



2024 INSPECTION OF ACACIA PRISON

163

JUNE 2025

*Independent oversight
that contributes to a more
accountable public sector*



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

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.

Artwork Acknowledgement

Marcia McGuire – Kolbang ‘Going Forward’ (2025)

Format: Digital illustration (cover uses elements)

The artwork *Kolbang* – meaning ‘going forward’ – depicts the positive impacts the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services has on the custodial estate in Western Australia.

The artwork embodies traditional knowledge passed on from Marcia McGuire’s families of the Whadjuk, Ballardong, Yued Noongar and Badimia Yamatji Aboriginal People.



2024 Inspection of Acacia Prison

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Inspector's Overview

Acacia has endured many challenges, but a sense of optimism has returned

Acacia Prison, as the only privately operated prison in Western Australia, has often been recognised for having a level of flexibility and adaptability in its operations that would prove difficult to achieve in public prisons. But this flexibility and adaptability has in recent years been significantly tested.

Over the past four years, Acacia has gone through the uncertainty of the contract renewal process, the commencement of a new Director, a major riot which resulted in the loss of a large accommodation unit and more than half of the adjacent industry workshops, a significant fire which destroyed the remaining industry workshops that had not been damaged during the riot, significant staffing challenges, and the residual impacts of the pandemic.

My honest assessment of their response to all these challenges is that they have come through reasonably well. And most of the credit for this rests with the leadership, operational management and staff at Acacia who have worked extraordinarily hard to keep the prison operating and provide meaningful services for prisoners. The prisoners who had to endure restricted services and conditions also deserve acknowledgment.

As will be seen in this report, at the time of our inspection there were many areas that required attention, some living conditions had deteriorated, meaningful employment opportunities for the prisoners had been reduced, access to programs and education was restricted, and the quantity and quality of food and water quality were commonly raised concerns.

The water quality issue is an interesting one. At the time of our inspection water quality was frequently raised with us by many prisoners and staff, they pointed to sediment in the drinking water and it having a metallic taste. Serco's initial response, as detailed later in this report, was that the issue had been addressed, but during a recent liaison visit we explored this issue again and heard continuing complaints from prisoners. We were also advised that recent funding applications to install a water filter for the prison water supply had been rejected by the Department. Clean drinking water is a basic right and, regardless of who is responsible, it needs to be addressed.

There were also many new initiatives seen that were quite impressive. Several of these had been implemented in response to the impacts of the riot and the fire.

One of the most impressive initiatives has been the cultural and support service networks that have been established in Acacia. The renewed focus on providing tailored services and supports, often directed at specific categories of prisoners, has included: a young adults community, cultural and peer supports for Aboriginal prisoners, a dedicated strategy and supports for prisoners serving life or long-term sentences, additional care for prisoners with high needs, a support network for veterans, and a network of other mentors and peer supporters.

In the year or so prior to our inspection Acacia had introduced a new model of health care which had proved to be problematic, with considerable impact on staff morale. But impressively, Acacia had recognised this and taken steps to return to the previous model that provided holistic patient centred health care. But high demand for services remained, particularly in the areas of mental

health and supports for managing addictions - both areas will require careful attention and resourcing now that the prison has returned to full capacity.

At the time of writing, there is a building sense of optimism at Acacia. With the reconstruction work almost complete, the two industry areas impacted by the riot and the fire are set to come back online. This will provide additional employment, education, and training opportunities. It will also have flow-on impacts in freeing up other infrastructure that had been heavily overused in trying to provide displaced services. These developments will be a particular focus area in our ongoing monitoring of Acacia in the coming months.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We had three Independent Prison Visitors for Acacia at the time of our inspection. They are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services, who attend Acacia on a regular basis observing the operations of the facility and providing an opportunity for the men placed there to raise issues and complaints that informs the work of our office. I acknowledge the importance of their work and thank them for their contribution to our monitoring of conditions in Acacia.

I also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Director and staff at Acacia and from key personnel in the Department.

The men living in Acacia who took the time to speak with us and share their perspectives also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would also particularly acknowledge and thank Cliff Holdom, for his work in planning this inspection, and Christine Wyatt as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

11 June 2025

Executive Summary

Key Findings

Contract pressures hindered Acacia's progressive leadership

Since our last inspection, Acacia's senior management had evolved, with new leaders working to restore the contract's viability and the facility's profitability. Significant efforts were also made to recruit custodial staff and reduce vacancies that had limited service access for those in custody.

People in custody were managed well but some felt unsafe

Acacia had invested in improving its management of people in custody and addressing their diverse needs. Despite better handling of bullying, many still felt unsafe. Security processes and infrastructure upgrades were also introduced to help improve perceptions of safety.

Health services had recovered a holistic, patient-centred approach

Acacia reverted to its previous healthcare model, resulting in better staffing, retention, and morale. Dental care access was among the best in the state. Mental and psychological health services were streamlined and more responsive to patient needs. Despite high demand, addictions services remained strong. Overall, healthcare access and outcomes for people in custody had improved.

Innovative support and cultural services

Support services at Acacia had significantly improved since the last inspection, with new networks established to meet the needs of diverse prisoner groups, many showing early signs of success. A strategic plan is needed to consolidate this progress, particularly by finalising the Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy to sustain gains in cultural support. However, despite service improvements, quality-of-life issues had declined, with concerns about deteriorating living conditions, frequent lockdowns, and poor food quality and quantity.

Innovative programs, employment, and reintegration opportunities

Acacia maintained strong delivery of criminogenic programs despite cancellations, partly caused by a backlog in treatment assessments. Sentence management had improved, but better officer training and guidance were needed to strengthen case management. Education and training remained in high demand, though access was restricted by custodial staff shortages. Employment opportunities were also sought after but were only beginning to recover following the loss of industries programs.

List of Recommendations

Recommendation	Page	DOJ Response
Recommendation 1 Investigate and address workplace culture concerns within the staffing group.	5	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 2 Introduce body scanning technology at Acacia to minimise potentially retraumatising effects of strip searches.	13	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 3 The Department of Justice develop a contemporary drug replacement/withdrawal treatment program that addresses the demand for treatment beyond opiates.	21	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 4 Develop and implement a strategic prisoner support plan that identifies need, establishes good governance, and provides transparent operational practice.	24	Noted
Recommendation 5 Finalise the Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy, and develop supporting policies and procedures for its operationalisation, including future reviews to ensure it remains relevant to prisoner and community needs.	25	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 6 Consider individual meals or supervise mealtime distribution to prevent the uneven allocation of food.	28	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 7 The Department of Justice must commit to significant changes to address the persistent issue of outstanding treatment assessments.	31	Supported – Current Practice / Project
Recommendation 8 Improve processes for custodial staff completing case management reports by offering additional training, clearer guidance, and regular support, to streamline report writing.	32	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 9 Examine why First Nations prisoners are more frequently denied parole and less likely to be released at their earliest eligibility date.	38	Supported

Background

Acacia Prison has faced significant challenges in recent years

Acacia Prison (Acacia) is a Western Australian medium-security prison located in the Perth hills. It is operated by Serco Asia Pacific through a closely managed contract with the Department of Justice (the Department). At the time of our last inspection in November 2021, the current contract was just six months into operation. The contract bid, preparation, and implementation had unsettled operations at the prison and some contractual requirements had not been fully implemented. Recruitment had also suffered, and our inspection found there ‘was a constant and loud complaint from uniformed staff about staff shortages and the impacts of regular cross-deployments’ (OICS, 2023A, p. iii).

In December 2021, a new Director commenced, but within three months (February 2022), men in Kilo Block rioted. They caused such considerable damage to their residential unit it was closed, reducing Acacia’s capacity by 220. A fire started during the riot burnt down a large part of the Romeo industry block. Consequently, various prison industries were lost including the main metal, cabinet, and fabrication workshops. Staff were also greatly affected by these traumatic events, and some have not returned to work.

As 2022 progressed, some industrial activities were re-established in Hotel Block, including the transfer of laundry equipment. This was the industrial workshop used by people placed within Acacia’s two protection units (India and Juliet blocks). However, in January 2023, it too was destroyed by fire, although we note this fire does not appear to have been deliberately lit. Regardless, it caused further loss of industries and employment opportunities for those in custody.

The Hotel Block fire also forced closure of the adjacent Whiskey Block which was used for education, programs, and other services for people held in protection. To prevent them missing out on these opportunities, other areas of the prison were regularly closed to mainstream prisoners for the strict use of those held in protection.

Two other factors have heavily influenced Acacia since our last inspection: the tight employment market, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Western Australia has observed a labour shortage due to both the continuing mining boom and the pandemic. The former made recruitment of new staff especially difficult for Acacia, as it has in the public prison system, and lured many existing staff away to more attractive opportunities.

The pandemic affected prison operations significantly between mid-2020 and early 2023. Social visits for people in custody and their families were cancelled for many months and when restored, were strictly managed. Movements within the prison were also greatly limited, with extensive lockdowns, the loss of recreation, and reduced access to many other events and activities. Staff contact with people in custody during this period was also restricted and many newly trained staff did not experience normal levels of contact with those in custody.

Innovation and recovery

In our first inspection report on Acacia Prison, the then Inspector stated:

The establishment of a new private prison was intended not merely to provide more beds but also to promote efficiency, flexibility, and innovation in service delivery. The ultimate goal was system-wide improvement (OICS, 2003, p. 83)

We have always sought to acknowledge innovation across the custodial estate, supporting good practice and encouraging other facilities to follow suit. As Acacia has evolved under its latest contract, we have been impressed by innovation observed in various areas. Yet, we are acutely aware of the setbacks and challenges the prison has experienced recently. We acknowledge areas where it is recovering and have identified areas where recovery is yet to fully occur. As such, twin themes of 'innovation' and 'recovery' were a useful lens for the current inspection.



ACACIA PRISON

FACT PAGE

ROLE OF FACILITY

Acacia Prison (Acacia) is a Western Australian medium-security prison for adult males located in the Perth hills. It is operated by Serco Asia Pacific through a closely managed contract with the Department of Justice.

HISTORY

Acacia Prison opened in May 2001. It is the only privately-operated prison in Western Australia.

In February 2022 there was a riot at the facility causing considerable damage. It led to the closure of Kilo Block, reducing Acacia's capacity by 220 men, and significant damage to the Romeo industry block. Various prison industries were lost including metal, cabinet and fabrication workshops.

In January 2023, another fire occurred at Acacia damaging Hotel Block and Whiskey Block, both of which provided employment in industries, and education, programs and other services for people held in protection.

OFFICIAL CAPACITY

1,371

PRISONERS AT TIME OF INSPECTION

1,355



Acacia Prison is located on Whadjuk Noongar land in the suburb of Wooroloo, Perth, Western Australia.



INSPECTION DATE

14 - 23 October 2024



1 Contract pressures hindered Acacia's progressive leadership

Acacia's senior management team had developed considerably since our last inspection. With new position holders in many roles, it was working solidly to restore the viability of the contract and profitability of the facility. Considerable effort had also been invested to recruit custodial staff and fill the significant number of vacancies which were, in part, hampering access to services for people in custody.

1.1 Prison's administration team was cohesive with good governance systems

Since the last inspection, members of Acacia's senior management had developed into a strong and cohesive leadership team. Many had lengthy experience in both public and private sectors, and we were pleased to hear them articulate a clear vision for the facility. This included areas for significant innovation while maintaining a strong focus on both the needs of people in custody and staff. The vision was well balanced and considered evolving environmental factors such as the growing custodial population. It also accounted for financial constraints, the tight job market, and Serco's own internal dynamics and constraints. At the time of the inspection the vision had been operationalised into a draft strategic business plan (2024–28) which has since been finalised and implemented.

The management team is multidisciplinary, and includes operational, security, administrative, cultural, medical, rehabilitation, and facility management representatives. Meeting daily, we observed good clarity in the chain of command in operations and administration that we have sometimes found confused at other large public facilities (OICS, 2023B). The leadership provided was reasonably regarded by staff such that they reported a good level of support from their local management (33%) in our pre-inspection survey. This had increased considerably since the last inspection (19%) and was well above the state average (18%). Another 43% reported support was 'mixed', while similar results were recorded for communication from local management.

Serco Asia Pacific (Serco, head office) provided considerable support and oversight of operations at Acacia. This practice also permitted a good degree of cross-fertilisation of ideas and services, making positive use of practices from Serco's other Australasian facilities. Head office also managed information and technology services to Acacia, including for human resources and financial management. Managers from these business areas also reported directly to head office which we found increased objectivity and accountability through its independence from local management.

The role of the Operational Performance Manager also added to Acacia's system of good governance. This position maintained the reporting processes which feed into the contract management team within the Department. These processes also included calculating the performance linked fees (PLFs) set out within the Acacia Prison Services Agreement (the contract).

1.2 Management worked creatively to restore the contract's viability

Acacia's management were working creatively to address challenges experienced under the current five-year contract. Some of these challenges related to the bidding and acceptance of the current contract, which resulted in a requirement for Serco to deliver some services that were not fully funded. Payments received under the contract were also reduced following the riot incident that resulted in a loss of accommodation and reduced population capacity at the site. The two separate fire incidents in the industry workshops also led to lost earnings. Serco had also found it difficult to achieve all of its PLFs.

To address these issues and in an effort to restore the contract's viability, Acacia management had examined:

- Re-opening the refurbished accommodation unit destroyed in the riot (Kilo Block) as soon as possible with one half of the unit expected to be re-opened by December 2024. This subsequently occurred in December 2024 as planned at the time of our inspection.
- The installation of an additional 65 beds to increase the facility's capacity to 1,590 when Kilo Block returned to full operation.
- Restoring industrial capacity at Acacia. However, this may be limited by changes to departmental policy which have restricted the commercial sale of prisoner-made goods.

Various other additional services were also being considered by Acacia's management team and the Department. These included:

- Converting part of one of the accommodation blocks into a much-needed Crisis Care Unit. The overwhelming need for such placement options across Western Australian prisons was highlighted in our recent review (OICS, 2025A).
- Developing one of the re-opened units in Kilo Block as a specific placement option for people on the Support and Monitoring System (SAMS); a system designed to assist some of the most vulnerable people in custody.
- Utilising Kilo Block to receive people on remand from Northam and adjacent areas closer to Acacia than Western Australia's main male reception and remand prison, Hakea.
- Creating an external minimum-security unit for Acacia.

The current five-year contract expires in May 2026, but it has a renewal option. Considering the challenges experienced by Serco it cannot be assumed they will take up their option to renew the contract. However, the efforts of Acacia's management team demonstrate their commitment to get the facility back on track following a difficult few years.

1.3 Efforts continued to recover custodial staffing and support a positive workplace culture

Acacia has long struggled with short staffing within its custodial ranks (OICS, 2023A; OICS, 2019B). Acacia management expressed concern at an accelerating attrition rate, which at the time of the inspection equated to approximately 35 officer resignations per year (16% of the custodial workforce). This acceleration was being attributed to factors such as the Department creating a two-

week bridging course for officers from Acacia, or from other jurisdictions, to join the public prison service and a very competitive labour market.

To alleviate the pressure of short staffing, as of 30 June 2024, there were 30 trainee custodial officer positions advertised. And by the time of our inspection in October 2024, Acacia had recruited against most of these positions with 23 new recruits in training, expected to graduate in November 2024. Another training course was scheduled to commence in early 2025.

Despite staffing shortages, Acacia still managed to roster close to its 90 required dayshift staff each day. Resourcefully, and unlike public prisons, Acacia relied on a pool of casual staff, mainly utilised on weekends. However, overtime was also used to cover vacancies as unplanned absences (on average 8.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) per day) and workers' compensation leave (on average 5.6 FTE per day) still significantly affected prison operations.

Essential areas affected by custodial officer shortages

Short staffing at Acacia was affecting people's access to some essential and rehabilitative services. Departmental data for August 2024 showed Victor Block (which contains the training centre, vocational studies rooms, and the music room) was closed for 6.5 weekdays while the gymnasium was closed for eight. Further to this, data from the prison indicated Oscar Block (the education centre, cultural centre, arts centre, and chapel) although not closed, was often short staffed and offered only a limited program. For example, service providers using the space advised us there were days the unit only remained open for criminogenic and departmental programs. Similarly, laundry-related work in the part of Romeo Block that remained operational, often had to cease due to insufficient staffing.

This meant short staffing was reducing people's access to and the effectiveness of many of Acacia's strongest business areas – its education, training, voluntary programs, industry, and prisoner services. Fortunately, unlike Hakea and Casuarina prisons, we found people in custody were rarely locked in cell solely due to staff shortages (OICS, 2025C; OICS, 2023B). Typically, they were locked in their units with access to common areas, showers, and phones.

Early intervention offered as part of the workers' compensation system

The February 2022 riot had caused a spike in workers' compensation claims. This was unsurprising given the extent of the damage caused, the traumatic impact on officers directly involved, and the potential for trauma to those who witnessed or responded to the event. However, at the time of the inspection, there was only a modest number of outstanding claims still under management, with most staff having recovered and returned to work. This could, in part, be explained by the assistance provided by Acacia's workers' compensation manager who we found maintained a consistent, supportive, and objective service to those on workers' compensation leave.

In addition, Acacia had contracted a service provider to deliver an early intervention program for those with potential claims. It was available to staff who were unsure whether to proceed with a worker's compensation claim. Employees could phone a hotline direct to a triaging nurse and then could access diagnostic scans and up to four visits with a general practitioner, physiotherapist, and psychologist. All treatment is confidential, free of charge to the employee, and can also be provided

for non-work-related injuries. Engaging with the service does not prejudice any compensation claim that the staff members may subsequently decide to make.

Women in Acacia network stands against some negative aspects of staff culture

Our pre-inspection staff survey revealed some concerns about culture within Acacia's workforce. Almost half of the respondents (48%) reported they had experienced staff-to-staff bullying in the past three years, while approximately a third (34%) said they were subject to other verbal abuse from their colleagues. Approximately one in every five (19%) staff survey respondents were reportedly subject to sexual assault or harassment by other staff, and about one in every six (17%) said they experienced racist remarks.

Table 1: Pre-inspection staff survey results indicated significant challenges within the staffing group that Acacia management will need to address.

Staff-to-staff – In the last 3 years have you experienced?			
	Yes (%)	No (%)	No answer (%)
Physical assault	2	83	15
Racist remarks	17	68	15
Bullying	48	40	12
Other verbal abuse	34	54	12
Sexual assault/harassment	19	67	14

We were made ware of some specific complaints from staff that may, in part, explain these results. Despite those, the results painted a troubling picture of Acacia's staff culture that management should consider closely to address individual and systemic concerns.

In early 2024, female staff at Acacia, at the invitation of the General Manager, established a Women in Acacia network. It includes a well-supported monthly meeting and various improvements have been implemented:

- launch of the Change our Tune in June site-wide campaign focusing on respect
- ensuring equitable access to leadership / people manager positions
- training for members as peer supporters for other women
- on-site training specifically for non-custodial staff to improve on situational awareness, safety at work, de-escalation techniques and less-technical self-defence techniques
- a room allocated specifically for use by breastfeeding mothers returning from maternity leave where they could express in privacy
- a female-only change room with shower facilities
- uniforms for pregnant staff members
- review of appropriateness of uniforms for non-custodial female staff and implementing improvements.

This is an example of a good, innovative, and supportive practice. Similar initiatives should be investigated.

Recommendation 1

Investigate and address workplace culture concerns within the staffing group.

1.4 Facilities management struggled under the current contract

Unlike previous service agreements, Serco was responsible for facilities management under the current contract. At the time of the inspection, we found the facilities management team was skilled and in high demand. The Facilities Manager was reporting jointly to Acacia's Director and Serco head office, providing a high level of oversight, particularly for outstanding requests. All tasks, complaints, and requests were logged and tracked until closure.

However, the team had experienced considerable turnover in the 12 months leading up to the inspection, with some positions still vacant including a critical tradesperson role. As such, we heard it had not always been possible to meet the maintenance related PLF timeframes established within the contract, particularly for high priority works. The workforce instability compounded the perceived unrealistic PLF timeframes. Given Acacia's location outside metropolitan Perth, staff contended it was unmanageable for priority one failures to be fixed within four hours, particularly when contractors were required.

Despite these challenges, the team had developed a five-year asset management plan which included routine maintenance and a schedule of necessary works and replacements for the prison. These were subject to approval by the Department, but we were advised 80 business cases had been submitted during the current contract period.

Ongoing maintenance issues, particularly with air conditioning, were frustrating

One of the biggest frustrations for the prison and the facilities management team was air conditioning. As part of the contract, various works were agreed to by the Department including replacement of air conditioning units in all staff areas of Charlie, Delta, and Echo blocks. However, despite parts being reportedly defective as far back as 2016, the air conditioning in Oscar Block was not included in the listed works.

Consequently, system maintenance and repairs were challenging. Like-for-like repairs were difficult and there were accessibility issues that limited the extent those repairs could be actioned. Serco had sought some remedy, installing split system units in staff offices, and investing \$1.2 million in portable units for two classrooms and three criminogenic programs rooms. However, other rooms remained uncomfortably hot while further solutions were sought.

Issues with air conditioning were also apparent in Acacia's kitchen. This unit had broken down in February 2024 and was only fixed during our inspection in October. This had contributed to a fractious relationship between facilities management and some kitchen staff, which was

compounded by various outstanding issues and faults with other vital kitchen equipment. We heard at times this was affecting the quality and types of the meals produced and at the time of the inspection, one cool room, an oven and two cooking kettles were not operational. Facilities management advised us they had sought to restore the relationship with kitchen staff. In addition to the five-year maintenance and replacement plan, this is critical as the risk to kitchen operations and the impact on people in custody should equipment fail is significant.

Persistent complaints about the quality of the drinking water

During the inspection people in custody expressed significant concern over the quality and potential contamination of the water supply. We heard persistent complaints the water contained black fragments and that it had a strong metallic taste. The Facilities Manager advised us the water had been tested but noted plumbers had been unable to replicate the black fragments out of Acacia's taps. Despite this, testing was ongoing. The prison was also in discussion with a water treatment provider to install a water softening device in the supply line.

In the meantime, people in custody were highly frustrated they were expected to continue drinking the water, without any option to purchase bottled water. In contrast, staff were provided bottled water, which caused annoyance and suspicion from people in custody. Acacia advised this was to meet workplace health and safety requirements for staff who were patrolling prisoner movements.

In response to a draft of this report, Acacia management further advised the water quality issue had been addressed. While we appreciate Acacia management have explored this issue and sought to implement remedies, we continued to hear concerns from prisoners during a follow-up visit in June 2025. This suggests the issue is ongoing. We encourage the Department to work with Serco to expedite a resolution to this problem including, if necessary, funding for the installation of additional water filters.

1.5 Workplace health and safety demonstrated good innovation

Workplace health and safety had progressed considerably since our last inspection. A Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) and wellbeing professional commenced in early 2024 and since coming into the role, he had expanded the HSE committee from three members to 20. We were advised he had worked closely with Acacia's managers in each business area to ensure they had their own standards, effective controls on identified risks, and regular inspections. Importantly, this included psychological and psychosocial risks and hazards.

Training was a core focus, with HSE representatives' initial and annual refresher training a key priority. However, there was an acknowledged gap with managers yet to receive full HSE training by the time of our inspection. The managers were also expected to receive a 90-minute session on holistic injury management which would ensure they attained a broad understanding of the intersection of physical, emotional, and psychological support to minimise the impact of workplace injuries. Safety induction training was also being delivered to new custodial officer recruits and other workers at the prison. And new training opportunities were being offered, including a resilience workshop to equip staff with coping mechanisms and teach them recognition and recovery skills.

People in custody were also engaged in the HSE system through a prisoner safety ambassador program. We were pleased to learn about this area of innovation, with people in custody helping to influence and train others in safer practices such as assisting with workshop toolbox meetings and risk assessments. The prison planned for these individuals to attain a Certificate IV Work Health and Safety through a registered training organisation or TAFE, providing valuable skills and qualifications which are useful upon release.

2 People in custody were managed well but some felt unsafe

Acacia had invested time and resources into enhancing its management of people in custody and their diverse needs. However, there remained a substantial proportion who felt largely unsafe in the prison despite some improvement in the way bullying was being managed. Acacia had also invested in a range of security processes and infrastructure upgrades that may increase prisoners' sense of safety.

2.1 Innovative management for different groups of people in custody

Like previous inspections, we found Acacia continued to try meet and manage the differing needs of the various groups of people in custody through unique approaches not observed elsewhere in the prison estate. Some of these initiatives were new, while others continued to evolve and develop.

The Young Adult Community was a good, evolving innovation

The Young Adult Community (YAC) continued to be an area of innovation at Acacia. It was originally created in 2015 following an expansion of the prison and it had faced major challenges since that time, including due to COVID-19 restrictions and following the February 2022 riot. However, this inspection the YAC had positively evolved. The community was led by a dedicated Young Adult Coordinator along with a team of 16 peer mentors and house 'Uncles' who provided support and guidance to younger people in custody aged between 18 and 26 years. The mentors demonstrated genuine passion and dedication to their role.

The YAC offered various classes and programs with a daily timetable scheduling three to four activities per day. Participation was voluntary, but popular. Some of these activities included:

- men's circle (also offered in Lima Block and Mike Block)
- self-help courses such as *Rethink Your Journey* and *Journey to Self-discovery*
- cultural workshops such as *Reconnecting to our Roots*
- parenting classes
- education assistance (basic English and numeracy)
- art
- guitar classes
- circuit training
- yoga
- weekend recreation and sporting competitions.

The activities were facilitated by the mentors, and mostly run within Uniform Block. However, some programs were also scheduled in Lima and Mike blocks. Unfortunately, these did not always proceed with mentors advising us it was often difficult to access these blocks. This was supported by younger people in Lima and Mike who also reported little contact with the mentors.

Uniform Block – Orientation

When people arrive at Acacia they are placed into Uniform Block for orientation. Units 1 and 2 provide induction for people of all ages, while Units 3 and 4 are dedicated to the young adult cohort. This group is encouraged to join the Young Adult Community after an initial induction period. However, many also find placements in other blocks, often to be with family or friends.

Acacia was refocussing on the needs of long-term prisoners

Acacia continued to house considerably more people with life or indefinite sentences than any other prison in Western Australia. There were 153 men in this cohort at Acacia, representing 48% of all people within this group across the state, and more than 2.5 times the next closest facility (Casuarina Prison with 58). There were also another 48 people in custody at Acacia with sentences longer than 14 years. They were included in Acacia's Lifers Strategy, which sought to recognise and alleviate the challenges faced by people with long sentences. This was good practice.

One of the key elements of this unique initiative was the Health, Education and Advancement for Lifers (HEAL) Committee. It met monthly and was comprised of operational staff and senior managers, as well as people in custody who were representatives of the group. This was a forum for people in custody to raise issues and make requests related to their status as lifers or long-term prisoners. Also key were the Lifer Liaison Officers (LLOs) – custodial officers who were selected via expression of interest to work in close contact with this group. LLOs received special training over six one-hour sessions, aimed at highlighting the challenges and needs of long-term prisoners. There were 12 LLOs at the time of the inspection and another 32 being trained.

Under the strategy, there were a range of incentives and entitlements available including:

- single cells
- care packages that could be purchased by family (usually around Christmas)
- special spends on items like shoes and art supplies
- annual spends for items like mattress toppers and pillows
- a library of DVDs and video games
- family luncheon visits in Oscar Block twice a year
- viewings of recordings of family events (birthdays, weddings, funerals).

More than half of the group were in the self-care units in November Block where they had access to additional incentives, including:

- quarterly spends on healthy foods such as dried fruit and nuts
- magazine subscriptions
- special spends – DVDs, CDs, tennis racquets, ground coffee, heaters, and fans
- additional access to the gym and oval (up to four hours per day).

There were also 51 lifers and long-term people in custody in protection. They had access to the same incentives and entitlements, apart from the additional access to the gym and oval.

Although the strategy had existed since 2015, Acacia acknowledged it had lost focus in recent years due to various incidents and competing priorities. This included the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the contract re-tender and transition process, and the 2022 riot. Acacia had only found space and time to start reinvigorating the strategy over the last year.

However, people in custody advised us most of the benefits included under the strategy were available less frequently or not at all. They also told us they appreciated the various material comforts offered to them. But their greater concerns were about higher-level issues including access to education, and approvals to start resocialisation programs so they could progress towards

release. They agreed many within their group had a poor understanding of resocialisation and what they should be doing to prepare. This was raised at HEAL Committee meetings and an initiative was underway, led by an individual prisoner, to write guidance on this subject. This was a good example of the HEAL Committee working successfully to address an issue raised by people in custody.

Safe accommodation and support for some of the most vulnerable prisoners

Acacia also offered an impressive level of support and accommodation for prisoners who were more vulnerable due to factors such as age, disability, or mental illness. Foxtrot Block provided a unique accommodation option within the broader prison estate and had established governance mechanisms which oversaw and monitored placement, continued accommodation, and supported reintegration (where possible) back into the mainstream units.

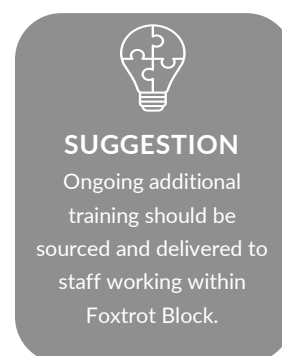
The unit offered:

- an assisted care wing with 20 single cells, including two cells with wheelchair accessibility
- a 13-bed wing supporting people with previous self-harm risks or major mental illness
- proximity to the health centre enabling medical in-reach services and rapid response to emergencies
- prisoner-carers employed to support the day-to-day needs of individual residents

A multidisciplinary committee comprising staff from custodial, psychological services, mental health and safer custody discussed potential residents and prioritised beds. The unit manager maintained records of assessment and discussions of each resident, including plans and supports to try to assist people to move towards reintegration back into the prison.

Custodial staff were rostered to the unit based on an expression of interest and had a higher staff-to-prisoner ratio than other units. Redeployment was also avoided as much as possible, with three staff always remaining allocated in the unit. As noted previously, staff do not receive any additional training to support their role (OICS, 2022).

With only 33 beds available, very few people can access the extra support available through the unit. We have previously highlighted the need for more systemic planning and services for the aged and frail (OICS, 2021). And while there are plans for the expansion at Casuarina Prison to incorporate some assisted care beds, its completion has been delayed and will still not meet the demand of an increasingly aged prisoner population.



Protection prisoners had fewer opportunities than previously

The 2023 fire in Hotel Block significantly impacted employment and education opportunities for protection prisoners. The fire caused severe damage, preventing the use of the prison's laundry and other smaller industries that predominately employed people in protection at Acacia. A section within Romeo Block (which had some unaffected areas while it was being rebuilt post-riot) was subsequently repurposed to allow protection prisoners to sort and fold laundry that was being washed commercially offsite. Acacia had also created employment in textiles and leather work, as

well as another 52 unit worker roles within the protection blocks (India and Juliet) to try to boost work options.

The fire also caused damage to Whiskey Block which prevented protection prisoners from accessing their education and programs areas. To address this, protection prisoners were provided access to education and programs within the mainstream blocks. While this did not fully replace the level of service they received prior to the fire, it meant they maintained some connection to education, programs, and courses.

Despite these efforts, some people in protection felt they had fewer opportunities when compared to people in the mainstream population. This was compounded by the reduction in the number of privileged single cells available for people in protection. Acacia added 35 additional beds within the protection units in 2022, double bunking them due to population pressures across the prison estate.

[We have] very limited education and employment opportunities. Protection prisoners have less rights and freedoms than the general prison population. Restricted work, education.

Respondent's comment to our pre-inspection survey.

2.2 Opportunities to increase people's sense of safety

Our pre-inspection survey revealed more than a quarter of prisoner respondents felt mostly unsafe at Acacia (27%). While this result remained unchanged since our last inspection, it still equated to a considerable proportion of people in custody who had concerns about their safety.

The result may in part be explained by the large proportion of survey respondents who reported experiencing some highly concerning behaviours from other people in custody – more than half said they had suffered threats or intimidation, approximately one in three reported physical abuse, and 10% reported sexual abuse.

Table 2: A high proportion of people in custody who responded to our survey had experienced concerning behaviours from their peers.

Behaviours	Respondents Experienced (%)	Behaviours	Respondents Experienced (%)
Verbal abuse	60	Theft of canteen or property	48
Racist remarks	41	Physical abuse	32
Threats or intimidation	52	Sexual abuse	10

During the inspection people in custody raised their safety concerns with us. They perceived these behaviours were permitted to occur and persist through the lack of or reduced officer presence within the accommodation units, citing mealtime distribution as a particular opportunity for bullying

and favouritism [see section 4.2 for further detail]. We heard consistently that custodial staffing levels and shortages were responsible for the reduced presence, with officers equally frustrated the shortages affected their capacity to conduct their duties and facilitate services and activities.

Improved systems for the management of perpetrators and victims of bullying

Last inspection we recommended reviewing the policy to manage perpetrators and victims of bullying and stand over (OICS, 2023A). Consequently, Acacia revised its safer custody policy, and an anti-bullying register was being maintained. People in custody on the register were identified by staff who were proactively tracking and reviewing assault- and injury-related incidents and conducting interviews with respective prisoners. The Safer Custody Team was also conducting monthly meetings to discuss any additional required supports for identified victims and perpetrators. Meetings also assessed whether those on the anti-bullying register were suitable to be removed.

A new practice also permitted people in custody to message the Safer Custody Team directly through the prison's client management system (CMS) kiosk to report stand over and bullying behaviours they observed or experienced.

The Safer Custody Team also distributed a quarterly bulletin to staff which included:

- a summary of incidents that fall under the Safer Custody umbrella
- self-harm management and reduction information
- information about violence-related incidents
- people on the at-risk management system and SAMS
- peer support engagement activities
- names listed on the anti-bullying register.

We are pleased with these improvements and Acacia's efforts to manage and mitigate issues around bullying. However, the results from our pre-inspection survey and interactions with people in custody suggest further work is required.

Officers lacked training and resources to implement a trauma-informed approach

Many people in custody have experienced abuse and trauma prior to incarceration. Acacia provided some training to staff for the management of people who have experienced trauma. However, staff advised us most of the training was online and somewhat disconnected from the work they conducted 'on the ground'. They were keen for further trauma-informed practice training opportunities.

Those in custody also expressed the need for a trauma-informed approach. For example, some people advised us they were required to 'squat and cough' during strip searches. While policy does allow for staff to request a prisoner to squat during a strip search if they suspect there is concealed contraband, the 'squat and cough' approach is not endorsed by departmental policy.

Prisoners felt the practices were traumatising or retraumatising and amounted to sexual abuse. One respondent noted a complaint was made about the practices, which then saw them stopped. However, when the complaint was withdrawn, they alleged the practices recommenced.

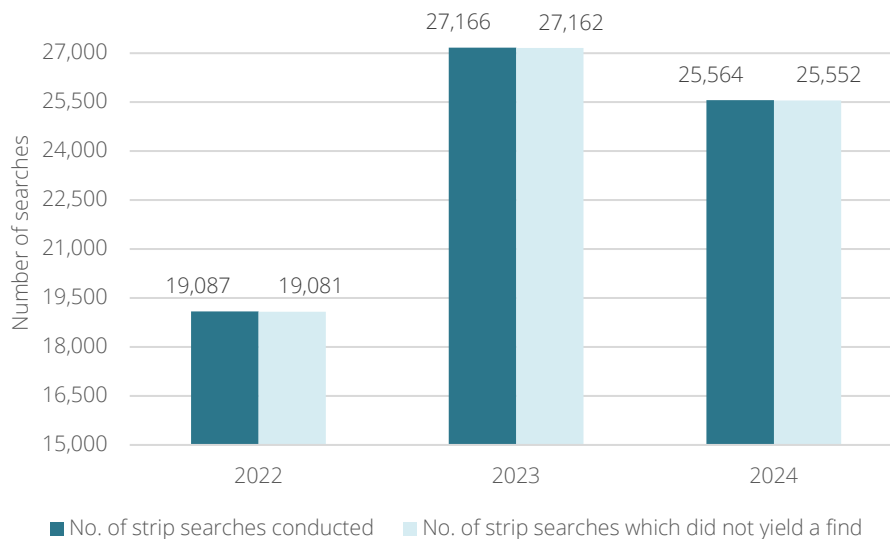


Figure 1: The number of recorded strip searches at Acacia over the last three years exceeded 70,000.

People in custody contended that such practices contributed to why they had limited trust in officers. Acacia currently does not have body scanners and was unable to update us about commencing the technology's use. This is despite several publicly run prisons recently introducing them¹.

Recommendation 2

Introduce body scanning technology at Acacia to minimise potentially retraumatising effects of strip searches.

2.3 Security and emergency management strengthened post-riot

Two post-riot reviews were conducted examining, amongst other matters, incident management and any lessons learned to improve responses to similar future emergencies.

One of the reviews was conducted by the Department (completed in July 2022). It included 18 recommendations. We were pleased Acacia had commenced action to address all but one of these recommendations by the time of the inspection, with some already completed. The outstanding recommendation still required further work to source an appropriate alternative product.

The second review was conducted internally by Acacia and finalised in May 2022. It identified similar areas of concern as the departmental review.

¹ An earlier version of this report erroneously stated that Acacia had previously used body scanning technology on prisoners, and it was recommended they re-introduce this technology. The wording of Recommendation 2 has been amended to 'introduce' this technology, noting it had never formally been introduced before.

Emergency management and response capacity had improved

In response to the riot and lessons learned reviews, the content of emergency management exercises at Acacia was adapted to reflect the prison's need. The frequency of exercises was also increased. As such, Acacia was projected to likely exceed the number of required emergency management exercises for both desktop and live simulations for 2024. Importantly, an increased number of the exercises conducted over the past 12 months centred around major disturbances, fires, and hostage situations seeking to improve staff's response capacity and confidence in these types of events.

The number of Correctional Emergency Response Team (CERT) trained staff at the time of the riot was only 26, a significant shortfall to the contractual requirement of 40. Consequently, Acacia had increased the number of CERT trained staff to 50. At the time of the inspection the prison was also conducting another training intake, hoping to increase the number further to 60. We found CERT members were a dedicated and passionate team led by a manager who fostered the team's close bonds.

The increased number of CERT trained staff was a direct result of the post-incident reviews' concerns regarding the response time taken to attend Acacia by the Department's Special Operations Group, the Western Australia Police Force, and other external agencies. Consequently, Acacia had also increased its engagement with these agencies, which may be called upon again in future emergencies. Memoranda of understanding were also established with each agency, and we welcome their involvement in emergency management exercises as the prison continues to recover and strengthen its response capacity.

Acacia had also increased its number of trained negotiators who were called upon to de-escalate situations. And it had also achieved a high-level of compliance with security and emergency response training – 94% of operational staff were up to date with their Defensive Equipment Tactical training, 98% had current First Aid qualifications, and 97% were current in Cardiopulmonary Response.

Table 3: Acacia had increased its emergency response capacity beyond the contractual requirements.

	No. trained at time of riot	Contractual requirement	No. currently trained*
CERT	26	40	50
Negotiators	14	8	29

* Includes some staff on long term leave, workers' compensation, or suspension, and some that have left employment but had not had their exits processed at the time of the inspection.

Security innovations and infrastructure upgrades complemented response improvements

As per previous inspections, we found Acacia continuing to innovate with security. New practices and technologies were being implemented, helping to boost people's sense of safety and address shortfalls identified in both post-incident reviews. Some of the latest innovations introduced or being explored were:

- Facial recognition technology to locate and identify every person in custody, staff members, contractors, and visitors on the premises.
- Radar CCTV (close circuit television) cameras in high-risk areas to detect movement. The cameras were calibrated for humans not triggered by animals, birds, or high wind like some other systems.
- Upgraded body worn cameras with live feed capabilities, providing real-time information for use during a serious incident to allow for timely and better-informed decisions and responses.

Acacia was also investing in infrastructure upgrades to minimise potential risks to staff within the units should a future major incident occur. This included new gates in Mike, Kilo and Lima blocks to control the number of people in custody in high-risk areas at any one time. Extra doors in Kilo Block's unit office and additional fencing had also been installed allowing staff to safely retreat in emergencies, reducing their need to exit through potentially risky environments. The fences and doors also improve access by CERT, making it easier and safer to extract any officers from the unit office in an emergency.

3 Health services had recovered a holistic, patient-centred approach

Since our last inspection Acacia had reverted to its previous healthcare staffing and service delivery model. As a result, staffing levels and retention had significantly improved as had team morale. And access to dental care for people in custody was close to the best we have observed in the state. The mental health and psychological health teams had merged and were more focused on patient needs while addictions staff offered excellent service but faced strong demand. Overall, there was reliable access to services and improved health outcomes for people in custody.

3.1 A restored patient-centred model without silos delivered positive outcomes

Since our previous inspection, Acacia had substantially reverted to its previous health service model and was committed to rebuilding health care within the prison. A strong emphasis was placed on patient-focussed service delivery with the team working together across different portfolios to provide more holistic care. We heard from many health centre staff who reflected an inclusive, cooperative approach, emphasising communication and patient care.

This was delivering positive outcomes. We found staffing levels improved over the rebuilding period, and some staff who had left following a restructure, returned. There was also a considerable improvement to staff morale. Doctors and specialist providers emphasised the positive culture of the centre, the improvement they had experienced in services, and the consistency of care enabled by more stable staffing.

Health service also supported its staff through an ongoing education model reinforced by a dedicated nurse educator role. This ensured health staff knowledge remained contemporary and that their professionalism was valued. Training records provided by Acacia revealed a diverse range of training options regularly available and completed by health centre staff.

Under the contract, health services provided monthly reports detailing the volume of services delivered and the diversity of specialists available to support patients. In the 2023-24 financial year, health services provided:

- 31,234 reception health assessment consults and general clinics
- 2,927 general practitioner (GP) appointments
- 309 GP opiate replacement clinics
- 1,429 nurse practitioner appointments
- 2,449 chronic disease health appointments.

Our pre-inspection survey also reflected the improved health centre operations with better results reported by people in custody in 2024 compared to our previous inspection and the state average.

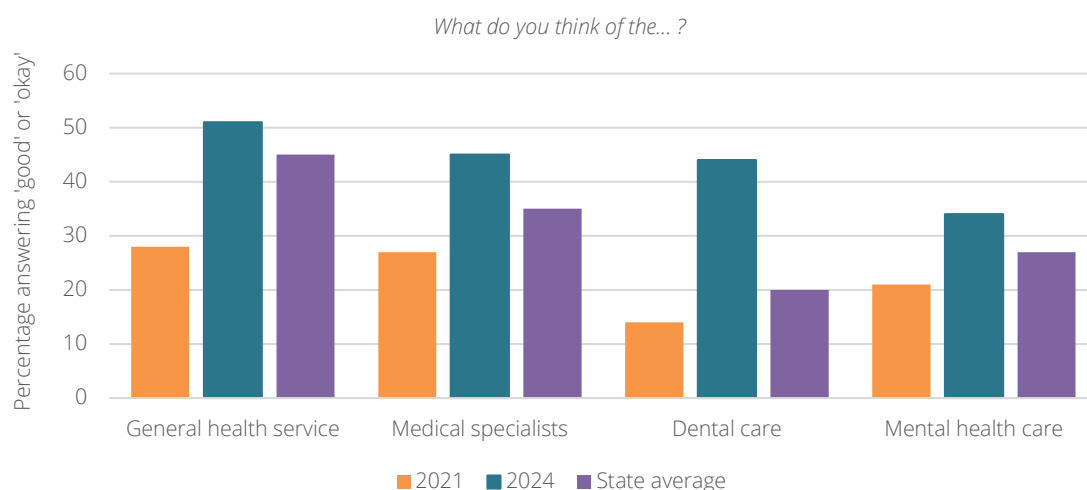


Figure 2: More prisoner survey respondents felt health services were 'good' or 'okay' compared to the previous inspection.

Providing reliable patient access to a holistic range of health services

At the time of the inspection, the primary and mental health centre team had 45.5 FTE allocated. Not all positions were substantively filled. However, enough positions had stable appointments or regular ongoing contractors to ensure the centre established good patient care systems and reliable access to a range of health services. This enabled a model of holistic care to meet the often-complex needs of the people in custody.

During the inspection several examples of patients who had benefited from a team approach to health care were highlighted to us. This was possibly most evident in the innovative model of care established for chronic illness and aged prisoners. Acacia had a dedicated team of four meeting the needs of patients who qualified as 'aged' – over 50 years for First Nations men and 65 years for others. A specific older person's assessment tool was developed incorporating mobility, nutrition, hearing, vision, and functionality testing. A shared care model between the various specialist providers and staff contributed to holistic health plans for patients.

The centre had also introduced urgent care clinics each weekday morning. For the first 30 minutes of business, people could self-refer for emergency treatment and to obtain clearance to stay in from their day's designated activities. Patients received immediate triage care from a nurse, and if necessary, were seen immediately by a doctor. Around 10 patients were seen through the clinics daily, ensuring their immediate needs were met. But it was also improving efficiency, minimising no-shows, and last-minute cancellations by those who no longer needed to see health staff.

Acacia had employed 2.5 FTE GPs, providing daily access for urgent patients and timely reliable access for those referred from the triage nurse. This meant wait times for general primary care appointments aligned with community expectations and were significantly less than the other large secure male prisons (OICS, 2025C; OICS, 2023B). Health centre data provided to us during the inspection showed a one week wait for CMS-requested initial triage appointments and a 1-2 week

wait to see a GP for those in mainstream units (a waitlist of 2-3 weeks was reported for those in protection).

The prison also employed or contracted a range of ancillary health care providers to support primary health needs and provide more holistic care. They ensured reliable and timely services, mostly within community equivalent standards as follows:

- audiologist (attends monthly – wait time 1 month)
- dietician (attends fortnightly – wait time 4 months for initial appointment)
- optometrist (attends monthly – 1-3 months wait time)
- physiotherapy (attends twice weekly – urgent same day, 3-week others)
- radiology/X-ray (trained own staff to provide onsite, as necessary)
- podiatrist (attends monthly – 4 months wait)
- phlebotomist (attends three days per week).

Having regular practitioners supported continuity of care for patients building familiarity with them and their treatment needs while onsite services, such as x-rays and blood sampling, eliminated the need for external health appointment escorts. This saved cost, reduced delays, and removed the risk of cancellations.

Leading the way in accessible, high-quality dental care

Since early 2021 Acacia had sub-contracted the delivery of dental services. An experienced dentist and dental assistants provided reliable and efficient services two days per week (although this was recently three days). Various dental services not frequently delivered at any public prisons in the state were available, including endodontics, surgical interventions, and restorative works.

At the time of the inspection, waiting times were within expectations for those seeking public dentistry services. Emergency needs could be met within one to five days; routine mainstream patients were seen within 13 weeks; and protection prisoners could get an appointment within 11 weeks. These timeframes were considerably shorter than other public prisons (OICS, 2023B; OICS, 2025; OICS, 2024B). Preventative care and education were also a focus with regular six-monthly check-ups provided to all people in custody whose sentences were approximately five years or longer.

Despite the quality and quantity of dental care being provided, pre-inspection survey results showed 37% of prisoner respondents believed dental care was poor at Acacia. While high, the figure was considerably lower than results found in the last inspection when services had only just begun under the new model. At that time 68% believed services were poor. This marked a substantial improvement in the prisoner-patient experience.



Reliable dental services meant for 8 days of service in September 2024, **127 dental consultations** were delivered.

However, the service was wary of two significant pressures that could impact its reliability. Firstly, the impact of the newly negotiated reduction in hours from three days to two, had yet to take full effect. And staff were concerned the preventative and educative role may need to stop if other service

demands could not be met. Secondly, the imminent reopening of Kilo Block and the additional patients that would bring would also put additional pressure on the reduced services now available.

3.2 Mental and psychological health services working together, focussed on patient needs

Mental health and psychological services were included in the realignment of health services over the past two years. Both were considered essential partners in the model of holistic care for people in custody, and the primary and mental health teams reported strong working relationships.

Importantly, we found the mental health team and psychological health services (PHS) team had been merged back together, and often provided shared care for patients. We were provided numerous case examples of prisoners who benefited significantly from the teams working together again. This contrasted with our findings at other prisons where these teams are siloed and resistant to working together with the same clients (OICS, 2025C). Acacia's team approach also extended beyond mental health and PHS, with care being managed and supported by primary health, cultural supports, and psychiatry to achieve best practice outcomes.

At the time of the inspection, there was only one vacancy in the PHS team. Yet, caseloads and demand were high, and staff were concerned about the effect on services when Kilo Block reopened. As with all prisons, the focus was on at-risk management, and the waiting time for counselling triage for clients without a risk-history was six to 12 months. PHS staff were not comfortable with this timeframe, stating it was clinically unsafe.

To provide support to those waiting, the team was trialling various options including a short session on alternative coping techniques for those within a month of registering for the counselling waitlist. A group of wellbeing support workers (trained prisoners) and some group programs (building mental wellbeing) had also been introduced. However, PHS staff noted these were not substitutes for professional counselling.

There needs to be more resources for PHS so prisoners who ask for help don't have to wait so long.

Staff survey comment about services for people in custody.

Acacia also benefitted from having an experienced psychiatrist on site two days a week. They were integrated well into the broader health team and the reliability of their service provided some certainty for patients. At the time of the inspection, they were waiting for eight weeks for a new intake assessment with the psychiatrist, and about six weeks for an existing patient review.

Notwithstanding the positive changes made in the centre and better staffing levels, people in custody perceived mental health services less positively than other aspects of health care (see Figure 2 above). Prisoners expressed their frustration accessing mental health services with demand outstripping resourcing. This was potentially compounded by the lack of adequate crisis care infrastructure to meet patients' therapeutic needs. While we understand a business case was

developed to convert an area in the prison to a dedicated crisis care unit, with a resident clinician and nursing staff, this was ongoing at the time of writing.

3.3 A strong team facing overwhelming demand to manage addictions

Access to voluntary addictions management programs that included pharmacotherapy were available at Acacia by request, but were also required under the contract (DoJ, 2020). People who tested positive for illicit substances had to be offered a treatment plan to address their substance use, and Acacia was required to measure how many people successfully completed an accepted plan.

Results from our pre-inspection survey highlighted the importance of these performance measures, with 21% of prisoner respondents reportedly developing a problem with illicit drugs since coming into the prison. Positive drug test data does not indicate that Acacia differed from other large male prisons in Western Australia. However, the tests showed buprenorphine, a highly trafficable opioid because of its size and cost, was a problem at Acacia. Therefore, it was good to see the team providing Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) services had been moved back into the mental health team in the services realignment. This ensured the team could reliably deliver a high-demand service while enabling a broader supportive environment.

The team managed a far greater number of people through its AOD program than any other prison in the state. At the time of the inspection, nearly 120 people in custody at Acacia were registered to the Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) replacement program, compared to approximately 30 at other male prisons. However, the waitlist was lengthy with more than 100 people awaiting program placement. As such, the AOD team had stopped adding names to the waitlist as it was unlikely they would access the program prior to the end of their sentence.

Despite this, the team was proactively looking at options for more effective management, making sure reviews required under the program were on time, and given the pressure from numbers, ensuring ethics and quality were not being compromised. As was the method of working within the health team, mental health also provided what assistance it could with dispensing.

Demand for help leads to feelings of despair

During the inspection people in custody expressed their feelings of hopelessness about the lengthy OST waitlist. Many perceived the program as their only means to successfully manage addiction and cease substance use. This was plainly apparent for one person who was recently sentenced to custody for more than 30 years and was being managed for self-harm and suicide risk. They requested placement on the OST program but were advised by the medical centre via letter that while they were placed on the waiting list, they would not be assessed for their suitability due to the length of the program's wait list.

The overwhelming demand faced by the AOD team is compelling justification for the Department to provide more substance withdrawal programs across the state. It was concerning when many people in custody told us (and reported to Acacia health staff) that other facilities had advised them to wait until arriving at Acacia to access the program.

Also of concern was the frequent feedback from prisoners of the desire to secure a place on the program, despite their addiction not being related to opiates. AOD and health centre staff also provided evidence this was an issue in managing the program. As OST was the only program available, it was preferable for many prisoners to be on this program rather than none at all. Given the extent of dependence on other drugs, the Department also needs to consider programs to address the needs of other substance misuse.

Recommendation 3

The Department of Justice develop a contemporary drug replacement/withdrawal treatment program that addresses the demand for treatment beyond opiates.

4 Innovative support and cultural services

Acacia offered vastly improved support services for people in custody compared to last inspection. It had identified the needs of many discrete groups and was creating and resourcing networks to support them. We were pleased to see many showing early signs of success. However, the prison could benefit from a strategic plan for all the support groups to help embed their early good practice. And specifically, it should finalise its Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy to ensure the continued success created in the cultural services and support space.

However, despite the considerably improved services, some quality-of-life aspects for people in custody had reduced. Many people were unhappy with the prison's declining living conditions, increasingly being restricted to their units due to building rectification works, and the quality and quantity of the food they were receiving.

4.1 Thorough orientation processes provided information in multiple forms

Acacia's orientation processes were thorough and informative. New prisoners were met at reception and given an overview of procedures for the first night, so they knew what to expect immediately. Most mainstream prisoners then spent their first week in an orientation unit, completing an orientation program before placement elsewhere within the facility. Protection prisoners' orientation was completed in the protection units.

Orientation was appropriately tailored to individual needs, with some people placed directly into a mainstream unit or even a self-care unit where they had family or other support networks. Acacia took particular care with young men transferring from youth custody after turning 18. We found there was good consultation between multidisciplinary staff at Acacia and Banksia Hill Detention Centre before these transfers occurred. Detailed planning was undertaken by Acacia with several successful transfers having already occurred. These young men were settled either in the YAC or elsewhere in the prison.

The orientation process gave prisoners the opportunity to receive and process information in several different ways. Several key elements helped make the program effective, underscoring the improved results we observed in our pre-inspection survey. The key elements included:

- an orientation unit or protection unit so new people stayed in a consistent location
- staff from different service areas attended these units to present information
- consistent orientation officer staffing
- peer involvement from induction workers and other support workers for those who were more comfortable approaching fellow people in custody for help or guidance.

In the units a comprehensive handbook complemented the orientation program. It contained a large amount of information about Acacia's services and was valuable to those with good literacy. For those with lower literacy levels, information was delivered verbally via a slideshow during the orientation program.

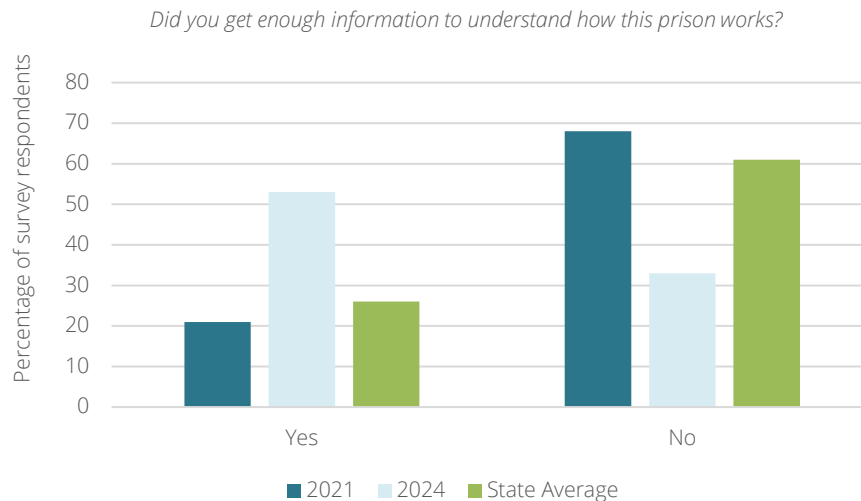


Figure 3: Survey results indicated people in custody were more satisfied with the information they received during orientation in 2024 compared to 2021.

4.2 Supports were tailored to different discrete groups

Acacia is a large, diverse prison needing a wide range of support services. As such, we were pleased to see it had appropriately identified the needs of many discrete groups and created and resourced networks to support them. Each group had a specific role and function and was aided by staff and management. The groups included:

- young adult mentors
- reintegration workers
- AOD support
- countrymen support
- PHS wellbeing support
- veterans
- Aboriginal focus unit workers
- Peer support.

Most public prisons do not have such an array of specific groups to support these differing needs.

Since Acacia adopted this new approach, the role of the prisoner peer support team has narrowed causing some frustration. Acacia's peer support strategy emphasises the role of peer support is to assist with ARMS processes and reduce self-harm. However, peer support members were dissatisfied they were unable to do the work they previously enjoyed and contributed towards, outside the specific remit of self-harm reduction and ARMS management. There was also frustration they could not access prisoners in some units, preventing them from fulfilling their role. As not every unit at Acacia has a peer support member, it is essential access be given for all prisoners requiring support.

Further, while the positive innovation of the support groups must be acknowledged, a level of siloing had occurred as an unintended outcome. We found the different groups were not necessarily coordinated, aware of each other's clients, or working together. Acacia management acknowledged

this issue and its potential risks. It advised a review and audit was planned of all prisoner support roles across the prison, and there was a need for coordination. This should be expedited.

Acacia management confirmed the existence of an overarching strategy and advised the existing strategy needed broadening to include specific briefs for each peer support role. These briefs will set out the intent for each group, as well as the support framework for each subset. This will also establish criteria for prisoner participation as a worker, who clients should be, and what training and support should be provided by the prison. Records management requirements could also be developed to ensure a central point documenting what support is needed and what has been provided, mindful that confidentiality in some areas of engagement may be necessary.

The groups should be encouraged to all work together to best support every person in custody, and not unnecessarily restrict one group over the other in providing support. People in custody may need multiple support points to best meet their needs.

Recommendation 4

Develop and implement a strategic prisoner support plan that identifies need, establishes good governance, and provides transparent operational practice.

4.3 Building relevant and respectful cultural services

As required by the contract, Acacia has built the foundations of a strong cultural services unit since our last inspection. In 2024, on average 38% of Acacia's population identified as First Nations. As such, the prison was developing stronger and more relevant services through the recruitment of a Cultural Advisor who reported to the prison's Director. The new position was given authority to establish a network of services and systems at Acacia which encouraged recognition, respect, and support for Aboriginal culture.

The cultural services unit and the programs incorporated within it were co-designed to ensure what was delivered was owned by and relevant to the people in custody, their families, and communities. The Cultural Advisor was provided with good resources to begin the recruitment or contracting of a network of appropriate roles to provide culturally appropriate supports to First Nations prisoners. This included a coordinator, cultural liaison officer, Aunties, and a language teacher. Recently 12 custodial officer positions were also reserved for First Nations candidates under section 50(d) of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (WA).

The unit also employed a network of people in custody who provided leadership and support to others. They took the lead in advocating for and designing several of the programs and services that were sourced and delivered. An accommodation unit was also dedicated to promoting and supporting cultural learning and living to foster positive modelling for life upon release. It emphasised food, language, art, based on collective living and responsibility.

The unit provided monthly reporting of its activities and outcomes as part of Acacia's contract reporting requirements. Data showed activities increased each quarter leading into our inspection.

The impact of this was reflected in our pre-inspection survey, which indicated prisoners' perception of respect for their culture had improved (increasing to 36% compared to 24% last inspection) and was better than the state average (28%).

Table 4: Cultural focus unit activities have increased each quarter in 2024 in the lead up to our inspection.

	Quarter 1, 2024		Quarter 2, 2024		Quarter 3, 2024	
	Activities	Hours	Activities	Hours	Activities	Hours
Total supports received	432	1,167	1,146	1,856.50	1,498	2,017

Staff in different service delivery areas of the prison also commented positively on the impact they had experienced through the cultural services area and unit. Some officers had called upon an Aunty – a respected, experienced, and skilled mental health practitioner – to provide support with conflict in units or behavioural issues with some prisoners. Cultural unit workers had also provided cultural family context to issues. Health centre workers had benefited from consulting with the unit, especially in the absence of First Nations health staff, to support engagement with patients. Cultural awareness training modules had also been developed, and new recruits were provided with an immersive cultural experience.

Embedding a cultural focus in everyday operations

Acacia's contract also required the development of an approved Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy which had been drafted but was still incomplete at the time of the inspection. A focussed and resourced plan, approved by prison management, was essential for ongoing success. This should be supported by prison policies, procedures, structures, and staff training.

Finalising and embedding the Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy would be a key mechanism towards ensuring the gains made in providing cultural support at Acacia are not lost. It would also ensure they can develop further and adapt to need. Other supporting documents underpinning the operationalisation of the strategy should then be developed and implemented. The prison should also document a timeline for reviewing the strategy for future improvement and adaptability to future prisoner needs and community input.

Recommendation 5

Finalise the Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy, and develop supporting policies and procedures for its operationalisation, including future reviews to ensure it remains relevant to prisoner and community needs.

4.4 Despite improved support services, quality of life had slipped

Living conditions had declined and maintenance was an ongoing challenge

The physical condition of accommodation areas varied between units, but many showed signs of deterioration. We observed dirt ridden walls, with ceiling and air-conditioning vents covered in thick dust. Some unit kitchens also showed considerable signs of age, with wooden shelving falling apart and some showing mould growth. Many cells showed signs of general wear and tear and needed maintenance.

Although Serco is now responsible for its own maintenance needs, frustrations had increased from both people in custody and staff about responsiveness to maintenance requests. Complaints included:

- phones being out of service for long periods of time
- air-conditioning and heating systems out of service
- the CMS kiosks breaking down and people missing scheduled appointments
- plumbing issues within cells
- washing machines and dryers breaking down and not being replaced.

Our pre-inspection survey supported these findings. Forty-six per cent of prisoner respondents thought their unit was 'poor', compared to the state average of 38%. Similarly, only 43% of staff respondents said the general cleanliness of the grounds and buildings was acceptable, down from 49% last inspection.

Despite the general decline in living conditions, we were pleased to see mattress hygiene had improved. Previously, we recommended the regular inspection of mattresses to ensure hygiene and cleanliness (OICS, 2023A). We were advised this now occurs monthly, and people told us it was easy to receive a replacement when needed.



Photo 1: Kitchen shelves were showing signs of deterioration.

Further, in response to a draft of this report, Serco advised designs for upgraded unit kitchens had been developed and were due to be manufactured and installed after Industries re-opened.

Increasing dissatisfaction with the food, and its distribution was concerning

Since our previous inspection there had been growing dissatisfaction with the quality and quantity of food. Only 17% of prisoner survey respondents rated the quality of food as good. This decreased from 28% in 2021 and was well below the state average of 41%. Similarly, only 22% thought the amount of food provided was good. Again, this had fallen since the last inspection (31%) and was well below the state average (49%). People in custody explained their concerns:

- there was not enough food for everyone
- meat portions had been reduced
- there were too many wet dishes (soups)
- the food lacked flavour
- there was rarely fresh salad available
- limited healthy options were available
- there was not enough Aboriginal cultural meals.



Photo 2: The frequency of wet dishes was a cause of complaint among people in custody.

Although we expected some dissatisfaction, the extent was significant and inconsistent with an independent dietician's review conducted 12 months prior to our inspection, and another review conducted during the inspection. Both were positive, noting:

- all macro and micronutrient categories were met or exceeded
- menu choice was available
- a 5-week rotational roster was consistent with community standards and culture
- the menu was adaptable to dietary requirements (Di Prima, 2023; Di Prima, 2024).

However, the reviews assumed people in custody received an allocated serving of food. At the time of our inspection, the food was served in large trays with distribution conducted by prisoner workers within the unit. We found staff supervision during meal times was poor and sometimes absent entirely. Consequently, we observed uneven distribution, with some people receiving large meals while others missed out. We strongly support Acacia's consideration of individual meals to allow for a better and more even distribution at mealtimes.

This jail's food is disgusting and there is never enough for everyone, we are always running for it and arguing over it which shouldn't be happening.

Prisoner food allocation seems to be constantly reduced – leaves prisoners hungry and causes fights between prisoners over food.

Respondents' comments to our pre-inspection survey.

Recommendation 6

Consider individual meals or supervise mealtime distribution to prevent the uneven allocation of food.

Acacia facilitated positive social contact with families

Acacia's visits centre was warm, welcoming, and held four 75-minutes visit sessions every Friday through Monday. The centre was recently repainted with cartoon artwork which engaged young children and there was a prisoner-run café open where people in custody could purchase food and drinks for themselves and their guests. The café was unique to Acacia, and the people we spoke with appreciated its amenity that was not offered at other large male prisons.

In contrast, the internal visits creche remained closed having not re-opened since the COVID-19 closure. This was unfortunate as it provided entertainment for children during visits and allowed adults the opportunity to discuss concerns without children present. To offset this, Acacia provided colouring in and pencils to occupy children. It also held four annual family days which took place on the oval inside the prison. They offered a fun family-friendly atmosphere with food and activities such as face painting, animal farms, and bouncy castles for families to enjoy together.

One-in-three approved funeral attendance escorts did not proceed

People in custody advised us they were struggling to attend funerals, even when approved to do so. They told us many escorts were cancelled at late notice, sometimes on the morning of the funeral. Data supported this, showing approximately 34% of approved funeral applications did not proceed (January 2024 – October 2024). This was mostly due to the transport service provider, Ventia, being unable to facilitate or adequately staff the escorts. In comparison, approximately 10% of Casuarina Prison approved funeral escorts for the same period did not proceed. While we acknowledge these cancellations were beyond Acacia's control, and they subsequently attempted to undertake a

number of funeral escorts themselves, supplementary escort staff may need to be considered so Acacia is not disproportionately affected.

Non-attendance at funerals often means people feel unable to appropriately grieve the loss of their loved ones. While we acknowledge staff efforts to facilitate alternative arrangements (such as livestreaming), this likely explains the drop in satisfaction found in our pre-inspection survey. Only 48% of respondents agreed access to funerals was acceptable this inspection compared to 2021 (62%).

5 Innovative programs, employment, and reintegration opportunities

We found Acacia had maintained high levels of criminogenic program delivery since our last inspection. This was despite many programs being cancelled, some of which were due to the considerable backlog in treatment assessment reports. We also found sentence management processes had improved. However, there was a need to bolster case management processes with officer training and guidance to capitalise on that improvement.

Education and training opportunities were still in great demand from people in custody. But their access was limited by ongoing custodial staff shortages. Similarly, the varied employment Acacia previously offered was also in demand but only just recovering due to the lost industries opportunities.

5.1 Good sentence management limited by weak case management and late treatment assessments

The number of prisoners with overdue Initial IMPs (Individual Management Plans) had more than halved since the last inspection, reducing from 187 in 2021 to 85 in September 2024. This was assisted by the Department waiving the requirement for treatment assessments to be completed as part an Initial IMP, in an effort to tackle the backlog being experienced across the custodial estate. As per the current contract, the Hakea Assessment Centre completes these initial plans for people placed at Acacia.

Following approval of an Initial IMP, Acacia is responsible for conducting:

- annual reviews for people with more than three years of their sentence remaining, or
- six-monthly reviews for people with a remaining sentence of between six months and up to three years.

In September 2024, 125 IMP reviews were approved by Acacia, the highest completion rate of any prison in the state. Acacia had consistently shown itself to be a high performer in this space, completing a high number of reviews each month. By the end of September, there were only 10 IMP reviews overdue due to some staffing shortages.

What is an Initial IMP?

The Initial IMP is completed for sentenced prisoners with an effective sentence of greater than six months, with a completed deadline of six weeks following sentencing. Historically, the IMP was developed in consultation with education and treatment assessors to provide a case management plan, identifying needs and recommendations for placement, security classification and interventions aimed to assist each prisoner during their sentence through to release into the community.

Table 5: Acacia was completing a high number of IMP reviews each month in the lead up to our inspection.

	June	July	August	September
Number of IMP reviews approved	147	138	126	125

Outstanding treatment assessment reports remained high

At the time of the inspection, approximately 22% of Acacia's sentenced population had overdue treatment assessment reports (TARs). This is considerably high and did not include 27 people with indefinite sentences or 34 others requiring a treatment re-assessment. It also did not include those with overdue TARs that were not completed because they were within six months of their maximum release date. Previously, Acacia programs staff assessed treatment needs and wrote TARs. However, during this inspection we found the Department's Treatment Course Planning Assessors were now completing most TARs. The backlog in TARs means that Acacia is unable to address the treatment needs for impacted prisoners.

TARs form part of a person's Initial IMP and include recommendations for people in custody to engage in criminogenic programs based on the outcomes of screening and risk/need assessment tools. This Office has consistently raised concerns, as far back as 2018, about delayed TARs, highlighting their impact on prisoner rehabilitation, particularly regarding the timely completion of programs before a prisoner's Earliest Eligibility Date (EED) (OICS, 2024A; OICS, 2024B).

In November 2023, the Commissioner for Corrective Services permitted Initial IMPs to be formulated without a full TAR. This change aimed to reduce the backlog of outstanding Initial IMPs which were delayed due to challenges completing TARs. However, by September 2024, the number of outstanding TARs across the custodial estate stood at 794. This represented a 45% increase from the 545 outstanding assessments in November 2023 when the strategy was introduced.

Denying people in custody a timely assessment of their treatment needs is fundamentally unfair. It denies them meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation, a fair chance at parole, and contributes to the growing prison population and overcrowding. Some prisoners are unable to complete required treatment programs before their EED, delaying their release for parole. Others may be denied parole altogether, with unmet treatment needs being a significant factor in those decisions.

Recommendation 7

The Department of Justice must commit to significant changes to address the persistent issue of outstanding treatment assessments.

Custodial staff did not share the focus placed on case management

The case management of people in custody was a high priority for Acacia. Policies outlined the 'responsible prisoner model', supported by case management and direct supervision (Serco Acacia, 2021; Serco Acacia, 2022A). During the inspection, senior management also emphasised to us the importance it placed on effectively case managing people in custody and a providing appropriate training to equip staff for case management.

Despite this, some staff expressed concerns about completing case management reports. They explained that these duties, including writing reports and responding to inquiries from Oscar Block

staff, conflicted with their responsibility to maintain prison security. Some officers noted short staffing also prevented them from providing information on prisoners.

Non-custodial staff also raised concerns, citing the lateness, and opinion included in custodial officers' reports. This affected the timeliness of their own reports, which rely on information from officers who provide detailed observations. This was compounded by the limited notes recorded on the Department's offender database, which meant non-custodial staff had to prompt officers for further information.

Without accurate input from custodial staff who work closely with people in custody, the effectiveness of Acacia's case management system is reduced. Under the prison's policy, unit managers are the gatekeepers of the case management process; they must ensure case reports are completed promptly and accurately. They are required to quality assure the reports' content and should be the liaison when Oscar Block staff request information.

Recommendation 8

Improve processes for custodial staff completing case management reports by offering additional training, clearer guidance, and regular support, to streamline report writing.

5.2 Offender program delivery was high with an innovative range of voluntary programs available

Acacia has maintained high levels of program delivery across several treatment needs including substance use, family and domestic violence (FDV), sexual offending, and cognitive skills. Acacia is contracted to provide 6,000 hours of programs annually. We were advised this was the highest of any prison in the state, equating for 65% of all programs delivered. But while program provision at Acacia remained high, it was restricted by various factors.

Between 2023 and 2024, 13 programs were cancelled and two delayed. Six programs were cancelled due to insufficient participant numbers caused by delays in assessing prisoners' treatment needs. A further four programs were cancelled due to the lack of available trained facilitators, and two due to operational issues including a lack of room availability.

Table 6: Less courses were completed in 2024 compared to 2023, but there were also fewer courses cancelled.

	2023 Courses		2024 Courses (to September)	
	Conducted	Cancelled	Conducted	Cancelled
Pathways	9	2	6	1
Sex Offending (medium)	2	1	1	0
Medium Intensity Program	3	0	0	1

Sex Offending (intensive)	1	1	1	0
Violence Prevention Program	3	3	3	0
Stopping Family Violence	3	2	2	0
Think First	2	1	1	1
Total	23	10	14	3

During the inspection we were advised the delays in treatment assessments meant fewer enrolments in lower-intensity programs which was leading to several programs being cancelled. However, enrolments remained high for intensive courses. In fact, four concurrent 240-hour Violence Prevention Programs were running, and positively only eight participants from these four programs had dropped out. Unfortunately, there were no criminogenic programs specifically for First Nations prisoners, and staff had not received the necessary training to deliver Not Our Way, a First Nations FDV program.

With over 300 people unassessed at Acacia, the demand for programs likely exceeded delivery. Only 36% of respondents said they accessed treatment programs in our pre-inspection survey. Further, we consistently heard from people in custody who were waiting to be assessed for programs or that their program had been delayed.

Treatment programs for IMPs are so far behind I will not get parole until I do my IMP courses. By the time I get assessed and do the course I will have done full time on my sentence.

Respondent's comment to our pre-inspection survey.

There was some success through the Parole in-reach Program (PiP), a throughcare rehabilitation program, which people commence in custody and, if granted parole, continue the program in the community. Made up of two streams, FDV and AOD, the program aimed to identify suitable candidates who had not been treatment assessed and were less likely to be referred to rehabilitation services due to lack of eligibility. PiP is delivered in a rolling format with a capacity of 10 participants per stream. Between 2023 and 2024, 51 out of 71 FDV participants had completed the program. For the same period, 45 people had commenced the AOD stream which saw 22 released on parole.

Acacia offered a wide variety of voluntary programs, but access was limited

Acacia offers a wide range of voluntary programs which target needs such as, but not limited to, AOD, FDV, general violence prevention, parenting, employment, mentoring, and gambling support. Some notable programs were:

- Outcare's Aboriginal Men's Throughcare and Behaviour Change program with 1-on-1 counselling.
- ReSet's parenting and AOD programs.

- Serco's Storybook Dads program, where prisoners record themselves reading a book and sending the recording to children.
- Uniting WA's specialist re-entry services for life, indeterminate, or long-sentenced prisoners.

The Real Support Network (RSN), composed of staff from Community Transitions, Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, and the Waalitj Foundation, also provide high levels of support to prisoners through voluntary services. In September 2024 the RSN delivered almost 430 hours of support, including 260 hours to First Nations prisoners, through 249 sessions.

Both staff and people in custody acknowledged the positive effect these programs had on rehabilitation. It was noted the Prisoner Review Board often considered completion of voluntary programs demonstration of a willingness to address offending behaviours.

However, 39% of prisoner respondents said they could not access voluntary programs. Like criminogenic programs, there was high demand and limited availability of program staff and infrastructure. The latter was an increasing issue as the growing number of IMP programs increased competition for rooms.

5.3 Education and training were limited, hampered by regular closures

The Education Centre was focussed on delivering basic education units and had planned its monthly student contact hours to meet the high demand for its service. Despite this planning, and the efforts of its committed facilitators, education was consistently unable to meet its targets throughout 2023 and 2024. For example, there were 15,340 student hours or 22 working days of education delivery planned in Victor Block for May 2024. However, it only achieved 9,714 hours, the equivalent of 15 days. Similarly, in October 2024, at the time of the inspection, Victor Block was required to close for 8.5 days.

The reduced service was in part explained by the closure of Whiskey Block which meant protection prisoners attended on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. An additional third officer was required to facilitate this, straining already stretched custodial numbers. But it also meant, at a minimum, people from mainstream units lost 1.5 days of education each week before any other closures. This was compounded by frequent custodial shortages which staff and prisoners confirmed often led to closures across the prison, with Victor Block typically the first area to shut.

The education team was also stretched due to its own staffing pressures. Several vacancies, including positions for an art facilitator and a fitness facilitator, contributed to a backlog of people wanting to engage in education. Adding to this, Acacia was unsuccessful at recruiting an Aboriginal Education Worker. However, two highly respected individuals were appointed since our previous inspection which allowed for Noongar language, reading and writing, and social and emotional wellbeing courses to be delivered.

An increased use of prisoner facilitators helped the centre to try cope with education demands. Some of these men were enrolled in an Indigenous Tertiary Enabling Course, a bridging course which required students to engage in peer tutoring.

Focus shifted from traineeships to industry-driven production

With Romeo (metal, cabinet, and fabrication workshops) and Hotel (laundry and other small industries) blocks offline, Victor Block had increased its capacity to 150 prisoners. In response to the capacity increase, Victor Block staff observed a shift in focus from vocational training to accommodate more employment needs. Short courses, such as White Card, Working at Heights, and Working in Confined Spaces were no longer offered, and the only traineeship available was a Certificate II in Engineering. Other employment and vocational training areas such as bricklaying were shut down, due to limited safe space in the workshop.



SUGGESTION

Avoid delay and begin the recruitment of vocational trainers now as industrial areas begin to re-open.

Several staff raised concerns with us about the changed focus from vocational training to industry-driven production. Much of the work produced by the metal shop was redirected toward servicing infrastructure in the destroyed Kilo Block, creating items like vending machines, gates, roof enclosures, benches, and telephone sets. This reduced training-related activities. Consequently, some staff left their roles due to the decreased focus in vocational training and other internal conflicts. As such, the team had reduced from six to two vocational trainers.



Photo 3: Benches for use within Kilo Block were part of a shifted focus to industry-driven production.

We were told when industries fully resume at Acacia, Victor Block is planned to facilitate Certificate I and Certificate II courses, including painting and decorating, and cabinet making. Higher-level qualifications, including Certificate III and above, will be conducted in the industries areas. However, we urge Acacia to be well prepared to recruit vocational trainers as industries areas begin to reopen.

Changes in external providers also affected vocational training as Acacia no longer received services from Train West, which had moved to a fully online delivery model.

Despite the downturn, at the time of the inspection there were still 58 active participants in traineeships, up from 39 in 2021. A total of 81 traineeships commenced in 2024. Seven of these were completed while most are scheduled to complete their courses in 2025. Disappointingly, there had been 45 cancellations. As with the last inspection, most traineeships were limited to roles in the kitchen or textiles, with only three active participants in the Certificate II in Engineering program that began in 2023.

5.4 Significant underemployment an outcome of major disruptions

Staff and prisoners alike outlined the challenges to gaining meaning employment at Acacia. Due to ongoing disruptions to industries since our last inspection (i.e., the riot, laundry fire, and departmental policy changes), employment opportunities had considerably reduced, and were yet to recover. To offset the lost opportunities, 52 new positions were created in other units not affected by disruptions, and a third shift was added in the kitchen. Positions in education and training also reduced. However, work opportunities in offender services, programs and support roles increased from 57 in 2021 to 97 in 2024. Overall, this increased the number of available employment positions in Acacia to 1,130 compared to its total capacity for 1,480. However, most roles were part-time, and most people effectively only worked for around 2.5 hours per day.

Prisoner employment was further compounded by custodial shortages

During the inspection some unit work was cancelled due to insufficient staffing levels to supervise workers. We were advised this occurred frequently, resulting in only two to three days of work available each week. While this reduced prisoner productivity, it was also burdensome on trades instructors who were required to complete tasks without their workforce.

At the time of the inspection, 28% of people in custody were unemployed. Concerningly, unemployment disproportionately impacted First Nations prisoners (40% compared to 20.3% for non-First Nations prisoners). Further to this, underemployment was also especially high. Overall, 56.2% of prisoners were either unemployed or underemployed in unit-based work, increasing from 50.6% last inspection. Among First Nations people, this rate was notably higher at 63%, compared to 51.8% for those from non-First Nations backgrounds. However, the true level of underemployment is likely to be higher given the part-time work offered in many areas across the prison.

Underemployment is work within the custodial setting which involves limited effort, skill, or potential for development. It is often completed quickly and holds minimal meaningful value. Most unit-based employment fits this category.

Gratuity level distributions also highlighted the disparity in employment opportunities for First Nations people compared to non-First Nations prisoners. As of 11 October 2024, only 100 First Nations prisoners (7.5% of the population) held the highest level of gratuities (Level 1 or 2 positions), whereas 279 non-First Nations people (21% of the population) were employed at these higher levels.

Prisoners require a lot more available employment to keep them busy – so many prisoners are applying for employment but are turned away as there are not jobs available.

Staff respondent's comment in our pre-inspection survey

5.5 Good re-entry and reintegration services but some disparate outcomes not limited to Acacia

Acacia's re-entry services offered a variety of supports, including:

- identification support (obtaining birth certificates, Medicare cards).
- financial assistance (help with fines, Centrelink).
- family support (child support, Child Protection and Family Services).
- accommodation assistance (Department of Communities housing, transitional housing, hostels, residential rehabs for AOD and FDV).
- specialised services (National Disability Insurance Scheme, Immigration, Redress Scheme, and parole plan classes).
- preparation of emergency clothing packs for those in need.

At the time of the inspection, an understaffed reintegration team was being supported by 29 prisoner workers across mainstream and protection units. This demonstrated an impressive focus and support of prisoner employment. These workers completed an initial assessment checklist for every new person transferred to Acacia and reassessed those within six months of release. Staff processed these assessments and made referrals or included prisoners on voluntary program waitlists.

The Real Support Network also plays a vital role in preparing people for release, in addition to other re-entry support and throughcare services provided by ReSet, Outcare, and Uniting WA.

First Nations prisoners were less likely to be released at their earliest eligibility date

Departmental data showed Acacia had a similar proportion of people in custody held beyond their EED compared to Casuarina Prison (another large metropolitan facility with a high number of sentenced men). But both facilities also had a disproportionate number of First Nations people held past their EED compared to non-First Nations people. At Acacia, 38% of all people with parole terms have passed their EED. However, this increases to 52.4% for First Nations prisoners, almost twice the percentage of non-First Nations prisoners (28.5%).

Table 7: First Nations people at Acacia Prison were more likely to be past their EED and denied parole.

	% prisoners past EED	% prisoners parole denied	% prisoners past EED	% prisoners parole denied	% prisoners past EED	% prisoners parole denied
	Total		First Nations		Non-First Nations	
Acacia	38.2%	42.6%	52.4%	58.1%	28.5%	32%
Casuarina	38.4%	41.1%	47.3%	51.7%	30.1%	31.3%

Similarly, almost 43% of all people in custody at Acacia had been denied parole, but this figure is disproportionately higher for First Nations people at 58.1%, compared to 32% for non-First Nations people. As a systemic issue, we encourage both the Department and Acacia to examine the reasons behind such disparate and poorly outcomes for First Nations people in custody.

Recommendation 9

Examine why First Nations prisoners are more frequently denied parole and less likely to be released at their earliest eligibility date.

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Appendix B Acronyms

Term	Expansion of Abbreviation
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
ARMS	At-risk Management System
CCTV	Closed circuit television
CCU	Crisis Care Unit
CERT	Correctional Emergency Response Team
CMS	Client management system
COPP	Commissioner's Operating Policy and Procedure
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
DOJ	Department of Justice
EED	Earliest Eligibility Date
FDV	Family and Domestic Violence
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GP	General Practitioner
HEAL	Health, Education, and Advancement for Lifers
HSE	Health, Safety, and Environment
IMP	Individual Management Plan
LLO	Lifer Liaison Officers
MHN	Mental Health Nurse
OICS	Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services
OST	Opioid Substitution Therapy
PHS	Psychological Health Services
PIP	Parole in-reach Program
PLF	Performance Linked Fee
PRAG	Prisoner Risk Assessment Group
PSO	Prison Support Officer

RSN	Real Support Network
SAMS	Support and Monitoring System
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAR	Treatment Assessment Report
TM	Transitional Manager
YAC	Young Adult Community



Response to OICS Draft Report:

2024 Inspection of Acacia Prison

April 2025

Version 1.0

Response Overview

Introduction

On 7 June 2024, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the 2024 Inspection of Acacia Prison (Acacia) - the State's sole privately run prison, operated by Serco, in accordance with the *Acacia Prison Services Agreement* (the Agreement). The on-site inspection took place from 14 – 23 October 2024.

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

On 31 March 2025, the Department received the draft inspection report for review, which contained nine recommendations.

Where recommendations are a requirement under the Agreement but are reliant on Serco taking action to address the issues raised by OICS, the Department will monitor Serco's actioning of these recommendations.

Where the Department is not satisfied that the action taken by Serco to address the recommendations is sufficient, the Department will request that additional action is taken, and evidence is produced demonstrating compliance with the requirements under the agreement.

Recommendations 2, 3, 7 and 9 will be actioned by the Department.

Response to Recommendations

1 Investigate and address workplace culture concerns within the staffing group.

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

Response:

Section 11 of the Agreement requires that Serco:

- *Ensure that its employees do not engage in workplace behaviour in contravention of workplace behaviour policies and Codes of Conduct and provide evidence of compliance with this requirement if requested by the Department to do so;*
- *Develop a process to manage employee grievances and ensure that employee grievances are dealt with promptly;*
- *Perform its obligations in compliance with all applicable laws including the Fair Work Act 2009, which seeks to protect employees from workplace discrimination and harassment.*

Serco maintains a Code of Conduct which is applicable to all employees and is aligned with the Department's Code of Conduct. Under both Codes, all staff have an obligation to report suspected misconduct.

Serco's Integrity Unit and the Department's People, Culture and Standards Division work collaboratively to ensure misconduct is managed appropriately.

The Department will monitor Serco's actioning of this recommendation accordingly.

2 Re-introduce body scanning technology at Acacia to minimise potentially retraumatising effects of strip searches.

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

Response:

It should be noted that while Serco previously utilised millimetre wave scanning technology for searching staff and visitors, this technology was not utilised for searching prisoners to reduce reliance on strip-searching and was limited in that it could only detect items on the surface of a persons body i.e., items hidden in clothing.

Whilst the Department acknowledges the benefits of body scanning technology and has implemented full body low dose x-ray scanning at State operated sites including Casuarina, Hakea and Melaleuca, the further rollout of this technology to the remainder of the custodial estate is still under consideration. Currently, the priority sites for this technology remain the remand and maximum-security facilities.

Although initial information pertaining to the body scanning technology has been provided to Serco, as the introduction of body scanning technology is not a current requirement under the Agreement, the roll out of this technology would be subject to further negotiation and agreement by the Department and Serco.

3 The Department of Justice develop a contemporary drug replacement/withdrawal treatment program that addresses the demand for treatment beyond opiates.

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

Response:

Whilst the Department supports the expansion of substance replacement therapies and treatments, it must be noted that Acacia is a single and privately operated facility who under the agreement are required to deliver substance replacement therapies and treatments.

The Department will request additional resources to expand and address gaps in its service provision of substance replacement therapies and treatments.

4 Develop and implement a strategic prisoner support plan that identifies need, establishes good governance, and provides transparent operational practice.

Level of Acceptance:	Noted
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Operational Support

Response:

The Department acknowledges that work is currently underway by Serco to address this recommendation and will continue to monitor Serco's progress against this recommendation.

5 Finalise the Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy, and develop supporting policies and procedures for its operationalisation, including future reviews to ensure it remains relevant to prisoner and community needs.

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

Response:

Schedule 2, section 2.17(h) of the Agreement requires that Serco:

- *Adopt an integrated strategy, with measurable targets, for the management of all aspects of Aboriginal Prisoner care at the Prison and, in doing so, must liaise with relevant Government Agencies, community groups and organisations, such as the Department of Training and Workforce Development, the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, the Department of Communities, the Department of Health, regional employers, NAIDOC, and Aboriginal Prisoners themselves.*

The Department has requested a copy of Serco's finalised Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy and will review the strategy to ensure it meets both the requirements under the agreement, and has appropriate strategies to support First Nations prisoners at Acacia.

6 Consider individual meals or supervise mealtime distribution to prevent the uneven allocation of food.

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

Response:

The Department is working collaboratively with Serco to address this issue.

Acacia Standing Order 6.3, governing prisoner food and nutrition, has been updated to incorporate provisions requiring staff to supervise meal distribution.

In addition, the Department's Operational Compliance Branch have commenced monitoring Serco's compliance with the updated requirement.

7 The Department of Justice must commit to significant changes to address the persistent issue of outstanding treatment assessments.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

The Department resumed responsibility for the completion of Individual Management Plans (IMPs) and Treatment Assessment Reports (TARs) for Acacia prisoners following the previous inspection.

The Department acknowledges that further work is required to reduce the backload of assessments, however the ability to do so relies heavily on the availability of clinical staff to undertake the assessments and meet the demand, accessibility to prisoners identified as requiring an IMP or TAR and the allocation of suitable rooms for interviews and assessments to be conducted.

In November 2022, the IMP Taskforce (the Taskforce) was established, comprised of subject matter experts from sentence management, treatment assessments, clinical governance, and custodial representatives, to track performance, consider current barriers and develop solutions for immediate and sustained improvements to manage overdue IMPs and TARs.

Since inception of the Taskforce, the following advancements have been made:

- Implementation of a triage process to screen out offenders who do not require more comprehensive assessments, enabling faster completion of the TAR process for those who are low risk.
- Suspension of:
 - the requirement to complete a TAR for inclusion within an initial IMP;
 - requirement to complete a TAR for prisoners who are within six months of their Earliest Date of Release (EDR); and
 - Creation of additional treatment assessment positions including supervisors and regional based assessors.

The Department will continue to work through the overdue TARs and IMPs. The Department will include infrastructure and resourcing needs in future budget submissions to improve service delivery in this area.

8 Improve processes for custodial staff completing case management reports by offering additional training, clearer guidance, and regular support, to streamline report writing.

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

Response:

Commissioner's Operating Policy and Procedure (COPP) 10.3 - *Case Management (Case Officers)* provides guidance to custodial staff on case management processes.

The Department will work collaboratively with Serco to ensure the expectations under COPP 10.3 are both understood and enshrined within Serco's relevant standing orders.

All other actions required to address this recommendation, including the potential provision of additional training, will be actioned by Serco accordingly.

9 Examine why First Nations prisoners are more frequently denied parole and less likely to be released at their earliest eligibility date.

Level of Acceptance:	Supported
Responsible Division:	Strategic Reform
Responsible Directorate:	WACSAR

Response:

The Western Australia Office of Crime Statistics and Research (WACSAR) will undertake research into the overrepresentation of First Nations people across the custodial estate to identify trends and potential causes. This will include, but not be limited to, factors contributing to the higher rate of parole denials and Aboriginal prisoners remaining in custody beyond their estimated eligible date of release.

Appendix D Serco's Response

Recommendation	Page
Recommendation 1 Investigate and address workplace culture concerns within the staffing group.	5
Serco's Response: Comparing results from the Serco Global Colleague Engagement Survey in 2023 to that of 2024 reflects an improvement in employee culture at Acacia Prison. It is to be noted that the OICS pre-inspection staff survey was completed by 125 respondents, representing 25% of Acacia Prison's workforce. This seems to be a standing recommendation in OISC reports; however, Acacia acknowledges that there is always room for improvement and efforts continue in this space.	
Recommendation 4 Develop and implement a strategic prisoner support plan that identifies need, establishes good governance, and provides transparent operational practice.	25
Serco's Response: The existing strategy is being broadened to include specific briefs for each peer support role. These briefs will set out the intent for each group, as well as the support framework for each subset.	
Recommendation 5 Finalise the Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy and develop supporting policies and procedures for its operationalisation, including future reviews to ensure it remains relevant to prisoner and community needs.	26
Serco's Response: The Aboriginal Prisoner Strategy had been completed by the time of the inspection; however, it was awaiting approval by the General Manager. This has now been completed and the Strategy has been implemented. By its nature, this includes operationalisation measures and future reviews and separate policies and procedures are, therefore, not required.	
Recommendation 6 Consider individual meals or supervise mealtime distribution to prevent the uneven allocation of food.	29

Serco's Response:

Acacia has commenced sourcing individual-serve containers and a suitable option has been identified. Further, meal-time supervision has been enhanced, with two officers observing and supervising meal distribution.

Recommendation 8

Improve processes for custodial staff completing case management reports by offering additional training, clearer guidance, and regular support, to streamline report writing.

33

Serco's Response:

Acacia acknowledges continuous improvement is required and work has commenced to address this recommendation.

Appendix E Inspection Details

Previous inspection			
10 – 19 November 2021			
Activity since previous inspection			
Liaison visits to Acacia Prison		9 visits	
Independent Visitor visits		34 visits	
Surveys			
Prisoner survey		21 – 22 August 2024	332 responses (25%)
Staff survey (online)		23 August – 4 September 2024	126 responses (25%)
Inspection team			
Inspector	Eamon Ryan	Inspections and Research Officer	Jim Bryden
Deputy Inspector	Jane Higgins	Inspections and Research Officer	Ben Shaw
Director Operations	Natalie Gibson	Graduate Officer	Tiana Kosovich
Inspections and Research Officer	Cliff Holdom	A/Research and Review Officer	Anna Morris
Inspections and Research Officer	Kieran Artelaris	Community Liaison Officer	Joseph Wallam
Key dates			
Inspection announced		7 June 2024	
Start of on-site inspection		14 October 2024	
Completion of on-site inspection		23 October 2024	
Presentation of preliminary findings		18 November 2024	
Draft report sent to Department of Justice & Serco		31 March 2025	
Response from Department of Justice & Serco		19 April 2025	
Declaration of prepared report		11 June 2025	



*Inspection of prisons, court
custody centres, prescribed lock-
ups, youth detention centres, and
review of custodial services in
Western Australia*

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