



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 297

WRITTEN QUESTION

J Davis to the Minister for Police, Hon Lia Finocchiaro MLA:

Watch House Custody Health and Ombudsman Recommendations

1. For each police watch house in the Northern Territory, please provide, in table form: the facility; whether a custody nurse position is funded; the number of funded full-time equivalent positions; the hours per day and days per week of nursing coverage provided; the number of those positions currently vacant; and the date on which the position was first funded.
 - a. Where custody nursing is provided under an arrangement with another agency or a contracted provider rather than by the Northern Territory Police Force, please name the agency or provider, and state the term and value of the arrangement.
 - b. For each watch house at which no custody nurse position is funded, on what date was the funding of such a position last considered, and by which agency?
 - c. If the number of funded positions is not recorded centrally, in which system or record is the establishment for each watch house maintained, and in what format?
2. Other than material already published, please list each coronial recommendation received by the Northern Territory Government since 2010 relating to the medical or nursing assessment of persons held in police custody, and for each: the inquest in which it was made; the date it was received; the Government's response; and its current implementation status at each watch house.
 - a. For any such recommendation not implemented at a particular watch house, what is the reason, and what is the expected implementation date?
3. What is the title, version and date of the policy, general order or standard operating procedure governing the medical assessment of persons taken into police custody?

- a. Within what period of a person being received into a watch house does that document require an assessment to be conducted, and by whom?
 - b. In which system is each assessment recorded?
 - c. For 2025–26, in how many cases was an assessment conducted within the required period, expressed as a number and as a percentage of persons received? Where a figure for an individual watch house is too small to report, please provide the Territory-wide total.
 - d. If compliance with that requirement is not measured, is the underlying information held in the custody management system, and in what format?
4. The Ombudsman's Watch House Investigation Report recorded detainees held without clean or laundered clothing, detainees sleeping on floors under continuous artificial lighting, and toilets used without screening from other detainees. What is the title, version and date of the policy, general order or standard operating procedure that governs conditions of detention in watch houses, including the provision of clothing, bedding, lighting and sanitation?
 - a. Which requirements of that document were not met in the incidents recorded in that report?
 - b. What amendments have been made to that document, or to the means by which compliance with it is enforced, since the report was tabled? Please provide the date of each amendment.
 - c. For 2025–26, in how many instances was non-compliance with that document recorded, and in which system is each instance recorded?
 - d. If compliance with that document is not measured, is the underlying information held in a form from which it could be compiled?
5. The Ombudsman's Watch House Investigation Report was tabled on 27 November 2025 (Tabled Paper 573) and made 16 recommendations. For each recommendation, please state: whether it is accepted, accepted in principle, not accepted, or under consideration; the date of that decision; and its current implementation status.
 - a. For each recommendation not yet implemented, what is the expected implementation date?

- b. Which recommendations, if any, have been assessed as requiring additional funding, and what amount has been identified for each?
 - c. For any recommendation recorded as under consideration, on what date did it enter that status?
- 6. Recommendation 1 of that report recommended that Territory prisoners be removed from watch house facilities as a matter of urgency, and that the Northern Territory Police Force and Corrections provide the Ombudsman monthly updates on the steps taken. The Force's published response states that it is "not accepted that NT Police provides the Ombudsman monthly updates on steps taken to remove Territory prisoners from the watch houses", and submits that the reporting should rest with Corrections. Recommendation 16 separately recommended that, for a period of 18 months following tabling, Corrections and the Force provide the Ombudsman a list of Territory prisoners held in a watch house facility for seven or more days — including the prisoner's name, sex, date of birth, the watch house they are held in, how long they have been held there, the reason for their length of stay and any action to exit them — when this occurs and weekly thereafter. Both agencies accepted Recommendation 16 in principle.
 - a. Has reporting under Recommendation 16 commenced and, if so, on what date was the first list provided?
 - b. For each week since that reporting commenced, how many Territory prisoners appeared on the list, by watch house?
 - c. Given the Force's response to Recommendation 1, which agency now provides the monthly updates, on what date did they commence, and how many have been provided?
 - d. If reporting under either recommendation has not commenced, what is the reason, and what figure is recorded in the custody management system for the number of Territory prisoners held in each watch house for each week since 27 November 2025?
- 7. The Government has stated that it has ceased holding people in watch houses for extended periods. For 2025–26 and for 2026–27 to date, please provide for each watch house the number of persons held for a continuous period exceeding 24 hours, exceeding 72 hours, and exceeding 7 days.
 - a. What was the longest continuous period for which any person was held in each watch house in each of those years?
 - b. Where a figure for an individual watch house is too small to report, please provide the Territory-wide total for each threshold.

- c. If length of stay is not compiled in that form, in which system is the time of reception and time of release for each person recorded, and in what format is that data maintained?
8. On 20 August 2026 a spokesperson for the Northern Territory Police Force stated publicly, in relation to records of the length of time young people had spent in watch houses, that the data “should not be relied upon”; that the records “are subject to manual data entry and, in some instances, may not accurately reflect the actual length of time a young person remained in a watch house”; and that where an error or incomplete record is identified retrospectively, “there may not be sufficient information available to reliably reconstruct the precise period a person spent in custody”.
 - a. On what date did the Force first identify that defect, and in which record, review or report is that identification documented?
 - b. Does the defect affect records of adults as well as of young people?
 - c. Is the defect present in records created today and, if not, from what date were records reliable?
 - d. What remediation has been undertaken or is planned, at what cost, and by what date will it be complete?
 - e. The Northern Territory Police Association has called for the system to be rectified. On what date did it do so, and what was the Force's response?
 - f. Does the weekly reporting to the Ombudsman referred to in question 6 draw on the same field or system?
 - g. Has the Commissioner advised the Minister that the length of time a person is held in a watch house cannot be reliably reported and, if so, on what date?
9. In respect of the persons who were held in the conditions recorded in the Ombudsman's Watch House Investigation Report:
 - a. Has any person held in a Northern Territory watch house been offered an apology, compensation or any other remedy in respect of the conditions recorded in that report? If so, how many, and how was each determined?
 - b. How many complaints were received from, or on behalf of, persons held in watch houses concerning conditions of detention in each of the last three financial years, and how many were upheld?

- c. If no remedy has been offered to any person, on what basis was that determined, and by whom?
- 10. In respect of the requirements that were not met, as recorded in the Ombudsman's Watch House Investigation Report:
 - a. How many members of the Northern Territory Police Force have been the subject of a disciplinary or managerial process arising from the matters recorded in that report? Please state the number without identifying any individual.
 - b. How many such processes have concluded, how many resulted in a finding, and how many in a sanction?
 - c. If no disciplinary or managerial process arose from those matters, on what basis was that determined, and by whom?
- 11. On 28 April 2026 the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency published a media release stating that portions of the Darwin City Watch House have been renamed the Darwin Transitional Custody Centre and transferred to the control of the Department of Corrections; that its clients are being held there in watch house-like cells "for 4-5 weeks at a stretch", with four to five other people, for around 23 hours a day; and that there are no on-site medical staff and no routine health screening at the facility. The release states this is despite the Northern Territory Government claiming that people are no longer being held for extended periods in watch houses.
 - a. On what date were portions of the Darwin City Watch House redesignated as the Darwin Transitional Custody Centre, under what instrument, and which cells and areas were transferred?
 - b. Are persons held at the Darwin Transitional Custody Centre counted in any figure the Government reports for the number of persons held in watch houses? If they are not, from what date did they cease to be counted?
 - c. What was the longest continuous period any person was held at the Centre in 2025–26, and what was the average length of stay in each month since it was established?
 - d. Is there on-site medical staffing at the Centre and, if so, at what hours and at what staffing level? Is routine health screening conducted on entry and, if so, by whom?
 - e. What arrangements exist for a person's recorded family contact numbers to be transferred with them on movement into the Centre?