



Time out of cells and the experience for women key issues for remandees at the AMC

ACT Inspector of Correctional Services delivers first review of a correctional service

The ACT Inspector of Correctional Services, Neil McAllister, today released the first review of a correctional service in the ACT conducted by his office, reviewing the treatment and care of persons on remand.

A key finding from the review is that although remandees are required under ACT law to be treated as innocent, there is no material difference in the way remandees are treated in the AMC as compared to convicted detainees. This is notwithstanding that some, if not many, will not be sentenced to a term of imprisonment when their charges are finalised in court.

“On any given day around 4 out of 10 detainees at the AMC are on remand and amongst women detained around 6 out of 10 are on remand. Furthermore, the proportion of detainees on remand is increasing” Mr McAllister said. “Given this reality, measures need to be in place to make sure, to the maximum extent possible, they are treated as innocent until proved otherwise. It needs to be remembered that unlike convicted detainees, remandees are not imprisoned as punishment”.

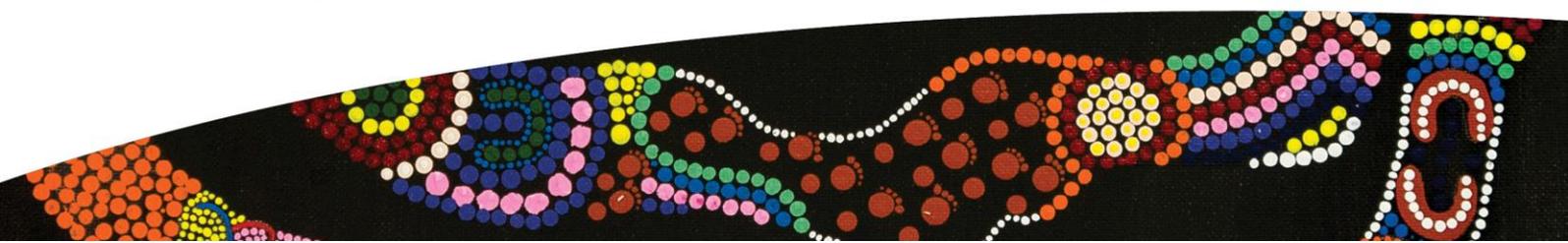
Although the AMC was originally designed to separate remandees from sentenced prisoners that has not occurred for a number of years. “Whilst this review does not set out to advocate for or against a separate remand prison, it identifies a number of areas where remandees, particularly women on remand, undergo a highly restrictive regime that significantly impacts on their experience in detention.” Mr McAllister said. The review identified that ACT Corrective Services did not, and appears never to have had, a specific policy on the treatment and care of remandees despite being required under the legislation to have one.

Other issues identified include:

- That detainees – and in particular, new reception remandees - are subject to planned and unplanned lock-ins, particularly in the early stages of detention, which may increase stress and trauma associated with detention;
- Female detainees are accommodated in a high security unit that is unsuitable for women and contradicts the AMC’s design philosophy. Further work needs to be done by ACT Corrective Services to provide women on remand with relevant programs and activities that provide meaningful activity.

The review notes areas for improvement such as a policy articulating the unique needs of remandees, increasing the amount of time all detainees but particularly remandees and newly arrived detainees spend outside their cell, emphasising the importance of access to visits, phone calls and email accounts for remandees

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to facilitate the crucial role that external support can play in what can be a highly traumatic time. Furthermore, the report suggests that ACT Corrective Services work with justice sector stakeholders to identify and support those eligible for bail but remanded in custody.

“This report recognises that ACT Corrective Services has no control over the number of detainees that are sent to AMC. There simply is not the option of putting up a ‘no vacancy’ sign” Neil McAllister said. “We have made 39 findings in relation to treatment and care of remandees, and we will continue to engage constructively with ACT Corrective Services to follow up on these findings. None of our findings are a criticism of the demanding work done by both uniformed and non-uniformed staff at AMC on a daily basis.”

For more information

Contact ACT Inspector of Correctional Services on 1800 092 010 or ics@act.gov.au. The report can be accessed from www.ics.act.gov.au.

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