

## MEDIA RELEASE

### EMBARGOED UNTIL 9 AM ON 6 November 2024

### Annual Report 2023-24

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\*\* Please note this release contains the name of a First Nations person who has passed, with the permission of his family \*\*

Inspector Eamon Ryan released his Annual Report 2023-24 yesterday which reflected the challenging year faced by prisons and youth detention in Western Australia. Mr Ryan highlighted consistent findings in the Office's reports and monitoring activities that found the system was struggling to cope with increasingly complex and growing populations, while stretched resources failed to meet demand. Mr Ryan said:

Our reports for 2023-2024 all reflected the stresses of overcrowding, understaffing and an inability for those in custody to access services needed for rehabilitation programs and support services that lead to a safer community.

The tragic loss of Cleveland Dodd to suicide was the most impactful event for the reporting year. While limiting comments in the Annual Report due to the ongoing coronial inquiry into Cleveland's death, Mr Ryan stated that despite increased ongoing monitoring and advocacy from his Office, not enough could be done to secure a safer environment for young people needing extra support.

For over 10 years we have reported on the growing issues and risks about how young people in custody were being managed in Western Australia, but our advice did not result in the systemic changes needed. It is essential that with Cleveland's passing, and that of another young man this August, urgent, meaningful, and system-wide reform is made.

This year the Office diverted significant additional resources to youth justice, conducting 12 visits to the youth facilities, daily and weekly data analysis of out of cell hours, staffing levels, critical incidents and acts of self-harm. In May 2024 we also commenced a follow up review of our 2023 inspection, with those findings due to be published by the end of 2024.

The Annual Report also reflects on the significant challenges of the escalating growth in prisoner population. On 30 June 2024 there were 7,792 people in Western Australian prisons, a 15% increase from the same time last year. The increase was mostly driven by a sharp rise in remand prisoners.

Mr Ryan noted most prisons were now operating at, or above, capacity and conditions were increasingly poor and breaching human rights standards. When combined with challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, this was resulting in daily staffing shortages and prisoners being locked in cell for unacceptable periods of time.

The impact of these pressures gave rise to such a serious level of concern during the May 2024 inspection of Hakea Prison, that Mr Ryan issued a show cause notice to the Department of Justice under Section 33A of the *Inspector of Custodial Services Act*. This is a rarely used power only exercised when the Inspector has an extreme level of concern about the conditions of people in custody. Mr Ryan explained:

Following our inspection of Hakea, I believed that the safety, care, and welfare of prisoners was at serious risk, and in some instances were subject to inhuman or degrading treatment.

In the notice Mr Ryan detailed evidence that prisoners were:

- being held in conditions that failed to meet minimum international standards
- regularly not accessing fresh air and exercise or time out of cell
- not being able to maintain contact with family
- being held in unhygienic conditions (daily showers, clean cells, private toilets)
- forced to eat in cell, with evening meal often at 4.00pm and no further food for 15 hours.

Evidence showed prisoners' lockdown hours were increasing, culminating in some days where some prisoners were not unlocked at all. Self-harming and attempted suicide events had also increased, with a correlation evident between more restrictive unlock hours and harming events. Mr Ryan said, 'the correlation was clear and evident - the risk to the wellbeing and lives of prisoners cannot be ignored.'

**Eamon Ryan**

Inspector of Custodial Services

### **For Further Media Information**

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, will be available for comment from 9.00 am 6 November 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](http://www.oics.wa.gov.au)).