

**2019**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STATEMENT**

**RESPONSE TO ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 25 SEPTEMBER 2019 - ACCOMMODATION AND  
FACILITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE ALEXANDER MACONOCHIE CENTRE**

**Presented by  
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Minister for Corrections and Justice Health**



## **Madam Speaker**

Today I am providing an update on the accommodation and facilities for women at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC); issues I addressed in the Assembly in September.

In 2009-10, the AMC held an average of 15 female detainees. In 2016, this jumped to 23 and by 2017 this number had almost doubled when it reached 43, overwhelming the 29 beds available in the existing women's cottages and forcing ACT Corrective Services to make use of special purpose beds in the Management Unit and the health wards with minimal access to services, to house the overflow.

It has always been acknowledged that the decision by ACT Corrective Services to move the female detainees from the women's community centre to the Special Care Centre was not ideal, however given the rapid increases in the number of female detainees at the AMC it was the only feasible option available to ACT Corrective Services at the time.

The move increased the beds available for female detainees from 29 to 57, allowed the co-location of female detainees and has allowed for a greater focus on enhancing opportunities for female detainees to access a wider range of services. As at 10 October 2019, the AMC had 37 women in custody – 23 were on remand and 14 under sentence.

Since the co-location of women detainees in the Special Care Centre, ACT Corrective Services has taken steps to improve the availability of services and support to female detainees. To assist with this, a Women and Children's Services Coordinator was established, this position is supported by the consistent support of two sentence management officers and access to a wide range of interventions. Women detainees

are able to access programs, education, healthcare, mental health services and recreation.

Improvements to the amenity of the SCC have been provided including a garden and grassed area to the rear of the Special Care Centre building allowing women access to outdoor areas during the day and enhanced opportunities to undertake purposeful activities. Cooking facilities were installed to ensure that women continued to be able to self-cater.

In April 2019, there was an incident involving one male and one female detainee breaching an internal perimeter fence and entering a restricted area to coordinate unauthorised contact. In the wake of this event, an internal management review was conducted to establish the circumstances surrounding the security breach. In response, ACT Corrective Services constructed a new internal perimeter fence for the women's compound, which was completed in August.

Additional measures have also been taken to eliminate inappropriate lines of sight between male and female detainees, including the installation of screens and window frosting.

The relocation of female detainees to their current accommodation was intended as a temporary solution to the increase of women in detention. However, improvements to amenities within the women's compound has resulted in the initially short-term solution becoming a more sustainable model for the medium term, allowing proper consideration of feasible long-term options available to the Government.

A Women Offenders Framework is currently under development to address the specific needs of the women detainees. The planning phase of the 'Women Offenders Framework' began in August this year and the Framework is due to be completed by the end of the 2019-20 financial

year. The Framework is being developed to better support women's experience in the correctional system, as well as optimising their chances of successful rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

Throughout the development of the framework, ACT Corrective Services will ensure that there is a clear focus on the specific needs of women offenders, this will be achieved through extensive consultation with the community sector. Preliminary discussions with both the Women's Centre for Health Matters and the ACT Council of Social Services have commenced, and I strongly welcome their involvement.

The Women Offenders Framework will also inform future policy development for women detainees.

Currently, considerations for women detainees are provided for in a range of policies and procedures. For example, the *Induction Operating Procedure* provides female-specific information on the AMC via the 'Female Induction Handbook' for new detainees. The *Remand Policy* prioritises visits between remanded women and their children. There is also a staff direction from the Executive Director titled *Management of Female Detainees at the AMC* which provides wide ranging information for staff on programs and education, healthcare and supervision arrangements for women.

The *Women and Children Program Policy* provides for care in custody arrangements for eligible mothers of young children. While it is acknowledged that care in custody arrangements are not currently possible at the AMC, ACT Corrective Services is actively working to formalise arrangements with the Corrective Services NSW 'Jacaranda

Cottages' program to provide mothers of young children with the opportunity to avoid family separation during custody.

The commitment by Government to build a new 80 bed minimum security reintegration centre, which is scheduled to open in 2022/23, will present longer term opportunities to consider how we can reconfigure accommodation options within the AMC to better meet the specific and reintegrative needs of female detainees.

It is therefore important that our planning now considers what further can be done to better meet the needs of the women in the short-term within their current accommodation, and what opportunities the development of the reintegration centre will present for the longer term accommodation of women within the AMC. I am committed to ensuring that a longer-term plan is developed in the first half of 2020.

Importantly, the solution does not lie simply in the provision of accommodation for women. The ACT Government is proactively managing the issues presented by the rise in detainee numbers through the 'Building Communities, not Prisons' strategy, which will develop appropriate and more effective community supports to reduce reoffending and improve community safety. This strategy provides a long-term plan to reduce the need to build additional capacity by reducing the number of detainees entering the AMC. We fully understand and agree that specific strategies are required for women.

Beyond these specific AMC focused measures, the ACT Government is continuing to fund new programs with the aim of reducing offending and recidivism, including housing and bail support programs. In the ACT, as part of our Parliamentary Agreement, we have committed to an ambitious target of reducing recidivism (reoffending rates) by 25% by

2025, and are working towards this goal under the banner of Building Communities Not Prisons.

Meeting this target will be a challenge and require us to think differently about how we address our use of imprisonment as a punitive measure, and how this can be done in a safe and supportive way for our community.

We cannot keep building larger and larger prisons in the hope that this will simply deal with the issue of rising imprisonment rates.

The work in the ACT to realise the principles of justice reinvestment for those coming in and out of the prison system marks some of the most ambitious justice work underway in Australia.

This is the first time an Australian jurisdiction has committed to reinvesting what would otherwise be millions of dollars in funding towards expanding prisons: instead, these future funds will be directed to rehabilitative programs. A number of major new projects will commence in coming months aiming to reduce reoffending, reduce the prison population, improve the lives of those individuals and their families, and improve community safety. These projects include:

- Enhancing our rehabilitation framework at the AMC, including the construction of a purpose built “reintegration centre”;
- Providing more supported housing options for people on bail and exiting detention - a major factor in reoffending - for better justice outcomes;
- Early support for people living with a mental illness or disability
- Providing more pathways for safe and sustainable bail

- Community building capabilities

By working with the community to reduce offending and working better with offenders in custody we are of course aiming to reduce the number of detainees in the future.

In summary, ACT Corrective Services are working hard to address the issues faced by women in detention at the AMC. I will continue to work with ACT Corrective Services to explore options on how to best use existing accommodation facilities to address increases in female detainee numbers.