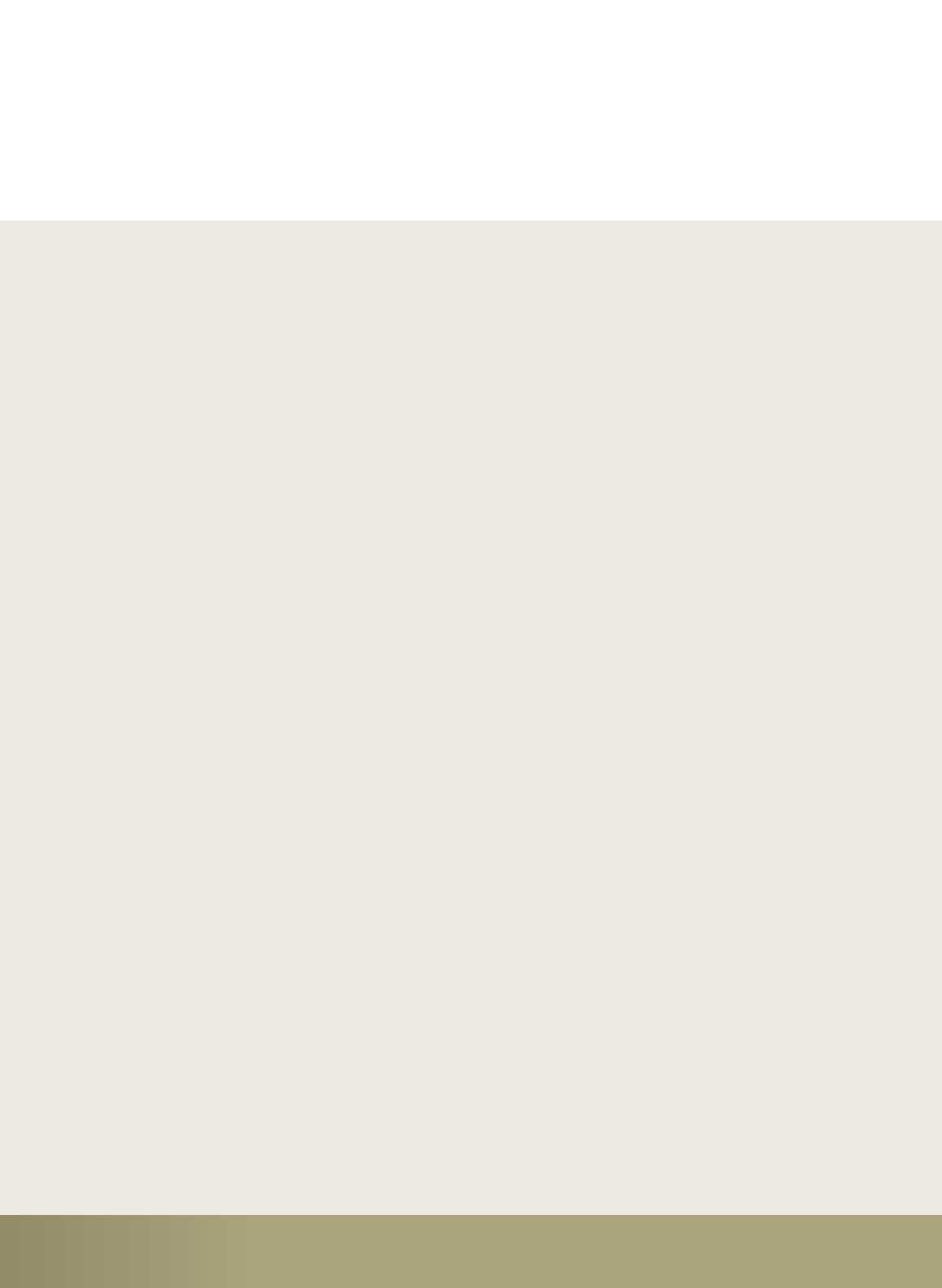


# Getting Out

Your Guide to Surviving on the Outside





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# Getting Out

## Your Guide to Surviving on the Outside

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Revision and new material by Sarah Saliba, social work student Emu Plains Correctional Centre, Jen Mills, CRC, and Bronwen Elliott, researcher/writer.

Design by Melinda May, Pro Bono Publico.

Corrective Services Industries co-ordinated the printing.

An electronic version of this guide is available from the websites of CRC, [www.crcnsw.org.au](http://www.crcnsw.org.au), and the NSW Department of Corrective Services, [www.dcs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dcs.nsw.gov.au).

If you've ideas about how to improve this booklet, CRC would welcome your feedback. Please contact us at 174 Broadway, Broadway NSW, on (02) 9288 8700 or at [info@crcnsw.org.au](mailto:info@crcnsw.org.au).

To the best of our knowledge, the information in this booklet was accurate as of March 2007.

# What is CRC?

CRC (Community Restorative Centre) is a community organisation dedicated to the support of prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families in NSW. We offer personal and practical assistance such as information and referral, transitional support (including supported accommodation), counselling, transport, court support, training and outreach to prisons.

Our services include:

- Telephone intake/information and referral service
- Transport service – we run a subsidised bus service to country prisons
- Family support – provides information, advice, support and referral regarding issues associated with having a relative or friend in prison
- Post-release support – CRC provides a supported accommodation program and Transitional Support Programme for people leaving prison. Referrals, assessment and support begin pre-release and continue up to 12 months post-release. Note: CRC has a limited number of supported properties available.
- Court Support Scheme – personal support to people attending local courts in metropolitan Sydney
- Jailbreak Health Project – health promotion, harm reduction focus including a radio show on 2SER FM 107.3 on Tuesdays at 6pm.

# Contacting CRC

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For information about CRC support programs contact:

**CRC Sydney**  
**174 Broadway**  
**(corner of Shepherd Street)**  
**Broadway NSW 2007**  
**Ph: (02) 9288 8700**  
**Fax: (02) 9211 6518**  
**email: [info@crcnsw.org.au](mailto:info@crcnsw.org.au)**  
**web: [www.crcnsw.org.au](http://www.crcnsw.org.au)**

**WHAT IS CRC?**

# Making a New Start

## **Get out and stay out**

This booklet is a guide for ex-prisoners and prisoners who are about to be released.

Freedom presents many day-to-day challenges, like finding a place to live, understanding how Centrelink works, organising your money, or getting in touch with your family and friends. These things can put a lot of stress on someone who's just been released.

Although you may have heard that many prisoners released from custody end up back in prison sooner or later, there are many others who succeed in making a new start. The first few weeks and months are critical. This booklet is here to help you through this time.

## **How to use this booklet**

Use this booklet to prepare before you're released and to get help after you're released. If you take it with you when you leave prison, you'll have easy access to phone numbers and information you may need later on.

Use the contents pages at the front of this booklet and the index at the back to find the chapters you need.

Each chapter has a quick guide at the front, if you're in a hurry or just want the basics.

Look for the true life stories from real people who've made a new start. You'll find them all through the book.

When in doubt, ask for help. Talk to your welfare officer, services and programs officer, alcohol and other drugs worker, parole officer, education staff or case officer if you need help with any of this information. For information about health, ask the Clinic.

## **Make the most of the pre-release programs and services**

Some prisons run pre-release 'expos' to help you prepare for release. At these sessions, people will visit from some of the services listed here, such as Legal Aid, Centrelink and the Department of Housing. Make the most of this opportunity.

## **Use the Planning Your Release NSW Exit Checklist**

The checklist booklet is designed to help you get organised before you get out. It starts six months before release. Talk to your welfare officer, services and programs officer or other worker about getting your copy.

### **NEXUS**

The NEXUS program helps you work through the parts of the Planning Your Release NSW Exit Checklist where you may need assistance, such as organising ID. You can also get help to link with other support agencies such as Centrelink and the Department of Housing.

Welfare and alcohol and other drug workers are there to help you prepare for your release. They can assist with making phone calls, getting into rehabs, etc.

For health, medication and mental health issues, see the Clinic. If you'll be on parole, your parole officer will help you plan for your release.

### **A note on the services listed in this booklet**

This booklet lists many agencies that can help you after your release. They're listed in the *Who to Contact* section at the end of each chapter. Because there are too many services to list them all, you may find 'key' numbers have been provided rather than a complete list for the whole of NSW. If they can't assist you, these key agencies should be able to refer you to an appropriate local service. Service providers may be able to help you better if they know that you've recently left prison, but it's your decision whether and how much to tell them.

### **Accessing the internet**

You'll find internet sites listed for a number of organisations. You can use these once you leave prison. If you don't have access to the internet after you get out, you can get free internet access at most libraries. In country areas there may be community technology centres, which give cheap internet access to people on Centrelink payments.

All information was current at the time of going to print, but things change over time. If there's a difference between this booklet and what you're told in your release preparation sessions, trust the information provided in the pre-release program.

**Remember: if you need help, ask for it.**

**GOOD LUCK!**



# Getting Support



## **Getting support**

You may think that if you can handle prison you can handle anything, but many ex-prisoners have said that the first few weeks outside were actually harder than the time they spent in gaol. Coping with money problems, dealing with other people, and feeling like you don't fit in can be overwhelming. You may feel depressed and anxious and not want to leave your room. If the stress feels like it's getting too much or is stopping you getting things done, it's time to seek support.

### **Who can help?**

On the following pages is a list of key agencies that provide free help. Some work only with prisoners. Others are available to anyone. Telling services that you've been in prison can help them understand better what you're going through. But it's up to you to decide how much you feel you want to say.

# Who to Contact

## Services working with people who've been in prison

### Community Restorative Centre (CRC)

Information, advice and support for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families.

Ph: (02) 9288 8700

### For help on the phone, and referrals to face-to-face services

### ADIS (Alcohol and Drug Information Service)

Advice, information and referrals about alcohol and other drugs.

Ph: (02) 9361 8000 (metro)  
1800 422 599 (rural)

### Credit and Debt Hotline

Financial counselling and referral for debt issues. For more information about finances see p.73.

Ph: 1800 808 488

### G-Line

Confidential help with problem gambling.

Ph: 1800 633 635

TTY: 1800 633 649

### Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service

Counselling for gay, lesbian, transgender and intersex people.

Ph: (02) 8594 9596  
1800 184 327

### The Gender Centre

Counselling for people with gender issues.

Ph: (02) 9569 2366

### Grief Support

24-hour grief counselling.

Ph: (02) 9489 6644

### Lifeline

Free and confidential telephone counselling, 24 hours.

Ph: 131 114

### Mensline

Family counselling, information and referral for men.

Ph: 1300 789 978

### Mental Health Information and Referral Service

Advice, information and referrals about mental health issues.

Ph: 1300 794 991

**Rape Crisis Centre**

Counselling and support for people affected by sexual assault.

Ph: (02) 9819 6565  
1800 424 017

**Salvo Care Line**

Free 24-hour counselling and referral.

Ph: 1300 36 36 22

**Violence Against Women Helpline**

Assistance and referral for people affected by domestic violence.

Ph: 1800 200 526

**Women's Information and Referral Service**

For counselling services for women.

Ph: 1800 817 227

**Counselling and support services**

Call these numbers to find a service close to you.

**NSW Family Services**

Family Services provide assistance to families with children.

Ph: (02) 9692 9999

**Relationships Australia**

Provides relationship counselling to couples, individuals and families.

Ph: 1300 364 277

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You'll be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

# Housing and Accommodation



## Quick Guide to Housing and Accommodation

### ■ Public housing with the Department of Housing

Public or social housing is low-cost housing for people who find it hard to get the housing they need. You must be on the Housing Register and there are long waiting times.

From prison you can apply for public housing or check if you can go back to public housing if you used to be a public housing tenant.

### ■ Rentstart

The Department of Housing (DoH) can give help with bond money. Within a month of leaving prison you may get extra help through Rentstart Plus. Contact DoH 24 hours a day on 1800 629 212.

### ■ For Crisis Accommodation ring

Homeless Persons Information Service on:

Ph: (02) 9265 9087

1800 234 566 from outside Sydney

Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line (DoH)

4.30pm – 10pm Monday – Friday, 10am – 10pm weekends

Ph: 1800 152 152

### Keep reading for:

- More information about public housing and other options
- Supported accommodation services
- Tenants' advice services
- Useful phone numbers.

# Housing and Accommodation

Your best chance of finding stable accommodation is to start planning well before your release. This section gives you some information about your options.

## Can I get public housing?

### What is public housing?

The Department of Housing (DoH) provides cheap housing for people on low incomes who've problems finding affordable housing or need extra support. If you're eligible you can apply for public housing and be placed on the Housing Register. You then have to wait until a property becomes available in the area where you want to live. There's a long wait for public housing and you may have to wait many years, depending on the kind of housing you need, and the location where you want to live.

From July 2006 new public housing tenants have their need for housing reviewed from time to time. For example, if someone has moved into stable employment with a regular income, they may no longer be eligible for public housing. Tenants are offered leases for one year, five years or ten years, depending on their circumstances. This may be extended after a review.

### Can I apply for public housing while I'm in prison?

You can apply for public housing while you're in prison. You need to get an application form from a welfare worker. They can help you fill it in. Or ask to talk to DoH staff if they visit the prison. You should let DoH know when you've left prison, and keep them informed each time you change your address. There's a long wait for public housing, so you'll need to look at other options as well.

### I was a public housing tenant when I went to prison. Can I get public housing when I leave prison?

You may be able to get public housing after your release but this will depend on:

- Meeting income and other eligibility criteria
- Acknowledging debts to DoH and agreeing to repay any money you owe DoH.

- Your past history as a tenant. If you owed a lot of money, or had serious tenancy difficulties, you may be asked to show you can manage to rent privately for six months before you can get public housing again. If the tenancy issues were extreme you may be ineligible for public housing.
- Property availability.

Check your eligibility for reinstatement with DoH by talking to DoH staff if they visit your prison, or get help from service and program officers. If you're eligible you'll need to let DoH know that you're leaving prison six to eight weeks before your release date. You'll need to have somewhere to go once you leave prison as you'll have to wait until DoH can find a property for you. Waiting time depends on the area where you want to live.

### **What should I tell the Department of Housing about my circumstances?**

DoH knows that the people who most need public housing are those who can't afford private housing that meets their needs and who need support to cope in the community. It can help DoH if you tell them about any needs you have that may make it hard to find housing, such as physical disabilities that mean you need to live somewhere with easy access. After you leave prison it can also help if you tell DoH about any additional support workers who are assisting you, such as mental health workers or living skills services. You may be able to get a letter from a doctor or support worker to tell DoH about your needs and supports.

### **I think the Department of Housing has made the wrong decision.**

#### **Can I appeal?**

You can ask for decisions to be reviewed if you don't think your individual circumstances were considered properly, or you think DoH didn't follow its policy and procedures correctly. Ask welfare staff or DoH for information about the appeals process, or talk to a tenants' advice service. See *Who to Contact* on p.17.

#### **How can I find out more about public housing?**

DoH staff visit most prisons at least once a month. If you're in prison, ask service and program officers about DoH visits. You can ask a welfare officer to ring DoH on your behalf if you sign a form giving permission (Disclosure Authority).

You can contact DoH 24 hours any day on 1800 629 212.

Ask for a copy of *Questions and Answers about Public Housing* booklet.



## Can I get help to rent privately?

### Rentstart

DoH can also help you get started in private renting with Rentstart. Standard Rentstart payment is **three weeks rent towards your bond** to help you set up a new lease. To get Rentstart or Rentstart Plus, the rent for the property should be 50% or less of your income. Rentstart help is usually available once a year. You may be able to get Rentstart even if you're an ex-DoH tenant with problems with your record with DoH.

Ex-prisoners within a month of leaving prison can get Rentstart Plus. Rentstart Plus can pay the full bond and two weeks' rent for private rental or a boarding house. You must:

- Be eligible for public housing
- Have less than \$1,000 in savings
- Be able to stay in the property for 12 months.

To apply for Rentstart Plus, go to your nearest DoH Office and bring:

- Any ID
- Your DCS Discharge Certificate
- Centrelink income statement
- Bank statement.

Rentstart Tenancy can pay rent you owe so that you can stay in an established lease. You can only get this payment once a year. Talk to DoH about your options.

### Rent Assistance

You may be eligible for Rent Assistance from Centrelink with your regular Centrelink payment.

## What if I need accommodation in a crisis?

Contact the Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) on (02) 9265 9087 any day from 9am to 10pm to get information about emergency accommodation.

Contact the Department of Housing Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line on 1800 152 152 from 4.30pm to 10pm Monday – Friday and 10am to 10pm on weekends. They may be able to help with temporary accommodation. This is only for a short period and there will be limits on how much temporary accommodation you can get and what you have to do to show that you're trying to find accommodation.

### **What is community housing?**

Community housing is subsidised housing managed by local organisations. Rent is usually about 25% of your income. Apply for this when you apply for public housing by ticking that option on the form. That way DoH can refer you to community housing. You can also apply directly to a particular organisation if you're on the Housing Register for public housing. There are lots of community housing associations in NSW. Look in the phone book under 'Community Tenancy' or 'Community Housing' or ring your local DoH office. Another option is to ring your local council, as councils often keep lists of community organisations in the area. In some community housing services (e.g. in housing co-ops) you'll be expected to go to meetings and do some work around the place.

### **What if I'm Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?**

If at least one member of your household is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you can apply for housing with the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), as well as public housing and community housing. You'll have to meet eligibility requirements, including that you're not adequately housed when you apply, providing a confirmation form to show that you're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and that you meet income criteria. For more information about the AHO contact (02) 8836 9444. There are also AHO offices in some regional centres.

### **Supported housing: CRC and others**

CRC offers an information and referral service to people leaving prison. This includes some assistance with housing, usually organised in advance through caseworkers in prison. There are also several hostels and short-term accommodation services in NSW. All of these places have special criteria you have to meet. Many of these places need you to book well in advance, so it's a good idea to start ringing around a few months before you get out. To find these organisations, call Homeless Persons on (02) 9265 9081 (or 1800 234 566 from outside Sydney).

# Who to Contact

These are some of the main housing services in NSW. We can't list them all here, so ask around as you go. This list is divided into:

- Crisis accommodation
- Supported housing
- Public housing
- Community housing
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contact numbers
- Tenants' advice.

## **Crisis accommodation**

Numbers to call if you're homeless or need somewhere to stay in an emergency.

See also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contact numbers.

### **Homeless Persons Information Centre**

The first place to call in a housing emergency, Homeless Persons has information about crisis bed availability across NSW.

**Ph: (02) 9265 9081  
1800 234 566  
(from outside Sydney)**

### **Inner City Homelessness Outreach and Support Service**

Inner Sydney service offering outreach and help finding accommodation.

**Ph: 1800 505 501**

### **Temporary Accommodation After Hours Line (DoH)**

The Department of Housing may be able to help if you need somewhere to stay in the short term.

This number is open 4.30pm–10pm on weekdays and 10am–10pm on weekends.

**Ph: 1800 152 152**

### **Youth Emergency Accommodation Line**

A recorded listing of vacancies in crisis refuges throughout NSW, updated daily by 9.30am.

**Ph: (02) 9698 5822  
1800 424 830  
(from outside Sydney)**

### **Women's Information and Referral Service**

Referral line to find housing and other support services for women.

**Ph: 1800 817 227**

## Supported housing

There are many housing services in NSW. The following are a few that specifically look after ex-prisoners. Their addresses are generally acceptable for parole purposes. Demand is high, however, and it's best to ring around and find out all your options as early as you can.

### Community Restorative Centre (CRC)

CRC has a supported accommodation program. You need to apply before release. Note: CRC has a limited number of supported properties available.

**Ph: (02) 9288 8700**

### Glebe House

12-week transition program for men leaving prison.

**Ph: (02) 9566 4630**

### Guthrie House

Temporary support accommodation for women.

**Ph: (02) 9564 5977**

### Rainbow Lodge

Short term (three months) accommodation; need to apply before release or through probation and parole.

**Ph: (02) 9660 7695**

## Wayback

Housing service for men on methadone.

**Ph: (02) 9633 4800**

## Western Housing for Youth

Housing service for people under 21 in western Sydney.

**Ph: (02) 9689 2740**

## Yulawirri Nurai Indigenous Association

Accommodation service for Aboriginal people in the Lake Macquarie area.

**Ph: (02) 4973 5560**

## Department of Housing (public housing)

Call DoH to find out about your eligibility for public housing or to find your local office.

**Ph: 1800 629 212**

**[www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au)**

## Community housing

There are many community tenancy schemes in NSW. To find one near you, ring Homeless Persons or your local DoH office (see above) or look in the phone book. Local councils may keep a list of places that can help you: look up the council name in the phone book or visit your local public library for more information.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contact numbers

### Aboriginal Enquiry Line

Information and advice from Aboriginal staff of DoH.  
Open 8.30am – 4.30pm weekdays.  
Ph: **1800 355 740**

### Aboriginal Homeless Persons

24-hour helpline for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are homeless.

Ph: **(02) 9799 8446**

### Aboriginal Housing Office

Contact the Aboriginal Housing Office for information about community housing programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with housing needs.

Ph: **(02) 8836 9444**

[www.aho.nsw.gov.au](http://www.aho.nsw.gov.au)

### Aboriginal Tenants Advice

Assists with public and private tenancies, including bond, temporary accommodation and tenants' rights.

#### Greater Sydney

**(02) 9564 5367 or 1800 772 721**

#### Northern NSW

**(02) 6643 4426 or 1800 248 913**

#### Western NSW

**(02) 6882 3611 or 1800 810 233**

#### Southern NSW

**(02) 4472 9363 or 1800 672 185**

### Tenants' advice

The following agencies assist people who are in public and private rental accommodation with information about their rights and responsibilities as tenants. This includes houses, apartments, caravan parks and boarding houses. See also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contact numbers above.

### Office of Fair Trading

Renting Services provides advice and information about private renting.

Ph: **133 220**

### Tenants' Union Hotline

Advice and information about renting, tenants' rights, etc.

Ph: **(02) 9251 6590**

## **Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Services**

Phone your nearest office for assistance.

### **Central Coast**

**(02) 4353 5515**

### **Eastern Suburbs**

**(02) 9386 9147**

### **Hunter Area**

**(02) 4969 7666**

### **Illawarra**

**1800 807 225**

### **Inner Sydney (Mon, Wed, Fri)**

**(02) 9698 5975**

### **Inner Western Sydney**

**(02) 9559 2899**

### **Mid North Coast**

**(02) 6583 9866 or 1800 777 722**

### **Northern Rivers**

**(02) 6621 1022 or 1800 649 135**

### **North Sydney**

**(02) 9884 9605**

### **South Sydney**

**(02) 9787 4679**

### **South West Sydney**

**(02) 4628 1678 or 1800 631 993**

### **Western NSW**

**1800 642 609**

### **Western Sydney**

**(02) 4731 6162 or 1800 625 956**

Parks and villages (caravan parks, residential villages, etc)

**(02) 9281 7967 or 1800 451 488**

Older tenants advice (55+)

**(02) 9281 9804 or 1800 451 488**

**For more tenants information, visit [www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au).**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You'll be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

# Dealing with Centrelink

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## Quick Guide to Dealing with Centrelink

- Centrelink staff visit prisons regularly. You can apply for a Crisis Payment and an Advance Payment before you leave prison. This way you'll have money when you leave.
- If you don't see Centrelink staff before you leave, make contact to claim payments as soon as you leave prison by visiting a Centrelink office with your Discharge Certificate or by phoning Centrelink on 131 021.
- Even if you don't have all your ID, tell Centrelink you want to claim a payment, as you may be paid from that date.
- Centrelink may arrange appointments with other agencies for employment services or assessments. You need to attend these to get paid.

### Keep reading for:

- Details of Centrelink payments
- How to avoid your payments being stopped
- Who to contact if you've trouble dealing with Centrelink.



# Dealing with Centrelink

Sorting out Centrelink payments will be really important for most people leaving prison. Your first contact with Centrelink will usually be when a Centrelink staff member visits you in prison before your release. Talking to Centrelink before you're released can make getting payments easier. If you haven't seen Centrelink and are about to be released, see a welfare or program officer. They can help you contact Centrelink on 131 021 to make an appointment for you on the day you get out (or the next working day).

## **Crisis Payment**

You may be able to get a one-off Crisis Payment from Centrelink so you have money as soon as possible when leaving prison. If you're eligible, the visiting Centrelink worker can assist you to apply for Crisis Payment while you're still in prison, so you can get it in cash as soon as you leave prison. Crisis Payment is worth one week of your usual Centrelink payment. Ask the Centrelink worker how much your Crisis Payment will be.

To claim Crisis Payment you must:

- Be eligible for income support payment from Centrelink
- Have been in prison at least 14 days
- Apply for the payment within seven days of your release (or up to three weeks before release)
- Be experiencing severe financial hardship
- Have your prison release papers (Discharge Certificate) if you apply after leaving prison.

Your Crisis Payment can be paid:

- By cheque
- With an Electronic Benefits Transfer card, which can be used in selected ATMs
- Into a bank account.

## **Advance Payment**

When you complete the claim form for Crisis Payment you can also apply to receive an advance payment of half your first regular income support payment on release. If you get a Crisis Payment and Advance Payment the day you're released, your first regular payment will only be one week's amount, and that will have to last a fortnight.

It's not easy to get by on this amount without extra support. See p.27 for services that may be able to assist.

### **Claiming a Centrelink payment**

You can tell Centrelink you want to claim a payment as soon as you get out.

You don't need an appointment to put in a claim for a payment. Phone 132 850, visit your local Centrelink office or go to [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au).

To claim, you'll need to provide 100 points of ID. See p.34 to learn more about what ID Centrelink will require, and how to go about getting it. You'll need proof that you were born in Australia, or documents to show when you arrived in Australia.

Even if you don't have all your ID ready, it's worth letting Centrelink know you want to claim. You may be paid from the date you first advised Centrelink that you wanted to claim once your claim is approved. You'll have 14 days to give Centrelink your completed forms and have any necessary interviews. Let Centrelink know if you'll have difficulty returning the form within 14 days.

You may also be eligible for Rent Assistance. This is an extra payment to help cover private rent (including boarding houses, etc). You need to show Centrelink a lease or Rent Certificate saying how much rent you pay. Ask the Centrelink staff how to apply.

### **Claiming Newstart Allowance**

Most people leaving prison will claim Newstart Allowance. If you're under 21 you may be able to claim Youth Allowance, which has similar conditions.

After you contact Centrelink you'll be required to attend an appointment about returning to work. This may be with a Job Network agency, which can help you find work, or for a Job Capacity Assessment, to identify what help you need to be ready for work. You must attend this meeting for your claim for Newstart to be approved.

To receive Newstart you must be willing to enter into an Activity Agreement. This agreement may be with Centrelink, or with an employment support service. Make sure you understand the requirements of your Activity Agreement.

### **Claiming a Disability Pension**

If you have a significant physical, intellectual or psychiatric disability which affects your ability to work, you may be able to claim a Disability Support Pension (DSP). The requirements for DSP are very strict. If you think you might be eligible, ask Centrelink for more information.

### **Claiming a Parenting Payment**

You can apply for a Parenting Payment if you're a sole parent or if your partner receives a Centrelink pension or benefit. You can only receive a Parenting Payment until your youngest child is six years old (if you have a partner) or eight years old (if you're a sole parent). Parents of older children may be eligible for Newstart Allowance.

Talk to Centrelink staff about expectations on parents to look for part-time work once their children reach school age.

### **Concessions**

Centrelink will send you a Health Care Card. You can use this to get discounts on medication and to see some doctors for no charge. If you need this card straight away, they can issue you with a temporary one over the counter.

To get a pensioner's price on public transport you'll need a current pension card. If you're not on a pension you may be able to get a half fare entitlement (concession card) through Centrelink. Ask the worker about this when you apply for your payment.

### **How can I avoid having payments stopped?**

To avoid a non-payment period it's important to:

- Go to all appointments at Centrelink or to any other services Centrelink directs you to attend to help you find work, or get ready to work.
- Let Centrelink or the other services know beforehand if you can't attend; ask for a new appointment, and attend then.
- Contact Centrelink or the other services immediately if you forget or miss an appointment.
- Read all mail from Centrelink or other organisations such as employment services, and respond if you're asked by mail to do something.
- Keep to your Activity Agreement.
- Tell Centrelink if you change your address.

**What ifs****What if I've been in for less than 14 days?**

- If you've been in prison for less than 14 days, you can't get a Crisis Payment. However, 14 days includes time spent in police custody and on remand. Your release papers may only have the dates you arrived and left prison. If you spent a few days in the cells and this brings it up to 14, tell the Centrelink worker where you were picked up so they can verify it.

**What if I owe Centrelink money?**

- If you're in debt to Centrelink, you can still apply for payments. You can pay back your debt in instalments. Usually this will start in the second fortnight, but if you think this will make things hard for you, talk to Centrelink. Having a debt doesn't stop you from qualifying for payments.

**What if I had a non-payment penalty before I went to prison?**

- Centrelink payments can be stopped for eight weeks if you haven't met participation requirements. If you've been in prison more than eight weeks, the penalty period will already be over. Otherwise check with Centrelink about your eligibility for a payment or other assistance.

**What if I don't have a bank account?**

- Centrelink can give you a Statement of Intention to Pay Benefits, which you can then use to open a bank account at most major banks.

**Specialist Job Network services**

Centrelink may ask you to attend services which can give you additional support to find employment. This could include intensive one-to-one help, training for job interviews, assistance if you have a disability, or specialist services for young people.

**Personal Support Program**

Centrelink may arrange for you to attend a Personal Support Program (PSP). PSP is run by community-based organisations that provide direct support and services to participants. The aim is to overcome barriers to joining the workforce such as homelessness or drug or gambling issues.

# Who to Contact

## Centrelink

To apply for a payment:

**13 10 21**

Indigenous Customer Service:

**13 10 21 (Southern states)**

Indigenous Customer Service:

**13 63 80 (Northern states)**

Employment Services:

**13 28 50**

Disability, Sickness and Carers:

**13 27 17**

Family Assistance Office:

**13 61 50**

Youth and Student Services:

**13 24 90**

Multilingual Call:

**13 12 02**

TTY:

**1800 810 586**

Internet:

**[www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)**

## Welfare Rights Centre

If you have problems dealing with Centrelink, they can help you.

**Ph: (02) 9211 5300**

**1800 226 028**

**[www.welfarerights.org.au](http://www.welfarerights.org.au)**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You'll be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

## Sandy's story

# 'It helps to do the groundwork in prison.'

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*Sandy had been in prison for some years when she was released. She had been on work release for five months prior to leaving prison.*

*'I had a lot of support when I got out. I'd built up a support network before I left and that was a big help. My boss kept me on at work after I was released. Having a job to go to was really good, even though I had to travel a long way from where I was living. It gives you a sense of purpose and identity.'*

*Sandy says that preparation was really important. 'It helps to do the groundwork in prison. You can't expect just to get out and find the way. I got help from a support organisation I'd connected with in prison. They helped me find somewhere to stay for a bit, until my flat with the Department of Housing came through. I also got help from a church group. I'd made friends from the church while I was in prison.'*

*Sandy had to put a lot of time into organising with the Department of Housing. 'There was a lot of paperwork, and Welfare were a big help with all of that. It took two-and-a-half months for my flat to come through with the Housing Department. I had a bit of furniture of my own, and I actually found a fridge and a bed on the side of the road. A friend from church had a trailer and picked them up for me.'*

*Six months after she left prison Sandy's boss had to let her go because business was slow. 'Getting another job was harder than I'd expected. Joining a job club helps you get a job faster. Getting help from those employment places is the best way to go.'*

*'The hardest part was talking about my work experience, because most of it had been in gaol. I got a temporary job, and on the first day they put a form in front of me to agree to a police check.'*

*'I had an uneasy, horrible feeling then, when I signed it. But even though it was a shock, it was better that I hadn't had to do it before then. By the time I signed it, I felt like I'd got my foot in the door. I was never asked about my record, and I kept the job for the time I'd expected.'*

*'Another hard thing was finding referees. My first boss was one referee for me, but I used someone from church as the other one, because I hadn't had another employer.'*

*Sandy found it quite easy to relate to people outside prison. 'What was difficult was finding things to talk about since I'd been in prison so long. I had to get back into the world, and that happened gradually.'*

*'I enjoyed going to church when I got out, and having a sense of community. I hadn't gone to church much before. There are a lot of things I can do through church, groups and social things. I also loved shopping and looking at everything.*

*A lot of things were different after years away. I loved buying things for my home.'*

*'It can be hard to find things to do without spending a lot of money. I put on a lot of weight in prison, and I thought it would be easy to lose when I got out. But it's not that easy, now I've got the freedom to eat whatever I want. I'm still working on it. I thought I would get further ahead quicker too. Things are a lot more expensive than they were before I was locked up.'*

*Sandy's chosen not to have contact with most of the people she knew in prison. 'I don't want to be reminded of that time. I don't trust a lot of people because they keep going back inside. They're not in the same place as me. It's good to develop a new support base when you want to get on with your life.'*





# Getting ID



## Quick Guide to Getting ID

Start early. If you don't have ID, it takes time to get enough together to apply to Centrelink and open a bank account.

Ask for help from service and program officers.

Remember some ID is free, e.g. Medicare Card.

A birth certificate or certificate of Australian residency or citizenship are really useful forms of ID.

Centrelink and banks give points for different kinds of ID.

Check how many points you need, and what points you can get for your ID.

Apply for ID even if someone is holding ID papers for you outside, so you can be sure you'll have it when you need it.

### Keep reading for:

- How to get a birth certificate or certificate of Australian residency or citizenship
- What you need for Centrelink or opening a bank account
- Ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can get free ID.

## An ID checklist

Type of ID	ID required to get it	Points value for Centre-link	Points to open a bank account	Cost
Birth certificate	Prison staff can assist you with this	70	70	\$38*
Certificate of Australian Citizenship/Residency		70	70	\$55/\$70
Reference from prison, parole officer or from a lawyer who's known you for more than two years	None	0	40	Free
Medicare Card	Letter of Verification and copy of MINCard if you apply from inside prison	20	25	Free
Marriage certificate	Prison staff can assist you with this	40	0	\$38*
Birth certificate of your child (under 18)	Prison staff can assist you with this	40	0	\$38*
Electoral enrolment card	None	10	0	Free
Driver's licence or learner's permit	Prison staff can assist you with this	40	40	\$41+
ATM card or passbook	100 points	40	25	Free
Current bank account statement	Varies between banks; check with prison staff	40	0	Free
Reference from an ATSI organisation (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders)	None	20	40	Free
Educational certificate/trade certificate		40	25	Free
Termination notice or separation certificate from a former employer	None, if you contact employer directly	10	0	Free

\* Cost in NSW. All costs for March 2007. Note: this is not a complete list.

## Getting ID

Once you leave prison you'll need to have ID which is sometimes called 'proof of identity'. You'll need it to claim Centrelink payments, open a bank account, get a driver's licence and get on the Housing Register with the Department of Housing. If you don't have ID now, it will take time to get hold of the documents you'll need.

Getting ID can be a frustrating task. It can be hard to get ID if you don't already have documentation. If you start early, even six months before you're due to leave, you won't have the pressure of trying to get ID after you leave, when you'll have other things to do. You can also make the most of the help you can get from welfare or services and program staff while you're in prison.

Some organisations may visit prison, and prisons will have information sessions to help you plan ahead. Ask service and program officers for more information.

## How much ID will I need?

### The point system

To open a bank account or apply for a Medicare Card or birth certificate you need to show some ID. Most often, you need 100 points of ID. Organisations like banks and Centrelink have their own lists of ID and their points value. Each organisation decides how many points you need to satisfy their ID checks. There's no one point system. You need to check with each organisation about the points you need, and the number of points you can get for different kinds of ID.

### ID for Centrelink

For most Centrelink payments, you need:

- Proof of birth in Australia or proof of arrival in Australia (a birth certificate, passport or citizenship certificate), and
- 100 points of identification from an approved list of documents. (If you have received Centrelink payments before, you may not have to provide as many points.)

Release papers or prison ID will not count, nor will a reference from a lawyer or community corrections officer.

If you can't get hold of enough ID for Centrelink, phone Centrelink on 1800 050 004 or visit your nearest Centrelink office. You may be able to establish your identity by Centrelink staff asking you some questions that only you can answer correctly.

### **ID to open a bank account**

Different banks may have slightly different ID requirements.

The following are acceptable for at least some banks:

- Birth certificate or passport
- Written reference from the prison verifying your identity.

If you have both of these, you may be able to open a bank account through Prisoners' Aid.

If you don't have a bank account when you apply for Centrelink benefits, it may be possible to get a Statement of Intention to Pay Benefits. You can take this to the bank to open an account.

### **Medicare Card**

A Medicare Card is free, and worth 20 points of ID for Centrelink claims. Medicare staff visit some prisons to assist in getting cards.

Call Medicare to see if you're already enrolled, and ask whether you need a new or replacement card. Ask them to send you the form you need. Or once you get out, go to a Medicare office and apply there. To contact Medicare or find your nearest office phone 132 011.

A Medicare Card means you can get free or cheaper health care at a hospital or from a doctor. You also need a Medicare Card to get into most rehabs.

### **Birth certificates**

A birth certificate is really useful ID. You can get a form to apply for a NSW birth certificate from Welfare or, after you're out, at any post office or at [www.bdm.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bdm.nsw.gov.au).

You need to send it to:

#### **Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages**

**In person:** 35 Regent St, Sydney (near Central Station)

**By post:** PO Box 30, Sydney NSW 2001

**Ph:** 1300 655 236

**Fax:** (02) 9699 5120

Note: things are changing for the better so ask your service and program officer for the latest.

You'll need to provide your full name, date and place of birth and the full names of your parents. You'll also need to provide some other ID. Prison staff can assist you with this.

It will cost you \$38 to apply for your certificate. (Fees at February 2007.)

### **Other Births, Deaths, and Marriages ID**

If you were born in another state, you need to apply to the registry office in that state. Fees may differ. If you weren't born in Australia, you need to get your Certificate of Australian Citizenship or Residency from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) (see below).

After you get out, you can get a Birth Card for \$48 from the NSW Registry. This is useful if you don't have a driver's licence because it's photo ID. Birth Cards are available from the Sydney, Newcastle or Wollongong registries. Your photo will be taken when you visit and the card sent to you. You cannot get a Birth Card in your married name.

If you have a child under 18 years of age, a copy of his or her birth certificate is worth 40 points of ID to Centrelink if you're named as parent or guardian on that certificate. A copy can be obtained by writing to the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, the same way you apply for your own birth certificate (see above) and for the same \$38 fee.

A marriage certificate is worth 40 points to Centrelink and 25 points for most banks. It's also available from Births, Deaths and Marriages for \$38.

### **Certificate of Australian Citizenship or Residency**

If you're an Australian citizen you can apply for a Certificate of Evidence of Australian Citizenship from DIAC. Call DIAC for a Citizen Pack. There's a \$55 fee and you need to send them certified copies of other ID and an endorsed photo.

**DIAC**

**Ph: 131 880**

**[www.citizenship.gov.au](http://www.citizenship.gov.au)**

If you weren't born in Australia but you're a permanent resident you can get a Certificate of Evidence of Resident Status from DIAC. The fee for this is \$70, and, again, you need to send them copies of other ID.

**[www.immi.gov.au](http://www.immi.gov.au)**

**Driver's licence**

A current driver's licence is worth 40 points for Centrelink.

If you have a current licence but have lost your card, there's a \$20 fee to get it replaced.

If you have an expired licence and have left prison you can arrange a new one by going into a Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) office and paying the renewal fee. The renewal fee (2006) is \$41 for one year, \$101 for three years, or \$135 for five years.

If your licence has lapsed by more than five years, you'll have to sit your driving test again and pay an extra \$42 for the test. The fees can be waived if you have a NSW Pensioner Concession Card.

Talk to Education about getting a learner's licence while you're in prison if you don't have a licence.

**Trade and study certificates**

Educational certificates and trade certificates, including AEVTI (Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute) Statement of Attainment Certificates you've gained in prison, are worth 40 points for Centrelink. If you need copies of your certificates, talk to a correctional education officer or call AEVTI on (02) 9289 1467.

**Electoral card**

An electoral enrolment card is worth 10 points for Centrelink and 25 points for most banks. It's easy to get. It confirms you're enrolled to vote in Australia. It's free and no additional ID is required. However, you must have lived at an address for more than a month, be 17 years of age or older and be an Australian citizen. You can apply for an electoral enrolment card by picking up an application form at any post office. Remember to vote or you'll be fined.

**Divorce papers**

Divorce papers are worth 40 points for Centrelink. For divorce papers, call the Family Court on (02) 9217 7111 and ask for a Document Request Form.  
Post to:

**Family Court of Australia**  
**GPO Box 9991 Sydney NSW 2001**

There is a small cost of around \$20. Ring to find out.

### **Work references**

A reference, termination notice or separation certificate from a former employer is worth 10 points for Centrelink. This includes any work you've done while in prison. Contact anyone you've worked for in the past. For work you've done in prison, speak to the CSI manager (usually called manager of industries) in your centre for a work referral.

### **Tax file number**

You need a tax file number to work or to claim Centrelink benefits (you'll get 28 days to get one after you apply for payments). Apply for a tax file number (or enquire about an old one you've lost) by calling the Australian Taxation Office. You'll need some ID to apply.

**Ph: 13 28 61 (Australian Taxation Office)**

### **Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders**

If you're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you may be able to get:

- Help to get your birth certificate
- A Medicare Card without other ID
- A reference.

### **Birth certificates for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander prisoners**

If you're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in prison you can fill out a birth certificate application form, include an Inmate Application Form and a copy of your MIN card, and send it to:

#### **Aboriginal Support and Planning Unit**

**Vagg Building, Long Bay Correctional Complex**

### **Medicare Cards for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders**

If you don't have other ID, get an ATSI enrolment form for Medicare signed by an elder, RAPO (regional Aboriginal program officer) or other prison worker who knows you. Send it to:

#### **Liaison Indigenous Access**

**HIC Reply Paid 9822**

Contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medicare Access line for more details: **1800 556 955**.



**Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander reference**

You may be able to get a reference from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation, giving your full details and the length of time they've known you. This can give you extra points with Centrelink and some banks.

Contact the Aboriginal Legal Service on (02) 9318 2122, Aboriginal Medical Service on (02) 9319 5823, or your local Aboriginal Land Council via the NSW Aboriginal Land Council on (02) 9689 4444.

**Other ID**

Other forms of useful ID are:

- Student ID cards
- Health care cards
- Gas, phone or electricity bills showing your name and address
- Other licences (e.g. forklift)
- Car registration papers
- Tenancy agreements
- School certificates or reports.

# Who to Contact

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## **Aboriginal Land Council (NSW ALC)**

Contact to find local land council for a reference for Aboriginal people.

**PO Box 1125 Parramatta NSW 2124**

**Ph: (02) 9689 4444**

**Fax: (02) 9687 1234**

## **Aboriginal Support and Planning Unit**

Vagg Building, Long Bay Correctional Complex.

**Ph: (02) 9289 2676**

**Fax: (02) 9289 2117**

## **Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)**

The AEC issues electoral enrolment cards.

**Ph: 13 23 26**

## **Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute (AEVTI)**

For Statement of Attainment certificates obtained while in prison.

**Ph: (02) 8346 1451**

## **Australian Taxation Office (ATO)**

Ring the ATO to find out about your tax file number.

**Ph: 13 28 61**

## **Banks**

ID requirements vary. As an alternative, consider one of the many credit unions in NSW.

**Commonwealth Bank: 13 2221**

**Westpac: 13 2032**

**National Australia Bank: 13 2265**

**ANZ: 13 1314**

**St George: 13 3330**

**Bendigo Bank: 1300 366 666**

## **Centrelink**

Contact Centrelink to find out their ID requirements.

**Employment: 132 850**

**Disability, Sickness**

**and Carers: 132 717**

**Family Assistance Office: 136 150**

**Youth and Student Services: 132 490**

**Multilingual Call: 131 202**

**TTY: 1800 810 586**

## **Department of Housing**

Contact DoH to find out their ID requirements.

**Ph: 1800 629 212**

## **Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)**

Citizenship and residency certificates.

**GPO Box 9984, Sydney NSW 2001**

**Ph: 131 880**

**www.immi.gov.au**

**Family Court of Australia**

For divorce papers.

**GPO Box 9991 Sydney NSW 2001**

**Ph: (02) 9217 7111**

**Medicare**

Contact Medicare about a new or replacement Medicare Card.

**GPO Box 9822 Sydney 2001**

**Ph: 132 011**

**ATSI Access Line: 1800 556 955**

**NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages**

For your birth and marriage certificates, a child's birth certificate, etc.

**In person: 35 Regent St, Sydney (near Central Station)**

**By post: PO Box 30, Sydney NSW 2001**

**Ph: 1300 655 236**

**Fax: (02) 9699 5120**

You can also download the forms from their website:

**[www.bdm.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bdm.nsw.gov.au)**

**Prisoners' Aid**

Can help with advice and financial assistance to re-establish ID.

**Ph: (02) 9281 7582**

**[www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)**

**Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA)**

For a new or replacement driver's licence.

**Ph: 132 213**

**[www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

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# Parole and Legal Issues

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## Quick Guide to Parole and Legal Issues

### What is parole?

- Parole is the part of a sentence that's served in the community
- Parole has conditions like reporting to a parole officer, doing programs and drug testing
- While you're on parole your parole officer will give you support and link you with other services.

### Who gets parole?

- A parole officer will interview you and visit where you plan to live when released
- After interviewing you and visiting the place where you plan to live, the parole officer will write a report for the State Parole Authority
- The report will recommend for or against your parole
- The State Parole Authority makes the final decision.

### **Parole and accommodation**

- Make sure you get your parole officer to explain all your parole conditions
- The State Parole Authority must approve your accommodation before you can get parole
- You need to check with your parole officer before you move to a different location
- It is highly likely that you will receive an unannounced home visit from your probation and parole officer.

### **Breaches**

- If you don't meet your parole conditions you could get reported to the State Parole Authority and be sent back to prison
- Not all breaches mean getting sent back to prison
- If you do go back to prison, you can apply for parole again later.

### **Need legal advice?**

Contact NSW LawAccess on 1300 888 529 (1300 888 LAW) or [www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au)

**Or** community legal centres (02) 9212 7333 or [www.nswclc.org.au](http://www.nswclc.org.au)

**Keep reading** for more information and contact numbers for probation and parole and legal services, including Aboriginal legal services.

# Parole and Legal Issues

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## Getting parole

### What is parole?

Parole means you serve some of your sentence in custody and serve the rest of your sentence in the community. About six out of every ten prisoners have parole.

You need to keep to the conditions that are set out in your parole order and have regular contact with a parole officer.

Your parole officer can give you practical help and support. This could include:

- Support to help you adjust to living back in the community
- Referral to programs that can help you avoid going back to prison, such as relapse prevention or anger management
- Helping you get into TAFE (Technical and Further Education) or other education programs
- Linking you with services that can help you find work.

Your parole officer will monitor how you stick to your parole orders.

This means:

- Regularly reporting to your Parole Office at the Community Offender Services (COS) office or sometimes meeting at your home
- It is highly likely that your parole officer will visit your home unannounced
- Telling your parole officer before you move to new accommodation
- Regular drug testing
- Participating in treatment or education programs.

Conditions are set by the State Parole Authority. They can be different for each person, and can be changed by the State Parole Authority at any time.

### Who gets parole?

When the court gives a prison sentence, it can state a 'non-parole' period. You will have to serve all of this period in prison. If your sentence was under three years, you'll generally be released automatically at the end of the non-parole period.



If you're serving a sentence of three years or more, the State Parole Authority decides what will happen with your parole. The State Parole Authority will review your case some months before your earliest release date (ERD). The ERD is the end of the non-parole period that was set by the court.

Talk with your parole officer early in your sentence so that you can plan for your release and increase your chances for parole when the time comes.

A parole officer will talk to you in prison, and write a report to help the State Parole Authority make its decision. The report will cover issues like your record, drug and alcohol issues, education and employment history. The State Parole Authority will also be interested in:

- Your participation in prison programs working on the behaviour that led to you being imprisoned
- Your overall behaviour in prison, e.g. any serious incidents
- Results of drug screening in prison.

You may have to attend a hearing with members of the State Parole Authority. The State Parole Authority looks at each person's case individually and can ask for extra information to help when making their decisions.

### **Parole and accommodation**

To get parole you must have somewhere to live when you leave prison. Good options for accommodation include:

- Staying with family, good friends or a partner
- Department of Housing accommodation.

Your parole officer is unlikely to support plans to live with co-offenders or others with a history of offending or drug use.

You need to tell your parole officer where you plan to live so a parole officer can make a visit and confirm your address beforehand. It's important to discuss your release with the people you want to live with so they're prepared when the parole officer visits.

Read the chapter on Housing and Accommodation (p.13) for more information about finding accommodation.

## **What happens after I'm released on parole?**

Before you're released you'll be given details of your first appointment outside with the parole officer who'll supervise you in the community. Usually you'll have to report for parole to a Community Offender Services office (Probation and Parole) the day you're released, or the next day.

At this meeting you'll go over your parole conditions, and sign a copy to show you understand these conditions and agree to meet them. An appointment with your parole officer will be made for you before you're released. At this appointment you'll be told about the conditions of your parole. This includes details of when and where you'll need to report for parole. You'll have to sign to show you understand these conditions and agree to comply with them.

As well as covering your reporting conditions, your parole officer will talk to you about your needs, and work out a plan. Their aim is to help you address the reasons why you went to prison, and to assist you to settle into the community and live a stable life. Your parole officer will be able to help you better if you can talk about what you need, and what you're hoping to do.

## **Breaches**

If you don't keep to your parole conditions, your parole officer may have to tell the State Parole Authority. The State Parole Authority will then decide what action will be taken. Action may include:

- noting the breach but taking no action
- issuing you with a warning or changing the conditions of your parole
- revoking your parole order, which means you would be arrested and returned to prison.

Parolees who are returned to custody can get parole again later. The State Parole Authority will consider the possibility of you being re-paroled. In this application you'd normally give reasons why you think you'd do better this time around. Getting support from one of the agencies in this booklet can help.

If you have difficulty meeting parole conditions you're more likely to get another chance if the State Parole Authority sees that you're not making excuses and are taking responsibility for your own behaviour.

# Who to Contact

## Parole

### State Parole Authority

GPO Box 31

Sydney NSW 2000

Administration Ph: (02) 8346 1780

### Community Offender Services

#### Probation and Parole

#### Regional Offices

For enquiries about parole, ring one of the numbers below to find your nearest office.

#### Northwest

Ph: (02) 6549 0400

#### Southwest

Ph: (02) 4824 2222

#### Outer Sydney Metro

Ph: (02) 9854 7200

#### Inner Sydney Metro

Ph: (02) 9289 2705

## Other legal issues

If you have legal questions regarding custody of children, outstanding warrants or fines, your rights, etc, the following agencies may assist.

The best place to ring first if you're not sure where to start is the NSW LawAccess line on

**1300 888 529 (1300 888 LAW)**

or [www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au).

## Aboriginal Legal Services

### Aboriginal Legal Services

#### (NSW/ACT) Ltd

(Head Office)

Parramatta Ph: (02) 8842 8000

Legal services are provided at the following locations:

#### Central South Eastern Zone

Parramatta Ph: (02) 8842 8000

Canberra Ph: (02) 6249 8488

Moruya Ph: (02) 4474 2400

Nowra Ph: (02) 4422 3255

Redfern Ph: (02) 9318 2122

Wollongong Ph: (02) 4225 7977

#### Northern Zone

Armidale Ph: (02) 6772 5770

Grafton Ph: (02) 6640 1400

Kempsey Ph: (02) 6562 5990

Lismore Ph: (02) 6622 7088

Moree Ph: (02) 6752 5700

Newcastle Ph: (02) 4921 8815

Tamworth Ph: (02) 6761 3766

Taree Ph: (02) 6551 3928

#### Western Zone

Bourke Ph: (02) 6872 2200

Broken Hill Ph: (08) 8087 3233

Dubbo Ph: (02) 6882 6880

Griffith Ph: (02) 6962 7675

Wagga Wagga Ph: (02) 6921 9230

Walgett Ph: (02) 6828 2039

### **Warringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Service**

Aboriginal legal service for women.

**Ph: (02) 9569 3847  
1800 686 587  
(from outside Sydney)**

### **Other legal services**

#### **Community legal centres**

There are around 40 community legal centres (CLCs) throughout NSW. They provide legal advice and assistance with a range of issues including debt, tenancy, parole and family law. To find your local CLC, contact the State Office:

**Ph: (02) 9212 7333**  
**[www.nswclc.org.au](http://www.nswclc.org.au)**

#### **Legal representation**

Legal Aid provides free legal representation to disadvantaged people. See them when they visit your prison or call the NSW LawAccess line:

**Ph: (02) 9219 5000**  
**Under 18s Hotline: 1800 101 810**  
**[www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)**  
**Law access line: 1300 888 529**

#### **Prisoners' Legal Service**

Prisoners' Legal Service is a specialist section of Legal Aid for prisoners.

**Ph: (02) 9219 5888**  
**Fax: (02) 9219 5059**  
**[www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au)**

### **Office of Fair Trading**

This NSW Government office can help with your rights as a consumer, and offers tenancy advice.

**1 Fitzwilliam Street  
Parramatta 2150**

**Ph: 13 32 20**  
**TTY: (02) 1300 723 404**

### **Women's Legal Resources Centre**

Provides free legal advice, information and referral on all aspects of the law as it affects women.

**Ph: (02) 9749 5533**  
**1800 801 501**  
**(from outside Sydney)**

**Indigenous women: 1800 639 784**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

## Grant's story

# 'Without my parole officer I'd still be on the street.'

*Grant got out of prison 13 months ago. This was his third time inside. 'I didn't plan for what would happen when I got out. I went to Centrelink and they said it would be two days before I could get some money. Things fell through for me and I had nowhere to go, so I went back to living on the streets. I spent about four months hanging out at the Cross, drinking and doing drugs.'*

*Because he was on parole, Grant had to meet regularly with his parole officer, Dave. 'Dave knew I was on the street. He found this place where I could live with a group of guys. I had a week to clean up my act, because I couldn't drink when I went there. I thought the people would be like screws, but it wasn't like that. They were pretty flexible. I got a case manager to help me, because I came out of prison with nothing. My family aren't into drugs, so they didn't want me around.'*

*Grant found it hard at first. 'When I first moved in to the house I couldn't sleep on my bed. It was too squishy after sleeping on the ground for four months. It was hard getting used to paying rent and not being able to drink at home. But it's been worth it.'*

*Grant says getting off drugs was the key. 'I went on methadone in prison, and when I got out I was trying to be a hero, getting my methadone down real quick. But then I'd be strung out, and I'd really want a hit. I had to get the methadone back up to a stable dose, so I didn't need the other stuff. Then I could start to do other things.' Dave, Grant's parole officer, helped him get drug and alcohol counselling, and then challenged him to think about doing a course.*

*'Dave told me, "You've got brains, use them!" He wants all his clients to make something of themselves. He could see that even on the street I'd be helping people, telling them where to get a free feed, or clean needles.'*

*'I left school young because of drugs and violence. Now, I'm at TAFE four days a week, and I'm working towards studying welfare. I thought Dave was crazy at first when he started talking about me doing a TAFE outreach course, but I've stuck with it. Dave got me involved in an Aboriginal men's group, and through that I've met brothers who've been inside like me. Today they're helping people to stay outside. If it wasn't for Dave I'd still be on the street. I'm going to use my stuff to help other people make it on the outside too.'*

# Getting a Job



## Quick Guide to Getting a Job

Although it can take time, many ex-prisoners get and keep good jobs.

When you apply for Newstart or Youth Allowance you'll be sent for an interview about finding work.

If you're ready for work you'll be sent to a Job Network service.

You won't get paid by Centrelink until you've had this interview, so it's important to go.

When you go to the interview take your work history or references with you.

There are special programs to help Aboriginal people and young people find work. Ask at Centrelink or Job Network about extra help you may be able to get.

For information about Job Network and other employment services contact 13 62 68.

For information about volunteering contact Volunteering NSW on (02) 9261 3600.

### **Keep reading to find out about:**

- How Job Network can help you
- Job Capacity Assessments
- Extra help to find work
- Work for the Dole and volunteer work.



# Getting a Job

Finding work is a numbers game. As the saying goes, 'you gotta to be in it to win it'. The more jobs you apply for, the more likely you're to find a job.

Everyone gets knocked back sometimes. Try not to take rejections personally. With persistence and the right help many ex-prisoners do find and keep good jobs.

It can help if you:

- Focus on applying for jobs where you have the necessary skills or experience.
- Look at the things you can offer an employer. This can help you stay positive while you're looking for work.
- Spend some time each day on the phone, looking in the paper or on the internet, or accessing the jobs kiosk at Job Network or Centrelink.
- Get up at the same time each morning, so you're in a routine when you get a job and need to leave for work each day.
- Make the most of services which are there to help you find work or access training.

## Job Network

Job Network services help people find work. When you claim Newstart or Youth Allowance from Centrelink you'll either be referred to Job Network or to a Job Capacity Assessment. If you appear to be ready for work, and there are no barriers to you finding work, you'll be referred to Job Network.

Job Network has replaced the old Commonwealth Employment Service (CES). A range of non-government agencies are members of Job Network. If you have a preferred Job Network member you can ask Centrelink to refer you to them. Otherwise Centrelink will refer you to one in your local area.

It's very important to attend your appointment with Job Network as you won't be paid a Centrelink Allowance until you do so.

At your first Job Network appointment you'll generally be given Jobsearch Support to find work, including registration on the website [jobsearch.gov.au](http://jobsearch.gov.au) with a summary of your skills and abilities. When you go for your first Job Network appointment take some identification, and any information relevant to your employment. You may have a summary of your work history (also called a résumé) or references, or applications you've written for jobs.

You'll be able to use Job Search facilities such as touch screen kiosks in Job Network and Centrelink offices where you can look for work. You'll get a Job Network card with your Job Seeker ID to use when visiting the Jobsearch Support office. You can also get advice on job search techniques, career options and employment programs.

### **Job Capacity Assessment**

If Centrelink can see you have medical issues, or other difficulties that mean you're highly disadvantaged in the job market, you'll be referred for a Job Capacity Assessment. This could be done by a specialist Centrelink officer, or by Commonwealth Rehabilitation Services (CRS) Australia, Health Services Australia or a non-government organisation.

Most Job Capacity Assessments take one to two hours. You'll be interviewed by the assessor in an office. As well as deciding if you're able to work, the assessment will work out whether you should be linked with employment or other services which could help you prepare for, find or keep a job. If you face barriers to work such as homelessness, drug or alcohol problems or other personal problems, you may be referred to a Personal Support Program. If you have a disability you may be referred to a specialist disability service.

### **Job Network Intensive Support**

You'll be referred for Intensive Support if you can't find a job in three months after you apply for Newstart. You can also be referred earlier if you're identified through a Job Capacity Assessment as needing extra support. This could include training in interview skills or to boost confidence. If you can't find work after 12 months you'll get more intensive support again.

### **Extra help for Indigenous people**

Job Search training is available as soon as you apply for Newstart or Youth Allowance. In some places where employment opportunities are limited, Community Development Employment Projects provide work experience that may lead to jobs.

### **Extra help for young people**

Job Search training is available as soon as you apply for Newstart or Youth Allowance.

If you're under 22 years you may be referred to a JPET (Job Placement Employment and Training) service. JPET can help you get back into education, get you help to find work, or sort out issues like being homeless that make it hard to find work.

### **Work for the Dole**

Work for the Dole provides opportunities for voluntary work. You may volunteer for Work for the Dole if you have difficulty finding work. While you volunteer you can earn credits towards the cost of training programs. Talk to your Job Network provider or other employment service about Work for the Dole. If you're unemployed for a long time (e.g. one year), you may be required to be involved in Work for a Dole for a period of time.

### **Do I have to tell my employer about my criminal record?**

If (in the interview or after you get the job) your employer asks you if you have a record, it's an offence to lie. If you get the job and your employer finds out about your criminal record, you could lose your job and be charged. Always tell the truth if you're asked. However, if you're not asked, you don't have to tell your employer.

Many employers will run a police check on everyone they consider for a job. This doesn't mean that you won't get the job if they find out about your record. However, you shouldn't expect to get a job driving an armoured car if you have a history of armed robbery, or to work directly with cash if you've been convicted of theft, for example.

If you're working with children you'll be asked to complete a Working with Children Check. This will involve a check of your police record in relation to relevant offences. If you're volunteering with children you'll be asked to make a declaration that you don't have a record of offences against children.

If you've been convicted of certain offences involving children you may be breaking the law if you do voluntary or paid work with children.

### **Do I have to put my time in prison on my résumé?**

A résumé is a way of advertising yourself to possible employers. It's not a life history. Everything you put on your résumé must be the truth, but you can leave things out that aren't going to help your chances. If you have certificates from courses you've done in prison, you can put them on your résumé without saying that you studied in prison.

It's not unusual for people to do short courses while unemployed. But again, remember that you must tell the truth if you're asked.

AEVTI runs courses in some prisons that can help you get ready for returning to work. For more information, talk to a correctional education officer or ring AEVTI on (02) 8346 1450. Your Job Network provider or other employment service can help you write a résumé, and work out how to deal with the gaps in your employment record.

### **Keeping your job**

Finding a job is only the start of the challenge. The next part is keeping it. If you've spent months or years in prison, it can be difficult getting up every morning to go to work. Employers expect you to turn up to work every day, on time. It's your responsibility, no matter how difficult at first, to get yourself up in time for work. It does get easier!

The difference between prison work and work on the outside may also cause problems. An employer in the 'real world' may have higher expectations than the prison did. You'll be expected to work hard all day, only taking breaks at permitted times. An employer won't 'carry' a lazy worker for long. Remember you're being paid a lot more than you were in prison for these greater demands.

Ex-prisoners might also find it difficult taking orders from a boss. In prison, orders from officers are given every day. Having a boss telling you what to do can make you feel like you're back in prison, only now you can walk out.

Walking out means being out of work again, so remind yourself you're not in prison, and that it's normal for a worker to be told what to do by the boss.

The better you become at your job, the less supervision you'll need.

Fear and anxiety can be overwhelming when you start a new job. If you need help coping, ask for help. Use the list of counselling services on p.9.

### **Bad workplaces**

There are dodgy workplaces out there. It's not uncommon for ex-prisoners to be offered cash for casual work. Cash-in-hand work is not recorded on the books, and it's illegal. However, it can be tempting to work for cash to supplement your Centrelink payment without declaring it. Be careful: if you're caught, the penalty will be heavy, and you may end up in serious debt to Centrelink or even be charged.

Also, if you work for someone on this basis you'll have no rights. It's not uncommon for dodgy employers to underpay or fail to pay their 'unofficial' employees for work done. They know you won't complain to anyone because of your situation. If you get injured at work you won't have the same protection. It can also make it harder later (e.g. for custody of kids) as you'll have no record of having worked.

In some circumstances, it's illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of their having a criminal record. If you feel you're being treated unfairly or harassed on the basis of your criminal record (or for any other reason), the Anti-Discrimination Board may be able to assist you. Jobwatch is also a useful contact for all legal matters related to employment. You can also talk to your union. See *Who to Contact* on p.61 for contact details of these organisations.

### **Volunteer work**

Doing voluntary work may sound like a strange idea when what you most need is money, but there are some good reasons for considering it:

- Working voluntarily can prepare you for paid employment in a number of ways. You get used to dealing with straight people again and get some workplace experience.
- It gets you out of the house, which helps you feel less isolated and builds your confidence.
- It looks good on your résumé, shows an employer you're serious about working, and improves your chances of getting a job.
- It can sometimes lead to paid employment in unexpected ways, particularly if you do your job well.

For ideas about where to find voluntary work contact:

- Volunteering NSW, Ph: (02) 9261 3600.

Other options include:

- The RSPCA, which has a large volunteer program. You need to attend information sessions first.
- The big charities, which always need help: try the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul (enquire at local offices).

**Other ideas**

*The Big Issue* is a magazine sold on the streets by unemployed people. The vendors keep half the sale price of each magazine sold. Training to sell the magazine is short and easy, so you can start earning a few dollars quickly. It won't make you rich, but if you're short on cash, it's worth considering.

*The Big Issue* sometimes runs other programs, such as creative writing classes, art classes and other groups that are free and worthwhile.

**Childcare**

If you're caring for children, you can't risk leaving your kids at home by themselves while you go to work. Talk to Centrelink and your Job Network or other employment service about financial help available with childcare fees. Fees for childcare centres vary, so ask around. Family day care (care in registered carers' homes) can be cheaper than childcare centres.

# Who to Contact

## Employment programs

### Employment Services Information Line

Information about Job Network service providers and other employment services.

Ph: 13 62 68

[www.jobsearch.gov.au](http://www.jobsearch.gov.au)

Government website with assistance for job seekers and contact details for employment services.

[www.workplace.gov.au](http://www.workplace.gov.au)

Australian government website with information about employment.

## Volunteering and other ideas

### The Big Issue

Level 5, Suite 58  
8–24 Kippax Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Ph: (02) 9212 2284

### Volunteering NSW

Helps you find volunteer work.

Ph: (02) 9261 3600

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)

## Help in the workplace

### Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)

Information about unions and general workplace advice.

Ph: 1300 362 223

### The Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW

If you think you've been discriminated against, the Anti-Discrimination Board may be able to help you.

Ph: (02) 9268 5544  
1800 670 812

### LawAccess

If you have questions about your rights at work, ring the LawAccess Hotline (NSW Legal Aid).

Ph: 1300 888 529

### Wage Line

For information about what wages you're entitled to.

Ph: 131 628

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You'll be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

## Kim's story

# 'At work they have no idea.'

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*Kim left prison almost 18 months ago.*

*'My biggest fear has been that someone would find out that I'd been in prison.'*

*She attended classes at a nearby TAFE before she was released. Even this was a big adjustment after being in prison. 'The first time I went to TAFE, I realised after an hour or so that I hadn't heard any keys. I needed some supplies and wondered "Who unlocks the cupboard?" Then I thought "Idiot, they're not locked!"'*

*She did end up telling several fellow students that she'd been in prison. 'I'd been advised not to make things up, but just to tell as much of the truth as I could. We were chatting about a movie but when the others asked if I'd like to see it, I had to say no, I didn't have enough money. Then one of them said, "you live with three other people; you don't have a phone or a car. How come you don't have enough money?" so I told him where I really lived.'*

*'It took a while for him to get that I was in prison, not just living at the prison, but he wasn't worried. I've kept in touch with him. I told one other person, and she just said, "So that's why you'd never take a lift home".'*

*But Kim's confidence took a beating when she was on work release, and realised someone who knew her and all about her past was working next door.*

*Several months after she was released Kim got the job. Her employer doesn't know that she's been in prison. 'At work they have no idea. Sometimes people ask what I used to do, and I talk about work I did in prison. I just don't say that I was inside.'*

*'At first I felt like I was lying, because they didn't know. I felt like a fraud. Then I told myself they hadn't asked, and they didn't need to know. Mind you, I did feel like I had to be superhuman in case they found out.'*



*Kim recently had an encounter at the bus stop that made her realise how people without prison experience would miss cues that were clear to her. 'This man told me how he'd moved round to different places, Parramatta, Grafton, Glen Innes. I knew he'd been inside, but I didn't bite, and he assumed I didn't know.'*

*'With people who don't know I've been in prison I have to watch what I say. It's often more relaxing being around people who know. We don't talk about it necessarily, but it's just easier.'*

*Kim enjoys being able to spend time on her own. Her flat is a refuge for her. She's also been doing volunteer work. 'I don't want to get too close to people, but I do want closeness. I'm just fooling around with that now, seeing where it goes.'*

*She's learning to live with the fear that people will find out that she's spent time in prison. Recently she watched the movie 'The Shawshank Redemption'. 'In the movie two guys who've been in prison talk about their fear that people will find out. It made me feel normal, like it wasn't just me.'*

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.



## Quick Guide to Education

- If you've done some study in prison (e.g. with AEVTI or TAFE) you can get recognition for what you've done, and keep working towards a qualification with TAFE or another training provider.
- TAFE staff such as the vocational counsellors, Outreach coordinators or Aboriginal coordinators can help you get recognition for your prison studies and help you choose a course and find out how to enrol.
- You can get income support from Centrelink while you study.
- If you're on a Centrelink pension or benefit you can enrol in a TAFE course for free. TAFE Outreach courses and basic education courses are all free.

Contact TAFE NSW on 131 601 for more information, or check their website at [www.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.tafensw.edu.au).

To find local reading and writing courses contact the Reading and Writing Hotline on 1300 655 506.

### Keep reading to find out about:

- PEET (Pathways to Education, Employment and Training)
- Studying at TAFE
- Studying at a community college
- Centrelink support for study
- Contact details.

## **Studying at TAFE**

Getting qualifications can make it easier to find work. If you've finished modules of study with AEVTI or TAFE while in prison, you're already on the way. If you didn't get the chance to study in prison, you may have opportunities to get started now.

Before you're released, if you've studied a course in prison with AEVTI or TAFE, talk to the teacher about what you could study next to build on your qualifications. Also ask where the course is taught, as this might make a difference to where you want to live when you leave prison.

It's a good idea to take the results of any courses you've done when you go to discuss study options at TAFE or other agencies. They may want to see your academic transcripts (lists of modules and marks).

## **PEET (Pathways to Employment Education and Training)**

TAFE runs PEET through Community Offender Services (Parole) offices in different parts of NSW. Sessions run for four hours each week, over nine weeks. The course helps people who've had drug or alcohol issues to set goals for education and work. It's a good place to start if you're not sure about your options for work or study.

Talk to your parole officer if you think PEET could help you.

## **Finding a TAFE course**

TAFE campuses in NSW are organised into groups, called institutes. Not all courses or services are available at each campus. Contact details for the institutes are in *Who to Contact* on p.71.

Many courses will enrol students only once or twice a year. This means that you may have to wait before you can enrol, depending on your release date. Outreach courses and basic education courses start throughout the year. Planning ahead will help you be prepared if you need to enrol fast, or if you have to wait a few months before you can start studying.

If you want to find out more about TAFE courses, or already know the area or course you'd like to study, you can get information about TAFE courses at [www.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.tafensw.edu.au) or by contacting TAFE on 131 601.

If you've left prison and want help to decide whether you could study at TAFE, and what you would study, try talking to a TAFE counsellor. Almost all TAFE colleges have a counsellor, and they're trained to provide counselling to help people make work and study plans.

TAFE counsellors also help with personal or learning issues that could be barriers to studying successfully. You can find out about courses in your area by contacting the TAFE NSW Information Centre on 131 601 or your nearest TAFE institute. Contact details are on p.71.

### **Fees for TAFE courses**

You don't have to pay fees for your TAFE courses if you're on Centrelink payments like Newstart, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment or Disability Support Pension or if you're Aboriginal. A number of TAFE access courses, such as Outreach courses and basic education courses, are free.

Many courses need textbooks and equipment, which you have to provide. If you're Aboriginal you should be able to get help through Abstudy with buying texts and equipment for the course.

### **Income while you study at TAFE**

If you're studying full-time at TAFE you should be eligible for Youth Allowance (up to age 24) or Austudy or Abstudy. This means you won't have the obligations to look for work that go with Newstart.

If you're Aboriginal, or receiving a Disability Support Pension, you can get some extra help from Centrelink if you're studying.

Contact Centrelink for more information. See the numbers in *Who to Contact* on p.71.

### **Help to succeed at TAFE**

TAFE offers introductory learning courses that can help you improve your reading, writing and number skills and learn work skills. These can be stepping stones to other TAFE courses, or to the workforce.

Outreach courses also provide introductory courses that cover a range of entry-level vocational areas. They're usually shorter courses running for about six to ten weeks. For more information contact the Outreach coordinator at the TAFE institute nearest to you. Contact details for TAFE institutes are listed in *Who to Contact* on p.71.

If you have difficulties with learning you may be able to get learner support to help you with your studies. Support is also available for students with disabilities. You might use a drop-in centre, have extra help in the classroom, see a tutor or get help on the internet.

If you're worried that your reading, writing or number skills will let you down while doing your TAFE course, talk to a TAFE counsellor, your TAFE teacher or an Outreach or Aboriginal coordinator about getting help.

### **Support for Aboriginal students**

TAFE offers services to help Aboriginal students to feel comfortable about accessing TAFE courses. Contact an Aboriginal coordinator at the TAFE institute nearest to you to ask about support for Aboriginal students. See *Who to Contact* on p.71 for contact details of TAFE institutes.

Most campuses will have an Aboriginal student support officer. They can help you with enrolment and give help while you do your course. They'll have information about any other support services that could help you.

### **Should I tell TAFE staff about being in prison?**

You don't have to tell anyone about being in prison unless you choose to or are asked. Sometimes TAFE staff will be able to support you better if they do know that you've been in prison, but the decision to tell staff is up to you.

TAFE counsellors provide a confidential service, so if you tell them that you've been in prison they can't share this information with other TAFE staff.

Certificates that you've gained in prison may show that you've studied at AEVTI. Most people in TAFE who see your certificates will not be aware that you got them in prison.

### **Studying at a community college**

Community colleges are non-profit colleges for adults. They're often located in the grounds of state schools. They offer courses ranging from hobby classes to certificate courses similar to those at TAFE. If you've been studying General Education courses in prison, you may be able to continue to work towards a certificate in these subjects at a community college without having to pay fees. Most of their other courses have fees, and they don't have the same concessions as TAFE.

To find a community college phone (02) 9642 5622 or visit [www.communitycolleges.nsw.edu.au](http://www.communitycolleges.nsw.edu.au).

### **Studying at university**

Some jobs need university qualifications. Some universities have alternative entry options, especially for older students. These can include special study programs and special schemes for Aboriginal students. Fees for university are generally much higher than for TAFE, and students often have to use government loan schemes to pay for them. Local libraries will generally have publications such as the *UAC (Universities Admission Centre) Guide*, *Good Universities Guide* or *Job Guide* with information about university courses. TAFE qualifications at Cert IV level or higher can sometimes count towards the first stage of a university degree. Contact the Universities Admission Centre on (02) 9752 0200 or [www.uac.edu.au](http://www.uac.edu.au) for more information.



# Who to Contact

## Reading and Writing Hotline

Help with reading and writing in your local area.

Ph: 1300 655 506

## TAFE NSW

### TAFE NSW Information Centre

Level 13

1 Oxford Street

Darlinghurst 2010

Ph: 131 601

[www.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.tafensw.edu.au)

### TAFE institutes

Hunter	(02) 4923 7222
Illawarra	(02) 4222 2908
New England	(02) 6768 2445
North Coast	(02) 6588 2222
Northern Sydney	131 674
Riverina	(02) 6938 1444
South Western	
Sydney	(02) 9796 5400
Sydney	(02) 9796 5400
Western NSW	(02) 6393 5900
Western Sydney	131 870

## Centrelink

Contact details for payments:

**Youth and Students (any age):**

Ph: 13 24 90

**Abstudy:** 13 23 17

**Disability:** 13 27 17

## Community colleges

To find a community college:

Ph: (02) 9642 5622

[www.communitycolleges.nsw.edu.au](http://www.communitycolleges.nsw.edu.au)

## Universities Admissions Centre

You must apply here to study at university.

Ph: (02) 9752 0200

[www.uac.edu.au](http://www.uac.edu.au)

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

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# Money Matters

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## Quick Guide to Money Matters

You can start to deal with debts while you're in prison.

Talk to Welfare staff if you're concerned about debts.

Face up to debts as soon as you can. Most debts have to be paid eventually. You'll probably pay less money in the long run if you work with your creditors, rather than avoiding them.

Financial counsellors can help if you owe lots of money. They can often talk for you to people you owe money to.

Financial counsellors can help you sort out affordable payments, and set up a budget.

Contact the Credit and Debt Hotline on 1800 808 488 to find a free financial counselling service near you.

### Keep reading for:

- Tips on making your money stretch further
- Places to get help with meals, food or other material aid
- Information about dealing with debts
- Phone numbers to get help with dealing with debts.

Many people who come out of prison find they owe money for unpaid bills, old fines, etc. A lot of people put off dealing with debts, but this can make it worse in the end because many creditors will keep going until they get the debt paid. By then interest and penalties may have made the debt a lot bigger than it was in the beginning. You can start sorting out your debts before you're released.

If you find yourself in a lot of debt when you get out, ring the Credit and Debt Hotline on 1800 808 488. They can help you sort out your money and find a financial counsellor. Financial counsellors can talk with the people you owe money to, and work out arrangements you can afford. They can often get creditors to come to an agreement, even where you haven't been able to get the creditors to listen. They can sometimes get the amount you owe reduced.

**Centrelink:** If you owe money to Centrelink, talk to them about your options. Remember that Centrelink can't refuse to pay you benefits just because you owe them money.

**Child Support Agency (CSA):** Contact the Child Support Agency on 131 272 if you think you may owe money, or you're concerned about your CSA obligations.

**Victims Compensation Tribunal:** Contact the Tribunal on 1800 069 054 to make arrangements if you have an order to pay a debt to the Tribunal. You can pay in instalments and, depending on your circumstances, payments could be reduced or put on hold.

**Unpaid fines:** If you owe money for unpaid fines, ring the State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO) on 1300 655 805 or visit [www.sdرو.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sdرو.nsw.gov.au). You can apply to pay these debts back in instalments or have them postponed or waived. For help dealing with the SDRO speak to a welfare officer, or when you're out find your local community legal centre by ringing 9212 7333 or talk to a financial counsellor.

**Credit record:** To find out if you owe any money for unpaid bills, credit cards, etc, write to Veda Advantage to request a copy of your credit file. See *Who to Contact* on p.79 for their contact details.

## **Start dealing with your debts before release**

You can start dealing with debts while you're in prison. If you owe money to Centrelink, the State Debt Recovery Office or the Child Support Agency and you tell them you're in prison they can suspend action until you leave prison. This may stop extra interest on the debt, and means family members won't have to

deal with debt collectors because of your debts. Or you can start paying your debts at very low rates.

If you have loan or credit card debts, you may be able to ask for repayments and interest charges to be stopped until you get out of prison. Ask Welfare staff if you need to contact creditors or get advice about dealing with debts while in prison.

### **Making your money go further**

It's tough living on a government benefit. It's even tougher surviving the first few weeks and months after release, when you may face many one-off costs such as paying bond, fees for getting ID, setting up accommodation and so on. It's possible to survive this! Here are some tips from people who've managed to do this.

#### **Make a budget or money plan**

*'I sat down and worked out everything I needed to pay for and whether my benefit would cover it. The financial counsellor got me started. I worked out a budget, so I knew what I could spend each week, and to try and put aside money for the power bills. For a while things were pretty tight, and I had to get some help with food vouchers at times, but I'm coping better now than I ever have.'*

(See *Who to Contact* on p.79 for information about food vouchers and financial counselling.)

#### **Look at your spending**

*'I couldn't work out where my money was going until someone suggested I write down everything I was spending. I didn't want to carry a book around with me so I saved all the dockets whenever I bought stuff. That helped me figure out how much I was spending on food while I was out, and how much my smokes cost. I started to take some food from home, and set a limit for how many ciggies I could smoke each day.'*

#### **If it's too good to be true, it probably is**

*'I used to try to solve my money worries by gambling, until I realised that the only people getting rich out of it owned the club. One time a mate got me into a scheme he promised would double my money in a month – but no such luck. Now I stay away from places where I know there will be pokies – it's better for me to share a drink at a mate's place than to go to a club or pub.'*

(If you could use help to avoid gambling there are numbers to call on p.80.)

### **Consider looking for a job with ‘perks.’**

*‘I got a job washing up in a restaurant. We get cheap meals, which really helps.’*

### **Use your Concession Card and Health Care Card**

*‘I save heaps by using my Concession Card on public transport and my Health Care Card when I see my doctor and buy medication. I keep it with me all the time.’*

(You can get Concession and Health Care Cards from Centrelink if you get an income support payment or are on a low income. If you’re eligible for a pension card you may save extra money, e.g. on movie tickets.)

### **Beware of fines**

*‘I never used to worry about getting tickets for skipping train fares until they started chasing me for hundreds of dollars I had no way of paying. I got some help to sort them out, and now I’ve got a car I’m really careful about avoiding tickets so I don’t have the same problem.’*

(Contact the Credit and Debt Hotline on 1800 808 488 if you need help sorting out unpaid fines.)

### **Watch your phone bill**

*‘Getting a mobile was great, but the bills nearly finished me. I never knew how much I was going to have to pay, and I ended with debts to different companies. At home other people used the phone and I got stuck with the bill. I ended up getting a pre-paid mobile so I could keep track of the costs. If I can, I get people to ring me on the home phone. I got my home phone converted so it only took incoming calls, so I only pay for the calls I made on the mobile.’*

(If you have a support worker, ask if you can make some of your important calls from their office. This is not always possible but they will help if they can.)

*‘At one stage I had to make a lot of phone calls to places where I had to wait on for a long time. This was really expensive on my mobile. My counsellor could see this was stressing me out, so she organised a couple of times for me to use the phone at her office.’*

(See *Getting Support* on p.9 for information on people who may be able to support you.)

### **If you can't pay a bill, call the company and explain**

*'I had some big bills left over from before I went inside. I just wanted to chuck the envelopes when I saw them because there was no way I could pay what they were asking for. In the end I got help to work out smaller payments. It's taken a while, but it's good not to have that sick feeling every time I look in the letter box.'*

(The Credit and Debt Hotline can advise you about this: ph 1800 808 488.)

### **Avoid excess bank fees**

*'I didn't know that every time I used another bank's ATM, they'd slug me \$2. And I used to use my bank's ATM all the time, until I found out that I only got ten free withdrawals a month.'*

### **Spend carefully**

*'I wish I didn't have to be careful with money, but I've accepted that I do. When I first got out I bought stuff I needed second-hand. I've used lay-by for things like Christmas presents. I try to put a tiny bit aside so I can save up and give myself a treat now and again.'*

### **Material aid**

Material aid means food or food vouchers, electricity vouchers, clothing or furniture. Cash assistance is rare.

Material aid agencies have limited resources and may not be able to help you. Try to be polite if you're refused, because you may want to ask for assistance another time.

If they can't help you, ask them if they can suggest anyone else you can contact.



# Who to Contact

## Material aid agencies

The following list is not complete. To find a service near you, ring one of these numbers or try your local council or neighbourhood centre.

### Mission Australia

Services include assistance with housing, food, household goods and clothing. Ask if they have a service near you.

Ph: (02) 9219 2000

### Salvation Army

Services include assistance with housing, food, furniture, household goods and clothing. Ask if they have a service near you.

Ph: (02) 9264 1711  
1300 36 36 22

### Smith Family

Provides a range of services including assistance with housing, food, household goods and clothing. Ask if they have a service near you.

Ph: (02) 9085 7222

### St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies)

Provides a range of services including assistance with housing, food, household goods and clothing. Ask if they have a service near you.

Ph: (02) 9560 8666

## The Station Drop-in Centre

Provides emergency relief to homeless people in the inner Sydney area (ring first to make an appointment).

Ph: (02) 9299 2252

## Credit and debt issues

### Child Support Agency

Contact them to organise your child support payments.

Ph: 131 272

### Credit and Debt Hotline

The Credit and Debt Hotline can provide general advice about credit and debt related problems, as well referring you to a free financial counselling service in your area.

Ph: 1800 808 488

### Community legal centres

To find your nearest legal centre, ring the state office.

Ph: (02) 9212 7333

### Consumer Credit Legal Centre

Legal assistance with debt issues.

Ph: (02) 9212 4216

**State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO)**

Contact the SDRO to find out about non-civil debts (parking fines, fare evasion, etc). You can apply to pay these debts back in instalments or to have them waived.

**PO Box A2571**

**Sydney South NSW 1235**

**Ph: 1300 655 805**

**Fax: (02) 9277 6363**

**Veda Advantage**

To get a copy of your credit file, apply in writing to Veda Advantage.

**PO Box 964**

**North Sydney NSW 2059**

**Ph: (02) 9464 6000**

**Fax: (02) 9951 7880**

**Victims Compensation Tribunal**

Contact them if you're required to pay compensation.

**Ph: 1800 069 054**

**Wesley Finance and Debt  
Counselling Services**

**Ph: (02) 9951 5544**

Note: A list of financial counsellors can be found on the Financial Counsellors Association website:  
**[www.financialcounsellors.asn.au](http://www.financialcounsellors.asn.au)**

**Gambling****G-Line**

Counselling and referral to assist with problem gambling.

**Ph: 1800 633 635**

**Gamblers Anonymous**

Contact GA to find a support group meeting in your area.

**Ph: (02) 9564 1574**

**Free and cheap meals**

The following list of material aid agencies is not complete. These organisations provide free or low-cost food. They have various criteria, so ring around first to see if you're eligible. You could also ring the main charities above. You may also be able to access other help such as medical, legal or counselling services through these centres.

**Edward Eager Centre**

Open weekdays 9.30am – 3.30pm.  
\$1.20 lunch, free coffee and drop in.

**348a Bourke St, Darlinghurst**

**Exodus Foundation**

'Loaves and Fishes' restaurant  
Monday – Saturday 11.30am –  
12.45pm. Free if you show a  
Centrelink benefit card.

**180 Liverpool Road Ashfield 2131**

**Ph: (02) 8752 4600**

**Food Distribution Network**

Volunteers get free lunch and cheap fruit/vegetables in return for two hours' volunteer packing in inner Sydney.

**Ph: (02) 9699 1614**

**Hare Krishna 'Food for Life' vans**

Free food at Redfern station at 5.30pm and opposite Newtown station at 6pm weekdays.

**Ph: (02) 9959 4558**

**Matthew Talbot**

Free meals.

**22 Talbot Place Woolloomooloo**

**Ph: (02) 9357 1533**

**Newtown Mission**

Free lunch Tues, Wed, Fri 1pm – 3pm  
Evening meal Thurs 6pm – 7.30pm

**280A King Street Newtown**

**Ph: (02) 9519 9000**

**Parramatta Mission**

Breakfast 8am – 9am and lunch 11.30am – 1pm, Monday – Friday.

**119 Macquarie Street, Parramatta**

**Ph: (02) 9891 2277**

**Women only****Lou's Place**

Open Monday – Friday 9.30am – 4pm except Thursday morning. Provides free meals for women and children.

**182 Victoria Street, Kings Cross**

**Ph: (02) 9358 4553**

**Women and Girls****Emergency Centre**

Provides meals for homeless women. Open Monday – Friday 9.30am – 4.00pm

**177 Albion Street, Surry Hills**

**Ph: (02) 9360 5388**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

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## Quick Guide to Health

You need a Medicare Card to get free or low-cost health services. Ring 132 011 for more information.

If you're on Centrelink payments, you'll get cheaper prescription medicines and other services if you have a Health Care Card. See Dealing with Centrelink on p.22.

### **Before leaving prison you can see Justice Health:**

- For contraception
- For referrals to services such as community mental health
- For referrals for methadone/buprenorphine.

### **Once you leave prison:**

- Let services know if you have a disability and need additional help
- Talk to your doctor before stopping medication you've been given for mental health treatment, or any other health condition
- Ask your health provider to contact Justice Health if information is needed about your past or current treatments
- Check if you can use public dental units.

### **Keep reading for:**

- Information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and Hepatitis
- Information about pregnancy and contraception
- Information about acquired brain injury
- Useful contact numbers for health care and dental services.

## Getting medical treatment

### Medicare Card

To get free or low-cost medical care, you need a Medicare Card. If you're an Australian citizen, you may already have a Medicare number. Ring Medicare to find out. For more information about getting a Medicare Card see p.35, or ring Medicare on 132 011.

### Health Care Card

A Health Care Card can save you money on prescriptions and some other services.

For information about Health Care Cards, see Dealing with Centrelink on p.25.

### Clinic referrals

You can ask the clinic nurse for referrals to help you look after your health needs. This is really important if you're on methadone or other treatments or if you have conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, Hep C or HIV where you need prescriptions and ongoing medical care.

## Getting dental treatment

You're eligible for free public dental services if you have a Medicare Card AND a Health Care Card or a Pensioner Concession Card or a Commonwealth Seniors Card. Emergencies get priority, so there may be a waiting list for treatment.

To find your nearest public dental service phone your local hospital or community health centre. See *Who to Contact* on p.93 for more details.

## Sexual health

### Safer sex

Outside prison you'll have new opportunities for sexual relationships, either by returning to your old partner or with someone new. Avoid the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and practise safer sex. Safer sex means:

- correct use of a condom and water-based lubricant during penetrative (anal or vaginal) sex
- using condoms or dental dams during oral sex
- wearing latex gloves when penetration with the hands or fingers occurs.

If you have unprotected sex with a person with an STI, you're at high risk of catching that STI. You can't tell by looking at someone whether or not they have an STI.

Infections that can be sexually transmitted include herpes, gonorrhoea, syphilis, genital herpes, pubic lice (crabs), chlamydia, Hepatitis A and B, and HIV/AIDS.

### **Condoms help prevent infection**

You can prevent most STIs by using condoms during vaginal or anal sex. Condoms will only protect against disease if they're used every time you have sex. Condoms can also prevent pregnancy. If you only have one sexual partner and are considering not using condoms, then it's advisable that you both have a sexual health check-up before stopping condom use.

### **STI symptoms can vary**

There are many different STIs and there are many signs that mean you may have caught one. Sometimes there are no signs at all. If you have symptoms of an STI, you're likely to have a better outcome if you see a health professional early.

Common STI symptoms can include:

- Unusual discharge from the penis or vagina
- Pain during sex or urination
- Sores, blisters, ulcers, warts or rashes in the genital area
- Itchiness or irritation in the genital area
- Persistent diarrhoea
- Fever, flu-like symptoms.

The vast majority of STIs are easy to test for and easy to treat. People who are sexually active should consider a sexual health check-up at least once a year at a GP, sexual health centre or health clinic.



### **Safer sex for women**

It can be hard for women to raise the question of safe sex with a partner. Women may be concerned that their partner will be offended or annoyed if they ask them to wear a condom. Everyone has a right to protect their own safety in a sexual relationship, and asking a partner to wear a condom is the most effective way to do this. Call the FPA (Family Planning NSW) Healthline on 1300 658 886 or the Sexual Health Information Line on Freecall 1800 451 624 for more information about safer sex.

### **Hepatitis**

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver and can be caused by a virus. The most common types of virus are Hepatitis A, B, and C. You can get vaccines to prevent Hepatitis A and B, but there's no vaccine for Hepatitis C.

### **Hepatitis C**

A lot of people in prison have Hepatitis C (Hep C). Hep C is passed on through blood-to-blood contact. The most common way to get Hep C is through sharing needles (fits) and other injecting equipment such as swabs, spoons and filters. It can also be passed on through unsterile tattooing and body piercing. It's less common for Hep C to be sexually transmitted, but it can occur if there's blood-to-blood contact.

It can take 10 to 15 years for symptoms to start developing and these will affect people in different ways. They can include pains in the liver area (the upper right side of your abdomen), tiredness, nausea, and flu-like symptoms. Some people may develop serious liver problems later in life. A healthy lifestyle, avoiding alcohol, eating a balanced diet and doing exercise can help you feel better and avoid long-term liver damage.

### **How to avoid Hep C**

Hep C survives in blood for a long time, and can be passed on from very small amounts of blood, e.g. through a sore or injecting site. Avoid direct contact with blood, e.g. don't share personal items such as toothbrushes and razors which may have blood on them. Other personal care items such as hair and nail clippers may also pose a risk if they haven't been cleaned between uses.

### **Should I have a Hep C test?**

It's not possible to know if someone has Hep C by how a person looks or feels. To find out if you have Hep C all you need to do is have a simple blood test.

If you're considering having a test, the Hep C Helpline (Freecall 1800 803 990) can provide information and support to help you make this decision. Testing can be done before or after you leave prison. In the community you can get a test at any GP, sexual health centre or health clinic.

One in four people are able to naturally clear the virus from their body within the first 12 months of being infected, but they will still show that they have been exposed to the virus when they get the standard Hep C antibody test. To confirm if a person has cleared the virus or not, people can ask their doctor for a PCR test to check if they still have the active Hep C virus. If a person has cleared the virus they cannot pass it on to others. Even if a person has cleared the virus there's no protection from getting reinfected with Hep C again in the future, so avoiding contact with other people's blood is important.

### **Will my partner, family or friends catch it?**

Hep C can't be passed on to others through everyday social contact. Hep C cannot be passed on by hugging or sharing plates, cutlery, cups, toilets, baths, etc. Although it's extremely unlikely to be passed on through sex, there's a small risk if there could be blood-to-blood contact (i.e. menstrual blood). It's important to use condoms or avoid sex at times when there could be blood present from either person. There's a small chance (about 5%) that women may pass Hep C on to a child during pregnancy or birth. It's unlikely that the virus can be passed on through breastfeeding unless nipples are cracked or bleeding, so breastfeeding is encouraged for Hep C positive mothers.

### **If I do have Hep C, what can I do?**

If you know you have Hep C there are things you can do to look after yourself. A well-balanced and healthy diet (low in animal fat) may help to relieve symptoms and reduce damage to the liver. Drinking less or giving up alcohol (and other drugs, including cigarettes) is recommended for someone with Hep C as these can be hard on your liver. Resting when tired helps combat fatigue. Mild exercise and maintaining a healthy weight is also important. Regular check-ups with your GP or health clinic are recommended.

There's a 6–12 month course of treatment available for Hep C that can permanently cure between 50% and 80% of people. Free treatment can be accessed while in prison and there are many treatment clinics in the community. Outside prison, treatment only costs \$10–\$30 per month, because most of the cost is covered by the Government. For more information about treatment, speak with your GP or health clinic, or phone the Hep C Helpline on Freecall 1800 803 990.

If you've never had Hepatitis A or B, then a vaccination is recommended to prevent infection. There's no vaccination for Hepatitis C. Even if you already have Hep C, stay clear of blood-to-blood contact to avoid getting another strain (genotype) of Hep C. Having two types of Hep C can make it more difficult to treat.

All sexual health centres offer free Hep C testing and pre- and post-test counselling. Most of them also offer free Hep A and B vaccinations for people with Hep C. For more information, and to find your nearest sexual health centre, phone the Sexual Health Information Line on Freecall 1800 451 624 or you can contact the Hep C Helpline on Freecall 1800 803 990.

## **HIV/AIDS**

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It's passed on through sexual fluids and blood-to-blood contact. Unsafe sex and sharing of injecting equipment are the most common means of transmission. See p.121 for information about avoiding infection.

Safer sex means correct use of a condom and water-based lubricant during penetrative (anal or vaginal) sex, using condoms or dental dams during oral sex, and wearing latex gloves when penetration with the hands or fingers occurs.

You can be tested for HIV/AIDS at free and confidential specialised services. For more information and to find your nearest centre, contact the Sexual Health Info Line on Freecall 1800 451 624.

Read *Who to Contact* on p.93 for information about services for people with HIV/AIDS.

## **Pregnancy and HIV/AIDS**

If you're pregnant or wish to have a baby, it's important to know if you have HIV, because if you're HIV positive, you may pass it on to your baby. If you're HIV positive, getting the right medical care early in pregnancy can greatly reduce the chance of passing HIV on to your baby.

Talk to your partner, doctor or counsellor about what being infected with HIV means for you and your baby.

## **Contraception**

Women who want to avoid getting pregnant after release can plan ahead to organise contraception. You can see Justice Health before you leave prison, or a doctor or reproductive health service after you've left.

There are several options for contraception:

- Implanon is a small hormone rod the size of a matchstick that's inserted under the skin on a woman's upper arm and lasts for three years.
- Condoms are available for men and women. They provide protection from pregnancy and from sexually transmitted infections. Partners only use a male or a female condom, not both at the same time.
- A diaphragm is a soft rubber cap which fits in the vagina and covers the cervix. Women should see their doctor or visit a reproductive health clinic for their first fitting. A replacement diaphragm may be necessary if you have a baby, gain or lose more than 5kg in weight, or if it feels uncomfortable.
- An IUD (intrauterine device) is a small device inserted into the uterus and is recommended for women who've already had children.
- The pill (oral contraceptive) is taken by mouth once a day.

For information about contraception and reproductive health services contact the FPA (Family Planning NSW) Healthline on 1300 658 886. When you see any health service you have the right to ask to see a female health worker if preferred. You can phone the Women's Information and Referral Service on 1800 817 227 to ask for information about women's health services.

## Emergency contraception

Emergency contraception is a special dose of the oral contraceptive pill that can be taken after unprotected sex to reduce the chance of pregnancy. It can be taken up to 72 hours (three days) after unprotected sex, but works best if taken as soon as possible. Visit your chemist, talk to a doctor or other health worker, or phone the FPA (Family Planning NSW) Healthline on 1300 658 886 if you need to access emergency contraception.

Keep using your usual contraception in addition to emergency contraception to make sure you don't become pregnant later in the month.

## Disability

A disability is something that limits your ability to do everyday activities. For example, someone with a physical disability may need a walking stick to get around. Some disabilities are not so obvious, such as an intellectual disability or hearing loss.

If you have a disability you may be eligible for extra services, e.g. to help you manage at home, or find work. It can be helpful to tell service providers about your disability and how it affects you.

If you can't find the services you need, or feel you're being discriminated against because of your disability, there are advocacy services that may be able to help. Read *Who to Contact* on p.93 for more information.

## Acquired brain injury

An acquired brain injury can cause problems with memory loss, controlling emotions, organising life and so on. You may not know that you have an acquired brain injury. Finding out about an acquired brain injury may help you get better medical help and other services.

If you answer 'yes' to any of the following, it could be helpful to be assessed for acquired brain injury:

- Have you been unconscious for more than 24 hours?
- Have you been a heavy drinker over a long period of time?
- Have you suffered a stroke or tumour, or an illness affecting your brain, such as meningitis?

- Do you have difficulty remembering things or planning things you need to do?
- Have you lost oxygen during an accident, overdose, suicide attempt or assault to your head?

For more information talk to your doctor or contact the Brain Injury Association of NSW on (02) 9868 5261 or 1800 802 840.

### **Mental health**

If you have a mental illness or were a patient of a mental health service or doctor before coming to prison, you can give permission to the clinic nurse to pass on your information to a service in the community so you can keep getting the medication or other treatment that you need.

If your doctor has prescribed you medication for a mental illness, it's important that you keep taking it unless your doctor advises you to stop taking it or changes it for you. If you need help with your medication or mental health issues, contact a community health centre, local doctor or your nearest hospital.

If you were referred to a mental health service when you left prison, but you've moved or you've lost contact with the service, you can go to any community health service or health provider and give them permission to ring the prison to ask for your information so you can get the right medication.

# Who to Contact

## **Aboriginal Medical Services**

Health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Services are located in various parts of the Sydney metropolitan area and country NSW.

**Ph: (02) 9212 4777** to find out where the nearest service is.

## **AIDS Council of NSW (ACON)**

ACON is a health promotion organisation based in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities with a focus on HIV/AIDS.

**Ph: (02) 9206 2000  
1800 063 060**

[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)

## **Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)**

Advice, information and referrals about drugs and alcohol. Ring ADIS to find the nearest Needle and Syringe Program (NSP).

**Ph: (02) 9361 8000  
1800 422 599  
(from outside Sydney)**

## **Community health centres**

Community health centres provide a range of services, including counselling and mental health services. To find your nearest centre look under 'Community health centre' in the White Pages or phone NSW Health:

**Ph: (02) 9391 9000**

## **Brain Injury Association of NSW**

Information and referral for people with an acquired brain injury.

**Ph: (02) 9868 5261  
1800 802 840**

## **Council for Intellectual Disability**

The peak NSW organisation for people with an intellectual disability.

**Ph: (02) 9211 1611**

## **Family Planning NSW**

Information, referral and reproductive health services for men and women.

**Ph: (02) 8752 4300  
1300 658 886**

[www.fpahealth.org.au](http://www.fpahealth.org.au)

**Guardianship Tribunal**

Appoints guardians for adults with disabilities who can't make their own decisions.

Ph: (02) 9555 8500  
1800 463 928

TTY: (02) 9552 8534

**Hep C Helpline**

Provides information, support and referrals about Hep C.

Ph: (02) 9332 1599  
1800 803 990

[www.hepatitisc.org.au](http://www.hepatitisc.org.au)

**Intellectual Disability Rights Service**

A community legal centre for people with an intellectual disability and their carers.

Ph: (02) 9318 0144  
1800 66 66 11  
(from outside Sydney)

**Kirketon Rd Centre**

Needle exchange, methadone, and a range of health and dental services for IV users, sex workers and at-risk young people.

100 Darlinghurst Rd  
(above the fire station), Kings Cross  
Ph: (02) 9360 2766

**Mental Health Information and Referral Service**

Advice, information and referrals about mental health.

Ph: 1300 794 991

**Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association**

Provides advice, information and referrals for people from a non-English-speaking background with a disability and for their families and carers.

Ph: (02) 9891 6400  
1800 629 072

**Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service (MHAHS)**

Bilingual services for HIV-positive people. Website provides information in community languages.

Ph: (02) 9515 5030  
1800 108 098

[www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au](http://www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au)

**People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)**

Provides support, referral and advocacy for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Ph: (02) 9361 6011  
1800 245 677

[www.plwha.org.au](http://www.plwha.org.au)



**Public dental clinics**

Contact NSW Health or your local hospital or community health centre for details of the nearest public dental clinic.

**Ph: (02) 9391 9000**

**Sexual Health Info Line**

Call for information on sexual health and to find your nearest services.

**Ph: 1800 451 624**

**Sydney Sexual Health Centre**

Free testing for Hep C, HIV and other STIs, as well as counselling and treatment services.

**Level 3, Nightingale Wing,  
Sydney Hospital**

**Macquarie Street, Sydney**

**Ph: (02) 9382 7440  
1800 451 624**

**Women's Information and Referral Service**

Ring this service to find your nearest women's health centre.

**Ph: 1800 817 227**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

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# Eating Well

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## Quick Guide to Eating Well

**Buying and cooking your own food is the cheapest way to eat well.**

Healthy eating means:

- Eat a range of food
- Eat some fruit and vegetables each day
- Eat meat, fish or dairy in moderation
- Don't eat too much deep fried or battered food
- Keep cakes and sugary things for treats, not every day.

**Keep reading for tips on:**

- Shopping on a budget
- Losing weight
- Kitchen equipment
- Easy recipes.

When you leave prison you can choose what you eat, and when. This can be great, but it can also feel a bit overwhelming when you haven't had these choices for a long time.

Take-away food is quick and easy, but it costs a lot, and may not be the best for you.

Keep reading to find out how to get ready to cook at home on a budget.

## Healthy eating

There are a lot of different ideas about healthy eating, and it's easy to get confused.

Most food experts agree that it's best to:

- Eat a range of food
- Eat some fruit and vegetables each day
- Eat meat, fish or dairy in moderation
- Not to eat too much deep fried or battered food
- Keep cakes and sugary things for treats, not every day.

## Shopping on a budget

Here are some tips for shopping on a budget:

- *'I write a list before I go and think about what meals I want to cook. That way I know what I need, and it's easier to avoid buying things on impulse that I may not need, or won't use later. I don't go down the aisles with chips and stuff I don't need.'*
- *'I never go shopping when I'm hungry because if I do I buy much more junk.'*
- *'Each time I shop I let myself choose one treat at the end.'*
- *'I look for the supermarket brand, or the plain tins without pictures. They're much cheaper, and most of the time they're just as good.'*

## Losing weight

If you've put on weight in prison you may be keen to lose it once you get out.

Here are some tips on losing weight.

- *'I was really wanting to lose weight straight away, but I realised I had to be realistic. There was so much that I had to deal with, it didn't seem as important as I had thought. Now I have smaller goals, and I'm just taking it step by step, day by day.'*

- *'Talking to my doctor about losing weight was good, because he explained how if you try to starve yourself and lose it really quickly, it will just come back on later. I've been keeping away from fatty foods and walking every day, and I can see the difference.'*
- *'When I first got out I was spending a lot of time on my own at home, and it was really easy to eat just to have something to do. I tried to stick to meal times, and do something to distract myself when I thought of eating. When a couple of people noticed I'd lost weight and commented about it, it gave me more motivation to keep going.'*

### **What you need in the kitchen**

You may need to get some basic equipment for your kitchen. See the list below for some ideas about what you'll need.

New kitchen equipment isn't cheap, and you may want to approach agencies like the Salvation Army (Salvos) or St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies) for help with second-hand things, at least until you get settled. (See p.79 in Money Matters for phone numbers.) Or you could try \$2 shops, which will usually be cheaper than the big chain stores for these items.

Once you're settled you can replace things with better-quality items if you wish. Also think about the stove you'll be using. If you don't have a griller, a frying pan or wok will be useful for cooking meat.

### **Basic kitchen equipment**

- Mug
- Bowl
- Small and large plate
- Glass
- Dessertspoon, teaspoon and knife
- Sharp vegetable knife
- Chopping board (or use large plate – gently!)
- Medium-sized saucepan with lid (handy for straining pasta, etc)
- Kettle
- Frying pan or wok
- Mixing bowl (or use ice cream container)
- Egg slice
- Tea towel.

### Extra equipment

You may add one or two of these to your shopping list each week:

- Vegie peeler
- Bread knife
- Whisk or egg beater
- Saucepan
- Strainer/colander
- Wooden spoon
- Juicer
- Tongs
- Potato masher
- Grater
- Oven tray.

## Recipes

If you haven't cooked in a while, here are some easy recipes to get you started.

### NOODLE OMELETTE

- 1 packet two-minute noodles**
- 1 small onion**
- 2 dessertspoons oil**
- 2 eggs**
- salt and pepper**
- 4 tablespoons frozen peas**

#### For something different:

- > Add 1/2 cup grated cheese to the beaten eggs.
- > Add 1/2 chopped tomato.

1. Cook noodles for 2 minutes in boiling water. Don't add the flavouring.
2. Chop onion into small pieces. Heat oil in frying pan and cook until soft.
3. Beat eggs with salt and pepper in a bowl.
4. Drain noodles and put in frying pan with onions.
5. Pour beaten eggs on top of noodles.
6. Add peas and stir everything gently to mix.
7. Cook on medium heat until brown on the bottom.
8. Cut into two pieces and turn each piece over to lightly cook on bottom.

### HOW TO COOK RICE

1. Put 2/3 cup of rice in a saucepan.
  2. Add 1 1/3 cups of cold water.
  3. Bring to the boil.
  4. Turn heat down low, and cover saucepan with lid.
  5. Check in 15 minutes. Rice is cooked when water has all been absorbed.
- 

### FRIED RICE

**2 cups cooked rice (cook some extra the night before)**

**2 dessertspoons oil**

**2 rashers bacon or 2 slices ham**

**1 egg**

**1/2 cup frozen vegetables (e.g. peas and corn)**

**soy sauce (if you like it)**

1. Beat egg.
2. Heat 1 dessertspoon of oil in frying pan.
3. Pour egg into frying pan and cook like an omelette.
4. When bottom is cooked turn over and cook the other side.
5. Take out and cut into slices.
6. Cut bacon into small pieces.
7. Add 1 dessertspoon of oil to pan and cook bacon.
8. Add rice to pan and mix with bacon.
9. Add vegetables and cook until vegetables are heated through, stirring to stop fried rice from sticking to the pan.
10. If you have soy sauce, add a teaspoon and mix through before eating.



### ONE POT SPAGHETTI

This is a quick version in one saucepan.

**100g beef mince**

**1/2 small onion**

**1 dessertspoon oil**

**1/2 can tomatoes**

**1/2 cup water**

**3 dessertspoons tomato paste**

**1/2 cup uncooked pasta**

1. Chop onion into small pieces.
2. Heat oil in saucepan on high heat.
3. Fry onion until soft.
4. Add mince and cook until soft.
5. Add tomatoes, tomato paste and water. Break up tomato pieces with a fork.
6. Bring to the boil and add pasta.
7. Reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes.

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### SPAGHETTI SAUCE PLUS

Makes two servings. This takes longer than the One Pot Spaghetti, but is very tasty.

**1 small onion**

**2 dessertspoons oil**

**250g beef mince**

**1 tin tomatoes**

**3 dessertspoons tomato paste**

**1/2 cup water**

**salt and pepper**

1. Chop onion into small pieces.
2. Heat oil in saucepan on high heat.
3. Fry onion until soft.
4. Add mince and cook until brown. Stir as you go to stop it sticking to the pan.
5. Add tomatoes. Break them up with a fork into smaller pieces.
6. Add water and tomato paste.
7. Sprinkle salt and pepper (if you want).
8. Let sauce boil, then turn heat down low.
9. Don't put on a lid.
10. Cook for about an hour, stirring regularly so it doesn't stick to the pan.

As well as serving with spaghetti you can use Spaghetti Sauce Plus for:

### **TOPPING FOR BAKED POTATOES**

1. Bake potatoes with skin on in the oven at 180° for 60–90 minutes, depending on the size of the potatoes. Using a fork or a knife, check they're cooked.
2. You can also bake potatoes in the microwave. Prick with a fork so they don't burst during cooking. Cook for 8–12 minutes, depending on their size and how many potatoes you're cooking.
3. Cut potatoes open and serve with mince on top.
4. You can add grated cheese if you like.

### **CHILLI CON CARNE**

#### **(Mexican beef with beans)**

1. Add a 125g can of kidney beans to the sauce and heat.
2. Add 1/4 teaspoon of chilli powder
3. Serve with rice. 1/3 cup of dry rice will give you one serving of rice when cooked.

### **TACOS**

1. Add 1/4 teaspoon of chilli powder to sauce.
2. Serve with taco shells, lettuce, tomato and cheese.
3. Save money by buying just the shells, not the kit.

### **VEGETARIAN OPTION**

Replace mince in these recipes with a tin of kidney beans or lentils.

# Drugs and Alcohol



## Quick Guide to Drugs and Alcohol

### If you want to stay clean consider:

- If you're using methadone/buprenorphine, get an appointment with a treatment service before release so you can keep getting treatment. You need to do this at least two weeks before you're released. Ask a nurse or AOD worker for help
- Getting a Medicare Card before you leave prison. See p.35
- Referral to detox or rehab programs
- Going to NA (Narcotics Anonymous) or AA (Alcoholics Anonymous)
- Attending a SMART Recovery Group
- Referral for drug or alcohol counselling.

Contact the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on (02) 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599 for information about detox, counselling, rehab and drug use, and for telephone support.

### Keep reading for:

- Information about staying clean
- Phone numbers for some rehab and detox services
- Phone numbers for self-help programs
- Phone numbers for counselling services.

If you want to avoid or control your alcohol or other drug use, you'll need to put a realistic support plan in place now. The same temptations and opportunities to use are still out there, so if you want to stay clean, the following information may help. If you're likely to inject drugs when you get out, the Safer Injecting section on p.115 provides important information on how to do so as safely as possible.

### **Methadone and buprenorphine programs**

An appointment with a methadone/buprenorphine doctor should be arranged at least two weeks before your release. That way you stand a better chance of getting the doctor you want and the pharmacy or clinic of your choice. Justice Health staff can organise this appointment for you. If you delay making these arrangements, you may have to wait a week or more after you get out before you can see someone. A lot can happen in a week.

To re-register on a methadone or buprenorphine program you'll need a passport photo. Some doctors will charge a fee (around \$80), so make sure that the doctor you see can 'bulk bill'. This means you won't have to pay anything. You also need a Medicare Card (see Getting ID on p.35).

Methadone or buprenorphine is expensive at around \$7.00 a day, especially if you're not working. You might be able to get the fees waived in the short term or find a clinic which charges less. To find a methadone provider close to you, call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) on (02) 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599.

### **Live-in rehab programs**

Live-in rehab (residential rehabilitation) can be useful if you don't think you'll be able to cope with the temptation to have a 'taste' once you're out. They provide a roof over your head as well as help with drug treatment. However, you need to be serious about staying clean, because most rehab programs will kick you out if you use. You may have to go to a detox program first. ADIS will give you numbers of rehabs in your area.

### **Withdrawal (detox) programs**

You can usually get into detox more quickly than into a residential program, but the wait is still a week or more. There are different ways to detox, some easier and slower, some quicker but more difficult. ADIS can provide information on different services in your area, how much they cost, and so on. Outpatient (non-residential) detox is available in some areas, usually through public hospitals.

### **NA and AA meetings (Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous)**

NA and AA meetings can help you cope with the temptation to drink or use, especially if you go regularly and find a good meeting. Some meetings may be more helpful than others, so don't be put off if you don't like your first meeting. NA and AA are based on the '12 step' system, which requires you to admit you're an alcoholic or a drug addict and commit to abstinence. That means you aim not to use or drink at all. AA and NA don't believe you can drink or use 'a little bit'. You can still go to meetings if you 'stuff up', but not if you're drug or alcohol affected at the time.

See *Who to Contact* on p.110 for their contact numbers.

If you'd prefer to control your drinking or drug use rather than stopping altogether, or if you simply find the 12-step meetings unhelpful, consider SMART Recovery Groups or counselling as an alternative.

### **SMART Recovery Groups**

SMART Recovery Groups provide a different type of self-help and support meetings for people with alcohol and drug problems. SMART Recovery Groups can help you to identify your triggers for alcohol and drug use, analyse the cost and benefits of use, and identify helpful strategies to prevent relapse. Ring ADIS to find out where SMART Recovery Groups are held in your area.

### **Drug and alcohol counselling**

Drug and alcohol counselling involves sitting down with a counsellor and talking about your drug or alcohol issues. The counsellor may give you tips and strategies for dealing with the urge to drink or use, work on a 'relapse prevention' plan with you, and help you look at the way you use drugs or alcohol to block bad feelings. Usually you'd see a counsellor about once a week.

Counselling can help you deal with the temptation to relapse into using again. Detox is only the start. The hard part is not using when things go wrong in your life, or when you're in a situation of temptation (e.g. when you meet 'old friends' from the drug scene). A counsellor can help you cope with these situations. If you do use again, your counsellor can help get you back on track.

Counsellors don't tell you not to use drugs or judge you if you stuff up. Counsellors know that most people need more than one try at stopping, and will not reject you or criticise you if you have a few ups and downs along the way.

# Who to Contact

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## **ADIS (Alcohol and Drug Information Service)**

ADIS is a good number to call for any drug and alcohol related information. They can give you the phone numbers of detox programs, drug and alcohol counselling services, and rehabs. They also give out information about different drugs, and can offer counselling over the phone. Don't feel that you can only call ADIS in a crisis. They can give referrals and general information about drugs and alcohol at any time. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**Ph: (02) 9361 8000  
1800 422 599  
(from outside Sydney)**

## **Alcoholics Anonymous**

Contact to find a self-help group near you.

**Ph: (02) 9799 1199**

## **Community health centres**

Community health centres may offer methadone or alcohol and other drugs counselling and treatment services. To find your nearest service, ring the Department of Health.

**Ph: (02) 9391 9000**

## **Methadone Advice and Complaints Service (MACS)**

MACS offers information and advice about the methadone program, and referrals to methadone providers.

**Ph: 1800 642 428**

## **Narcotics Anonymous**

Contact NA to find a self-help group in your area.

**Ph: 1300 652 820**

## **NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)**

Peer-based service for people who use drugs illicitly.

**Ph: (02) 8354 7300  
1800 644 413  
(from outside Sydney)**

## **Quitline**

Advice and information on how to quit smoking.

**Ph: 13 1848**

## **Women's Information and Referral Service**

A first point of contact for women's health and other services.

**Ph: 1800 817 227**



## Detox and rehab programs

There are many rehabs and detox services in NSW. The following is not a complete list and doesn't include outpatient (non-residential) detox services. Ring ADIS and ask them what services are available in your area: (02) 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599.

Many of these places need you to book in advance, so talk to your AOD worker, welfare worker or clinic nurse before you get out to get a referral, or discuss your options with your parole officer.

### **Arcadia House**

Detox service in Canberra.

**Ph: (02) 6253 3055**

### **Bennelong Haven**

Rehabilitation service in Kinchela Creek near Kempsey.

**Ph: (02) 6567 4856**

### **The Buttery**

Residential rehabilitation service in Bangalow, northern NSW.

**Ph: (02) 6687 1111**

### **Campbell House**

Housing support and rehab in inner city Sydney for men.

**Ph: (02) 9380 5055**

### **Foster House**

Detox in inner city Sydney for men.

**Ph: (02) 8218 1209**

### **Freeman House**

Residential drug treatment in Armidale.

**Ph: (02) 6772 4475**

### **The Glen (The Entrance)**

Rehabilitation service for men based on Aboriginal cultural beliefs.

**Ph: (02) 4388 6360**

### **Gorman House**

Detox and other services for men and women in inner city Sydney.

**Ph: (02) 9361 8080**

### **Langton Centre**

Outpatient and inpatient detox, groups and other drug and alcohol services, based in inner city Sydney.

**Ph: (02) 9332 8777**

### **Lyndon Community**

Residential rehabilitation in Canowindra.

**Ph: (02) 6344 1128**

### **Matthew Talbot**

Crisis accommodation for homeless men in inner city Sydney.

**Ph: (02) 9357 1533**

**Namatjira Haven Drug and Alcohol Healing Centre**

Drug and alcohol healing centre at Alstonville in Northern NSW. Predominantly for Aboriginal men.

**Ph: (02) 6628 1098**

**Odyssey House**

Residential detox and rehab.

**Ph: (02) 9281 5144**

**Orana House**

Residential detox service in Wollongong.

**Ph: 1300 652 226**

**Salvation Army**

A range of programs, including rehab.

**Ph: (02) 9264 1711**

**We Help Ourselves**

Residential therapeutic community in Surry Hills for men.

**Ph: (02) 9319 1211**

**We Help Ourselves (New Beginnings)**

Residential therapeutic community in Redfern for women.

**Ph: (02) 9318 2139**

**We Help Ourselves (Cessnock)**

Residential therapeutic community for men and women, including couples.

**Ph: (02) 4991 7000**

**Weigelli Centre Aboriginal Corporation**

Rehabilitation service in Cowra for Aboriginal people.

**Ph: (02) 6345 1803**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

## 'I found the courage to give it up.'

*Adam was released from prison six months ago, after his third time inside. 'I was smoking marijuana, a couple of sticks a day, using some ice, sometimes speed. In gaol I went cold turkey. I found the courage to give it up, because I didn't like what could happen to me. When I got out I went straight into rehab. It was hard, and I got the boot – I didn't think it was fair, but I had to go. I hadn't had a drink for a year, and I was standing there, waiting for the bus. I saw this pub over the road and I thought I could go and have a quick drink before the bus comes. Then I thought, "No, because that drink will lead me to somewhere I don't want to be".'*

*Adam caught the bus home and got straight in contact with Probation and Parole. 'They helped me to get started doing the things I had to do. I started going to meetings, did a men's program, got some counselling and went to NA.' Adam spent a lot of time at meetings. 'Going to those meetings really helped.*

*You see people who were worse than you are, who've really made something of themselves.'*

*Adam was worried he might have to go back inside because he didn't finish rehab. But because he got into counselling and got a good report from his parole officer, things were OK. He keeps all his certificates to help show he's making progress. He says of his parole officer: 'It wasn't just him telling me what to do. He wants to know how I'm going. I can tell him what I want to do, and he listens to my view.'*

*'I know people who've been inside for so long, they can't cope on the outside, things have changed so much. Other people like it in gaol. They get a feed, a bed, and other people to stand over. But for me, that last time was enough. My mum was really sick while I was in gaol. I'd be waiting for news, and I wouldn't know what was happening. I've had enough. I'm not going back there.'*

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# Safer Injecting



The Department of Corrective Services does not condone the use of illegal drugs. It is safest not to use drugs at all. The information provided in this section is based on health promotion and harm reduction material from the Department of Health, the Hep. C Council of NSW and the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON).

## Quick Guide to Safer Injecting

**Be aware that people who've recently left prison have a high risk of overdose**

Reduce the risk of overdose by:

- Not mixing drugs
- Testing with smaller amounts and going slow
- Not using alone
- Learning mouth-to-mouth first aid.

Avoid viruses such as HIV, Hep B and Hep C by:

- Using a clean fit every time
- Using Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs)
- Not sharing any injecting equipment.

**Keep reading for:**

- More information about safer use
- What to do if someone overdoses
- Details of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre at Kings Cross
- Useful contact numbers.

There's no such thing as safe use of street drugs. However, there are ways to reduce the risk of harm that can go with drug use.

People who've recently left prison have a high risk of overdosing. (The risk of a fatal overdose is up to 14 times greater for men who've been in a correctional centre than for men in general, and as much as seventy times greater for women). If you've stopped using, or have been using a weaker strength drug, your body's tolerance will have been reduced.

### **Avoiding an OD**

To reduce the chance of an overdose:

- Avoid combining drugs. Mixing heroin or other opiates with other drugs increases the risk of overdose. Drinking alcohol and benzodiazepines (such as Valium, Serapax) is also very risky.
- Test with small amounts and go slow – wait at least five minutes (the longer the better) before another hit.
- Think about tolerance – if you haven't used for a while or are using less, you should try a small amount first.

### **Never use alone**

Think what will happen if you drop (overdose). Having someone else present when using could mean the difference between life and death.

### **MSIC**

The Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) operates at 66 Darlinghurst Rd, Kings Cross, Ph (02) 9360 1191.

The MSIC is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9.30am – 9.30pm; Wednesday 9.30am – 3.45pm and 6pm – 9.30pm; and Saturday and Sunday 11am – 7pm.

Clients must be over 18 years old. The centre is totally confidential and non-judgemental. The centre has booths where people can inject themselves, waste bins for used syringes, a fully-equipped resuscitation room to manage drug overdoses, and a counselling room. There are two trained staff, including a registered nurse, permanently on duty. Rather than using alone, consider attending the MSIC, where you'll be supported to use more safely.

### **Additional information for people with Hep C**

If you have Hep C and/or some damage to your liver you may have a greater risk of overdose because your liver may break down drugs more slowly, and their effects may last longer. Combining drugs increases this risk.

Safer injecting is important for people who are Hep C positive because you can be reinfected with a different strain (genotype) or infect others with the Hep C virus. Not only syringes with minute amounts of blood can spread the disease but also tourniquets and fingers – even in microscopic amounts – can get into a shared mix, filters or water and onto injection sites.

### **Avoiding HIV/AIDS, Hep B, Hep C and other blood-borne viruses**

To prevent the spread of blood-borne viruses don't reuse syringes and don't share any drug using equipment. Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) provide new syringes and injecting equipment either free or at low cost. They can also provide information on injecting safely, and referral to other services such as drug treatment, medical care and legal and social services. NSPs also provide condoms and lube for safer sex.

Some areas have roaming NSP vans. Other places where you can get new injecting equipment include the emergency department of your local hospital, community health centres, and some pharmacies. To find your nearest NSP contact the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) – see *Who to Contact* on p.123.

Protect others in our community by disposing of fits in a special sharps container. You can also give your used injecting equipment to NSPs for safe disposal.

### **Some facts about overdose**

- Narcan is the heroin-blocking drug that paramedics ('ambos') give to people who've overdosed. Only Narcan can revive someone who's OD'd. Cold baths and showers, coffee, speed, ice, injections of lemon juice or water, walking around, and so on are all useless.
- Ambos won't call the police to an overdose unless they're threatened at the scene, or the OD is fatal. Don't fail to call the ambos because you think they'll bring the police.



- Narcan won't protect you from a second overdose if you hit up again shortly after being revived. The Narcan wears off in half an hour to an hour, and you could drop again. Narcan won't affect benzos or other drugs you've taken apart from heroin.
- Just because someone doesn't drop immediately doesn't mean they haven't OD'd. Overdoses can occur quickly or slowly, and the person may go in and out of unconsciousness several times.
- People die from overdose because they stop breathing. The brain is starved of oxygen and eventually dies. Brain damage will occur within three to five minutes of a person ceasing to breathe, which is why you must call an ambulance immediately, and know how to give mouth-to-mouth (see p.120).

**Signs of overdose include:**

- Not responding when talked to
- Blue lips and fingernails
- Convulsions
- Cold, clammy skin
- Snoring or gurgling sounds.

**What to do if a friend overdoses:**

- Talk to them and try to get a response.
- If they don't respond, call 000 immediately and ask for an ambulance. A person will die quickly once they stop breathing.
- Don't waste time trying to bring them round yourself.
- Lie the person on their side and clear their mouth of spit, vomit or anything else. Tilt their head back slightly to clear their airway. Snoring noises indicate the person's airway may still be partially blocked. Tilt the head further back.
- If the person is not breathing, give them 'mouth-to-mouth' (see p.120).

### **How to give mouth-to-mouth**

- Roll the person gently onto their back.
- Tilt their head back by lifting up their jaw. This clears the airway.
- Pinch their nose to block the nostrils.
- Place your mouth over their open mouth.
- Gently blow into their open mouth.
- Make sure their chest rises and falls. This indicates the air is getting into their lungs.
- Give them one breath for each breath you take (about one breath every four seconds).

This is just a guide – training will help you be better prepared. The Red Cross runs the Save-A-Mate (SAM) program, a first aid course designed specifically for overdoses. The fee is usually \$55 but much cheaper if you explain your circumstances. Call the Red Cross on 1800 246 850 for more information.

### **Safer injecting sites**

You must only inject into veins. Veins carry blood towards the heart, and arteries carry blood away from the heart. Hitting an artery is dangerous because drugs injected into an artery have to pass through the capillaries before they get to the brain. These tiny blood vessels can become blocked, causing severe bruising, gangrene and even loss of a limb.

You can't tell veins and arteries apart by the colour of the blood – all blood is red. Larger arteries have a pulse. Never inject into a blood vessel that has a pulse.

### **How to tell if you hit an artery:**

- The blood will force back the plunger
- The blood may appear frothy when you draw back
- The artery may bleed heavily when you take out the needle and/or cause a rapidly growing bruise under the skin
- The artery may hurt if you try to inject.

**If you hit an artery:**

- Pull out immediately
- Apply firm pressure for at least half an hour
- Raise the affected area if possible
- Lie down
- Contact a doctor or ring 000 for an ambulance.

Avoid injecting into your groin, neck, hands and feet. Avoid the veins below the waist as they can lead to serious circulation problems if damaged. When injecting into a vein, inject with the blood flow (towards the heart). Make sure there's adequate light when injecting. Blast slowly and pull out if you experience any pain, discomfort or swelling. If your veins are blocked, consider another method of taking your drug, such as sniffing, swallowing, smoking or stuffing.

**Avoiding infection and other problems**

Even with new syringes, if you don't inject properly you place yourself at risk of bruising, 'dirty hits', blood poisoning and abscesses (collections of pus under the skin). The following are only some basic tips. You should speak to a health worker about the safest method.

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water before injecting.
- Make sure all your equipment (swabs, water, spoon, tourniquet, filter, fit, etc) is new and sterile. Don't share any part of your equipment, even a tourniquet. Hep C can be transmitted by tiny, unseen amounts of blood on hands or equipment if it comes into contact with another person's bloodstream (e.g. through contact with the injecting site). Take extra care with group mixes. Don't double-dip your syringe into the mix after it's been used.
- Sterile water is better than boiled water, but boiled water is better than straight tap water.
- Use sterile alcohol swabs (Mediswabs) to clean the spoon and the injecting area (different swab for each). Allow the spoon or skin time to dry after wiping. Wipe the injection site only once and in one direction.

- Don't use filters from tailor-made cigarettes to filter your drugs, as these contain glass fibres that can damage your heart and veins if injected. When filtering always use a cotton wool ball. You can even use a tampon or cotton bud in an emergency.
- Use a tourniquet that's easy to release and make sure you release it before injecting.
- After injecting, keep your arm straight and apply pressure to the injecting site with a clean tissue/cotton ball for a couple of minutes to help reduce bruising and bleeding. Don't use a swab to wipe the site after injecting as this can actually encourage bleeding (swabs contain alcohol).
- Always dispose of your used fit in a 'sharps' disposal bin or at an NSP. Never reuse a fit, because a blunt and dirty fit can increase the risk of infections and vein problems.
- Clean up any blood with a clean tissue and water (soapy water if available).
- Throw away old swabs and filters in a double plastic bag. Don't reuse them.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after each hit.
- Rotate injection sites. Alternate the site every time you inject. Give the skin and the vein time to recover.
- Rubbing Lasonil or Hirudoid cream into your arm after about ten minutes will help reduce bruising and swelling.

# Who to Contact

## **Aboriginal Medical Services**

Health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Services are located in various parts of the Sydney metropolitan area and country NSW.

**Ph: (02) 9212 4777** to find out where the nearest service is.

## **Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)**

Advice, information and referrals about drugs and alcohol. Ring ADIS to find the nearest needle exchange.

**Ph: (02) 9361 8000  
1800 422 599  
(from outside Sydney)**

## **Albion St Centre**

A community health centre with services for people with, or at risk of contracting, blood-borne viruses.

**Ph: (02) 9332 1090**

## **ACON (AIDS Council of NSW)**

ACON is a health promotion organisation based in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities with a focus on HIV/AIDS.

**Ph: (02) 9206 2000  
1800 063 060**

## **Community health centres**

Community health centres provide a range of services, including drug and alcohol services. To find your nearest centre contact NSW Health:

**Ph: (02) 9391 9000**

## **Hep C Helpline**

Provides information, support and referrals about Hep C.

**Ph: (02) 9332 1599  
1800 803 990**

**[www.hepatitisc.org.au](http://www.hepatitisc.org.au)**

## **Kirketon Rd Centre**

Needle exchange, methadone, sexual health, dental services, home detox and specialist drug and alcohol services.

**100 Darlinghurst Rd  
(above the fire station), Kings Cross  
Ph: (02) 9360 2766**

## **Langton Centre**

Outpatient and inpatient detox, groups and other drug and alcohol services, based in inner city Sydney.

**519 South Dowling St, Surry Hills  
Ph: (02) 9332 8777**

### **Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC)**

The MSIC is a supervised injecting centre in Kings Cross. Nurses, counsellors and social welfare staff are on hand.

**66 Darlinghurst Rd, Kings Cross**

**Ph: (02) 9360 1191**

### **NSW Health Needlestick Hotline**

Call this service if you get a needlestick injury or exposure to body fluid. They will provide counselling, advice and referral.

**Ph: 1800 804 823**

### **NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)**

Provides safe injecting information, advocacy, support and referral for people who use drugs.

**Ph: (02) 8354 7300**

**1800 644 413**

### **Red Cross**

Runs the Save-A-Mate program to teach first aid to people likely to be present at an overdose.

**Ph: 1800 246 850**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

# Returning to Family

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## Quick Guide to Returning to Family

### If you're returning to your partner:

- It's normal to feel anxious about living together again
- Talk about your hopes and plans before release
- Keeping talking once you go home
- Listen to them
- Get help early if you're having relationship problems.

### Returning to your children:

- Be prepared for the children to take a while to get used to you being back at home
- Try to be patient and understanding – they aren't old enough to understand how you feel
- Remember children are often messy and noisy – this is normal, although it may take time for you to get used to it
- You may need to rebuild trust with your children and the people who've been caring for them
- Get help early if you're finding it difficult to cope with your children.



**Returning to live with your parents:**

- Parents may keep checking up on you because they're worried that you may use drugs or reoffend
- It can help to remember they're checking because they care about you
- Let them know how you feel, and what's helpful for you
- If you and your parents can't agree about expectations, you may find it better to move into other accommodation.

Programs in gaol may help you work on parenting and communication skills.

A family conference through the Restorative Justice Unit or discussions with CRC may help improve communication before you go home – see Welfare staff to discuss this.

Contact the Restorative Justice Unit on (02) 8346 1333 or CRC on (02) 9288 8700. CRC can also provide counselling for families of prisoners and ex-prisoners.

Chaplains can also provide support if you're concerned about returning to your family.

**Keep reading for:**

- more information about returning to family, and phone numbers for other services which can help.

Prisoners often really look forward to returning to their family. But many ex-prisoners say that after the ‘honeymoon period’ is over things may not go smoothly. CRC knows how difficult it can be to come from prison back into the family and can provide support. Contact details for us and other family counselling services are listed in *Who to Contact* on p.132.

Before your release you may be able to arrange a family conference where you can talk through issues about living together. The Restorative Justice Unit in Corrective Services can help set up and run a family conference for you and your family. Talk to your welfare officer if you think this would be helpful.

Chaplains can also provide support if you’re worried about returning to your family. Ask for an appointment with the chaplain to talk about your concerns.

CRC offers support to the families of prisoners and ex-prisoners. If anyone in your family is having trouble coping, call CRC on (02) 9288 8700.

Below are a few tips on dealing with some of the problems that might occur.

## Returning to your partner

### What do you expect of your partner after you’re released?

Picking up where you left off in a relationship may be more difficult than you expect. You and your partner will have adjusted to living apart. It’s understandable that you both may feel anxious about living together again. You may not be sure how you’ll get started with even everyday things like having sex and working out money.

The key is to talk to your partner about your ideas and hopes before you get out, and keep talking after your release. It’s easy to get carried away inside gaol with ideas about what it will be like when you get back together. If your partner tells you you’re being unrealistic or getting carried away, listen. He or she is probably more in touch about this than you are.

### What if you had relationship problems before you went to prison?

Any problems in your relationship before you went to prison will probably still be there when you get out. If, for example, your relationship was violent or there were lots of arguments, you may find these patterns return after your release, even though you may have hoped they’d be different. If things aren’t working out, it’s important to seek help. See *Who to Contact* on p.132 for more information.

### **Did you start your relationship while in prison?**

A relationship that starts in prison can be very intense, because you often have a lot of time to focus on it, and few distractions. Even if you know each other really well, there'll still be more to learn when you're able to spend more time with each other. You may find it hard if you learn things about each other that you weren't expecting.

### **You may feel prison has changed you, or you may be confused by your feelings and behaviour.**

Being withdrawn or having mood swings and angry outbursts are common. It's all part of the difficult process of readjusting from prison life to family life. Suddenly you're faced with a whole new set of demands. What helps people survive in gaol may be unhelpful back home. In gaol, violence and intimidation are often used to 'solve' conflict. At home, those tactics could destroy your relationship with your family and even land you back inside. The skills of listening and open communication are essential to a good relationship.

If you do find yourself having problems, relationship or family counselling can help sort things out. See *Who to Contact* on p.132 for information. Don't wait until the relationship is on the rocks or your family is falling apart to seek help. It's better to see someone early, when things are easier to sort out.

There may also be relationship and family programs available to you while you're still inside. Take advantage of them.

### **Returning to your children**

#### **Will your children be living with you all or some of the time after your release?**

Children can react in lots of different ways when a parent comes home from prison. They may be extremely happy, but they may also be upset and confused because you were away for so long. Any changes can be unsettling for children. Younger children may not remember a time when you were at home with them. Older children may have taken on family responsibilities, and for a time may resent the changes that come when their mother or father returns home.

Remember that they need to hear from you that you do love them. Try not to be too hurt if they give you a hard time. They won't understand that you didn't mean to go to gaol, and they may feel that you've let them down. Listen and try to understand how your children feel rather than being defensive. They'll settle down if you can be patient and are prepared to work to regain their trust.

Perhaps some other family member took on the parenting role while you were in prison. You may need to regain their trust, as well as your children's, as you and the person who has been looking after your children work out exactly what roles each of you'll play in your children's lives. If your child was placed in their care through a court order, you may benefit from legal advice to find out what steps would be involved in resuming their care. See *Who to Contact* on p.132 for suggestions.

### **Be prepared for the noise and mess that children make.**

In prison, the one thing you have control over is your cell. If you always kept your cell spotless, you may find it difficult to cope with children who leave toys around and yell and scream. It can help to remember that this is normal behaviour for children. You can teach them to tidy up after themselves, but you can't stop them behaving like children. Insisting on having complete control over your environment will only create more stress for you and them.

### **Will you be a single parent after you're released?**

It can be hard enough to look after yourself in the early days post-release, let alone a demanding child. Some children may become particularly 'clingy' when their parent returns home from prison. This may be due to their fear of being separated again. It's important to get support if you feel you or your children aren't coping. Don't wait until things build up to the point where you lash out at the children, take drugs or do something else that might hurt you or your children. See the list of agencies on p.132 that can provide parenting support.

## Returning to parents

Living with parents after your release can have practical, emotional and financial advantages but it can also be stressful. Parents of ex-prisoners often worry that their son or daughter is going to reoffend or use drugs again. They often try to control them or monitor their behaviour in various ways. If your parents do this, remember it's because they care about you. However, feeling that you're being watched over, or that your parents don't trust you, can be hard. You can even feel tempted to do something rash just to break out. Remember that the decision not to reoffend or use drugs is about what you want for your life. You're not doing it to please them.

Tell your parents what's helpful and not helpful for you in terms of support. It may be useful for them to hear from you how what they do affects you. Remember that while you live in your parents' house it's reasonable for them to expect you to live by their rules. If you can't do this, then you'll need to look for your own place. If that's the case, read the chapter on Housing and Accommodation on p.12 for more information.

# Who to Contact

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## Parenting assistance services

### NSW Family Services (FamS)

Contact FamS to find the Family Service nearest to you. Family Services are non-government organisations whose support workers can help with parenting and other family matters through home visiting, counselling and educational and social groups.

**Ph: (02) 9692 9999**

### DoCS Helpline

Contact DoCS if you want to report a child at risk or request assistance from DoCS. Also contact if your child is in DoCS' care and you're not sure who to talk to about them.

**Ph: 1800 066 777**

### SHINE for Kids

Supports children with a carer in custody.

**Ph: (02) 9714 3000**

### Parentline

Parentline is a telephone advice and referral helpline for parents of children under 18 years of age. You can ring 9am – 4.30pm Monday – Saturday. They provide telephone counselling and advice if you're feeling stuck, and can refer you to services, such as parenting courses in your area.

**Ph: 13 20 55**

## Domestic violence and sexual assault

Domestic violence isn't just physical violence. It may also include verbal abuse, making threats, forcing a partner to have sex or controlling a partner's access to money, or stopping their contact with friends or family. Living in a relationship where there's domestic violence can be dangerous physically and emotionally for you and your children.

### Domestic Violence Line

24-hour advice about safety, AVOs, child protection, etc. Run by DoCS.

**Ph: 1800 656 463**

### Rape Crisis Centre

Counselling and support for people affected by sexual assault.

**Ph: (02) 9819 6565**

**1800 424 017**

**(from outside Sydney)**

### Violence Against Women Helpline

Assistance and referral for people affected by domestic violence.

**Ph: 1800 200 526**

## Relationship and family counselling

### Community Restorative Centre (CRC)

CRC provides family support, advice and referrals.

Ph: (02) 9288 8700

### Kids Helpline

24-hour helpline for young people.

Ph: 1800 551 800

### Lifeline

Free 24-hour counselling service.

Ph: 131 114

### Mensline

Family and relationship counselling for men.

Ph: 1300 78 99 78

### Relationships Australia

Relationship counselling by appointment to couples, individuals and families. Centres at various locations.

Ph: 1300 364 277

## Separation, custody and child support issues

### Child Support Agency

Helps separated parents manage their child support responsibilities by working actively with parents to help them make the best arrangement for them and their children.

Ph: 13 12 72

### Family Court of Australia

Mediation, dispute resolution and counselling for couples going through separation. Assists separating couples to reach agreement on custody, child support and other arrangements without going through the courts. Can also make orders for children to live with other family members where DoCS isn't involved.

GPO Box 9991 Sydney NSW 2001

Ph: (02) 9217 7111

**LawAccess**

Provides legal information and referral to Legal Aid.

**Ph: 1300 888 529**

**Link Up**

Assists Aboriginal men and women from the Stolen Generation in re-establishing contact with their families.

**Ph: (02) 4759 1911**

To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You'll be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.



## Matt's story

# 'I want to make up for the time I was inside.'

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RETURNING TO FAMILY

*Matt has a wife and four children. He got out of prison about a year ago after a couple of spells inside. This time, Matt wanted things to be different. 'I grew up in homes. Things weren't good for me. But my oldest son is seven now. I want to be a role model for him. I don't want my kids to spend time in gaol like I have. Realising that made me want to change. I want to make up for the time I was inside.'*

*Matt's wife, Tracey, and his children had left their home town and moved in with Tracey's sister while he was in gaol. He decided to make a fresh start by moving in with them, rather than returning home to the bush. 'I didn't trust myself to go back. At home my mates would be drinking four or five days a week. I'm very cautious with mates now. One slip puts you back where you don't want to go.'*

*Matt got help to stop drinking by going to a SMART Recovery Group that was suggested by his parole officer. 'I've only had two drinks in the last six months.' His parole officer met Tracey, and kept track of how things were going. Matt says 'Tracey doesn't lie to her, and she doesn't beat around the bush.' Matt is excited about the positive changes in his relationship with Tracey since he decided to make changes. 'We talk problems through now, there's no more arguing, no more domestics. We do a lot more together. We do more with the children, and talk more ourselves.'*

*Matt's family still need their own place to live. Matt, Tracey and their four children are living with Tracey's sister, who has a son of her own. In a three-bedroom house there's not a lot of room. Matt and Tracey are talking to the Housing Department about their options. At the moment they're waiting to see if they can get housing through the Department.*

*Otherwise they may need to go bush to find somewhere with enough room for the kids that they can afford.*

*Matt says that every now and then he runs into someone who hasn't seen him for a while. He says that the praise he gets from others, and thinking about his children and Tracey, are his inspiration to keep on going. 'It's good to get the help, but it's up to you to do it.'*

# Overcoming Isolation and Loneliness

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## Quick Guide to Overcoming Isolation and Loneliness

Feeling isolated and lonely is very common after you've left prison.

In prison you didn't expect to open up to people and enjoy their company. Now you're outside it takes time to relax and be friendly to people.

Small talk doesn't happen much in prison, and once you leave it takes time to learn what to talk about, and how to chat.

Having someone who can support you during the first months when you leave prison can really help. If you don't have family or a friend who can do this, look for a support service that may be able to help. See p.9 for some suggestions.

If your aim is to go straight, you may not want to hang around your old mates, but you may feel like you don't have anyone else. If you've got a mate who's also wanting to go straight, you can support each other.

If you need someone to talk to right now, ring Lifeline on 13 11 14 for 24-hour confidential telephone counselling.

### **Keep reading for:**

- more ideas about meeting new people and dealing with old mates.

Lots of ex-prisoners feel isolated and lonely once they leave prison, especially if they aren't living with family. Some people have ended up reoffending just to return to prison where they know people and don't feel out of place. Meeting people and making friends is hard for most people, and it's even more difficult when you've been in prison.

### **Your 'prison self'**

In prison you may have acted tough, hiding your feelings so that no one thought you were an easy target. Being like that protected you and helped keep you safe. But outside prison behaving that way isn't necessary and may scare people off. What you need to 'make it' in the community is the very opposite of what cuts it inside. Being open and friendly is more likely to get you what you want than behaving as you would in prison.

To get to know people and make some friends you'll have to slowly take a few risks and open up to people.

### **Small talk**

Talking about the weather, the football or what you did on the weekend doesn't happen in prison much. In fact, what passes for normal conversation in the general community can seem trivial and

annoying when you've spent time in prison, where survival was the main concern. Learning what people in the community talk about takes time, and feels strange.

It will take time to get used to the different social rules that operate outside prison. Listen to other people. How do they start a conversation? What gets talked about? You'll soon get the hang of it. Don't forget that most people, 'straight' people included, feel shy or don't know what to say from time to time.

### **Choose a support person**

While you're in custody, you can choose to have a meeting with a person who'll be your key support when you get out. They could be a family member, trusted friend, or community member.

Talk to people supporting you about your expectations for life on the outside, and follow this up with them when you get out. Having someone to call when things get difficult can be a real help.

Don't forget that you can always call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

### Old mates and new mates

A lot of prisoners who want to go straight when they come out worry about seeing old associates from criminal or drug-using circles. They know if they hang around those people, there's a strong chance that they'll end up reoffending. On the other hand, if they don't see any of their old associates, they'll have nobody. At least with their old connections they feel comfortable and know the score.

There are no easy answers to this one. Building up a new circle of friends is not easy, but it can be done. Here are a few tips:

- Make it clear to your mates that you don't want to fall back into old ways, but don't rely on them to make it easy for you. People who are still using or breaking the law are more likely to want to drag you back down than wish you well in your new life. That's reality. After all, if you succeed, they might feel uncomfortable about their own lives.
- Be selective about who you keep in contact with. It's not hard to tell who is good for you and who means trouble. Another person who's also committed to staying out can be a great help. Build on your contacts with those

prisoners who you believe are likely to stay out and who are serious about going straight.

- If you're going to meet someone who still uses drugs, think about how and when you have contact. It might be better to see a person in a café rather than in their lounge room, where it's all too easy to light up that bong or have that hit.
- Form a relationship with a support worker you can trust. Although workers are professional people who are paid to help you, a real bond of trust can develop. Look in *Getting Support* on p.7 for numbers to contact.
- NA, AA and other 12-step programs have a 'sponsoring' system in which more experienced members of the program provide support and guidance to newer members. If you have drug or alcohol problems, attend a meeting and see if there's someone there you like. They may be able to sponsor you. Contact AA on (02) 9799 1199 or NA on 1300 652 820 for a referral to your nearest meeting.

Here are some ideas about meeting new people:

- *'I did an internet course at a local community centre. It was good to meet the same people each week, and to have a bit of chat afterwards. I didn't make any new friends, but I felt more confident when I was in groups of people after that.'*
- *'I hadn't played footy for ages, and I was pretty nervous when I went to sign up with a local club. I felt uncomfortable for a few weeks, and I was pretty quiet, but it got better, and I'm playing with them again next season. It helped when I realised that there was another guy who was new, like me, and he wasn't that much better at breaking into the group than I was.'*
- *'I started doing some volunteer work, and I've got to know some people that way. They get together a bit socially, and I go along sometimes. I've made one good friend from there and now I'm getting to meet some of his mates.'*

(See Getting a Job on p.59 for more information about volunteering.)

If you need support, ring one of the services listed in this booklet. See *Getting Support* on p.9 for more information.

## 'Sometimes I miss prison.'

*Kerry spent six years in prison. After 12 months of freedom, she has a job and lives in her own flat.*

*Six months before she was released from prison, Kerry met with her parole officer for the first time. 'For the first time it hit me that I was going to be leaving. I had to talk about my crime, and why I deserved to get out. I felt terrible having to go over it all again with someone I didn't know. I thought "If this is what freedom is like, then I don't want it".*

*Kerry had to have somewhere to live before she could get paroled. 'The Housing Department wouldn't reactivate my application until I was out of prison, and I couldn't get out of prison until I had somewhere to live. My parole officer found me a place to live, but it wasn't until the last month before I got paroled that I knew I had somewhere to go.'*

*'I left on a Sunday and I had my crisis payment from Centrelink and a bit of money I'd earned. I felt like I was rich. The person who picked me up from prison told me to ring my family on her mobile phone, because we were meeting them. I'd never used a mobile phone before!'*

*'The first day I went to Paddy's Market and bought some shoes just because I could. It was great to see my family, but after a while that day I needed to be on my own. I wondered if I would miss being locked in, but I didn't.'*

*Kerry had obtained her birth certificate while she was still in prison, and had applied for her Medicare Card. She needed a bank account, and went to the bank where she'd previously held an account. The counter staff were rude and unhelpful, so she visited a different bank the next day. 'I took in every scrap of personal paper I had and put them all down on the counter.*



*I had my birth certificate, an interim card from Medicare, my rent papers, my forklift licence and my discharge certificate. The lady at the bank was fascinated when she realised I'd been in prison; she asked "What was it like?" When I said, "Am I going to get an account?" she said "Of course" and I did.' Twelve months later when the bank invited her to get a credit card, Kerry was thrilled.*

*Loving her freedom, Kerry still found life outside wasn't always what she expected. 'What sustained me when I was inside was the thought that when I got out I would walk on the beach, and through town. And I did do those things – I could even tell you the date when I did them for the first time. It was wonderful, but there was still that emptiness. It wasn't as wonderful as I thought it was going to be.'*

*Kerry found that even making small decisions could be hard. 'It takes me forever to make up my mind. I never know what I want. But I don't want people to push me. I have to take my time.'*

*When she came down with a cold, she couldn't decide which flu tablets to buy from the chemist because there were so many. In the end, she just asked for the cheapest.*

*'I don't ever want to wear a pair of joggers after wearing them every day for so long. I've gone to buy a pair of joggers, then I've thought no, I really don't want them. 'It's my choice now.'*

*There are still challenges ahead. 'There are some things I can't face yet. I need to go to the dentist, but I don't want to have to explain where the last work on my teeth was done. I haven't done my tax return yet, and I don't want to have to explain that the reason I wasn't lodging tax returns before was that I was in prison.'*

*Kerry now sees her parole officer about once every two months. 'She's good. Some things I can talk to her about that I couldn't talk to anyone else about.'*

*'Sometimes I miss prison like crazy. The world outside can be a harsh place. But prison's not the real world. It's nothing of what the real world is about.'*

*'In prison you focus on the day you'll get out. Now my focus is the rest of my life. You have to find lots of different goals, not just one.'* Among other things Kerry hopes to do, she's planning an overseas holiday once she finishes her parole.

# Coping with Anxiety and Depression

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## Quick Guide to Coping with Anxiety and Depression

It's normal to feel anxious or depressed as you get ready to leave prison and in the months following your release.

You may:

- Have difficulty sleeping
- Eat more or less than usual
- Feel sick, or have difficulty breathing
- Feel agitated, restless or panicky
- Find you don't have the energy to do things
- Feel negative, and that everything is too hard
- Feel fearful that people know that you've been in prison
- Find it hard to make decisions.

If you:

- have these kinds of feelings without a break for three weeks or more, or
- can't do basic things like feed yourself or go to parole appointments because you feel so bad, or
- just want help so you cope better,

talk to your doctor or a support service (see p.9), or call Lifeline on 131 114.

**Keep reading for:**

- tips on coping with the emotional side of leaving prison.

**Do you have ‘gate fever’?**

It’s normal to feel anxiety or ‘gate fever’ as the date of your release approaches. This is more likely the longer you’ve been inside.

As well as feeling excited about your release, you may also be feeling fearful that something will go wrong so that your release will be delayed, or that you won’t be able to make it once you’re released. You may notice physical signs of anxiety, like sleep problems or agitation.

It’s important you make practical plans for your release, but it’s often easier to deal with things if you can stay focused on the here and now, and take your preparations for being released step by step, a day at a time.

Here are some tips about dealing with the emotional side of being released.

**They don’t know where you’ve been**

*‘At first I felt like everyone could tell I’d been in prison. I felt different, and I thought everyone else had marked me out. But after a while I realised that most people were too busy to pay me much attention. Gradually I stopped feeling so separate and different, and I was less worried that people would find me out.’*

**It’s normal for people to look you in the eye**

*‘In prison you learn to look away so no one will get the wrong idea, and think you want to take them on. I didn’t like it when I got out when people looked me in the eye. I almost got into fights a few times when I thought people were wanting to have a go at me, just from the way they looked at me. Then I started to realise that they did it with everyone, and it wasn’t about me.’*

**You can’t take everything personally**

*‘In the beginning I used to think if something went wrong, it was because people had it in for me. I’d assume they knew I’d been in prison when they probably didn’t have a clue. I had to tell myself things like “they’re just rude to everyone” or “they’re just having a bad day” so I didn’t get caught up in stuff.’*

**You forget how busy and noisy things are**

*‘I’d forgotten what it was like outside. Driving away from prison at 60 kph felt like we were speeding, and I nearly got knocked down the first time I tried to cross the road. I just had to take things slowly, and be careful, until I got used to it all again.’*

### **You have to stop watching your back**

*'I had to unlearn lots of things I did in prison to make sure I was safe. Outside I couldn't keep track of everything the way I used to inside. When I went to the shops I had to learn to relax, and not check everybody out to see where they were and what they were going to do. I would have gone crazy if I'd kept it up the way I was inside.'*

### **Don't push yourself too fast**

*'I felt really nervous about some places and people, and I had to pace myself, because if I tried to do everything at once I started to panic. I'd get all sweaty and felt like I couldn't breathe. I just had to do things gradually, in small doses, until I was coping better. I learnt how to say stuff that would calm me down, and to make myself breathe slowly and deeply.'*

### **It helps to get out of the house**

*'In the beginning I just felt so anxious being around people that I didn't go out much. My flat started becoming like another prison. But I could see that I had to get on top of it, or things would only get worse. I started going out once a day, even just to go and get the paper, or go for a walk, and after a while it got easier to go to more places and stay out for longer.'*

### **You have to learn to make decisions again**

*'I felt really anxious whenever I had to make decisions. Inside all my decisions had been made for me and I was out of practice. Even a little decision like what to have for lunch would be too much for me. For a while I tended to let other people decide things for me, but then it started to feel like they were bossing me around, even though I wanted it that way. It helped not to worry too much about getting things right all the time. Most of the time it didn't matter what I decided, I just had to get used to making decisions without spending too much time worrying about things. But it takes a long time, even years, to get used to having so many choices and having to decide for myself.'*

## Getting help

If anxiety or depression are making it hard to get on with life, see a doctor. It may be helpful for you to take prescription medication for a period of time and/or to talk through your feelings with a doctor or a counsellor or health professional. Using drugs or alcohol may make you feel better for a brief time, but they don't keep helping in the longer term.

### Signs that you may be anxious include:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Feeling restless and agitated
- Feeling sick
- Losing your appetite
- Panic attacks (feeling sweaty, shortness of breath, heart racing).

### Signs that you may be depressed include:

- Feeling continually sad and hopeless
- Not being able to enjoy anything in life (it all seems 'grey' or pointless)
- Having a lot of negative thoughts about life and yourself
- Lacking motivation to do anything, even to get out of bed
- Losing your appetite, or over-eating
- Being unable to sleep, or sleeping too much
- Thoughts of suicide.

You can expect to have some of these feelings as you adjust to life outside. However, if you find these feelings go on for more than a couple of months, or become so severe that you're unable to function properly (feed yourself, meet parole commitments, etc), then seek help. Talk to your doctor or a worker you trust.

### Who to contact

See *Getting Support* on p.9 for counselling services.





# Keeping Your Cool



## Quick Guide to Keeping Your Cool

After you leave prison you may have lots of reasons to lose your cool, especially in the first few months when plans might fall through, people don't understand, or you have to wait for things you need now.

Keeping your cool can help you keep your freedom. If you can find ways to avoid getting agro with others, it's worth it.

It may help to:

- Remind yourself about what could happen if you lose it
- Take time out
- Take ten deep breaths
- Stay away from people or places where you get agro
- Find ways to relax and stay calm.

Anger management courses can help you learn more ways to do this:

- Contact CRC on (02) 9288 8700 about the BASE program (Balancing Addictions, Strengthening Energies)
- Talk to your parole officer.

**Keep reading for:**

- tips from people who've found ways to keep their cool
- more information about services that can help.

# Keeping Your Cool

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KEEPING YOUR COOL

There's plenty to be frustrated about when you come out of prison. Particularly in the first couple of months, you may find yourself under intense pressure. Things will go wrong, fall through, or take longer than expected. You may feel like you're constantly hitting your head against a brick wall. If you 'lose it' and lash out at someone, whether it's your partner, your kids, a worker, or someone at the pub who you think is looking at you the wrong way, the next stop may be the remand centre.

Here are some tips from people who've found ways to keep their cool, even when times are tough:

## ■ Positive self-talk:

*'I've learnt to talk good stuff to myself. I just get worked up if I let myself think things like "they've got it coming to them". What I do these days is say something to myself like "I won't let this get to me", "I can handle this", or just "Chill". If I talk like that, I can calm myself down.'*

## ■ Think about the consequences:

*'I think about what will happen if I lose my cool. There's no way I want to lose my freedom. Then when I've walked away, I'll give myself a little pat on the back for keeping it together.'*

## ■ Time out:

*'Sometimes I'll just have to get away from the situation. Once when I was going to lose it with my boss I had to shut myself in the loo. Sometimes at home I'll just go for a walk until I feel calmer. The first few blocks I won't think about anything much, then on the way home I'll think about how I'll handle things when I get back.'*

## ■ Take some deep breaths:

*'If you take some deep, slow breaths, it can really calm you down. I didn't believe it when my counsellor told me this, but it really works. Now I notice if I'm getting worked up, because I start breathing faster, and I'll stop and take ten real slow, calm breaths.'*

## ■ Danger signs:

*'I've learnt to read the warning signs, so I can get away from the situation, or if I can't leave, I can try to slow things down. I'll hear my voice getting louder, and I'll start to feel hot and sweaty. I'll tense up, and it's like I get this rush of energy. I'm learning to stay in control, rather than letting my body take over.'*

### ■ True strength

*'I used to think I had to prove that no one could get on top of me, but these days I tell myself that it takes a really strong person to be in control of your feelings and take charge of your life. If you let other people wind you up, you're really just letting them run the show.'*

### ■ Be assertive:

*'I was someone who had to be on top all the time, which meant I came across as really agro. I did an anger management course, and they talked about being assertive, rather than aggressive. I've had to work at it, but I'm getting better now at talking about what I want, without shouting at people or trying to scare them. I thought people would think I was a pushover, but like they said on the course, you don't have to use force to get your point across. It means I usually get better help from people because they listen to what I say, and they're not trying to get me out the door as fast as they can.'*

### ■ Do things to help you relax:

*'I started working out because it made me feel better when I was feeling agro. Now I try and do it every day, because if I do it regularly it just seems to help me stay cool. Working out isn't for everyone, but walking, or swimming, or stuff like yoga should work the same*

*way. I used to drink when I felt worked up, but even though drinking loosens me up, it also makes it more likely that I'd go off at other people, so it made things worse in the long run.'*

### ■ Be prepared:

*'I'm more aware now of ways I can think ahead and avoid problems before they start. If I'm already feeling worked up, I'll try to stay away from people and places where I'll just start feeling worse. So I'll stay away from my mum's place, because if she sees I'm not going so well she starts at me, and things go from bad to worse. If I know that I have to go somewhere that might stress me, like a meeting with my ex, I'll take some time to relax first, so I'll have a clear head and a good attitude.'*

If you're worried that 'losing your cool' may be an issue for you, see the psychologist in your correctional centre. You may be able to get onto a program before you get released that can help you find other ways of coping with difficult situations. The following organisations can assist after you get out.

# Who to Contact

## **Community Restorative Centre (CRC)**

CRC runs the BASE program (Balancing Addictions, Strengthening Energies), which can teach you strategies to deal with anxiety and anger. CRC also provides counselling and can refer you to someone who provides conflict resolution.

**Ph: (02) 9288 8700**

## **Community health centres**

To find your nearest community health centre, call NSW Health.

**Ph: (02) 9391 9000**

## **Mental Health Information and Referral Service**

Advice, information and referral about mental health.

**Ph: 1300 794 991**

## **Parentline**

Counselling and referrals for parents.

**Ph: 13 20 55**

## **Relationships Australia**

Counselling, groups and referral for couples, individuals, and families.

**Ph: 1300 364 277**

## **Women's Information and Referral Service**

For referral to services for women.

**Ph: 1800 817 227**

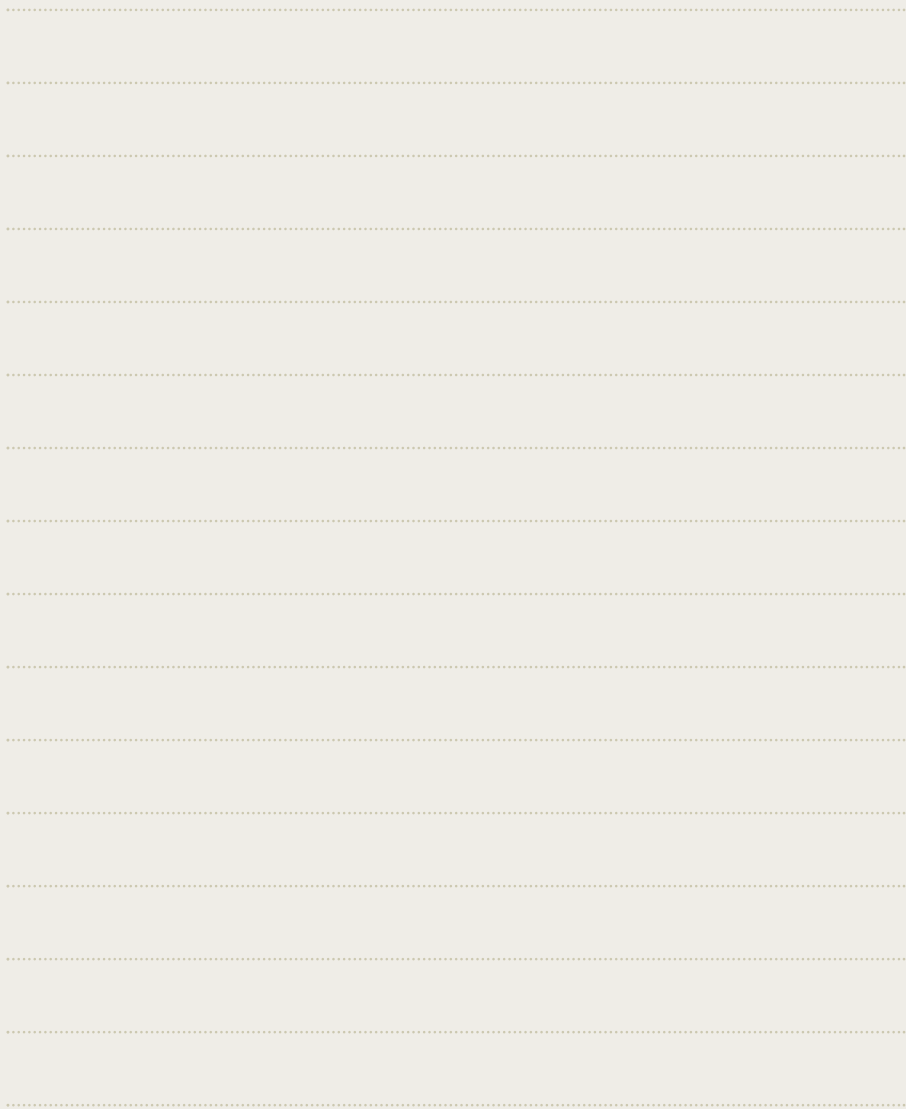
To get phone numbers for other services call 1223. There may be a charge for this call if you're not calling from a Telstra home phone.

1800 numbers are free from a fixed line. Some 1800 numbers can only be accessed from outside Sydney or on a mobile phone. You will be charged for these calls if you use a mobile phone.

Check your local library for free internet access.

# Notes

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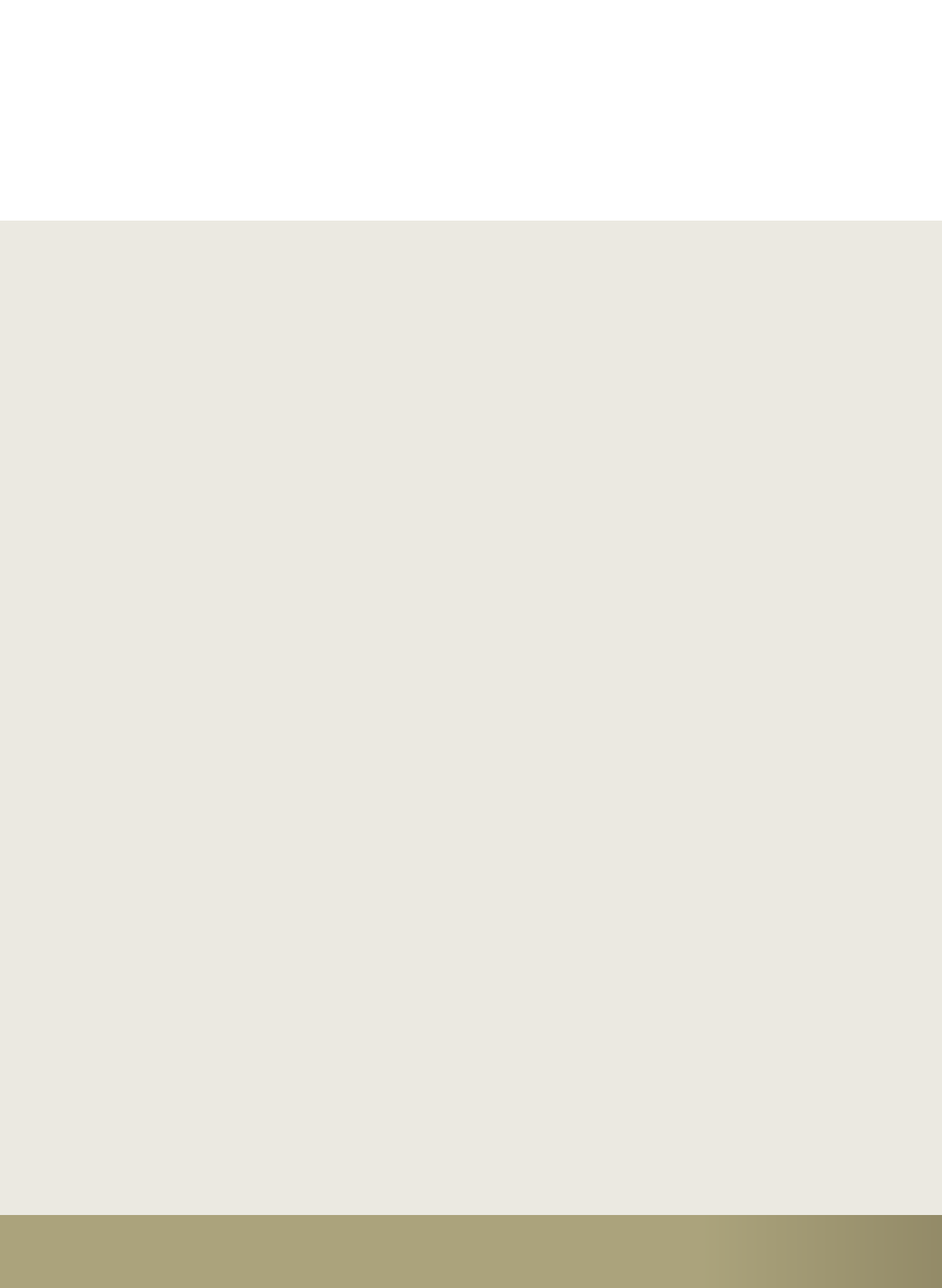
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## Important phone numbers

- Alcohol and Drug Information Service **361 800** or **1800 422 599**
- Centrelink **131 021**
- CRC **(02) 9288 8700**
- Community legal centres **(02) 9212 7333**
- Credit and Debt Hotline **1800 808 488**
- Department of Housing **1800 629 212**
- Homeless Persons Info Centre **(02) 9265 9081** or **1800 234 566**
- LawAccess **1300 888 529**
- Lifeline **131 114**
- State Parole Authority **(02) 8346 1780**