



20 October 2021

Janis Adair  
Chief Inspector  
Department of Corrections

By email: [janis.adair@corrections.govt.nz](mailto:janis.adair@corrections.govt.nz)

Tēnā koe Janis

### **Re: Draft Thematic Report - The Lived Experience of Women in Prison**

On behalf of Corrections, thank you for the opportunity to respond to the draft thematic report on women in prison. This report follows the earlier individual inspections undertaken by your office, of the three women's prisons within New Zealand in 2020.

We acknowledge the opportunity that all of these reports provide to support those women who have been or are in custody by identifying interventions and services that meet their unique risks and needs, managing women in ways that are trauma-informed and empowering, and strengthening the capability of the women's prisons and the development of staff who manage these women.

The report recognises the gains made under our current women's strategy and the positive impact this has had for women in prison, including access to social workers, trauma counsellors and a wider range of rehabilitative, education and training opportunities.

Your report made one overarching recommendation that Corrections must review the strategic and operational leadership, resourcing, operating model and service delivery across the women's prison network (including health services) to enable, and deliver, better outcomes for women, which are critically gender specific, culturally responsive and trauma informed. This recommendation is accepted. The broader work programme being undertaken for the women's prison network will address how we will respond to this, and how we continue to address the findings from the three individual prison inspections.

As your report notes, work is already underway to transform the way Corrections manages and cares for women following the letter of expectation from the Minister of Corrections to the Department in March 2021.

To support the three women's prisons to address the expectations set out by the Minister, the Chief Executive established the Women's Prison Network Improvement Programme. As well as the expectations of the Minister, the programme is

responsible for implementing other positive initiatives that will contribute to women's wellbeing and help reduce re-offending.

There is wide recognition of the unique needs of women within the prison system, and that our current system has been unable to address this to date. The longer-term initiatives to improve prison systems and processes require further investment and potentially legislative changes.

Corrections is considering ways to address the capability and service delivery gaps across the three women's prisons, aligned to the findings of your office, while ensuring the right foundations are put in place for the transformational change. We are committed to making changes to the network.

Two key pieces of work that will assist in underpinning these changes are:

- **Wahine – E rere ana ki te Pae Hou: Women's Strategy 2017 – 2021:** while we are currently refreshing our women's strategy, our existing strategy lays out our vision and the underlying principles for the way we manage women in prison and in the community. Our new strategy will build upon the existing work and achievements we have made to date and ensure alignment to our departmental strategy *Hōkai Rangi*.
- **Te Mana Wahine:** a Māori Pathway underway at Christchurch Women's Prison. Te Mana Wahine is focusing on co-designing an end-to-end kaupapa Māori pathway for women we manage and their whānau. It is looking to transform the way Christchurch Women's Prison operates over four years, to then inform the transformation of the other two women's prisons.

We also acknowledge the Waitangi Tribunal Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry, whose outcomes could further inform work in this area.

While the improvement programme is ongoing, a number of changes have already occurred/are in-train including:

- Addressing immediate staffing pressures at Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility (ARWCF) including the appointment of a permanent Prison Director
- Appointing a mental health Clinical Nurse Specialist at Arohata Prison and Christchurch Women's Prison to focus specifically on supporting women with moderate to severe mental health needs. A similar, but more comprehensive, service is being delivered at ARWCF by the Intervention and Support Practice Team. We have increased funding for the Drug Treatment Programme at Arohata Prison to create peer support and cultural support roles for women undertaking this programme
- Establishing He Kete, a community residential AOD treatment programme in Christchurch, through funding from the Proceeds of Crime Fund. He Kete is for women who are in the justice system, meaning that women on bail and community-based sentences are able to be referred

- Approving a \$12 million work programme at ARWCF to establish additional recreation yards, for more recreation time in the fresh air
- Increasing prioritisation of monitoring and responding to the complaints of people in our care in a timely manner
- Introducing site-based implementation leads for each of the three women's prisons
- Upgrading the visitors' centre at Arohata Prison, and upgrade of the playground and refurbishment of the bonding room at ARWCF.
- Changing our policies to ensure mechanical restraints will not be used for women who are 30 weeks or more pregnant, during labour, and while they are in hospital after giving birth.
- Will be setting up wāhine panels at each of the three sites, giving women another way to suggest changes.
- Commissioning Associate Professor of Psychology Dr Julia Ioane to develop a 'trauma informed approach' training package for our leaders at ARWCF as women in prison are more likely to have experienced trauma and victimisation than men.
- Reviewing self-care unit occupancy rates to ensure as many women benefit from living in these as possible, as evidence shows self-care is a positive part of transitioning to the community
- Reviewing of our current Maximum-Security operating model, including personalised management plans
- Co designing Kaupapa Māori Health Services – this is set to transform all of Corrections health services to design an end to end Kaupapa Māori foundation for how health services will be developed, designed, and delivered across all sites including the women's sites.

In your report you provided Corrections with areas for consideration, which we have acknowledged below.

#### *Entering Prison – Reception, Induction and Escorts*

We acknowledge good induction processes and demonstrating manaaki during reception to prison are key to ensuring wāhine feel settled and prepared. This includes maintaining connections with whānau and tamariki in the community. We acknowledge the importance of providing sufficient supplies of gender appropriate personal items including hygiene products, underwear, clothing and bedding to meet women's immediate needs. There is also recognition that while a small cohort, our women's sites have greater medical escort requirements and the potential impact of supporting these at a site level.

#### *Safe and Humanising Treatment*

Early engagement and timely access to gender and culturally responsive interventions and meaningful activities across each site, including in remand, is vital to managing behaviour and supporting wellbeing. We recognise women's journeys to oranga are varied and that these, alongside the importance of safety, are impacted

by relationships and the relational nature of women in our care and management. Humanising treatment includes holistic approaches to understanding and supporting women's connections, and for wāhine Māori, nurturing a sense of identity and belonging through whānau, whakapapa and tikanga practices.

#### *Environment*

We recognise creating spaces that are nurturing and support the wellbeing and healing for everyone living and working within them is central to succeeding for the women in our care and management. Providing gender appropriate specific items and schedules for managing property is important to maintaining wellbeing and being responsive to women's needs.

#### *Health and Wellbeing*

The demand for health services in women's prisons is higher than for men and our resourcing model must reflect this difference. Whether it is primary health care needs, specialist interventions at hospitals, mental health support within our Intervention Support Units, or AOD programmes in remand units, providing individualised care for women's physical and mental health is critical for wellness and healing. Ensuring women receive holistic care must also be supported by consistent policies and practices that are gender and culturally responsive. In addition, physical and mental wellbeing is impacted by the accessibility of constructive activities and exercise programmes. We are committed to providing a wide range of opportunities to all women, regardless of location within the prison.

#### *Rehabilitation and Reintegration*

We understand access to gender and culturally responsive rehabilitation programmes and reintegration opportunities and services, including education and training, is critical for women to succeed. We acknowledge that interventions must be delivered in appropriate spaces and that some programme delivery may benefit from the use of technology, supporting women to successfully re-enter an increasingly digital world. However, we must also ensure women are confident and capable to meet the basic needs for themselves and their tamariki, including through having established and accessible support networks to tautoko their transition into the community.

#### *Relationships and Family and Whānau*

Ensuring women remain connected with positive supports and can bring their whānau along on their journey despite the physical separation is vital to maintaining oranga when released to the community. We are committed to enabling whānau contact, through in person visits and increased use of technology, that meet the needs of wāhine, whānau and tamariki, and is humanising and healing while maintaining safety.

#### *Staffing*

We recognise it is a special skill working with women in prison. It is important that staff feel supported and have the time to build relationships and effect change in women's wellbeing. We want to make sure we have the right staff available at all levels of our organisation, who understand of the unique needs of women, have completed appropriate training, and will tautoko them on their journey to oranga.

I look forward to further implementation of work to align with our Hōkai Rangi strategy, and to provide positive outcomes for women in prison and those staff that manage them.

We trust that you are satisfied with our response to the draft report. Please let me know in the first instance if you have any concerns.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of fluid, connected strokes that form a stylized, elongated shape.

Rachel Leota  
National Commissioner