

Committee on Children and Young People
Public hearing – 14 May 2021

Response to question taken on notice
NSW Health

Support for Children of Imprisoned Parents

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Question on Notice

QUESTION – Page 66

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given we all accept that this is perhaps the most vulnerable group—or one of the most vulnerable groups—of children in the State and given that there is a significant number of kids washing in and out of the out-of-home care system, how is it that their status is not being tracked across the department? Separately to that, is it being tracked in the broader health department?

Dr HAYSOM: Yes. Where we interface with young people at court it is certainly recorded there, and we have data that we can provide to you. In custody it is part of our reception process to determine that status and on release from custody, if they are being followed up by our community clinicians, it is certainly being recorded at that point.

ANSWER

The Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (JHFMHN) Adolescent Health staff undertake Reception Assessment screening for all young people entering the six Youth Justice Centres across New South Wales. There are standardised questions about current incarceration of significant others and the number and whereabouts of any children.

The Adolescent Health Initial Assessment is completed for all young people within 48 hours of admission to custody. The person is asked: *'Do you have children?'* If the response is 'yes', the clinician follows a script that asks for the number, names and whereabouts of those children. Staff are trained in Mandatory Reporting for any concerns that are raised in these interviews.

In 2019-20, a total of 1,239 Initial Reception Assessments were completed, and 53 (4.3 per cent) of young people self-reporting that they had their own child/children. In 2020-21, a total of 1,036 Initial Reception Assessments were completed, and 33 (3.2 per cent) of young people self-reporting that they had their own child/children.

The number of young parents is significantly less than the rates reported in the 2015 Young People in Custody Health Survey, where 14 per cent of young people reported as being a parent.

The Adolescent Health Comprehensive Assessment is completed for all young people who remain in custody seven to 10 days following their admission. The person is asked: *'Do you have significant family members currently in custody?'* If the response is 'yes', the clinician records the name, relationship and residency of every family member/significant other currently in custody. There are also standardised questions in this assessment that clearly outline the relevant living arrangements in the community, Out of Home Care placements, and any involvement from the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). Staff make a Mandatory Report for any concerns that are raised and contact DCJ case workers for any young people who are in the care of the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services.

In 2019-20, a total of 687 young people completed a Comprehensive Assessment, and 177 (26 per cent) reported a significant family member currently in custody. Of these young people, the majority (61 per cent) were Aboriginal. In 2020-21, a total of 491 young people completed a Comprehensive Assessment, and 110 (22.4 per cent) reported a significant family member currently in custody. Of these young people, 45 per cent were Aboriginal. This is a significant reduction in over-representation when compared to 2019-20 reports, and the 2015 Survey.

Almost all these young people were referred to the JHFMHN Community Integration Team where clinicians provided continuity of healthcare and advocate for these young people in the post-release period. For example, clinicians meet with young people in the custodial setting in the pre-release period and make note of any issues and health concerns, including information related to parental incarceration and children at home.

The JHFMHN Adolescent Health Court and Community Team Clinicians (ACCT) are present in the Children's Courts, Youth Koori Court and local courts. They advocate for diversion of referred young people away from custody based on mental conditions, mental illness and cognitive impairment. In 2019-20, there were 563 ACCT Assessments, and 173 (31 per cent) of young people were diverted under section 32 of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*. These holistic assessments include information on family circumstances, including parental incarceration.