



Update

Orientation visits: First step in developing aged care inspections programme

March 2020

Background

New Zealand is required to have independent inspections of ‘places of detention’ under a United Nations Convention, to ensure people are being treated humanely.

The Chief Ombudsman is one of the independent inspectors in New Zealand. The Chief Ombudsman has a prevention focus, to make sure facilities have sufficient safeguards in place to prevent any human rights violations. If not, he recommends practical improvements to address any risks, poor practices, or systemic problems.

On 6 June 2018, the places to be inspected by the Chief Ombudsman were extended by the Minister of Justice to include people detained in privately-run aged care facilities.

Parliament gave the Chief Ombudsman funding which is progressively available from 1 July 2019, to develop and implement this new inspections programme over the next three years.

Introduction

Our first step in developing our new inspections programme is to familiarise ourselves with privately-run aged care facilities. We are doing orientation visits to help inform our approach and the development of our inspection programme, as well as the assessment criteria we will use when we conduct inspections.

These visits are also a chance for us to introduce ourselves. We’re calling these visits ‘orientation visits’. We made similar visits when we were developing our other inspection programmes.

We will not produce individual reports on, or make recommendations to, the facilities we visit. Nor will we charge facilities for these orientation visits, or future inspections.

We have a three year programme of work to develop our aged care inspections. Orientation visits are one of the ways in which we will gather the information we need to develop our new inspections, and these will take place in the early stages of the programme. We still have a lot more work to do and, at this point in time, expect that inspections will start from 1 July 2021

(in Year 3). We propose to seek feedback on our inspection assessment criteria before reporting on inspections. A diagram of how we have structured our three year programme, and our key milestones, is available on our [website](#).

What facilities we visit

We visit a range of facilities across New Zealand. This is to give us a greater understanding of facilities that provide specialised dementia and psychogeriatric care, are a range of sizes, and have differing ownership structures. Facilities are not selected because of any concerns about how they operate. We visited 15 facilities in late 2019, and plan to visit another seven by 30 June 2020 — a total of 22 in 2019/20. We will be doing more visits in 2020/21.

What a visit will involve

Our orientation visits are announced – that is, we directly contact each facility that we are visiting at least one week before we visit.

The purpose of these initial orientation visits is to familiarise ourselves with privately-run aged-care facilities that provide specialised dementia and psychogeriatric care. We are interested to learn how the facility operates and meet the key people who work there. We will not be inspecting the treatment and conditions of residents during these orientation visits.

We send 2-3 people to visit each facility. They will carry identification indicating that they have been authorised by the Chief Ombudsman to visit the facilities on his behalf. The Chief Ombudsman and his staff are legally able to enter the facilities and talk with people.

The orientation visits will likely take one to two hours, depending on facility size. During a visit, we would like to speak to the person in charge of the facility. If the person normally in charge of the facility is not available on the day of the scheduled visit, we will be happy to speak with the person acting in their place. Our aim is to minimise any disruption to the facility's routines.

What happens to the information we gather

We will not produce individual reports on, or make recommendations to, facilities as a result of our orientation visits. This is not the purpose of our orientation visits.

Updates and more information

We are publishing updates on our progress in setting up the work programme. We will not be identifying any individuals, facilities or themes from our orientation visits in these updates. For this reason, we are not publishing our visit schedule.

These updates and more information about our inspections programme are available on our website (www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/opcat). If you have any more questions about the development of the Chief Ombudsman's aged care inspection programme, please email us (info@ombudsman.parliament.nz). While we may not be able to answer them now, we will endeavour to do so in future. Let us know if you want us to contact you with any updates or you can follow us on Facebook (@ombudsmannz).