

## Inspector's overview

### A strong management team faced with many challenges and limitations

It is difficult to write an overview for an inspection of Hakea Prison without sounding a bit like a broken record. Looking back over previous inspection reports there is a ring of familiarity to many of the issues that we have identified and reported on following this inspection. Infrastructure limitations and inadequate services continue to dominate our findings.

Hakea as the main male reception and assessment prison in Western Australia, is a complex and busy facility. It is an aging 1980s prison that has many infrastructure shortcomings. It is also seriously overcrowded, with most cells originally designed for one person now double bunked. The original total design capacity is listed at 666 beds, but with double bunking that now stands at a total of 1,211. The population at the time of our inspection was hovering around 940 but at the time of writing this has fallen further to 805.

Hakea recorded a total of almost 12,000 receptions and discharges in 2020–2021, and this continues to be an area of high performance and expertise. Management of remand prisoners is quite different to managing a stable sentenced prison population. The needs of the prisoners are different, the average length of their stay is often shorter, their entitlements differ, and the requirement to facilitate access to daily visits, courts and legal advisers poses ongoing challenges. Many remand prisoners are also unsettled and volatile, some are experiencing withdrawal, and others have higher mental health needs.

Moreover, Hakea also holds:

- a large number of sentenced prisoners, approximately 200 at the time of our inspection
- a significant cohort of protection prisoners
- many prisoners with serious mental health issues
- many other prisoners with alerts from gang affiliations or other reasons.

This paints a picture of the level of complexity involved in the day to day operation of the prison.

As noted above, the population at Hakea has continued to fall since the time of our inspection. At 805 the Department reports this as a 68.5 per cent utilisation rate (based on Hakea having 1,175 general purpose beds). Ordinarily this would create opportunities to release pressure on accommodation units. But at the time of our inspection and more recently, Hakea has been undertaking comprehensive COVID planning and preparations which has led to one unit being designated as an isolation unit to deal with possible COVID outbreaks. Added to this, we were recently advised that parts of Unit 8 are being closed due to problems with the structural integrity of the flooring. This means that the other units have remained under significant pressure despite the reduced overall population.

Infrastructure limitations continue to impact almost every aspect of Hakea's daily operations, with the notable exception being the new video-link facility. The area where these limitations are most

obvious is in the double-bunked accommodation units, which are mostly cramped and crowded with inadequate facilities to provide decent living conditions. Many units do not have enough space to allow all the men to sit and eat, resulting in many prisoners taking their meals back to their cells to eat sitting on their bed or standing up. There have, however, been some recent modifications in several mainstream units to create unit-based exercise yards and this has been a positive development.

Other infrastructure limitations impact Hakea's ability to provide all prisoners with a daily regime of purposeful activity involving employment, education, programs and organised recreation. High levels of custodial staff absences mean that other staff are often redeployed on a daily basis causing further restriction to whatever limited services that are available. Both staff and prisoners told us that most of the men at Hakea are just spending time on hold, a term often used was "warehoused". This is a lost opportunity for rehabilitation and creates safety risks with large groups of men sitting idle in their units.

A significant focus for this inspection was how Hakea manages a high caseload of prisoners with general health needs and serious mental health issues. We engaged the services of an experienced forensic psychiatrist to assist with this area of the inspection. We found that at an individual level many services operated effectively, and staff worked very hard. But we identified governance issues, lack of cohesion and integration, fragmentation of services, and poor communication and information exchange between the various health service teams at Hakea. This was having a negative impact on the quality of integrated health care and mental health support provided to prisoners in need.

The Department is a significant provider of mental health services and classifies prisoners with diagnosed mental health needs on a scale of P1 to P3.

- Prisoners rated P1 have a serious psychiatric condition requiring intensive and/or immediate care.
- P2 rated prisoners have a significant ongoing psychiatric condition requiring psychiatric treatment.
- P3 are prisoners with a stable psychiatric condition requiring appointment or continuing treatment.

In December 2021 the Department held 13 P1 rated prisoners (Hakea 6), 121 P2s (Hakea 33), and 481 P3s (Hakea 89). Our expert told us that prisoners rated at P1 should be receiving treatment in a hospital setting, but due to the absence of forensic beds in the public hospital system many of these prisoners had to be managed in prison.

Our expert's assessment of the Hakea Crisis Care Unit (CCU) was that it does not provide a therapeutic setting for mental health care, nor does it compare favourably to modern community standards for inpatient units. Accordingly, the CCU cannot be considered a therapeutic setting for prisoners with mental illness or for those in significant distress.

The CCU is staffed by custodial officers, who are not provided any specific training prior to working there. Aside from visits from the mental health team or prison counsellors, there is no proactive

engagement with the men held there and few activities are available. The CCU staff do a remarkable job despite these limitations.

Hakea's mental health staff are doing what they can with the limited tools and infrastructure available to them. But more appropriate health services are simply not accessible either in prisons or in the public health system. This is inhumane and cannot be allowed to continue for much longer.

Over half of the recommendations arising from this inspection (12 out of 21) related to either health or mental health services at Hakea. The Department's response to these 12 recommendations was generally positive. Ten were supported or supported-in-principle, one recommendation was noted and only one was not supported. Many of the solutions will require an additional funding commitment from Government.

Reading all of this creates a somewhat bleak outlook for Hakea. But we did see many positives, none the least of which is a noticeable improvement in staff culture and relationships between staff and management. There is a strong and cohesive leadership team that have set a clear direction and started to build better relationships and communication with the staffing group and their union.

We saw many examples of staff, both custodial and non-custodial, doing a remarkable job in keeping Hakea running and managing all the daily challenges and difficulties they face. Most notably, we saw custodial staff with limited mental health training doing their best to manage a difficult and challenging cohort of very unwell prisoners with acute mental health needs.

Having an effective and efficient staffing group is the key to managing Hakea. Staff relationships and culture continue to improve, but there is more to be done and current improvement efforts need to be supported and encouraged. Stability, cohesion and a clear direction set by management has no doubt contributed to this, but credit must also go to the staff who are willing to engage and take on new opportunities. It is not perfect, and we heard that there are still many issues to be resolved, particularly around the impacts of custodial staffing absences. But cultural change is a journey, often with an evolving destination, and it was pleasing to see many positive changes.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We have two experienced Independent Prison Visitors who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attend Hakea on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the men to raise issues and feedback information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of this volunteer work and thank them for the contribution they are making to our oversight of Hakea.

It is important to also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Hakea and from key personnel in the Department. The prisoners who spoke with us to share their perspective on being held in Hakea also deserve special acknowledgment and thanks.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Stephanie McFarlane for her hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan  
Inspector of Custodial Services

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