



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 177

WRITTEN QUESTION

K McNamara to the Minister for Corrections, Hon Gerard Maley MLA:

Neurodevelopmental impairments of children in custody

- 1. Do children or young people taken into custody receive a neurodevelopmental assessment?**

Through the Specialist Assessment and Treatment Service (SATS), youth detainees have access to specialist clinicians such as psychologists and social workers. Psychologists undertake a range of psychological, cognitive and functional assessments.

In addition to SATS, the Department of Health operates a medical centre at Holtze Youth Detention Centre that provides detainees access to paediatric and psychiatric support.

- 2. If not, is there a formal process in place to refer some children in custody for a neurodevelopmental assessment?**

At various stages during the young person's detention, they can be referred for cognitive and functional assessment. This is supported through a formal referral process through to SATS for action.

- 3. If so, what is this process?**

On admission, the receiving Youth Justice Officer completes the Initial Risk and Needs Assessment (IRNA) with the young person to identify risks and potential impairments. IRNA covers institutional risks/needs, risk factors for suicide/self-harm, drugs and alcohol use, psychiatric/psychological factors, intellectual disability, medical history, and physical disability.

SATS will undertake a joint intake assessment with cultural mentors, where applicable. The intake provides brief background history for the young person, social/emotional wellbeing, trauma, self-harm/suicide risk, alcohol and other drug use, current situation, sleep, behaviour

management, and a Mental Status Examination. The intake assessment assists in understanding the young person and their immediate needs, alongside identifying appropriate assessment/s, supports and referrals that may be needed. Behavioural indicators of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or other disability are also noted in this assessment (e.g. difficulty with cognition, attention, hyperactivity, communication/language, motor skills, memory, executive functioning, affect regulation, or adaptive behaviour).

This assessment reviews the young person's immediate needs within the centre and provides an opportunity for any issues or difficulties to be addressed and identify the need for any cognitive and or functioning assessment to be completed.

4. How many children and young people currently in custody have neurodevelopmental impairments?

There is an over-representation of youth detainees with cognitive and functional impairments. As outlined in the "Northern Territory Youth Detention Centres Model of Care" released in 2022, up to 89% of youth detainees may have severe neurodevelopmental impairment.

5. If no neurodevelopmental assessments are currently taking place for children or young people in custody, are there any plans to introduce this?

As outlined above, cognitive and functional assessments are available for youth detainees.