



2026 INSPECTION OF
BUNBURY REGIONAL
PRISON

170

AUGUST 2026

*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.



2026 Inspection of Bunbury Regional Prison

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August 2026
ISSN 1445-3134 (Print)
ISSN 2204-4140 (Electronic)

This report is available on the Office’s website and will be made available, upon request, in alternate formats.



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Inspector's Overview

A prison with strengths tested by sustained pressure

Bunbury Regional Prison has long been regarded as one of Western Australia's stronger performing prisons. Previous inspections have identified a facility with a clear rehabilitative focus, positive staff-prisoner relationships, and a commitment to preparing people for return to the community. This inspection found many of those strengths remain evident.

At the same time, Bunbury is operating in an environment of increasing complexity and pressure. Population growth, staffing shortages, ageing infrastructure and system-wide constraints have combined to create challenges that are evident throughout this report. What stood out to me, however, was not simply the existence of these pressures, but the extent to which staff continue to work around them to keep the prison functioning effectively. The question facing Bunbury is no longer whether staff are committed enough to manage these challenges, it is whether local effort and ingenuity alone can continue to compensate for systemic pressures beyond the prison's control.

During the inspection, we heard a consistent message from management and staff. The focus has become maintaining daily operations, meeting immediate needs and keeping the prison open. Strategic planning, innovation and longer-term improvement have become increasingly difficult when resources are stretched, and attention is directed towards responding to operational demands. Bunbury was operating without a local operational plan, a reality openly acknowledged by local leadership, not through a lack of commitment, but rather the extent to which managing daily pressures had become the overriding priority.

Yet despite these constraints, there were many examples of good practice. Bunbury continued to achieve levels of out-of-cell time above the state average and remained committed to avoiding unnecessary lockdowns. Staff and management recognised that a prison that remains active, connected and engaged is generally a safer prison. This philosophy was evident across the facility and reflects an approach that prioritises rehabilitation, progression and constructive engagement rather than restriction alone.

We also found encouraging signs that workplace culture had improved since the previous inspection. Staff survey results, interviews and observations pointed to stronger teamwork, improved perceptions of safety and a more positive working environment. The work undertaken to address psychosocial hazards demonstrated a genuine commitment to supporting staff wellbeing. While challenges remain, particularly in relation to workload and staffing pressures, the progress achieved should be recognised.

The inspection identified a number of programs and initiatives that deserve recognition. The STEPS alcohol and other drugs program stood out as a strong example of throughcare in practice, connecting treatment, reintegration and post-release support in a meaningful way. Education staff continued to adapt limited space and resources to create opportunities for prisoners, while peer support prisoners played an increasingly important role in supporting vulnerable individuals and helping people navigate what can be a difficult and stressful environment. Throughout the inspection, we observed examples of staff working collaboratively across disciplines to support prisoner wellbeing and rehabilitation outcomes.

However, the report also highlights several areas where local effort cannot solve broader systemic problems. Delays in treatment assessments continue to impede prisoner progression. Access to healthcare is increasingly constrained by workforce and infrastructure limitations. Rehabilitation opportunities, employment pathways and support services are all affected by staffing pressures that extend beyond Bunbury itself. Many of the challenges identified in this report are not unique to this prison and reflect pressures that are currently being experienced across the custodial estate.

One observation stayed with me throughout the inspection. Bunbury continues to operate well because of the commitment, professionalism and resilience of its staff. Time and again we encountered people who were finding practical ways to overcome obstacles, support one another and maintain services despite limited resources. While this is commendable, it also carries risk. Reliance on goodwill is not a sustainable strategy. Without adequate investment in staffing, infrastructure and support services, there is a danger that the strengths that have traditionally characterised Bunbury will become increasingly difficult to maintain.

Overall, this is a prison that continues to perform well in difficult circumstances. It retains many of the qualities that have historically made it a positive and progressive correctional environment. The challenge now is ensuring these strengths are supported, rather than stretched, by the broader system in which it operates. The recommendations in this report are intended to assist both Bunbury and the Department to address these issues and to ensure the prison remains capable of delivering safe, humane and rehabilitative custody into the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have two Independent Prison Visitors for Bunbury. They are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services, who attend Bunbury on a regular basis and observe the operations of the prison. They also provide an opportunity for the men to raise issues and complaints which informs the work of our office. I acknowledge the importance of their work and thank them for their contribution to our ongoing monitoring of Bunbury.

I extend my appreciation to Superintendent Kerri Bishop and her team, and the Department of Justice for their cooperation and openness throughout this process. Most importantly, I thank the men who shared their experiences and insights with us so generously.

Finally, I acknowledge the professionalism and dedication of the inspection team, and particularly Jim Bryden for coordinating the inspection, and for preparing this report.

Jane Higgins
Acting Inspector of Custodial Services

24 August 2026

Summary of Findings

Bunbury demonstrated progress despite facing challenges

Bunbury managed day-to-day operations effectively, despite the absence of a documented local operational plan. In practice, however, this meant the prison remained focused on responding to immediate pressures, rather than working to clear local priorities. Ongoing staffing shortfalls placed sustained pressure on staff wellbeing and routine operations. However, there were improvements in workplace culture and psychosocial safety. Core assurance functions, including emergency preparedness, remained sound despite these constraints.

Daily life was strained by population growth and limited infrastructure

Population growth placed sustained pressure on Bunbury's ageing infrastructure, staffing, and service delivery. Double bunking in cells not designed for shared accommodation reduced space, privacy, and amenities, and decreased the standard of living conditions. Visits and phone access were constrained by demand, and limited facilities, affecting wellbeing and family contact. Food services were well received, but recreation and library access were increasingly disrupted by staff redeployment, adding further strain on daily life and unit infrastructure.

Gaps in service and supports for some populations

Orientation was often delayed due to staff redeployment, increasing the risk that new arrivals entered custody without timely information and support. Remand prisoners received limited targeted support, with little distinction in regime or accommodation to reflect their unsentenced status. Access to legal support was constrained by privacy and phone access, reducing prisoners' ability to prepare for court effectively.

Health and support services were under pressure

Health services at Bunbury operated under increasing strain, with staffing shortfalls, infrastructure limitations, and insufficient clinical space delaying access to care. Primary health and dental services were under considerable pressure, while the loss of psychiatry services created a critical gap in an otherwise strengthened mental health care team. Therapeutic alcohol and other drug programs were well received, but more restrictive responses to substance use lacked adequate clinical support.

Peer support remained critical for vulnerable prisoners, highlighting gaps in formal service provision. Despite these constraints, health and custodial staff worked collaboratively to support prisoner wellbeing and access to services.

Statewide pressures impacted rehabilitation and re-entry

Delays in Treatment Assessment Reports (TARs) limited progression by delaying access to treatment programs, reintegration opportunities and parole. Education was valued by prisoners but constrained by staffing and infrastructure shortfalls, and delays. Employment opportunities and release preparation were also restricted by population pressure and staffing shortfalls, limiting meaningful activity.

Behaviour management was handled effectively

Behaviour at Bunbury was managed through a strong focus on culture, incentives, and progression. While safety perceptions were mixed and population pressures created constraints, staff generally emphasised positive behaviour over punishment. Formal disciplinary and confinement processes were well governed and proportionate, though pressure on accommodation and progression pathways reduced the effectiveness of some incentives. Overall, behaviour management aligned with Bunbury's broader rehabilitative approach.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Page	DOJ Response
Recommendation 1 Develop and implement a documented local operational plan aligned with Corrective Services' strategic plan.	2	Supported
Recommendation 2 Expedite the completion of the Safer Staffing Review.	3	Supported
Recommendation 3 Review Bunbury's infrastructure to align with its population and operational requirements.	9	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 4 Increase full-time equivalent general practitioners and nursing staff to meet the needs of Bunbury's population.	17	Supported-Current Practice/Project
Recommendation 5 Develop and implement a digital health strategy for custodial health services to identify technology to reduce administrative workloads of clinical staff.	18	Supported-Current Practice/Project
Recommendation 6 Increase dental service provision at Bunbury.	19	Noted
Recommendation 7 Prioritise resourcing Bunbury with a psychiatric consult and advice service to support facility-based staff.	21	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 8 Increase Psychological Health Services (PHS) staffing at Bunbury to meet the needs of the increased population.	21	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 9 Review the Drug Reduction Strategy (DRS) to ensure prisoners involved in drug-related activity are provided appropriate supports to address their substance use.	24	Not Supported
Recommendation 10 Develop a strategic drug strategy to guide local initiatives in Western Australian prisons.	24	Supported

Recommendation 11 Review the provision of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) before and after the implementation of the smoke-free prisons policy.	25	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 12 Appoint, or provide access to, an occupational therapist to help support vulnerable prisoners.	28	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 13 Address treatment assessor staffing shortfalls at Bunbury to reduce the assessment backlog.	30	Supported-Current Practice/Project
Recommendation 14 Strengthen program delivery at Bunbury by increasing facilitator capacity, support and oversight.	32	Supported-Current Practice/Project
Recommendation 15 Increase employment opportunities for First Nations prisoners.	34	Supported in Principle

Background

Bunbury Regional Prison (Bunbury) is a male, multi-security prison accommodating maximum security (remand only), medium security and minimum-security prisoners. It is the largest regional prison in Western Australia and the fourth largest in the state.

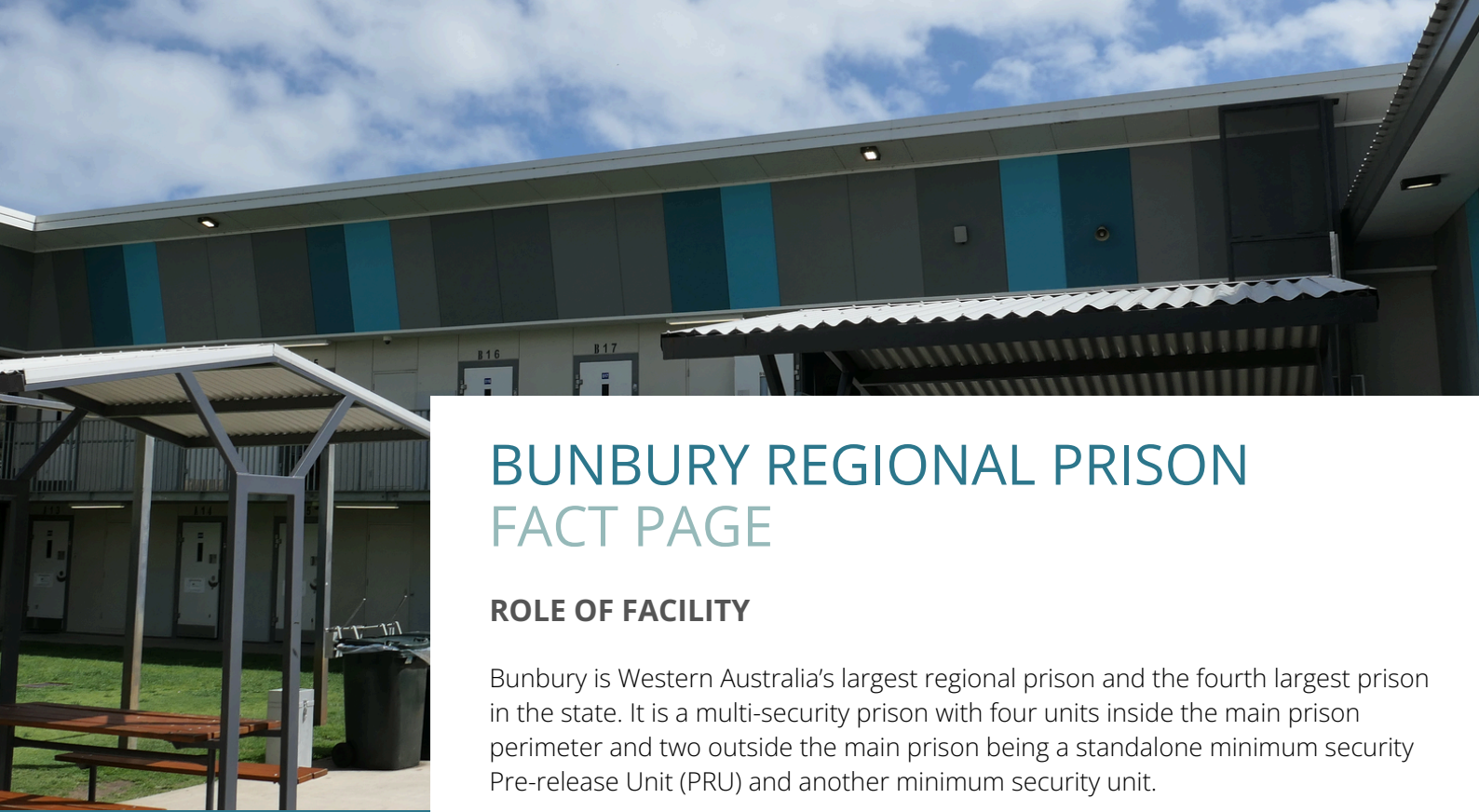
The prison was commissioned in February 1971 as a rehabilitation centre for male first offenders under the age of 25 with a capacity to accommodate 68 young offenders in single-bed cells.

In 1982 a dedicated minimum-security section was built outside the main security fence. This allowed those prisoners to work in the market garden located adjacent to the prison which provided fresh produce for the prison system. In 1992 the prison was upgraded to a genuine medium-security facility, with the addition of a new high-security fence and a sophisticated electronic surveillance system.

The 2023 inspection found that Bunbury lacked a strategic plan and relied on a management structure that had not been reviewed for 12 years. A significant development was the addition of an Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) support and reintegration service.

Previous inspections have found that Bunbury was a strong performer and operating well, albeit there were some major changes to infrastructure, prisoner dynamics and prison population.

The prison population has increased from 502 to 595 since the last inspection.



BUNBURY REGIONAL PRISON

FACT PAGE

ROLE OF FACILITY

Bunbury is Western Australia's largest regional prison and the fourth largest prison in the state. It is a multi-security prison with four units inside the main prison perimeter and two outside the main prison being a standalone minimum security Pre-release Unit (PRU) and another minimum security unit.

Bunbury provides a large proportion of fresh vegetables throughout WA's prison system. It is also one of the busiest prisons in the state in relation to program delivery.

HISTORY

Bunbury Regional Prison opened in 1971 as a rehabilitation centre for young first offenders with a bed capacity of 68. In 1982 a dedicated minimum security section was built outside the main prison. This allowed prisoners to work in the market garden adjacent to the prison which provided fresh produce for the prison system.

In 1992 the prison was upgraded to a genuine medium security prison with the addition of a new high tech security fence and surveillance system. An addition of a 72 bed pre-release centre adjacent to the prison was built in 2008.

Further additions of a large unit for 160 beds and double bunking has raised the bed capacity to 611.

OFFICIAL CAPACITY

611

PRISONERS AT TIME OF INSPECTION

595

as at 13 February 2026

PRISONERS SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR

0



Bunbury Regional Prison is located on Kaniyang land in the suburb of College Grove, Western Australia.



INSPECTION DATE

09-13 February 2026



The Inspection Process

This inspection was guided by the Office's *Inspection Standards for Adult Custodial Services* (the Standards) (OICS, 2025), which draws on expectations and rights established in relevant international treaties and guidelines. The Standards provide a framework for assessing the performance of custodial facilities.

The scope of this inspection was refined to focus on 24 of the 33 adult standards, across all of the eight core themes. Scoping was based on the assessment of available evidence such as liaison visit reports, data on key indicators, a self-assessment completed by the Superintendent, and themes arising from Independent Visitor reports.

Before the on-site inspection, surveys were conducted with prisoners and staff, and interviews were held with departmental staff, key prison personnel, and service providers. Additional documents from the Department and a demographic data pack also informed the inspection's lines of inquiry.

The on-site inspection took place over five days in February 2026. It involved engagement with management, staff, and prisoners; observation of key processes; and review of relevant documentation. At the end of the inspection week, a debrief was held with senior management to present preliminary findings.

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on evidence gathered throughout the inspection process. Generative artificial intelligence has been used to summarise inspection notes to prepare an early draft. This draft is then subject to human oversight, proofing and editing to ensure accuracy, clarity, and readability. The Department was provided with an opportunity to respond to recommendations within this report.



1 Bunbury demonstrated progress despite facing challenges

Despite operating without a local operational plan, Bunbury managed day-to-day demands effectively. Significant staffing shortfalls placed sustained pressure on staff wellbeing and daily operations, but workplace culture and psychosocial safety showed improvement. Core assurance functions, including emergency preparedness, remained sound despite ongoing operational constraints.

This chapter assesses the performance of Bunbury Regional Prison against the following standards:

Standard 1 – Operational Planning

A strategic vision informs a comprehensive plan of the custodial facility's priorities, principles, values, and actions.

Standard 2 – Human Resources

All staff possess the necessary skills and authority to manage people in custody safely and effectively.

Standard 32 – Incident and Emergency Management

The facility aligns its prevention and response systems with assessed risk, implements approved protocols for serious incidents, and conducts ongoing monitoring for indicators of potential disturbances.

1.1 Despite no formal plan in place, Bunbury was operating well

At the time of our inspection, Bunbury did not have a documented operational plan in place outlining the prison's vision, priorities, and values. This was despite the release of the *Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025–2030* in July 2025 (DOJ, 2025). The strategic plan provides an overarching direction for the custodial estate and guidance to individual prisons when developing their own local plans.

In the absence of clearly articulated local priorities, Bunbury largely operated on a day-to-day basis. This meant the prison remained focused on responding to immediate operational pressures rather than working towards agreed local priorities. While there was evidence of established governance processes including regular Senior Management Team (SMT) meetings and a weekly 'Short Staffing Meeting', these forums were primarily used to manage competing pressures and daily operational demands rather than to set or monitor local priorities.

The development of a clear operational plan, supported by defined priorities, and communicated to staff, would provide greater clarity and consistency, strengthen accountability, and better support staff and prisoners during a period of sustained operational pressure.

Recommendation 1

Develop and implement a documented local operational plan aligned with Corrective Services' strategic plan.

1.2 Staffing shortfalls impacted prison operations

Staffing shortfalls were the most significant constraint on the prison's ability to plan, allocate resources, and deliver core functions consistently. Staffing was based on a 2019 staffing level agreement for a maximum population of 573 prisoners, which no longer reflected the current capacity of 606. A total of 60.5 FTE (23%) funded positions were vacant or absent. Most of these (40) were vacancies affecting custodial, security, administrative and support roles. Just over a dozen were on workers compensation.

While the prison had strategies in place to forward plan and anticipate critical staffing shortfalls, staffing pressures remained a significant and ongoing challenge. Staff across several areas reported feeling overwhelmed and under-resourced, with workloads increasing over successive years without corresponding increases in staffing. Staff across custodial, health and public servant roles reported working extended hours, with some unable to take regular breaks.

The impact on daily operations was also clear. To keep prisoners out of cell, security staff were redeployed almost daily, which reduced their capacity to carry out core security functions such as searches, monitoring calls and visits, and proactive surveillance. Organised recreation was often limited due to the redeployment of recreation officers. Prisoner orientations were given less priority, and access to education was regularly disrupted when duty officers were required elsewhere. Non-essential industries were frequently closed, minimising valuable rehabilitation, training and employment opportunities for prisoners. The Superintendent also absorbed projects that senior staff were unable to take on due to their heavy workloads.

Reflecting these challenges, surveyed staff rated work-related stress at 6.48 out of 10.

Constant changes due to staff shortages- redeployment has an overall negative effect on the quality of life.

It becomes overwhelming and exhausting when it is continuously short staffed.

The prison is working day to day to cover positions. There is no job satisfaction.

Quotes from staff in the pre-inspection survey

In April 2023 the Department commenced a review of custodial staffing in public prisons to enable the development of a staffing model capable of meeting current and future demands. In April 2024 the review was broadened to include non-custodial staff such as health, education, and public servants. In February 2026, at the time of this inspection, this review – known as the Safer Staffing Review – remained incomplete. The Department needs to expedite completion of this review to ensure all prisons are sufficiently resourced across custodial and non-custodial staffing areas.

Recommendation 2

Expedite the completion of the Safer Staffing Review.

1.3 Workplace culture was improving

Staff in prisons face unique workplace pressures, risks, and responsibilities. Under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020*, prisons have a duty of care to provide a safe working environment for staff including psychological safety and wellbeing. Leadership responses, policies and governance mechanisms played an important role in shaping workplace culture and managing psychosocial risk.

Procedures to support psychosocial wellbeing had been developed

In response to a psychosocial hazards improvement notice issued by WorkSafe, both the Department and Bunbury had taken steps to strengthen psychosocial safety in the workplace. Actions included additional staff training in psychological first aid, safe workplaces, and responses to post traumatic events. Managers had also received targeted training, including human resources essentials and mental health training for leaders.

The prison had also developed process charts, risk assessments and procedures to guide managers in responding to staff concerns about psychosocial hazards and injuries. A workplace mental health and wellbeing action plan and a psychological hazard and injury program were also in place. These initiatives reflected an increased focus on supporting staff wellbeing and managing psychosocial risk and leadership commitment to creating a safer working environment.

Workplace health and safety data showed reported psychosocial hazards had declined since peaking in 2023, suggesting the measures implemented were having a positive impact.

Staff morale had improved

Staff survey results indicated improvements in teamwork, perceptions of safety, and overall quality of working life. Surveyed staff also noted improved perceptions of support and communication from managers and head office since 2023.

Most staff reported they worked well together and felt safe at work, with results exceeding state averages. Conversations with staff during the inspection supported these findings and reflected a more stable and cooperative working environment. The staff survey results found:

- Staff who reported they generally worked well together increased from 55% to 65%, above the state average of 45%
- Staff who reported they mostly felt safe at work increased from 45% to 88%, well above the state average of 51%
- Quality of working life was rated 6.90 out of 10, indicating generally positive conditions.

Overall, Bunbury is one of the best workplaces I have worked at. Being able to discuss with peers makes each day achievable.

Generally staff just get on with the job.

I enjoy working in Bunbury. The relationship I have with prisoners and staff makes my working life happy.

Quotes from staff pre-inspection survey

While workplace culture had improved, some staff continued to express ongoing concerns about communication from the senior leadership team and the impact of staffing shortfalls on workload and stress levels. Overall, the inspection found evidence of a workplace culture that was improving but still affected by operational and systemic pressures often beyond the control of the prison.

Confidence in grievance processes remained low

The pre-inspection staff survey found ongoing dissatisfaction with the timeliness, rigour, and perceived fairness of grievance resolution. Confidence in grievance resolution was low, with more staff uncertain (42%) or dissatisfied (29%) with outcomes than believing grievances were resolved (27%). Just over half of staff (53%) said they were able to raise work-related grievances, suggesting awareness of the process. However, almost half either felt unable to raise grievances (22%) or were unsure whether they could (23%).

The prison and the Department maintained formal and informal grievance mechanisms, including ability for staff to submit confidential complaints online via the Department's SolvSafety portal. The prison also maintained a list of local Conflict Resolution Officers and Staff Support Officers, each who receive training to fulfil the duties of the role.

Few formal grievances were escalated to the Department's People, Culture and Standards division in the 12 months prior to the inspection. This supported broader survey findings and staff feedback indicating that most staff generally felt safe working at Bunbury.

1.4 Emergency preparedness remained sound

Despite the prison's pressures on planning, staffing and wellbeing, core assurance functions such as emergency management remained sound. Regular exercises were held to practice a range of scenarios including disturbances and natural disasters, and the number of exercises delivered met minimum requirements. There had been good inclusions of outside agencies such as the Department

of Fire and Emergency Services and the Western Australia Police Force. The introduction of the Assistant Superintendent Security, Infrastructure and Emergency Management (ASSIEM) position continued to support the work in this area.

Forty-three per cent of surveyed custodial staff reported feeling adequately trained in emergency response, fire and natural disaster which represented small gains since the previous inspection. However, just over one quarter of surveyed staff (i.e. custodial and non-custodial) reported adequate training, suggesting there is work to be done to increase non-custodial staff sense of preparedness.

2 Daily life was strained by population growth and limited infrastructure

Sustained population growth placed increasing pressure on Bunbury's ageing infrastructure, staffing, and service delivery. The use of double bunking in cells not designed for shared accommodation reduced available space and contributed to declining perceptions of the living conditions.

Access to visits and telephone contact was constrained by increased demand, cost barriers, and system limitations. These restrictions affected prisoner wellbeing and reduced opportunities to maintain family and community connections.

Food services were generally well received. Recreation and library services remained a strength but were increasingly disrupted by staff redeployment and placed additional strain on infrastructure in units.

This chapter assesses the performance of Bunbury Regional Prison against the following standards:

Standard 11 – Living conditions

The built environment is clean, functional and culturally appropriate.

Standard 13– Contact with family and visits

People in custody can maintain contact with their friends and family and organise regular visits.

Standard 14– Food and canteen

There is access to a varied and balanced diet and additional items for purchase through a canteen system.

Standard 15 – Purposeful activities

Individuals in custody have access to a range of purposeful activities during the day and at least two hours of recreation in the open air.

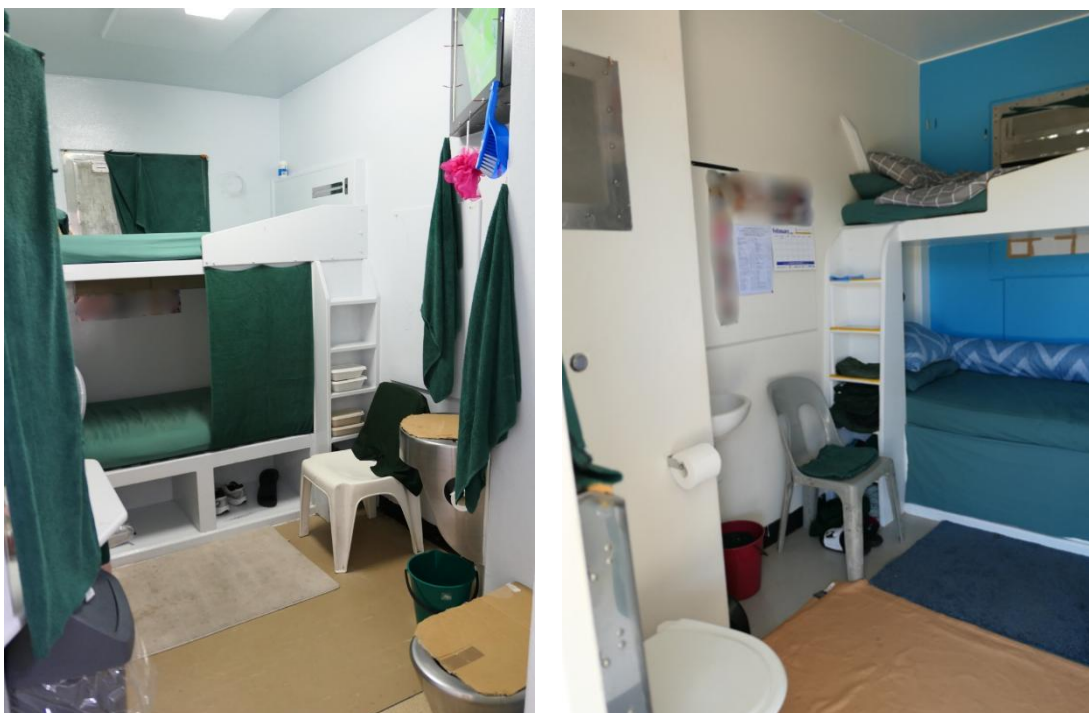
2.1 Population growth led to overcrowded living conditions

At the time of the inspection, Bunbury accommodated 103 more prisoners than during the 2023 inspection. In response to sustained population growth, additional beds had been installed in most units, 'double bunking' cells not originally designed for shared accommodation. 'Double bunking' reduced the living space in cells, restricted movement, and limited storage space. While some prisoners accepted the changed living arrangements as symptomatic of network-wide pressures, the

loss of personal space impacted privacy and dignity and contributed to increased frustration and tension between some cell occupants. Only 14 cells remained configured for single occupancy, these were retained for prisoners with single cell alerts, peer support roles, or those with a long history at Bunbury.

No cells met the minimum size standards outlined in the *Standard Guidelines for Prison Facilities in Australia and New Zealand (1990)* (Office of Corrections, 1990). Double-occupancy cells ranged from approximately six m² to 10 m², below the guideline's range of 11.5–12.75 m². This compounded safety, accessibility, and wellbeing risks for prisoners. Top bunks were also difficult to access safely with narrow and slippery ladders. Several prisoner injuries associated with the difficult-to-access top bunks had been recorded.

Double bunking also compounded existing deficiencies in ventilation and temperature control. Units 6 and 2B were particularly affected due to limited shade and poor airflow. Prisoners in these units reported sleep disruption, discomfort, and reduced wellbeing because of the heat in summer and cold in winter. In contrast, Unit 3 (the self-care unit) benefitted from larger green spaces offering a better shade canopy and improved airflow.



Photos 1 and 2: Typical double bunking being added throughout the prison.

Shared bathroom facilities were generally clean and functional but showed signs of long-term wear, including leaking showers, missing tiles, and rusted fixtures. Across the prison, disability-accessible amenities were also limited with only one wheelchair accessible shower.

Despite the perceived deterioration in living conditions and challenges arising from overcrowding, most prisoners continued to regard Bunbury as a better environment compared to other prisons, with two-thirds of survey respondents (67%) rating unit conditions as 'good'.

2.2 Infrastructure limitations impacted prisoners access to services and supports

Outdated and insufficient infrastructure significantly constrained service delivery across Bunbury. Despite population growth and increased service demand, key facilities—including health, mental health, education, and legal spaces—had not expanded, leading to competition for space, reduced access, and compromised service quality.

For example, there were insufficient clinical consulting rooms to operate all health services at the same time. As a result, valuable clinical contact time was often diverted to administrative tasks while staff managed access to limited space. While the increase in clinical staffing at Bunbury since the last inspection was positive, any expansion of services logically requires additional workspace to avoid displacing existing services.

Bunbury's ability to support prisoners experiencing acute psychological distress was also limited by infrastructure. Cells for monitoring unwell prisoners were stark and sterile, with no therapeutic alternative. Prisoners referred for further assessment under the *Mental Health Act 2014* were frequently transferred to metropolitan facilities due to Bunbury's infrastructure deficiencies and insufficient local forensic mental health capacity.

As was the case last inspection, different services continued to compete for the three available consulting rooms inside the main prison. Programs staff and Psychological Health Services (PHS) counsellors utilised the rooms to meet privately with prisoners, but had to negotiate access, limiting their daily appointment capacity.

Similarly, education infrastructure had not expanded in line with population growth, requiring spaces to be repurposed and used flexibly to maximise capacity. The education coordinator actively reconfigured rooms and installed adaptable equipment to support a wider range of programs, including university studies, vocational training, arts, and hospitality courses. Examples included relocating the university space to create an additional classroom, sharing rooms across programs, and adapting adjoining spaces to support practical training.

Video-link facilities continued to be insufficient to meet the needs of the remand population and court demand, with only two video-link courtrooms available. There was no dedicated private space for prisoners to consult with their lawyers before or after court appearances, and staff resorted to using a corridor with improvised equipment. Legal visits were conducted in the same areas as social visits, without adequate privacy, which was inappropriate and did not support confidential legal communication.

Infrastructure is poor, overcrowded, a real problem.

...infrastructure too old, staffing too short to actually make a difference.

Some of the infrastructure is old and weary.

Quotes from pre-inspection staff survey

Staff feedback gathered through surveys and interviews reinforced concerns inadequate infrastructure was a barrier to effective service delivery. Sixty-eight per cent of staff reported the prison's infrastructure was not fit for purpose and only 11% assessed the quality of the facilities in which they worked as 'good'. As part of its ongoing long-term infrastructure planning, the Department must evaluate the infrastructure needs of Bunbury as its population continues to expand.

Recommendation 3

Review Bunbury's infrastructure to align with its population and operational requirements.

2.3 Contact with family and friends were prioritised

A sustained increase in visitor numbers placed pressure on social visits, but they were prioritised and rarely cancelled. Access to telephone contact with family and community connections was impacted by cost and insufficient phones.

Visits were a highlight but in high demand

Visitor numbers at Bunbury had increased 33% since 2023, consistent with population growth. This demonstrated the prison's commitment to facilitating social visits, despite the challenges of population growth and staffing shortfalls. This is a positive outcome – noting that regular contact with family and friends supports prisoner wellbeing, reduces anxiety, strengthens family connections, and supports reintegration following release.

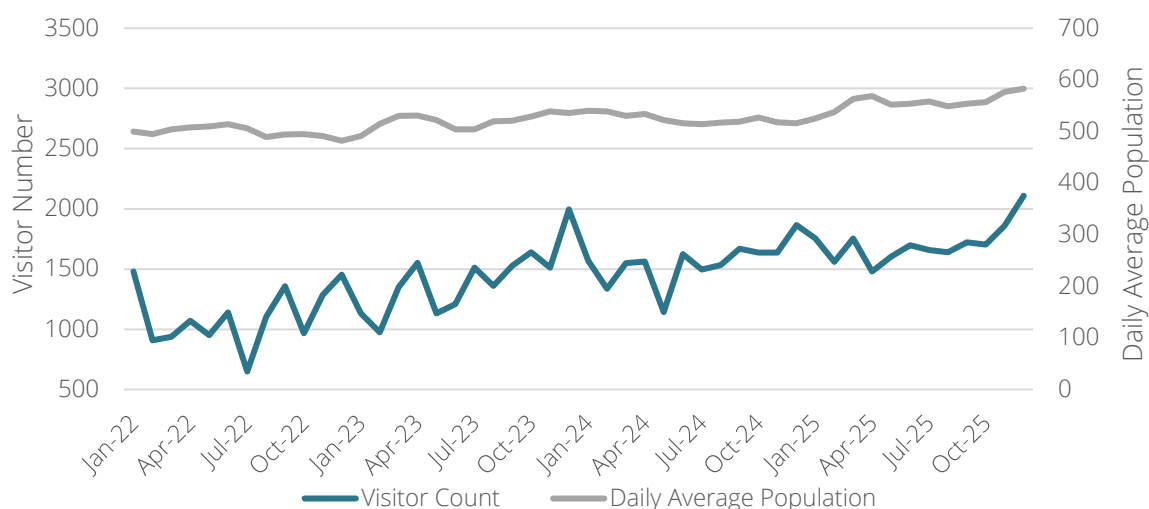


Figure 1: There was an increase in visitor numbers in line with the growing population.

The physical environment and how visit sessions were conducted were also positive. Prisoners were able to bring food items purchased from the prison canteen into visit areas, tea and coffee-making facilities were available, and cold drinks could be purchased from vending machines. Staff were observed to treat visitors in a friendly and respectful manner, were unobtrusive during visits, and

permitted appropriate physical contact on arrival and departure. Information outlining how to request a visit was available online, and a range of visiting times was offered across all units. The main prison facilitated visits every day except Friday, while Units 4 and 5 offered weekend visits only. Visitors we spoke with during the inspection reported no difficulty navigating the booking process.

Despite the increase in visit sessions, they remained in high demand and booked out quickly as they were allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. This resulted in unequal access, with some prisoners receiving more visits than others. Visit sessions were occasionally cancelled because of staff redeployment but the prison prioritised visits even during lockdown. A few prisoners and visitors reported frustration on the rare occasions when cancellations could not be communicated until visitors had arrived at the prison.

The cost and duration of phone calls restricted family and community connections

Call length limits, costs, and insufficient phone availability constrained prisoners' access to telephone contact. As is the case at most prisons, phone calls were limited to a maximum duration of 10 minutes, followed by a mandatory 10-minute wait before another call could be made. While this helped reduce monopolisation of phones, prisoners reported 10 minutes was often insufficient for meaningful conversations.

Each call cost 80 cents, which some prisoners described as a financial burden. One prisoner estimated spending approximately \$30 per week on calls, while others reported that \$150 of phone credit lasted only a few months.

Prisoners also reported insufficient phone access within accommodation units, particularly during peak periods. In Unit 6, six phones were available for 160 prisoners equating to one phone for every 27 people. In Unit 5, two phones were available for approximately 40 prisoners, or one phone for every 20 prisoners. Prisoners advised this often resulted in queues and reduced opportunities to maintain contact with family and support networks.

2.4 Food and canteen were well regarded

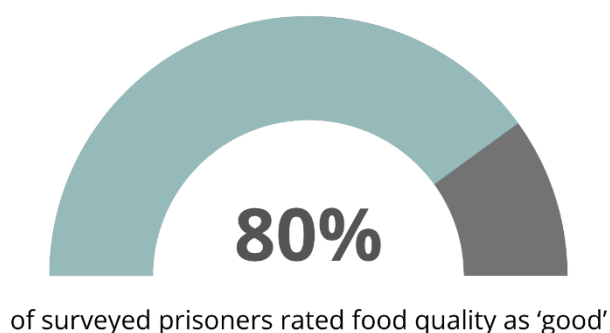
Food continued to be rated highly at Bunbury and prisoners reported good access to fresh produce. Kitchen operations had stabilised, and prisoners valued the canteen but were looking for an improved service.

Food was a highlight of everyday life

Food was frequently reported by prisoners as one of the best things about Bunbury, with approval ratings twice the state average. Access to good-quality, nutritious food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, is important for maintaining prisoner health and wellbeing.

In general living units, meals were prepared using fresh produce, with menus developed by qualified kitchen Vocational Support Officers (VSOs) and reviewed annually. Due to reliance on produce from the prison market garden, menus at the time of inspection featured a high proportion of roast vegetables and fresh rolls. While feedback from prisoners was generally positive, some felt the menus lacked variety.

In the self-catered Unit 3, house cooks received large crates of fresh vegetables twice weekly, and fridges were observed to be well stocked with fresh ingredients. Prisoners in the Pre-release Unit (PRU) purchased their own groceries through a house shop, which offered a good range of fruit and vegetables. The house shop catalogue was colour-coded to encourage healthier food choices.



Kitchen equipment failures had been rectified

Pre-inspection visits to Bunbury had identified equipment failures in the main kitchen that limited food preparation options. At the time of inspection, these issues had largely been resolved. All three combination ovens were operational, and a replacement bread oven was scheduled for delivery in May 2026.

While kitchen operations were no longer impacted by equipment breakdowns, staff advised replacement and repairs took an extended amount of time to complete. The delays forced changes to the menu with a greater reliance on stews and curries that did not require the ovens to prepare.

Further equipment upgrades were still required, and staff emphasised the importance of proactive, ongoing maintenance and replacement planning to reduce the risk of future disruptions to food preparation and delivery.

Canteen was highly rated, but increased spending limits and healthier choices were requested

The canteen was rated positively in the pre-inspection survey with 66% of surveyed prisoners assessing the service as 'good'. The state average was 50%. However, some prisoners raised concerns about rising prices and restrictions on spend limits. Price increases linked to broader cost-of-living pressures had exacerbated the issue.

As an example, the cost of fans was raised frequently. The cheapest available fan cost just over \$50, which prisoners said was difficult to afford within existing canteen spending limits. Staff explained canteen prices reflected the cost to the prison, with special offers passed on where available, and that prices were subject to frequent change.

Despite concerns about pricing, prisoners said the product range was generally adequate but lacked healthy food options. Canteen staff were responsive to these concerns and had tried to stock healthier items; however, fluctuating demand meant quantities were limited to manage expiry dates. Positively, staff used prisoner 'wish list' forms to gather feedback and inform future product choices, including healthier options.

Staff also advised that the Department had directed prisons to expand the range of canteen products ahead of an estate-wide rollout of the smoke-free prisons policy. However, in March 2026, the

Commissioner of Corrective Services announced the rollout had been delayed to 2027. We will continue to monitor if and how this change impacts the products available.

2.5 Good recreational facilities but redeployment reduced access

Bunbury had a well-maintained oval and outdoor areas to support physical activity. Recreation officers ran team sports such as basketball, soccer and tennis, and there was a reasonable variety of gym equipment in most units. The library was well attended, with more than 2,000 prisoners visiting per month, and prisoner workers managed the high demand effectively.

Access to recreation is an important component of daily prison life, supporting prisoner wellbeing, mental health, and constructive behaviour. However, recreation services were frequently disrupted by the redeployment of the recreation officers. Facility data indicated over the previous 12 months recreation officers were able to work in their substantive roles only 44% of the time. Prisoners reported a significant reduction in the frequency and availability of recreation and a greater reliance on unit-based and passive recreation such as playing cards, darts, and board games. Fifty-eight per cent of surveyed prisoners rated the amount of organised sport as 'poor'.

Increased time spent confined to units placed additional pressure on internal infrastructure, with prisoners reporting the need to develop informal schedules to manage demand for equipment. The impact of population growth and reduced out-of-unit time was most evident in Unit 2B, where overuse had resulted in the loss of grass and a largely sandy, uneven outdoor surface, limiting recreation options for older prisoners and those with mobility issues.



Photos 3 and 4: Unit-based recreation varied, with some yards having basic equipment and uneven surfaces and others having better equipment.

Positively, Bunbury had maintained high levels of out-of-cell time despite population growth and ongoing staffing challenges. Departmental data showed prisoners received an average of 11.36 hours out of cell per day in 2025, compared with the state average of 9.20 hours (excluding juvenile facilities). Higher averages in the PRU (15.5 hours) and Unit 5 (17 hours), both operating less restrictive regimes, contributed to this result. However, other units still recorded between 8 and 10 hours per prisoner per day. This reflected Bunbury's sustained efforts to minimise lockdowns and support time out of cell despite resource pressures.

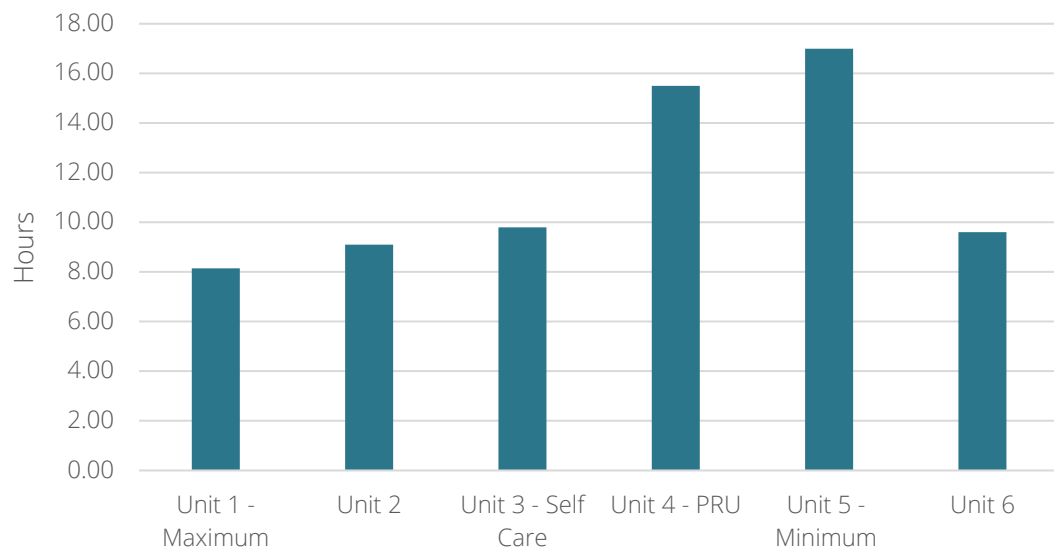


Figure 2: Average out-of-cell hours per prisoner, per day, per unit across Bunbury in 2025.

3 Gaps in service and supports for some populations

Orientation was frequently delayed due to staff redeployment. People remanded in custody received limited support and there was little distinction in daily routine or accommodation to reflect their status as non-sentenced prisoners. Access to legal supports was constrained by resourcing which reduced prisoners' ability to prepare for court.

This chapter assesses the performance of Bunbury Regional Prison against the following standards:

Standard 5 – Orientation

People entering custody receive a prompt, effective and supportive orientation to understand life in prison, including their rights and obligations.

Standard 6 – Support for people on remand

Custodial facilities minimise the stress for people entering custody on remand, offer a regime that reflects their unconvicted status, and assists them to meet their bail conditions and be promptly released from custody.

Standard 7 – Access to legal supports

People in custody have confidential access to legal representatives and resources and are assisted to prepare for their court appearance.

3.1 Orientation of prisoners was delayed

Orientation is an important safeguard that supports prisoners in understanding prison rules and expectations as they transition from the community into custody. Departmental policy requires all prisoners to receive an orientation within the first 72-hours of arrival at a facility. However, at the time of inspection 113 prisoners (19%) were awaiting orientation due to the frequent redeployment of the Orientation Officer. The prison understood the importance of a detailed orientation but needed to prioritise essential services due to chronic staffing shortfalls.

In the absence of timely staff-led orientation, peer support prisoners provided facility tours, social introductions, and practical information to new arrivals. While this support was valuable, Peer support prisoners advised peer-led tours could not replace formal staff-led orientation, as they did not include the official detail normally provided. This lack of detail may increase confusion and anxiety at an already stressful time.

Following the 2023 inspection, it was recommended the prison update the orientation handbook to improve readability. While we found this work had commenced the handbook remained text-heavy and not accessible for prisoners with low-literacy levels. It also remained an insufficient substitute for a comprehensive, staff-delivered orientation.

3.2 Minimal supports offered to people remanded in custody

At the time of inspection, Bunbury held 165 people on remand, making up 28% of the prison population. Being held on remand can be highly stressful, particularly for people with little prior contact with the justice system. Uncertainty about court outcomes can increase anxiety and the risk of harm.

Despite this, Bunbury did not provide any targeted supports for people on remand beyond an initial one-on-one meeting with the contracted reintegration provider, Accordwest, to identify urgent needs or help with legal access. Accordwest advised they would like to offer additional supports and programs for people on remand but are not funded to do so.

Although remand prisoners are usually transferred to Hakea Prison, population pressures meant many were being accommodated across the system. At Bunbury, staff completed management and placement assessments regularly on remanded prisoners to re-classify their security rating, allowing them to progress from maximum security to other areas of the prison.

Unsentenced prisoners indistinguishable from sentenced prisoners

Prisons are required under the *Prison Regulations 1982* to give people on remand a daily routine that reflects the fact they have not been convicted of an offence. This is also consistent with the Nelson Mandela Rules, which recognise the rights of unsentenced people.

In practice, this rarely occurs. At Bunbury, remand prisoners were generally managed in the same way as sentenced prisoners, with little difference in their daily routine. They were also accommodated together. While remand prisoners could access education and apply for traineeships if they were likely to remain long enough, they were not prioritised for voluntary programs. Although remand prisoners were allowed more social visits than sentenced prisoners, they were booked on a first-come, first-served basis, limiting this entitlement in practice.

3.3 Legal supports were limited

Access to legal support at Bunbury was available through the prisoner telephone system (PTS), official visits and the legal library. Prisoners were provided with information on accessing legal resources through the orientation booklet, posters displayed in accommodation units and phone lists that included Legal Aid WA and Aboriginal Legal Service WA. Staff perceptions of prisoner access to legal resources had improved since the last inspection, with 68% of staff survey respondents rating access as acceptable, up from 53% in 2023.

However, significant limitations were identified. The legal library was small, often closed, and contained outdated legal materials, with some key legislation printed more than a decade earlier. Access was restricted to a single computer with no privacy, and prisoners reported difficulty accessing the facility. Prisoners also reported difficulty contacting Legal Aid by phone due to long wait times and unanswered calls, further compounded by limited call durations and a lack of private spaces for confidential legal discussions.

4 Health and support services were under pressure

Health services at Bunbury continued to operate under increasing strain. Staff shortfalls, infrastructure constraints, and limited clinical spaces resulted in delayed access to care.

Mental health care and supports had increased but was undermined by a lack of psychiatric services and while treatment-focused substance use programs were well received, more restrictive approaches lacked therapeutic support.

Peer support played an important role in supporting vulnerable prisoners, but this highlighted the need for more formal service provision. Despite these constraints, health and support services reported strong collaboration with custodial staff to progress prisoners' best interests and access to support services.

This chapter assesses the performance of Bunbury Regional Prison against the following standards:

Standard 17 – Physical health care

People in custody are treated with respect and have equal access to all health services, including prompt care, clear information, and culturally sensitive practices, supported by a multi-disciplinary approach and strong partnerships.

Standard 18 – Mental health care

People in custody receive thorough mental health care and support.

Standard 19 – Substance use treatment

The facility has a comprehensive drug and alcohol strategy and provides personalised and culturally appropriate supports.

Standard 20 – Support

All people in custody can access a culturally sensitive support system, including a Prison Support Officer, peer support groups, and Aboriginal Prison Visitors.

4.1 Primary health services were under strain

Primary health services were under significant strain due to insufficient clinical staffing, particularly general practitioners (GPs) and dental services, leading to long wait times, delayed assessments, reduced preventative care, and heavy reliance on nurses to manage demand.

Health centre staffing was insufficient

While the health service benefitted from experienced nurse management and committed clinicians, staffing levels were insufficient to meet demand. The number of GPs had not changed since the last inspection, despite the increase in population. At the time of inspection, GP presence across the prison was just over one full-time equivalent for a population close to 600 prisoners. As a result, reported wait times to see the GP ranged between six weeks and three months, and initial GP assessments for new arrivals were delayed by approximately four months, unless deemed urgent.

Preventative care was deprioritised to manage more acute clinical needs. Departmental data showed fewer than one quarter (23%) of eligible prisoners (n=334) had received an annual health review. These occurred opportunistically rather than through scheduled programs as did other health promotion activities. Staff and prisoners expressed concern the increased patient load and staffing constraints impacted timely access to health care.

It takes a long time to see the health care team.

Quotes from prisoners in the pre-inspection survey

Casual and agency nurses were rostered to service the increased population and provide cover when staff were on leave. Nurses reviewed all prisoners on arrival and referred them for an urgent GP assessment if required. Non-urgent appointments to see a nurse generally occurred within five days but were also subject to delay if triaged patients required an appointment. There was no Aboriginal Health Worker appointed to bring cultural security to health services despite 23% of the prison population identifying as First Nations.

Despite the challenges, staff worked hard to improve service delivery. Bunbury had initiated a new process for prisoners to request a medical appointment by submitting a written request rather than leaving a voicemail message. Staff reported improved documentation, triage, and communication with prisoners, although some prisoners reported not receiving acknowledgement of their requests.

Staff efforts were reflected in the prisoner survey, with 53% of respondents rating services as 'good' or 'okay', compared to 45% in 2023. Prisoners frequently commented positively about staff but raised concerns about wait times, follow-up, and access to dental services. Seventy-five per cent of surveyed custodial staff considered in-prison health services to be effective.

Without increases in clinical staffing, primary health services at Bunbury will be unable to provide timely and proactive healthcare to prisoners.

Recommendation 4

Increase full-time equivalent general practitioners and nursing staff to meet the needs of Bunbury's population.

Technology could reduce the administrative burden

Clinicians reported time-consuming administrative tasks significantly reduced available clinical time. Incoming results were managed manually, patient notes were recorded by hand, and paper-based prescriptions required printing, signing, and scanning. While technology, digital innovations or AI-supported systems are available in community health settings, there was nothing similar in the prison health centre to reduce the administrative workload. Staff noted concerns that GPs had to complete administrative tasks in their own time to preserve clinical time with patients. In a resource-constrained environment, the Department should explore technological solutions that could relieve pressures.

Recommendation 5

Develop and implement a digital health strategy for custodial health services to identify technology to reduce administrative workloads of clinical staff.

Allied health services were available, but dental care was lacking

A range of allied health and specialist services were provided through a combination of on-site clinics, telehealth, and external appointments. These included general surgery, optometry, podiatry, skin cancer clinics, diabetic education, dietetics, and specialist telehealth reviews.

However, as was the case last inspection, dental care was insufficient to meet the needs of the prison population. Although dental clinics were scheduled for two half-days per week, service delivery was unreliable with many clinics cancelled due to dentist unavailability and equipment failures. In the 12 months prior to inspection, almost three quarters of clinics were cancelled and, as a result, the dental wait list was reported to be about 10 months. Unresolved dental pain and infections were managed by the primary health team, increasing demand for their service.



111
patients seen
instead of
potential 420
due to clinic
cancellations

Unsurprisingly, 67% of surveyed prisoners rated dental services as 'poor'.

In response, Bunbury was one of the few prisons to allow community members to pay for a prisoner's private dental treatment. A handful of prisoners had taken up this option. However, many could not afford the expense or did not have supports in the community to help with the cost.

Dental care in Western Australian prisons is predominantly provided by the Department of Health's Dental Health Services. This Office has made numerous recommendations over the years regarding access to timely dental care but recognises delivery of this service falls outside the control of the

Department of Justice. Despite this, we encourage the Department to advocate for increased service provision for prisoners.

Recommendation 6

Increase dental service provision at Bunbury.

Access to external medical appointments remained a challenge

Access to external medical appointments was adversely affected by factors within and outside of the prison's control, impacting patients' access to care. Ventia, the contracted escort provider, was responsible for conducting up to three prisoner escorts per day with a two-hour gap between each appointment. However, this capacity was not always sufficient to meet demand.

Custodial staff assisted with additional escorts where possible and were responsive to the health centre prioritising some appointments. This often had broader impacts across the rest of the prison as staff were diverted from operational roles to escort duties.

As a result, clinicians reported having to choose between sending the patient to the emergency department, which was resource-intensive, or waiting for a scheduled appointment, which may be delayed by staff and vehicle availability.

Departmental data reflected these pressures. Appointments cancelled by the prison due to transport or staffing limitations represented 17% of all cancellations, while Ventia cancellations for the same reasons accounted for 6%. Hospital-initiated cancellations accounted for 28% of missed appointments and prisoner refusals accounted for a further 22%. The remaining 27% of cancellations occurred for a range of other reasons.

4.2 Mental health provision had increased but there were critical gaps

The appointment of a Mental Health Nurse (MHN) improved care of vulnerable prisoners, but the loss of psychiatry services at the end of 2025 left a critical gap.

Increased support for patients with major mental illnesses

A Mental Health Nurse commenced in March 2025, providing clinical expertise to a population reported by staff and prisoners to be experiencing increasingly complex mental health challenges. The MHN had a caseload of approximately 50 patients who had been diagnosed with or were experiencing major mental illnesses. As the only mental health clinician available, the position also supported primary health services who were responsible for patients with less acute issues such as anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in addition to their filling the gap left by the cessation of psychiatric services.

Positively, the MHN had access to Psychiatric Services On-Line Information System (PSOLIS), Western Australia's main mental health information system. This helped improve continuity of care for prisoners who had previously received mental health treatment in the community. However, access was read-only, meaning MHNs could not add new information. This limited information sharing and reduced continuity of care when prisoners returned to the community.

Absence of psychiatry services left a critical gap in mental health care

Psychiatry services ceased at the end of 2025 following the departure of the prison psychiatrist, who had previously conducted two half-day telehealth clinics each week, seeing around five patients per clinic. After the service ended, demand for psychiatric support increased. In January 2026, 30 prisoners required psychiatric inputs ranging from urgent care to significant and ongoing psychiatric needs¹.

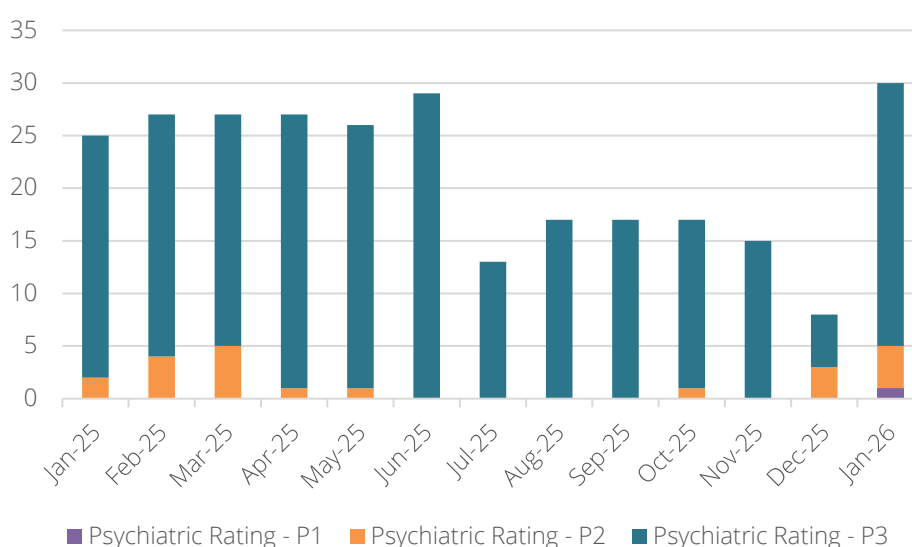


Figure 3: At the time of inspection, the prison had seen an increase in prisoners requiring psychiatric support following the departure of the psychiatrist.

The loss of psychiatry services created a critical gap in care. Prisoners requiring assessment, diagnosis, medication initiation or specialist review were left without appropriate oversight, increasing risks of deterioration, prescribing gaps, and discontinuation of essential treatment. Limited access to psychiatric assessment restricted diagnosis and medication initiation for conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder, contributing to frustration and behavioural escalation among some prisoners.

Primary health clinicians were required to manage complex mental illness without specialist support, placing additional strain on an already stretched service and exposing staff to high-risk presentations.

¹ The 30 prisoners comprised of 1 person rated as a P1 (a serious psychiatric condition requiring intensive and/or immediate care); 4 people rated as a P2 (a significant ongoing psychiatric condition requiring psychiatric treatment); and 25 people rated as a P3 (a stable psychiatric condition requiring appointment or continuing treatment).

Survey results reflected these gaps in psychiatric capability and service effectiveness. Only 30% of prisoners rated mental health care as 'good' or 'okay'. Less than half of custodial staff (48%) considered mental health services effective, and just over one fifth felt adequately trained to manage prisoners with mental illness or cognitive impairment.

Staff advised that access to an on-call psychiatric service would improve clinical safety and decision-making. Without reinstatement of psychiatry services, mental health care will continue to fall short of patient need and place pressure on existing services.

Recommendation 7

Prioritise resourcing Bunbury with a psychiatric consult and advice service to support facility-based staff.

Psychological Health Services were an important but overly stretched resource

Psychological Health Services (PHS) remained a committed and valued service, but demand had increased significantly and exceeded their capacity. The general PHS team comprised of one clinical supervisor and three counsellors. The Steps Towards Exiting Prison Successfully (STEPS) program team comprised one clinical supervisor, two prison counsellors, and an Aboriginal mental health worker who provided flexible support across the teams when demand for counselling was high.

Like many of Bunbury's services, PHS staffing levels had not increased to match demand. According to departmental data, there were 689 new counselling referrals in 2025, and 1,642 counselling sessions delivered, compared with 1,127 sessions in 2023. At-Risk Management System (ARMS) and the Support and Monitoring System (SAMS) referrals also increased substantially over this period. There were 88 new ARMS referrals in 2023 compared to 149 in 2025. The number of new SAMS referrals in the same timeframe almost doubled from 60 to 111. These figures outpaced the population growth experience at Bunbury over the same period.

Prisoners were offered six counselling sessions, with the option to apply for additional sessions. However, with wait times of approximately three months, some prisoners did not get help when they needed it most. To provide interim support for prisoners on the waitlist PHS delivered psycho-education groups on mindfulness and coping skills programs.

Recommendation 8

Increase Psychological Health Services (PHS) staffing at Bunbury to meet the needs of the increased population.

Sound at-risk management of vulnerable prisoners

Processes for managing prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide were generally sound. The Prisoner Risk Assessment Group (PRAG) met several times during the inspection week and was attended by mental health clinicians, Prison Support Officers (PSO), PHS counsellors, chaplaincy, and custodial staff. On some occasions, prisoners were invited to participate in discussions about their welfare and risks. Collaboration worked well with input from different team members.

In the three months prior to inspection, between 50 and 60 prisoners were monitored under ARMS and SAMS, representing approximately one tenth of the population. Seventy-three per cent of surveyed custodial staff considered suicide prevention and at-risk management services to be effective.

4.3 Bunbury applied a range of strategies to address substance use and drug activity

Provisions for Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) services at Bunbury had expanded since the previous inspection. The STEPS AOD pilot program was a clear strength and valued by staff and participants. An AOD nurse was delivering the Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) program to eligible prisoners. The Drug Reduction Strategy (DRS) reflected a commitment to respond to substance use within the prison, and some improvements had been made to the governance of the DRS. However, the strategy remained largely punitive, with limited therapeutic supports for most prisoners and little capacity to address continued substance use.

The Alcohol and Other Drugs pilot program was a highlight

Since the previous inspection, Bunbury had commenced the STEPS AOD pilot program. The program was delivered in partnership with Palmerston and South West Aboriginal Medical Services and funded through Royalties for Regions until 2028. The pilot arose from a 2021 election commitment to improve pre-release AOD and reintegration services in prisons. Evaluation of the program was ongoing.

STEPS was voluntary, and targeted prisoners in the final 12 to 18 months of their sentence. It focused on identifying substance-use triggers, trauma, reducing harm, and developing strategies for participants to sustain recovery in the community. Participants engaged in psycho-education before progressing to reintegration and pre-release activities which included attending community recovery groups and counselling with family or supporters. Men spoke positively about reconnecting with community supports and strengthening relationships ahead of release. Up to 36 participants were accommodated across three dedicated houses in Unit 3 and the PRU. This model allowed participants to practise recovery skills in preparation for release.

Intensive case management was another key component. Participants valued the accessibility of dedicated STEPS caseworkers and PHS counsellors and reported faster access to counselling than the general prison population. At three-monthly reviews, participants reported more positive relationships whilst in custody and felt ready to manage their recovery when released from prison.

Continuity between in-custody treatment and post-release support was viewed as critical to reducing relapse risk. Participants were eligible for up to two years of post-release support after completing the

program, including counselling and practical assistance such as emergency accommodation. Staff reported positive outcomes, including former participants returning to the prison to motivate others. Approximately 40 people were receiving these community-based supports at the time of inspection.

Participants reported positive experiences. They said the program helped them to understand the drivers of their substance use, which led them to developing better coping strategies. While the program had not yet been formally evaluated, it was well designed and resourced, with a strong potential to improve outcomes for prisoners, their families, and the community.

In April 2026, the Department advised it will close the Mallee Rehabilitation Centre (Mallee) at Casuarina (Casuarina) Prison and cease delivery of the Solid Steps AOD program, but planning would commence for a new program at Bunbury, informed by the AOD partnerships already in place. We will monitor how this impacts service delivery and custodial operations at Bunbury.

The Drug Reduction Strategy lacked therapeutic assistance

In 2022, Bunbury developed and implemented the DRS – a local response to the challenges posed by drugs and contraband entering the prison. The DRS aimed to maintain a safe and secure environment by reducing the supply and demand for illicit and unauthorised substances. However, during our last inspection we found the DRS was punitive and did not support prisoners to address their addictions (OICS, 2024). If found participating in drug-related activity:

- Prisoners are immediately placed in a dedicated unit and lose access to work, contact visits, and social interaction.
- A first offence results in a six-week sanction. Further offences reset the process and lead to stronger sanctions.
- Prisoners may also face additional punishment or confinement if found guilty of prison charges by a Visiting Justice, which many viewed as ‘punishment on top of punishment’.

This inspection we found there had been some improvements made to better support prisoners returning a positive drug test or who were involved in drug related activity. Management convened fortnightly multidisciplinary meetings with affected prisoners and explored substance use, their motivation to change, and access to supports. Sanction periods were also decreased.

However, most prisoners on the DRS had no access to specialist AOD intervention or counselling and felt unable to address their addiction without clinical supports. Prisoners continued to be held in Unit 2A – a controlled environment with little amenity – and reported leaving the unit angry rather than motivated to pursue sobriety. Many staff expressed concern the current model did not support behaviour change and continued to be punitive rather than therapeutic.

There was a clear commitment to addressing substance use at Bunbury, but treatment programs and support did not reach everyone, leaving many prisoners with unmet needs, and a risk of ongoing substance use. Leadership at Bunbury acknowledged the DRS was under-resourced. We were advised work was ongoing to introduce an AOD program for this group, however, it was not in place at the time of the inspection. With the recent announcement of the closure of Mallee and the Solid Steps

AOD program at Casuarina, and planning for the establishment of a replacement program at Bunbury, there is an opportunity to review the supports made available to prisoners sanctioned under the DRS.

Recommendation 9

Review the Drug Reduction Strategy (DRS) to ensure prisoners involved in drug-related activity are provided appropriate supports to address their substance use.

We also note the DRS was developed in response to the *Western Australian Prisons Drug Strategy 2018–2021*, which is now out-dated (DOJ, 2018). Throughout our ongoing inspections of prisons in Western Australia, drug use continues to be raised as a key issue. To better support prisons to address this challenge at a local level, and to achieve an appropriate balance between supply reduction, demand reduction, and rehabilitative supports, the Department should prioritise the development of a new drug strategy to guide local initiatives. This would align with Corrective Services' strategic priority of 'creating environments that facilitate positive change to reduce reoffending' (DOJ, 2025).

Recommendation 10

Develop a strategic drug strategy to guide local initiatives in Western Australian prisons.

Opioid Substitution Therapy was in demand

Since our last inspection, Bunbury had appointed an AOD nurse who was responsible for the clinical delivery and day-to-day management of the OST program – a program designed to manage opioid dependence.

Around 25 prisoners were receiving OST through methadone or Buprenorphine, with around 10 on a waitlist. Health briefings, prisoner surveys, and interviews also indicated strong interest in the program, including from opportunistic opioid users. Some prisoners sought OST to avoid unsafe injecting practices, highlighting unmet harm-reduction needs.

Applications were usually reviewed within 72 hours, but strict eligibility criteria excluded many prisoners, including some with less than six months until release. Some prisoners said that being removed from OST for drug use meant they were left with no choice but to resume opioid use to become eligible again, which undermined harm reduction strategies and increased risk.

Release planning was strong. The AOD nurse liaised with community prescribers and education on overdose was provided. However, naloxone² was not provided on release because pharmacy guidelines did not align with OST procedures, despite policy requiring it. This issue was identified

² Naloxone is a fast-acting medication that temporarily reverses opioid overdoses.

during our inspection of Casuarina prison, where we recommended the distribution of naloxone as part of a broader harm reduction response (OICS, 2026).

Work had commenced to roll out the smoke free prisons initiative

Work had commenced on the rollout of the smoke-free prisons initiative, with management engaging peer support prisoners and the prison council to communicate key dates, staged restrictions, and implementation arrangements. Under the rollout timeline, nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) would cease four weeks before the commencement date of 30 July, cigarettes two weeks prior, and smoking outside accommodation units would not be permitted four weeks before the prison went smoke-free. A nurse had been tasked with assessing eligibility for prisoners requesting Champix, (a prescribed medication to help adults stop smoking) and monitoring those on the medication.

Concerns were raised about the impact of these changes on vulnerable and at-risk prisoners who had previously relied on cigarettes to manage their mood and wellbeing, with potential flow-on effects for health and wellbeing services. Prisoners received from the community, or from prisons yet to commence the rollout, would not be supported with NRT. Staff were in discussions about how to manage these prisoners and support their withdrawal.

Following the inspection, in March 2026, the Commissioner of Corrective Services announced that, due to significant pressures across the custodial estate, the implementation of the smoke-free prisons policy had been deferred. This delay in implementation offers an opportunity to re-visit decisions made around the provision of NRT before and after a smoking ban, in a way that balances security, good order, and prisoner wellbeing.

Recommendation 11

Review the provision of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) before and after the implementation of the smoke-free prisons policy.

4.4 Cultural and individualised supports were mixed, but peer support were the exception

Perceptions of cultural safety at Bunbury were mixed. Peer support prisoners were a significant resource for prisoners and frequently filled gaps left by under-resourced services. While the Aboriginal Visitor Scheme (AVS) and cultural activities provided important safeguards for First Nations prisoners, resourcing challenges limited access. Supports for prisoners with disability or impairment were limited and lacked clear pathways, increasing the risk that vulnerable prisoners did not receive appropriate support. Overall, these supports relied heavily on goodwill and informal arrangements rather than systematic, sustainable frameworks.

Peer support prisoners were a protective factor for vulnerable prisoners

Bunbury's peer support service was highly valued by both staff and prisoners. Peer support prisoners were identified as an accessible and trusted source of support and practical help that filled gaps created by under-resourcing in other areas. Peer support prisoners identified prisoners requiring additional support and liaised with the Prison Support Officer (PSO) to facilitate referrals to appropriate services.

Peer support prisoners reported supporting prisoners with complex needs, including cognitive impairment, major mental illness, anxiety related to lockdowns, and grief and trauma. They described intervening to de-escalate interpersonal conflict, bullying and predatory sexual behaviour. Prisoner surveys ranked peer support as one of the most trusted sources of help. Fifty-nine per cent of surveyed prisoners reported that peer support prisoners would assist them if needed, second only to support from other prisoners.

Peer support prisoners spoke positively about the leadership and support of the PSO, who set clear expectations while recognising the unique contribution of the role. Regular team meetings were occurring, and training had increased in recent months. Although there was no dedicated budget, recent training included disability awareness, Aboriginal mental health, mindfulness, first aid, and suicide awareness (Gatekeeper and Lifeline).

It is important to highlight the risk of compassion fatigue among peer support prisoners. There was no formal supervision structure to assist them to manage the emotional demands of the role. We encourage the Department to explore how supervision can be provided to all peer support prisoners as they support an increasing and complex prisoner population.



Some cultural resources had reduced

The AVS continued to be an important safeguard for First Nations people, providing cultural connection and advocacy while taking a preventative role in identifying prisoner distress and vulnerability. Prisoners reported reduced access to AVS compared to last inspection but were appreciative of the cultural support provided by Elders visiting the prison as part of specific programs such as Journey Ways and the AOD program.

Cultural activities continued despite staffing and operational pressures. NAIDOC Week, National Sorry Day, and National Reconciliation Week were acknowledged, and activities included yarning circles, cultural cooking, and the lighting of a ceremonial fire. First Nations prisoners appreciated these activities but identified the need for more regular, structured and sustained cultural engagement

rather than reliance on one-off events. This need was also noted in the Aboriginal Services Committee minutes.

Prisoners reported a desire for more cultural activities, increased opportunities for cultural connection, and improved staff understanding of First Nations culture and the impacts of racism. Thirty-seven per cent of surveyed prisoners reported that staff respected their culture. Sixty-eight per cent of surveyed custodial staff considered respect for and recognition of First Nations culture to be 'good', a slight decline from the previous inspection and consistent with the state average. These findings indicated that while goodwill existed, cultural safety was not consistently embedded or experienced.

Officers (need) to be educated on Aboriginal culture and how racism has affected a lot of Aboriginals overtime in their life.

Quote from the pre-inspection prisoner survey

Disability and impairment supports were limited

Supports for prisoners with disability or impairment were limited, with unclear pathways for identification, referral, and coordination. People in custody should have the same rights to access support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) as people living in the community. However, reflective of system wide gaps, there was no dedicated position to coordinate disability supports or to progress NDIS applications.

Several staff and clinicians reported undertaking NDIS-related tasks in addition to their core roles. This was unsustainable and increased the risk that eligible prisoners would not receive supports they may be entitled to or would be released without appropriate arrangements in place.

Surveyed prisoners' comments reflected frustration and confusion regarding access to NDIS supports, with several reporting the disability supports received in the community had not continued in custody. Ten per cent of surveyed prisoners reported needing supports they were not receiving. Only 3% reported receiving disability-related supports.

Supports for other vulnerable populations were limited. The *Criminal Law (Mentally Impaired) Act 2023* introduced additional protections for people with mental impairment, but processes at Bunbury were still developing. Two prisoners subject to the legislation were monitored under SAMS.

Unit 2B accommodated some of the prison's most vulnerable prisoners, including those with intellectual impairment, autism, neurodevelopmental conditions, and physical disability. Some prisoners benefited from informal care arrangements with other prisoners to assist with daily living tasks. Peer support prisoners also played an important role in monitoring their wellbeing and safety. But we identified limited other concessions to support people with impairment, disability, and other challenges in completing tasks of daily life. Only 23% of surveyed custodial staff felt adequately trained to work with people with intellectual or cognitive concerns, and only 24% felt adequately trained to work with people with mental and physical disability.

Need more training on Mental health and intellectually/cognitive prisoners, online training not sufficient.

Increasing numbers of prisoners with disabilities are coming in and staff in general are not adequately trained to manage the complexities associated with this.

Quotes from staff pre-inspection survey

The appointment of an occupational therapist to support vulnerable prisoners to improve independence, build skills and emotional functioning in the prison environment would also benefit staff, many of whom have not been trained to work with people with this level of complexity.

Recommendation 12

Appoint, or provide access to, an occupational therapist to help support vulnerable prisoners.

5 Statewide pressures impacted rehabilitation and re-entry

Delays in Treatment Assessment Reports (TARs) significantly affected prisoner progress by limiting their access to treatment and intervention programs and delaying or preventing approval for parole. Education was valued by prisoners, but access was restricted by staffing shortfalls and infrastructure limitations. Meaningful employment opportunities and preparation for release were also constrained by the population pressure and staffing shortfalls.

This chapter assesses the performance of Bunbury Regional Prison against the following standards:

Standard 21 – Classification, sentence administration, and case management

People are lawfully held and released, provided with clear information about their custody, tailored risk assessments, and support to pursue their goals in custody.

Standard 22 – Programs and education

All people in custody are assessed to identify their risks and needs, and receive evidence-based programs, education and life skills training tailored to their requirements.

Standard 23 – Employment

All people in custody can participate in meaningful work that is fair and nonexploitative and boosts their employability upon release.

Standard 24 – Preparation for release

All people in custody are well-prepared for release and provided essential support for their departure and successful reintegration into the community.

5.1 Overdue assessments impacted prisoner progress

Overdue TARs had a significant impact on prisoners' access to programs, reintegration activities and release. TARs are comprehensive assessments identifying an individual's treatment needs and the required interventions based on their offending, history, and perceived risks. TARs are required for all prisoners serving sentences of more than six months and should be completed within six weeks of sentencing. This was not occurring. In February 2026 there were 93 overdue TARs at Bunbury, and 1,108 across the prison estate.

Delays in the completion of TARs is a chronic issue the Department has been attempting to address for several years. Part of the challenge is the process required to complete a TAR. It is labour-intensive, involving background research to identify patterns of behaviour, the use of various psychometric tools to identify treatment needs, and the completion of a detailed evidence-based report. The other

challenge is resourcing. While the Department had increased staffing, many were inexperienced in completing the complex process.

At Bunbury, assessments were also impacted by staffing shortfalls. According to departmental data, Bunbury's two treatment assessors lost approximately 514 assessment productivity hours between 2 February 2026 and 1 March 2026: 66 hours due to custodial officer redeployments, 158 to leave and 290 to vacancy hours. Addressing these issues at the local level will assist in reducing the backlog.

Recommendation 13

Address treatment assessor staffing shortfalls at Bunbury to reduce the assessment backlog.

Prisoners waiting for assessment could not progress through the prison system and engage with rehabilitation and reintegration milestones. They could not access the required treatment programs and risked being denied parole for having 'unmet treatment needs'. Nor could they access the benefits of Section 95 employment, which allowed prisoners to work outside the perimeter fence, or the Prisoner Employment Program (PEP), which enabled suitably assessed prisoners to work for a wage prior to their release. In some cases, prisoners would be released at the end of their sentence without having completed any rehabilitation. This caused frustration among prisoners and staff and did little to advance community safety.

The inability to access and receive assessments and programs is ridiculous. The whole system is backlogged because of this! I am ten months past my parole date due to lack of programs. Because of this my ability to rejoin society and start my life again has been put back.

Quote from the pre-inspection prisoner survey

Treatment assessments are so far behind that parole dates are coming and going with no assessment, and in some cases, prisoners are released without having done a program because they haven't been treatment assessed in time to complete one.

Quote from the pre-inspection staff survey

In addition to TARs, there were 25 prisoners with an overdue initial Individual Management Plan (IMP) and a further 42 prisoners with an overdue IMP review. These plans outline the goals, placement, and support needs of a prisoner.

5.2 A range of treatment and voluntary programs ran

Bunbury continued to be a high-performing site for program delivery, with a broad range of criminogenic and voluntary programs delivered. Although new and updated programs were well received, limitations in staffing constrained Bunbury's ability to further improve program delivery outcomes.

Bunbury delivered a range of programs, including a culturally responsive pilot

Bunbury continued to play an important role as a hub for program delivery. Between 2024 and 2025, the prison delivered 22 treatment programs to 215 participants, including the Pathways alcohol and other drugs program (88 participants), sex offending programs (59), general offending programs (39), and violent offending programs (29). Nine programs were postponed due to staff availability and rescheduling of earlier cancellations. Twelve programs were scheduled for 2026.

New and updated programs were well received. Bunbury was piloting a revised sex offending program with content adapted to the Australian context, including improved cultural responsiveness. Facilitators described it as a significant improvement on the previous version. Participants also responded positively, describing it as 'brilliant' and 'helpful'. The STEPS AOD program similarly received strong feedback from staff and prisoners for its capacity to change lives (see section 4.3).

However, staff reported concerns about the currency and appropriateness of the Stopping Family Violence program. Staff reported the content was outdated (it is from the early 2000s) and no longer meets the needs of participants. They also expressed concerns regarding cultural responsiveness and were hoping for cultural supervision for this program in the future.

Bunbury offered a strong range of voluntary programs that helped prisoners develop life skills and positive behaviours. These programs did not require a TAR. They included the Community Transition Program, which supported prisoners to prepare for release and was attended by 75 prisoners in 2025.

Other programs included Journey Ways, a healing program designed by and for First Nations people, which 53 prisoners attended in 2025, and the Alternative to Violence Program, which was completed by 74 prisoners.

While these programs supported rehabilitation and reintegration, the Department advised they did not necessarily improve parole outcomes where criminogenic treatment programs were later identified through a TAR. Priority for voluntary programs was given to sentenced people within six months of release, with remaining places offered to people on remand.

More resources were required to improve program delivery

Eight of the nine program facilitator positions at Bunbury were filled at the time of the inspection. Despite this, staff told us there were not enough facilitators to meet prisoner program demand. Facilitators also reported limited training opportunities were available to them, and most were held in Perth which was difficult to attend.

Facilitators had access to internal supervision, but a reduction in regional supervisors meant supervision was limited and often unavailable. Staff also raised concerns about cultural responsiveness, particularly for older programs, and reported difficulty accessing cultural supervision despite new professional requirements. Staff further reported shortages of basic program resources, including manuals and materials. Some facilitators told us they purchased resources themselves to ensure programs could continue.

Recommendation 14

Strengthen program delivery at Bunbury by increasing facilitator capacity, support, and oversight.

5.3 Prisoners valued the education opportunities available

Education played an important part of life at Bunbury and was viewed as integral to rehabilitation. Prisoners described education as giving them a sense of purpose and direction, improving self-image, and supporting future employment prospects. Teachers were consistently described as supportive, courses as high quality, and the self-paced learning model as effective. Sixty-two per cent of surveyed prisoners reported being able to access education. Staff reported students as being motivated and engaged, with most classes full, and strong demand for courses leading to skill tickets.

Educations and programs are great. The education budget could probably use a few more dollars to ensure it can continue to expand. I have completed every course available so far and I continue to do so as more course [sic] become available.

Quote from the pre-inspection prisoner survey

However, access to education was impacted by staffing shortfalls. Although education was generally scheduled on weekdays, frequent redeployment of duty officers meant it rarely ran at full capacity. With only one duty officer often available, attendance was reduced from 50 to 30 students. Vacancies in key roles, including a Prisoner Education Coordinator and an Aboriginal Education Worker, further impacted capacity. As a result, prisoners reported some difficulty progressing between courses, and university students said they were limited to completing one unit at a time.

Despite these challenges, we found staff made effective use of the resources available to them, carefully prioritising spending, training, and facilities to meet demand and support prisoner rehabilitation. Despite growing administrative complexity and infrastructure limitations, staff actively maximised existing resources and planned to future-proof education spaces.

5.4 Insufficient work for the prisoner population

Almost half of prisoners lacked meaningful work or any sort of employment. Non-essential industries were frequently closed due to the redeployment of VSOs and restricted contracts. Consequently, nearly half of prisoners were underemployed or unemployed, with First Nations prisoners disproportionately affected.

Non-essential industries were frequently closed

Non-essential industries at Bunbury had become a less viable option for prisoner employment, traineeships, and income generation. Several factors contributed to this decline. Industry workshops, such as the cabinet and metal shops had been restricted to servicing the prison, government agencies and not-for-profit organisations. This came after an estate-wide direction was issued by the Commissioner of Corrective Services in February 2024 to cease purchases from prison industries by external customers. The restrictions in place have resulted in the loss of significant external work for Bunbury, which has reduced employment and training opportunities for prisoners.

Staffing pressures further limited industry delivery. Redeployment of VSOs and duty officers to meet the operational needs of the prison reduced operating days and capacity. Changes to VSO recruitment processes, from being locally led to centralised through head office, and then back again, created confusion and made it difficult to attract staff to regional roles. New union requirements for VSOs to complete a training course before commencing prisoner-facing duties further delayed recruitment and redeployment.

We need more staff so that the VSO's aren't constantly redeployed. The prison needs to secure contracts for jobs so that the prisoners have something to do to make them feel like they are learning something and achieving something.

Need more jobs in industries.

Quotes from the pre-inspection staff survey

Underemployment and unemployment affected nearly half of the population

To compensate for the reduction in the number of employment positions available in industries, additional jobs were created in units to provide a form of employment and allow prisoners to earn gratuities. Just before we inspected, there were 163 unit workers employed in mostly menial, sometimes tokenistic unit-based tasks which did not require a full day's work. First Nations prisoners were over-represented in these positions with 46 (33%) First Nations prisoners and 117 (26%) non-First Nations prisoners employed doing unit-based tasks.

There were an additional 100 prisoners without any employment. First Nations prisoners were again over-represented in this cohort, with 43 (31%) First Nations prisoners without work compared to 66 (15%) non-First Nations prisoners not working.

More industries and access to more learning

I have been trying to get job for 6 months

Applied for employment both inside and out the unit but ignored

Quotes from the pre-inspection prisoner survey

Because First Nations prisoners were overrepresented among those who were unemployed or underemployed, they were less likely to earn higher-level gratuities (e.g. Level 1) and more likely to receive lower-level payments, as shown in the graph below. This left First Nations prisoners with less money to meet basic needs like supplementary food from the canteen, phone calls, and hygiene items. It can also deepen existing disadvantage, and suggests the system is not providing fair access to work and pay.

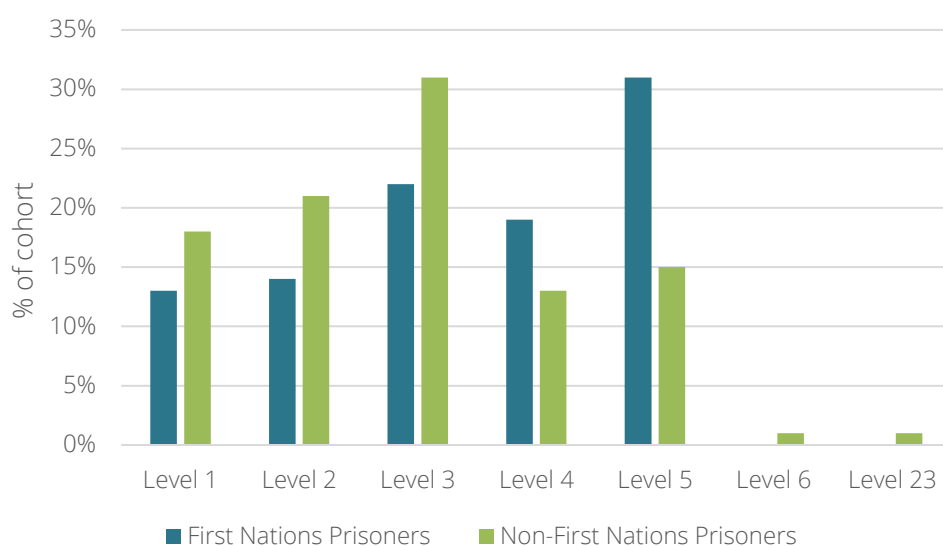


Figure 4: First Nations prisoners were less likely to receive higher gratuities than non-First Nation prisoners.

Recommendation 15

Increase employment opportunities for First Nations prisoners.

5.5 Prisoners were prepared well for release

Prisoners at Bunbury generally benefited from strong release-planning supports. Transitional managers, education staff, and the contracted re-entry provider, Accordwest, helped prisoners obtain identification, plan accommodation, connect with employment and training, and link with community

services. Programs such as the Community Transition Program, vocational training, and the STEPS AOD program improved readiness for release when prisoners were able to access them in time.

Bunbury had a dedicated transitional and employment team and strong re-entry support from Accordwest. Two prisoners were employed as transitional clerks to promote services across the prison. Accordwest also provided transitional accommodation through four three-bedroom properties for up to three months, although securing suitable housing remained a common barrier to release and parole. Bunbury also hosted the 'Inside-Out' expo, which connected prisoners with community services, employment providers, financial counsellors, AOD supports, and health services.

Bunbury also offered valuable pre-release options through its minimum-security pre-release units, Units 4 and 5. Unit 4 operated as an open-campus, cottage-style unit that supported self-care, budgeting, meal preparation, and independent living skills. Unit 5 provided further progression, though facilities were older and access to education was more limited. Community-based work through Section 95, PEP, and home leave helped prisoners build confidence, rebuild family relationships, and prepare for successful reintegration into the community.

Despite these strengths, delays in assessments and approval processes limited access to many of these reintegration opportunities. Although staff and service providers showed strong commitment, improving timeliness, communication, and access to release pathways would strengthen outcomes and reduce the risk of reoffending.

6 Behaviour management was handled effectively

Behaviour at Bunbury was managed through a strong emphasis on culture, incentives and progression, supported by disciplinary processes where needed. While safety perceptions were mixed and population pressures created constraints, staff focused on encouraging positive behaviour rather than punishment. Confinement regimes were well governed, proportionate, and used to prevent escalation within a broader, rehabilitative approach to behaviour management.

This chapter assesses the performance of Bunbury Regional Prison against the following standards:

Standard 8 – Feeling safe

People in custody feel safe from bullying, abuse, violence and victimisation, and those seeking protection are appropriately located and safely managed to prevent harm, abuse, and neglect.

Standard 25 – Encouraging positive behaviour

The relationship between staff and people in custody is positive and respectful, fostering pro-social behaviours and personal responsibility.

Standard 27 – Isolation and confinement

Isolation of individuals in custody is permitted only with proper authority, as a last resort, and for the shortest duration possible, ensuring they are treated with decency and humanity.

6.1 Perceptions of safety were mixed

Feeling safe is important for prisoner wellbeing and good prison management. Although departmental data shows Bunbury has lower levels of violence than the state average, fewer prisoners said they felt safe in 2025 (72%) compared to 2023 (84%). Reports of physical and sexual assault in the pre-inspection survey also suggest not all incidents were being officially reported.

Many prisoners said issues were often dealt with ‘in house’ rather than reported to staff, which can put vulnerable prisoners at risk, especially those with sexual offence histories. Increased prisoner numbers and double bunking have also added tension and reduced the prison’s ability to separate incompatible prisoners or manage discipline effectively.

Positively, when staff were made aware of safety issues, they responded quickly and appropriately. Peer support prisoners received training in suicide prevention and disability awareness, and most prisoners still described Bunbury as safer than similar prisons. This was linked to the prison’s culture, known as the ‘Bunbury Way,’ and the relatively high level of freedom.

These mixed perceptions of safety highlight the importance of effective behaviour management systems that promote positive conduct and reduce the need for formal intervention.

6.2 Incentives encouraged positive behaviour

At Bunbury, progression and reward were used to encourage positive behaviour, helping to foster a safe environment. The prison's incentive scheme demonstrated clear links between conduct, responsibility and access to opportunities. However, the hierarchical system was under strain.

Prisoners who demonstrated compliance and pro-social behaviour progressed through a clearly defined hierarchy from general living units in the main prison, into self-care in Unit 3, and then into minimum-security Unit 4 and Unit 5. Self-care was sought after accommodation and offered shared living spaces, opportunities to prepare meals and develop other life skills. Units 4 and 5 offered access to more employment, education and pre-release pathways. Incentives like higher level gratuities, access to trusted work roles, external employment and PEP, reinforced expectations around behaviour and personal responsibility. Overall, progression mechanisms were understood by prisoners and aligned with Bunbury's ethos of rehabilitation and reintegration.

One of the strongest incentives for positive behaviour had been access to single cell accommodation in self-care. This had largely disappeared following the recent introduction of double bunking. While shared accommodation in Unit 3 offering greater freedom of movement, longer out of-cell-hours and more attractive grounds remained appealing to many prisoners, opportunities to progress there were limited. These opportunities were likely to become even scarcer following the Commissioner's announcement to relocate future Mallee participants from Casuarina to Unit 3 at Bunbury.

Small incentives, such as increased canteen spend limits, additional recreation, or extra in-cell items, were valued but insufficient to offset the long waitlist to move to Unit 3. Prisoners questioned why earned privileges could not be recognised within their current units rather than being contingent on vacancies elsewhere.

As an important component of behaviour management, Bunbury may need to reconsider how it can continue to acknowledge appropriate behaviours within the current population pressures and constraints.

6.3 The backlog in prosecutions had reduced but sanctions faced challenges

Bunbury utilised appropriate disciplinary processes to address antisocial behaviour and manage prison charges. Prosecutors were responsible for gathering evidence to support the process and hearings held before a Visiting Justice (VJ) or the Superintendent.

Despite frequent redeployment disrupting continuity and slowing case progression, prosecutors had made concerted efforts to reduce the backlog of charges, most of which related to lower-level matters. Survey results reflected improved staff confidence in charges and prosecutions, with 48% of custodial staff rating the process as effective, compared with 16% at the previous inspection.

Limited punishment cell capacity also created ongoing bottlenecks. The prison only had seven multi-purpose cells to accommodate prisoners on various restrictive regimes, including those under medical observation. As a result, even where prosecutions were upheld, appropriate sanctions could not

always be imposed. Some staff felt this undermined the deterrent effect of the disciplinary process. VJs also frequently dismissed backdated prosecutions – while this assisted in managing the backlog, it could be perceived as further undermining the disciplinary process.

6.4 Governance of confinement regimes was appropriate

Disciplinary confinement at Bunbury was generally well managed. The separation and management of prisoners was authorised by appropriately delegated staff, time-limited in accordance with legislation and policy, and subject to oversight. Records and observations during the inspection showed confinement was used only when necessary and for the shortest possible time.

Decisions to place prisoners on Close or Basic regimes were properly recorded, reviewed on time, and focused on preventing the escalation of negative behaviour rather than punishment. Most prisoners progressed out of Close Supervision within a short period, often within a week. Senior staff spoke with prisoners daily, explained expectations, and clearly outlined the steps needed to return to a standard regime.

Confinement records were maintained in both electronic and hard-copy systems, supporting accountability. Sampled records showed prisoners were progressed appropriately through confinement regimes before returning to standard conditions. While staff shortfalls and limited multi-purpose cells caused some constraints, overall practice was careful, transparent, and compliant with policy.

Appendix A Bibliography

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Appendix B Acronyms

Term	Expansion of Abbreviation
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
ARMS	At-risk Management System
ASSIEM	Assistant Superintendent Security, Infrastructure and Emergency Management
AVS	Aboriginal Visitor Scheme
DOJ	Department of Justice
DRS	Drug Reduction Strategy
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GP	General Practitioner
IMP	Individual Management Plan
MHN	Mental Health Nurse
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NRT	Nicotine Replacement Therapy
OICS	Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services
OST	Opioid Substitution Therapy
PEP	Prisoner Employment Program
PHS	Psychological Health Services
PRAG	Prisoner Risk Assessment Group
PRU	Pre-Release Unit
PSO	Prison Support Officer
PSOLIS	Psychiatric Services On-Line Information System
PTS	Prisoner Telephone System
SAMS	Support and Monitoring System
SMT	Senior Management Team
STEPS	Steps Toward Exiting Prison Successfully

TAR	Treatment Assessment Report
VJ	Visiting Justice
VSO	Vocational Support Officer
WA	Western Australia

Appendix C Department of Justice's Response

Response to the Announced Inspection:
2026 Inspection of Bunbury Regional Prison

Response Overview

On 11 November 2025, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the Inspection of Bunbury Regional Prison (the Inspection), which took place between 9 and 13 February 2026 (inclusive).

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

On 3 July 2026, the Department received the draft report which raised 15 recommendations for review and comment.

Of the 15 recommendations:

- Three are supported;
- Six are supported in principle;
- Four are supported and considered current practice / project;
- One is noted being outside of the Department's control; and
- One is not supported.

Detailed responses to the recommendations can be found below.

Response to Recommendations

1 Develop and implement a documented local operational plan aligned with Corrective Services' strategic plan.

Level of Acceptance: Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

The development of site-specific operational work plans will occur through the implementation of the Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025 – 2030. These are long-term works with development not scheduled to start until the development and implementation of overarching directorate-specific operational work plans.

2 Expedite the completion of the Safer Staffing Review.

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

Response:

The Department is in the end stages of finalising the Safer Staffing Review with final consultation currently occurring with key stakeholders including the Western Australian Prison Officers' Union and the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Upon finalisation, implementation of the revised Staffing Level Agreements developed for each custodial facility as part of the Safer Staffing Review will be subject to funding availability.

3 Review Bunbury's infrastructure to align with its population and operational requirements.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

All custodial facilities, including Bunbury, are considered in the Long-Term Custodial Infrastructure Plan 2025-35 (LTCIP) which provides the strategic direction for ensuring investment in custodial infrastructure across the estate is appropriately aligned with operational requirements and the needs of the custodial population.

Infrastructure development at Bunbury will continue to be informed by the LTCIP and will be subject to funding availability.

4 Increase full-time equivalent general practitioners and nursing staff to meet the needs of Bunbury's population.

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

Response:

The Department continues to advocate for additional Justice Health and Wellbeing Directorate (JHWS) resourcing across the custodial estate to meet the health and mental health needs of the custodial population.

Recent budget submissions have been successful in securing an additional registered nurse position at Bunbury. The Department will continue to seek additional resources, including for General Practitioners, as part of future budget submissions.

5 Develop and implement a digital health strategy for custodial health services to identify technology to reduce administrative workloads of clinical staff.

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

Response:

In September 2025, JHWS commenced a review of its medical records management processes to explore alternative solutions to streamlining records management and reduce administrative burdens for site-based staff.

These include information technology stabilisation, modernisation and capability uplift initiatives that have been informed by the review works. These initiatives are intended to address priority risks, improve system supportability and strengthen the Department's ability to safely and effectively deliver health services while maintaining continuity of operations

A Business Needs Analysis to implement these system improvements has been developed in consultation with the Knowledge, Information and Technology Directorate and has been submitted to the Health Information Management Committee for consideration. If approved, the implementation of these system improvements will be subject to funding availability.

6 Increase dental service provision at Bunbury.

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

Response:

All dental services within Western Australian custodial facilities are provided by the North Metropolitan Health Service, Dental Health Service (DHS). To monitor the effectiveness, challenges, and impact of this externally delivered service, Justice

Health and Wellbeing Services Branch compiles annual reports on dental service provision across the custodial estate.

The Department remains committed to collaborating with DHS to improve prisoner access and optimise available clinic capacity where possible, however the responsibility for dental service policies, procedures, models of care, clinical prioritisation, and service delivery ultimately rests with DHS and remains outside the operational scope of the Department.

7 Prioritise resourcing Bunbury with a psychiatric consult and advice service to support facility-based staff.

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

Response:

Whilst a Bunbury-specific psychiatric consult and advice service would not be feasible given psychiatric care is required at all facilities across the custodial estate, the Department's attempts to resolve systemic issues in relation to Psychiatrist access are ongoing through the active recruitment to Psychiatrist positions. In addition, amendments to the Psychiatrist job description form have recently been completed to formally incorporate telehealth and consultation-liaison duties within the remit of the role.

Noting the above, psychiatric consults and advice is dependent on the successful recruitment of additional psychiatrists, and who's services will be delivered based on demand across the custodial estate opposed to a single facility.

As an immediate interim measure, the Department has engaged an internal Prison Medical Officer who possesses a background in psychiatry. While not formally employed in a specialist psychiatrist capacity, this clinician is successfully providing essential telehealth and consultation-liaison support to regional sites.

To further mitigate risks and address remaining gaps in specialist care, active negotiations are currently underway to secure telepsychiatry services through an external digital healthcare platform specializing in telehealth mental health services. This partnership will ensure timely assessments and clear diagnostic pathways for complex presentations. Crucially, it will establish a dedicated on-call and advisory framework, providing JHWS nurses and health clinicians with the robust specialist support required to ensure clinical safety.

8 Increase Psychological Health Services (PHS) staffing at Bunbury to meet the needs of the increased population.

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

Response:

The Department continues to advocate to increase JHWS resourcing, including PHS positions, across the custodial estate.

Budget submissions will continue to be prepared to increase resourcing noting these will be subject to funding availability.

9 Review the Drug Reduction Strategy (DRS) to ensure prisoners involved in drug-related activity are provided appropriate supports to address their substance use.

Level of Acceptance: Not Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Operational Support

Response:

The Drug Reduction Strategy is a legacy policy that is outdated and no longer supported by the Department.

The development of a new Strategic Drug Strategy, as per the response to Recommendation 10, will capture the elements of this recommendation in providing prisoners with appropriate supports for addressing substance abuse issues.

10 Develop a strategic drug strategy to guide local initiatives in Western Australian prisons.

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

Response:

Planning for the development of a new Strategic Drug Strategy has commenced, noting this planning is in the early stages and a finalised strategy will be a long-term outcome.

The development process will include consultation with key internal and external stakeholders, interjurisdictional scanning to identify emerging trends, best practice approaches and alignment with the Corrective Services Strategic Plan of contributing to a safer Western Australia.

Consideration will also be given to legislative, policy and operational requirements, including assessment of potential impacts across custodial and community corrections settings. This will ensure any future strategic initiatives are evidence-based,

operationally feasible and responsive to the diverse needs of Corrective Services facilities and business areas.

The Drug Detection Unit continues to introduce local strategies and mechanisms for improved drug detection in the custodial estate. The Unit has recently implemented new oral fluid and urine testing devices capable of detecting a greater number of current and emerging drugs of concern.

11 Review the provision of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) before and after the implementation of the smoke-free prisons policy.

Level of Acceptance:	Supported in Principle
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Adult Male Prisons

Response:

The Department has deferred the implementation of the smoke-free prisons policy until February 2027 as a proactive measure to ensure the safety and security of the custodial estate in the wake of population pressures.

The Department will reconsider the current policy requirements in respect to the provision of NRT and will determine whether amendments are required prior to the current deferral date of February 2027.

12 Appoint, or provide access to, an occupational therapist to help support vulnerable prisoners.

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

Response:

The Occupational Therapy position at Bunbury is currently undergoing a recruitment process and will primarily support the Bunbury Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) program. However, there will be capacity to assist in the assessment of non-AOD participants who have a clear diagnosis and require an assessment to explore eligibility to the NDIS, in addition to assisting with the development of behavioural support plans.

13 Address treatment assessor staffing shortfalls at Bunbury to reduce the assessment backlog.

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

Response:

Funding of approximately \$3.6 million has been approved under the 2026-27 budget process to establish a Treatment Assessment Project. The project, which provides 21

additional FTE for 12 months until 30 June 2027, will focus on addressing the backlog of treatment assessments by combining surge workforce capacity with structured process reforms to improve efficiency, maintain clinical integrity, and support sustainable system performance.

The dedicated project team will focus solely on the backlog of treatment assessments as to not impact business-as-usual operations and will also serve as a controlled environment to test streamlined assessment approaches and processes to inform future system design.

14 Strengthen program delivery at Bunbury by increasing facilitator capacity, support and oversight.

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

Response:

The Department has conducted an analysis of the current and projected demand for criminogenic programs at Bunbury which has determined the current facilitator FTE as sufficient to meet the anticipated demand for the 2026 and 2027 program schedule. Where there is not enough demand for a particular program to be facilitated at Bunbury, prisoners requiring that program as part of their identified treatment needs will be considered for placement at an alternative facility.

Training is routinely facilitated in the metropolitan area with all regional programs staff supported to attend. Since May 2025, nine separate training sessions have been delivered on a variety of criminogenic programs. In addition, efforts are being made to boost local training delivery capability by providing development opportunities to programs staff to become internal trainers, allowing them to facilitate training to other programs staff at their regional facility.

Ongoing recruitment for program facilitators and clinical supervisors is also occurring to fill vacancies across the custodial estate, particularly in regional locations including Bunbury. Where clinical supervision is unavailable, remote supervision is provided as required by metropolitan-based clinical supervisors.

15 Increase employment opportunities for First Nations prisoners.

Level of Acceptance:	Supported in Principle
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Adult Male Prisons

Response:

The Department supports the intent of this recommendation and recognises the importance of increasing outcomes for First Nations prisoners. This is captured as a priority under both the Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025 – 2030 and the Department's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2022 – 2024 (currently subject to renewal).

Whilst Bunbury has undergone a range of infrastructure upgrades to expand its operational capacity, its industries and employment profile has not expanded proportionately to meet the unprecedented growth in the custodial population. The completion of the Safer Staffing Review and subsequent implementation of revised SLAs (subject to funding availability) is anticipated to improve the availability of meaningful employment opportunities on site by establishing additional Vocational Support Officer positions that are crucial to the effective operation of industries.

In addition, Corrective Services have re-established a Work Camp Manager position, with the successful candidate commencing in the position in July 2026 following a recruitment process. Whilst Bunbury does not oversee a work camp, the Work Camp Manager position is responsible for the promotion of work camps across the custodial estate and to engage with Superintendents to identify potential work camp candidates and supporting their placements through streamlined processes. The commencement of the Work Camp Manager further strengthens existing initiatives aimed at increasing First Nations participation in work camps.

Appendix D Inspection Details

Previous inspection		
23 July – 28 July 2023		
Activity since previous inspection		
Liaison visits to Bunbury Regional Prison	9 visits	
Independent Visitor visits	22 visits	
Surveys		
Prisoner survey	18-19 November 2025	218 responses (37%)
Staff survey (online)	26 November – 5 December 2025	133 responses (50%)
Inspection team		
Deputy Inspector	Jane Higgins	
Director Operations	Ryan Quinn	
Principal Inspections and Research Officer	Liz George	
Senior Inspections and Review Officer	Jim Bryden	
Senior Inspections and Review Officer	Charles Staples	
Senior Inspections and Review Officer	Simon Gamble	
Senior Inspections and Research Officer (Tasmania)	Jessica van der Molen	
Key dates		
Inspection announced	11 November 2025	
Start of on-site inspection	9 February 2026	
Completion of on-site inspection	13 February 2026	
Presentation of preliminary findings	13 February 2026	
Draft report sent to Department of Justice	3 July 2026	
Draft response received from Department of Justice	24 August 2026	
Declaration of prepared report	24 August 2026	



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

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