

Research Brief

Review of the birth certificate Identity Management Enhancement pilot

Sarah Cassidy, Sasha Nahleen, & Mark Howard

AIM To conduct a review of the activities and outcomes of the birth certificate Identity Management Enhancement pilot, a joint initiative between Corrective Services NSW and the NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages (BDM) to provide free birth certificates to vulnerable people housed in correctional centres.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A total of 3344 applications were processed over the pilot operational timeframe, which compares to 4780 inmates who were routinely identified as meeting eligibility criteria for the initiative over the same period. Around 30% of those identified as eligible commenced applications, whereas a large number of additional applications appeared to involve inmates who did not meet all eligibility criteria. The prevalence of vulnerability characteristics among participants was comparable to the broader target population, with some over-representation of the age criterion and under-representation of the financial hardship criterion.

Applications had a high rate of completion, with 91.4% resulting in a birth certificate being issued to the participant by BDM. By comparison, slightly more than two in three (68.4%) applications resulted in a participant receiving a certificate during their custodial episode, as indicated by correctional centre property records. The average total processing times for received applications was 46.3 days.

Available data indicated that external and internal Corrective Services NSW postage processes were influential to timely receipt of birth certificates. Total processing time was largely determined by postal transit, and tended to be substantially longer for those who received certificates after their earliest date of parole release (EPRD). A number of incomplete applications were also recorded as lost in post. Additional analyses showed that participants who did not receive their certificate in correctional centres had significantly shorter time to their EPRD at the time of commencing applications compared to those who did receive their certificate.

We concluded that the pilot showed promising capabilities of the initiative in managing high volumes of applications and delivering birth certificates to vulnerable people in NSW correctional centres. Further development and fidelity to implementation principles relating to eligibility criteria and application timing may help to support a continuation or expansion of the initiative in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The first few months following release from custody is a critical period for successful reintegration (e.g., Baldry et al., 2006) as individuals seek stable accommodation and employment, open a bank account, and access various services and support. Achieving these tasks usually requires official identification documents such as a birth certificate, driver's licence, and/or passport. Therefore, leaving custody without identification presents a major barrier to meaningful reintegration into society (Nacro, 2018; Sanders et al., 2020). Difficulties with reintegration may, in turn, increase the risk of recidivism and arrest (e.g., Baldry et al. 2018; Jacobs & Gottlieb, 2020; Willis, 2009), thus, potentially impacting community safety and increasing the financial costs of crime (see e.g., Borzycki, 2005; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). A lack of identification can also directly lead to imprisonment; for example, if someone is convicted for multiple offences involving driving without a licence (*Road Transport Act 2013 (NSW)*).

Unfortunately, many offenders do not have identification documents for a variety of reasons, including their birth never being registered in the first place, the financial cost of obtaining identification, homelessness, and being arrested far from home (see Penal Reform International, 2020). One potential solution to this problem is issuing identification documents while offenders are still incarcerated so that they would then be better able to access services and support post-release. Issuing birth certificates would be particularly helpful for inmates in Australia given that it is often used as a foundation document to access other forms of identity documentation and vital services.

Currently, inmates in NSW can apply for birth certificates while in custody; however, there is a cost attached to this application, making it an unfeasible option for many. To this end, Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) has partnered with NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages (BDM) to run the Identity Management Enhancement pilot, a project assisting inmates in obtaining free birth certificates prior to their release into the community. To be eligible to take part in the pilot, inmates were required to be exiting CSNSW custody within 6 months, born in NSW and meet the criteria of a 'vulnerable person'. Vulnerable persons are defined as experiencing financial hardship (i.e., less than \$500 in their trust account) and fitting one or more of the following factors: Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander, at risk of homelessness on release, low literacy skills, under 25 or over 65 years of age, have a confirmed disability (i.e., as assessed by CSNSW Statewide Disability Services, and may be intellectual, physical, neurological or sensory / communicative in nature). The birth certificate Identity Management Enhancement pilot was conducted at correctional centres across NSW from June 2020 until June 2022.

AIMS

Consultations with stakeholders have indicated that key areas of implementation for the Identity Management Enhancement pilot are identifying and engaging eligible inmates, and the administrative interdepartmental processes of completing applications and delivering identification documents to inmates before they are released from custody. Therefore, this evaluation aims to provide a quantitative analysis of process indicators relating to reach and throughput of the target population. Specifically, we examine how many inmates were eligible for the pilot, their demographic characteristics compared to the total target population, how many successfully received a birth certificate within the study timeframe, and the average duration to process an application. Research questions of interest included:

- How many eligible inmates participated in the pilot? How did this compare to the total target population of eligible inmates in correctional centres over the study timeframe?
- What were the characteristics of participants? How did they compare to the total target population of eligible inmates in correctional centres over the study timeframe?
- How many participants successfully completed the pilot in the study timeframe? What factors were associated with applications being closed incomplete at each stage of processing?
- How much time was required to complete applications at each stage of processing? How did this relate to the custody episode characteristics of participants?

These results are intended to provide insights into best practice for continuation or expansion of the project.

METHODS

Two main data sources were utilised to examine the activities and outcomes of the birth certificate Identity Management Enhancement pilot over its operational lifespan between June 2020 and June 2022. These were the BDM operated LifeLink database and the CSNSW's Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS). LifeLink is an electronic database where BDM staff maintain the birth, death, and marriage records in NSW. From this portal we accessed relevant birth certificate data pertaining to this specific project, such as applicant details (e.g., name, date of birth, MIN [Master Index Number]), and processing information (e.g., date application was received at registry, date birth certificate was printed, information pertaining to where and when the birth certificate was posted).

At the commencement of the pilot, the CSNSW operational project team collaborated with the Corrections Research, Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) data team to create a weekly generated list of inmate information to aid participant selection. These lists were derived from OIMS and contained information to identify eligible inmates (e.g., name, MIN, correctional centre) as well as which of the eligibility criteria were met. As there were inmates who submitted an application who were ineligible, we also extracted additional data from OIMS for inmates to generate variables and calculations that are equivalent to those used in the eligibility lists. Other relevant data extracted from OIMS included dates of referrals to the pilot by CSNSW staff, in addition to locations and dates where birth certificates were recorded as being received at correctional centres and lodged in inmates' official property records.

Data relating to participants' characteristics and pathways through the pilot were analysed in aggregate using descriptive statistics. Quantitative data was used to map participants' pathways through the pilot at a descriptive level, as well as to represent the aggregate distribution of indicators across participants. To assess if there were any significant differences in the distribution of participant characteristics compared to the larger eligible target sample, a series of chi-square tests were conducted. Independent samples t-tests were used to examine differences in application processing and episode pathways between groups of interest, such as participants who did or did not receive birth certificates in correctional centre property records.

FINDINGS

Indicators of pilot activity

Over the timeframe of the pilot, a total of 3344 individual applications were registered for processing by BDM. On average, BDM received 133.8 applications per month, peaking at 251 applications in May 2021. An average of 122.2 applications were issued by BDM per month, and 91.5 birth certificates were recorded as being received in inmates' correctional centre property per month. Figure 1 presents the rate of applications received and certificates issued and received per month over the pilot period.

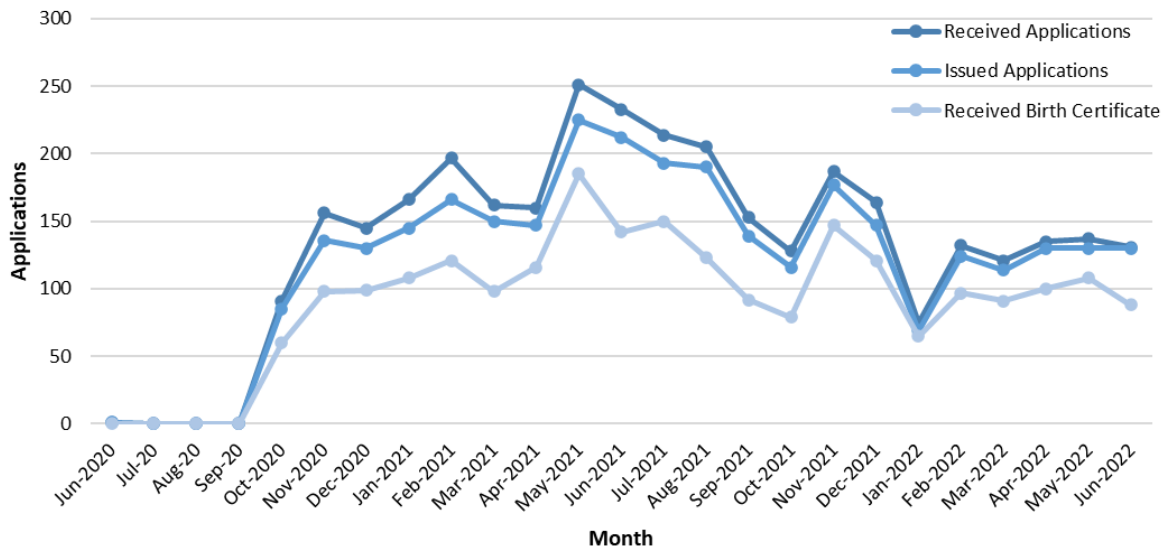


Figure 1. Number of applications received and issued by BDM, and number of birth certificates received by NSW correctional centres and recorded in participants' property records

It is noted that the total of 3344 applications processed did not exclusively involve distinct individuals, or individuals who were represented on routine eligibility lists for the pilot. Of the applications processed, 45.7% (n = 1527) were for inmates who were on the OIMS eligibility lists (including 5.3% [n = 81] duplicate applications) and 54.3% (n = 1817) were for inmates who were not (including 3.0% [n = 55] duplicate applications). This will be examined in greater detail in following sections.

Eligible inmates

Throughout the course of the pilot, a total of 4780 eligible inmates were identified as being housed in correctional centres according to routine eligibility lists. Approximately 30% (n = 1446) of those eligible inmates applied for a birth certificate.

Table 1 gives a breakdown of eligible inmates by NSW correctional centre, excluding duplicate applications. It can be seen that the highest volumes of eligible inmates tended to be housed at Parklea, Clarence, Junee, and South Coast correctional centres as well as the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre, whereas the highest rates of applications for eligible inmates relative to the total pool of eligible individuals occurred at Emu Plains, Goulburn, Lithgow and South Coast correctional centres.

Table 1. Comparison between the number of eligible inmates by NSW correctional centre and applications made by eligible inmates

Correctional Centre	Number of eligible inmates	Number of eligible applications*	%
June Correctional Centre	344	116	33.72
Broken Hill Correctional Centre	27	6	22.22
Bathurst Correctional Complex	287	74	25.78
Compulsory Drug Treatment Correctional Centre	18	0	0.00
Cessnock Correctional Centre	252	100	39.68
Clarence Correctional Centre	415	145	34.94
Cooma Correctional Centre	88	18	20.45
Dawn de Loas Correctional Centre	83	19	22.89
Dillwynia Correctional Centre	126	49	38.89
Emu Plains Correctional Centre	2	1	50.00
Goulburn Correctional Centre	110	65	59.09
Glen Innes Correctional Centre	24	9	37.50
High Risk Management Correctional Centre	9	2	22.22
Hunter Correctional Centre	27	2	7.41
John Morony Correctional Centre	151	25	16.56
Kariong Correctional Centre	10	1	10.00
Kirkconnell Correctional Centre	46	12	26.09
Long Bay Hospital	44	19	43.18
Lithgow Correctional Centre	92	55	59.78
Mannus Correctional Complex	17	3	17.65
St Heliers Correctional Centre	121	26	21.49
Macquarie Correctional Centre	57	28	49.12
Mid North Coast Correctional Centre	318	121	38.05
Metropolitan Remand & Reception Centre (MRRC)	338	38	11.24
Metropolitan Special Programs Centre (MSPC)	162	64	39.51
Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre	104	29	27.88
Mary Wade Correctional Centre	6	0	0.00
Oberon Correctional Centre	17	3	17.65
Geoffrey Pearce Correctional Centre	83	13	15.66
Parklea Correctional Centre	549	29	5.28
Shortland Correctional Centre	280	104	37.14
South Coast Correctional Centre	336	181	53.87
Tamworth Correctional Centre	53	4	7.55
Wellington Correctional Centre	184	85	46.20

Participant characteristics

According to available OIMS data, the average age of participants across all applications, including those who were and were not on eligibility lists ($n = 3344$) was 34.9 years old (range = 18 - 85; $SD = 9.42$). Most were male (88%), and almost half (46.8%) were of Aboriginal cultural background, with the result being that total pilot application activity involved similar proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal applicants ($m^{diff} = 6.5\%$). One in ten participants (10%) were from a Non-English Speaking Background

(NESB) and approximately one quarter (23.7%) of participants were confirmed to have a disability¹. A small proportion of all participants were assessed as having low literacy skills (23.0%), and the majority were at high risk of being homeless on release from CSNSW custody (87.4%). Finally, participants' trust account balance, on average, held \$175.4 (range = \$0.0 – \$25,195.1; SD = \$682.3).

We also examined cumulative distributions of the five optional vulnerability criteria for participation in the pilot (i.e., Aboriginality, risk of homelessness, low literacy, confirmed disability, and age [i.e., < 25 or > 65 years of age]) across all applications, as represented in routine eligibility lists². The average (median) number of optional vulnerability criteria for participants was one. There was a positively skewed distribution, so that 500 applicants (14.9%) were recorded as meeting none of the criteria, over a third (38.5%) met one, and few (0.8%) met all five. Figure 2 shows the cumulative distribution of vulnerability criteria across all applications.

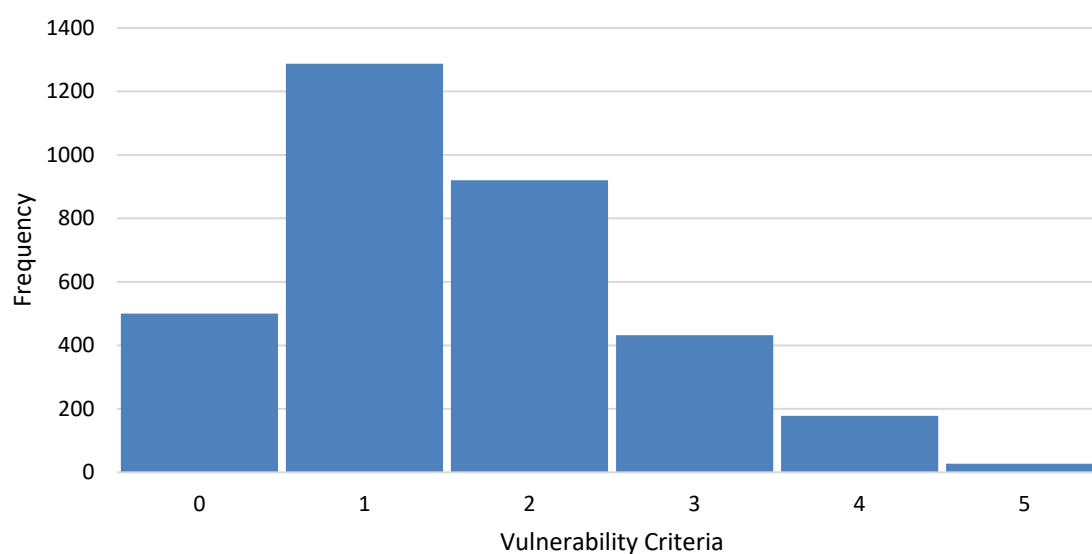


Figure 2. Distribution of vulnerability criteria across all applications (n = 3344).

A series of chi-square analyses were conducted to examine how the characteristics of participants compared to those of inmates who were targeted for the pilot more broadly (see Table 2). This was operationalised for the purpose of analysis by comparing participants to inmates who were recorded as eligible but did not commence an application. In terms of key vulnerability criteria, analyses indicated that people who participated in the pilot had a significantly higher prevalence of being under 25 or over 65 years old relative to eligible inmates who did not participate. Conversely, participants had a significantly lower prevalence of financial hardship when compared to other eligible inmates. No significant differences were found between the two groups on the other vulnerability criteria relating to Aboriginality, confirmed disability, risk of homelessness, or low literacy.

In reference to other characteristics, differences were found between the two groups on two demographic factors, namely gender and NESB. Specifically, there were significantly greater proportions of women and

¹ Type of confirmed disability is not available with the current set of OIMS data.

² It is noted that assessments of eligibility and vulnerability criteria did not show 100% agreement when calculated from routine eligibility lists or from underlying OIMS data. This may reflect changes to the status of these criteria over the course of the inmate's custodial order and resulting effects on differing point in time estimates.

those from a NESB who were selected to apply for a free birth certificate compared to the distributions of these characteristics in eligible inmates who did not participate.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and crosstabulation results for participants, in comparison to the greater eligible target inmate population

Variable	Group				Crosstabulation			
	Participants		Target population		χ^2	p	df	
	n	%	n	%				
Aboriginal								
	<i>Yes</i>	1563	46.77	1618	48.07	1.138	.286	1
	<i>No</i>	1779	53.23	1748	51.93			
Disability								
	<i>Yes</i>	793	23.71	756	22.45	1.519	.218	1
	<i>No</i>	2551	76.29	2612	77.55			
At risk of homelessness								
	<i>Yes</i>	2922	87.38	2907	86.31	1.675	.196	1
	<i>No</i>	422	12.62	461	13.69			
Low literacy skills								
	<i>Yes</i>	730	22.97	746	23.85	0.679	.41	1
	<i>No</i>	2448	77.03	2382	76.15			
Age (<25 or >65)								
	<i>Yes</i>	426	13.28	302	9.06	29.46	<.001	1
	<i>No</i>	2782	86.72	3032	90.94			
Financial Hardship								
	<i>Yes</i>	3156	95.75	3368	98.72	194.806	<.001	1
	<i>No</i>	188	4.25	0	1.28			
Gender								
	<i>Female</i>	400	11.97	215	6.38	62.792	<.001	1
	<i>Male</i>	2943	88.03	3153	93.62			
NESB								
	<i>Yes</i>	335	10.06	223	6.77	23.238	<.001	1
	<i>No</i>	2995	89.94	3071	93.23			

Note: Financial hardship = less than \$500 in trust account

Application completion outcomes

One indicator of completed applications is whether a birth certificate was recorded as being issued to the participant, indicating that it had been posted to their nominated address. BDM Livelink records indicated that 91.4% (n = 3056) of all applications over the pilot timeframe were issued to inmates. Of the remaining applications that were identified as incomplete (8.6%; n = 288), 9.4% (n = 27) were duplicate applications. Manually recorded notes on Livelink also indicated that closed incomplete applications were largely associated with the birth certificate being returned to sender or labelled as 'lost' or 'lost in post'. It is noted, however, that data on reasons for incomplete applications were missing in many cases and not documented for all records.

Given the objectives of the pilot, we also examined a second indicator of completed applications, which is whether the inmate had a birth certificate lodged as recorded property at a correctional centre during their index custodial episode. OIMS property records indicated that 68.4% (n = 2288) of all participant applications resulted in receipt of a birth certificate at a correctional centre. Of those applications where BDM recorded having issued a birth certificate (n = 3056), 86.6% (n = 2646, including 95 duplicate applications) were posted to a NSW correctional centre, while the remaining 13.4% (n = 410, including 14 duplicates) were posted to a residential or non-correctional centre affiliated address (e.g., a Community Corrections office). Correspondingly, the location of 358 (11.7%) birth certificates that were recorded by BDM as having been posted to a correctional centre is unknown.

Application processing times in the context of inmates' episode characteristics

One eligibility requirement for all participants was to have 6 months or less to serve before their EPRD. Of all applicants (n = 3344), 71.2% (n = 2381) were recorded as meeting this requirement. For the remainder of applications, the majority of participants' time to EPRD was greater than 6 months, and in some cases ranged to up to 16 years to EPRD (n = 512; 15.3%). Smaller numbers of applications which did not meet this eligibility criterion involved cases where the participant's EPRD had passed (n = 90; 2.7%) or where EPRD was not calculated or otherwise missing in OIMS (n = 361; 10.8%)³. On average, participants had 4 months (SD = 9.15) remaining to their EPRD at the time of commencing an application (see also Figure 3 for distributions of application timing).

When considering processing time per application, available data on two processing periods are relevant: the amount of time between when the application was received by BDM and when the certificate was marked as issued (for all applications resulting in an issued birth certificate); and the total time between when the application was received by BDM and when receipt of the birth certificate was recorded on an inmate's property record (for those participants who received a birth certificate while in custody).

On average, it took 4.5 days (range = 0 – 369 days; SD = 19.17) for birth certificate applications to be received by BDM and for the certificates to be recorded as printed and ready for post. Including this time, it took, on average, 46.3 days (range = 1–853 days; SD = 114.49 days) for birth certificate applications to be received by BDM and for them to be received at a correctional centre and reported on an inmate's property record. By extension, there was an average delay of 41.8 days between a birth certificate being recorded as issued by BDM and it being received and recorded as property at correctional centres.

Additional analyses were conducted to examine how the timing of application processing relative to participants' episode characteristics might have an influence on timely receipt of a birth certificate during the pilot. One indicator of this outcome is whether an application resulted in receipt of a birth certificate in correctional centre property. Independent samples t-tests indicated that participants who received a birth certificate in correctional centre property commenced applications significantly earlier in their custodial episode, or an average of 4.12 months prior to their EPRD, compared to those who did not have a certificate recorded in property, who commenced applications an average of 2.93 months before their EPRD (see Table 3). Figure 3⁴ illustrates that participants who did not receive certificates most commonly commenced applications with 0–2 months remaining until their EPRD, whereas participants who received certificate showed a broader distribution of applications most commonly commencing 1–5 months before their EPRD.

³ An examination of available OIMS data suggests that such scenarios can occur when inmates are held beyond their sentence date while awaiting sentencing on another matter, or an application was submitted in close proximity to the release date.

⁴ To improve the legibility of Figures 3 and 4, data ranges are restricted to +/- 24 months to EPRD at time of application.

Table 3. Comparisons of number of months from EPRD at the time of application for selected groups

Reference group	n	Number of months from application to EPRD		Difference between groups	
		M	SD	F	p
All applicants					
<i>Received certificate</i>	2045	4.12	9.71	9.98	.002
<i>Did not receive certificate</i>	938	2.93	9.27		
Applicants who received a certificate in property records					
<i>Received before EPRD</i>	1754	5.25	9.49	180.98	<.001
<i>Received after EPRD</i>	291	-2.68	8.14		

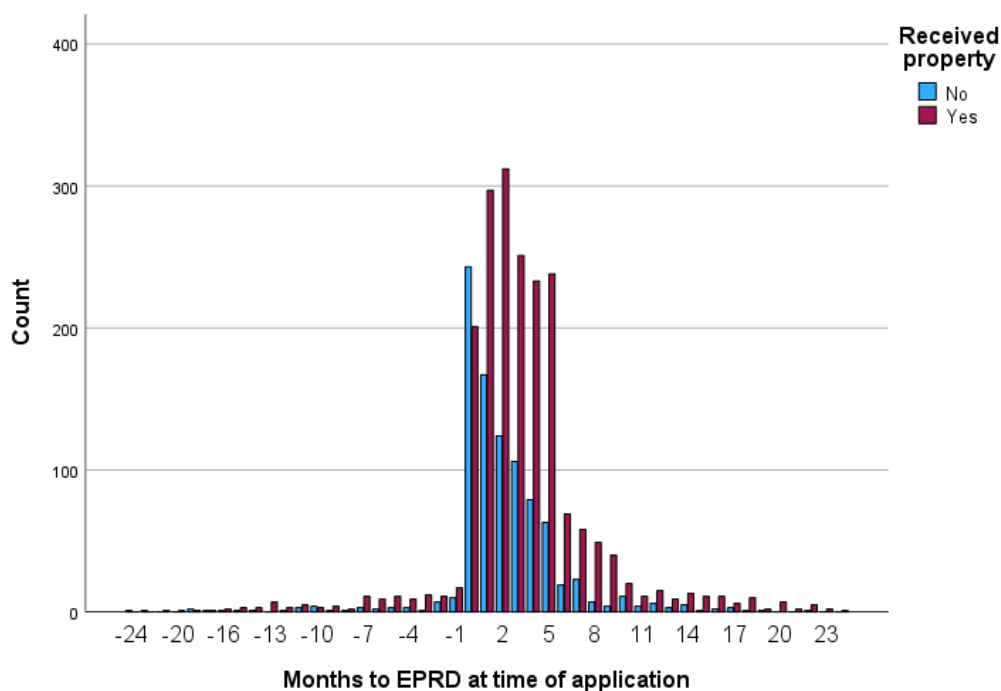


Figure 3. Distribution of months to EPRD at time of commencing applications, as a function of whether the participant received a birth certificate in correctional centre property

Another index of timely receipt of a birth certificate is whether the participant had a certificate recorded as property in correctional centres before or after their EPRD. As indicated in Table 3, participants who received certificates after their EPRD commenced applications significantly later in their custodial episode compared to those who received certificates before their EPRD. In fact, participants who received certificates after their EPRD tended to commence applications after their EPRD on average, although most commonly commenced applications with less than one month to serve to their EPRD (see Figure 4). Participants who received their certificate after their EPRD also experienced significantly longer application processing times ($M = 199.15$ days; $SD = 243.71$) compared to those who received it before their EPRD ($M = 20.54$ days; $SD = 32.85$; $F(1, 2043) = 851.01, p < .001$)⁵.

⁵ It was not possible to compare total processing time for participants who did or did not receive as birth certificate in correctional centre property records, as the property record date was used in calculations of processing time.

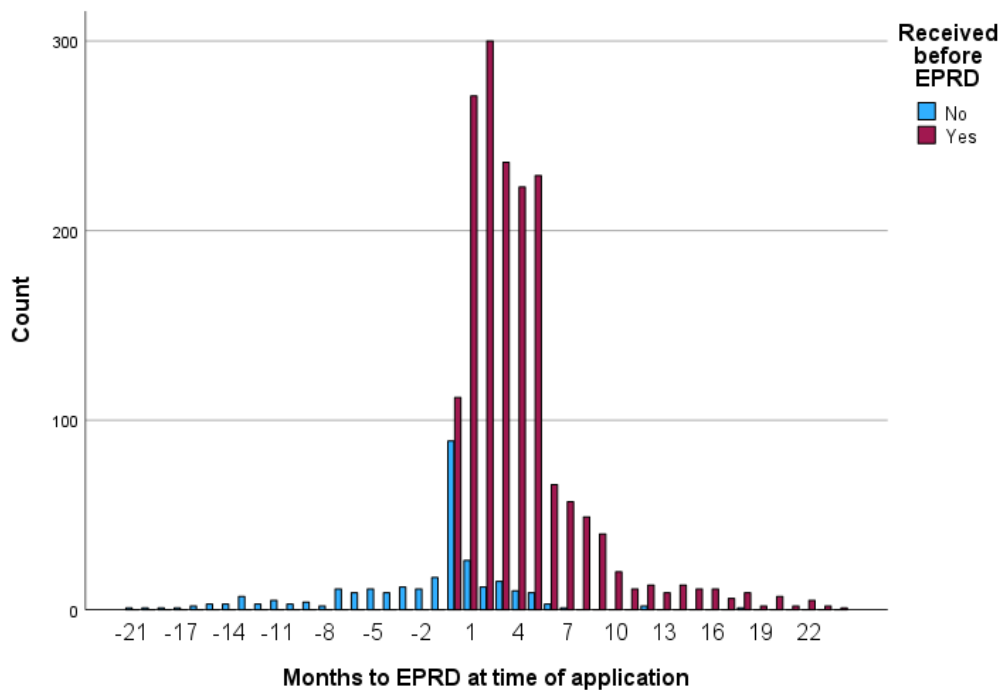


Figure 4. Distribution of months to EPRD at time of commencing applications, as a function of whether the participant received a birth certificate before or after their EPRD.

CONCLUSIONS

Leaving custody with identification presents a major avenue to meaningful reintegration into society as it allows former inmates to better access services and support post-release. To this end, CSNSW partnered with NSW BDM to pilot a project assisting vulnerable inmates obtain free birth certificates prior to their release into the community. The aim of this study was to provide a quantitative analysis of process indicators relating to reach and throughput of the target population in order to provide insights into best practice for continuation and expansion of the project.

The results of this study provided positive indications about the activities and outcomes of this initiative. A total of 3344 applications were processed by BDM over the pilot timeframe, with monthly processing rapidly growing from the commencement of the pilot to a peak of more than 250 applications per month. Over the same period, 4780 people were identified as eligible for the pilot according to routine eligibility lists, which suggests that the initiative is currently well resourced, or could potentially benefit from further expansion, to service the target population. In this regard, the results also highlight the prevalence and extent of needs among people who meet vulnerability criteria in NSW correctional centres, and are likely to benefit from access to free birth certificates as part of their criminal justice and reintegration pathways.

This study indicated that the pilot was moderately successful in accessing and promoting uptake among the target population, with approximately 30% of people on routine eligibility lists commencing an application. Participants also showed similar representation of vulnerability characteristics relative to other members of the target population, with slight tendencies towards over-representation of the age criterion and under-representation of the financial hardship criterion.

However, a large amount of additional activity appeared to be oriented towards people who may not have met eligibility criteria for the initiative. The available data suggests that in many cases this may be

attributable to case managers waiving certain mandatory criteria, such as commencing applications for people who had more than 6 months left to serve to their EPRD or had already passed their EPRD. The observed inconsistencies in data across sources also suggest that eligibility decisions could be driven by access to additional or updated information about vulnerability criteria relative to those used to calculate the routine eligibility lists alone; in this regard, applications made for people who are nominally deemed ineligible according to routine lists may not necessarily imply a failure of the initiative or servicing of non-target or non-vulnerable inmates. Nonetheless, ongoing implementation may benefit from a review of eligibility processes including criteria, routine calculations, and awareness and application by staff, to ensure that the initiative has optimal reach and accessibility to vulnerable people in NSW correctional centres.

This study also indicated good completion outcomes of the pilot, with 91.4% of applications being recorded as issued to inmates by BDM. However, a more complex pattern emerged when considering this outcome in reference to participants' receipt of a birth certificate as lodged in official correctional centre property records, with slightly more than two-thirds of all applications resulting in a property record. We acknowledge that while conclusive data was unavailable, it is likely that a greater number of applications resulted in successful receipt of the birth certificate, such as those that were posted to the participant's home address or Community Corrections office. At the same time, receipt of a certificate during the participant's custodial episode may be considered an optimal outcome of the initiative, given both the value of such identification and the potential for address-related and other instability during the immediate post-release period (e.g. Baldry et al., 2006; Sanders et al., 2020).

A related consideration is that our analyses highlighted the importance of circumstances surrounding postage on outcomes. For example, incomplete applications were often marked as lost in post; similarly, large numbers of birth certificates that were issued by BDM to correctional centres could not be located through linkage with property records. Further, while application processing times were relatively short on average, they appeared to be largely driven by the interval between issuing a birth certificate and receiving it at the appropriate correctional centre destination, where applicable. Longer processing times were also associated with receiving a birth certificate after EPRD, which may in turn act as an indirect indicator of increased uncertainty of successful delivery.

The pattern of results suggests that for many applications, ample buffering time may be required for an issued birth certificate to navigate both external postage and internal Corrective Services mail and redirection systems. Consistent with this, we found that participants who did not receive a certificate in correctional centre property records commenced applications significantly closer to their EPRD compared to those who did receive a certificate, and most frequently did so with less than a month remaining until their EPRD. On the proviso that receiving a birth certificate in custody is the preferred location of delivery, our results indicated that this may optimally be achieved by commencing applications some 3–4 months prior to EPRD, and there may be a case for excluding otherwise eligible participants who have less than a month to serve before their earliest date of release.

The current study aimed to provide a preliminary review of the Identity Management Enhancement pilot activities and outcomes, and some limitations are noted. Data used in this study were primarily generated from operational records and limited information was available for a number of key variables, such as the final destinations of all issued birth certificates and detailed reasons for incomplete applications. Relatedly, we observed both between-agency and within-agency inconsistencies in the data which may have contributed to error in analyses.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the results of this study give promising evidence for the capabilities of this initiative in managing high volumes of applications and issuing birth certificates to support vulnerable

people, while illustrating the existing and ongoing need for such provisions among inmates of NSW correctional centres. Refinement of, and fidelity to, principles of implementation best practice, including in relation to eligibility criteria and application timing, may help to ensure that a continuation or expansion of the initiative delivers successful outcomes to participants in the future.

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Corrections Research Evaluation & Statistics
Corrective Services NSW
GPO Box 31
Sydney NSW Australia

Telephone: (02) 8346 1556
Email: research.enquiries@justice.nsw.gov.au