

Mental Health Foundation welcomes report on mental health services for prisoners

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The Mental Health Foundation welcomes a report by the Auditor General outlining recommendations to improve mental health services for prisoners.

Deb Christensen, a Mental Health Foundation Board member, says “Mental illness affects a large number of New Zealanders and it is essential that people in all parts of society, including those in the prison system, have access to mental health services.”

“We need to cater for people’s mental health needs wherever they reside,” says Deb Christensen, “and that includes people inside the prison system or serving home detention sentences in the community.”

Specialist mental health facilities are available for those people who, due to a mental illness, are considered not to be responsible for their actions. But most prisoners do not fall into this category. Many prisoners may have a mental illness at the time of their imprisonment that does not diminish their responsibility, or may develop a mental illness during their time in prison.

“For these people, we need to look at what support services are in place both in prison and following their release,” says Deb Christensen.

The Auditor General’s report highlights the need to understand the mental health needs of prisoners and ensure that people working with prisoners are well trained in dealing with all types of mental illness.

Deb Christensen says “We welcome the report; our interest now is in seeing how the recommendations will be implemented.”

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Further information:

Auditor General's report "Mental Health Services for Prisoners":

<http://www.oag.govt.nz/2008/prisoners-mental-health>