

Taking sexual and reproductive health services inside: Embedding best practice care in South Australia prisons

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Background/Purpose:

People in custodial settings face significant barriers to accessing timely and appropriate sexual and reproductive healthcare. Recognising these challenges, SHINE SA has partnered with correctional health services to support the delivery of in-reach clinical care aiming to improve health access and equity for people in custodial settings.

Approach:

SHINE SA delivers weekly clinics at Adelaide Women's Prison (AWP), staffed by a nurse and medical officer, and monthly nurse-led clinics at Yatala Labour Prison. These clinics provide primary sexual and reproductive healthcare within a prison context, in collaboration with on-site prison health teams.

Outcomes/Impact:

At AWP, comprehensive services are provided, including STI testing, treatment, and management; cervical screening and follow-up care; contraceptive counselling and initiation (including Implanon and IUD procedures); as well as assessment and management of gynaecological and breast health issues. Shared care pathways are implemented where appropriate.

Innovation and Significance:

Providing sexual and reproductive healthcare in prison settings presents unique logistical and systemic challenges—particularly in ensuring patient access to services amid security restrictions and unit protocols. Despite these barriers, SHINE SA has established a model that supports privacy, continuity of care, and collaboration with correctional staff. Clinics are supported by efficient administrative systems including pre-prepared patient notes, on-site medications and equipment, and structured clinical handovers.

Barriers remain, such as difficulty arranging external specialist appointments due to transport logistics and the use of restraints, which can deter attendance. SHINE SA has, on occasion, successfully advocated for nurse escorts to facilitate essential external care.

This model demonstrates that it is possible to deliver high-quality, patient-centred sexual and reproductive healthcare within restrictive environments. Providing these services within prisons plays a critical role in supporting the health autonomy and rights of incarcerated individuals, a population often underserved in healthcare systems.