



Policy Directive 32

Prisoners at Risk of Self Harm or Requiring Additional Support and Monitoring

Legislation / policy referred to:

[Prisons Act 1981](#) ss 7(1), 95A and 95B

[Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia 2004](#) ss 1.27, 1.31, 1.34, 2.4, 2.18-2.20 and 2.32.

[ARMS Manual](#)

[SAMS Manual](#)

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1. Introduction

The Department of Corrective Services is committed to the early identification and management of adult offenders in custody presenting either as at risk to self, or as requiring multidisciplinary intervention and additional support and monitoring whilst in the custodial environment.

To facilitate this the Department implemented the **At Risk Management System (ARMS)** providing a framework for suicide prevention which is formalised in policy, with clear procedures for staff to assist in the identification and management of prisoners at risk to self.

The At Risk Management System incorporates various preventative strategies and requires a whole of prison approach. It also provides a multi-disciplinary case-management system which draws together the expertise of different staff groups for the prevention and management of prisoners facing an acute self-harm or suicidal crisis.

To complement this is the **Support and Monitoring System (SAMS)**, which also provides a collaborative case management system for the management of prisoners who are not at risk to self, but have been identified as requiring multidisciplinary intervention and additional support and monitoring whilst in the custodial environment.

The Department's strategies aim to provide continuity of care, and consistency across facilities in terms of the identification and management of prisoners requiring additional assistance whilst in custody. They rely on a whole of prison, holistic approach, and are formalised in policy.

The Assistant Commissioner Custodial Operations, in consultation with the Clinical Governance Unit, shall approve and maintain operational procedures consistent with this policy, to be published as manuals or such other format as may be approved by the Assistant Commissioner.

Guidelines, procedures, and the role and responsibilities of staff are outlined in the respective [ARMS Manual](#) and [SAMS Manual](#).

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to formalise the requirement to identify and appropriately manage prisoners who present either as at risk to self, or as requiring additional support and monitoring whilst in custody. In addition to providing guidance to Superintendents, Officers and Prison Staff, the Policy provides a foundation on which standards and procedures are developed to enable sound governance, and consistency across facilities.

3. Scope

This Policy Directive applies to all public and private prisons and work camps and is to be applied with reference to all relevant legislation (*Prisons Act 1981*, Prison Regulations 1982), Adult Custodial Rules, Policy Directives, Operational Instructions, Local and Standing Orders, and the procedural manuals for the At Risk Management System (ARMS) and the Support and Monitoring System (SAMS).

4. Definitions

See glossary attached

5. Policy Content

The Department of Corrective Service's suicide prevention strategy is based on the public health model which requires multiple approaches across 3 levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) in order to be effective. The 3 levels are:

- **Primary prevention** – strategies which aim to create a physical and social environment in the prison that limits stress on prisoners. For example, comprehensive induction / orientation processes aim to reduce stressors of prisoners upon admission to custody. Additional preventative measures include anti-bullying policies to reduce or prevent bullying between prisoners or the provision of meaningful employment, programs, and / or education.
- **Secondary prevention** – includes strategies that aim to support prisoners at

statistically higher risk of suicide or self harm. Procedures relating to the management of New Young Offenders is an example of a secondary prevention strategy.

- **Tertiary prevention** - includes strategies which are aimed directly at individuals who are identified as at risk of self-harm or suicide. Increased monitoring, the provision of psychological intervention, and / or placement in a safer environment if necessary are tertiary prevention strategies.

The principle of shared responsibility is paramount, in terms of identification and the management of prisoners presenting as either at acute risk to self, or requiring additional support or monitoring. The reasons for this are as follows:

- **Suicide is not simply a medical problem:** Officers and employees of all disciplines shall work together to share information, knowledge and skills in assessing and managing prisoners. A team approach leads to an improved quality of care for prisoners at risk.
- **The need to support staff:** Coping with prisoners who may be suicidal inevitably causes concern and anxiety. Wherever possible the designated Superintendent shall not leave officers to make key decisions in isolation. Making decisions on a team basis provides reassurance and enables officers and employees to take justified risks where appropriate.
- **A consistent approach:** A team approach encourages consistency in the management of individual prisoners. Work is not repeated and it avoids any manipulation of different parties involved in the case. There is also a likelihood of greater consistency in the quality of care offered to prisoners in general; the action taken is less likely to depend on individuals.
- **The prisoner's responsibility:** Prisoners themselves must accept some responsibility for dealing with problems which could lead to suicide or self-harm. The prisoner shall be involved insofar as is possible in identifying their problems and ways of tackling them. Suicide is ultimately a matter of choice, though others can usually influence that choice.

Shared responsibility does not absolve an officer of responsibility or accountability; however no individual officer should be expected to carry all the responsibility should an incident of suicide or self-harm occur. The key to the multi-disciplinary approach is effective communication, teamwork and support, along with thorough procedures and systems of documentation.

6. Related Key Legislation / Policies

- [ARMS Manual](#)
- [Prisons Act 1981](#) ss 7(1), 95A and 95B
- [SAMS Manual](#)
- [Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia 2004](#) ss 1.27, 1.31, 1.34, 2.4, 2.18-2.20 and 2.32

7. Approved

Commissioner:

Ian Johnson

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Johnson', written over a horizontal line.

Date:

18 May 2010

Policy Sponsor

Assistant Commissioner Custodial Operations

Contact Person

Superintendent Operations

Glossary

Definitions:

ARMS	At Risk Management System
At Risk Prisoner	A prisoner who is considered to be at risk of self harm or at risk of assault from other prisoners, or one who has a potentially harmful medical condition. In the context of this directive, the first condition of the definition applies.
Buddy	A prisoner who can be a relative, a friend or a peer support prisoner who agrees to share a cell with an At Risk prisoner. They can provide help and support to a prisoner in need, and are able to alert staff when they are concerned about the at-risk prisoner.
Double Up	In the context of this directive is defined as the placement of an At risk prisoner in a cell with other prisoners as a means of providing social support and reducing isolation.
Instrumental suicide-related behaviour	Any interpersonal action (verbal, nonverbal, stopping short of a directly self-harmful act) that a reasonable person would interpret as communicating or suggesting that a suicidal act or other suicide related behaviour might occur in the near future.
Officer	A person appointed or deemed appointed for the purposes of the <i>Prisons Act 1981</i> and includes Prison Officers, Public Servants, Contractors and Medical Officers employed in the operation of the prison.
PRAG	Prisoner Risk Assessment Group.
Risk	The Department of Corrective Services acknowledges that all prisoners by virtue of simply being in prison pose an elevated risk of suicide and/or self-harm. All at risk prisoners will be managed according to the guidelines as outlined in section 5 of the ARMS Manual which defines behaviours and activities noted according to the level of risk, together with notes on the required level of supportive supervision.
SAMS:	relates to the Support and Monitoring System which provides a collaborative, coordinated approach to the identification of prisoners who are not an acute risk to self, however require additional support, management, intervention and/or monitoring within the prison environment
Self-harm	The practice of injuring oneself in order to relieve emotional distress with non-fatal consequences.
Suicide	Death from injury, poisoning or suffocation where there is evidence (implicit or explicit) that the injury was self-inflicted and the person intended to kill him/herself.

Suicide attempt with injuries	An action resulting in non-fatal injury, poisoning or suffocation, where there is evidence (implicit or explicit) that the injury was self-inflicted and that the person intended at some level to kill him/herself.
Suicide attempt without injuries	A potentially self-injurious behaviour with a nonfatal outcome for which there is evidence (implicit or explicit) that the injury was self-inflicted and that the person intended at some level to kill him/herself
Suicide ideation	Any self reported thoughts of engaging in suicide related behaviour.
Suicide threat	Any interpersonal action (verbal, nonverbal, stopping short of a directly self-harmful act) that a reasonable person would interpret as communicating or suggesting that a suicidal act or other suicide related behaviour might occur in the near future
Terminology used on Total Offender Management System (TOMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Harm Actual: an Offender who has a history of self-harm • Self-Harm Potential: an Offender who has been diagnosed as a risk of self-harm • Suicide Attempt: an Offender who is known to have previously attempted suicide • Suicide Potential: an Offender who displays suicidal tendencies.