

11 October 2021

Mr David Shoebridge  
Chair  
Public Accountability Committee  
NSW Parliament

By email: [Public.Accountability@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Public.Accountability@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Shoebridge

**Response to question on notice**

Please find enclosed an answer to the question I took on notice during the Inquiry into the NSW Government's Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

I note that throughout the pandemic we have continued to receive and handle complaints from people in custody, as well as their family and friends. To assist us handle complaints promptly and effectively and understand issues arising across the correctional system we have regular contact with senior staff at many centres each day, have direct access to a range of confidential information held by agencies, and liaise regularly with Executive staff of relevant agencies.

We recognise that restrictions imposed due to the pandemic may, in some circumstances, make it more difficult for inmates (and detainees in youth justice centres) to contact our office to make a complaint (because of more limited time out of cell for phone access, for example). Therefore, if you, or other Members of Parliament, become aware of issues of concern within centres we would welcome receiving relevant details. While it may not be appropriate for us to treat such information as a complaint, it may still inform decisions we make about issues to monitor or otherwise follow up with relevant agencies.

Yours sincerely

Paul Miller  
**NSW Ombudsman**

### **Response to Question on Notice**

**The Chair:** I have had a number of families contact me about very real concerns about the treatment within Parklea. One of the concerns is that hand sanitiser has been withdrawn from inmates because the prison authorities are saying that there is a risk that inmates will consume it. Has that information been provided to you, Mr Miller, in any way?

**Mr Miller:** Not that I am aware of, Mr Shoebridge, but I can check whether we have received any concerns in that regard.

### **Answer**

As at 8 October we have not received any complaints about the provision of hand sanitiser in correctional centres during 2021.

In 2020, we had 3 conversations with inmates in which the issue of hand sanitiser in correctional centres was mentioned:

- March 2020 - Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre (MRRRC) (mention of no hand sanitiser)
- July 2020 - Parklea Correctional Centre (complaint about an empty sanitiser container)
- December 2020 – MRRRC (complaint that there was no hand sanitiser station in a yard used by quarantined inmates).

We recommended the inmates raise these concerns internally (as they had not done so before speaking with us) and to call us back if they were not addressed for us to pursue if necessary. None called us back.

During our 2021 visits to custodial facilities (up to the end of June 2021 and the current lockdown) we observed that hand sanitiser was generally available throughout centres.

On 28 September 2021, we were advised by CSNSW:

- CSNSW started supplying additional hand sanitiser to centres in March 2020.
- Non-alcohol based sanitiser is available to inmates in all common areas at all correctional facilities.
- While there were well publicised world-wide accounts of difficulties in sourcing personal protective equipment and sanitiser during the early part of the pandemic in 2020, there was no decision by CSNSW to remove or replace hand sanitiser. In addition to sanitiser in common areas, inmates have access to soap and water in their cells which is an effective cleaning method.
- There have been no internal complaints about sanitiser to the Corrective Services Support Line or centrally to the Executive Services Unit.