



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES
WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services

Strip searching practices in Western Australian prisons

ANZSOC Presentation

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Powers of the Inspector

- *S28 Inspector of Custodial Services Act 2003* authorises the Inspector and their delegates to free and unfettered access to:
 - Documents
 - Data
 - People (including prisoners and young people in custody)
 - Places (prisons, youth detention centre, court custody centres, escort vehicles)

Methodology

- Document reviews
- Data extractions
- Announced visits to 3 Western Australian prisons
- Meetings with departmental staff
- Custodial staff survey
- Literature review of best practice and international standards and principles
- Cross-jurisdictional scan

Strip search processes

- Strip searches can be conducted in two ways:
 - Partially clothed search
 - Removing all clothes at the one time
- Two staff of the same gender are present (with the exception of a medical practitioner)
- Where possible, a strip search should not occur in the presence of other people



Strip searches cause harm

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- International standards seek to largely eliminate strip searches.
- Strip searches conflict with trauma-informed practice.
- Strip searches can result in staff-prisoner conflict, including assault.
- Almost half the formal complaints about strip searching were about adverse effects.



Strip searching is ineffective

Strip searching is ineffective

- Strip searches are very unlikely to find contraband
- Strip searching as a deterrent is unjustified
- Some strip searches appear to be punitive in intent
- Dept. of Justice WA standards recognise the ineffectiveness of strip searching women but departmental policy and the standards conflict
- Staff believe strip searching is effective



Strip searching is routine, excessive,
and rarely driven by intelligence

Routine, excessive and rarely driven by intelligence

- Most strip searches are routine required by policy and inflated by local search strategies
- Women are strip searched less than men
- Some prisoners are searched excessively
- Contract performance indicators lead to higher levels of strip searching
- Visitors to prisons were being searched beyond the policy requirements



Other options are available, but
have not been embraced by the
Department

Alternatives are available but have not been embraced

- The Department has a responsibility to find alternatives to strip searching.
- Transmission x-ray technology is the emerging leader in body scanning tech.
- Costing new technology was not weighed against the cost of strip searches.



The Department of Justice is
reviewing its policy