

AMC Inmate Health Survey

Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Research Project

Introduction

Understanding the health status of the inmates of the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), the ACT's prison, is one of the ways to develop appropriate policy and service responses to for this unique population. Conducting inmate health surveys is a key mechanism towards developing this understanding.

In 2010, the ACT Government Health Directorate conducted the first inmate health survey at the AMC with a summary results paper being completed in July 2011 and released publicly in November (<http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=sendfile&ft=p&fid=1321337363&sid=>). The summary report provides broad information about alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) related issues for inmates and commits to a series of additional reports, including one focused on ATOD.

The ACT Government, ATOD sector and allied stakeholders have made significant investments towards improving ATOD policies and services in the AMC. The results from the Inmate Health Survey are an essential data source for this ongoing work.

The survey data was collected in May 2010, so it is important that the analysis and availability of the ATOD information is timely so as to be able to inform decision-making and development processes.

A Canberra Collaboration of ATOD researchers has been established in the ACT to strengthen linkages between research, policy and practice (see www.atoda.org.au for further details). Engaging members of the Collaboration in progressing this key area of work could be effective and efficient.

It is therefore proposed that a research project be overseen by members of the Collaboration and undertaken by identified researcher/s to analyse the ATOD data from the Inmate Health Survey so as to be able to understand inmates' ATOD related issues and to inform policy, practice and future research in this area.

Proposed Project

The *AMC Inmate Health Survey Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Research Project* (the project) is a collaborative research project that aims to analyse, present and disseminate the alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) specific data from the 2010 Inmate Health Survey. The data are quantitative only; the ACT Health Directorate's Epidemiology Branch is the custodian of the unit record file.

The project will produce a comprehensive report on the ATOD aspects of the survey within the context of inmates' broader health status and other comorbidities. The report would produce factual data and draw implications for policy, services and future research in this area.

We propose a project comprising two phases: an initial report will analyse ATOD data from the 2010 ACT Inmate Health Survey. This initial report (data analysis and

brief demographic and descriptive analyses) would then be the basis for a workshop of key stakeholders, seeking their feedback on how the results resonate with their understandings of the ATOD situation within the AMC, and more broadly within the ACT context. A subsequent report will detail implications and will include the outcomes of the workshop, focusing on policy, service provision and implementation, and further research.

Both phases of the project would be made available electronically as appropriate. A public presentation of findings would also be conducted.

Potential stakeholders

It is proposed that this project could be conducted as part of the Canberra Collaboration. These stakeholders could include:

- Justice Health, ACT Government Health Directorate
- AOD Policy Unit, ACT Government Health Directorate
- Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA)
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
- Epidemiology Branch, ACT Government Health Directorate
- National Centre for Population Health and Epidemiology, Australian National University
- ACT Branch, Public Health Association of Australia
- Wiunnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service

Some key considerations

- Identify a researcher or researchers able and willing to undertake this project in a timely manner
- Determine who would own and be able to use the intellectual property brought into existence through the data analysis and ATOD report preparation
- Secure access to the unit record dataset through the Epidemiology Branch, ACT Government Health Directorate
- Identify a source of funding for the project

Funding estimates

Approximately \$20,000 will be required to undertake the project. Significant in-kind resources will be provided to support the project, for example from ATODA, the researchers who developed the survey instrument and collected the data, and from ACT Justice Health regarding health policies and services at the AMC.

Next steps

Proposal was presented to the ACT ATOD Strategy Evaluation Group and the ACT Government Health Directorate and the AMC Health Policies and Services Advisory Group in early 2012 for their consideration.

For further information regarding this proposal please contact Carrie Fowle, Executive Officer, ATODA, on carrie@atoda.org.au or (02) 6255 4070.

ATTACHMENT 1: Background and context

Prison inmate health¹

On 30 June 2010, there were 29,700 prisoners in Australian prisons. Of these prisoners, 203 were inmates in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) which represents less than one per cent of the nation's prisoners. The ACT's imprisonment rate decreased by 8% between 1999 and 2009 (from 81 to 75 prisoners per 100,000 adults).

Prison inmates are characterised by disadvantage, with histories of disrupted family and social backgrounds; abuse, neglect and trauma; poor educational attainment and limited employment opportunities; unstable housing; parental incarceration; juvenile detention; dysfunctional relationships and domestic violence; and previous episodes of imprisonment. With such multiple risk factors for poor health, it is hardly surprising that prison inmates are further characterised by physical and mental health far below that enjoyed by the general population.

Inmate Health Survey background and context²

In 1996, 2001 and 2008, NSW Corrections Health Service/Justice Health conducted Inmate Health Surveys to investigate the health status of the NSW prisoner population. These surveys provide comprehensive descriptions of prisoner health, covering issues such as drug use, bloodborne viruses and other infectious diseases, mental health, the relationship between physical and mental health, cardiovascular disease, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, intellectual disability, access to health services, smoking, and oral health. Similar but limited surveys have been conducted in Victoria, Queensland and New Zealand.

The 2010 ACT Inmate Health Survey was conducted by the ACT Government Health Directorate and was the first survey conducted in the ACT prison, the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). In November 2011 the *ACT Inmate Health Survey 2010: Summary Results* was released publicly.

Results from the survey provide evidence to form a baseline assessment of the health needs of prisoners in the ACT. These results can inform the provision of health services and policy development to ensure that health service delivery in correctional facilities meets the needs of the inmate population. However, as a summary document, there is minimal ATOD detail provided. The summary acknowledges this and commits to presenting a series of subsequent reports, including one focused on ATOD results.³

Policy context

This initiative links with key policy areas, including the *ACT Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2010 – 2014*, the Burnet Report, the Hamburger Report, and the AMC Health Services and Policy Advisory Group.

¹ Adapted excerpt from ACT Government 2011 *Inmate Health Survey 2010: Summary Results*, <http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=sendfile&ft=p&fid=1321337363&sid=>

² *ibid*

³ ACT Government 2011 *Inmate Health Survey 2010: Summary Results*, p5.