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Tēnā koe Janis

Separation and Isolation Thematic Report

We are pleased to provide an update on the Department of Corrections' progress in addressing the recommendations from the Separation and Isolation Thematic Report. Since our last update in July 2025, we have continued to work to reduce the incidence of separation and isolation and to ensure humane treatment for all individuals in prison.

Since July, the Action Owner Working Group has continued to meet monthly, providing a structured forum for collaboration and decision-making. These meetings have enabled members to refine approaches and ensure alignment across work programmes. Engagement with the Office of the Inspectorate remains invaluable, offering opportunities to test thinking and share progress transparently.

We welcome the opportunity to share updates on current work programmes and initiatives, which we believe will help Corrections progress towards achieving the recommendations made by your report.

Progress update on the report recommendations

Recommendation One: Corrections must recognize the profound isolation experienced by segregated and at-risk prisoners

The updates provided below reflect Corrections' overarching commitment to reducing isolation and ensuring safe, humane treatment for everyone in prison. It is part of a continuous effort to identify and act on opportunities that uphold people's dignity and wellbeing. Our work remains aligned with Hōkai Rangī and is a priority focus for the Executive Leadership Team as we strengthen practices that support connection and care across the prison system.

Recommendation Two: Mitigating the extent of isolation, and increasing opportunities for meaningful human interaction

Defining Meaningful Human Contact

Custodial Services, Pae Ora, Legal, Legislative Policy and Chief Custodial Officer's teams are working collaboratively to develop and table options to ELT for a definition of meaningful human contact. Alongside this, Corrections will aim to provide people in prison with more access to meaningful human contact than they are currently receiving, particularly those who are segregated from others. In addition to this, work will commence in early 2026 to develop operational guidance and determine how prison sites can record whether opportunities for meaningful human contact have increased.

Custodial Risk Assessment

In late May 2025, Custodial Services initiated a network-wide risk assessment focused on solitary confinement. This assessment drew on data from unlock regimes across the country and examined the delivery of minimum entitlements to better understand where risks may be emerging. Custodial Services conducted a risk bowtie exercise for the risk of solitary confinement, highlighting key controls and identifying assurance activities that give confidence that unlock regimes maximise time out of cell across the network. These insights are now informing the development of the prolonged solitary confinement assurance plan discussed under Recommendation Four, which will provide a structured approach to monitoring and mitigating these risks. Additionally, Custodial Services have implemented assurance processes regarding minimum entitlements delivery, with cases of people in prison who frequently choose not to access entitlements being escalated to Pae Ora for engagement. This approach better recognises the impact of prolonged isolation on those who are often housed in ISUs.

In parallel, Custodial Services has been working to support operational leaders in making informed deployment decisions. By using accurate data and prioritising effectively, leaders are better equipped to maximise staff availability, maximise unlock hours, and as a result reduce the likelihood of individuals experiencing prolonged isolation.

Young Adult Placement Assessments

The refreshed Assessment of Placement for Young Adults (APYA) process is near final approval, and updated training is underway for frontline staff. Using the APYA to assess young people within seven days of arrival is intended to reduce the time they may be kept isolated from others. This also enables better decisions about where they are best placed across the prison estate, with a particular focus on connection to whānau/iwi and rehabilitative programmes and community support.

Recommendation Three: Collecting better data on segregated people

IOMS Upgrades

On 17 November 2025, new digital processes went live in IOMS for managing segregation, at-risk assessments, and use-of-force reporting. These changes replace paper-based systems, making it easier for staff to access and share case information, improving security, and reducing manual reporting. Site registers are no longer required, and COBRA dashboards will be created by June 2026 to further enhance reporting capability. For people on directed segregation who are transferring, segregation must be revoked before transfer, with the receiving site determining whether a new direction is necessary. This ensures

segregation directions are only reapplied if the site determines the risk remains, so people are segregated for the shortest time necessary

Management and care planning has also been strengthened. Each person who is segregated or assessed as at-risk must receive clear reasons for the decision and a management plan outlining how minimum entitlements will be met within 24 hours. Risk Management Plans in IOMS align with existing paper-based templates, and now include a Care Plan section informed by health professionals during daily multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings. These plans detail medication schedules, indicators of health deterioration, and wellbeing checks.

A new transition plan has been introduced as part of this work for individuals returning to the general population who are no longer assessed as at-risk of self-harm but who may still be vulnerable. The plan ensures goals and actions are in place to support the person's safe reintegration into a mainstream unit. The MDT will determine if a transition plan is required and ensure it accompanies the person to their new unit.

Additional improvements include a new feature that allows segregation directions to be quickly reinstate within five days of expiry and enhancements to use-of-force processes. All use-of-force reviews are now configured as learning reviews, completed by authorised managers to maintain privacy and security. Incident reports are linked within IOMS for streamlined reporting. Health staff continue to play a critical role post-restraint, completing assessments for physical and psychological impacts and documenting outcomes in both clinical records and IOMS. Guidance has also been developed to support daily MDT meetings in Intervention and Support Units, reinforcing collaborative decision-making and timely reviews aimed at reducing segregation wherever possible.

Recommendation Four: Development and implementation of an assurance framework for people who are segregated or assessed as at risk of self-harm

National Prolonged Solitary Confinement Assurance Plan

Corrections is committed to ensuring that assurance activities associated with ensuring people do not experience prolonged solitary confinement¹ in prisons are consolidated and supported by strong system-wide oversight. On 25 September 2025, Operational Deputy Chief Executives (DCEs) endorsed the development of a prolonged solitary confinement national assurance plan. This plan will focus on the current controls in place to prevent prolonged solitary confinement and will assess whether these are effective. It will also identify any gaps in assurance processes and evaluate the risks of them going unchecked.

The assurance plan will bring together existing controls and assurance activities, clarify roles and responsibilities, and align with the Organisational Assurance & Learning Framework. While it will not introduce new assurance activities, it will strengthen transparency and consistency across sites, ensuring compliance with domestic legislation and international standards. This structured approach will help eliminate duplication, close gaps in assurance coverage, and provide confidence that people in prison are managed lawfully and humanely. This work will also develop associated reporting responsibilities for prolonged solitary confinement, which will in part be enabled by the upgrades that have been made to IOMS.

¹ Prolonged solitary confinement is defined under the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules) as confinement for 22 hours or more per day without meaningful human contact, for a period exceeding 15 consecutive days.

A working group with representatives from across business functions has begun building the plan, with a draft version scheduled for presentation to Operational DCEs in February 2026.

Recommendation Five: Corrections will report segregation information publicly in its Annual Report

Segregation data was published in the 2024/25 Annual Report and will be included again in the 2025/26 report. We will continue to look for opportunities to improve reporting in this space, as better data becomes available through the IOMS upgrades.

Recommendation Six: Corrections will ensure COVID-19 learnings are incorporated into planning for future events where people may experience prolonged restrictions and access to family.

A Pandemic Plan has been drafted with input from Pae Ora and incorporates key learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic. Further work is planned for completion by June 2026 to strengthen the pandemic plan, including wider consultation, formal approval, and testing. This plan is considered the most appropriate starting point, a pandemic scenario is the most likely event to create conditions where people are isolated for extended periods. While the plan focuses on infectious disease outbreaks, many of the workarounds and approaches identified can be adapted to other events that result in similar restrictions.

Further work is planned to strengthen the pandemic plan, including wider consultation, formal approval, and testing. Insights from this process, along with lessons from other plans, will also inform the development of the new Resilience Framework which is planned for progression in 2026, ensuring a robust approach to future events where people may experience prolonged restrictions.

Recommendation Seven: Report back on progress

The next report back on progress is due to the Office of the Inspectorate in June 2026. We look forward to providing you with information on further developments.

We hope this update has been informative and provides a clear picture of the progress being made. Thank you for your continued engagement and support as we work towards these important goals.

Nāku noa, nā

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Leigh Marsh

Commissioner Custodial Services

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Dr Juanita Ryan

Deputy Chief Executive