

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON 15 June 2021

Older prisoners

It is not unique to Western Australia that the prison population is aging; it is a trend seen across Australia and internationally. In WA, prisoners who are 50 years and over make up about 12 per cent of all those in custody.

In a report released today by the Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan said that people in the community aged 50 years and over might not consider themselves older. But there is research indicating a 10-year age differential between the overall health of prisoners and the general public, meaning prisoners' needs are higher at a younger chronological age. Older prisoners were more likely to have poorer physical and mental health, requiring higher-level of care and support.

In the report, Mr Ryan noted that prisons' regimes and infrastructure tended to be geared towards younger, able-bodied prisoners, despite the very different age-related needs of the older prisoner cohort.

Many older prisoners are above the age of retirement. Criminogenic and treatment programs are often targeted at reducing recidivism in younger prisoners. Recreational and sporting activities are often geared towards those who are able-bodied. With these issues in mind, reasonable adjustments to the regime are required to ensure that older prisoners are not routinely excluded from activities like employment, programs, or recreation.

Mr Ryan found the Department did not currently have a strategic framework or specific policy for the age-related needs and management of older prisoners. However, the Department had accepted this as a recommendation recognising the need for extensive research in order to determine a 'model that will provide optimal solutions to accommodating older prisoners.'

Despite the absence of a strategic vision, Mr Ryan said that the Department of Justice was investing in new infrastructure for an Assisted Care Unit (ACU) at Casuarina Prison. The ACU is expected to meet the needs of older male prisoners requiring the highest level of care, equivalent to aged care accommodation in the community. Mr Ryan welcomed this investment reporting that the ACU is also likely to alleviate some of the demand on the Infirmary at Casuarina and allow for better servicing of prisoner patients there. Regrettably, he found that planning for the needs of older women was still to be addressed.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For Further Media Information:

The Inspector, Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on 15 June 2021 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.