



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Justice**
Corrective Services

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.

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.