



28 June 2017

C86574

Mackenzie Valgre
fyi-request-6002-0c2abc4b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Ms Valgre

Thank you for your email of 14 June 2017, requesting information about strip gowns and blankets that have been torn by prisoners. 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 must make public safety paramount when managing offenders, and administer all sentences in a safe, secure, humane and effective manner. All prison facilities are operated in accordance with New Zealand legislation and based on other agreements, such as the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

The Department is committed to preventing unnatural deaths and life threatening incidents of self-harm in prisons. As you may be aware, prisoners have a higher prevalence of mental health disorders and illnesses than the general population. In order to understand and address a prisoner's mental health, 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 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 registered 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. Additionally, they may include advice about mental health well being, problem solving strategies, solution focused therapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy.

All prisoners who are identified as being at risk of self-harm are housed in designated At Risk Units. Prisoners who are not initially deemed at risk may be reassessed at any time if mood, behavioural or situational change gives rise for concern. These units are set up to ensure that prisoners are managed in the safest environment possible.

Staff in ARUs are experienced in managing prisoners who are undergoing a period of crisis, and in identifying the warning signs of suicidal behaviour and thoughts.

You requested the following information regarding ARUs:

'Can you please provide me with the total number of strip gowns and blankets torn by prisoners since 2009. Can this please be broken down by year and by prison.'

I am advised that the Department does not maintain information of this nature, related to torn strip gowns or blankets. Therefore, the requested information does not currently exist in a form that can be readily supplied to you, and would instead require initiation of a project to extract, analyse and present the data in the form requested.

Accordingly, your request is declined under section 18(g) of the OIA as the information requested is not held by the Department and we have no grounds for believing that it is held by another agency or more closely connected with the functions of another agency.

As you have noted, in 2009 the Office of the Ombudsman investigated an incident of self harm in Christchurch Women's Prison and this investigation included information related to the number of strip gowns, blankets and mattresses torn by prisoners. I understand that this information was created for the sole purpose of informing the investigation, hence the absence of further information since this date.

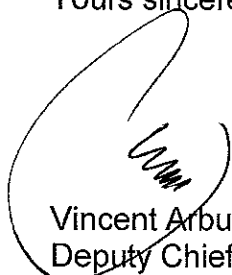
In declining your request, I also note that the Ombudsman has previously advised that information is not considered to be held by an agency in instances where a request necessitates research or analysis of source data in order to generate fresh information.

It may be helpful to note that the Department is currently in the process of assessing new garments for use in At Risk Units, as part of a re-tender for prisoner apparel. Corrections' Health Services unit is undertaking this assessment and the safety of at risk prisoners is a paramount consideration in this process.

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 read 'Vincent Arbuckle', enclosed within a large, hand-drawn oval shape.

Vincent Arbuckle
Deputy Chief Executive
Corporate Services