

Recommendation Response from Department of Health Biannual Report – February 2025

Matthew Francis Leach died, aged 50 years, as a result of ligature compression of the neck (hanging). Mr Leach had a history of alcohol use disorder since his early twenties with associated comorbidities. His mental health issues were poorly defined, with self-reported depression and anxiety, intermittently treated with antidepressant medication. Mr Leach and was remanded in custody at Hakea Prison and was initially placed in the Crisis Care Unit (CCU) for management of alcohol withdrawal, was placed on the At-Risk Management System (ARMS) and reviewed by a psychologist with the Psychological Health Service. His final court appearance was not treated as a 'Date of Interest' by prison staff, which would have ensured increased support and monitoring was provided before and afterwards. Mr Leach was sentenced to a total of 12 months in prison, though he had formed a belief that he would be released from prison. Later that day he was found to have hung himself using a bedsheet and the cell door. The coroner found the manner of death to be suicide.

The coroner made two recommendations relating to funding for the recruitment of staff and extended facilities to provide appropriate mental health care to prisoners, and to the consideration of alternative models of mental health care for prisoners, such as the Queensland model.

The CRC reviewed these findings and members were joined by a guest representative from the Department of Justice to discuss key issues of concern including workforce and risk assessment and treatment. Members discussed the Queensland model of care for health care in corrections and plans to develop a discussion paper for consideration by the Department of Health/Mental Health Commission Joint Leadership Group, with the Department of Justice being involved in the ongoing conversation.

The Department of Health has also commenced discussions with the Department of Justice, initially through the HSOJOE and will continue to engage with the Department of Justice and other major stakeholders to progress this recommendation.

Further updates will be sought for the progress of the Leach recommendation and will be included in the next biannual progress report.