

A pragmatic approach to Harm Reduction in Prisons

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Background/Approach: In 2017 NSW Health and Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) formed a joint Harm Reduction Reference Group (HRRG) to provide high-level oversight of Harm reduction initiatives across the System. The HRRG audited the access to disinfectants, condoms and education in NSW prisons. In 2018 through the group the Commissioner of CSNSW and the Chief Executive Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (The Network) endorsed 12 recommendations to improve Harm Reduction access across NSW Prisons.

Analysis/Argument: With support from external experts The Network and CSNSW have worked together over the past 3 years to implement these recommendations. Despite the different perspectives of health and security the HRRG have been able to find common ground to enable improvements in the area of Harm reduction to be implemented

Outcome/Results: A follow up audit in 2021 found significant improvements across the system in relation to Harm Reduction including a 30% increase in access to Disinfectant dispensers and a 60% increase in access to Condom and dental Dam Dispensers.

Conclusions/Applications: Despite differences in both organisation philosophies and aims with expert guidance from the HRRG external stakeholders the group has fostered common ground around Harm reduction allowing positive gain to be made.

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