

9 February 2024 Media release: Inspector of Custodial Services releases three reports

Today the Inspector of Custodial Services (ICS) released a report: *Inspection of the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre*. On 1 December 2023 the ICS released two reports: *Review of the response to COVID-19 in NSW custody* and *Inspection of Silverwater Women's and Dillwynia Correctional Centres 2022*. Together these reports highlight the experiences of people in custody during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inspection of the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre

At the time of our inspection of the Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre (MRRRC), its operations were focused on preventing the introduction and containing the transmission of COVID-19 in NSW custody. As a major remand and reception centre and a designated COVID-19 'isolation hub', most people in custody at MRRRC were in either quarantine (those newly received into custody) or isolation (those infected with COVID-19). The inspection found that COVID-19 significantly impacted MRRRC's ability to effectively perform its role and function as a remand and reception centre. This was exacerbated by staff shortages caused by COVID-19 that reduced the access of people in custody to time out of cell and essential services, including contact with legal representatives. The report makes 14 recommendations.

Review of the response to COVID-19 in NSW custody

The review found that the response to COVID-19 in the NSW custodial system prevented widespread serious illness and death among people in custody and staff. However, there are lessons to be learned to inform future pandemic planning and improve custodial operations. Aspects of the response to COVID-19 exposed and exacerbated existing weaknesses in the custodial system, including a reliance on 1800s era infrastructure and the challenges in monitoring and staffing 36 correctional centres. The restrictions imposed to mitigate the severe risks of COVID-19 caused enormous upheaval across the system and had a profound impact on frontline health and custodial staff. People in custody were often held in poor conditions for extended periods with limited access to basic amenities and essential services including contact with family and legal representatives, time out of cell, health services, and rehabilitation services. The report makes 21 recommendations.

Inspection of Silverwater Women's and Dillwynia Correctional Centres 2022

The inspections found that conditions and access to services for women in custody had deteriorated since our last inspections, due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated staff shortages. The inspections took place before the trial and conviction of Wayne Astill. This report which makes 36 recommendations does not address the circumstances of Astill's offending. The Special Commission of Inquiry into the circumstances related to the sexual offences committed by Wayne Astill at Dillwynia Women's Correctional Centre is due to deliver its report in February 2024.

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 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.

These reports are available at the following link: <https://www.inspectorcustodial.nsw.gov.au/reports-and-publications/inspection-reports/adult-reports.html>

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