

CORONAVIRUS — PRISONS

Statement by Minister for Corrective Services

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Corrective Services) [12.08 pm]: I rise to provide an update on the COVID-19 response within Western Australia's custodial estate. Since March 2020, the Department of Justice has maintained a sustainable and scalable COVID-19 task force to respond to the virus across detention centres and all prisons. I commend the task force for providing a first class strategic and operational response for the maintenance of health, safety and security of people in custody, the staff and visitors. The task force has proactively engaged with external stakeholders and assisted with COVID-19 preparedness and response matters, including contact tracing, onsite response, and vaccinating people in custody. The task force continues to work with the custodial estate to provide tailored responses addressing local complexities associated with COVID-19 outbreaks. The adaptability of our frontline staff, who have responded so well to the challenges the pandemic has presented, needs to be recognised, along with their professional and compassionate approach.

The task force has undertaken a significant body of work, including the implementation of a vaccination program for prisoners, detainees and staff. To further protect the people within the department's care, educational posters and pamphlets were distributed to ensure that prisoners were aware of the benefits of receiving COVID-19 vaccinations. A total of 88 per cent of the prisoner population has been vaccinated, including 92 per cent of vulnerable prisoners and nearly 90 per cent of Indigenous prisoners. Prison staff and health professionals did a wonderful job in supporting prisoners with their choice to become vaccinated.

Throughout the pandemic, the response to outbreaks has been timely and effective and because of this careful management, corrective services has not had one death or hospitalisation due to COVID-19. This is a remarkable achievement given the high-risk environment and the number of vulnerable people housed within the custodial estate.