



7 October 2015

C73421

Caitlan Stevens
FYI website
<fyi-request-3070-1de26004@requests.fyi.org.nz>

Dear Ms Stevens

Thank you for your email dated 20 August 2015, requesting:

“Total number of prisoners with a mental health condition being held at Milton Prison. Please include stats from last five years.”

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Research shows that mental illness is up to five times more common among prisoners than in the general population. Assisting prisoners to address their health issues enables them to properly engage in rehabilitation opportunities, thereby improving their ability to address the causes of their offending and lead pro-social lives on release from prison.

In order to more effectively identify and treat mental illness, the Department implemented the Mental Health Screening Tool (MHST) in June 2012. The tool was developed and validated by an expert group including a number of Forensic Psychiatrists for use by the Department to identify prisoners with mental health needs. The NZ Forensic Psychiatric Advisory Group advised the Department in 2013 that the screening tool would be appropriate for use with female prisoners and it was subsequently extended to include all newly received female prisoners in July 2013. Currently all prisoners over 18 years of age are screened by the Department using the MHST when they arrive into prison. If a prisoner is screened as ‘positive’ they will be referred to Forensic Services for further specialised assessment of their mental health needs.

Prisoners assessed by Forensic Services as having mild to moderate mental health needs are referred back to the prison health centre where a decision is made to refer the prisoner to a medical officer (prison doctor), a nurse or to a contracted provider for a Package of Care. Packages of Care are interventions offered to prisoners, which can include self-guided tools (e.g. reading material), group sessions or individual sessions. The content of the packages includes education about healthy lifestyles, mental illness, medications, recovery and resilience, advice and support about mental health well-being, problem solving strategies, solution focused therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy.

Prisoners who were assessed as having serious mental health needs will receive treatment directly from Forensic Services usually in the prison. In acute cases prisoners may be transferred to a secure forensic mental health facility, managed by one of the five lead District Health Boards.

The primary benefit of the MHST is that we now have a validated tool that provides a process for screening all newly received prisoners. Consequently we are able to identify prisoners who have mental health needs and reduce the barriers that those needs can present. For example, a prisoner with depression will receive support to deal with that depression so they can then engage in their rehabilitation.

We can provide you with relevant data about MHST referrals, and related information, from Otago Corrections Facility for the period 1 July 2012 to 30 April 2015 to answer your request in part.

During this period, 835 prisoners had the MHST Screening Tool applied at their Initial Health Assessment.

Of these 835 prisoners, 205 had mental health needs identified by the Forensic Services assessment process, of which 91 were treated by Forensic Services (serious mental health needs) and 114 prisoners were referred back to the health centre at the prison for primary mental health care (those with mild to moderate mental health needs).

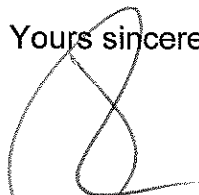
Over the five year period you have requested information for, prisoners will have come and gone through the prison due to the short term nature of some sentences and times spent on remand in custody. Every prisoner has a medical file, both electronic and hard copy. When they are released from custody the electronic file is de-activated and the information on services provided does not form part of our current database.

Unfortunately, we cannot readily extract the requested information from our electronic records about the "total number of prisoners with a mental health condition being held at Milton Prison... include stats from last five years" as this medical information is noted on those individual prisoner records at Otago Corrections Facility (OCF). OCF was established in 2007 and has a capacity of 485 men. In order to identify this type of specific information, we would be required to manually review a large number of files, including historical information for the large number of offenders who have been in custody but who are no longer with us over the five year period you have requested information for.

In accordance with the OIA, we have considered whether to affix a charge or extend the time limit for responding. However, given the scale of the request we do not consider that this would be an appropriate use of our publicly funded resources. Therefore, this part of your request is declined under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with the Department. Alternatively you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jeremy Lightfoot', written over the words 'Yours sincerely'.

Jeremy Lightfoot
National Commissioner