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| MEDIA RELEASE |
| Report Name: ***Transitional services in Western Australian Prisons.*** |
| In WA, over 7,000 people are released from our prisons each year. These people are leaving a highly structured, monitored, and securitised prison environment to return to the community. The transition can be difficult and, in many cases, unsuccessful. Most prisoners face complex challenges including issues with mental health, accommodation, family relationships, substance abuse and employment. It is unrealistic to expect that all of them will settle back into society without support.Over 40 per cent of all sentenced prisoners return to prison within two years of release. The costs of reoffending are incredibly high with each prisoner costing the state $332 per day, not to mention the financial and human costs to victims. Tackling the rate at which ex-prisoners commit further crime is a community and financial necessity. Today, the Inspector of Custodial Services Neil Morgan released a report into the services provided by the Department of Corrective Services which help to transition people from prison back into the community. In his report Mr Morgan found the transition services that are offered perform a valuable function and are highly appreciated by prisoners. However, he also said:Providing support to prisoners to transition back to society should be a key element in reducing the number of people returning to prison. However transition services in WA prisons are under-resourced, staffing levels are poorly correlated with demand, and services do not always reach the higher risk prisoners. Inevitably where resources are strained compromises and reductions are made on the type of services that can be delivered. Access to services is unequal across the state with some facilities actively promoting the service availability. Other facilities rely on prisoners requesting services often without knowing if the prisoners are aware of its availability. This means those most in need of help may not know these services exist and therefore cannot access assistance.The Department’s primary response to all of the report’s recommendations is that the introduction of an Individualised Integrated Offender Management Framework would resolve the problems identified in transition services. The framework is intended to improve assessment and classification processes, to provide a more effective allocation of offenders to programs, and to improve the prioritisation and sequencing of programs. Mr Morgan noted:I welcome the IIOM as it should improve and streamline service delivery. However, it is very much in its infancy and this is not the first time we have been promised better targeted and streamlined services. In the 1990’s, when I was a member of the Parole Board, we were told that the then Ministry of Justice had implemented a system which would provide a ‘seamless transition’ for prisoners to the community. It hadn’t, though the intentions were as good then as they are now. Unfortunately, for almost half our prisoners, the only seamless transition seems to be back into prison. That is why transition services matter, why we need to deliver more comprehensive services, and why we need to resource and manage them better.The report is available on the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services website: <http://www.oics.wa.gov.au/publications/review/>.  |