

Health Services in State Correctional Facilities

Update to 2014 Evaluation Report

March 2016

Problems Identified

- **Policies Inconsistently Aligned with Professional Standards.** Department of Corrections (DOC) health services policies were consistent with some but not all of the standards and recommended practices of the corrections profession.
- **Weak Quality Assurance Mechanisms.** Inmates had limited options if they had concerns about the health services they received. Also, DOC prisons were not accredited by external organizations, and (unlike other correctional facilities in Minnesota) they were not licensed. Some prison health care units that are similar to facilities regulated by other state agencies were not subject to this type of oversight.
- **Inmate Copayments Not Always Consistent with Law.** State law requires a \$5 inmate copayment “per visit.” However, DOC did not require inmates to make copayments if they were indigent, nor did it require copayments for mental health visits.
- **Higher Pharmaceutical Prices.** For items on which we could make direct comparisons, we found that DOC paid more, in aggregate, than a State of Minnesota purchasing organization.

Changes Implemented

- **Updated Policies.** Consistent with our report, DOC has amended (or is amending) its health services policies and provided additional guidance in a number of areas, including: nursing practices, emergency responses during hours when health care staff are not on duty, chronic disease management, reviews of inmate deaths, inmate requests to see health services staff, and inmate copayments. In addition, as we recommended, DOC has developed staffing plans and performance objectives for health services.
- **Pursuing Facility Accreditation.** Our report said that accreditation by an outside organization was a possible means of providing greater assurance of service quality in Minnesota’s prisons. Such reviews could help to ensure that DOC’s health services align with practices recommended by corrections professionals. DOC’s central office received accreditation from the American Correctional Association in 2015, and individual prisons will be seeking accreditation during the next three years.
- **Competitive Pricing.** As we recommended, DOC has been seeking more competitive prices for inmate medications and medical supplies. DOC joined a multi-state organization for this purpose and has been purchasing insulin and some other medications through it.

Action Needed

- **Require Regulatory Review of Certain DOC Health Services Units.** The Legislature should amend state law to require the Department of Human Services (DHS) to periodically determine the compliance of DOC’s Mental Health Unit with applicable DHS rules, and it should require the Department of Health to determine the compliance of two prison health care units with the applicable rules of that department.
- **Clarify Law on Copayments.** The Legislature should clarify DOC’s authority to adopt exemptions to the general statutory requirement for inmate copayments.