



# COVID-19 and Detention

## COVID-19 and Decarceration Webinar 2

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# 1. How important has decarceration been as a response to COVID-19?

Three things that tell us decarceration is important in the COVID-19 era

1. **Historical examples** of prisons as incubators of infectious diseases: 16th century typhus (“gaol fever”) in English prisons; 20<sup>th</sup> century tuberculosis in Russian prisons<sup>1-4</sup>
2. **Recent systematic review of evidence (pre-COVID-19)**: Prison cell spatial density is likely associated with infectious and communicable diseases transmission in prison<sup>5</sup>
3. **COVID-19 measures for prisons overlook the asymptomatic issue**: The assumption that COVID-19 is containable through the identification of prisoners with clinical signs or symptoms<sup>6</sup>

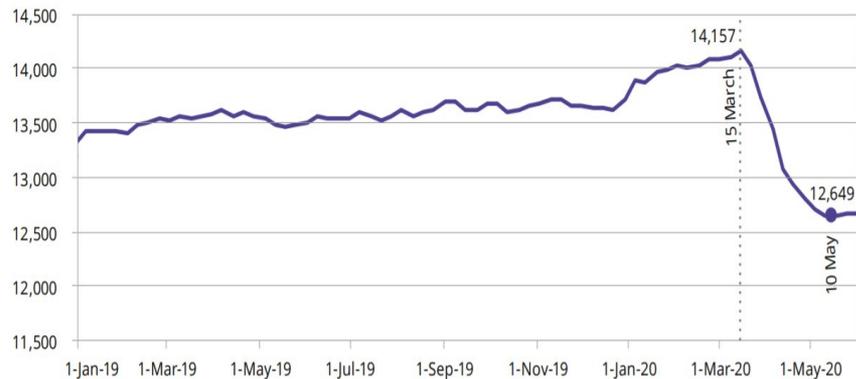
## 2. What have been the key issues, opportunities and challenges around this?

### 1. Reactive not preventive approach to decarceration

- Decarceration required before an index case enters the prison, as preventing an outbreak is likely to carry fewer challenges and reduced health and economic costs than controlling a substantial outbreak, which will include extensive contact tracing, isolating or quarantining those released into community settings

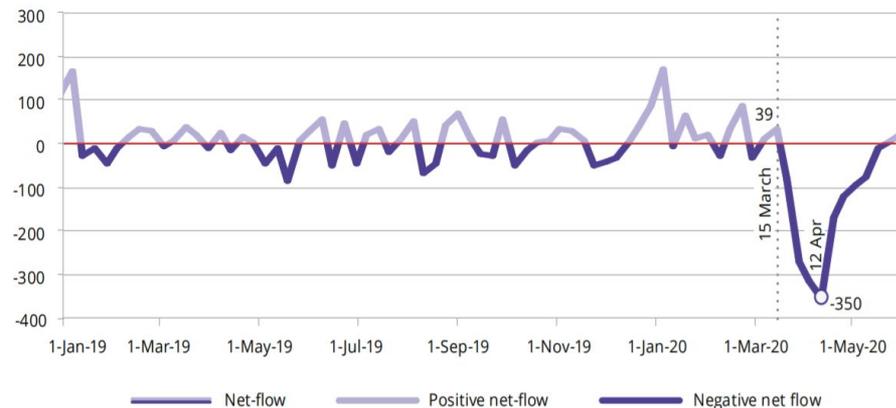
# Prisoner population in New South Wales since COVID-19 public health measures were implemented<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1. Total NSW adult prison population



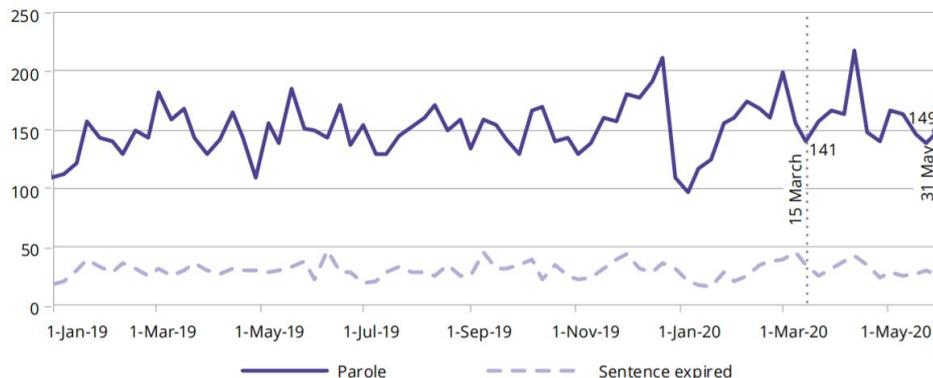
— Total population

Figure 3. Net-flow into custody (prison receptions versus discharges)



— Net-flow    — Positive net-flow    — Negative net flow

Figure 9. Discharges from sentenced custody to parole and after sentence expiry



— Parole    - - - Sentence expired

Chan, N. (2020). NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

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### 2. Mitigating the collateral effects of existing prison COVID-19 measures

- Collateral effects: prisoner mental health issues, prisoner resistance, family strain
- Raise human rights concerns
- Decarceration can help, but who is left behind?

### 3. What has been missing from the response, in relation to decarceration and COVID-19? What are the impacts of this?

**Missing:** Lack of investment and discourse on community reintegration preparedness

- Well managed decarceration program requires integrated health, social, and economic supports in place
- Effective collaboration between government departments, prisoner support organisations and NGOs
- Situation more acute when returning to community during COVID-19 related restrictions

#### **Impacts**

- Increase risk of poor health outcomes, including COVID-19 infection in communities with high prevalence rates, homelessness, recidivism.
- Contributes to lack of governance and leadership on decarceration strategies
- Incarceration is the easier default option??

## 4. What are the three biggest priorities in order to respond sustainably and effectively

### For the next year?

- Targeting prisons with high spatial density
- Listen to prisoner support and peer-based organisations
- Telehealth and telesocial services

### For the next three years?

- Integrative health care and housing in the community
- Changing public attitudes to prisoners
- Recognising decarceration as an opportunity

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