

# Queensland Corrective Services Interim Women's Strategy 2023-2025

*Women in our custody and care*

24 April 2023



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# Contents

Commissioner’s foreword.....	4
About this Interim Strategy.....	6
Introduction .....	7
Objective 1 – Individualised Care and Support.....	13
Objective 2 – Gender and Trauma Informed Practice.....	16
Objective 3 – Equality and Equity .....	19
Objective 4 – Accommodate to Rehabilitate .....	23
Next Steps.....	25



## Acknowledgement

*Queensland Corrective Services respectfully acknowledges and recognises the First Nations peoples of Australia as the Traditional Owners and ongoing custodians of the lands, winds, and waters where we live, learn and work. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.*

*Queensland Corrective Services also acknowledges the over-representation of First Nations peoples in our custody and care and its link to the impacts of colonisation. We acknowledge First Nations women continue to be imprisoned at a far higher rate than non-First Nations women. We are committed to partnering with our First Nations communities to ensure their voices are listened to and responded to appropriately.*

*Queensland Corrective Services acknowledges the trauma experienced by mothers and children when families are separated during imprisonment. We also acknowledge all victim-survivors of gender-based, sexual and domestic violence and pay tribute to those that have died as a result of the violence inflicted on them.*





## Commissioner's foreword



It is with pleasure that I endorse the Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) *Interim Women's Strategy 2023-2025*. This Interim Strategy articulates the vision outlined in our 10-year Strategic Plan, *Corrections 2030* and highlights our commitment to keeping Queenslanders safe.

There is an urgent need for cultural change to place women at the centre of QCS' efforts to break the intergenerational cycles of trauma and social disadvantage associated with imprisonment. To reduce crime and make a difference to victim-survivors, we need to consider the underlying causes of offending and take an evidence-informed approach which provides women with the opportunity to remain with their children and family, in their community.

This two-year Interim Strategy provides a framework for driving system-based reforms for the management of women in our custody and care. The focus of this reform agenda will be equitable access to individualised care and support, empowering First Nations women in our custody and care, and listening to the voices of women to understand better practice approaches to turning lives around. The four overarching strategic objectives are:

1. **Individualised care and support:** We incorporate women's individual and collective needs into service design and delivery. Programs and services are responsive to the unique needs of women and delivered through the lens of women as mothers and victim-survivors.
2. **Gender and trauma informed practice:** We ensure women's correctional practices are gender-centric, person-centred, evidence-informed, culturally safe and trauma-informed.
3. **Equality and equity:** We take a deliberate and systematic approach to equity of access, service integration, wellbeing, connection, healing, and promotion of social and economic participation regardless of legal status and location, consistent with human rights.
4. **Accommodate to rehabilitate:** Wherever possible, we accommodate women in the lowest security environment or the lowest level of supervision, proportionate with their assessed level of risk and need, to support women to maintain connections with culture, children and family.

On 21 November 2022, the Queensland Government issued its response to Report Two of *Hear Her Voice: Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce*, backed by \$363 million in funding in response to the Taskforce's first report in June 2022. This Interim Strategy will capture this work and provide a roadmap to position QCS as a top-tier, forward-thinking public safety agency in our response to women in our custody and care.

Paul Stewart APM  
**Commissioner**  
24 April 2023



## Interim Women's Strategy 2023 – 2025

**Vision:** QCS is reforming the women's system and aiming to reduce the negative impacts of imprisonment for women and their families by embedding gender-centric, person-centred, culturally safe, and trauma informed programs and services. QCS will deliver these services to women within a holistic women's system with renewed and targeted focus on equity of access, service system integration, wellbeing, connection and healing, and promotion of social and economic participation.

Corrections 2030	Interim Women's Strategy 2023-2025	
Safety	<p>Promote Safety - the Strategy will contribute to strengthening correctional practices that improve safety, health and wellbeing, and reduce the risk of further trauma and re-victimisation of female offenders.</p>	<p><b>Objective 1. Individualised care and support:</b> We incorporate women's individual and collective needs into service design and delivery. Programs and services are responsive to the unique needs of women and delivered through the lens of women as head of household, mothers, care givers and victim-survivors.</p>
Respect	<p>Empower a professional workforce - the Strategy will empower our professional workforce by providing them with the tools they need to effectively manage gender and culturally responsive practices.</p>	<p><b>Objective 2. Gender and trauma informed practice:</b> We ensure women's correctional practices are gender-responsive, person-centred, evidence-based, culturally safe and trauma-informed.</p>
Empowerment	<p>Reduce crime - correctional practices will be evidence-based and informed by principles of strength-based and trauma-informed practice, contributing to reducing the number of women in custody.</p>	
Excellence	<p>Strengthen partnering and collaboration - through collaboration with our partners, QCS will deliver effective programs, services and case management that consider women's individual and collective needs.</p>	<p><b>Objective 3. Equality and equity:</b> We take a deliberate and systematic approach to equity of access, service integration, wellbeing, connection, and healing, and promotion of social and economic participation regardless of legal status and location, consistent with human rights</p>
Accountability	<p>Drive innovation - QCS will investigate evidence-based operational and programmatic innovations specific to women, to improve our reform efforts.</p>	<p><b>Objective 4. Accommodate to rehabilitate:</b> Wherever possible, we accommodate women in the lowest security environment or the lowest level of supervision, proportionate with their assessed level of risk and need, to support women to maintain connections with culture, children and family.</p>



## About this Interim Strategy

This Interim Strategy has been developed by a Project Team under the supervision of the QCS Women's Steering Committee (the Steering Committee) to guide QCS' journey to improve our engagement with women in our custody and care. The Steering Committee includes the following members:

- Ms Ursula Roeder ACM, Deputy Commissioner, Community Corrections and Specialist Operations (Senior Responsible Officer, Co-Chair);
- Mr Tom Humphreys, Assistant Commissioner, Strategic Futures Command (Strategy Executive, Co-Chair);
- Ms Samantha Newman, Assistant Commissioner, Community Corrections Command;
- Ms Eloise Hamlett, Assistant Commissioner, Central and Northern Region Command
- Ms Sarah Hyde, Assistant Commissioner, Specialist Operations Command;
- Mr Tim Thomson, Assistant Commissioner, Infrastructure, Asset Services and Major Works Command;
- Superintendent Claire Walker, Director, Murrighagun Cultural Centre;
- Superintendent Vanessa Hollis, Project Director, Women's System Reform, QCS Transformation Office; and
- A/Superintendent Tania Donaldson, A/Director, Enterprise Strategy Group, Strategic Futures Command (Strategy Director).

The Interim Women's Strategy Project Team includes the following officers:

- Jack Crittenden, Manager, Enterprise Strategy (Strategy Manager); and
- Rebecca Burgess, Principal Analyst, QCS Transformation Office (Strategy Lead).

This Interim Strategy provides an overarching framework for the development and implementation of initiatives to support women to rehabilitate and break the cycle of re-offending. This reform program will acknowledge the unique needs of women, particularly First Nations women, to ensure operational responsiveness to their needs.



# Introduction

## The *Interim Women's Strategy 2023 – 2025* in context

Since the #MeToo movement began in 2017, momentum has been building in Queensland to reform the way government agencies, in particular in the criminal justice system, interact with women and their families. On 21 November 2022, the Queensland Government released its response to [Hear Her Voice – Report 2 – Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce](#), which supported 103 recommendations in full, 71 recommendations in principle, and noted 14 recommendations. QCS is identified as having lead or co-lead responsibility for 34 of these recommendations. The whole-of-government response reflects an integrated and collaborative approach, with the delivery of many recommendations to be co-led across agencies. QCS has established a Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (WSJT) Program Management Office to drive the implementation of these recommendations .

The Government Response to the WSJT is complemented by the vision of the [Queensland's Women's Strategy 2022 – 2027](#), that women and girls:

- have equal rights, and equal access to opportunities;
- are safe, valued, and able to freely participate and succeed in the economic, social and cultural opportunities available; and
- are recognised and celebrated for their achievements and contributions to the community.

This Interim Strategy has been developed, consistent with this vision, to provide an overarching framework for the implementation of the Government Response to the WSJT for QCS.

This Interim Strategy acknowledges the over-representation of First Nations women in QCS' custody and care. It will contribute to achieving [Closing the Gap](#) targets by improving social outcomes for First Nations women and their children through a range of initiatives aimed at reducing imprisonment and domestic and family violence victimisation.

A key theme that emerged from consultation during the development of the Queensland Women's Strategy was the need to address men's violence against women and girls. QCS acknowledges the prevalence of gendered violence in our community in general, and the experiences of women in our custody and care in particular. It also recognises the over-representation of First Nations women in our custody and care, and their experience of domestic and family violence. Through this Interim Strategy, we seek to elevate the voices of First Nations women in our custody and care, while contributing to the *Closing the Gap* targets. <sup>1</sup>

This Interim Strategy will complement work underway to develop a subject-specific *Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2023-2028* (DFV Strategy), which is scheduled for release later this year. The DFV Strategy will be consistent with work underway across the Queensland Government to address gendered violence, including responding to [Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland](#).

QCS is committed to implementing evidence-informed practices that address the causes of offending behaviour and ensure public safety. As this Interim Strategy is implemented, the views and experiences of women will remain at the forefront of our consideration. We will seek the lived-experience perspective wherever possible, and new services co-designed with those who need them. The gender-responsive and trauma-informed model outlined in this Interim Strategy will

<sup>1</sup> [Queensland 2022 Closing the Gap Implementation Plan \(dsdsatsip.qld.gov.au\)](#).



contribute to the Queensland Government's commitment to keep communities safe, as outlined in the Queensland Government *Commitments for the Community*.

Imprisoning mothers contributes to a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. Recognising and addressing the needs of mothers in our custody and care requires the transformation of correctional approaches to reduce recidivism and disrupt this cycle. In partnership with Griffith University, QCS and other agencies are implementing Transforming Corrections to Transform Lives (TCTL). This Interim Strategy captures QCS' response to the WSJT and the implementation of TCTL as part of a broader, overarching framework to guide QCS from its current state to a desired end-state. It is nested in a policy context that acknowledges the need for governments of all levels, in Australia and internationally, to do better in their service responses to women.

The Interim Strategy provides a framework for how QCS manages women in our custody and care, ensuring our workforce is empowered to operate with empathy, hold perpetrators to account and support victim-survivors. It outlines the policy context and QCS' overarching strategic objectives to guide the development of a gender-informed women's correctional service system. The aim of this program is to reduce the negative impacts of imprisonment for women and their families into the medium-term. The Interim Strategy is grounded in evidence from other Australian jurisdictions and international practice. It seeks to promote evidence-informed, gender-centric, individualised, culturally safe, and trauma-informed practice across QCS. This is the start of an ongoing journey to embed the voice of women with lived experience in service design and delivery.

The Interim Strategy builds on the work already undertaken at QCS to improve its services in response to a range of cross-cutting issues, including the [Drug and Alcohol Strategy 2020-2025](#), [Anti-Corruption Strategy 2020-2025](#), and [Mental Health Strategy 2022-2027](#). The Interim Strategy will focus on developing the four objectives in the short term, with a more fulsome QCS *Women's Strategy 2026-2031* to be developed once current reform work is more mature and embedded across our organisation.

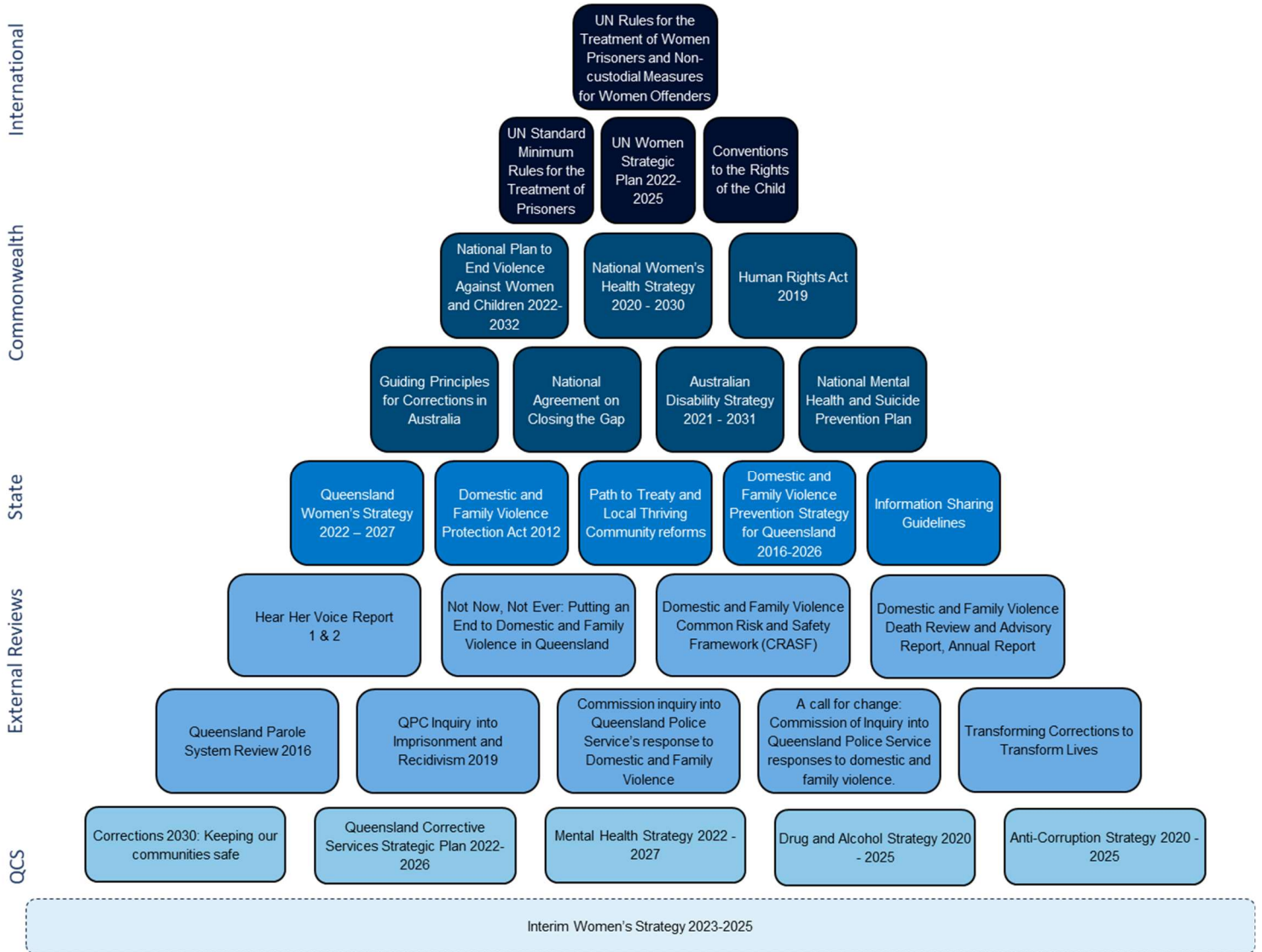






## The Policy Context

This section provides an overview of the various policy instruments at the International, Australian and State level which have informed the development of the Interim Strategy.







## The case for change


### [Hear her voice – Report 2 – Women and girls’ experience of the criminal justice system](#)


demonstrates there is a clear need to change the way QCS provides custodial and community corrections services to women in Queensland. Women do not break the law as often or go to prison for as long as men. However, the rate at which women are offending and being held in custody is increasing at a much higher rate than men.<sup>2</sup> All people who offend must be held accountable for their behaviour. Being held accountable, however, can include an acknowledgement of an individual’s specific circumstances and tailored supports to give them the best chance at rehabilitation and reintegration.





- 


The most common offences women and girls were sentenced for between 2005-06 and 2018-19 in Queensland were traffic and vehicle offences (38%), justice and government offences (22%), theft (16.2%) and drug offences (13.9%).
- 


One in three women prisoners in Australia were homeless or in short-term emergency accommodation before entering custody.
- 

Between 2012 and 2018, reported drug offences contributed to 89% of the increase in reported women offenders. Women in our custody are more likely to report injecting drug use and 41% of women prison entrants have Hepatitis C.
- 

About 62% of women prisoners report having a history of mental health issues.
- 

The proportion of imprisoned women in Queensland is noticeably greater than the national average. First Nations Women are over-represented in Queensland prisons: 40% of women in our custody identify as First Nations people. First Nations people make up 4.6% of the total Queensland population.
- 

87% of women prisoners have been victims of child sexual abuse, physical violence or domestic violence. 66% have been victims of all three.
- 

Self-harm leading to hospitalisation is over 40% higher for women than for men.
- 

10% of women have organised paid employment upon discharge (27% of males).

<sup>2</sup> Queensland Productivity Commission (2019), [Inquiry into Imprisonment and Recidivism](#).



Trauma, abuse, entrenched disadvantage, discrimination, mental illness, and alcohol and other drug use are the primary drivers of women and girls' contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>3</sup> A gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach is needed to effectively respond to offending by women and reduce the risk of reoffending. Investing in early intervention and prevention, including through justice reinvestment, will address the underlying drivers of offending to keep the community safe.

Many 'risk-factors', such as social and economic disadvantage, are strongly associated with men and women who have contact with the criminal justice system. However, research indicates women who offend often experience unique life events that create distinct and gendered offending pathways.<sup>4</sup> These 'gendered pathways' include social disadvantages in education, mental health and disability, family support, and relationship dysfunction leading to unemployment and financial difficulties. First Nations women are more likely to experience these social disadvantages than non-Indigenous women. Further, First Nations women experience additional drivers of contact, including inequality, racism, and intergenerational trauma.<sup>5</sup>

Experiences of domestic and family violence and coercive control impact the offending behaviours of women in several ways. For example, victim-survivors may:

- be coerced into criminal activity by an abusive partner;
- offend as a way of escaping or responding to violence or coercive control;
- offend by using reactive violence against their abuser; and
- commit theft or fraud offences in connection to their experiences of financial abuse.

Women can be misidentified as the primary aggressor in domestic violence situations and be charged for using 'resistive violence' or breaching domestic violence orders.<sup>6</sup>

QCS is still experiencing legacy issues associated with its custodial and community supervision services as policies and procedures were designed for men, who make up the overwhelming majority of people in our custody and care. In recognition of the differences in risks and needs of women, a range of specialised initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying causes of offending have been recently implemented across QCS. These include the new End-to-End case management model, specialised reintegration and rehabilitation programs, domestic violence and sexual assault counselling services, housing support and parenting programs.

While efforts are made every day to address the specific needs of women, clear policy and operating frameworks are required to ensure an appropriate and dedicated focus on women as service delivery demands increase. This Interim Strategy builds on work underway across QCS and the Queensland Government to change the way we do business to better support women to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate into their communities.

<sup>3</sup> Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (2022), [Hear Her Voice: Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce – Report Two](#).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Day et al, [The forgotten victims: Prisoner experience of victimisation and engagement with the criminal justice system](#) (Research Report, 2018) 1/2018 ANROWS 40.

<sup>5</sup> SNAICC - [National Voice for our Children. The Family Matters Report 2021](#) (2021) 67 citing - The Healing Foundation, Growing Our Children Up Strong – The Intergenerational Trauma Initiative: Volume 1 (2013) Canberra

<sup>6</sup> Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (2022), [Hear Her Voice: Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce – Report Two](#).



## A vision for a better future

The QCS *Interim Women's Strategy 2023-2025* will take a gender-responsive and trauma-informed approach to how women are cared for in custody and while on supervision in Queensland. It supports the implementation of the WSJT across QCS, which will be governed by the following six design principles:

1. Service design and delivery integrates women's voices to ensure their unique, individual, and collective needs are incorporated into service design and delivery.
2. Women's correctional practices are gender-responsive, person-centred, evidence-based, culturally safe and trauma informed.
3. Programs and services are responsive to the unique needs of women and delivered through the lens of women as head of household, mothers, and women as victim survivors.
4. Deliberate and systematic approach to equity of access, service integration, wellbeing, connection, and healing, and promotion of social and economic participation irrespective of legal status and location.
5. Wherever possible, women are accommodated in the lowest security environment or supervised under the lowest level of service proportionate with their assessed level of risk and need.
6. All correctional practices will prioritise enabling women to maintain connections with culture, children, and their families.

These design principles are supported by four priority areas for the WSJT program, which complement the objectives of this Interim Strategy:

**Cultural and Gender Diversity** – delivering correctional practices that respond to the gendered and cultural needs of women and ensuring women feel that their culture and identity is safe, secure, and respected.

**Safety, Health, Healing and Wellbeing** – enhancing women's access to specialised services that improve their safety, health, and wellbeing, and amending correctional practices to promote healing and reduce the risk of further trauma and re-victimisation.

**Strengthening Family Connections** – increasing opportunities for women to connect with their children and families to reduce the immediate, long term and intergenerational impacts of maternal imprisonment.

**Supervision and Case Management** – reforming whole of system correctional practices to increase women's access to evidence-based, gender-responsive and trauma-informed services that promote healing and desistance.





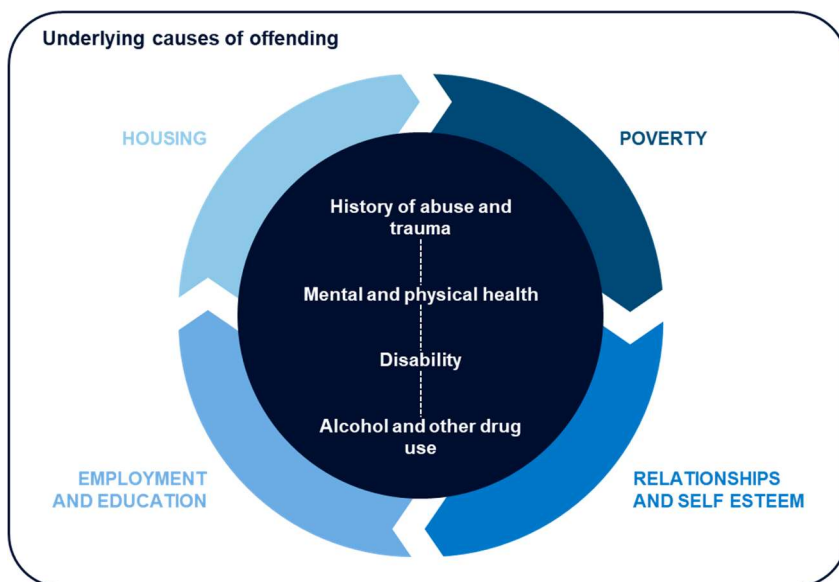
## Objective 1 – Individualised Care and Support

*“We incorporate women’s individual and collective needs into service design and delivery. Programs and services are responsive to the unique needs of women and delivered through the lens of women as head of household, mothers and victim-survivors.”*

There is no single cause of offending behaviour. Rather, a combination of circumstances and experiences influence the paths that lead to women entering QCS’ custody and care.<sup>7</sup> While there are common drivers, every woman has unique experiences, circumstances and histories. We must acknowledge them as individuals with differing needs and requiring varying service interventions.

Many women who come into contact with QCS experience compounding issues of social disadvantage, including experience of childhood trauma and/or domestic, family and sexual violence, mental and physical ill-health, alcohol and other drug abuse, low educational attainment, unemployment and/or underemployment, and housing instability.

The strong intersectionality between domestic and family violence, alcohol and other drug abuse, and mental and physical ill-health highlights the need for individualised support and a holistic whole-of-person response.<sup>8</sup> The further relationship between these complex issues and children entering the child protection system can exacerbate the impact on the broader family and result in intergenerational trauma and, in some cases, intergenerational imprisonment.



### A revised framework for practice for a women’s correctional system

QCS is exploring options to develop and implement a framework for practice within all women’s correctional services that includes revised policies, procedures and practices that support staff to

<sup>7</sup> Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce (2022), [Hear Her Voice: Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce – Report Two](#).

<sup>8</sup> Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety, [Safe & Together Addressing Complexity for Children \(STACY for Children\): Key findings and future directions](#)



have the necessary skills and competencies required to effectively and appropriately manage women in prison. This will include:

- ongoing competency-based trauma-informed, gender responsive and culturally capable training for staff at both an intensive and entry-level;
- practical guidance about managing women in a correctional setting who have experienced child and other sexual violence, physical violence and domestic and family violence; and
- other initiatives, including professional supervision and support.

The framework will be co-designed with women will lived experience to ensure if it representative of the needs of women in our custody and care. Views will be captured using QCS' prisoner advisory committees and the establishment of future reference and working groups to support ongoing work.

### **End-to-End case management**

QCS recognises that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to reducing the harm caused by contact with the criminal justice system. A major milestone for the Queensland Parole System Review<sup>9</sup> program was the development of an End-to-End case management model to ensure the consistent, streamlined and offender-centric management of eligible individuals coming into contact with the adult correctional system.

Through tailored case management and enhanced reintegration planning, women will be better prepared for a safe transition from custody to the community. Moreover, women will receive front-end assessments, thereby ensuring rehabilitation needs are identified early and program planning can occur. This model will also enhance the information provided to the Parole Board Queensland, minimising barriers that may inhibit women achieving parole at their earliest eligibility date.

### **Legislative change to ensure women's needs are met**

QCS is progressing amendments to the [Corrective Services Act 2006](#) to ensure ongoing support for women for a reasonable period after their release while encouraging women to take responsibility for their own care and wellbeing after release and empower them to seek assistance. QCS will explore further legislative amendments to support the humane containment and supervision of women to ensure:

- their dignity and rights are respected at all times;
- the need for physical care and basic hygiene will be met, including being provided with adequate food, accommodation and clothing;
- their emotional and psychological needs are being met;
- connection to family, community and culture;
- the complaints process is robust, transparent and confidential;
- their education, training and employment needs will be identified and adequately met, including options for work-release;
- their rehabilitation needs will be adequately identified and met;
- their medical, disability and other therapeutic needs will be adequately assessed and met; and
- the right to maintain family relationships is encouraged and supported.

QCS will continue to work across government to investigate and implement a range of legislative reform to better support women in our custody and care.

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<sup>9</sup> Mr Walter Sofronoff QC (2016), [Queensland Parole System Review](#)



## Gender-informed re-entry services to promote reintegration

QCS will review the information available to women about services and supports to help them transition from custody. We will ensure this information is accessible, comprehensive, up-to-date, easy to understand and tailored to the needs of women. Following the review, the information will be provided to all women and support release planning.

We will deliver programs and services that provide and coordinate supports and services to women prior to and following their release from custody through a single model of re-entry support. Existing programs and services will be reviewed to ensure they reflect the needs of women and the services system in local areas. Where new services are required, they will be co-designed in partnership with local stakeholders including women with lived experience and First Nations peoples and organisations.

## Enhanced, gender-informed rehabilitation services

QCS will work with our government partners to enhance the provision of rehabilitation programs to women in our custody and care, including those on remand. We will continue to examine best practice approaches here in Australia and embed the voices of women with lived experience into service delivery and design. This initiative recognises the sentencing profile of women in Queensland, where a large proportion of women are on remand or serving short custodial sentences (less than six months).

### RELEVANT SYSTEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Hear Her Voice – Report 2 – Women and girls’ experiences across the criminal justice system

- *Recommendations 139, 142, 147, 149, 155, 167, 169, 171*

## Measures of success

PLACEHOLDER

By 2025:

- Contribute to reducing the number of Queenslanders who are victims of personal and property crime by 10% by 2028.
- A 10% increase in the availability of gender-responsive and trauma-informed alcohol and other drug use and health and wellbeing programs.



## Objective 2 – Gender and Trauma Informed Practice

**“We ensure women’s correctional practices are gender-centric, person-centred, evidence-informed, culturally safe and trauma-informed.”**

The majority of women in QCS’ custody are victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, particularly in childhood.<sup>10</sup> In 2018, 87% of women in Australia’s prisons had been victims of childhood sexual abuse, physical violence or domestic abuse, with two thirds of those women experiencing all three types of abuse.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, two thirds had been diagnosed with mental ill-health – nearly double the rate of men reporting a past or current mental health disorder.<sup>12</sup>

Within the correctional environment, understanding the gendered nature of domestic, family and sexual violence is vital to developing a response model to provide necessary support to victims. It is also important to understand how previous trauma and victimisation relates to women’s offending behaviour, drug and alcohol use, housing instability and mental ill-health.<sup>13</sup>

Women’s experience of violence has a range of implications for service and program delivery. Victimisation can result in complex mental health concerns that can impact on women’s experiences in the correctional system and their capacity to engage in rehabilitation programs.<sup>14</sup> Programs and services for women with a history of trauma and victimisation need to include the establishment of a sense of personal, interpersonal and environmental safety, and an awareness of the pervasiveness of trauma in the offending pathway of women. The significant implications for post-release transition also needs careful consideration, with many women at risk of returning to violent relationships upon release.

QCS recognises that many aspects of traditional correctional service delivery, including environmental design, can exacerbate the impacts of trauma. For rehabilitation to be effective, it is essential these practices are actioned in a manner that minimises further trauma for women. QCS is working to ensure women’s correctional practices are gender-centric, person-centred, evidence-informed, culturally safe and trauma-informed, taking into consideration the lived experience of women who have experienced violence and First Nations women in our custody and care.

### **Develop and implement a Domestic and Family Violence Strategy for QCS**

QCS is currently developing its *Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2023-2028*, which will provide a framework for improving QCS’ response to this cross-cutting issue into the medium term. This work is consistent with the Queensland Government’s *Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-2026*, Commonwealth government policy, and international best-practice. We will work with local QCS staff, communities and non-government organisations to solidify our culturally safe and appropriate DFV practices, services and policies. We are also

<sup>10</sup> [Hear Her Voice: Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce – Report Two.](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Not Now, Not Ever – Putting an End to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland](#); Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce (2022), [Hear Her Voice: Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce – Report Two.](#)

<sup>12</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Government, [The health of Australia’s prisoners 2018.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Corrective Services NSW (2014), [Women as offenders, women as victims. The role of corrections in supporting women with histories of sexual abuse.](#)

<sup>14</sup> Corrective Services NSW (2014), [Women as offenders, women as victims. The role of corrections in supporting women with histories of sexual abuse.](#)





engaging women with lived experience of domestic and family violence in our custody and care in the development of this strategy. Through this work, QCS will continue to:

- Implement an Integrated Service Response to work with government partners to ensure safe practice and victim-survivor perspectives are at the centre of agency decision-making;
- Consider the Safe and Together model's applicability in the Queensland Corrective Services context; and
- Work collaboratively through High Risk Teams to provide a sophisticated response to safety planning to mitigate high-risk behaviours at the point of crisis.

The final *QCS Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2023-2028* will align with the objectives of the Interim Strategy and aim to reduce re-victimisation and empower our First Nations communities.

### **QCS will end the practice of removal of clothing searches for women in custody**

Barrier hardening is a key initiative of the *QCS Drug and Alcohol Strategy 2020-2025*. Staff, prisoners and visitors have a reasonable expectation to feel safe when they attend a corrective services facility, which includes the prevention of the introduction of contraband, as far as reasonably practicable.

QCS is currently implementing a trial of body scanner technology to explore options to eliminate the need for removal of clothing searches for women in custody. This initiative is scheduled to commence at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (BWCC) in 2023-24. Following the outcomes of this trial, widespread rollout of the technology is expected across the state.

Further, the Queensland Human Rights Commissioner will review the [Human Rights Act 2019](#) to assess policies, procedures and practices relating to the use of removal of clothing searches on women in corrective services facilities in Queensland. The Commissioner will then provide advice to QCS about how compatibility could be improved.

### **Specialist mental health and trauma support for women in our custody and care**

QCS, in consultation with its Queensland government partners, will expand access to trauma support services for women in QCS' custody and care taking into account the intersectionality of mental ill-health, past trauma and substance abuse issues experienced by many women. This initiative will consider the provision of acute and non-acute assessment, treatment and care to women in custody, including those on remand. The program will deliver services that are trauma-informed and gender responsive and will aim to help women to address factors contributing to their offending behaviour while reducing the risk of re-offending.

### **QCS officers will have the confidence to be gender-responsive**

QCS will implement competency-based, trauma-informed, gender responsive and culturally safe training for frontline staff both at entry-level and by extension through professional development and specialisation. We will develop practical guidance for responding to the specific needs of women in our custody and care including targeted support for women who have experienced childhood, domestic, family and/or sexual violence.

### **Improved data integration**

QCS will work with its government partners to improve data integration across the criminal justice system so that information about victim-survivors and accused persons and offenders is able to be recorded, tracked and monitored across the system. This will improve protection for victim-survivors by holding perpetrators accountable across government services.



### RELEVANT SYSTEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

**Hear Her Voice – Report 2 – Women and girls’ experiences across the criminal justice system**

- *Recommendations 136, 137, 139, 150, 180*

**Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an end to Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland**

- *Recommendation 1*

### Measures of success

PLACEHOLDER



## Objective 3 – Equality and Equity

***“We take a deliberate and systematic approach to equity of access, service integration, wellbeing, connection, and healing, and promotion of social and economic participation regardless of legal status and location, consistent with human rights.”***

QCS acknowledges that, for a variety of social, cultural and economic factors, not every Queenslanders is fortunate enough to experience equality of opportunities. In collaboration with our government and non-government partners, QCS is committed to promoting equity of opportunity for women in our custody and care. We recognise that equity involves a consideration of an individual’s circumstances and life history and investing in targeted services and supports to enable social and economic participation.

Women who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with poorer physical and mental health than the general population, higher rates of drug and alcohol use, lower educational attainment, and significantly higher rates of homelessness. One quarter of women in prison in Australia in 2019 reported having an activity-limited disability and three quarters had used illicit drugs in the past year.<sup>15</sup> Over 80% of women prisoners had not completed high school, and one in three were homeless in the four weeks prior to entering prison. Underlying causes of offending are multifaceted, with women having complex backgrounds and unique needs.

First Nations women are faced with additional issues of intergenerational trauma, and systemic racism associated with the history of colonisation, leading to over-representation in the criminal justice system. As of April 2022, 42.9% of women in QCS custody and 33.5% of women being supervised in the community identified as First Nations. There are significant systemic challenges that impact the correctional experience of First Nations Women. When in prison, First Nations women are less likely to access the same opportunities as non-First Nations women, compounding the challenges they face to successfully reintegrate.<sup>16</sup>

QCS is taking action to ensure equity of access, service integration, wellbeing, connection, and healing, and promotion of social and economic participation irrespective of legal status and location, consistent with human rights. We will do this by engaging with First Nations women to design programs and services, and wherever possible seek to partner with First Nations-owned corporations to deliver programs and services. We will continue to actively promote self-advocacy determination wherever possible, particularly on release from custody.

### **Improve access to justice, consistent with human rights**

Consistent with the *Mandela Rules*<sup>17</sup> and the [Queensland Human Rights Act 2019](#), QCS is exploring options to provide capacity for its women’s corrective services facilities to hold women on remand separately to sentenced women, as far as reasonably practicable. QCS is currently investigating options to:

- Implement in-cell technology to replace the current Prisoner Telephone System, provide access to emails and video calls, and increase opportunities for rehabilitation, education and training;
- provide women in custody with free telephone calls to obtain legal advice and representation in a variety of matters, including applications for bail and parole;

<sup>15</sup> The Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (2019), [Women in Prison 2019](#).

<sup>16</sup> The Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (2019), [Women in Prison 2019](#).

<sup>17</sup> [The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners \(unodc.org\)](#).



- provide independent legal advice and assistance to women in custody;
- expand court advisory services to support the judiciary to make evidence-informed decisions which take into account a woman's individual experiences and circumstances; and
- identify women who require support to access bail and/or parole, to ensure they are not held in custody longer than in necessary.

These initiatives will ensure all women in our custody and care have opportunities to be managed in the least restrictive environment, consistent with their assessed risk and legal status.

### **We will collaborate with First Nations women to provide culturally safe service responses**



*Target 10. By 2031, reduce the rate of First Nations adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent.*



*Target 13. By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against First Nations women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero.*



*Target 8. By 2031, increase the proportion of First Nations people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62 per cent.*



*Target 9a. By 2031, increase the proportion of First Nations people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent.*



*Target 12. By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent.*

This Interim Strategy acknowledges the over-representation of First Nations women in QCS' custody and care. It will contribute to [Closing the Gap](#) by improving social outcomes for First Nations women and their children through a range of initiatives.<sup>18</sup>

The Path to Treaty is a shared journey between the Queensland Government, First Nations peoples and non-First Nations people. Similarly, QCS is expanding programs and services co-created by First Nations women for First Nations women, embedding cultural awareness and safety into policies and procedures, and cultural advice into service design and delivery.

Successful treaties between governments and First Nations peoples should meet three criteria:

- recognition that First Nations peoples are the original owners of the land, and have endured injustices as a result of ongoing processes of colonisation;
- the coming together of First Nations peoples and government through a process of negotiation and agreement; and
- substantive social justice outcomes for First Nations peoples.<sup>19</sup>

This Interim Strategy seeks to recognise these three key elements and guide the improvement of social justice outcomes for First Nations women by working alongside First Nations people and First Nations-owned organisations. Their lived experience will be pivotal in designing services for First Nations women and in co-designing services for First Nations people in our custody and care.

The *QCS Domestic and Family Violence Strategy 2023-2028*, is working further towards empowering our First Nations women, and through the use of best practice, we have sought feedback from victim advocate agencies, those with lived experience, and re-entry support services.

### **Access to education programs**

We are partnering with the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs and the Department of Education to improve access to quality education programs for women in custody, including online programs. These will include offering basic numeracy and literacy

<sup>18</sup> [Queensland 2022 Closing the Gap Implementation Plan \(dedsatsip.qld.gov.au\)](#).

<sup>19</sup> [Treaty Advancement Committee Report October 2021 \(dedsatsip.qld.gov.au\)](#).



programs and financial literacy to all women who require them, whether they are serving sentences in custody or the community.

As part of the review, QCS will engage with universities and education and training providers to ensure women have access to programs which may continue after their release and lead to future employment. We are also reviewing existing transition plan procedures for women leaving prison and make any changes required to promote continuity of education between custodial and community contexts.

### **Opportunities for work while in custody**

Prison industries operate at every correctional centre in Queensland and provide women with the opportunity to gain vocational skills and improve their ability to secure and retain employment upon release from custody. Low custody facilities also facilitate various forms of community service, including work carried out at work camps, to help not-for-profit and non-government organisations.

QCS will review employment, wages and working conditions for all women in custody, whether on remand or serving a sentence in Queensland, to ensure that all allowances, employment and remuneration offered are compatible with human rights and relevant industrial requirements. We will also aim to establish an integrated pathway for women to access education, employment and training that promotes social and economic participation.

We will continue Sisters for Change, a Community-Based Health and First Aid program run in Townsville Women's Correctional Centre by the Red Cross. The program brings prisoners, prison staff and management, and Red Cross together as partners. Volunteers receive formal qualifications in Basic First Aid and Mental Health First Aid, Cultural Competency and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

### **Work release scheme and Work and Development Orders**

Work release programs exist in other jurisdictions across Australia, and internationally.<sup>20</sup> They support re-integration by providing a prisoner with an opportunity to establish pro-social routines associated with participation in paid employment outside the custodial setting. QCS will review the work release scheme and improve opportunities for women in Queensland to access Work and Development Orders in our custody and care.

### **Improve health and wellbeing for women in our custody and care**

Consistent with the objectives of the [Queensland Prisoner Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) and [Mental Health Strategy 2022-2027](#), QCS, in collaboration with its government and non-government partners, will improve our responses to the individual health, disability, mental health and wellbeing needs of women in our custody and care. This will include continuing to advocate for access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and expansion of disability practitioners in the correctional system.

### **Improve access to government services to promote reintegration**

We will enhance current processes to enable women in custody to apply for relevant identification documents, so they have them prior to their release, as far as possible.

We will also explore options for implementing a process to notify the Queensland Revenue Office when a person with a State Penalties Enforcement Registry (SPER) debt enters custody so SPER can immediately suspend enforcement action in relation to that debt.

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<sup>20</sup> [Transitional Release Program - Corrective Services \(act.gov.au\)](#).



## RELEVANT SYSTEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Hear Her Voice – Report 2 – Women and girls’ experiences across the criminal justice system**

- *Recommendations 105, 106 109, 113, 115, 116, 117, 130, 131, 132, 148, 150, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 158, 163, 168*

### **Measures of success**

PLACEHOLDER



## Objective 4 – Accommodate to Rehabilitate

*“Wherever possible, we accommodate women in the lowest security environment or the lowest level of supervision, proportionate with their assessed level of risk and need, to support women to maintain connections with culture, children and family.”*

QCS acknowledges the disruption experienced by children and families as a result of women’s imprisonment. These women are primary caregivers and often children are removed from their family environment. This intergenerational cycle can have long-term consequences for children that includes disruption to their education, unstable accommodation, and – in some cases – contact with the criminal justice system.

Visits from family are beneficial and can significantly reduce the risk of recidivism.<sup>21</sup> However, visiting a correctional facility can be a difficult experience, both practically and emotionally, especially for children visiting their parents. It is important that steps are taken to support families to regularly visit women. QCS has a key role in maintaining strong family connections while mothers are in custody or under supervision, to reduce the impact on children and families.

We need to ensure that where operationally viable, service delivery is reflective of the reality of women and children’s lives, and efforts are made to foster and strengthen these connections with family networks. Wherever possible, we must accommodate women in the lowest security environment to allow continued connection to their children and family, and by extension, their culture.

### **Women will be accommodated in the least restrictive setting possible**

QCS will examine the use of low custody for women following the 2022 Low Custody Thematic Review. We will also consider how offence categories included in the [Corrective Services Act 2006](#) are classified to ensure an appropriate balance between supporting rehabilitation, reintegration, community safety and the public’s confidence in the low custody system.

### **Family and parenting support**

QCS is committed to increasing opportunities for women in our custody and care to connect with their children and families to reduce the immediate, long-term and intergenerational impacts of maternal imprisonment.

Partnering with the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, we will implement culturally appropriate family and parenting support to women and girls in custody who are mothers, to enable them to maintain a connection with their children and help mothers to care safely for their children when they are released from custody.

QCS will ensure the needs of women and girls in custody who are pregnant and the needs of children living with their mothers in custody are met in a clinically safe manner, commensurate with services available in the wider community. This will include consideration of providing essential items for children and babies living with their mothers in custody and will support the wellbeing of mothers and women who have experienced pregnancy loss through trauma-informed management and practice.

### **Transforming Corrections, Transforming Lives**

<sup>21</sup> Duwe, Grant & Clark, Valerie. (2013). [Blessed Be the Social Tie That Binds The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism](#). Criminal Justice Policy Review. 24. 271-296. 10.1177/0887403411429724.



QCS will continue to partner with Griffith University to implement TCTL. Co-created with women in custody, TCTL will improve how QCS responds to women and children in the correctional system by adopting a coaching approach that supports staff to be gender-responsive, trauma informed support women in custody to self-advocate, and child and family support to foster connection and reunification.

### **Expanding access to community-based orders and services**

Consistent with the recommendations of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council's [Community-based Sentencing Orders, Imprisonment and Parole Options Report](#), QCS will seek to expand suitable, gender-specific services that support women to complete community-based supervision rather than short periods of imprisonment. This initiative recognises the disruption imprisonment has on women as head of household and mothers. QCS work with the Department of Justice and Attorney-General to examine new sentencing options.

### **Assistance with accommodation upon release**

QCS, in partnership with Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, and in consultation with women with lived experience will identify women and girls who are at risk of being refused bail and women eligible to apply for parole and provide assistance to access appropriate accommodation, services and supports so that they are not held in custody longer than is necessary.

We will continue to partner with the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy to expand the Next Step Home program to assist women exiting Queensland correctional facilities to access and sustain affordable housing, through products and services available through the state-wide network of Housing Service Centres.

## **RELEVANT SYSTEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Hear Her Voice – Report 2 – Women and girls' experiences across the criminal justice system**

- *Recommendations 105, 106, 109, 117, 127, 129, 133, 134, 138, 151, 163, 172*

## **Measures of success**

PLACEHOLDER





## Next Steps

### Benefits mapping and measures for success

On publication of the Interim Strategy the Women's Reform PMO will conduct benefits analysis and develop a suite of key performance indicators to measure the successful implementation of the strategy.

### Women's System Reform implementation

The Women's System Reform will be implemented over the next five years. This program of work will involve a range of projects, including changes to the way QCS does business as well as developing measures of success and actions to support the implementation of the Interim Strategy.

### Evaluation and review

The Interim Strategy will be reviewed in 2025, to support the development of the *Women's Strategy 2026-2031*.

