

# Funeral attendances by incarcerated individuals in WA

## Background

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The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody made specific reference to the cultural importance and family obligations for Aboriginal prisoners to attend funerals and burial services (Recommendation 171). Between 1 June 2002 and 31 May 2012, 6023 funeral and burial services were attended by prisoners and detainees across Western Australia. Approximately 80 per cent of attendees were of Aboriginal descent.

In recent years there has been a significant decrease in prisoners attending funerals. In 2011, prisoners attended 627 funerals, a drop of approximately 50 from 2010. This decrease was publicly acknowledged by the Corrective Services Minister<sup>1</sup> at the 2012 Estimates Committee and then more widely reported in *The West Australian* on 9 July 2012. The drop in funeral attendance has been suggested to be indirectly racist given the high percentage of Aboriginal people who will be affected. An alternative for prisoners to 'virtually' attend a funeral has raised a number of concerns.

## Purpose of the review

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This audit will examine funeral attendances by WA incarcerates from 1 June 2002 to 31 May 2012. It will also examine other options suggested as alternatives to physically attending a funeral and determine if these options are feasible, equally available to all prisoners and cost effective.

## Terms of Reference

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1. What is the profile of prisoners accessing funerals and has this changed in the last ten years?
2. Is there clarity around the process of assessing and approving prisoners and detainees for attendance at funerals?
3. What are the short term and long term impacts of not attending a funeral or burial service (ie. self-harm and health effects, cultural obligations eroded)?
4. What support mechanisms are in place for those whose funeral application has been refused?
5. What alternatives are being considered for prisoners to participate in funerals without physically attending?
  - a) Are these options feasible, culturally appropriate and available to all prisoners in an equitable manner?
  - b) Are there appropriate risk management strategies in place to ensure technological and other faults affecting a person's ability to participate in a funeral are appropriately managed?
  - c) Who bears the cost associated with using these options and whether the cost is efficiently offset by the savings of not allowing prisoners to physically attend the funeral
  - d) What processes are in place to inform communities and families of the new arrangements and are there appropriate process to ensure arrangements are coordinated?

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<sup>1</sup> The Hon Terry Redman, Department of Corrective Services Minister, Parliament of Western Australia, Legislative Assembly Estimates Committee 2012, Committee B: Tuesday 29 May 2012, 'Extract from Hansard' [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/c4f7274614c32eed48257a210030b6cc/\\$FILE/A38%20S1%2020120529%20p127c-150a.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/c4f7274614c32eed48257a210030b6cc/$FILE/A38%20S1%2020120529%20p127c-150a.pdf)