

Inspector of
Custodial Services

Inspector of Custodial Services

Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre

2025

Acknowledgement of Country

The Inspector of Custodial Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this report.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

Inspector of Custodial Services

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Glossary of terms and acronyms

Aboriginal	'Aboriginal' when used in this report is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
AVL	Audio visual link
Buy-up	Purchase by inmate of pre-approved items
CAS Regulation	<i>Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2014</i>
CMO	Case management officer
CMU	Case management unit
COPP	Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures
CSNSW	Corrective Services New South Wales
CSI	Corrective Services Industries
DKT	Driver knowledge test
ELP	External leave programs
EPRD	Earliest possible release date
ESC	Education services coordinator
EQUIPS	Explore, Question, Understand, Investigate, Practice and Succeed programs
HIPU	High Intensity Programs Unit
ICS	Inspector of Custodial Services
ICS Act	<i>Inspector of Custodial Services Act 2012</i>
IDATP	Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program
IDC	Inmate development committee
JH&FMHN	Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network
MOS	Manager of security
MPU	Multipurpose unit
RIT	Risk intervention team
SMAP	Special management area placement ('protection')
SSIM	Senior service integration manager

Executive summary

Cooma Correctional Centre (CC) is a minimum and medium security facility for sentenced men. It is located 400 kms from Sydney on the land of the Ngarigo people.

The original infrastructure was built in 1873 and was known as Cooma gaol, with several periods of operation and closure. The centre most recently reopened as Cooma CC in November 2001 in response to a substantial increase in inmate numbers in NSW. In 2025, Cooma CC was included on the NSW State Heritage Register, acknowledging the past injustices experienced by people held at the gaol, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and Asexual (LGBTIQA+) people.

Cooma CC can accommodate 225 inmates in two separate accommodation areas. Area 1 is comprised of the original gaol built in 1873 and a 1950s extension. The original gaol has a concrete recreation yard and a solid brick perimeter wall with razor wire. Area 1 can accommodate 175 inmates.

Area 2 is a separate minimum security section of Cooma CC and is located 500 metres away from Area 1. It accommodates up to 50 inmates. The more modern Area 2 buildings are set on 300 acres of land and colloquially referred to as 'The Farm'. Inmates in Area 2 have opportunities to engage in community projects and to participate in release for external employment (work release).

This is the second full inspection of Cooma CC undertaken by the Inspector of Custodial Services (ICS). Our previous inspection occurred in February 2020 and the findings and recommendations are detailed in our *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* report, published in November 2020. The inspection detailed in this report was conducted in January 2025.

We were pleased to see several recommendations from the previous inspection had been implemented. These included improving accommodation for inmates at risk of harm, increasing completion rates for vocational training, ceasing practices that punished non-workers and creating a bushfire emergency management and evacuation plan. However, there was a lack of progress in relation to other recommendations, and some areas where little appeared to have changed. We have reiterated several recommendations in light of our observations, as well as identifying additional areas for improvement. Despite the efforts of Cooma CC to provide a safe and secure environment with a focus on rehabilitation, the centre has several limitations due to its age, design and staff shortages.

We acknowledge the assistance and cooperation of Cooma CC management and staff during the inspection. Despite the pressures of short staffing, we observed Cooma CC staff who were accessible to inmates and engaged with inmates throughout Area 1. Many inmates confirmed that Cooma CC staff were approachable. Maintaining positive and regular staff-inmate interactions supports the safety and security of correctional centres.

Custody

Cooma CC continues to accommodate inmates in Area 1 cell infrastructure that was constructed in the 19th century. Our report published in November 2020 recommended that regular maintenance audits be undertaken in the 1873 wing at Cooma CC, and that Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) reduce the number of inmates housed in these cells. In January 2025, we again observed dilapidated infrastructure. Further, the 1873 wing was close to full and over half the small, dimly lit cells were used to house two inmates, with no in cell shower.

The physical environment in the 1873 wing is not conducive to inmate wellbeing and presents issues for the security and safety of inmates and staff at Cooma CC. Use of aged infrastructure falls short of expected standards in a modern correctional system. We have therefore recommended that CSNSW develop and implement a plan to cease using the 19th century infrastructure for inmate accommodation. We acknowledge that removing accommodation is a statewide operational issue requiring consideration of all available accommodation options across CSNSW facilities and is subject to budget considerations.

During the inspection, it became apparent that Cooma CC continued to face challenges in maintaining a full complement of staff. Despite undertaking local recruitment, Cooma CC was competing for staff with large regional infrastructure projects. Some staff were experiencing fatigue due to working overtime and were unable to travel to Sydney for professional development or training.

Staff shortages impact on inmate daily routines and movements. We previously recommended in 2020 that CSNSW increases time out of cells in Area 1. At the time, the average was 5.73 hours out of cells per day. During our recent inspection, inmates in Area 1 (many with a minimum security rating) had an average of 6.8 hours out of cell each day, lower than the state average for maximum security custodial facilities. Conversely, the 50 inmates in nearby Area 2 benefit from around 12 hours of time out of cell. It was disappointing to find little progress had been made in Area 1 beyond the modest one hour increase. We reiterate our previous recommendation that CSNSW increases the average time out of cells in Area 1.

On arrival at Cooma CC, inmates alight from the transport vehicle outside the secure perimeter and enter the centre through a smaller gate within the main gate structure. This is because inmate transport vehicles are unable to fit through the main gate. It would be preferable for transport vehicles to have a secure entrance. This issue was raised in our 2020 inspection report and remains a concern.

We were pleased to see that the multipurpose unit (MPU) had been refurbished, hanging points had been removed and each room had suitable mattresses. Our review of data also showed a decrease in the number of days inmates were waiting in the MPU prior to transfer out of the centre.

At the time of our 2020 inspection we observed that an inmate was responsible for preparing all new inmate custodial files and was present during the admission process. We highlighted that personal information relating to inmates must be secure, confidential and not accessible to inmate clerks. It was disappointing to see that an inmate clerk was still responsible for preparing custodial files for new inmates. This issue was immediately raised with the manager of security (MOS).

Care and wellbeing

We observed some overall improvements in the arrival and orientation process for inmates, such as Cooma CC management briefing incoming inmates who were then given access to showers. However, inmates did not receive new clothing until the day after arrival. This issue was raised in 2020 but had not been addressed. Further, the amount of clothing distributed to each incoming inmate did not meet expectations under the CSNSW *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures* (COPP). Concerningly, used socks and underwear were being laundered and redistributed to arriving inmates, as well as damaged mattresses. We have made recommendations to address these deficiencies that negatively impact inmate wellbeing.

It is also essential that all required information is provided at inmate orientation, particularly about complaint mechanisms, to comply with legislation. Cooma CC's induction did not appear to fully comply with obligations under the *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2014* (CAS Regulation). Inmates were also erroneously told that they were restricted in how many complaints and requests they could lodge locally. This process needs to be reviewed and rectified.

Overall, visits were conducted efficiently and tablet visits supported inmates to connect to family and prepare for release. Weekend contact visits were available in both Area 1 and Area 2. However, contact visits booked through the 'JUST Connect' online system could only be booked for one hour. While the duration of visits was able to be extended on the day, the initial time limit is unreasonable for visitors travelling long distances. We have recommended CSNSW improves the booking process.

We were also informed that inmates were being strip searched before, as well as after, contact visits. Conducting strip searches prior to visits is unnecessary and conflicts with CSNSW policy.

Cultural support for Aboriginal people in custody

Around one in five inmates at Cooma CC were Aboriginal. At the time of the inspection, Aboriginal people in custody in Area 2 had access to a Yarning Circle but Area 1 which houses the majority of Cooma CC inmates did not have a Yarning Circle. Cultural programs and support for Aboriginal inmates had not been sufficiently prioritised at Cooma CC, particularly given our 2020 recommendation that Cooma CC establish a visiting Elders program to provide cultural and spiritual support to people in custody. We have also recommended that CSNSW reviews inmate placement processes to ensure Aboriginal people in custody, where possible, remain on Country. Eligible men with connection to the area should be placed at Cooma CC.

Health services

Overall, physical health care at Cooma CC was operating adequately despite limited space in the existing infrastructure. We have also detailed an update regarding waitlists for specific services. In our 2020 inspection report we noted that the absence of a stand-alone health centre in Area 2 meant that Area 2 inmates had to be escorted each morning and afternoon to the Area 1 health centre for medication and consultations. We identified that this was both resource intensive and could create security risks. In 2020, we recommended that CSNSW and the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (JH&FMHN) establish a satellite health centre in Area 2. This recommendation was accepted. The satellite health centre is due to open in late 2025.

Rehabilitation

For most inmates, Cooma CC will be their final location prior to their release to the community. Preparing inmates for release and reintegration is of critical importance. While there were many positive aspects to the rehabilitative opportunities available for men at Cooma CC, there were several gaps and limitations.

Due to staff shortages, Cooma CC was behind in maintaining case plans for all inmates, with fewer than 60% of inmates having an approved case plan. At the time of inspection, full employment was also impacted due to a shortage of custodial and Corrective Services Industries (CSI) staff. Limited out of cell hours made it difficult for inmates to fully participate in programs, education and exercise. The centre also has strong community partnerships with the local council and community groups to provide project work opportunities for inmates. However, at the time of inspection only three men were engaged in work release. We have recommended that CSNSW increase these figures. Animal rehabilitation programs in Area 2 that have been positive for inmates were also paused due to staffing constraints.

The centre would benefit from increasing opportunities for a purposeful day for inmates for whom there is no work available, or who are not eligible for custody based criminogenic programs. We raised this issue in 2020 and have restated our recommendation about increasing these activities.

There was a strong appetite amongst the inmate population to participate in education and vocational training. In 2023–24 there was a 98% completion rate for students enrolled in vocational courses, which was a positive improvement since the previous inspection in 2020. At the time of inspection seven men were participating in traineeships. We have recommended that CSNSW increase the number of inmates undertaking vocational training and traineeships at Cooma CC.

Recommendations

The Inspector recommends:

1. Corrective Services NSW ensures regular maintenance audits are undertaken at Cooma Correctional Centre.
2. Corrective Services NSW ceases using the cells built in the 1870s as inmate accommodation at Cooma Correctional Centre.
3. Corrective Services NSW increases the average time out of cells for Area 1 at Cooma Correctional Centre.
4. Corrective Services NSW reinforces that inmates being taken off contact visits and telephone calls must not be regarded as a routine penalty.
5. Corrective Services NSW conducts an appropriate risk assessment before allocating inmates to cells.
6. Corrective Services NSW ceases using inmate clerks to prepare reception paperwork at Cooma Correctional Centre.
7. Corrective Services NSW ensures that Cooma Correctional Centre provides inmates with information in relation to complaint mechanisms including the ability to make complaints to external bodies.
8. Corrective Services NSW ensures that Cooma Correctional Centre ceases the practice of inmate legal calls occurring in front of other inmates.
9. Corrective Services NSW ensures all Cooma Correctional Centre inmates are issued the minimum allocation of clothing in accordance with the Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures.
10. Corrective Services NSW ensures that Cooma Correctional Centre ceases the practice of issuing inmates with used socks and underwear.
11. Corrective Services NSW ensures that Cooma Correctional Centre repairs or replaces all damaged mattresses.
12. Corrective Services NSW enables longer visits to be booked via JUST Connect for Cooma Correctional Centre.
13. Corrective Services NSW ceases the practice of strip searching inmates prior to contact visits at Cooma Correctional Centre.
14. Corrective Services NSW reviews inmate placement processes to ensure Aboriginal people in custody, where possible, remain on Country.
15. Corrective Services NSW increases engagement with the Aboriginal community and establishes a local Elders visiting program.
16. Corrective Services NSW ensures that correctional staff follow methadone administration procedures correctly at Cooma Correctional Centre.
17. Corrective Services NSW ensures that the Case Management Unit at Cooma Correctional Centre is adequately resourced so that case plans can be completed.

18. Corrective Services NSW considers establishing an Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program for special management area placement inmates.
19. Corrective Services NSW increases the number of inmates undertaking traineeships and vocational training programs at Cooma Correctional Centre.
20. Corrective Services NSW increases the number of men on work release at Cooma Correctional Centre.
21. The Inspector recommends that this report is made public immediately upon being tabled in NSW Parliament, in accordance with section 16(2) of the *Inspector of Custodial Services Act 2012*.

Cooma Correctional Centre profile

Location

Cooma Correctional Centre (CC) is located on the land of the Ngarigo people. It is situated in the heart of Cooma, approximately 400 kms from Sydney. It is the most southern correctional centre in NSW and can experience cold winters.

History

Cooma CC was established in 1873 as Cooma gaol and served as a police gaol, mental health facility and correctional facility before it closed in the early 1900s. It reopened in 1957 and was used to imprison gay men, transwomen and non-binary people for the crime of homosexuality until it was decriminalised in 1984. The injustices faced by those incarcerated at Cooma gaol served as a focal point for the first public campaigns to decriminalise homosexuality.¹

Cooma gaol was closed again in 1998, and reopened as 'Cooma Correctional Centre' in November 2001 due to a substantial increase in inmate numbers in NSW.² In 2025, Cooma CC was included on the NSW State Heritage Register, acknowledging the past injustices experienced by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and Asexual (LGBTIQA+) people incarcerated at Cooma gaol.³

Function

Cooma CC is a minimum and medium security facility for male inmates. The centre only receives inmates who have been transferred from other correctional centres. It does not receive inmates directly from court or police custody. The centre accommodates sentenced inmates or those appealing their sentence and does not hold remand inmates.

Cooma CC has two accommodation areas that house two specific inmate populations. Area 1 is designated for special management area placement (SMAP), or 'protection', inmates.⁴ SMAP inmates are those who have been assessed as being vulnerable or at risk from other inmates in the general prison population.⁵ At Cooma CC these inmates can associate freely with each other in Area 1 and have access to programs and services similar to inmates housed in a mainstream correctional centre.⁶

Area 2 is a less restrictive placement for approved minimum security inmates approaching the end of their sentences. Some Area 2 inmates can participate in work release or community projects. Area 2 only accommodates mainstream, not SMAP, inmates.

Cooma CC is also home to the Corrective Services NSW Museum which showcases the history of corrections in NSW since 1788.⁷ The museum is in a separate building adjacent to Cooma CC.

1 NSW Government, 'Historic Cooma Gaol listed on the NSW State Heritage Register' (Media Release, 13 March 2025) <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/historic-cooma-gaol-listed-on-nsw-state-heritage-register>>.

2 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 16.

3 NSW Government, 'Historic Cooma Gaol listed on the NSW State Heritage Register' (Media Release, 13 March 2025) <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/historic-cooma-gaol-listed-on-nsw-state-heritage-register>>.

4 Area 1 of Cooma CC was designated as a site specifically for SMAP inmates in January 2024. Corrective Services NSW, *Correctional Centre Role and Function Statements* (version 1.2, 13 February 2024) 11.

5 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 3.3 Special management area placement* (version 1.5, 14 August 2024) 4.

6 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 3.3 Special management area placement* (version 1.5, 14 August 2024) 4.

7 NSW Government, 'NSW State Correctional Museum' (Web page, 24 July 2025) <<https://correctiveservices.dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/museums-and-galleries.html>>.

Capacity

Cooma CC can hold a maximum of 175 inmates in Area 1 and 50 inmates in Area 2.

Previous inspections by the Inspector of Custodial Services

Cooma CC was first inspected by the Inspector of Custodial Services in 2015 as part of the *Prison Greens: The clothing and bedding of inmates in NSW* report.⁸ It was then subject to inspection in February 2020, with the report released in November 2020.⁹

Key dates

Pre-inspection visit	9 August 2024
Inspection	21–25 January 2025

8 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Prison Greens: The clothing and bedding of inmates in NSW* (Report, June 2017).
9 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020).

Inspection process

The office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (ICS) was established by the *Inspector of Custodial Services Act 2012* (the ICS Act) in October 2013. The mandate of the office is to provide independent scrutiny of the conditions, treatment and outcomes for people in custody, and to promote excellence in staff professional practice. The Inspector is required to inspect each adult custodial centre at least once every five years and report on each such inspection to the NSW Parliament with relevant advice and recommendations.¹⁰

Inspection provides independent information gathering and analysis concerning what is working well and which areas require improvement. The inspection of Cooma CC focused on:

- custodial conditions, including safety and security
- the treatment, care and wellbeing of people in custody
- the rehabilitation of people in custody, including programs, employment, education and preparation for release
- resources and systems, including the staffing and management of Cooma CC.

In August 2024, we conducted a liaison visit to Cooma CC to inform our planning. The inspection of Cooma CC took place in January 2025. The inspection team consisted of the Inspector, a Senior Inspection and Research Officer, two Inspection and Research Officers and one Aboriginal Inspection and Liaison Officer.

During the inspection, we observed a range of processes and areas of Cooma CC and collected documentation. We held discussions with management as well as custodial and non-custodial staff. The inspection team also spoke to inmates, including Cooma CC's inmate development committee (IDC) delegates. Supplementary documents and data were obtained after the inspection.

Prior to, and after the onsite inspection, a range of additional information was obtained through liaison visits and documents and data provided by the correctional centre, the Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics branch of CSNSW, and the JH&FMHN.

It is acknowledged that inspections capture a snapshot in time. Observations are limited to time spent onsite. The ability to observe all operations can be impacted by staff rostering, absences and changes to routines. Some interviews took place by telephone after the onsite inspection.

Shortly after the onsite inspection, a debrief was held with the governor of the centre. Debriefs provide an opportunity for local management to address any immediate concerns and to be aware of the initial findings of the inspection and likely recommendations.

The inspection considered sensitive information and methodologies. In accordance with section 15 of the ICS Act, the Inspector must not disclose information in a report to Parliament if there is an overriding public interest against disclosure of the information.² This is where there are public interest considerations against disclosure and, on balance, those considerations outweigh the public interest considerations in favour of disclosure.³ Section 15(3) of the ICS Act provides that there are public interest considerations against disclosure of information if disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to have one or more of the following effects:

- a. prejudice the supervision of, or facilitate the escape of, any person in lawful custody or detention,
- b. prejudice the security, discipline or good order of any custodial centre,
- c. prejudice national security (within the meaning of the *National Security Information (Criminal and Civil Proceedings) Act 2004* of the Commonwealth),
- d. reveal or tend to reveal the identity of an informant or prejudice the future supply of information from an informant,

10 *Inspector of Custodial Services Act 2012* s 6.

- e. identify or allow the identification of a person who is or was detained at a juvenile justice centre or in custody in a juvenile correctional centre,
- f. endanger, or prejudice any system or procedure for protecting, the life, health or safety of any person who is in custody, detained or residing at a custodial centre (including but not limited to systems or procedures to protect witnesses and other persons who may be separated from other persons at the centre for their safety),
- g. identify or allow the identification of a custodial centre staff member or endanger, or prejudice any system or procedure for protecting, the life, health or safety of such a staff member.

A draft report or relevant parts thereof were provided to CSNSW and JH&FMHN in accordance with section 14(2) of the ICS Act, and submissions were received from both. In accordance with section 14(1) of the ICS Act, the Inspector provided the Hon Anoulack Chanthivong MP, Minister for Corrections with the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the draft report. In accordance with section 14(3)(b) of the ICS Act, each submission and the Minister's response was considered before the finalisation of the report for tabling.

1 Inmate profile

On 30 June 2024, Cooma CC held 182 inmates. Data provided by CSNSW provides a breakdown of the population housed at Cooma CC by security classification, legal status, age, educational background and cultural background.¹¹

1.1 Legal status and classification

As of 30 June 2024, 94.5% (n=172) of inmates were sentenced and 5.5% of inmates (n=10) were appealing their sentences. There were no inmates on remand.¹²

Table 1: Most serious offences for inmates at Cooma CC as at 30 June 2024¹³

Most serious offence type	Number of inmates
Acts intended to cause injury	54
Sexual assault and related offences	49
Offences against justice procedures, government security and government operations	21
Illicit drug offences	14
Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter	10
Homicide and related offences	8
Dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons	5
Theft and related offences	4
Robbery, extortion, and related offences	4
Prohibited and regulated weapons and explosive offences	3

Cooma CC holds both medium and minimum security rated inmates but more than 80% of inmates have a minimum security (C1, C2 or C3) classification. Over half the inmates at Cooma CC are 'C2' or 'C3', meaning they do not need to be confined by a physical barrier at all times.¹⁴ As at 30 June 2024, the inmate population was comprised of:

- 34 (18.7%) inmates with a medium (B security) classification
- 41 (22.5%) inmates with a C1 classification
- 97 (53.3%) inmates with a C2 classification
- 10 (5.5%) inmates with a C3 classification.¹⁵

¹¹ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

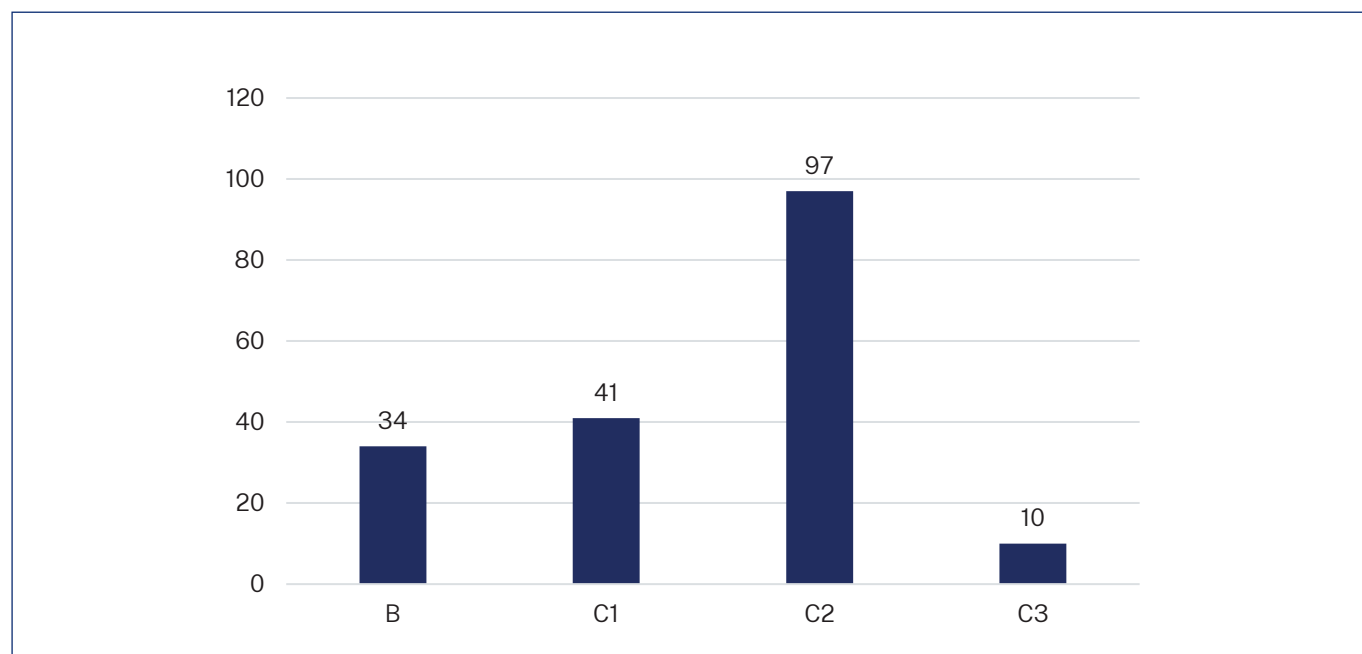
¹² Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

¹³ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

¹⁴ *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2014* cl 12.

¹⁵ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

Figure 1: Inmate security classifications at Cooma CC as at 30 June 2024¹⁶



There were 152 SMAP inmates, 83.5% of the inmate cohort.¹⁷ This large number is due to Area 1 being designated for SMAP inmates since January 2024.¹⁸

The Pre-Release Leave Committee (PRLC)¹⁹ was managing 61 (33.5%) of the inmates. The Serious Offenders Review Council (SORC)²⁰ managed seven inmates (3.8% of the population). There were six (3.3%) immigration release notification inmates at the centre.²¹

1.2 Age, cultural and educational background

As at 30 June 2024, the majority of inmates at Cooma CC were aged between 25 and 44 years.²² Eight per cent (n=14) were aged between 18 and 24 years. Cooma CC had a lower than average number of inmates aged over 65 when compared with other correctional centres, with only four inmates (2% of the population) in this age group.

Most inmates at Cooma CC (79.1%, n=144) were born in Australia as at 30 June 2024. The majority of inmates (76.9%, n=140) identified their cultural background as Australian.

There were 37 Aboriginal people in custody at Cooma CC, representing 20.2% of the inmate population of Cooma CC. Other cultural backgrounds identified were Arab, South East European and Polynesian (n=6, 3.3% each).²³

Data shows that around half of the inmate population, 88 inmates, had received year 10 and over education. Around 28.5% (n=52) had a tertiary or university level education. There was no information on the level of educational attainment for 6.6% (n=12) of the inmate population.²⁴

¹⁶ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

¹⁷ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

¹⁸ Corrective Services NSW, *Correctional Centre Role and Function Statements* (version 1.2, 13 February 2024) 11.

¹⁹ The PRLC is the division of the SORC that manages 'public interest inmates'. This includes an inmate serving a custodial sentence for an offence which is the subject of wide public interest or specified in the policy. See, Corrective Services NSW, *Inmate Classification and Placement: Serious Offenders Review Council (SORC) and Subcommittee Managed Inmates* (version 2.6, 8 April 2022) 17–18.

²⁰ The SORC makes recommendations to the Commissioner of Corrective Services NSW regarding the security classification, placement, and program participation of 'serious offenders'. A 'serious offender' includes an inmate serving a life sentence, or at least 12 years in custody, or who is required to be managed as a serious offender due to a decision of the sentencing court, the State Parole Authority or the Commissioner. See *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999*, s 197.

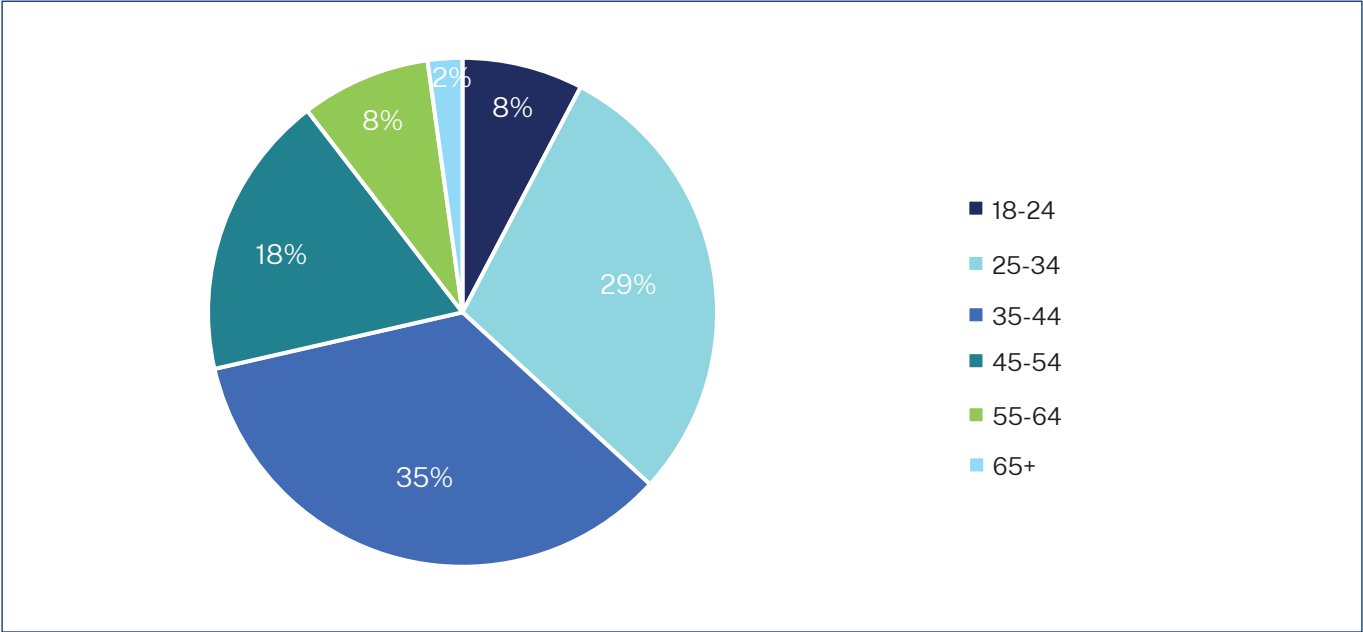
²¹ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

²² Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

²³ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

²⁴ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

Figure 2: Age of inmates at Cooma Correctional Centre as at 30 June 2024²⁵



25 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

2 Custody

2.1 Custodial infrastructure

Cooma CC had two accommodation sectors: Area 1 is the original gaol, and Area 2 is located approximately 500 metres from Area 1. The original gaol was constructed in 1873 and has a solid brick perimeter wall with razor wire.

2.1.1 Area 1

The accommodation in Area 1 was built in 1873 with some building additions in the 1950s. It can accommodate approximately 175 inmates. At the time of the inspection in January 2025, it mainly accommodated men with minimum security classifications. Also located within Area 1 is a health centre, the MPU, textiles workshop, laundry, kitchen, library, a High Intensity Programs Unit (HIPU)²⁶ and classrooms used for education and programs.

In our 2020 inspection report we highlighted that the living conditions in Area 1 were substandard and that the cells built in 1873 were not fit for purpose.²⁷ We noted that these cells lacked natural light, had broken windows and ligature points.²⁸ We observed these issues again in our recent inspection, as well as evidence of vermin. Our 2020 report recommended that regular maintenance audits be undertaken.²⁹ This recommendation is still relevant given the dilapidated living conditions and maintenance issues we observed during our recent inspection.

Area 1 inmate accommodation ('1873 wing')



Our previous report suggested that the number of inmates who share a cell in the 1873 wing should be reviewed as those cells are not designed to accommodate two people.³⁰ In our recent inspection we noted that just over half (21) of these cells accommodated two men. The remaining 19 cells housed one person.

The cells in the 1873 wing were small (6.72 square metres (sqm)). Our inspection standards stipulate that 8.75 sqm is a satisfactory size for an individual cell, and 12.75 sqm for a two person cell.³¹ Inmates should not be sharing cells that do not meet the size requirements for two people, let alone one.

While all cells had a toilet and hand basin, they did not have showers. At the time of inspection in January 2025, all inmates in Area 1 used a communal shower block with 12 shower heads. We

²⁶ HIPUs provide rehabilitation services, programs and release planning for inmates serving short sentences.

²⁷ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 28.

²⁸ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 28.

²⁹ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 29.

³⁰ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 28.

³¹ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection standards for adult custodial services in New South Wales* (May 2020) 20.4.

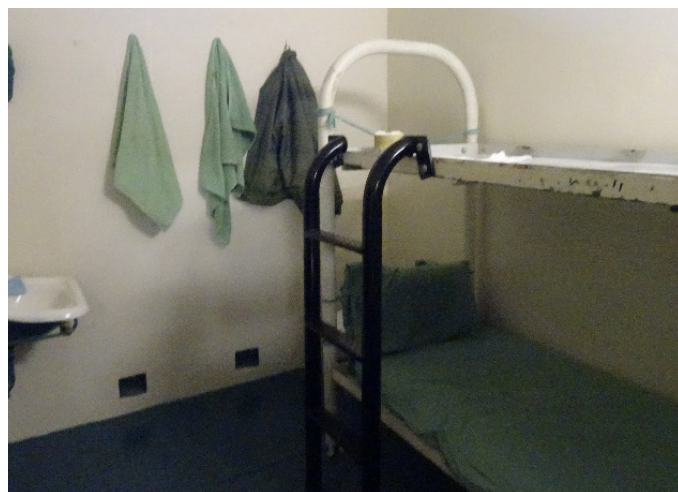
understand that CSNSW have since installed shower stalls.³² While these stalls offer more privacy and may reduce the risk of assaults, they do not address the issues around accessing showers when inmates are locked in their cells, which occurred frequently. CSNSW acknowledge that 'inmates should not go 24 hours without access to showers'.³³

The 1873 infrastructure presents issues for the security and safety of inmates and staff at Cooma CC. Officer posts in Area 1 did not have adequate lines of sight, including to the yard. Cell doors provided staff with limited visibility into cells with a small viewing hole the only means to communicate. Some of these viewing holes were painted shut and could not be opened. To assess any security risks or incidents, doors needed to be fully opened.

We were also concerned about the risk of fire, especially given the wooden floors in the 1873 wing. Correctional centre infrastructure should be compliant with recognised fire and safety standards. In aged infrastructure, such as Area 1, this can be difficult. We reviewed minutes of the Cooma CC Work Health and Safety Committee, which had not met consistently in 2023–24.³⁴ We were pleased to see, however, that the centre was undertaking monthly inspections of all fire detection and suppression systems, as per CSNSW policy.³⁵

Inmates and custodial staff told us that inmates located in the 1873 wing, particularly on the upper level, could overhear staff discussions in the reception area and in some staff areas. This is a risk to the security of the centre.

Area 1 cell with ligature points



In our 2020 report we recommended that CSNSW reduce the number of inmates who were accommodated in cells built in the 19th century.³⁶ In our recent inspection we noted that the 1873 wing was close to full. Given the poor living conditions and the safety risks posed by aged custodial infrastructure, we recommend CSNSW develops and implements a plan to cease using this wing for inmate accommodation. We acknowledge that removing inmate accommodation is 'a statewide operational issue requiring consideration of all available accommodation options across CSNSW facilities' and is subject to budget considerations.³⁷

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures regular maintenance audits are undertaken at Cooma CC.

Recommendation: CSNSW ceases using the cells built in the 1870s as inmate accommodation at Cooma CC.

³² Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

³³ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 9 October 2025.

³⁴ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 25 August 2024.

³⁵ Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 15.2 Fire safety and maintenance* (version 1.1, 12 March 2020) 6.

³⁶ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 29.

³⁷ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 9 October 2025.

Area 1 cell window



Area 1 communal shower block (January 2025)



2.1.2 Area 2

Area 2 is set on 300 acres of land and is colloquially referred to as 'The Farm'. It consists of a U-shaped prefabricated accommodation area and a separate building with a common area and kitchen, and adjoining staff area. These buildings open onto a grassed area with a covered gymnasium.

Area 2 can house up to 50 men with capacity for two people in each of its 25 rooms. At the time of inspection, there were only 35 inmates housed in Area 2. To be housed in Area 2 inmates must have a C2 or C3 minimum security classification and hold a section 6(2) 'on complex' order.³⁸

Area 2 has shared bathroom facilities with shower and toilet cubicles as well as a laundry. There was a decent communal kitchen adjoining a large common room with tables, chairs, a couch, a television and a DVD library. There was also a HIPU facility used for programs, education and psychological services, as well as a Yarning Circle and vegetable garden. A few large sheds on the property stored equipment and overflow items for the CSNSW Museum.

While the standard of accommodation in Area 2 was good, some of the rooms had ventilation issues. This was raised in our last report.³⁹

³⁸ Section 6 of the *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999* permits the governor of a correctional centre to direct a convicted inmate to carry out community service work, or any work for CSNSW or a public or local authority: within the inmate's correctional centre, within the inmate's correctional complex but outside the correctional centre, or outside the inmate's correctional complex. An order that operates outside a correctional centre is known as section 6(2) 'off complex' order. An order that operates on the grounds of a correctional complex is known as a section 6(2) 'on complex' order.

³⁹ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 28.

Area 2 inmate accommodation



Area 2 yard and accommodation building



Area 2 communal kitchen



Area 2 covered gymnasium



2.2 Staffing

As at 30 June 2024, Cooma CC had a staff establishment of 84, including 45 correctional staff.⁴⁰

Table 2: Staffing profile and approved full time equivalent (FTE) positions at Cooma CC⁴¹

Area	Positions	Approved FTE
Custodial	Manager of security (MOS)	1
	Functional managers	2
	Senior correctional officers	13
	Correctional officers	29
CSI	Manager of industries	1
	Senior overseers	3
	Overseer	9
	Museum manager	1
	Education services coordinator	1
	Assessment and planning officer	1
Offender Services and Programs (OS&P)	Senior Service Integration Manager (SSIM)	1
	Senior Services and Programs Officer	2
	Services and Programs Officer	8
	Psychologist	1
Classification and Placement	Classification and placement officer	1
Case Management Unit	Senior case management officer	1
	Case management officer	4
Administration	Clerk Grade 7/8	1
	Clerk Grade 3/4	2
	Clerk Grade 1/2	1
	General scale clerks	1

Cooma CC had correctional staff shortages at the time of the inspection. It had been experiencing

⁴⁰ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 22 August 2024.

⁴¹ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 22 August 2024.

staffing challenges for some time, as noted in our last report.⁴² Correctional staff shortages impact on inmate daily routines and movements, as discussed later in this report.

Cooma CC frequently relied on overtime payments to fill absences and enable the centre to remain open. In the year 2023–24, the centre spent \$725,093 on overtime.⁴³ Fatigue management was an issue for custodial staff, especially those who worked double-shifts or overtime. We understood that Cooma CC was undertaking local recruitment, however the centre was competing for staff with the Snowy 2.0 project⁴⁴ that reportedly offered better remuneration.

Staffing shortages also meant that Cooma CC staff were unable to travel to Sydney for training at Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy, limiting their opportunities for professional development. Only mandatory training conducted at Cooma CC was available. In 2023–24, Cooma CC ran the following training:

- Hostage awareness course (17 staff completed)
- First responding officer training (17 staff completed)
- Method of entry (17 staff completed)
- Chemical munition aerosol course (14 staff completed).⁴⁵

2.3 Out of cell hours

In our 2020 inspection report, we raised concerns about the limited time out of cells in Area 1, which at that time was 5.73 hours on average.⁴⁶ Most inmates in Area 1 have a minimum security classification. While the average time out of cells in Area 1 has improved and currently sits at an average of 6.8 hours per day, it is still lower than the state average for secure custodial facilities. As of February 2025, the average NSW time out of cell was 7.6 hours per day for secure custodial facilities.⁴⁷ This indicates Area 1 inmates at Cooma CC have similar out of cell hours to maximum security inmates in NSW.

Minimum security classified inmates in Area 2 were released from their cells at 7am and locked in at 6.50pm, providing them with around 12 hours of time out of cell,⁴⁸ which was higher than the state average of 10.4 hours for open security custodial areas.⁴⁹

A review of the two month period prior to our inspection (November to December 2024) showed there were 21 lock-ins.⁵⁰ Five of these were full day lock-ins, with priority given to keeping essential services such as the kitchen and laundry operational with workers able to attend work. The remaining 16 lock-ins were partial lock-ins, meaning inmates were let out of their cell for limited hours to enable them to exercise and shower. Inmates were locked in for an average of four hours and 20 minutes during these partial lock-ins. Thirteen of these partial lock-ins were restricted to Area 1 and the remaining three impacted both Area 1 and Area 2. Reasons for these lock-ins included staff deficiencies due to sick or other leave, hospital escorts and staff training and meetings.⁵¹

Recommendation: CSNSW increases the average time out of cells for Area 1 at Cooma CC.

42 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 32.

43 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 September 2024.

44 Snowy 2.0 is a large-scale pumped-hydro expansion of the existing Snowy Scheme in Australia, designed to provide additional energy generation and storage capacity.

45 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 September 2024.

46 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 32.

47 Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2024*, part C, section 8: Corrective Services (4 February 2025).

48 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 25 August 2024.

49 Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2024*, part C, section 8: Corrective Services (4 February 2025).

50 A lock-in is where inmates are kept in their cells for operational purposes until such time as it is safe to unlock their cell and allow them time out of their cell.

51 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

2.4 Security

Area 1 has three entry points with staff, visitors and inmates entering Area 1 through separate areas.⁵²

Unlike other correctional centres with a secure perimeter, transport vehicles do not drive into the gatehouse of Cooma CC. They are required to park outside Cooma CC and inmates walk from the transport truck and enter through a smaller pedestrian door within the main gate structure. This is because the gatehouse dates to the late 1800s and was not designed to accommodate a modern transport vehicle. Consequently, inmates disembarking from the CSNSW transport truck are supervised by an armed transport officer to prevent escapes. Apart from the security issue this arrangement presents, it is important that when inmates are being moved between custodial facilities they are not within public view.⁵³

We highlighted this issue in our 2020 report and recommended that CSNSW consider the construction of a secure entry for transport vehicles to address these security and privacy issues.⁵⁴ However, this recommendation was not supported by CSNSW.⁵⁵ We are aware that Cooma CC has been listed on the NSW State Heritage Register⁵⁶ and that this could possibly create challenges to changing the façade of the centre.

CSNSW transport vehicle outside Cooma CC main gate



⁵² Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 17.

⁵³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (The Nelson Mandela Rules)* (2015) Rule 73.1.

⁵⁴ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 27.

⁵⁵ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Annual Report 2023–24* (Report, October 2024) 73.

⁵⁶ NSW Government, 'Historic Cooma Gail listed on the NSW State Heritage Register' (Media Release, 13 March 2025) <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/historic-cooma-gail-listed-on-nsw-state-heritage-register>>.

At the time of writing, Cooma CC had been subject to three escapes in 2025: one prior to and two since our inspection. The first occurred 10 days prior to our inspection, when an inmate escaped during an unscheduled hospital visit. The inmate absconded while being loaded into a CSNSW escort vehicle at the hospital. A review of this incident was conducted by Cooma CC management and further training in risk assessment and risk management strategies as well as escort procedures were recommended.⁵⁷

Dynamic security plays an important role in all custodial facilities and arises from staff-inmate relationships. Alert staff who interact with inmates in a positive manner, allow staff to anticipate and prevent problems before they arise.⁵⁸ We observed staff regularly engaging with inmates throughout Area 1. Inmates also commented that correctional officers were approachable. The Area 1 accommodation manager had an 'open door' policy which enabled inmates to approach them with their enquiries and concerns at any time. This good practice is to be commended. This level of interaction and dynamic security may be more easily facilitated in Cooma CC, a smaller correctional centre with a relatively stable staff group.

In our last report, we recommended the development of a bushfire management plan, noting that it was particularly important for Area 2, which is located next to bushland.⁵⁹ We were pleased that a bushfire emergency management and evacuation plan for Cooma CC was published in August 2024.⁶⁰

2.4.1 Incidents and contraband

The rate of incidents at Cooma CC was low. There were 19 inmate assaults and one staff assault between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024. There were 10 uses of force.⁶¹

In 2023–24 there were 40 drug and drug related contraband finds. Sixty per cent (n=24) of these finds were drugs, with Buprenorphine (n=11, 46%) the most common. Urinalyses results confirmed the use of buprenorphine by inmates at Cooma CC, making up 31% of positive drug test results. The remaining 40% (n=16) of contraband finds were for drug paraphernalia with the most common being syringes and needles (n=14, 88%).⁶²

2.4.2 Disciplinary offences and penalties

In 2023–24, the most common offences were: charges against good order (87), other drug charges (76), fighting or assault (24), smoking related (9), and abusive behaviour (5).⁶³

The most common sanctions imposed on inmates for correctional centre offences in 2023–24 were: removal of phone calls (53), removal of buy-ups (50), confinement to cell (47) and removal of contact visits (43).⁶⁴

We reviewed inmate disciplinary documentation for the three months prior to our inspection and found that the penalty of removing contact visits, as well as phone calls, was issued to a third of the sample.⁶⁵ We note with concern the frequent use of the removal of contact visits and phone calls as disciplinary measures, given that the CSNSW policy provides that 'contact with family and friends is an integral and effective management tool' and that an inmate's contact visit and telephone privileges 'should only be withdrawn as a last resort'.⁶⁶

Recommendation: CSNSW reinforces that inmates being taken off contact visits and telephone calls must not be regarded as a routine penalty.

57 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 22 January 2025.

58 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Handbook on Dynamic Security and Prison Intelligence* (2015) 29–30.

59 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 17.

60 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 25 August 2024.

61 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 25 August 2024.

62 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 25 August 2024.

63 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 25 August 2024.

64 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 25 August 2024.

65 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

66 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 14.1 Inmate discipline* (version 1.2, 9 August 2024) 15.

2.5 Segregation

The MPU is in Area 1 and comprised of three cells that can each accommodate two inmates. The MPU houses inmates who need to be kept apart from the rest of the inmate population, mainly those who are segregated, are on protective custody orders (including those awaiting transfer out of Cooma CC) or who require observation. Inmates on a Risk Intervention Team (RIT) management plan at Cooma CC are placed in the MPU for observation as the health centre does not have an appropriate space.

Two cells are 'multipurpose' and one is a camera observation cell, equipped with closed circuit television, which is used to house inmates at risk of self-harm. All three cells have a shower, toilet, and outdoor space.

In our previous report we were concerned about the length of time inmates placed on separation orders⁶⁷ were being held in the MPU whilst awaiting transport out of Cooma CC.⁶⁸ The concerns about lengthy periods in the MPU in 2020 were amplified because the MPU facilities were not of an adequate standard and not designed to accommodate inmates for lengthy periods of time.

Our last inspection report noted the dilapidated condition of the cell interiors in the MPU and that uncovered mattresses presented an additional safety risk.⁶⁹ We were pleased to see on our recent inspection that the MPU had been refurbished, there were appropriate mattresses and hanging points in cells had been removed. We also reviewed the paperwork for seven inmates who had been separated under section 78A in the three months prior to our inspection and found that inmates were transferred out of Cooma CC within four to 12 days.⁷⁰

As discussed later in this report, there were very few inmates requiring RIT observation at Cooma CC – none were placed on a RIT management plan in the three months prior to the inspection.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the refurbishment of the MPU will better support the safety and security of inmates requiring segregation or observation.

MPU refurbished cell and rear yard



67 *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999* s 78(A).

68 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 20-1.

69 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 20-1.

70 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2024.

71 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 May 2025.

2.6 Reception and induction

2.6.1 Reception procedures

Cooma CC does not receive inmates directly from court or police custody; it only receives inmates who have been transferred from other correctional centres. We observed some inmates arriving at Cooma CC. Inmates were met by the MOS, a functional manager and the SSIM. Management staff provided a brief outline of the remainder of the day and advised that a group induction would occur the following morning. This is good practice as it orientates incoming inmates.

Cooma CC provided incoming inmates with a linen/amenities pack and the Cooma CC Inmate Information booklet. Receiving the information booklet on arrival rather than at a later time ensures literate inmates do not have to rely on other inmates for information about the centre, its routines, and services.

An improvement from our last inspection was that incoming inmates were able to shower the day they arrived at Cooma CC.⁷² However, as we found on our 2020 inspection, clothing entitlements were not provided until the following day.⁷³ This meant that the incoming inmates had to change back into the clothes that they had travelled in after showering. This is a concern because Cooma can experience extremely cold conditions. Inmates may not have clothing that is sufficiently warm.

Incoming inmates were strip searched as there is no body scanner at Cooma CC. We were, however, pleased to see that a strip search log was completed. This office has previously recommended to CSNSW that centres record when and why a strip search is undertaken⁷⁴ as it increases accountability and is good practice.

Inmates were screened by the admissions officer in an open office area which had little privacy. This was of concern as it did not create a safe environment to disclose sensitive information or concerns. Some of the sensitive screening questions relating to mental health and suicidal ideations were asked in a leading manner, for example, 'you don't have any thoughts of self-harm or suicide?' Framing screening questions is not conducive to the disclosure of important information. CSNSW acknowledge this is an issue and have informed us that reception screening is now conducted in a small office attached to the reception area that offers privacy away from other inmates.⁷⁵

The incoming inmates were also seen by JH&FMHN staff.

During our 2020 inspection we observed that an inmate was responsible for preparing all new inmate custodial files and was present during the admission process.⁷⁶ We highlighted that personal information relating to inmates must be secure, confidential and not accessible to inmate clerks.⁷⁷ It was disappointing to see that an inmate clerk was still responsible for preparing custodial files for new inmates. This issue was immediately raised with the MOS.

Of concern, there appeared to be a limited risk assessment conducted prior to the allocation of incoming inmates to cells. There was considerable diversity within the Area 1 SMAP population which presented a risk that an incoming inmate may be placed in a cell with another inmate who may jeopardise their safety and wellbeing.

Cell placement must conform with the COPP⁷⁸ which requires staff to use the cell placements decision guide before determining a cell placement. This guide asks correctional staff to consider whether an inmate falls into one or several risk categories including risk of harm to self, risk of harm

72 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 22.

73 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 22.

74 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Kirkconnell Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2024) 38.

75 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 9 October 2025.

76 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 22.

77 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2023) 22.

78 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 5.2 Inmate accommodation* (version 1.7, 3 September 2024) 5, 14.

from others, risk of harm to others, health/special needs, employment, and alcohol/drug abuse.⁷⁹ It then provides guidance on suitable accommodation options, including single cell accommodation, shared accommodation or segregation.⁸⁰

Recommendation: CSNSW conducts an appropriate risk assessment before allocating inmates to cells.

Recommendation: CSNSW ceases using inmate clerks to prepare reception paperwork at Cooma CC.

2.6.2 Induction

Cooma CC holds a group induction, also referred to as orientation, for newly arrived inmates the day after they arrive at the centre. The group induction was much improved from the one we observed during the 2020 inspection. The induction material was comprehensive with managers from different sections of Cooma CC also in attendance to explain their role in the centre.

Despite these improvements, some essential information was not communicated to inmates, including how they can contact their family to advise them of their transfer to Cooma CC and information pertaining to the visits process at Cooma CC.

We were concerned that inmates were told that they were only allowed to lodge four requests and two complaints per week. This has no foundation in legislation or policy and such instructions should cease. On the contrary, the CAS Regulation stipulates that inmates need to be informed of the authorised methods of seeking information and making complaints as soon as practicable.⁸¹

The group induction should advise inmates of the complaint mechanisms available to them, most notably the NSW Ombudsman and Official Visitor (these two services were mentioned in the Cooma CC Inmate Information Booklet). Inmates were also not made aware that they could access external agencies via free telephone calls, including the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission, Legal Aid NSW and the Aboriginal Legal Service.

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures that Cooma CC provides inmates with information in relation to complaint mechanisms including the ability to make complaints to external bodies.

79 Corrective Services NSW, *Cell placement decision guide* (version 1.2, 14 August 2024).

80 Corrective Services NSW, *Cell placement decision guide* (version 1.2, 14 August 2024).

81 *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2014* cl 5(e).

3 Care and wellbeing

3.1 Inmate enquiries, complaints and advocacy

As highlighted above, we were concerned to learn that inmates had been informed that they were only allowed to lodge four requests and two complaints per week. Inmates should be able to raise concerns and complaints about their experiences in custody easily and privately, both internally and externally.

3.1.1 Complaint mechanisms

At the time of inspection, inmates could make enquiries and lodge complaints via the Corrective Services Support Line, a free telephone service for inmates in all correctional centres in NSW. They could also access the CSNSW Sexual Misconduct Reporting Line, a free and confidential service where inmates can report any sexual misconduct that they may have experienced or witnessed in NSW correctional centres, including by CSNSW staff. Inmates could also lodge complaints with external agencies via free calls, including to the NSW Ombudsman, the Healthcare Complaints Commission, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the Law Enforcement and Conduct Commission. We were pleased to see that a range of these services were being promoted through posters displayed throughout the centre.

Cooma CC has one Official Visitor. The Official Visitor takes complaints from inmates and assists with the resolution of these complaints at a local level. Prior to the inspection and to understand the main issues of concern for inmates at Cooma CC, we asked the NSW Ombudsman for complaint data related to this centre. We also reviewed the reports from the Official Visitor. Daily routine of the centre, lack of hygiene and basic amenities as well as access to telephones were the main issues of concern raised with the NSW Ombudsman. The complaints received by the Official Visitor related to frequent lockdowns affecting daily routines, significant wait time to access some medical services, and access to employment.

3.1.2 Inmate development committee

Inmates can also raise concerns with correctional centre management through the IDC.⁸² Cooma CC had an IDC for Area 1 and another for Area 2 with an Aboriginal delegate on each. Prior to the inspection, we reviewed the minutes of the IDC meetings that were held from June to October 2024.⁸³ We also met with the IDC inmate delegates whilst on the inspection.

We learnt that while inmate delegates found the forum worthwhile, on many occasions management had agreed to address an issue but it had not been resolved in a timely fashion. While we acknowledge that some issues can take longer to resolve as they are dependent on feedback from CSNSW or changes to infrastructure, it is important that delegates are kept informed of progress on longstanding issues as this helps maintain trust between management and inmates.

3.2 Access to legal representatives

Inmates at Cooma CC could telephone, receive visits and hold audio visual link (AVL) conferences with their legal representatives. Area 1 had three AVL suites, however there were no AVL suites in Area 2. Inmates in Area 2 needed to be transported to Area 1 to use an AVL suite.

During the inspection we observed an inmate in an AVL holding cell on a legal phone call in the presence of other inmates. When we asked custodial staff about this, we were informed that it can be easier to have inmates take handheld calls from their lawyer whilst in a holding cell either prior to or after a court AVL, as long as their lawyers agree. This is inappropriate. It is a breach of privacy and

⁸² Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 9.8 Inmate development committee* (version 1.2, 12 March 2020) 4.

⁸³ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 6 November 2024.

can create security risks. The MOS was informed of this practice during our inspection debrief.

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures that Cooma CC ceases the practice of inmate legal calls occurring in front of other inmates.

3.3 Clothing and bedding

Newly arrived inmates to Cooma CC are taken to the reception area the day after they arrive to receive their clothing entitlements. We observed this process and noted that the clothing distributed to each incoming inmate did not align with the amount required under the COPP.⁸⁴

Some newly arrived inmates received used socks and underpants that had been laundered. Inmates should not be given used socks and underwear. The COPP states that 'used clothing that is in good condition, with the exception of socks and underwear, must be laundered in accordance with Australian Standards (AS/NZ 4146, 2000) and re-issued to inmates'.⁸⁵ We note that in 2023–24 there was a \$14,344 underspend on the amount budgeted for inmate clothing.⁸⁶ Cooma CC should not have any supply issues given that inmate clothing is made onsite.

In our previous report we highlighted that there were damaged mattresses needing to be repaired or replaced.⁸⁷ During this inspection, we again saw mattresses of poor quality, despite new mattresses being available in the Cooma CC storeroom. We note that there was an underspend of \$4,094 on mattresses in the 2023–24 budget.⁸⁸

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures all Cooma CC inmates are issued the minimum allocation of clothing in accordance with the COPP.

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures that Cooma CC ceases the practice of issuing inmates with used socks and underwear.

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures that Cooma CC repairs or replaces all damaged mattresses.

Damaged mattress



84 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 1.5 Issuing correctional centre clothing and linen* (version 1.4, 22 June 2023) 5.

85 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 1.5 Issuing correctional centre clothing and linen* (version 1.4, 22 June 2023) 4.

86 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 September 2024.

87 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 23.

88 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 September 2024.

3.4 Recreational activities

In Area 1 there were few spaces for inmates to engage in recreation. While an undercover gym area was well utilised, most inmates remained in the small outdoor concrete yard which was subject to extreme climatic conditions. Area 2 had an undercover gym surrounded by grass.

In our 2020 inspection report we highlighted that Area 1 rostered daily activities for inmates, including table tennis, soccer, racquetball, basketball, cricket, movies, board games, and music, such as guitar.⁸⁹ There were no rostered daily activities when we inspected the centre in January 2025.

It was positive to see that inmates had access to televisions, and a rental scheme (priced at \$5 per week) was in place if inmates could not afford to purchase their own television for \$350. At the time of inspection demand for televisions outstripped supply. We were informed in April 2025 that a total of 62 televisions were rented to inmates, with another 30 televisions on order.⁹⁰

Tablets can be a viable alternative to televisions. Cooma CC introduced in cell charging in March 2025.⁹¹ This allowed inmates to charge their tablets in their cell and have access to standard free television stations and paid entertainment packages on their tablets.⁹²

Inmates had access to a library in both Area 1 and 2. They were well stocked with various reading resources in multiple languages, as well as colouring sheets and puzzles. Inmates also ran trivia in the Area 1 library on a regular basis. In our last report we recommended that CSNSW explore a weekend library or out of hours lending service for inmates in Area 1. In May 2025, the library commenced operating seven days a week.⁹³ This is commendable.

The Area 2 lounge and library were also accessible at any time for use by inmates. The Area 2 common room also had a DVD library, television and DVD player accessible at any time.

Area 1 library



89 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 32.

90 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

91 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

92 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

93 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

Area 2 lounge



3.5 External contacts and communications

3.5.1 Phone calls

It is now standard practice in most NSW correctional centres to provide people in custody with the use of an electronic tablet device. One of the functions of tablets is the ability for inmates to make telephone calls between 6am and 10pm. Previously, calls could only be made at fixed telephones while inmates were out of cells during the day. Staff and inmates informed us that the tablets were important for facilitating regular contact with families and friends and were particularly appreciated by people with family overseas who could make contact during different time zones.

Intelligence teams at correctional centres have a broad range of responsibilities, including responsibility for the recording and monitoring of inmate telephone calls.⁹⁴ The roll-out of tablets has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of calls. This is a system-wide issue and is not specific to Cooma CC, and we have highlighted this issue in a previous report.⁹⁵

As previously mentioned, there were wall telephones available in each accommodation area for use during the day. In Area 1, telephones were in the yard area, in the accommodation unit and in the textiles workshop.

Area 2 telephones were located on the wall outside the staff office, affording little privacy. In our 2020 inspection report we recommended that a sound barrier/privacy screen be installed to address this issue.⁹⁶ We were pleased to see that sound barriers/privacy screens had been installed, although there was one telephone located between two windows that did not have one.

⁹⁴ Inmate personal calls may be subject to monitoring and must be recorded. See, *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2014* cl 119B; Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 8.2 Inmate telephones* (version 1.12, 18 July 2024) 12.

⁹⁵ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Bathurst Correctional Centre 2023* (Report, February 2025) 49.

⁹⁶ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 11, 16, 34-5.

Area 2 telephone



3.5.2 Contact visits in Area 1

At the time of inspection, contact visits were operating in Area 1 on Saturdays and Sundays from 8.30am to 11.30am and 12.30pm to 3pm. Contact visits booked through the 'JUST Connect' online system can only be booked for one hour; however, the duration of visits can be extended on the day.

Given that Cooma is approximately 400 kms from Sydney, longer time slots should be made available on JUST Connect for those travelling long distances so that they can better plan for their visit in advance. Information about travel accommodation assistance through the Community Restorative Centre⁹⁷ needs to be communicated through JUST Connect and on the CSNSW website.

We observed Area 1 contact visits sessions on a Saturday. Visit processing was quick, efficient and correctional staff were professional and courteous. The area where contact visits were held was small and narrow. There was no room for play equipment or toys for children, however Shine for Kids⁹⁸ activity packs were available. We were pleased to see an operational vending machine in this area.

We were informed that inmates, regardless of their security classification, were subject to strip searches both before and after a contact visit. This breaches CSNSW policy, which stipulates that: 'All maximum and medium security inmates must be body scanned (where practicable) or strip-searched, and minimum security inmates may be randomly body scanned or strip-searched, after each visit'.⁹⁹ Strip searching inmates prior to a contact visit is unnecessary and should cease, particularly as the inmates at Cooma CC who were mostly minimum security were also required to wear overalls during contact visits.

Recommendation: CSNSW enables longer visits to be booked via JUST Connect for Cooma CC.

Recommendation: CSNSW ceases the practice of strip searching inmates prior to contact visits at Cooma CC.

97 The Community Restorative Centre has limited funding to provide travel and accommodation assistance to members of an inmate's immediate family or support network who live over 100 kms away from the NSW correctional centre the inmate is located in. Community Restorative Centre, 'Travel Support for prison Visitors' (Web Page, undated) <<https://www.crcnsw.org.au/get-help/visiting-a-nsw-correctional-centre/travel-support/>>.

98 Shine for Kids is a non-profit organisation that supports children and young people who have a parent or carer in custody. Shine for Kids, 'What we do' (Web Page, undated) <<https://shineforkids.org.au/what-we-do/>>.

99 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 10.1 Visits to inmates by family and friends* (version 1.10, 24 May 2023) 4.

3.5.3 Contact visits in Area 2

At the time of inspection, contact visits were operating in Area 2 on Saturdays and Sundays from 9am to 11.30am and 12.30pm to 3pm.

We observed contact visits in Area 2 on a Saturday. Area 2 contact visits were held in a spacious common room and Area 2 inmates wore standard correctional centre clothing during contact visits.

There were no vending machines, however inmates could purchase food through buy-ups to share with their visitors. We understand that prior to the pandemic, visitors were able to bring in food items (subject to security checks) to share with inmates.

3.5.4 Tablet visits

Tablet visits were available to Area 1 inmates on Saturdays and Sundays. Three tablet visits could be facilitated each half hour in a room adjacent to the contact visits room. A spare tablet was available if one of the tablets malfunctioned. We observed tablet visits in Area 1 and were pleased to see that inmates were able to wear standard correctional centre clothing instead of visits overalls and that they were not strip searched prior to or after their tablet visit.

Tablet visits were also held in Area 2 in the common room where contact visits took place. When we visited there were two inmates wearing headphones on tablet visits. There was an ample amount of room for contact visits and two tablet visits to be held simultaneously and not impinge on privacy.

3.6 Cultural connection for Aboriginal people in custody

As at 30 June 2024, 37 inmates at Cooma CC were Aboriginal, making up 20.2% of the total inmate population.¹⁰⁰ It is important that Aboriginal people have the opportunity to be placed at regional correctional centres, particularly if they have a connection to the land on which the correctional centre is located.

We found that cultural programs and support for Aboriginal people in custody had not been sufficiently prioritised. There were no cultural programs specifically for Aboriginal people and no Yarning Circle in Area 1, in which most Cooma CC inmates reside. Aboriginal people in custody who wished to paint could request paint from the Education unit and we were pleased to see a Yarning Circle had been built in Area 2 that was accessible to inmates. At the time of inspection, no Aboriginal flags were being flown in either Area 1 or Area 2. This was raised with the MOS and has been rectified.

In our 2020 inspection we noted that there were no Elders visiting Cooma CC to provide cultural and spiritual support to people in custody.¹⁰¹ We recommended that a visiting Elder program be established at the centre.¹⁰² At the time of our 2025 inspection, this recommendation had not been achieved.

Regular presence of recognised Elders and Aboriginal community members can significantly support Aboriginal people in custody in their rehabilitation. A reciprocal relationship with the local Aboriginal community would benefit the people in custody and the staff at Cooma CC.

Recommendation: CSNSW reviews inmate placement processes to ensure Aboriginal people in custody, where possible, remain on Country.

Recommendation: CSNSW increases engagement with the Aboriginal community and establishes a local Elders visiting program.

¹⁰⁰ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

¹⁰¹ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 33.

¹⁰² Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 33.

Area 2 Yarning Circle



3.7 Psychology services

Psychology services in NSW correctional centres are managed by CSNSW. At the time of inspection Cooma CC had one full-time psychologist who covered Area 1 and Area 2. Cooma CC management were aware of the need for more psychology staff at the time of the inspection.

In addition to appointments with inmates, the key focus for the psychologist was delivering programs cofacilitated with a services and programs officer, such as CONNECT.¹⁰³ Cofacilitated programs can enrol 12 rather than six inmates with a single facilitator. The psychologist was also planning to recommence a mood management program targeted at men in Area 1 who were not enrolled in the HIPU or engaged in employment. These initiatives are positive for inmate wellbeing.

3.8 Religious and spiritual needs

As at 30 June 2024, just over half of the inmates (n=96) at Cooma CC had no preferred religion or no religion, while one fifth (39) identified as Christian from varying denominations. Eleven inmates were Muslim and four were Buddhist. The remaining 32 inmates either refused to provide information or had no religion recorded.¹⁰⁴

At the time of inspection there was a Canberra-based Catholic chaplain who provided a monthly in person service in Area 1 and Area 2. We were informed that a locally based Chaplain was due to commence visiting the centre in the latter half of 2025.¹⁰⁵ Virtual access to an Imam can be arranged by Services and Programs.¹⁰⁶

Approved religious items, such as prayer mats, are available on request through Services and Programs.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ The CONNECT program addresses concepts such as logical and emotional thinking, acceptance, communication and resilience.

¹⁰⁴ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 July 2025.

¹⁰⁶ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 July 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 July 2025.

3.9 Food and nutrition

All inmate meals at Cooma CC were provided by CSI. Prepared meals were delivered to the centre and stored in the Area 1 kitchen. The kitchen then arranged the distribution of meals to all inmates in Area 1 and Area 2. The inspection team observed the distribution of lunch and dinner to inmates in Area 1. Breakfast was cereal and toast. Lunch was a bread roll with fillings and a piece of fruit and dinner was a hot meal. Alternative meals were provided to inmates with special dietary and religious requirements.

Area 2 received daily supplies of CSI meals from Area 1 which were then reheated in the Area 2 kitchen and provided to inmates. Area 2 inmates also had access to a communal kitchen to cook their own food with groceries purchased through inmate buy-ups, supplemented by produce grown in the vegetable garden.

4 Health services

The Cooma CC health centre is in Area 1 but services inmates from both Areas 1 and 2. It operates seven days per week and is staffed between 7am and 4.30pm Monday to Friday and between 8am and 4.30pm on weekends. The health centre had a patient waiting area, a dental suite and two consultation rooms (both able to facilitate virtual care appointments).

The health centre had a full-time nursing unit manager and three full-time registered nurses. There was also a health centre clerk who provided support two days per week and a clinical support officer who worked one day a week. The nursing staff attended to walk-in appointments and conducted health assessments, chronic disease screening, opioid substitution therapy, immunisations and medication administration. JH&FMHN staff acknowledged that the custodial staff were cooperative and provided access to patients.

Nursing services were delivered in person. The main ailments treated at the health centre were reportedly sporting injuries, dry skin and rashes. As of 12 September 2024, there were 162 patients on the waiting list to see the primary care nurse. None of those patients were priority 1 (urgent). Three patients were classed as priority 2 (semi-urgent, meaning they needed to be seen within three to 14 days) but had been waiting between 31 to 76 days, far longer than the recommended waiting time.¹⁰⁸

Fifty-six patients were classified as priority 3 (non-urgent, meaning they needed to be seen within 14 and 90 days). Six of these patients had been waiting between 93 to 168 days, exceeding the recommended waiting time. One hundred patients were classified as priority 4 (routine) and three patients were classified as priority 5 (follow up). None of the priority 4 and 5 patients were waiting beyond the recommended waiting time.¹⁰⁹

Space was at a premium in the health centre. The provision of virtual care in treatment rooms meant that treatment rooms could not be used for in person appointments. In 2023–24 there were 917 virtual care appointments.¹¹⁰

In our 2020 inspection report we noted that the absence of a stand-alone health centre in Area 2 meant that Area 2 inmates had to be escorted each morning and afternoon to the Area 1 health centre for medication and consultations. We identified that this was both resource intensive and could create security risks. We recommended that CSNSW and JH&FMHN establish a satellite health centre in Area 2.¹¹¹ The recommendation was accepted. The satellite health centre is due to open in late 2025.

4.1 General practitioner

A local general practitioner visited the centre for six hours once a week. The weekly visit involved seeing patients and completing paperwork. It is positive that a general practitioner attends the centre weekly.

The waiting list data provided by JH&FMHN shows that as at 12 September 2024 there were no patients in priority 1 and 2 categories (urgent and semi-urgent). We were informed during the inspection that anyone classified as priority 1 or priority 2 are sent to the emergency department at the local hospital if the general practitioner is not present.

In 2023–24, there were 84 planned and 81 unplanned transfers to hospital or external health specialists.¹¹² The waiting list data did show that there were 19 patients classified as priority 3 (non-urgent), 14 classed as priority 4 (routine) and three as priority 5 (follow-up). Nil patients were waiting beyond their recommended wait time.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

¹¹⁰ Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

¹¹¹ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 30.

¹¹² Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

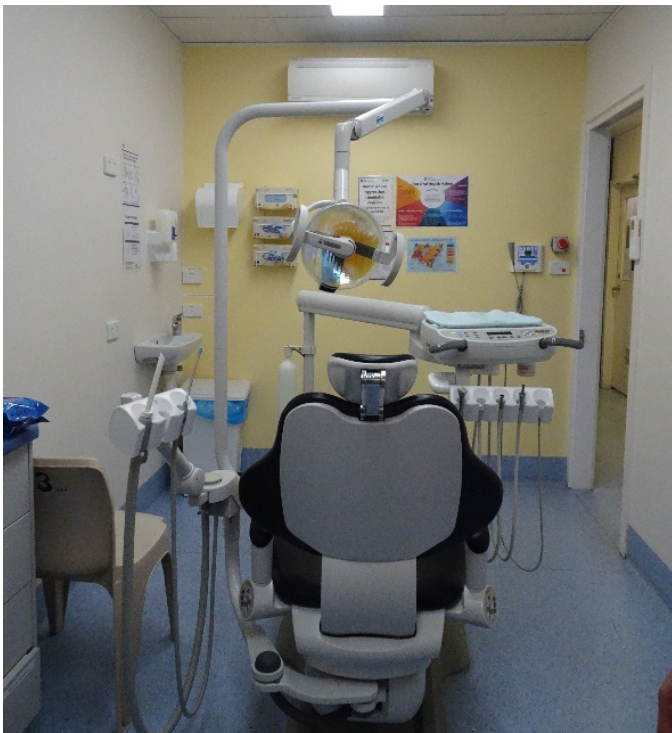
¹¹³ Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

4.2 Dental services

A dentist attends Cooma CC every six to seven months for two days of in person appointments with inmates. The dentist was at Cooma CC at time of our inspection and had seen four of the 12 patients listed for dental services. The dentist indicated it was highly unlikely that they would be able to see all the listed patients during that visit. Inmates present with complex and time consuming oral health needs because they rarely access dental care outside of custody.

In the twelve months to 30 June 2024, 81% of patients requiring an assessment for oral healthcare were seen outside the recommended waiting time. Almost all those patients were in the first two priority categories. In the same period, all patients requiring treatment were seen within the recommended time frame.¹¹⁴ The reason for this may be that inmates with an urgent dental issue are able to redeem an urgent care voucher through NSW Health to visit a dentist in the community.¹¹⁵ In 2023–24, Cooma CC recorded 61 visits to a local dental clinic using vouchers.¹¹⁶

Dental suite



4.3 Drug and alcohol health services

Drug and alcohol health services are delivered in person by a drug and alcohol nurse (16 hours a week), and a drug and alcohol doctor through virtual care (eight hours a week). As at 12 September 2024 there were 90 patients on a waiting list to see a drug and alcohol nurse or doctor. None of those patients were priority 1 (urgent) or priority 2 (semi-urgent). There were six patients classified as priority 3 (non-urgent), 41 classified as priority 4 (routine) and 43 classified priority 5 (follow-up). No data was available to indicate if the patients classified as priority 3, 4 or 5 were waiting beyond the recommended time frames.¹¹⁷

The opioid agonist treatment program, which includes methadone, is an important option available for inmates at Cooma CC. At the time of inspection, nine inmates were prescribed methadone. Inmates taking methadone must do so under supervision. During the inspection we observed eligible

¹¹⁴ Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

¹¹⁵ NSW Health, 'Oral Health Fee for Service Scheme' (Web Page, 25 November 2024) <<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/oralhealth/Pages/nsw-oral-health-fee-for-service-scheme.aspx>>.

¹¹⁶ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

¹¹⁷ Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

inmates receiving their daily dose of methadone. JH&FMHN staff provided an inmate with their dose of methadone but correctional staff did not check the inmate's mouth to confirm that the dose had been digested.¹¹⁸ Correctional staff require refresher training to ensure they are following methadone administration procedures correctly.

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures that correctional staff follow methadone administration procedures correctly at Cooma CC.

4.4 Mental health services

In 2023–24, there were 21 inmates at Cooma CC (11.5% of the inmate population) who had a history of mental illness. Two men self-harmed during this period.¹¹⁹

Mental health services are delivered via virtual care by a mental health nurse (10 hours a fortnight) and a mental health nurse practitioner (five hours a fortnight). As at 14 September 2024 there were 77 patients on a waiting list to see a mental health nurse or a mental health nurse practitioner. No patients were priority 1 (urgent) or priority 2 (semi-urgent). Of the 32 patients who were classified as priority 3 (non-urgent) and needed to be seen within 14 days to three months, 13 patients had been waiting between 92 to 126 days, far longer than the recommended waiting time. Patients at lower priority levels were seen within the recommended waiting time.¹²⁰

Psychiatry services were also delivered via virtual care for eight hours every four weeks. The waitlist to see a psychiatrist consisted of 24 people, none of whom were classified as a priority 1 or a priority 2 patient. Two patients classified as priority 3 had exceeded their recommended time frame by one day.¹²¹

Custodial and health staff have the shared responsibility for managing inmates deemed to be at risk of self-harm. Cooma CC's RIT consists of a senior correctional officer, a JH&FMHN nurse and a services and programs officer. RITs propose cell placement options, apparel, restraints, observations and diversionary activities. Inmates on a RIT management plan at Cooma CC were placed in the MPU for observation as the health centre does not have an appropriate space.

During the inspection we were informed that inmates going on RIT management plans at Cooma CC was a rare occurrence. We requested data for the three months prior to our inspection and found that no inmates were placed on a RIT management plan during this time.¹²² Data shows that in 2023–24, 20 (11% of the population) inmates were placed on a RIT management plan at Cooma CC.¹²³

118 Corrective Services NSW, *Custodial Operations Policy and Procedures: 6.4 Opioid substitution treatment* (version 1.2, 18 August 2023) 6.

119 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

120 Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

121 Information provided by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network, 21 October 2024.

122 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 May 2025.

123 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

5 Rehabilitation

5.1 Case planning and classification

The Cooma CC Case Management Unit (CMU) assesses inmates and develops case plans outlining programs and interventions suitable for inmate rehabilitation.

The CMU at Cooma CC consisted of a senior case management officer and two case management officers (CMOs), one who was part-time. At the time of the inspection, the CMU was understaffed by 1.4 FTE CMOs, although a full-time CMO was due to commence after the conclusion of the inspection. As a result, the CMU was behind in case planning. Less than 60% of inmates (94 out of 160 men) had an approved case plan.¹²⁴

In our previous inspection report published in 2020, we raised the issue that some offenders were ineligible for custody based criminogenic programs offered in the Cooma CC HIPU and that CMOs were required to work with these inmates to identify purposeful day activities.¹²⁵ We recommended that CSNSW increase purposeful day activities at Cooma CC.¹²⁶ At the time of our recent inspection these inmates continued to experience limited access to activities and insufficient employment opportunities, leaving them with few opportunities to fill their days. CSNSW claim there are ‘ample opportunities to engage in programs and there are many employment opportunities in the textiles area, ground maintenance or sweeper roles’ at Cooma CC.¹²⁷

As inmates at Cooma CC are sentenced and have already had initial classification reviews in other correctional centres, they will only meet with the classification and placement officer for their annual review when it becomes due (or earlier if required, such as due to a change in outstanding charges). Sentence progression was an issue raised by inmates residing in Area 2 with C2 security classifications. Several inmates expressed an interest in receiving a C3 classification to become eligible for external leave and work release placements. Some inmates were unclear on the process to progress from a C2 to a C3. This is not a concern unique to inmates at Cooma CC. While many inmates may not meet the criteria for progression or their individual circumstances may not warrant review, it is important that progression processes and criteria are transparent and clearly understood by inmates.

Recommendation: CSNSW ensures that the CMU at Cooma CC is adequately resourced so that case plans can be completed.

5.2 Programs

There are two HIPUs at Cooma CC that deliver programs, services and reintegration planning for inmates in preparation for release to the community. Inmates attend the HIPU up to four days per week over approximately 16 weeks. An individualised plan outlining an inmate’s treatment needs and expected program, service and community engagement is created for all participating inmates. Inmates may complete one or more modules of the Explore, Question, Understand, Investigate, Practice and Succeed (EQUIPS) suite of programs as well as additional programs as required, such as parenting courses or TRIP for serious or repeat high-risk driving offenders.

In 2023–24, programs at Cooma CC also included: Addictions support; In Cell Getting EQUIP’ED; In Cell Getting Past Addiction; In Cell Family and Domestic Violence. Alcohol Anonymous meetings were also running at Cooma CC with an external facilitator. Since our inspection a SAPO led addiction program has commenced and a Brief Intervention and Group (BIG) program has been approved for delivery by JH&FMHN and a SAPO.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 28 January 2025.

¹²⁵ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 36.

¹²⁶ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 37.

¹²⁷ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 9 October 2025.

¹²⁸ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 9 October 2025.

The HIPU in Area 1 had been operating consistently in the lead up to our inspection. The HIPU in Area 2 had not operated from October 2024 to February 2025 due to staff deficiencies. Cooma CC management confirmed the HIPU in Area 2 had recommenced in March 2025.¹²⁹

We reviewed information for the twelve month period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024. Cooma CC reported that out of a total of 127 potential HIPU candidates, 99 inmates commenced HIPU and 67 inmates completed their full suite of EQUIPS and other programs.¹³⁰ Cooma CC advised that of the 60 inmates who did not commence or complete HIPU, the most common reasons were due to an inmate having insufficient time to complete or their placement being changed. Eight inmates refused to participate in the HIPU.¹³¹

Cooma CC staff reported that they may commence an inmate in HIPU even when their earliest possible release date (EPRD) means they may not be able to commence or complete all modules. Staff prioritised participation in individual programs or modules within HIPU to ensure people in custody would receive some of the benefits of the content prior to their release into the community. They noted this approach lowers the HIPU completion rate. Cooma CC provided additional data regarding completions for some of the individual HIPU components.

Table 3: Program enrolment and completions at Cooma CC from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024¹³²

Program	Enrolments	Completions
CONNECT	66	62
EQUIPS Addiction	66	65
EQUIPS Aggression	63	62
EQUIPS Domestic and Family Violence	50	48
EQUIPS Foundation	67	66
TRIP	50	49

While in the HIPU, inmates are considered ‘employed’ and are paid a wage. We were informed by the centre that inmates with skills, trades or a good work ethic are permitted to engage in work activities when they are not required for HIPU programs, for example if an inmate is not required to participate in EQUIPS Domestic & Family Violence, they are able to work during the days that this program is running.¹³³

The centre was also ensuring inmates had the opportunity to complete work development orders while in custody, working to pay off unpaid fines. We were advised that 130 inmates submitted work development order applications in 2023–24.¹³⁴

We understood that Cooma CC inmates who needed to complete the Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program (IDATP)¹³⁵ were reluctant to do so because it would require a transfer to Geoffrey Pearce CC. Geoffrey Pearce CC is the only location that offers IDATP to men in NSW, but it only accommodates ‘normal discipline’ inmates and cannot receive SMAP inmates. Many Area 1 inmates at Cooma CC were unwilling to ‘sign off’ SMAP, for fear it would increase risks to their personal safety.

¹²⁹ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

¹³⁰ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 15 May 2025.

¹³¹ Cooma CC reported that the January 2024 change of cohort to SMAP in Area 1 resulted in a high number of placement changes which affected the list of HIPU candidates. Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 15 May 2025.

¹³² Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 15 May 2025. Not all inmates commence all programs.

¹³³ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 15 May 2025.

¹³⁴ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

¹³⁵ The IDATP is a high intensity group treatment program for offenders whose drug and alcohol use are linked to their offending behaviour. Corrective Services NSW, *Compendium of Offender Behaviour Change Programs in New South Wales* (June 2016) 20.

Figures provided by CSNSW highlight that 3,956 inmates or 30.2% of the inmate population in NSW are designated SMAP for their protection.¹³⁶ This shows it is important to consider the program needs of the SMAP cohort. Consideration should be given to establishing an IDATP for SMAP inmates within the NSW custodial system.

Recommendation: CSNSW considers establishing an Intensive Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program for SMAP inmates.

5.3 Education and training

Inmates should have access to education to address their learning needs and vocational training to assist with employment opportunities upon release. An education services coordinator (ESC) oversees the delivery of education and vocational training courses at Cooma CC and is supported by an assessment and planning officer. Most inmates arrived at Cooma CC with a core skills assessment, to determine reading and numeracy capability, already in place.

Trainers are contracted from BSI Learning to deliver the Foundation Skills Program (Literacy and Digital Literacy Courses). Between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024, 13 people completed level 1 of Language, Literacy and Numeracy and 11 people completed level 2 Language, Literacy and Numeracy courses respectively. Fourteen men completed the Basic Digital Literacy course and 29 completed the Advanced Digital Literacy course.¹³⁷

Vocational training programs aim to develop employability skills and allow inmates to attain recognised trade qualifications to improve post release work opportunities, potentially reducing their likelihood of reoffending.¹³⁸ Cooma CC achieved a 98% completion rate for students enrolled in vocational courses in 2023–24.¹³⁹ This was a dramatic improvement from the figures highlighted in our last inspection report, which showed of the 415 participants enrolled in a vocational or workplace training course, there were only 16 completions.¹⁴⁰ Table 4 details the vocational training courses offered at Cooma CC from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 together with enrolment and completion rates.

Table 4: Vocational training enrolment and completions from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024¹⁴¹

Program	Enrolled	Completed
Chainsaws	7	7
Chemical handling	10	10
Cleaning Operations	8	7
Food safety 1	10	10
Food safety 2	9	9
Forklift operations	8	8
Total	52	51

As discussed previously, Cooma CC has insufficient correctional staff. This negatively affected inmates attendance at education classes and programs. Feedback from the ESC and inmates indicated that the inmate population were eager to participate in more vocational courses. Between September 2023 and August 2024, there were 32 instances when classes were cancelled due to

136 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 12 May 2025.
137 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 24 January 2025.
138 Jesse Cale et al, 'Australian prison vocational education and training and returns to custody among male and female ex-prisoners: A cross-jurisdictional study' (2019) 52(1) *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 129–147.
139 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 24 January 2025.
140 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 42.
141 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 24 January 2025.

staff shortages and four instances because of lockdowns.¹⁴² In addition, the ESC position was vacant for an extended period in 2024, limiting the number of vocational training opportunities that were offered at that time.

Traineeships are available at Cooma CC. This means that inmates can engage in full-time work in a CSI Business Unit under the supervision of a qualified overseer whilst receiving training from a registered training organisation. In 2023–24, seven men were participating in traineeships in business and supply chain operations.¹⁴³

Inmates with fewer than 12 months left of their sentence who are eligible for a NSW driver licence can complete a driver knowledge test (DKT) while in custody. This is facilitated by the Education team, under an agreement with Transport for NSW. Upon release, these inmates can attend a Service NSW centre with their DKT certificate to obtain a learner licence without having to re-sit the test. In 2023–24, a total of 65 men passed the DKT at Cooma CC.¹⁴⁴

Recommendation: CSNSW increases the number of inmates undertaking traineeships and vocational training programs at Cooma CC.

5.4 Employment

The table below outlines the available work locations in May 2025.

Table 5: Employment profile, locations and positions at Cooma CC as at May 2025¹⁴⁵

Industry	Work	Positions	Inmates employed
Textiles	Produce inmate clothing items	45	35
Food services and laundry	Distribute CSI pre-prepared meals and complete laundering services for inmates and local organisations	15	12
Facility management	Inmates with a C2 classification are engaged in undertaking maintenance work to facilities within the centre	15	12
Grounds maintenance and hygiene	Inmates with a C2 classification provide cleaning, gardening and lawn maintenance services	30	27

At the time of inspection in January 2025, there were insufficient employment opportunities for inmates in Area 1 due to CSI and correctional staff shortages. We understood that approximately half of the inmate population in Area 1 were engaged in employment. When we visited the textiles workshop only 15 inmates were working in this area as it did not have sufficient custodial and CSI staff to enable the workshop to run at full capacity (45 inmates).

142 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 24 January 2025.

143 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 24 January 2025.

144 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 24 January 2025.

145 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 May 2025.

Area 1 textiles unit



The Corrective Services NSW Museum sits outside the gates of Area 1 and is a popular tourist attraction. The museum has the capacity to employ up to six men with a C2 classification to catalogue museum pieces and guide tours. There were no inmates working at the museum at the time of inspection, due to there being a shortage of custodial staff and eligible inmates.

In addition to the above work locations, community project work was performed by Area 2 inmates who had a C2 classification and a section 6(2) 'off complex' order. As at 14 May 2025, there were five inmates working on supervised community projects.¹⁴⁶ The centre had community partnerships with the Snowy Monaro Regional Council and Snowy Landcare. Projects included grounds maintenance at the local oval and pony club and hazard reduction.

We were disappointed to learn that the dog rehoming program had ceased due to the overseer of the program being on long-term leave. However, selected Area 2 inmates had also been involved in a program caring for orphan lambs to help farmers affected by drought. At the time of inspection there was one lamb being cared for in Area 2.

In our 2020 report, we expressed concerns around a Cooma CC practice of placing some inmates who refused to work or who were dismissed from work in a small outdoor holding cell, referred to as 'the non-workers yard', for six hours per day for 10 working days. We recommended that this practice of punishing non-workers cease.¹⁴⁷ It was pleasing to find that this practice no longer occurs at Cooma CC.

5.5 Reintegration and release

5.5.1 External leave and work release

Correctional centres accommodating minimum security inmates throughout NSW may provide a range of external leave programs (ELPs).¹⁴⁸ Participation in ELPs can assist inmates to reintegrate to society upon their release, and to gradually re-establish relationships with family and friends. Inmates are not escorted but must be accompanied by an approved sponsor during their leave.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 May 2025.

¹⁴⁷ Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of Cooma Correctional Centre* (Report, November 2020) 41.

¹⁴⁸ Corrective Services NSW, *Progression to C3/Category 1 and External Leave Programs (ELP)* (version 2.5, 4 August 2023) 6.

¹⁴⁹ Corrective Services NSW, *Progression to C3/Category 1 and External Leave Programs (ELP)* (version 2.5, 4 August 2023) 21.

Inmates at Cooma CC who have progressed to a C3 classification, meaning they can have some periods without direct supervision by CSNSW staff, may apply for day leave for work and education purposes 12–18 months before their EPRD. Inmates completing work or education in the community can apply for weekend leave four months from their EPRD but only after three successful day leaves. Day leave for other purposes, such as time with family, is only available to inmates with fewer than nine months before their EPRD. For overnight or weekend leave, inmates must have under two months to their EPRD.¹⁵⁰

As at 30 June 2024, of the 182 inmates at Cooma CC, 10 were C3 inmates and potentially eligible for ELPs.¹⁵¹ Between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024, Cooma CC approved 42 day/weekend leave orders.¹⁵² While onsite, we spoke with inmates who had participated in an ELP, including one inmate who had successfully attended weekend leave with family. These opportunities were highly regarded. We spoke with many more inmates who were keen to progress to C3 in order to access ELP opportunities and work release.

Work release provides an opportunity for inmates nearing release to utilise and develop skills in paid employment. Cooma CC provides opportunities for Area 2 inmates, with a C3 classification, to participate in work release with local businesses in the Cooma district. Area 2 can accommodate up to 10 men on work release at a time. At the time of the inspection, there were three men on work release. We recommend that CSNSW increases the number of work release opportunities at Cooma CC.

Recommendation: CSNSW increases the number of men on work release at Cooma CC.

5.5.2 Release

Services and programs officers assist inmates to prepare for release through the provision of reintegration planning. NEXUS is a program that assists inmates to think about family and relationships, housing, money, education and employment, wellbeing, connection, and their impact on their reintegration upon release.¹⁵³

Eighty-seven inmates completed NEXUS in 2023–24 as part of their HIPU participation.¹⁵⁴ We were informed by Cooma CC management that NEXUS will be available to all non-HIPU inmates once newly onboarded service and programs officers had completed training.¹⁵⁵

During the inspection, we observed the release of an inmate from custody. The release was undertaken by a senior custodial officer in a professional and respectful manner; however, we observed that the discharge documentation had been pre-signed, affirming actions that had not yet occurred. This poor practice has been observed during other inspections of NSW correctional centres and is a training issue.¹⁵⁶ CSNSW acknowledge that the practice of pre-signing documentation is not appropriate and will cease.¹⁵⁷

The inmate's property and personal items were checked and placed in a clear bag. The inmate was discharged from the pedestrian door within the main gate structure. This is a good practice as we have noted that many correctional centres release people from custody through the vehicle sallyport, a practice that has little regard for the dignity of the person being released.¹⁵⁸

150 Corrective Services NSW, *Progression to C3/Category 1 and External Leave Programs (ELP)* (version 2.5, 4 August 2023) 21.

151 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 26 August 2024.

152 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 May 2025.

153 Corrective Services NSW, *NEXUS: Planning your release* (Brochure).

154 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 30 April 2025.

155 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 14 May 2025.

156 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of John Morony Correctional Centre* (Report, March 2024) 59.

157 Information provided by Corrective Services NSW, 9 October 2025.

158 Inspector of Custodial Services, *Inspection of John Morony Correctional Centre* (Report, March 2024) 60.

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