

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2 PM ON 21 October 2025

Non-custodial staffing shortage

The Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, has today released a report on the shortage of non-custodial staffing facing all prisons across Western Australia. The report noted that an effective prison system must provide people in custody the opportunity to address their immediate health and welfare needs in addition to supporting behavioural and attitudinal change through tailored programs and services. However, the Inspector found that prolonged shortages in the areas of health, mental health, rehabilitation, and reintegration had led to delays in health assessments, case management, and rehabilitation planning. Such delays were affecting prisoner care and reintegration outcomes.

The report found 1 in 5 Department of Justice positions in Health and Wellbeing roles were vacant while more than 1 in 4 Rehabilitation and Reintegration positions were unstaffed. Mr Ryan said:

Non-custodial staffing models in prisons were not clear, consistent, or contemporary in determining the number of professionals needed across these portfolios. Furthermore, the efforts of the Department to recruit and retain these staff remained challenging, exacerbated by national clinical shortages. Currently, the Department is not an employer of choice. We found staff attrition was linked to increased workloads, unsafe working conditions, limited opportunities for career progression or innovation, a lack of clinical supervision, and an undesirable workplace culture.

The Department faces a critical and multifaceted challenge to adequately staff non-custodial roles across Western Australian prisons. Mr Ryan added:

Shortages in non-custodial staffing need to be addressed sooner rather than later. Without comprehensive reform and sustained investment, the Department risks continued service shortfalls that compromise the wellbeing, rehabilitation, and reintegration outcomes for people in custody. This means people will stay in prison for longer and come out no better than when they went in, driving up the size of the prison population, and not making communities any safer.

Mr Ryan welcomed the fact that the Department has convened the Clinical Shortages Workforce Group to address those shortfalls and work towards making the Department an employer of choice. Some promising strategies have been introduced, however more robust retention measures and competitive incentives are urgently needed. Serco's tailored approach at Acacia Prison highlights opportunities for the Department to enhance its employment offerings.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, will be available for comment from 2.00 pm on 21 October 2025 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925. The full report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au).