

05 October 2022

C157450

S 9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe S 9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email of 7 September 2022 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about self-harm incidents at Invercargill Prison. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Any death by suicide is a tragedy that has lasting impacts on the person’s whānau and staff who have worked with them. Corrections acknowledges that people who self-harm need additional support, and prison staff devote significant time and resources to caring for those vulnerable to self-harm or suicide.

Corrections recognises the demand for mental health services across New Zealand, and we have seen our role expand in recent years as we find ourselves managing people with significant mental health issues.

Our research shows that people in prison have higher rates of personality disorder, mental health and substance use disorders than the general population. It is estimated that 62 percent of people in prison would have met the diagnostic criteria for either a mental health or substance abuse disorder within the 12 months prior to imprisonment and 91 percent of people in prison also had a lifetime diagnosis of a mental health or substance use disorder. These disorders often went undetected and were not treated prior to prison.

While our prison-based services were not historically designed to support people with serious mental illness, we are doing more than ever in the area of mental health and are being proactive in ensuring people in prison have access to the specialist mental health support they need. We have a range of work underway to improve the mental health support for people we manage. This includes doing more to upskill our frontline staff in identifying and managing people’s needs and ensuring they have the appropriate tools and resources to keep people safe from harm.

When a person enters prison, our immediate priority is to ensure their mental and physical health needs are met. People in prison undergo an induction process, where health staff assess their health needs, including any mental health needs, to determine whether they

may be at risk of self-harm or suicide and whether they require a referral to a prison doctor, or a mental health provider.

People in prison who are identified as being vulnerable to self-harm or suicide may reside in an Intervention and Support Unit (ISU). An Intervention and Support Unit (ISU) is a safe environment with a multidisciplinary team approach to patient care. People in these units are closely monitored, have access to specialised care, and have focused plans to help them to return to a state of wellbeing and return to their unit on site, or to receive ongoing support while they wait for a bed in an inpatient mental health facility.

You requested:

I am seeking information through the Official Information Act regarding self harm incidents including those that lead to death at Invercargill Prison since the start of the year.

I would like a breakdown of each month from January to August 2022 of all self harm incidents with an indication of those which ultimately lead to death of a prisoner.

I would also like a comparison of self harm incidents (also indicating those which ultimately lead to death) for the years prior starting from 2018 to 2022 from January to December (preferably with the same .monthly breakdown).

We have interpreted “self harm incidents with an indication of those which ultimately lead to death of a prisoner.” to mean all incidents of unnatural deaths by apparent suicide.

I can advise that there have been two unnatural deaths by apparent suicide at Invercargill Prison since the 2017/18 financial year, one in August 2022, and the other in March 2021.

Please also find attached as appendix one the number of self-harm - threat to life and self-harm – no threat to life incidents at Invercargill Prison since the 2017/18 financial year, broken down by month. As per Corrections’ reporting standards, statistics are reported by financial year (1 July to 30 June per year).

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

Ngā mihi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kerry-Leigh Dougall'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the top.

Kerry-Leigh Dougall
Acting Deputy Chief Executive Health

Appendix One: Self-harm - threat to life and self-harm – no threat to life incidents at Invercargill Prison since the 2017/18 financial year

Number of self-harm - threat to life incidents at Invercargill Prison, by financial year and month						
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
July	-	-	-	1	-	-
August	-	-	-	-	-	-
September		-	2	-	-	-
October		-	-	-	-	-
November		-	-	1	-	-
December		-	-	-	-	-
January		-	-	-	1	-
February		-	-	-	-	-
March		-	-	-	-	-
April		-	-	1	-	-
May		-	-	-	-	-
June		-	1	-	-	-

Number of self-harm - no threat to life incidents at Invercargill Prison, by financial year and month						
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
Jul	1	1	5	1	-	2
Aug	1	-	3	2	-	1
Sep		1	8	-	-	1
Oct		2	-	1	1	-
Nov		3	4	-	-	-
Dec		-	-	1	-	-
Jan		2	-	-	2	-
Feb		1	1	1	1	1
Mar		-	1	2	-	1
Apr		-	-	6	-	2
May		1	-	2	-	-
Jun		2	1	2	-	3

Table notes:

- Year-to-date numbers in the current financial year 2022/23 are subject to change until the full year process has been completed.
- All deaths in custody are subject to a Coroner's enquiry. The majority of coroner's inquests can take 12 months at a minimum, with some taking three years.
- Self-harm - threat to life is defined as an intentional act of harm to oneself which would most probably have led to death if there was no immediate intervention (includes all attempted suicides).
- Self-harm - no threat to life is defined as an intentional act of harm to oneself which would most probably not have led to death if no immediate intervention.