



# Juvenile justice: A new national collection

## **Potential benefits of Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set**

- A national picture of the juvenile justice system in Australia
- A profile of juvenile justice clients
- The measurement of relative performance against agreed indicators
- The monitoring of national service standards in the juvenile justice area
- The examination of national trends over time
- The monitoring and evaluation of juvenile justice policies and programs
- Accountability
- The identification of 'good practices'
- Informing the community about the level and extent of juvenile incarceration and community-based sentences
- Capacity for research
- Exploration of possible links with other social and health-related data
- A source of data for the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (ROGS)
- The ability to identify the movement of juvenile justice clients between jurisdictions

## **History of the Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set project**

The decision to attempt the creation of a Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set (NMDS) was made in April 1999 when what is now the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CSMAC) agreed to fund the National Community Services Information Management Group (NCSIMG) for its establishment. The process from then to the draft NMDS ready for piloting, is detailed in Report on the Development of a Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set (AIHW: Broadbent 2001).

Briefly, in January 2000 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) proposal for the development of the NMDS was accepted by the Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators (AJJA) and the NCSIMG. By June 2000 the draft NMDS Data Dictionary v1.0 was released for comment and a workshop was held in July 2000. Outcomes from the workshop included:

- clear differentiation between nationally significant information requirements and the information needs of the states and territories and other interested parties;
- clearly stated national purpose for including each specific data item;
- staged approach agreed for developing the NMDS, beginning with core essential data items only;
- incorporation of other data items to be undertaken in a planned way, and only if considered to be essential to meet national information needs.

During the process of developing data items for an NMDS, key priority areas for juvenile justice agencies nationally were identified. These included:

- measures of recidivism (such as repeat contacts with the juvenile justice department and repeat periods of detention)
- alternatives to detention (including cautioning, conferencing)
- juvenile justice clients and their characteristics
- offences—trends in the types and numbers of offences committed by juveniles
- sentences—trends and variations in the types of sentences served
- outcomes of juveniles in the system
- juvenile justice institutions—size, location, programs offered, escapes etc.

The NMDS has been designed to incorporate as many of these areas as practicable. General principles which the AIHW has applied have been:

- national and international standards used wherever relevant
- collector burden minimised
- privacy of individuals respected
- data are appropriate to its purpose
- data definitions are clear, concise and comprehensive.

By late 2001, an agreed set of core items for collection on a nationally comparable basis had been developed, along with nationally agreed standards and definitions for those data items. The client collection contained data on the characteristics of juvenile justice clients, and their reason for involvement with the juvenile justice system.

A second, centre-based collection was also proposed as a simple descriptive collection on juvenile justice remand/detention centres and their characteristics (e.g. capacity, utilisation rates, services provided). This will be collected only once per year, with aggregate-level data.

Alongside the two data collections, the development of performance indicators was also being considered. It became clear that while some indicators may be available from the NMDS items, a number would have to be collected in a separate process, in order to fulfil requirements both for the Productivity Commission's Report On Government Services, and for operational requirements within the jurisdictions.

The Juvenile Justice NMDS Data Dictionary v1.0 contained the data items and concepts shown in Box 1.

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## **Box 1: Juvenile Justice NMDS Data Dictionary Version 1.0**

### **Data items**

<b>Juvenile justice client</b>	<b>Juvenile justice episode</b>	<b>Juvenile justice institution</b>
Unique client ID	Entry date	Centre name
Letters of name	Reason for intervention	Centre postcode
Date of birth	Transferred from	Juvenile justice remand/detention centre capacity
Sex	Most serious offence type	Number of juvenile justice detainees
Indigenous status	Sentence severity: hours of community service	Escapes
Country of birth	Sentence severity: number of days of sentence	
Last known home suburb/locality/town name	Juvenile justice agency name	
Last known home postcode	Juvenile justice agency postcode	
Statistical linkage key	Exit date	
	Reason for exit	

### **Data concepts**

#### **A juvenile justice client was defined as:**

A person who has committed an offence or allegedly committed an offence whilst between the ages of at least 10 years and less than 18 years and who, as a consequence, is under the supervision of, or is case-managed by, a juvenile justice department.

#### **A juvenile justice episode was defined as:**

A period of time during which a client is under the supervision of, or is case managed by, a state or territory juvenile justice department, under a specific legal order or arrangement.

## **Field and pilot testing the draft Juvenile Justice National Minimum Data Set v1.0**

Prior to testing, decisions were required on how the client collection data would be collated and reported—would the collection be aggregate or unit record data, snapshot (single point in time) or episode based (flow data)?

The recommendation that the collection be episode-based unit record data was accepted by AJJA, the NCSIMG and CSMAC. Field and pilot testing began on the draft NMDS items during 2002 and 2003.

Field testing was conducted in early 2002, with the AIHW visiting each jurisdiction to assess the feasibility of collecting the draft NMDS data items. Several issues were highlighted during this process, and decisions made to alter or eliminate certain data items. The details of this are outlined below in the section on changes to data items.

Generally, it was recognised that most jurisdictions would need to change the way that they collect and record some client information in order to comply with the requirements of the Juvenile Justice NMDS. This would necessitate changes to data