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## “Lockdown, Suicide Claims Spark Outcry at Melbourne Prison”

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– Categories: Crime



Shocking allegations have emerged from inside the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC), Victoria’s maximum-security prison for women, with former inmates claiming widespread lockdowns, suicide attempts, and unsafe living conditions.

Ashleigh Chapman, who spent four years at the DPFC before her release in May, described her time in solitary confinement as psychologically tormenting. Locked in her cell for up to 24 hours a day, Chapman said she experienced severe weight loss, medical neglect, and exposure to contaminated water. “The water turned my kettle black,” she claimed, adding

that staff repeatedly ignored her food allergies, sometimes serving only cereal or nothing at all.

Her experience was echoed by Kelly Flanagan, another former inmate who was released in March after two years in the Murray Unit. Flanagan documented daily lockdowns and claims that seven women attempted suicide in her final month inside, including five Indigenous inmates. “Two of those attempts were nearly fatal,” she said. “One woman near me tried to end her life in silence. She couldn’t handle being alone anymore.”

Both women blame staff shortages for the extreme isolation. Flanagan tracked lockdowns at the prison from January 2024 to May 2025, showing repeated full-day lockdowns across various units. In one instance, the Gordon Unit, where Chapman was held, had 14 full-day lockdowns in just two months due to lack of staff.

The Victorian government has acknowledged the issue. During Question Time in May, Corrections Minister Enver Erdogan admitted to being “frustrated” with the frequency of lockdowns but defended them as necessary for safety and security.

The Department of Corrections responded by stating that during lockdowns, prisoners still have access to healthcare, meals, and legal services. A spokesperson also denied reports of green or contaminated water at the facility.

Shadow Corrections Minister David Southwick criticised the government, saying the prison system is “overcrowded, understaffed, and unsafe.” He warned that ongoing staff shortages are fueling a crisis that impacts both inmates and correctional officers. “This is not justice. It’s neglect,” Southwick said.

While the Department said new staff recruits are set to begin at DPFC, advocates including Chapman and Flanagan are calling for immediate reforms to address the mental health and safety of incarcerated women in Victoria.