

The impact of COVID 19 on young people in the criminal justice system

Nicholas Chan

SUMMARY

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BACKGROUND

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW government introduced a suite of measures to minimise the risk of transmission. From 15 March onwards, these affected the movement of residents, the use of indoor spaces, and the delivery of teaching in schools. Within the youth justice system these changes led to the vacation of Children's Court hearings between 24 March and 1 May 2020.

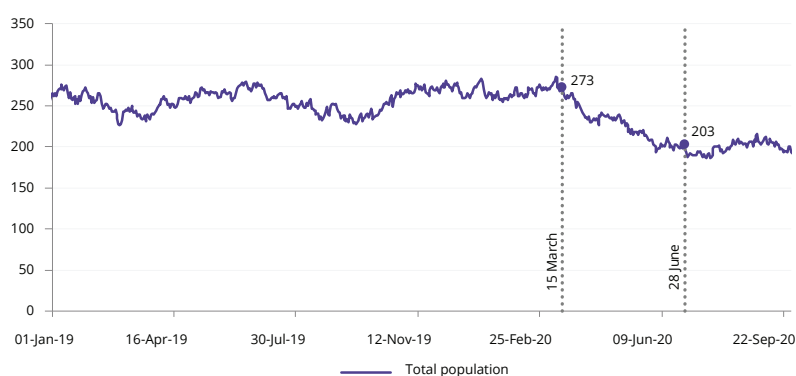
This brief examines the impact of the initial COVID-19 pandemic response on the interactions of young people with the NSW criminal justice system and the follow-on effects on the youth custody population.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19 young people remand
sentencing Children's Court
Young Offenders Act

KEY FINDINGS

NSW youth custody population



- From 15 March 2020 to 28 June the NSW youth custody population decreased by 25.6% from 273 to 203.
- A fall in the remand population accounted for 60.0% (42 people) of the decrease in the total youth custody population. The reduction in the number in remand was due to an increase in young people being discharged to bail and a decrease in bail revocations following breaches of bail.
- The number of young people in sentenced custody decreased by 23.5% (28 people between 15 March and 28 June. This was due to a reduction in finalised appearances in the Children's Court and a resultant fall in young people receiving a custodial sentence.
- There was a sharp decline in the number of warnings (down 71%) and infringement notices (down 49%) issued in April 2020. This was largely caused by a reduction in fare evasion. The number of cautions and court actions issued by police to young people remained stable after 15 March.

CONCLUSION

The NSW youth custody population decreased by a quarter between 15 March and the end of June. The remand population fell due to increased discharges to bail and a reduction in bail refusal following breaches of bail. The number of young people in sentenced custody decreased due to a reduction in finalised appearances in the Children's Court.