



31 January 2017

C82362

Ian Andrews  
[fyi-request-5172-841eacbe@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-5172-841eacbe@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Mr Andrews

Thank you for your email of 31 December 2016, requesting information about suicides in New Zealand Prisons. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

Public safety and reducing re-offending are the ultimate goals for the Department of Corrections. In accordance with the Corrections Act 2004, we make public safety paramount when managing offenders, and administer all sentences in a safe, secure, humane and effective manner. All prisons are operated in accordance with New Zealand legislation and having regard for other agreements, such as the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

All deaths in custody are reported to the Police and are the subject of a Coronial Inquest and an investigation by an Inspector of Corrections. The Coroner ultimately determines the cause of a person's death. Where a death in custody is suspicious, the Police can make the decision to investigate.

The Department reports on deaths in custody in two categories:

- **Apparent Unnatural Deaths** – this can include death as a result of self harm, an accident, foul play, or a death where the cause is unable to be initially confirmed.
- **Apparent Natural Deaths** – The death while in custody of any prisoner, as a result of natural causes.

The Department is committed to preventing deaths in custody and improving the provision of prisoner health services. Prisoners have a higher risk of mental health disorders and illness than the general population. In order to understand and address a prisoner's medical condition, we conduct health screenings when a prisoner is received into prison, and when they are transferred between prisons. We have also introduced a specialised Mental Health Screening Tool and developed a suicide prevention framework to support the review of practice and reduce the risk of self-harm and suicide by prisoners and community based offenders.

If a prisoner is screened as 'positive' during the Mental Health Screening Tool 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, 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, group sessions or individual sessions. The content of the packages include 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 are assessed as having serious mental health issues receive treatment directly from Forensic Services.

Despite our efforts to reduce suicide and self harm in prison it is incredibly difficult to stop someone who is determined to harm themselves. In saying this, our staff have saved the lives of approximately 60 prisoners over the last five financial years. These prisoners were involved in self harm incidents where the individual would have been unlikely to survive without staff intervention.

You have requested the following information:

- 1. Please provide a schedule showing dates of prisoner suicides at each New Zealand Prison during the year ended 31 December 2016.*

You have requested information on the dates of prisoner suicides at each New Zealand prison for the year ended 31 December 2016. Please note the Department records data on a financial year basis and the parameters of your request have been adjusted accordingly.

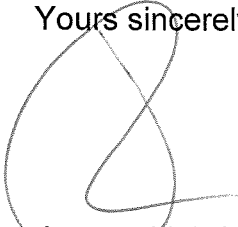
The Department is statutorily obligated to protect all private information that we hold, including information relating to offenders. We are unable to release the date of each apparent unnatural death broken down by prison for the 2015/16 Financial Year as doing so would contravene our obligations under the OIA and the Privacy Act. Therefore, this part of your request is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, to protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.

As per section 9(1) of the OIA, we have also considered whether there are countervailing public interest considerations favouring the release of the requested information. We do not believe such considerations are present in this case. However, I can advise that for the 2015/16 Financial Year, there were 11 instances of apparent unnatural deaths in New Zealand Prisons.

You have also asked for information regarding the instances of suicide broken down by prison for the 2016/17 Financial Year as at 31 December 2016. This request is also declined under section 9(2)(a) of the OIA, to protect the privacy of natural persons, including that of deceased natural persons.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. 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 a faint circular stamp or watermark.

Jeremy Lightfoot  
National Commissioner