

01 March 2024

C176748



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 20 December 2023 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about people in prison and reintegrative services. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

As you are aware, question nine which asks “*how much financial assistance is available for ex-inmates to find accommodations*” was transferred to the Ministry of Justice in accordance with section 14 of the OIA.

For ease of your response, some of your questions have been reordered and some questions are answered together. You requested:

1. *What are the numbers of first offenders in Otago Corrections facility?*
2. *What are the numbers of repeat offenders in Otago Corrections facility?*

On 31 December 2023, there were 57 sentenced prisoners at Otago Corrections Facility (OCF) who were serving their first aggregate sentence and 171 sentenced prisoners who were serving their second or subsequent aggregate sentence.

3. *Among repeat offenders in prison across New Zealand, what is the average number of times they have been in prison? (Broken down by age group, preferably)*

Please see the table below, which outlines the average number of previous aggregate prison sentences served by people in OCF who have served a previous sentence (‘repeat offenders’), broken down by age group. These figures are as at 31 December 2023.

Age group	Average number of previous sentences
20 – 24	3
25 – 29	3
30 – 39	5
40 – 49	7
50 – 59	7
60 and over	9

- 5. Homeless people have told us that prison is their best housing option and do the above. What comment does Corrections have on this?*
- 6. Do Correction funded reintegration services coordinate with one another regarding prisoners accommodation status/reintegration?*
- 7. What steps are taken to ensure someone who has been released from prison does not end up homeless?*
- 8. If an inmate informs Corrections they will be sleeping rough/have nowhere to stay, what is Corrections response?*
- 12. Has Corrections made any changes to their practices to reflect the growing demand for housing?*

Corrections manages people at the direction of the courts and the New Zealand Parole Board and does not determine who is in prison and who is in the community. Across New Zealand, around 15,000 people are released from prison every year. On release from prison, the vast majority of people return home to family or make their own arrangements about where to live or have provided the New Zealand Parole Board with a release plan (including a proposed address) for consideration, prior to leaving prison.

Safety is our top priority, and we work closely with a range of other agencies and social housing providers to help people we are managing avoid homelessness. No person is permitted to live at an address if we think the risk cannot be safely managed and public safety upheld.

For people who need extra support finding somewhere to live, Community Corrections staff will assist them to identify suitable addresses. Our funded reintegration services work together to ensure a coordinated approach to a person's reintegration. Corrections also helps connect people who need help with accommodation to other social support agencies, including as the Ministry of Social Development and Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities.

Finding suitable accommodation for people being released from prison and people we are managing in the community is one of Corrections' most significant challenges. Alongside issues of affordability and competition for accommodation, people we manage can face difficulties in obtaining tenancies, and we also need to ensure public safety is upheld. Some people may not be able to reside at a particular address if it is close to victims, former associates, or facilities designed for children.

In recent years, in response to an increasing shortage of supply of options in the housing market for challenging or hard to place offenders, we have increased our investment in accommodation and support services for people on bail, serving a community-based sentence or order, or released from prison.

Nationwide, we provide over 1,200 emergency, transitional and supported accommodation places each year, delivered by service providers across the country. Accommodation is mainly in individual one bedroom flats or in a home-like setting for between two and four people. Service providers work with offenders to transition them from prison into the community by helping them to develop a reintegration plan, find sustainable accommodation, source employment, and reconnect with the community.

4. Does Corrections have any research evidence suggesting homeless people purposefully commit crime to gain re-entry to prison (as a housing option)?

Corrections conducted a post release study in 2015-2017. The study did not find evidence of this; however, an unstable housing situation was a dominant factor which contributed to people reoffending and, on account of this, returning to prison.

More information on this study is available on our website [here](#).

10. Are breaches of release conditions overlooked due to individual circumstances? ie an ex-prisoner cannot remain at an address/ an ex-prisoner is sleeping on the streets?

11. Is living on the street a violation of release conditions?

Prisoners' release dates are determined by sentencing laws, sentencing judges and the New Zealand Parole Board. On release some offenders will automatically have standard conditions of release imposed, others will also have special conditions imposed. The terms of a person's release from prison can vary significantly depending on the type of order imposed and their individual conditions.

Further information about release from prison can be found on our website [here](#).

Corrections is responsible for ensuring that offenders comply with their sentences and orders and to hold offenders to account when they do not. Any breaches are managed on a case-by-case basis.

In itself, living on the streets is not a violation of release conditions, however certain sentences and special conditions are linked to approved accommodation. For example, a person on parole may have residential restrictions imposed and be required to complete their parole at an approved suitable address. A child sex offender would have a condition that any accommodation be approved by their probation officer to support public safety.

13. What crimes are most common for those released from prison who go on to offend further in the months following release?

Corrections routinely reports on recidivism rates via the Recidivism Indices measure, published in our Annual Report. For the most recent data please refer to page 204 – 207 of our [2022/23 Annual Report](#) which includes offence types:

14. Do Corrections hold information regarding the number of ex-prisoners who have been hospitalised or died while engaging with reintegrative services? If so, can we please be given that data?

We do not centrally record this data and to answer this part of your request we would need to manually review individual people's file notes to determine if they had been hospitalised or died while engaging with reintegrative services. As noted earlier in this response, across

New Zealand each year around 15,000 people are released from prison and we provide over 1,200 emergency, transitional and supported accommodation places annually (note too that this figure does not take into account people released from prison who may have engaged with similar services provided by other agencies).

Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. In accordance with section 18A and 18B we have considered whether fixing a charge, extending the time limit or consulting with you would assist to make the request in a form that would remove the reason for the refusal. However, we do not believe this would be an appropriate use of our publicly funded resources.

If you are aware of a specific case or cases and can provide further information, we may be in a position to comment further on this aspect of your request.

I can advise though that in cases where Corrections becomes aware of an assault against a person on a community-based sentence or order, our staff work closely with New Zealand Police to ensure they have access to any information or evidence Corrections may hold that could assist any criminal investigation.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Leigh Marsh
National Commissioner