Responsive action improves detainee safety and care

In the past year, the ACT Government has made significant changes to improve detainee health, care and safety in the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) as part of its response to the Moss Review.

Minister Rattenbury has tabled a progress report one year after the Moss Review into the treatment in custody care of Mr Steven Freeman was tabled in February 2017.

Mr Russel Taylor AM, the independent chair of the Review implementation steering committee, has agreed four recommendations related to the Government have been fully implemented, with strong progress made against the remaining four.

The ACT Government responded to the Moss Review on 16 February 2016, agreeing to eight of the nine recommendations. The ninth recommendation was noted as it related to the independent Health Services Commissioner.

Members of the steering committee are directors-general of Government agencies and community representatives from Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services, Aboriginal Legal Service and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body.

“This independent oversight of the Government response provides strong assurance to the community of how seriously we have worked to change our practices and operations,” Mr Rattenbury said.

“The ACT Government acknowledges the grief, loss and sadness that Steven Freeman’s family has experienced. The Government also acknowledges the significant impact that his death has had on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

“Steven Freeman’s death in May 2016 was a tragedy. The thorough review by Mr Philip Moss AM following his death has led to an extensive reform program for government, and our work is continuing to deliver better outcomes for all detainees.”

Mr Rattenbury said effective independent oversight was important to build and maintain public confidence in the ACT’s corrections system.

“The independently chaired steering committee has ensured recommendations are being implemented in the spirit of the Moss Review,” Mr Rattenbury said.

“It has also provided a forum for representatives of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to meet regularly with high-level Government officials to discuss issues their community faces.
“In the coming weeks I will announce the ACT’s first Inspector of Correctional Services. Due to the unique make-up for the ACT’s correctional system and growing population pressures, this new model of oversight is required so that as Minister for Corrections I can be assured we are providing appropriate care and services to detainees.

“Our work will be further strengthened following Australia’s ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) in December 2017 which allows for visits from the United Nations (UN) Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture. We were disappointed that not all political parties in the Assembly are of the view that this level of scrutiny and accountability is important.

“The Government has also invested significantly to improve the security by providing more CCTV cameras for the effective operation of the AMC, safety of detainees and to assist with the investigation of assaults so that offenders can be held accountable.

“This, along with a strengthened memorandum of understanding between ACT Corrective Services and ACT Policing, has led to a number of investigations of assaults in the AMC leading to prosecution. This demonstrates that the intent of the Moss Review for pro-investigation and prosecution is being achieved.

“Over the next two-and-a-half years, the Government will also spend $8 million to build accommodation at the Hume Health Centre for 25 health staff and to facilitate health services to detainees from Winnunga Nimmityjah Health and Community Service.”

Further changes implemented since the Moss Review include:

- a new arrangement signed by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate and ACT Health outlining the responsibilities for care of detainees in the AMC and enables improved information sharing;
- an improved detainee induction process with a separate area for new admissions to be accommodated for a period of five to seven days;
- improved next of kin notification process that makes available a designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ACT Corrective Services representative to accompany ACT Policing and/or ACT Coroner representative when required; and;
- an independent feasibility study to provide future planning options on the needs of the AMC.

Mr Rattenbury said much of the work in response to the Moss Review also supports Government steps to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system.

“The Government has set a goal to reduce recidivism by 25 per cent by 2025 and we are investing in programs and services to help support this target.

“Unfortunately, our ACT incarceration rates are not where we want them to be – particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”


Statement ends

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