



Queensland Corrective Services

# Strategic Research

## Agenda

2017 - 2022

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# The Strategic Research Agenda 2017–2022

## Introduction

In February 2017, the government announced the commitment of \$265 million over six years to commence implementation of the recommendations contained within Queensland Parole System Review (QPSR). This review, undertaken by Mr Walter Sofronoff QC, recommended a number of comprehensive changes to the Corrective Services system in Queensland.

As part of these recommendations, Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) has re-established an internal Research and Evaluation unit, tasked with supporting, conducting and disseminating high quality research and evaluations relating to the Corrective Services system in Queensland.

The objective of the Strategic Research Agenda is to outline research priority areas for investigation by researchers external to QCS. The Strategic Research Agenda 2017–2022 outlines four key priority areas and lists research topics under these priority areas to guide research activity. QCS supports research partnerships that will progress productive and timely research in the key priority areas.

This Agenda will assist external researchers to develop and implement research projects that will add to the knowledge base of Queensland correctional issues. Research in the following identified priority areas will enhance QCS's ability to develop evidence-based policy and deliver effective and efficient offender management.

## Research governance

Research involving QCS facilities, subjects and resources is overseen by the QCS Research and Evaluation Committee and supported by the QCS Research and Evaluation team. External researchers must submit an *Application to Conduct Research* to the QCS Research and Evaluation Committee in order to gain approval to undertake research relating to QCS.

The QCS Research and Evaluation Committee is not an ethics committee. Therefore, external researchers must obtain approval from an accredited Human Research Ethics Committee.

QCS encourages external researchers interested in submitting an application or developing research partnerships to discuss their proposed research with representatives from the Research and Evaluation team, and to complete an *Expression of Interest to Conduct Research*. More information about the QCS Research and Evaluation Committee and lodging a research application is contained in the *Research Guidelines*.

## The Agenda

QCS has identified four priority research themes with corresponding topics for targeted investigation. They are:

### 1. Managing demand

- Understanding the growth in the number of people under corrective services supervision

### 2. Understanding and responding to the diversity of the offender population

- Domestic and family violence
- Youthful offenders
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island offenders

### 3. Effective and efficient service delivery

- Safe and secure prisons
- Staff culture, training and development
- Service delivery in rural and remote communities

### 4. Rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners and offenders

- Evaluation and improvement of rehabilitation programs
- Transitions and successful reintegration

An overview of the priority areas is shown in Table 1. These priority areas are not considered to be mutually exclusive. For example, understanding the offender population will assist in the provision of effective and efficient service delivery.

### Queensland Corrective Services Strategic Research Priorities 2017-2022

Managing demand	Understanding and responding to the diversity of the offender population			Effective and efficient service delivery			Rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners and offenders	
Understanding the growth in the number of people under corrective services supervision	Domestic and family violence	Youthful offenders	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island offenders	Safe and secure prisons	Staff culture, training and development	Service delivery in remote and rural communities	Evaluation and improvement of rehabilitation programs	Transitions and successful reintegration
<p>Drivers of growth and effective strategies for reducing the prison population</p> <p>Criminal justice responses and legislation and policy changes</p> <p>Innovative or ‘best practice’ approaches to manage growth</p> <p>Identification of low risk prisoners and diversion strategies</p>	<p>Best practice models for the treatment and reduction of DFV re-offending</p> <p>Strategies to improve the personal safety of offenders who have experienced DFV</p> <p>Responding to DFV in regional / remote settings</p> <p>Development of a typology of DFV offenders</p>	<p>Incorporating education and training into case management and rehabilitation of offenders</p> <p>Identification of social support mechanisms: impact on risk of reoffending</p> <p>Best practice models for reducing reoffending</p>	<p>Community and cultural reintegration</p> <p>Pathways and approaches to support desistance from crime</p> <p>Strategies to increase prosocial goals and a desire for a better life</p> <p>Programs: what works? what doesn’t? why? implications?</p>	<p>Perpetrators and victims of prisoner-on-prisoner violence</p> <p>Perpetrators and victims of prisoner-on-staff violence</p> <p>When, where and why prisoner-on-prisoner violence is most likely to occur</p> <p>Strategies based on best practice to reduce prison violence</p>	<p>Recruitment and retention of staff</p> <p>Role of custodial and community corrections officers: have they changed? how have they changed? implications?</p> <p>Expectations of staff: have they changed? how have they changed? implications?</p> <p>Strategies to best prepare staff for their role in QCS</p> <p>Effectiveness of training programs in custodial and community settings</p>	<p>Effective models of service delivery</p> <p>Strengthening program/service delivery</p> <p>Engaging communities and organisations to assist in the reintegration of offenders</p> <p>Innovative and best practice models adopted by government agencies or other jurisdictions</p>	<p>Effectiveness of rehabilitation programs and re-entry services</p> <p>Analysis of rehabilitation programs designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people</p> <p>Effective delivery of opioid substitution treatment</p> <p>Evaluation of the use of GPS monitoring in probation and parole</p> <p>Design of services for offenders on remand</p>	<p>Pre-release planning: factors that improve the likelihood of successful parole completion</p> <p>Increasing employment opportunities post-release</p> <p>The role of family and community in offender rehabilitation</p>

## 1. Managing demand

### 1.1. Understanding the growth in the number of people under corrective services supervision

Queensland Corrective Services has experienced high growth in the number of individuals under the supervision of corrective services. In the four years from 2012 to 2016, the number of persons in full time custody increased by 38%, and the number of persons in community based corrections increased by 26% (ABS, 2014; ABS, 2016).

This increase in demand has been driven by a number of factors including general population growth, legislative amendments, and changes in both sentencing and policing practices. The following information will be helpful in the development of strategies that aim to reduce the prisoner population and slow its growth:

- *the impact of various criminal justice responses, including legislative, policy and practice changes, on the growth and composition of offenders under corrective services supervision*
- *innovative or 'best practice' approaches that have been adopted in other jurisdictions to effectively manage the growth of prisoner numbers*
- *identification of groups of low risk offenders who may be safely diverted from the custodial system, including (but not limited to) the exploration and trial of suitable diversion strategies*

## 2. Understanding and responding to the diversity of the offender population

### 2.1. Domestic and family violence

QCS is committed to strengthening its response to domestic and family violence through holding offenders accountable, and ensuring effective and efficient responses to address and reduce this type of offending.

Queensland has seen a marked increase in reported occurrences of domestic and family violence. In 2015–16, 87,100 incidents of domestic and family violence were reported to Queensland Police (Queensland Government, 2016). The annual cost of domestic and family violence to the Queensland economy is estimated to be between \$2.7 and \$3.2 billion (Queensland Government, 2016).

QCS has implemented the Positive Futures Program that addresses domestic and family violence in the custodial setting, based on a culturally safe and strengths based approach.

QCS also facilitates a number of programs that address other behaviours that contribute to domestic violence, including programs that focus on cognitive self-change, emotional resilience and wellbeing, sexual offending, substance abuse and violence.

The following information will assist in developing effective and efficient responses to domestic and family violence:

- *innovative or 'best practice' models for the treatment of domestic and family violence offenders and the reduction of reoffending of this type*
- *strategies to address self-esteem, self-efficacy and other factors to improve the personal safety of those who have experienced domestic and family violence*
- *responding to domestic and family violence in regional and remote settings*
- *the development of a typology of domestic and family violence offenders, including (but not limited to) implications for treatment, case management and supervision in the community*

## **2.2. Youthful offenders**

As at 30 June 2016, Queensland recorded a higher proportion of adult prisoners aged under 25 years, than all other states and territories (ABS, 2016). Whilst during this time Queensland was the only Australian jurisdiction to treat 17 year old offenders as adults for the purpose of criminal justice system, previous QCS research has found that offenders who enter custody at age 17 or 18, and to a lesser extent 19 to 21, are at a higher risk of having lengthy custodial careers with high recidivism. These offenders are also likely to commit more serious offences (i.e. violent offences) and are more likely to go on to be considered prolific offenders (with four or more custodial admissions and five or more years of aggregated incarceration time) (QCS, 2013).

Research has shown consistently that lower levels of educational attainment, literacy and numeracy and histories of truancy are associated with prisoner employment rates post release well below population averages nationally (Callan & Gardner, 2007). To overcome this challenge, in 2016 QCS commissioned Borallon Training and Correctional Centre (BTCC) as Queensland's first dedicated education and training prison. QCS's operation of BTCC as a dedicated training prison for younger male prisoners provides an opportunity to investigate the potential for innovative strategies for pre- and post-release offender engagement with the employment, training and community sectors.

Young offenders often have other needs such as mental health and drug problems and housing instability that require attention. Therefore, the following information concerning youthful offenders will be helpful to inform early intervention strategies that could be implemented by QCS to encourage desistance of offending behaviour:



- *effectiveness of education, training and employment approaches in custodial facilities, including understanding the trajectories of these offenders*
- *social support mechanisms to reduce the risk of reoffending in the youthful offender cohort (e.g., stable accommodation, employment, education, pro-social modelling)*
- *incorporating education and training into case management and rehabilitation of offenders*
- *innovative or 'best practice' models for reducing reoffending with young offenders*

### **2.3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island offenders**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people have historically been, and continue to be, over-represented in the Australian criminal justice system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people represent 2.8% of the total population in Australia, yet 27% of Australia's prison population in 2016 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island adults are 15 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island adults (ABS, 2016).

More specifically in Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people make up 4% of the Queensland population (ABS, 2016) and are similarly over-represented in Queensland prisons. As at March 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island prisoners represented 24% of the total Queensland prison population (ABS, 2017).

The following information will assist to develop strategies to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island offenders:

- *innovative or 'best practice' programs that aim to reduce offending of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, including (but not limited to):*
  - strategies that promote successful community and cultural reintegration
  - responses that focus on education and/or stable employment and accommodation in the community
  - effective approaches that support and sustain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders desistance from crime
- *understanding the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island offenders on parole, and implications for case management and community supervision*
- *understanding and assessing the risk of violent and substance related offending, specific to the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island offenders*



### 3. Effective and efficient service delivery

#### 3.1. Safe and secure prisons

A safe and secure prison requires that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that individual prisoners and staff members are protected from harm by others.

Prison violence research regarding prisoner-on-prisoner violence suggests that many incidents are not reported to custodial officers. Current explanations for prison violence are increasingly focused on examining the interaction between the prison environment and prisoners. This is evident in the interest in various aspects of prison culture, such as procedural routines, programs, staffing issues, management of offenders, compliance and discipline and organisational ethos.

However, the issue of violence in prison is complex. The mechanisms of prisoner-on-staff violence differ greatly from prisoner-on-prisoner violence, making it difficult to find a uniform explanation for prison violence. Further, it is apparent that there is an absence of Australian research, particularly in relation to the experience of victimisation by females and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners.

The following information will assist to strengthen the commitment of QCS to community safety and crime prevention through the humane containment, supervision and rehabilitation of offenders:

- *understanding the characteristics and circumstances of the different types of violence that occurs within the prison complex, including (but not limited to)*
  - *when, where, and why such violence is likely to occur*
  - *understanding the characteristics of both perpetrators and victims of prison violence*
- *innovative or 'best practice' strategies that aim to reduce the likelihood of violence within the prison complex*

#### 3.2. Staff culture, training and development

Since its establishment at Wacol in 1986, the QCS Academy has provided education, training and development services to corrective services staff across Queensland. These services enable staff to carry out their primary roles of protecting the Queensland community with confidence, competence and safety.

The QCS Academy operates as a Registered Training Organisation, developing and delivering recognised qualifications, including programs for new Custodial Correctional Officers, including the Custodial Officer Entry Level Program (COEP); programs for Probation and

Parole staff, including Practitioner Development Program (PDP); management and leadership programs, including training and development programs for QCS staff who undertake trainer and assessor roles within their workplaces, with training in specific areas such as cultural awareness, suicide prevention, staff safety, protecting vulnerable offenders, firearms and control and restraint; as well as dog squad training programs.

In relation to training of Probation and Parole staff in particular, the recent Queensland Parole System Review (QPSR) found that training may not always be delivered at the appropriate time and recommended that QCS reformulate its training program, including the timing of such training, so as to ensure that new probation and parole officers undertake all necessary and appropriate training prior to being allocated a caseload of offenders to supervise.

In addition, the requirement for mandatory degree qualification for probation and parole officers, was also recommended to be removed, with a recommendation to develop additional training modules appropriate for trainee officers without an academic qualification.

The following information is sought to explore opportunities to strengthen current training and development strategies, and to gain a greater understanding of staff culture within QCS.

- *innovative or 'best practice' training approaches for staff working within the area of Corrective Services*
- *exploring issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of Corrective Services staff, including (but not limited to):*
  - motivations of staff to commence employment and remain working with QCS
  - strategies for the effective recruitment and retention of suitable staff
  - training and development strategies to best prepare staff for their role in corrective services
- *understanding the changing nature of Corrective Services staff roles, including (but not limited to)*
  - the roles of custodial and community corrections officers
  - ongoing training and development strategies to continue to support staff for their role in Corrective Services

### **3.3. Service delivery in rural and remote communities**

Resource limitations and the large size of Queensland create challenges for the delivery of effective and appropriate services to offenders in rural and remote areas. QCS continually

aims to improve its capacity to supervise and deliver rehabilitation programs to such offenders in the community.

QCS has established permanent Probation and Parole reporting centres in a number of remote communities, including Weipa, Cooktown, Mornington Island, Doomadgee, Thursday Island, Palm Island and Woorabinda.

For remote communities that do not have permanent reporting centres, two alternative service delivery methods are used by QCS staff to ensure appropriate offender supervision and management is delivered. These are drive in, drive out, or fly in, fly out.

In addition, a cultural liaison officer in the Far Northern Region also provides advice to staff on specific cultural issues and works with District Managers to further establish and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks and stakeholder relationships.

The following information is sought to improve and promote effective responses to offenders in rural and remote areas:

- *current models of service delivery in rural and remote communities that are proving effective*
- *opportunities to strengthen program and service delivery in rural and remote communities*
- *strategies to engage local communities and organisations to assist in the reintegration of offenders into the community*
- *innovative and 'best practice' models adopted by other government agencies or jurisdictions to provide support and delivery of services in these areas*

## **4. Rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners and offenders**

Rehabilitation and reintegration programs aim to keep the community safe by decreasing prisoners and parolees' risk of re-offending. A number of key reforms were recommended under the Queensland Parole System Review relating to the way in which prisoners are dealt with in prison, and while they are on parole or probation, that aim to support rehabilitation and reintegration.

### **4.1 Evaluation and improvement of rehabilitation programs**

Under the QPSR, a number of recommendations were made in relation to the expansion of rehabilitation programs available within Prison and for offenders whilst on Probation or Parole, as well as the expansion of opioid substitution treatment in prisons.

QCS' delivery of these reforms will provide an important opportunity to evaluate the initiatives to improve the rehabilitation outcomes of prisoners and offenders.

The following information is sought to assist in the evaluation and improvement of rehabilitation programs:

- *strengthening the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs for offenders both within prison and in the community*
- *understanding the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*
- *models of effective delivery of opioid substitution treatment in prisons*
- *innovative and 'best practice' services for offenders on remand*

## **4.2. Transitions and successful reintegration**

As with rehabilitation programs, under the QPSR a number of key reforms were recommended in relation to transitional support and reintegration services. In addition, the expansion of GPS monitoring technology to monitor parolees in the community was also recommended.

An underlying principle of case-management strategies for offenders is throughcare. This approach aims to support an offender's continuing rehabilitation from their initial reception into custody, throughout their custodial sentence and during the critical transition into the community.

To increase the likelihood of an offender successfully reintegrating into the community, QCS provides transitional programs. Transitional programs deliver release preparation providing offenders with an opportunity to address their practical resettlement needs prior to release through the provision of accurate information, planning assistance, emotional support and linkages with appropriate community agencies. Transitional programs are targeted at offenders assessed as having a higher likelihood of reoffending, in order to improve their chances of successful reintegration into the community.

Available evidence shows that effective throughcare strategies can reduce recidivism and produce better outcomes for offenders. A reduction in recidivism will strengthen the Agency's commitment to community safety while at the same time, assist in easing the growth of prisoner numbers being experienced in Queensland.

In August 2015, QCS commenced a project to review, design and implement new prisoner re-entry services to improve support for prisoners transitioning from prison to the community, and during 2016-17, new services were rolled out. These new re-entry services included a regionally based re-entry service (CREST), as well as two additional services co-designed between government and non-government organisation service agencies, namely – a centre based service at Borallon Training and Corrections Centre, and a specific service for female prisoners in South East Queensland (MARA).

QCS' delivery of these re-designed services provide an opportunity to evaluate the initiatives as to their effectiveness, both in relation to supporting prisoners upon re-entry, but also in relation to the co-design process.

The following information is sought to strengthen the effective and efficient service delivery provided by QCS in relation to the provision of re-entry services:

- *what factors improve the likelihood of successful parole completion*
- *what works to increase employment opportunities for offenders post-release, particularly for female offenders*
- *what role does family and community play in offender reintegration, and how can families and communities be supported as key participants in the case management of offenders*
- *the effectiveness of GPS monitoring in probation and parole*

## **5. Applications to conduct research**

The QCS Research and Evaluation Committee gives careful consideration to all research applications submitted by external researchers. However, due to the staff assistance and resources required from QCS custodial centres and Probation and Parole Offices, research applications that examine the identified themes and topics will be considered favourably and prioritised.

### **5.1. Contact Details**

If you require further information about the Queensland Corrective Services Strategic Research Agenda, please contact the QCS Research and Evaluation team on telephone number (07) 3006 4103 or by email [Research@dcs.qld.gov.au](mailto:Research@dcs.qld.gov.au).