

APPENDIX

Further Information on Better Pathways Provided by Corrections Victoria to Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria on 2 August 2006.

“The development, implementation and evaluation of *Better Pathways*”

The launch of *Better Pathways* was the culmination of over two years of extensive research, data analysis and investigation into the needs of women offenders in Victoria. The strategy is informed by a comprehensive evidence base, including analysis of the demographic and offending profiles of women prisoners and offenders, mapping of the key drivers of the increase in female prisoner numbers, female prisoner population projections and an evidence based review of effective community based programs for female offenders.

- 1.1 Our research highlighted the need for a multi-disciplinary approach to addressing the increase in women’s imprisonment in Victoria with input from a range of criminal justice and human services agencies. A range of government and non-government stakeholders offered invaluable advice and feedback on the development of *Better Pathways*. A Reducing Women’s Offending Inter-departmental Committee (IDC) was established in July 2003 to guide the development of the *Better Pathways* strategy. The membership of this committee included representatives from the Victorian Government departments of Justice, Human Services, Victorian Communities, Education and Training, Premier and Cabinet, and Treasury and Finance. A number of these departments have formed partnerships with CV to jointly and collaboratively deliver a range of initiatives under *Better Pathways* (eg, Office of Housing – post release and bail initiatives, Department for Victorian Communities – employment initiative and Courts – bail initiative).
- 1.2 The Strategy has also been developed in consultation with key non-government stakeholders through the mechanism of the Women’s Correctional Services Advisory Committee (WCSAC). This Committee consists of non-government representatives with expertise in the area of women’s corrections, including the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO), Melbourne Citymission, Caraniche, the Federation of Community Legal Centres and Somebody’s Daughter Theatre Company (see Appendix A).
- 1.3 As stated in the *Better Pathways* policy document (Department of Justice, 2005), the *Better Pathways* strategy has been developed in response to the increase in the number of women in prison over the last decade, in particular the 84% increase between 1998 and 2003. The Victorian Government provided \$25.5m for the implementation of *Better Pathways* over the four years 2005/06 to 2008/09, including \$18.3 for programs to support women prisoners and offenders and \$7.2 for improvement to the infrastructure at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.
- 1.4 The strategy is outcome based. It includes 37 initiatives to address the increase in women's imprisonment. Of these, 28 are specific projects to be implemented over the next four years, with a focus on reducing women's imprisonment, re-offending and victimisation. These initiatives address a range of areas of need shared by women who come into contact with the criminal justice system, incorporating policy development,

program and service delivery, infrastructure projects, workforce training and development, and research.

- 1.5 CV believes that the range of initiatives to be delivered under *Better Pathways* is a proactive response which will explicitly address many of the issues raised in the allegations.
- 1.6 The development and implementation of *Better Pathways* has been and will continue to be subject to intense scrutiny from within government and from external stakeholders. As a key initiative of A Fairer Victoria - the Victorian Government's four-year \$788.2 million plan to address systemic disadvantage and to improve the lives of all Victorians – CV is required to regularly report on progress of *Better Pathways* initiatives to the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC), Social Development Cabinet Committee (SDCC), Justice Executive Committee (JEC) and others. CV has also established a Project Board and a cross-government implementation steering committee and is required to report to these committees on the progress of *Better Pathways* initiatives.
- 1.7 WCSAC will continue to play a major role in overseeing and providing input into the development of strategy initiatives. Currently, their input is informing the development of key principles to guide the Women's Correctional Services Framework. Also, as indicated in the draft EOCV Report, the Ombudsman Victoria will request regular reports on implementation, as will a range of other stakeholders through CV's quarterly Stakeholder Forums.
- 1.8 A formal evaluation of the *Better Pathways* strategy will be undertaken throughout the life of the strategy, to determine its success in reducing the number of women who enter prison custody and the number of women who return to the correctional system after re-offending. An Evaluation Framework has already been developed to inform the tender requirements for the independent evaluation strategy for *Better Pathways*.

Key initiatives of *Better Pathways* - progress to date

- 1.9 Initiatives detailed below represent those commencing in 2005/06 and 2006/07, the first two years of four years of change implementation under *Better Pathways*.

Women's Correctional Services Framework.

- 1.10 The development of the Women's Correctional Services Framework is a key initiative of the *Better Pathways* strategy. It is intended that the Framework will assist in meeting the aims and objectives of the Strategy, by enhancing the gender responsiveness of Victoria's correctional services system to reduce the risk of re-offending among women prisoners and offenders. *Better Pathways* acknowledges that in order to maximise women offenders' rehabilitation outcomes, CV endeavours to ensure that all aspects of correctional practice are sensitive to women's specific gender and cultural needs.
- 1.11 Some examples of how correctional services have already been adapted to better meet the needs of women include the establishment of a residential Mothers and Children program to enable children up to school age to live with their mothers in custody, and a pilot to trial an alternative way of conducting personal searches of women prisoners.

- 1.12 The purpose of the Framework is to articulate an overarching approach to the development and delivery of correctional services for women, in order to sustain these and other developments over the longer term. It will also identify opportunities to further enhance the gender and cultural responsiveness of the correctional system to meet the unique needs, characteristics and life experiences of women offenders.
- 1.13 The Framework will include:
- a policy statement setting out guiding principles and objectives to direct a gender responsive approach to correctional services for women. Areas to be addressed are likely to include offender management, program design, service delivery, workforce planning and development and monitoring and evaluation.
 - a work plan detailing a number of priority projects, in the context of the aims of the *Better Pathways* strategy, to improve the gender responsiveness of correctional services for women as directed by the policy statement. For example, the Framework will address issues such as classification, disciplinary processes, risk assessment and the use of force.
- 1.14 The EOCV has been provided with a draft-in-confidence copy of the draft principles and objectives developed for the Framework. The development of the draft principles and objectives has been informed by an analysis of legal and policy instruments relevant to women and women offenders, including distillation of key messages from international human rights law, state and federal equal opportunity legislation and other Victorian government strategies designed to improve wellbeing for women in the community. The draft principles and objectives also draw upon the existing evidence base developed for the *Better Pathways* strategy, including a comprehensive review of effective correctional responses for women offenders and a detailed statistical profile of women prisoners and offenders in Victoria.
- 1.15 The development of the final Framework document, including the workplan for priority projects to be progressed for women prisoners and offenders, will be informed by extensive consultation with key stakeholders including the Women's Correctional Services Advisory Committee, CV head office and regional staff, community based service providers and women prisoners and offenders. A number of consultations with these groups have already taken place.

Flexible Intensive Support Unit (mental health unit).

- 1.16 *Better Pathways* has provided funding to establish a 20-bed Flexible Intensive Support Unit at DPFC to meet the needs of women prisoners experiencing mental illness. The building design phase for this Unit is almost complete. The Unit will provide accommodation and specialist care, including 24 hour psychiatric nursing staff, to:
- women with serious acute mental illness who are awaiting transfer to Thomas Embling Hospital;
 - women in the recovery phase following an acute psychotic episode, who are returning from Thomas Embling Hospital;

- women with long term severe personality disorders who are not certifiable under the parameters of the Mental Health Act and are therefore ineligible for transfer to Thomas Embling Hospital;
- women at risk of suicide or self-harm who have been placed under observation by the High Risk Assessment Team at DPFC; and
- elderly women prisoners who require specialist aged care services, including for example, women with dementia (i.e. aged care beds).

1.17 The effectiveness of specialised mental health units, which provide a ‘therapeutic community’ to care for prisoners with serious mental illness and/or long-term personality disorders who are unable to cope within the general prison population but who are either not in need of, or eligible for, inpatient care, has been demonstrated in numerous prison systems. Specialised mental health units have been shown to reduce prison incidents, suicide and self-harm attempts and the use of crisis and inpatient care as well as improving the quality of life of prisoners.

1.18 A working party comprising Corrections Victoria (Women's Policy & Health Services Units), Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) and the Department of Human Services, has been established to develop a service delivery model for the Unit - which will include the development of a health & custodial staffing model. The model is scheduled to be completed by the end of July 2006. The Flexible Intensive Support Unit will receive significant additional clinical/psychiatric and allied health staffing support upon the unit becoming operational in the later half of 2006-07.

1.19 In order to provide additional clinical/psychiatric and allied health services to this population of women prisoners at DPFC this financial year, an interim service delivery model is currently being developed. The implementation of this interim model will result in additional clinical/psychiatric, allied health and custodial staff being employed at DPFC to commence service delivery as soon as practically possible.

Medical Centre Upgrade.

1.20 The Medical Centre at DPFC was originally designed to provide medical services for up to 125 prisoners. As a facility operating 24 hours per day, 7 days per week including public holidays, it has been under considerable pressure to meet the demands for health services to the increased number of women prisoners accommodated at DPFC. The limited consultation and office space within the Medical Centre is utilised by up to thirty health professionals including nursing staff, general practitioners, a pharmacist, a dentist and dental nurse, a ward clerk, a psychiatrist, a podiatrist, an optometrist, a maternal child health nurse and a physiotherapist.

1.21 *Better Pathways* has provided funding to expand and upgrade the Medical Centre to include a multi-purpose room, additional consultation rooms, a dispensary system for the Opioid Substitution Therapy Program and a post-supervision dose supervision area, additional office space and medical and stores area. The design phase for this upgrade is almost complete.

Visits Centre Upgrade.

1.22 One of the most significant implications of women's imprisonment, given women's primary role in childrearing and care-giving, is the impact on dependent children and other family members. It is also acknowledged that while separation from children can have a negative impact on rehabilitation outcomes for women, the existence and maintenance of family relationships, including mother-child relationships, can significantly reduce the risk of re-offending and have a positive effect on women's reintegration post-release. In acknowledging the importance of providing an environment that is supportive of these outcomes, *Better Pathways* has provided funding to significantly upgrade and expand the general indoor visiting area as well as the size of the existing visit cubicles. The design phase for this upgrade is almost complete.

New Multi-Purpose Programs Building.

1.23 Effective rehabilitation – which reduces recidivism – is a critical element of reducing crime and custodial numbers. The Rehabilitation Framework (funded as part of Corrections Victoria's Long Term Management Strategy – CLTMS) aims to deliver a new service delivery model based on targeted and coordinated package of effective programs which promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism. The efficacy of this new approach to offender management, however, is dependent on adequate supporting infrastructure. Despite more than doubling prison bed capacity at DPFC since its inception, there have been limited improvements to the prison's program facilities. *Better Pathways* has funded a new multi-purpose programs building which will include multi-purpose program rooms, interview rooms, a dedicated 'place of worship' and office space to accommodate all multi-disciplinary program staff. The design phase for this upgrade is almost complete.

Education Centre Upgrade / Expansion.

1.24 Evidence demonstrates that undertaking education and training can have a significant reductive impact on the likelihood of re-offending and that the provision of appropriate education and training programs in prison enhances prisoners' employment prospects post release. Despite more than doubling the bed capacity at DPFC to 260, the Education Centre has remained the same in size since DPFC first opened in 1996 with a design capacity of 125. It is acknowledged that the existing space within the Education Centre is insufficient to cater for the increased demand for education programs. *Better Pathways* has provided funding to provide additional space and design improvements to facilitate the delivery of education programs to women prisoners, commensurate with the increased demand. The design phase for this upgrade is almost complete.

Prison Industries Workshop Expansion.

1.25 Research shows that employment reduces the risk of re-offending by between one third and one half. Participation in prison-based employment, notably Prison Industries, provides prisoners with an opportunity to gain skills which may enhance their employment prospects post release. The existing Prison Industries Workshop at DPFC consists of very small work areas and the building itself lacks appropriate facilities. *Better Pathways* has provided funding to expand the existing workshop area, construct a

loading dock and enhance the design of the building to improve the supervision of prisoners. The design phase for this upgrade is almost complete.

Establish procedures for conducting personal searches across the women's prison system that are sensitive to women's needs.

- 1.26 The searching of prisoners is paramount for maintaining the good order and security of the prison, and prison authorities must conduct personal searches where necessary in order to protect all prisoners and staff against the possibility of a prisoner concealing drugs or other dangerous items. CV endeavours to minimise the level of intrusion without compromising the safety of prisons.
- 1.27 The possible detrimental effect of strip searching on prisoners who have been victims of physical or sexual abuse in the past is also acknowledged. In view of the prevalence of past victimisation among the female prisoner population, steps are taken to minimise possible distress arising from being strip searched, such as ensuring that the search is conducted in a sensitive manner, and only by female staff.
- 1.28 A review of strip searching practices was conducted by Corrections Victoria in 2003. A series of recommendations were made which informed the development of a policy framework and principles for best practice in relation to strip searching of women prisoners in Victoria.
- 1.29 In consideration of this work, CV has progressively explored options to modify strip searching procedures for women prisoners, aiming to obtain a balance between the need to maintain the good order and security of the prison and the need to provide a gender specific response which takes into account women's life experiences.
- 1.30 To this end, a pilot program was established in 2003 across the Women's Prisons Region. The pilot consisted of two phases, involving the trialing of an alternative strip searching model (based on only partial removal of clothing) and reducing the frequency of strip searches through an increased use of random rather than routine searching practices.
- 1.31 As a result of the pilot there has been a significant reduction in the number of strip searches conducted across Women's Prisons Region, with a reduction in searches of 38% at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and 52% at Tarrengower. Further, feedback sought from both prisoners and staff in relation to the alternative strip searching model has been positive. In particular, prisoners reported that they found the new process less invasive and that it provided them with more dignity. While some women continue to prefer the previous method of searching, all women agreed that having a choice between the two methods was important.
- 1.32 Building on the success of this pilot, CV approved a new approach to strip searching in the Women's Prisons Region in May 2006. The new approach includes an increased use of targeted searches (on suspicion of concealing contraband), rather than routine or random searches, to further reduce the frequency of strip searching across the Region, and further changes to progress the development of gender specific personal searching methods.

Provide sexual assault counselling, advocacy and support services to women offenders and women exiting prison.

1.33 While experiences of abuse, both in childhood and in adulthood, are extremely common amongst women prisoners, research indicates that these experiences contribute to women's criminality and shape their patterns of offending. Past victimisation has been identified as a critical treatment target in order to reduce women's re-offending. It is generally estimated that up to 80% of women in prison are victims / survivors of some form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. *Better Pathways* has acknowledged that there is a compelling need for the expertise of a specialised agency to provide a range of sexual assault counselling, advocacy and support services to women prisoners. Funding has therefore been provided to engage the services of Centres Against Sexual Assault (C.A.S.A.) in the provision of sexual assault counselling, advocacy and support services to the Women's Prisons Region. The provider commenced establishment work within the Women's Prisons Region in the last quarter of 2005-06.

Establish dedicated transitional housing for female CREDIT/Bail Support Program clients.

1.34 One of the key drivers of the increase in Victoria's female prisoner population was the increased use of remand, particularly for women with inadequate accommodation and complex treatment and support needs. The Bail Support Program and the THM-Bail Support Program Housing Pathways Initiative are two of the key diversionary initiatives that were introduced as part of the Corrections Long Term Management Strategy to reduce the number of women in prison custody.

1.35 The Bail Support Program aims to enhance the likelihood of a defendant being granted bail and successfully completing the bail period through the provision of appropriate accommodation, support services and referral to treatment programs.

1.36 The THM-Bail Support Program Housing Pathway Initiative was established as a partnership between the Office of Housing and CV to provide transitional housing and support to Bail Support Program participants with a history of homelessness. *Better Pathways* has provided funding for an additional ten dedicated transitional housing properties and the provision of housing support to women participating on the Bail Support Program. Establishment of these houses has now commenced.

Establish dedicated supported transitional housing for Indigenous women on bail.

1.37 Preliminary observations from the Victorian Implementation Review of the Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody include the outstanding need to address bail and remand issues in order to tackle Indigenous peoples' increasing over-representation in the criminal justice system. While Indigenous women are more likely than non-Indigenous women to be unsentenced at the time of their reception into prison custody, they are also more likely to be subsequently discharged from remand to bail without spending any part of that term under sentence.

1.38 To address the issue of housing as a barrier to diverting Indigenous women from prison custody, *Better Pathways* has provided funding to establish two dedicated Indigenous women's transitional housing properties and housing support to women participating on the Bail Support Program. The Aboriginal Justice Forum has approved the two dedicated Indigenous women's transitional housing properties being located in Mildura and

Shepparton. Establishment of these houses has now commenced. Indigenous women will also have priority access to the additional ten properties referred to under the previous initiative.

Extension of post-release support for women exiting prison.

- 1.39 Since 2002, CV has funded a number of transitional services for female prisoners. Of particular note is the range of programs that provide more intensive pre and post release support to prisoners and offenders. These programs are the Correctional Services Employment Pilot Program (CSEPP), the THM-CHPI Transitional Housing Management – Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative and Bridging the Gap (BtG). All programs have been independently evaluated and have been successful.
- 1.40 The results of the evaluations confirm that transitional support for women exiting prison is most effective when it is matched to their level of need. Offering intensive support to women with complex needs, including assistance to access community-based services and treatment programs, can reduce the likelihood of them re-offending and minimise their risk of experiencing harm.
- 1.41 *Better Pathways* has provided funding to improve outcomes for high risk and high need women exiting prison by extending the post release support period from six to twelve months for up to 100 women per year. As from 1 October 2006, a new ‘Intensive Bridging Support Program’ will be operating across the Women’s Prison’s Region, providing integrated transitional support services to high risk and high need women.

Provide employment and training opportunities to women offenders and women exiting prison.

- 1.42 Sustainable, good quality employment is a significant factor in reducing the re-offending of prisoners and offenders. One of the key recommendations from the *Review of Education and Training in Victorian Prisons* was the need to strengthen links with appropriate employment assistance for prisoners post release. The Department for Victorian Communities through their Communities Workforce Participation Partnership grant scheme has provided funding for 50 employment outcomes for women ex-prisoners and offenders. These are to be delivered by the Women4Work Program (W4W) – a program operated by Melbourne Citymission. *Better Pathways* has provided additional funding to W4W to support further employment outcomes, so that in all approximately 250 women will be assisted through their participation on the W4W Program.

Assist women prisoners to minimise utility-related debt.

- 1.43 The vast majority of women received into prison custody report having some form of debt or financial difficulties. Women are generally more vulnerable than men to the negative effects of debt when they are released from prison, usually as a result of their roles as carers and their related dependence on welfare services. As an initiative of the *Better Pathways* strategy, a pilot has commenced across the women’s prison system to help women prisoners to manage existing debt incurred as a result of unpaid electricity, gas and water bills, and to prevent them from accumulating further utility debt while in

prison. The pilot assists women to cancel direct debit payments, negotiate repayment plans, access information on consumers' rights and responsibilities, and have utilities reconnected.

Improve access to women's health services for women exiting prison.

1.44 CV has for a number of years funded transitional or post release support services for women prisoners, including the provision of transitional housing. Although for some women they will have access to supported transitional housing upon their release, it is acknowledged that women often find it difficult to secure stable long-term accommodation on release from prison, which can result in their frequent relocation throughout Victoria. This transient nature of women offenders presents a significant challenge when attempting to provide consistent post release support. As a initiative of *Better Pathways*, CV will explore with DHS, the best ways to assist women exiting prison to facilitate their access to women's community health services in order for women to access appropriate health, mental health, drug treatment, parenting and family support programs, and sexual assault and family violence counselling services.

Ensure prison-based education and training meets the needs of women.

1.45 In 2002, a *Review of Education and Training in Victorian Prisons* was undertaken to analyse current education and training arrangements in Victorian prisons, and the education and training needs of prisoners. The review made 29 recommendations that set the way forward for corrections education and training in Victoria in the future. As an initiative of *Better Pathways*, the implementation of the review recommendations will ensure that prison-based education, training and employment are responsive to the needs of women prisoners. *Better Pathways* will also support this through the development and introduction of the management standards for women prisoners, which incorporate guiding principles to oversee the provision of education and training programs and employment options for women prisoners.

Ensure prisoner health care is responsive to the needs of women.

1.46 Standards for the delivery of health care services for prisoners were redeveloped in 2005. As an initiative of *Better Pathways*, the development of the management standards for women prisoners will incorporate guiding principles relevant to the provision of health care services, including mental health care across the Women's Prisons Region. These policy developments that are occurring under the *Better Pathways* strategy provide an opportunity to ensure that prisoner health care services are responsive to women's needs. Initiatives outlined above indicate infrastructure and program initiatives already underway relevant to the area of the health care needs of women prisoners.

Deploy a full-time Vietnamese Liaison Officer for the women's prisons system.

1.47 Corrections Victoria acknowledges that language presents a significant barrier to the majority of Vietnamese-born women prisoners engaging in a range of prison-based

programs, services and supports which are integral to addressing the link between problem gambling and offending behaviour and reducing the risk of re-offending. In acknowledging that there existed such a pressing need amongst this group, funding was provided through *Better Pathways* to fund the employment of a full-time Vietnamese-speaking Liaison Officer for the Women's Prisons Region. A Vietnamese Liaison Officer has been employed in the Women's Prisons Region since October 2005. The role of this officer includes the following duties:

- interviewing all Vietnamese women within 48 hours of being received into the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre;
- providing one to one case management to the Vietnamese women and liaising with unit case managers;
- providing a link between Vietnamese prisoners, their families and the local community and where necessary provide advice, welfare support and referrals to appropriate agencies or professionals;
- providing advice and raising awareness of cultural issues for Vietnamese women prisoners amongst prison staff; and
- facilitating Vietnamese women's access to prison-based programs and services, including informing and assisting with the development of culturally relevant programs.”¹

¹ “Corrections Victoria’s Comments on the Report -*Women Prisoners in Victoria* A Report on the considerations and conclusions of the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria in determining whether to seek the Attorney-General’s consent to conduct a formal investigation into systemic discrimination against women in Victorian prisons. Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria. June 6 2006” pp6-16, received by EOCV 2 August 2006