

Strategic Research Agenda (2022-2027)

Queensland Corrective Services



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Acknowledgement of Country

Queensland Corrective Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Queensland and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respects to the Elders – past and present – for they hold the memories, traditions, the culture and hopes of First Nations peoples across the state.



Commissioner's Foreword



It is with pleasure that I present the Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 for Queensland Corrective Services (QCS).

I would like to start by acknowledging the contribution of my predecessor, Commissioner Peter Martin APM. Commissioner Martin led the agency through a transformational period, overseeing the delivery of major reform projects that positioned QCS as a forward thinking, top-tier public safety agency.

Commissioner Martin understood the important role of research and evaluation in informing evidence-based practice and ensuring our prisoner and offender programs achieve their rehabilitative goals and contribute to reductions in recidivism.

Research and evaluation, and the QCS Research and Evaluation Group, are vital to QCS' success in implementing the recommendations set down in the Queensland Parole System Review (QPSR). Since QPSR, the Research and Evaluation Group has continued to grow and this new iteration of the Strategic Research Agenda further demonstrates QCS' continued commitment to evidence-based practice and rigorous program evaluation.

The priorities outlined in this Strategic Research Agenda reflect the operational challenges faced by not just QCS, but all corrective service agencies and other agencies working within criminal justice systems. The overall aims and objectives of this Strategic Research Agenda reflect the principles outlined in *Corrections 2030* and centre around the vision for QCS in enhancing community safety through humane, modern, sustainable and evidence-based corrective services to maximise rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.

It is an honour to lead QCS as we continue our journey as a forward thinking, top tier public safety agency. I am proud of the continued emphasis QCS places on research, evaluation and evidence-based practice, which contributes to our overall objectives of keeping people safe.

Paul Stewart
Commissioner
Queensland Corrective Services



Objective of the Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027

The objective of the Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 is to outline the priority areas for investigation by researchers, both internal and external to QCS. These priority areas are guided by the principles set down in *Corrections 2030* and include accountability, excellence, empowerment, respect and safety.

The Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 provides a summary of the key research themes and lists priority research topics under these themes to guide research activity. QCS supports research partnerships that will progress productive and timely research in the key research themes.

The Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 is designed to assist researchers to develop and implement research projects that will add to the knowledge base of Queensland correctional issues, enabling the development of evidence-based policy and the delivery of effective and efficient offender management.

Corrections 2030 guiding principles



Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 themes and priority areas



Internal and external research projects

focused on the key priority research areas and enabling the development of evidence-based policy and practice that meets the current service delivery challenges

Existing challenges for corrections

The release of the revised Strategic Research Agenda comes at a time of unprecedented challenges to correctional policy and practice, not just in Queensland but nationally and internationally. Most notably, the COVID-19 global pandemic declared in early 2020, created disruptions to all aspects of daily life and is likely to have far reaching effects for many years to come. Correctional agencies across the world have had to adapt operational practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in custodial settings and deal with other challenges to the criminal justice system, which are increasing demand on the correctional system.

Within this context, QCS faces ongoing and increasing challenges including the following (based on information for the Queensland corrective services system unless otherwise noted):

- rapid growth in the number of people held in custody (up 67% over the 10-year period June 2012 to June 2022) or under supervision in the community (up 27% over the same period)¹
- disproportionate growth in the number of women in the prison population (79% growth in the number of female prisoners over the 10-year period June 2012 to June 2022)²
- a rising rate of recidivism (return to corrections with a prison sentence or community corrections order within two years of release from prison up from 43.5% in 2010-11³ to 51.6% in 2020-21⁴)
- a high proportion of the prison population who are on remand (33% at June 2022), sometimes for lengthy periods (greater than six months)⁵
- First Nations people remaining significantly overrepresented amongst the prison population (36% at June 2022)⁶, compared with their representation in the general community, despite decades of focused attention to address this issue
- high proportions of the prison population who have complex needs such as:
 - mental ill health (around a quarter of prisoners nationally self-reported current medication use for a mental health condition)⁷
 - a history of illicit substance use (nationally, around two thirds self-report substance misuse during the 12 months prior to incarceration)⁸
 - a history of homelessness (around a third nationally self-report being homeless in the four weeks prior to incarceration)⁹
 - low educational attainment (around a third nationally self-report having less than 10 years formal education)¹⁰

¹ QCS Data Analytics team

² QCS Data Analytics team

³ Productivity Commission (2014) Report on Government Services - [Sector overview C Justice - Report on Government Services 2014 \(pc.gov.au\)](#)

⁴ Productivity Commission (2022) Report on Government Services - [C Justice - Report on Government Services 2022 - Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#)

⁵ QCS Data Analytics team

⁶ QCS Data Analytics team

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. *The health of Australia's prisoners 2018* – available at [The health of Australia's prisoners 2018 \(AIHW\)](#)

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. *The health of Australia's prisoners 2018* – available at [The health of Australia's prisoners 2018 \(AIHW\)](#)

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. *The health of Australia's prisoners 2018* – available at [The health of Australia's prisoners 2018 \(AIHW\)](#)

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. *The health of Australia's prisoners 2018* – available at [The health of Australia's prisoners 2018 \(AIHW\)](#)



- a chronic condition or disability that limits or restricts participation in everyday activities, employment and/or education (self-reported by 35% in Queensland)¹¹.

Furthermore, changes in the types or nature of offending are affecting the way in which QCS delivers services. Most notably, there has been a disproportionate increase in violent, drug-related, and domestic and family violence (DFV) offending in recent times. For example, in the Queensland correctional services system¹²:

- over the 10-year period June 2011 – June 2021, there was a 117% increase in the number of prisoners for whom the most serious offence was “acts intended to cause injury”
- over the same 10-year period there was a 148% increase in the number of prisoners with drug-related offences (49% of prisoners in June 2021 had drug-related offences)
- the proportion of prisoners with a ‘flag’ indicating they are currently subject to a correctional order for a domestic violence offence or are named on a domestic violence protection order increased from 32% in January 2018 to 53% in June 2021.

The themes identified within the Strategic Research Agenda are developed based on this context and dictate the nature and types of research projects to be engaged.

¹¹Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. *The health of Australia's prisoners 2018 Data Tables: 09-Disability-States & territories*

¹² QCS Data Analytics team



Revising the Strategic Research Agenda

The key themes presented in this Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 were developed through consultation with key QCS business areas and external stakeholders, along with a review of relevant literature and government reviews which highlighted key research gaps.

Whilst themes from the previous Strategic Research Agenda remain relevant, updates have been made to ensure alignment with *Corrections 2030*, operational priorities and the wider corrections and criminal justice system environment.

Methodology

In developing the revised Strategic Research Agenda, a number of phases were undertaken.

The first phase involved consultation with key stakeholders internal and external to QCS, and leading criminology researchers from Queensland academic institutions. The information obtained through this consultation was then synthesised into key themes relating to research areas of interest or agency operational need.

Once the key themes had been determined, a mapping exercise was carried out to ensure the themes aligned with the overall principles outlined in *Corrections 2030*. Work previously undertaken by QCS as well as projects approved by the QCS Research and Evaluation Committee were considered to identify any current research gaps.

Finally, “grey literature”, such as key government reviews from the past 10 years, were reviewed to ensure the priorities highlighted in this Strategic Research Agenda aligned with recognised evidence gaps relevant to corrections policy and practice.

Key messages emerging from consultation

Following consultation, several key messages emerged from both internal and external stakeholders.

Internal stakeholder consultation

Key messages emerging from consultation with internal stakeholders included:

- Themes identified in the previous Strategic Research Agenda remain relevant to the work of QCS, notably understanding the needs of First Nations prisoners and offenders, and the prevalence of domestic and family violence offending (either current or historical) amongst the prisoner and offender population.
- Research questions should remain focused on what works in the management of prisoners and offenders given the complexity of their needs, the nature of their offending and in relation to preventing recidivism.



- The need for greater recognition of interrelationships between themes identified in the Strategic Research Agenda.
- Recognition of the value of developing partnerships across government, academia and the non-government sector to address issues which impact on prisoners and offenders, QCS officers, and/or the wider criminal justice system.
- The need to identify key priority areas for research within the context of current operational pressures such as prison overcrowding. For example, what can be done in terms of rehabilitation given the prisoner capacity pressures.

External stakeholder consultation

Consultation with external stakeholders identified research gaps connected to fields of interest in criminological research including, but not limited to, female offending, sexual offending, youthful offenders and domestic and family violence. Emerging issues in the 'practice' of criminology research were also raised across the discussions with external stakeholders. These identified research gaps have been used to inform the revised Strategic Research Agenda, with the emerging issues to be considered in any research and evaluation projects conducted with QCS.

Key messages that emerged from consultation with external stakeholders included:

- Related to First Nations individuals:
 - the critical importance of understanding the needs of First Nations prisoners and offenders
 - the need for due consideration of issues around data sovereignty for First Nations individuals when conducting research and evaluation projects
 - the importance of working with First Nations researchers in conducting culturally appropriate research with First Nations individuals.
- The need for program evaluations to be tailored to the relevant context given the unique considerations of Queensland and Australia (for example service delivery in rural and remote areas given Queensland's geographical expanse).
- The need for a shift in research measures and outcomes from a deficit-based model to a more strength-based model.
- Problems with the quality and availability of data to allow effective monitoring and evaluation of a range of indicators. For example, data relating to prisoner and offender parental status, disability, and domestic and family violence for First Nations people in contact with corrective services.
- The need for data linkage to map the trajectory of prisoners and offenders between the youth and adult systems.



- The need for research exploring if any models from the youth justice system could be applicable to the adult context.
- The importance of dissemination of research findings and critical factors in 'successful' dissemination, including the utilisation of multiple channels such as podcasts, evidence-summary presentations/ videos, newsletters, academic papers and stakeholder presentations.

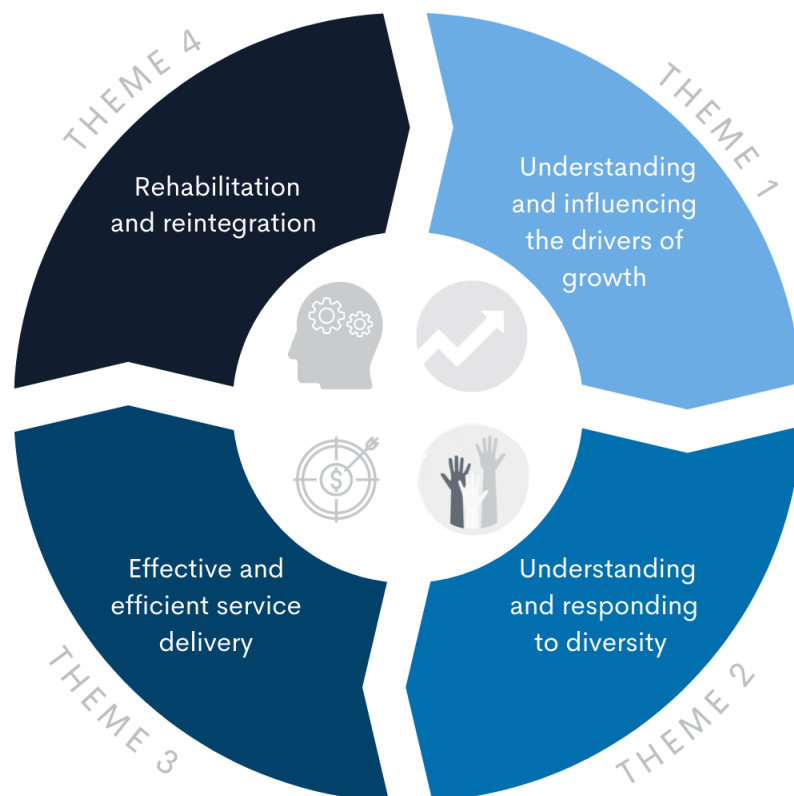
These key messages from internal and external stakeholder consultation have been used to update the priority research areas within each of the Strategic Research Agenda themes. These are discussed in more detail in the following section.



Overview of strategic research themes and priority areas for 2022-2027

QCS has identified four broad research themes for targeted investigation. They are:

1. Understanding and influencing the drivers of prisoner and offender growth.
2. Understanding and responding to the diversity of the prisoner and offender population.
3. Effective, efficient and tailored service delivery.
4. Rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners and offenders.



These themes are considered to be highly interconnected. For example, understanding the diversity of the prisoner and offender population will assist in the provision of effective and efficient service delivery. While generally these themes are retained from the previous version of the Strategic Research Agenda, new priority research areas have been identified and are mapped against each theme, as displayed overleaf.

Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 – themes and priority research areas

Theme	Priority research areas	Operational needs	Strategic alignment
Theme 1: Understanding and influencing drivers of prisoner and offender growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring patterns and factors that characterise DFV offenders in custody. Best practice around use of low custody facilities and utilisation of progression models. Exploring what options are available around community sentencing, the effectiveness of community sentencing, and levers of influence in community sentencing. Understanding parole policies and practice in Queensland, including effective parole and order conditions with consideration of the complexity of prisoner and offender cohorts, and exploring levers of influence in parole order conditions. Exploring and evaluating the effectiveness of electronic monitoring in Queensland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity issues and high prisoner numbers. Changes in prisoner profile driving changes to operation and culture of correctional centres (for both officers and prisoners). Resourcing pressures driven by higher prisoner numbers. 	Aligns to the following principles of <i>Corrections 2030</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> promote safety drive innovation reduce crime empower a professional workforce.
Theme 2: Understanding and responding to the diversity of the prisoner and offender population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring the specific needs of First Nations prisoners and offenders in all aspects of correctional policy and practice (this includes a focus on Torres Strait Islander prisoners and offenders as a distinct group), and what is effective in meeting these needs. Exploring what is, and what has been, effective in meeting the specific needs of female prisoners and offenders (including issues of parental responsibility). Understanding the diverse and changing needs and profiles of prisoner and offender groups (e.g., those living with disability/ neurodiversity, or mental ill health, youthful offenders, older prisoners, culturally and linguistically diverse prisoners and offenders, transgender prisoners, outlaw motorcycle gang prisoners or right-wing or violent extremist prisoners) and the impact of this on correctional policy and practice. Understanding the intersecting vulnerabilities of the prisoner and offender populations and the impact on service delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice management of prisoners and offenders. Prioritisation of resource allocation across prisoner and offender groups. Balancing the needs of the overall prisoner and offender population with the needs of prisoners and offenders with complex and diverse needs. Maintaining the human rights of all prisoners and offenders under QCS supervision. 	Aligns to the following principles of <i>Corrections 2030</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduce crime drive innovation promote safety.



Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 – themes and priority research areas

Theme	Priority research areas	Operational needs	Strategic alignment
Theme 3: Effective, efficient and tailored service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the impact of End-to-End Case Management on long term outcomes for prisoners and offenders, and 'learnings' that can be applied across the agency. Exploring the barriers to coordinated and consistent service delivery across government agencies to support joined up approaches across the criminal justice system. Exploring the impact of correctional infrastructure, prison design and built environment on service delivery. Exploring effective approaches to managing risk in decisions around community-based sentences. Exploring new innovations and technologies that can improve service delivery for prisoners and offenders. Understanding the recruitment drivers for QCS officers. Understanding and evaluating best practice approaches to building a positive culture within custodial and community corrections environments (including treatment and management of prisoners, effective interactions and communication with prisoners and offenders, procedural justice and staff safety). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logical and timely program delivery. Innovative program and service delivery. Cohesive officer culture working to achieve a shared outcome. Robust data collection to demonstrate outcomes. Integrated service delivery. Case management focused model of operation. Officer training and development based on best practice. 	<p>Aligns to the following principles of <i>Corrections 2030</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> promote safety empower a professional workforce drive innovation strengthen partnerships and collaboration.



Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027 – themes and priority research areas

Theme	Priority research areas	Operational needs	Strategic alignment
Theme 4: Rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners and offenders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluating prisoner and offender programs delivered for a range of offending types (e.g. sexual offending, including non-contact child sexual offenders, violent offending, DFV offending). Development and validation of assessment tools, including their alignment with best practice, and what is appropriate for the Queensland or Australian context. Evaluating best practice in reintegration and transition from custody services, including benchmarking of services against similar programs interstate where possible. Exploring whether current QCS program service offerings address the complex needs of prisoners and offenders. This includes cost effectiveness and the development of agreed outcome measures (e.g. recidivism measures). Understanding drivers of intergenerational offending patterns. Understanding best practice support for offenders after release from prison, including enablers and barriers to accessing services (e.g. post-release employment services). Understanding factors surrounding unnatural deaths of offenders in the community. Understanding the influence of media and public attitudes to the role of correctional agencies and the impact of this on rehabilitation and reintegration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient program resourcing and availability. Matching service delivery with prisoner and offender needs. Integration between custodial and community corrections services. Programs that cater to the diversity of the prisoner and offender population. Understand coordination and integration of government provided services. 	<p>Aligns to the following principles of <i>Corrections 2030</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduce crime empower a professional workforce strengthen partnerships and collaboration promote safety.

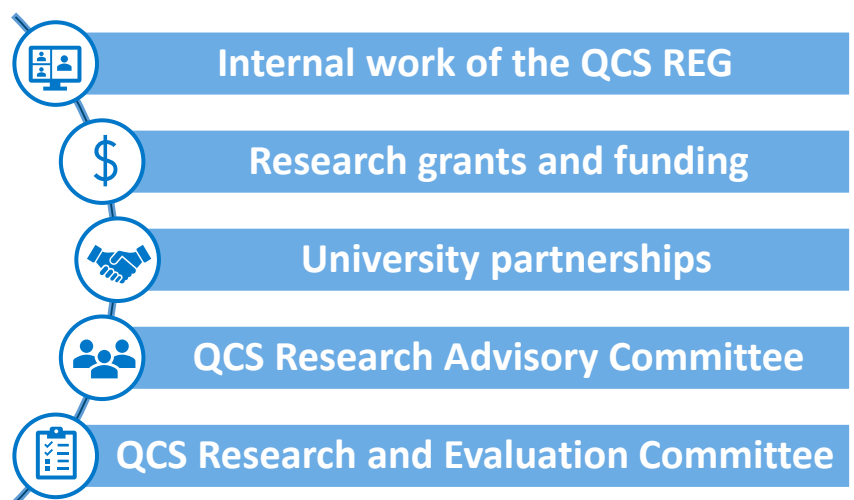


Implementation of the Strategic Research Agenda 2022-2027

The QCS Research and Evaluation Group (REG) will have the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Strategic Research Agenda, ensuring that any research and evaluation activities conducted within QCS facilities, with officers, prisoners or offenders, or with data held by QCS, align with the themes and priority areas identified in this document.

The overarching themes and research priorities will be implemented and governed through the following mechanisms, with more information provided below.

Implementation of the Strategic Research Agenda



Internal work of the QCS Research and Evaluation Group

The work of the REG over the next five years will be dictated by the overarching themes and research priority areas outlined in this Strategic Research Agenda. The REG will conduct relevant and appropriate internal research and evaluation projects which align with specific research areas identified in the Strategic Research Agenda.

Commissioned research and research grants

The REG will facilitate and manage the commissioning of research and evaluation projects with external providers that respond to the identified research needs outlined in the Strategic Research Agenda. This could include the management of research grants or other contracted arrangements, dependent on the nature of the research and evaluation project.

University partnerships

The REG will further strengthen its existing partnerships with universities to engage placement students and facilitate academic research projects. Projects initiated under any partnership will align with identified research priority areas of the Strategic Research Agenda and will serve to both strengthen research capacity and engagement within the university sector, as well as meet the needs of QCS.

The QCS Research Advisory Committee

QCS will chair a newly formed Research Advisory Committee to facilitate collaborative research across QCS as an agency, as well as within the academic and non-government sectors. The Research Advisory Committee will provide an important forum for ongoing discussions on emerging research in corrections-related policy and practice that align with the Strategic Research Agenda and underpin supportive and productive collaboration with the university sector to help address complex criminal justice-related issues.

The QCS Research and Evaluation Committee

The projects approved through the QCS Research and Evaluation Committee will be guided by the priority areas outlined in this Strategic Research Agenda.

The QCS Research and Evaluation Committee is dedicated to supporting ethically sound research initiatives that further QCS goals of enhancing community safety, rehabilitating offenders and preventing reoffending. The committee is made up of senior QCS executives from key areas of the organisation and oversees all research and evaluation activities involving QCS. Researchers must apply for and gain approval from the committee to conduct research using any of QCS officers or facilities, offenders under its supervision or data it holds.

The *QCS Research Guidelines* contain more information about the QCS Research and Evaluation Committee and lodging a research application. Application-related enquiries can be directed to: Research@Corrections.qld.gov.au.

