

Northern Territory Correctional Services Organisational Review – Executive Summary and Recommendations

October 2021



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Correctional services play a vital role in any modern society and are an important function of government. Securely and safely confining offenders, as well as contributing to their rehabilitation, is essential to developing stronger and safer communities and building public confidence in the Government to deliver essential services. Custodial and community corrections is a complex activity – staff work in a high risk environment with difficult and challenging individuals and policy decisions made elsewhere along the justice continuum influences the number of offenders sentenced.

For many years, Northern Territory Correctional Services (NTCS) has been exceeding its budget allocation, and while there might be valid reasons for this, it is necessary to reflect and review whether NTCS is using public money as efficiently and effectively as it could be.

The ultimate, but challenging, aim is for NTCS to build and maintain a sustainable balance between employee and operating budgets while servicing the increasing demands of the criminal justice network.

The Northern Territory Government directed NTCS undertake a review to consider how NTCS is delivering against government priorities, strategic and business planning, core operations, financial and resource management and future needs and making recommendations to improve efficiency and effectiveness. The review process involved examining previous external reports, strategic and annual business planning processes, analysis of human resource and financial data, benchmarking performance against other Australian jurisdictions, site visit of correctional facilities and engagement with relevant staff and stakeholders.

The challenges with increasing incarceration rates, increasing service costs, increasing re-offending and diminishing budgets is well-understood and to date has been an intractable “wicked problem” without clear resolution. Changes recommended in previous reviews and reports have been met with either a lack of funding or resources or perceived unwillingness of staff to change the way they do things.

The quality and effectiveness of the NT corrections system can be improved by strengthening organisational governance arrangements and workforce culture, ensuring a better allocation of existing resources, focusing on evidence-based approaches, and collaborating with the non-government/Aboriginal controlled sectors and universities to deliver contemporary solutions.

Simple service delivery changes will not alter existing outcomes in this complex and inter-connected system; a fundamental change in approach is required. Addressing the identified issues necessitates transformation of the way NTCS operates, with a focus on improving strategy and governance, sustaining effective operations and tackling re-offending, in combination with implementation of the actions from the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and mandatory sentencing reform.

There are a number of areas in which organisational improvements could be made to NTCS such as:

- Increasing access to education, vocational training and employment opportunities for prisoners; developing culturally appropriate offender rehabilitation programs and expanding access to programs for females, remand and short sentence prisoners and in the community;
- Developing a more cohesive approach to sentence planning, through-care and reintegration of prisoners upon release and addressing the rising prison population;
- Developing clear organisational direction and business plans that outline inputs, outputs, activity, and performance measures and increasing cohesion between business units to deliver statutory and regulatory obligations;
- Enhancing governance processes to increase accountability and improve decision-making;
- Establishing a compliance monitoring and evaluation program, supported by effective key performance indicators, reducing the levels of manual activity and introducing more efficient business processes; and
- Increasing attention to workforce performance management, career development and training, coupled with reducing high levels of overtime and unscheduled leave in custodial operations.

This report outlines 48¹ recommendations across eight themes, supported by 138 specific actions to improve efficiency and effectiveness (see Section 7). The eight themes are:

- Improving strategic governance and oversight – 5 recommendations
- Redesigning organisational structure – 6 recommendations
- Delivering high quality prisoner health services – 5 recommendations
- Improving workforce outcomes – 6 recommendations
- Reducing workloads and increasing operational effectiveness – 6 recommendations
- Enhancing custodial operations – 7 recommendations
- Improving prisoner education and employment outcomes – 6 outcomes
- Enriching offender rehabilitation programs – 7 recommendations.

These recommendations are not a quick fix to the current operational and financial issues being faced by NTCS. However improving decision-making, efficiency and workforce outcomes; creating operational excellence in policy, processes and procedures; developing an integrated approach to the case management of prisoners and offenders, focusing on skills, rehabilitation and reintegration; providing culturally appropriate interventions that are evidence-based, resourced appropriately, prioritised, targeted and delivered at the right time; and using resources more effectively to deliver results have a strong chance of generating positive impacts to break the cycle of re-offending and creating public value.

The recommendations will be delivered across three phases. Phase 1 (6 months) is the 'early wins' phase, where short-term actions considered business-as-usual would be completed in the first 6 months, including preparatory work for the next phases. Phase 2 is the 'transition' phase consisting of medium-term actions to be completed 6-18 months after commencement, some of which are pending outcomes on the preparatory tasks from Phase 1; and Phase 3 is the 'new service delivery' phase, with longer-term actions to be completed beyond 2023, because they require substantial transformation or additional approvals or funding. Actions in Phases 2 and 3 will likely have budget and industrial relations implications.

¹ The author of the report has confirmed this is a typographic error and there are 46 recommendations in the final report

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are 48² recommendations to be delivered across three phases, as follows:

No	Recommendation	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
		6 months	6-18 months	+ 18 months
1	Improving strategic governance and oversight			
1.1	Developing a strategic roadmap defining the way in which NTCS can deliver on the government's objectives and meet the challenges it faces	•		
1.2	Developing a revised suite of key performance indicators	•	•	
1.3	Developing an internal compliance auditing program against key statutory obligations		•	
1.4	Developing a range of operational strategies to amplify focus in specific operational areas to improve outcomes that support the overall strategic direction	•	•	
2	Redesigning organisational structure			
2.1	Establishing clearer lines of accountability and decision-making across NTCS		•	
2.2	Increasing responsibility of General Managers for delivering all outcomes at their respective correctional facilities		•	
2.3	Improving the executive leadership team operation, functionality and decision support processes, including establishing focused governance groups for Finance, Health Services and Safety and Security	•		
2.4	Undertaking an independent functional/business capability mapping exercise to provide clarity of functions, roles and responsibilities to underpin a more efficient organisational structure	•		
2.5	Establish a small team with responsibility for performance monitoring, policy and continuous improvement	•		
3	Delivering high quality prisoner health services			
3.1	Undertaking an independent review of the current prisoner health service delivery model	•		

² Ibid

No	Recommendation	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
3.2	Prioritising efficiency of prisoner movements to ensure prisoners attend medical and telehealth appointments, and female prisoners access adequate health services	•		
3.3	Revising the overarching Memorandum of Understanding, governance and decision-making arrangements for delivery of prisoner health services		•	
3.4	Developing a risk stratification approach for prisoners being admitted to hospital that considers their security classification	•		
3.5	Inter-governmental advocacy to secure access to Medicare Benefits Scheme and medication under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to improve continuity of primary health care post-release			•
4	Improving workforce outcomes			
4.1	Re-configuring the custodial staffing profile to ensure rosters, duty sheets and post orders are aligned and efficient, including the development of best practice rostering guidelines that meet industrial requirements and provide transparency		•	
4.2	Increasing availability of staffing through employing additional custodial officers in secure escort teams, establishing a reserve workforce and reducing unscheduled leave	•	•	•
4.3	Developing and implementing a Managing Attendance/Unscheduled Leave policy	•		
4.4	Preparing a workforce development strategy and plan to improve attraction, recruitment and retention, including pathways to increase the Aboriginal workforce		•	
4.5	Increasing focus on performance management, staff engagement, learning and development and mandatory training	•		
4.6	Increasing leadership training opportunities for all new and emerging leaders		•	
5	Reducing workloads and increasing operational effectiveness			
5.1	Conducting a review of all directives, policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to identify and delete obsolete documents, including development of an over-arching policy framework for consistency and a three-year rolling review timetable	•	•	

No	Recommendation	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
5.2	Undertaking business process mapping of all core business processes across NTCS and re-engineer processes where there are opportunities for efficiency	•		
5.3	Undertaking a range of content updates to intranet and internet, preparing a business case for a new integrated case management IT system, develop improved reporting tools and address in-cell learning technology	•	•	
5.4	Establishing clearer roles and responsibilities and improving induction, training and guidance documentation for NTCS business managers and finance officers, including improved accountability for reporting		•	
5.5	Maintaining and monitoring all contracts across NTCS through Contrax, reviewing existing contracts to verify contract performance is being optimised and ensuring all relevant NTCS staff have procurement and contract management training	•	•	
5.6	Implementing the recommendations from the 2018 KPMG report in relation to improving governance arrangements for the Darwin Correctional Centre Public Private Partnership		•	
6	Enhancing custodial operations			
6.1	Developing a 10 year infrastructure master plan based on various future scenarios, including prison population projections, differentiated sentencing policies, whether and where new facilities would be constructed		•	
6.2	Reviewing the prisoner core/structured day to ensure the program, work and activity requirements that underpin the Responsible Prisoner Model are being met, then aligning the custodial operations work profile with the revised core/structured day model	•	•	
6.3	Ensure all recommendations of KPMG reviews regarding post shifts are considered and either implemented or intentionally discarded.	•		
6.4	Focusing on improving the sentence management and through-care model by implementing the Through-Care Integrated Case Management approach developed to support the Operational Philosophy, ensuring reasonable caseloads, focused attention to pre- and post-release planning and improved coordination with and referrals to housing, employment, income support, health and social service agencies		•	

No	Recommendation	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
6.5	Use sentence management plans to establish a rolling forward program and measure demand for education, training and offender rehabilitation programs		•	
6.6	Reviewing the provision of existing custody staffing levels at Darwin Local Court	•		
6.7	Undertaking a Request for Information/Request for Tender to test the capacity of the market to provide outsourced court custody and/or prisoner escort and transport activities		•	
7	Improving prisoner education and employment outcomes			
7.1	Developing an overarching education strategy to align education program delivery with the specific needs of participants and skills requirements in the NT context	•		
7.2	Reviewing NTCS Prison Industries policy and develop a pricing policy to optimise returns from prison industries		•	
7.3	Partnering with a university or relevant education institution to design and implement a suite of education programs for improved literacy and numeracy, employability skills and vocational education and training		•	
7.4	Increasing access and availability of literacy and numeracy education, and employment skills development to prisoners with short sentences		•	
7.5	Establishing partnership and collaborations with the industry and skills sector to identify skill needs in the Territory, employment placements and skill development opportunities		•	
7.6	Expediting the rectification works for Sector 2 at DCC which was severely damaged during the incident in May 2020	•		
8	Enriching offender rehabilitation programs			
8.1	Hosting a Ministerial Roundtable on the Future of Offender Rehabilitation in the NT with experts and researchers from around Australia	•		
8.2	Introducing a range of 'short courses' on substance abuse and building pro-social skills for remand and short sentence prisoners		•	
8.3	Developing, in partnership with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement implementation team, a suite of new/enhanced family violence, violent offender and sexual offender rehabilitation programs that are	•	•	•

No	Recommendation	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
	evidence-based, contemporary and culturally competent			
8.4	Carrying out regular and timely program reviews to examine program availability and accessibility, modification in accordance with clinical practice, and provide the Corrections Commissioner with an annual report on the outcomes		•	•
8.5	Establishing an Offender Programs Accreditation Panel to approve, review and assess offender rehabilitation programs		•	•
8.6	More closely monitoring and providing priority to prisoners nearing the end of their non-parole period, to ensure their potential for release on parole is not disadvantaged	•		
8.7	Implementing the internationally renowned Good Lives Model approach to offender rehabilitation		•	•