

## Living conditions for most Invercargill prisoners have improved

25 July 2019

Invercargill Prison is now cleaner, tidier and in better repair than it was three years ago, and general living conditions for most prisoners have improved.

The Chief Ombudsman, Peter Boshier, today released his report on progress towards improving the conditions and treatment of prisoners at Invercargill Prison. He was pleased to find that two thirds of the 18 recommendations he made in 2016 were being actioned, including that cells are kept in a clean and decent state of repair.

Mr Boshier however continues to be concerned about the quality of care and management provided to prisoners held in the Intervention and Support Unit (ISU).

The purpose of an ISU is to enable the observation and safe management of prisoners with current or ongoing mental health needs who may be at risk of suicide or self-harm. 'At the time of my inspection, there was no evidence of ISU prisoners receiving any therapeutic activities, interventions or support for their mental distress, says Mr Boshier.

In April 2019, Inspectors also found that at-risk prisoners are being held in 'dry cells' — cells without toilets or running water — when the ISU's 'safer cells' are full. 'This is a contravention of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners,' says Mr Boshier.

The Chief Ombudsman commends the introduction of two new cultural and arts programmes for a small group of prisoners awaiting trial.

'I welcome these culturally informed initiatives but I remain concerned about the conditions in which all remand prisoners are held,' he says. 'Remand prisoners continue to be double-bunked in cells built for one. The prison's lack of internal recreation space and purposeful activities means the majority of remand prisoners remain locked in their cell or in the yard, with few constructive things to do with their time.'

The Chief Ombudsman has made six recommendations for safeguarding prisoners' human rights, following his most recent inspection. The Department of Corrections has agreed to address the issues raised by the Chief Ombudsman, some of which are being addressed on a nation-wide basis.

The report of the follow up inspection conducted from 8 to 12 April 2019 can be found [here](#).

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## **Our function**

New Zealand signed up to the United Nations' Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) in 2007. The Chief Ombudsman is a 'National Preventive Mechanism' (NPM) under OPCAT, meaning he monitors prisons and other places of detention (like health and disability facilities) to ensure they meet international human rights.

The Chief Ombudsman's focus is on making sure prisons have sufficient safeguards in place to prevent any human rights violations. If not, he recommends practical improvements to address any risks, poor practises, or systemic problems that could result in a prisoner being treated badly. Follow up inspections are conducted to look for progress in implementing previous recommendations. Reports are written on what is observed at the time of inspection.

Find out more about the Chief Ombudsman's role in examining and monitoring places of detention, and read our other OPCAT reports, at: [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz). You can also follow us on Facebook: @ombudsmannz.