

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2 PM ON 11 June 2024

Recording and Reporting of Self-Harm and Attempted Suicides in Custody

The Inspector of Custodial Services today released a report examining the accuracy of recording and reporting data relating to self-harm and attempted suicide incidents within adult and youth custodial facilities. The report found at least 18 attempted suicides between January to September 2023 were misclassified as acts or threats of self-harm. In-depth analysis found for all 18 occasions the person in custody had verbalised an intent to end their life and had acted to fulfil that intent. Another 20 self-harm incidents also appeared to be attempted suicides, but Department of Justice (the Department) recording did not include whether intent was stated.

These misclassifications suggested the Department's recording of self-harm and attempted suicide incidents, and subsequent reporting of those incidents to relevant bodies including the Parliament, could be improved. The report recommended using a definition of attempted suicide which does not rely on identifying intent, and introducing a clinical review process as two potential mechanisms to ensure incidents are categorised appropriately.

The Inspector of Custodial Services, Mr Eamon Ryan said:

By accurately recording incidents of self-harm and attempted suicides, the Department can build a better understanding of the extent of the mental health challenges within our prisons and youth detention facilities. This information can be used to more accurately provide the resources required on the ground to support the wellbeing of people in custody.

The report also found the Department's reporting system, at the time of the review, did not distinguish between self-harm threats and suicidal behaviours such as thinking, planning, or threatening suicide. As a result, the Department had no visibility over the extent of suicidal behaviours being exhibited by people in custody. Mr Ryan acknowledged the Department's recent introduction of a 'suicide threat' category, which he expects will improve the recording accuracy of these incidents.

The report did not assess individual cases or the causes of self-harm or attempted suicide in custody, or the quality of care provided to people in custody who had engaged in an act of self-harm or who had attempted suicide.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, will be available for comment from 2pm on 11 June 2024 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.

The full report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au).