

28 February 2025

Janis Adair
Chief Inspector
Department of Corrections

By email: janis.adair@corrections.govt.nz

Tēnā koe Janis,

Suspected Suicide and Self-harm Thematic Report

Please find below, our second semi-annual update on Corrections' response to the above noted report that was released in February 2024.

We are pleased to share updates on a range of work we have underway in response to the areas for consideration noted in your report. We acknowledge we are still in the early stages for some of the areas, which will require significant coordination between different parts of Corrections, and investment and effort over the long-term. To support this, we intend to refresh our Suicide Prevention and Postvention Action Plan and extend it to 2029. We will keep you updated as this work progresses.

Strategy and Leadership

Corrections must continue to review the strategic and operational leadership, resourcing, operating models and service delivery for prisoners vulnerable to suicide or self-harm as set out in its Suicide Prevention and Postvention Action Plan

- We are in the process of considering recommendations from the review of our mental health services¹ that was delivered in December 2024. Improving Corrections' ability to identify, assess and treat mental health and to improve overall wellbeing of the people in our care is the primary goal of the recommendations.
- Following on from the successful pilot, five portable prisoner phones are now available for prisoners to use in the maximum-security units at Auckland Prison. This gives greater access to support from whānau within the maximum-security environment.
- We are working with our Community Corrections team and Data Management teams to develop improved processes to monitor suicide rates of those who are under community management. Improved data analysis will support service delivery and assist our community partner, Clinical Advisory Services Aotearoa (CASA), to monitor and respond to contagion effects.
- An Intervention and Support Unit Placement Review Process was published in October 2024 to support changes arising from the Corrections Amendment Bill 2024. The internal procedure provides direction to frontline health and mental health staff to consult regularly

¹ The Executive Summary is appended to this letter for your convenience.

(i.e., daily) with custodial staff, Forensic Mental Health Service providers and other key people to ensure that decisions made about a person's at-risk status, segregation status, and placement in an Intervention and Support Unit (ISU) are timely, made collaboratively, and with all available information considered. The procedure outlines that ideally, this consultation would take place as part of the daily multidisciplinary team meeting, wherein the placement of each person in an ISU would be reviewed. The procedure provides structure around when and how reviews of ISU placement are undertaken, and escalation steps which help to ensure that the right supports are in place where a person remains in ISU without a clear plan for progressing or transitioning out.

- Evidence-based best-practice guidance on assessment, formulation and intervention in relation to suicide and self-harm is contained in a newly developed Mental Health Operations Manual that was delivered in November 2024. The manual is intended to standardise mental health services across the prison estate. Staff are being supported to implement the changes.

Training and development

Corrections must continue its investment in additional training, development, and supervision for staff in recognising and responding to risk factors for suicide and self-harm, as set out in its Suicide Prevention and Postvention Action Plan, specifically including using trauma-informed approaches and managing alcohol and drug withdrawal.

- Updated safer Prescribing Guidelines were communicated to relevant staff on 29 January 2025. The Safer Prescribing Guidelines support Medical Officers, Nurse Practitioners, and Nurse Prescribers in addressing the unique challenges of prescribing within the prison environment. This system aids clinicians in prioritising patient safety and reducing risks of misuse or harm. Specifically related to suicide, guidelines include those for pain management, substance use withdrawal and insomnia. This updated edition builds on the first, reflecting the expertise of clinicians and providing a vital resource for safe, equitable, and culturally responsive care delivery.
- Withdrawal Management training has now been delivered to 107 health staff since June 2024. Four more sessions (25 participants per session) are scheduled to be delivered before the end of June 2025. The training follows Aotearoa New Zealand's best-practice guide for medically managed withdrawal. Medically assisted substance withdrawal management minimises risk and distress. So far, the training has been well received by participants.
- A course on trauma and trauma-informed practice is being delivered to all new staff as part of the Corrections Officer Development Pathway and is available for all existing staff to complete as part of their ongoing development. This course is being updated and will be made available later in 2025.
- An eight-hour training programme on trauma-informed care, delivered over two sessions, is being piloted at Christchurch Men's Prison, Auckland Prison and Spring Hill Corrections Facility. It was designed to help Corrections Officers, understand the benefit and need for trauma-informed care practices. Strategies and tools for how to provide humanising and healing (trauma-informed) care in the prison setting are provided. Approximately 130 people have completed the training so far.
- Mental Health 101 is a full day workshop delivered to prison and Community Corrections staff. While these staff are not expected to act as mental health experts or provide direct mental health support, this workshop is specifically designed to equip non-clinical staff with skills to identify and respond to someone who may be struggling with their mental health, including knowing when to seek specialised support. Since its initial delivery starting in May 2021, 2677 staff have completed the workshop.

Improving Intervention and Support Units

Corrections must review its model of care for managing people at risk of suicide or self-harm in the Intervention and Support Units, and ensure there are sufficient resources to support the model of care.

- An electronic dashboard is in development which will display information about who is placed in an ISU and the status of their placement (as decided through the process previously described). This dashboard will assist frontline staff to more easily monitor those under their care and management in ISUs and aims to reduce administrative burden. The dashboard will also provide managers (on the frontline and at National Office) with greater oversight and assurance over the people who are placed in ISUs.
- The Mental Health Operations Manual noted above is intended to standardise mental health services across the prison estate. Staff are being supported to implement the changes.
- Six identified priority ISUs are undergoing cosmetic and environmental upgrades such as acoustic improvements, access to natural light and lighting upgrades. Work is anticipated to begin in the ISU in Christchurch Men's Prison, the pilot site for the project, in April 2025. The pilot will help determine requirements for the remaining five priority sites. In addition, all ISUs across the custodial estate are receiving televisions.
- We are working towards ensuring all Intervention and Support Units receive regular educational services and culturally appropriate support, such as daily visits by Kairūruku (a specialist role to support culturally and clinically responsive mental health care from a Mātauranga Māori knowledge base and a te ao Māori world view).

Partnering with key stakeholders

Corrections must continue to work with agencies across sectors to explore how services for people with complex mental health needs can be coordinated and improved.

- We are working with a Te Whatu Ora suicide prevention programme team to deliver training to probation officers on suicide prevention and the new *Manawa* phone app (that supports safety planning for those with suicidal distress). <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/suicide-prevention/suicide-prevention-resources/manawa-my-own-survival-plan-app>
- The Department of Corrections, Ministry of Health, and Health New Zealand have established a cross-agency team to begin addressing the challenge of access to Health New Zealand inpatient beds for mentally ill people in prisons. This work aims to reduce the number of people on the waitlist, the length of time on the waitlist and to provide more coordinated care to ensure best approaches for a vulnerable population.
- We are working to develop information sharing practices with local postvention coordinators to ensure a coordinated approach in postvention.

Assurance

Corrections must regularly update its Suicide Prevention and Postvention Advisory Group about its progress towards the recommendations and areas for consideration in this report. The Office of the Inspectorate will report on progress publicly at periodic intervals.

- As noted in our previous update, this advisory group in its initial form was not sustained.
- Corrections continues to consult with various internal and external stakeholders as required to progress relevant recommendations and areas for consideration as well as the actions within our Suicide Action Plan. One example of this is consultation with the Suicide

Prevention Office in the development of our guidance around assessment of suicide risk and interventions. We are also in the process of reaching out to the Centre of Māori Suicide Prevention/Te Rau Ora to look at ways we might improve our guidance and processes to ensure they are appropriate and effective for Māori in our care.

- Corrections' Pae Ora Senior Leadership Team is continuing to provide governance, assurance and oversight over the delivery of our Action Plan and progress toward the recommendations.

Anti-ligature remediation

Corrections must provide the Office of the Inspectorate with progress updates on the work to identify and mitigate against potential ligature points in cells across the prison network.

- The reduction of ligature points wherever possible continues to be a priority for Corrections. Within the Anti-Ligature Programme, work is nearing completion for identified ligature points across Christchurch Men's, Christchurch Women's and Invercargill Prisons. Since October 2024 across these sites, there has been 1225 identified ligature points remediated. This was seen particularly across towel holders and hooks, doors and door flaps, shelves and privacy screens.
- Remedial work is due to commence at Mt Eden Corrections Facility, Spring Hill Corrections Facility and Otago Corrections Facility by March 2025.
- The Programme has undertaken scope assessments for Whanganui, Manawatu and Arohata Prisons to understand requirements to remediate identified ligature points, with planning underway to firm up dates to undertake remedial work.
- Scoping assessments at remaining sites (Northland Region Corrections Facility, Hawkes Bay Regional Prison, Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility and Rimutaka Prison) are anticipated to be undertaken by the end of March.

We really appreciate the way in which we are working in partnership with the Office of the Inspectorate to ensure we do the best for the people in our care. Please let us know if there were any aspects of this report, you would like to discuss further.

Ngā mihi nui,



Emma Gardner,

Chief Mental Health and Addictions Officer