



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2022-2023

Mr James Milligan MLA (Chair), Mr Andrew Braddock MLA (Deputy Chair),
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA

(ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE)

MRS KIKKERT MLA: To ask the Minister for Justice Health

Ref: Budget Statement C, Output 1.2: Mental Health, Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Service,
page 37, dot point 4

In relation to: bleach powder for cleaning prohibited needles

- 1) The 2019 Detainee Hygiene Policy states that detainees can access sachets of bleach powder in their accommodation units for the purposes of cleaning prohibited injecting or tattooing equipment. These sachets are provided by Justice Health. Does Justice Health track the usage of these sachets such as how many they distribute and how often they top up sachet packets?
 - a) The issue of needles and needle exchanges has been the cause of conflict at the AMC in the past. Has this particular policy item been a source of conflict or disagreement with AMC staff?
- 2) How does the process for restocking the bleach sachets work? Are detainees able to request them at any time, or are stocks within accommodation units regularly checked and topped up as necessary?
 - a) If detainees have to ask for the bleach packets, are they then asked in return why they need them?
 - i) If so, when a detainee is upfront about needing the bleach to clean prohibited items, are they still given the bleach packet or are steps taken to prevent the use of the item to clean the needles?
 - ii) If not, why aren't they asked what they need the bleach packet for?

MS DAVIDSON MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

- 1) Justice Health Services (JHS) does not track who or how many bleach sachets are used in each area. In the absence of a clean needle exchange program, they are made available as a harm-minimisation strategy with the consent and agreement of ACT Corrective Services (ACTCS).
 - a) The issue of needles and needle exchanges has not been reported as an issue or point of conflict at any JHS operational governance meetings. Whilst Canberra Health Services continues to advocate that needle exchange programs are an important population health initiative, the decision to implement a program of this kind in the AMC is complex and multifaceted and ultimately a decision for ACTCS.
- 2) JHS staff restock the bleach sachets as required. Detainees can approach the JHS Primary Health nursing team at any medication round to request further supply. Detainees are also able to access bleach sachets from the Hume Health Centre. Please note that bleach sachets are not freely provided to detainees housed within the Crisis Support Unit.

- a) Detainees are not questioned on why they need the bleach sachets as it is commonly accepted that they are supplied and used for cleaning equipment used for intravenous drug use.
- i) Justice Health Services adopts a health-based approach to drug-use by detainees. Disclosure of IV drug use provides an opportunity for a brief intervention and risk reduction discussion with the detainee and for a referral to Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) services to be offered.
- ii) The provision of bleach sachets is an important population health strategy to minimise the risk of detainees contracting infectious diseases or developing other medical complications from injecting drug-use and home-made tattoos and piercings. The priority of Justice Health Services is to encourage safe behaviour and promote harm-minimisation so any practice that is likely to deter this or undermine trust (in the health services) is not considered consistent with the values of a health service. To date there have been no significant adverse events associated with the provision of bleach sachets.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2022-2023

Signature: *Emma Davidson*

Date: 9 September 2022

By the Minister of Justice Health, Emma Davidson MLA