



Appendix two – Managing women in custody

Overview

In 2018, women inmates made up around eight per cent of the total adult inmate population in New South Wales. Over our period of review, they were one of the fastest growing and most complex cohorts within the correctional system.

From June 2012 to June 2018, the number of women in prison increased by around 50 per cent from 697 to 1,067 inmates. Over this time:

- the number of women on remand more than doubled from 201 inmates to 404 inmates
- the number of sentenced women inmates increased by around 35 per cent from 495 inmates to 663 inmates
- the number of Aboriginal women inmates increased by 75 per cent from 210 inmates to 369 inmates.

At 2018, DOJ had five dedicated correctional centres for women inmates and seven locations across New South Wales where women can be held in separate units within male custodial facilities (Exhibit 13).

Exhibit 13: Profile of women’s prisons

Centre	Prison bed capacity	Function
Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre	325	Sentenced and remand
	273 (operational)	
Dillwynia Correctional Centre	248 (planned)	Sentenced and remand
Emu Plains Correctional Centre	193	Sentenced and remand
Mary Wade Correctional Centre	94	Sentenced and remand
Berrima Correctional Centre	75	Sentenced and remand
Male facilities with female units on site		
Wellington Correctional Centre	82	Sentenced, remand and transit
Mid North Coast	54	Sentenced and remand
Broken Hill	12	Sentenced and remand
Grafton	20	Sentenced, remand and transit
Cessnock	68	Sentenced, remand and transit
Junee	10	Transit unit
Bathurst	10	Acute crisis management unit
Grafton	(300 planned)	Not yet operational

Source: Audit Office 2019, from NSW Department of Justice 2017–18, The Treasury 2017.

Managing women in custody

Compared to men, women in custody are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of previous victimisation, experience poorer mental health and serious mental illness, substance misuse, experience unemployment and low educational attainment, be Aboriginal and be a parent.

Women generally face shorter sentences, have greater needs for services and require significant and complex interventions. They also face challenges in accessing their children while in custody.

Characteristics of women's prisons

DOJ faces a significant deficit in fit-for-purpose facilities for women inmates, as well as a lack of surge capacity to deal with fluctuations in the number of inmates. Current capacity issues present a challenge to DOJ as it works to ensure a suitable approach to managing women inmates including:

- strategic population management, including managing inmates who require limited association, protection, or segregation is difficult due to the limited numbers of facilities
- doubling-up and tripling-up the number of beds in cells increases tension between female inmates, and other responses such as conversion or repurposing may not be suited to women-specific needs
- some women prisons' role and function are affected by the increasing proportion of inmates on remand occupying beds more suited to inmates who are eligible for programs, education, and employment, which may be the focus of a prison
- having small numbers of women located across New South Wales accommodated in larger male facilities can affect the level of suitable services available to those women, for example, small numbers make program groups difficult to achieve
- reduced opportunities to accommodate women inmates in the region from which they came, reducing ties to their families and children, support networks and increasing difficulties for reintegration upon completing their sentence.

DOJ advises that it is addressing these issues through the CSIS.

Two dedicated prisons for women under the Prison Bed Capacity Program

Two dedicated prisons for women have been commissioned in response to the growth in the inmate population. Mary Wade Correctional Centre is a women's correctional centre that was recently converted from a Juvenile Justice facility in late 2017 (Exhibit 15).

Exhibit 14: Mary Wade Correctional Centre



Source: NSW Department of Justice, 2019.

Another centre, Berrima Correctional Centre, was converted from a male facility in mid-2018 to cater for a rapid increase in the women prison population at the beginning of 2018.

Longer-term planning for women prisons

The NSW Government recently approved a business case to, among other things, expand Dillwynia Correctional Centre. The expansion aims to:

- address the demand for fit for purpose female beds in the metropolitan area and growing cohort of female inmates
- address the higher proportion of inmates on remand which is affecting the role and function of female correctional centres.

Future women inmates may spend their entire sentence at Dillwynia, enabling a step-down process through maximum to minimum security.

The new correctional centre at Grafton is expected to provide 300 women-specific maximum-security beds in Northern New South Wales, and the CSIS 2018 outlines a planned action to convert parts of the South Coast Correctional Centre to accommodate women.