

MEDIA RELEASE

REVIEW: SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO PERPETRATORS AND SURVIVORS OF FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2:00PM ON TUESDAY 21 JUNE 2022

Today the Inspector of Custodial Services has released a report examining the supports available to people in custody who are perpetrators and survivors of family and domestic violence (FDV). The report briefly covers some of the contemporary FDV research noting that there are various groups of people who are at greater risk of experiencing FDV. The Inspector, Eamon Ryan, said that it was a sad reflection that some of these groups also have an increased risk of imprisonment or detention.

"Prisoners are more likely to come from low socio-economic backgrounds, be unemployed before entering custody, and experience periods of homelessness. Research indicates that people from socio-economic disadvantage are also at an increased risk of FDV and they face additional barriers when trying to leave violent relationships.

Of particular concern are our First Nations women. Aboriginal women are at a much greater risk of experiencing FDV. They are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to an FDV assault compared to non-Aboriginal women, and they are twice as likely to be a victim of intimate partner homicide. And yet they are also the fastest growing prisoner population in Australia."

Importantly, the report found that the Department of Justice (the Department) was appropriately identifying perpetrators of FDV through a proactive series of security measures. This was particularly important when people entered custody for offences unrelated to FDV. In contrast, survivors and witnesses were only identified through self-disclosure. Mr Ryan noted this was good practice but emphasized that this will only ensure positive outcomes where people are treated with respect and dignity. He said:

"Trauma-informed models of care (TIC) are critical in closed environments, particularly for women who make up the largest proportion of victim/survivors of FDV. TIC allows people in custody to feel safe and supported to self-disclose. If they do not feel supported enough to have these conversations, the Department may miss the opportunity to provide essential services, including safety planning prior to a person's release."

Mr Ryan explained that until recently departmental data about FDV perpetrators was unreliable. As such, it hampered the ability of the Department to conduct any long-term analysis to identify gaps in service delivery or forward plan for the increasing needs of offenders. The report also found that once perpetrators were identified, they faced multiple barriers accessing criminogenic treatment programs, including FDV programs, in order to address their offending. Mr Ryan explained:

"For many prisoners the first hurdle is being held on remand for long periods of time which means that, as unconvicted persons, they cannot participate in criminogenic programs. Once a

person is found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment, they need to receive a timely assessment as to which programs they require to help address their offending behaviour. Then they need to have been given a sentence long enough to get allocated to a program and for that program to run and be completed. Ultimately, there needs to be enough people with the same program needs, in the same facility, at the same time for the program to run. This is a difficult challenge within adult prisons, and even more problematic in the youth space.”

Mr Ryan welcomed the fact that the Department has identified these issues and has drafted an FDV Strategic Framework which it hopes will address these problems. Mr Ryan noted that the framework demonstrates the Department has a broad system-wide leadership focus on FDV, not just in custody but within its broader societal remit.

“FDV is a scourge on Australian society. It is an extraordinarily complex subject with myriad intersecting causes and consequences. For this reason, any departmental response needs to be nuanced to the individual needs of each and every perpetrator and survivor who finds themselves in custody. I welcome the Department’s support for the report’s seven recommendations and their planned initiatives to address the problem. But it is discouraging that each one of our recommendations has been marked as completed, suggesting no further follow-up. A lot more work is required to address the FDV scourge, and that job is not yet completed.”

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For further media information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 2:00pm on Tuesday 21 June 2022 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.