



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Justice**
Corrective Services

Response to Review:

Prisoner Access to Dental Care in Western Australia

September 2021

Version 1.1

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Response Overview

Introduction

The snapshot series review into *Prisoner Access to Dental Care in Western Australian* (the Dental Review) was announced by the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) on 16 March 2021. As per usual process, a wide range of documentation and access to systems, policies, processes, custodial facilities including staff, prisoners and contractors were made available to OICS upon request for the purpose of the review.

On 11 August 2021, the Department of Justice (the Department) received the draft report on the Dental Review from OICS for review and comment. The draft report has highlighted key findings and made six recommendations. The Department has reviewed the draft report and provides comments and responses to the recommendations as below.

Appendix A contains further comments linked to sections in the report for the Inspector's attention and consideration.

Review Comments

The Department appreciates the work undertaken by OICS on the Dental Review and thanks the Inspector for the opportunity to respond to the key findings and initiate improvements as required.

Dental services to prisoners in custody are provided by the Department of Health's Dental Health Services (DHS) branch through an established Memorandum of Understanding with DHS. DHS is also responsible for the provision of publicly funded dental care to the wider community based on set eligibility criteria. Dental services in prisons is largely dependent on the availability of DHS resources which is often balanced with the high demand for dental services in the community.

The Department acknowledges the research information within the report that highlights the causes for people in custody having high levels of dental health needs, including: 'for some people, prison is the only time they see a dentist' and prisoners have poorer oral health compared to people in the wider community. This could be due low socio-economic backgrounds and limited access to low cost dental services, higher rates of using both legal and illicit substances which can negatively affect a person's dental health, and linkages between dental disease and mental ill health noting that 40% of people coming into custody report having had a mental health condition at some stage in their life.

The Department agrees with the Inspector that more needs to be done to treat and prevent dental problems and is supportive of the key findings, however, the Department is also mindful of the resourcing challenges faced in recruiting specialist medical professionals, including dentists, within Australia and across the globe.

The Department is committed to improving current practices relating to the facilitation of dental services provided by DHS, and will continue to work with the Department of Health and DHS to secure additional resources for an increased level of dental care being provided to prisoners.

Response to Recommendations

1 The Government should commit additional resources to increase the number of DHS dental teams accessible to Western Australian prisons.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

The Department notes the recommendation for Government to commit to additional Dental Health Services (DHS) resources accessible to Western Australian prisons.

In support of this, the Department has written to the Department of Health (DoH) advising them of the additional demand for dental services in WA prisons and to seek their support for additional dental resources to adequately service the prison population.

2 Regularly analyse and evaluate DHS data to ensure adequate levels and equity of services, in regard to issues such as: demand, waitlists, gender, sentence status, security rating, and location.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: 31 December 2022

Response:

Proper analysis and evaluation of dental services across prisons is dependent on regular reports from DHS, with accurate, meaningful data.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding, DHS is required to provide the Department with quarterly patient activity reports. These reports were provided on an ad-hoc basis in 2020 due to workload and COVID-19 restrictions. Although DHS has agreed to provide regular reports in line with the MOU going forward, it is resource-dependent.

The Department's Health Services meet with the DHS management team to discuss operational items such as their resourcing, frequency of clinics, management of wait lists, etc., however any proper assessment of the demand and service provision is dependent on timely reporting and accuracy of the data.

The Department will work with DHS to refine the reports being provided. This will enable further analysis and evaluation of the provision of dental services.

3 Regularly review and evaluate dental service provision across the entire prison estate.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

This Recommendation is linked to the Department's response and actions identified to address Recommendation Two above.

4 Increase the number of Aboriginal Health Workers in prisons across Western Australia.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle, Subject to Funding
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: 31 December 2022

Response:

The Department supports the employment of Aboriginal Health Workers in prisons across Western Australia. Whilst previous attempts at seeking funding for this purpose were unsuccessful, the Department will consider developing a new business case for consideration.

5 Streamline vetting processes to ensure dental staff can commence in a timely manner and that a pool of relief dental staff can be maintained.

Level of Acceptance: Not Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

Recruitment of dental staff falls under the remit of Dental Health Services within the Department of Health. As per response to Recommendation One, the Department has written to the Department of Health to initiate discussions to improve the current arrangements with DHS and make suggestions about establishing a pool of relief dental staff to draw from as required.

The Department of Justice is responsible for the screening process. Application forms are generally expedited to the Department's screening branch without delay. The time taken to complete the screening process can vary based on complexities and level of background checks required for individuals. The Department's screening and vetting processes however have been streamlined and are deemed to be effective with an average turnaround timeframe of approximately five days.

6 Review the requirement for prisoners to pay for escort costs when accessing private dental treatment.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: Completed

Response:

The Department has undertaken a review of Policy Directive 16 Provision of Health Services and Additional Medical Costs and implemented new policy COPP 6.1 Prisoner Access to Health Care.

The Department's position in COPP 6.1 is that Prisoners are eligible for routine dental examinations and treatments that are available to the general public through the WA Public Health System.

Prosthetic and/or orthodontic treatment (including, but not limited to cosmetic treatment, crowns, bridges and wires, and cost of staff time incurred) are available at the prisoner's own expense.

Prisoners may request private health consultation and treatment, including private dental appointments provided the prisoner meets the associated costs. Transport cost is payable by the prisoner as appropriate.