



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

MEDIA RELEASE

Report Name: ***Funeral Attendances by Incarcerated People in Western Australia***

The Inspector of Custodial Services has released a report on funeral attendance by incarcerated people in WA.

Attending a funeral is an important aspect of enabling a prisoner to maintain a connection with their family and community. For Aboriginal people who have a lower life expectancy and significant cultural obligations to attend funerals, failing to attend can be damaging to the persons mental wellbeing.

In September 2012, the Department of Corrective Services' policy governing funeral attendance was changed with the intention of saving \$500,000, a 50 per cent cut in expenditure on funerals. Such a sharp cut to one area of expenditure, should have been preceded by a thorough analysis of the impact of the changes and anticipated cost savings, but this did not occur.

In launching the report, the Inspector Neil Morgan said:

The Department was unable to substantiate claims about cost savings. It has no discrete budget for funeral attendance, nor any capacity to readily identify the costs associated with attending funerals. As a result, the Department had no means of determining how much funeral attendance was costing, how much could be saved, or how effective the changes had been in achieving any savings.

The Department should have been able to explain the costs of funerals and how the anticipated savings had been quantified. Unfortunately, its efforts proved inconsistent, incoherent and unpersuasive.

In addition to the inability to substantiate cost savings, the Department did not adequately understand the impact of changes to funeral attendance policies, particularly in regard to the impact on Aboriginal people. Mr Morgan said that:

In undertaking these policy changes the Department failed to follow its own guidance on assessing the impacts of new policy on Aboriginal people. Furthermore, the current policy does not appear to comply with whole of government substantive equality requirements.

The current policy ignores the well documented importance of acknowledging kinship ties in Aboriginal culture and therefore goes against a recommendation regarding funeral attendance made in the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Mr Morgan acknowledged that there will always be limitations to accessing funerals while incarcerated, however noted that a governing system for attendance needs to be fair, equitable, transparent and flexible. He notes that the current policy does not achieve this.

The report is available on the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services website at (<http://www.custodialinspector.wa.gov.au/go/reviews>).
