

Percentage of sentences served

The proportion of time served in prison before release is increasing

Since the Parole Act 2002 came into force, the average proportion of prison sentences served before release on parole has increased from 55% to 78%. This has been one of the key drivers of the increase in the number of people in prison.

The Parole Act

The Parole Act, which came into force in 2002, established the New Zealand Parole Board. Its main functions are to decide when to release on parole people serving long prison sentences (that is, more than two years) and to set parole conditions. Pre-2002, nearly all prisoners were released after serving 66% or less of their sentence. The Parole Act allowed for prisoners on long sentences to be released between one-third and 100% of their sentence.

Long and short sentences

People serving short prison sentences (that is, up to two years) are automatically released after serving 50%. People serving long sentences are usually eligible for, but not entitled to, release on parole after serving one-third of their sentence.

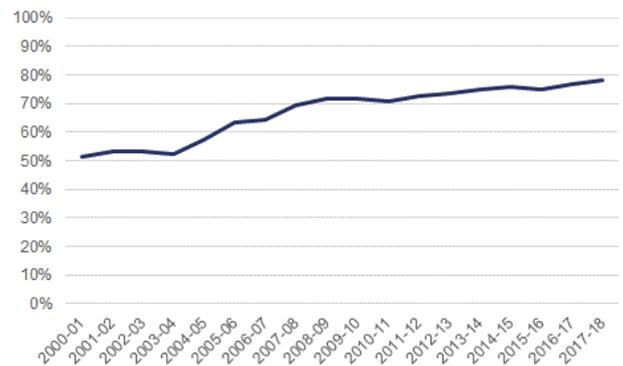
Definition of proportion of sentence served

The proportion of sentences served refers only to long determinate sentences (that is, sentences greater than two years but excluding life and preventive detention sentences). The proportion served is calculated as the average ratio of (a) the amount of time each released prisoner has served in prison and (b) the imposed sentence length.

The average proportion of sentence served is steadily increasing

The average proportion served has steadily increased since 2002. In the last decade, it has been increasing by approximately 1% per year, and is now around 78% (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Average proportion sentence served



Impact on the prison population

The prison population is determined by two factors: how many enter the prison system and how long they stay. The increase in proportion of sentences served has resulted in people staying longer in prison and has been a key driver behind the large increase in the prison population over the last 20 years.

The proportion of sentences served by Māori in prison, at 83%, is higher than the overall average of 78%.

Date published: 17 AUG 2018

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