

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON 10 APRIL 2025

People in custody requiring crisis care

A report released today by Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, has found that crisis care units are not meeting the needs of prisoners who are suffering acute mental health issues.

The review focussed on the state's seven crisis care units and found them to be under significant pressure to meet demand. The key causes were found to stem from outdated infrastructure, increased prisoner population, and more people in custody who are at risk of self-harm or suicide.

This has put additional pressure on mental health staff to discharge prisoners from crisis care units as soon as possible to free up beds. Releasing the report's findings, Mr Ryan urged immediate action to address the identified issues:

With the soaring adult prison population, which stands at just over 8,400, the extraordinary demands on mental health staff and crisis care infrastructure are only likely to increase rather than diminish.

The report identified several prisoners who had spent a significant period in crisis care, which not only compounds capacity constraints, but also undermines prisoner wellbeing. Some of these prisoners would be better managed in a forensic hospital setting, such as the Frankland Centre. However, the Frankland Centre has a limited capacity of only 30 beds and can only accommodate around 10 patients from prisons at any one time. Data shows there is a significant shortfall in meeting the needs of even the most acutely unwell prisoners.

Mr Ryan said the report also found many prisoners reported feeling worse in crisis care:

Prisoners said they experienced feelings of loneliness and isolation because of extended periods of time in cell and being managed on separate unlock regimes. Some reported not wanting to reveal their struggles to avoid placement in crisis care units, feeling it was akin to punishment.

While mental health and therapeutic professional support was available to prisoners in crisis care, the report details how this was also limited due to critical shortages of mental health nurses, counsellors, and psychiatrists.

Physical design of crisis care facilities was found to not support psychological wellbeing. Units were noisy, lacked stimulation, colour and natural lighting which can ultimately affect mood and wellbeing. Dayrooms and recreation yards within crisis care units provided very basic amenities, with little access to meaningful activities or nature.

The report also documents a couple of exceptions to this, with Bandyup Women's Prison and Melaleuca Women's Prison having made efforts to soften the appearance of their crisis care units. Also notable, is the Bindi Bindi Unit in Bandyup Women's Prison as a specialist unit for women in crisis. There is also redevelopment work underway in Casuarina Prison which will include an upgrade to the infirmary and a new specialist mental health unit.

Eamon Ryan

Inspector of Custodial Services

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on 10 April 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).