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Mr Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services
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Dear Mr Ryan,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some comments regarding your review on "Prisoner access to dental care in Western Australia".

Primary health care, including dental care, is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The State Government however provides a safety net public dental service via a network of Dental Health Services (DHS) public dental clinics throughout Western Australia for eligible adults who possess a current Health Care Card or Pension Concession Card. Urgent care is provided as required and patients requiring non-urgent courses of dental care are wait listed to ensure equity of access.

As well as the eligible adult population of Western Australia, DHS provides the following special dental services:

- Aged care facility – visiting program to screen consenting residents;
- Prisoners in metropolitan and major rural Department of Corrective Services facilities mainly in prison-based clinics;
- Eligible Disability Services Commission clients in the Special Needs Clinic, North Perth; and
- Medically compromised general dental care to eligible patients in Graylands Hospital.

The State Government also funds the School Dental Services (SDS) through DHS. The SDS provides free general dental care to students aged 5 to 16 or until the end of year 11 attending a Department of Education recognised school.

The SDS is delivered state-wide by teams of professionals across 132 fixed dental therapy centres (DTC), which are co-located with schools. In addition to the fixed DTCs, 24 Mobile School Dental Therapy Vans provide care to students across 160 locations where there is an insufficient student population to require a fixed DTC, usually in outer metropolitan and country locations.

In regard to issues specifically relating to dental services provided by DHS to prisons:

- Historically these services have been provided "free of charge" to both the prisoners and the Department of Corrective Services

- The budget for these services is part of the DHS block funding provided by the Department of Health
- Funding for services delivered to prisons has remained fairly static and consistent for the last five years
- With the transient prisoner population, the majority of dental care provided is urgent care
- For metropolitan prisons, there is a dedicated team of dental officers and dental assistants who provide these services. Any difficulty in recruitment or staff shortages due to illness or leave impacts DHS ability to provide the usual services to prisoners. There is no leave relief budget within DHS block funding.
- For rural prisons, dental officers from the nearest Public Dental Clinic are rostered to visit the prison. In some rural areas, the same dental officers also provide visiting services to Aboriginal Medical Services and Schools. Again, any staff shortages will impact on DHS' ability to send resources to the prison as anticipated schedules and rosters may change.
- An MoU between the Department of Justice and DHS has been negotiated and was finalised in February 2020. The MoU states that services provided by DHS will be dependent on "available funding and resources". The MoU also clearly states that any new additional sites (eg: Eastern Goldfields Prison) requiring dental services will be "considered and evaluated...funding for these services to be negotiated".
- DHS staff shortages and inability to recruit to several vacant positions contribute to the "access" to services by prisoners. The extra security procedures required in delivering prisoners to the clinic and to keep everyone safe whilst treatment is provided shorten the available treatment time in a usual work day for the DHS dentist. There are less appointments per day available at a prison as compared to a Public Dental Clinic.

The National and State Oral Health Care Plans both include the following guideline regarding dental care:

"all adults should receive an oral health check-up and preventively focused oral health care at least every two years and adults with greater oral health needs should be seen more frequently"

DHS utilises this guideline when managing the treatment of eligible adults and school children. The demand for dental services exceeding available resources is an issue for all DHS eligible consumers and not just for prisoners.

Should you have any queries or require additional information, please contact [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

Yours sincerely


Tony Dolan
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
31 August 2021