

## Women who are Justice-Involved

Women make up 18% of the correctional population in the United States and 28% of the adult probation and parole population in Pennsylvania. Their pathways to the justice system often differ from men's. Yet, most research for evidence-based practices has been focused on men and applied equally to both genders. While many best practices are effective across gender, gender-specific approaches are more effective.

### Improving Outcomes for Women in the Criminal Justice System

- **Examine policies and train staff.** Implement a framework to assess organizational alignment with evidence-based, gender-responsive, and trauma-informed policies and practices. Ensure staff understand the impact of gender on pathways into crime, criminogenic needs, responsivity and stabilization factors, and supervision strategies.
- **Use gender-responsive assessment tools.** Standard tools have been found to be implicitly gender-biased; they tend to overclassify women into higher-risk categories. Gender-responsive tools such as the Women's Risk and Needs Assessments (WRNA) and the Service Planning Instrument for Women (SPIn-W) are essential for more accurately identifying criminogenic needs and responsivity factors that should be addressed during supervision.
- **Use gender-responsive programming.** Programming often does not consider women's different pathways into crime, strengths, needs, and barriers. Women have improved outcomes when groups are gender-specific.
- **Match supervision level.** The supervision frequency, intensity, and duration should match the risk level and the person's needs.
- **Develop professional alliance.** Research has found that developing a trusting relationship is important for a correctional professional's work with all people on supervision. This is particularly true with justice-involved women, whose life experiences often underscore a need to know they are respected and will not be taken advantage of or ridiculed.
- **Use a strength-based approach.** Identify the person's strengths and work with them to determine how their strengths can assist them in achieving their goals.
- **Build links to the community.** Develop the person's involvement and relationship with their community. Increase natural and professional support systems.

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## Pathways

Women can have various, sometimes overlapping, pathways into the criminal justice system. Corrections professionals should use appropriate screening and/or assessment tools and make referrals to resources and programs during the reentry and supervision process.

## Evaluate and Develop a Plan

**To identify and address potential gender disparities in practice and outcomes:**

- **Evaluate** the current number of people on supervision, the level of risk and need, trends, and the staffing capacity of the department, by gender. Strengthen the capacity of staff to work effectively with women who are justice-involved.
- **Assess** current supervision strategies and programs for gender-responsivity and review and evaluate practices and outcomes for gender disparities. Conduct a program gap analysis specific to women in the jurisdiction.
- **Develop** a plan collaboratively with stakeholders to create a gender-responsive approach to women on supervision. This should include programs, supervision strategies, and a possible specialized caseload.



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