



Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023–2024

Answer to question on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Health

Reference: Health – Canberra Health Services

Hearing: 20 February 2025

In relation to: AMC Health Care

Question received: 24 February 2025

Answer Due: 03 March 2025

The Official Visitor gave evidence that the level of healthcare in the AMC is not equivalent to what's available in our community outside of the AMC.

1. Where are the gaps?
2. What needs to change to create an equivalence between what's available in the AMC and what's available in the community?

MINISTER FOR HEALTH: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. The ACT Government provides health care to the AMC through Justice Health Services (JHS). While JHS consistently strives to deliver health care equivalent to community standards, JHS does not have control over the wait times for community health care services. In the last Official Visitor (OV) 2023 - 2024 Annual Report, several health care concerns were raised. The below table outlines JHS update in relation to these:

Official Visitor Concerns	JHS Update
Medication timing issues: inappropriate dispensing times, with detainees receiving nighttime medications in the afternoon.	JHS is working with ACT Corrective Services and appropriate industrial bodies to commence the third medication (evening) round. The next meeting is scheduled 12 March, with the aim of commencing the later medication round by the end of April 2025.
Delays for new detainees: new arrivals sometimes experienced significant delays in seeing a doctor and restarting regular medications used prior to detention.	When a person enters custody, a health care induction assessment is completed within 24 hours, which outlines a person's regular medication/s. However, there may be a delay in receiving information from the detainee's community GP and pharmacy, which is required to confirm the person's current prescribed medication/s.

Communication: detainees reporting a lack of clarity about their treatment and medication and in some cases staff communicating in a disrespectful manner	JHS is investigating trauma informed care training that includes the medical officers. JHS has also met with NSW Justice Health and the Mental Health, Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Services (MHJHADS) Director of Lived Experience to undertake a Prisoner Satisfaction Survey. JHS aims to have this out towards the end of 2025.
Staffing: challenges in accessing healthcare out of hours, and in the court cells where no health staff are present	Detainees have access to urgent health care out of hours through an on-call Medical Officer who can be contacted by ACT Corrective Services (ACTCS) as required. In the event of a medical emergency, ACT Ambulance Service is contacted, and the detainee is transported to a public hospital Emergency Department. Currently, there are no health care services provided in Court cells. The ACT Government has identified this as a gap.
Dental service: for some periods there have been considerable delays for detainees in accessing dental care	For a short period of time Oral Health Services (OHS) reduced the number of days at the AMC due to the availability of dentists. OHS is back to providing services three days a week at AMC.
Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service (Winnunga)	JHS refers detainees to Winnunga upon request. If accepted, JHS provide all required transfer documentation to support the transfer of care. JHS does not have control over Winnunga's processing times and cannot comment on how long this process can take.

Source: *Official Visitor 2023 – 2024 Annual Report*

2. All detainees are treated and triaged as community clients, and therefore the wait times for specialist medical appointments or routine x-rays/ultrasounds are determined by community health care providers as these are services provided externally to AMC.

In 2024, JHS took significant steps to address this issue by establishing in-reach services at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). Services now include an onsite physiotherapist, optometrist, and pain clinic. The ACT Government will continue to consider options for health service improvement in the AMC alongside broader public health services changes to ensure services remain accessible, accountable and sustainable.

JHS as stipulated in the *Corrections Management Act 2007*, provides a therapeutic health care service to all individuals detained within the AMC, aimed at protecting the health of all detainees (Section 21, (2) (a) & (b)). JHS endeavours to provide all incarcerated individuals with health care that is as close to community standards as possible, including access to all necessary healthcare services and medications free of charge, without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status.

In the context of a health service run within a correctional environment, rather than a community setting, a range of legislative requirements must be taken into consideration, such as the safety and security of the prison and community members. Despite the complexity of running a healthcare service within a correctional environment, JHS seeks to provide timely access to general practitioners, nurses and vaccinations, as well as diabetes management and optometry services. The average wait time for a detainee to see a GP in the AMC for non-urgent health care is less than one week.

OFFICIAL

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'R. Stephen-Smith', written over a horizontal line.

Date:

213/25

By the Minister for Health, Rachel Stephen-Smith