

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2PM ON 2 DECEMBER 2025

Follow-up: Contact with family and others while in custody

Today the Inspector of Custodial Services released a follow-up report on prisoners' ability to maintain contact with family and friends while in custody, finding both positive progress and ongoing barriers.

The Inspector, Eamon Ryan, said:

We returned to this subject again in 2025, largely because it remains a constant source of complaint and grievance raised with us by people in custody and their families.

There have been important changes since the initial review in 2018, both positive and negative. A notable improvement is the introduction of a flat call rate that includes mobile calls, as phone calls remain the most accessible and reliable method for maintaining family connections. However, a continuing reduced ratio of phones to people in custody (due to rising population) and restrictions on phone access hours remain significant barriers.

Despite a recommendation in 2018 to implement an online booking system for social visits across all prisons, many facilities still do not use the system that was introduced. The average number of social visits has also declined since the initial review. This is concerning considering visit entitlements for people on remand have also been reduced, while the number of people on remand have increased.

E-visit technology installed across facilities in 2020 is also underutilised. Where ongoing visit limitations were attributed to COVID-19 protocols, complaints about visit restrictions are now attributed to staff shortages, which continue to limit the availability and quality of visits. Mr Ryan urged the Department to provide support to people in custody and the community to increase the use of e-visit technology, including with an information package and support for when technical issues arise.

Mr Ryan welcomed the fact that the Department is implementing a digital services platform to improve contact, though noted this will take time:

The Offender Digital Services Platform aims to modernise contact with community and has the potential to improve the lives of people in custody. However, delays have hindered the implementation of digital technology, with upgrades to the phone system, e-visit service, and online booking system unlikely to be completed in the short term.

While there have been some positive developments in facilitating family contact for people in custody since our review, the Department must address significant remaining barriers. Continued focus and investment will be essential to ensure that people in custody can maintain vital connections with their families.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, will be available for comment from 2pm on 2 December 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).