

22 July 2024

C182994

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 5 June 2024 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about prison capacity and corrections officer recruitment. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Corrections is responsible for managing approximately 9,700 people in prison and 26,000 people in the community. We are a 24/7 operation, with 18 prisons and a significant number of Community Corrections sites across the country. We also deliver rehabilitation and treatment programmes, employment and training, health services, mental health and addiction support and accommodation and reintegration services to people in prison and the community.

As has been widely reported, we are continuing to manage ongoing staffing pressures, alongside many other organisations and businesses around the country. We fully acknowledge the pressure this has placed on our people working in prisons, which is why we are making a concerted effort to recruit, retain and train frontline staff.

We have a significant recruitment effort underway, involving a refreshed recruitment campaign launched in February 2024, strengthened recruitment processes, improved onboarding processes, and continuous work underway to improve staff safety. As a result, we've seen an increase in the number of job applications for new corrections officers. Between 1 October 2022 and 30 June 2024, we received 42,200 applications across all frontline custodial roles (including case managers, instructors and corrections officers). Of these applications, nearly 38,000 were for corrections officer roles. Since October 2022, more than 1,580 people have been recruited into corrections officer roles, and thousands of active applications are in the recruitment pipeline. Overall, frontline staffing levels are increasing thanks to the lift in recruitment and a reduction in turnover.

Retention is also a priority for Corrections. Our staff are our biggest assets, and we are committed to finding ways to hold on to their experience and expertise, especially in such a tight labour market.

A number of staff retention measures have been implemented across Corrections, including:

- Continuously working to improve staff safety
- Investing in the capability and training of our frontline staff
- Implementing new rosters
- Continuing to work with our union partners on matters concerning staffing levels and staff safety
- Improving our wellbeing initiatives, including injury management, wellbeing, and health promotion
- Making sure people have pathways to build long-term careers at Corrections.

We are currently developing a new facility at Waikeria Prison, which will provide an additional 500 physical beds, as well as an extra 96 beds (plus four dry cells) reserved for those with mental health and addiction needs. We have a significant recruitment drive underway in the local area in preparation for this. The Government has also recently announced an additional 810 beds will be built at Waikeria Prison. It typically takes four to six years from construction commencement to bring a new prison into service.

You requested:

Could I please request how many beds are in the prison network currently, and how many are in use? (this could be on average as of June 5).

As at 10 June 2024, the maximum prison capacity was 11,445, with 10,094 of those beds being currently available for use and an onsite prison population of 9,542¹. Please note that the prison population fluctuates on a daily basis due to court decisions and scheduled releases.

How many prisoners are currently double bunking?

As at 10 June 2024, 3,872 people in prison were sharing a cell.

What is the average staff to prisoner ratio that Corrections allows?

Staff to prisoner ratios are not universal and are determined based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to the unit's layout, prisoners' security classification and their remand or sentenced status and if applicable, the unit's focus (for example youth or Intensive Support Units). It is not unusual for a prison to have several operating models in place relating to staffing requirements across the site.

However, the overall total average of corrections officers to prisoners across all prisons was 1:2.2 as at 30 May 2024. Note this figure includes all corrections officers and does not take into account the number of people working during any particular shift.

¹ This total excludes a small proportion of people in Corrections' legal custody held in offsite facilities such as police cells or mental health facilities, and therefore may not be directly comparable to figures published elsewhere.

How many beds are not in use due to staffing issues?

No beds in prison are currently unused due to staffing issues. We have enough open beds to manage the prison population.

Of the new Correction officer recruitment, how many train at one time, and what is the average wait time before new recruits can be brought in for training?

New corrections officers start their training with a 10-week initial learning programme, typically delivered at our National Learning Centre in Wellington. The average time-period before another cohort of recruits can be brought in for training varies but is approximately one month.

Due to the recent increase in new recruits, we have adapted the way we deliver our Corrections Officer Development Programme (CODP) training. Prior to this year, we only trained new staff at the National Learning Centre and the average size of a cohort was approximately 60-80 people. However, we are now also conducting training at local centres including Christchurch and Auckland to keep up with demand and to accommodate up to 120 new recruits each month. To ensure the integrity and success of this initiative, National Learning Centre facilitators have been sent to each region where training is being delivered locally.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I hope this information is helpful. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Leigh Marsh
Commissioner Custodial Services