



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

2023 INSPECTION OF MELALEUCA
WOMEN'S PRISON

155

OCTOBER 2024

*Independent oversight
that contributes to a more
accountable public sector*

The Inspector of Custodial Services and staff acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this country, and their continuing connection to land, waters, and community throughout Australia. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders, be they past or present.

2023 Inspection of Melaleuca Women's Prison

Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services
Level 5, Albert Facey House
469 Wellington Street
Perth WA 6000
Whadjuk Noongar Boodja

www.oics.wa.gov.au

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Inspector's Overview

Melaleuca Women's Prison needs better resourcing and support

Melaleuca Women's Prison (Melaleuca) has a relatively short but interesting history. Originally the prison consisted of two male accommodation blocks opened in April 2011 on the grounds of Hakea Prison to allow for population expansion. In January 2013 it was designated as a Youth Detention Centre for a period of 12 months or so, to accommodate young people displaced by a riot at the Banksia Hill Detention Centre. In December 2016, following the addition of a new gatehouse and other administration and support buildings, it commenced as the Melaleuca Women's Remand and Reintegration Centre, privately operated by Sodexo. Then in April 2020 the prison returned to public operation and was renamed Melaleuca Women's Prison and is the main reception and remand facility for women.

This potted history illustrates a key point, that Melaleuca was not designed and built as a dedicated women's reception and remand facility. Our report provides many examples of how infrastructure limitations restrict almost every aspect of daily life in Melaleuca for both prisoners and staff. These restrictions are compounded by staffing issues that often result in inadequate services or services that are overwhelmed by the demands of record population numbers.

The Department's response to a draft of this report acknowledged many of these challenges and outlined plans and initiatives to address them. These include a focus on recruitment and retention of custodial staff, with increased officer training schools. Also identified are better oversight and governance around recruitment and retention of clinical staff. All this is underpinned by long term strategic planning, including infrastructure and information technology planning.

These are positive initiatives, some of which will have an impact in the short term, such as efforts to recruit additional staff and change some processes, while others are long term such as strategic and infrastructure planning. It is imperative that the government supports the Department's plans for these badly needed improvements at Melaleuca.

One very positive aspect of our inspection was the commendable attitude and approach of most staff at all levels working in Melaleuca. Despite the many shortcomings around infrastructure and resourcing, the dedication and commitment to 'make it work' was evident almost everywhere we went. Although this was highly commendable, ultimately it may not be sustainable.

What we are seeing at Melaleuca mirrors what we see in almost every other adult prison. Record high populations, issues with staff recruitment and retention, unmet demands for key services particularly around mental health, infrastructure limitations, and significantly reduced rehabilitation opportunities for prisoners – all documented with regularity in our published inspection and review reports.

Yet the stresses and pressures in the corrections system remain year after year.

There is little value in looking back to lament missed opportunities for improvement, because there is urgent work required to be done now. If there is not significant and sustained resourcing of corrective services, then the situation we see in Melaleuca and elsewhere will not change and the prospect of reducing recidivism and incarceration rates is significantly lessened.

Continuing as we are and hoping for a better outcome is folly. There is no doubt in my mind that significant investment is required to rebuild the corrections system so it can provide meaningful rehabilitation opportunities for the people sent there by the courts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have three Independent Prison Visitors for Melaleuca who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attended Melaleuca on a regular basis observing the operations of the prison and providing an opportunity for the women placed there to raise issues and feed back that information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of the work undertaken and thank them for their contribution to our ongoing monitoring of Melaleuca.

I also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Melaleuca and from key personnel in the Department.

The women living in Melaleuca who took the time to speak with us and share their perspectives also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I acknowledge and thank Lauren Netto for her hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan

Inspector of Custodial Services

7 October 2024

Executive Summary

Melaleuca's journey has been tenuous and privatisation was precarious

Melaleuca Women's Prison (Melaleuca) did not start out as a women's prison. Its origin was two accommodation units attached to Hakea Prison (Hakea). The facility has also been used to accommodate young people. It is not a fit for purpose women's prison.

The prison commenced operations on 15 December 2016 under the private management of Sodexo Australia Pty Ltd (Sodexo). It was branded as both a remand and reintegration facility for women that Sodexo would manage for five years. Our first inspection of Melaleuca described the contract to operate the facility as 'lengthy, complex, and overly prescriptive' (OICS, 2018, p. 8). Added to this was a changing political landscape that left Sodexo in a precarious position. By December 2019, just three years into the contract, Sodexo and the government agreed to end the contract early. The prison transitioned to public management in April 2020.

Inadequate infrastructure, not fit for purpose and increasing crowding

Melaleuca is a 'one-size-fits-all' prison, not purpose built for women. There were no specialised spaces like other prisons have, for example self-care accommodation and limited dispersal options. Essential infrastructure was missing and existing infrastructure inadequate. Increased crowding in the women's estate added extra pressure on Melaleuca's already inadequate infrastructure.

A complex prison without an apparent strategic vision

The cohort was complex. It included a high percentage of women on remand (90%), and more than half the population was First Nations women. The women also had complex needs, particularly mental health needs, which Melaleuca was not set up to manage appropriately. There was no clear strategy at a local level to guide a consistent model of care for managing the women. Short-staffing and regular redeployment impacted heavily on the provision of services for the women. Lack of collaboration across the women's estate kept women stuck at Melaleuca.

No purposeful regime

There were too many women at Melaleuca and not enough to keep them meaningfully occupied. Officers could not facilitate a purposeful regime. Women working in the kitchen and gardens were busy and enjoyed these roles, but other employment opportunities were limited. Education lacked essential infrastructure to provide a full suite of courses, but the team worked hard to achieve outcomes despite being stretched. Women could stay connected with family and friends through a flexible and well-managed social visits system.

More appropriate searching procedures but limited management options

The introduction of a full-body x-ray scanner allowed for more decent and appropriate searching and mostly removed the need to strip search the women. There had been an increase in use of force incidents and women were concerned for their safety in the prison. Re-purposing of cells in

unit 2 assisted in managing prisoners on punishment or management regimes. But this impacted the regime for other prisoners in the unit.

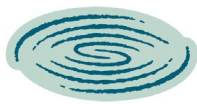
Women's complex health needs were well-managed but the team was stretched

The health services' team worked hard to achieve good health outcomes for the women, many of whom had complex health needs. Dental services were not available on site. Mental health services were struggling with a significantly under-resourced team and no multi-disciplinary approach. The Crisis Care Unit (CCU) where women in crisis were accommodated was not fit for purpose. Pregnant women received good health care, but the environment was not suitable for pregnant women, and they did not feel safe.

List of Recommendations

| Recommendation | Page | DOJ Response |
|---|------|--------------------------------------|
| Recommendation 1 Review infrastructure needs at Melaleuca and commit resources to address identified deficiencies. | 8 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| Recommendation 2 Introduce an electronic system for prisoners to manage their own requests, similar to the CMS that was previously in place. | 9 | Supported |
| Recommendation 3 Develop clear communication strategies between head office, local management and staff. | 12 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| Recommendation 4 Develop clear guidelines for the transfer of women between Melaleuca and Bandyup, particularly those requiring specialist or intensive support and monitoring. | 14 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| Recommendation 5 Develop and implement an appropriate staffing model for all aspects of operations at Melaleuca. | 14 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| Recommendation 6 Increase custodial officer resourcing at Melaleuca. | 16 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| Recommendation 7 Develop and implement a dedicated program of cultural support and activities. | 21 | Supported in Principle |
| Recommendation 8 Invest in body worn cameras at Melaleuca and other high-security prisons. | 32 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| Recommendation 9 Construct a purpose-built management unit at Melaleuca. | 35 | Supported in Principle |
| Recommendation 10 Fill the Aboriginal Mental Health Worker position and recruit an Aboriginal Health Worker. | 37 | Supported in Principle |
| Recommendation 11 Engage with WANDAS to extend in-reach service to include pregnant women at Melaleuca. | 40 | Noted |

| | | |
|--|----|--------------------------------------|
| <p>Recommendation 12</p> <p>Develop a workforce plan to recruit and retain sufficient mental health staff to provide women in Melaleuca a safe mental health service.</p> | 41 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| <p>Recommendation 13</p> <p>Commence regular multidisciplinary team meetings involving the psychiatrist, mental health nurses, psychologists and custodial staff.</p> | 42 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| <p>Recommendation 14</p> <p>Improve conditions for the women in the Crisis Care Unit, including access to more social interaction, appropriate clothing and underwear and opportunities for more privacy during health and other consultations.</p> | 45 | Supported |
| <p>Recommendation 15</p> <p>Clarify roles, responsibilities and processes for the management of substance withdrawal for women at Melaleuca.</p> | 46 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |
| <p>Recommendation 16</p> <p>Provide adequate and appropriate training for the peer support team.</p> | 47 | Supported – Current Practice/Project |



MELALEUCA WOMEN'S PRISON

FACT PAGE

ROLE OF FACILITY

Melaleuca Women's Prison is the state's primary remand and reception prison for women prisoners. It is a maximum-security facility.

HISTORY

In 2014, the Department of Justice announced that Units 11 and 12 of Hakea Prison would be transformed into a maximum-security, remand and reintegration facility for women. In July 2016 it was announced that Sodexo Australia Pty Ltd had been awarded the contract to privately manage the facility. It commenced operations under Sodexo in December 2016.

But by December 2019, just three years into the contract, Sodexo and the government agreed to end the contract early. The prison transitioned to public management in April 2020.

OFFICIAL CAPACITY

256

PRISONERS AT TIME OF INSPECTION

224



The prison is located on Whadjak Noongar land, 19 kms south of Perth



INSPECTION DATE

12 to 17 November 2023



1 Melaleuca's journey has been tenuous

Melaleuca Women's Prison (Melaleuca) did not start out as a women's prison. Its origin was two accommodation units attached to Hakea Prison (Hakea). The facility has also been used to accommodate young people. It is not a fit for purpose women's prison.

1.1 Male accommodation units re-purposed

Increasing crowding in male prisons forced investment into adding capacity across the men's estate. In addition to new infrastructure planned for the male maximum-security prisons at Albany Regional and Casuarina Prisons, two units (11 and 12) were commissioned within the Hakea Prison (Hakea) perimeter. These officially opened in April 2011. Between 2011 and 2013, this accommodation was not fully utilised for various reasons, including staff safety concerns and a lack of clarity around the specific role and purpose of these units for the men at Hakea.

Following a riot at Banksia Hill Detention Centre (Banksia) in January 2013 that caused significant damage to that facility, over 130 young male detainees were transferred to Units 11 and 12 at Hakea, while repairs were carried out at Banksia. The young people remained in these units, which was temporarily commissioned as the Hakea Juvenile Facility, for nine months.

In 2014 the Department of Justice (the Department) announced that Units 11 and 12 of Hakea would be re-purposed into a 256-bed, maximum-security, remand and reintegration facility for women. This became the Melaleuca Remand and Reintegration Facility. Melaleuca began life as a male facility, spent some time as a youth detention centre, and was then handed over to women.

1.2 Privatisation was precarious

The introduction of Melaleuca as part of the women's estate was welcome. The then state government outsourced the management of the facility and, following a tender process, Sodexo Australia Pty Ltd (Sodexo) was selected as the contractor to manage the new facility for five years. Melaleuca Remand and Reintegration Facility commenced operations on 15 December 2016.

Our first Melaleuca inspection report included a chapter dedicated to the complexity of the contract between the Department and Sodexo. We found the contract was 'lengthy, complex, and overly prescriptive' (OICS, 2018, p. 8). This, combined with a changing political landscape and a new state government elected in March 2017, proved to be a precarious situation for Sodexo. By December 2019, just three years into the contract, Sodexo and the government agreed to end the contract early. The prison transitioned to public management in April 2020.

The change from private to public happened quickly, over 75 working days. While most staff agreed to stay on, there was an influx of staff from other prisons, with different approaches. The culture was unsettled.

MELALEUCA'S STORY

KEY EVENTS



This story provides crucial context for our 2023 inspection findings. It explains how tenuous conditions were for Melaleuca from the beginning:

- The accommodation was re-purposed rather than designed for purpose for women.
- The role and purpose of Units 11 and 12 had never been clearly defined for the men.
- It was used to house young people who had rioted and damaged Banksia Hill.
- Private management of the facility was precarious due to a complex contract.
- The transition to public management caused much upheaval for staff and prisoners.

1.3 Three inspections, but few improvements for prisoners

Our first inspection of Melaleuca was in November 2017, 11 months after it commenced operating under Sodexo, followed by inspections in November 2020 and November 2023.

There was substantial upheaval that accompanied the transition, and this carried on for much of the time between inspections. Not only did the officer cohort undergo significant change and movement, the senior management team was not stable over this period. All this change, combined with the lack of investment in the prison's infrastructure, meant little had improved for the women at Melaleuca.

The consistent message across all three inspections has been that Melaleuca is not fit for purpose.

IN 2017
THE INSPECTOR
SAID...

The accommodation is 'usable' but is the very opposite of trauma-informed (it is counter-therapeutic and not female-focused.) Insufficient infrastructure – Melaleuca was driven by necessity, not design. And built to budget, not need.

Prof Neil Mogran
Inspector of Custodial Services
November 2017

Limitations of the existing physical infrastructure is one of the most significant challenges facing Melaleuca and negatively impacts almost every facet of the prison's operations.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services
July 2020

IN 2020
THE INSPECTOR
SAID...

IN 2023
THE INSPECTOR
SAID...

Melaleuca is not fit for purpose with its inadequate infrastructure and staffing levels affecting operations and service delivery.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services
December 2023

2 Inadequate prison infrastructure

Melaleuca is a 'one-size-fits-all' prison, not purpose built for women. There were no specialised spaces like other prisons have, for example self-care accommodation and limited dispersal options. Essential infrastructure was missing and existing infrastructure inadequate. Increased crowding in the women's estate added extra pressure on Melaleuca's already inadequate infrastructure.

2.1 Accommodation not purpose built for women

The two accommodation units were built in 2011 and intended to be used to house adult men. Following a riot at Banksia in 2013, young men were placed in these units. Then they were repurposed for women as a standalone facility in 2016.

Each unit (Unit 1 and Unit 2) had capacity for 128 prisoners and were divided into two wings – A/B on one side and C/D on the other side. The wings were separated by a centrally located staff control room, staff offices and amenities.

There was a communal area with tables and seating and a kitchen area in each wing. The kitchen was used primarily to serve meals that were prepared by the central prison kitchen and sent to the units. There were basic appliances – kettle, fridge, toaster – but nothing the women could use to prepare their own meals or snacks. The communal area was stark with only a couple of couches to provide any kind of comfortable seating.

2.2 Crowding in a restricted environment

Operational capacity figures did not accurately reflect capacity

On the first day of the inspection, there were 224 women held in Melaleuca. This was 87.5% of the prison's reported total capacity of 256 beds. But this total operational capacity (256) was not accurate. It was based on all cells being double bunked. This had changed during 2023 when 16 cells in Unit 2A had been converted into single occupancy because they were designated management cells. Operationally this meant that the actual capacity at that time was 240, not 256 (Chapter 5 provides more details on the repurposing of these cells as management accommodation and the impact of this on the regime in Unit 2).

Unfortunately, since the inspection, population pressure across the estate has been increasing. This has necessitated the reversion of the management wing at Melaleuca to general-purpose, double-bunked cells. So Melaleuca's current operational capacity stands at 256.

The population was steadily increasing

In a pre-inspection presentation, Melaleuca's Superintendent told us that, in the last financial year (2022/23) the Daily Average Population (DAP) at Melaleuca rose by 21%. The DAP at Bandyup Women's Prison (Bandyup) fell by 3% over the same period.

Below is a snapshot of the populations at Melaleuca and Bandyup between September 2023 and our inspection in mid-November for comparison.

Table 1: Comparison of population across Melaleuca and Bandyup women’s prisons

| Date | Melaleuca Women’s Prison | | Bandyup Women’s Prison | |
|------------|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | Population | % of total capacity | Population | % of total capacity |
| 4/09/2023 | 209 | 81.6% | 222 | 65.7% |
| 10/09/2023 | 222 | 86.7% | 225 | 66.6% |
| 17/09/2023 | 208 | 81.3% | 234 | 69.2% |
| 24/09/2023 | 201 | 78.5% | 239 | 70.7% |
| 1/10/2023 | 202 | 78.9% | 236 | 69.8% |
| 9/10/2023 | 214 | 83.6% | 240 | 71% |
| 16/10/2023 | 205 | 80.1% | 240 | 71% |
| 23/10/2023 | 207 | 80.9% | 243 | 71.9% |
| 30/10/2023 | 217 | 84.8% | 240 | 71% |
| 7/11/2023 | 216 | 84.4% | 240 | 71% |
| 14/11/2023 | 223 | 87.1% | 239 | 70.7% |

The table shows both the increase and the volatility of movement within the population at Melaleuca. The numbers fluctuate compared to the stability in Bandyup. The occupancy percentage at Bandyup never rose above 71.9%. At Melaleuca the occupancy rate did not dip below 78.5% and sat consistently above 80%. And while numbers at Bandyup moved up or down by a few (an increase of five women over the week 17 to 24 September 2023 was the biggest fluctuation), at Melaleuca the peaks and troughs were more pronounced (from 209 to 222 between 4 and 10 September 2023, a jump of 13 in one week).

The population continued to increase in the months following the inspection. At the time of writing (February 2024) Melaleuca was operating at over 90% capacity (on 7 February 2024 the population was 238, 93%). This remained consistent through the early months of 2024 with the population consistently around 90%. On 27 June 2024 it was at 91.4%.

No room to move

At Melaleuca, the lack of space due to only having two accommodation units severely restricted dispersal options. In contrast, Bandyup not only had a higher overall bed capacity, but crucially, a total of seven accommodation units which provided greater opportunities for prisoner dispersal. The units at Bandyup had specific purposes and included earned privilege accommodation, self-care options for mothers and babies, dedicated placements for long-term prisoners, purpose-designed crisis care and management units as well as mainstream accommodation. Alerts between prisoners could be more easily managed because there was a spread of placement options.

Departmental data showed that prior to the inspection almost 40% (38.92%) of the Melaleuca population had alerts recorded on their profile. These could be due to being at risk from other women in the prison, or because they were a risk to other prisoners there. This impacted on their placement. Those with risks to/from each other clearly could not be accommodated together, some not even in the same unit. If these alerts included multiple prisoners, assigning cells and units to ensure these prisoners were separated was a difficult juggling act, and presented a real safety issue for both staff and prisoners.

‘One-size-fits-all’

Melaleuca’s infrastructure was designed on a ‘one-size-fits-all’ rather than an ‘each-space-has-a-purpose’ model. In other facilities - like Hakea the men’s remand and receipt facility - certain spaces have specific functions, such as orientation and induction, protection, earned privileges, and management and punishment. Similarly, Bandyup’s accommodation units have specific designations, as described above.

But Melaleuca only had Units 1 and 2. These units had not been purpose-built for a female remand population. Each unit had to manage different, and sometimes conflicting regimes. It was not fit for purpose. It did not provide the range of options and services appropriate for 200+ women.

Unit 2 had 16 cells designated as management and punishment cells in A wing. But Unit 2 (C/D wing) was also the enhanced living unit for those prisoners with earned supervision status. The same staff managed both these wings operating vastly different regimes. Unit 1A/B wing was where new arrivals were placed, although this placement was always based on managing active alerts between the women. If there were significant risks to/from a newly arrived prisoner and others in Unit 1 A/B, she would be placed elsewhere. So there were new prisoners accommodated across the prison.

2.3 Major infrastructure shortfalls

Melaleuca has a severe shortage of purpose-built infrastructure. The facility does not have crucial amenities that are standard in all other prisons in the state including:

- an education centre and classrooms
- dedicated programs rooms
- gym or indoor recreation space
- stand-alone library
- staff amenities (communal dining area, gym)
- management unit
- chapel or spiritual space
- appropriate cultural space
- industry workshops (like laundry, skills, etc).

Few rooms, many uses

Management had taken a pragmatic approach to the infrastructure limitations understanding there is unlikely to be any funding for building or significant upgrades to the prison. Perhaps to its detriment, Melaleuca has been ‘making do’ with its resources, making areas multifunctional to try

increase access to services, supports and activities. However, this means there was always competition for space.

There was a room attached to each accommodation wing, four in all, and these were the only spaces available for all prisoner activities. Their (multipurpose) uses included:

- education classes
- library
- art room
- recreation activities
- programs (parenting programs, Alcoholics Anonymous 'AA' groups)
- spiritual services
- computer room
- community-based services (yoga, meditation).

The demand for these rooms outweighed supply, meaning activities and services for the women were restricted by the lack of adequate spaces to facilitate these.

One of the rooms was also the library. So access to the library was restricted if it had been booked for a program, class or other activity.



Photo 1: The library doubled as a programs and education space.

Another was for art classes. We acknowledge the importance of a dedicated art space, understanding the therapeutic benefits of creative practices, but this area was neither functional as an art room nor an appropriate space for any other activity. Being an art space, it was full of paint pots, canvasses, and completed and in-progress artworks. But it was carpeted, and heavily stained.

The adjoining toilet cubicle had been used to store excess art supplies. Given the state of the room, it was not appropriate for other activities that needed the space, such as yoga classes, AA meetings or education classes that required a standard desk and chair arrangement.

2.4 Health care infrastructure was inadequate

The health centre was relatively new having been added when Melaleuca became a stand-alone female prison in 2016. Still, it lacked essential infrastructure and struggled to keep up with the increasing numbers and complex needs of the population.

There was no infirmary to accommodate women who required more continuous monitoring of their health. Those returning from surgery or from giving birth had to recover in their shared cells in the general accommodation units. This was not an appropriate environment for women to heal and recuperate.

There was no infrastructure to support women with significant mobility issues or the elderly and frail. There was no dental suite, so women had to access dental services off site, and this was problematic (see Chapter 6).

There were only three consult rooms that had to be shared between the nurses, doctors, mental health staff, the psychiatrist and allied health workers. When multiple providers were on site, there were not enough clinical rooms to meet patients. Staff told us they had to 'juggle' for rooms and sometimes used the triage area, an open bay shared with phlebotomy services and separated only by a curtain.

We have recommended that the Department invest in appropriate infrastructure for Melaleuca in both its private and public iterations (OICS, 2018, p. 16; OICS, 2021, p. 12). There has been no progress against any of these recommendations. Perhaps this 2023 inspection will be a catalyst for change.

Recommendation 1

Review infrastructure needs at Melaleuca and commit resources to address identified deficiencies.

2.5 The removal of essential IT infrastructure diminished autonomy

When Sodexo managed the prison, they introduced electronic kiosks prisoners could use to manage their own affairs. This was called the Custodial Management System (CMS). It promoted independence and a sense of agency for prisoners over their own lives while incarcerated. CMS also reduced the burden on staff to manage these requests. A similar system is in place at the privately-managed male prison Acacia.

The CMS kiosks allowed prisoners to manage their own schedules and needs. They used CMS to:

- book health appointments
- book social visits
- choose meal options
- apply for jobs
- check their gratuity and private cash balances
- order canteen purchases
- apply for education courses
- stay updated with prison news and events
- make various requests, eg. to see peer support
- make complaints.

When Melaleuca transitioned back to public management, the Department refused Sodexo's offer to purchase the CMS kiosks. Neither did the Department introduce anything similar to replace the electronic system. Instead, the prison reverted to a paper-based system for requests and bookings. Prisoners seeking information about their gratuity or private cash balances had to wait for dedicated inquiry times when officers were available to assist them.

Staff at Melaleuca told us that this was a lost opportunity that had a significant impact on their workload. Prisoners relied on officers to manage all their requests. For officers, this meant they were stuck in the control room rather than out in the wings interacting and building rapport with the women. It was also detrimental to dynamic security and reduced opportunities for the early identification of women who might be struggling or other security risks.

We heard from the women that the unit interview request forms they had to submit were not actioned efficiently, and in some cases, women had not had any answers to their requests. We heard from staff that processing this paperwork was onerous and reduced opportunities for them to engage with the women.

Recommendation 2

Introduce an electronic system for prisoners to manage their own requests, similar to the CMS that was previously in place.

3 A complex prison with little strategic direction

The cohort was complex. It included a high percentage of women on remand (90%) and more than half the population was First Nations women. The women also had complex needs, particularly mental health needs, which Melaleuca was not set up to manage appropriately. There was no clear strategy at a local level to guide a consistent model of care for managing the women. Short-staffing and regular redeployment impacted heavily on the provision of services for the women. Lack of collaboration across the women's estate kept women stuck at Melaleuca.

3.1 The strategic vision was not apparent

No common understanding about the model of care

Management and staff were not aware of any overall strategic vision for Melaleuca. We found the same in 2020 but this was attributed to the recent transition to public administration, resulting in delayed policies and operational procedures (OICS, 2021). Three years later, we found that much work had been done to finalise local operating procedures. But there was no common understanding among staff about the prison's approach to managing the women in their care.

We frequently heard the phrase 'trauma-informed approach' over the course of the inspection. We heard it from the chaplains, support/wellbeing staff, health staff, officers and managers. But it was clear that the understanding of what this approach actually means was not the same for each of these different staff groups.

Some thought it was as simple as ...

Women just want to be heard

Quote from staff

This allowed for a wide interpretation of the approach with limited guidelines on what it meant in practice.

Others evidenced a weariness with, or limited understanding of, what trauma-informed care looked like. Some thought it equated to excusing and accommodating poor behaviour and indicated they were in favour of a more punitive approach to prisoner management. Some staff reported discipline was not consistent across officers and this destabilised relationships with women. They said ...

Some staff have gone too far on being trauma informed. Women need boundaries. You have to be firm and say no.

MWP suffers from a "trauma informed" mentality that has gone too far in favour of letting prisoners do what they want with minimal repercussions.

Quotes from staff

This led to inconsistent approaches by officers in their day-to-day management of the women. We heard from the women that some officers were helpful and approachable, but not all. They said officers on one shift would allow certain privileges while those on another shift would not.

Fifty-eight per cent of the women we surveyed prior to the inspection said they felt staff treated them with respect. This was an improvement from three years ago when only 33% felt staff treated them respectfully. We heard from some staff they had received training in trauma-informed care in preparation for their role and had empathy for the traumatic backgrounds of the women. This could explain the increase in the women feeling more respected by staff. But 58% was still just over half of the respondents and could reflect the lack of clear understanding and inconsistent approaches in working within a trauma-informed model of care.

A trauma-informed model of care was referenced in local and wider plans

On the one hand we found a level of confusion and uncertainty about a trauma-informed approach and its benefits for managing the women. But we also found detailed references to this approach in both the local business plan, and a departmental framework.

Melaleuca's business plan for 2021 to 2023 mentions a trauma-informed approach upfront in the vision statement:

Melaleuca Women's Prison is committed to providing all women in our care with:

A safe, secure, decent, and trauma-informed custodial experience that is responsive to their needs as women (DOJ, 2021).

The plan also shows commitment to understanding the complex needs and traumatic pasts of the women:

Melaleuca acknowledges the complex trauma and abuse experienced by the vast majority of women in custody prior to imprisonment. Understanding that providing women with the maximum level of choice, autonomy, self-determination, dignity and respect is central to healing. Melaleuca creates an environment conducive to healing from trauma with the support and guidance of staff across the facility who work in a number of specialised roles (DOJ, 2021).

The Department has also developed a document titled 'Better futures: Empowering women changing lives' (DOJ, 2022). This document, endorsed by the Deputy Commissioner, Women and Young People in October 2022, presents a framework to support women in prisons. In order to understand how to support women and address offending behaviours, the framework includes a commitment to trauma-informed practices that 'foster an environment of safety, empowerment, collaboration, trust and respect' (DOJ, 2022).

There were gaps in processes to communicate the vision

The Superintendent had established a change management team and used this structure to communicate operational priorities and obtain feedback from staff. But there were clearly gaps in

these processes, otherwise all staff would have a clear understanding of the trauma-informed vision embedded in the local prison and wider Departmental plans.

There were no systemic strategy and business planning processes in place between head office and superintendents. The relationship between officers on the ground and head office was tenuous at best. In our pre-inspection survey, only 10% said the support they receive from head office was good, and only 9% perceived head office communication to be good. Responses across these measures for support and communication from local management were more positive with over a third (35%) feeling support and communication from this group was good. But 35% was still low. This shows a gap in communication processes with almost two thirds of staff not rating these measures positively. These survey results were supported by collective and individual feedback we had from staff groups during the inspection.

It should go without saying that effective communication is essential if the strategic vision is to be understood and followed by management and staff in individual facilities.

Recommendation 3

Develop clear communication strategies between head office, local management and staff.

3.2 Uncertainty in the women's estate

Lack of collaboration kept women stuck

We found a lack of collaboration among the women's estate to achieve common goals. This impacted the women at Melaleuca and caused some cohorts to remain stuck there when they could be better managed and supported at another facility.

The tension was specifically between Melaleuca and Bandyup and evident across different operational levels. The frustration among those who raised it with us was intense. The lack of collaboration contributed to the crowding at Melaleuca and exacerbated tensions between the women.

No strategic approach

All the staff we spoke to, at all levels across the prison, unanimously said they had no advice or guidelines about how to manage the flow of women between Melaleuca and Bandyup. They agreed there were no 'trigger' points which, when reached, would activate a transfer so a woman could move to Bandyup where they would be better supported and managed. In the absence of a strategic approach with clear guidelines, these decisions were left up to individuals to make, often acting alone with little accountability for their decisions.

The issue was most stark for long-term remand prisoners (see 3.4 for numbers of long-term remands), pregnant women (see 6.3 for appropriate placement for pregnant women) and those experiencing acute mental health breakdowns.

Women with complex mental health problems could not be adequately managed at Melaleuca

There were very few options for managing women with complex mental health issues and associated distress and/or behavioural disturbance. The only options were the mainstream accommodation units, which were noisy and chaotic, or the Crisis Care Unit (CCU). Chapter 6 describes the CCU as inappropriate and not fit for purpose.

Bandyup had a greater variety of options, in particular the Bindi Bindi Unit (BBU). This opened in 2021 for women who required ongoing and intensive mental health support. They may be experiencing an acute mental illness, or just recovering from an acute episode. It had a high dependency area for those women requiring constant monitoring and observation as well as a sub-acute area for those women who need monitoring and support rather than full-time observation. This area had landscaped gardens with covered seating, an activity room for group sessions and a sensory cell for those women needing emotional regulation.

Melaleuca had none of these facilities. Yet there were women there with complex and severe mental health problems who could benefit from the environment of the BBU. We found a tension between Bandyup and Melaleuca over the placement of these women which often disadvantaged the women in crisis at Melaleuca. This had a significant impact on staff at Melaleuca, with one officer noting:

Something needs to be done about looking after those with mental health issues. There is the Bindi Bindi Unit in Bandyup but the criterion for placement is so tight that most of them do not get approved to go. Bandyup do not work with Melaleuca to look after this cohort as they refuse to take them. Once these women are sentenced and then moved to Bandyup, they are automatically placed in the Bindi Bindi Unit as they are too difficult to manage in the general living units. This should really be looked at as the unit should accommodate many more mental health prisoners. The women's estate does not work as a cohesive team for the best interests of the women.

Quote from officer in our pre-inspection survey

Bandyup's approach was that placement in the BBU was for those experiencing acute mental illness usually involving psychosis and not for vulnerable women or those displaying behavioural disturbances. Melaleuca's approach was the two were difficult to differentiate and, regardless, the BBU was a much more appropriate environment to manage and support these women.

We heard that there were many players involved in the decision-making including nurses, mental health staff, the psychiatrist, assistant superintendents and even superintendents at both sites. But there was no collaborative approach informed by mutually understood guidelines to ensure the safest and most therapeutic outcome for the women experiencing acute mental illness and behaving badly as a result.

Recommendation 4

Develop clear guidelines for the transfer of women between Melaleuca and Bandyup, particularly those requiring specialist or intensive support and monitoring.

3.3 Management faced challenging staffing issues

A cohesive management team

We found an experienced and stable management team in place at Melaleuca, but the path to this stability had been turbulent. In 2020 we found leadership instability due to the prison transitioning from private to public operation (OICS, 2021). The intervening years saw a substantive superintendent appointed but then seconded to another facility and an acting superintendent put in place. We heard that previous tensions between the site and head office had been resolved in the months preceding the inspection. When we came on site in November 2023, we found a cohesive and experienced team in place.

The staffing model was inadequate

Management identified issues with the staffing model in their pre-inspection presentation to our Office. We heard that following the transition back to public administration, no additional resources were allocated to ensure it was staffed accordingly. We had similar concerns back in 2020, finding that the prison was short-staffed, affecting services in all areas of operations (OICS, 2021). We recommended that the Department develop and implement appropriate staffing models for each area (OICS, 2021, p. 6). The Department supported the recommendation and said that these issues should be resolved when the new Staffing Level Agreement (SLA) was finalised.

The most recent SLA that was provided to us in the lead up to this inspection did not support the Department's claims. In fact, it showed that positions had been removed, including a prison officer position in the gatehouse, a Prison Officer Assessments, and a Vocational Support Officer (VSO) movements position. And extra duties were added to existing positions, such as the Senior Officer Visits assuming responsibility for supervision of the CCU.

Melaleuca's staffing profile fell short at every level. The management team had three fewer positions than Bandyup's, despite both facilities managing a similar population count and offering the same services. Clerical and administrative staff numbers were insufficient for a complex remand facility, and there was no capacity within the team for backfill to cover leave. Each accommodation unit had a minimum of two staff short when compared to unit staffing numbers at Hakea, Casuarina and Bandyup.

Recommendation 5

Develop and implement an appropriate staffing model for all aspects of operations at Melaleuca.

Chronic under-staffing

Staff reported feeling under pressure constantly due to insufficient staff numbers and that staff shortages were affecting the day-to-day running of the prison. The pace was frenetic and staff said they were exhausted – often resulting in time away from the prison. The under-staffing cannot be separated from the inappropriate staffing model as described above. The model does not provide adequate staffing across all operational areas of the prison. So staff were constantly stretched and overloaded.

The prison is under-resourced from a staffing point of view which places strain on everybody.

Constantly running all the aspects of the prison whilst constantly being short staffed.

With the current and constant short-staffing coupled with the dramatic rise in workload ... creates a heightened sense of anxiety for prison officers. It is frankly a system set for failure on every level.

We were 42% staff short last weekend.

Quotes from staff

Our continuous inspection process means we have a regular presence within all prisons over the three-year period between inspections. Our staff conduct structured liaison visits every two to three months. And our Independent Visitors (IVs) visit monthly. At Melaleuca, these IVs report on the staff shortages at each visit because this was such a critical issue for the prison. The table below provides a day-per-month snapshot of the number of staff short on each day over most months from March to October 2023.

Table 2: Snapshot of staff shortages, March to November 2023

| Day/Month 2023 | Number of staff short |
|--|-----------------------|
| 21 March 2023 | 14 |
| 26 April 2023 | 16 |
| 23 May 2023 | 10 |
| 6 July 2023 | 19 |
| 23 August 2023 | 9 |
| 3 October 2023 | 12 |
| 14 November 2023 (during our on-site inspection) | 12 |

Optimal custodial staffing each day was 54 on weekdays and 39 on the weekends. The dates included in Table 2 were weekdays. On the day with the most officers at work (23 August 2023), the prison was still operating without 16% of its essential workforce. On 6 July 2023, when 19 officers did not arrive for work, the prison was under-staffed by more than a third (35%) of its essential workforce. We heard that staff absences on weekends were even higher.

Recommendation 6

Increase custodial officer resourcing at Melaleuca.

A lot of inexperienced officers

More than two thirds (63%) of officers allocated to Melaleuca had less than two years' experience in the job. We spoke to many of these officers who said they felt like they had to 'sink or swim'. They referenced a lack of support when they first started, with new officers being shown the ropes by officers who were also new to the role. Many said they would seek a transfer to another prison as soon as they were allowed.

Under-staffing and redeployment impacted meaningful activities

Vocational Support Officers (VSOs) facilitate employment, recreation, and general constructive activities for prisoners. Too often we find VSOs redeployed from their roles to cover custodial positions that are unfilled due to under-staffing. At Melaleuca this impacted heavily on prisoners' access to meaningful activities like employment and recreation.

Recreation and maintenance VSOs were most commonly redeployed. We saw the recreation officer in the gatehouse and supervising visit sessions. These are custodial roles. Similarly, we observed the maintenance VSO in the gatehouse as well as escorting external contractors across the site. But other VSOs were also regularly redeployed – the cleaning VSO was redeployed daily to assist in managing the busy video link area. And we observed the gardens VSO also working in video link, processing women in and out of the area.

When these staff were redeployed to other positions, the women they usually employed in their work areas were left in the units with nothing to do.

The VSOs frustration over the constant redeployment was palpable. We heard one VSO was leaving to take up a similar role at another facility because of the constant redeployment and another had recently left Melaleuca and was already working at another female prison for the same reason. Another VSO told us that they had been redeployed eight out of their last 10 shifts.

The lack of consistency over when VSOs were redeployed was also a source of frustration. Redeployment decisions were made each morning once the day shift had commenced and custodial managers received the final officer numbers for the day. We heard there was inconsistency in how this was applied. An example given was one day when the facility was 15 staff short, but the VSOs were not redeployed to custodial positions, but another day when they were only 10 officers short, VSOs were redeployed.

During the inspection we heard that a matrix outlining a schedule for VSO redeployment had been drafted and circulated to VSOs for comment. But there had been no progress in implementing this. A few weeks after the on-site inspection we received a copy of an email that included the matrix for redeployment. The rationale was that the matrix would promote a healthy balance with redeployments taking into account workloads and operational schedules. Feedback was invited after the matrix had been trialled for two weeks. We will monitor whether this leads to a more effective system of redeployment and use of VSOs valuable skills and time in the future.

Redeployment in key areas carried risk

Redeployment of staff from crucial operational areas carried risk. We found this in the reception centre. We found in 2020 that this area was not sufficiently staffed. Since then, this situation had deteriorated with reception staff now regularly being redeployed. Given the level of inexperience among the prison officer cohort, probationary officers often cover positions in the reception centre. Reception processes are quite detailed and must be followed precisely, in particular procedures for gathering information from new intakes about their at-risk status. Not having experienced, knowledgeable staff in this key area was a serious risk for Melaleuca as the main reception and reception women's prison.

Our pre-inspection survey revealed an increase in the distress levels of women on arrival, with 82% saying they felt 'upset or very upset', much higher than the state average of 68%. Also, the percentage of women who said at the time of entering prison staff helped them 'very well or okay' slightly decreased from 63% in 2020 to 58% in 2023.

3.4 Rising remand population increased pressure on the prison

Remand numbers were high and climbing

Melaleuca is the primary remand facility for women in Western Australia. A snapshot sourced on 30 October 2023, just two weeks before the start of the on-site inspection, showed that 196 of the 218 prisoners at Melaleuca were on remand, 90% of the population. This was higher than the percentage of men on remand at Hakea Prison, the state's primary remand facility for men, which sat at 82%. Departmental data shows the daily average remand population at Melaleuca for the month of October in 2022 was 146. By October 2023 this had grown to 190, a 23.2% increase.

During our inspections we often meet with prisoners in focus groups to discuss their experience of the prison. We asked for a meeting with women who had been on remand for over six months. The prison advised there were 35 women who fit this criterion. This number was too big for a meaningful focus group, so this was extended to those who had been on remand for over 12 months. At this meeting we met with 15 women, but there were several others who did not attend. Two of the women in this group had been on remand for 26 months. By the time their trials take place in 2024 they will have been incarcerated for over two and a half years.

Infrastructure limitations for remand prisoners

Most women who were remanded into custody will initially be placed at Melaleuca. Our standards state that remand prisoners should be managed separately to sentenced prisoners (OICS, 2021a).

This aligns with national and international standards which establish rights for unsentenced prisoners. It is also reflected in the Department's own policy on remand prisoners - Commissioner's Operating Policy and Procedure (COPP) 4.1 suggests that all remand prisoners, as far as practicable, be kept separate from sentenced prisoners in the interests of security.

The infrastructure limitations and crowding at Melaleuca (explained in Chapter 2) made the separation of remand and sentenced women impossible.

Women on remand should have reasonable access to legal resources to prepare and potentially represent themselves in court, as well as to obtain general legal information. At Melaleuca, the legal library and resources were in the main library in Unit 1, a room that was also used for programs and other activities. Only 25% of women surveyed prior to the inspection rated access to the library as acceptable. Access to the library was poor because of the competing demands on this space, as well as the availability of the recreation officer to supervise the women using it.

The legal library took up only a few shelves and included some generic legal texts, but nothing relating to family law. Many books were marked 'not for loan' so women could only spend limited time accessing them. There was a computer with some legal information on it, but we heard there was little demand for this service. But low demand may not actually reflect real need and should not be used as an excuse to avoid providing useful legal resources.

Rules around remand prisoners being allowed daily visits had recently changed. This is reflected in COPP 7.2 (Social Visits v6.0) which states that a remand prisoner should receive a social visit as soon as practical after admission, and then two visits per week. Despite this change, Melaleuca had managed to continue daily social visits until recently.

As the state's primary remand facility for women, we would expect that services for this cohort would be tailored and specific.

Court services were well-managed but hampered by infrastructure challenges

The video link area was part of the new infrastructure that was added in 2016 when Melaleuca was established. The space was a long corridor with two holding cells and two court rooms. The area was managed by two officers who knew the systems and processes and handled these efficiently. One was a prison officer who was permanently in the role, even though it was a rostered position. This provided stability and consistency for the area. The other was the cleaning VSO who was redeployed from the cleaning role to video link on most days. A third position was rostered, but this was often filled through redeploying a VSO, most commonly the gardens VSO.

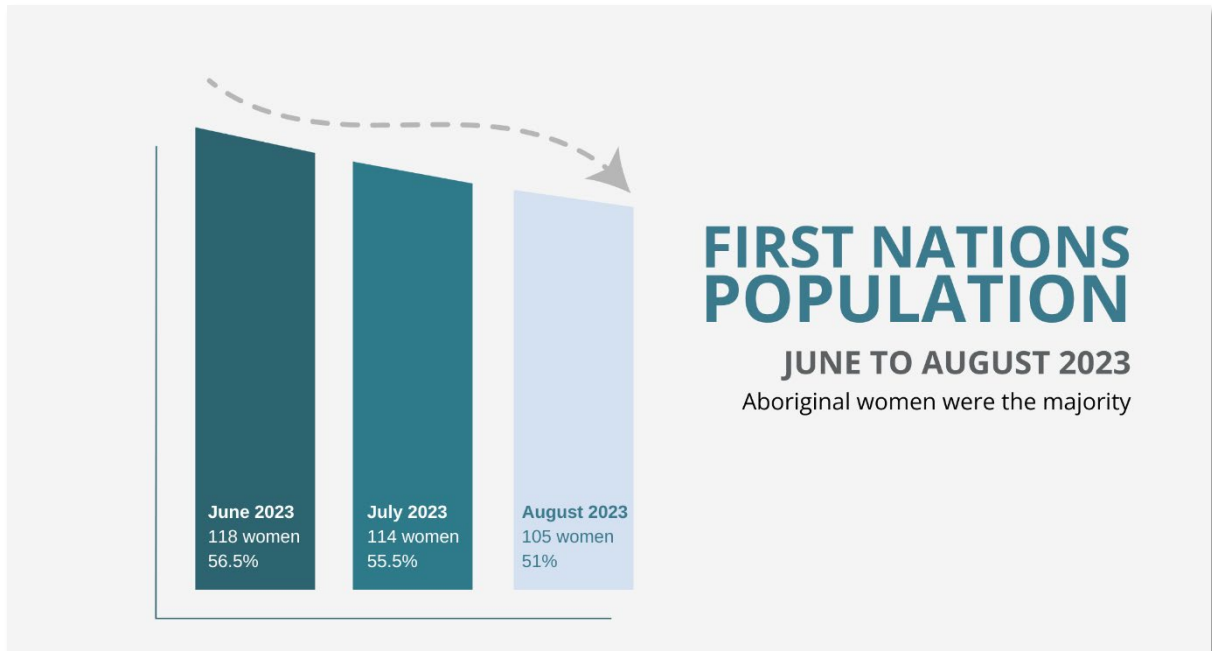
The two holding cells were poorly ventilated and sparse. The officers had to manage any alerts between women to ensure they were not placed in the same holding cell. There was no comfortable seating, only a metal bench, and the only entertainment was a television that was placed on a wall outside the holding cells. Women in the cells could not hear the TV, they had to read the sub-titles, but they were allowed to take a book into the holding cell to read while they waited.

We heard that it was not unusual for women to wait in these cells from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm some days. On occasions there have been as many as nine women in each cell.

3.5 First Nations women over-represented and under-served

A majority First Nations population

First Nations women consistently made up more than 50% of the prisoner population at Melaleuca.



This majority was not reflected in the services and meaningful activities in the prison regime. First Nations women were managed as part of the general population with no special regard given to the high numbers and churn through Melaleuca. Only 34% of the women who responded to our survey felt that staff understood their culture; and only 37% felt their culture was respected by staff.

We found similar concerns in 2020. There was no cultural meeting place, no visiting Elders program, and a lack of understanding by many staff of cultural priorities like family structures and traditions around grief and loss.

Since 2020, a space had been developed as a cultural area. This was a positive initiative and it was good to see women using this area. Unfortunately, it was in the open space between the two units and had no shelter or shade which limited its use to days when the weather was fine.



Photo 2: A cultural space had been developed.

Women off-country struggled to get back home

Management identified First Nations cultural issues as the second of the big five issues on their priority list. Not only were they over-represented, many were also off country, isolated from their home and families. On average, 16 First Nations women per month were off country.

Let us stay where we come from

Quote by First Nations woman in the pre-inspection survey

There are no female prisons or even accommodation options in Western Australia's south-west. The two southern prisons in Bunbury and Albany are male prisons covering all security classifications. There is a small unit in Albany Regional Prison that can hold three women. But they are only held there for a few days at most until the scheduled weekly escort transfers them to either Melaleuca or Bandyup.

There is capacity for women in Roebourne, West Kimberley, Greenough, Eastern Goldfields, and Broome. But women's access to these is restricted by short staffing, crowding, risks to/from other women, and court directions. Better system-led planning between the male and female custodial estate needs to occur to identify appropriate pathways to ensure women are held at the prison closest to home at the lowest security classification.

One program is highly valued

The Western Australia Aboriginal Leadership Institute (WAALI) had run its leadership program for First Nations women at Melaleuca at least twice between 2020 and this inspection. The 11-week course focused on empowering women to build confidence and better resolve conflict. It also encouraged the women to be leaders within their own families and communities.

The program was well attended by those women who enrolled and completion rates were high. There was a formal graduation ceremony at which participants had to speak about their journey and perform a traditional dance. These sessions were very moving for the participants and invited guests. The program was highly valued by participants, and we hope WAALI continues to be engaged with the First Nations women at Melaleuca.

But other supports were lacking

We acknowledge the work of individual staff to support First Nations prisoners. The chaplains, for example, provided meaningful support to these women on a day-to-day basis as well as facilitating memorial services and supporting the community during times of grief and loss. But there were no other formal supports, programs or activities for First Nations women, despite these women being in the majority.

We heard from these women they wanted culturally appropriate and safe supports and activities:

Have more spokespeople for the Indigenous

More Indigenous lore awareness for some people/inmates

Need a yarning group like Bandyup

We should have more Elders come in

Units need to get smoked out more often ... has bad energy and spiritual stuff

Quotes from First Nations women in the pre-inspection survey

Recommendation 7

Develop and implement a dedicated program of cultural support and activities.

4 Lost opportunities for meaningful engagement

There were too many women at Melaleuca and not enough to keep them meaningfully occupied. Officers could not facilitate a purposeful regime. Women working in the kitchen and gardens were busy and enjoyed these roles, but other employment opportunities were limited. Education lacked essential infrastructure to provide a full suite of courses, but the team worked hard to achieve outcomes despite being stretched. Women could stay connected with family and friends through a flexible and well-managed social visits system.

4.1 The regime was neither purposeful nor flexible

Our inspection standards (Standard 37) articulates that the prison regime should be purposeful and sufficiently flexible to account for the diversity of prisoners (OICS, 2021a). We found the daily routine for women at Melaleuca was neither of these.

Beyond infrastructure limitations, the main impacts on a purposeful daily regime were:

- Staffing – insufficient staff meant prisoner activities listed as part of the daily regime could often not all proceed.
- Insufficient employment opportunities – grounds and kitchen were the only industries that could provide consistent and meaningful employment opportunities.

Low staff numbers and too many women in the units also meant staff could only attend to the most pressing and necessary tasks. This environment could not facilitate meaningful engagement opportunities.

A restricted regime such as this could not be described as purposeful or flexible.

4.2 Under-staffed assessments team meant service gaps for women

We were surprised to find that the assessments team had reduced from two full-time Case Management Assessors (CMAs) to one part-time CMA. The staffing model for this team was two CMAs, but one was on extended parental leave, so there was only the part-time CMA in position at the time we inspected.

The CMA workload was significant and included completing:

- remand Management and Placement (MAP) assessments
- immigration assessments
- MAPs for prisoners after they were sentenced
- parole review reports
- some aspects of funeral applications
- case management of women engaged with child protection and family services, in conjunction with the Senior Family Links Officer
- case management of pregnant women and participation in the Expectant Mothers' Committee.

They also managed referrals that come from the women by way of Unit Interview Forms, coordinated and scheduled programs, and started the process for resident child and child visit applications, which are finalised once the woman transfers to Bandyup or Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women (Boronia).

The CMA worked hard to manage this workload and achieve positive outcomes for the women. But given the demand at Melaleuca, and with only one part-time CMA, we were concerned that some women may be missed, particularly those who may be vulnerable and need more intensive support.

4.3 Limited options to engage in useful activities

Too few women had meaningful jobs

The number of women engaged in meaningful employment was low. We found the same in 2020 when 148 out of the 214 women there at the time were either unemployed or underemployed (OICS, 2021, p. 18). In 2023 two-thirds of the population were either unemployed or underemployed. Aboriginal women were further disadvantaged, with just 22% in meaningful employment, compared to 53% of non-Aboriginal prisoners.

Some women had been at Melaleuca for long periods. One third had been on site for more than four months, a quarter for more than five months, and one in 10 for more than eight months. During 2023, the sentenced population varied between 13 and 30.

Long-term remand and sentenced women need meaningful work and other opportunities to maintain their health and wellbeing.

Staff were also frustrated by the lack of employment options for the women:

There is a desperate need to increase access to employment within the prison. We should have more industries such as a commercial laundry where women can learn skills and obtain qualifications which may help them find a job upon release.

Melaleuca is not fit for purpose. There is not enough work for the prisoners.

Quotes by staff in our pre-inspection survey

Kitchen and grounds offered good employment opportunities

The kitchen was allocated up to 26 workers, the highest of any workplace in the prison, but it can operate with just 15. Shifts were over five days, 8.30 am to 11.10 am, and 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm. The longer hours in the kitchen warranted higher pay, and 10 kitchen workers were on the highest Level 1 gratuity, but only one of these workers was Aboriginal.

In 2020, the kitchen cooked over a thousand meals a day for prisoners and staff. Since October 2022 it also catered for the Special Operations Group and trainees at the Academy. The kitchen was a meaningful employer and contributed to a purposeful regime for the few women who worked there.

Gardens and grounds were allocated up to 10 workers, but usually only had seven. Five women were completing a Certificate II in Horticulture. In addition to ongoing garden maintenance, special projects included a greenhouse and a market garden, which provided some produce to the kitchen. There were also plans to make the courtyard garden in the CCU a more appealing and soothing green space.

We were told that the grounds VSO was rarely redeployed. But we saw them working in the video link area on two separate days during our on-site inspection.

Good recreation schedule was often disrupted due to cancellations and inadequate infrastructure

There was a good recreation schedule in place and the recreation VSOs were keen and proactive. Management said they supported a full recreation regime because it got women out of the units and doing something meaningful. It was also a good distraction from a limited daily regime and offered the physical and mental health benefits of exercise.

Until recently, recreation had been split with only one accommodation unit at a time allowed out to recreate. This was due to the number of alerts between prisoners. Having prisoners who were a risk to or from others all out recreating together made staff nervous. But management had worked with staff on managing these alerts. When women with alerts listed on their profile were asked whether they would rather be out of the unit recreating with other women they may be in conflict with, or stay in the unit, most chose the former. So the large number of alerts between the women dwindled and mixed recreation with both units at the same time became part of the daily schedule.

There were organised volleyball, basketball, and netball games. The recreation VSOs also coordinated a walking group on the oval most mornings. Satisfaction with the amount of organised sport had risen from 22% who thought it was good in 2020 to 36% in 2023. Although this is still low, it is perhaps explained in part because Melaleuca has no gym and the limited outdoor static exercise equipment is exposed to the weather and seldom used. There was no undercover area for the women to use for recreation.

Notwithstanding the inadequate recreation infrastructure, the real problem was that the schedule was often disrupted by redeployment of the Recreation VSOs.

Scheduled recreation was frequently cancelled

The prison had two Recreation VSO positions, and two prisoners were employed as recreation workers. Redeployment of VSOs away from their designated tasks to cover the lack of custodial staff was a recurring theme. Although the activity schedule listed team sports every afternoon, when a Recreation VSO was redeployed, the session was cancelled. Women said the volleyball game we saw on the first day of our inspection was the first in weeks.

With just one Recreation VSO position filled for much of 2023, activities had been limited. Although an acting Recreation VSO had been appointed in August, since then he had been redeployed on two thirds of his rostered days. Chapter 3 details the chronic under-staffing and impact of redeployment on the VSOs. Taking VSOs away from their roles significantly impacts women's access to meaningful activities and makes prison a lot harder for the women than it should be.

4.4 Rehabilitative opportunities were limited

Education struggled for space and resources

With no dedicated education centre, classes were delivered in one of the four shared rooms attached to Units 1 and 2 (see Chapter 2 for details). The education team had been utilising other spaces such as the visits area until changes to visit sessions meant they could no longer use this space.

The team was stretched. There was one full-time Campus Manager and only one part-time Prison Education Coordinator (PEC). An Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW) from Hakea had previously assisted Melaleuca and developed good connections with the women through an art program. Unfortunately, this position was not allocated to Melaleuca's team and the AEW had stopped attending some months prior to our inspection. Education budget cuts impacted the prison's capacity to recruit tutors to deliver different classes, and other valuable courses, like the White Card and the infectious cleaning course, could no longer run.

The Campus Manager was heavily involved in scheduling and facilitating classes to fill gaps and try to meet some of the women's needs. He tried to ensure there was an appropriate quota of First Nations women in the courses offered, particularly evident in the 'Keys for Life' driving education program in which 90% of participants were First Nations women.

The team achieved outcomes within these constraints

The education team worked hard and understood the importance of education in improving rehabilitation outcomes. Courses offered were focussed on building employable skills. Hairdressing and barista training were popular with women as were literacy, numeracy, and art courses. Women could also participate in a condensed public speaking course to help build their confidence.

There were traineeships running – five in horticulture, two in supply chain and two in commercial cooking. These were facilitated by the VSOs managing these areas working with external TAFE tutors who delivered sessions and signed off on assessments.

Despite the resourcing and infrastructure challenges, the education team was achieving positive outcomes for some women but this was nowhere near meeting the level of demand.

Melaleuca facilitated a range of voluntary programs

As the state's primary remand facility for women, Melaleuca did not deliver any criminogenic programs to the limited number of sentenced women accommodated there. However, the prison

did provide a range of voluntary programs focussing on substance use, parenting and life skills. Over the 12 months up to 30 June 2023, the following programs were delivered:

- ReSet, the contracted re-entry service provider, delivered 16 two-day alcohol and other drugs brief intervention courses.
- Four three-week Cognitive Brief Intervention (CBI) programs were scheduled, but one was cancelled.
- Centrecare scheduled nine one-day parenting sessions and offered individual parenting counselling referrals, but two sessions were cancelled.
- A two-day Moorditj Moort parenting program was scheduled over 19 sessions, but five of these were cancelled.
- AA regularly ran two days per week.
- A single Aboriginal specific course, Prevention Intervention Early Leadership Program (PIELP) was delivered by the Western Australian Aboriginal Leadership Institute (WAALI) over a 10-week period.
- A Noongar language course had been delivered weekly until shortly before the inspection, when facilitators moved to deliver sessions at another facility.

All these programs were delivered in one of the four rooms attached to the accommodation units. Demand for the programs was high. But so too was demand on the spaces available to run them. Once again, efforts to achieve positive outcomes for the women were hampered by inadequate infrastructure.

4.5 Women could stay connected with family

Social visits occurred daily and were well managed. There were four visit sessions per day, with one scheduled at 4.00 pm to allow school-age children the opportunity to visit outside of school hours. Each prisoner was allowed to have up to three adults and three children visit with them per session. During visits we observed flexibility in the application of these rules, allowing more children and fewer adults, which was welcomed and aligned with a trauma-informed approach.

The visits centre was purpose built when Melaleuca became a standalone female prison. It was probably the only fit for purpose piece of infrastructure in the prison. It has a café which allows for prisoners and their visitors to enjoy a hot drink and a snack. It also provided valuable barista training opportunities for the women working there. Unfortunately, the café was not operational when we inspected and had not been consistently open since COVID forced its closure in 2020. There were different reasons provided for this, some of which related to security concerns by officers. We understand that management was working with staff to resolve any concerns, but the process was laborious and in the meantime the women and their visitors were missing out.

4.6 Reintegration opportunities were limited

Little available in the way of re-entry support

The Department's contracted re-entry service provider ReSet had limited scope in the contract to work with women on remand. They could not, for instance, provide employment and accommodation services to this group, despite the high need for these services. Their work with the

women focused mainly on delivering programs like parenting and alcohol/drug courses, such as those listed in 4.4 above.

ReSet did engage individually with women on remand, but this was limited to a one-off interview during which they provided general information about community services available.

The gap in re-entry services for women on remand was concerning. Many women on remand told us they were worried about their reintegration prospects and needed more help than just general information. One of the biggest issues we heard from these women was anxiety over what would happen with their housing while they were on remand. The women needed more support to ensure they would not lose their homes because they were in prison, particularly those likely to be held only for a short time.

But transitional services were proactive

Transitional services in prisons are provided by Transitional Managers (TM). A list of available transition services at Melaleuca was given to women during their orientation session. The TM was assisted in this work by two transitional clerks, one from each accommodation unit, who could assist women with the general queries in the units, so they did not have to wait to see the TM.

Transitional services included identifying women with outstanding identification documents and applying for these, referrals to service agencies like Centrelink, connecting women with providers like ReSet and processing referrals to Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison (Wandoo).

Melaleuca was fortunate to have a proactive TM who worked hard to support women facing homelessness, in addition to the other responsibilities of the role. She liaised with the Department of Communities on behalf of the women and worked with a community legal agency that provided advice about tenancy law and advocacy services, all of which was valuable for women needing accommodation support.

The TM was busy and focussed on getting good outcomes for the women. But the extent of reintegration services available at Melaleuca fell well short of demand. The contract restrictions limiting ReSet's capacity to provide meaningful re-entry options for the women meant many women fell through the gaps. Another gap was the lack of alcohol and drug throughcare programs. These are in place at other prisons and offer sessions in prison which are continued on release.

5 Good initiatives to keep women safe, but still a way to go

The introduction of a full-body x-ray scanner allowed for more decent and appropriate searching and mostly removed the need to strip search the women. There had been an increase in use of force incidents and women were concerned for their safety in the prison. Re-purposing of cells in unit 2 assisted in managing prisoners on punishment or management regimes. But this impacted the regime for other prisoners in the unit.

5.1 Searching procedures were more appropriate

Melaleuca commenced using their new full-body x-ray scanner in April 2023. This is similar to the scanning equipment used in airports for passenger screening. The machine was located in the reception centre.



Photo 3: A new x-ray body scanner reduced reliance on strip searching.

X-ray scanning was used in situations where prisoners would usually be strip searched, for example:

- on arrival at the prison
- before and after an external medical escort
- after a contact visit
- before being placed in confinement for punishment or in an observation cell
- based on reasonable suspicion that they are carrying contraband.

Use of the full-body scanner in lieu of strip searching was positive. In 2019 we published a review into strip searching practices which concluded that:

- strip searches cause harm
- strip searching is ineffective
- strip searches conflict with trauma-informed care (OICS, 2019).

This review also detailed the human impact of strip searching as ‘humiliating and degrading’ and re-traumatising people ‘with histories of victimisation and abuse’ (OICS, 2019, p. 1). We recommended, in that report, the use of ‘new technology to reduce the reliance on strip searching’ (OICS, 2019, p. 33), a recommendation the Department did not support then. We think the Department’s current stance, as evidenced by the introduction of this technology at Melaleuca, is more appropriate, proactive and in keeping with a trauma-informed approach.

In the three months before the x-ray scanner’s introduction, Melaleuca was conducting approximately 180 strip searches per month. Since then, the average has dropped significantly to about 40. There has also been a considerable decrease in the number of pat searches conducted.

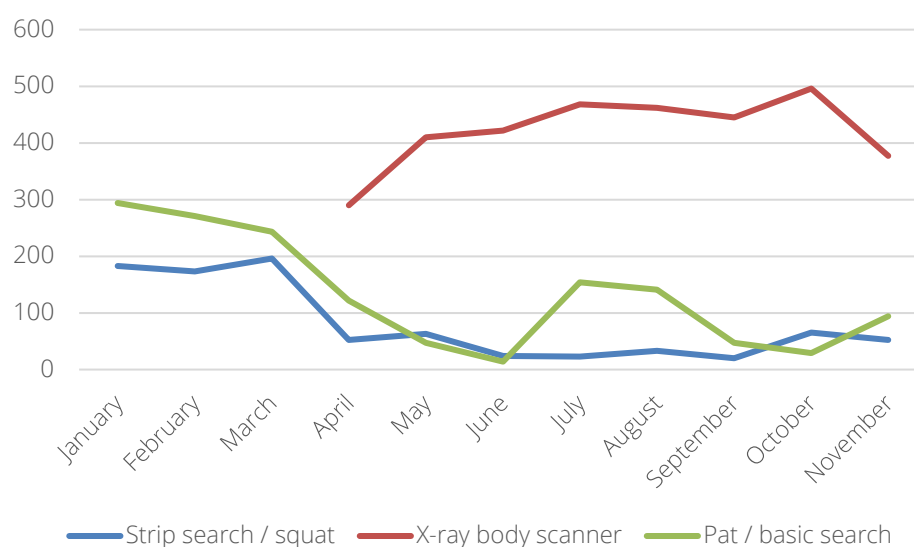


Figure 1: A decline in strip searching and pat searches following the introduction of the body scanner.

Melaleuca has prioritised women’s dignity with the introduction and use of the x-ray scanner. It has implemented policy that largely ensures the scans are only performed by female staff. Given the level of detail the scans can achieve, this was appropriate. At the time of the inspection, 42 female

staff were trained in using the scanner and interpreting the results. However, there was an exception – two male security team staff members were also trained in case they were required to process a contraband find. One was the Acting Security Manager whose role also designated him the prison's Radiation Safety Expert.

Radiation safety was also a significant priority. The prison had taken a cautious approach to scanning women with the current scan levels emitting two micro-Sieverts of radiation per scan. We were told that at this level, it was safe to perform up to 500 scans per person per year. But Melaleuca, and the Department, have capped this at 250. The number of scans is further reduced for pregnant women (125). Melaleuca had also strategically placed nine radiation monitors across the prison which captured radiation level data. This information was reported through to the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency each quarter. In the lead up to the inspection we heard some women were concerned about the effects x-ray scans might have on their bodies. However, Melaleuca seemed to have appropriately mitigated these concerns through an education campaign as we did not hear these concerns repeated to us while we were on site.

5.2 Fights, standovers, and intimidation made the prison feel unsafe

Women worried about their safety at Melaleuca

Compared to the state average, women at Melaleuca felt less safe. Results from our pre-inspection prisoner survey indicated that 66% of women 'mostly' felt safe which is lower than the state average across this measure which was 72%.

Our pre-inspection survey findings also supported the accounts women gave us during our on-site inspection about the fights, standovers, and intimidation occurring across the prison.

A lot of bullying here

I feel unsafe with girls out in recreation as girls pay/bribe other girls to bash people for them

I was attacked by another inmate for no reason

There are way too many bullies in this prison

Nothing about this prison feels safe

I'm scared

Quotes from women in our pre-inspection survey

Processes to manage friction between women were under-utilised

Melaleuca's anti-bullying policy (Standing Order 10.6) approved in September 2022 outlined a comprehensive approach to the identification, management, and resolution of bullying between women. This was important especially given the violence most of the women at Melaleuca had been exposed to in their everyday lives.

However, some of the reporting and review mechanisms to address bullying were under-utilised. The anti-bullying committee did not meet and although the anti-bullying register was now reviewed fortnightly by the Assistant Superintendent Operations (ASO), this had not happened prior to April 2023 when they took on the role. This may explain why only one name had been recorded on the register in the 12 months prior to the inspection.

Women confirmed the prison did not feel safe and bullying was not consistently addressed or managed. And 60% of officers who responded to our staff survey said that bullying between prisoners occurs 'often', an increase from 48% three years ago.

5.3 An increase in use of force incidents

Physical control and restraint incidents had tripled

Physical control and restraint is the lowest level of physical intervention officers use to reduce a threat and/or gain control. It is defined as a use of force. At Melaleuca, these incidents had tripled from 41 in 2021 to 136 in 2023.

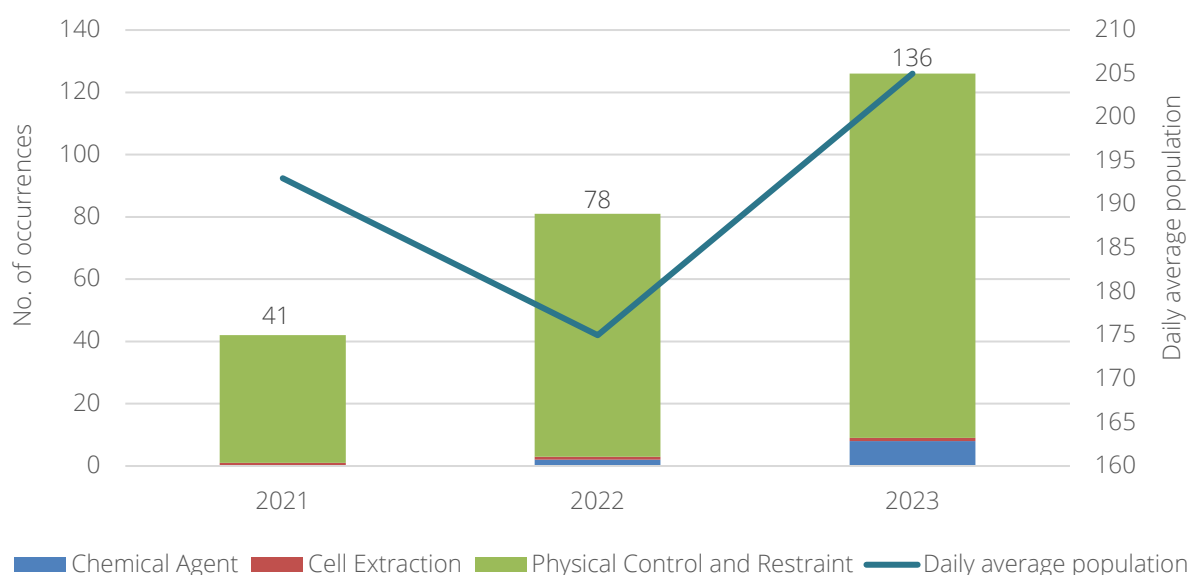


Figure 2: Use of force incidents had increased.

We also found higher levels of physical intervention used, in particular 14 occasions in which chemical agent was deployed in 2023, compared to none in 2021.

Melaleuca management confirmed the upward trend and advised they tended towards over-reporting incidents as use of force rather than under-reporting. But they also offered other reasons likely for the increase in these incidents:

1. Population increase – in 2023 the daily average population at Melaleuca rose by 30 women from the previous year.
2. Short staffing – the lack of available staff to address the women’s needs or facilitate services and activities outside the units could increase women’s anxiety which could in turn lead to disruptive behaviour requiring intervention.

3. High numbers of new and inexperienced staff – with Melaleuca having 63% of staff with less than two years' experience, their skills in prisoner management, de-escalation, situational awareness, and precise execution of use of force techniques were still being developed through experience.
4. Governance improvements – policy change over the last few years and a dedicated focus by Melaleuca staff to ensure accurate reporting was producing more reliable data.

Women involved in these incidents can also be significantly affected. Many of the women at Melaleuca are vulnerable and already traumatised by constant exposure to violence in their everyday lives. While acknowledging the challenges faced by staff at Melaleuca, we encourage continued scrutiny and oversight of use of force incidents to ensure safety and compliance with expected standards. This will ensure that these interventions are used as the last rather than first option in settling disturbances.

Body worn cameras would improve oversight of use of force incidents

Depending on the level of force used, incidents involving force may be reviewed locally or by the Department's head office to determine appropriateness, compliance, and opportunities for training and improvements. At the time of the inspection, Melaleuca management reported it was up to date with its local reviews, apart from the most recent incidents (3) that had occurred during the on-site inspection.

However, management also acknowledged that use of force reviews could be improved with higher quality visual evidence and the addition of audio which is not captured by CCTV. Investment in body worn cameras would provide a possible solution. Elsewhere, body worn camera footage and audio has identified training opportunities, details missed in incident reporting, and possible staff or prisoner misbehaviour.

When Melaleuca was privately operated by Sodexo, body worn cameras were trialled for approximately eight months. However, when the prison transitioned back to the public sector, the Department did not continue the trial.

Incorporating this technology at Melaleuca, and throughout the prison system in Western Australia, would improve accountability and oversight of use of force incidents, ensure compliance with use of force protocols and be a valuable training tool particularly for inexperienced officers.

Recommendation 8

Invest in body worn cameras at Melaleuca and other high-security prisons.

5.4 Disciplinary processes well managed and timely

Melaleuca was up to date with processing prisoner disciplinary charges, which was an example of good practice. This finding was also a little unusual in comparison to many other inspections, where

we have found long backlogs in formal prison charges being prepared and adjudicated (OICS, 2021; OICS, 2022; OICS, 2023).

Delays in processing charges against prisoners for poor behaviour presented risks to the safety and good order of the prison. Staff often felt unsupported that charges they had brought against a prisoner were not progressed in a timely manner, leading to a lack of confidence in the system as well as a safe working environment. Also, prisoners might think that they could get away with behaving badly because of a lack of timely consequences.

A full-time prison prosecutor at Melaleuca, supported by regular Superintendent and Visiting Justice parades, ensured the timely processing of prisoner charges. Although the prosecutor was subject to redeployment and re-tasking, there was an understanding of the value of the role and an ability, when necessary, for them to argue against redeployment.

5.5 Re-purposed infrastructure led to negative impacts for many prisoners

General living cells converted into a management wing has created conflict

The punishment and discipline system can only work effectively if there are dedicated management cells with capacity to confine prisoners who are found guilty of charges. In 2020 we found that the absence of such cells was the primary reason for charges not being processed efficiently, and often being dropped completely (OICS, 2021). At that time Melaleuca was the only maximum-security prison in the state without a designated management unit.

This changed in 2023 when the 16 cells in Unit 2 A wing were re-purposed as a management unit. Women were placed there to serve periods of confinement determined as the outcome of the prosecutions process. Six of these cells were fitted with cameras to allow observation and monitoring of the women in those cells.

Although acknowledging the significant efforts of Melaleuca management and staff to re-purpose part of a general accommodation wing into a management unit and to develop a regime and operational orders, it was never going to be a good fit. We heard and observed evidence of the significant challenges arising from co-locating a management unit (2A) - with a restricted regime - alongside a general living unit (2B) - with a standard regime - and the impacts this had on the workload of the officers and the routine for mainstream prisoners in the wing.

Many women in Unit 2 just wanted to fit in with the prison routine and make their time in prison as smooth as possible. Ordinarily this would be possible in a general accommodation unit, but those living in, or alongside, a management wing were heavily impacted by this placement. This is because women on confinement regimes are not permitted to mix with other prisoners, but the confinement rules still require a minimum time out of cell each day. This meant that officers were constantly trying to manage these individual prisoners' regimes at the same time as allowing the mainstream prisoners in the unit access to all the services and activities to which they were entitled. Staff rostered for the management wing also had the same responsibilities as any other wing officer, as well as managing those on management regimes. We observed significant challenges for unit staff in trying to meet all these conflicting requirements.

The impact on recreation time – already reduced by regular redeployments - for those not on confinement was the biggest complaint we heard from mainstream prisoners in Unit 2. They were frustrated that when women on confinement were allowed out of their cells during general recreation time, mainstream prisoners either had to remain locked in their cells or behind the grille in their wing or remain outside the unit in the recreation yard. There were no toilets available in the outside recreation yard, no access to cool water, and limited shade or shelter from adverse weather conditions.

Access to recreation was also restricted for those on confinement regimes

Women held in the management unit on punishment regimes could only recreate in their accommodation wing and they had no access to any outdoor space for recreation.

We heard from the Superintendent that plans to create an outdoor recreation space for these women was a priority. There was an unused fenced off yard attached to the confinement wing and plans were in place to rejuvenate this area so the women on punishment regimes could use it when they were allowed out of their cells. This would alleviate much of the pressure caused by the clash of regimes currently occurring in Unit 2 A and B wings.



Photo 4: The yard attached to the management cells was currently unused.

Improvising with existing infrastructure carried risk

In the absence of investment in better or more appropriate infrastructure for Melaleuca, local management had little choice but to improvise, but that often comes at a cost. A good example of

this is the re-purposing of existing accommodation cells in Unit 2A to establish a management unit. As discussed above, such decisions come with risks, limitations, and negative implications.

One significant risk is that none of the management cells were ligature-free because their original purpose was for general accommodation living. Six of these cells in Unit 2A had been fitted with CCTV cameras so women who needed closer monitoring could be placed there. But these cells are also used as overflow for the CCU when that was full. We observed the unit and heard from staff and prisoners that the unit could be loud, busy and chaotic.

But a busy and often chaotic management unit was not appropriate for women with poor mental health that needed extra supervision and de-escalation. For women in crisis, or even those just needing some quiet de-escalation time, placement in Unit 2A was not a therapeutic option and potentially could do them more harm than good.

We do not criticise the decision to create a management wing from standard accommodation cells, but as shown above there is a strong argument for a purpose-built management unit at Melaleuca.

Recommendation 9

Construct a purpose-built management unit at Melaleuca.

6 Women's health and wellbeing services were strained

The health services' team worked hard to achieve good health outcomes for the women, many of whom had complex health needs. Dental services were not available on site. Mental health services were struggling with a significantly under-resourced team and no multi-disciplinary approach. The Crisis Care Unit (CCU) where women in crisis were accommodated was not fit for purpose. Pregnant women received good health care, but the environment was not suitable for pregnant women, and they did not feel safe.

6.1 Women's complex health needs were well-managed, but the team was stretched

Health services had improved

Many women are received into prison experiencing substance withdrawal, undiagnosed health conditions, or untreated mental health illnesses and this increased demand on health services. To meet this demand, a remand facility like Melaleuca, should be well-resourced to address the needs of incoming women, including identifying any previously undiagnosed or untreated health conditions. The health services staff we met during this inspection were committed to providing quality services and cognisant of their responsibility to screen, diagnose, and treat the women in their care. Health staff also understood many women had underlying trauma and how this might affect the care they needed.

In our 2020 inspection, women were concerned about access to health care (OICS, 2021, p. 35). The appointment system was not working as it should, mainly because women did not receive confirmation of their booked medical appointment and staff made little effort to locate and escort them to these appointments. The situation was much improved in 2023; women now received an appointment card and officers were expected to follow up with women if they did not attend the health centre. The Senior Medical Receptionist (SMR) scheduled follow-up appointments, future reviews and recalls in each woman's medical notes to ensure continuity of care.

All women were seen by a nurse in a consulting room in the reception centre each time they were received into custody. First time admissions were referred to the doctor and seen within 24 hours. But women re-entering Melaleuca, who had non-urgent medical needs, could wait up to five weeks for a doctor's appointment.

Health screening on admission was thorough, including testing and referrals for sexually transmitted infections and blood borne viruses. Screening also identified Aboriginal women on intake and, if over 35 years, included a referral for an ECG.

Women could access a range of gender specific services, such as pap smears and breast screening, with a female General Practitioner (GP). A range of allied health services also regularly attended the prison, including physiotherapy, podiatry, and optometry.

Health staff were a dedicated but small team

A small but dedicated health services team were well led by an experienced clinical nurse manager. They worked hard to meet the needs of a remand population with complex needs. Staff across various disciplines shared information and worked collaboratively to achieve good health outcomes for their patients.

We heard that the workload on nursing staff was at times overwhelming, leading to gaps in some key health services. For example, consistent management of chronic disease portfolios, proactive management of health promotion, and discharge planning were all impacted by limited nursing time.

Although good use of casual part-time nurses meant there were no vacant positions in the nursing team, staff said the team was just too small to manage the complex demands and increasing prisoner numbers at Melaleuca.

Four part-time doctors worked across five days. Ordinarily Melaleuca would have five doctors available, but one was on long-term leave and the position had not been backfilled. Despite the daily coverage, this service was also under pressure, and this often led to less scope for proactive care, patient recalls and effective management of women with chronic illness.

Limited cultural health support for First Nations women

The proportion of First Nations women at Melaleuca is consistently around 50% of the population and this creates many challenges in meeting their specific health needs. The health care teams were aware of, and sensitive to, these challenges, including particular risk factors around the prevalence of mental health and physical health conditions. First Nations women were screened for these conditions as a priority, but there was no Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) or Aboriginal Mental Health Worker (AMHW). The latter position is listed as part of the staffing profile but has never been filled.

Culturally appropriate health services should have an AHW and an AMHW, particularly in a prison setting. These positions build trust and connection, allowing First Nations women to better engage health care services in a culturally safe environment.

Being on country is also a protective factor for First Nations people. But on average 16 women from the regions were held in Melaleuca far away from their culture and supports creating an additional risk factor. Occasionally other regional women were asked to help support out of country women with health-related concerns, but this was not always appropriate and could compromise women's privacy.

Recommendation 10

Fill the Aboriginal Mental Health Worker position and recruit an Aboriginal Health Worker.

6.2 Dental care was lacking

Prisoners traditionally have high dental health care needs (OICS, 2021b). But there is no dental service at Melaleuca. Following our 2020 inspection we recommended that a full dental service be established (OICS, 2021). Although the Department supported this in principle, there had been no progress against this recommendation.

Instead, women at Melaleuca could now access dental services one day per week at the dental clinic in Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison. While this was progress, it was still too limited. Only up to six women, who were classified as medium- or minimum-security, could attend on the scheduled day. But the major difficulty with this arrangement was most women on remand at Melaleuca are classified as maximum-security. A visit to the dentist required adjustments to be made to women's security classifications, excluding women whose maximum-security classification could not be lowered. Women with critically urgent dental need could be escorted off site to community dentists.

All these options were resource intensive. Officer escorts were required to transport women off site to the dentist, taking them away from their normal custodial roles in the prison. This meant that occasionally these escorts did not occur because of daily staffing shortages at Melaleuca.

Primary health care staff provided symptomatic treatment to those with dental pain while they awaited appointments with the dentist. But we heard that many women were released before receiving dental care. At the time of the inspection there were at least 70 women at Melaleuca on the waitlist to see a dentist.

6.3 Antenatal care had improved but placement options were not well managed

Better care for pregnant women

In the year leading up to our inspection, Melaleuca had managed 28 pregnant women. The oversight and management of these women was much improved from the level of care we found in 2020 where pregnant women were anxious about what was in store for them and concerned about a lack of appropriate antenatal care (OICS, 2021).

Expectant mothers received a full check-up and screening with the GP soon after admission and the Clinical Nurse Manager (CNM) had developed a tool to track and update pregnancy milestones for each woman. This included recording gestational age, a forecast of their scans, and upcoming court appearances.

A multi-disciplinary team comprising health, custodial and support services discussed each woman at the fortnightly Expectant Mothers Committee meeting. The Coordinator Parenting Services from Bandyup was also included in these meetings and the minutes reflect that these meetings were thorough, collaborative, and reflected on lessons learned from the various experiences pregnant women had been through during their time at Melaleuca.

Limited resources to manage antenatal care

There were no dedicated accommodation spaces for pregnant women at Melaleuca. And while their care had improved, coordination of this was an added responsibility to the workloads of the CNM and the Assistant Superintendent Women's Services (ASWS).

A Senior Family Links Officer (SFLO) provided services to mothers at Melaleuca one day a week. This was one of two positions working across female metropolitan prisons, but the second position was vacant, and the service was stretched.

The SFLO is also the conduit between the Department of Communities (Communities), each prison, and women who were open cases with Communities. This included mothers whose children were in state care and pregnant women whose care arrangements for their child once born were uncertain. The role also supports women through pre-birth planning and developing a safety plan for when the baby is born.

This was an essential service. At Melaleuca the SFLO worked with 80 women who had open cases with Communities. But the SFLO service was critically under-resourced given this one position stretched across the three metropolitan women's prisons. It was very difficult for the SFLO to manage a caseload of 80 women at Melaleuca with coverage of only one day a week.

Both Bandyup and Boronia had dedicated staff and separate living units for pregnant women in their care. At Bandyup there was a Coordinator Parenting Services and a GP who also worked at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH). Boronia had a Manager, Family and Community Services who provided similar support for residents.

None of these resources are available at Melaleuca.

The environment for pregnant women was not appropriate

Pregnant women said they did not feel safe at Melaleuca. We heard that they felt vulnerable being pregnant and having to share a cell in accommodation units that were often chaotic. They felt easily intimidated and worried that they were easy targets as they would not retaliate in instances where they were threatened for fear of harming their baby.

When we interviewed pregnant women during the 2020 inspection, they reported the same concerns (OICS, 2021, p. 42).

The pregnant women were worried about their physical safety at Melaleuca. They all wished to be transferred to Bandyup Women's Prison where they could live separately from the rest of the prison population. They believed it would be safer for them and their babies and that it would be easier to see a doctor there.

Bandyup has specialised accommodation available and provided a more suitable place for pregnant women. There were designated self-care houses for pregnant women and those with children in their care.

But several factors had to be considered before an expectant mother could be approved for placement at Bandyup, and not everyone will be suitable. Some women will have no alternative to Melaleuca because of the nature of their charges or conviction, or the risks of association with other women at Bandyup. This increases the need for dedicated accommodation for expectant mothers at Melaleuca along the lines of what is available at Bandyup.

Continuity of care was not available

Melaleuca did not have the resources or processes in place to offer continuity of care for pregnant women between the prison and the community. For example, Bandyup has an ultrasound scanner to allow monitoring of pregnancies and each baby's development, but Melaleuca did not have this equipment. Pregnant women at Melaleuca had to be transported off site for these regular and crucial antenatal checks.

The Women and Newborn Drug and Alcohol Service (WANDAS) is based at KEMH and supports pregnant women with histories of drug and alcohol problems. The team comprised a range of health professionals including doctors, midwives, and social workers. WANDAS offered an in-reach service to Bandyup providing antenatal care for pregnant women there. We were told that WANDAS did not provide a similar service to pregnant women at Melaleuca because there was no agreement in place for this. The Department should as a matter of urgency address this gap in care and work with WANDAS to extend its in-reach program to include Melaleuca.

Recommendation 11

Engage with WANDAS to extend in-reach service to include pregnant women at Melaleuca.

The policy relevant to pregnant prisoners (COPP 4.4) aimed to establish clear and consistent practices for managing this cohort. Sections 6.13 and 7.16 particularly mention that antenatal care and birthing should occur at KEMH. But current practice was inconsistent with this policy, not all antenatal care was provided through KEMH. Melaleuca regularly sent women for antenatal appointments to Fiona Stanley Hospital and not all babies were delivered at KEMH.

The Department advised in response to our last inspection report that pregnant women would no longer be transferred to Bandyup for their pregnancy to be managed as they could be safely accommodated at Melaleuca and access the same shared care at KEMH (OICS, 2021, p. 62). We know though that this continuity of care was not available at Melaleuca because the systems and processes to support it were not in place there. We also know that the Department's own policy on the care and management of pregnant women is not consistent with current practice. This suggests that the policy needs to be updated to reflect the level of care being provided at Melaleuca.

6.4 Mental health services were struggling

The mental health team was not able to meet demand for services

Mental health services at Melaleuca were provided by a psychiatrist, an acting nurse unit manager, a clinical nurse consultant and two mental health nurses. Apart from the psychiatrist, all of the team

had only commenced a few months before our visit. We found them to be hard-working, dedicated and committed to providing a meaningful service to the women. But they struggled to meet demand for women's mental health support.

The psychiatrist was covering the whole of the women's estate as well as several regional prisons and was only on site at Melaleuca two days a week. The nurse unit manager, who had recently started in an acting capacity, was covering youth detention as well as the whole women's estate. The problems overwhelming the youth custodial estate and the concerns about the impact of this on the young people, meant the nurse unit manager was rarely able to spend much time at Melaleuca. Similarly, we heard that the clinical nurse consultant was spending much of their time at Bandyup as their mental health team was also under-resourced.

This left the bulk of day-to-day clinical responsibility to the two mental health nurses, and usually there was only one on shift at a time. Their daily task list included:

- attend to women who had been referred for placement on the At-risk Management System (ARMS)
- attend the daily Prisoner Risk Assessment Group (PRAG) meeting at which the women on ARMS were assessed
- consult new referrals of women who had been screened during the reception process as having a mental illness
- review patients on their case list with mental illness
- dispense medication to women in the CCU
- dispense Schedule 8 opioid substitution medication to women in the units.

Although, the mental health team did their best to provide care to the most acutely unwell women, high workloads and staff turnover rates had led to low team morale. The additional workload demands on the nurse unit manager, clinical nurse consultant and psychiatrist meant they were not able to provide adequate clinical leadership the mental health team. We heard that the impact of this was that the mental health nurses felt isolated, unsupported, and at risk of burnout.

Recommendation 12

Develop a workforce plan to recruit and retain sufficient mental health staff to provide women in Melaleuca a safe mental health service.

No formal multidisciplinary team approach

There were no regular multidisciplinary team meetings to case manage new referrals and existing patients. This left nurses, without much experience at Melaleuca, feeling exposed and having to make decisions about the urgency and severity of new cases without the level of support and supervision that a multidisciplinary team approach would provide.

This gap in regular oversight and support could lead to new referrals being missed and a lack of appropriate prioritisation, triage, or follow-up care. The mental health nurses reported that they did check in with the psychiatrist on the days he attends the prison. Although this was helpful, it was

informal and raised concerns that referrals and clinical care of patients were not being reviewed in a systematic way.

We heard that women with acute, severe mental illness were seen promptly by the mental health nurses, and within a few days by the psychiatrist. As the psychiatrist only attends two days a week, there were limits on the number of appointments he can facilitate. Consequently, the mental health nurses had developed an informal triage process as to identify which patients were referred for review by the psychiatrist. The absence of a regular multidisciplinary team meeting to discuss all referrals, leaves individual nurses to make crucial decisions without adequate clinical support.

Recommendation 13

Commence regular multidisciplinary team meetings involving the psychiatrist, mental health nurses, psychologists and custodial staff.

6.5 Inadequate support for women in crisis

The Crisis Care Unit (CCU) was not fit for purpose

The CCU comprised four cells adjacent to the medical centre. It was used to accommodate women at acute risk of self-harm or suicide, those who were acutely mentally unwell, and women requiring medical observation. Many of these women were often highly distressed and the environment in CCU was not conducive to reducing their levels of distress and risk to themselves.

While some effort had been made to soften the appearance of the CCU, many of the cells remained stark and often dirty. There were no private interview rooms for women to see the prison counsellors, the mental health team or for telehealth appointments. Rather, these interactions occurred in the communal living area which was surrounded by cells that open directly into this area. This potentially compromised confidentiality as women secured in the cells were likely to be able to hear these conversations and see what was happening through the hatches in their cell doors.



Photo 5: Attempts had been made to 'soften' the CCU.



Photo 6: The cells were sparse.



Photo 7: The cells were dirty.



Photo 8: Old stains were visible.

An isolating and unsupportive environment

Women in the CCU did not get many opportunities to get out of their cells. Some were managed on different regimes which restricted whether they could mix with others. Staff were also frequently redeployed from CCU meaning that the remaining officer had to monitor the CCU observation cameras and could not supervise women out of their cells at the same time. As a result highly distressed women often spent long periods alone in bare cells with little social interaction and support.

Women could only communicate with officers through the intercom system in their cells. This is designed for use in medical emergencies and not as a means for the women to maintain social contact or support. Keeping women socially isolated like this exacerbates rather than reduces their mental distress, potentially increasing their risk of self-harm.

Clothing provided was inappropriate

Women who were at heightened risk of self-harm were issued with rip-proof gowns to wear. We were told that there was a shortage of these for women, who had to wear gowns sent from Hakea designed for men. These did not provide a sense of dignity for women. They were oversized with no sleeves and large arm holes through which women's breasts could be seen.

We heard that a newer, slightly more dignified version of the rip-proof gown was available, but stock and supply were limited, and these were not yet in circulation.

There was also a lack of clarity over whether women in the CCU were allowed underwear. We heard that this was not provided if they were in the rip-proof gowns because these could be used as a ligature. We were also told there were no disposable underpants available for the women to use even when they were menstruating.

Following a reading of this draft report, the Department provided subsequent information. Women placed in the CCU are generally permitted to keep their underwear, unless they are using it to actively self harm. Which is rare but has occurred. When this happens, the underwear is removed but returned as soon as possible following a risk assessment. Enquiries into options for disposable underwear have not been successful as these all have drawstrings which are a risk, although investigations into this option continue.

Overall, as we have found in previous inspections, there was limited therapeutic benefit in keeping women in these conditions in the CCU. Based on advice from a different health expert in our previous inspection we made a similar recommendation around the therapeutic suitability of crisis care environments.

Recommendation 14

Improve conditions for the women in the Crisis Care Unit, including access to more social interaction, appropriate clothing and underwear and opportunities for more privacy during health and other consultations.

Increased risk around management of substance withdrawal

Many women who arrived at Melaleuca were experiencing withdrawal from alcohol and/or other drugs. This carries risks of physical harm, psychological distress and (rarely) death. The primary aim of withdrawal management is to minimise these risks.

There was a dispute at Melaleuca about whose responsibility it was to manage and monitor alcohol and other drug withdrawal.

Until a few weeks prior to the inspection, the primary health nurses doing the reception screen referred all women identified during this process as being at risk of drug or alcohol withdrawal to the mental health nurse. The reception nurse would not start medication to manage withdrawal symptoms in the first 24 hours unless the woman scored very high on the withdrawal symptom scale administered during screening. The mental health nurse would see the woman the following day to assess their drug and alcohol issues and measure withdrawal symptoms. They would then recommend to the GP whether a withdrawal medication pack needed to be prescribed. The mental health nurse then reviewed and monitored the withdrawal symptoms over the next few days.

But this process had changed just before our inspection. We were told that the mental health team had advised the primary health team that they would no longer be assessing and monitoring women withdrawing from alcohol or other drugs. This was apparently in line with a head office policy, which the primary health team had not been aware of. The mental health team told us that they did not have enough staff to assess and manage all withdrawals and they would only assess a woman if her withdrawal symptoms were severe. The primary health nurses were concerned that they did not have the training or experience to safely manage withdrawals.

Although we understand that the mental health team was stretched, so too were the general health team. A change such as this probably warranted discussion and agreement about who would manage withdrawals and the provision of training for the primary health nurses. This would promote cohesion between the two services and avoid clinical risks of physiological and psychological deterioration and distress for the women.

Recommendation 15

Clarify roles, responsibilities and processes for the management of substance withdrawal for women at Melaleuca.

6.6 Psychological and welfare support was limited

Not enough psychologists or counsellors

There was a good working relationship between the mental health team and Psychological Health Services (PHS). Nonetheless, PHS did report difficulties accessing a mental health assessment for their more complex clients.

Women sought counselling from PHS, and although providing a good service, they were under resourced. Of the four PHS positions available, only 2.2 were filled and on some days there was only one PHS counsellor on site. This impacted the timeliness of their reviews of women on ARMS and those on the Support and Monitoring System (SAMS).

At the time of our inspection there were approximately 85 referrals to PHS, and between 40 and 50 had not been actioned. There was a four to six week wait time to see a counsellor during which time it was likely many of these women would have been released. There was no backfill of PHS positions when a counsellor took leave which made the situation even worse.

A strong peer support model despite no training

The peer support team was doing a good job of supporting the women at Melaleuca. They were led by an experienced Prison Support Officer (PSO) who made good use of strong cultural connections. During the inspection we heard that the PSO was leaving and this created some uncertainty at the time about who would replace her. Subsequently the position has since been filled and the substantive occupant is now in the position.

The peer support team was small, only five women, three of whom were First Nations women. Some women resided in the orientation wing to provide support and information to the newly arrived prisoners. Two worked in reception as reception workers and offered immediate support to women just arriving and being processed through reception.

As was the case in our 2020 inspection, the peer support team had not received any formal training in crisis support and/or suicide prevention. In the past the Department offered the Gatekeeper training program for peer support prisoners across adult prisons, but this had been discontinued and no replacement program implemented.

We recommended that the Department provide adequate and appropriate training for the peer support team following our last Melaleuca inspection in 2020. But despite the Department supporting the recommendation and responding positively about implementing a suitable training package for peer support teams, we found no progress against this recommendation in 2023.

Recommendation 16

Provide adequate and appropriate training for the peer support team.

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Appendix B Acronyms

| Term | Expansion of Abbreviation |
|----------|---|
| ARMS | At-risk Management System |
| ASWS | Assistant Superintendent Women's Services |
| AVS | Aboriginal Visitor Scheme |
| COPP | Commissioner's Operating Policy and Procedure |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus disease |
| DOJ | Department of Justice |
| GP | General Practitioner |
| IMP | Individual Management Plan |
| MHN | Mental Health Nurse |
| OICS | Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services |
| PHS | Psychological Health Services |
| PRAG | Prisoner Risk Assessment Group |
| PSO | Prison Support Officer |
| SAMS | Support and Monitoring System |
| TM | Transitional Manager |
| VSO | Vocational Support Officer |



Response to OICS Draft Report:

2023 Inspection of Melaleuca Women's Prison

August 2024

Version 1.1

Response Overview

Introduction

On 10 July 2023, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the 2023 Inspection of Melaleuca Women's Prison (Melaleuca), with the onsite inspection taking place from 12 – 17 November 2023.

To assist with the inspection and inform the Inspection Report, the Department of Justice (the Department) provided a range of documentation as well as access to systems, custodial facilities, staff and prisoners.

On 10 July 2024, the Department received the draft inspection report for review and has provided comments and responses to all sixteen (16) recommendations.

Appendix A contains comments linked to sections in the draft report for the Inspector's consideration when finalising the report.

Department Comments

The Department welcomes the findings of the OICS report on the 2023 Inspection of Melaleuca, the primary remand custodial facility for women in Western Australia (WA).

Melaleuca's units were originally used to accommodate male prisoners from Hakea Prison before being repurposed as a standalone maximum-security women's prison almost eight years ago. The Department acknowledges the facility was not designed or originally intended for use as a women's prison and acknowledges the infrastructure, staffing, resourcing and other challenges outlined in the report. The Department also recognises the dedicated senior management team and staff who work tirelessly to ensure the smooth operation of Melaleuca.

The infrastructure limitations at Melaleuca have been exacerbated by the recent unprecedented increase in the custodial population. Demand for additional space at Melaleuca across all areas of service delivery, e.g. education, programs and health services has never been as high, and the Department has commenced initial scoping works for a proposed expansion of the remand facility.

The Department is committed to expanding services and support for women in Melaleuca's care including facilitating more employment opportunities and meaningful activities and building infrastructure to manage specific cohorts. These and other options will be explored through the scoping works, which are still in their infancy. The Department will continue to advocate for funding to enable upgrades to occur.

While Melaleuca benefits from having a stable Superintendent and leadership team, the staffing issues raised in the inspection report are acknowledged. The Department is committed to addressing the staffing challenges at Melaleuca as well as ensuring all Western Australian (WA) custodial facilities are adequately staffed.

There has been an increase in the number of Entry Level Training Programs in 2024 (five more than in 2023), which is expected to boost staffing levels. Negotiations have also commenced for the Department's next Prison Officers' Industrial Agreement, while a Corrective Services statewide staffing review is underway aimed at developing new staffing models for all custodial facilities to help increase efficiency, provide flexibility and meet current and future demands for managing the WA prisoner population.

The installation of an X-ray body scanning machine at Melaleuca has seen a drastic reduction in the level of contraband being trafficked into the facility. Since body scanning commenced in April 2023, contraband detection from searches of persons has increased significantly, from one detection in 2022 to 59 detections in 2023, and 19 detections to date in 2024. The introduction of X-ray body scanning has also reduced the reliance on strip-searching for detecting contraband. The reduction in strip searching aligns with best practice approaches for trauma-informed care, which contributes to the successful management and overall care and wellbeing of prisoners at Melaleuca.

Health services across the Department, including mental health services, continue to be reviewed in an effort to increase service provision where possible and identify solutions for better recruitment and retention of personnel. The Clinical Workforce Committee, which was established in early 2024, has identified potential improvement strategies to increase the number of clinical staff across the custodial estate. These strategies include but are not limited to interstate and New Zealand recruitment campaigns, increasing placements of students studying clinical roles, and reviewing the remuneration and incentives for all clinical roles.

The Department is striving to improve the availability of therapeutic support to prisoners with severe mental illnesses at Melaleuca. The Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch has commenced monthly multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings which includes a triage process and is attended by a psychiatric registrar. Melaleuca staff also make every effort to improve conditions within the Crisis Care Unit (CCU) as far as resourcing and staffing availability permits.

The Department was pleased the OICS report pointed out the complex health needs of women prisoners at Melaleuca were well-managed by a dedicated health services team who worked collaboratively and were committed to providing quality services and delivering positive health outcomes.

The report also noted the peer support team were doing a good job and that Melaleuca had developed a cultural meeting place for First Nations women.

Melaleuca has an experienced and stable senior management team and a committed workforce who have continued to successfully manage the women residing at the facility. The Department is committed to resolving the infrastructure, staffing, resourcing and other matters identified in the OICS report and will work closely with Melaleuca to achieve this and enhance the support and services for women prisoners in Melaleuca's care.

Response to Recommendations

1 Review infrastructure needs at Melaleuca and commit resources to address identified deficiencies.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prisons

Response:

The Department is cognisant of the infrastructure deficiencies at Melaleuca.

The 2024-25 Corrective Services infrastructure program sets out the short-term infrastructure works to be undertaken within this period, including works categorised as 'priority items' at Melaleuca.

Supplementing the 2024-25 program, long-term infrastructure planning for prisons across the custodial estate has commenced. To this end, Adult Women's Prisons has submitted a proposal for medium and long-term priority infrastructure works. This proposal will inform the long-term infrastructure plan for Melaleuca, Adult Women's Prisons and Corrective Services as a whole.

2 Introduce an electronic system for prisoners to manage their own requests, similar to the CMS that was previously in place.

Level of Acceptance: Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prisons

Response:

The Department's Long-Term Custodial Technology (LTCT) plan is currently being revised to include technology enhancements across the custodial estate that will give prisoners the independence and autonomy to book their own appointments, visits and manage their own gratuities.

The LTCT plan includes giving prisoners access to an Offender Digital Services Platform (ODSP) which is also expected to replace the existing prisoner telephone system (PTS). Implementation of the ODSP has commenced with the procurement tender for the project being launched on 13 August 2024.

Following replacement of the PTS, the Department will investigate options and funding requirements to support the expansion of the new PTS platform that will allow prisoners to manage their own requests, similar to the CMS that was previously in place.

3 Develop clear communication strategies between head office, local management and staff.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prison

Response:

Corrective Services acknowledges there has been a lack of a strategic plan for many years which was one of Commissioner Royce's top priorities when starting as Corrective Services Commissioner at the end of October 2023. Planning is well underway, and a Strategic Plan will be communicated to all staff once completed. The Strategic Plan will outline the agency priorities and provide all employees clarity on the strategic direction for Corrective Services. Each facility will then develop their own Business Plans to align with the Strategic Plan, which is planned for completion by the end of 2024. As a first step, a Vision for Corrective Services has been established "A connected Corrective Services contributing to a safer Western Australia".

The appointment of a dedicated Assistant Commissioner for Adult Women's Prisons has provided a liaison point and additional focus for the women's custodial facilities, which has enhanced communications and reporting of issues pertaining to Melaleuca and other women's custodial facilities.

4 Develop clear guidelines for the transfer of women between Melaleuca and Bandyup, particularly those requiring specialist or intensive support and monitoring.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prisons

Response:

As a priority, a procedural document outlining transfer guidelines for women between Melaleuca and Bandyup has been drafted and is currently under review for subsequent approval. The document includes guidelines for the transfer of women requiring specialist or intensive support and monitoring. Once finalised and approved, the guidelines will be distributed to both facilities where it is anticipated it will provide clarity and a better framework of transfer decision making across management.

The guidelines will undergo a further review to assess changes that may be required taking into consideration transfers of women not only between Melaleuca and Bandyup, but women across the custodial estate.

5 Develop and implement an appropriate staffing model for all aspects of operations at Melaleuca.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prison

Response:

Corrective Services is currently working on a workforce planning framework aimed at modernising custodial staffing models across the estate to enable Corrective Services to be the best it can be. The workforce planning framework will provide better services, increase safety and security and provide the ability to anticipate the current and future demands for managing the custodial population.

6 Increase custodial officer resourcing at Melaleuca.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prison

Response:

Corrective Services has commenced a number of initiatives to increase levels of custodial staff across the estate, including Melaleuca.

The bulk-recruitment function for prison officers has recently been restructured under the Corrective Services Division to enable a focused and coordinated effort for recruitment and filling of vacancies. Furthermore, the number of Entry Level Training Programs has increased to 16 schools for 2024, with a number of schools being delivered in regional locations to promote greater access.

Corrective Services recently issued a reminder to all staff that Vocational Support Officers (VSOs) were to be trained in the Essential Training Program (ETP). Although it is acknowledged VSOs have not always been able to complete the ETP due to not being released as a result of staff shortages, the Academy has now prioritised additional ETP training to enable as many VSOs to be trained as possible.

Corrective Services is currently working on a workforce planning framework which will help inform the staffing requirements across all facilities in the custodial estate required now and into the future. Melaleuca continues to utilise all options available to backfill positions when short staffed, e.g. overtime, redeployment, etc.

7 Develop and implement a dedicated program of cultural support and activities.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prisons

Response:

The Melaleuca Aboriginal Services Committee (ASC) meets quarterly to review the cultural supports available to Aboriginal prisoners and identify potential improvements.

There have been challenges in implementing initiatives identified by the ASC due to limited availability of staff to support cultural activities, and infrastructure deficiencies that do not provide appropriate spaces or privacy.

Efforts are made where possible to ensure Melaleuca prisoners who are off country are provided opportunities to transfer to regional facilities on country, however bed shortages in regional facilities often prevent this. To overcome the issue, Melaleuca and regional facilities facilitate one-for-one transfers to rotate prisoners on/off country.

There are currently 18 women from across the metropolitan women's estate who have been temporarily transferred to Greenough Regional Prison to allow these women back on country or as close to on country as possible. These transfers recognise the importance of cultural connections and visits with family. Plans are underway to utilise the existing beds at Greenough to ensure full capacity for women, bringing the number up to 25.

Corrective Services has also utilised other facilities across the adult estate to facilitate on country visits including at West Kimberly Regional Prison and Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison.

Learning from experiences of other facilities, Melaleuca will explore additional initiatives for supporting prisoners off country, such as ensuring the peer support team include off-country prisoners, use of a buddy system that includes doubling up country women together where possible, and the provision of cultural food from specific areas to help off country prisoners feel welcomed.

8 Invest in body worn cameras at Melaleuca and other high-security prisons.

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Level of Acceptance: | Supported – Current Practice / Project |
| Responsible Division: | Corrective Services |
| Responsible Directorate: | Adult Women's Prison |

Response:

The Department has commenced the rollout of body worn cameras to high-priority areas in the first instance, including the youth estate and the Perth Children's Court. Attention is now being focused on other facilities, including Melaleuca, which will be subject of Government support for funding of additional body worn cameras.

9 Construct a purpose-built management unit at Melaleuca.

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Level of Acceptance: | Supported in Principle |
| Responsible Division: | Corrective Services |
| Responsible Directorate: | Adult Women's Prison |

Response:

A larger fit-for-purpose management unit at Melaleuca is being considered as part of the 2025-2030 Custodial Infrastructure Program. The cells within this unit will be ligature minimised in line with management cells across the estate.

10 Fill the Aboriginal Mental Health Worker position and recruit an Aboriginal Health Worker.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

The Department continues to strive to recruit Aboriginal Mental Health Workers for the WA prison estate. A lack of experienced and interested applicants has hindered these efforts.

The Department established the Clinical Workforce Committee in January 2024 which is conducting an analysis of the challenges the Department is experiencing in recruiting and retaining staff to these critical roles. Through the Clinical Workforce Committee, initiatives to mitigate these barriers have been identified and are underway, including interstate recruitment campaigns and a review of incentives and remuneration.

11 Engage with WANDAS to extend in-reach service to include pregnant women at Melaleuca.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prison

Response:

This recommendation is reliant on support and agreement from the Women and Newborn Drug and Alcohol Service (WANDAS). The Superintendent at Melaleuca in conjunction with Offender Services has commenced advocating to extend WANDAS in-reach services to Melaleuca.

In the interim, pregnant prisoners with medium/high risk factors are being transferred to Bandyup for the duration of their pregnancies which then gives them access to WANDAS.

12 Develop a workforce plan to recruit and retain sufficient mental health staff to provide women in Melaleuca a safe mental health service.

Level of Acceptance: Supported Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Corrective Services has commenced the development of a Workforce Recruitment Plan to identify the current and future employment needs across all business areas within Corrective Services.

In addition, the Clinical Workforce Committee is conducting an analysis of the barriers and challenges experienced in the recruitment and retention of clinical staff. The

findings of the Clinical Workforce Committee will assist in informing the Workforce Recruitment Plan.

13 Commence regular multidisciplinary team meetings involving the psychiatrist, mental health nurses, psychologists and custodial staff.

Level of Acceptance: Supported Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Melaleuca has commenced multi-disciplinary team meetings with mental health staff and a psychiatric registrar, however mental health resourcing is currently critically low, with meetings only being run monthly.

All patients discussed at the multi-disciplinary team meetings have clinical notes recorded in ECHO allowing for sharing of pertinent information and continuity of treatment between health professionals.

As per response to Recommendation 12, several initiatives are underway to address staff shortages.

14 Improve conditions for the women in CCU, including access to more social interaction, appropriate clothing and underwear and opportunities for more privacy during health and other consultations.

Level of Acceptance: Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Women's Prison

Response:

Conditions in the CCU have improved through repainting of all cells and the addition of an art mural to soften the appearance of the unit, and alternative anti-ligature clothing that is more appropriate for use by women has been sourced.

All women placed in the CCU undergo risk assessments to determine what in-cell activities can safely be provided, and women housed in the CCU for extended periods are also allocated a support prisoner for interaction and co-recreation daily on the oval when not in use by the mainstream population.

Melaleuca is also exploring options to prevent periods of isolation through increased officer interactions and time out of cell. The CCU daily schedule stipulates out of cell time should be maximised as much as possible. In addition, Melaleuca is assessing the viability of relocating the officer pod to a more central location within the CCU.

The proposed infrastructure plans for Melaleuca includes an expansion of the CCU which will provide more purpose-built spaces that will allow for increased privacy during health and other consultations.

In regards to clothing and underwear, Corrective Services acknowledges that the safety of the women in CCU is always the priority. Corrective Services is currently exploring other options with regards to safe, suitable underwear for this cohort of women.

15 Clarify roles, responsibilities and processes for the management of substance withdrawal for women at Melaleuca.

Level of Acceptance: Supported Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Substance withdrawal treatment at Melaleuca is currently provided by the primary health team due to critical staff shortages within the mental health team.

The Department acknowledges this is an issue given the differences in training, knowledge and expertise between primary health and mental health clinical positions.

Health Services is reviewing this arrangement with the aim of having substance withdrawal treatment transferred back to the responsibility of the mental health team.

16 Provide adequate and appropriate training for the peer support team.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Melaleuca has a specific training program in place for the peer support team (PST).

The 2024 program includes:

- Talking about Suicide training delivered by Lifeline - March 2024.
- Yarning it Up – smoking cessation information sessions delivered by Cancer Council - May 2024.
- Training on understanding and managing stress delivered by Zonta - June 2024.
- Reset information sessions delivered by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation - July 2024.
- Disability Awareness training - September 2024.

Appendix D Inspection Details

| Previous inspection | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| 15-19 November 2020 | | |
| Activity since previous inspection | | |
| Liaison visits to Melaleuca Women's Prison | 9 visits | |
| Independent Visitor visits | 23 visits | |
| Surveys | | |
| Prisoner survey | 18 September 2023 | 104 responses (50%) |
| Staff survey (online) | 4-25 September 2023 | 77 responses (61%) |
| Inspection team | | |
| Inspector | Eamon Ryan | |
| Deputy Inspector | Jane Higgins | |
| Director Operations | Christine Wyatt | |
| Principal Inspections and Research Officer | Lauren Netto | |
| Principal Inspections and Research Officer | Liz George | |
| Inspections and Research Officer | Ben Shaw | |
| Inspections and Research Officer | Charles Staples | |
| Research and Review Officer | Kelly Jackson | |
| Community Liaison Officer | Joseph Wallam | |
| CMO, Mental Health Commission (External health expert) | Dr Sophie Davison | |

| Key dates | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Inspection announced | 10 July 2023 |
| Start of on-site inspection | 11 November 2023 |
| Completion of on-site inspection | 16 November 2023 |
| Presentation of preliminary findings | 7 December 2023 |

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Draft report sent to Department of Justice | 10 July 2024 |
| Draft response received from Department of Justice | 2 October 2024 |
| Declaration of prepared report | 7 October 2024 |

*Inspection of prisons, court custody centres, prescribed lock-ups,
youth detention centres, and review of custodial services in Western Australia*



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

Level 5, Albert Facey House
469 Wellington Street
Perth, Western Australia 6000
Whadjuk Noongar Boodja
Telephone: +61 8 6551 4200

www.oics.wa.gov.au