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Auditor General finds more can be done to minimise substances in prisons

In his latest report tabled in Parliament today, *Minimising Drugs and Alcohol in Prisons*, Auditor General Colin Murphy found the Department of Justice does not have a clear understanding of the extent of drug and alcohol use in prisons.

The presence of substances presents the Department with a challenge as it continues to also manage increased prisoner numbers and the stresses from overcrowding.

Mr Murphy said drugs and alcohol in prisons pose risks to staff and prisoners as their use can contribute to violent and disruptive behaviour, bullying and intimidation, and health issues.

'We found considerable improvement is needed to minimise the supply and use of substances and to help treat prisoners' addictions.

'Efforts to address supply are being undermined by poorly executed searches and limited access to quick and reliable searching devices,' Mr Murphy said.

The Department provides programs to address demand for drugs and alcohol but we found places are not available for all prisoners, timeliness of treatment is an issue and the program may not meet the cultural, educational, and gender specific needs of all prisoners.

In some cases, parole has been denied resulting in additional prison time and increased costs to the State, and if treatment is not available a key opportunity to intervene in substance addiction and rehabilitation has been missed.

Mr Murphy said prison is an ideal opportunity for the State to intervene in the cycle of addiction and drug related crime.

'Treating a prisoner's addiction is vitally important, but at the moment many prisoners are not receiving the treatment they need to break this cycle.

'The recommendations in the report build on the Department's existing practices and focus on practical and achievable actions that reflect the constrained resource environment within which agencies are operating,' Mr Murphy said.

The Auditor General's report, *Minimising Drugs and Alcohol in Prisons*, (Report 22 – 2017), is available on the Office of the Auditor General website at www.audit.wa.gov.au

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