

Media release: Inspector of Custodial Services releases a report on Wellington Correctional Centre

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The Inspector of Custodial Services (ICS) has released a report on Wellington Correctional Centre (CC). This report makes 37 recommendations aimed at improving the centre's operation and enhancing the treatment and conditions of people in custody.

Wellington CC is situated on Wiradjuri land approximately 350 km from Sydney. The centre is less than twenty years old, having opened in 2007, and is an important remand and reception centre for the Central West region of NSW.

The inspection of Wellington CC took place in November 2022, less than a year after the re-opening of the centre, which closed for 10 months in 2021-2022 to repair extensive damage caused by a mouse plague. The remediation works cost \$38 million.

The inspection found that remand inmates, who comprised over one third of the population of the centre, were significantly disadvantaged compared with sentenced inmates, and had limited access to services. This was largely due to staffing shortages and high staff absences resulting in frequent lock downs and limited time out of cells. Five years on from our previous inspection which focused on the treatment and conditions of women on remand, we found little had changed. Aboriginal women with children from the local area were still being told they could be moved off Country and away from their children to other correctional centres throughout NSW, merely because they were on remand.

The centre was among one of the first to implement in-cell tablets which enable inmates to phone their families after they are locked in their cells or units. However, the positive impact of this technology was being undermined by the high cost of phone calls. Video visits remained popular and were necessary, due to a lack of public transport available for visitors to reach the centre.

Despite having one of the largest populations of Aboriginal people in custody across correctional centres in NSW, there were significant gaps in addressing the needs of this population. Further, the inspection found that women in custody at Wellington CC, many of whom were Aboriginal, were the most disadvantaged group in the centre. They had very limited access to meaningful work, programs, education, and psychologists.

There were rehabilitation services such as employment and programs available for sentenced minimum security men accommodated at the centre; however, the intensive learning centre, one of only four specialist education centres staffed with teachers in the State, was underutilised.

The ICS was established in October 2013 to provide independent oversight of the NSW custodial system. The ICS is required to inspect each adult custodial facility in NSW once every five years and may also examine and review any custodial service at any time. The ICS must report to the NSW Parliament on each such inspection, examination, or review.

The report is available at the following link: <https://inspectorcustodial.nsw.gov.au/reports-and-publications/inspection-reports/adult-reports/wellington-correctional-centre.html>

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