

Solitary Confinement Transformation Project

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Solitary Confinement Transformation Project (SCTP)?

The Solitary Confinement Transformation Project is an initiative envisioned and created by the Washington State Department of Corrections to reduce our use of solitary confinement by 90% over the next five years.

What is solitary confinement?

Solitary confinement is the security protocol in which an incarcerated individual is in a single-person cell for more than 20 hours per day- without meaningful human interaction, programming, or congregate opportunities. These conditions exist within restrictive housing areas such as Intensive Management Units (IMUs), Administrative Segregation (AdSeg) Units, Close Observation Areas (COAs), or other isolated settings within prisons.

What is restrictive housing?

Restrictive housing is the physical structure/unit in which individuals who pose a safety concern are housed, separated from the general population. Restrictive housing uses single occupancy cells to separate incarcerated individuals from the general population due to elevated safety and security concerns.

What is Administrative Segregation (Ad Seg)?

Administrative segregation is a temporary process to safely house an individual who poses a significant risk to the safety and security of staff, other individuals, a facility, requests protection or is deemed to require protection, is pending transfer to a more secure facility, poses a serious escape risk, or is pending investigation for behavior that represents a significant threat, which may include investigation from outside law enforcement agencies. Its purpose is to temporarily remove an individual from the general population until a timely and informed decision can be made about appropriate housing based on behavior and security.

What is the status of the SCTP?

The SCTP has made significant strides in 2024 through the Proof of Concept, or pilot initiative, launched in July at Stafford Creek Corrections Center (SCCC) IMU. This pilot project demonstrates targeted implementation of requirements from the SCTP Plan with the resources available. Key progress includes:

- Increase in Out-of-Cell Time: Average daily time out-of-cell in the SCCC IMU increased by 83% within 35 days of implementation in August 2024.
- Statewide Impact: The most restrictive solitary conditions (<2 hours out-of-cell daily) have decreased by 14% statewide since January 2023.

Does this project mean that everyone in solitary confinement is moving into general population?

No. Reducing the use of solitary confinement by 90% does not change the housing assignment for individuals who pose a serious threat to others or the safety and security of

the facility.

How are we going to accomplish more out-of-cell time without more staff?

Staffing levels that ensure the safety of staff and incarcerated individuals remain a top priority for the SCTP initiative. Secretary Strange has emphasized sufficient staffing resources are essential, and legislative support is required to sustain this transformation. We have already made significant progress in addressing staffing needs, including:

- Custody Positions: Multiple additional positions to facilitate increased movement and out-of-cell activities.
- Support Roles: One Office Assistant dedicated to data tracking and reporting.
- Specialized Staff:
 - Investigator to expedite investigations and improve restrictive housing transitions.
 - Psych Associate dedicated to Restrictive Housing mental health needs.
 - Psych Associate assigned to support Washington Way Resource Team participants.
 - Psychologist contractor hired to further bolster mental health services.

These staffing enhancements are essential for maintaining safety, providing mental health support, and ensuring the initiative's success.

Some incarcerated individuals repeatedly return to restrictive housing. What are the intervention strategies planned to reduce future placement in restrictive housing for these individuals?

As part of this initiative, DOC will conduct clinical risk assessments through all custody levels and implement responsive evidence-based programming and Cognitive Behavioral Interventions for those at high risk for placement in restrictive housing. Creating alternatives to Administrative Segregation will reduce the incidence of placement in restrictive housing, and lower the number of those housed under the conditions of solitary confinement.

What if an incarcerated individual refuses to come out of their cell?

Unless an individual is deemed too dangerous, all incarcerated people will have time out of cell scheduled and offered; an incarcerated may refuse time out of cell, though it will be encouraged and all time out or refused is documented. Opportunities for out-of-cell time will continue to be offered, regardless of refusal or amount of time in restrictive housing.

When does more out-of-cell time start, and is it a phased approach?

Some of these initiatives are already under way at some facilities, while others will require additional funding for staff, programs and additional space for recreation and programming. As legislative appropriations are received, DOC will expand its resources and systematically offer more out-of-cell time as it becomes possible.

How does this benefit staff?

Prisons are an inherently dangerous environment, and restrictive housing is one of the most intense, high-stress and challenging places to work within prisons. Shifting the prison culture in a way that blends rehabilitative practices for individuals, greater positive interactions with staff and lower violence has been shown to create a safer, more positive working environment. DOC recognizes that existing research reveals the average life expectancy for correctional officers is only 59 years of age. By implementing the [Washington Way](#) initiative, the agency is committed

to creating a healthier work environment for our staff, more positive interactions with incarcerated individuals, and a better overall work-life balance by reducing the life stressors our staff experience.

Why are we doing this, anyway?

Solitary confinement has the potential to cause long-lasting harm to some incarcerated individuals. While it can be an effective way to prevent violence, spending prolonged periods under these conditions can have devastating effects on an individual's mental and physical health, long after they leave our facilities. In other states under legislative mandates requiring elimination of solitary confinement, the result has been an immediate and significant increase in violence against staff and other incarcerated individuals, creating an environment profoundly detrimental to the safety and security of the entire prison community. The agency is committed to internally developing a proactive approach and providing more safe and humane prison system for all.

Which populations are counted in the 90%? Is it just those in restrictive housing, or those in other areas under the conditions of solitary confinement too?

Solitary confinement protocols only exist within restrictive housing units. Medical units and COAs are examples of settings that might not typically be considered restrictive housing, but where solitary confinement protocols may apply. In those areas, individuals will continue to be tracked and reported for transparency.

Does SCTP change access to visiting, mail or phone calls between the incarcerated and their families and loved ones?

The SCTP does not impose additional restrictions on communication or visitation. In fact, visitation hours in SCCC's and WSP's IMU have been updated to mirror regular visitation schedules, increasing access for families and loved ones.

What programming is going to be offered?

As part of this initiative, the DOC is implementing a range of evidence-based and responsive programming tailored to individuals at high risk for placement in restrictive housing across all custody levels. Recent progress made at SCCC includes F.A.S.T. (Fun Activities and Social Time) which offers regular opportunities for engagement and meaningful out-of-cell time. F.A.S.T. and congregate meals and programs such as Stress and Anger Management are delivered out of cell to support personal growth and encourage social interaction.

Where can I find more information on the Solitary Confinement Transformation Project?

Please visit <https://doc.wa.gov/SCTP> to view the entire plan. You may also email questions to DOCSTP@doc1.wa.gov.