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# KEY MESSAGES

## The effectiveness of primary health care and social support services in meeting the needs of Aboriginal people released from the criminal justice system: a systematic literature review

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### Policy context

Whilst their need for social support and health interventions is high, Aboriginal people re-entering the community from prison face many barriers in accessing the services required to build lives in the community. This systematic literature review examined the physical, mental health and social support needs of Aboriginal people released from custody and the impact of pre and post release programs on Aboriginal people's access to primary health care once released from custody, and the barriers to accessing these programs.

### Key messages

Aboriginal people who have been in contact with the criminal justice system were found to have multiple, long standing health issues, and to be at a high risk of illness and injury post release. Despite the importance of the issue, the review found little research evaluating the impact of programs providing access to primary health care for Aboriginal people released from custody. Even less research was available on the programs that specifically target Aboriginal people and the responsibility of corrective services, health services and non-government organisations in meeting their needs.

People who are excluded from post release support tend to have worse health outcomes after release including those who are released to freedom after completion of sentence, those on remand, those imprisoned in remote areas and Aboriginal women. Prisoners released from remand or at the end of a sentence without a parole period were more likely to have no support and these were directly related to reoffending and deterioration of mental and physical health.

Throughcare is corrective services' official policy and is intended to provide continuous management for offenders to support their successful reintegration into the community. However, in practice, the availability of appropriate pre and post release programs is limited, services are poorly coordinated, especially for women, remandees and those who are released to freedom. Principles for effective throughcare in prisons include: developing coordinated, holistic and culturally appropriate programs; starting planning for release on reception; incorporating case management; supporting more transitional programs for Aboriginal prisoners on release; providing housing, mental health and disability support; and developing programs specifically targeted to Aboriginal women's needs.

The primary health care system could support throughcare by providing in-reach services into prisons, contributing to release planning, and providing support pre and post release. A Medicare item for Aboriginal people with multiple morbidities released from custody would facilitate this.

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