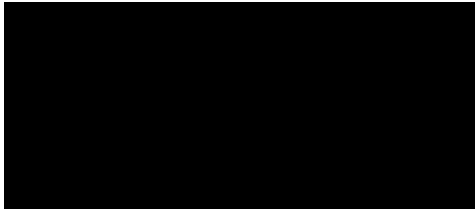
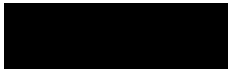


28 October 2022

C158033



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 15 September 2022 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about incidents of self-harm, Arohata Prison and temporary removal to attend funerals. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested:

- *The number of attempted suicides and/or self-harm that has occurred in prisons across New Zealand since 2017.*
- *Please break this figure down on an annual basis and by individual prison.*

Corrections is committed to reducing the impact of self-harm and suicide on people in prison, their whānau, families, friends, and our staff. Our staff work with some of New Zealand's most complex and challenging people, and we make every effort to ensure their mental wellbeing and physical safety during their time in custody. We know that people who self-harm need additional support, and frontline staff devote significant time and resources to caring for those vulnerable to self-harm or suicide.

Corrections' role has expanded in recent years as we find ourselves having to manage 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, including 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.

Please see attached as Appendix One, the number of incidents of self-harm, from 2017/18 to 2021/22 broken down by prison.

- *Any reports, briefings, assessments, evidence and rationale, in relation to the decision to close Arohata Prison, the impact on prisoners and their families, and how the relocation of prisoners is determined.*

There are no plans to close Arohata Prison and no plans to stop using it as a site for sentenced prisoners with a number of sentenced prisoners remaining on site.

As has been widely reported, Corrections has been facing staffing challenge across many of our prisons. To respond to this, and as COVID-19 cases in prisons have now dropped considerably across the country, we have been temporarily moving some men and women to different prisons to alleviate pressure on staff at our most affected sites to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing is not put at risk. This is also about making sure we can increase minimum entitlements (including unlock hours, which mean more time out of their cells) and access to rehabilitation programmes for people in prison, alongside resuming in-person visits with family and friends as soon as possible.

Alongside the movements that have already been carried out at a number of men's prisons across the country, we identified that some sentenced women at Arohata Prison could be transferred to Christchurch Women's Prison (CWP) or Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility (ARWCF).

This has enabled some staff from Arohata Prison to redeploy to Rimutaka Prison, which is the largest prison in the Lower North region. This is in turn allowing Rimutaka Prison to open

additional capacity to support the easing of pressures being felt at Mt Eden Corrections Facility (MECF) and Spring Hill Corrections Facility (SHCF). These are all temporary measures.

The welfare and wellbeing of the women from Arohata Prison is a priority for us. Corrections is fully committed to supporting each women's pathway towards their parole or scheduled release date and we know that these sorts of movements can have an impact on someone's access to rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

Where possible, we specifically identified the whakapapa connections of those scheduled for transfer so that any impacts could be considered and minimised.

We considered women's whānau, rehabilitation, medical and parole needs, as well as the location of whānau support, when identifying who could be transferred. We also looked at each person's individual circumstances before deciding whether it was appropriate to move them, and we have been doing as much as we can to look after each women's individual needs.

We also made a conscious choice to do everything possible to accommodate people in the least restrictive environment possible and to minimise disruption to their rehabilitation and reintegration.

For example, women taking part in rehabilitative programmes (such as Kowhiritanga and the Short Rehabilitation Programme for Women) were selected to move to Christchurch Women's Prison at a time that best suited the delivery of their programme.

In addition, we are exploring options around sending programme facilitators currently working at Arohata to Christchurch Women's Prison to support the women to complete their programme. We are also looking at options for delivering the Drug Treatment programme at Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility and Christchurch Women's Prison.

We worked to ensure the impacted women were aware of planned moves and the reasons for them, so that they could inform family and whānau. This included the Prison Directors from both Arohata and Christchurch Women's prisons personally meeting with the women who were transferred.

We are extremely mindful of the impact for a small number of the women from the Wellington region in being further away from their family and whānau. Only a small portion of the women moved are from the Wellington region. If there are families who will now have to travel further to visit a family member in prison, they may be eligible to apply for assistance from the Child Travel Fund if they have a child visiting a parent in prison or if they are a parent traveling to visit a child under 18 years of age in prison. This fund is administered through local Prisoners' Aid and Rehabilitation Society (PARS) and Salvation Army offices.

There are also plans to increase the AVL capacity across the women's prison network to assist in ensuring anyone moved would have greater access to AVL capabilities to keep in contact with family and loved ones.

Corrections received a similar OIA request, which was related to the network rebalancing, including the transfer of those sentenced from Arohata Prison to other prisons. We will provide you with the same documents that were sent to that requester. It may include additional documents outside the scope of your request, however we are providing the documents for transparency. Please see attached as Appendix Two, documents relating to the transfer of sentenced prisoners from Arohata Prison to other prisons.

Please note that some information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, to protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.

Further information is withheld under section 9(2)(b)(ii) of the OIA, as the making available of the information would be likely unreasonably to prejudice the commercial position of the person who supplied or who is the subject of the information.

In accordance with section 9(1) of the OIA, we have considered whether there are countervailing public interest consideration that outweigh the need to withhold the information, including transparency and accountability. We consider that public interest considerations do not outweigh the need to withhold the information, in this case.

- *How many prisoners and staff will be impacted?*
- *What compensation if any is in place for staff who may lose their jobs?*
- *When is this relocation expected to take place?*

No staff members will be losing their jobs as a result of these movements. As of 21 October 2022, twelve Arohata Prison staff have been seconded to Rimutaka Prison. CWP required two staff to go to Arohata for a short period, which was from 20 September to 14 October 2022, and these staff have since returned to their substantive roles.

Women were transferred from Arohata Prison on the following dates:

- Tuesday 20 September 2022: 12 women transferred from Arohata Prison to CWP, and six women transferred from Arohata Prison to ARWCF
- Tuesday 4 October 2022: 12 women transferred from Arohata Prison to CWP
- Thursday 6 October: 12 women transferred from Arohata Prison to CWP

In a previous OIA (ref. C154358) you requested:

- *An annual breakdown since 2017 detailing the number of times leave was granted to a prisoner to attend tangihanga. Please break this figure down further by each prison.*

In our previous response we noted that a manual review of 943 applications for temporary removal would be required to identify the total number of times a person was approved to

attend a funeral, tangihanga, or subsequent commemoration of the death of a family member or close friend. This part of your request was refused under section 18(f) of the OIA as the information requested could not be made available without substantial collation or research. In your letter, dated 15 September 2022, you requested a reconsideration of this refusal.

Corrections acknowledges that receiving news about the passing of a family member or loved one can be distressing for people in prison, and we aim to ensure people are safe and can access the support they need during this time. This includes carrying out welfare checks, alongside providing access to cultural support or a prison chaplain if requested.

Approval to attend a funeral or tangihanga is also considered where appropriate. Corrections needs to balance supporting a person in prison to farewell their loved one, with the safety and security of the community and staff.

Following your initial engagement with us on this matter, Corrections has reviewed the temporary removal record details that are stored electronically and classified them where possible, such as identifying tangihanga or funeral by where the temporary removal address is specified as a funeral home or cemetery, or where a comment exists mentioning a tangihanga.

A number of applications remain unspecified as many were made under the category “temporary removal to recognise or maintain a family relationship or friendship” with an address based in the community, which may have been for the purpose of a tangi or funeral, but cannot be confirmed without substantial manual collation. No subcategories were built in Corrections original data storage system, therefore, a further level of detail is not readily available. Applications to marae, churches or community centres/halls with no further identifying details or comments that have been uploaded electronically could be for the purpose of a funeral, wake, unveiling or tangihanga. However, any further collation from the paper applications and cross-referencing with other data storage systems would impede the effective administration of our data teams.

The table below provides the number of applications made between 2017/18 to 2021/22, broken down by their location and outcome. With improved data capturing and analysis, this data may differ slightly from figures reported elsewhere.

Temporary Removal Applications Made				
Location of Temporary Removal	Approved	Declined	Pending/ Incomplete	Total
Unspecified	207	56	37	300
Tangi / Funeral / Cremation / Service / Cemetery	175	48	20	243
Hospital	152	17	17	186
Marae	49	45	20	114
Church	26	6	1	33
Rest Home	21	2	1	24
Community centre / Hall	13	1	2	16

Family Court	9	-	-	9
Corrections location	6	1	-	7
Oranga Tamariki	4	1	-	5
Guided Release	4	-	1	5
Police station	1	-	1	2
Total	667	177	100	944

The table below provides the number of applications approved between 2017/18 and 2021/22, broken down by their location and year.

Temporary Removal Applications Approved						
Location of Temporary Removal	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
Unspecified	10	61	47	55	34	207
Tangi / Funeral / Cremation / Service / Cemetery	11	58	48	38	20	175
Hospital	15	45	34	35	23	152
Marae	1	16	11	14	7	49
Church	2	11	3	8	2	26
Rest Home	1	6	6	6	2	21
Community centre / Hall	1	3	2	7	-	13
Family Court	3	5	-	1	-	9
Corrections location	-	3	2	-	1	6
Oranga Tamariki	-	4	-	-	-	4
Guided Release	-	1	-	2	1	4
Police station	-	1	-	-	-	1
Grand Total	44	214	153	166	90	667

It is important to note that this data is provided to the best of Corrections' ability at this time.

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



Ben Clark

Acting National Commissioner