



Systemic change recommended for responding to sexual assault in prison

The ACT Inspector of Correctional Services has recommended the ACT Government review its approach to preventing, tracking and responding to allegations of sexual coercion and violence in adult custodial settings, and report publicly on the outcome.

The recommendation is contained in a critical incident review by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services, tabled in Legislative Assembly today. The review was triggered by a detained person being transferred to hospital after raising concerns about a sexual assault at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC).

“The report does not consider and makes no comment about the veracity of the allegation,” said Rebecca Minty, ACT Inspector of Correctional Services. “Instead, this report considers how ACT Corrective Services and Justice Health Services responded to the reported sexual assault, including what worked well and identifying any areas for improvement.”

“This review notes there is extremely limited Canberra Health Services policy guidance for clinical teams in the AMC about responding to reports of sexual assault, and none specific to a correctional setting. I note there was a delay between the detained person first discussing the alleged assault with Justice Health Services and his eventual transfer to hospital for specialist sexual assault care. This review makes recommendations to address this deficiency,” said Ms Minty.

“This review also highlights the lack of policy framework for both ACT Corrective Services and Justice Health Services in the areas of prevention, reporting and response to sexual assault in the AMC generally, and a lack of staff training on responding to reported sexual assault in a custodial setting. This needs to be addressed.”

The lack of a guiding framework to prevent and respond to sexual coercion and violence in the AMC was identified by the Inspector in the Healthy Prison Review of the Alexander Maconochie Centre 2022. That review recommended ACT Corrective Services consult with key stakeholders to develop a strategy to prevent, track and respond to incidents of sexual coercion and violence in the AMC.

This review reiterates that recommendation, as well as recommending the installation of enhanced security systems, such as CCTV cameras, in communal areas of the Alexander Maconochie Centre men’s cottages. The incident is alleged to have occurred in cottage accommodation designed for detained people on minimum and medium security classifications at the AMC, where there is no CCTV coverage. In addition to methods of dynamic security (staff interaction and engagement with detained people), CCTV may assist in preventing sexual coercion and violence and provide a potential source of evidence to assist with accountability.

The review also recommends ACTCS improve its reporting practices and data collection regarding reported sexual assaults at the AMC.

“Sexual coercion and violence is a complex issue, including in places of detention. This review highlights that more needs to be done to respond to such allegations. Places of detention should be safe for detained people, staff and visitors.”

For more information

The full report can be found at ics.act.gov.au

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MEDIA BACKGROUND

Inspector: Rebecca Minty

Rebecca Minty is the Inspector of Correctional Services. The ACT Inspector of Correctional Services was established to provide independent oversight of ACT correctional and youth detention facilities, focusing on continual improvement and prevention of ill-treatment.

The Inspector of Correctional Services provides this oversight through conducting reviews of ACT correctional facilities and services, and reviewing critical incidents. Initially this was limited to adult correctional facilities and services. However, in December 2019 this expanded to youth detention, including oversight of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

The Inspector is independent of, the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, ACT Corrective Services and the Community Services Directorate (which operates the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre).

Rebecca has worked at the ACT Office of the Inspector of Correctional Services (OICS) since it commenced operations in 2018, initially as Deputy Inspector prior to her appointment as Inspector in March 2023.

Rebecca Minty has worked in human rights law and policy for more than fifteen years, both in the ACT and internationally. Rebecca's work has focused particularly on conditions and treatment of persons deprived of their liberty, as well as international, national and local structures for independent oversight of detention.

