

MEDIA RELEASE

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2023 Inspection of Bandyup Women's Prison

Bandyup Women's Prison was taking important steps to create a women-centred model of care, aligned with the Department of Justice's recently developed women's strategic framework, a report released today by the Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, has found.

"We have stated on many occasions the importance of having detailed operational or business plans that are linked to a broad organisational strategic plan. It was very positive, therefore, to see evidence of this in the connection between the Department's *Better Futures* strategic framework for women in custody, and Bandyup's local operational plans," Mr Ryan said.

During this eighth inspection of the women's prison, Mr Ryan found the recognition of women's distinct experiences and needs had led to the beginnings of some local initiatives to embed a women-focussed, trauma-informed approach. This included making changes to how staff addressed women's behaviour, introducing whole of family visits days, and delivery of the Relationships WA *Leave Safe, Stay Safe Program* for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.

A significant development in Bandyup's move towards a more trauma-informed model of care was the opening of the Bindi Bindi mental health unit in July 2021. The inspection found Bindi Bindi was providing a much-needed step-up and step-down option for women managing a serious mental health illness, helping them re-enter the community with improved mental wellbeing.

However, Mr Ryan warned that the objectives of Bindi Bindi were at risk of being undermined by chronic staffing shortages:

"In Bindi Bindi the most significant challenges have been the recruitment and retention of specialist clinical staff and maintaining a cohort of specially trained custodial staff for daily operations. Nonetheless, we found staff remained committed to doing their best to meet the needs of the women with the limited resources available."

Infrastructure limitations were also found to be a barrier to implementing a trauma-informed focus, mirroring the findings of several previous inspection reports. Despite the Department closing previous infrastructure recommendations, Mr Ryan noted that inadequate progress had been made.

"Aside from the completion of the much-needed Bindi Bindi unit, there has been limited improvement to infrastructure in recent years. Staff and service providers continue to compete for space, the visits centre for women to reconnect with children and family is poor, accommodation areas are crowded, and the education centre limits participation. The lack of investment at Bandyup is not supportive of the prison's goals to be able to provide a more comprehensive women-focussed service," Mr Ryan said.

Despite these ongoing challenges, and increasing population pressures, the inspection highlighted a range of positive findings at the prison, including:

- An increased focus on the distinct needs for First Nations women in custody

- The primary health team continuing to deliver a good service that focussed on the needs of women
- An increased focus on the needs of women living with disabilities, supported by an occupational therapist
- Improved focus on family reunification with the appointment of a dedicated Family Services Coordinator
- A new education team had developed a diverse, relevant, and engaging program for students, and
- Prison industries continued to expand roles to give women more diverse and relevant work experiences.

The report also found Bandyup's role as the first smoke-free prison in Western Australia had uncovered some important lessons for other facilities. Despite the trial's initial success, a key lesson learned was the need to fully engage with, and properly resource, prison health staff to lead and support what is essentially a health issue. The trial became permanent at Bandyup in April 2023, before being rolled-out across all women's prison in early 2024.

The inspection report made 10 recommendations to the Department on issues relating to infrastructure, mental health, digital technology, and access to adequate dental care. Of these, two were supported by the Department, four were supported in principle, three were supported as current practices or projects. A recommendation relating to increased dental services was noted.

The Department's full response to the report and recommendations can be viewed in Appendix C of the inspection report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Eamon, will be available for comment from 12 noon on 23 January 2025 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.

The full report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au).