



## Access to chaplaincy and faith services

April 2025

*The Inspector of Custodial Services and staff acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this country, and their continuing connection to land, waters, and community throughout Australia. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders, be they past or present.*

## **Access to chaplaincy and faith services**

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## Inspector's Overview

*Lessons to be learnt that might improve the range and quality of chaplaincy services available to people in custody.*

People in custody have a well-established right, enshrined in international human rights instruments and standards, to freely practice their chosen religious and spiritual beliefs.

In Western Australia this is governed by relevant Department of Justice legislation and policy. In practice, people in custody rely on custodial facilities having an effective framework and adequate resources in place to facilitate their right to religious freedom.

The provision of chaplaincy and pastoral care is the centrepiece of the framework that provides religious and spiritual support to people in custody. This service is provided through two separate contracts for the provision of chaplaincy services in Western Australian prisons held by Serco Acacia and the Department of Justice with the Council of Churches Western Australia Inc.

Although these are separate contracts, as detailed later in this report, they essentially cover similar services involving the provision of pastoral care and chaplaincy to people in custody and staff. Both contracts are high value totalling over \$13 million over the term of the agreements. The Department's contract is currently up for renewal, while Serco has recently exercised an extension option for a further two years.

During our Review, we received positive feedback about the day-to-day provision of services under each contract. Accordingly, this review is not critical of the quality or genuineness of the services provided to prisoners and staff under both contracts. In fact, quite the opposite is true, most staff and prisoners we engaged with spoke highly of the pastoral care and support they received from individual chaplains who work in custodial facilities, but many also said that chaplains struggled to meet the demands and expectations on their services.

But the feedback was not all positive. We heard concerns from many non-Christian faith providers about the difficulties they faced in obtaining security approvals to attend prisons and gaining regular access to provide religious supports. People in custody of non-Christian beliefs also spoke of the difficulties they faced engaging with religious leaders from their faith group and practicing their religious beliefs while in custody.

The terms of both contracts create an obligation to provide chaplaincy services that are equitable for all religions and faiths, and those with no religious beliefs. Although the Council of Churches Western Australia Inc. is an ecumenical collaboration between several Christian churches, representatives advised us that they provided pastoral care and support to people in custody of all faiths and those who do not have a religious affiliation. We have no reason to doubt that this is the case, yet many people in custody said they wanted to have contact with a chaplain from their own faith group. Likewise, most non-Christian faith providers we spoke to expressed concerns about their ability to access prisons and provide support to people in custody. This inequity needs to be addressed.

It is accepted that chaplains engage with, and provide support to, all people in custody regardless of their beliefs. But the core of the problem seems to be that, either by design or default, the current contractual arrangements in effect limit the role of prison chaplains to individuals of Christian faith.

What is clear from this Review is that non-Christian faith providers are viewed entirely in the context of them providing religious ministry to individuals of their own faith, rather than the broader definition of chaplaincy, providing welfare and support to whomever needs it or asks for it.

The role of a prison chaplain should be open to people of different beliefs other than Christianity.

Both contracts include various oversight and governance mechanisms, requiring regular performance reporting and monitoring. This is consistent with what ought to be expected in contracts of this value. We did not undertake a detailed review of the adequacy of these performance measures, instead we looked at whether they were being met by the contract monitoring processes in place within the Department and Serco. We established that some of these oversight requirements were not being met, or even could not be met, because the systems and procedures were not in place or were ineffective. That is not to say there was no contract monitoring, just that the agreed measures were often not in place or were not being implemented. Again, the identified deficiencies need to be addressed.

The key takeaway from our Review is that the Department's religious and faith services contract is now due for renewal, and the Serco contract is due to be renewed in the next year or so. This provides an opportunity to address many of the governance issues identified in our Review, and, in doing so, ensure that adequate and measurable performance monitoring mechanisms are in place and followed. Likewise, it is an opportunity to address the challenges and inequities faced by non-Christian faith providers and people in custody, by way of considering possible means by which they could be included under the umbrella of contracts for the provision of a broad range of chaplaincy services for all custodial facilities across Western Australia.

A final note. In accordance with our usual practice, in October 2024 we sent the first draft of this report to the Department of Justice, Serco Acacia, and the Council of Churches Western Australia Inc. for consideration and comment. After considering each of the responses received, we undertook further work, including having several meetings with key representatives, and updated the contents of our report. A second draft was provided to the parties on 28 January 2025 for consideration, (responses received are attached at Appendix C, D, and E). This report reflects our consideration of all these submissions and the additional work undertaken by us.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the support and cooperation received throughout the Review from key personnel at the Department of Justice, Serco (the private operator of Acacia Prison), and the Council of Churches Western Australia Inc.

I acknowledge the contribution and hard work of the team in our office who were involved in undertaking this Review. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Kelly Jackson for her hard work in leading this Review and as principal analyst and drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan  
**Inspector of Custodial Services**

16 April 2025

# Executive Summary

## Background

The right to practice religion or spirituality is a fundamental human right for people in custody. It is enshrined in various international standards and rules – for example Standard G(48) of the *United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty* and Rules 65 and 66 of the *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*. These instruments state people in custody should have the opportunity to hold, adopt, and practice their chosen religious or spiritual belief. It is commonly known as the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

In Western Australia the obligation to provide these opportunities and freedoms to people in custody is enacted within legislation. Section 95E of the *Prisons Act 1981* outlines the right of prisoners to engage in the observance or practice of religious or spiritual beliefs and to receive religious or spiritual guidance from recognised advisors or practitioners. This right is subject to restriction only for the security, good order, and management of the facility or population. The *Young Offenders Act 1994* is less explicit with Section 181 conferring authority on the Commissioner of Corrective Services to develop operational rules for the management of detention centres and detained young people.

These Acts are operationalised by various Department of Justice (the Department) policies and procedures which contain standards dedicated to the provision and management of religious and spiritual services, resources, and requirements.

## Christianity remains dominant, but other beliefs are growing in affiliation

In 2021, at the time of the most recent census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported the most common religious affiliations across Australia were:

- Christianity (43.9%)
- No religion (38.9%)
- Islam (3.2%)
- Hinduism (2.7%)
- Buddhism (2.4%).

While Christianity remains the most common affiliation, its prevalence has almost halved since 1971, from 86.2% to 43.9% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; see Figure 1). The fastest growing religious affiliations in 2021 included Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism. This has been attributed to increased immigration from Southern and Central Asia. Secular and spiritual beliefs including Atheism, Agnosticism, New Ageism, and Own or Other Spiritual Beliefs accounted for 1.2% of Australians.

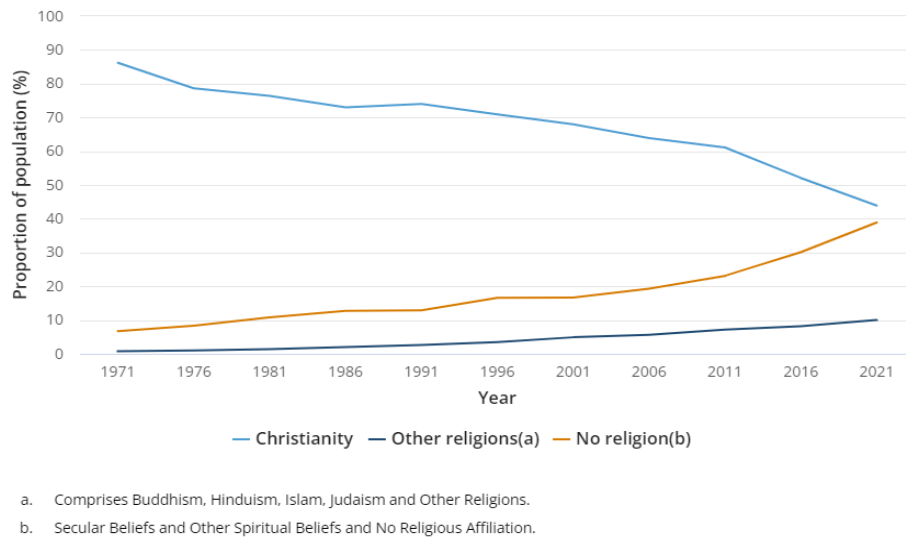


Figure 1: Religious affiliation across Australia is shifting (ABS, 2022).

Australians are becoming more religiously and spiritually diverse. This trend is also reflected within the Western Australian prison population where most people on their intake into custody do not identify with a mainstream religion. In 2023, 62% of those received into Western Australian prisons reported having no religious affiliation or secular or spiritual beliefs (including Agnosticism, Confucianism, New Ageism, and Taoism). This increased from 57% in 2013. Similarly, the prevalence of mainstream religions other than Christianity have steadily increased (3% in 2013 to 5% in 2023) while Christianity has consistently decreased over the same time (from 33% to 27%).

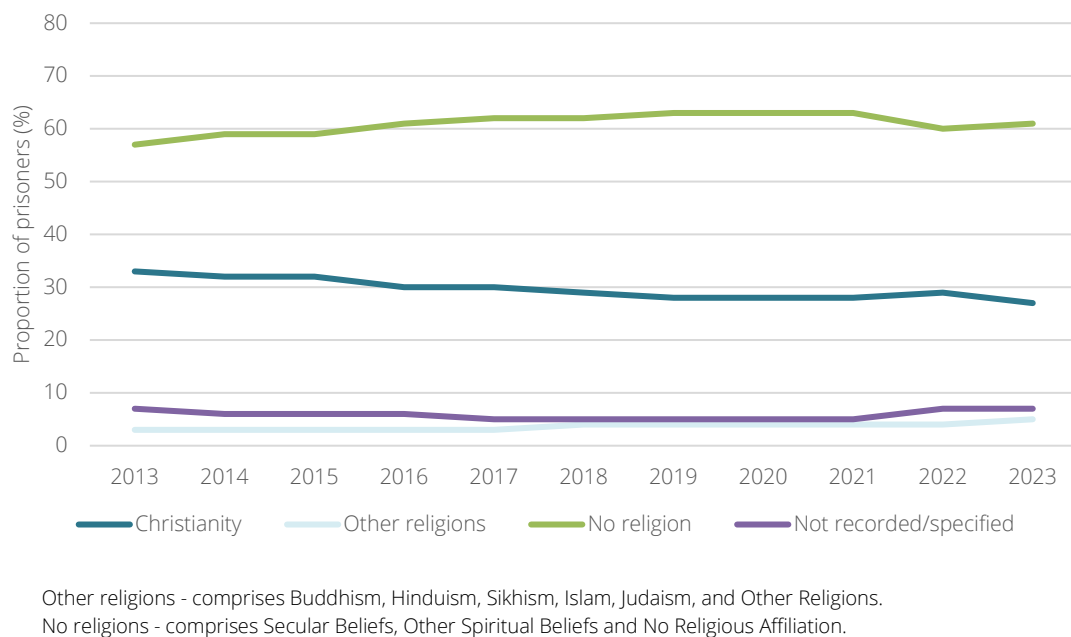


Figure 2: Intake data across the custodial estate consistently shows most people have no religious affiliation (2013–2023).



In Western Australia, people’s religious affiliation is only recorded on their initial intake into custody (DOJ, 2023; DOJ, 2021A; DOJ, 2021B). It is not re-recorded when they transfer to another custodial facility. If a person in custody wants to alter their religious affiliation, departmental policy stipulates this can be achieved by completing a form that is provided to chaplaincy and approved by security. However, we found prisoners may also undergo an assessment by chaplaincy to determine the authenticity of their request, particularly around the time of cultural events. This is not aligned with departmental policy as it is inappropriate for chaplaincy to determine the authenticity of prisoner requests.<sup>1</sup>

Staff and chaplains advised us due to current population pressures and staff shortages, intake processes were often delayed, inconsistent, and cursory. This appears to be supported by the steady increase in the number of people in custody whose religious affiliation was ‘not recorded’ or ‘not specified’, rising from 5% in 2021 to 7% in 2023. Therefore, caution is warranted interpreting this data as there is a growing ‘unknown’ rate.

### A sole service provider for all religious and pastoral care services

Within the Western Australian custodial estate, over \$13 million is allocated to provide religious services and pastoral care to people in custody and staff. This is divided into two contracts which, although determined by differing tender processes, are both held by one organisation, the Council of Churches Western Australia (CCWA). These contracts differ in terms of timeframes, focus, remit, resourcing, and monitoring.

<p><b>Council of Churches WA – Department of Justice</b></p> <p>Effective: October 2020 until September 2025</p> <p><b>Total Value: \$11,964,088</b></p> <p>Including Goods and Services Tax</p>	<p><b>Council of Churches WA – Serco Acacia</b></p> <p>Effective: May 2021 until May 2024</p> <p>Serco exercised the option to renew for another two years during our review.</p> <p><b>Total Value: \$1,043,490.80</b></p> <p>Including Goods and Services Tax</p>
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The CCWA is a Christian organisation bringing together Christian denominations with an ecumenical focus. CCWA has been involved in prison chaplaincy for over 20 years and has three core roles:

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<sup>1</sup> In response to a draft copy of this review, CCWA acknowledged the inappropriateness of an assessment to determine the authenticity of a prisoner’s request to change their religious affiliation. However, it also advised that on occasion, early within the contract, this did occur. It has subsequently made efforts to address this. Similarly, in its response, the Department advised us its policy does not require chaplains to conduct this assessment. However, it did acknowledge the Change of Religion Notification form included language that could be interpreted as requiring that practice. As such, the Department is now considering amendments to the form to ensure relevant processes are applied.

advocating for Christian unity; providing religious and pastoral services to prisons and hospitals; and arranging disaster relief (CCWA, 2024). Member Churches listed by the CCWA in its tender for the Department's contract include:

- Anglican Church
- Church of Christ Wembley Downs
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Ethiopian Orthodox Church
- Greek Orthodox Church
- Lutheran Church of Australia
- Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
- Roman Catholic Church
- Romanian Orthodox Church
- Salvation Army St George Indian Orthodox Church
- Syrian Orthodox Church
- Uniting Church<sup>2</sup>

All CCWA contractual obligations are overseen by its General Secretary who is assisted in their role by the Chaplaincy Coordinator who manages prison and hospital chaplains. Each prison is overseen by a coordinating chaplain, who manages a team of between one and six chaplains. Core roles and responsibilities of chaplaincy, as outlined in both contracts and included in departmental policy include:

- pastoral support to detainees, prisoners, and staff
- religious and spiritual practices and ceremonies
- referrals to other religious and spiritual organisations
- involvement in facility activities (self-harm/risk referral, facilitating memorials)
- involvement in recruitment and professional development
- servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- coordinating services.

The CCWA contract with Serco includes additional responsibilities:

- Performing appropriate risk assessments and considering security implications in all elements of the provision of services.
- Presenting the chaplaincy service during Prisoner Induction Module.
- Promoting, encouraging, and supporting prisoners in their faith journey, and creating a safe environment for spiritual fellowship.
- Supporting prisoners to prepare for release through building relationships between prisoners and in-community churches, synagogues, mosques, or other faith communities according to prisoner request.
- Providing advice to Serco to ensure specific faith events, including catering, closely adhere to religious requirements.
- Organising and facilitating educational programs relating to religion, spirituality, restorative justice, and life skills that contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration.

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<sup>2</sup> The Uniting Church was listed within the CCWA contractual tender as a member organisation, though did not form part of contract service schedule.

- Providing direction and support including appropriate audio-visual material to the dedicated internal faith television channel at Acacia Prison.
- Recording prisoner attendance at chaplaincy sessions and events.

As the timing of this review has coincided with renewal period for the departmental contract, the recommendations outlined throughout this review are framed in terms of considerations for the next contract period.

## Key findings

### Limited monitoring of standards yields superficial understanding of chaplaincy

While formal reporting requirements are clearly stated in each contract, in practice it was often informal, incomplete, or inconsistent, and overall ineffective in meeting contractual requirements. Consequently, services have not been adequately evaluated for efficiency or effectiveness for the life of either contract. Partial and inaccurate reporting has not been informed by the experiences of people in custody or staff using the contracted services. There is also a misunderstanding of reporting lines, with the practical expectation to follow prison management direction on site causing confusion and tension among involved parties. Inconsistent training availability and completion, as well as reduced professional development avenues, has meant chaplains were often left feeling isolated and with limited support in contemporary understanding of diverse faiths or spirituality. Feedback we gathered from young people in custody and adult prisoners highlighted a need for greater theological understanding and religious and spiritual diversity within chaplaincy, as required under both contracts. A review of alternative prison chaplaincy models adopted in other jurisdictions provided examples of religious and pastoral services delivered with independent oversight and structured equity, which was found to be lacking within the current model.

### Access to non-Christian services is inequitable

Access to religious items, chosen faith representatives, and desired religious services was the largest issue raised throughout this review, with findings highlighting inequity for non-Christian prisoners and practitioners.

People in custody were satisfied with the Christian religious services provided by CCWA chaplains, though they were frustrated by infrastructure and resourcing issues resulting in disrupted services. Chaplains were described as approachable, helpful, respectful, accessible, and empathetic. Pastoral care was highly valued by staff and prisoners, in addition to the support provided to Psychological Health Services, Prison Support Officers, Aboriginal Visitors Scheme, and Cultural Services. However, the boundaries between pastoral care and counselling services appear to have blurred across the custodial estate. At sites where medical and psychological services were under-resourced or absent, the role of chaplaincy had expanded.

There was an apparent misunderstanding of an equitable religious and faith service among both the contract holder and contract monitoring teams. At the time of this review, CCWA had not sub-contracted any individuals from non-Christian faiths. Many prisoners wanting access to non-Christian faith services were unsatisfied, and feedback highlighted recurring requests for increased diversity within chaplaincy, variation of religious services and information about non-Christian religions. Aboriginal prisoners reported a desire for Christian services, but that these be delivered by Aboriginal chaplains and/or Elders from Country. The experience of non-contracted religious practitioners was largely one of confusion, inaccessibility, and underappreciation. Chaplains relied on external faith practitioners to provide non-Christian and non-English resources yet had been directed not to assist non-contracted practitioners applying for security clearances or arranging either ad hoc visits or ongoing services. While this direction was aligned with departmental policy, it had resulted in significant challenges for those outside of CCWA attempting to access facilities to provide prisoner-requested services. Removing the requirement for chaplains to arrange and

manage requested religious services isolates them from non-contracted religious practitioners and hampers building networks and partnerships necessary for an equitable religious service. Unlike departmental sites, chaplains at Acacia were responsible for sourcing, arranging, and supporting external practitioners. The result was the best representation of equitable access to inter-faith services across the custodial estate. But there was scope for improvement.

### Resourcing is assumed adequate though is not aligned with current policy

Both contracts make provisions for the adequate resourcing of chaplaincy to meet the needs of the prison population. These are sufficient in terms of financial allocation. However, access is not necessarily equitable. Chaplains advised us they had sufficient and appropriate access to equipment to do their allocated work. However, some sites did not have access to a dedicated space for religious or spiritual services, while some provided spaces were overtly Christian. Beyond falling short of meeting all contractual obligations, a lack of accessible or appropriate space was impeding the right of people in custody to freely practice their chosen religion. Prisoners had a strong desire for consistent and varied religious services to be held away from others. Contractual requirements and departmental policy regarding procuring, clearing, and disseminating religious and spiritual resources were not aligned, leading to inconsistent practices which directly disadvantaged prisoners of non-Christian faiths.

### Conclusion

With retendering of the Department's religious and faith services contract imminent, and Serco due to retender within the next two years, there is much work to be done to ensure future chaplaincy models provide multi-faith services that are consistently monitored for effectiveness and equity. To continue with the model currently in place would be to deny non-Christian prisoners and young people the fundamental human right to practice the religion or spirituality of their choosing.

## List of Recommendations

Recommendation	Page	DOJ Response
<b>Recommendation 1</b> The Department and Serco Acacia review all contractual requirements for purpose, achievability, clarity, and alignment between service level requirements and on site processes.	6	Supported
<b>Recommendation 2</b> The Department and Serco Acacia review current recruitment, training, and development practices and progress to ensure all meet with agreed contractual requirements and on site role requirements.	10	Not Supported
<b>Recommendation 3</b> The Department and Serco Acacia review alternative chaplaincy models that can inform new contractual requirements which meet the inter-faith needs of the custodial population.	10	Supported in Principle
<b>Recommendation 4</b> The Department, Serco Acacia, and service providers utilise local communities and organisations to source both Aboriginal chaplains and Aboriginal Elders as part of an inter-faith chaplaincy model.	17	Not Supported
<b>Recommendation 5</b> The Department and Serco Acacia revise the chaplaincy model and contractual requirements to formally incorporate non-Christian and Aboriginal organisations into chaplaincy.	23	Supported in Principle
<b>Recommendation 6</b> Serco Acacia formally adhere to current contractually stipulated monitoring requirements in full.	24	N/A

# 1 Limited monitoring of standards yields superficial understanding of chaplaincy

A public tender process was undertaken to award the Department's chaplaincy and pastoral services contract. In assessing submissions, the Department applied state government policies relevant to service delivery, accountability, and sustainability, and evaluated value for money against qualitative criteria, mandatory requirements, and a price schedule. Three organisations submitted offers, in addition to the CCWA. Although a shared-contractor arrangement was possible, the Department determined there was no benefit in diversifying the contract.

CCWA also holds a contract with Serco, covering Acacia only. This contract was effective from May 2021 to May 2024. During this review Serco confirmed it had exercised the contractual option to renew for another two years. However, it was unable to provide information about the tender process undertaken prior to the 2021-2024 contract being awarded to CCWA.

## 1.1 Clear reporting requirements are not followed

Efficiency and effectiveness of religious and spiritual services in prisons are supposed to be assessed through formal reporting requirements outlined in each contract. Requirements include ongoing reporting of performance measures, reviewing compliance with service specifications and contractual requirements, and meetings between service providers and contract management teams. Informal reporting and monitoring is also present on site, which at times appeared to replace formal reporting mechanisms. While formal reporting requirements are clearly stated in each contract, in practice it is often incomplete, inconsistent, onerous, and ineffective. Consequently, services have not been evaluated for efficiency or effectiveness for the life of either contract.

Reporting requirements outlined in the Department's contract are detailed, though are considered onerous and unsuitable. Both CCWA and the Department have reporting obligations outlined within the contract. CCWA is required to submit a bi-annual performance review report to the Department's Contract Management Team (CMT), which incorporates quantitative information and survey responses from prisoners and staff with qualitative feedback provided by chaplains. Additionally, CCWA representatives are required to attend quarterly stakeholder and service delivery meetings with CMT to maintain standards, improve service outcomes, and build relationships. CMT uses these reporting mechanisms to inform annual Disability Access and Inclusion Plans as well as cyclical Service Reviews, to assess level of compliance with services specifications and contractual requirements.

Formal reporting and governance requirements within the Serco-CCWA contract are clear, though an informal approach to reporting is practised on site. Standards require monthly operational meetings, quarterly planning meetings, and annual review meetings. These meetings include various Serco and CCWA stakeholders and are required to raise services issues, report incidents, communicate prison changes, management relationships, and ensure holistic management of prisoners. Additionally, chaplaincy are required to provide a monthly report to Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration management detailing services and summarising achievements for the period. Annually, a Service Delivery Plan is required from Chaplaincy to outline the schedule of services,

programs, events and all associated costs and full time equivalent (FTE) staffing requirements necessary to complete the schedule.

## Onerous and unworkable reporting mechanisms within Department's contract

Prior to the commencement of the Department's contract, a conscious effort was made to ensure the quality of reporting mechanisms. However, these mechanisms lacked the key processes and systems necessary for successful implementation. It has resulted in partial and inaccurate reporting, that is not informed by the experiences of people in custody or staff using the contracted services.

For example, bi-annual performance review reports were developed to enhance reporting. This required chaplains to provide, for each facility (broken down by demographics):

- average daily population
- number and type of pastoral care contacts
- number, type, and attendees of religious and spiritual services.

Feedback from people in custody and staff was also expected to be included in each report while summaries of trends, issues, and resolutions were required for the various service user cohorts (male and female prisoners, Indigenous prisoners, detainees, and staff).

The report was meant to be an opportunity for CCWA to demonstrate the benefit of services as well as value for money. However, in practice performance reporting was regularly incomplete. Both CMT and CCWA considered the contractual reporting requirements unworkable. We also found the bi-annual performance reports did not include survey data feedback for the life of the contract. No survey had been designed to gather feedback from users, nor was there an intention by CMT or CCWA to collect feedback by any other means. CMT agreed there was a concerning lack of input from the service users as to the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided by CCWA chaplains.

We found contractual reporting occurred consistently, but the reports were often incomplete and/or contained errors. CCWA is contractually obliged to provide both quantitative and qualitative information to demonstrate its performance against specific measures. However, we were advised that as many chaplains lacked the skill and/or time to input the quantitative information under the contract's reporting requirements, this task was taken over by CMT. CMT also took on the task of extracting quantitative data from departmental systems. Yet despite this shift, we identified several reports missing data. We were pleased to see qualitative summaries identifying common themes were consistently provided by CCWA chaplains. However, surveys to elicit detailed and rich qualitative feedback were not conducted as required. We acknowledge the manual and therefore time-consuming processes required when collecting the quantitative information stipulated within the contract. But this was agreed to by all parties. We also acknowledge the resource constraints within CMT meant it had to rely on spot-checking bi-annual performance review reports. However, CMT was unaware of the errors in reporting we identified as part of this review, and this leads us to conclude that the overall bi-monthly reporting was inadequate.



Chaplains and CCWA consistently reported challenges with data reporting. However, minimal action appears to have been taken to rectify these through training or automation. Issues included:

- available categories lacked relevance
- input was too time consuming
- access to computers was often scarce
- the reporting system was not fit for recording religious and spiritual information.

Developing an electronic reporting system to aid chaplains with reporting requirements was included within the Department's contract. However, attempts to implement a suitable tool were not workable with the performance report's template. As such, CMT agreed to input the data on behalf of CCWA to increase qualitative feedback from chaplains. Providing appropriate training to chaplains was consistently raised at quarterly meetings. The Department advised us it expects to deliver this in 2024. However, at the time of our review, this had not occurred. Given this data informs both contractual parties' understanding of need and demand, these issues reflect a failure to meet service delivery requirements and significantly hamper any assessment of efficiency and effectiveness.

### Informal approaches to reporting procedures by Serco

Reporting mechanisms for the Serco contract with CCWA were largely informal in practice. We were advised this was due to the strong on-site working relationship between the chaplains and Serco's contract monitoring body, the Rehabilitation and Reintegration management team. However, this meant there had been no monthly, quarterly, or annual meetings as per contract requirements for the length of the current contract. Serco also do not receive monthly program and service reports summarising service level achievements. Instead, issues with service delivery and contractual performance, on site incidents, significant events, new services, and potential risks within the prison population were casually communicated to Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration as needed. This communication was supplemented by daily observations of practice permitted by the proximity of Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration to the chaplains and the multi-faith centre.

We were advised by Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration the informal reporting system was effective, transparent, consistent, and accessible. However, it acknowledged contractual reporting requirements were not being met and ought to be. Where formal reporting was compiled by chaplaincy, it was incomplete and therefore lacked transparency. Monthly reporting consisted of attendance counts and dot point analyses of trends and issues, rather than summaries of the achievement of the service obligations. Annual Service Delivery Plans were consistently provided to Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration, outlining the schedule of services, programs, and events for the year. They included a forecast of resourcing needs, but not the associated costs for delivery as per the budgetary reporting requirements.

Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration advised us formal reporting beyond what was currently provided was unnecessary as the contract was mature, the chaplaincy team was established, and the provided services were valued. We agree the chaplains were highly regarded at Acacia Prison. However, the informal reporting processes have led to a limited understanding of contractual obligations and the efficiency and effectiveness of services.

We are also concerned that there is no contractual requirement to gather feedback from prisoners or staff at Acacia, effectively excluding the direct input of service users.

## Inconsistent monitoring of training and development

Inconsistent monitoring of training in both contracts has reduced the understanding of chaplains' suitability to provide safe and effective services. Under the Department's contract with CCWA, responsibility for training and development rests with CCWA, while endorsement and monitoring lies with CMT. These tasks occurred during quarterly meetings as part of the review of service documentation, processes, and procedures. Based on the terms of the contract, CMT expects chaplains to arrive on-site both qualified and trained, including an expectation that they have completed mandated training in:

- suicide prevention
- at-risk management processes
- mental health awareness
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness
- cyber security
- disability awareness
- harassment protocols.

Despite using the Department's online learning system, at the time of this review, there were inconsistent and inaccurate records of the ongoing training and professional development of chaplains. Completed training was not formally monitored by CMT for consistency, completion, or relevance, nor was there a training register.<sup>3</sup>

The responsibility for training and development for the Serco contract similarly lies with CCWA. This contract requires only that CCWA follow the direction of Serco regarding internal training. However, Acacia's wider services agreement requires all contracted workers, such as CCWA, to develop and implement an induction package and ongoing training package at the commencement of the contract (DOJ - SSO, 2020). These packages must cover the basic requirements of working in prisons, and specific requirements for the chaplaincy role. However, in practice Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration were only aware of Serco's standard on-site induction and mandatory online training being available to chaplains. Monthly and annual meetings gave chaplains the opportunity to raise training and development issues or changes, but there were no specified monitoring responsibilities by Serco.

Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration expected chaplains to be suitably trained and qualified to work with people who have trauma, mental ill-health, and vulnerability. However, its oversight of

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<sup>3</sup> In response to a draft copy of this review, the Department established a formal training register for monitoring internal mandatory training requirements for prison chaplains, in addition to Clinical Pastoral Education qualifications. As at February 2025, compliance against training requirements for prison chaplains was at approximately 90%.

completed training and development was minimal. Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration did not monitor the role specific training and development provided by CCWA and was not involved in recruitment. This meant there was only a superficial understanding of chaplains' suitability in providing emotional support or religious services safely and effectively.

### Limited awareness of reporting expectations

Across the custodial estate there is misunderstanding of reporting lines, with several chaplains mistaking local management for their line management. But within both contracts line management responsibility rests with CCWA. The practical expectation on site to follow prison management direction causes confusion and tension among the parties. This misunderstanding by chaplains and prison management alike, has meant a minority of incidents, in addition to potential behavioural or conduct issues, were not reported to CCWA as per contractual protocols.

At the time of this review, poor communication has led to a misunderstanding of CCWA's role as a sub-contracting service provider with responsibility for reporting issues, incidents, and changes to CMT and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration. Both CCWA and CMT routinely contact prisons, and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration observe daily chaplaincy practices. However, we question the adequacy of this contact given the breakdown in reporting to CCWA, which has resulted in unreported incidents and issues across regional sites.

Increased site visits by CCWA since 2021 have aimed to mitigate risks and clarify its role in consulting with chaplains, prison management, CMT and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration to resolve breaches, incidents, or issues. CCWA address issues while on site with a combination of performance development and training. CCWA reported a strong desire to clarify their role as line management for all chaplains, as opposed to prison management, to support chaplains in their roles while ensuring consistency and accountability across all sites.<sup>4</sup>

CMT plan to disseminate clarifying information to all superintendents regarding its role and function compared to facilities. CMT expects this will improve contract awareness and understanding of the need to deliver value for money. However, at the time of writing, this had not occurred because the relevant departmental policy had not been formally updated despite practical changes already occurring.

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<sup>4</sup> In its response to a draft copy of this report, CCWA noted it had been clear and consistent in outlining reporting line for chaplains throughout the contract but despite these efforts some chaplains had failed to adhere to the reporting protocols. CCWA added it has sought to address concerns through performance management, additional support, and clarification.

We were advised by Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration that Acacia's chaplains follow the Acacia reporting process, but Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration were unaware of the specific reporting processes for issues or incidents. Subsequently, the team were considering implementing formalised reporting procedures. It is unclear if this includes involving CCWA as line management.

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Department and Serco review all contractual requirements for purpose, achievability, clarity, and alignment between service level requirements and on site processes.

### **Serco's superficial monitoring of spending was unable to prove efficient services**

There was minimal monitoring of chaplaincy budgets or spending by Serco. The Rehabilitation and Reintegration team reported being largely unaware of contract requirements in relation to meetings, reports, and budgets. While Serco received monthly invoices from CCWA as per the contract, these invoices were not consistent in price and were not itemised beyond the umbrella term 'chaplaincy services'. The invoices were not provided to Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration, therefore as a contract monitoring body, it has no understanding of the worth of the contract, the monies being paid, what these monies were for, or the value for money being provided.

Furthermore, CCWA reported Acacia chaplaincy were highly programs focused, with minimal time spent on the provision of religious services and pastoral care. Despite this concern, CCWA had only visited Acacia twice since the commencement of its contract. This was compounded by minimal contact between Acacia's chaplains and CCWA regarding responsibilities, occurrences, or needs. As such, we do not believe efficiency and value for money can be adequately determined for the life of Serco's contract with CCWA.

## **1.2 Changed recruitment practices and limited professional development meant inconsistent knowledge and eroded supports**

Informal changes have been made to chaplaincy recruitment across both contracts, potentially impacting religious knowledge and pastoral skill for contracted chaplains. This was compounded by inconsistent training availability and completion and reduced professional development avenues. Ultimately, this meant chaplains were often isolated and had a limited support in contemporary understanding of diverse faiths or spirituality.

### **Informal changes to recruitment diminished the chaplaincy role**

CCWA manages recruitment, training, and professional development of chaplains for both contracts. Under the Department's contract, alterations to service documents, processes, procedures, training and development could be made by CCWA, although they must be reviewed and approved by CMT. Despite this obligation, we found CMT were not aware CCWA had made changes to recruitment processes which were generalising chaplains' qualifications. This highlighted both non-adherence with the contract and a gap in monitoring.

At the commencement of both contracts separate job description forms (JDFs) outlined essential and desirable criteria for both chaplains and coordinating chaplains. Essential criteria included in both JDFs included:

- a tertiary degree in Theology
- minimum one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)
- previous pastoral experience
- good standing with church or faith community
- attendance at spiritual retreats
- commitment to continuing education
- broad knowledge of faiths, traditions, and designated contacts.

Coordinating chaplains had an additional essential criterion of at least five years pastoral care experience.

However, at the time of our review, the separate JDFs had been combined into one for both roles and all essential criteria were reclassified as desirable experience. A degree in Theology and minimum attainment of CPE points were no longer required for either position. They had been substituted for a demonstrated ability to:

- promote religious and spiritual wellbeing through pastoral care
- respond to spiritual needs
- work with empathy with people from all ethnicities and religions
- understand the impact of trauma, grief, and loss.

The Department was not aware of these changes. Nor were the changes aligned to the Department's contract which requires CCWA to consult with them where CPE qualifications are not met, to determine if the gap in qualification can be suitably addressed through training and development. CPE is a course undertaken by chaplains which involves self-reflection upon own issues and is therefore considered important by chaplains for a deep understanding of themselves and their role in providing pastoral care.

The changes significantly generalise the knowledge and experience of incoming recruits. Feedback from young people in custody suggested there was benefit in learning about different religions, while adult prisoners requested services from Aboriginal Elders, and specifically female Noongar Elders, Buddhist Monks, Muslim Imams, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Taken together, this highlights a need for greater theological understanding and religious and spiritual diversity within chaplaincy, as required under both contracts. We welcome the removal of Christian-centric qualifications in chaplaincy JDFs, as an opportunity for the recruitment of non-Christian chaplains across the custodial estate.

*Qualifications are there for a reason. Chaplains deal with complex issues and its dangerous to have well-meaning people without training.*

Chaplaincy feedback

## Professional development opportunities had been eroded

Professional development is part of the ongoing training provided by CCWA. It includes supervision, professional development retreats, peer gatherings, and departmental training. Some of these opportunities were well embedded, while others had diminished recently.

1. **Debriefing** with a supervisor, who was typically a former chaplain, was available, as well as access to the CCWA General Secretary and employee assistance program. The frequency of this supervision depends on the chaplain's member church and own preferences. However, across the custodial estate chaplains reported satisfaction with supervision and debriefing support.
2. **Shadowing** with an experienced chaplain before new recruits commenced the role themselves was recently reinstated. This system was not consistent across sites, but it was appreciated as an opportunity to impart practical knowledge and skill.
3. **Retreats** for professional development offered opportunities to refresh general skills and pursue spiritual development. We were informed by chaplaincy that during the current contracts only one retreat had been held, though CCWA advised that three retreats had occurred during this time. Many chaplains appreciated this, but its intermittent nature did not promote continual development of new and established chaplains.
4. **Peer gatherings** such as monthly team meetings and breakfast meets were planned by CCWA, but few had occurred during the current contracts. We also heard monthly meetings were so inconsistent at some facilities, communication was via a handover book.

By far the most lamented professional development opportunity that had eroded was the disbandment of the Prison Chaplains Association (PCA). The PCA was a group for both contracted chaplains and non-contracted practitioners of faith across the custodial estate, which gathered to discuss issues and exchange information relevant to providing religious and pastoral services. Active at the time both current contracts commenced, the PCA was included in the Department's contract as a tool for coordinating chaplains. The PCA was also a professional development resource for chaplains, and it was listed as a partner organisation which CCWA could regularly contact and share information.

Despite this, the PCA disbanded in 2021, and we received conflicting accounts for how and why this occurred. In previous contracts, the PCA had performed the function of contract management meetings. However, this was deemed inappropriate for the current contract. CCWA reported some service providers allegedly dominated quarterly PCA meetings and they preferred having one organisation providing all services to streamline communication and reduce workload. Under the current contract, PCA members can raise matters and provide advice at contractual Reintegration Services Meetings, though a review of attendees found no chaplains, coordinating chaplains, or non-contracted practitioners of faith attended these meetings.

Current chaplains and external faith practitioners advised us the PCA was a highly valued source of knowledge and support. Without the PCA, chaplains said they had no direct line of communication with other chaplains, were unaware of other chaplains across the custodial estate, and missed the sense of community and togetherness. Several practitioners expressed a desire for the PCA, or a similar body, to be restored so all religious and pastoral service providers could communicate and network.

## Training opportunities were not comprehensive

We found the Department expected chaplains to complete a suite of internal online training programs, with ad hoc site wide training offered by prison management. Some chaplains reported barriers to accessing the online learning system, such as they were not authorised to use it. On-site training varied between facilities as determined by the Superintendent. This meant some chaplains actively engaged in weekly or monthly training with uniformed staff while other chaplains were not invited to attend these opportunities at all.

Serco chaplains were also required to complete standardised mandatory site training through the online learning system, which was auto-monitored for completion. This training is mandatory for all Serco staff, and spans modules from suicide prevention to asbestos handling. It is not targeted towards the chaplaincy role. Beyond this generic online training and on-site induction, there were no further directions for training given by Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration as chaplains were expected to arrive suitably trained. This was despite the contractual requirement for a tailored induction and ongoing training programs implemented by CCWA.

CCWA was developing a training program for chaplains. However, this had been ongoing for the life of both contracts and was yet to be approved for implementation by either CMT or Serco. As such, several chaplains had arranged individual training and development to supplement the online and mandatory training provided by the Department and Serco respectively. This included:

- Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
- Alpha Course
- Mental Health First Aid
- Trauma Counselling.

Other training was sought to address gaps in contemporary understanding, such as family violence and FASD, or to upskill to meet the growing needs of a diverse and understaffed prison population such as substance use, complex trauma, and suicidal tendencies. Training in program facilitation was often at the request of prison management in response to a gap in service provision. Chaplains undertook this training, seemingly unaware that CCWA possess a professional development budget for chaplains who seek additional training. It is suggested there is limited awareness of this budget across chaplaincy. There is an opportunity here for CCWA to ensure all chaplains are aware of the processes in place to request funded training opportunities.

Chaplains should not be expected to arrange their own training, in lieu of sufficient or clearly available training and development being provided by their employer. Nor should they undertake training at the request of prison management to fill other gaps in services elsewhere across the facility. This is particularly important in light of mandatory training requirements in both contracts.

*We need to know more. I want to know anything that will help me provide a better service.*

Chaplaincy feedback

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Department and Serco review current recruitment, training, and development practices and progress to ensure all meet with agreed contractual requirements and on site role requirements.

### **1.3 Independent oversight needed to improve monitoring and reduce burden on contractual monitoring teams**

Standards for reporting and monitoring are clearly stated within both contracts. However, not all standards were consistently or sufficiently met in practice often due to onerous requirements, informal procedural changes, and lack of awareness. Superficial reporting and inconsistent monitoring have led to services being delivered with limited evidence of efficiency or effectiveness. Reporting processes, practices and procedures, and policies for both contracts require review to better align practice with policy in a manner that is consistent with the original contracts.

Alternative prison chaplaincy models adopted in other jurisdictions provide examples of religious and pastoral services delivered with independent oversight and structured equity. For example, New South Wales offers an inclusive and equitable model of chaplaincy. Currently, the Civil Chaplaincies Advisory Committee provides religious and pastoral services to all New South Wales prisons. Committee members include Christian, Buddhist, Islamic, and Jewish organisations. A Coordinating Chaplain manages chaplains as a Corrective Services employee who reports to both the Assistant Commissioner of Offender Management and Programs, and the Civil Chaplaincies Advisory Committee. The Coordinating Chaplain is also supported by a Corrective Services employed administrator.

Feedback from religious organisations in Western Australia which have had experience with the New South Wales model indicate it is cohesive, transparent, and supportive. This they said was due to the objective nature of departmental management and the inclusivity of the advisory committee. Formally incorporating an independent management body in Western Australia could allow for equity not currently achieved through the contractual monitoring of CMT and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Department and Serco review alternative chaplaincy models that can inform new contractual requirements which meet the inter-faith needs of the custodial population.



## 2 Access to non-Christian services is inequitable

Access to religious items, chosen faith representatives and desired religious services was the largest issue raised throughout this review, with findings highlighting inequity for non-Christian prisoners and practitioners.

### 2.1 Chaplaincy is valued as a source of hope and support

People in custody were generally satisfied with the Christian religious services provided by CCWA chaplains. People in custody of Christian faith explained the chaplains were approachable, helpful, respectful, accessible, and willing to help. Many chaplains were also described as passionate and committed to their role, and adept at developing meaningful rapport with youth, men, and women. Some relationships even extended beyond prison and into the community, with chaplains officiating marriages for former prisoners.

However, people in custody of Christian faith were also frustrated by infrastructure and resourcing issues which often led to disrupted services. Common issues included irregular services, inconsistent access to spaces of worship, and limited resources, such as DVD's, CD's, and books. Some prisoners also struggled to identify chaplaincy within the prison. This suggests a need for clearer identification of chaplains themselves and better advertising of both available religious services and the process for nominating for these services.

### 2.2 Pastoral care was accessible, though this role was expanding to alleviate pressures in other support services

Pastoral care is defined in the contract as the provision of emotional and wellbeing support through active listening and rapport building. It was highly valued across the custodial estate. Staff and people in custody alike advised us they found chaplains empathetic, committed to helping, available to listen, and supportive both in the prison and community. CCWA viewed pastoral care as a core role for chaplaincy, and chaplains spent much of their time providing pastoral care to prisoners, often working in collaboration with medical and psychological services. While providing religious services could arguably be the core role of chaplaincy, the focus on pastoral care likely reflected the high rate of people in custody without religious affiliations.

The additional support chaplaincy provides to Psychological Health Services, Prison Support Officers, Aboriginal Visitors Scheme and Cultural Services was also greatly valued by local management and staff working in these areas. CCWA is committed to ensuring chaplains understand the boundaries of pastoral care and when to refer on to other support services. However, the boundaries between pastoral care and counselling services appear to have blurred across the custodial estate. At sites where medical and psychological services were under-resourced or absent, the role of chaplaincy had expanded. In some facilities, this included supporting those with mental health issues and suicidal risk.

As per contractual responsibilities, the role of chaplains in assisting distressed individuals is to listen, provide comfort and calm, encourage self-care, and facilitate pro-social relationships. Where risk is identified by chaplains, they are to report this to the on-site Superintendent. Departmental policy

however, contradicts this and requires chaplains to be part of the support process for prisoners who may be at risk, inclusive of attending risk assessment meetings. Further compounding the confusion, CCWA actively directs chaplains not to engage in risk assessment meetings as it is not part of their role. In the absence of clear reporting lines or job role, adequate psychological staffing, and consistent religious services, some chaplains have prioritised mental health support over pastoral care and religious services.<sup>5</sup>

Pastoral care was also provided to custodial staff, and on occasion, it was prioritised over providing services to prisoners. Across prisoners and staff, chaplaincy was most highly valued in the aftermath of critical incidents or deaths in custody, where they were relied upon to provide emotional support. This could include community support for the families of staff or people in custody. CCWA told us they were developing a critical incident response team and critical incident training, in addition to the standardised training plan it was also creating. In the interim, chaplains were often providing support during critical moments without adequate mental health training or relevant qualifications.

Our pre-inspection surveys revealed prisoner satisfaction with the perceived ability of chaplains to assist with issues has reduced over the life of the current contracts (from 71% to 56%; see Figure 3). Prisoner feedback revealed chaplains were dedicated and caring, but unable to action change. Some prisoners said they were referred to chaplaincy by mental health staff when seeking psychological support. This led to confusion and frustration. The reduction in perceived ability may be indicative of chaplaincy's expanded role into mental health, where they are unable to adequately address people's needs and the appropriate services were not available for referral.

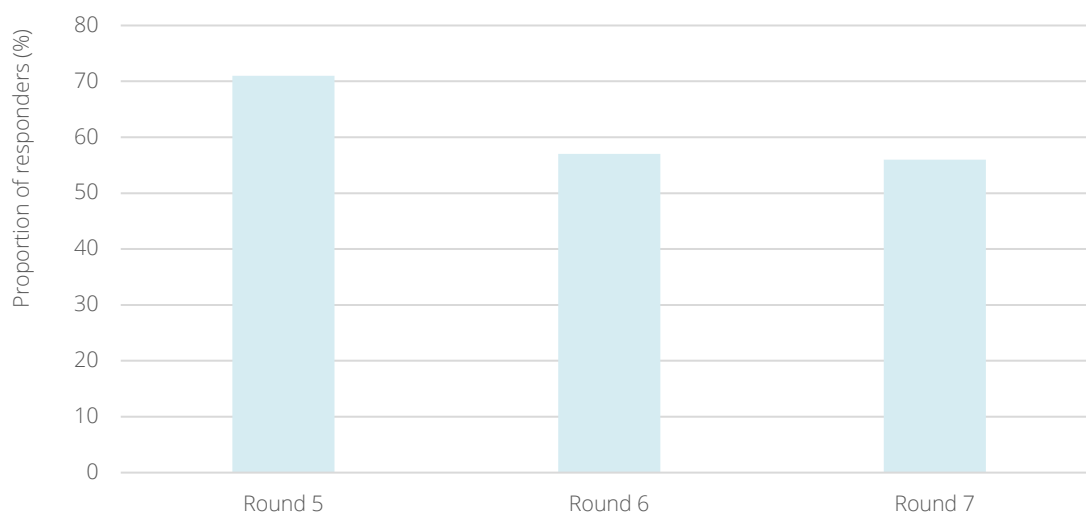


Figure 3: People in custody's perceived ability of chaplains to assist with issues (2013–2021).

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<sup>5</sup>In response to a draft copy of this review, a Deputy Commissioners' Broadcast was issued to all custodial staff to clarify the role, responsibilities, and reporting requirements of prison chaplains within custodial facilities.

*Chaplain is extraordinary – respectful and empathetic, providing an ear or shoulder as well as prayer... overworked though and may need help to be more accessible.*

*The only people who make an effort are the Chaplaincy and they are pretty much powerless to do anything.*

Prisoners' feedback

## 2.3 Chaplaincy services were ecumenical not inter-faith

It is a core contractual obligation that the role, conduct, and services of chaplaincy are equitable for all religions and faiths. This is described within the Department's contract with CCWA as an 'ecumenical' approach whereby chaplains provide religious and spiritual service to prisoners of all religions and faiths, regardless of their own affiliation. But this is a misunderstanding of an ecumenical approach, which is defined as the unification of Christian Churches in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ (Britannica, 2024). Therefore, an ecumenical approach is not aligned with the provision of support or service for those religions that do not incorporate these aspects of Christianity.

In contrast, an inter-faith approach incorporates both related and unrelated religious groups (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2024). Although this term is reflected within the Serco contract, the practice is not fully embraced.

A misunderstanding that an equitable religious and faith service was not the same as an ecumenical approach was apparent from our discussions with CCWA and the contract monitoring teams (CMT and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration), and also by the award of the contract and how it has been implemented. As the successful recipient of both contracts, CCWA sub-contracts chaplaincy positions to its member churches only, all of which are Christian. At the time of this review, CCWA had not sub-contracted, or considered sub-contracting, any individuals from non-Christian faiths. We were advised this was unnecessary as CCWA chaplains came from various Christian denominations, had experience with prisoners from multi-faith backgrounds, and had rapport with Aboriginal communities.

While these statements may be accurate, they do not remove the right of a prisoner to receive guidance and visits from practitioners of the same religion or faith as per Section 95E of the *Prisons Act 1981*. This gap in service was apparent to prisoners, with feedback from across the custodial estate highlighting a lack of information about and accessibility to other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and Hinduism. We heard many requests for more chaplains from these religions and for a stronger Aboriginal presence within religious and spiritual services.

Nevertheless, it remained that the CCWA were essentially providing an ecumenical service. This is not a criticism of the CCWA, rather it highlights the anomaly that the contract, as awarded, contemplates delivery of a broader service. We appreciate that CCWA is providing the service they tendered for. However, we are concerned that currently neither the departmental or Serco contracts provide for pastoral care or religious service outside of Christianity. It is clear to us non-Christian

faith chaplains can provide general pastoral care rather than just deliver religious ministry. Any award of future contracts should consider this as paramount.

## 2.4 People in custody's experience practicing diverse faiths was poor

Many prisoners wanting access to non-Christian faith services were unsatisfied. As seen in Figure 3, prisoner survey results show perceived ability to practice one's chosen religion was rated near or below 40% for the life of the current contracts, suggesting a low rate of satisfaction with religious freedom in prison. Feedback from people in custody highlighted recurring issues with access to religious services including requests for increased:

- contact with member churches in the community
- diversity within chaplaincy (such as Aboriginal Elders, Buddhist Monks, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslim Imams)
- variation of religious services (including meditation sessions and Noongar spiritual teachings)
- information about non-Christian religions (such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism).

Some prisoners also indicated they had been denied the right to change their religion to non-Christian denominations. Chaplains, non-contracted practitioners, and custodial staff advised us prisoners' religions were not being properly recorded on intake and the process for changing religion was lengthy and inappropriate. Some prisoners waited months for changes to be formally recorded, which could create tension as it delayed access to services, meals, and resources. The process of altering religious affiliation created a conflict as it required vetting by a chaplain who may not share or understand the prisoner's faith.

Prisoners and external faith practitioners also reported challenges in meeting daily needs, such as dietary requirements. Issues reported included inconsistent dietary allowances across sites, refusal to facilitate dietary requirements, and the supply of unsuitable foods.

*Being Jewish is never talked about.*

*My religion is not respected. Christian religious support is the only option.*

Prisoners' feedback

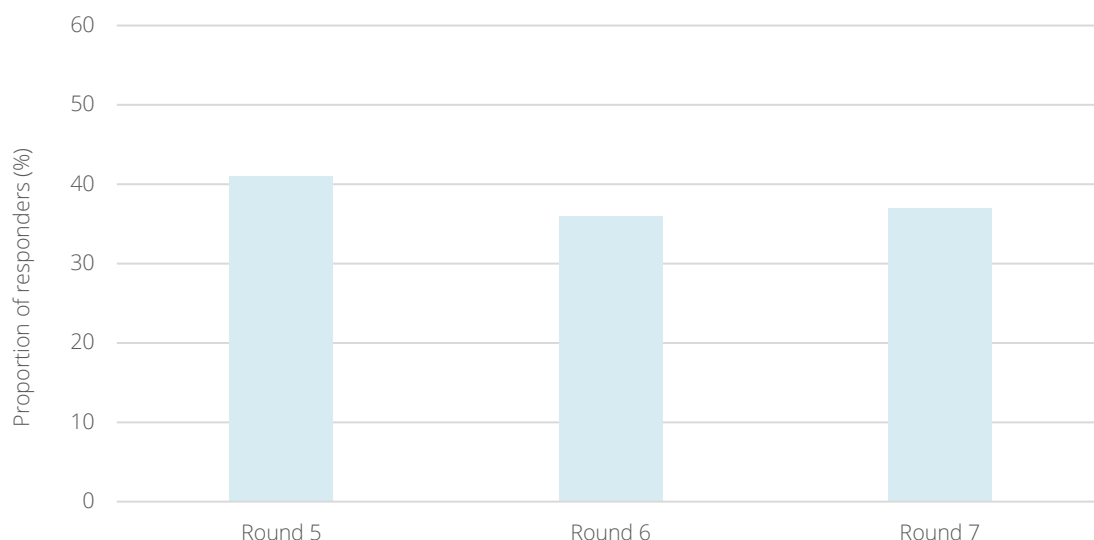


Figure 4: People in custody's perceived ability to practice their chosen religion (2013–2021).

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, observed by Muslims as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community (Huda, 2021). During Ramadan observers fast from sunrise to sunset and engage in increased prayer, recitation of the Quran, spiritual reflection, and charity. This holy month is a time of spiritual purification and gratitude and is observed within Western Australian prisons as a major religious event. However, we found observation of strict timeframes for both the consumption of appropriate foods and involvement in prayer was inconsistent across facilities. Often inadequate provisions were made for practicing Muslim prisoners during this time. This is reflected the personal experiences of prisoners.

### Case Study 1

In 2024 a Muslim prisoner requested the kitchen provide appropriate foods for himself and other practicing prisoners for Ramadan. He advised us he was denied access to both appropriate foods and the opportunity to eat prior to sunrise. The prisoner alleged kitchen staff said they did not care about practicing prisoners' needs during Ramadan and it was not the kitchen's responsibility to cater to religious dietary requirements.

Unable to fully participate in Ramadan, he raised a formal complaint with prison management. He was advised to lodge a request form each time the prisoners required specialised foods or meals at specific times. Departmental documentation confirmed a discussion between the prisoner and kitchen staff occurred, but there was no record of the religious needs or rights of the prisoner, nor the formal complaint. Despite policy requirements, neither the chaplain or Superintendent were involved in supporting the dietary needs or religious observance for these prisoners. Nor were they involved to resolve the matter. Having experienced these barriers and lack of appropriate supports, the prisoners reported feeling discriminated, vilified, and unable to practice their chosen faith in accordance with basic human rights.

## A strong argument for Aboriginal chaplains and Elders

Aboriginal prisoners' feedback added further depth to the argument for more diversity among chaplains. They wanted an integrated approach to religion, spirituality and culture through services and visits from Elders. Christianity is a dominant religion among Aboriginal prisoners (almost 87% of prisoners who identified as Christian on intake to prison were Aboriginal).<sup>6</sup> However, Aboriginal peoples' relationships with Christianity vary greatly depending largely on their experiences with Christian Missions. This is important, as many Aboriginal prisoners reported a desire for Christian services, but that these be delivered by Aboriginal chaplains and/or Elders from Country. It is acknowledged that the Aboriginal Visitors Scheme provides cultural contact and counselling, though not religious services.

Noongar Elders can provide an integrated Noongar-Christian tribal experience inclusive of storytelling and working with spirits. Even without a religious affiliation, Aboriginal people remain spiritually and culturally strong in practicing elemental and ancestral prayer, as well as traditional rites including Sorry Business. The inclusion of Aboriginal chaplains and Elders in religious and spiritual practices was especially important for young people, allowing for positive role models to share knowledge about religion, spirituality, and culture through tradition.

*A different kind of support is needed as part of a tribe – both Noongar and Christian.*

### Prisoner feedback

Recognising the importance of strong cultural and spiritual practice for Aboriginal youth, Banksia Hill Detention Centre had recently commenced embedding Aboriginal spirituality and culture into centre policies and processes, with some involvement by chaplains. The Aboriginal Services Unit and chaplaincy work together to co-coordinate funerals, memorials, and cultural healing events, even though the unit is the primary contact for these services.

Aboriginal Services had developed a cultural healing site at the top of Banksia Hill, within the grounds of the centre. It was activated by Elders from different community groups to allow inclusion of all detainees across the State. The cultural space includes Elders seating to facilitate spiritual services and events and incorporates a spiritual walking trail. The site aims to foster belonging and commitment to culture, as well as increase feelings of acceptance in line with the Aboriginal ideology that everything is interconnected to spirit.

Overall, spiritual, cultural, and therapeutic care is developing at Banksia Hill under the Aboriginal Services Unit, with an encouraging increase in services. Stronger integration of Aboriginal people in

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<sup>6</sup>In response to a draft copy of this report, CCWA advised recruiting and retaining more First Nations chaplains were core goals, but it had faced challenges in retention.

chaplaincy would build on these gains. It would also provide support for these fledgling services within the remit of religious and spiritual service provision.

Acacia Prison chaplaincy had actively engaged with Cultural Services to provide culturally responsive services including a men's Healing Circle. Integration of Aboriginal need was strong at Acacia, with Elders and the chaplains working collaboratively to manage religious, spiritual, and cultural services. The presence of Elders was described as calming for prisoners, enhancing the cultural safety of the site.

Across the custodial estate several chaplains have also been vouched for by community. Through closely working with First Nations communities, some chaplains consider themselves part of these communities and are treated as such by Aboriginal peoples. This is acknowledged as important for building the trust needed to provide culturally responsive services. However, there remains a strong desire for Aboriginal people to be present on-site.

*For Aboriginal youth the connection to Elders is important. Elders are keepers of knowledge, storytellers, role models and people we pray to. We are losing knowledge and youth will seek connection and knowledge elsewhere.*

*Singing and preaching by Chaplains is ok but trust is needed to provide services beyond this. We need our own people – known people with connection.*

Prisoners' feedback

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Department, Serco Acacia, and service providers utilise local communities and organisations to source both Aboriginal chaplains and Aboriginal Elders as part of an inter-faith chaplaincy model.

## **2.5 The experience of non-Christian faith practitioners was mostly poor**

Non-contracted religious practitioner experience was largely one of confusion, inaccessibility, and underappreciation. CCWA and CMT attitudes did not elevate the needs of these practitioners, and we were told chaplains had been directed not to assist non-contracted practitioners applying for security clearances or arranging either ad hoc visits or ongoing services. While this direction is aligned with departmental policy, it had resulted in significant challenges for those outside of CCWA who wished to provide prisoner-requested services. Conversely, at Acacia, there was greater equity, but there was still capacity for increased access.

### **Over-reliance on free resources**

Both contracts adequately accounted for the number of FTE positions needed to meet current needs for Christian services across the custodial estate. However, an absence of paid chaplaincy positions for practitioners from non-Christian faiths meant inequitable access to non-Christian

services. At the time of this review, practitioners from religious faiths including Islam, Buddhism, Jehovah's Witness, Sikhism, and Judaism had or were providing voluntary religious resources and services at various locations across the custodial estate. Resources included literature, clothing, and ritual items. Services spanned weekly Muslim prayer services, fortnightly Buddhist meditation sessions, and sporadic Jehovah's Witness bible study classes and visits from Jewish Rabbi's. These services were in addition to ad hoc individual visits to identified prisoners.

External faith practitioners had provided resources and services free of charge for the past decade, at significant financial and personal cost and without compensation or reimbursement. CCWA, CMT, and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration management advised us they were unaware most chaplains relied on external faith practitioners to provide non-Christian and non-English resources instead of sourcing these items themselves and drawing from the CCWA budget. However, the three parties were aware numerous religious and faith practitioners of Christian and non-Christian denomination were providing religious and spiritual services, including visits, programs, and rites, without payment.

We are concerned this shows a significant lack of understanding about the inequities of this arrangement. And more so, as this arrangement was long standing across previous contracts, it appears that no consideration has been given to compensating external practitioners for their ongoing contributions. The current arrangement represents financial inequity and limits prisoner access to chosen religious or faith representatives. It also emphasises that the current service is an ecumenical rather than a multi-faith service.

### Policy change disproportionately affects non-Christian practitioners

Compounding financial inequity is departmental policy, which obscured access processes for non-contracted faith representatives by removing the need for CCWA chaplains to help arrange external faith practitioner visits and services.

A core role of the chaplains (included within both contracts) was arranging access to a religious or spiritual practitioner of a prisoner's own faith. Departmental policy outlines the process for this access, with requests to be referred to and managed by site superintendents (DOJ, 2024). The local Superintendent approves or denies requests made by a single prisoner. If multiple prisoners or services, programs, or courses are requested, the approval process must include the Superintendent in consultation with chaplaincy, and Department's own Rehabilitation and Reintegration branch. We found this process was not followed.

CCWA and CMT advised policy change in 2021 altered the procedure for sourcing external practitioners due to chaplain feedback the task was too time consuming. To alleviate the impost, the local Superintendent must now identify and arrange all non-Christian religious practitioner requests. This involves sourcing a representative in the community and supporting them to gain a department security clearance. Prison management may also manage and monitor the religious services provided, including by arranging site escorts and developing religious booklets. Chaplains were available for consultation, but this varied across sites. The Chaplain Coordinator communicates with representatives from faith communities including Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Jewish and Sikh, although these communities reported to us their access to custodial sites could be challenging. The



requirements of this policy contradict the contractual requirement that chaplains support all other religious and spiritual needs by ensuring ability to access spiritual leaders from their chosen religion.

CCWA actively precluded its chaplains from arranging, clearing, and managing external faith practitioners while we found the Department's Rehabilitation and Reintegration branch had not been involved in any consultation.<sup>7</sup> The change to departmental policy had not been communicated to service providers or stakeholders. This meant there was a lack of clarity for external religious practitioners and prison management at each facility.

*Over the last 18 months the Department of Justice has told us that we must go through the Superintendent as [the policy] is still being ratified. The current [policy] is not being adhered to in the interim. Not sure what the delay is. It is frustrating trying to get access. Individual Chaplains are helpful though we could do more with clarity regarding access pathways. There's no clarity through the Department of Justice and CCWA are saying it's not their role to facilitate us.*

External faith practitioner feedback

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<sup>7</sup> In response to a draft copy of this review, the Department advised us fortnightly meetings are held between its Rehabilitation and Reintegration branch and CCWA to review prospective religious and spiritual services, ensuring they are reputable, appropriate, and not a duplicate. This function is included within departmental policy, though no documentation was provided to evidence its occurrence.

## Case Study 2

One external religious practitioner had been visiting several Western Australian prisons for almost a decade. Over this time, they provided religious items and conducted religious services free of charge and covered costs out of their own pocket. In response to the ongoing barriers accessing prisoners of shared belief, their role of providing services and resources expanded to include:

- managing security clearances for additional external practitioners
- developing information resources for prisoners and staff
- negotiating consistent resources and services with chaplaincy and management
- advocating for the observance of dietary needs and major event practices.

Negotiation and advocacy occur across multiple custodial sites and, in addition to providing ongoing religious support, these significantly strain their time and resources.

The compounding financial pressures meant they were concerned they will not be able to provide religious items or facilitate services to all prisoners when requested. The practitioner did not believe monetary compensation would better assist prisoners of shared belief. Rather, external practitioners needed improved access, transparent communication, and consistent services. Overall, they wanted a recognised voice, to directly represent and meet prisoners' religious needs.

## Obtaining security clearances could be discouragingly time consuming

Individuals and organisations outside of the CCWA and its Christian member churches experienced significant challenges accessing facilities, largely due to unclear security clearance processes and a lack of systemic support. External religious practitioners reported the process for gaining security clearance was lengthy and lacked transparency and communication. We heard complaints that when clearance applications were sent to the Department, there was no reference number given, no timeline for processing, and follow-up correspondence was often not returned. If a clearance was needed for multiple prisons, the process was required for each prison but there was no tracking of these applications.

According to the CCWA, a typical turnaround for security clearances was a fortnight although this had slowed to four to six weeks at the time of our review. However, we heard of occasions up to 10 months for cleared parties to be notified, during which time the practitioners could not access prisons in any religious or spiritual capacity. This led to attrition, with several external faith practitioners feeling frustrated and underappreciated. They reported losing motivation to engage with prisons in the face of continued barriers and limited assistance.

*It took 4 months to see a prisoner as the Chaplain gave me the run around and then I had to be escorted. A person in need asked to see me, why did it take 4 months?*

External faith practitioner feedback

## Siloing hampers access and equity

Removing the requirement for chaplains to arrange and manage requested religious services isolates them from non-contracted religious practitioners. It also hampers building networks and partnerships necessary for an equitable religious service. This limitation was evident when sourcing non-Christian resources and practitioners, as chaplains relied upon personal theological knowledge and connections, which varied greatly.

There were a few non-Christian services, but at several facilities only Christian services were delivered. Reasons given for this included COVID delays, clearance processes deterring visitors, an inability to source requested practitioners, and diverse services not being requested. While some external practitioners took an active approach to contact prisons and chaplaincy to offer services, other practitioners were unsure of who to contact or how to arrange access. Without a professional body or centralised list of security-approved external religious practitioner contacts, several chaplains were unaware of non-Christian practitioners already available. Additionally, where external religious organisations had received requests for visits directly from prisoners or their families, some were told there was no need for their services when following up with on-site chaplains.

Siloing of contracted and non-contracted practitioners extended to Christian organisations too. For example, at several prisons, management were tasked with arranging and managing all Prison Fellowship practitioners and services. CCWA advised its chaplains they would be breaching contract if they facilitated Prison Fellowship programs, as chaplaincy were not funded to facilitate external religious visits or services. This contradicts the role of Prison Fellowship as it is listed as a CCWA Associate Member within the Department's contract. The inconsistency has meant extra work for on-site prison management, confusion for members of the Prison Fellowship, and discomfort for chaplains wishing to assist.<sup>8</sup>

These actions represented a fundamental misunderstanding of a core role of chaplaincy to ensure the diverse religious needs of prisoners are met. Clarity around how external practitioners are to arrange on site services and engage with chaplains is needed.

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<sup>8</sup>In response to a draft copy of this report, CCWA advised us Prison Fellowship is no longer an associate member, but it does refer service providers seeking access to prison management.

*There's been no non-Christian faith services or visits recently – there are issues here.*

Chaplaincy feedback

### **Acacia Prison offers the most equitable access, though there is scope to improve**

Acacia offers the most equitable access for non-contracted practitioners, though there is scope for improvement. Unlike departmental sites, chaplains at Acacia were responsible for directly managing external religious practitioners. Security clearances were processed through departmental systems and so they remained a barrier. However, Acacia chaplains' source, arrange, and support external practitioners with the assistance of Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration. The result was the best representation of equitable access to inter-faith services across the custodial estate.

At the time of this review, Acacia was the only facility consistently holding more than one non-Christian religious service, offering fortnightly Muslim prayer services and Buddhist meditation sessions. Prison Fellowship were also included, running a weekly Christian program. Security clearances had also been successfully arranged for Jewish and Jehovah's Witness practitioners. External practitioners appreciated the chaplains' direct assistance. However, better access was still needed (including increased frequency and greater freedom in scheduling service days, especially for days which hold religious significance). Similarly, better communication regarding service alterations was required.

A clear strength of Acacia's integration of external religious and spiritual affiliation was the inclusion of Aboriginal spirituality, culture, and people. Elders and chaplaincy worked collaboratively to manage religious, spiritual, and cultural services. On-site Aboriginal Elders provided cultural and spiritual services and engaged in religious services upon request. At the time of this review, an Aboriginal member of Cultural Services was transitioning to chaplaincy and an Elder from Ebenezer Aboriginal Corporation had been approached to facilitate a men's Healing Circle.

Some public prisons actively included Aboriginal people as Elders (in memorials and Sorry Business), but we understand there were no Aboriginal chaplains employed by CCWA. CCWA had, however, reportedly approached a female Elder and former CCWA chaplain to re-engage with chaplaincy. Although this was encouraging, CCWA by its own admission, has struggled to retain Aboriginal chaplains. We heard that problems experienced recruiting and retaining Aboriginal chaplains included educational barriers, familial responsibilities on Country, and professional poaching of chaplains to other services. The desire to recruit Aboriginal chaplains, must be matched by processes to facilitate successful recruitment and retention.

*It's always important to increase the number of Aboriginal people working in prisons in general. This will create a culturally safe environment.*

Cultural Services, Acacia.

## 2.6 Sub-contracting inter-faith organisations could resolve access issues

At the time of this review CCWA reported it had successfully recruited an Aboriginal chaplain and intended to sub-contract a Muslim chaplain to broaden services. There was scope to review the allocation of chaplaincy hours across the custodial estate, both in terms of number of chaplains and the process for determining each site's need. Over the length of the current contracts, extra hours had been requested at various facilities based on changes on site, with most linked to the population increase.<sup>9</sup>

However, none of these requests related to the divergent religious needs of the increasing population. Requests for increases to FTE positions provide the opportunity to improve inter-faith access. We urge the Department to work with CCWA to follow through and expand the network to include Aboriginal Elders and multiple non-Christian religious and spiritual organisations.

*The population is changing – it is becoming more diverse and more ethnic.*

Prison officer feedback

### Recommendation 5

The Department and Serco Acacia revise the chaplaincy model and contractual requirements to formally incorporate non-Christian and Aboriginal organisations into chaplaincy.

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<sup>9</sup> In response to a draft copy of this review, the Department reported that funding requests to increase the level of service provision under the contract to meet the needs of the increasing custodial population have not been supported due to funding availability.

### 3 Resourcing is assumed adequate though is not aligned with current policy

Both contracts make provisions for the adequate resourcing of chaplaincy to meet the needs of the prison population. These are sufficient in terms of financial allocation. However, access is not necessarily equitable.

#### 3.1 Resourcing was acceptable, though value for money was unclear

Under the Department's contract with CCWA, many chaplains advised us they had sufficient and appropriate access to facilities and equipment (like offices, desks, phones, and computers) to do their allocated work. Individually, several also reported relative ease in accessing requested religious or spiritual items for major religions, including Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. However, this was concerning because there was no specific allocation of finances in the Department's contract with CCWA for these resources. Most of the contract's budget was used for contractually agreed FTE across all departmental sites. An additional \$93,817 per annum remained after employee salaries and benefits. However, it was unclear to us how this money was being spent given many resources were being sourced by chaplains for free.

Similarly, the Serco contract does not have a clear financial allocation for religious, spiritual, or pastoral materials and items. The chaplaincy team receive a monthly allocation of \$25,273. But there are no stipulations within the contract regarding how this money is to be allocated. And in November 2023, the monthly invoice cost rose to \$26,501, accounting for a CPI (consumer price index) increase.

Under Serco's contract, chaplains must advise the Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration management team of annual costs for all consumables and similar items needed to deliver services, programs, or events in an Annual Service Delivery Plan. While these plans are developed, resourcing costings have not been included for the life of the current contract, and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration were also unable to advise the resource spending of chaplaincy. As such, we were not able to establish whether the Serco contract was providing value for money when procuring resources.

##### **Recommendation 6**

Serco Acacia to formally adhere to current contractually stipulated monitoring requirements in full.

#### 3.2 Inconsistent access to places of faith restricts religious practice and pastoral care

##### Places of faith were predominantly Christian

Although there was a specific requirement for all departmental sites to have dedicated religious and spiritual spaces available for use by all faiths, most presented as overtly Christian (see Photos 1 and

2). Most centres were spacious and adequately resourced, but many were referred to as chapels and the furnishings, items, and literature were predominately Christian. This was a consistent theme across prisons, where physical access was largely mistaken for religious and spiritual equity.

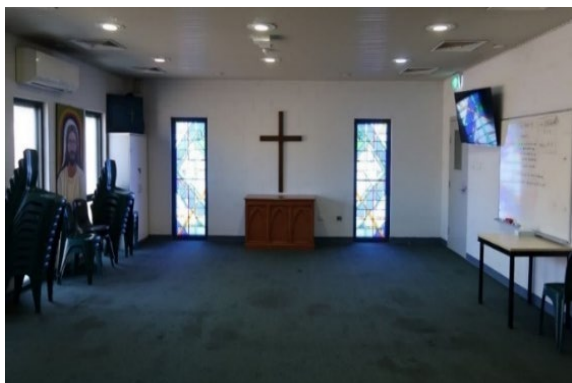


Photo 1: All Faiths Spiritual Centre at Acacia Prison



Photo 2: Chapel at Casuarina Prison

Conversely, a few sites had successfully developed an inter-faith space. One success, the Spiritual Centre at Boronia Pre Release Centre, was considered a beautiful space by prisoners, free of religious aesthetic (see Photo 3). Centres such as the Hakea Multi-Faith Centre and Bandyup Dat Nyininy Sanctuary also represented more equitable spaces for the practice of any religion or faith. However, staffing shortages meant Hakea's Multi-Faith Centre was closed at the time of this review, and there were no upcoming plans to re-open it. Bandyup's Dat Nyininy Sanctuary was routinely available for prisoners to use independently. But it was also used as a staff amenities room and so there was little religious and spiritual resourcing or décor (see Photo 4). Staff shortages and the multi-purpose use of multi-faith spaces were also linked to inconsistent religious services in Albany Regional Prison.



Photo 3: Spiritual Centre at Boronia Pre-Release Centre

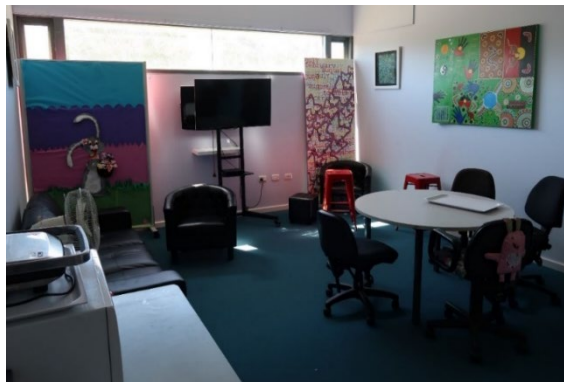


Photo 4: Dat Nyininy Sanctuary at Bandyup Women's Prison

### Some sites did not have places of faith or their access was limited

Some sites did not have access to a dedicated space for religious or spiritual services, multi-faith or otherwise. Chaplains at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, Melaleuca Women's Prison, and Greenough Regional Prison conducted religious and spiritual services in public spaces such as day rooms, ovals, or smoking huts. Sporadic use of program or cultural rooms could be arranged, though these spaces were sometimes too small or difficult to book. This was not a significant issue for religious or spiritual services, but it did pose privacy issues when engaging people in pastoral care.



There were no dedicated spaces at Banksia Hill or Melaleuca to speak with people in custody about sensitive and confidential personal issues which limited the effectiveness of pastoral care. Conversations about emotional wellbeing sometimes occurred at the grilles, through cell door hatches, or in public spaces where discussions could be interrupted or overheard by others. Staffing issues also impeded effective pastoral care. At sites such as Hakea, chaplains could access spaces for private pastoral care, but custodial staffing shortages limited prisoners' visits to the chaplains. It is noted that at Hakea chaplains had adapted services in response to these challenges, inclusive of a dedicated religious TV channel, live streaming of funerals, and external bible study. Acacia, Bandyup, and Casuarina prisons were satisfied with both dedicated spaces for confidential discussions and consistent facilitation of visits for pastoral care.

Beyond failing to meet contractual obligations, a lack of accessible or appropriate space was impeding the right of prisoners to freely practice their chosen religion. Prisoners had a strong desire for consistent and varied religious services to be held away from other prisoners. Holding services in units or on ovals was distracting, while cancellations and scheduling changes posed significant barriers and led to lost motivation. Consistent religious services held in a dedicated location were important for connection and wellbeing.

*In the 8 months I've been here I've never visited the Chapel.*

*Chaplain will come to units but hard to arrange to see him. Weekend staff shortages mean no prayer.*

Prisoners' feedback

### 3.3 Poor procurement practices resulted in inequitable management of non-Christian resources

#### The Department's contract was ill-aligned to policy

Departmental policy guides procuring, clearing, and disseminating religious and spiritual resources (DOJ, 2021B). However, the contractual requirements and contemporary procurement practices were not aligned to this policy. It states departmentally managed prisons must maintain a supply of sacred writings relevant to the beliefs of their population and, where required, these must be available in other languages (once sourced from approved suppliers) (DOJ, 2021B). Where a religious article is not available, an application should be made to the chaplain via a request form. This is then reviewed by security. Prisoners must pay for the items while chaplaincy source and maintain them. Religious items, such as jewellery, literature, and items of spiritual, religious, or devotional significance can be kept in the prisoner's possession, subject to local orders.

However, the Department's contract with CCWA contradicts this policy. The contract states prisoners are not required to pay for religious items, as resourcing is covered under the contract's total annual budget. This was leading to confusing practice with some sites paying for resources themselves while others were taking payment from prisoners.



A similar policy governs young people's access to resources, without the need for them to pay for the requested items (DOJ, 2023). Acacia's policies provide a general statement that chaplains will facilitate the receipt of spiritual resources through an inter-faith library (Serco Australia Pty Limited, 2020).

## Outdated policy has resulted in poor procurement practices

The Department's policy governing the management of religious items was also out of date. Intelligence Services no longer maintains a list of approved suppliers of religious and spiritual articles and thus cannot provide such a list for chaplains to source these things on behalf of people in custody. Instead, chaplains kept personal records of religious organisations which provided either paid or free resources.

Despite the allocation within the Department's contract's budget, there was a consistent reliance on obtaining free resources from non-Christian religious practitioners who were already providing unpaid services on site. Across the custodial estate chaplains received free religious items from Islamic, Sikh, Hindu, and Buddhist practitioners and organisations, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses. However, some of these practitioners advised us they could no longer provide religious items, because the financial cost of providing unpaid religious and spiritual services and resources was not sustainable.

*All resources are self funded and I'm having to stop providing as prisons are not managing these resources.*

### External practitioner feedback

Without centralised suppliers, there is inconsistent awareness of alternative sources, which directly disadvantages prisoners of non-Christian faiths. One site had been waiting 12 months for prayer mats as the chaplain was unsure where they could be sourced outside of the non-Christian external faith practitioner who was the previous supplier. It was similarly challenging to locate resources, such as Bibles or Qurans, in languages other than English. Inadequate understanding of the policy has resulted in a reliance of personal networks and knowledge of other faiths, which was inconsistent and not freely shared.

## Policy was sometimes misunderstood resulting in discriminatory practices

Chaplaincy and prisoner feedback revealed the Department's policy governing religious resources was inconsistently applied with the importance of religious items misunderstood. This was resulting in discriminatory practice. For example, prisoners reported largely acceptable access to mainstream religious items such as Christian crucifixes and Bibles, and Islamic Qurans and prayer mats.

But in contrast, some prisoners from Albany, Bandyup, Boronia, and Wooroloo advised us their personal religious items, including Buddhas and cultural necklaces, were taken off them. Incidents reported by chaplains also revealed instances where religious items such as Rosary Beads were removed from prisoners on the grounds of security risks, after being provided to them by chaplaincy. This inconsistency may arise from the need for chaplains to follow the direction of prison staff to ensure safety and good order at each individual site, though it results in confusion and upset.

Many prisoners valued access to their religious items and believe once the item is taken from them, their religious strength is taken too. Gaps in understanding policy and contemporary religious affiliations limit the effectiveness of an equitable religious and spiritual service.

*I asked to have my religious Buddha but reception wouldn't allow it. You can have a gold cross but not a gold Buddha or a jade Buddha.*

*As an Atheist I do find it insulting that prisoners of religious/faith backgrounds are allowed to have brought in Bibles etc yet I am not allowed to have books on my philosophical principles brought in.*

Prisoners' feedback

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## Appendix B Acronyms

Term	Expansion of Abbreviation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
APSA	Acacia Prison Services Agreement
BHDC	Banksia Hill Detention Centre
CCWA	Council of Churches WA
COPP	Commissioner's Operating Policy and Procedure
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DOJ	Department of Justice
FTE	Full time equivalent
OICS	Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services



# **Response to OICS Draft Report:**

## **Review into Access to Religious and Faith Services**

**February 2025**

Version 0.1

## Response Overview

### Introduction

On 7 September 2023, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the commencement of the *Snapshot Series Review into Access to Chaplaincy and Faith Services* (the Review).

To assist with the Review, the Department of Justice (the Department) provided a range of documentation as well as access to systems, custodial facilities, staff and prisoners.

On 30 September 2024, the Department received the draft report on the Review which contained six recommendations. Following review of the draft report, the Department provided feedback to OICS surrounding the veracity of the Review findings as well as additional contextual information. As a result, OICS amended the draft report, and a revised version was provided to the Department on 28 January 2025.

The Department acknowledges and respects OICS' role to independently and impartially report on the performance of custodial services to Parliament.

### Department Comments

In accordance with section 95E of the *Prisons Act 1981* (the Act), all people in custody have an equal opportunity to practise any form of religious or spiritual belief of their choosing.

The Department acknowledges the importance that religion and spirituality serves not only as a fundamental right but also as a protective factor for prisoners and has a number of operational policies in place to guide the provision of cultural, religious and spiritual services provided by the Department and its contractors, including:

- COPP 9.1 *Cultural, Religious and Spiritual Services (Adult)* (COPP 9.1);
- COPP 7.3 *Official, Religious, Spiritual and Other Visitors (Adult)* (COPP 7.3);
- COPP 2.2 *Cultural and Religious Requirements (Youth)* (COPP 2.2); and
- COPP 11.3 *Official Visitors (Youth)* (COPP 11.3).

Under these policies, access to religious representatives is facilitated through the following mechanisms:

- 1) The Religious and Spiritual Services Contract (the Contract) provided by the Council of Churches Western Australia (CCWA), who currently provide 48 qualified chaplains Statewide who deliver pastoral care at all public adult and youth custodial facilities to both people in custody and Department staff. These services are governed by COPPs 9.1 (Adult) and 2.2 (Youth); and
- 2) Non-contracted faith practitioners requested directly by a custodial facility or upon referral from CCWA, for example, when support for a chosen faith cannot be facilitated under the contract, or where a person in custody requests the attendance of their own religious representative. These services are governed by COPPs 7.3 (Adult) and 11.3 (Youth).

The current Contract is scheduled to expire in September 2025, after which it will undergo re-commissioning in accordance with Western Australia's State Commissioning Strategy. The re-commissioning of the Contract will provide an

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Version 1.0

opportunity to review and update the current chaplaincy model and give consideration to alternative models and methods of service delivery. The findings raised by OICS will be considered as part of the recommissioning process.

The Department is committed to addressing concerns of merit raised by OICS in collaboration with CCWA and since the review has undertaken and / or is in the process of initiating the following actions:

- Incorporated several improvements to the six-monthly reporting process including streamlining reporting templates. The Department is also investigating the development of an automated TOMS report for quantitative data on prison chaplain service provision in collaboration with the Department's technology branch.
- Establishment of a formal training register for monitoring internal mandatory training requirements, in addition to Clinical Pastoral Education qualifications for prison chaplains to provide greater oversight by the Department's Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) Contract Management Team.
- A Deputy Commissioners' Broadcast was disseminated to remind staff of the roles and responsibilities of prison chaplains, the reporting lines and mechanisms for raising issues identified by chaplains.



## Response to Recommendations

- 1 The Department and Serco Acacia review all contractual requirements for purpose, achievability, clarity, and alignment between service level requirements and on site processes.**

Level of Acceptance:	Supported
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Offender Services

### Response:

The current Contract<sup>1</sup> will expire in September 2025 and a complete review of the existing contractual requirements will be undertaken as part of the re-commissioning process that will be conducted in accordance with Western Australia's State Commissioning Strategy<sup>2</sup>.

Any inconsistencies between the Department's operational policies and procedures and the Contract will be addressed as part of the re-commissioning process to ensure contractual requirements, service level requirements, and on-site processes are aligned.

In addition, the R&R Contract Management Team also conducts site visits to custodial facilities Statewide to discuss contractor performance with local management teams and identify improvements both at a local and system-wide level.

With respect to OICS' findings pertaining to reporting expectations, to clarify and reinforce the role of prison chaplains to all staff working within custodial facilities, a Deputy Commissioner's Broadcast has been issued as a reminder of the roles and responsibilities of prison chaplains, including reporting lines and mechanisms for raising issues identified while performing their duties.

- 2 The Department and Serco Acacia review current recruitment, training, and development practices and progress to ensure all meet with agreed contractual requirements and on-site role requirements.**

Level of Acceptance:	Not Supported
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Offender Services

### Response:

Whilst under the Contract, a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is the minimum qualification required by prison chaplains, and the recruitment, training and professional development opportunities for prison chaplains remains the responsibility of CCWA, the Department provides additional internal training opportunities to help chaplains better understand the needs of the dynamic prisoner population and in turn better support prisoners.

Training provided internally includes, but is not limited to, cultural capability, mental health awareness, suicide prevention and Prisoner Risk Assessment Group (PRAG).

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<sup>1</sup> [Religious and Spiritual Services Contract ROI201903529](#)

<sup>2</sup> [State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services](#)



The Department will work with CCWA to resolve access issues reported by OICS to ensure CCWA staff can access Department issued online training.

To ensure greater oversight on training undertaken by prison Chaplains, the Department's R&R Contract Management team have established a formal training register for monitoring internal training requirements as well as Clinical Pastoral Education qualifications.

A copy of this training register has been provided to OICS which shows that as at February 2025, compliance against training requirements for prison chaplains was at approximately 90%.

**3 The Department and Serco Acacia review alternative chaplaincy models that can inform new contractual requirements which meet the inter-faith needs of the custodial population.**

Level of Acceptance:	Supported in Principle
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Offender Services

**Response:**

This recommendation, along with the alternative models outlined by OICS in the review report will be considered as part of the re-commissioning of the Contract following its expiry in September 2025.

**4 The Department, Serco Acacia, and service providers utilise local communities and organisations to source both Aboriginal chaplains and Aboriginal Elders as part of an inter-faith chaplaincy model.**

Level of Acceptance:	Not Supported
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Offender Services

**Response:**

CCWA makes all efforts to source Aboriginal chaplains to provide pastoral support to prisoners, noting Aboriginal chaplains are exceedingly rare and recruitment cannot be guaranteed.

While it is understood that religious and cultural beliefs are not mutually exclusive, it is important to ensure the service provision of the two remain distinct from one another, particularly given some Aboriginal prisoners may have suffered from past negative experiences associated with religious organisations and representatives.

This distinction is reinforced under section 2 of COPP 9.1 which states "*Aboriginal prisoners may have a strong spiritual connection to their culture that is not based on a religion. COPP 4.2 – Aboriginal Prisoners provides guidance for working with Aboriginal prisoners who may require support that is different and separate from services outlined in this COPP*".

In addition, section 3.10 of COPP 4.2 authorises Superintendents to approve the use of cultural consultants for the purpose of "*individual cultural interventions (ceremonies, translation, healing, counselling) for Aboriginal prisoners*".

**5 The Department and Serco Acacia revise the chaplaincy model and contractual requirements to formally incorporate non-Christian and Aboriginal organisations into chaplaincy.**

Level of Acceptance:	Supported in Principle
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Offender Services

**Response:**

This recommendation will be considered as part of the re-commissioning of the Contract following its expiry in September 2025.

However, it should be noted that while the Department may consider the inclusion of Aboriginal organisations into the chaplaincy model, this will be for the delivery of pastoral care only as the provision of cultural support under the Contract is not supported as per the response to recommendation 4.

A number of mechanisms for the provision of cultural support are already established, including the Aboriginal Visitors Scheme, Prison Support Officers, and the Aboriginal Services Committees at each custodial facility.

**6 Serco Acacia formally adhere to current contractually stipulated monitoring requirements in full.**

Level of Acceptance:	N/A
Responsible Division:	N/A
Responsible Directorate:	N/A

**Response:**

This recommendation is not applicable to the Department.

## Appendix D Serco Acacia's Response



31 October 2024

Eamon Ryan  
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Dear Mr Ryan,

### **Draft Review of Snapshot Series: Access to Chaplaincy and Faith Services**

Thank you for sending a copy of the Draft Review of Snapshot Series: Access to Chaplaincy and Faith Services for our review and response. We have reviewed the report and appreciate the recommendations.

In relation to Serco's contract with the Council of Churches WA (CCWA), we have no concerns and have strong working relationships with our chaplains, however, will take the recommendations into consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Harrison", is written over the "Yours sincerely," text.

John Harrison  
Superintendent  
Acacia Prison

**Impact**  
a better  
**future**

## Appendix E Council of Churches Western Australia's Response



THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA INC.

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3 April 2025

Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services



Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for inviting our response to the Draft Report of the OICS review of Access to Religious and Faith Services in Western Australian prisons and youth detention facilities.

The Council of Churches of WA is disappointed in some negative findings of the review in terms of their premise and accuracy in respect of our chaplains' work.

From the draft report, it appears that the responsibilities for delivering Religious and Spiritual Services in WA prisons and detention centres require greater clarity. The draft report and recommendations seem to conflate the roles and expectations of DOJ staff, service providers, and Serco.

There seems to be a rigid view that we are providers of a one-stop Christian-only chaplaincy, a view that fails to recognise the diverse, non-denominational nature of our pastoral work pertaining to the general well-being of prisoners and detainees; the diversity in ethnicity and languages of our member churches from which our pool of chaplains are drawn; our close collaboration with religious representatives of other faiths who come into the prisons to lead worship or to administer pastoral care that has been requested by prisoners; and the lengths to which the council goes to source and provide religious materials for people of all faiths across the custodial estates.

The commitment to supporting individuals in need is a fundamental principle of Christian theology, rooted in the example of Jesus and his Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the context of prison chaplaincy, pastoral care plays a vital role, not as a response to the high number of individuals in custody without religious affiliation, but as an expression of a Christian commitment to meet the daily needs of all prisoners.

We currently employ 48 chaplains to work in WA prisons and in youth detention, a number that has remained static over the course of the five-year DOJ contract while WA's prison population has increased by 22.96% from an October 2020 'snapshot' muster of 5,551 to 6,826 in March 2025, according to DOJ figures. (These figures do not include the Serco Acacia contract.)

In accordance with the DOJ and Serco Acacia contracts, our chaplains provide pastoral care to detainees, prisoners, prison officers and administrative staff of all faiths and to those of no faith. It is never the role of a prison chaplain to proselytise or convert. Nor are prisoners ever compelled to speak with a chaplain.

We treat each prisoner or detainee as an equal in our encounters, regardless of their religion, or lack of religion, their ethnicity, age, intellectual capacity, background or the nature of the charges or any sentence they are facing. While it is our faith that informs this neutral approach, the issue of faith does not enter into an encounter unless and until a prisoner or detainee invites it in. The chaplains understand and respect their professional boundaries. Chaplains are trained to be cautious about blurring the lines between their roles and those of others who are more qualified to

respond to prisoner's physical, social, and mental health needs. Chaplains adhere to their supportive role for the team of specialists to whom they are quick to pass on referrals that are beyond their remit or training.

Chaplaincy Teams are made up of people from different ethnic backgrounds, language and religious affiliations who understand the importance of Ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue. They are attentive listeners, well-versed in the human condition, and able to maintain a respectful silence or to communicate to the extent to which they are invited.

While the provision of religious services is part of chaplains' responsibilities, these services typically occur on a weekly basis and should not be considered the primary focus. The central function of chaplaincy is to provide consistent support and pastoral care to prisoners, detainees, prison officers and administrative staff in the metropolitan and regional custodial estates. Operational challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent disruptions have made the regular scheduling of religious services more difficult.

Please find following our response to sections of the draft report that we feel would benefit from clarification. By way of example, we've included some anecdotal information from our Chaplain Coordinator at Hakea Prison.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure the continued success of the chaplaincy program and its positive impact on the incarcerated population.

We're open to incorporating non-Christian and Aboriginal organisations into chaplaincy and would embrace all efforts to better accommodate the religious and pastoral needs of prisoners and staff of other faiths.

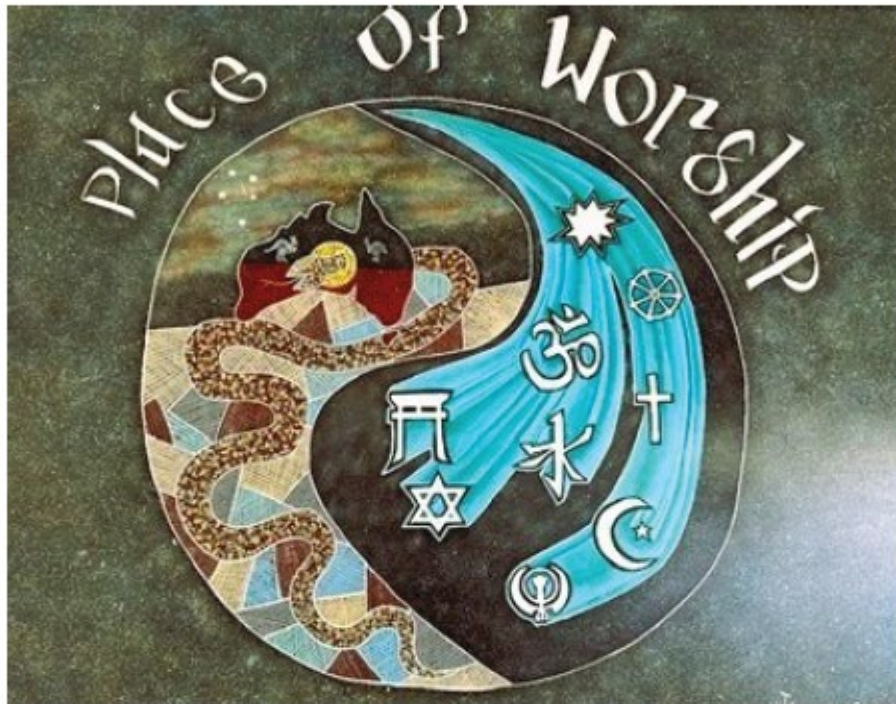
Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Simicke', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Ms Simone Micke  
CCWA General Secretary



## THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA INC.



*Hakea Prison's Worship Centre is adorned with a 1.8m high by 2.4m wide mural painted by Indigenous inmates to reflect a multi-faith approach.*

Response to  
Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services Report on  
ACCESS TO RELIGIOUS AND FAITH SERVICES

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## OICS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*'In Western Australia, people's religious affiliation is only recorded on their initial intake into custody (DOJ, 2023; DOJ, 2021A; DOJ, 2021B). It is not re-recorded when they transfer to another custodial facility. If a person in custody wants to alter their religious affiliation, they must put their request in writing and undergo an assessment by chaplaincy to determine the authenticity of their request, particularly around the time of cultural events. This is not aligned with departmental policy as it is inappropriate for chaplaincy to determine the authenticity of prisoner requests.'* (pg.vi)

As the review identified, people's religious affiliation is recorded only on their initial intake into prison. For some, it will be the first time they have been incarcerated and the whole intake process – fingerprinting, relinquishing civilian clothing and other effects, strip-searching, losing their autonomy – may be extremely daunting, especially in the context of their fears of the unknown that awaits them beyond the clank of the prison gate.

As individual prison chaplains reported to the review, chaplains have encountered several cases in which recording of a prisoner's religion has slipped through the cracks of the intake processes that are, as the draft report states, "often delayed, inconsistent or superficial because of current population and staff shortages".

When it comes to a prisoner attempting to rectify this by having their religious affiliation recorded or if they wish to change their denomination, departmental policy stipulates that a prisoner must first complete a request form that is provided to chaplaincy and that must be approved by security.

The review found that prisoners may undergo "an assessment by chaplaincy to determine the authenticity of a prisoner's request".

CCWA believes that there have been only limited incidences of a chaplain taking it upon themselves to do such an "assessment", and that there have been no such incidences in the latter part of the current contract because of our efforts to bring about cultural change within the chaplaincy.

We acknowledge that it would be inappropriate for a chaplain to judge the authenticity of a prisoner's request. We take the view that prisoners have the sole right to determine their religious affiliation.

Once a prisoner completes their form, there is a section for a chaplain to sign as a mere formality. A chaplain plays no role in a prisoner's decision to nominate a religion or to change their religion. The coordinating chaplain then sends the form to the prison executive for processing.

*"You have truly made a difference in my life and direction."*

*~ Prisoner's letter to a CCWA chaplain, 24/12/24*

*'The CCWA is a Christian organisation bringing together Christian denominations with an ecumenical focus. CCWA has been involved in prison chaplaincy for over 20 years and has three core roles: advocating for Christian unity; providing religious and pastoral services to prisons and hospitals; and arranging disaster relief (CCWA, 2024)'. (pg. vi)*

From this paragraph's structure, it could be misconstrued that CCWA advocates for Christian unity within its prison chaplaincy and this is not correct. It would be clearer to say:

The CCWA is a Christian organisation bringing together Christian denominations with an ecumenical focus. CCWA's three core roles are advocating for Christian unity; providing religious and pastoral services to prisons and hospitals; and arranging disaster relief. CCWA has been involved in prison chaplaincy for more than 20 years.

## 1.1 CLEAR REPORTING REQUIREMENTS ARE NOT FOLLOWED

*'Contractual reporting was consistent, though partial and errored (sic). CCWA are contractually obliged to provide quantitative and qualitative information demonstrating performance against specific measures. However, when they advised CMT its chaplains lacked the skill and/or time to input the required information this task was taken over by CMT. Collecting the required quantitative information is manual and therefore time-consuming process. Consequently, and due to limited staffing within its own team, CMT only spot check bi-annual performance review reports and were unaware of the errors in reporting we identified.'* (pg. 2)

As part of their training and induction, CCWA stresses to each chaplain that it is imperative that they enter on the relevant prison management data system every significant pastoral and religious encounter in the prison.

As a remand facility with a large and more transient prison population, Hakea Prison presents its Prison Chaplaincy Team with greater challenges in developing a rapport with individual prisoners who seek a referral.

On a typical day, the Hakea Chaplaincy Team meets in the morning to 'triage' the day's cases. This is done by opening the *Total Offenders Management System* (TOMS) to check new Religious and Spiritual Referrals. Usually there are around 20 -30 per day and they are shared between up to five chaplains, according to our Hakea Chaplain Coordinator. There may be two chaplains one day, three another.

Referrals can be automatic *At Risk Management System* (ARMS) referrals. They can emanate from Prisoner Risk Assessment Group, individual Prison Units, a prisoner's verbal request or their request via a Unit Interview Form, or requests from families and friends.

Prisoners on ARMS and the *Supports and Management System* (SAMS) are given first priority, followed by first-time prisoners and young offenders. Regular prisoner visits begin only after the priority list is completed. No prisoner or youth detainee goes unseen.

Each chaplain is allocated their list of referrals for the day, with prisoners and chaplains matched according to individual needs and gifts such as language and cultural understanding whenever possible. At no time does religion play a part in the chaplaincy visits allocation.

In the case of at-risk prisoners, chaplains are required to input a report into ARMS immediately after each visit with each prisoner. If there are three at-risk prisoners, the chaplain will return to the office three times in succession to input each individual report.

Recording is an essential part of the role. Chaplains record each visit on TOMS and on the ARMS and SAMS supervision logs where appropriate. On occasions chaplains also write additional notes under Assessments. Much of this essential administrative work is done at the end of an often-demanding day of chaplaincy.

*"As you may remember, I was highly suicidal when I first came into prison, only my faith was keeping me alive. The PHS team organised a meeting with you on my behalf – it was the best decision they ever made. Your words resonated with me when I was in a dark place, and you have continued to reach me." ~ A transferred prisoner's letter to a CCWA chaplain, 22/01/25*

All relevant visits and interactions recorded on TOMS form the quantitative part of the reporting requirements. The current tender has more reporting requirements than in previous Service Agreements. DOJ has endeavoured to limit the administrative burden in relation to this quantitative reporting that would have required the CCWA General Secretary to perform the onerous task of extracting and collating data from TOMS in respect of all religious and pastoral contacts of all the prisoners in all the prisons every six months. It needs to be remembered that TOMS is only accessible within the prisons or DOJ.

The qualitative component is evidenced in a bi-annual report to the Contract Management Team.





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*'Across the custodial estate there is misunderstanding of reporting lines, with several chaplains mistaking local management for their line management. But within both contracts line management responsibility rests with CCWA. The practical expectation on site to follow prison management direction causes confusion and tension among the parties. This misunderstanding by chaplains and prison management alike, has meant a minority of incidents, including potential behavioural or conduct issues, were not reported to CCWA as per contractual protocols.*

*'At the time of this review, poor communication has led to a misunderstanding of CCWA's role as a sub-contracting service provider with responsibility for reporting issues, incidents, and changes to CMT and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration. Both CCWA and CMT now routinely contacted prisons, and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration observed daily chaplaincy practices. However, we question the adequacy of this contact given the lack of formal reporting directly to CCWA, which has resulted in ongoing, unreported incidents and issues across regional sites.*

*Increased site visits by CCWA since 2021 have aimed to mitigate risks and clarify its role in consulting with chaplains, prison management, CMT and Serco Rehabilitation and Reintegration to resolve breaches, incidents, or issues while on site with a combination of performance development and training. CCWA reported a strong desire to clarify their role as line management for all chaplains, as opposed to prison management, to support chaplains in their roles while ensuring consistency and accountability across all sites.'* (pg. 4, 5)

CCWA has been clear and consistent in outlining the proper reporting lines for chaplains throughout the duration of the contract. CCWA acknowledges that despite these efforts, a small number of chaplains have at times failed to adhere to these reporting protocols. When issues have arisen, CCWA has addressed them through performance management, providing additional support and clarification to ensure all chaplains understand and follow the established channels.

CCWA remains committed to fostering a positive and effective working environment and views adherence to reporting lines as essential for operational integrity and the smooth delivery of services. By maintaining these standards, CCWA aims to support chaplains in their roles while ensuring consistency and accountability across all levels of service.

Cultural change takes time and requires a consistent approach, and that is our ongoing commitment.

## 1.2 CHANGED RECRUITMENT PRACTICES AND LIMITED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MEANT INCONSISTENT KNOWLEDGE AND ERODED SUPPORTS

*"At the commencement of both contracts separate job description forms (JDFs) outlined essential and desirable criteria for both chaplains and coordinating chaplains. Essential criteria included in both JDFs included:*

- a tertiary degree in Theology*
- minimum one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)*
- previous pastoral experience*
- good standing with church or faith community*
- attendance at spiritual retreats*
- commitment to continuing education*
- broad knowledge of faiths, traditions, and designated contacts.*

*Coordinating chaplains had an additional essential criterion of at least five years pastoral care experience.*

*However, at the time of our review, the separate JDFs had been combined into one for both roles and all essential criteria were reclassified as desirable experience. A degree in Theology and minimum attainment of CPE points were no longer required for either position. They had been substituted for a demonstrated ability to:*

- promote religious and spiritual wellbeing through pastoral care*
- respond to spiritual needs*
- work with empathy with people from all ethnicities and religions*
- understand the impact of trauma, grief, and loss.*



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*The Department was not aware of these changes. Nor were the changes aligned to the Department's contract which binds CCWA to ensuring its chaplains are qualified as per the CPE requirements for prison chaplaincy. CPE is a course undertaken by chaplains at local hospitals which involves self-reflection upon own issues and is therefore considered important by chaplains for a deep understanding of themselves and their role in providing pastoral care.*

*The changes significantly generalise the knowledge and experience of incoming recruits. Feedback from young people in custody suggested there was benefit in learning about different religions, while adult prisoners requested services from Aboriginal Elders, and specifically female Noongar Elders, Buddhist Monks, Muslim Imams, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Taken together, this highlights a need for greater theological understanding and religious and spiritual diversity within chaplaincy, as required under both contracts. (pg.6, 7)*

Below we cite the relevant clause of the DOJ contract to clarify actual DOJ qualification requirements. While you have quoted the original CCWA JDF that we have since modified to allow a more expansive selection pool, it has never been stipulated in the DOJ or Serco contracts that it is essential for a chaplain to have a degree in Theology. A lot of our chaplains have degrees in Theology. Some have Masters or Doctorates. Others have multiple degrees and have been industry leaders in different Ministries.

A Clinical Pastoral Education certificate (CPE) or equivalent is the minimum requirement stipulated by DOJ as per the following excerpt from the contract and addendum.

*5.6 Appointing and Employing Chaplains*

*All staff of Service Providers must undergo a Pre-employment Clearance in accordance with the Department's Criminal Records Screening Policy prior to commencing work in any prison or detention centre.*

*Chaplains working at Banksia Hill Detention Centre will also need to undergo a Working with Children Check prior to commencement.*

*The Service Provider will be responsible for management, administration and oversight of Chaplains to ensure they are:*

- Suitable;*
- Qualified as per the requirements to become a prison Chaplain under the Clinical Pastoral Education; and*
- In good standing prior to employment under this Service Agreement.*

*Where qualifications are not met, the Service Provider, in consultation with the Department will determine if the gap can be suitably addressed through training and development.*

*Addendum 12 February 2020*

*Under 5.6 Appointing and Employing Chaplains, one of the requirements is to be "Qualified as per the requirements to become a prison Chaplain under the Clinical Pastoral Education". This provision is to be revised to add the following: "Consideration will be given to progress toward the Chaplaincy Pastoral Education qualification, as well as equivalent qualifications and/or experience".*

As an aside, it is a requirement for chaplains working in Banksia Hill and Unit 18 to have a Working With Children Check (WWCC) clearance. We have gone a step further and require all CCWA chaplains to have a Working With Children Check clearance.

And we have moved on from the days when chaplains did their CPE in hospitals alone. Today, they undertake CPE through a university or professional body or undertake placement in different industry sectors, including hospitals, aged care and mine sites.

*'By far the most lamented professional development opportunity that had eroded was the disbandment of the Prison Chaplains Association (PCA). The PCA was a group for both contracted chaplains and non-contracted practitioners of faith across the custodial estate, which gathered to discuss issues and exchange information relevant to providing religious and pastoral services. Active at the time both current contracts commenced, the PCA was included in the Department's contract as a tool for coordinating chaplains. The PCA was also a professional development resource for chaplains, and it was listed as a partner organisation which CCWA could regularly contact and share information.*





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*Despite this, we were told the PCA was disbanded by the CCWA because some service providers allegedly dominated quarterly meetings. CCWA preferred having one organisation providing all services to streamline communication and reduce workload. Current chaplains and external faith practitioners advised us the PCA was a highly valued source of knowledge and support. Without the PCA, chaplains said they had no direct line of communication with other chaplains, were unaware of other chaplains across the custodial estate, and missed the sense of community and togetherness. Several practitioners expressed a desire for the PCA, or a similar body, to be restored so all religious and pastoral service providers could communicate and network.’ (pg. 7, 8)*

To suggest that CCWA disbanded the PCA group is erroneous and appears designed to reflect poorly on our organisation. As CCWA began the DOJ and Serco contracts, we offered to help PCA transition into a pastoral and peer support group for chaplains. However, the PCA leadership chose not to accept this offer and decided to disband. While some may have been disappointed, a significant number of chaplains expressed dissatisfaction with PCA, finding it to have become a politically charged, negative group led by a few dominant voices.

CCWA understands the importance of providing pastoral support for chaplains. In line with this, three retreats have been organised during the contract period — one led by a subcontractor and two facilitated by CCWA. Additionally, for chaplains in remote areas, CCWA covers travel and accommodation costs to ensure they can participate in retreats, meetings, and conferences.

The General Secretary, Chaplain Coordinator, and other chaplains have also made multiple visits to chaplains in metropolitan and regional facilities, providing on-site support and training. This continued engagement reflects CCWA’s commitment to the well-being and professional growth of its chaplains.

CCWA believes it is incorrect to state that ‘PCA was included in the Department contract as a tool for coordinating chaplains.’ We refer to the wording of 12 FEBRUARY 2020 ADDENDUM TO REQUEST DOCUMENT pertaining to our contract: ‘Representation from PCA on the Religious and Spiritual Services Board (the Board) is not required as the Department has no contractual relationship with the PCA.’

*‘Other training was sought to address gaps in contemporary understanding, such as family violence and FASD, or to upskill to meet the growing needs of a diverse and understaffed prison population such as substance use, complex trauma, and suicidal tendencies. Training in program facilitation was often at the request of prison management in response to a gap in service provision.*

*Chaplains should not be expected to arrange their own training, in lieu of sufficient training and development being provided by their employer under both contracts. Nor should they undertake training at the request of prison management to fill other gaps in services elsewhere across the facility. This is particularly important in light of mandatory training requirements in both contracts.’ (pg. 9)*

CCWA provides training to chaplains from induction onwards and expects all chaplains to take part in DOJ Mandatory Training. All our chaplains have completed at least 90% of all DOJ Mandatory Training as required to date, a situation that would be corroborated by DOJ records.

CCWA allocates funds from its Professional Development budget to support chaplains who seek further training relevant to their roles. This funding underscores CCWA’s commitment to fostering professional growth and enhancing the skills of its chaplains in a way that aligns with their core responsibilities.

In providing this support, CCWA carefully assesses each training request to ensure that it directly benefits chaplains in their pastoral care duties and does not create overlaps with the roles of other agencies. This approach is taken to maintain clear distinctions in responsibilities, safeguarding the unique contributions of chaplains while respecting the expertise of other professionals within the prison system. By supporting targeted, role-specific training, CCWA enables chaplains to continue delivering high-quality pastoral care without blurring the boundaries of their role.

*“I first met you in (XXX) Prison after requesting to speak with a psychologist; the Senior Officer recommended a Chaplain first! When I met you, I truthfully explained that I was of no particular faith; you immediately said that it was of no consequence. You made me feel comfortable, at ease, so the talk flowed. For me it was the first opportunity to have an interesting and educated conversation; I was in a foreign country with no contacts. You visited me regularly despite my*

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*feelings of guilt for using your valuable time; you assured me that you were happy to meet with me. Over the months I grew to trust you as a friend and opened up on more of my life. I explained that trust had been a problem due to past experiences. We spoke on numerous subjects and I felt a rapport developed. I listened to your advice re prison life and being isolated;..... After many months and deeming you as a friend, I started to discuss my offences. You were the only person I felt that I could totally trust to speak the truth as I did not want someone who would just say what I would like to hear! It was embarrassing, but you listened and your observations were thoughtful, sincere and most helpful.” ~ Prisoner’s letter to a CCWA chaplain, 24/09/21*

### 2.3 CHAPLAINCY SERVICES WERE ECUMENICAL NOT INTER-FAITH

*‘It is a core contractual obligation that the role, conduct, and services of chaplaincy are equitable for all religions and faiths. This is described within the Department’s contract with CCWA as an ‘ecumenical’ approach whereby chaplains provide religious and spiritual service to prisoners of all religions and faiths, regardless of their own affiliation. But this is a misunderstanding of an ecumenical approach, which is defined as the unification of Christian Churches in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ (Britannica, 2024). Therefore, an ecumenical approach is not aligned with the provision of support or service for those religions that do not incorporate these aspects of Christianity.’ (pg. 13)*

The goals of ecumenism are not the same as working ecumenically. The former refers to a movement within the Christian tradition which seeks to deepen and foster unity amongst the churches, while the latter describes an attitude of cooperation and common action by Christians from different churches. The ‘common action’ in this case is the provision of religious and spiritual services to people of all faiths and of none. To date, our chaplains have been successful in delivering services without prejudice and have actively collaborated with Religious Visitors from other faith traditions to meet the needs of all, as detailed more fully below.

*As you said, writing letters is good, but nothing can replace our open and lively debate.”  
~ Prisoner’s letter to a CCWA chaplain, 11/02/24*

### 2.5 THE EXPERIENCE OF NON-CHRISTIAN FAITH PRACTITIONERS WAS MOSTLY POOR

*‘Non-contracted religious practitioner experience was largely one of confusion, inaccessibility, and underappreciation. CCWA and CMT attitudes appeared somewhat indifferent to the needs of these practitioners, and we were told chaplains had been directed not to assist non-contracted practitioners applying for security clearances or arranging either ad hoc visits or ongoing services. While this direction is aligned with departmental policy, it had resulted in significant challenges for those outside of CCWA who wished to provide prisoner-requested services. Conversely, at Acacia, there was greater equity, but there was still capacity for increased access.’ (pg. 17)*

CCWA takes exception to the claim that we are “somewhat indifferent” to other faith practitioners. After all, CCWA chaplains come from different ethnic backgrounds, speak different languages and have different religious affiliations under the umbrella of Christian religions. We do not adhere to an “us and them” ethos.

Using the situation at Hakea as an example, the Hakea Chaplain Coordinator meets with a representative of the Muslim faith, an Imam, each fortnight to facilitate scheduled Muslim Prayer services in Hakea’s multi-faith Worship Centre.

Facilitating Muslim Prayers is time-consuming and requires a strong working relationship with the Imam. The Chaplain Coordinator meets the Imam at the gatehouse, escorts him to the Worship Centre, provides him with a list of the names of prisoners who will attend prayers, returns to the chaplaincy office to contact the relevant prison units to remind them to escort their Muslim prisoners to the Worship Centre, escorts the Imam back to the gatehouse after prayers, and then returns to the office to record the worship attendance of each prisoner and any other relevant information on TOMS.

A similar scenario unfolds at other metropolitan prisons and at Bunbury Regional Prison where the same Imam visits.



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Additionally, chaplains refer specific Muslim prisoners to the Imam upon request and help distribute essential religious items such as prayer mats, Qur'ans, and other Islamic literature to prisoners. Replenishing supplies of these items is done in collaboration with the Imam. While some of these items are supplied by the Imam who has repeatedly declined our efforts to remunerate him, CCWA procures some of these items independently. All such items must first be approved by the prison administration before they can be distributed.

Each Chaplain Coordinator in the metropolitan and regional prisons also maintains communication with representatives of the *Buddhist, Sikh and Jewish faiths, Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Christ of Latter Days Saints* to facilitate their visits to prisoners.

As with the Imam, each of Religious Visitor of the different faiths is accompanied through the prison to a place of worship or meeting room by a chaplain accordance with security clearance protocols. This is because chaplains have the appropriate level of security clearance and religious visitors do not. Chaplaincy Teams also help facilitate organisations like Prison Fellowship or even AA leaders to support and visit prisoners.

In addition, chaplains regularly distribute religious study materials of other faiths, including correspondence courses from groups such as Emmaus to prisoners engaged in religious education. This support underscores CCWA's commitment to fostering spiritual care and its respect for the diverse religious needs within the prisons. Again, this literature must first be approved by prison administration.

We would like to reiterate the ethnic diversity and array of languages spoken by CCWA chaplains that proves so beneficial in communicating with prisoners and Religious Visitors of many different faiths. Languages spoken by our teams include the Chinese languages of Mandarin, Hokkien, and Hakka, Vietnamese, Indian, Afrikaans, Arabic, the Sudanese languages of Bari and Dinka, Burmese, Filipino, German, Italian, Malay (the official language of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei), Noongar, and Kimberley Kriol (the first language of many Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley and a variation of one of the most widely spoken Aboriginal languages in Australia).

In 2021, through the Contract Management Team, CCWA was advised that DOJ had reviewed and streamlined procedures for religious visitor security clearances. It was relayed to the chaplains that whereas they'd previously been involved in the process, applications for prison visits and the running of programs were to be directed in the first instance to the Superintendent of their facility for approval. *Refer to COPP 7.3*

*"I had a visit from Chaplain (XXX) – thank you. It will take time. Trust and confidence must be built up, I appreciate his workload, however, you can be sure that I will do my best. It is hard to imagine anyone filling your shoes." Transferred prisoner to a previous CCWA chaplain 21/07/22*

*'Aboriginal prisoners' feedback added further depth to the argument for more diversity among chaplains. They wanted an integrated approach to religion, spirituality and culture through services and visits from Elders. Christianity is a dominant religion among Aboriginal prisoners (almost 87% of prisoners who identified as Christian on intake to prison were Aboriginal).' (pg. 15)*

Recruiting and retaining more Indigenous chaplains remains a core goal of CCWA. Over the course of the contract, we have recruited some fine Noongar chaplains but retaining them is our greatest challenge.

In an endeavour to meet some of the religious needs of Indigenous prisoners, CCWA has procured bibles and religious texts in language and is in the process of seeking approval through DOJ for their use in the prisons and in youth detention.



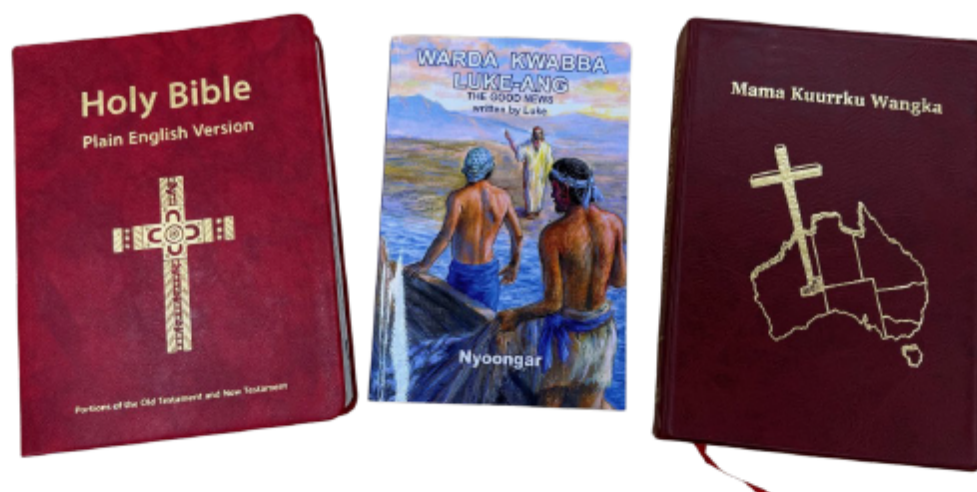


We have recently sourced a plain English version of the bible with portions of the Old and New Testament translated for speakers of Australian Indigenous languages for whom English is a second language. It uses the type of English they speak and understand. Think of terms like 'Pharisee mob' and 'Galilee country'. Through Uniting Church frontier chaplains, CCWA has road-tested this bible in Indigenous communities in Mount Magnet, Tom Price and other Pilbara region communities with great success. We will now seek approval from the various prisons for them to be distributed to Indigenous prisoners and detainees who want them. And we are exploring the possibility of making this bible available in a spoken word format.

*'Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea Country. At that time, the big boss over that country was called Herod.'* ~ Holy Bible Plain English Version published by Bible League Inc.

Through the Bible Society, we have obtained bibles translated into the Ngaanyatjarra language of the peoples of the Goldfields-Esperance region that we are in the process of supplying these to the Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison.

We have also purchased copies of the Book of Luke in Noongar, the language of Indigenous peoples of WA's South-West. It is the first time a whole book from the Christian bible has been published in Noongar, a project many years in the making by a team of Noongar speakers together with facilitators and consultants from Bible Society Australia.



We have also sourced religious reading materials in a format that makes them more accessible to particular groups, such as a graphic novel for youth detainees.

For the visually impaired or those who are not literate, we are in the process of seeking approval from DOJ for a hand-held, solar-powered audio device that can play pre-recorded versions of the bible or other religious texts such as the Qur'an. There is also capacity to have these spoken holy books translated into other languages, subject to DOJ/prison approval.

*'CCWA advised its chaplains they would be breaching contract if they facilitated Prison Fellowship programs, as chaplaincy were not funded to facilitate external religious visitors or services. This contradicts the role of Prison Fellowship as it is listed as a CCWA Associate Member within the Department's contract. The inconsistency has meant extra work for onsite prison management, confusion for members of the Prison Fellowship, and discomfort for chaplains wishing to assist. These actions represent a fundamental misunderstanding of a core role of chaplaincy to ensure the diverse religious needs of prisoners are met. Clarity around how external practitioners are to arrange onsite services and engage with chaplains is needed.'* (pg. 20)

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Prison Fellowship is not currently an associate member of CCWA. Chaplains do not have the authority to approve programs. It would be a breach of contract to do so without seeking the approval of DOJ. Some Prison Fellowship programs have been approved by DOJ but Prison Fellowship must still apply to run its programs through the proper channels and not seek approval through the chaplains. It is a chaplain's responsibility to refer a service provider to prison management.

## CONCLUSION

This report contains several inaccuracies and misleading statements, particularly with respect to the distinct services and responsibilities outlined under the two separate contracts (Serco Acacia and DOJ). These contracts were procured using different methods and have different terms, so comparing them directly is not appropriate. We have consistently met all contractual obligations, including those related to updates in specific COPPs, and have remained flexible in accommodating changes within the current contract. We have worked closely with the Contract Management Team to ensure that outcomes benefit all parties involved.

Key points to highlight:

- **Commitment to Quality Chaplaincy Services:** We have remained fully committed to delivering high-quality chaplaincy services across all WA prisons, adhering to our contractual obligations, including under COVID restrictions for a significant part of the contracts.
- **Improved Governance:** Since the commencement of the contracts, we have made significant improvements to governance, streamlining processes to enhance efficiency and accountability.
- **Mandatory Reporting Compliance:** In October 2022, we implemented mandatory reporting protocols for all contracted chaplains, ensuring full compliance with the Children and Community Services Act 2004, governing the reporting of child sexual abuse in Western Australia. Additionally, all new chaplains will be required to complete a DOJ TOMS mandatory onsite training module (currently still under development) when they commence their role with CCWA.
- **Adaptation to Contractual Changes:** We have successfully adapted to and implemented changes approved under the contract, further ensuring that all requirements are met.
- **Ongoing Training and Development:** We have established a comprehensive training program for chaplains, which has been submitted for departmental approval. This program is designed to provide Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and ongoing professional development tailored to the prison environment. While we await approval, all our chaplains have either completed CPE or possess equivalent qualifications.
- **Commitment to Excellence:** We are fully compliant with all contractual requirements and are held in high regard by prison management and the Department of Justice across all facilities. CCWA continues to focus on maintaining high standards for chaplaincy services, adapting to the changing landscape of the prison system.
- **Respect for All Prisoners:** CCWA chaplains are dedicated to supporting every prisoner in the system, treating all individuals with respect regardless of their belief or background or the crimes that put them behind bars in the case of a sentenced prisoner.

Chaplains are consistently recognised as a vital and respected resource by prison management across both adult and juvenile facilities, according to the feedback we receive at our quarterly business meetings with Contract Management Team, often attended by prison superintendents. Chaplains' contributions are valued not only for the spiritual and emotional support that they provide to incarcerated individuals but also for their role in fostering a positive, rehabilitative environment. Prison management acknowledges the chaplains' professionalism, dedication, and ability to engage with diverse populations, including individuals from various cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. Their work is integral to the overall well-being of the incarcerated, supporting their personal growth, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society.



## Appendix F Operational Policies

Table 2: Operational policy outlining the accesses to religious or spiritual services, resources and requirements.

Service, Resource or Requirement	Operational Policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Religious or spiritual information will be recorded at intake. Prisoners will be advised of the scope and availability of religious or spiritual services, including how to request visits from either chaplaincy or another representative of faith.</li> <li>Internal visits from those acting in a religious or spiritual capacity can be requested of the Superintendent. Visits can constitute the conduct of ceremony, worship, or pastoral care. Where a faith is not represented, chaplaincy will arrange for access to a practitioner of shared faith.</li> <li>External visits outside of the prison for the observance of religious, spiritual or cultural beliefs, practices or obligations can be requested of the Superintendent.</li> <li>Daily routines and/or religious or spiritual activities will consider significant festivals, events, dietary requirements, and personal practices relevant to prisoner beliefs.</li> <li>Possession of religious or spiritual articles including jewellery, headwear, literature, or items relevant to practice or belief is permitted.</li> <li>At the death of a prisoner's family member, the Superintendent is notified and appropriate support provided by either Peer Support, Health Services, Aboriginal Visitors Scheme, Aboriginal Welfare Officer or counselling services. Chaplaincy should be considered part of the support process for at risk prisoners.</li> <li>Prisoners can apply to attend a funeral and will be supported in making this application. Should an application be denied alternative activities will be considered including visits or calls with community members or significant support persons, conducting an in-prison memorial service, video linking the funeral, assisting a prisoner with writing something to be read out, or any other culturally appropriate activity.</li> <li>Aboriginal prisoners can access recognised spiritual leaders or community members to assist with connection to country, strengthening of spirituality, practice of customs and management of culturally related issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BHDC-COPP 2.2, COPP 2.2 and 9.1</li> <li>BHDC-COPP 2.2, COPP 7.1, 7.3 and 9.1, APSA s.3.9</li> <li>BHDC-COPP 10.3, COPP 8.7</li> <li>BHDC-COPP 2.2 and 4.1, COPP 4.2, 6.3 and 9.1, APSA s.2.9</li> <li>BHDC-COPP 2.2, COPP 3.1 and 9.1, APSA s.3.9</li> <li>BHDC-COPP 10.3, COPP 9.1 and 14.5, APSA s.1.10 and s. 2.21</li> <li>BHDC-COPP 10.3, COPP 14.5, APSA s.1.10</li> <li>BHDC-COPP 2.2, COPP 4.2, APSA s.2.17 and s.3.9</li> </ul>



## Appendix G Methodology

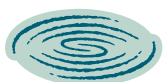
Data sets for this review were obtained from the Department of Justice's (the Department's) offender database. We used survey results from our pre-inspection surveys of people in custody from 2013 to 2021. Extensive stakeholder engagement also occurred, and we completed site visits to various custodial facilities including Banksia Hill Detention Centre, Bandyup and Melaleuca women's prisons, Casuarina and Hakea prisons, and Greenough Regional Prison.

We examined the two contracts held by the Department and Serco Acacia, as well as departmental policy and procedures.

A draft version of this report was sent to the Department, Serco Acacia, and the Council of Churches Western Australia Inc. in October 2024 for comment and to respond to recommendations. After considering each of the responses received, we undertook further work, including having several meetings with key representatives. Subsequently, we updated the contents of our report, and a second draft was provided to the parties on 28 January 2025 for consideration, as shown in Appendix C, D and E. This report reflects our consideration of all these submissions and the additional work undertaken by us.

This report was a review of a custodial service in accordance with Section 22 of the *Inspector of Custodial Services Act 2003*.

Key dates	
Review announced	7 September 2023
Field work	September 2023 – September 2024
Final draft report sent to Department of Justice	28 January 2025
Response received from Department of Justice	7 March 2025
Declaration of prepared report	16 April 2025



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