

The first week

GETTING STARTED

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This is Booklet 1 in the Getting Started Series.

**Getting Started is a guide
for people leaving prison.**

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It is never too early to plan for your release. If you prepare as much as you can before you get out, things will be easier.

It is normal to be nervous about getting out. You will have different demands and will need different skills. You probably know how much faster life is on the outside but it can still come as a shock.

You shouldn't be surprised if the first few weeks feel hectic. Many of the things that used to be normal will feel strange.

Preparing for release

Some things can be organised before your release. Others will have to wait until you get out.

The following checklist acts as a guide for things you can organise before release.

These are the basics:

- Go to a health discharge appointment
- Organise medication and prescriptions
- Find out how and where to collect your personal property

- Arrange to get the money from your prison accounts
- Make sure you have somewhere to stay
- Write down the address of where you're going to stay and the directions to get there
- Organise a Centrelink payment
- Tell your friends, family or anyone else who should know about your release
- Organise transport from the prison
- Make a back-up plan in case you are released on the weekend or out-of-hours
- Check that you have clothes to wear when you're released

There may be other things you need to prepare in advance. Ask around in prison. The staff or other prisoners may have advice.

When making plans think about more than just the practical things.

Trying to answer these questions now will help when you are released.

- What are my expectations? Are they realistic?
- Do I know where to get help or extra support if I need it?
- What will it be like returning to my family? How will my friends react?
- If things don't go as expected, how will I cope?
- Will I return to drugs, alcohol or gambling?

Asking the hard questions is the best way to prepare for getting out - even if you don't have all the answers. Start putting a plan together and think about who you can go to for advice.

Leaving Prison

Each prison has its own discharge procedures. Make sure you understand what to expect and when to expect it.

Transport

If you are not being picked up by family or friends, the prison will usually arrange transport to the nearest railway station. If you are unsure you should ask the prison staff.

If you need to travel a long distance and have less than \$50, the prison will give you a train ticket to your destination. Ask in advance about the prison procedure.

If you are released on the weekend, there may be different public transport times.

If family or friends are picking you up, make sure they know where and when to collect you. You should warn them that cars are often searched in prison car parks.

Keep in mind that people often have long distances to travel. Unexpected things can happen and arrangements can change.

After Release

There will be a lot of things you have to do and plenty more things you'll want to do once you get out.

If you are on parole there is an intensive parole period. You may be required to report more than once a week, do urine tests and community work. You will also have to go to Centrelink and

other appointments. Demands often clash with things like hanging out with friends or family.

In the excitement of being out it is easy to put off the things you should be doing.

Appointments

It may feel like a big part of each day is spent going to appointments. As annoying as this feels, there is no other option.

It might help to arrange your appointment times to suit your needs. You may want to spread them out so that you can tackle one at a time. You could also ask to have them on the same day to leave more days free. Decide what works best for you and request times to suit your needs.

Common appointments include:

- Parole
- Centrelink
- Doctor
- Chemist
- Drug and Alcohol Counselling
- Community work

Housing

Housing continues to be the biggest problem for people leaving prison. Waiting lists for public housing are longer than ever before and temporary housing is hard to come by.

Moving back with family or friends might be your first option – or your only option. Keep in mind that it may not be ideal and may not last. If you plan to live with friends and family let them know early.

Don't assume anything! Discuss the arrangement before you are released.

If you have any doubts about your housing, talk to the Housing Worker at the prison. See Getting Started 2: Housing for more information.

Money

If you have been in prison for a while the price of everything will have gone up. Money never goes as far as it used to!

Making a budget is a good idea if money is tight. See the budget plan at the back of this booklet for more details.

People often tell VACRO that the supermarket can be a challenge. Being surrounded by choice and people and different products can be daunting. If this happens to you try to go during the quiet times or go with someone else. It is also ok to leave and try again later.

Food Shopping

Fresh Food Markets (such as South Melbourne, Footscray, Darebin and farmers markets) are often cheaper at the end of the day.

If you only have access to a supermarket look out for the specials. Only buy what you will use and always check the best before date.

Clothing can be expensive. Op-shops are a cheap and popular way to get clothes, furniture and kitchen items.

You may also be eligible for clothing vouchers from St Vinnies or the Salvos.

Emergency Relief

There are many services that provide vouchers for supermarkets, free second-hand and new goods, food parcels, transport assistance, pharmacy assistance and information. These services are called material aid or emergency relief.

They are located in some community centres, churches, homelessness services and other welfare agencies. Phone ahead if possible and ask if you qualify for assistance.

There are free meals available at Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda, St Mary's House of Welcome in Fitzroy and many other locations in and around the city.

Centrelink

You should be able to access a Centrelink worker before you leave prison.

See Getting Started 5: Centrelink for more details.

Health

If you are on any medication or have any health issues see the Prison Health Service before you leave. Ask for a health discharge plan. You'll need to set up doctor's appointments and find out about chemists. They will also refer you for one month of free OSTP in the community.

See Getting Started 4: Alcohol and Other Drugs and the Getting Started Info Sheet E: Health for more details.

Getting around

Public Transport

Transport can be expensive. Concession fares are cheaper but if you don't have a Health Care Card or Pension Card, you will have to pay the full amount.

There has been an increase in ticket inspectors on all forms of transport. The fine for not having a ticket or having the wrong ticket is currently \$170.

Myki is a new prepaid system for public transport. It doesn't cover all transport routes yet. Ask at the train stations for more information or look at the Myki website. You can still use the old ticketing system.

It is cheaper to buy tickets in bulk. The 10 x 2hr Metcard is the most cost effective option. There are also cheaper tickets for weekends but you have to buy them at newsagencies or at a ticket office.

If you have a Health Care Card then some support agencies can provide travel tickets or other assistance to offset the cost of travel. For more information, speak to **Travellers' Aid (03) 9670 2072**

See the Getting Started: Emergency Relief

For train, tram and bus information, contact Metlink on 131 638 (6am – 10pm daily) or visit www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au

Cars

If you will be driving, make sure your driver's licence is current. The car you are driving also needs to be registered. If there are any problems it's the driver's responsibility.

Check if you have any outstanding fines that you need to pay (or start paying off). You may have missed mail about your licence and it could have been suspended. Check with

VicRoads 13 11 71.



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Weekly planner

Tips on how to use your planner

- 1 Write the Days and Dates into your planner – Day 1 is the day you get out.
- 2 **Make a list** of everything you need to do before and after your release.
- 3 Highlight all the **appointments** on your list (e.g. CCS, doctor, chemist). Put them into your planner and include travel time.
- 4 Mark out time in your planner to arrange **housing, clothing and food**. These things can take a while.
- 5 Write all of your **deadlines** into your planner (e.g. the last day you can apply for a Centrelink Crisis Payment, or the day your medication will run out). Make a note to remind yourself a few days before your deadline.
- 6 Add any **special events** to your planner. This could include birthdays or anniversaries. Remembering the little things will help get your relationships back on track.

This planner only lasts for two weeks. If you think it is useful you should buy a diary. You can also use the calendar in your mobile phone or internet.



Things to do Before I get out

Things to do when I get out

Things I can ask other people to do

Who can I go to if I need assistance?

Day 1	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 2	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 3	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 4	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 5	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 6	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 7	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 8	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 9	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 10	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 11	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 12	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 13	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Day 14	Date	Day
Morning		
Afternoon		
Evening		

Budgeting: Start up costs

Type of income

Money from withheld-savings	\$
EBT Card/s	\$
	\$
Total	\$

Set up costs

Concession Met Ticket	\$
Shoes	\$
Mobile	\$
Phone Credit	\$
Clothes	\$
Toiletries	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
Total	\$

Fortnightly Budget

Payments Due	Cost per fortnight
Rent	\$
Electricity	\$
Gas	\$
Telephone	\$
Transport	\$
Food	\$
Entertainment	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
Total	\$
Income	\$
Savings (income minus total)	\$

