

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2.00 PM ON 18 November 2025

Workers' compensation trends in WA prisons

The Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, has released a report examining workers' compensation claims in the prison system and the effects any associated leave have on the workforce and people in custody. Mr Ryan said prison staff should not expect to get injured despite prisons being high-risk environments:

Working in prisons is inherently risky as staff are regularly exposed to physical, psychological, and operational hazards. However, accepting there is risk is not that same as accepting harm is inevitable. Good governance, efficient and effective processes, and early intervention programs can mitigate harm and help staff return to work sooner.

The report found there was a recent uptick in the number of claims for physical injuries, rising 27% between 2023 and 2024. But this was dwarfed by a 77% increase in claims for psychological injuries which are often more complex – they tend to result in more time lost compared to physical injuries, they are costlier, and they have poorer return-to-work outcomes. Mr Ryan explained:

Recent reforms to Western Australia's workplace health and safety legislation have enhanced employers' obligations to provide a safe workplace, with an increased emphasis on psychosocial hazards. Critical incidents including deaths in custody, assaults, and self-harm have increased in recent years. These further compound any staff trauma and potentially correlate to the doubling of psychological injury claims over the last six years, such that they now account for one in four workers' compensation claims from the Department of Justice.

The review established that high levels of workers' compensation were heavily impacting prison operations. The staff shortages contributed to by workers' compensation leave affected every aspect of daily life for people in custody. And for staff, the impact was equally as acute and widespread on both an individual level and for the broader workforce. Furthermore, the high claim volume was potentially creating reputational risk to the Department, reducing its attraction as an employer of choice.

The Inspector detailed significant and systemic challenges the Department needs to address to curtail these trends, recommending the wholesale review of its workers' compensation and injury management process. He welcomed the Department's support of this recommendation and its recent appointment of a consultant to undertake this review.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, will be available for comment from 2.00 pm on 18 November 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).