

**Parolee Needs in California: A Descriptive Analysis of 2006 COMPAS Data**

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## Introduction

California prisons are severely pressed for space because of overcrowding and high recidivism rates that contribute to overcrowding. Between 1985 and 2005, the prison population grew by over 350%—from roughly 48,000 inmates to over 170,000 (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2006a). California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) institutions are currently operating at more than 200% of capacity.<sup>1</sup> Of those released from CDCR custody, two-thirds return to California prisons within three years, severely restricting efforts to reduce the size of the institutional population (Fischer 2005). The growing prison population is directly associated with the rapidly growing number of California parolees. In 2005, there were roughly 123,000 releases to parole supervision. By way of comparison, there were 103,000 releases in 1995, and only 30,000 releases in 1985 (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2006a).<sup>2</sup>

Research has indicated that California's prisoners and parolees have serious educational, vocational and substance abuse-related deficits which contribute to their propensity to return to prison. Petersilia (2006) analyzed data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) 1997 *Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities*, finding that despite high rates of reported educational, vocational and substance abuse needs, most California prisoners did not receive necessary services while in custody. As she states:

“The vast majority of California prisoners do not receive the rehabilitation they need. Like prisoners of all other states, they have problems with substance abuse, lack of education, and inadequate job skills. In some cases, California prisoners have even more severe issues in these areas than their counterparts in other states. Despite these critical needs, however, California provides fewer rehabilitation programs than comparable states, so the prison experience often fails to give inmates the tools for successful reintegration.” (p.39)

According to Petersilia's analysis of the 1997 BJS data, more than half of California inmates reported that they had not participated in any rehabilitation program during their current prison term, compared to 31% nationally.

Petersilia found that about 15% of California prisoners could be categorized as having a high need for educational or employment training due to their work histories, limited job skills and poor educational backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> But compared to similar inmates across the United States, California's “high need” prisoners reported participating in vocational and educational programs at lower rates. Fifteen percent of California prisoners had high educational and vocational needs but only 6% reported participating in a program. In comparison, 15% of inmates nationally were similarly categorized as having high educational and vocational needs, and 9% reported having been in a program.

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<sup>1</sup> CDCR population report for February 21, 2007:

<http://www.cya.ca.gov/ReportsResearch/OffenderInfoServices/WeeklyWed/TPOP1A/TPOP1Ad070221.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> These are not the numbers of *individuals* released to parole, but the number of *releases*. An individual could have been released multiple times in a year.

<sup>3</sup> “High need” was defined as having been unemployed frequently, few job skills, and below an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education.

Petersilia further found that while California prisoners exhibited rates of alcohol- and drug-related needs that were close to national averages, they were substantially less likely to have received appropriate treatment while in prison. Forty-two percent of California prisoners were found to have high need for alcohol treatment—almost identical to the 43% national rate. However, only 8% of California prisoners participated in alcohol treatment in prison—compared to a national rate of 18%. Moreover, only 1% of California inmates participated in alcohol treatment programs run by professional staff, compared to 7% nationally. Fifty-six percent of California prisoners were found to have a high need for drug treatment, compared to 49% nationally. But only 9% of California inmates participated in drug treatment while in prison—well below the national rate of 19%.

While Petersilia's findings are informative, the BJS data are now about ten years old. Moreover, the data are derived from inmate self-reports and the veracity of such reports has not been established. California has an urgent need to document the specific work and treatment needs of its prison and parole population if it is to develop appropriate programming and the California Legislature has recognized the need for CDCR to implement a standardized risk/need assessment instrument. Such instruments represent best practices in corrections and are widely used throughout the United States. Assessment instruments are empirically validated, predict the risk of recidivism using crime and offender background information, typically covering areas such as demographics, criminal history, and drug dependence. Those who "score higher" on the risk component of the instrument would, in theory, present a higher risk of reoffending, and a variety of correctional decisions can be informed by such an assessment. Needs may be assessed across a variety of domains—for example, mental and physical health, substance abuse, housing, education, employment, and family functioning. Needs data can then be used for case management and making individualized treatment decisions. From time to time, risk/need assessment instruments are "re-validated" through research, ensuring that instrument items and scoring scales continue to accurately predict risk and evaluate needs.

In 2005, the California Department of Corrections (DOC, now the CDCR) Division of Adult Parole Operations (DAPO) purchased the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) to provide evidence-based risk and needs assessment for the California parolee population. The instrument is comprised of risks and needs scales, and raw data collected from COMPAS assessments can be interrogated to provide overviews of offender needs. Developed by the Northpointe Institute for Public Management,<sup>4</sup> the COMPAS was piloted in selected locations in 2005, and full implementation was planned for 2006 (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2005). In March 2006, parole staff associated with the Parole Planning and Placement (PPP) program began using the COMPAS to interview soon-to-be-released prisoners serving time on a new commitment, and parole violators "with a new term" (i.e., sentenced in court) who had served longer than six months. In August 2006, PPP staff expanded this effort to further include parole violators "returned to custody" (i.e., sentenced by the parole board) who had served longer than six months.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.northpointeinc.com/>

COMPAS is now (2007) being successfully implemented throughout the parole division, and plans are being made to expand its use for inmates at admission in four pilot prison reception centers in 2008. Adoption of the COMPAS tool represents a significant advance for CDCR, as it will provide the basis for matching offender characteristics, risk of recidivism, and programmatic needs – the cornerstone of evidence-based programming. Administering the COMPAS to soon-to-be-released inmates will facilitate service planning for California parolees. The plan to expand its use to prison reception centers also means that it can be used to prioritize inmates for participation in education, work, and behavioral change programs while in prison. And importantly, the data will eventually provide the baseline information that can be used to evaluate the costs and effectiveness of new interventions for both the in-custody and parole populations.

The COMPAS represents the first time that CDCR has used an actuarial, systematic instrument to gather data on the risk and needs of offenders. This is a critical first step towards matching available programs to inmates who can most benefit from them. Evidence from other states shows that properly matching inmate needs to quality rehabilitation and work programs can significantly reduce recidivism (National Research Council 2007). Prior to the implementation of COMPAS, there was no risk/needs instrument routinely used by correctional staff, and no other reliable data source for describing the programmatic needs of prisoners and parolees—a major impediment for program planning.

Ideally, CDCR's COMPAS assessment process begins at 240 days prior to the estimated release data. At 120 days prior to release, parole staff try to determine whether a social worker referral is appropriate for case planning. The entire case planning component is meant to be completed 14 days before releases, but sometimes, it takes longer.<sup>5</sup> Items on the COMPAS instrument comprise four risk scales and eighteen needs scales. The risk scales predict the likelihood of:

- Violence
- Recidivism
- Flight (i.e., absconding)
- Non-compliance (i.e., technical violations)

The COMPAS needs scales assess the following areas:

- Criminal associates/peers
- Criminal attitude/thinking
- Criminal involvement
- Criminal opportunity
- Criminal personality
- Current violence
- Socialization failure
- Family criminality
- Financial problems/poverty
- History of non-compliance

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Darby Lannom, CDCR Division of Adult Parole Operations.

- History of violence
- Leisure/recreation
- Residential instability
- Social adjustment problems
- Social environment
- Substance abuse
- Vocational/Education problems
- Social isolation

COMPAS items pertaining to legal and correctional history are collected from official CDCR electronic records. All other data are collected through interviews with offenders.

See Figure 1 for a sample screen capture from the COMPAS computer interface.

**Figure 1: Sample COMPAS screen capture**

*Source: Northpointe Institute for Public Management*

The Expert Panel was tasked with “evaluating the Department's approach to providing inmate programming and treatment,” and making recommendations about “programs that show promise and should be expanded, as well as on programs that are ineffective and should be discontinued” (California Governor’s Budget Summary 2007-2008, p.196). Identifying effective programs necessarily entails determining the range and extent of offender needs. Again, prior to the implementation of the COMPAS, there was no risk/need instrument in use by correctional staff, and no other data source for assessing the needs of prisoners and parolees.

Data collected through the COMPAS can provide a general portrait of the needs of the California parolee population. However, the COMPAS data as they currently exist are seriously biased, and there are a number of limitations to the interpretation of these data, which are discussed in detail in the next section. Nevertheless, analyzing COMPAS data that collected by parole staff between the months of March and July of 2006 can yield some insight into the following areas:

- Respondents' educational needs
- Respondents' vocational needs
- Respondents' financial needs
- Respondents' drug- and alcohol-related needs

This memo presents findings from a first attempt at analyzing the education, employment, financial and substance abuse domains of the 2006 CDCR COMPAS data.

#### *Overview of sampling strategy and sources of bias in the data*

The COMPAS data are biased, and records do not constitute a representative sample of the group of individuals being released. CDCR is currently taking steps to remedy some of these biases and make future COMPAS data more representative of the release population, but these steps had not yet been taken during this initial round of data collection. There are a few different sources of bias which stem from different sampling decisions, and they are described below.

First, the data being analyzed only capture information about prisoners being released from institutions (i.e., prisons). The instrument was not administered to those being released from CDCR camps, reentry centers, hospitals and other non-institutional settings. Overall, about 15% of inmates are released from these non-institutional settings.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, analysis of COMPAS data can, at best, yield insight into the needs of CDCR institutional releases, and does not speak to the needs of those released from these other places. CDCR is now developing plans to reach these “out stationed” inmates, and in time, they will also be included in the COMPAS assessment process.

Second, the COMPAS was not administered to every prison inmate due to be released. The instrument was given to all *new commitments* being released from an original sentence and *parole violators with a new term* (PVWNTs) who had served longer than six months in an institution. PVWNTs who served less than six months were excluded. New commitments are prisoners who were not on parole when arrested, convicted and sentenced in court. PVWNTs are prisoners who were on parole when arrested, convicted and sentenced. New commitments and PVWNTs can serve any amount of prison time prior to release.

Parole violators who had been returned to custody through the parole board—called *parole violators returned to custody* (PVRTC)s—were for the most part excluded from the data collection. PVRTCs are prisoners who had been on parole, and were returned to custody because of a parole violation processed through the parole board; they constitute about 47% of releases

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Carrie Daves, Manager, Parole Automation (CDCR).

from CDCR institutions.<sup>7</sup> This violation could have been for a “true technical violation” (e.g., failed drug test, failure to report to the parole agent, failure to follow conditions of parole), or for a “criminal technical violation,” which stems from an arrest that a county court declines to prosecute, and is thus processed through the parole board as a violation. Importantly, PVRTCs can only serve a maximum of twelve months upon their return to custody. They are, in general, the “shortest stayers” in CDCR institutions. CDCR began to administer the COMPAS to PVRTCs serving longer than six months in August 2006. However, the COMPAS dataset collapses all sentence statuses together (new commitment, PVWNT, PVRTC), making it impossible to distinguish between the three types. This means that from March through July 2006, PVRTCs were completely excluded from the data, and from August through December, some of them were included. Thus, the data is essentially split into two different samples—one completely without PVRTCs and one that includes some of them.

Because PVRTCs serving less than six months were not given the COMPAS, data about the PVRTC subpopulation are severely biased. Consequently, it was decided to only conduct analyses on COMPAS data collected between March and July 2006 (n=11,140), as these data completely exclude the unrepresentative PVRTC subpopulation, and can thus provide a somewhat accurate depiction of the cohort of new commitments and PVWNTs being released during this time period. In other words, the COMPAS data described in this memo represent the characteristics of prisoners who had been sentenced in court for a criminal offense and served six months or longer in prison (i.e., new commitments and PVWNTs). No individual in the data had been returned to prison for a parole violation (i.e., PVRTCs) and none had served less than six months.

A third source of bias stems from the fact that certain inmates targeted by specialized mental health and substance abuse programs were also not included in the COMPAS data collection. Specifically, inmates with Correctional Clinical Case Management Services/Enhanced Outpatient (CCCMS/EOP) status—those with serious mental health issues—were not interviewed because it was believed that state-contracted mental health programs would perform their own assessments. Moreover, the reliability of data provided by inmates with serious mental health issues would be questionable at best. For similar reasons, inmates with serious addiction problems who were targeted by the state’s Substance Abuse Program (SAP) program were ignored. This means that released prison inmates with, arguably, the most severe mental health and substance abuse problems were left out of the data; such inmates constitute about 31% of new commitments and PVWNTs being released from institutions.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, the results presented in this memo are likely to understate the needs of released prisoners. Currently, CDCR is developing plans to reach “functional” CCCMS and SAP inmates and administer the COMPAS to them. Depending on the quality of collected data, future analyses should be able to speak to the needs of these populations.

Finally, inmates who were pending deportation were also ignored. In substance, this does not really present a problem, as these inmates would not draw on CDCR agency resources after release.

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<sup>7</sup> California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2006). *California prisoners and parolees 2005*. Sacramento: CDCR. (See Table 44.)

<sup>8</sup> Special analysis by Bubpha Chen, **TITLE**, CDCR.



As a result of these biases, the 2006 COMPAS data represent the needs of roughly 31% of all CDCR releases. This figure is the result of the following calculation:

- 85% of CDCR releases are from institutions.
- Of this 85%, 53% are new felon commitments and PVWNTs, leaving 45% of the total.
- Of this remaining 45%, 69% have no CCCMS/EOP or SAP status, **leaving 31%** who are released from institutions, are new felon commitments or PVWNTs, and have no CCCMS/EOP or SAP status.

Figure 2 below presents a visual depiction of the sampling bias within the COMPAS data. Each “column” in the figure represents one of the three principal groups of prison inmates—new commitments, PVWNTs and PVRTCs. Inmates being released from non-institutional settings are excluded from all three groups. Inmates targeted by the SAP program and those with CCCMS/EOP status are also excluded. The PVWNT subsample is further reduced through the exclusion of inmates serving less than six month sentences. And again, for the purposes of this analysis, PVRTCs are completely left out of the sample. Figure 2 should clarify the nature and extent of sampling bias.

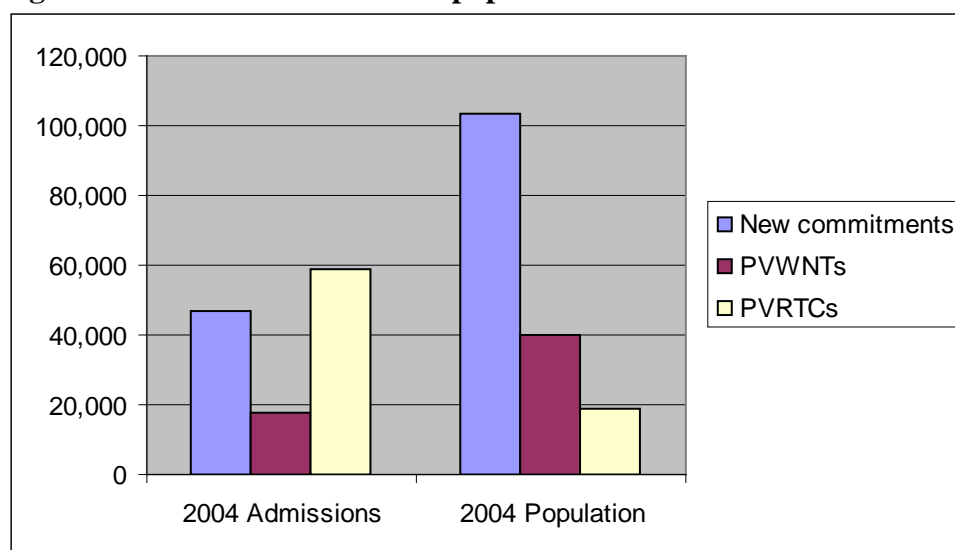
**Figure 2: Visual depiction of sampling bias in 2006 CDCR COMPAS data**

New commitments	PVWNTs	PVRTCs
Non-institutional releases	Non-institutional releases	Non-institutional releases
SAP- and CCCMS/EOP-targeted inmates	SAP- and CCCMS/EOP-targeted inmates	SAP- and CCCMS/EOP-targeted inmates
All other new commitments	PVWNTs serving less than 6 months	All other PVRTCs
	All other PVWNTs	

 In sample
 Not in sample

Overall, the most concerning sources of bias are the exclusion of “short stayers” (those serving less than six months) and prisoners with the most serious mental health and substance abuse problems (SAP- and CCCMS/EOP-targeted prisoners). The result of this bias is probably an underestimation of the needs of the prison release population. Parole violators serving less than six months have a higher-than-average probability of being “churners”—so-called because they cycle in and out of custody frequently. Blumstein and Beck (2005) conducted a study that found that almost 10% of California prisoners had gone in and out of prison six or more times during a seven year period. These churners, on average, served about eight months in prison during each spell, and averaged only nine months in the community between prison spells.<sup>9</sup> Research suggests that churners are more likely to drug and property offenders, and may have problems with addiction, employability and other issues that set them apart from other parolees (Lynch and Sabol 2001; Taxman, Young and Byrne 2002; Travis 2003). And while the crimes and parole violations committed by these offenders may appear less serious than average, churners, by definition, are responsible for a large number of violations and returns to custody. Thus, in missing many of these offenders, the data leave out an important, and potentially needy, portion of the California correctional population that commands a disproportionate share of California’s correctional resources.

**Figure 3: CDCR admissions and population counts in 2004**



*Source: “California Prisoners and Parolees 2004” (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation 2006b)*

To illustrate this point, Figure 3 above shows that while PVRTCs do not comprise a large portion of the overall CDCR population, they are responsible for a much larger number of movements into and out of prison. In 2004, PVRTCs made up 12% of the CDCR inmate population, but accounted for 48% of all admissions.

<sup>9</sup> In other large states (New York, Illinois and Florida), less than 0.1% of prisoners churned through prison in the same way.

### *Comparing the COMPAS sample with the larger population of institutional parole releases*

As an imperfect test of the effect of sampling bias on the analysis, certain demographic and legal characteristics of the COMPAS analysis sample were compared to the characteristics of a larger population of parolees released between March and July 2006. Table 1 displays the result, effectively comparing:

- New commitments and PVWNTs serving longer than six months who were given the COMPAS between March and July 2006 (the COMPAS sample).

*against*

- All parolees released from CDCR institutions between March and July 2006, regardless of sentence length, including new commitments, PVWNTs and PVRTC. Parolees targeted by CCCMS/EOP and SAP programs were also included, but those released from non-institutional settings were not.

Ninety-four out of 11,140 COMPAS respondents were not identified in CDCR's parole data systems. This is probably due to the fact that some COMPAS respondents were not actually released during the period, and therefore never entered parole databases.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1: Comparing COMPAS analysis sample to the larger population of institutional parole releases**

		<i>COMPAS sample</i>	<i>All institutional parole releases, March-July 2006</i>
N	Number of cases	11,046	24,264
Sex	Female	11%	12%
	Male	89%	88%
Race	White	32%	35%
	Black	27%	27%
	Hispanic	36%	34%
	Asian	1%	1%
	Other/unknown	4%	4%
Age	Under 20	<0.1%	<0.1%
	20-29	36%	31%
	30-39	30%	31%
	40-49	24%	27%
	50 and over	10%	12%

<sup>10</sup> That is, the COMPAS was administered to these respondents, but they were released after August 2006. Source: Personal communication with Carrie Daves, Manager, Parole Automation (CDCR).

Most serious commitment offense	Violent	24%	23%
	Property	32%	34%
	Drugs	32%	33%
	Other/unknown	12%	11%

*Source: Special analysis by Carrie Daves, Manager, Parole Automation (CDCR)*

Overall, the characteristics of COMPAS respondents are quite similar to the characteristics of the larger institutional release population. The COMPAS sample skews slightly younger, and is slightly “less white” and “more Hispanic.” In terms of sex and top commitment offense, the two samples are very comparable.

These results are encouraging, but they should not be interpreted to mean that the COMPAS sample is representative of all institutional releases to parole. While the two groups are similar in terms of these few *observed* measures, they may differ substantially in terms of their *unobserved* characteristics, and differences in unobserved characteristics could signify differences in needs. For example, those in the COMPAS sample could have fewer addiction problems. They could be less educated, or less employable. Unless all pertinent characteristics can be compared across groups, the true nature, and extent, of cross-group difference cannot be determined with certainty.

Below, descriptive results from analysis of the 2006 COMPAS needs data are presented. For the most part, these are simple frequency counts of inmate responses to individual instrument items, and are meant to provide a general overview of the educational, vocational, financial and substance abuse-related needs of respondents. Some respondents refused to answer certain questions, or they did not know the answers. In these instances, no response was reported in the data. Thus, in addition to the raw response breakdowns, the percentage of respondents that answered each item is also reported. Overall, response rates were at or above 90% for the reported items, so the potential biasing effect of non-responding is fairly limited. Nevertheless, rates of missing data should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

Relatedly, it should be noted that many of the items on the COMPAS questionnaire ask respondents to recall events and experiences that occurred in the past. As is the case with all such data collection efforts, certain details of respondents’ pasts may be reported inaccurately, either because of intentional misrepresentation or faulty memory.

## Educational needs of parolees

Table 2 below reports results from COMPAS items which pertain to the educational background of respondents.

**Table 2: Educational needs of the 2006 COMPAS sample (n=11,140)**

<i>COMPAS Item</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of sample responding</i>
Graduated high school or received GED <sup>11</sup>	Yes	56	94
Were you ever suspended or expelled from school?	Yes	60	94
Did you fail or repeat a grade level?	Yes	22	94
Highest completed grade was 8 <sup>th</sup> or lower	Yes	7	94
How often did you have conflicts with teachers at school?	Never	66	94
	Sometimes	28	
	Often	6	
How often did you get into fights while at school?	Never	52	94
	Sometimes	41	
	Often	8	
How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following: Did you always behave yourself when you were in school?	Strongly disagree	4	90
	Disagree	22	
	Not sure	15	
	Agree	47	
	Strongly agree	12	
How many times did you skip classes while in school?	Never	26	94
	Sometimes	51	
	Often	23	
What were your usual grades in high school?	A	5	94
	B	30	
	C	49	
	D	12	
	F	4	

CDCR prisoners released from new commitments and PVWNTs have limited educational backgrounds. Among respondents, the average grade completed was 11<sup>th</sup> (not reported in Table 2). Only 56% reported having ever received a high school diploma or GED, and 7% had not been schooled past the eighth grade. A clear majority (60%) had ever been suspended or expelled from school, and 22% had to repeat a grade. Roughly one-third of respondents (34%) reported “sometimes” or “often” having conflicts with teachers in school. Almost one half (49%) “sometimes” or “often” got into fights in school, and 26% thought that they did not always behave themselves in school. Three-quarters of respondents (74%) “sometimes” or “often”

<sup>11</sup> This measure was calculated from two different COMPAS items. (1) “Did you graduate from high school?” and (2) “Did you receive a GED?”

skipped classes. Finally, 65% of respondents reported their usual high school grades to be Cs, Ds or Fs.

### *Vocational and financial needs of parolees*

Table 3 below reports results from COMPAS items which pertain to the vocational backgrounds of respondents, as well as their self-perceptions of financial need.

**Table 3: Vocational and financial needs of the 2006 COMPAS sample (n=11,140)**

<i>COMPAS Item</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of sample responding</i>
Have you ever been fired from a job?	Yes	35	90
Right now, do you feel you need more training in a new job or career skill?	Yes	67	94
Do you currently have a skill, trade or profession at which you usually find work?	Yes	76	94
Do you frequently get jobs that don't pay more than minimum wage?	Never	61	89
	Sometimes	26	
	Often	13	
How hard is it for you to find a job ABOVE minimum wage compared to others?	Easier	37	94
	Same	29	
	Harder	22	
	Much harder	12	
Right now, if you were to get (or have) a good job how would you rate your chance of being successful?	Good	86	94
	Fair	13	
	Poor	2	
How many times do you have barely enough money to get by?	Never	29	89
	Sometimes	46	
	Often	25	
How often do you have trouble paying bills?	Never	45	89
	Sometimes	40	
	Often	15	
How frequently do you worry about financial survival?	Never	35	89
	Sometimes	38	
	Often	27	
How frequently do you have conflicts with friends/family over money?	Never	70	90
	Sometimes	25	
	Often	6	

Respondents report poor vocational histories and limited job prospects. Over one-third of respondents (35%) reported having been fired from a job. While three-quarters (76%) of respondents claim to have a skill, trade or profession with which they find regular work, two-thirds (67%) still feel they need job training. Almost 40% say that they sometimes or often get jobs that pay less than minimum wage, and only 37% believe that it is easier for them to find a job paying above minimum wage compared to others. Recall also that only 56% of the sample has a high school diploma or GED in hand. Despite these vocational restrictions, a large majority (86%) feels that if they got a “good job,” they would have a good chance of being successful; 13% feel they would have a fair change at success at a good job, and only 2% feel that they would have a poor chance.

Money is a problem for respondents. Over 70% say that sometimes or often, they barely have enough money to get by; 55% sometimes or often have trouble paying bills, and 65% sometimes or often worry about financial survival. Finally, 31% report that they sometimes or often have conflicts with family or friends over money.

### *Substance abuse-related needs of parolees*

Table 4 below reports results from COMPAS items which pertain to respondents' alcohol and drug-related needs.

**Table 4: Substance abuse-related needs of the 2006 COMPAS sample (n=11,140)**

<i>COMPAS Item</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent of sample responding</i>
Committed for drug trafficking (at least one current charge)	Yes	15	100
Committed for drug possession (at least one current charge)	Yes	28	100
Do you think your current/past legal problems are partly because of alcohol or drugs?	Yes	39	94
Did you use heroin, cocaine, crack or methamphetamines as a juvenile?	Yes	30	94
Were you using alcohol when arrested for your current offense?	Yes	18	94
Were you using drugs when arrested for your current offense?	Yes	44	94
Respondent was using alcohol OR drugs when arrested for current offense <sup>12</sup>	Yes	54	94
Is it easy to get drugs in your neighborhood?	Yes	47	90
How many of your friends/acquaintances are taking drugs regularly (more than a couple times a month)?	None	33	90
	Few	38	
	Half	11	
	Most	18	
Are you currently in formal treatment for alcohol or drugs such as counseling, outpatient, inpatient, residential?	Yes	14	94
Have you ever been in formal treatment for alcohol such as counseling, outpatient, inpatient, residential?	Yes	24	94
Have you ever been in formal treatment for drugs such as counseling, outpatient, inpatient, residential?	Yes	40	94
Do you think you would benefit from getting treatment for alcohol?	Yes	17	94
Do you think you would benefit from getting treatment for drugs?	Yes	36	94

Alcohol and drug problems appear to be common among COMPAS respondents. Twenty-eight percent have been committed for drug possession and 15% for drug trafficking.<sup>13</sup> Almost 40%

<sup>12</sup> This measure was calculated from two different COMPAS items. (1) "Were you using alcohol when arrested for your current offense?" and (2) "Were you using drugs when arrested for your current offense?"

<sup>13</sup> These percentages indicate that *at least one* commitment charge was for drug possession or trafficking. Offenders may be committed on more than one charge. For example, if the most serious commitment charge was homicide, but

feel that their current or past legal problems are at least partly due to alcohol and drug use. Thirty percent report having used heroin, crack, cocaine or methamphetamine as a juvenile. Many respondents claim to have been under the influence of alcohol or drugs<sup>14</sup> during the offense that got them into prison—18% were using alcohol during the offense, 44% were using drugs, and when measures were combined, over half (54%) were found to have been under the influence of either alcohol or drugs or both during their offense.

Results also suggest that respondents' environments and peer associations are conducive to ongoing drug use. Almost half (47%) claim that drugs are easy to get in their neighborhoods. Only one-third (33%) report that none of their friends or acquaintances use drugs regularly—more than a couple of times a month. Another 38% say that a few of their friends are regular drug users, while 11% say that half of their friends are regular users, and 18% say that most of their friends are using regularly. In other words, about three out of ten (29%) respondents report that half or more of their friends and acquaintances are regular drug users.

Only a small percentage (14%) of respondents are currently in formal treatment for alcohol or drugs, although larger numbers claim to have ever participated in formal treatment for alcohol (24%) or drugs (40%). Many respondents believe that they would benefit from treatment. Just over 17% feel that they would benefit from treatment for alcohol, and 36% feel that they would benefit from drug treatment. Again, inmates targeted by the SAP program—offenders with serious addiction issues—were excluded from these data, so the substance abuse needs reported in Table 4 likely underestimate the true extent of substance abuse-related needs among prisoners due to be released onto parole.

In order to further explore the issue of treatment participation in prison, Table 5 below breaks down COMPAS items pertaining to current and past substance abuse treatment by relevant demographic and drug- and alcohol-related characteristics of the sample. This provides a general overview of treatment engagement by offender characteristics. In other words, what types of offenders are more likely to be in a substance abuse treatment program while in prison?

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the offender was also convicted of drug trafficking, this offender would still count towards the drug trafficking measure in Table 3. The percentages in Table 3, therefore, do *not* accurately indicate the numbers of respondents whose top charges were drug-related—only those whose commitment offenses contained at least one drug charge.

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear *which* drug or combination of drugs they were using.

**Table 5: Participation in substance abuse treatment, by offender characteristics**

	<i>Response</i>	<i>Percent currently in formal alcohol or drug treatment</i>	<i>Percent ever in alcohol treatment</i>	<i>Percent ever in drug treatment</i>
Gender	Male	12	23	38
	Female	26	30	55
Age	16-21	8	11	25
	22-30	11	19	35
	31-40	14	26	44
	41 and older	17	30	46
Has high school diploma or GED	Yes	14	25	42
	No	13	22	38
Committed for drug trafficking or possession	Yes	17	26	51
	No	11	23	33
Do you think you would benefit from getting treatment for alcohol?	Yes	25	54	52
	No	11	17	37
Do you think you would benefit from getting treatment for drugs?	Yes	25	33	61
	No	7	19	28
Have you ever been in formal treatment for alcohol?	Yes	24	N/A	N/A
	No	10	N/A	N/A
Have you ever been in formal treatment for drugs?	Yes	22	N/A	N/A
	No	8	N/A	N/A
Do you think your current/past legal problems are partly because of alcohol or drugs?	Yes	18	37	53
	No	11	16	32
Were you using alcohol when arrested for your current offense?	Yes	19	48	42
	No	12	18	39
Were you using drugs when arrested for your current offense?	Yes	20	29	58
	No	8	20	25
Did you use heroin, cocaine, crack or methamphetamines as a juvenile?	Yes	18	30	56
	No	12	21	33

There are differences in past and present treatment engagement by sex and age. In this sample, women are more likely than men to currently be in substance abuse treatment (26% vs. 12%), to have ever been in alcohol treatment (30% vs. 23%), and to have ever been in drug treatment (55% vs. 38%). Age and likelihood of current and past treatment appear to be positively

correlated; older respondents are more likely to have ever been in treatment, and to currently be in treatment.

Having a high school diploma or GED does *not* seem to be associated with the likelihood of past or present substance abuse treatment. Respondents who finished high school are only slightly more likely than those who did not to report past or present treatment,

Importantly, Table 5 shows that among offenders who think that they need treatment, program participation remains low. Among the 17% who think that alcohol treatment would help them, over half (54%) report participating in alcohol treatment at some time in their lives, but only one-quarter (25%) report currently being in a treatment program.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, among the 36% who feel that drug treatment would help them, 61% report participating in drug treatment at some time in their lives, but only about one-quarter (25%) report currently being in treatment.

Respondents who exhibit other indications of substance abuse problem also report low rates of treatment participation. Seventeen percent of those who had been committed for drug trafficking or possession reported currently being in treatment; 26% had ever been in alcohol treatment and more than half (51%) had ever been in drug treatment. Among those who say that their current and past legal problems are partly because of alcohol and drugs, only 18% are currently in treatment, although 37% had ever been in alcohol treatment and 53% had ever been in drug treatment. Only 19% of those who had been using alcohol during their current offense report being in treatment, and 20% of those who had been using drugs during their current offense were in treatment. Among respondents who used “hard drugs” (heroin, cocaine, crack, methamphetamine) as juveniles, 18% report currently being in treatment.

### *Conclusion*

The COMPAS is a welcome and useful improvement to the CDCR’s inmate and parolee needs assessment procedures. While the agency is still working out some issues around data collection, the COMPAS data can eventually serve as a reliable resource for program planning and case management.

This analysis of 2006 COMPAS data suggests that new commitments and PVWNTs serving longer than six months in CDCR institutions appear to be a needy group of offenders. They generally report limited educational histories, poor vocational prospects, chronic financial problems, and high rates of drug and alcohol involvement. Moreover, few of those who appear to need treatment for substance abuse report participating in appropriate programming while in prison.

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<sup>15</sup> The “Are you currently in treatment?” measure combines alcohol and drug treatment programs, so it is not possible to determine whether an individual respondent is in an alcohol treatment program or a drug treatment program. Thus, there is a possibility that some respondents who report needing alcohol treatment are actually in a drug treatment program, and that some respondents who report needing drug treatment are actually in an alcohol treatment program.

That said, the data are biased, excluding those who have the shortest stays in custody, and those with the most serious mental health and substance abuse problems (CCCMS/EOP and SAP-targeted inmates). Some research suggests that short stayers, particularly those who frequently cycle into and out of custody (i.e., “churners”), may be an extremely needy population—particularly with regard to employability and addiction issues. Furthermore, while short stayers do not comprise a large proportion of the overall prison population, they make up a disproportionately large share of people being released onto parole. Thus, the results presented in this document probably understate the true extent of California parolee needs, and the degree to which these needs are understated is unknown. At best, readers can refer to the results presented in Tables 2 through 5 as “lowball estimates” of parolee needs.

To address the limitations of this analysis, CDCR should attempt to administer the COMPAS to everyone being released from custody, regardless of where they are being held, the length of their stay, and the probability that they will participate in a state mental health or substance abuse program. (As mentioned earlier, plans are already in place to address some of these limitations.) The status of each respondent should also be coded clearly, so that analysts and researchers can clearly distinguish between new commitments, PVWNTs and PVRTC. Relatedly, data administrators should include a measure of sentence length in the COMPAS data so that characteristics of long- and short-stayers might be compared.

There are a few measures that are weak in the current COMPAS data, and they should be improved in future data collection efforts. There is currently no measure indicating respondents’ race in the data. The measures indicating commitment charges also need to be better distinguished. In the data, there are a series of binary (yes/no) indicators about various charge types that the respondent was committed for, but there is no indication of the top charge type, or top charge severity. Race and charge data could be added by using respondent CDC numbers to interrogate CDCR data systems. In fact, a number of measures describing commitment status could be attached to the COMPAS dataset in this way, and with some manipulation by CDCR staff, others could be calculated. These measures include:

- Age at first California prison commitment
- Number of prior prison terms
- Number of prior original prison commitments
- Sex offender status (i.e., sex registration flag)
- Whether the respondent is a serious and/or violent offender
- Number of prior serious or violent offenses
- “Strike count” (pertaining to “three strikes” laws)

With these adjustments and additions, COMPAS data collected in the future can provide a far more accurate depiction of the needs of parolees in California.

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