

**Supplementary  
Submission  
No 20a**

## **SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN OF IMPRISONED PARENTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Department of Communities and Justice

**Date Received:** 12 April 2021



**Corrective Services NSW supplementary submission to the Inquiry into support for the children of imprisoned parents in NSW**

***Introduction***

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a number of significant challenges in correctional environments worldwide. Traditionally, correctional centres have been hotbeds for the spread of infectious disease. Corrective Services NSW responded quickly, implementing a range of risk mitigation strategies to ensure organisational readiness and responsiveness and protect the health and well-being of inmates, offenders and staff. Corrective Services' approach to the COVID-19 pandemic drew on best practice advice from a range of experts including NSW Health, epidemiologists and Justice Health and the Forensic Mental Health Network.

Corrective Services established the Coronavirus Command Post in early March 2020 to facilitate and ensure timely, informed and consistent communication across the organisation about protective measures and critical updated policy and practice.

Precautionary measures were aimed at minimising transmission through screening, reducing movements of staff, external visitors and inmates into correctional centres, reducing movements to and from courts, health education, hygiene measures and protocols for managing those with exposure to COVID-19. This included temporarily placing restrictions on visits to correctional centres.

While hygiene and COVID-19 related safety protocols remain in place, Corrective Services has worked to ensure that the normal operations of correctional centres and management of offenders resume as quickly and as safely as possible.

This supplementary submission focusses on the suspension and subsequent resumption of in person visits for inmates and work to facilitate communication between inmates and their families during the pandemic.

***Suspension of in person visits***

Corrective Services NSW placed a temporary suspension on in person social visits on Tuesday 17 March 2020. This was an essential measure to address the risk of transmission. Prisons in NSW receive over 50,000 visitors each quarter and the majority of these are contact visits. All correctional jurisdictions in Australia subsequently suspended in person visits. CSNSW published a road map setting out key issues relating to the reintroduction of in person visits.

***Free phone calls for inmates***

To mitigate disruption to family relationships and support ongoing contact between inmates and their families, Corrective Services NSW provided three additional free phone calls per week to each inmate from 27 March 2020 until 8 January 2021, with a reduction to one free additional phone call per week from 9 January 2021 to 19 February 2021 as in person visits resumed.

### ***Video visits for inmates and families rolled out***

One of the most significant innovations implemented by CSNSW during the pandemic, was the introduction of video family visits to support contact between inmates and their families, including children. By 24 April 2020, Corrective Services NSW had rolled out 600 tablets and upgraded audio visual technology to enable video visits of up to 40 minutes each session in correctional centres. Since March 2020, Corrective Services has facilitated 208,033 (as at 5 March 2021) visits in this way. The feedback from inmates and their loved ones has been overwhelmingly positive.

### ***Resumption of in person visits***

COVID-Safe In-person social visits were reintroduced on 23 November 2020, which allowed for a maximum of two visitors per inmate, for a period of 30 minutes. A number of important protocols were established to ensure that visits could be conducted safely for inmates, visitors and our staff. These included:

- Temperature testing and screening checks of visitors
- Visit duration was limited to address risk of close contact transmission
- Visits areas cleaned before and after each session
- Restrictions on physical contact
- Use of face masks and hand sanitation

From 10 December 2020, the number of children allowed to visit was increased to three, with the ability for the local Governor / Manager of Security to approve additional children.

On Monday 21 December 2020, Corrective Services NSW temporarily suspended in-person visits due to the Northern Beaches cluster outbreak. Corrective Services NSW reintroduced visits on 18 January 2021 in the same format as 10 December 2020.

On 15 February 2021 after further assessment of risk, Corrective Services NSW allowed for up to two adults and three children (with the Governor/Manager of Security able to approve additional children), or up to three adults to visit at a time, and an increase in visiting time to 50 minutes.

### ***Business as usual visit arrangements in place from 5 April 2021***

On 5 April, visits will return to pre COVID-19 arrangements at all correctional centres. Visit duration and the number of visitors allowed will revert to business as usual arrangements. Hygiene protocols will remain in place and visitors will need to book a visit to ensure that contact tracing can occur if necessary.