



Commonwealth
National
Preventive
Mechanism



ACT National
Preventive
Mechanism

Post Visit Report

ACT Watch House and Police Stations

23 May to 23 June 2025

March 2026

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT and recognise any people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Table of Contents

Summary	4
Purpose and scope of the visits	4
What the visits revealed.....	4
Implementation of past suggestions.....	5
Recommendations.....	6
Recommendations	7
All facilities	7
ACT Watch House	10
Woden Police Station	13
Belconnen Police Station.....	13
Tuggeranong Police Station.....	14
Jervis Bay Police Station	14
NPM’s mandate	16
Visit methodology	17
Visiting team	17
Before the visits	17
During the visits.....	18
After the visits	19
Facilities visited	20
ACT Watch House	20
Belconnen Police Station.....	20
Tuggeranong Police Station.....	21
Gungahlin Police Station	21
Woden Police Station	21
Jervis Bay Police Station	21
Demographics	23



Length of detention	23
First Nations people.....	25
Young people.....	26
Other characteristics	27
Infrastructure	29
Implementation of past suggestions	32
The ACT Watch House	35
Material conditions.....	35
Maintenance and hygiene.....	35
Clothing.....	35
Food and drink	39
Menstrual products	39
Showers.....	41
Privacy.....	41
Procedural safeguards.....	44
Rights, entitlements and complaints processes.....	44
Contact with the outside world.....	48
Initial health assessment	49
Healthcare.....	52
Medical observations.....	54
Vital signs monitoring trial.....	55
Mental health assessment.....	55
Medication management	56
Safety, order, discipline and restrictive practices.....	57
Searches.....	57
Strip searches.....	58
Restraints and use of force.....	60
Transportation.....	62



Sallyport deficiencies	62
ACT Corrective Services Court Transport Unit (CTU)	63
Leadership and staffing	64
Watch House Readiness Team	64
Staffing model	64
Promotion of safe and respectful custody	67
Training and professional development	68
ACT police stations	69
Material conditions	69
Woden and Gungahlin Police Stations	69
The alternate Watch Houses	70
Jervis Bay Police Station	77
Procedural safeguards	79
Rights, entitlements and complaints processes	79
Interview safeguards and telephones	79
Healthcare	83
Jervis Bay Police Station	83
Transportation	84
Leadership and staffing	87
Belconnen Police Station	87
Jervis Bay Police Station	90
Agency Response	92



Summary

Purpose and scope of the visits

The ACT National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) and the Commonwealth NPM conducted a joint program of visits to the ACT Watch House, Belconnen Police Station, Gungahlin Police Station, Tuggeranong Police Station, Woden Police Station and Jervis Bay Police Station between 23 May and 23 June 2025.

Staff from the ACT Ombudsman led the visits with the assistance of the Commonwealth NPM and staff from the other ACT NPM bodies (ACT Human Rights Commission and the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services). The visits were conducted under s 8J of the *Monitoring of Places of Detention (Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture) Act 2018* (ACT) and s 8 of the *Ombudsman Act 1976* (Cth).

This was the ACT and Commonwealth NPM's third visit to the ACT Watch House and second visit to the ACT police stations as part of our joint role monitoring places of detention under control of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) within the ACT jurisdiction.

What the visits revealed

The visiting team observed several positive initiatives throughout the visits, such as a trial of ways to monitor the key health signs of people in detention; the introduction of the Watch House Readiness Team; the collaborative relationship between Clinical Forensic Medical Services (CFMS) and the ACT Watch House to provide training and guidance; improved onboarding for new staff; the purchase of safety PPE for staff; and the placement of information posters and flyers in all detention locations.

ACT Policing was very responsive to comments made during the visits and where possible looked to immediately remedy any concerns identified. We also acknowledge the sustained work and commitment from senior management to implement many of the ACT and Commonwealth NPM's past suggestions.

Our visits occurred while remediation works were underway at the ACT Watch House and several other police stations. The NPMs welcome these works. The improvement of the breakout area for staff at the ACT Watch House, the new



charging counter and screening, and the addition of a reasonable adjustment cell¹ (amongst other improvements) will improve experiences for both the staff working in places of detention and the people deprived of liberty.

Nonetheless, it was evident that more work is needed to either bring facilities up to an acceptable standard or in some instances to replace them. Woden and Gungahlin Police Stations are not fit for custodial purposes, and Belconnen and Tuggeranong Police Stations are not suitable as medium to longer-term detention facilities. The latter are of particular concern if the ACT Watch House was to become temporarily inoperable. Suggestions made to remedy infrastructure deficiencies at the Jervis Bay Police Station in 2024 have not been implemented.

The visits also revealed shortcomings in ACT Policing's ability to collect data to identify systemic issues and make improvements in police custody practices. However, partly in response to the announcement of the visits, several new initiatives to improve data use were evident both during the visits and as a result of them.

The visits examined the use of police vehicles for transportation between Stations and the ACT Watch House, finding several deficiencies impacting upon safety and the welfare of both transporting officers and people deprived of liberty.

We observed the majority of interactions between officers and people deprived of liberty to be respectful and dignified. However, some concerns were identified about the use of disparaging humour at one station and through our surveys with people who were recently in police custody.

Implementation of past suggestions

The visiting team assessed the implementation of past suggestions made by the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs in our 2024 reports following visits to these facilities in 2023. We were pleased to observe that ACT Policing has made substantial efforts to address our past suggestions. Of the 53 suggestions made in 2024, we assessed that 26 had been fully implemented, 15 were partially implemented, 11 had not yet been implemented and 1 was superseded.

¹ The reasonable adjustment cell includes modifications to meet accessibility requirements for people who use a wheelchair or have other mobility concerns.



While there has been a focus on the ACT Watch House remediation works, we encourage ACT Policing to also prioritise the infrastructure concerns identified at the other police stations.

We have published a separate report *Assessment of Implementation of Past Suggestions* providing our detailed assessment, which is available on the [ACT NPM website](#).

Recommendations

Following our most recent visits, we have made 30 recommendations:

- 10 across all facilities
- 14 about the ACT Watch House
- 1 about the Woden Police Station
- 1 about the Belconnen Police Station
- 1 about the Tuggeranong Police Station, and
- 3 about the Jervis Bay Police Station.

The recommendations cover a broad range of topics including improvements in data collection and oversight; critical infrastructure enhancements for existing and future policing facilities, important safeguards for the dignity and privacy of people deprived of liberty; safety improvements including further training and the adoption of body scanner technology; reviewing the staffing model to ensure adequate coverage at all times; and addressing transportation vehicle deficiencies.

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs are appreciative of ACT Policing's engagement throughout our visits, and we look forward to engaging constructively on the implementation of these recommendations.



Recommendations

All facilities

Recommendation 1:

ACT Policing improve demographic data collection within police custody for intersectional analysis. Data should identify, to the greatest extent practicable:

- age groupings
- gender
- First Nations people status
- culturally and linguistically diverse status
- disability status
- types of impairment
- people who identify as LGBTIQ+
- average time in custody
- longest time in custody

Recommendation 2:

The Watch House Readiness Team, or another appropriate oversight mechanism, promptly review all instances where a person is deprived of liberty in excess of the legislated maximum, to ensure compliance with the *Corrections Management Act 2007* (ACT) and to identify opportunities for systemic improvement.

Recommendation 3:

ACT Policing continue to work with the ACT Government to ensure that future police custodial facilities, including an alternative Watch House, are designed in a manner that prioritises the human rights and safety of people deprived of liberty and of the staff that work within them.



Recommendation 4:

ACT Policing progress the implementation of any partially implemented or not implemented suggestions from the [2024 Post Visit Summaries report on the ACT Watch House and police stations](#) and the [2024 Post Visit Summary report on the Jervis Bay Police Station](#).

Recommendation 5:

To strengthen practice in the Watch House, ACT Policing continue to invest in and support the Watch House Readiness Team, so that it can support the officers assigned to the Watch House, provide advice and guidance, coordinate and deliver training, review use of force incidents, review strip searches, advise on best practice and undertake audits of the readiness of other stations' watch house facilities.

Recommendation 23:

ACT Policing reviews the interview rooms at all police stations and the ACT Watch House to ensure:

- a) duress alarms are clearly locatable and accessible on the wall near the officer conducting the interview
- b) a landline telephone, preferably a conference phone to enable 3-way conversations, is placed in every interview room
- c) automated electronic signs are placed outside all interview rooms to alert others that an interview is taking place
- d) effort is made to make the interview rooms appear less sterile without compromising safety
- e) interview rooms are inspected on a regular basis to ensure unnecessary loose items are removed.



Recommendation 25:

ACT Policing ensure every vehicle used to convey a person deprived of liberty has audio and visual recording capability.

Recommendation 26:

ACT Policing ensure every vehicle used to convey a person deprived of liberty has aircon/heating capability in the detention pod.

Recommendation 27:

ACT Policing review its fleet of vehicles with the intention of improving the design and safety of all detention pods, including through the possible inclusion of seatbelts, if an appropriate design has been thoroughly tested and is currently in operation in another jurisdiction.

Recommendation 28:

The tailored trauma-informed policing framework that is under development, include consideration of the impact of trauma on ACT Policing members, and how to focus on healthy coping mechanisms and supports for officers so as to reduce the negative impacts of routine exposure to traumatic events.



ACT Watch House

Recommendation 6:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure that underwear is included in the list of standard clothing supplies.

Recommendation 7:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure:

- a) the use of paper/forensic suits due to violent behaviour, other non-compliance or self-harm risk, is an option of last resort, used only where necessary and proportionate, in line with an individualised risk assessment
- b) the decision to place someone in a paper/forensic suit is documented with a clear rationale and reviewed at regular intervals
- c) all reasonable action is taken to ensure a person's dignity, including returning their clothing or providing replacement clothing as soon as possible
- d) an appropriate mechanism is nominated to review all uses of paper/forensic suits at the ACT Watch House; to identify trends and opportunities for systemic improvement.

Recommendation 8:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure:

- a) women are asked about their menstrual needs in private and, where possible, by a female officer, during the reception and lodgement process
- b) when required, women are provided with new menstrual products without request, at least every 6 hours in custody and when released or transferred
- c) disposal of menstrual products is facilitated where possible by a female officer.



Recommendation 9:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to align with the *AFP National Guideline on persons in custody and police custodial facilities'* positive duty on officers to encourage persons deprived of liberty to shower as necessary and to attend to their personal hygiene.

Recommendation 10:

ACT Policing prioritise the installation of privacy screening in the remaining cells at the ACT Watch House and implement privacy squares on the CCTV system to block out footage of a person using the toilet.

Recommendation 11:

ACT Policing improve the provision of information to people deprived of liberty about their rights, entitlements and avenues to make complaints.

Recommendation 12:

ACT Policing improve how it collects and reviews all complaints received from people deprived of liberty at the ACT Watch House to ensure it can identify trends and opportunities for systemic improvement.

Recommendation 13:

ACT Policing consider amending the Watch House Operations Manual and Reception and Lodgement Form to require officers to verbally confirm if a person deprived of liberty has been provided the opportunity to notify a family member or third party about their arrest and detention, and once all necessary information is available, to proactively offer the opportunity to make a call. A record of these interactions should be made.



Recommendation 14:

ACT Policing work with Clinical Forensic Medical Services to produce micro-learning videos for Watch House officers to reinforce their initial training. These micro-learning videos should include information on understanding social determinants of health and culturally capable care.

Recommendation 15:

ACT Policing continues to work with the ACT Government and the ACT Magistrates Court to improve the mental health assessment process to minimise the need for transfers to and from hospital, restraints in a medical setting and unnecessary detention.

Recommendation 16:

ACT Policing work with Clinical Forensic Medical Services to raise awareness among Watch House officers about the process for handling sealed takeaway methadone.

Recommendation 17:

ACT Policing ensure the training package developed for the ACT Watch House includes a module on strip searching. This training should emphasise

- a) the inherently humiliating character of strip searching
- b) that strip searches must be carried out lawfully and professionally by a person of the same gender as the person who is being searched
- c) that strip searches should not be undertaken in the presence or view of a person whose presence is not necessary, unless unavoidable
- d) that strip searches should be undertaken in the designated strip-searching area, unless unavoidable
- e) that accurate records of all strip searches are maintained and include the reason for the search, the results, and the parties involved.



Recommendation 18:

ACT Policing work with the ACT Government to expedite the procurement of body scanner technology at the ACT Watch House.

Recommendation 19:

ACT Policing review the ACT Watch House staffing model to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the ACT Watch House at all times, including for peak periods and if possible, the reintroduction of Protective Services Officers to supplement staffing.

Woden Police Station

Recommendation 20:

ACT Policing officially decommission the holding cells at the Woden Police Station.

Belconnen Police Station

Recommendation 21:

ACT Policing remedy the infrastructure deficiencies that pose a safety risk in the event Belconnen Police Station is required as an alternative Watch House. This includes:

- a) installing shielding to the charging counter similar to that now installed at the ACT Watch House
- b) exploring options to increase the staffing area capacity
- c) locating a dedicated area for strip searching that ensures privacy can be maintained



Tuggeranong Police Station

Recommendation 22:

ACT Policing remedy the infrastructure deficiencies that pose a safety risk in the event Tuggeranong Police Station is required as an alternative Watch House.

This includes

- a) installing privacy screening around the cell toilets to provide privacy from both outside view and cameras but still allowing sight lines to the upper body for officers to maintain visibility for security and safety purposes
- b) installing intercoms in all cells
- c) removing the camera from the visits room to enable confidential discussions with lawyers and/or personal visitors
- d) installing shielding to the charging counter similar to that now installed at the ACT Watch House and ensuring the counter extension is removed
- e) installing privacy screening to the staffing area room to ensure computer screens/white boards cannot be viewed by people deprived of liberty, but of a type which does not obscure officers' line of sight into the cells
- f) rectifying the safety and privacy deficiencies observed with the shower
- g) rectifying the safety deficiencies observed with the medical treatment room.

Jervis Bay Police Station

Recommendation 24:

ACT Policing update the Jervis Bay Person in Custody Handbook to clarify under what authority officers maintain custody of a person deprived of liberty when transferred from the Jervis Bay Police Station to a NSW health facility for medical treatment or assessment.



Recommendation 29:

ACT Policing consider alternatives to transporting, or more efficient ways of managing transport requests when required to transport people deprived of liberty from Jervis Bay Police Station to Canberra.

Recommendation 30:

ACT Policing continue to support the activities undertaken by officers stationed at Jervis Bay within the Wreck Bay and Jervis Bay communities to promote genuine engagement and build on the existing relationships between community and Police; including by increasing opportunities for officers to work with the First Nations Liaison Officers team.



NPM's mandate

The Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen the protections for people deprived of their liberty and potentially vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse. It does not create new rights for people who are detained, rather it seeks to reduce the likelihood of mistreatment. OPCAT combines monitoring at an international level (by the UN Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture) with that of NPMs at a domestic level.

NPMs are independent visiting bodies, established in accordance with OPCAT, to examine the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty, with a view to strengthening their protection against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

An NPM is not an investigative body. The mandate of an NPM working against torture is preventive: it seeks to pro-actively identify patterns and detect systemic risks of torture and related ill-treatment, rather than reacting to complaints.

In July 2018, the Australian Government announced the Commonwealth Ombudsman as the visiting body for Commonwealth places of detention (the Commonwealth NPM). In 2019, amendments were made to the Ombudsman Act Regulations 2017 (Cth) to specifically confer this function on the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

The ACT Custodial Inspector, ACT Human Rights Commission and ACT Ombudsman were nominated to jointly perform the function of the ACT NPM by virtue of a ministerial statement dated 20 January 2022; and later established through the Monitoring of Places of Detention (Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture) Regulation 2024 (ACT), effective 18 September 2024.



Visit methodology

Visiting team

The ACT Ombudsman's Office (as part of the ACT NPM) led visit planning and preparation together with members of the Commonwealth NPM. Other members of the ACT NPM provided staff for the visits with expertise in nursing and custodial settings to supplement the expertise of the visiting team.

Before the visits

ACT Policing were notified that a program of visits would occur across a 2-month period and advised of the specific visit dates apart from one visit to the ACT Watch House, where they were advised that the visit would occur within 3 weeks of the last announced visit (a semi-announced visit).

ACT Policing was advised that the focus of the visits would be on:

- implementation of past suggestions
- material conditions
- procedural safeguards
- healthcare
- safety, order, discipline and restrictive practices
- transportation
- leadership and staffing

ACT Policing was given information on the visits and asked to provide information to assist with visit preparation. Information requested included statistical data from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, relevant policies and procedures and a self-assessment of ACT Policing's implementation of the NPM's past suggestions.

The focus of the visits was additionally informed by information received from local community organisations and statutory office holders. The visiting team invited several local organisations with broad expertise across community legal, drug and alcohol, people with disability, culturally and racially marginalised people and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, to provide submissions, case studies, or share their concerns ahead of the visits.

The Australian Federal Police Association was also invited to provide information.



One meeting with a community organisation was held to discuss their concerns and 1 submission was received in early May.

To assist the visiting team, guidance material was developed to assist with identifying areas of concern. The guidance material was organised into overarching topics, followed by expectations, which are underpinned by a series of sub-topics and indicators. The development of this guidance material was informed by other domestic and international oversight bodies standards, ACT legislation and international standards and guidelines. This material has been published on the [ACT NPM website](#).

During the visits

The NPMs conducted visits to the ACT Watch House, Belconnen Police Station, Gungahlin Police Station, Tuggeranong Police Station, Woden Police Station and Jervis Bay Police Station between 23 May 2025 and 23 June 2025.

On their first visit, the visiting team conducted an entry meeting with the Acting Superintendent, Officer in Charge and a member of the Watch House Readiness Team and Governance and Compliance Support team. Apart from the Acting Superintendent, these 3 members attended all site visits with the NPMs (except the semi-announced visit) and facilitated the visiting teams prompt entry and access to all areas.

At each facility visited, the visiting team undertook a tour of the facilities and holding areas, made observations, and in some cases took measurements of cells and temperature readings.² The team also reviewed transport holding pods, documents and Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) in some instances, as well interviewed officers, nursing staff and cleaning staff.

During the visits to the ACT Watch House, the visiting team observed officers and nursing staff conducting their regular duties while on shift. This included the opportunity to observe the reception and processing of people deprived of liberty, pat searching, the application of de-escalation methods, medical assessment and treatment, the taking of identification material, in cell observations and the transfer of custody to, and transportation of people deprived of liberty by the ACT Corrective Services Court Transport Unit (CTU).

² Measurement taken with a CAT MK210K laser distance measurer and Pinpoint PHT300 Digital Temperature and Humidity Meter.



While recognising the importance of interviewing people deprived of their liberty (if they consent to being interviewed), the NPMs must also operate under the 'do no harm' principle,³ meaning that when monitoring places where people are deprived of their liberty, visiting teams are to act in a way that avoids causing further harm or distress to persons deprived of their liberty, even if it means limiting members' investigation methods or interactions, prioritising the prevention of harm over potential information gathering.

Except for the ACT Watch House, there were no people deprived of liberty present at any of the facilities during the visits. As there were only a small number of people detained at the ACT Watch House during the visits, the team made the decision to not interview anyone to reduce the possible risk of sanctions or reprisals against these individuals.⁴

After the visits

Following the visits, the NPMs made a second request for information and documents to ACT Policing to complement what had been observed and to cross-check the NPMs' understanding. ACT Policing provided the requested information and documents across July to October.

Given the concerns made about interviewing people deprived of their liberty at the ACT Watch House, the NPMs undertook additional visits to the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) and the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre (Bimberi) in August, to survey people who had been detained over the last month about their recent experience of police custody. The NPMs surveyed 23 individuals (13 at AMC; 10 at Bimberi). Eighteen were male; 5 were female; 5 identified as First Nations; 11 as culturally and linguistically diverse; and 5 identified as having a disability.

³ Association for the Prevention or Torture (2004). [Monitoring places of detention: A practical guide](#), 29.

⁴ Association for the Prevention or Torture (2014). [Monitoring Police Custody - A practical guide](#), 60.



Facilities visited

The ACT Watch House and police stations are ACT Policing facilities under the control of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and owned by the ACT Government. The ACT Watch House is part of the Canberra City Police Station which first opened in 1966. The other police stations opened between 1993 and 2012. The police stations are seldomly used for detention and generally only for holding persons awaiting interview for minor offences who are compliant.

ACT Watch House

The ACT Watch House provides a charging and custodial facility that operates 24 hours a day and is the only Watch House in the ACT. It is the main facility where people are deprived of their liberty following arrest. The ACT Watch House contains a total of 28 cells, which can accommodate up to 52 people in detention. It is divided as follows:

- 4 pre-charge cells
- 2 group holding cells able to accommodate up to 20 persons each
- 1 male block of 5 cells and 1 female block of 6 cells
- 6 intoxicated persons cells
- 4 at risk cells (2 x padded and 2 not padded), and
- 1 drug evidence cell

At the time of our visits to the ACT Watch House, remediation work was underway, including the conversion of an existing cell into a reasonable adjustment cell, upgrades to the CCTV system, and the renewal of the charging counter, staffing area, kitchen and medical treatment room.

Belconnen Police Station

The Belconnen Police Station is one of 2 that has been designated backup Watch House facilities in the event the ACT Watch House becomes inoperable for any reason. It is also used as an overflow facility if the ACT Watch House is at capacity.

The Belconnen Police Station contains a separate detention area which is accessed internally by an electronically controlled double door or via a sallyport (garage) area to the rear. There are 5 cells and the sallyport is able to



accommodate 2 to 3 vehicles. It does not have high care accommodation, such as padded cells.

Tuggeranong Police Station

The Tuggeranong Police Station is the second designated backup Watch House. It is also used as an overflow facility if the ACT Watch House is at capacity.

The Tuggeranong Police Station contains 5 cells, which are only used for very short durations. It does not have high care accommodation.

Gungahlin Police Station

Gungahlin Police Station forms part of the Gungahlin Joint Emergency Services Centre, a tri-service emergency services building incorporating elements of the ACT Policing, ACT Ambulance Service (ACTAS) and ACT Fire & Rescue (ACTF&R).

During our 2023 visit, the station had a single cell. At the time of our most recent visit the cell had been removed and the room re-purposed with an administrative workstation. Gungahlin Police Station therefore no longer has the capacity to hold someone in custody.

Gungahlin Police Station is dominated to the rear by residential apartment units that have immediate lines of sight to the entire rear of the station including entry/exit points, which compromises the privacy of people deprived of liberty and victims of crime, particularly victims of sexual crimes. At the time of the recent visit, remediation works were being undertaken to address this concern.

Woden Police Station

The Woden Police Station has a separated detention area containing 5 single cells around a central square with 5 interview rooms, a shower, separate toilet, and a double door sallyport attached. The cell facility has not been in operation for almost a decade. Like Gungahlin Police Station, the facility is dominated by residential apartment units that have immediate lines of sight into the facility's car park.

Jervis Bay Police Station

Facilities at the Jervis Bay Police Station consist of a secure interview room, detention area, sallyport for the police vehicle and 2 cells. One of the cells is



padded and fitted only with a recessed light, intercom and duress button. The second standard holding cell is designed for the short-term detention of up to 2 people but has no capacity to separate people deprived of liberty.

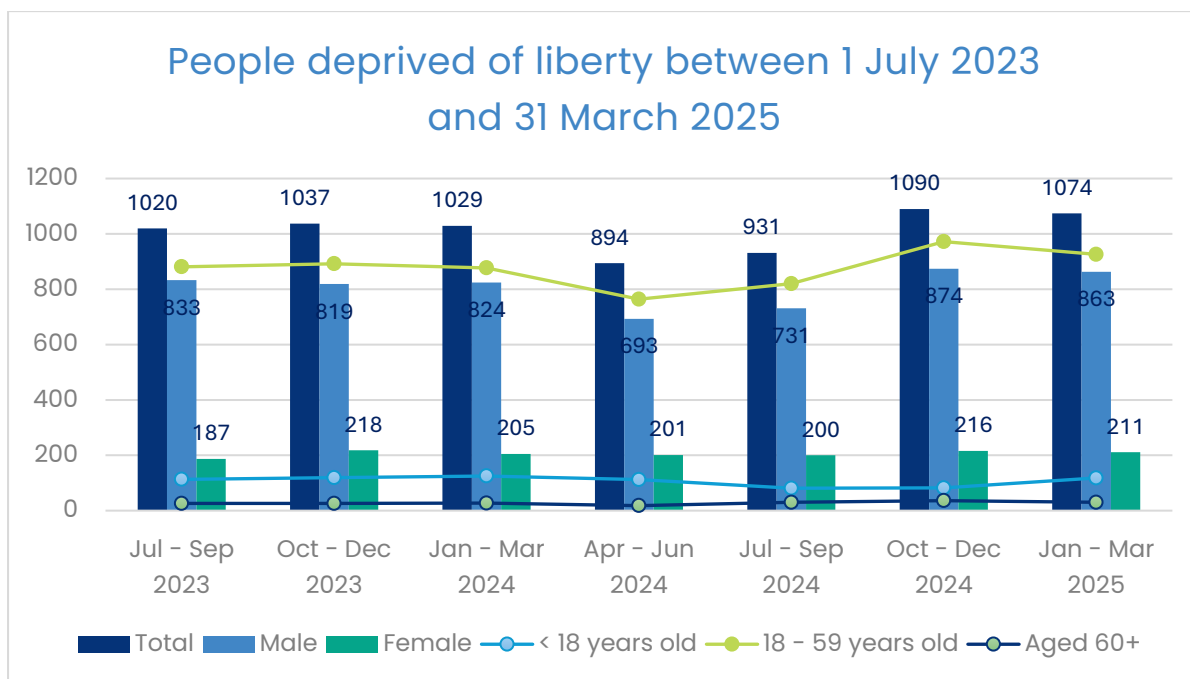
Jervis Bay Police Station is used only for short periods for protective custody, to assess bail or as a last resort until transfer to the ACT Watch House can be facilitated.



Demographics

Data we received from ACT Policing⁵ reveals that from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, 7,075 people were deprived of liberty across all ACT Policing facilities.⁶ Of those people deprived of their liberty, 99.7% were detained at the ACT Watch House, which is consistent with the other police stations being seldomly used for police custody. 1,158 (or 16.4%) people were in protective custody and 5,917 (or 83.6%) had been charged.

Of the people deprived of their liberty, 5,637 (or 79.7%) were male and 1,438 (or 20.3%) were female. The majority of people (6,132 or 86.7%) were aged between 18–59 years old, while those under 18 accounted for 10.6% (750 people) and those over 60 years old accounted only for 2.3% (193 people).



Length of detention

Section 30 of the *Corrections Management Act 2007* (ACT) provides a maximum time limit for detention in a police cell, being 36 hours for an adult and 12 hours for

⁵ Data provided by ACT Policing – 02 May 2025.

⁶ For context, recent data published by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) reveals that in 2024, QPS processed a total of 78,108 admissions through their 63 Watch Houses, equating to approximately 2,066 admissions per Watch House (or just over 50% of the admissions to the ACT Watch House over the same period); see Queensland Police Service (July 2025) [Watch-house Review](#), 4.



a young person. Detention beyond this timeframe may require the transfer of custody to either AMC or Bimberi.

The data from ACT Policing revealed the average time in custody for people over the age of 18 was 10 hours 47 minutes and for those under 18, the average was 4 hours 37 minutes. When asked what was included as 'time in custody' for the purpose of counting length of detention, ACT Policing explained:

Time in custody starts when a person is in 'custody care or control', meaning a person's right to freedom of movement is restricted or removed as a result of dealings with police. Time in custody includes interview and investigation time, transit between police stations and the ACT Watch House, time previously detained at a police station prior to transfer to the ACT Watch House, and time held at a hospital for medical assessment either before transfer to the ACT Watch House or after.

The data provided to us covering the period 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025 advised that the longest single length of detention for an adult was 47 hours and 9 minutes and for a young person was 14 hours and 50 minutes. Given these times exceeded the legislative maximum, we asked ACT Policing to clarify the number of times detention occurred beyond the legislative maximum, the reasons for it having done so and the approval process.

After further investigations, ACT Policing advised that some of the data had incorrectly included instances where a person was transferred to the custody of ACT Corrective Services to attend court and subsequently returned to the Watch House to be released or transported to the AMC. Excluding these circumstances, ACT Policing identified 3 occurrences where the legislative maximum was exceeded. They provided detail on the reasons, approval process and advice on whether the person was transferred into ACT Corrective Services' custody. In all 3 occurrences we found the reasons for exceeding the legislative maximum to be acceptable in the given circumstances.

During our visits to AMC and Bimberi, 6 survey respondents alleged they had been held in custody for longer than the legislated periods. We did not check records to confirm their allegations.

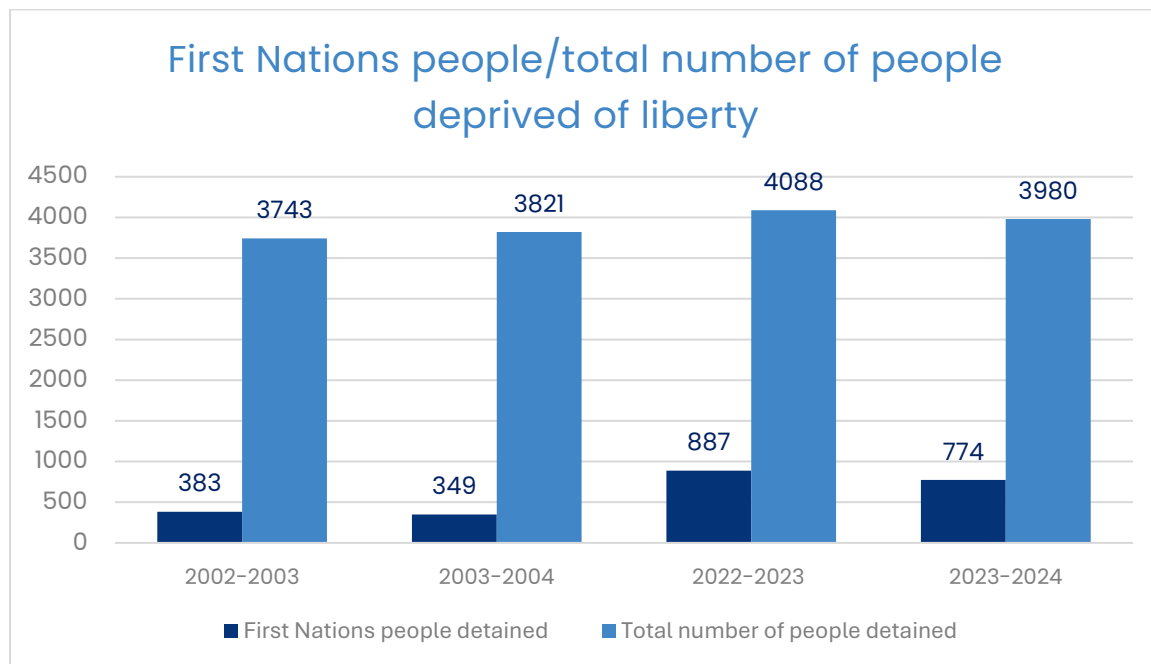
During our visits the NPMs observed ACT Policing members entering data on time of custody, as well as the ACT Watch House staff being aware of the maximum times in custody. However, the data we received in response to our information request was inaccurate, requiring further refinement by ACT Policing to correct. It



was clear that any excess time in custody was not being actively tracked. We believe there is a risk that more people may have overstayed the maximum legislative times in custody and that no one is properly overseeing this.

First Nations people

1,367 (or 19.3%) of the total number of people deprived of liberty for the period 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025 identified as First Nations.



When compared to previous data we received from ACT Policing,⁷ there is a noticeable decline in the total number of First Nations people taken into custody between the 2022-2023 financial year (887 people detained at the ACT Watch House alone) and 2023-2024 financial year (774 people detained across all facilities).

Despite this positive trend, data sets from twenty years earlier demonstrate, for example, that in the 2002-2003 financial year, 383 First Nations people were detained at the ACT Watch House (representing 10.5% of the total admissions) and in the 2003-2004 financial year, 349 First Nations people were detained (representing 9.1% of the total admissions).⁸

⁷ Data provided by ACT Policing – 29 June 2023.

⁸ Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), Appendix 5 Statistical breakdown of persons in custody at the City Watchhouse 2002 to 2007.



The more than doubling of First Nations people taken into police custody over the twenty years may in part be attributable to the 124% increase in the First Nations population in the ACT between 2001 and 2021.⁹ However, given First Nations people represent just 2.1% of the total ACT population¹⁰, there remains a significant and prolonged issue of over-representation of First Nations people taken into police custody.¹¹

In its interim response to the 2025 [Jumbunna Review](#), the ACT Government has reiterated its commitment to reducing the over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice system and committed to establishing an interim Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led justice oversight body to support independent and representative decision-making on the implementation of the Review's recommendations.¹² A number of specific measures by ACT Policing have also commenced to reduce over-representation and embed trauma-informed approaches.¹³

Young people

Between 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, 36 young people were on average detained per month. When compared to previous data we received from ACT Policing,¹⁴ there was an increase in the overall number of young people detained between the 2023-2024 financial year (377 young people detained) and the 2024-2025 financial year (467 young people detained).

The ACT Government has noted that from 1 July 2023 to 30 April 2024, ACT Policing reported 171 apprehensions of people aged under 18 on a 'breach of bail charge'.¹⁵

⁹ ACT Health Directorate (March 2024). [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and demographic profile](#), 15.

¹⁰ ACT Health Directorate (March 2024). [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and demographic profile](#), 12.

¹¹ See Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research (July 2025). [Independent Review into the Over-Representation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System: Final Report](#). University of Technology, Sydney.

¹² ACT Government (September 2025). [ACT Government Interim Response Final Report of the Independent Review into the Over-representation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System: The Jumbunna Review](#), 5, 7.

¹³ ACT Government (September 2025). [ACT Government Interim Response Final Report of the Independent Review into the Over-representation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System: The Jumbunna Review](#), 13-14.

¹⁴ Data provided by ACT Policing – 29 June 2023.

¹⁵ ACT Government (12 June 2024). [ACT Government Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety Inquiry into the Administration of Bail in the ACT](#), 4.



While this data does not span the entire 2023–2024 financial year it does indicate that at least 45% of the total number of detentions related to breach of bail.

In its 2024 Healthy Centre Review of the Bimberi, the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services reported that anecdotal evidence suggested ‘common reasons for young people breaching their bail conditions did not involve threats of safety to alleged victims or interference with witnesses, but rather involved them not residing at their nominated address or not meeting curfew conditions.’¹⁶

Both the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services and the ACT NPM have advocated for reforms to provide ACT Policing with the discretion to grant bail for a young person arrested for breaching bail conditions.¹⁷ The ACT Government is currently undertaking a review of the *Bail Act 1992* (ACT).

Other characteristics

We also requested additional data on the number of people deprived of liberty based on other characteristics such as people identifying as having a disability, medical condition or by trans and gender diverse status. ACT Policing noted it would require manual review to identify and extract this data and was unable to provide it to us.¹⁸

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability emphasised the importance of data collection for undertaking informed and evidence-based policy and decision-making.¹⁹ It noted that in a criminal justice context, ‘data should be ‘disaggregated’, or split into smaller components, as far as possible to enable analysis on groups with intersecting or multiple disadvantages.’²⁰

¹⁶ ACT Inspector of Custodial Services (December 2024). [Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024](#), 99.

¹⁷ ACT Inspector of Custodial Services (December 2024). [Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024](#), 99–100; ACT NPM (13 June 2025). [Review of decision-making criteria in the Bail Act 1992](#), 11–12.

¹⁸ The Commonwealth Ombudsman’s 2007 review of the ACT Watch House also found statistics on people in detention with disabilities were not available; see Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing’s Watchhouse operations](#), 71.

¹⁹ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (September 2023). [Final Report Volume 8: Criminal justice and people with disability](#), 235.

²⁰ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (September 2023). [Final Report Volume 8: Criminal justice and people with disability](#), 234.



Recommendation 1:

ACT Policing improve demographic data collection within police custody for intersectional analysis. Data should identify, to the greatest extent practicable:

- age groupings
- gender
- First Nations people status
- culturally and linguistically diverse status
- disability status
- types of impairment
- people who identify as LGBTIQ+
- average time in custody
- longest time in custody

Recommendation 2:

The Watch House Readiness Team, or another appropriate oversight mechanism, promptly review all instances where a person is deprived of liberty in excess of the legislated maximum, to ensure compliance with the *Corrections Management Act 2007* (ACT) and to identify opportunities for systemic improvement.



Infrastructure

The ACT Government is responsible for providing appropriate facilities and associated infrastructure to enable the provision of policing services by ACT Policing, while ACT Policing is responsible for the management and maintenance of those facilities.

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs recognise that the remediation works underway at the time of our visits were the result of concerted and dedicated efforts by ACT Policing senior management. We very much welcome those improvements, and acknowledge they go towards addressing many of our past suggestions.

Nonetheless, it is evident that more work is needed to either bring facilities up to an acceptable standard or to replace them entirely.

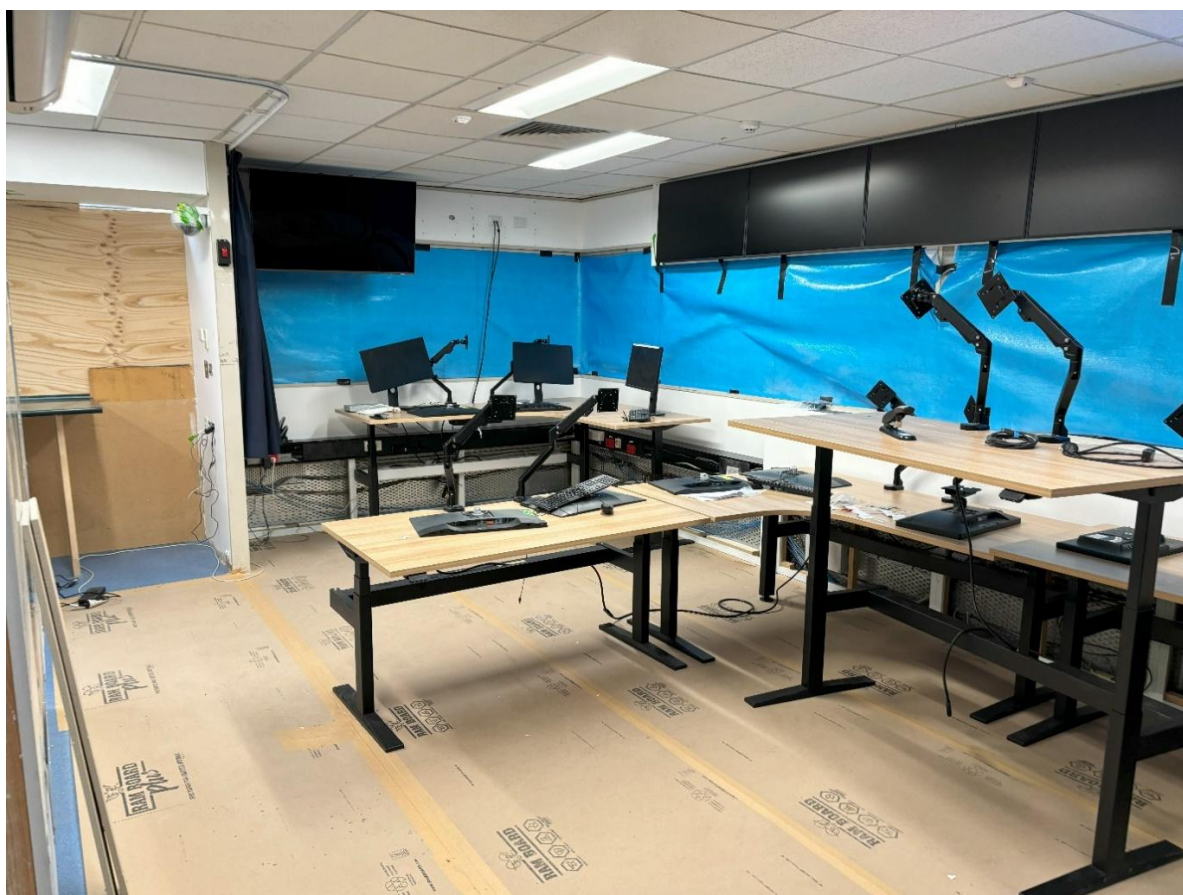


Photo: Remediations underway in the staffing area at the ACT Watch House (13 June)

A 2024 performance audit report by the ACT Audit Office revealed that all of the ACT's policing sites had a condition rating of 'below average' or 'average' and

required immediate or imminent renewal or replacement, to the value of \$7.5 million.²¹

It is our view that there remains a need for a new Watch House. The current one, while improved, has systemic issues (discussed further below) that cannot be remediated. It also remains at risk from its aging infrastructure, as became apparent in November 2025 when a sewage overflow forced its temporary closure.²²

It is also our view that the Woden and Gungahlin Police Stations are not fit for custodial purposes, and we acknowledge that ACT Policing are not currently using these facilities as such. Further, we consider the Belconnen and Tuggeranong Police Stations are not suitable as medium to longer-term detention facilities in the event the ACT Watch House becomes temporarily inoperable.

The ACT Government recognises the Canberra City Police Station needs replacement and in the 2023-24 ACT Budget provided approximately \$3.5 million to enable early planning works.²³ It has additionally committed \$3.7 million in the 2025-26 ACT Budget, for critical infrastructure upgrades including mechanical, electrical, fire and hydraulic systems at the Canberra City Police Station, and planning for new stations (including detailed planning and analysis for future police accommodation in the Woden Patrol Zone, a Molonglo Police Station and identifying a site for a new headquarters and station in the CBD).²⁴

It is important that this planning and analysis meets the operational requirements of ACT Policing in a manner that respects both the human rights and safety of people deprived of liberty and equally of the staff that work with them. As recognised by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADC), 'one cannot expect police officers to have a positive attitude towards prisoner

²¹ ACT Audit Office (2024). [ACT Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report: Management and oversight of ACT Policing services, Report No. 5 / 2024](#), 43.

²² Travers, P (9 November 2025). [Canberra police watch house closed again after sewage 'spewed out all over the place'](#), ABC News.

²³ ACT Government (15 February 2024). [ACT Infrastructure Plan Update City Services, Recreation and Community Facilities](#), 25.

²⁴ ACT Government (2025). [Australian Capital Territory Budget 2025-26 Budget Statements D](#), 40; Bushnell, I (18 June 2025). [ACT Budget: \\$3.7 million to repair failing police stations and plan for new ones](#), Region.



care, if they are required to carry out their duties in substandard and degrading conditions'.²⁵

Planning should at a minimum consider the following issues:

- capacity to separate men from women
- capacity to separate adults from children
- capacity to separate boys from girls
- provision of separate common areas
- access to fresh air
- access to natural light
- impact of continuous lighting of cells at night
- availability of private areas to conduct reception and lodgement assessments
- availability of facilities and telephones to support contact with family
- privacy of toilets and showers
- reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities, including non-physical disabilities
- facilities for staff which reflect respect for them and for the tasks they perform
- availability of body scanner technology
- appropriate facilities for an alternative Watch House in the event the main Watch House is temporarily inoperable.

Recommendation 3:

ACT Policing continue to work with the ACT Government to ensure that future police custodial facilities, including an alternative Watch House, are designed in a manner that prioritises the human rights and safety of people deprived of liberty and of the staff that work within them.

²⁵ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (15 April 1991). [National Report Volume 3, Chapter 24 Custodial Health and Safety, 24.3 Police Custodial Practices and Procedures: The Physical Environment: Cell design](#) [24.3.126].



Implementation of past suggestions

As part of this program of visits, the visiting team assessed ACT Policing's implementation of past suggestions made by the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs in the following Post Visit Summaries (PVS):

- [PVS Report on the ACT Watch House and Police Stations \(24 June 2024\)](#)
- [PVS Report on the Jervis Bay Police Station \(22 October 2024\)](#)

We have published a separate report *Assessment of the Implementation of Past Suggestions* providing our detailed assessment, which is available on our [website](#).

We found that of the 53 past suggestions, 26 had been fully implemented, 15 had been partially implemented, 11 had not been implemented and 1 was superseded.

26 fully
implemented



15 partially
implemented



11 not
implemented



1 superseded



We were pleased to observe that ACT Policing has made substantial efforts to address our past suggestions. Their commitment to improvement was evident through the establishment of the Watch House Readiness Team.

The Watch House Readiness Team is led by a sergeant and has overarching responsibility for supporting operations in the ACT Watch House, including coordinating training for new Watch House staff, checking supplies and operational readiness. The Watch House Readiness Team was closely involved in the ACT Watch House remediation project, which has addressed, or is in the process of addressing, many of the past suggestions.

The Watch House Readiness Team was responsive throughout our visits and when they were able to address issues quickly (for example the provision of underwear), they did so.

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs consider the Watch House Readiness Team an excellent initiative and would encourage ACT Policing to continue the team



and to evolve and embed their processes to ensure that corporate knowledge is not lost and practice in the ACT Watch House is strengthened.

At the ACT Watch House, the visiting team were pleased to find the previously noted suggestion of ensuring a female officer was on shift for every shift (suggestion 19) had become part of the standard staffing. The only suggestions at the ACT Watch House to not have been implemented were about the introduction of personal duress alarms (suggestion 4) and addressing the design deficiencies of the sallyport (suggestion 8). While ACT Policing recognise the sallyport as a vulnerability, they advised that it is unlikely ACT Government funding would be available given the scale of works required and the current consultation on a new Canberra City Police Station and Police Headquarters.

While focus has been on the ACT Watch House remediation project, infrastructure concerns at other police stations have not yet been addressed, with several of those outstanding.

However, the majority of non-infrastructure related suggestions had been progressed, with several able to be fully implemented with only some minor additional work. For example, installing suitable fire extinguisher signs or charts in the Tuggeranong Police Station detention area (suggestion 1 of all facilities); using a consistent and appropriate property locker across the police stations (suggestion 9 of all facilities); updating the Jervis Bay Person in Custody Handbook to specify a minimum time out of cell for people detained over 24 hours (suggestion 10) and a supply of underwear being made available upon request for people deprived of liberty (suggestion 9).

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs will continue to monitor the implementation of these past suggestions.

Recommendation 4:

ACT Policing progress the implementation of any partially implemented or not implemented suggestions from the [2024 Post Visit Summaries report on the ACT Watch House and police stations](#) and the [2024 Post Visit Summary report on the Jervis Bay Police Station](#).



Recommendation 5:

To strengthen practice in the Watch House, ACT Policing continue to invest in and support the Watch House Readiness Team, so that it can support the officers assigned to the Watch House, provide advice and guidance, coordinate and deliver training, review use of force incidents, review strip searches, advise on best practice and undertake audits of the readiness of other stations' watch house facilities.



The ACT Watch House

Material conditions

Maintenance and hygiene

Forensic cleaning in a detention environment is crucial for maintaining hygiene, managing biohazards, mitigating risk, and ensuring the safety of both staff and people deprived of liberty. A clean and well-maintained detention facility can positively influence the psychological well-being of people deprived of liberty and demonstrates a commitment to their well-being and treatment.

In our 2024 report, the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs identified that generally cells are in good condition and appeared well kept, however raised concern about the external cleaning contractors not being trained in forensic cleaning.²⁶

Despite the remediation works, our visiting team again observed the ACT Watch House to be well maintained and clean. We observed cleaning staff undertake forensic cleaning of cells on several occasions. We also observed cleaners all wearing appropriate biohazard Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).

During our visits to AMC and Bimberi to survey people about their recent experiences of police detention, 83% of respondents agreed the physical environment was well maintained and safe. Those that disagreed commented that "sometimes walls dirty", "mattresses not clean", "putrid vans".

We reviewed the contract between ACT Policing and the external cleaning company and confirmed the requirement for forensic cleaning training. The visiting team also noted that cleaning is required on a 7-day basis, and a 2-hour response is required 24 hours a day to attend to the cleaning and removal of bodily fluids and contaminants.

Clothing

Replacement clothes

Our visiting team observed an assortment of grey tracksuit pants and tops, blue t-shirts and thongs in storage. Officers advised us that clothing was generally

²⁶ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 24.



offered to people who arrived at the ACT Watch House soiled or who were not wearing clothing suitable to the conditions, and that clothing is always offered to people attending court. We observed officers offering people clothing.

The visiting team reviewed the Watch House Operations Manual²⁷ and confirmed that clothing can also be brought in by a family member/friend provided it does not have any cords or items that can be used as ligatures or weapons such as ties or shoelaces.

Underwear

When our visiting team asked about stores and supplies of underwear, we were told it was not available. When we further asked about people deprived of liberty menstruating and needing fresh underwear or those who did not have any on to begin with, a sergeant suggested the person could be offered leggings and a menstrual pad.

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs find this solution unsuitable and would be particularly degrading to a person who was menstruating. The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (“The Bangkok Rules”) stipulate that women shall have facilities and materials required to meet women’s specific hygiene needs.²⁸ Additionally, the College of Policing (the professional body for police services in England and Wales), in its professional practice guidance notes ‘[d]etainees should be able to remain clean and comfortable while in custody. Changes of clothing, especially underwear, should be facilitated as required.’²⁹

Our visiting team raised this issue directly with the Watch House Readiness Team during our initial visits. We acknowledge that after initially raising the concern with ACT Policing, they were proactive in addressing our concern and by the final visit to the ACT Watch House had stocked an assortment of underwear.

²⁷ All references to the Watch House Operations Manual made in this report refer to version 1.27 of the Manual which we received from ACT Policing in July 2025.

²⁸ United Nations General Assembly (21 December 2010). [United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders \(the Bangkok Rules\)](#), Rule 5.

²⁹ College of Policing (23 May 2024). [Authorised Professional Practice, Detention and Custody, Detainee Care, Welfare and Safety, Clothing](#).



Recommendation 6:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure that underwear is included in the list of standard clothing supplies.

Paper/forensic suits

The visiting team observed a supply of plastic polymer polypropylene jumpsuits (“paper/forensic suits”) and was advised they were provided to persons deprived of liberty who had clothing seized when there is a risk to officers or the person deprived of liberty due to violent behaviour, other non-compliance or self-harm risk.

The visiting team is concerned that the use of paper/forensic suits may be degrading and compromise the dignity of people deprived of liberty, especially when using the toilet, as the entire suit must be removed—leaving the person exposed to CCTV surveillance.

The Watch House Operations Manual provides limited detail on when a paper/forensic suit should be used, other than outlining procedures for when a person deprived of liberty is required to wear one while attending court. The ACT Chief Magistrate has previously criticised the use of these suits noting the presentation of an individual in court should always consider their entitlement to personal dignity and suggesting if police needed to take a defendant's clothes for whatever reason they should be able to provide a fresh set of clothing.³⁰

Considerable progress has been made in England and Wales to reduce the use of paper/forensic suits in police custody and some forces including the Metropolitan Police Service and Thames Valley, Leicestershire and Kent Police, have removed them entirely.³¹ The United Kingdom’s College of Policing has issued guidance with an emphasis on limiting the use of paper/forensic suits. The guidance states:

³⁰ Andrews, L (17 June 2019). [No 'dignity' in court overalls](#). *The Canberra Times*.

³¹ Independent Office for Police Conduct (August 2023). [Learning The Lessons improving policing policy and practice: Custody](#), Issue 42, 9-8.

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) additionally undertook a pilot project with Dyfed Powys Police aimed at eradicating the problematic use of anti-rip clothing and reducing its use by using observations and effective de-escalation instead. The pilot found that enhanced scrutiny of the use of anti-rip clothing had a positive impact on recording the proportionality and justification for its use. There were also improved reviews of its use, so that people deprived of liberty were given standard custody clothing, or their own clothes as risk reduced; see



If a detainee is believed to be at risk of suicide or self-harm, seizing and exchanging clothing may not remove the risk but may increase the distress caused to the detainee and, therefore, increase the risk of them self-harming. Leaving a detainee in their own clothing can help to normalise their situation. The use of anti-rip clothing because a detainee is not engaging in risk assessment questions is inappropriate. However, a custody officer may use other available risk information to decide the most appropriate way to mitigate any risk. The use of anti-rip clothing should be documented on the custody record with clear rationale.

Constant observation or observation within close proximity may be a more appropriate control measure in these circumstances than anti-rip clothing.

Clothing may be taken from a detainee in the course of an investigation as evidence or for hygiene purposes. In all cases, replacement clothing must be provided. There are various alternatives to the paper suits that are marketed as being safe for detainees who are at risk. No suit is totally safe, although some are more difficult to use in self-harm attempts than others.³²

Recommendation 7:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure:

- a) the use of paper/forensic suits due to violent behaviour, other non-compliance or self-harm risk, is an option of last resort, used only where necessary and proportionate, in line with an individualised risk assessment
- b) the decision to place someone in a paper/forensic suit is documented with a clear rationale and reviewed at regular intervals
- c) all reasonable action is taken to ensure a person's dignity, including returning their clothing or providing replacement clothing as soon as possible

Independent Custody Visiting Association (July 2024). [Use of anti-rip clothing in police custody: an update](#), 1.

³² College of Policing (23 May 2024). [Authorised Professional Practice, Detention and Custody, Detainee Care, Welfare and Safety, Clothing](#); Independent Office for Police Conduct (August 2023). [Learning The Lessons improving policing policy and practice: Custody](#), Issue 42, 9-8.



d) an appropriate mechanism is nominated to review all uses of paper/forensic suits at the ACT Watch House; to identify trends and opportunities for systemic improvement.

Food and drink

Our visiting team observed a variety of frozen meals, drink, bread and condiments readily available in the kitchen area with sufficient fridges and microwaves for heating. All food is prepared by the ACT Police College and vegetarian, vegan, halal and kosher options were available at the time of the visits. We did note that gluten free options were not readily available at the time of our visit, however, we were advised that ACT Policing members will purchase suitable meals or gluten free items from local supermarkets where required.

The visiting team reviewed the Watch House Operations Manual and noted persons deprived of liberty on substantive charges and in cells for a substantive amount of time are entitled to meals. The manual also states the provision of food is at the discretion of officers considering factors like intoxication and safety. Additionally, the manual notes day shift staff are responsible for checking stock, re-ordering as required and ensuring expired food is disposed of.

The visiting team observed officers proactively offering people deprived of liberty food. Additionally, during our visits to AMC and Bimberi, most (87%) survey respondents confirmed they were offered food and drink.

Menstrual products

As noted earlier in the report, the Bangkok Rules require women to be provided with the facilities and materials to meet their personal hygiene needs. On the first visit to the ACT Watch House the visiting team observed only one packet of menstrual pads and tampons in storage. After raising this with ACT Policing on site, an assortment of menstrual products was purchased and observed during subsequent visits to the ACT Watch House and at all other police stations.

The visiting team reviewed the Watch House Operations Manual and noted that menstrual pads, tampons, underwear and discreet menstrual bags are to be made available for persons deprived of liberty who require them. Additionally, disposal is facilitated by an officer who will bring a menstrual disposal bin to the person in custody.



While we recognise the manual does not specify whether the officer should be male or female, we note the Queensland Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce shared the experience of one woman in a Watch House who described having to dispose of used menstrual items in front of male officers as being 'degrading.'³³ Additionally, the Commonwealth Ombudsman's review of the ACT Watch House in 2007 also noted at that time that several female staff members acknowledged that females deprived of liberty 'may feel uncomfortable asking a male staff member for menstrual pads or tampons.'³⁴

The dignity of women, relating to menstrual care in police cells in England and Wales, has been a topic of concerted focus for the ICVA over many years.³⁵ Following incidents of women not being provided with menstrual products or having them removed as a safety precaution, the ICVA initiated a successful campaign to amend legislation in England and Wales to require special provisions for the treatment of menstruating women.

Recommendation 8:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure:

- a) women are asked about their menstrual needs in private and, where possible, by a female officer, during the reception and lodgement process
- b) when required, women are provided with new menstrual products without request, at least every 6 hours in custody and when released or transferred
- c) disposal of menstrual products is facilitated where possible by a female officer.

³³ QLD Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. (2022). [Hear her voice, Report Two, Volume Two Women and girls' experiences across the criminal justice system](#), 490.

³⁴ Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 79.

³⁵ Independent Custody Visiting Association (4 January 2018). [Women Detainees in Police Custody Revision of Code C, Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984](#).



Showers

The Watch House Operations Manual states that at the commencement of the day shift, people deprived of liberty should be woken and provided with access to the showers, time permitting. The manual also states that specific consideration be given to those who have soiled themselves prior to being lodged at the ACT Watch House.

During our visits to AMC and Bimberi, 9 survey respondents indicated they were not offered a chance to shower, and most did not know it was an option.

While the manual states showering is to occur 'time permitting', the *AFP National Guideline on persons in custody and police custodial facilities* (the AFP National Guidelines) places a proactive duty on officers stating they must encourage persons deprived of liberty to shower as necessary and to attend to their personal hygiene.

During our visit, we did not observe anyone using a shower, and conversations with officers on duty suggested that showers were offered by exception and rarely. As adults can be held lawfully in the Watch House for up to 36 hours, and time of detention exceeding 24 hours is not uncommon when the arrest occurs over the weekend, the NPMs consider there is an opportunity for improvement.

Recommendation 9:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to align with the *AFP National Guideline on persons in custody and police custodial facilities'* positive duty on officers to encourage persons deprived of liberty to shower as necessary and to attend to their personal hygiene.

Privacy

One of our most significant concerns was the lack of privacy for persons deprived of liberty while using the toilet. The visiting team found some, but not all cells contained privacy screening and, even where it was present, toileting was still observable under CCTV coverage.

During our visits to AMC and Bimberi, when asked whether security, dignity and privacy were provided for, a couple of respondents specifically raised concerns about their privacy not being safeguarded because toileting was captured by the CCTV.



The Commonwealth Ombudsman's review of the ACT Watch House in 2007 also found

the lack of privacy, especially when cells are constantly monitored through CCTV, is of concern. The vast majority of staff working in, or passing through, the Watchhouse is male. In our view it is inappropriate for detainees, females particularly, to be on full view when engaged in intimate, personal activity.³⁶



Photo: The new toilet including grab rail and privacy screening within the reasonable adjustment cell at the ACT Watch House (4 September)

In relation to CCTV coverage, the visiting team was able to observe persons deprived of liberty using the toilet on the large monitors in the staffing area. The visiting team also noted the presence of multiple workers moving in and out of the staffing area to undertake the remediation works.

When we asked why privacy screening had not been installed in all cells, a sergeant stated that it was a safety measure due to people deprived of liberty

³⁶ Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 55.

being able to secrete items from their body cavities, which may result in incidents of self-harm or harm to others. The visiting team notes this is the same reasoning provided to the Commonwealth Ombudsman in 2007.³⁷

The visiting team asked if ACT Policing had considered privacy squares on the CCTV system, which would allow visibility of the top half of a person while they are toileting while safeguarding their privacy and dignity. A sergeant advised us they were not aware if ACT Policing had previously considered the option.

In its review of Queensland Watch Houses, QPS noted '[t]o ensure privacy for prisoners, some watch-houses implement privacy squares on CCTV systems to block out footage of a prisoner using the toilet.³⁸ QPS went on to recommend immediate remediation work be undertaken to address its Watch House's privacy concerns.³⁹

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs acknowledge there is some risk associated with providing privacy screens if people deprived of liberty are determined to injure themselves. However, providing a reasonable assessment of the individual's risk of self-harm is made on arrival, and appropriate observations are kept, the risk is minimal and the benefit in terms of preservation of dignity and privacy is considerable.⁴⁰

Recommendation 10:

ACT Policing prioritise the installation of privacy screening in the remaining cells at the ACT Watch House and implement privacy squares on the CCTV system to block out footage of a person using the toilet.

³⁷ Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 55.

³⁸ Queensland Police Service (July 2025). [Watch-house Review](#), 12.

³⁹ Queensland Police Service (July 2025). [Watch-house Review](#), 15.

⁴⁰ Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 55.



Procedural safeguards

Rights, entitlements and complaints processes

Information about rights

In our 2024 report, the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs identified deficiencies in information being provided to people deprived of liberty regarding their right to complain about their treatment or how to go about making a complaint.⁴¹

The visiting team reviewed the Watch House Operations Manual and found some processes in place for ensuring people deprived of liberty were informed of their rights and officers were informed of their responsibilities when taking complaints.

We observed that ACT Policing has now placed information posters in all cells and common areas outlining rights and entitlements for people deprived of liberty and providing contact details for the ACT Ombudsman, Aboriginal Legal Service ACT/NSW, Legal Aid ACT and the ACT NPM. When the visiting team noted it was difficult to read information on the posters that were A4 in size, ACT Policing immediately rectified this by replacing the posters with A3 versions.

A post custody flyer is to be provided with the property of people deprived of liberty on their release or transfer from the ACT Watch House. The visiting team reviewed the flyers, which are available in English, Punjabi, Chinese, and Vietnamese, with additional languages printable upon request.

Despite these positive developments, during our visits to AMC and Bimberi we received mixed responses on rights, entitlements and complaints. 67% of respondents confirmed that the reason they were in custody was explained to them and 65% said their rights were explained to them. However, no respondent indicated they were sure that they could make a complaint and over 90% said they were not provided with any information on how to make complaints. While some respondents indicated they did not want to make complaints, others said they did not know it was possible, and one indicated it would "fall on deaf ears".

While we certainly acknowledge the positive developments, the survey results demonstrate ongoing and more proactive measures are required by ACT Watch

⁴¹ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 22–23.



House officers to inform people deprived of liberty about their rights in custody as well as the complaints mechanisms available to them.



Photo: An information poster within a cell at the Watch House (23 May)

Recommendation 11:

ACT Policing improve the provision of information to people deprived of liberty about their rights, entitlements and avenues to make complaints.

Complaints analysis

The visiting team requested data from ACT Policing about complaints made by persons deprived of liberty in the ACT Watch House and other police stations. ACT Policing advised us that their existing data could not be filtered to cases relating to an arrest or a person's custody. Providing the data would require manual review of each complaint to extract the relevant information.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman's review of the ACT Watch House in 2007 noted then that '[n]o formal structures are in place to enable Watchhouse management to use complaint information to improve performance across the Watchhouse; or to inform governance and training requirements'⁴²

It appears to the visiting team that the deficiencies in the way in which complaints data is captured would suggest that such data is still being underutilised for its potential to provide valuable insight and an early warning of deficiencies that need to be addressed if more serious problems are to be avoided.

Recommendation 12:

ACT Policing improve how it collects and reviews all complaints received from people deprived of liberty at the ACT Watch House to ensure it can identify trends and opportunities for systemic improvement.

Reporting complaints

The Watch House Operations Manual and the *AFP National Guideline on complaint management and resolution of grievances* set out the procedures for ACT Policing to follow when a complaint is raised by a person deprived of liberty. At the time a complaint is made, officers are required to make an official record of the request and prior to release from custody, confirm that the person would like to proceed with their complaint.

⁴² Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 90.



The *Australian Federal Police Act 1979 (Cth)* stipulates that a complaint relating to a conduct or practice issue can be made orally or in writing either expressly or in a manner in which the information given necessarily implies that he or she wishes to be kept informed of the action taken in relation to the issue.⁴³ Depending on its nature, some complaints, such as matters arising from the misunderstanding of the facts, law or police procedure can be resolved informally. Complaints of a more serious nature must be dealt with formally and entered into the Workplace Issues and Complaints Resolution (WICR) System.

While at the ACT Watch House, the visiting team observed the reception of a person deprived of liberty who alleged their arresting officers had intentionally slammed the brakes of the vehicle causing them injury and requested the video footage from the transport vehicle. Following the visit, we requested documentation from ACT Policing to confirm whether the complaints process had been followed. The records we reviewed did not demonstrate at any time during custody that the allegations made were treated as a complaint. At the time of the incident the arresting officers informed the Custody Sergeant that the abrasion was allegedly self-inflicted, and this was noted throughout the custody records.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman's review of the ACT Watch House in 2007 identified that '[t]he demeanour of a detainee when seeking to complain may influence how the request is handled. However, the fact that a detainee is angry and/or intoxicated does not affect the right to complain and does not justify staff in ignoring the request.'⁴⁴

While acknowledging the person deprived of liberty displaying a range of behaviours during their time in custody, it was clear to the visiting team that they intended their allegation to be taken seriously, particularly as they had requested footage. Given the allegation related to a potential misconduct issue meant it was not a matter that could be dealt with informally and required mandatory entry into the WICR system.

We acknowledge that after raising the matter with ACT Policing it was referred to the WICR Team for further investigation.

⁴³ *Australian Federal Police Act 1979 (Cth) Part V, Division 2, s40SA (2) and (3).*

⁴⁴ Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 90.



Contact with the outside world

The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) notes that ‘the right to have a family member or third party notified about the fact of arrest, detention, and/or transfer, and about the place of detention, constitutes an essential safeguard against ill-treatment and incommunicado detention.’⁴⁵

The AFP National Guidelines stipulate that a person deprived of liberty may make a request to communicate with a legal practitioner and/or a relative or friend. Where requested, such facilities must be made available as soon as is practicable and cannot be denied except on a limited number of grounds outlined in s 23L of the *Crimes Act 1914* (Cth). The Watch House Operations Manual also states that legitimate requests to notify someone will be honoured, where possible and practical. However, investigating officials have primary responsibility to provide these phone calls, not the Watch House.

Both documents place the onus on people deprived of liberty to request a telephone call rather than it being proactively offered to them by officers.

The visiting team observed that telephone calls were not routinely offered during the reception and lodgement process. The *Reception and Lodgement Form* additionally does not require an officer to ask the person deprived of liberty if they have had the opportunity to notify a family member or third party of their detention (except for young people).

When asked why this was the case, one of the sergeants informed us that Watch House officers do not know the details of a case on arrival and can not be sure if it is appropriate for the person deprived of liberty to call certain people – which is why responsibility is placed on the investigating officials.

While understanding the initial reluctance of Watch House officers to offer telephone calls until further information is provided by the investigating officials; there is no impediment to officers asking persons deprived of liberty if they have already had the opportunity to make a call during the reception and lodgement process; and to then to proactively offer the opportunity to make a call later when the necessary information is available.

⁴⁵ Association for the Prevention of Torture (2004). [Monitoring places of detention: A practical guide](#), 126.



During our visits to AMC and Bimberi, only 54.4% of survey respondents stated they were provided an opportunity to make a phone call to notify someone that they had been detained.

Recommendation 13:

ACT Policing consider amending the Watch House Operations Manual and Reception and Lodgement Form to require officers to verbally confirm if a person deprived of liberty has been provided the opportunity to notify a family member or third party about their arrest and detention, and once all necessary information is available, to proactively offer the opportunity to make a call. A record of these interactions should be made.

Initial health assessment

The RCIADC noted the reception process 'provides a unique opportunity for observation and evaluation of the physical and mental state of the prisoner on a one-to-one basis.'⁴⁶ Additionally, while officers are not expected to diagnose a person deprived of liberty's health conditions upon reception:

they do have certain responsibilities which must be discharged. Their job is to make a preliminary assessment of the prisoner's mental and physical state on the basis of known information about that prisoner's health, on their own observations and the application of common sense. It is on the basis of this assessment that decisions such as whether the person requires professional medical attention, special supervision or transfer to a more appropriate facility must be made.⁴⁷

When a person deprived of liberty arrives at the ACT Watch House, the Custody Sergeant conducts a reception and lodgement questionnaire, which contains a number of health and welfare related questions (designed in consultation with the Director of CFMS). If medical conditions, medications or drug/alcohol use are

⁴⁶ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (15 April 1991). [National Report Volume 3, Chapter 24 Custodial Health and Safety, 24.3 Police Custodial Practices and Procedures: Reception Procedures: The Importance of Assessment](#) [24.3.5].

⁴⁷ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (15 April 1991). [National Report Volume 3, Chapter 24, 24.3 Police Custodial Practices and Procedures: Reception Procedures: The Importance of Assessment](#) [24.3.4].



identified, the sergeant contacts the nurse from CFMS to conduct a comprehensive health assessment.

If onsite, the nurse checks the Digital Health Record (DHR), which records all interactions between a person and ACT public health services and attends to the person deprived of liberty. If a nurse is not onsite, the Custody Sergeant calls them, DHR records are remotely checked, and a decision is made that:

- no action is required
- an onsite visit is required
- the information/conditions disclosed by the person deprived of liberty requires an ambulance (ACTAS) to be called.

If a person deprived of liberty appears acutely unwell on arrival to the ACT Watch House, the Custody Sergeant can decline to accept the person deprived of liberty, and they will be transferred to the Canberra Hospital.

To assist officers when a nurse is not onsite, a list of conditions which the nurse should always be called about (e.g. a head injury) is located at the Custody Sergeant's desk. There is also a Case Management Register which list "regulars" to the ACT Watch House who have very complex health histories – the nurse will always be called if one of the regulars is brought in.

The visiting team observed the reception and lodgement process on a number of occasions and found the process involved a number of officers (arresting officers and Watch House officers) being present in and around the charging counter. On some occasions the Custody Sergeant and 4 other officers were present with additional Watch House officers within hearing and visual distance (noting the temporary location of the charging counter at the time).





Photo: The temporary charging counter used while remediation works were underway at the ACT Watch House (23 May)

The design of and lack of space within Watch Houses in Queensland has recently been assessed by both QPS and the Queensland Inspector of Detention Services as leading to a lack of privacy during the reception and lodgement process. Both have found this in turn is likely to impact on the truthfulness of answers provided.⁴⁸

QPS has recognised this lack of privacy

as inadequate, with cultural issues, such as gratuitous concurrence (a communication style, common amongst First Nations peoples, whereby a person appears to agree with everything said to them, even where they do not agree or do not understand the question. This can manifest in saying 'yes' to all questions asked), not properly recognised in the questions asked or the responses received.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Queensland Inspector of Detention Services (September 2024). [Cairns and Murgon watch-houses inspection report. Focus on detention of children](#), 41, 42.

⁴⁹ Queensland Police Service (July 2025). [Watch-house Review](#), 10.

The concerns identified by the visiting team due to the temporary location of the charging counter at the time, will be ameliorated by the reception and lodgement process returning to the remediated charging counter.

ACT Policing is reminded to ensure the privacy of people deprived of their liberty is safeguarded during the reception and lodgement process. This includes by ensuring that the number of officers present is limited to that which is strictly necessary to maintain safety.

Healthcare

Watch House officers are provided basic life support training and can, if necessary, administer Naloxone (an opioid antagonist medication that reverses or reduces the effects of opioids by restoring breathing after an overdose).

Primary responsibility for health care at the ACT Watch House is provided by CFMS which is part of Canberra Health Services (CHS). CFMS is separate from Justice Health Services (JHS).

A nurse is onsite at the ACT Watch House:

- Monday – Wednesday: 5:00pm – 9:00pm
- Thursday – Saturday: 9:00pm – 6:30am
- Sunday: 3:30pm – 12.00am

Nurses and doctors are additionally available on a rotational on call basis at all times outside of these hours.

Research suggests that people in police custody have significant health complexities with higher rates of mental illness, substance dependence and communicable diseases than the broader community. In addition, they commonly present with acute exacerbations of chronic conditions and may also be acutely injured, intoxicated and/or distressed owing to the circumstances surrounding their detention, which may mask symptoms or hinder timely health assessment.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Crilly, J. et al. (28 August 2022). [Health care in police watch-houses: a challenge and an opportunity](#). *The Medical Journal of Australia*, Volume 217(6), 287–289.



According to data received from ACT Policing,⁵¹ between 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, CFMS medically reviewed 1,087 people deprived of liberty, referred 188 people to ACTAS and made 15 mental health referrals.

The mere fact that at least 15.4% of the people deprived of liberty across the data period required a medical review underscores the importance of a permanent medical presence at the ACT Watch House. The RCIADC also recognised that ‘the assessment of prisoners and the identification of those at risk will be greatly enhanced’ by ‘having a permanent medical (or nursing) presence in all major police lockups.’⁵²

Further, we note that during our visits to AMC and Bimberi, 7 survey respondents (64%) of the 11 that considered they required medical attention at the ACT Watch House, alleged they were not provided with it at all, or only after a significant delay.

While this anecdotal evidence cannot suggest a pattern, it is important to emphasise that ‘watch-house detention provides a unique opportunity to intercept a vulnerable, complex and otherwise hard-to-reach population, and identify unmet health needs.’⁵³

The visiting team acknowledges that Watch House officers now undertake some health training from CFMS on induction and this has led to an improvement in officers recognising medical conditions early. Officers would benefit however from additional health training, which should include an understanding of social determinants of health and culturally capable care.

Recommendation 14:

ACT Policing work with Clinical Forensic Medical Services to produce micro-learning videos for Watch House officers to reinforce their initial training. These micro-learning videos should include information on understanding social determinants of health and culturally capable care.

⁵¹ ACT Policing caveat this data and note that it may not capture all detained people who received a medical review while in custody at ACT Policing facilities or prior to arrival at an ACT Policing facility.

⁵² Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (15 April 1991). [National Report Volume 3, Chapter 24 Custodial Health and Safety, 24.3 Police Custodial Practices and Procedures: Reception Procedures: Access to Medical Support](#) [24.3.16].

⁵³ Crilly, J. et al. (28 August 2022). [Health care in police watch-houses: a challenge and an opportunity](#), *The Medical Journal of Australia*, Volume 217(6), 287–289.



Medical observations

Apart from recognising the importance of the role of officers in initial health assessments, the RCIADC noted that 'responsible officers must then observe the prisoner closely for any changes in his or her condition and continually re-assess the prisoner's health and welfare needs. The duty to assess is a continuing one.'⁵⁴

The visiting team reviewed CFMS Clinical Treatment Protocols, which outline monitoring requirements for specific conditions e.g. if a person deprived of liberty has experienced a recent head injury, 4 hours of onsite monitoring by the nurse is required.

As noted earlier in the report, the visiting team observed the reception of a person deprived of liberty who reported an abrasion to their forehead following transportation in the transport vehicle. The nurse conducted a comprehensive health assessment and enacted the head injury protocol in compliance with the protocol. 15-minute observations for the first hour then 30-minute observations were conducted by police and 30-minute observations by the nurse for 4 hours. The Digital Health Record (DHR) was also reviewed to ascertain a medical history, and a mental health diagnosis was confirmed, with a summary of advice provided to the officers.

The visiting team observed the person deprived of liberty displaying a range of behaviours during their time in custody. At all times, the nurse and officers of the ACT Watch House acted professionally, conducted physical checks while engaging positively with the person deprived of liberty and maintained constant monitoring via the CCTV. The person deprived of liberty was offered warm clothing, blankets and drinks on several occasions.

At the time of the visits, the medical treatment room where the nurse is usually stationed was not in use as it was undergoing remediation work and would be refitted with input from CFMS. In the interim, the nurse was stationed with the officers in the temporary staffing area and had access to an emergency trolley that included an automated external defibrillator (AED), Oxygen, suction, nasopharyngeal airways, Guedel airways and Laryngeal mask airways.

⁵⁴ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (15 April 1991), [National Report Volume 3, Chapter 24, 24.3 Police Custodial Practices and Procedures: Reception Procedures: The Importance of Assessment](#) [24.3.4].



Vital signs monitoring trial

The visiting team was informed by ACT Policing that they will be commencing a vital signs monitoring trial in partnership with CHS and Australian National University (ANU) academics. Vital signs monitoring is non-invasive and uses radar technology fitted within a ceiling light fitting to allow for remote monitoring of heart rate and respirations. The technology will be based on that currently implemented at the Silverwater Correctional Complex in NSW.

We were advised that generic monitoring parameters will be set by CFMS, based on current understanding of the impact on vital signs of drugs commonly used in the ACT. If vital signs fall outside of the prescribed parameter, an alarm will sound. The trial will take place in the 5 'at-risk' cells and will run for 6-12 months. An evaluation of the trial will be co-published with CHS and ANU.

ACT Policing noted this will be the first time technology of this kind will be used in a Watch House setting in Australia and emphasised its importance in early intervention and the prevention of deaths in custody.

Positively, ACT Policing proactively noted the possible risks of the technology included over-reliance, reduced in-person checks, and alarm fatigue. While the visiting team welcomes the introduction of technology as an aide, we emphasise that it should not replace physical checks. As also noted by the RCIADC:

Mere visual surveillance from a distance should in no circumstances be considered as sufficient ... [it is] important that the checking include some active personal interaction by way of greeting and conversation, with some inquiry made as to the prisoner's health and needs ... This emphasis on the human element of contact with persons in custody is, in my view, of utmost importance.⁵⁵

Mental health assessment

Concerns regarding the process for conducting assessments under the *Mental Health Act 2015* (ACT) were raised with the visiting team by both officers and CFMS staff.

⁵⁵ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (15 April 1991). [National Report Volume 3, Chapter 24, 24.3 Police Custodial Practices and Procedures: Supervision and Monitoring Issues: The Nature and Frequency of Cell Checks](#) [24.3.65 and 24.3.66].



Under current arrangements, a person deprived of liberty is transferred to ACT Corrections to be taken to Court for their bail hearing, at which point the Magistrate may order a forensic mental health assessment before the person is released. The person is then transferred back to the ACT Watch House for officers to escort the person to Canberra Hospital, where they may wait, generally handcuffed, for several hours for an assessment.

Once the assessment is completed, they must be escorted back to the ACT Watch House and then re-presented to a Magistrate for either bail or a Forensic Mental Health Order. If the person deprived of liberty is returned to the ACT Watch House after 2pm, they will then spend the night in the ACT Watch House.

Current practice also requires officers to be taken from the ACT Watch House or other duties to perform these tasks which take significant amounts of time.

The visiting team were advised ACT Policing and other stakeholders have initiated a workshop aimed at streamlining and improving the efficiency of this process. ACT Policing would prefer for assessments to be conducted at the ACT Watch House, so people do not have to be moved back and forth resulting in unnecessary transportation and searching.

Recommendation 15:

ACT Policing continues to work with the ACT Government and the ACT Magistrates Court to improve the mental health assessment process to minimise the need for transfers to and from hospital, restraints in a medical setting and unnecessary detention.

Medication management

Medications are stored in a locked cupboard, and the ACT Watch House has an agreement in place with the Canberra Hospital and Northbourne Pharmacy for the provision of medication for those whose medical records are held in the DHR.

If a person deprived of liberty brings in their own personal medications, which are appropriately packaged and labelled, these medications are kept in the locked cupboard. If the medication is low risk e.g. an antibiotic, the nurse will give the officers instructions about when the medication is to be administered. If the medication is high risk e.g. insulin, or a drug of potential addiction, the nurse will attend to administer the medication as needed.



If a person deprived of liberty says they are taking medications regularly but does not have their medications with them, the nurse confirms this information from DHR or by contacting the person deprived of liberty's regular pharmacy, then the doctor prescribes the medications for use in the ACT Watch House. The nurse can also prescribe limited medications under standing orders.

If a person deprived of liberty is on methadone and brings in their prescribed, sealed takeaway dose, the methadone will be administered by the nurse as prescribed. However, if a person deprived of liberty appears intoxicated/drug affected, methadone will not be administered. Methadone is not routinely sourced if the person deprived of liberty does not bring it in with them. The Visiting team notes that while nursing staff were clear on the ability to administer methadone, officers were less clear about the process for handling sealed takeaway methadone.

Recommendation 16:

ACT Policing work with Clinical Forensic Medical Services to raise awareness among Watch House officers about the process for handling sealed takeaway methadone.

Safety, order, discipline and restrictive practices

Searches

The AFP National Guidelines stipulate that a person deprived of liberty must be thoroughly searched before placement in a holding room or cell. The visiting team observed that a pat down search is always conducted at the ACT Watch House during the reception and lodgement process.

In all observable cases the search was undertaken in line with the requirements of the AFP National Guidelines and the Watch House Operations Manual and conducted in a dignified manner (e.g. women were searched by women officers, men by men, all searches were recorded by CCTV and gloves were worn by officers in all cases).

No survey respondents raised concerns about searches during our visits to AMC and Bimberi. All respondents confirmed they were searched by an officer of the same sex.



Strip searches

Strip searches may be conducted in the ACT Watch House under the *Corrections Management Act 2007* (ACT) (CM Act), or the *Crimes Act 1900* (Cth). Strip searches under the CM Act are conducted in most cases to mitigate or respond to a risk to personal safety due to self-harm. Under the Crimes Act, they can be used for the purposes of locating evidential material or a seizable item. In every case a search must have approval from a member of the rank of Superintendent or above.

Data

Prior to the commencement of the visits, data was requested from ACT Policing on the number of strip searches that had occurred between 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025. They advised that only 2 incidents occurred at the ACT Watch House during this period. However, ACT Policing later identified that their record-keeping procedures meant strip searches could be recorded a number of ways and as such, accurate data would require manual interrogation of each record. Through use of force reports the visiting team identified an additional strip search that had occurred at the ACT Watch House.

The visiting team found most officers were unable to recall a time they were involved in a strip search, and so are comfortable that they occur rarely. However, they do occur, and given their highly intrusive nature they deserve appropriate oversight.

During our visit, ACT Policing undertook to update the Watch House Operations Manual and introduce a training package to stipulate a single and reliable method for recording strip search incidents moving forward. Additionally, the Watch House Readiness Team has been tasked to monitor strip search incidents to ensure they are appropriately reviewed by a Custody Sergeant.

Conduct of strip searches

The visiting team reviewed all documentation and CCTV footage relating to the 3 identified strip searches and found that each search appeared to be necessary in the circumstances.

In one case, it appeared that effective communication from officers resulted in a strip search in which the person deprived of liberty was cooperative, treated with dignity and minimal physical contact was made by the officers.



In the other cases, there was no apparent effort to relocate the person deprived of liberty to the designated strip-searching area (with no CCTV coverage for privacy). There was minimal negotiation with the person deprived of their liberty about assisting with/complying with the search. In both of these cases, there were female officers present despite the persons deprived of liberty being male.

Recommendation 17:

ACT Policing ensure the training package developed for the ACT Watch House includes a module on strip searching. This training should emphasise

- a) the inherently humiliating character of strip searching
- b) that strip searches must be carried out lawfully and professionally by a person of the same gender as the person who is being searched
- c) that strip searches should not be undertaken in the presence or view of a person whose presence is not necessary, unless unavoidable
- d) that strip searches should be undertaken in the designated strip-searching area, unless unavoidable
- e) that accurate records of all strip searches are maintained and include the reason for the search, the results, and the parties involved.

Alternatives

While strip searching may be required in some circumstances to mitigate risks, the recent QPS review of Queensland Watch Houses recognised they can be ‘intrusive and undignified, especially for women and girls’⁵⁶ and recommended the trial of a body scanner at one of its facilities.⁵⁷

ACT Policing was asked about whether they had also explored the introduction of non-invasive search technology such as body scanners and indicated they were in a scoping phase.

In its 2024 Healthy Centre Review of the Bimberi, the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services recommended the procurement of body scanners be expedited, including at the ACT Watch House⁵⁸, based on ‘an emerging acceptance in international human rights practice about the harmful impact of strip searching,

⁵⁶ Queensland Police Service (July 2025) [Watch-house Review](#), 11.

⁵⁷ Queensland Police Service (July 2025) [Watch-house Review](#), 11.

⁵⁸ ACT Inspector of Custodial Services (December 2024). [Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024](#), 73.



lack of evidence that it makes places of detention more secure and availability of technological alternatives.⁵⁹

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs support this recommendation noting the use of alternative technology-enabled search methods is a safer and more effective means of detection.

Recommendation 18:

ACT Policing work with the ACT Government to expedite the procurement of body scanner technology at the ACT Watch House.

Restraints and use of force

In our 2024 report, the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs identified deficiencies in the availability of emergency staff PPE and in defensive tactics training focused on techniques that prioritise safety and minimise use of force. It was noted that a

[I]ack of appropriate response equipment and training may lead to incidents becoming unnecessarily drawn out resulting in preventable injury to staff and people in detention alike.⁶⁰

The visiting team observed PPE has since been purchased and is now accessible for officers to assist in resolving incidents quickly whilst lessening injuries to people deprived of liberty and staff. The visiting team also confirmed that approved onsite restraints included handcuffs, shields and Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) foam.

Additionally, Watch House officers now receive training at induction on in-cell extraction/insertions, vehicle extraction and shield use. ACT Policing has also developed 3 micro learning refresher videos on extractions from a standard or padded cell with or without the use of OC foam that our visiting team reviewed.

During our visits to AMC and Bimberi, 36% of survey respondents expressed concerns with use of force used against them, ranging from handcuffs being too tight through to being 'slammed to the ground', having their head 'smashed down', being 'roughly thrown' into a police vehicle and rough driving. These were

⁵⁹ ACT Inspector of Custodial Services (December 2024). [Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024](#), 71.

⁶⁰ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 15-16.



mainly during arrest with a couple relating to the ACT Watch House specifically (being slammed onto a mattress, forcibly escorted to a cell).

Following our visits the visiting team requested the 20 use of force reports covering the period of 1 April 2025 - 30 June 2025. From this information, it was apparent that:

- 5 of the 20 uses of force involved a person lodged at the ACT Watch House under the *Intoxicated Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1994*
- 8 involved people who were described in the use of force report as 'Alcohol affected', 'Drug affected', 'Intoxicated – drug and/or alcohol'
- 4 arose due to the detained person resisting having identification/DNA material taken.
- 1 use of force involved a strip search.

During our visits and in a follow-up meeting, ACT Policing advised it had introduced a new process for reviewing all uses of force in the ACT Watch House. The process commenced in March 2025 and was formally included in the Watch House Operations Manual.

The process involves the Custody Sergeant forwarding finalised use of force reports to the Watch House Readiness Sergeant, who in turn reviews the report, records it on a database and identifies any issues and improvement recommendations. The information is also forwarded to the Officer in Charge of the ACT Watch House, who vets the report and determines if it meets the thresholds for referral to the Operational Practices Safety Committee (OPSC). At any stage, a reviewer may also refer the matter to the WICR team or Professional Standards for their attention.

The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs consider this review step to be a positive initiative and, once embedded, offers great potential to increase accountability and improve/reduce how Watch House officers use force.

We note the process is new and therefore still being settled. In this context, we observed some inconsistencies with how the process was working in its early stage and provided our observations to ACT Policing during our post-visit engagement so appropriate actions can be taken to embed consistent and comprehensive reviews of all use of force reports for the ACT Watch House, with appropriate tracking of lessons learned and actions.

We also note that the ACT Ombudsman has recently published a report on ACT Policing's use of force with several recommendations that when implemented



would also assist in de-escalation of responses that might otherwise result in police force being used.⁶¹

Transportation

Sallyport deficiencies

People deprived of liberty enter the ACT Watch House via police vehicle through a driveway and steep ramp at the rear of the Canberra City Police Station. The driveway leads to a secure vehicle entry sallyport. Arresting officers drive a vehicle into the sallyport and onto a rotating plate that allows the vehicle to be turned up to 360 degrees to allow the vehicle to exit.

The sallyport is small and only able to fit one vehicle at a time. Ambulances are too tall and are unable to fit into the sallyport requiring ill or injured people to be transported up a steep winding driveway onto the main road.

As noted in both the 2007 Commonwealth Ombudsman review⁶² and the 2024 ACT and Commonwealth NPMs report⁶³, vehicles can be queued up outside the ACT Watch House waiting to bring in persons deprived of liberty. The risk at this time to people deprived of liberty who may be highly intoxicated, may have been exposed to OC spray and remain un-decontaminated or have underlying medical conditions is high.

Watch House officers shared this concern with the visiting team noting that Canberra's winter temperatures also pose a risk to people deprived of liberty in transport vehicles, especially those arrested with minimal clothing, as hypothermia can develop rapidly.

The visiting team additionally notes concern for the safety of Watch House and arresting officers who may have to manage the frustration of people deprived of liberty having been held in a confined vehicle pod for longer than is necessary. Arresting officers occupied in this way are also not available to respond to other calls.

⁶¹ ACT Ombudsman (June 2025). [Use of force by ACT Policing: more to do to lessen harm, An investigation into ACT Policing's use of force 2019-2024](#).

⁶² Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 78.

⁶³ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 17-18.



ACT Policing, while also recognising the concern, informed the visiting team that it is unlikely ACT Government funding would be made available to address the design deficiencies given the scale of works required. While aware the plans to build a new Canberra City Police Station and Police Headquarters may take precedence, the visiting team notes that Infrastructure Canberra estimates a new facility may not be built until 2030 (5 years away).⁶⁴

ACT Corrective Services Court Transport Unit (CTU)

During our visits to AMC and Bimberi, 30% of respondents raised concerns with their transportation from the ACT Watch House, commenting on being left waiting in the vehicle on arrival at the Bimberi for extended periods, being cold/freezing, driving rough/too fast, or not having the fan on.

In relation to Bimberi, we note the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services has previously report that 'CTU vehicles are on occasion required to wait at the Bimberi gate for a prolonged period (up to 30 minutes) when collecting or returning a young person at Bimberi, even after having given prior notice of arrival.'⁶⁵

The visiting team observed the handover of several people deprived of liberty into ACT Corrective Services CTU custody on separate occasions. We observed Corrections officers working together to review paperwork and property provided by Watch House officers. Seven of the 11 files they reviewed had missing property sheets identified by the Corrections officers, with additional information printed by Watch House officers to address this concern.

Corrections officers determined the groupings of people to be transported to court together (men and women may be transported in the same vehicle due to separate pods. However, young people must be transported in a separate vehicle).

We observed (in person and from screens) the process of individuals being taken from cells, brought through to the temporary charging counter, where clothing and shoes were available, the individuals were advised of their charges and that they were being transported to court. Corrections officers conducted a pat search

⁶⁴ ACT Government (15 February 2024). [ACT Infrastructure Plan Update City Services, Recreation and Community Facilities](#), 63.

⁶⁵ ACT Inspector of Custodial Services (December 2024). [Healthy Centre Review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre 2024](#), 40.



(and have the authority to conduct a strip search if they deem it necessary) and placed handcuffs (to the front) and escorted them to the ACT Corrective Services CTU vehicle.

We note for the purposes of this report that the CTU is not operated by ACT Policing. While we did not observe the transportation occurring (noting this is where the survey respondents noted concerns), the ACT NPM will monitor this issue as part of its ongoing oversight of ACT Corrective Services' and the Health and Community Safety Directorate's places of detention.

Leadership and staffing

Watch House Readiness Team

The visiting team notes positively that ACT Policing has established a Watch House Readiness Team that performs a number of functions to support the ACT Watch House, including reviewing use of force incidents and monitoring supplies and maintenance at the other police stations custody suites. It provides continuity of support to the officers in the ACT Watch House.

We support the continuation of this function and as recognised by several recommendations made within this report already, advocate for it to take a larger role in systems oversight and improvements.

Staffing model

Stated staffing arrangements

The visiting team was informed that officers are stationed at the ACT Watch House for 6 months and sergeants for 12 months. Both have an option for extension; however, efforts are made to rotate officers out of the ACT Watch House after 12 months because of the impacts on health and well-being.

We were advised that efforts were made to ensure at least one female officer was on shift every shift and if no one was available from the ACT Watch House roster, a female officer would be seconded from other operational areas.

A 2024 Queensland Police Union of Employees (QPUE) review of Queensland Watch Houses found staff there reported they frequently experienced stress and periods of anxiety, depression and other illnesses.⁶⁶ It is unquestionable that

⁶⁶ Queensland Police Service (July 2025) [Watch-house Review](#), 22.



officers at the ACT Watch House, operating under similar circumstances, also experience a great amount of work-related stress. They are also impacted by the lack of natural light and amenities in the Watch House.

Each ACT Watch House sergeant is an experienced police officer with a detailed understanding of custodial issues. Sergeants provide advice and guidance to officers both in the ACT Watch House, as well as advice and assistance to the on-road teams about preparing necessary paperwork and briefs of evidence. As recognised in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's 2007 review of the ACT Watch House, 'the responsibility placed on Watchhouse Sergeants for the safety and well-being of detainees goes beyond that normally required in other policing duties.'⁶⁷

Most officers working at the ACT Watch House are nominated by their home station, though some self-nominate to work there. One officer we spoke to said they had self-nominated because they liked the certainty of starting and finishing their shift in the same place.

We were advised at the time of our visits that there were 6 sergeants (some acting) and 24 officers on the rosters. 22 of the 24 officers were due to transition out of their 6-month rotation. During our visits we heard from some officers who wanted to stay beyond their 6 months, and the ACT Watch House was negotiating with stations to keep them. However, we also spoke to other officers who were keen to finish their rotation.

Comparison to previous arrangements

In our 2024 report, the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs noted that at that time the ACT Watch House operated 'under a static staffing model consisting of a limited number of sworn AFP Officers and Protective Service Officers who are sworn as special Members.'⁶⁸ Each shift the Watch House staff were supplemented with 2 Protective Services Officers (PSOs).

When asked about the previous staffing model compared to the current model, every senior officer we spoke to said the previous model had been more effective. The previous model allowed more officers to be available for traditional policing

⁶⁷ Commonwealth Ombudsman (6 June 2007). [Review of ACT Policing's Watchhouse operations](#), 76.

⁶⁸ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 28.



activities and provided PSOs a training opportunity that made them more prepared to become sworn officers. It also provided continuity and expertise in the Watch House.

We were told that all PSO's had been reassigned, though ACT Watch House would ideally like to see them returned.

Reliance on overtime

We were advised by numerous senior officers and officers that there was a heavy reliance on overtime to fill shifts and on availability from the police stations.

During one of the visits, we observed an incoming sergeant at shift change calling around to try to identify someone to 'redirect' from another team as no morning shift team member wanted to take overtime – ultimately the issue was resolved by a morning shift officer taking overtime until 9pm.

On another occasion we were also advised by an officer that they had experienced a recent situation where one officer had called in sick earlier in the week and had not been replaced and the Canberra City Police Station Sergeant had not been informed that they were covering the ACT Watch House. They described the shift as the most stressful situation they had found themselves in.

The visiting team is concerned about the adequacy of the current staffing model. Its heavy reliance on overtime and availability from other stations is impacting on the safe operation of the ACT Watch House and the morale of the staff working there. Further, the regular short-term rotations of officers through the ACT Watch House means that corporate knowledge and experience is lost, and that training needs to be regularly re-run.

Recommendation 19:

ACT Policing review the ACT Watch House staffing model to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the ACT Watch House at all times, including for peak periods and if possible, the reintroduction of Protective Services Officers to supplement staffing.



Promotion of safe and respectful custody

The visiting team acknowledges the difficulties inherent in working at the ACT Watch House but also notes that

a duty of care arises where public authority has been exercised to assume control over a person's life. Not only are persons in custody deprived of their liberty, they are deprived of the ability and resources to care for themselves.⁶⁹

The visiting team observed officers to be professional and caring in their duties throughout the visits.

Our visiting team also sat in on training sessions of staff new to the ACT Watch House. Senior officers reinforced the message that all officers in the ACT Watch House were expected to be respectful and professional, as well as to focus on the safety of the people deprived of their liberty as well as their own safety.

During our visits to AMC and Bimberi, 61% of survey respondents agreed that officers acted with integrity, respect and professionalism and treated people with dignity and respect. However, a number of respondents qualified their response, noting it depended on the officer – one said "some officers are a bit rude, give you attitude. Some are ok." Another said, "There's a stark difference between Watch House staff compared to arresting officers." Some used terms like "a bit gruff" or "just doing their job."

Of the 9 survey respondents who expressed concerns, they identified feeling deliberately provoked by Watch House staff, or said Watch House staff "don't care about you", "have no empathy", and are "judgmental".

When asked about whether security, dignity and privacy were provided for, 65% of survey respondents responded positively. Of the 7 respondents that expressed concerns, these included allegedly being kept waiting for extended periods, not being listened to/ignored, not being able to make a phone call, having their intercom muted, not being provided toilet paper and officers remaining in the cell when changing clothes. One young female described allegedly being made to

⁶⁹ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (15 April 1991). [National Report Volume 1, Chapter 4 The Adequacy of Previous Investigations, 4.5 Coronial Inquiries: Coronial Jurisdiction and Inquests](#) [4.5.41].



move cells without any clothing on her top half and not being provided a blanket or any other covering.

Training and professional development

New officers to the ACT Watch House undertake a 3-day induction training immediately before or just after commencing work. This dedicated induction training includes cell extractions/insertions, use of emergency PPE, use of force reporting and forensic procedures, a health care induction by CFMS and practical safety and de-escalation training. The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs also now presents to this training course.

The visiting team obtained training records to verify that the current cohort of officers had all completed the training.

At the time of the visits, we were informed that training in relation to age of criminal responsibility was also about to be rolled out.

In addition to the initial induction training, as mentioned earlier, ACT Policing has developed 3 micro-learning videos to reinforce training elements for cell extractions. The visiting team reviewed the micro-videos and heard from a sergeant that they found them quite good. Unfortunately, none of the officers spoken to seemed to be aware these videos were available.

Our visiting team considers the training packages invaluable for officers who will be rostered in the Watch House. We note that it is a significant commitment to ensure all officers are trained especially given the high rotation of officers through the ACT Watch House as a result of the current staffing models.



ACT police stations

Material conditions

Woden and Gungahlin Police Stations

In our 2024 report, the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs identified a number of deficiencies at the Woden and Gungahlin Police Stations. At Gungahlin Police Station for example, we found the narrow corridors, and a lack of handrails made the single cell unsuitable for a mobility impaired person and identified that there was no showering facilities available.⁷⁰ At the Woden Police Station, we found the cells smelled of raw sewage and like Gungahlin, cell doors were old and operated with a slide bolt on the upper and lower halves of the cell door.⁷¹

During this visit, we found the single cell at the Gungahlin Police Station had been demolished and the space re-purposed for an administrative workstation. ACT Policing occupies a small portion of the Joint Emergency Services Centre and in its current state does not have an appropriate facility for detention. The visiting team therefore welcomes the removal of cell and the redirection of anyone requiring to be taken into custody, to the ACT Watch House.

The visiting team was told by ACT Policing that the Gungahlin Police Station only brings people into the station for out-of-hours family violence orders or drink-driving offences. The data provided by ACT Policing also demonstrates that in the 7 quarters from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, only one person was taken into custody at the Gungahlin Police Station for a period of 2 hours and 6 minutes.

The visiting team observed work being undertaken at the Gungahlin Police Station to erect a carpark shelter that will provide some screening of the entrance from the residential apartment units that have immediate lines of sight to the entire rear of the station.

During our visit to the Woden Police Station, we were advised that the detention facilities had not been used in 10 years. We observed most of the area comprised dysfunctional cells and unmaintained officer area, with mess and old furniture

⁷⁰ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 46-48.

⁷¹ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 53.



and other items stored in the space. The drug and alcohol testing room closest to internal stairs was the only part of the floor that is used.

We observed the space poses many hazards and is not deemed to be fit for purpose due its outdated design which would make it too resource-heavy to bring back to operational readiness.

Recommendation 20:

ACT Policing officially decommission the holding cells at the Woden Police Station.

The alternate Watch Houses

In our 2024 report, the ACT and Commonwealth NPMs identified a number of positives at the Belconnen and Tuggeranong Police Stations. At Belconnen Police Station for example, we found a dedicated medical room, which was modern, well furnished, and sanitary; as well as the only cells in ACT Policing facilities with privacy screening for toilets that also provided screening of the lower half of the body from CCTV coverage.⁷² At Tuggeranong Police Station we found the only dedicated visitors room with no monitoring equipment or CCTV, which is able to be used for confidential discussions with lawyers and/or personal visitors.⁷³

During these recent visits we were made aware that Belconnen Police Station, and if needed, Tuggeranong Police Station, had been designated the Alternate Watch Houses should the ACT Watch House be non-operational for any reason.

For the reasons set out below, the visiting team is concerned that the Alternative Watch Houses are not fit for purpose and if required for more than a few hours, there may be a broader impact on ACT Policing resources that has the potential to place officers and people deprived of their liberty at risk. We consider it important that any future infrastructure plans factor in the need for appropriate premises for an alternative Watch House (see Recommendation 3).

⁷² ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 43, 48.

⁷³ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (24 June 2024). [Post Visit Summaries ACT Policing Watch House and ACT Police Stations](#), 46.



Belconnen Police Station

When not used as an Alternate Watch House, the Belconnen Police Station is sometimes used to detain compliant individuals for interviewing before transfer to the ACT Watch House for processing. As there are no dedicated officers in the custody area, arresting officers are responsible for meeting the needs of those in their care. The data provided by ACT Policing demonstrates that from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, 12 people had been detained at Belconnen Police Station for an average of 2 hours and 32 minutes.

Noting the custody area is not usually staffed, the visiting team was pleased to hear that the ACT Watch House Readiness Team now conducts monthly audits to Belconnen and Tuggeranong Police Stations to monitor supplies and ongoing maintenance.

There is one room within the custody area that can be used as the staffing room when stood up as the Alternate Watch House or as the breath analysis room under usual circumstances. The room contains one computer and stores a small amount of clothing as well as PPE/towels and blankets. When stood up as the Alternate Watch House it provides very limited room for additional staff seating.

Finally, there is no dedicated strip-searching area so if required they would need to be conducted in cells under CCTV. This would require officers to disregard the guidance in the Watch House Operations Manual that the dignity of the person deprived of liberty being searched, is to be considered at all times.

In December 2024, ACT Policing was required to activate their Business Continuity Plan (BCP) due to planned electrical works at Canberra City Police Station affecting CCTV monitoring and power to terminals and equipment used for management of persons deprived of liberty. This was the first time the Belconnen Police Station had been activated as an Alternate Watch House.⁷⁴

The visiting team reviewed documents and incident reports relating to the activation of the Alternate Watch House and was pleased to find ACT Policing had identified a number of facility deficiencies and learnings from the experience. For example, the absence of the ability to monitor the CCTV cameras in each cell as monitors are only located at the front office of Belconnen Police Station. During

⁷⁴ The BCP was subsequently activated in November 2025 after sewage overflow caused the unplanned closure of the Watch House. The ACT and Commonwealth NPMs have not reviewed that incident.



the activation of the BCP, 2 people deprived of liberty required constant monitoring and this necessitated 2 of the 3 available officers to be placed outside of their cell doors at all times.

ACT Policing also identified other deficiencies such as no meal preparation area or fridge being available, no property storage lockers; a rough floor surface which could cause injury during use of force incidents, and windows in cell doors having internal blinds which obscured observation from differing heights.

Following the BCP activation, ACT Policing developed a list of facility improvements to progress, and we were advised that they would be prioritised following the completion of the ACT Watch House remediation works.

The visiting team observed a number of additional deficiencies with the Belconnen Police Station custody area, especially if activated as an Alternate Watch House for any length of time. For example, the facility has only 5 cells, with limited options for separation of men from women, adults from young people or for separation of those deemed 'at-risk'. We were informed that if required, young people would be accommodated in the cells closest to the staffing area.

The BCP states that if the number of occupants exceeds the number of cells; consideration is to be made to place multiple people in single cells as well as activating the Tuggeranong Police Station. Placing multiple people in a single cell presents significant safety challenges. The Watch House Operations Manual for example states that people deprived of liberty deemed 'at-risk' through the potential for being harmed by other people should be segregated from others. This guidance could clearly not be followed if the cells are at their capacity.

A sizable medical treatment room (much larger than the ACT Watch House medical room) was observed outside of the custody area, and we were informed that during the activation of the BCP, a CFMS nurse would be onsite as per the standard hours for the ACT Watch House. However, we were also informed that given the medical room was outside the custody area, there may be challenges in treating people deprived of their liberty in that room.





Photo: The medical treatment room at the Belconnen Police Station (29 May)

Noting the limited CFMS presence, the BCP states consideration should be made for custody at hospital with guarding preferred to cells to manage limited medical resources and delayed care for people in custody. The visiting team notes this would require the diversion of other ACT Policing resourcing from usual duties.

As the planned December 2024 activation of the BCP demonstrated, while only active for 6 hours, ACT Policing had to unarrest and release one of the 3 people detained into the care of ACTAS for medical treatment due to their limited resources.

Recommendation 21:

ACT Policing remedy the infrastructure deficiencies that pose a safety risk in the event Belconnen Police Station is required as an alternative Watch House. This includes:

- a) installing shielding to the charging counter similar to that now installed at the ACT Watch House
- b) exploring options to increase the staffing area capacity
- c) locating a dedicated area for strip searching that ensures privacy can be maintained

Tuggeranong Police Station

When not used as an Alternate Watch House, the Tuggeranong Police Station is sometimes used to detain compliant individuals for interviewing before transfer to the ACT Watch House for processing. As there are no dedicated officers in the custody area, arresting officers are responsible for meeting the needs of those in their care. The data provided by ACT Policing demonstrates that from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, 5 people had been detained at Tuggeranong Police Station for an average of 2 hours and 5 minutes.

There are 5 cells in the custody area, all of which are identical. However, 4 of the cells were not operational at the time of visit due to rectification works needed on the toilet flushing device. The cells are of a suitable dimension for one person, cameras are present at each end of the cell however, none of the cells has privacy screening or an intercom. The cells are bare and contain a room length platform for mattress placement. The doors contain dual glass panels, and each cell has a large glass wall ensuring visible line of sight from the staff area.

The facility contains a reasonably sized visits room with appropriate screening. We noted this visit that CCTV has been installed in the room despite our 2024 report highlighting its previous absence as a positive in enabling confidential discussions with lawyers and/or personal visitors.

The charging counter is large and has no shielding, which could present a risk to the safety of staff. There is also an extension in the counter which acts as a privacy screen for the computer, however, the extension has hard corners and could present a safety risk to persons in custody.



The staffing area contains 2 computers (including at the charging counter) and stores a small amount of clothing as well as PPE/towels, menstrual products and blankets. The room also contains a defibrillator but does not currently hold a fire extinguisher (we were told placement for an extinguisher is currently being determined by WHS).

The room contains monitors with good vision of the cells. The room also contains a panel which lights up when any of the cell duress alarms are pressed. The room is surrounded by glass to ensure clear line of sight into the cell area, however, there is no privacy screening which means computer screens and white boards are visible to people deprived of liberty in the cells. The room also contained a small fridge and lockers for holding property.



Photo: Cell interior with no privacy screening at the Tuggeranong Police Station (3 June)

There is one shower facility which is located next to the visits room. The shower door opens outwardly and may pose a risk to officers if a person deprived of liberty slams it into someone standing outside of the door. The door has a small peephole, which on testing can be used to view someone who is undressed in the shower – meaning there is no privacy.

After testing the shower, water was observed running out of the room into the drain in the facility pathway. This is likely to cause a slip hazard to anyone walking past the shower to the end cells or to the visit room. Additionally, as there is nowhere to place clothing except on the floor, it is likely that clothing would get wet due to the runoff water exiting the room.

A sizable medical treatment room (much larger than the ACT Watch House medical room) was observed outside of the custody area, and we were informed that during the activation of the BCP, a CFMS nurse would be onsite as per the standard hours for the ACT Watch House. The room had an inward opening door and no duress alarm.

Recommendation 22:

ACT Policing remedy the infrastructure deficiencies that pose a safety risk in the event Tuggeranong Police Station is required as an alternative Watch House.

This includes

- a) installing privacy screening around the cell toilets to provide privacy from both outside view and cameras but still allowing sight lines to the upper body for officers to maintain visibility for security and safety purposes
- b) installing intercoms in all cells
- c) removing the camera from the visits room to enable confidential discussions with lawyers and/or personal visitors
- d) installing shielding to the charging counter similar to that now installed at the ACT Watch House and ensuring the counter extension is removed
- e) installing privacy screening to the staffing area room to ensure computer screens/white boards cannot be viewed by people deprived of liberty, but of a type which does not obscure officers' line of sight into the cells
- f) rectifying the safety and privacy deficiencies observed with the shower



g) rectifying the safety deficiencies observed with the medical treatment room.

Jervis Bay Police Station

The Jervis Bay Police Station is located in the Jervis Bay Territory, which includes lands owned by the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council (including the Booderee National Park).

All laws relating to police powers and responsibilities, including detention, are provided to the AFP in the Jervis Bay Territory by virtue of the *Jervis Bay Territory Acceptance Act 1915* (Cth), which extends all ACT laws and principles to the Jervis Bay Territory so far as they are applicable.

The Jervis Bay Police Station is seldomly used to detain people. This is attributable to a strong preference for diverting people from custody. The data provided by ACT Policing demonstrates that from 1 July 2023 to 31 March 2025, 6 people had been detained at Jervis Bay Police Station for an average of 11 hours and 31 minutes.

The Jervis Bay Police Station contains one standard cell, which can, if needed, accommodate 2 people, there is also a padded cell. There was no privacy screening or an intercom in the standard cell, however, the basin blocks the only inward view of the toilet from the staffing office through a tinted window. There is a camera in the cell but at the time of the visit, it was not being monitored through the staffing office monitors (as it is seldom used). There was ample natural lighting in the cell. The padded cell was small, has a camera, toilet and a drain of a commercial variety and not of Crocodile Roll Resistant (CCR) design.

There is one shower facility which is located between the cell and padded cell. There is very little privacy available in the shower as the door contains 2 glass panels giving full view of the shower to the staffing office. While these glass panels are positioned to give view of the lower and upper half of the shower and maintain some privacy, anyone standing at the shower door would have an unobstructed view of the complete shower area. The shower contains a small area to place clothing and a towel.





Photo: The padded cell at the Jervis Bay Police Station (13 June)

The facility contains a very small visit room with appropriate screening. The visitor side is in the reception area and the side for the person deprived of liberty is located next to the storage area. A duress alarm is located on the visitor side.

A small storage area containing blankets, a first aid kit and menstrual products is situated next to the visit room.

The charging counter is positioned in the reception area and does not provide a physical barrier between the person being brought into custody and the officer. It is however noted the facility is seldom used and is small. The charging counter contains one monitor. However, this was not working at the time of the visit, and all documents are completed manually. There was a camera in the charging counter area, however, officers relied on body worn cameras to record processing and property. We were able to view footage of a recent detention to confirm that this is suitable. The charging counter contained complaints pamphlets in various

languages, an assortment of clothing and menstrual products. The charging counter also contains a small lockable cupboard to house property.

There is a large room adjacent to the custody area that contained staff desks and had the capacity to be used as the monitoring room (however none of the monitors were in use at the time of the visit).

In our 2024 report, we identified a number of areas of concern including the lack of toilet privacy, commercially available floor drains which can be used as ligature points and deficiencies found with the duress alarms and intercom systems, all of which were either not working or only working intermittently.⁷⁵ These same issues were present during this visit. In its self-assessment against past suggestions, ACT Policing advised us that remediation works at the ACT Watch House were being prioritised before all other locations.

Procedural safeguards

Rights, entitlements and complaints processes

We observed that ACT Policing has placed information posters at all ACT police stations in all cells (with the exception of Belconnen Police Station where they are placed opposite the cell doors) and common areas outlining rights and entitlements for people deprived of liberty and providing contact details for the ACT Ombudsman, Aboriginal Legal Service ACT/NSW, Legal Aid ACT and the ACT NPM. The visiting team noted all posters were A3 in size.

The visiting team also note a post custody flyer is to be provided with the property of people deprived of liberty, on their release. These flyers were reviewed, and are available in English, Punjabi, Chinese, and Vietnamese, with additional languages printable upon request.

Interview safeguards and telephones

As noted earlier in the report, the main reason for detention at the ACT police stations is to conduct interviews before transfer to the ACT Watch House for processing.

The *Crimes Act 1914* (Cth) outlines the obligations of officers towards those they have detained for interviewing and sets of the length of time interviewing can

⁷⁵ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (October 2024). [Post Visit Summary Jervis Bay Police Station](#), 3.



take place. Most importantly, it states that ‘[a] person who is under arrest or a protected suspect must be treated with humanity and with respect for human dignity, and must not be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.’⁷⁶

The AFP National Guidelines and the Watch House Operations Manual reinforce and expand upon these obligations.

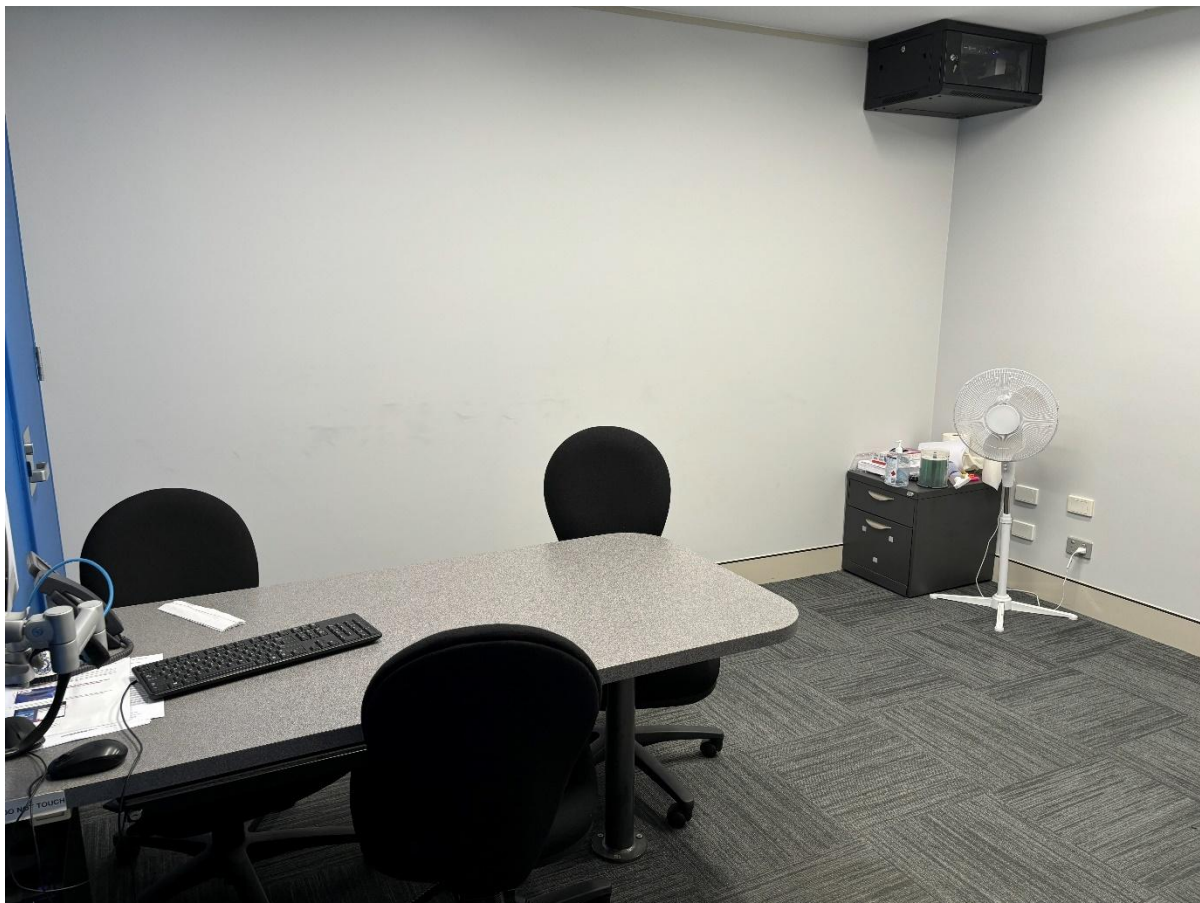


Photo: Interview Room at the Canberra City Police Station (23 May)

While the visiting team did not observe interviews taking place, we were able to make observations about the rooms in which these interviews took place. The Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering (“The Méndez Principles”) notes that ‘[i]nterviewing is a complex adaptive process involving human beings, human behaviours and human rights. The process is affected by the environmental conditions, and the outcomes can be influenced by the actions of the interviewer and all authorities involved.’⁷⁷ Therefore,

⁷⁶ *Crimes Act 1914* (Cth) Part 1C, Division 3, s23Q.

⁷⁷ Steering Committee of Experts with the support of Anti-Torture Initiative, the Association for the Prevention of Torture, and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (May 2021). [Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering](#), 15.

interviews should 'be conducted in a non-intimidating, human-rights compliant environment with attention to privacy and safety.'⁷⁸

We observed at all police stations that interview rooms were similarly configured and plain in colour with the exception of Belconnen Police Station, where interview rooms had blue panels on the walls making the room look less sterile.

At the Canberra City Police Station, we observed the interview table was small and had a duress alarm under it, located to the left of the officer when they were seated. The duress alarm was not immediately apparent and when officers were asked about it, they were not aware that one existed.

The duress alarms at Belconnen, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and Jervis Bay Stations on the other hand, were large and situated on the wall right behind where an officer would sit during interview.

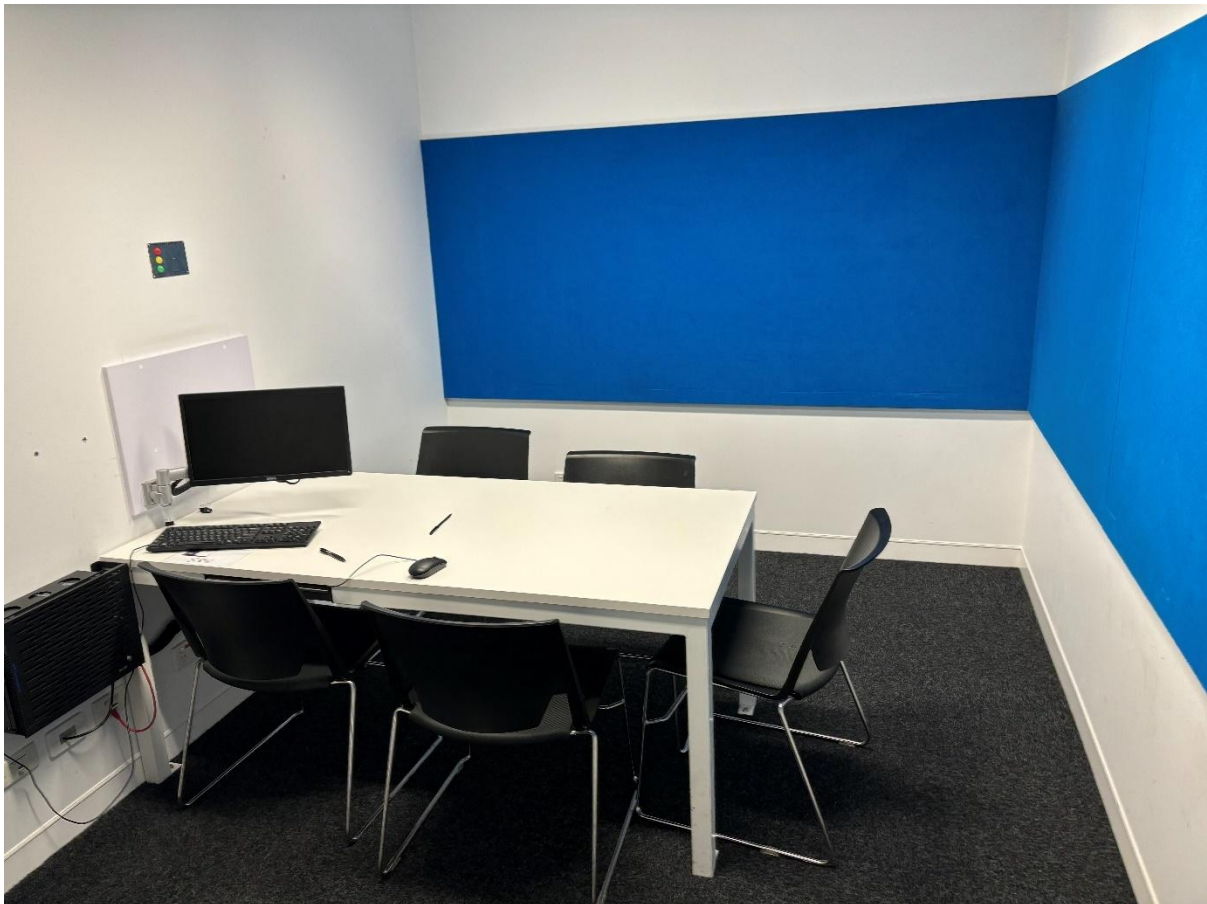


Photo: Interview Room at the Belconnen Police Station (29 May)

⁷⁸ Steering Committee of Experts with the support of Anti-Torture Initiative, the Association for the Prevention of Torture, and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (May 2021). [Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering](#), 18.

We observed that the interview rooms at Canberra City Police Station were the only ones that had a landline telephone placed in them. Belconnen, Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and Jervis Bay Stations all relied on officers using their mobile phones, which is not ideal in situations where an interpreter is required in a 3-way conversation.

We also observed that the Canberra City Police Station interview rooms had numerous loose items located on the cabinet in the room and a pedestal fan. The Jervis Bay Police Station interview room was being used for multiple purposes, including storage at the time of the visit. The AFP National Guidelines however state that interview rooms should be clear of objects that could be used as a weapon.

Tuggeranong Police Stations interview rooms were the only ones to have electronic sign outside the door that lit up to indicate that an interview was in progress.

Recommendation 23:

ACT Policing reviews the interview rooms at all police stations and the ACT Watch House to ensure:

- a) duress alarms are clearly locatable and accessible on the wall near the officer conducting the interview
- b) a landline telephone, preferably a conference phone to enable 3-way conversations, is placed in every interview room
- c) automated electronic signs are placed outside all interview rooms to alert others that an interview is taking place
- d) effort is made to make the interview rooms appear less sterile without compromising safety
- e) interview rooms are inspected on a regular basis to ensure unnecessary loose items are removed.



Healthcare

Jervis Bay Police Station

Jervis Bay Police Station does not contain a medical treatment room and CFMS does not have an on-site presence there. First aid kits and defibrillators are located throughout the facility. There are also backpack response kits with defibrillators for use off site. Staff receive training in basic first aid including defibrillator use every twelve months.

In the event of a medical emergency, officers will contact NSW Ambulance who have 2 stations, both of which are located less than 15 km from the Jervis Bay Police Station. The nearest hospital is the Shoalhaven Memorial Hospital.

When asked about the arrangements in place with NSW Ambulance, officers stated there was a memorandum of understanding in place with ACT Policing. ACT Policing however later clarified that this was not the case and that the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts have overall responsibility for the provision of local and state government-type services in the Jervis Bay Territory.

When asked about the jurisdictional issues for people deprived of liberty receiving medical treatment in an NSW hospital, officers said it had never happened before, and they were unclear about the process or if there are any jurisdictional issues.

The AFP National Guidelines state that where medical treatment for an illness or injury cannot be conducted at a police station the person must be conveyed to a hospital. A member must remain with a person deprived of liberty until they are discharged from the hospital and returned to exclusive police custody.

Further, the AFP Better Practice Guide on Persons suffering from mental illness or mental disorder (ACT Policing), states that where a person in police custody is suffering a mental illness or mental disorder and is required to attend an approved health facility for mental health treatment prior to appearing before the Court, the person is deemed to be still in police custody.

How an ACT Policing officer is able to attend a NSW health facility for the duration of care and maintain custody, remains unclear to the visit team and the officers at the Jervis Bay Police Station.



Recommendation 24:

ACT Policing update the Jervis Bay Person in Custody Handbook to clarify under what authority officers maintain custody of a person deprived of liberty when transferred from the Jervis Bay Police Station to a NSW health facility for medical treatment or assessment.

Transportation

The visiting team was able to observe 2 transportation vehicles used to convey people deprived of liberty from the point of arrest to the police stations and/or ACT Watch House.

At Gungahlin Police Station we viewed a Ford Ranger. The transportation pod, which has an entrance on either side of the vehicle, appeared to be difficult to get into, particularly for people with mobility concerns or larger people, due to height of the step and narrowness of the side doors. The layout of the pod also makes extraction difficult with added concern about dropping someone in the process given the height to ground.

Inside the pod was hard, low-profile seating with no cushioning and no seatbelts as they have been deemed a risk for self-harm. It appears however, particularly when someone is handcuffed, that there is very little protection from injury which might occur from sudden movement or stopping.

The pod has no aircon/heating but relies on a fan and light system that turn on together when activated by an officer in the front of the vehicle. This is insufficient for longer distance travel or colder weather.

There is no direct voice intercom system so officers must rely on hearing the person deprived of liberty yelling or kicking/striking pod walls (in additional to visual monitoring). There are 2 cameras in the pod which display images to the front of the vehicle; however, we were informed that cameras do not have recording or audio capability. There are usually 2 officers in the front of a vehicle, and the general rule is that the non-driver always has 'eyes on' the screen monitoring the pod. There can be times when there is only one member driving, which means they will not have 'eyes on' the screen.

The side panel units contained first aid kits, 20L of water for decontamination and a fire extinguisher.



At the Woden Police Station, we were able to view a Hyundai iLoad that was nearing its end of operational life (there are no plans to purchase a new Hyundai iLoad to replace). We were advised the vehicle was seldom used or preferred for use to transport people.

The detention pod in the back of the van was much more easily accessible than the Ford Ranger. However, as the back doors are the only means of access it poses a risk to officers, making extraction more difficult. The pod has more appropriate seating height than that of the Ford Ranger and a clear glass panel providing direct line of sight between the person deprived of liberty and the officers.

As with the Ford Ranger, the Hyundai iLoad has no aircon/heating, seatbelt and the 2 cameras in the pod do not have recording or audio capability.

Car maintenance includes weekly cleaning by officers and bio-cleaning can be arranged as needed. Servicing is conducted on a schedule and officers check for faults/defects routinely.

The visiting team is particularly concerned about the absence of seatbelts, audio and visual recording capabilities and lack of aircon/heating.

In relation to aircon/heating, we observed in the 2024 Jervis Bay Police Station Post Visit Summary that the lack of an aircon/heating unit made vehicles unsuitable for use particularly on long trips to and from the ACT, which can be more than 3 ½ hours duration, sometimes in inclement weather conditions.⁷⁹ We suggested at that time that an aircon be fitted into the pod and while ACT Policing accepted this suggestion it has not been actioned.

The absence of audio and visual recording capabilities presents a significant safety concern for people deprived of liberty and for the protection of officers from false claims of mistreatment. As mentioned earlier in the report, at the ACT Watch House we observed the reception of a person deprived of liberty who reported an abrasion to their forehead following transportation in the transport vehicle. The person deprived of liberty alleged that officers intentionally stopped the vehicle to cause injury to them and after raising the matter with ACT Policing it was referred to the WICR team for investigation. Audio and visual records would

⁷⁹ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (October 2024). [Post Visit Summary Jervis Bay Police Station](#), 24.



assist greatly to ensure officers are driving responsibly and likewise to protect them from claims of intentional reckless driving.



Photo: An ACT Policing Ford Ranger with a fiberglass rear pod at the Gungahlin Police Station (29 May).



Photo: The rear pod of an ACT Policing Hyundai I-Load at the Woden Police Station (03 June).

We note the Police Association of Tasmania has led a sustained campaign to improve safety in police vehicles in Tasmania having raised a number of similar concerns about the cage-like set up of pods with no restraints, leading to higher injury risk during an accident and people deprived of liberty having to either sit, crouch with legs stretched or lie down. Additionally, raising concern about cameras having been fitted to monitor but not record, leaving officers at risk if there is an inquest or complaint; and a lack of heating in the rear pod.⁸⁰

Recommendation 25:

ACT Policing ensure every vehicle used to convey a person deprived of liberty has audio and visual recording capability.

Recommendation 26:

ACT Policing ensure every vehicle used to convey a person deprived of liberty has aircon/heating capability in the detention pod.

Recommendation 27:

ACT Policing review its fleet of vehicles with the intention of improving the design and safety of all detention pods, including through the possible inclusion of seatbelts, if an appropriate design has been thoroughly tested and is currently in operation in another jurisdiction.

Leadership and staffing

Belconnen Police Station

ACT Policing personnel are required to adhere to the highest levels of professional standards 'consistent with the high degree of responsibility required by their profession.'⁸¹ The AFP Code of Conduct requires officers to act with due care and

⁸⁰ Bevin, E (2 September 2019). [No protection' for prisoners in Tasmania Police transport vans, union says, ABC News](#); Mobbs, M (14 September 2023). [Tasmanian police department 'considering options' for prisoner transport upgrades, The Examiner](#).

⁸¹ United Nations General Assembly (17 December 1979). [Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials](#), Article 1.



diligence, courtesy and respect, and without discrimination or harassment. They must also behave in a way that upholds the integrity and good reputation of the AFP.

The Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials additionally notes that 'in the performance of their duty, law enforcement officials shall respect and protect human dignity and maintain and uphold the human rights of all persons.'⁸²

During our initial visit to the Belconnen Police Station, we identified a concerning image within the front office area of the station. The image appeared to be taken from a body worn camera, of a man allegedly being tasered and shielding his eyes with the caption 'Taser Dab!!' added. A 'dab' refers to a gesture or dance move in which a person leans forward into the bent crook of a slanted, upward angled arm, while raising the opposite arm out straight in a parallel direction. It appears to be similar to someone sneezing or coughing into an elbow. It is typically used in internet 'meme' culture as tool for light entertainment. The image was situated on the wall to the left of the monitoring screens at the height of the desks.

The visiting team immediately raised the inappropriateness of the image with the ACT Policing members that were accompanying us. It was agreed by all persons present that the image was completely inappropriate and it was removed at the time of the visit by the escorting members. At the time of the visit, the front office area was being staffed by 2 officers who also said the image was inappropriate, after we raised the concern. It is disappointing that officers did not act to remove the image themselves.

While on return to the Belconnen Police Station the image had been removed, we observed other images throughout the staffing area that appeared to be screenshots from body worn camera footage, including one where a person was handcuffed and being carried by police only wearing underwear. We do not consider this an appropriate use of footage of a person who is in custody.

Some research suggests that dark humour related memes, often related to sensitive and controversial topics are posted by people who are oblivious or unaffected by the impact.⁸³ There is also some research to suggest that dark

⁸² United Nations General Assembly (17 December 1979). [Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials](#), Article 2.

⁸³ Hesketh, I et al. (July 2025). [The Use and Abuse of Dark Humour in Emergency Services](#), *Research Square*, 4.



humour is commonly used in emergency services to reduce feelings of anxiety, helplessness and trauma associated with challenging situations involving death and serious injuries.⁸⁴ Further research suggests that it may be used as a coping tool for police officers and can be valuable in building teamwork and trust in teams.⁸⁵

The Queensland Human Rights Commission's 2024 Strengthening the Service Report, found, for example, that widespread patterns of everyday/casual racism and sexism, often in the form of jokes, banter or dark humour was found within the QPS, with some seeing these as important for camaraderie and stress relief, without acknowledging the associated harms.⁸⁶

The ACT Government has acknowledged that ACT Policing members are routinely exposed to traumatic events in the course of their duties and that cumulative exposure to traumatic incidents has the potential to increase the risk factors for psychological injury.⁸⁷ Despite some of the benefits of humour, particularly as a coping mechanism, disparaging humour, which denigrates, belittles, or maligns individuals or groups, is unacceptable as it creates and re-enforces stereotypes of social groups and fosters prejudice.⁸⁸

In its responses to the 2025 ACT Ombudsman's [Use of Force by ACT Policing Report](#) and the Jumbunna Review, ACT Policing noted it is currently undertaking a research project to capture the current understanding of trauma-informed policing practices, with the aim of informing the development of a tailored trauma-informed policing framework.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Hesketh, I et al. (July 2025). [The Use and Abuse of Dark Humour in Emergency Services, Research Square](#), 3-4.

⁸⁵ Hesketh, I et al. (July 2025). [The Use and Abuse of Dark Humour in Emergency Services, Research Square](#), 7.

⁸⁶ QLD Human Rights Commission (2024). [Strengthening the Service: Independent review of workplace equality in the Queensland Police Service](#), 196.

⁸⁷ ACT Government (20 December 2023). [Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety: Inquiry into immediate trauma support services in the ACT: ACT Government Submission](#), 8.

⁸⁸ Hesketh, I et al. (July 2025). [The Use and Abuse of Dark Humour in Emergency Services, Research Square](#), 4.

⁸⁹ ACT Ombudsman (June 2025) [Use of force by ACT Policing: more to do to lessen harm](#), Attachment A – Recommendation response, 8; ACT Government (September 2025); [ACT Government Interim Response Final Report of the Independent Review into the Over-representation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System: The Jumbunna Review](#), 13.



We consider there may be benefit in extending that research and the development of the framework to include the impact of trauma on ACT Policing members, and how to focus on healthy coping mechanisms and supports for officers so as to reduce the negative impacts of routine exposure to traumatic events. The framework should cover acceptable humour in the workplace, focusing on empathy and the importance of the context in which the humour is used.

Recommendation 28:

The tailored trauma-informed policing framework that is under development, include consideration of the impact of trauma on ACT Policing members, and how to focus on healthy coping mechanisms and supports for officers so as to reduce the negative impacts of routine exposure to traumatic events.

Jervis Bay Police Station

The Jervis Bay Police Station currently operates a static staffing model. All staff perform rotating shifts 7 days a week and complete a 2-year rotation which is staggered to allow for continuity and consistency in service provision. Following an internal review, a recommendation to increase the rotations by one additional year has been made.

At the time of the visit, recent promotions meant that the new sergeant and 2 officers started in January-February 2025, with the more experienced officer having started in July 2024.

At the time of the visit, a transport to Canberra had occurred the day before and the Sergeant had been on duty for several days straight and was the only one on duty the day before (2 officers in Canberra and 1 officer on RDO) so the station was forced to close.

We were advised that sometimes ACT Policing would send officers to Braidwood, NSW (85km east of Canberra) to meet with Jervis Bay Police Station officers and facilitate the remainder of a transfers to Canberra.

The Jervis Bay Person in Custody Handbook promotes transfer to Canberra as a last resort, if it can be avoided, as it places a significant strain on finite resources and limits the ability to respond to other matters should they arise.



Recommendation 29:

ACT Policing consider alternatives to transporting, or more efficient ways of managing transport requests when required to transport people deprived of liberty from Jervis Bay Police Station to Canberra.

Community relations

In our 2024 report on Jervis Bay Police Station, the visiting team noted the then Officer in Charge had an excellent working knowledge of the local Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community.⁹⁰ Noting the changeover of staff since our previous visit, we asked the sergeant about how newer staff were able to gain credibility with the local community and we were advised that connections with the community had relied heavily on others introducing them and passing along their own knowledge.

While all ACT Policing members are required to undertake cultural literacy training,⁹¹ it is important for staff at Jervis Bay to be provided with ongoing support and training to build genuine connections with the local community and operate in a culturally sensitive manner.

Recommendation 30:

ACT Policing continue to support the activities undertaken by officers stationed at Jervis Bay within the Wreck Bay and Jervis Bay communities to promote genuine engagement and build on the existing relationships between community and Police; including by increasing opportunities for officers to work with the First Nations Liaison Officers team.

⁹⁰ ACT and Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanisms (October 2024). [Post Visit Summary Jervis Bay Police Station](#), 17.

⁹¹ ACT Ombudsman (28 February 2025). [Actions Speak: ACT Policing: Implementation of recommendations from our March 2021 report ACT Policing's administrative framework for engagement with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community](#), 13.





AFP

COMMISSIONER

[REDACTED]
26 February 2026

Mr Iain Anderson
Commonwealth and ACT Ombudsman
Commonwealth and ACT National Preventative Mechanism

Via email: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Anderson

Thank you for your letter dated 18 December 2025, providing the Australian Federal Police (AFP) the opportunity to review and respond to your draft reports *'Post Visit Report – ACT Watch House and Police Stations'* and *'Assessment of Implementation of Past Suggestions: ACT Watch House and Police Stations'*, as part of the procedural fairness process.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to you and the members of your team who conducted the joint program of visits to the ACT Watch House and Police Stations between 23 May and 23 June 2025. I acknowledge the significant effort taken to conduct these visits and in drafting the reports and recommendations.

The AFP greatly values the role of the National Preventive Mechanism and understand that it plays a crucial role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of persons in custody.

I note that the 2025 Post Visit Report identifies a range of recommended improvements to ACT Policing's infrastructure, resourcing, data collection, training and governance. Deputy Commissioner Scott Lee will provide a formal response to this report and its recommendations in his capacity as Chief Police Officer of the ACT. The response will include ACT Policing's proposed actions to address the recommendations.

I will continue to work closely with Deputy Commissioner Lee to address the themes identified within the 2025 Post Visit Report, and we will continue to advocate for improved facilities through engagement with the ACT Government.

If you require any additional information, please contact AFP's Chief Operating Officer, [REDACTED] on [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]
Krissy Barrett APM
Commissioner

/ Address: GPO Box 401 Canberra ACT 2601 Australia

/ Telephone: +61 2 5127 4101

/ Email: Office-of-the-Commissioner@afp.gov.au

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ACT
Policing

23 February 2026

Mr Iain Anderson
Commonwealth and ACT Ombudsman
Commonwealth and ACT National Preventative Mechanism
By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Anderson,

Iain

Thank you for your letter to AFP Commissioner, Krissy Barrett APM on 18 December 2025, providing an opportunity to review and respond to your Reports '*Post Visit Report – ACT Watch House and Police Stations*' and '*Assessment of Implementation of Past Suggestions: ACT Watch House and Police Stations*'. I am responding in my capacity as Chief Police Officer of the ACT.

I would like to also thank the members of your office who conducted a joint program of visits to ACT Policing facilities between 23 May and 23 June 2025 under the National Preventative Mechanism (NPM).

The NPM provides an important function in the protection of persons in custody, and ACT Policing values the tangible opportunities for improvement which have been identified through these visits. ACT Policing also values the ongoing relationship between our agencies on matters related to persons in custody, outside of a formal inspection schedule.

As you are aware, ACT Policing completed a significant program of remediation works on the ACT Watch House during 2025 and I am pleased to see this progress reflected in the *Assessment of Implementation of Past Suggestions: ACT Watch House and Police Stations* Report. The recent works undertaken at the ACT Watch House are the most significant upgrades to this facility since 1995, and reflect an important investment by the ACT Government to improve the safety and accessibility of ACT Policing's primary custody facility.

I understand that ACT Policing's Governance and Compliance Support team has provided officer-level feedback on the content within the Reports, and I appreciate your consideration of this feedback, and wish to thank you for providing updated draft Reports with us for consideration.

I am pleased to provide ACT Policing's formal response to the recommendations within the *Post Visit Report – ACT Watch House and Police Stations* at **Attachment A**. ACT Policing has already made progress against and completed several of the recommendations in the time since receiving the draft Report.

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As you will observe in our response, ACT Policing has accepted 29 out of the 30 recommendations, however; ACT Policing is unable to accept recommendation 10 as the introduction of privacy screening on toilets within the ACT Watch House presents an unacceptable risk to safety for persons in custody.

I note that page 38 of the Report refers to comments made during an inspection of the Brisbane Watch House facility in 2007, where staff advised that the risk to safety associated with the installation of privacy screens is minimal if reasonable assessments of self-harm risk are made on arrival. I do not consider this position to be sufficiently evidenced, or reflective of current best-practice given the passage of time since the comments were made. ACT Policing will engage with other jurisdictions on this issue and share our learnings with your office for awareness.

I note that your office has advised our Governance and Compliance Support team that several suggestions from the 2024 Post Visit Report are considered superseded by recommendations made in the 2025 Post Visit Report for the purposes of ongoing reporting. I would like to confirm that ACT Policing will consider the following recommendations superseded.

- 2024 Report – All Facilities Suggestion 21 (superseded by 2025 Rec 15)
- 2024 Report – ACT Watch House Suggestion 18 (superseded by 2025 Rec 19)
- 2024 Report – Tuggeranong Station Suggestion 3 (superseded by 2025 Rec 22)
- 2024 Report – Jervis Bay Suggestion 15 (superseded by 2025 Rec 26)

I would like to thank you once again for your Reports. I look forward to continuing to work with you and your team as ACT Policing progress our actions to address both the recommendations within the 2025 Post Visit Report, and the ongoing implementation of existing recommendations and suggestions from previous inspections.

If you require any additional information, please contact Acting Coordinator of ACT Legislation and Governance, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], or via email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Deputy Commissioner Scott Lee APM
Chief Police Officer, ACT Policing

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Attachment A – Recommendation response

ACT Policing’s response to the National Preventative Mechanism Post Visit Report (23 May – 23 June 2025)

Recommendation 1	Accepted	Recommendation 11	Accepted	Recommendation 21	Accepted
Recommendation 2	Accepted	Recommendation 12	Accepted	Recommendation 22	Accepted
Recommendation 3	Accepted	Recommendation 13	Accepted	Recommendation 23	Accepted
Recommendation 4	Accepted	Recommendation 14	Accepted	Recommendation 24	Accepted
Recommendation 5	Accepted	Recommendation 15	Accepted	Recommendation 25	Accepted
Recommendation 6	Accepted	Recommendation 16	Accepted	Recommendation 26	Accepted
Recommendation 7	Accepted	Recommendation 17	Accepted	Recommendation 27	Accepted
Recommendation 8	Accepted	Recommendation 18	Accepted	Recommendation 28	Accepted
Recommendation 9	Accepted	Recommendation 19	Accepted	Recommendation 29	Accepted
Recommendation 10	Not accepted	Recommendation 20	Accepted	Recommendation 30	Accepted

ACTP response	Total
Accepted	29
Partially accepted	0
Not accepted	1

All facilities



Recommendation 1:

ACT Policing improve demographic data collection within police custody for intersectional analysis. Data should identify, to the greatest extent practicable:

- **age groupings**
- **gender**
- **First Nations people status**
- **culturally and linguistically diverse status**
- **disability status**
- **types of impairment**
- **people who identify as LGBTIQ+**
- **average time in custody**
- **longest time in custody**

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will continue to improve capability within existing systems (including PROMIS and SAS Firefly) to capture and extract the information identified in this recommendation to the greatest extent practicable. As data collection and capacity to extract data increases, ACT Policing will develop a monthly demographic data 'dashboard' for presentation and analysis at the Operational Practices Safety Committee meetings (or other appropriate ACT Policing forum).

While ACT Policing recognise the importance of data collection and analysis in custodial environments, ACT Policing notes that disclosure of personal information such as First Nations status or disability status is at the discretion of the individual, and this information is not always willingly shared by a person when asked during their time in custody.

Expected timeframes: 12 months

Updates to existing systems (including PROMIS and SAS Firefly) are scheduled through a priority system and can be subject to protracted timeframes pending other priority updates.



Recommendation 2:

The Watch House Readiness Team, or another appropriate oversight mechanism, promptly review all instances where a person is deprived of liberty in excess of the legislated maximum, to ensure compliance with the *Corrections Management Act 2007* (ACT) and to identify opportunities for systemic improvement.

Accepted

Proposed action:

It is not common practice for ACT Policing to hold a person in custody over the maximum legislated period, and where this does occur, it is due to extenuating circumstances or a decision by the person in custody to remain past the exceeded timeframe. An example of this is when a person reaches the maximum time in custody late at night, and may wish to remain in custody and be released in the morning, rather than disturbing their sleep and having to find their way home during the night. ACT Policing members always seek to adhere to the legislation, and the ACT Watch House Manual provides members with guidance on their responsibilities in relation to maximum time in custody.

Notwithstanding, ACT Policing will seek to improve oversight of instances where a person remains in custody for longer than the legislated maximum time through the creation of an alert within the custody management module in PROMIS once the maximum time in custody has been reached.

Once this alert is in place, the ACT Watch House Operations Manual will be updated to require the on-shift Sergeant to notify the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the Watch House when a person has exceeded the legislated maximum time. The OIC will be responsible for reviewing each instance, and will consider if further review or monitoring is required.

Expected timeframes: 12 months

Updates to existing systems (including PROMIS) are scheduled through a priority system and can be subject to protracted timeframes pending other priority updates.

Recommendation 3:

ACT Policing continue to work with the ACT Government to ensure that future police custodial facilities, including an alternative Watch House, are designed in a manner that prioritises the human rights and safety of people deprived of liberty and of the staff that work within them.

Accepted (Subject to Cabinet in Confident considerations by the ACT Government)

Proposed action:



ACT Policing will continue working with ACT Government on strategic need for investment and plans for future policing infrastructure, including the development of a new fit-for-purpose ACT Policing headquarters, City Police Station, Watch House facility and alternative Watch House locations. ACT Policing is committed to ensuring the rights and safety of both people in custody and ACT Policing members is prioritised, now and into the future.

Expected timeframes: TBC

Timeframe to be confirmed pending further engagement with the ACT Government.

Recommendation 4:

ACT Policing progress the implementation of any partially implemented or not implemented suggestions from the 2024 Post Visit Summaries report on the ACT Watch House and police stations and the 2024 Post Visit Summary report on the Jervis Bay Police Station.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing appreciate the comprehensive report *Assessment of Implementation of Past Suggestions: ACT Watch House and Police Stations* provided by the Commonwealth and ACT National Preventative Mechanism following the 2025 visits to ACT Policing facilities.

As noted in the 2025 Post Visit Report, ACT Policing have conducted a significant amount of work within the ACT Watch House to address known issues, including several raised through the 2024 National Preventative Mechanism Post Visit Report. This work has included the construction of a purpose-built reasonable adjustment cell, replacement of the existing charge counter, upgrades to the duress alarm system and intercom, improvements to the padded cell, upgrades to the medical suite and kitchen facilities, flooring and paintwork improvements, CCTV upgrades, and improved heating and cooling within the facility.

These physical improvements are complemented by a further uplift to training, staffing capacity, and governance within the ACT Watch House, with work expected to continue throughout 2026.

ACT Policing will continue to progress the implementation of outstanding suggestions where possible and considered operationally appropriate.

ACT Policing note that several outstanding suggestions have been included as new recommendations within the *2025 Post Visit Summary Report* (the 2025 Report). In instances where the intent of a recommendation is repeated in the 2025 Report, ACT Policing will refer to the new recommendation for reporting purposes and consider the previous recommendation as superseded to avoid confusion.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing

Recommendation 5:



To strengthen practice in the Watch House, ACT Policing continue to invest in and support the Watch House Readiness Team, so that it can support the officers assigned to the Watch House, provide advice and guidance, coordinate and deliver training, review use of force incidents, review strip searches, advise on best practice and undertake audits of the readiness of other stations' watch house facilities.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing recognise and value the important work of the Watch House Readiness team and the support they provide to the operation and officers in the ACT Watch House. To uplift the support offered to ACT Policing members assigned to the ACT Watch House, ACT Policing will develop a specialised online training package which members will be able to access at any time, including as a refresher on specific elements of Watch House operations.

The proposed training package will include all identified training opportunities relevant to the Watch House contained within the *2025 Post Visit Summary Report*. As such, this package will be referred to as the 'Watch House online training package' in ACT Policing's responses to subsequent recommendations.

Expected timeframes: 12 months

This timeframe reflects current capacity within existing resources balanced with competing priorities.

Recommendation 23:

ACT Policing reviews the interview rooms at all police stations and the ACT Watch House to ensure:

- a) duress alarms are clearly locatable and accessible on the wall near the officer conducting the interview
- b) a landline telephone, preferably a conference phone to enable 3-way conversations, is placed in every interview room
- c) automated electronic signs are placed outside all interview rooms to alert others that an interview is taking place
- d) effort is made to make the interview rooms appear less sterile without compromising safety
- e) interview rooms are inspected on a regular basis to ensure unnecessary loose items are removed.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will ensure all designated interview rooms have functioning signage, clear and accessible duress alarms, and a schedule of routine inspections to ensure cleanliness and removal of loose items.

ACT Policing will consider options to make interview rooms appear less sterile; however, it is noted that 'soft interview rooms' are available in ACT Policing facilities for use when interviewing families, victims, and/or vulnerable people. These rooms are often larger than a standard interview room, with softer furnishings such as couches, and items including children's toys.

ACT Policing members are issued with a mobile device which can be used to facilitate 3-way conversations when required. Current ACT Policing practice is to use these mobile devices when required in an interview context. This negates the need for a landline telephone in interview rooms, and reduces the risk posed by the introduction of additional cabling into an interview room.

Expected timeframes: 6-18 months

Parts a, c, and e of this recommendation are expected to be addresses in the short term, while part d of this recommendation will be scheduled for completion within 18 months.

Recommendation 25:

ACT Policing ensure every vehicle used to convey a person deprived of liberty has audio and visual recording capability.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will consider options for introducing audio and visual recording capability to dedicated custody transport vehicles as part of the routine vehicle fit-out process.

Expected timeframes: 12-16 months

Introduction of audio and visual recording will likely occur in line with the natural attrition of custody transport vehicles in the ACT Policing fleet.

Recommendation 26:

ACT Policing ensure every vehicle used to convey a person deprived of liberty has aircon/heating capability in the detention pod.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will consider options for introducing heating and cooling capability to dedicated custody transport vehicles as part of the routine vehicle fit-out process.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing (expected to impact vehicles from December 2027)

Introduction of heating and cooling capability will likely occur in line with the natural attrition of custody transport vehicles in the ACT Policing fleet.

Recommendation 27:

ACT Policing review its fleet of vehicles with the intention of improving the design and safety of all detention pods, including through the possible inclusion of seatbelts, if an appropriate design has been thoroughly tested and is currently in operation in another jurisdiction.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing regularly review the design and safety of fleet vehicles, including when the vehicles reach 'end-of-life' and are replaced.

ACT Policing will consult with policing agencies across Australia to determine best practice in relation to the design and safety of detention pods. Responses from jurisdictions will be considered and further action will be taken based on the information provided through this consultation.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing

Any identified design or safety improvements will likely occur in line with the natural attrition of custody transport vehicles in the ACT Policing fleet.

Recommendation 28:

The tailored trauma-informed policing framework that is under development, include consideration of the impact of trauma on ACT Policing members, and how to focus on healthy coping mechanisms and supports for officers so as to reduce the negative impacts of routine exposure to traumatic events.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing is currently undertaking research into trauma-informed policing (TIP) to support the development of a TIP framework. The research, and the TIP framework that will be developed from it, will support practical measures such as:

- strengthened supervision and leadership modelling
- structured reflective practice
- clearer referral and partnership pathways

- improved access to supports and wellbeing mechanisms

These elements align directly with the focus of this recommendation and will help to reduce the negative impacts of trauma on ACT Policing members and promote a more trauma-aware policing culture.

Expected timeframes: 12-18 months

A definitive timeframe cannot be provided due to research timelines being dependent on a number of steps, such as the completion of the draft framework article, peer review and publishing process, however; ACT Policing will continue to work closely with the research team to ensure the framework meets the intent of this recommendation.

ACT Watch House

Recommendation 6:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure that underwear is included in the list of standard clothing supplies.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing has updated the ACT Watch House Operations Manual to reflect the current practice of storing underwear in the standard clothing supplies available at the Watch House.

Expected timeframes: Complete



Recommendation 7:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure:

- a) the use of paper/forensic suits due to violent behaviour, other non-compliance or self-harm risk, is an option of last resort, used only where necessary and proportionate, in line with an individualised risk assessment
- b) the decision to place someone in a paper/forensic suit is documented with a clear rationale and reviewed at regular intervals
- c) all reasonable action is taken to ensure a person's dignity, including returning their clothing or providing replacement clothing as soon as possible
- d) an appropriate mechanism is nominated to review all uses of paper/forensic suits at the ACT Watch House; to identify trends and opportunities for systemic improvement.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing has updated the ACT Watch House Operations Manual as per the recommendation.

Expected timeframes: Complete

Recommendation 8:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to ensure:

- a) women are asked about their menstrual needs in private and, where possible, by a female officer, during the reception and lodgement process
- b) when required, women are provided with new menstrual products without request, at least every 6 hours in custody and when released or transferred
- c) disposal of menstrual products is facilitated where possible by a female officer.

Accepted

Proposed action:



ACT Policing has updated the ACT Watch House Operations Manual as per the recommendation.

Expected timeframes: Complete

Recommendation 9:

ACT Policing update the Watch House Operations Manual to align with the *AFP National Guideline on persons in custody and police custodial facilities'* positive duty on officers to encourage persons deprived of liberty to shower as necessary and to attend to their personal hygiene.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing has updated the ACT Watch House Operations Manual to align with the positive duty expressed within the *AFP National Guideline on persons in custody and police custodial facilities* as per the recommendation.

ACT Policing has also updated the Watch House intake form to encourage persons in custody to request use of the shower during their time in custody. ACT Policing will facilitate these requests where possible, and without compromising the safety of the person in custody or any other person in the facility.

Expected timeframes: Complete

Recommendation 10:

ACT Policing prioritise the installation of privacy screening in the remaining cells at the ACT Watch House and implement privacy squares on the CCTV system to block out footage of a person using the toilet.

Not accepted

ACT Policing acknowledge the intent of this recommendation to improve privacy and dignity for persons in custody; however, ACT Policing believe there are significant risks associated with the use of privacy screening within custody cells.

ACT Policing members in the Watch House take their responsibility for the safety of all persons in their custody very seriously. Watch House staff regularly observe and respond to situations where a person in custody has internally concealed an implement of self-harm, illicit drugs, or a lighter prior to their lodgement at the ACT Watch House.

The concealed items are often retrieved while a person is using the toilet within their cell. Obstructing or removing CCTV vision of this area significantly reduces the likelihood of these items being identified by Watch House staff, therefore increasing the risk to the person in custody and others at the ACT Watch House.

ACT Policing believe that safety must be prioritised in a custody environment such as the ACT Watch House.

Recommendation 11:

ACT Policing improve the provision of information to people deprived of liberty about their rights, entitlements and avenues to make complaints.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will analyse and review current Watch House procedures to identify the most appropriate mechanism to provide information to people in custody. Furthermore, the provision of reading material into the property of persons in custody will be reviewed with the potential to add additional information pertaining to this recommendation.

Expected timeframes: 12 months

This timeframe reflects current capacity within existing resources balanced with competing priorities.

Recommendation 12:

ACT Policing improve how it collects and reviews all complaints received from people deprived of liberty at the ACT Watch House to ensure it can identify trends and opportunities for systemic improvement.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will engage with AFP's Professional Standards (PRS) to identify ways collect complaint information to help inform improvement within the ACT Watch House.

Expected timeframes: 6 months

The timeframe reflects the work required to engage with PRS, identify a process for improved information sharing, and implement a review mechanism to inform improvements in practice.

Recommendation 13:



ACT Policing consider amending the Watch House Operations Manual and Reception and Lodgement Form to require officers to verbally confirm if a person deprived of liberty has been provided the opportunity to notify a family member or third party about their arrest and detention, and once all necessary information is available, to proactively offer the opportunity to make a call. A record of these interactions should be made.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing has updated the Watch House Operations Manual and the Lodgement Form as per the recommendation.

Expected timeframes: Complete

Recommendation 14:

ACT Policing work with Clinical Forensic Medical Services to produce micro-learning videos for Watch House officers to reinforce their initial training. These micro-learning videos should include information on understanding social determinants of health and culturally capable care.

Accepted (subject to Canberra Health Services agreement/capacity)

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will engage with Canberra Health Services on the possible development of a module which can be included in the Watch House online training package referenced in response to recommendation 5. ACT Policing note that implementation of this recommendation may require additional funding and/or resource implications outside of ACT Policing's control.

Expected timeframes: TBC

Timeframe to be confirmed pending engagement with Canberra Health Services.

Recommendation 15:

ACT Policing continues to work with the ACT Government and the ACT Magistrates Court to improve the mental health assessment process to minimise the need for transfers to and from hospital, restraints in a medical setting and unnecessary detention.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will continue to work with the ACT Government and the ACT Magistrates Court to improve the mental health assessment process, including through workshops that will continue in early 2026. ACT Policing submitted a legislative reform proposal in 2025 to address this matter, and it is with the ACT Government for consideration.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing

Recommendation 16:

ACT Policing work with Clinical Forensic Medical Services to raise awareness among Watch House officers about the process for handling sealed takeaway methadone.

Accepted (subject to Canberra Health Services agreement/capacity)

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will engage with Canberra Health Services on the possible development of a module which can be included in the Watch House online training package referenced in response to recommendations 5 and 14. ACT Policing note that implementation of this recommendation may require additional funding and/or resource implications outside of ACT Policing's control.

Expected timeframes: TBC

Timeframe to be confirmed pending engagement with Canberra Health Services.

Recommendation 17:

ACT Policing ensure the training package developed for the ACT Watch House includes a module on strip searching. This training should emphasise

- a) **the inherently humiliating character of strip searching**
- b) **that strip searches must be carried out lawfully and professionally by a person of the same gender as the person who is being searched**
- c) **that strip searches should not be undertaken in the presence or view of a person whose presence is not necessary, unless unavoidable**
- d) **that strip searches should be undertaken in the designated strip-searching area, unless unavoidable**
- e) **that accurate records of all strip searches are maintained and include the reason for the search, the results, and the parties involved.**

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will develop a training module inclusive of points a-d of this recommendation which can be included in the Watch House online training package referenced in response to recommendations 5, 14, and 16.

The proposed module will also include guidance on the definition of a strip search, the reasons searches may be conducted in a Watch House/custody context, the types of searches that may be conducted, and the different pieces of legislation under which a search may be conducted. The module will also include information on how to properly record a strip search, and instructions on who must be notified and/or provide approval and when.

Expected timeframes: 18 months

This timeframe reflects current capacity within existing resources balanced with competing priorities.

Recommendation 18:

ACT Policing work with the ACT Government to expedite the procurement of body scanner technology at the ACT Watch House.

Accepted (subject to future Watch House facility)

Proposed action:

ACT Policing notes physical constraints within the existing ACT Watch House prevent the use of body scanners within the current footprint.

ACT Policing will consider this recommendation in the context of future facility planning, and implementation will be subject to funding through the ACT Government budget process.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing

Recommendation 19:

ACT Policing review the ACT Watch House staffing model to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the ACT Watch House at all times, including during peak periods and if possible, the reintroduction of Protective Services Officers to supplement staffing.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing actively considers resource management in the ACT Watch House; however, this must be balanced with the broader demands on the workforce. ACT Policing will continue to engage internally and with the broader AFP on opportunities to support ACT Watch House operations where possible and appropriate.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing

Woden Police Station

Recommendation 20:

ACT Policing officially decommission the holding cells at the Woden Police Station.

Accepted

Proposed action:

Between 29 January and 5 February 2026, ACT Policing's Corporate Governance Committee considered and out of session paper seeking endorsement of the formal decommissioning of the holding cells at the Woden Police Station. The paper was formally endorsed by the Committee on 5 February 2026. Consistent with current ACT Policing practice, the holding cells at Woden Police Station will not be used for custody purposes and these cells are now considered formally decommissioned.

Expected timeframes: Complete

Belconnen Police Station

Recommendation 21:

ACT Policing remedy the infrastructure deficiencies that pose a safety risk in the event Belconnen Police Station is required as an alternative Watch House. This includes:

- a) installing shielding to the charging counter similar to that now installed at the ACT Watch House
- b) exploring options to increase the staffing area capacity

c) locating a dedicated area for strip searching that ensures privacy can be maintained.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will seek advice and quotations for the installation of an appropriate safety shield on the charging counter at Belconnen Police Station. Given the limitations regarding extending the current footprint of the Belconnen Police Station, ACT Policing will consider alternatives to current operating procedures that may support the intent of this recommendation.

Expected timeframes: 18 months

In the current schedule of facility improvements, the installation of the safety shield is expected by August 2027.

Tuggeranong Police Station

Recommendation 22:

ACT Policing remedy the infrastructure deficiencies that pose a safety risk in the event Tuggeranong Police Station is required as an alternative Watch House. This includes

- a) installing privacy screening around the cell toilets to provide privacy from both outside view and cameras but still allowing sight lines to the upper body for officers to maintain visibility for security and safety purposes
- b) installing intercoms in all cells
- c) removing the camera from the visits room to enable confidential discussions with lawyers and/or personal visitors
- d) installing shielding to the charging counter similar to that now installed at the ACT Watch House and ensuring the counter extension is removed
- e) installing privacy screening to the staffing area room to ensure computer screens/white boards cannot be viewed by people deprived of liberty, but of a type which does not obscure officers' line of sight into the cells
- f) rectifying the safety and privacy deficiencies observed with the shower
- g) rectifying the safety deficiencies observed with the medical treatment room.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will ensure intercoms are operable in all custody cells within the Tuggeranong Police Station. ACT Policing will ensure that the visitor room within the Tuggeranong custody area has the capacity to restrict audio when in use to allow for confidential conversations; however, for safety reasons, removal of CCTV from this room is not possible.

ACT Policing will seek advice and quotations for the installation of an appropriate safety shield on the charging counter, and will install privacy mesh over the glass to prevent persons in custody from viewing the staffing area.

Rectification works will be conducted on the shower and the medical treatment room, to address deficiencies observed during the visits.

In line with the response to recommendation 10, ACT Policing will not install privacy screening within custody cells, given cited safety concerns.

Expected timeframes: 6-18 months

In the current schedule of facility improvements, intercoms at Tuggeranong Police Station are expected to be completed by July 2026, with the installation of the safety shield expected by August 2027.

Jervis Bay Police Station

Recommendation 24:

ACT Policing update the Jervis Bay Person in Custody Handbook to clarify under what authority officers maintain custody of a person deprived of liberty when transferred from the Jervis Bay Police Station to a NSW health facility for medical treatment or assessment.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing will update the Jervis Bay persons in Custody Handbook to reflect the current processes followed by ACT Policing members stationed at Jervis Bay in relation to persons in custody requiring medical treatment at a NSW health facility.

ACT Policing notes that for certain mental health assessments, current legislation requires persons in custody in Jervis Bay to be transported to the ACT for assessment. When Jervis Bay members require emergency action to be taken on a person who is suffering a mental health emergency, these powers are utilised by the NSW Ambulance Service, not ACT Policing.

In the rare instance that a person in custody at Jervis Bay requires urgent medical treatment or assessment, ACT Policing members always prioritise the health and safety of that person.

Expected timeframes: 3 months

Updates to governance materials will be managed within existing resources and balanced with existing priorities.

Recommendation 29:

ACT Policing consider alternatives to transporting, or more efficient ways of managing transport requests when required to transport people deprived of liberty from Jervis Bay Police Station to Canberra.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing acknowledge the impact of transporting a person in custody away from their community and family in Jervis Bay, to the ACT.

ACT Policing are actively working to identify alternatives to transporting persons in custody to the ACT, including through engagement with the Chief Psychiatrist.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing

Recommendation 30:

ACT Policing continue to support the activities undertaken by officers stationed at Jervis Bay within the Wreck Bay and Jervis Bay communities to promote genuine engagement and build on the existing relationships between community and Police; including by increasing opportunities for officers to work with the First Nations Liaison Officers team.

Accepted

Proposed action:

ACT Policing is committed to building strong, genuine relationships with the First Nations community in both the ACT and in Jervis and Wreck Bay. ACT Policing members stationed at Jervis Bay are always looking for ways to enhance their existing connection to community, and actively engage with local schools and community groups after hours to remain connected outside of their traditional policing capacity.

ACT Policing's First Nations Liaison Officers play an important role in supporting engagement with community and regularly attend community events with the team at Jervis Bay.

Expected timeframes: Ongoing

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