



# Breach of policy escalates to corruption

## Guidance material – integrity scenario

This guidance material presents an ‘integrity scenario’ which is intended to assist in public sector training regarding integrity risks, exploring how minor misconduct can evolve into serious corruption when left unaddressed. It follows a corrections officer who initially bends the rules to help inmates cope with a smoking ban but gradually becomes involved in a larger contraband operation. The scenario highlights the importance of maintaining clear boundaries, effective screening procedures and ongoing support for staff in maintaining integrity.

### The situation

A public custodial correctional facility in Victoria implemented a comprehensive no-smoking policy as part of a state-wide health initiative. The ban applied to all inmates, staff and visitors on facility grounds. To support this transition, the facility offered nicotine replacement therapy, including patches, to inmates for a limited time.

As the support program ended, many inmates struggled with nicotine withdrawal. A corrections officer, who had worked at the facility for over a decade, empathised with the inmates’ difficulties. The officer had previously been a smoker and understood the challenges of quitting.

### How did the misconduct start?

Initially, the corrections officer occasionally turned a blind eye when inmates traded their allotted nicotine patches. The officer rationalised this as a harmless way to help inmates manage their addiction without compromising overall security.

Over time, the officer began to pocket unused patches from the medical dispensary, intending to distribute them to inmates who were struggling the most. This marked the beginning of the officer’s misconduct, violating policy and facility protocols, and misappropriating medical supplies.



## How did it escalate?

Once inmates discovered the corrections officer as a new supply source, competition intensified for the limited patches available. Some inmates offered small favours or canteen items in exchange. The corrections officer, facing financial pressures at home, began accepting these offerings. This created a dangerous precedent, blurring the line between the officer's duty and personal interests.

The facility's management had underestimated the impact of the smoking ban. They failed to provide ongoing support for inmates and staff, creating an environment where informal solutions to nicotine addiction seemed necessary, while staff shortages led to reduced supervision and less frequent contraband searches.

The situation escalated when an inmate with connections outside the facility proposed a more organised operation. They offered the corrections officer significant financial incentives to smuggle in larger quantities of nicotine patches. Faced with mounting personal debts, the officer agreed. The corrections officer began exploiting security blind spots and manipulating patrol schedules to facilitate the smuggling operation. As the scheme grew, it involved multiple inmates and began to include other contraband items beyond nicotine patches.

Another corrections officer, recently transferred to the facility, began to notice inconsistencies in contraband confiscation reports. They observed that certain areas of the facility consistently had fewer reported incidents, despite being known trouble spots. The new corrections officer also noticed the unusually friendly relationship between the corrupt officer and several inmates.

The new corrections officer approached the facility's integrity officer with their concerns. This triggered a more thorough investigation, including a review of security camera footage. Suspicious patterns in the corrections officer's behaviour and movements within the facility led to increased surveillance, confirming their corrupt activities.

As a result of the investigation, the corrections officer was immediately suspended and later charged with corruption offences. Several inmates involved in the scheme lost privileges and faced additional sentences. The facility underwent a comprehensive security review, leading to stricter contraband detection measures and an emphasis on identifying emerging corruption vulnerabilities to prevent similar incidents in the future. The case attracted media attention, damaging public trust in the correctional system's ability to maintain security and uphold the law. It prompted a broader review of smoking bans and support programs in custodial correctional facilities across Victoria.

The new corrections officer was commended for their integrity and played a key role in improving the facility's anti-corruption measures.





## Lessons learned

- Develop comprehensive, long-term support strategies for policy changes that could significantly impact individuals' daily lives and wellbeing.
- Improve staff support programs, including financial counselling and stress management, to address vulnerabilities that may lead to corruption.
- Conduct ongoing training on ethical decision-making, using integrity scenarios to show the gradual nature of ethical compromises.
- Strengthen anonymous reporting mechanisms for to encourage early detection of misconduct.
- Regularly review and update technologies and systems, to stay ahead of evolving issues and ensure proactive identification of trends or concerns.
- Emphasise the crucial role of integrity among public servants in identifying and reporting misconduct to uphold the standards of the correctional system.

This product was prepared based on findings from research and stakeholder consultations from IBAC's 2024 Public Sector Strategic Assessment. It is representative and created for educational purposes only. Any resemblance to real persons, organisations, or incidents is purely coincidental.

## If you experience or suspect public sector corruption, report it to IBAC



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