

21 August 2019

C109452

Christopher Wilson  
[fyi-request-10289-0b657e4f@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-10289-0b657e4f@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Mr Wilson

Thank you for your email of 15 May 2019 to the Ministry of Justice, requesting information about the cost of imprisonment for cannabis offences. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Corrections does not decide who is in prison and who is in the community, these decisions are determined by a Judge in Court, or the New Zealand Parole Board. There are a range of factors that influence the prison population, including arrests, court decisions, releases and seasonal trends.

Public safety is our top priority and we are committed to helping prisoners prepare for their safe return to the community. Corrections has a wide range of programmes available to offenders to address their specific rehabilitative and reintegration needs. Each year we deliver programmes and interventions to thousands of prisoners and community-based offenders.

For information about our rehabilitation programmes, please refer to pages 61-62 of Corrections' 2017/18 Annual Report, at:  
[https://www.corrections.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/926219/Department\\_of\\_Corrections\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2017\\_2018.pdf](https://www.corrections.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/926219/Department_of_Corrections_Annual_Report_2017_2018.pdf)

A total of \$128.3 million over four years has been invested through Budget 2019 for mental health and AOD services for prisoners and community-based offenders. This funding will allow us to support up to 2,310 additional offenders with mild to moderate mental health needs per year.

It also includes expanded social worker and trauma counselling services for up to 800 prisoners each year to help them reconnect with their whānau or children, address personal trauma, and transition back into the community; a service for up to 275 whānau of offenders who need mental health services; and supported living accommodation for offenders with intensive mental health needs who are transitioning to the community, with up to 30 offenders supported in total each year.

\$66.7 million is allocated over four years for AOD testing and treatment. This will be invested in strengthening and expanding Corrections' core AOD treatment programmes, including the Drug Treatment Programmes and eight week Intensive AOD Treatment Programmes delivered in prisons.

Your email of 15 May 2019 to the Ministry of Justice requested:

*Could you please tell me the total cost of enforcing, prosecution and incarceration of cannabis offences*

As you are aware, your request for the cost of 'incarceration of cannabis offences' was transferred to Corrections for response on 20 May 2019, in accordance with section 14 of the OIA. I understand that New Zealand Police have responded to the other parts of your request.

As requested by Corrections on 20 May 2019, on 19 June 2019 you clarified the part of your request transferred to Corrections, as follows:

*the total cost, but if I am able to get both costs of possession as well as the figure for supply, it would also be helpful*

During the 2017/18 financial year, the average cost of administering a sentence of imprisonment for sentenced prisoners was \$330 per individual, per day. The average volume of sentenced prisoners during this period was 7,402, and the average sentence length imposed was 564 days. Costs include programmes and interventions provided in prison.

For remand prisoners, who are held in prison while awaiting their trial or sentencing, the average cost of imprisonment during the 2017/18 period was \$199 per individual, per day. The average volume of remand prisoners during this period was 3,113, and the average length of remand was 71 days.

We have been able to calculate the estimated cost of imprisoning remanded and sentenced prisoners whose lead or most serious offence was for any cannabis-related offence (including seed, plant, resin, oil and other forms) during the 2017/18 financial year period, including both possession and supply charges.

When reviewing these figures, please note:

- if a person was both remanded in custody for cannabis offending and later served a sentence of imprisonment for the same charges within the 2017/18 period, they will be counted in both the sentenced and remand groups.
- in many of these cases, the individual will have also been convicted of other offending or breaches of existing sentences or orders, and cannabis offences would not have been the sole reason for their imprisonment.
- these figures exclude individuals whose sentence to imprisonment or remand in custody included cannabis charges that were not their lead or most serious offence.
- sentencing decisions are made by a judge in Court, not Corrections.

During the 2017/18 financial year, a total of 152 individuals were sentenced prisoners who had a lead or most serious offence relating to cannabis possession or supply. During this period these individuals served a total of 23,560 days in prison (an average of 155 days per offender). As the average cost of imprisoning a sentenced prisoner during this period was \$330 per day, we estimate that the total cost of imprisonment for this group was \$7,774,800.

During the 2017/18 financial year, a total of 201 individuals were held in prison on remand who had a lead or most serious offence relating to cannabis possession or supply. During this period, these individuals served a total of 10,804 days in prison (an average of 53.8 days per offender). As the average cost of imprisoning a remand prisoner during this period was \$199 per day, we estimate that the total cost of imprisonment for this group was \$2,149,996.

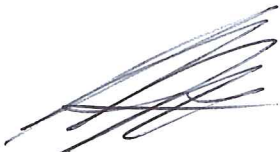
An analysis of the prison population undertaken in 2017 found that prisoners whose lead or most serious offence related to drug possession had an average of 70 previous convictions.

As such, the possession of drugs will generally have only been one factor in these individuals' offending histories, and it will not have been the sole reason leading to their imprisonment.

Please also note that prison populations fluctuate on a daily basis due to arrests, court decisions and sentence end dates. Based on a snapshot of the prison population at 30 June 2018, there were a total of 72 prisoners, including 19 on remand and 53 serving a sentence of imprisonment, who had a lead or most serious offence related to cannabis offending. On this date the total prison population was 10,435. As such, this group comprised around 0.7 percent of the total prison population.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with Corrections. Alternatively you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Your sincerely



Richard Waggott  
Acting Deputy Chief Executive  
Service Development