

Ombudsman's Office to take role in monitoring private aged care facilities / court cells

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The Office of the Ombudsman will soon be monitoring the treatment of patients in privately run aged care facilities and detainees in court cells.

The additional responsibilities were gazetted today by Justice Minister, Hon Andrew Little.

They are in addition to the Office's current responsibilities under the United Nation's Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

"This amounts to a major expansion of our work and the breadth of our mandate", says Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier.

"The new designation will enable the Ombudsman to monitor and inspect privately run care facilities where there are dementia units and where people, often the elderly, are detained because of their vulnerability.

"We need to make sure New Zealand's reputation for the good treatment of its citizens, whatever their circumstances, is protected and enhanced."

Mr Boshier says he hopes private age care facilities will welcome the Office's oversight of this important area of work.

"We appreciate this represents a major change for players within the industry and we will be engaging with them at the earliest opportunity about how a new independent inspection regime could work."

Mr Boshier says his Office currently inspected 110 sites including prisons, health and disability places of detention, immigration detention facilities, childcare and protection residences, and youth justice residences.

"We already monitor state run dementia facilities. It makes sense for this role to extend to both the public and private sectors. I hope it will provide a good overview of the standard of care across the country.

"As it stands, we initially expect to oversee approximately 180 privately run dementia units with locked facilities.

"As the population ages, and the number of aged care facilities increases, it is so important for them to be independently inspected. We need to make sure the care of some of our most vulnerable people is both reasonable and humane. We need to act now because the number of people with dementia is projected to nearly triple to around 170,000 by 2050.

Another new area of work will be the inspection of court cells.

“This will open up approximately 60 detention facilities within the court system to our OPCAT inspectors.

“My Office will immediately begin planning for the expansion of our work in both of these areas including staffing. I expect this to take about 12 months to complete. Then we’ll be seeking funding from Parliament.”

ENDS

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