Research Publication

Evaluation of the Practice Guide for Intervention (PGI): Staff Perceptions Five Years After Implementation

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Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics

1 Executive Summary

The Practice Guide for Intervention (PGI) is a suite of exercises that can be applied by Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) as part of routine supervision. These exercises are designed to enhance the behaviour change content of supervision sessions by providing a structure for officers to help supervisees address their criminogenic needs.

The PGI was introduced in 2016 and has since undergone further development to address identified limitations and integrate the growing evidence base for best practice. Ongoing delivery of the PGI in recent years has also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current study aims to understand current staff perceptions of the utility and delivery of the PGI, taking into account more recent developments in PGI content and practices in the context of officers' more established use of the model as part of their business as usual. To achieve these aims, staff perceptions were sampled through a state-wide online survey administered to CCOs and semi-structured interviews conducted with Unit Leaders (ULs).

1.1. Key findings

Most officers perceived rehabilitation and monitoring compliance of people under their supervision as integral functions of their role. ULs provided a similar response, describing the role of a CCO as balancing compliance monitoring and behaviour change, the latter of which was deemed especially important.

Most respondents agreed that the PGI is a useful behaviour change tool that helped officers identify and address criminogenic needs and improve their interactions with their supervisees. However, they raised areas of improvement around the utility and inclusivity of PGI exercises to certain individuals such as those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Officers reported feeling confident in their skills and ability to deliver the PGI model as intended. Some ULs, however, identified areas for improvement and felt that additional resources and support provided for officers' continuous skill development would assist them with delivery. For example, ULs noted that advanced training on how to initiate difficult behaviour change conversations could help their officers be more effective in delivering the PGI.

Respondents noted several factors facilitating PGI delivery, including the new roles of phone and video supervision sessions that were introduced during the pandemic lockdowns, the positive attitudes of new officers that closely align with principles underlying the PGI, and the assistance of various support people and tools (e.g., Practice Managers, the PGI User Guide) in fostering officers' skill development. Identified barriers to delivery included perceived challenges related to staff resistance to the PGI model, the tension between delivering quality service versus meeting quantitative KPIs, and the need for ongoing staff skills development. Respondents identified opportunities for continuous improvement around continued reinforcement of positive perceptions of the model with clear communications about the directions and purposes of the PGI, and the provision of additional training and resources to support officers in performing their roles.

1.2. Conclusion

The current study gives indications that the PGI model continues to be widely accepted and applied by Community Corrections staff. Staff viewed the PGI as a useful tool in promoting behaviour change and improving the structure of sessions. The findings also emphasise how support resources for the PGI are key to ongoing skills development and confidence in service delivery. While some continued resistance to the model was noted by senior staff, this was moderated by perceptions that officers' attitudes and buy-in had improved over time. The study identified some opportunities for improvement and avenues for best practice, including increasing the inclusivity of content and further integrating the PGI into training regimes, highlighting the value of continuous cycles of evidence-based review and development of the PGI as part of its ongoing implementation by Corrective Services NSW.

Table of Contents

2 Introduction

Over 35,000 people are supervised daily under community-based orders in NSW (Corrective Services NSW, 2022). Service delivery targeting this population therefore has significant potential to impact upon state-wide reoffending rates. In recognition of this, Corrective Services NSW Community Corrections introduced the Practice Guide for Intervention (PGI) in 2016 as part of the Enhanced Offender Supervision workstream of the now Department of Communities and Justice Strategies to Reduce Reoffending. The PGI consists of 56 exercises grouped into 13 modules that can be applied by supervising officers as part of routine supervision. These exercises are designed to enhance the behaviour change content of supervision sessions and promote adherence to Risk Need Responsivity (e.g., Bonta & Andrews, 2016) principles, by providing a structure for officers to help supervisees address their criminogenic needs and by providing consistency to practice across sessions.

Since its implementation, several PGI evaluation studies focusing on the initial stages of rollout and early outcomes have been conducted. For example, in 2019, Corrections Research, Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) conducted two process evaluation studies to examine staff experiences with, and perceptions of, the PGI during the initial stages of implementation (Tran et al., 2019; Thaler et al., 2019). While these studies found early indicators of good uptake by Community Corrections Officers (CCOs) and highlighted staff's growing recognition of the shift in their role towards one that is more focussed on rehabilitation, they identified avenues for continuous improvement to facilitate PGI delivery. For example, results indicated that staff initially felt insufficiently trained to effectively and confidently deliver exercises, leading many to only use exercises they were familiar with and to feelings of resistance to the PGI in general (Thaler et al., 2019).

The PGI model has undergone further development to address identified limitations and integrate the growing evidence base for best practice. This development included updates to the selection and content of PGI exercises in the PGI User Guide and the implementation of quality assurance procedures to assess officers' service delivery and provide opportunities for continuous professional development. Ongoing delivery of the PGI in recent years has also been impacted by operational implications of the COVID-19 pandemic; for example, by shifting supervision sessions from taking place face-to-face to virtually via phone and video calling.

2.1 The current study

Following these recent developments, CRES has been asked to undertake a second phase of evaluations of the PGI in the context of officers' more established use of the model as part of their business as usual, in addition to updates to PGI policies and procedures. The current study, which is one of a series of planned studies, aims to understand current staff perceptions of the utility of the PGI, their application of the PGI model, and facilitators and barriers to PGI implementation, taking into account more recent developments in PGI content and practices. To achieve these aims, staff perceptions were sampled through a state-wide online survey administered to CCOs and semi-structured interviews conducted with Community Corrections Unit Leaders. Results specifically for the questions around the quality assurance procedures will be presented in a separate report (Chong et al., 2023).

3 Method

The current study utilised a mixed-methods approach, collecting data by means of an online survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews. The two main participant groups involved in this study are CCOs[1] and ULs[2] who support these staff. Details of these methods are described below.

3.1 Survey of Community Corrections Officers

CCOs were invited to participate in an online survey, hosted via Alchemer. Recruitment spanned approximately two months (November-December 2021) via an email broadcast to the Community Corrections distribution list. One week prior to the conclusion of recruitment, a reminder email broadcast was sent to the same distribution list. Practice Managers, who provide ongoing support and training to officers in delivery of the PGI, were also asked to encourage staff to participate.

After initial piloting by the research team, the survey was further piloted by selected Community Corrections staff to ensure the integrity of the content and phrasing of the questions. Ultimately, the survey delivered to respondents comprised 32 questions (open-ended, categorical, and 5-point Likert scale) about officers' practices and experiences implementing the PGI and associated quality assurance procedures. It is noted that some respondents received fewer than 32 questions as skip logic was used to limit questions to only those relevant to the experiences of the participant.

To be eligible for the survey, participants were required to be employed as a Community Corrections Officer, Senior Community Correction Officer, or Trainee Community Corrections Officer, and have used the PGI in supervision sessions in the 12 months before the survey was administered. All participants were provided with an information sheet and the opportunity to contact the lead researcher to ask questions prior to participation. Informed consent was electronically collected at the onset of the survey.

A total of 384 eligible officers responded to the online survey. The majority of respondents were female (69%) and were in the role of CCO (43%). There were more respondents from the Hunter region (21%) compared to other regions; otherwise, there was a balanced representation of regions across the sample. Over 70% of respondents reported having at least two years of experience supervising people in the community. Approximately one third of officers reported receiving PGI training as part of their primary Community Corrections Officer training provided at the Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy (BFCSA), while the remainder received on the job training. Table 1 shows the demographic information of our respondents.

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, the terms 'Community Corrections Officer' and 'officer' are used here to refer to all Community Corrections supervising officers in the study regardless of position (i.e., CCO, SCCO and Trainee).
[2] Since the time of study, the role title of Unit Leader had changed to Team Leader. The term Unit Leader is retained in this report to reflect the operational context and methods as they applied to this study.

Table 1. Reported characteristics of the officer participant sample

	n	%
Position	**384**	**100**
Community Corrections Officer	167	43.49
Senior Community Corrections Officer	125	32.55
First Year Community Corrections Officer (Trainee)	92	23.96
Gender	**382**	**100**
Woman or female	263	69.21
Man or male	95	25
Prefer not to answer	22	5.79
Other	2	0.53
Region	**383**	**100**
Hunter	82	21.41
Northern	44	11.49
Southern	57	14.88
Sydney Central	46	12.01
Sydney South West	53	13.84
Sydney West	51	13.32
Western	50	13.05
Aboriginal[a]	**383**	**100**
Yes	22	5.74
No	344	89.82
Prefer not to answer	17	4.44
Number of years as a CCO	**379**	**100**
< 1	28	7.39
1-2	81	21.37
2-5	145	38.26
5-10	53	13.98
10-20	66	17.41
20+	6	1.58
PGI training at BFCSA	**353**	**100**
Yes	223	63.17
No	130	36.83

Note. n's differ because partially completed survey responses were retained for analysis.
a. For the purposes of this report, the term "Aboriginal" is used to refer to all First Nation Australians including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

3.2   Interviews with Unit Leaders

The UL interviews commenced in December 2021. The interviews covered a broad range of topics similar to those presented to CCOs in the online survey (i.e., PGI delivery and implementation of quality assurance processes). These questions were, however, asked from a higher-level supervisory perspective. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, guided by the participant's responses.

A list of potential participants was identified by key Community Corrections staff (e.g., Managers, Practice Managers, State-wide Co-ordinator) and provided to the research team. These ULs were sent an invitation to participate via email and were asked to return a completed consent form if they chose to participate. ULs were also provided with an information sheet and could contact the lead researcher with questions prior to participation. Interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and were video recorded with consent.

Of those who consented to participate, two Unit Leaders were selected per NSW region, resulting in a final sample of 14 interviewees. To promote representativeness, ULs from the same region were selected from different offices. Half of these ULs identified as female. Slightly less than half of interviewees had been in their current position as a UL for more than three years. Before taking up a UL position, nearly all interviewees had experience in delivering the PGI in supervision sessions as a CCO. At the time of interview, approximately two-thirds of ULs were supervising four officers as part of their workload. Table 2 shows the demographic information of these ULs.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Unit Leader participant sample

	n	%
Years in Unit Leader position	**14**	**100.00**
1-3	8	57.14
4-6	2	14.29
7-9	2	14.29
10-11	2	14.29
Years at Community Corrections	**14**	**100.00**
2-5	4	28.57
6-9	3	21.43
10-13	4	28.57
14-18	3	21.43
Number of CCOs currently supervising	**14**	**100.00**
0-3	5	35.71
4	9	64.29
Used the PGI in role as CCO	**14**	**100.00**
Yes	10	71.43
No	4	28.57

3.3   Analytical plan

Quantitative data from the online survey were aggregated to report descriptive statistics. Qualitative data (i.e., open-ended responses from the online survey and the interview transcripts) were analysed using QSR NVivo following two similar, but separate procedures.

Two coding frameworks were developed: one for the qualitative survey data (i.e., open-ended questions), and another for the interview data. Initial coding frameworks were first developed based on the aims of the research, research questions and associated survey or interview questions. These frameworks were then refined via familiarisation and interpretation of the data and discussion between the research team. Data coded into the framework were reviewed to assess the commonality of different themes, as well as the relevance of different participant characteristics. Detail regarding each theme was provided through further review of the coded data in context.

For the open-ended survey responses, all data were coded by a single researcher, with intra-coder reliability conducted to assess the consistency of the researcher's coding (Cofie et al., 2022; Given, 2008). The researcher coded approximately 10% of responses to each question and then recoded them four days later, achieving an agreement level of K = .92, assessed as 'Almost Perfect' in the commonly used benchmark provided by Landis and Koch (1977).

For the interview data, inter-coder reliability was conducted by two researchers coding approximately 20% of total interviews (Burla et al., 2008; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The team reached a final agreement level of .40, which is benchmarked as 'Fair/Moderate' agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

4 Findings

The findings of the current evaluation are reported in four parts, categorised by research theme. Where relevant, both quantitative and qualitative data are presented within each section to demonstrate the views of both CCOs and ULs on each topic.

4.1   Perceived role of Community Corrections Officers

CCOs play an integral frontline role and the core values they hold can have an impact on the success of behaviour change models of community supervision such as the PGI. As such, we asked CCOs to indicate the importance of three different functions that are often associated with CCOs' roles: rehabilitation, compliance monitoring and managing social welfare. As shown in Figure 1, officers rated each of the suggested role-related functions with a high level of importance (very important/important > 85%). Specifically, officers perceived rehabilitation and monitoring compliance of those under supervision as similarly integral components to their role, while in comparison, social welfare was deemed of lesser importance.
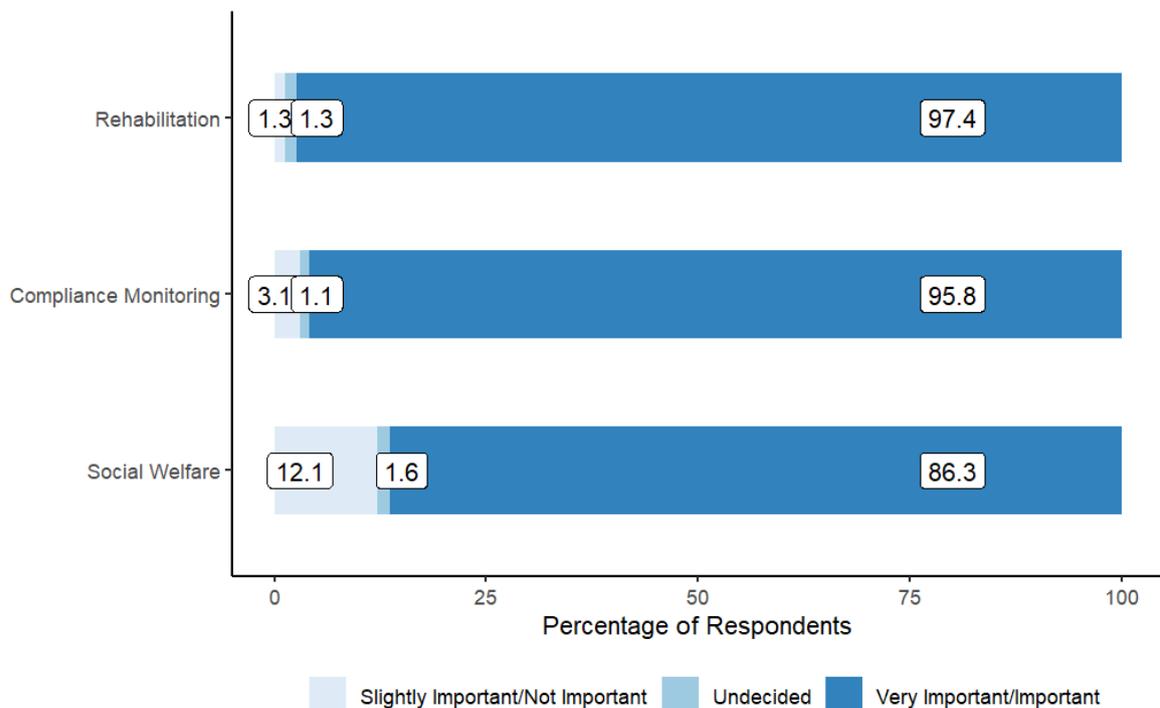

Figure 1. Perceived importance of rehabilitation (n = 381), monitoring compliance (n = 382) and social welfare (n = 378) as part of CCO's role

ULs provided a similar response, describing the role of a CCO as balancing the duality of compliance monitoring and behaviour change. However, when asked further, most ULs expressed that helping those under supervision change their offending behaviours is the core of an officers' role.

The majority of CCOs (80.5%) reported that they feel confident or very confident that the work they do can help people under their supervision change for the better. Almost all CCOs agreed or strongly agreed that they feel motivated to build good relationships with individuals under their supervision and that they have the skills to motivate them to change (see Figure 2).
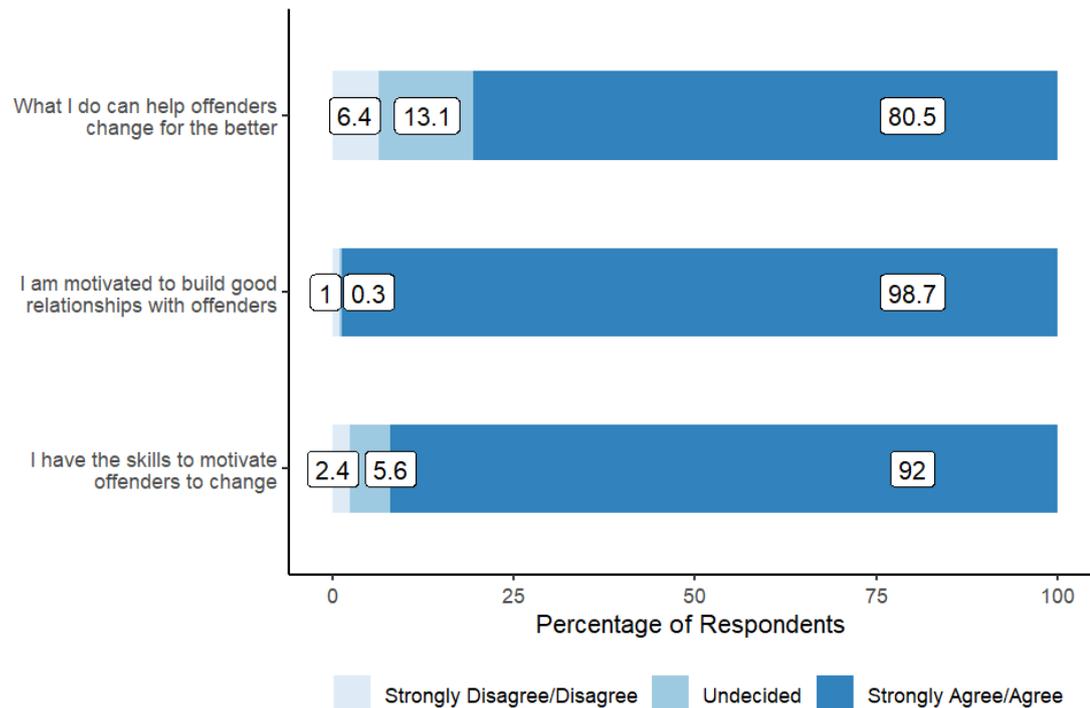
Figure 2. CCO perception of their ability to work with their supervisees

4.2 Staff perceptions of the utility of the PGI

Aligned with the design aim of the PGI as a behaviour change tool for CCOs to use in supervision sessions, CCOs were asked to rate their agreement with a number of statements about the utility of the PGI (see Figure 3). Most agreed or strongly agreed that the PGI worksheets are useful, help address criminogenic needs and improve their interactions with their supervisees. However, officers' views about whether the PGI exercises are inclusive (e.g., culturally, socially, linguistically) and helpful for keeping supervisees motivated were less favourable.

When we further examined the survey and interview data, ULs and officers clarified that the PGI is a useful behaviour change tool that helped provide a structure to supervision that was missing in the previous model of community supervision. This structure allowed officers to identify and address behaviours and thought patterns associated with their risks and criminogenic needs. ULs were appreciative of the value that the PGI adds in enhancing their officers' practice, especially when their more experienced officers were able to adopt the PGI into their existing skillset and practice. However, staff reported that they sometimes had difficulties delivering the PGI to certain individuals, such as those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, making the model potentially less inclusive.

"The PGI gives CCOs something to structure what their supervision will look like. Previous to PGIs, oh my god, you would look back now and would just think I don't know what we were doing, what we were achieving. We [were] just literally onward referring everyone."

"Yes. I think our Aboriginal offenders struggle with the written [and] it's best [if the PGI exercises were] delivered as a conversation."
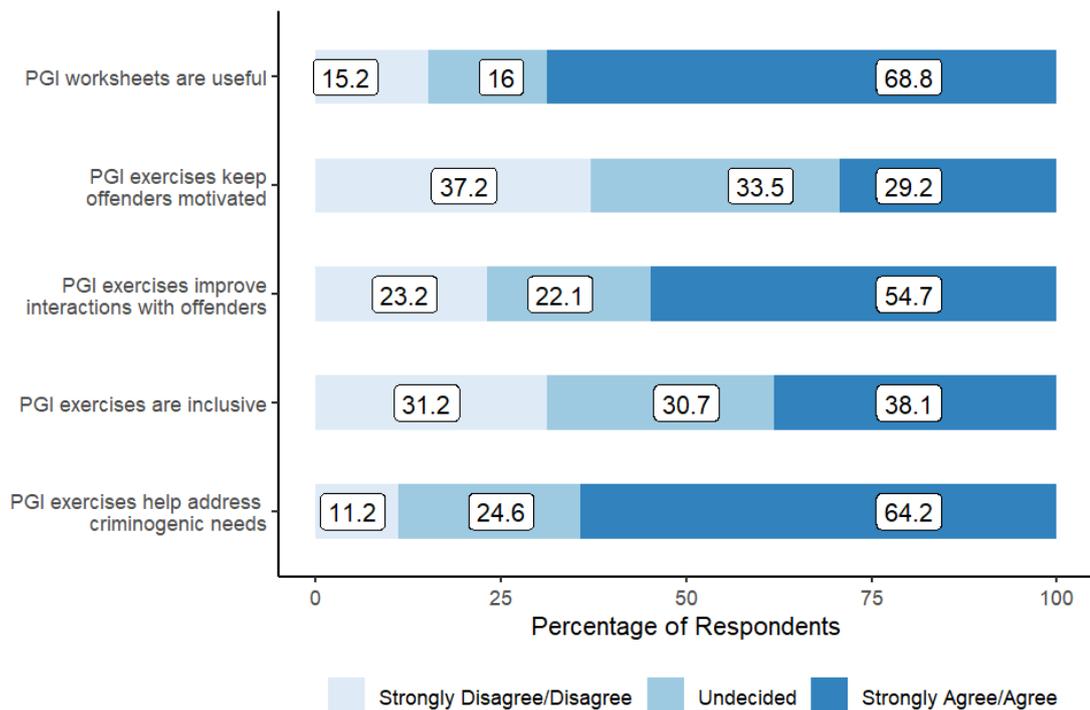
Figure 3. CCOs' ratings of the utility of the PGI

4.3   Delivery of the PGI

Officers estimated using the PGI in the majority of supervisory sessions (average of 90% of sessions, *n* = 361). When asked about their experience in using the PGI, nearly all officers (95%, *n* = 359) reported feeling confident in selecting the appropriate PGI modules when developing case plans. When it came to delivery of the PGI in sessions, Figure 4 shows that about 84% of officers reported that they often or always integrated the exercise into conversations with those under their supervision without using visual aids[3]. About half of the respondents reported that they often or always used the PGI worksheets in supervision sessions, while about 15% of CCOs often or always used other forms of visual aid aside from worksheets (e.g., videos and other tools developed in office such as emoji cards).

Overall, CCOs appeared to give high ratings about their ability to deliver the PGI according to the program logic. For example, CCOs reported that they made adjustments to delivery depending on the responsivity factors of those under their supervision. They commonly reported making adjustments for those with cognitive impairment (e.g., a learning disability or an acquired brain injury). They also endorsed use of adjustments for those with poor literacy, and for those from culturally and linguisticly diverse communities. CCOs reported making similar adjustments for a variety of presenting conditions such as active psychosis, crisis situations (e.g. loss of accommodation) and substance use. Adjustments include simplifying exercises, delivering the same exercise slowly over the course of several supervision sessions, delivering exercises verbally through conversations, and using visual aids.

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[3] The pattern of results suggests that many CCOs interpreted this item to refer to visual aids other than the standard PGI worksheets.
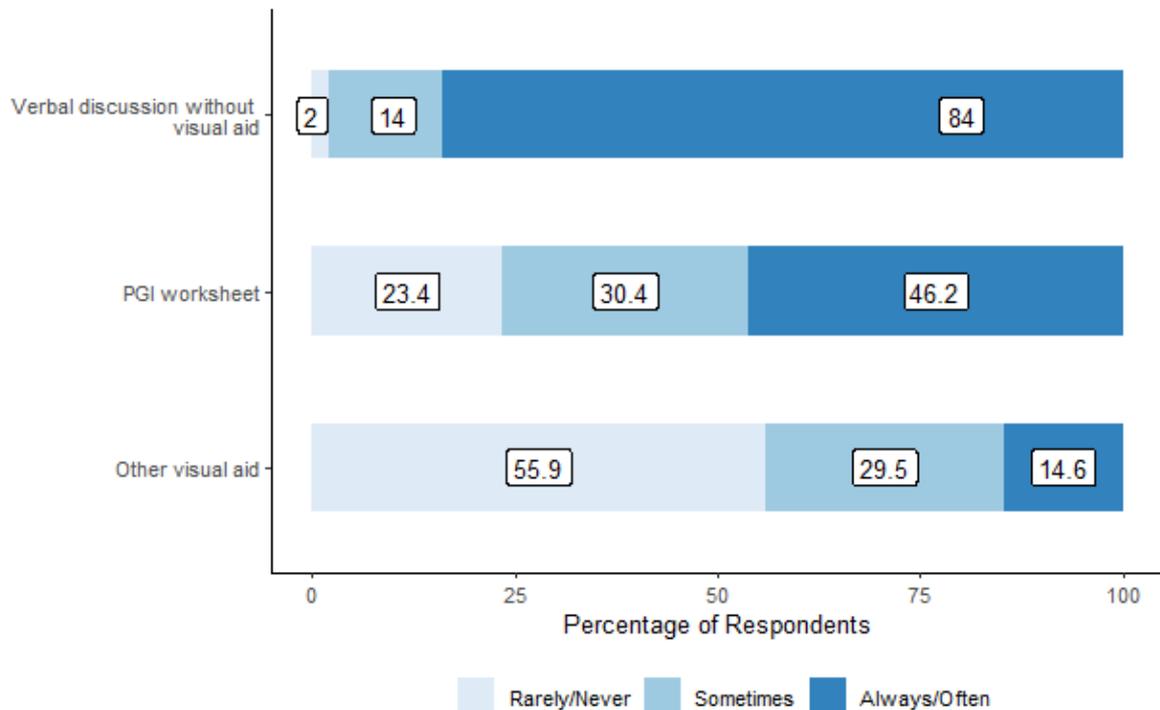
Figure 4. Different ways officers deliver PGI exercises

Interviewed ULs tended to be more circumspect about officers' delivery and adaptation of the PGI. A number of ULs assessed their officers' quality of PGI delivery as only slightly above average. These ULs felt that some of their officers often missed opportunities to have deeper and more meaningful behaviour change conversations with those under their supervision because of the rigidity in how PGIs were delivered. ULs also noted that some officers appear to have a case plan 'template' where the selection of modules may be informed by officer routines or preferences rather than by the factors associated with the relevant index offence.

"They think that the PGI particularly is a tick-a-box, is a worksheet that we go through as opposed to a guide for meaningful discussion. So, there are still some people that view PGI worksheets as a script and so will go through and tick it and then it's done. And then they go "See? It doesn't work". It's not going to work if I ask you yes/no closed-off questions versus [when] I use this as a tool to really inspire some meaningful dialogue."

"Yes, one of the problems is that 'Managing Cravings' is probably on nearly every case plan I see. And my first question is, was [the person's index offence] drug-related? And often I get the answer "no", and I'll say, "well, why are you doing 'Managing Cravings' if there's no drugs in the offence?" "Oh, they used drugs a few years ago". Yes, but they've shown that, so far, that they're drug-free, so why are we taking them back there? We can actually be creating a risk by taking them back there."

Relatedly, some modules, such as Communications, Interpersonal Relationships and Conflict Resolution, were viewed to be underutilised, perhaps because officers are reluctant to deliver modules which require them to have uncomfortable conversations with those under their supervision.

"So, the achieving goals one, it's not confronting to talk about your goals, and you'll probably see that that's done quite a lot. The general skills ones are also done a lot, or they're dealing with setbacks because they're really, again, non-confrontational. And for me what I think I see is the Conflict Resolution which is really confronting and hard to think about, [and also] Interpersonal Relationships, Communication. They're not used very often, and they're probably the ones that we most need to use. And they're not used because they are confronting."

Indeed, when asked to list the five exercises they utilised the most and least, CCOs' responses, to a certain extent, aligned with patterns of usage described by ULs. CCOs reported that they most frequently delivered the following five modules: 1) Managing Stress and Anger, 2) Managing Environment, 3) Managing Cravings, 4) Achieving Goals and 5) Managing Impulsivity; they least frequently delivered: 1) Self-awareness, 2) Prosocial Lifestyle, 3) Conflict Resolution, 4) General Skills and 5) Interpersonal Relationships.
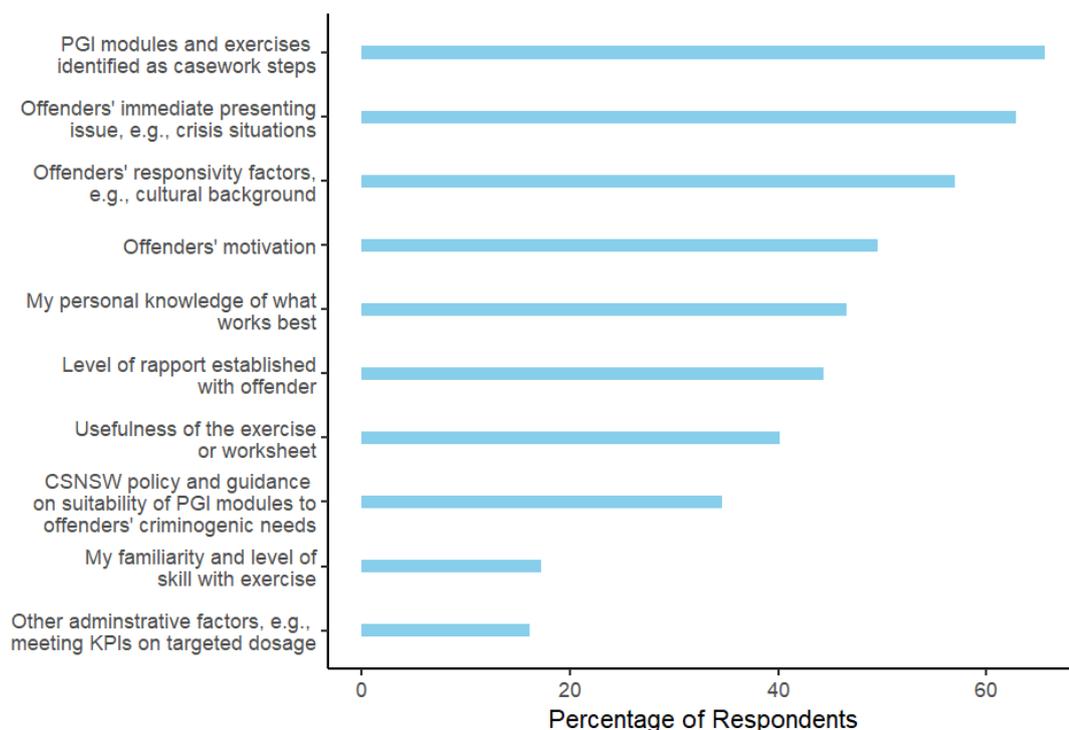

Figure 5. Top factors influencing selection of PGI exercises (n = 356)

To better understand how officers select PGI modules to deliver in sessions, officers were asked to select up to five options from a list of factors that might influence their decision (see Figure 5). Most officers reported choosing modules based on the case plan or immediate presenting issues. Responsivity factors (e.g., cultural background) and the person's motivation to engage in behaviour change were also influential factors. Corroborating ULs' experience, officers' familiarity with an exercise was one of the top 5 reasons behind the PGI selection process for some CCOs (17%).

4.4 Facilitators and barriers to implementation

4.4.1 Facilitators

ULs noted several factors facilitating PGI delivery among CCOs, which we outline below.

Phone and videotelephony reporting

The introduction of social distancing rules during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a greater reliance on phone and videotelephony reporting, shifting supervision from a predominantly face-to-face modality to a virtual one. ULs expressed beliefs that phone reporting reduced logistical and administrative inefficiencies.

"And it also freed them up. Rather than [being held] down [by] appointments, and getting people, and people missing their appointments, and the interview room being available. The phone was their interview room."

"So I think that it's about then it being tangible and accessible for behaviour change wherever the client is. So, if they're working, that's cool, on your smoke break we're going to have this conversation. Once upon a time, if an offender was working and their shift ran long, they missed their appointment for that week."

Most ULs held the opinion that phone and video reporting had a positive impact on outcomes for those under supervision by increasing the accessibility of officers and their skills in delivering the PGI.

"It has encouraged our offenders to reach out to us more frequently. Because prior to phone reporting, they never had mobile phone numbers for staff to call… I've got a classic example of it, is one of our clients for my team, he just texted me because he [was] homeless again."

"What I have noticed is over time, the more comfortable officers feel with the material, the more natural it becomes and the more they're able to turn it into a conversational piece. I think [that is] the benefit of Covid over the last two years… it's forced people to do a lot of phone stuff, which means you can't have the sheet in front of the person you're interviewing"

Positive attitudes in new staff

Many facilitators to PGI delivery were related to the attitude and approach of officers. This is particularly seen in new officers, as they come into the job with a mindset and background that may be more closely aligned with the principles underlying the PGI.

"Yes, I think it depends on where they get the new recruits from because, historically, we used to love to get police officers and ex-custodial officers. And I again don't mean it disrespectfully, but they're literally trained the complete opposite for how we are trained. You have to hold the view that people make mistakes and can come back from it. If you don't, you cannot meaningfully be a change agent unless you believe it… My whole team are new recruits and they're amazing."

Support from Practice Managers

Figure 6 shows that the majority of the surveyed CCOs were positive about the support provided by their Practice Managers. About 69% of CCOs agreed or strongly agreed that their Practice Managers were always available when needed and felt satisfied with the level of support received from them. Almost three quarters of CCOs agreed or strongly agreed that engaging with their Practice Managers has been beneficial to their skill development.

Aligned with CCO perceptions, almost all ULs identified Practice Managers as a helpful source of support in the continued development of officers' skills. ULs mentioned that Practice Managers were very knowledgeable in the underlying concepts of the PGI and its delivery. Both the one-on-one support and workshops given by Practice Managers have helped officers better understand how to deliver specific PGI exercises and how to deal with challenging issues, such as managing those in crisis situations, using the relevant PGI exercises.
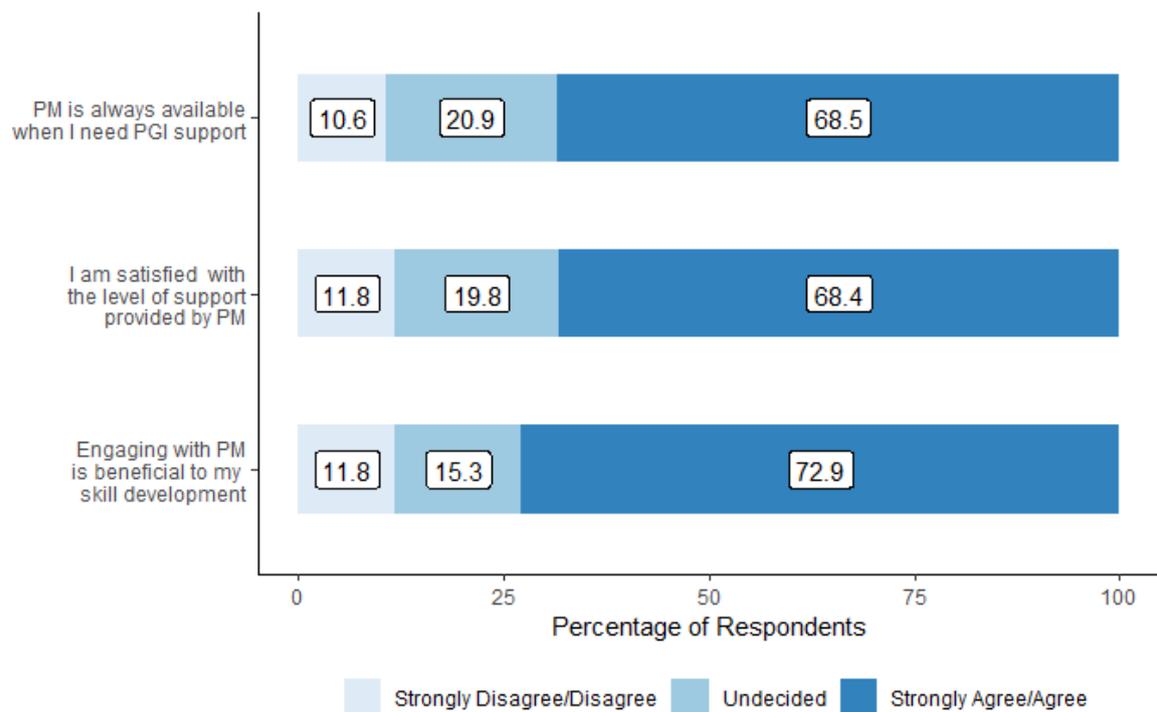

Figure 6. Community Corrections Officers' perceptions of the level of PGI-related support provided by their Practice Managers (PM) (n = 339)

Support from Unit Leaders, Senior Management and other Corrective Services NSW agencies

Figure 7 shows that CCOs were generally positive about the level of support provided by their ULs. About 78% of CCOs agreed or strongly agreed that their ULs were always available when needed and that engaging with them was beneficial to their skill development. Almost three quarters of CCOs agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their ULs' support.
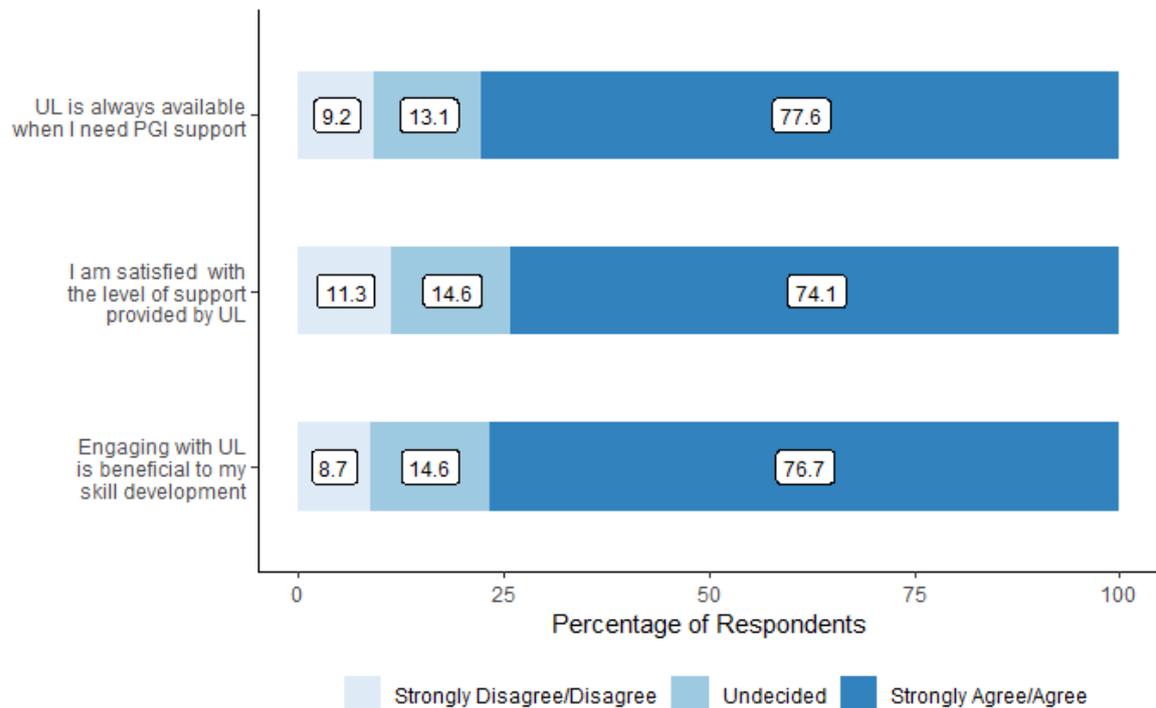
Figure 7. Community Corrections Officers' perceptions of the level of PGI-related support provided by their Unit Leaders (n = 345)

ULs noted that their officers also benefited from the support of various members within Community Corrections offices. For example, ULs see the value of having informal but readily available opportunities for officers to shadow, learn from, and have case discussions with them or other CCOs. Importantly, ULs valued the role that Senior Management has in improving staff motivation and implementation fidelity by providing initial training and a clear direction and rationale of the underlying program logic as part of rollout.

"And I remember doing a [training] session with [the Director of Strategy for Community Corrections] prior to the roll-out of new live case planning. And in that time, he was explaining the importance of get[ting] people to get on board with the foundational reason [for the program], and maybe that's part of the reason I've adapted that into my own practice as well. The foundation concepts will drive the decision making going forward."

ULs and CCOs often credited the support that they received from other support staff as facilitators to the effective delivery of the PGI. For example, staff were able to reach out to Aboriginal Community Engagement and Culture Officers (ACECE) and other Corrective Services NSW staff such as psychologists who provided assistance and advice on how to better manage different people under supervision.

"Well, we've been lucky to have a cultural support officer come on. … that's really, I guess, giving us a good look to helping us better understand [Aboriginal] people, as well as providing that extra layer of support to help [those under supervision] access services, meet their appointments… I think that's a really good point there from the department what they've done."

PGI User Guide

The PGI User Guide was first released in 2016 to support staff in the delivery of the PGI. The PGI User Guide contains a compilation of all PGI modules and exercises as well as helpful information and examples of how individual exercises may be delivered, to whom they may be delivered to and how they can be linked with the content of other criminogenic programs offered by Corrective Services NSW. The second edition of the PGI User Guide was released in 2019 and contains updates based on feedback and learnings from staff in the field on best practice delivery of the PGI. When asked about the current utility of the PGI User Guide, ULs expressed that it is useful, both as an immediate reference for CCOs needing to understand how to deliver a module or exercise, and as a source for discussions during staff meetings to better enable group learning.

"We still refer a lot to [the PGI User Guide] and we still use them a lot... I know for myself, in every team meeting, we refer to a topic in the [User Guide] still, and we open a discussion at the end of my team meeting and I allow the team to have a discussion around a topic in the [User Guide]. … But, yes, I definitely think that they're still very useful and people are using them still just as much."

Other support tools

Some ULs noted the importance and utility of tools that were developed organically within Community Corrections offices such as emoji cards and laminated printouts of picture cards in different languages. These bespoke tools were found to be helpful in supporting communication with people under supervision who may have difficulty communicating effectively.

"So, I personally have used an emoji card. And so, all the emojis on your phone … it's a big printout, laminated. … So, the first client I ever used it on was schizophrenic, and he was still in psychosis, he's on serious meds. And he picks, I think it was a big black cloud and then we unpacked it from there."

4.4.2   Barriers

The section below outlines the barriers that CCOs and ULs had encountered when delivering the PGI.

Difficulty in building rapport in a virtual environment

Some ULs shared that their officers had encountered difficulties in developing rapport with people they are supervising through the phone as they were unable to assess non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions.

Reporting from inappropriate locations

Some ULs were concerned that the option to conduct supervision sessions outside of the office increased incidences of people under supervision reporting from inappropriate locations that were not conducive to behaviour change conversations or put them at risk of privacy and compliance breaches.

"I can hear everyone in the background. It was a little bit of an insight for me about what [CCOs are] dealing with. And people will be reporting on the bus, they'll be reporting in their cars."

Resistance from experienced staff

ULs noted that staff resistance continues to be one of the key barriers to delivering the PGI. Some ULs had encountered difficulties where their more experienced officers remained reluctant to deliver the PGIs. However, on a more positive note, some ULs felt that there has been an improvement in staff attitudes and buy-in compared to when the PGI was first implemented.

"It's definitely improved. As I said, I think we have much more meaningful interactions. When we first started with the PGIs, I found there was a lot of resistance because a lot of the staff that were employed by the department at the time were old school. There is still a certain amount of resistance, sadly."

Pressure to meet KPIs

Senior management have a vital role in setting the directions and expectations for staff to follow. In this regard, a number of ULs and CCOs made reference to a tension between core Community Corrections values of quality service delivery and a focus on meeting KPIs, which may affect how the PGI is implemented by some staff.

"I can see that there are so many CCOs that follow the worksheet completely and miss out on any meaningful engagement around issues that face the offender. It has at times become a question-and-answer session with no engagement and the focus has become KPI driven and more about data than people. This is not a reflection of the PGI model but of the systemic drive to achieve KPIs. Even the training focusses on meeting KPIs rather than connecting with people and shifting attitudes and behaviours."

Skills and resources gap

While CCOs reported that they can modify the way they delivered the PGI depending on their supervisees' responsivity needs, precisely how this can be done effectively is one of the key challenges encountered in their daily work. For example, both CCOs and ULs noted the difficulty in delivering PGIs to resistant and chaotic people who usually present in crisis situations, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people who have committed certain types of offences, such as domestic violence offences, which present fixed gender-related thought patterns.

Interviewees related these challenges to the value of additional training and resources that may support officers in performing their roles. Indeed, several ULs felt that the Community Corrections Officer Primary Training offered at the Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy did not devote enough time to the PGI and that training in certain areas, such as completing intervention plans, may have been inadequate.

"So all of my trainees who just passed their six month [course]… had the same feedback that they didn't do their intervention plan appropriately and correctly … . So, that's an immediate deficit for me is the level of training in that initial part that the team need. The other part of that initial training and a significant challenge I'm seeing is … they get one day of practice training in that initial training period. One day to learn 13 modules including offence mapping. So, that whole time that they're at Brush Farm, which essentially is ten weeks in total before they start their six-month assessment, they get one day of PGI training."

Of the 224 CCO respondents who had received training at Brush Farm, about one in five (22%) indicated that they felt completely unprepared to deliver the PGI after completing their primary training. About 43% were undecided or felt slightly prepared while about 35% felt prepared or very prepared to deliver the PGI on completion of training.

As such, some ULs felt that more advanced training on how to have difficult conversations and initiate behaviour change conversations could help their officers be more effective in delivering the PGI. Some staff members also raised that additional CBT and other foundational training related to the underlying program logic of the PGI may help bridge this gap.

"If you don't understand why it works and how it's developed, then it's really hard to see the value in it. Because I've seen people that go, "I don't like that sheet. I just have a discussion." But how do we know that that discussion is actually CBT-based? We don't because they don't know what CBT is."

Inadequate case notes

Some ULs identified case notes to be an area for improvement. When writing case notes, an officer should document the PGI exercise which was delivered in session and identify the next planned PGI (action plan). ULs reported that officers often do not include enough information in case notes to give readers a good grasp of the content of the supervision session and current progress of the person under supervision. This shortcoming in the quality of written case notes was described as having a potentially negative impact on the continuity of case management, such as the delivery and follow through on action plans.

5   Discussion

The aim of this study was to re-examine Community Corrections staff perspectives on the PGI model as currently implemented, considering recent developments in PGI content and practices. Specifically, we sought to gain an understanding of current staff perceptions of the utility of the PGI and their application of the model, as well as facilitators and barriers to PGI implementation. To do so, staff perceptions were sampled through an online survey sent to all CCOs across NSW and through semi-structured interviews with selected ULs. Overall, feedback raised a number of implications around ongoing implementation of the PGI by Corrective Services NSW.

5.1   Officers' views of their role in the context of the PGI

The results of this study reflect previous findings (Tran et al., 2019) that in the context of their ongoing delivery of the PGI, most officers continue to identify the rehabilitative function of their role as important. The majority of CCOs also viewed their role in compliance monitoring as equally important. Indeed, the results suggest that the perceived importance of this role has become more prevalent in recent years (Tran et al., 2019) and may reflect a strengthening in officers' views towards the dual role they play; one which involves the officer developing a firm and fair relationship with the offender that simultaneously supports prosocial behaviour change while also monitoring compliance to legal requirements (e.g., Howard et al., 2019; Skeem et al., 2007).

5.2   Implications around perceived utility of the PGI

As indicated by the high level of reported usage of the PGI in supervision sessions, respondents appear to have continued to accept the model as part of business-as-usual operations within Community Corrections. Most staff viewed the PGI as a useful tool in addressing criminogenic needs and promoting behaviour change, improving interactions with those under supervision, and providing a structure to supervision. However, some felt that the exercises were limited in terms of inclusivity and keeping supervisees motivated during sessions. This may have implications for continuous revision and improvement of available PGI content; however, there were also indications that opportunities for further skills development in how content is delivered in sessions could be beneficial to this end.

5.3   Implications around PGI delivery

Feedback from supervising officers suggested that they tended to have positive perceptions of their uptake of the PGI and success in adhering to key principles of individualised, targeted intervention and flexible delivery. By comparison, interviews raised concerns about practices and principles surrounding more rigid delivery of the PGI by some officers, resulting in missed opportunities to have meaningful dialogue around behaviour change. Some ULs suggested that this may be due to the underutilisation of some modules which require officers to have uncomfortable conversations with those under their supervision. Others noted that the selection of PGI modules as part of the case planning process may be informed by officers' preferences rather than by the factors associated with the relevant index offence.

 Given these observations, ULs identified the potential value of more upskilling and professional development opportunities for officers. ULs noted that more advanced training on how to have difficult conversations and initiate behaviour change conversations could help their officers be more effective in delivering the PGI. A related observation is that some respondents expressed beliefs that not enough time is devoted to PGI during initial training at Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy (also see Thaler et al., 2019 who reported a similar

finding during the initial implementation phase of PGI). As such, there may be benefit in further integration of training models to facilitate CCOs skills development and ensure PGI delivery meets case needs. Relatedly, it is also expected that recently implemented PGI Quality Assurance procedures may have utility in addressing areas of improvement in PGI delivery, including the selection and use of PGI modules (see Chong et al., 2023).

5.4 Implications around facilitators and barriers to implementation

Respondents mentioned various facilitators and barriers to PGI delivery, which we group and discuss by theme.

5.4.1 Ongoing resources and support provided for officers' continuous skill development

Similar to findings from CRES' previous evaluation (Thaler et al., 2019), CCOs and ULs frequently reported that Practice Managers continue to play a critical role in supervising officers' continuous skill development, providing opportunities to improve PGI delivery and ensure delivery meets case needs. Respondents also felt that support from various Corrective Services NSW staff including Unit Leaders, ACECOs, CECOS, Senior Management, psychologists, as well as the PGI User Guide, benefited officers' motivation to implement the PGI and overall implementation fidelity. This finding highlights the importance of ongoing support to maintain and improve the skills of those delivering interventions (see Bonta et al., 2013) and the need for clear, accessible pipelines to this support to improve PGI delivery.

Some respondents also noted the utility of tools that were developed within Community Corrections offices, such as emoji cards and picture cards in different languages. These tools were particularly helpful in assisting conversations with those who found communicating difficult. Due to the organic nature in which these tools were created in different offices, they are currently not available state-wide. Therefore, exploring opportunities for further disseminating and standardising such resources across offices may also support ongoing delivery of the PGI and fidelity across the jurisdiction.

5.4.2 The introduction of phone and video reporting

Some ULs were concerned that introducing the option to conduct supervision sessions via phone or video calling, while necessary under recent conditions such as the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased incidences of people under supervision reporting from inappropriate locations. Feedback also suggested that some officers may find it difficult to build rapport through the phone, as they were unable to see and assess non-verbal cues. On the other hand, phone and video reporting was identified as having the potential to reduce logistical and administrative inefficiencies and improve officers' skills and accessibility in delivering the PGI, thus positively impacting outcomes for people they are supervising.

The pattern of results indicates that these modalities of conducting supervision sessions have promise for delivery of the PGI, although some compromises may be considered and accounted for. For example, the use of video reporting may be encouraged over phone reporting when possible, to reinforce rapport building. Further, the suitability of phone and video reporting may need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis as some supervisees such as those with difficulties accessing or using technology or who present with complex needs may be more suited to in-person supervision sessions. Consistent with this, we understand that since the time of this study changes have been made to the PGI (exercise A4 in particular) to assist CCOs in addressing matters relevant to the modality of sessions together with their supervisees.

5.4.3   Staff resistance to the PGI model

ULs noted that resistance to delivering the PGI from more experienced officers continues to be a key barrier to PGI implementation. This was generally related to "old school" thinking, which raises complex considerations about the extent to which resistant attitudes may reflect generational shifts in how the role and function of CCOs is perceived, or underlying role conflicts such as requirements to enact advanced therapeutic skills that many officers may not feel sufficiently qualified for. Another identified source of resistance was the tension between quality service delivery and meeting KPIs, including those relating to the PGI. Similar concerns were reported in a previous evaluation (Thaler et al., 2019), highlighting the continued importance of emphasis on quality as a priority in PGI policies and communications.

It is important to note, however, that some ULs felt that staff attitudes and buy-in to the PGI had improved over time. In a previous evaluation, almost half the respondents indicated that they identified needs and referred individuals to change-oriented programs, with the PGI seemingly a secondary behaviour change tool for them (Tran et al., 2019). In this evaluation, however, respondents tended to recognise that the PGI provided CCOs with a structure to be direct and active agents of change themselves. Further, they felt that newer officers have a more positive attitude towards the PGI, as they come into the job with a mindset that is already aligned with underlying PGI principles. It is consistent with staff feedback and other literature that continued reinforcement of positive perceptions are supported by clear communications about the directions and purposes of the PGI, as well as ongoing developments to PGI policies and procedures, by Corrective Services NSW senior management (Endrejat et al., 2020; Helpap, 2016; Khaw et al., 2022).

5.5   Study limitations

The study presents self-report data and the subjective perceptions of staff were not corroborated with more objective data. For example, there is no quantitative data around how the PGI was delivered in session (e.g., worksheet vs. verbal discussion). Self-report data can also be susceptible to social desirability, a tendency to bias responses to appear in a more favourable light. Participation in this study was also voluntary and responses from individuals who volunteered to participate may inherently be different from those who did not, a phenomenon called self-selection bias; however, this limitation cannot be overcome as consent is a critical principle of ethical research practice (Robinson, 2014). We note that the design of this study was intended to orient respondents to provide in-depth and nuanced perspectives about their experiences of PGI delivery. It is not intended to be the sole source of evidence regarding processes and outcomes of PGI delivery; later studies will also examine quantitative indicators relating to quality of service delivery.

5.6   Conclusions

This study provides insights about how the evolving PGI operational model is perceived and delivered by key Community Corrections staff. Findings from this study indicate that several years after initial implementation, the PGI model continues to be widely accepted and applied by Community Corrections staff as a core component of supervision. Most staff viewed the PGI as a useful tool in promoting behaviour change and improving sessions, although some opportunities for improvement of content to optimise inclusivity and engagement were noted. While resistance to the model continued to be identified in some cases, respondents were of the view that this has improved over time and for newer cohorts of officers, with promising implications for shifts in culture and skillsets among Community Corrections staff associated with implementation of the PGI.

The results mirror those of previous studies (Thaler et al., 2019) by indicating that established support resources for the PGI, including Practice Managers and the PGI User Guide, are key to ongoing skills development and

confidence in service delivery; however, there appears to be some scope for further integration of the PGI into initial recruit training. At the same time, this study indicates new opportunities and avenues for best practice, including in relation to the increasing use of different modalities of supervision sessions in recent years. This highlights the value of continuous cycles of evidence-based review and development of the PGI as part of its ongoing implementation by Corrective Services NSW over time.

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