

8<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Janis Adair  
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Tēnā koe Janis

**Re: Progress update for thematic report – Mothers and Babies: Prison management of pregnant women and mothers of infants**

In July 2023 you provided the Department of Corrections (Corrections) with the *Mothers and Babies: managing pregnant women and mothers of infants* thematic report. Overall, this report identified that the Mothers with Babies units (MBU) and Feeding and Bonding facilities were well-resourced, and provided a cosy, supportive environment for mothers to bond with their children, which we were pleased to have acknowledged. In addition, the report noted that there were appropriate resources for mothers to express and store breastmilk, and pregnant women and mothers received healthcare comparable to that which they would receive in the community.

You provided seven overarching recommendations and some considerations to help focus and strengthen our efforts in managing women in prison who are pregnant, have a baby in prison or have children in the community.

Corrections considered the seven recommendations and accepted six in full, and partially accepted one (recommendation 1). We have made progress on each of the recommendations and consider two closed. This letter provides an update on progress to date on those actions.

**Progressing the recommendations**

Our initial response to the report on 4 August 2023 noted,

*Led by the Workstream Co-Leads Women’s Strategy and the National Operations Director Health<sup>1</sup>, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, we will use your recommendations to seek continuous improvement for pregnant women and mothers in prison, particularly within our MBUs. Consideration will be given to the priority of such work and alignment with current strategies and practice to accomplish the changes that have been proposed within*

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<sup>1</sup> Note these role titles have changed following the organisational restructure in April 2024; this work continues, being jointly led by the Deputy Commissioner Women’s Prisons and the Chief Nurse.

*your report. This will of course include the three women's prisons being involved in the development and implementation of any changes proposed and progressed.*

The review period of your report was 2021, and site visits were conducted between February – June 2022, and again at the end of 2022. At this time New Zealand was recovering from the impacts of COVID-19 and the unprecedented lockdowns, and many of our prison sites were facing significant staffing challenges and pressures.

In November 2021 the Health Quality and Practice team developed and published the Pregnancy Healthcare Pathway. This included the following practice guidance and documents:

- Pregnancy Healthcare Pathway
- Pregnancy Care Plan
- Pregnancy Notification
- Pregnancy Screening

In November 2022 Corrections published updated operational guidance in the Prison Operations Manual (POM) in terms of management of pregnant women and women residing in the MBU. Additionally, the information booklet for women was updated, as well as some of the associated forms.

Given the proximity of these new areas of guidance to the Inspectorate's fieldwork, some of the proposed considerations had already been resolved in new guidance and are now being embedded at a site level. As such, many considerations of your report had already been actioned at the time the report was released.

### ***Progress update on the report recommendations***

**Recommendation 1: Corrections must develop a Practice Centre setting out guidance for the management of women who reside in a Mothers with Babies unit, are pregnant or who have children in the community under 24 months, from when they arrive at prison through to when they are released.**

Corrections partially accepted this recommendation, considering a Practice Centre to be too prescriptive. Corrections considered that 'guidance' would be more appropriate, to support consistency while allowing for necessary and appropriate local differences.

Guidance can be found within the POM in the operational procedures *M.03.08.01* to *M.03.08.14* and the associated forms and resources. Locating operational guidance within the POM means that information is accessible to all staff and located in the same place as other custodial guidance. This guidance is also published on our external website and available on the kiosk which means women in prison and their whānau can also access it. This guidance was updated in November 2022 to include recommendations from the Office of the Children's Commissioner, as well as other key areas identified by frontline staff.

For Pae Ora staff, health related resources can be found in the Health Operational Procedures page on Tātou and are accessible to all staff.

Site representatives have noted that every situation with women is different, and guidance that is too prescriptive may not meet the needs of each woman's personal situation. Instead, they suggested a process for sharing learnings and best practice. In April 2024, the three women's prisons convened for a national MBU workshop at Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility (ARWCF) to share learnings across the network. The workshop was an opportunity for staff from

different disciplines (Pae Ora, Case Management, Custodial), and Te Hā Oranga (ARWCF's external MBU support service), to share their experiences, discuss complex cases and look at future opportunities. Attendees are continuing to reach out to one another and share practice across the network, and are planning a second workshop.

We consider this action closed.

**Recommendation 2: Corrections must ensure better collection of information about women who arrive at site with children under 24 months in the community, having regard to the privacy interests of the children.**

This recommendation includes wider privacy considerations for the storage of information for children who are not in Corrections care, and whether women choose to disclose this information. The Women's Strategy, Custodial Practice, and Health Practice teams are currently exploring a solution for this recommendation that considers our obligations under the Privacy Act 2020. In 2023, an updated Immediate Needs Checklist was trialled at ARWCF which included a question asking if women had children under 24 months. Following learnings from this trial, work is continuing to determine the recommended approach. Once this has been approved, associated changes to systems and guidance will be enacted across the women's prison network as necessary in late 2024-early 2025.

ARWCF continue to support women in Te Waharoa Whakatautangata, their induction unit, and Christchurch Women's Prison (CWP) have also recently set up a similar unit. These units aim to support women by offering support and identifying their needs within the first few days in prison.

**Recommendation 3: Corrections must better support women to maintain relationships with their children in the community, including both in-person visits and telephone and video calls.**

At the time of the inspection, Corrections was still navigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. All prisons across the country are now open for visits. In addition to the standard visits, CWP has reinstated the Child Centric Visits post-COVID, which are held once a quarter and are in addition to regular visits. These visits are held in conjunction with Storytime Foundation, and aim to strengthen whānau relationships, with child-friendly activities for mothers to do with their children.

Women in prison are now able to access free phone calls following the introduction of the new Corrections Prison Telephone System (CPTS) in 2023, reducing a significant barrier to maintaining whānau connection.

A new section was included in the MBU section of the POM in 2022, *M.03.08.07 Contact with family / whānau*. This updated guidance includes the following excerpt:

*Family and whānau should be involved as early as possible, and bonding encouraged and facilitated especially between the nominated alternative caregiver and the child. Where operationally feasible, increased access to contact with whānau should be made possible, for example through visits, phone calls, and video calls.*

At CWP, Te Mana Wāhine Pathway designed, tested, and developed information packs for whānau. These information packs provide information to whānau about visit options, including in-person and video calls, and details about processes for accessing visits. Improving access to information about visits and telephone calls will better support whānau to remain connected.

Measures that can be tracked, to evidence these changes, is being explored with our performance and analytics team in order to provide further assurance that this recommendation is being achieved across the Women's network. As such this recommendation is "in progress".

**Recommendation 4: Corrections must better support, including through welfare checks, women who return to prison from hospital having miscarried, terminated a pregnancy or who have given birth where the child remains in the community.**

In our original response, we acknowledged that this is an area where improvements can be made, and we were going to consider whether the Intervention and Support Practice Team (ISPT) could support with mental health screening for women who return from hospital following one of these events.

Discussions with prison Health Centre Managers and Social Worker staff has identified that support is regularly offered, however, may not be being recorded accurately. Current documentation and guidance has been reviewed and discussed with Health Centre Managers and mental health staff at each of the sites. This has determined that current guidance provides a clear understanding of the multidisciplinary planning undertaken to support pregnant women who experience loss while in our care and management. The Pregnancy Healthcare Pathway lists actions and supports available to women who experience miscarriage, termination of pregnancy, or give birth and their child remains in the community, as does the POM. The Visits to External Health Providers policy has been strengthened to ensure people returning to prison after external health visits are reviewed by health services staff and a care plan is put in place to support their ongoing welfare.

Each women's prison has a range of counselling, listening and therapeutic support for mental health and/or spiritual support that is offered to women. These supports may include access to agencies external to Corrections, based in the local community. They include services that are iwi/Māori led. Internally there is access to social workers and mental health teams that include trauma counsellors. The care provided to women on their return from hospital is managed depending on their individual clinical needs, thus support pathways may vary.

To further strengthen the support offered, the Mental Health Quality & Practice Team will send communications to front-line staff in the women's network, to ensure there is a clear process for mental health screening and referrals for women in Mothers and Babies Units and women who return to prison from hospital having miscarried, terminated a pregnancy or who have given birth where the child remains in the community. The Mental Health Quality & Practice team will also provide guidance to Intervention and Support Practice Teams to ensure women identified above are considered a priority when triaging referrals. This work is expected to be completed by December 2024.

**Recommendation 5: Corrections must develop criteria for selecting those staff most suitable for working in the Mothers with Babies unit, and appropriate training package for staff in the unit, and ensure that all staff who work in the unit have completed this and ongoing training.**

Due to the rostering system, it is not feasible to have the same Corrections Officer/Senior Corrections Officers staff always in the MBU as Corrections Officers and Senior Corrections Officers still may need to move around more dynamically depending on the needs of the site. To mitigate this, ARWCF and CWP have both recently re-located senior staff into their MBUs, identifying staff with strong practice and experience in the MBU space. These senior staff provide steadiness, and regular multi-disciplinary team meetings are held at all women's prison sites with regular MDT members, supporting consistency in the wrap-around support for mothers with babies in prison.

Arohata Prison have not had a child in their MBU since this report was released, however staff continue to engage with the other sites around MBU practice so they are prepared when an application to the MBU is received and approved.

A Learning and Development (L&D) module specific for staff working in the MBUs is being created as part of the wider L&D Pathway and Support Framework for custodial staff working in women's prisons. This learning module is currently being developed and includes input from our Mothers with Babies Support Services as child development specialists. Delivery of the module to staff will be determined once development has been completed.

As mentioned earlier, all three women's prisons have connected for a face-to-face workshop and continue to share experience and practice across the network to strengthen practice within the MBU.

**Recommendation 6: Corrections must develop and implement an assurance framework to ensure its policies for pregnant women and women with children under 24 months are being consistently applied across all three women's sites.**

The Organisational Resilience and Safety (ORS) team are currently progressing work on an Assurance Framework for Corrections. While not specific to Mothers with Babies in prison this will provide the framework to implement an appropriate assurance approach for this area.

The framework is in the early stages of development and is pending endorsement of the assurance approach by ORS and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

We aim to have an interim framework ready to begin testing in December 2024. Once ready and recruitment completed, ORS will work with the Women's Prison Network to further develop their current assurance approaches including those for women who are pregnant or have young children in their care in custody.

**Recommendation 7: Corrections must consider how comparable overseas jurisdictions manage visits for children, and consider the report of the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into the Prison System, Te Ara Hou: the New Way, including the recommendation for visiting centres for children up to the age of five, and that assistance with transport and accommodation be provided across the entire prison network.**

A report has been completed by the Women's Strategy Team to address this recommendation, with a focus particular to women's prisons. The report explores how comparable international jurisdictions compare to Aotearoa New Zealand with respect to child visits across the women's prison network. It provides considerations and aspirations for ways in which access to and quality of visits are already being practiced or could be improved – this includes where there are learnings from one site which could be considered for expansion across the network.

This report is still to be shared with other relevant teams across Corrections to review and influence their work in considering broader steps to be taken by the organisation in relation to visits with children in prison. It is important to note there are resourcing implications associated with some of the considerations that need to be balanced in the current fiscal environment. We have identified several ways the women's prisons are already working to ensure improved visits and greater connectivity for women and their whānau.

This action has been recommended to close once the report has been shared with all other relevant business groups. Any future work is considered to be wider than just the women's prison network.

## **Additional progress and work underway**

In addition to progress on the seven recommendations, work to improve the experience of women in prison continues as part of our continuous improvement approach. For example, pregnant women are better supported through the updated pregnancy diet, improved access to maternity wear, inclusion of the pregnancy entitlements in the POM, and the new *Birth Support Plan* completed with social workers to identify key supports and logistics for the escort and return to site, including consideration of cultural birth practices.

Babies residing in the MBU are provided with important developmental outings through contracts with local daycares and/or approved places for baby outings. This also provides mothers with respite and the space to focus on their rehabilitative programmes.

A formalised process for contacting Oranga Tamariki for input into decisions about the MBUs is being progressed through an updated schedule to our Relationship Agreement.

We have improved processes to allow social workers to spend time with the women they are working with. The new case noting database, named NurtureNet, went live in June 2023. It is a system that allows Social Workers at the women's prisons to create cases centred around the women they work with, including pregnant women, women in the Mothers with Babies Units and women undertaking Feeding and Bonding. The database has restricted access to protect sensitive information, however custodial staff have access to the emergency contacts for mothers and children in case of an emergency outside of hours. Social Workers and their managers have reported positive feedback on the easy usability of this system, saving time on administrative tasks. The previous Mothers with Babies database has been archived.

The social worker practice guidance is currently being updated. This will include guidance for case noting in NurtureNet. The Social Work Registration Board has been consulted in terms of providing input to strengthen this guidance and ensure it reflects current best practice.

Finally, work is underway to strengthen guidance regarding applications for compassionate release for women who have given birth to a child. This is to ensure clarity of process for applications made under s41(1)(a) of the Parole Act 2022.

Thank you again for your thematic report and the work undertaken by your team. This report continues to provide a valuable foundation for our continuous improvement approach to supporting pregnant women and mothers of infants.

Ngā mihi nui



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