



Public Health Association of Australia:

Policy-at-a-glance – Prisoner Health Policy

Key message:

1. PHAA recommends that:
 - a) A harm minimisation approach be incorporated into health policy, services and standards of care in correctional services.
 - b) The Commonwealth Government support a national approach to establish minimum standards to protect, promote and maintain the health and well-being of people deprived of their liberty by the criminal justice system.
 - c) An independent National Prisoners Health Group be established to monitor and review the agreed national minimum standards for prisoner health care.
 - d) Prisoners be given the right to access Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in those instances where certain health services are not provided by the local health service.

Summary: Standards of health care service delivery in criminal justice settings should be comparable to that in community settings. This policy seeks to outline a series of principles and tangible actions designed to address this issue and ultimately achieve an overall reduction in offending behaviour over the longer term.

Audience: Australian, State and Territory Governments, policy makers and program managers.

Responsibility: PHAA's Justice Health Special Interest Group (SIG)

Date policy adopted: September 2010

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PRISONER HEALTH POLICY

The Public Health Association of Australia notes:

1. The high correlation between the use of alcohol and other drugs, violence, crime and incarceration is a public health issue of national significance.
2. That 60% of Australia's inmates are convicted for drug-related crimes.
3. Changes in sentencing policies have been responsible, in part, for imposing custodial sentences on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Australia.
4. The lack of Commonwealth Government action and intervention to prevent over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in both adult and juvenile custodial settings across all jurisdictions.
5. The prevalence and incidence of communicable diseases in the prison setting and the associated risk of transmission to the prisoner population and general community;
6. The lack of Commonwealth and State and Territory cooperation to enforce national standards to protect, promote and maintain the health and well-being of people held in custody.
7. The increasing rate of female incarceration in Australia.
8. The high prevalence of mental illness among prisoners.
9. The high rate of post-release mortality of Australian prisoners.
10. The lack of post-release services to promote reintegration and reduce recidivism for prisoners.
11. Current policies related to incarceration impact unequally and unfairly on the children, extended families and communities, closest to prisoners.
12. Prisoners are effectively excluded from Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) which has consequences for prisoners' health.
13. Most jurisdictions have moved responsibility for health services from custodial authorities to state and territory health departments.
14. The establishment of national indicators for prisoners' health.
15. The extraordinarily high prevalence of smoking among prisoners.

The Public Health Association of Australia affirms the following principles:

16. Incarceration should be used as a punishment of last resort. Efforts should be made at both the policy and procedural levels to ensure that incarceration of mothers of infants does not prevent them breast feeding their babies.
17. Culturally appropriate services should be available for all groups representing minority populations – applies transculturally.
18. National action, lead by the Commonwealth Government, is required to foster innovation in the development and implementation of sentencing options that provide for effective diversion from custody.

19. National minimum standards to protect, promote and maintain the health and well-being of people held in custody must be developed and monitored to ensure the protection of people held in custody across all jurisdictions.
20. Health care for people deprived of their liberty must be guided by evidence that supports effective, appropriate and confidential services.
21. Health service policy and provision in prisons and juvenile detention facilities must be provided independent of corrections authorities.

The Public Health Association of Australia recommends that:

22. A harm minimisation approach be incorporated into health policy, services and standards of care in correctional services.
23. Programs for perpetrators of sexual abuse and sexual assault and prevention of re-offending programs should be developed and implemented during the custodial sentence.
24. The Commonwealth Government support a national approach to establish minimum standards to protect, promote and maintain the health and well-being of people deprived of their liberty by the criminal justice system; separate standards for adults and juveniles will need to be developed.
25. An independent National Prisoners Health Group be established to monitor and review the agreed national minimum standards for prisoner health care. The National Prisoners Health Group would progress the implementation of all the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody as a matter of urgency.
26. Prisoners be given the right to access Medicare and the PBS in those instances where certain health services are not provided by the local health service.

The Public Health Association of Australia resolves to undertake the following actions:

27. PHAA will develop and promote model public health standards for use in Australian corrections and juvenile detention institutions.
28. PHAA will develop and promote guidelines for creating healthy prison environments.

For further information on PHAA's key policy directions and advocacy messages in relation to Justice Health, refer to the 2009 Justice Health in Australia Conference Resolutions paper, available on the PHAA website at:

http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/JUSTICEHEALTHCONFERENCE_RESOLUTIONS.pdf

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FIRST ADOPTED 1999, REVISED AND RE-ENDORSED IN 2007 AND 2010

The original Prison Health: Minimum National Standards for Correctional Services Policy was adopted at the 1999 Annual General Meeting of PHAA. This policy was revised in June 2007 and passed at the PHAA AGM with the name changed to Prison Health: Minimum National Standards for Correctional Services and Juvenile Detention Policy. The policy was then revised and re-endorsed as part of the 2010 policy review process.