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3 January 2018

The Hon John Dowd AO QC
President
Community Justice Coalition
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Dear Mr Dowd

I refer to your emails of 20 October 2017 and 18 December 2017 regarding the provision of computers in cells to deliver online counselling services. I also refer to your email dated 20 October 2017 to the Hon David Elliott MP, Minister for Corrections, on the matter. The Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf. The delay in responding is regretted.

The continued interest of the Community Justice Coalition (CJC) in the rehabilitation and counselling of inmates is appreciated. I note the information provided in your emails about the benefits of online counselling for offenders.

Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) supports increasing inmate access to computers and has satisfied itself of the benefits of controlled access to digital devices in cells. CSNSW has adopted a cautious and incremental approach to introducing computers to cells. At each step security considerations and community expectations are paramount considerations.

CSNSW has developed the Digital Offender Initiative to improve prison education and training. Through its Offender Digital Services Program Blueprint CSNSW is addressing the way technology can be appropriately and safely used to provide a range of services to offenders in custody to promote personal autonomy and responsibility; extend access to programs, services and information; support pro-social family contact; encourage constructive use of "in-cell" time; and enhance program effectiveness through multi-modal delivery that targets a range of dynamic risk factors and is more accessible and incorporates incentives and tools that lead to increased program participation.

As part of this CSNSW is trialling the use of laptops in cells for educational purposes at South Coast Correctional Centre, and for viewing e-briefs at the High Risk Management Correctional Centre.

The first stage of scaling up in cell technology has now commenced with the purchase of 800 digital devices that will be available for each inmate in the new rapid build correctional centres. Using these devices inmates can access online educational programs, legal resources and initiate self-service prison-related transactions such as scheduling programs and services, enrolling in courses, checking court schedules and ordering buy-ups. Inmates will also be able to make internal inquiries and applications on line.

The expansion of in cell solutions to other facilities will be built into the digital platform that will be delivered via the replacement of the Offender Telephone System that has recently been tendered. The implementation of the solution and the functions that will be used by CSNSW inmates will be determined via a robust analysis which will have regard to security issues, cost and community expectations.

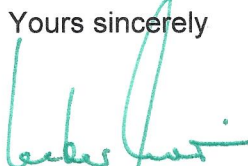
With regard to online counselling, CSNSW considers there are a number of complexities around this issue. These include the need for counselling, the equity of access by inmates to counselling, and the use and risks associated with technology in a prison.

CSNSW has not found any empirical evidence to directly support the claim that inmates will engage in online counselling, or that the delivery of online counselling for inmates has efficacy. CSNSW however is supportive of inmates accessing a range of appropriate services from internal and external service providers and is committed to exploring innovative options in digital technologies to support the future needs of inmates in NSW. Evidence for the usefulness of on line counselling in the community context is encouraging and this will be explored further when in cell digital solution have been bedded down.

I note also the concerns of the CJC that not all inmates have participated in a therapeutic program before their earliest possible release date. With regard to your references to the report of the Audit Office *Therapeutic Programs In Prisons*, it should be recognised that the release of the report coincided with the biggest expansion of therapeutic program delivery for offenders in the state's history. The report also did not adequately acknowledge the challenges facing all correctional agencies in their efforts to encourage high risk offenders to participate in, and complete, programs. Instead it focused narrowly on group work programs that are only one component of the Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) reoffending effort.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



PETER SEVERIN
COMMISSIONER