



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

*Better information and statistics
for better health and wellbeing*

Developing and implementing a recidivism data collection

Project proposal

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Background

The Australasian Juvenile Justice Administrators (AJJA) funded the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) to explore options for measuring juvenile recidivism on a comparable basis across states and territories (Richards 2010 *Recidivism outcomes for juveniles in Australia: a national research project*).

The report outlined the measures currently used by states and territories and identified a number of possible measures of juvenile recidivism (Richards 2010:51). Richards also noted that ‘it is important for jurisdictions to collect data that extend beyond those relating to the recommended Counting Rules...[t]his report does not, therefore, recommend that jurisdictions limit their collection of data to only those required by the recommended counting rules.’ (2010:28).

At the Juvenile Justice Research and Information Group (JJ RIG) meeting held 31 March – 1 April 2011, the RIG discussed the benefits of implementing a unit record collection rather than an aggregate collection. These benefits would include:

- Recidivism could be measured across different time periods rather than only within a fixed time period.
- Recidivism could be measured across jurisdictions, that is, recidivism by young people who reoffend in jurisdictions other than the index jurisdiction could be captured.
- Recidivism could be measured by the specific type of order beyond whether the order was a community-based order or a detention order.
- Recidivism could be measured by the level of contact with the juvenile justice system.
- The collecting agency would be able to validate the data at a unit-record level.
- It would not possible to link data on juvenile recidivism with data on adult recidivism if such data are available at a later stage.

At this meeting, the JJ RIG agreed that the recidivism data collection project would progress in a number of stages:

Stage	Responsibility
1. Analyse recidivism using currently available JJ NMDS data	AIHW
2. Develop and pilot additional data items for the JJ NMDS	AIHW and jurisdictions
3. Develop and pilot adult data	AIHW and jurisdictions
4. Develop and pilot offence seriousness	Research Task Group

The RIG requested that the AIHW prepare a scoping document for the development and implementation of a recidivism data collection.

Objective

The objective of this project is to develop a data collection that can be used to measure juvenile recidivism on a comparable basis across the Australian states and territories.

The project will be guided by the principles outlined in Richards (2010) *Recidivism outcomes for juveniles in Australia: a national research project*.

Project plan

The project will progress in a number of stages. Together, these stages will enable a number of key concepts in the measurement of recidivism to be included.

Stage 1: Analyse recidivism using currently available JJ NMDS data

At its 31 March to 1 April meeting, the JJ RIG agreed that as a first step, the proposed counting rules outlined in Richards 2010 would be piloted using available JJ NMDS data. The analysis of recidivism using existing JJ NMDS data would serve several purposes, including:

- testing and refining the principles and data specifications developed by Richards (2010)
- identifying additional data items required for the full analysis of recidivism.
- evaluating the usefulness of JJ NMDS data or similar unit record data for measuring recidivism.

However, there are several limitations to using currently available JJ NMDS data. First, the order file of the JJ NMDS does not contain the dates the offences were committed, only the dates the orders started and ended. This may result in pseudo-recidivism being captured (see Richards 2010:42-43). Second, data on adult supervision are not available through the JJ NMDS, so age limits would need to be applied to enable adequate time for follow-up. Third, offence data are currently available for three states (NSW, Vic and Qld), but no ranking for offence seriousness has yet been endorsed by AJJA.

Stage 2: Develop and pilot additional data items for the JJ NMDS

The recidivism analysis conducted in stage 1 would be used to determine the additional data items, such as offence dates, required for a full recidivism analysis. One of the principles outlined by the AIC in its technical report is that offence dates should be used rather than conviction or sentencing dates (2010:44). Using offence dates rather than order dates eliminates the possibility of including pseudo-recidivism in the measurement of juvenile recidivism. Using offence dates for both the index date and the recidivism dates also reduces the impact of judicial administration time.

Stage 2 would involve developing and piloting these additional data items for inclusion in the JJ NMDS.

Stage 3: Develop and pilot adult data

The AIC's technical report recommends that, in order to accurately measure recidivism, young people be tracked into the adult system (2010:32-33). Including young people who have 'aged out' of the juvenile justice system in a measure of recidivism where adult data are not included would substantially underestimate the level of recidivism.

Work conducted during stage 1 and stage 2 would be used to inform the data items required on adult supervision and the most practicable format of the data. For example, these data could be linked to JJ NMDS records at a jurisdictional level before being provided to the AIHW for analysis.

Stage 4: Develop and pilot offence seriousness

The AIC's technical report notes that additional measures of recidivism could consider frequency and severity of recidivism (2010:47-48). Measuring the severity of recidivism requires information on offence type and a method for determining the seriousness of an offence type.

The Research Task Group of the JJ RIG will consider conducting a project on offence seriousness and the definition of a serious offence. This work will inform the development and piloting of data items relating to offence seriousness.

Timeline

Stage 1 (analysing currently available JJ NMDS data) is the foundational stage for the project and will inform the future stages. Together with stage 2 (developing and implementing additional data items for the JJ NMDS), this work will take approximately six months to complete. It is estimated that the time required for stages 3 and 4 will depend on the results from stages 1 and 2 and the availability of data.

Key components for a recidivism data collection

Key components	Stage 1: currently available JJ NMDS data	Stage 2: additional data items for the JJ NMDS	Stage 3: develop and pilot adult data	Stage 4: develop and pilot offence seriousness
Offence dates	use order dates as proxy	develop and pilot data items		
Adult supervision	limit age range		develop and pilot data items	
Offence seriousness	no measure			develop and pilot data items

Timeline for stages 1 and 2

Month	Stage	Task
Month 1	Stage 1	analyse JJ NMDS data
Month 2		interim report
Month 3	Stage 2	develop data items
Month 4		pilot data items
Month 5		
Month 6		final report

Funding for stages 1 and 2

As this work is not currently included in the schedule for the MoU between the AIHW and the AJJA, the AIHW is seeking a variation to the MoU for this work, which is costed at \$88,750 (plus GST). The AIHW proposes that this work be funded on a population cost-share basis, per the MoU between the AIHW and the AJJA.

Cost for stages 1 and 2

	Population	Per cent	Contribution (excl GST)	Contribution (incl GST)
New South Wales	7,041,393	32.54	\$28,876	\$31,764
Victoria	5,364,796	24.79	\$22,001	\$24,201
Queensland	4,349,529	20.10	\$17,837	\$19,621
Western Australia	2,204,040	10.18	\$9,039	\$9,942
South Australia	1,612,002	7.45	\$6,611	\$7,272
Tasmania	500,278	2.31	\$2,052	\$2,257
Australian Capital Territory	347,843	1.61	\$1,426	\$1,569
Northern Territory	221,682	1.02	\$909	\$1,000
Australia	21,641,563	100.00	\$88,750	\$97,625