

Youth Detention Operations and Reform Response to Youth Detention Inspection Report – June 2024

YDOR Response (for publication on Government Portal)

On behalf of the Department of Youth Justice (the department), we welcome the Youth Detention Inspectorate's June 2024 inspection report for the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre (BYDC), Cleveland Youth Detention Centre (CYDC) and West Moreton Youth Detention Centre (WMYDC).

Rigorous and transparent oversight is essential to ensuring young people in detention are managed appropriately, safely and securely in accordance with the *Youth Justice Act 1992* and *Youth Justice Regulation 2016*. Inspection recommendations provide critical insights to ensure youth detention services evolve with contemporary best practice.

The inspection process focused on trends and issues regarding **cultural responsiveness** this quarter.

The department welcomes the June 2024 report.

Sincere appreciation is extended to the Youth Detention Inspectorate (YDI) for their important work to improve the youth justice system. I also acknowledge the youth detention staff who work in these challenging environments and their commitment to improving the lives of young people and ensuring the safety of youth detention centres.

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YDOR response to recommendations including implementation actions and timeframes

Cultural Responsivity

Findings

The inspectorate identified the following strengths and challenges relevant to this focus area.

Strengths

Risk, Need, Responsivity Principles

- CYDC and BYDC have employed strategies to capture advice and information from Cultural Liaison Officers (CLOs) for the purpose of case reviews.
- YDCs reported delivering core cultural programs as follows:
 - CYDC reported delivering three cycles of Black Chicks Talking (BCT) but could not deliver Young Black and Proud (YBP) without male facilitators.
 - BYDC are delivering BCT and YBP to individuals or small groups.
 - WMYDC reported delivering three cycles of YBP in partnership with Elders and the Workforce and Practice (Cultural Capability) team.
- All YDC Programs teams identified ways that core programs have been adapted to be more culturally responsive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- BYDC and WMYDC identified cultural services that attend the centres. Regular engagement with Queensland African Communities Council (QACC) was reported. BYDC noted an inclusion of African Education Queensland staff (on centre) in this relationship as they support Client Services engagement with African young people and families.
- YDC Cultural Units demonstrated resilience despite system, centre and team level challenges. Across consultations, particular note was given to the difficulty with balancing their role at the centre and in community, complex workloads, challenging team dynamics and cultural load.

Wellbeing of young people

- YDCs reported implementing strategies where possible to support young people experiencing Sorry Business and Sad News including increased phone time, time in the cultural garden (specifically BYDC and WMYDC), connection with family on centre, and visits with external family.

Training

- Multidisciplinary teams and CYDC Team Leaders reported accessing additional cultural training, including suicide risk training with Indigenous Psychological Services.
- Operational and Client Services staff across YDCs expressed a desire for more cultural training opportunities.

- The Cultural Capability team, in partnership with each YDC Cultural Unit, are reviewing cultural training packages. This will ensure training is comprehensive and consistent while incorporating elements specific to individual cohorts and centre locations.

Challenges

Risk, Need, Responsivity Principles

- YLS/CMI risk assessments and case reviews reflected limited consideration of cultural needs across domains. Further, it was not readily evident that Cultural Unit staff are consulted and help inform risk assessment completion. Case reviews reflected a similar issue with limited evidence of feedback from Cultural Unit staff and stakeholders being incorporated.
- Reduced delivery of cultural programs, activities, and supports were noted at CYDC. This was reportedly due to impacts of separation, staff shortages, challenges regarding team dynamics, and reduced community engagement.
- At the time of writing the document core cultural programs data for BYDC and WMYDC was unable to be provided to confirm participation rates and details of engagement. Some BCT data was provided by CYDC. YDOR note existing information system deficits contribute to challenges in data availability and accuracy.
- The strength of stakeholder relationships and awareness of the work stakeholders conduct on centre, varied across WMYDC and BYDC Client Services teams. Stakeholder data was unable to be provided to confirm regularity and nature of stakeholder engagement. CYDC Client Services teams advised minimal stakeholders outside of Elders attending for court support attend the centre.
- YDC Cultural Units reported experiencing challenging internal and external team dynamics, noting instances of lateral violence. Further, Cultural Unit staff spoke of systemic barriers impacting the cultural support they could provide to young people.

Wellbeing of young people

- Multidisciplinary teams across YDCs reported minimal inclusion of Cultural Unit staff in SRAT processes due to issues with staff availability, workloads, and turnover.
- The term 'Sorry Cutting' was used across centres when discussing self-harm behaviours of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Staff advised that this terminology is being increasingly incorporated in YDC service delivery and YDC policy and procedure. Consultation with YDC Cultural Units and the Cultural Capability team would enhance understanding of the term and promote consistent language being used across YDC and community settings.

- Consultations indicated there are no clear local guidelines or local operating procedures for responding to Sorry Business and Sad News across YDCs. This includes roles and responsibilities of teams and consistent communication with young people, staff, and stakeholders. Some Operational, Multidisciplinary, and Programs staff across centres reported not being advised of Sorry Business or Sad News occurring. A statewide resource exists which provides guidance on understanding Sorry Business, Sad News, how to support young people and Leave of Absence considerations. This resource was due for review and update in 2022.
- Responsibility for who notifies a young person and family about Leave of Absence (LOA) outcomes is unclear. Cultural Units reported that they are often tasked with the responsibility which can add to cultural load and impact cultural relationships if LOAs are declined. Lack of clarity was reported to cause further challenge with young people being provided inconsistent messages about approvals.
- Minimal debrief opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were reported across YDCs following attending LOAs for funerals and tombstone unveilings. CYDC Unit Managers expressed particular concern regarding lack of support for young people around Sorry Business when in separation and returning from LOAs.

Training

- Data from L&D identified YDC staff across multiple positions had not consistently engaged in cultural training¹. This aligned with staff feedback, with a need for additional and regular refresher training acknowledged.
- Operational and Client Services staff across YDCs advised more in-depth information on engagement with young people and appropriate ways to respond to Sorry Business and Sad News was needed. Staff across centres, particularly new Caseworkers, expressed anxiety about not responding in culturally safe ways to young people and families experiencing Sorry Business and Sad News. Access to training to increase cultural capability of non-Indigenous staff was identified as an opportunity in each YDC 3E Report.

Recommendations	Accepted in principle/Accepted/Not accepted	YDOR Implementation Actions (Please provide detail of a verifiable actions in dot point format)	Date for Completion (please list 'month/year' for each dot point action that will
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¹ This includes the Cultural Capability training and Cultural Responsivity training delivered by the Cultural Capability team and localised delivery of Cultural Awareness training by YDC based Cultural Units.

			be/was completed)
<p>Recommendation 1: YDOR to implement processes to ensure ongoing partnership and building of shared language with Cultural Capability team. Regular consideration and consultation to occur regarding development and amendment of any policies and procedures that directly relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and staff in detention, including Suicide Risk Policy. Feedback to be consistently sought from other central office teams and YDC Cultural Units where appropriate.</p>	Accepted	<p>YDOR is committed to facilitating open communication and collaborative discussions to gather insights and perspectives on policy impacts and effectiveness.</p> <p>The department recognises that the people most able to provide a culturally safe environment to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people, are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.</p> <p>Youth detention policies, practices, service provision and programs are developed in consultation with youth detention centre Cultural Units and cultural staff as well as other key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural stakeholders.</p> <p>In accordance with the Youth Detention policy governance framework, policies and procedures are consulted and disseminated for feedback through various forums including Local Consultative Committees, Youth Detention Consultative Committees, Policy, Practice and Consistency meetings, Youth Detention Forum, First Nations Action Board and central office teams, in addition to youth detention centre staff. YDOR will actively ensure the necessary representation of decision makers across all workgroups.</p> <p>Strengthening cultural responsiveness is a critical and enduring priority for youth detention service delivery, including applying cultural considerations in policy reviews and consulting with First Nations staff and stakeholders.</p> <p>A thorough review of the suicide and non-suicidal self-injury risk management policy is currently underway, informed by extensive collaboration with youth detention centres (YDCs) and a range of internal and external stakeholders. An objective of the review is to enhance the cultural competency of suicide and NSSI management</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2025</p>

		<p>processes when providing assessment and intervention to First Nations young people.</p> <p>To ensure an informed and comprehensive review of best practice suicide and NSSI management and its application to youth detention centres, the following actions have been progressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literature review, including a focus on risk assessment and cultural considerations such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ suicide contagion, prevention of suicide clusters, cultural risk factors, and cultural-bound syndromes ○ analysis of risk assessment tools including the Westerman Symptom Checklist Youth (WASC-Y) • interjurisdictional analysis, including quorum of SRAT membership and application of risk assessment tools • comparative analysis of available suicide and NSSI risk assessment tools to inform suicide risk and intervention needs • completion of Indigenous mental health, complex racial trauma, attachment and suicide prevention training delivered by Dr Tracey Westerman, including accreditation of the WASC-Y of 13 additional YDC multi-disciplinary and Youth Detention Operations staff • ongoing collaboration and partnership with key staff and stakeholders (including the Cultural Capability team and YDC Cultural Units) to facilitate policy and practice changes. Following consultation, the policy has been updated to include that identification and appropriate management of culture-bound syndromes must occur in consultation with the cultural unit and a young person's family, kin and community. 	
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<p>Recommendation 2: YDOR and YDCs to work in partnership with Cultural Capability team to review LOA Policy and Appendix 1-5 – Grief and Loss: Understanding Sorry Business and Sad News, to determine whether the existing guidance sufficiently supports local application around responses to young people experiencing Sorry Business and Sad News. Procedures to clearly outline team roles and responsibilities, communication expectations (including staff, young people, and stakeholders), and support options for staff and young people.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>A review of the youth detention leave of absence (LOA) policy is currently underway to improve efficiency and decision-making in the risk assessment and approval processes of LOAs. This review has identified a need for system change to improve information capture of cultural considerations when young people are applying for LOAs for the purposes of Sorry Business and Sad News.</p> <p>It is noted that LOA proposals for Sorry Business and Sad News are prepared by the young person's caseworker in close consultation with the Cultural Unit. When considering this leave, YDCs must discuss the request and the possible arrangements with respected members of the young person's community and family.</p> <p>Chapter 2 of the Youth Detention Centre Operations Manual (YDCOM) outlines that when an LOA is rejected, the Caseworker, Cultural Unit staff or Unit Manager must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide an explanation to the young person, and • advise the young person of the complaints process. <p>These staff also notify young people when leave is granted, taking into consideration the type of leave and the relationship and rapport between the staff member and the young person.</p> <p>Chapter 2 also specifies that young people must be provided with an opportunity to debrief post-leave to discuss and deal with any difficulties experienced during the leave. A debrief is conducted by the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young person's Caseworker in business hours, or • the Shift Supervisor/Section Supervisor outside of business hours. <p>Appendix 1-5 – Grief and loss: understanding Sorry Business and Sad News reiterates that supporting a young person during this time involves increased support from youth workers, the Cultural Unit, Elders, the multi-disciplinary team, mental health professionals and other stakeholders as relevant. Per current practice, additional</p>	<p>March 2025 – LOA policy</p> <p>Sorry Business and Sad News – July 2025</p>
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		<p>support is available upon return of young people after LOAs for Sorry Business and Sad News to assess their emotional state and provide therapeutic interventions as required.</p> <p>YDOR will review the LOA policy and Appendix for further opportunities to strengthen cultural safety for staff and young people.</p>	
<p>Recommendation 3: L&D to work with YDOR and YDCs to prioritise and increase Client Services, Leadership and Operational staff engagement in foundational Departmental cultural training, namely Cultural Capability and Cultural Responsivity training. YDCs to consider whether Operational staff are afforded sufficient time to access cultural training, including refresher localised training and other Departmental training opportunities. Regular rostering of staff specifically for cultural training to be evaluated</p>	L&D YDC training – accepted	<p>L&D YDC training are exploring better ways to connect with YDC Client Services to promote training products and increase enrolments. This may include, for example, promoting the L&D Training Calendar and enrolment process through the ABC Portal, assisting YDC's to identify relevant staff who should complete Cultural Training, and reporting on completions.</p> <p>DYJ L&D Training policy also needs to be considered in response to this recommendation (noting the alignment with similar OPR Actions).</p>	March 2025
<p>Recommendation 4: Youth Detention Centre Cultural Units and Programs teams to review the delivery of YBP and BCT across centres, working in partnership with the Cultural Capability team and Service Improvement Support team. This will include record keeping practices and exploration of how to increase frequency of program delivery. Staff to explore if and how programs are modified for a detention</p>	L&D YDC training – accepted	<p>YDCs ensure young people have access to a range of offence-focused and developmental programs, including educational, vocational, behavioural, social, recreational and cultural programs, services, mentoring and activities.</p> <p>Operational complexities and infrastructure limitations may temporarily impact a young person's program attendance in situations where it has been assessed that attendance may compromise the safety or security of the centre, staff and young people. Circumstances where program attendance may be impacted include:</p>	2025 and ongoing

<p>centre environment and differing cohorts. L&D to assist with implementation of appropriate record keeping practices. This recommendation is in alignment to a related YDC Operational Performance Review action.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mix issues between young people attending the program and the risk is unable to be mitigated • young person's behaviour and the risk is unable to be mitigated • insufficient staff to safely escort young people and/or maintain supervision ratios • weather events • unavailability of program deliverers or suitable program spaces • other security considerations. <p>Staff work collaboratively to navigate these complexities to ensure program attendance is prioritised and maximised for all young people.</p> <p>Recruitment and retention of frontline YDC roles remains a paramount priority, as evidenced by strong growth in frontline FTE since 2023. A strategic workforce plan to promote sustainability, diversity, capacity and capability is being finalised, inclusive of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finalisation of an Employee Value Proposition • ongoing use of recruitment and retention analytics to refine processes and strengthen applicant and employee supports • increased investment to strengthen statewide recruitment processes • industry partnerships to build a long-term applicant pool for scheduled recruitment cycles • increased investment in staff training and implementation of recommendations from the Training Needs Analysis for YDCs • improved workforce structural supports, compensation and benefits to promote staff development, wellbeing and retention. <p>Youth Justice core change-orientated and cultural programming data collection, requires statewide consistency and recording practices. The introduction of Unify should mitigate recording inconsistencies</p>	
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		<p>and offer a centralised system to capture and record delivery of core and cultural programs. The intention of Unify is to ensure YDC and community-based program delivery is the same and evidenced in the same way. Implementing an additional recording keeping process may impede Unify records and statewide data collection.</p> <p>DwP and OPR actions will also contribute to the above activities.</p>	
<i>Previous/open recommendations – some have been amended to incorporate additional actions/considerations based on the inspection findings.</i>			
<p>Recommendation 1: YDCs to explore whether staffing of Cultural Units is currently meeting the needs of First Nations young people. This may include seeking feedback from Cultural Unit staff and consideration of findings from 3E, OPR, and inspection processes. Opportunities for expansion may be considered.</p>	Accepted in principle	<p>Incorporated into YDC OPR Actions, which will first include a review of the cultural unit manager role profile.</p> <p>AIP due to establishment constraints, noting that if further resources are required, this will be subject to budget submissions and relevant approvals.</p>	July 2025
<p>Recommendation 2: Cultural considerations are embedded in all decision-making processes from the time a young person is admitted to YDCs.</p>	Accepted	<p>Strengthening cultural responsiveness is a paramount priority for the YDCs. The Department of Youth Justice Cultural Capability Action Plan, Respectfully Journey Together, <i>Reframing the Relationship Plan</i> 2023-2025 and the Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan document the commitments and key steps required to build and support cultural capability across Youth Justice.</p> <p>Culture remains central to all decision-making and informs the assessment and service response of each young person and their individual needs while in youth detention. Cultural considerations, trauma informed responses and human rights are fundamentally embedded in all YD policies and operational procedures.</p> <p>YDC Cultural Units and cultural staff work collaboratively with all youth detention workgroups and stakeholders to ensure that cultural competence and cultural safety is integrated across all policy,</p>	Ongoing throughout 2025

		<p>procedures and business areas of the youth detention service delivery. With recent recruitment of the Cultural Unit Managers across the YDCs, there continues to be increased opportunities to enhance connection and collaboration and ensure cultural considerations are included in any decision-making process, and applied consistently across YDCs.</p> <p>DwP and OPR actions will also contribute to the above activities.</p>	
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Other Observations and Issues

The March 2024 inspections identified some observations of concern. However, these were raised directly with Executive Directors where required.