessions focused on practical issues of the eligibility criteria for the ITS as well as the process of referring offenders for support.

Caseworkers' and Gatekeepers' responses aligned with supervising officers' experience that the most common form of ongoing support provided for supervising officers are discussions, rather than formal training or documentation. These were usually informal discussions with Caseworkers about eligibility and available supports, often regarding a specific offender prior to their referral. Many interviewees also highlighted the value of formal discussions conducted as a regular agenda item in staff meetings. They generally used these meetings to update supervising officers about the status of ITS in their office, especially in terms of capacity, and to discuss eligibility of offenders.

*"Well, at... one of the more recent staff meetings the ITS worker talked to the floor about the wording [to use in referrals]... We talked about the amount of people that we're taking on, what type of tasks. So, generally it's more ad hoc but it's [also during] staff meetings."*

– Gatekeeper

### Training and support for Caseworkers and Gatekeepers

*Caseworkers and Gatekeepers described mixed experiences of their initial ITS training but spoke positively about their ongoing support from Service Providers and CSNSW.*

Gatekeepers commonly stated that they received practically no direct training to begin their work as the Gatekeeper for their office. These usually noted that they only received documentation to explain the program, the role, and the FPI portal (the repository of data on services provided by contracted organisations). Those who did receive training explained that this was usually from the previous Gatekeeper and was almost solely focused on using the data portal. Most Gatekeepers, including some who did receive training, felt that they were unprepared for the role when they began, but often

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noted that they learned ‘on the job’. Some argued that simply working at it is the best way to learn and develop in the position.

Gatekeepers saw having the Caseworkers based in their office as extremely helpful to developing their understanding of the ITS. Those in offices where the Caseworker was colocated, or at least spent a substantial amount of their week, commonly noted that this provided more opportunities for formal and informal discussions about the ITS, which helped them clarify issues around the operation of the program. Gatekeepers commonly reported that they seek support from the Caseworker or the PACE unit if they had questions about aspects of the program or the data portal. Most Gatekeepers who mentioned PACE were generally positive about the support provided by unit staff as well as their availability.

Caseworkers reported that they received a multi-day training seminar as part of their induction into the role. According to them, the seminar, provided by the service provider employing them, focused on practical issues of eligibility criteria and data collection, and was helpful in these regards. Many felt, however, that it was not sufficient to provide them with a clear and comprehensive understanding of the program. Caseworkers commonly noted that they were not very confident at the beginning of their work in the role, and also highlighted the importance of learning ‘on the job’, often noting that this is how they learned the bulk of the job. Caseworkers with substantial previous experience in case management and welfare support commonly stated that this experience was important to helping them feel confident at the beginning, and then to effectively undertaking the role.

Caseworkers generally identified their regional team leader as their main source of support, often highlighting the importance of having them available to answer questions and assist in making difficult decisions.

*“...we have a team leader [that] we catch up regularly and he’s always available, and very good in answering any questions or providing any information that we may need... So [I’ve] definitely got that support to speak with somebody...”*

– Caseworker

## Referrals to the ITS

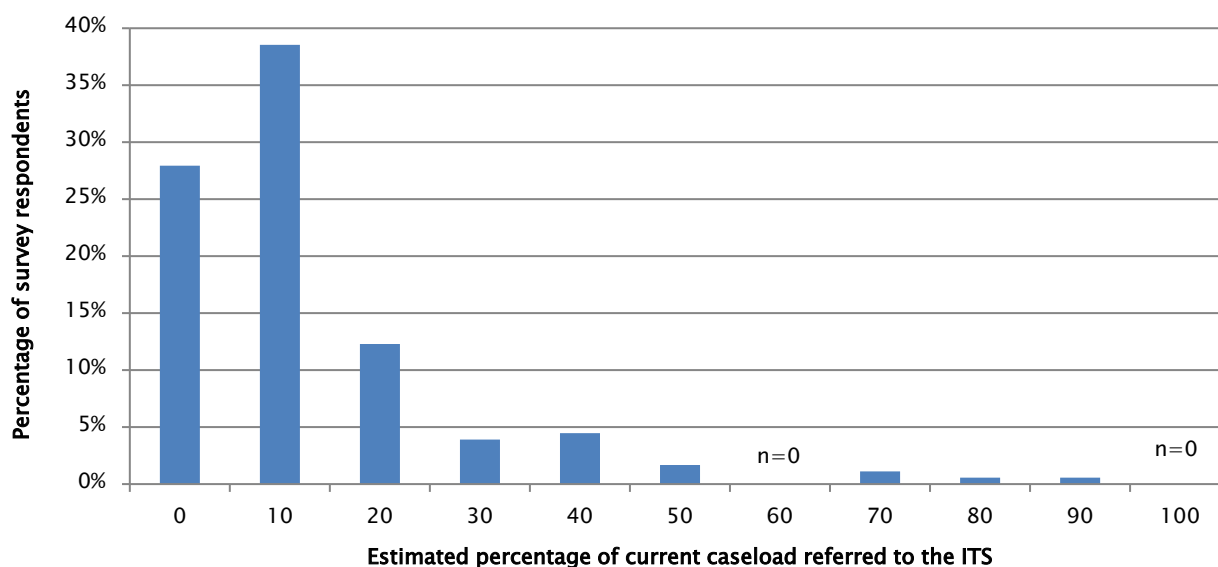
Survey respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of their current caseload that they had referred to the ITS. They were also asked which types of offenders they referred and, for parolees, at what point in their supervision they made their referrals. Interviewees were asked to outline the process of referring an offender to the ITS, including the time it took and who was involved. Interviewees and survey respondents were both asked to outline their understanding of the purpose of the ITS.

### Type, frequency and timing of referrals

*Supervising officers reported referring a small percentage of their caseloads to the ITS, with the vast majority generally referring offenders within the two months following release from custody.*

Of the 179 survey respondents, 150 (84%) had referred offenders to the ITS. Figure 1 shows that of their current caseload, respondents typically estimated that they had referred around 1 in 10 offenders to the ITS. Respondents from Expansion sites typically referred a higher proportion of their offenders (median 15%) than from Original sites (median 11%). This disparity is partly due to the very low levels of referral from Feeder sites (median 0%).



**Figure 1.** Estimated percentage of current caseload referred to the ITS (N=179)

*Note.* '0' includes never referred (n=24) or previously referred (n=26); Missing data (n=16) not shown in figure.

Table 3 shows that nearly half (48%) of supervising officers had referred both parolees and offenders on community orders to the ITS; a further 20% had only referred parolees, 13% had only referred offenders on community orders, and 16% had not made a referral. These proportions were similar for Original and Expansion sites, whereas referrals of offenders on community orders were relatively less common in Feeder sites (45%, vs. 65% in other sites).

Respondents who had referred to the ITS (n=151) typically prioritised 2 or 3 subgroups of offenders when considering whether to make a referral to the ITS. As Table 3 shows, almost all respondents prioritised offenders according to their high (93%) or medium/high (72%) risk of reoffending. Around half (52%) also reporting prioritising offenders who had recently been released from custody. Fewer respondents prioritised Indigenous offenders (21%, although this was higher at Expansion (28%) relative to Original (15%) sites) and fewer still prioritised other subgroups such as females, domestic violence

offenders or those who had not been recently released from custody.

Respondents who referred parolees to the ITS usually did so soon after their release from prison, and only one in five respondents usually referred offenders prior to their release from custody.

Respondents who referred offenders on community orders (n=109) rated how much their referrals were informed by 'needs identified at the initial assessment' and 'crises arising at some point in the supervision process': referrals were strongly informed ( $\geq 4$  out of 5) by initial needs for 71% of respondents and later crises for 60% (70% in Expansion sites; 51% in Original sites). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to compare ratings of both reasons and further elaborated differences between site types: Original sites emphasised offenders' initial needs ( $p < .001$ ), but Expansion sites placed similar emphasis on both reasons ( $p = .87$ ).

**Table 3.** Features of referral to the ITS

|  | Responses | n   | %<br>(N=179) |
|--|-----------|-----|--------------|
| <b>Order types of ITS referrals</b><br>(N=179)                     |           |     |              |
| Parole & community orders  | 174       | 86  | 48.0%        |
| Parole only  | 174       | 36  | 20.1%        |
| Community orders only  | 174       | 23  | 12.9%        |
| Neither (have not referred)  | 174       | 28  | 15.6%        |
| <b>Most recent referral</b><br>(N=144)                             |           |     |              |
| Past month   | 144       | 54  | 37.5%*       |
| 1 to 6 months ago  | 144       | 47  | 32.6%        |
| > 6 months ago   | 144       | 43  | 29.9%        |
| <b>Subgroups prioritised for referral<sup>a</sup></b><br>(N=151)   |           |     |              |
| High risk  | 148       | 140 | 92.7%        |
| Medium/high risk   | 148       | 109 | 72.2%        |
| Just released from custody   | 151       | 80  | 53.0%        |
| Indigenous   | 148       | 32  | 21.2%~       |
| Domestic violence  | 148       | 23  | 15.2%        |
| Women  | 148       | 16  | 10.6%        |
| Established in community   | 151       | 7   | 4.6%         |
| Other <sup>b</sup>   | 151       | 25  | 16.6%        |
| <b>Usual referral timing for parolees<sup>c</sup></b><br>(N=122)   |           |     |              |
| Pre-release  | 117       | 27  | 22.1%        |
| <1 month post-release  | 117       | 67  | 54.9%        |
| ≥1 month post-release  | 117       | 27  | 22.7%        |
| <b>Reason for community order referrals<sup>d</sup></b><br>(N=109) |           |     |              |
| Needs at initial assessment  | 105       | 77  | 70.6%        |
| Crisis during supervision  | 106       | 65  | 59.6%*       |

*Note.* 'N' and % include question recipients who did not respond (range: 3–5). \*  $p < .05$ , ~ $p = .05$  (higher for Expansion sites vs. Original sites). a. Respondents who had made referrals to the ITS; b. Other includes multiple needs, complex needs, and homeless; c. Respondents who referred parolees; d. Rating  $\geq 4/5$ ; Respondents who referred offenders on community orders.

## Referral processes

*Stakeholders' descriptions of the referral process commonly indicated that discussions between supervising officers and Caseworkers helped make referrals more relevant and realistic.*

Caseworkers and Gatekeepers both noted that referrals often came through supervising officers' discussions with them about the needs of an offender; however this was much more the case for Caseworkers. Interviewees explained that officers identified offenders who they thought might benefit from ITS support, and usually consulted with the Caseworkers about whether they were appropriate referrals for the ITS, and whether the Caseworker had availability. Interviewees noted that such consultations are helpful to ensuring that referrals were relevant, realistic and meaningful.

Caseworkers pointed out that discussions about the details that need to be included in the referral form were particularly helpful. They said they explained to the officers the details that were required in task descriptions in order to make them realistic and helpful, and the information required about the offender in order to ensure that the Caseworker can best help them. According to interviewees, such conversations were most commonly only with the Caseworker, though some noted that officers spoke with the Gatekeepers instead, and a few noted that both the Caseworker and the Gatekeeper were involved in such discussions.

Gatekeepers' views of their roles were critical to whether or not they were involved in this pre-referral coordination. Some described themselves as an important, or even critical, mediator between the caseworker and supervising officers, enabling coordination and information sharing. Others saw themselves as clerks who simply entered referral and exit data into the FPI portal.

Interviewees noted that Gatekeepers would typically receive referral forms from officers and would then review the capacity and availability of the Caseworker, sometimes directly discussing this with them. Gatekeepers noted that, in situations where Caseworkers did not have available capacity to take on another offender, they often put the offender on a waitlist. They commonly did this by entering an offender's details into the FPI portal and not making their referral 'active', or by entering these details into the portal only when capacity became available.

Caseworkers felt that wait times for referred clients to begin support were usually short, with effective coordination between Caseworkers and Gatekeepers commonly assisting in managing capacity and new referrals. The most commonly cited reason for delays in starting support was difficulty engaging offenders, such as failure to return calls or attend meetings.

### **Stakeholders' conceptualisations of the program and its purpose**

*Stakeholders' descriptions of the program were diverse, with reintegration, recidivism reduction, higher risk offenders, and supplementing of routine supervision featuring strongly.*

Survey respondents varied in their views of the purpose of the ITS and which offenders the ITS could support, with no single view being shared by a majority of respondents. Furthermore, the issues mentioned were not mutually exclusive, with some survey respondents providing multiple explanations for the program's purpose. Around one third of respondents noted reintegration, or support for offenders exiting custody more broadly, as the purpose of the ITS. A similar proportion of respondents highlighted the program's ability to help offenders with 'additional' (often welfare-related) issues that are commonly integral to the success of Community Corrections supervision, but are outside the remit of Community Corrections Officers.

In their reasons for referring offenders to the ITS, many survey respondents cited offenders' high or medium/high recidivism risk (one of the program's eligibility criteria), and in some cases related this to the potential for Caseworker support to reduce their risk of reoffending. Many respondents said that they referred offenders for the specific types of support provided by the ITS (in particular, referral to and engagement with services) or for support with needs in specific domains, typically Accommodation, Mental Health, and/or Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD). Very few respondents explicitly related their referral reasons to offenders' histories of imprisonment (e.g. provide immediate post-release support; find housing for parolees).

Caseworkers and Gatekeepers who discussed the purpose of the ITS were mostly aligned with survey respondents' views, offering varied conceptualisations of the program. Several explained that they see the support as complementing what is provided as part of routine Community Corrections supervision. Others explicitly mentioned reintegration or post-release support for parolees as a focus. Caseworkers and Gatekeepers commonly saw the ITS as a way of reducing the likelihood of reoffending by high-risk offenders.

*"[The purpose of the ITS is] to provide support to the corrections officer with achieving their case plan... complementing the corrections officer case plan and working towards to achieve the outcomes in that case plan."*

– Caseworker

## Coordination during the support period

The following sections explore how stakeholders coordinate work with the offender at different stages of the ITS, including all interaction between Caseworkers and Community Corrections staff during an offenders' support period. The 'support period' begins when an offender's referral is accepted by the Caseworker and ends when the offender is officially exited from the service; it does not include coordination of a referral, or regular training unrelated to a specific case.

### Coordination between supervising officers and Caseworkers/Gatekeepers

*Stakeholders highlighted opportunities for coordination between supervising officers and Caseworkers during the support period as particularly important and helpful for the effective conduct of the ITS.*

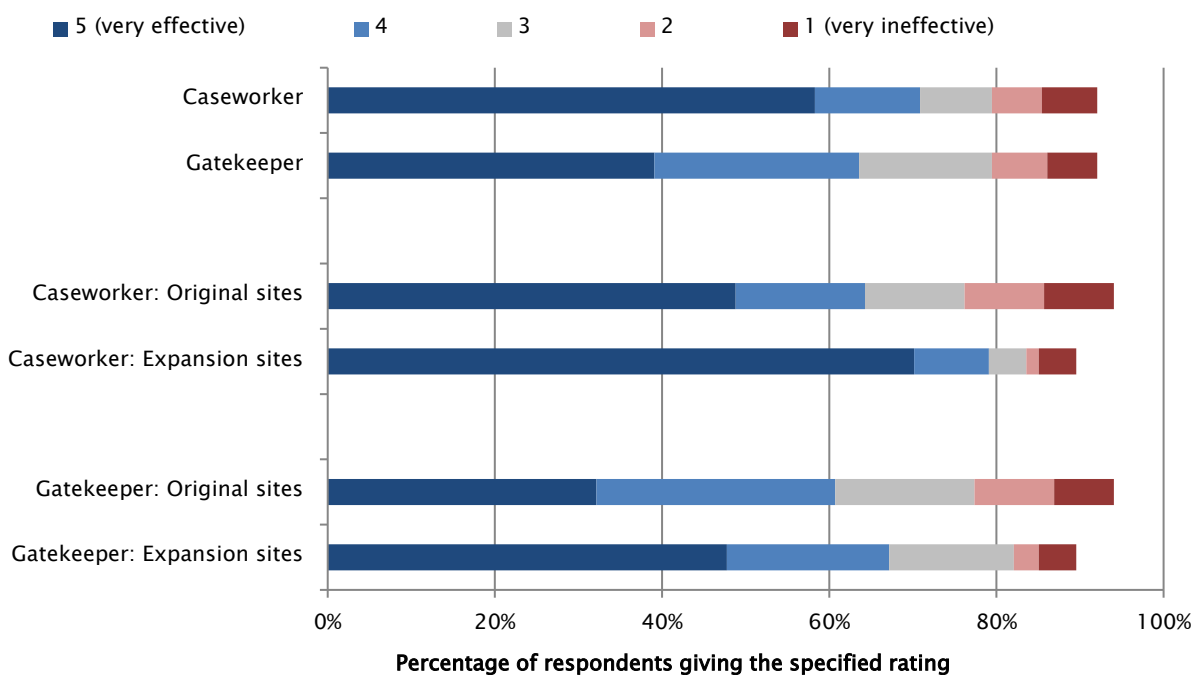
As Figure 2 shows, survey respondents generally gave high ratings ( $\geq 4$  out of 5) for coordination with Caseworkers and Gatekeepers. Ratings of coordination were highest for Caseworkers in

Expansion sites (and significantly higher than for Caseworkers in Original sites;  $p < .05$ ).

Caseworkers generally reported ongoing coordination with supervising officers over the course of the support period, mostly through informal discussions. These discussions generally involved information sharing about changes in the status of offenders, as well as their changing needs. Several Caseworkers noted that during the early phase of the support period, when they need to engage offenders in the support, this can also involve coordination of joint activities such as supervision and home visits. Caseworkers assessed coordination as mostly effective and important to engaging offenders and helping them achieve their goals.

Gatekeepers saw the overall extent of their coordination with CCOs as minimal, but nonetheless effective in ensuring that the support provided is timely and appropriate. They explained that such coordination was most commonly only during the early stages of referring offenders to the ITS or while deciding whether to extend or end the offender's ITS support period. According to Gatekeepers, during

Figure 2. Supervising officers' ratings of effectiveness of coordination (N=151)



the referral stage, coordination was focused on reviewing the eligibility of referred offenders, the appropriateness of tasks, and the Caseworker's capacity. During the support period, Gatekeepers were sometimes involved in exchange of information between Caseworkers and supervising officers, especially regarding offenders' housing, drug use, criminal activity, and reincarceration. Despite the limited nature of the coordination, Caseworkers typically saw it all as helpful and important to effective referral and ongoing information sharing.

Some Caseworkers felt that there were gaps in information sharing between supervising officers and themselves that, at times, limited their ability to support offenders. They explained that the supervising officers sometimes did not notify them about changes in the status of offenders they were supporting, which led to wasted time and misdirected support. Caseworkers highlighted the value of regular attendance at the Community Corrections office, as well as colocation, to effective coordination with supervising officers. They explained that spending time at the office provides opportunities for information sharing and unplanned discussions with the supervising officers. This enabled better information sharing and agreement on important aspects of the support.

Interviewees had minimal experience of ITS implementation at Feeder sites. The few who had worked with a Feeder site conveyed divergent experiences of implementation. One Caseworker reported making weekly visits to their associated Feeder site to support offenders and discuss referrals with officers, while one Gatekeeper stated that they rarely engaged with officers from their Feeder site.

### **Coordination between Caseworkers and Gatekeepers**

*Caseworkers and Gatekeepers commonly described their coordination with each other as limited, but*

*helpful for information sharing and decision-making around offender referral and exit.*

As they did with supervising officers, Gatekeepers rarely involved themselves in active coordination of offenders' support with Caseworkers. Most interviewees assessed coordination between Caseworkers and Gatekeepers as minimal. However, they saw it as effective in fulfilling its core roles: information sharing, and facilitating decisions regarding referrals and exit. They often noted that coordination worked well during referral stages and at the point of deciding on offenders' exit from the program. These were generally planned discussions, often involving the supervising officers.

When coordination and information sharing did occur during the support period, it mostly involved regular emails about the progress of offenders, or updates about the status of offenders when it has changed. In some cases, this was improved by impromptu discussions to share information, especially when Caseworkers were colocated or regularly visited the Community Corrections office.

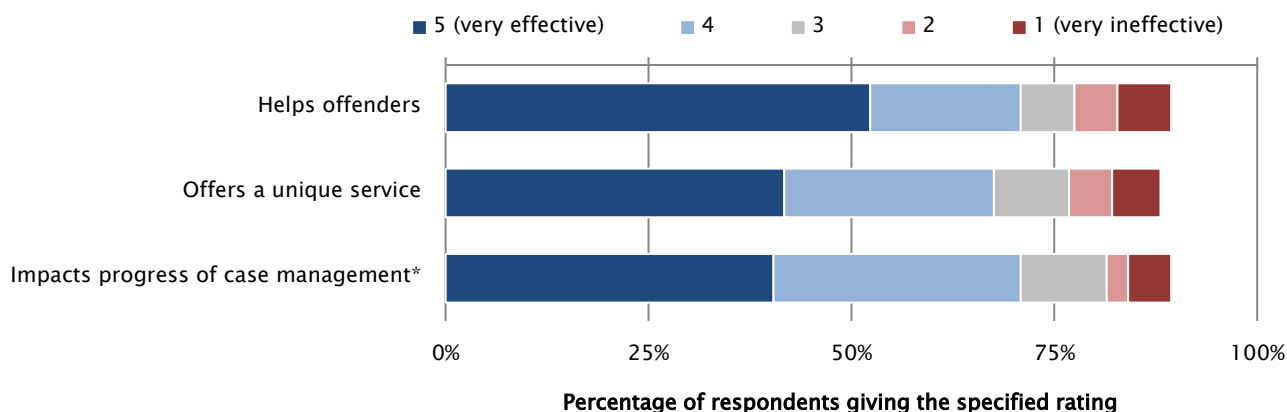
## **Perceived helpfulness and impact of the ITS**

In the sections below, we examine stakeholders' perceptions of the helpfulness of the ITS for different offender subgroups and domains of need, and of its impact on case management, and how contextual factors (such as location and service availability) affect the delivery of the ITS.

### **Perceived helpfulness and impact on case management**

*Most stakeholders reported that the ITS is helpful for offenders, provides unique support, and impacts on their case management, especially in relation to welfare needs, which are outside the scope of Community Corrections supervision.*

Figure 3. Survey ratings of the ITS (N=151)



Note. \*For this item, 5 indicates 'very strongly' and 1 indicates 'not at all'

Survey respondents and interviewees who were involved with coordinating and delivering the ITS saw the service as generally helpful in supporting offenders' welfare needs, as well as processes of routine supervision by Community Corrections. Interviewed Caseworkers and Gatekeepers commonly noted that the ITS complemented the work of Community Corrections, and that it helped offenders deal with the issues in their lives that were making stability and reintegration difficult to achieve. Many saw this assistance as providing support that supervising officers cannot due to the scope of their role and available time.

Figure 3 presents supervising officers' ratings of the ITS on three measures. At least two-thirds of supervising officers gave high ( $\geq 4$ ) ratings about the extent to which the ITS is perceived to help offenders (71%), offer a service that could not otherwise be accessed (68%), and impact on the progress of case management (71%). These proportions did not differ significantly by site type, but ratings out of 5 (as presented in the Figure) tended to be higher in Expansion sites than in Original sites ( $p < .05$ ). Ratings also tended to be lowest for Feeder sites.

### Perceived helpfulness by type of offender

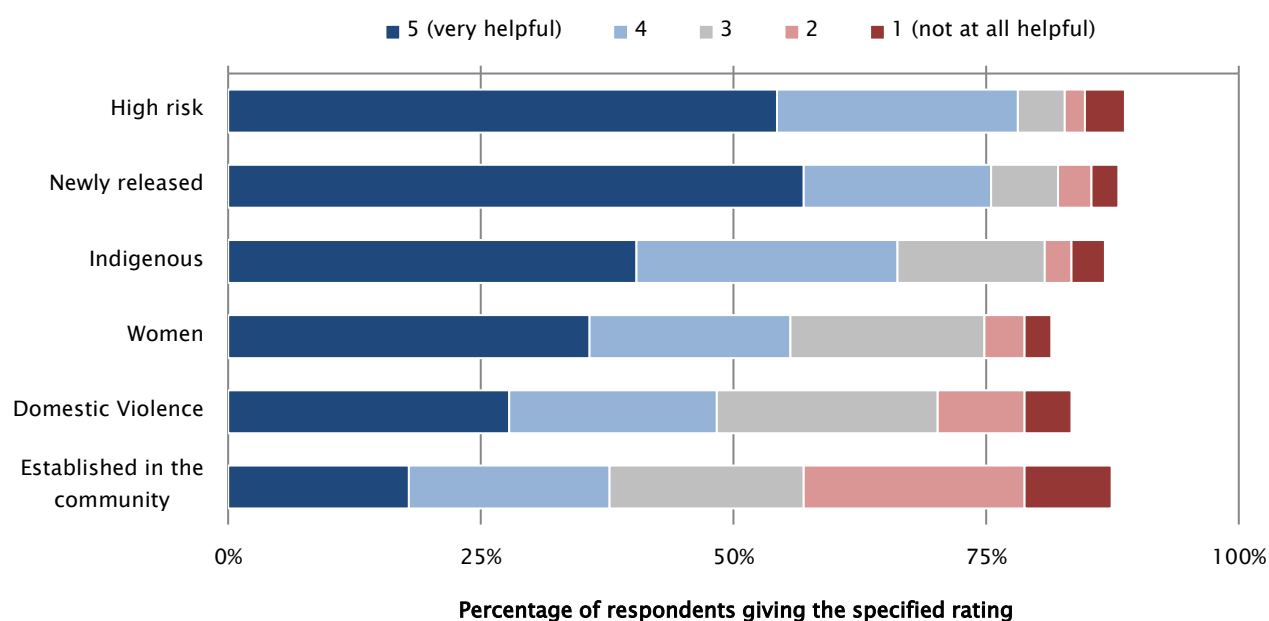
*Stakeholders rated the ITS as most helpful for high risk and newly released offenders.*

Figure 4 presents survey respondents' ratings of the extent to which the ITS helps different offender subgroups. Respondents rated the ITS as most helpful for 'high risk' and 'newly released' offenders, and least helpful for those 'established in the community'. The proportion of respondents giving a high rating did not differ by site type so we compared their ratings (out of 5); ratings were significantly higher in Expansion vs. Original sites ( $p < .05$ ).

Several interviewees explained that offenders who are recently released from custody experience a pronounced impact of services provided through the ITS, as they often have more instrumental needs such as gaining housing and developing positive post-custody supports and activities. Interviewees reported impressions that offenders who are already established in the community were commonly entrenched in their setting and tended to have particularly complex needs. Caseworkers and Gatekeepers also highlighted the value of ITS support for the same domains as those highlighted by officers, especially accommodation. Many expressed beliefs that the ITS has particular value in dealing with the acute housing needs of offenders.

When discussing which offenders are most likely to benefit from the ITS, Caseworkers and Gatekeepers noted that the interest and engagement of the offender was a determining factor in the support

Figure 4. Survey ratings of the ITS' helpfulness for offender subgroups (N=151)



process. Both argued that offenders who are willing to engage with the Caseworker and are interested in making changes in their lives are, by far, more likely to succeed. They mentioned that Caseworkers may spend time 'chasing' after those who do not engage, but that these are overall unlikely to succeed in the service. Supervising officers also expressed similar perceptions about the importance of offender engagement to the impact of ITS support throughout the surveys.

Most Caseworkers and Gatekeepers did not see large differences between the way ITS supports and impacts different demographic groups, such as Indigenous offenders and women offenders. Some, however, noted that women were more likely to be difficult to engage and support, because those who were eligible for the ITS were often in particularly difficult circumstances relative to eligible men.

*"...women offenders...generally, their trauma far exceeds that of the male, mental health is often much, much more extreme. They're much more resistant to trusting me..."*

– Caseworker

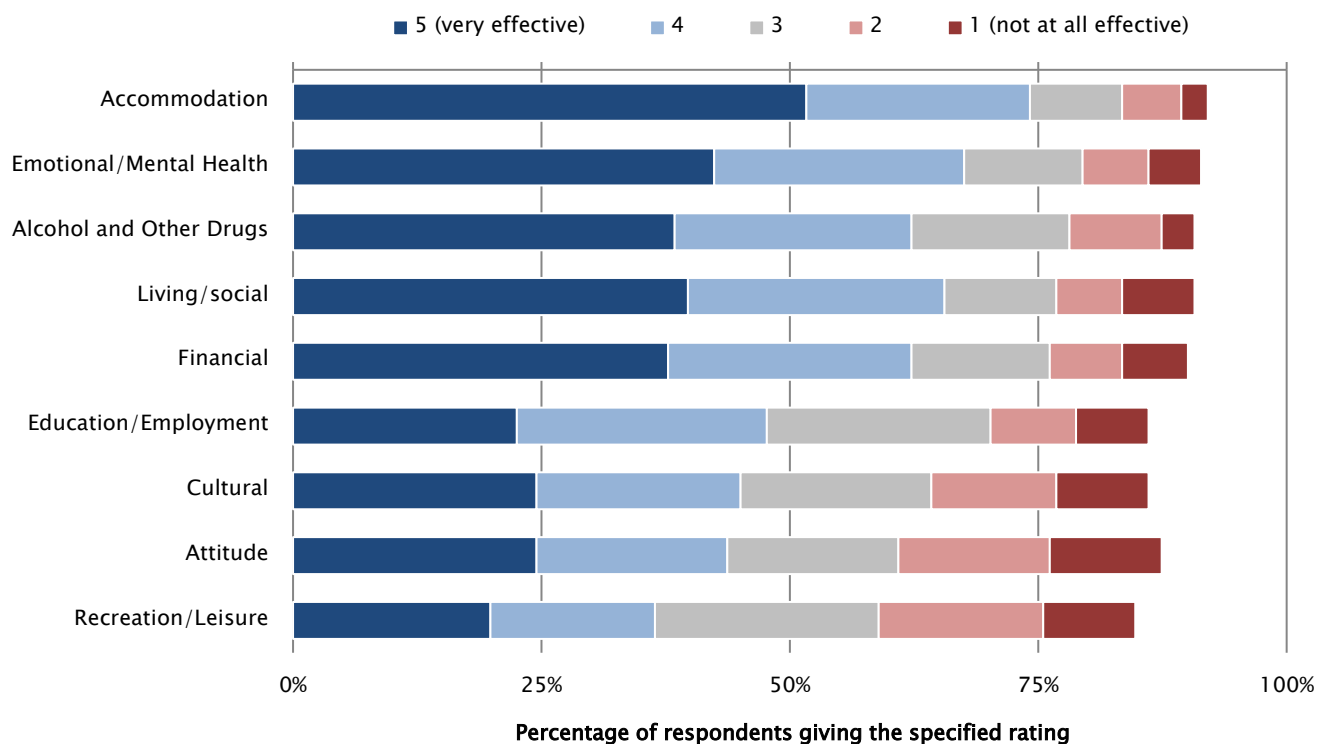
### Perceived helpfulness by domain of need

*Stakeholders rated the ITS as more effective for the most commonly referred domains of need (Accommodation, AOD and Mental Health).*

Survey respondents were asked for their perceptions of how effective the ITS was in supporting offenders across the 10 domains of need for which offenders could be referred for support (see Figure 5). Survey respondents saw the ITS as effective in addressing offenders' needs for most domains, particularly so for the three domains involved in most ITS referrals (Accommodation, AOD and Mental Health). Respondents made particularly positive ratings for Accommodation, with more than 80% rating the ITS as effective in helping with Accommodation needs.

Other domains typically received lower ratings, particularly those receiving few referrals (e.g. Attitude, Culture). Ratings for most domains were higher for Expansion sites. High ( $\geq 4$ ) ratings were significantly more likely in Expansion vs. Original sites for AOD (73% vs. 54%), Mental Health (78% vs. 60%) and Attitude (67% vs. 37%), ( $p < .05$ ).

Figure 5. Survey ratings of the ITS' effectiveness with domains of need (N=151)



## Facilitators and barriers of delivery

In the sections below we report on the facilitators and barriers of delivery of the ITS described by stakeholders, including the impacts of challenges with offender engagement, expansion to new sites, and brokerage funding on delivery of the ITS.

### Opportunities for interaction between Caseworkers and supervising officers

*Stakeholders felt that frequent interaction between Caseworkers and supervising officers helps enable better referrals and coordination.*

Caseworkers and Gatekeepers highlighted the benefits of having the Caseworker at the Community Corrections office frequently. They reasoned that regular access to the Caseworker enables and encourages more informal discussions, providing supervising officers and Gatekeepers with advice to ensure they understand the ITS, as well as the requirements of the referral process. They also saw

this as prompting better information sharing about the changing status and needs of the offender. Interviewees highlighted the value of having the Caseworker available to attend staff meetings to provide updates about cases and capacity, and give additional information or training about the program itself. They also noted the benefit of having the Caseworker available for meetings with the offender together with the supervising officer, especially if the offender comes in at an unexpected time.

### Difficulty engaging offenders

*Caseworkers were concerned about how time spent encouraging offenders to engage with the ITS reduces the time available to them to provide support.*

As noted previously, supervising officers and staff in specialist ITS roles saw engagement with offenders as critical to the success of the ITS. Caseworkers and Gatekeepers pointed out that encouraging and enabling engagement is often very time consuming,



especially in the case of more resistant offenders. One common example of this is when offenders fail to respond to phone calls or show up for appointments. Interviewees noted that they actively worked to counteract the risk of disengagement by ensuring that offenders had phones (at times buying them phones or credit with brokerage funding), visiting their homes, and waiting for them to arrive at the Community Corrections office. They reported that some of these measures were done in coordination with the supervising officer in order to leverage offenders' legal requirements, such as attending supervision sessions. They explained, however, that repeated attempts to contact the offender, including phone calls, home visits and waiting at the office can affect their overall workload and time available to directly support offenders. Caseworkers were concerned that this could limit the overall impact of the ITS among target offenders, and increase the need for extensions of support periods.

### Brokerage funding

*Caseworkers and Gatekeepers saw brokerage funding as enabling offender engagement and improving delivery of the program.*

Brokerage funding was seen by both Caseworkers and Gatekeepers as a very helpful, and at times critical, feature of the ITS. Both saw brokerage funding as a valuable tool for engaging offenders with the ITS and preventing drop-outs. Caseworkers reported that they used the funding to help remove practical barriers to engagement, like lack of bus fare to reach appointments, and phone credit to call and coordinate ITS support appointments. They also said the funding acted as an incentive for engagement by paying for things that the offender wanted, like cheap household goods or certain activities. The vast majority of Gatekeepers were aware that brokerage funding was available as part of the ITS, and expressed beliefs that this was also common knowledge among supervising officers. Some felt that it encouraged officers to refer offenders to the

ITS, as it increased the likelihood of the support achieving its aims. However, most generally felt that it did not affect supervising officers' views of the function of the ITS, and did not lead them to make referrals specifically to access funding.

### Inadequate transport

*Caseworkers named inadequate transport as a barrier to engagement and service use, particularly in regional areas, but one that could be mitigated by driving offenders to appointments.*

In discussions about issues specific to regional and rural areas, some interviewees suggested that a shortage of services in these areas affected the ability of Caseworkers to find appropriate support for offenders. However, Caseworkers in regional areas, in particular, mentioned that many offenders have difficulty accessing services due to lack of transport. In these areas, infrequent and poorly connected public transport can lead offenders who live away from services, and cannot drive, to miss appointments. Caseworkers often saw this as a major barrier to engaging offenders with services, and could further limit their interest in addressing important needs in the community. Several Caseworkers argued that being able to drive offenders to appointments could be pivotal from this perspective. One noted that they already do this and it has become a critical function of the ITS at their office. Others pointed out that organisational policies limit their ability to do so.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine experiences of implementing the ITS among stakeholders who refer offenders to, deliver and coordinate the program, including supervising officers and staff in specialist ITS roles (Caseworkers and Gatekeepers). Themes about the implementation of the ITS derived from our interview and survey results are discussed below.

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## The coordination model

In general, stakeholders saw the ITS as making a positive contribution to case management of offenders. A primary theme associated with these perceptions was the coordinated service delivery model between CSNSW and external Service Providers. Stakeholders viewed the ITS as being designed to provide services that complement formal supervision by Community Corrections, and address needs that are important to offenders' stabilisation in the community but are often outside the capacity or remit of supervising officers.

Correspondingly, stakeholders viewed processes of coordination between staff groups and agencies to be one of the most important and positive areas of implementation for the program. They noted the value of opportunities for formal and informal communications between staff groups for multiple purposes, including developing an understanding of the program and eligibility criteria, facilitating referrals, and gathering information about participating offenders as well as maintaining their engagement. These opportunities appear to be bolstered by the establishment of specialist Gatekeeper staff roles, and more recently by co-location of Caseworkers at Community Corrections offices. Differences across sites in the level and nature of interaction between staff groups may be associated with developments to the program implementation model over time; this will be discussed in greater detail in later sections.

## Implementation challenges and facilitators of offender engagement

Gatekeepers, Caseworkers and supervising officers saw the willingness of an offender to engage with the ITS as an important factor in their likelihood of benefitting from support. Offender engagement was also viewed as a major challenge to implementing the program. Respondents highlighted difficulties engaging offenders with referrals, and Caseworkers

in particular expressed concerns that time spent engaging offenders 'eats into' time available to deliver support. A previous study of the ITS (Thaler et al., 2021) also found that Caseworkers commonly made many attempts to reach offenders and engage them in the ITS, often without success. Interviewees in the current study noted that this process is time-consuming and can limit their overall capacity.

Difficulty with offender engagement is a common challenge to providing reintegration support services across jurisdictions (e.g. Berghuis, 2019). At the same time, respondents in this study gave insights about features of ITS best practice that can help to address the issue. One feature, as discussed earlier, is close coordination between supervising officers and Caseworkers, which helps tailor support and methods of approaching offenders to an offender's needs and preferences. Coordination can also allow the Caseworker to leverage the offender's legal requirements to increase the likelihood of attendance and even compliance.

Other features that are commonly seen as ways to increase engagement are brokerage funding and access to transport. Brokerage funding was seen by stakeholders as an incentive for inmates as it pays for things they want and need, while access to transport was seen by stakeholders as increasing compliance by simplifying access to services. A focus on implementation factors that facilitate offender engagement may be particularly important for the ITS because the program targets higher risk offenders, who tend to be more prone to attrition from programs and services (e.g., Olver, Stockdale, & Wormith, 2011).

## Target offender populations and needs

Stakeholders' responses indicated that their perceptions of target offender cohorts for the ITS are well aligned with program policy. They most commonly reported prioritising offender referrals on the basis of their risk of recidivism, and also

expressed beliefs that the program was most likely to be of benefit for higher risk offenders. Specific offender demographics, such as women and Indigenous offenders, were less consistently prioritised for the ITS. A previous outcome evaluation has indicated that Indigenous offenders may be particularly likely to benefit from participating in the ITS (Morony et al., 2019). The findings may indicate opportunities for tailoring referrals to preference criteria, in addition to eligibility and suitability criteria, that are oriented towards this and other vulnerable offender cohorts.

Whereas similar numbers of supervising officers reported that they had referred parolees and community-based offenders at some point, they tended to prioritise those who had recently been released from custody. Respondents also perceived these offenders as more likely to benefit from the ITS relative to offenders who were established in the community. This is consistent with ITS policy that gives precedence to transition support for parolees while also accommodating community-based referrals where appropriate. Further study is needed to understand how stakeholders' perceptions fit with Morony et al.'s (2019) finding of a significant effect of the ITS on recidivism for offenders on community orders, but not for parolees.

Given the transitional focus of the program and stakeholders, it is notable that pre-release referrals were not more common; only one in five officers typically referred offenders before their release from custody. In line with the throughcare principle of reintegration (Kendall et al., 2018; Sotiri, 2016), best practice implementation of the ITS and ongoing offender engagement may potentially be supported by further developing or streamlining processes by which program participation can be informed by pre-release planning.

Stakeholders across the staff groups tended to view the ITS as having the greatest utility in supporting offenders' accommodation needs; they also

commonly perceived the program as helpful in supporting needs relating to mental health, AOD, leisure/social functioning and finance. Earlier studies indicated that these are also the most common domains identified in referrals to the ITS (Morony et al., 2019; Thaler et al., 2021). This pattern of results is consistent with the complementary role of the ITS to Community Corrections supervision in supporting primarily welfare-oriented and instrumental needs in the community. The common association between ITS and accommodation support could also account for perceptions that the program is more helpful for newly released parolees, who may be more likely to have acute housing needs compared to those already established in the community. Notwithstanding these findings, there are indications that securing stable housing for offenders in the ITS is often difficult (Thaler et al., 2021; see also Sotiri, 2016). An implication is that accommodation is often perceived as a foundational function of reintegration case management, and programs such as the ITS may be facilitated in multiple ways by coordination with other initiatives and resources that support offenders in this area.

We note that respondents' perceptions of the helpfulness of the ITS to various offender populations and needs may not be independent of the prevalence of their referral or case management activities. For example, supervising officers may view the ITS as well suited to higher risk offenders or to addressing accommodation needs because these are the factors they most commonly apply when making referrals or are most familiar with in the context of the program. On the basis of the available evidence it may not be appropriate to conclude that the ITS is not, or would not be effective for offender groups or needs that are less commonly prioritised in referrals.

## Implementation and the ITS expansion

To better understand implementation of the ITS it was important to consider the staged roll out and expansion of the program over time. In part, we

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accounted for this by examining differences between Original and Expansion sites. We expected that Expansion sites would have benefited from accumulated knowledge about best practice at the time of their establishment under the Strategies to Reduce Reoffending, some four years after inception of the program. Consistent with this, respondents from Expansion sites tended to rate various aspects of ITS implementation, including training and the level of coordination between stakeholders, more favourably compared to those from Original sites. Respondents at Expansion sites were also more likely to view the ITS as helping to address offenders' needs across various domains.

Observed operational differences between the sites may account for some variation in the perceived quality of implementation and potential impacts of the ITS. Respondents from Expansion sites received more frequent visits from Caseworkers compared to those from Original sites, which as described earlier emerged as a key facilitator of the ITS model. Officers at Expansion sites also prioritised differently in their referrals, placing greater emphasis on Indigenous offenders and crises emerging during community-based supervision. This is notable given previous suggestions that the ITS may be more likely to benefit Indigenous offenders (particularly females) as well as those experiencing discrete breakdowns in functioning, as compared to those requiring more comprehensive processes of post-release reintegration (Morony et al., 2019).

Expansion sites may also have benefited from the improved clarity and streamlining of general ITS policies and procedures that is likely to develop over time and experience, relative to sites that were part of the initial roll out of the program. The longer operational lifespan of Original sites may similarly result in greater opportunities for implementation drift though change fatigue and local adaptations (Breitenstein et al., 2010), relative to Expansion sites.

An additional factor is that this study showed relatively consistent poor results for Feeder sites, which were only introduced as part of the initial phase of the ITS. Several measures of implementation were least favourable for Feeder sites, and these were associated with officers' low ratings of coordination with Gatekeepers (who were usually based elsewhere) and Caseworkers (with whom they also described having fewer opportunities to interact). This is consistent with other evidence for the value of close coordination between stakeholders at sites, and appears to support the reduced focus on establishing new Feeder sites and conversion of existing Feeder sites as part of the ITS expansion.

### **Data recording issues and Gatekeeper training**

Gatekeepers who were interviewed for this study reported that they received little formal training to prepare them for their role. Several reported that they were required to develop knowledge of related processes and systems while 'on the job'. While they did not explicitly associate this with data entry, it may have some bearing on previous findings for relatively inconsistent data quality and methods of recording program activity in the FPI portal (Thaler et al., 2021). As it is Gatekeepers who generally provide the central point of data entry for the program, recording issues may be due to Gatekeeper error in their use of the portal or how they understand the data definitions specified for the portal.

A related possibility is that formal policies and procedures around ITS case data recording may be limited, which could result in the observed inconsistencies while also imposing challenges on providing effective training to staff in specialist ITS roles. In either case, implementing measures to improve consistency in the definition and entry of program data may have operational benefits, such as supporting communication between the various

stakeholder groups, in addition to facilitating ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

## Study limitations

Some limitations of this study are noted. The survey sample was not demographically stratified or weighted, and therefore may not be representative of the wider population of Community Corrections staff who can refer offenders to the ITS. Respondents were drawn from all 32 ITS sites and their roles reflected those of the wider population. Respondents from sites in Sydney were under-represented, consistent with the much higher response rate for Expansion sites, which tended to be regionally located.

Another limitation is the informal nature of the analysis of the interviews. Due to the small number of interviews with staff in each role (14 Caseworkers, 14 Gatekeepers), formal thematic or content analysis involving quantification of text elements would not have enabled meaningful analysis. The 'framework matrix' approach was selected as viable alternative because it provides a method to break down text data in a somewhat systematic way, while still enabling informal analysis in context.

Finally, we note that this study aimed to convey the experiences and perceptions of staff who are involved in coordinating and delivering the ITS. As such, feedback from survey respondents and interviewees are subjective, and may not align with other indicators of program delivery and impact such as administrative data sources.

## Conclusions

Interviews and surveys conducted with stakeholders across staff from Community Corrections and external Service Providers provided generally positive feedback about the ITS program and its implementation. There were also indications of continuous development to best practice over time, notably in relation to the ITS expansion initiated in 2017. A key feature of the ITS in this regard is high

levels of coordination between supervising officers, Caseworkers and Gatekeepers in supporting referral and service delivery processes. Stakeholders acknowledged that implementation of the ITS is critically influenced by offender engagement, and identified various methods of accounting for this such as use of brokerage funding, securing transport, and leveraging shared knowledge about and relationships with offenders across the staff groups.

Opportunities for continuous improvement of the ITS include optimising access and information flow between Caseworkers and Community Corrections staff, and reducing the impact of engagement challenges on core Caseworker support time and workload, as well as ensuring that these and other developments to best practice are consistently applied to ITS sites across the state.

## Acknowledgements

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## APPENDIX 1

### Community Corrections ITS sites in 2019

| Site                     | Feeder site <sup>a</sup> | Remoteness <sup>b</sup> | Service Provider |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| ORIGINAL                 |                          |                         |                  |
| Leichhardt               | <i>Sydney</i>            | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Mt Druitt                | <i>Penrith</i>           | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Parramatta               | <i>Blacktown</i>         | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Campbelltown             | –                        | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Newcastle                | –                        | Major Cities            | Salvation Army   |
| Wollongong               | –                        | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Wyong                    | –                        | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Dubbo                    | <i>Wellington</i>        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Lismore                  | <i>Casino</i>            | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Tamworth                 | <i>Armidale</i>          | Inner Regional          | Salvation Army   |
| Bathurst                 | –                        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Kempsey                  | –                        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Wagga Wagga              | –                        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| EXPANSION                |                          |                         |                  |
| Gosford                  | –                        | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Lake Macquarie           | –                        | Major Cities            | arbias/ACSO      |
| Maitland                 | –                        | Major Cities            | Housing Plus     |
| Albury                   | –                        | Inner Regional          | Centacare        |
| Goulburn                 | –                        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Grafton                  | –                        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Muswellbrook             | –                        | Inner Regional          | Housing Plus     |
| Nowra                    | –                        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Orange                   | –                        | Inner Regional          | Housing Plus     |
| Taree                    | –                        | Inner Regional          | arbias/ACSO      |
| Broken Hill <sup>c</sup> | –                        | Outer Regional          | Housing Plus     |
| Griffith                 | –                        | Outer Regional          | Centacare        |
| Moree                    | –                        | Outer Regional          | Housing Plus     |

a. Feeder sites are Original sites where the ITS was not delivered but offered by referral to another ITS site

b. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2016). Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS): Vol. 5 – Remoteness Structure (Cat. 1270.0.55.005). Canberra: ABS.

c. Included in the 2014 ITS roll-out but categorised as Expansion site after changing Service Providers in 2017

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Aug 2020 Understanding the spectrum of domestic violence: Risk factors, treatment pathways and recidivism among offenders who commit intimate partner or non-intimate partner violence

Aug 2020 Process evaluation of the High Intensity Program Units (HIPUs): Within-treatment change

Aug 2020 Evaluation of the Practice Guide for Intervention (PGI): Relationship between offender needs and PGI use in case planning and supervision practice

Dec 2019 Effectiveness of the Initial Transitional Support (ITS) Service 2014-2017

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May 2019 Blending care and control in delivery of the Practice Guide for Intervention (PGI): An assessment of the quality of dual role relationships between offenders and supervising officers in the community

Feb 2019 Process evaluation of the Practice Guide for Intervention (PGI): Staff perceptions of community supervision in the context of change

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Corrections Research, Evaluation & Statistics  
Governance & Continuous Improvement  
Corrective Services NSW  
GPO Box 31  
Sydney NSW Australia  
Telephone: (02) 8346 1556  
Email: [research.enquiries@justice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:research.enquiries@justice.nsw.gov.au)