

Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (Department) Use of Temporary Stabilization Units

Department has not always followed its policy and procedures for referring youth to temporary stabilization units (TSUs), and youth isolation can potentially have negative consequences and undermine the Department's mission to rehabilitate youth

Audit purpose

To determine whether the Department's use of TSUs for delinquent youth committed to its care is consistent with Department policy and best practices for rehabilitating delinquent youth.

Key findings

- Department has established 2 TSUs (1 for males and 1 for females) to isolate and stabilize youth who are an imminent danger of inflicting substantial injury to themselves or others, and 84 percent of youth in its care between January 2019 and February 2020 spent time in TSUs.
- Department policy and procedures outline youth de-escalation, TSU referral, check-in, and admission procedures and time frames, and it regularly reviews for compliance with several of these procedures. Department policy and procedures also indicate that TSU should only be used as a last resort when a youth is an imminent danger of inflicting serious physical harm to themselves or others and after all appropriate and practical interventions have been taken to safely stabilize and de-escalate the youth's behavior.
- Although the Department's TSU policy is consistent with best practices, it did not follow its TSU referral policy and procedures for 12 of 30 referrals we reviewed. Specifically, Department staff either did not follow the policy and procedures or document the required TSU referral details in incident reports.
- Department's noncompliance with TSU referral policy and procedures may increase youth exposure to isolation, which can potentially have a range of negative consequences, including psychological, physical, and developmental harm for youth, and undermine its mission to rehabilitate youth.
- When youth are referred to TSU, they are also subject to strip searches and, in many cases, mechanical restraints, both of which can cause trauma and have other negative impacts.
- Department does not review TSU referrals to help ensure compliance with TSU policy and procedures but identified and implemented revised documentation requirements and supervisory approval procedures for some TSU referrals during our audit. The Department reported that these changes have resulted in a decrease in TSU referrals.

Key recommendations

The Department should:

- Follow its policy and procedure requirements for referring youth to TSU and ensure that TSU referrals comply with policy and procedure by:
 - Developing and implementing policies and procedures for reviewing compliance with the Department's de-escalation and TSU referral procedures to identify, track, and reduce noncompliant TSU referrals.
 - Revising and implementing its TSU policy and procedures to address any differences between policy and standard practice as needed.
 - Ensuring its staff are trained on any TSU policy and procedure revisions.