

Queensland Government Response

Outcomes of Queensland Corrective Services Sexual Offender Treatment Programs

Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), a division of the Department of Community Safety (DCS), delivers a suite of sexual offender treatment programs that seek to reduce an offender's risk of re-offending. These programs are based on best practice research and methodologies in the treatment of sexual offenders.

The integrity of these programs is maintained through regular review and training by leaders in the field of programming for sexual offenders.

In 2009 QCS engaged the services of Professor Stephen Smallbone, from Griffith University's School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, to independently evaluate the effectiveness of its sex offender treatment programs with particular reference to their impact on recidivism rates.

The evaluation looked at the recidivism data of 409 adult males who had served a term of imprisonment in Queensland for a sexual offence and had been discharged between 4 April 2005 and 30 June 2008. Of the 409 offenders, 158 had participated in a sexual offending program in custody and 251 had not.

The report, *Outcomes of Queensland Corrective Services Sexual Offender Treatment Programs* (the Report), documents the findings from the evaluation and makes six recommendations for the continuation or enhancement of program practices.¹

What did the evaluation find?

Generally, the evaluation found that QCS sexual offender treatment programs are producing discernible and promising reductions in offenders committing further sexual offences and significant reductions in offenders committing non-sexual violent offences and offending generally.

- All types of recidivism were lower for treated offenders than for untreated offenders, including sexual and non sexual violent offences. Treated offenders were less likely to reoffend in any way.
- Five out of 158 treated offenders reoffended sexually compared to 15 out of 251 untreated offenders.
- Offenders were also less likely to re-offend if subject to supervision after their release from prison, whether on parole or under continuing supervision pursuant to the *Dangerous Offenders (Sexual Offenders) Act 2003*.

The evaluation report also noted that:

- *Participation in sexual offending treatment programs delivered by QCS was not consistent with the risk principle* (Key Finding 2). In other words, the Report argues for prioritising high risk sex offenders over lower risk sex offenders, however QCS believes all eligible sex offenders should be referred to treatment. The risk principle holds that treatment should target offenders that are at a higher risk of reoffending and that the amount of treatment should correlate with the level of risk. Rather than discourage low risk offenders from actively seeking treatment, QCS staff ensure that all eligible sexual offenders are referred to the correct intensity program.

¹ Smallbone, S. and McHugh, M. (2010) *Outcomes of Queensland Corrective Services Sexual Offender Treatment Programs*, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, p xii

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The value of mandatory attendance has not yet been proven. Effective treatment requires an offender to examine and discuss their offending behaviour in a group environment and some offenders are not prepared to do this. Unwilling participants may also be detrimental to group outcomes and reduce effectiveness for other participants by being disruptive. While program participation is not mandated, QCS makes a concerted effort to encourage high risk offenders to participate in relevant programs.

- *The low base rates of sexual offenders prevented meaningful statistical analysis* (Key Finding 6). In keeping with similar studies that have looked at the recidivism of treated versus non-treated sexual offenders, the evaluation report found that sexual offenders who had participated in treatment were less likely to reoffend, in any way, than sexual offenders who had not. While the low rate of sexual recidivism prevented a finding of statistical significance in relation to this sub-group, it is anticipated that given time and sufficient numbers this analysis will be able to be undertaken and further strengthened. To address this issue a further evaluation incorporating the same sample group is proposed, commencing 2012.
- *That almost half of the sexual offenders in the sample were released with no community supervision* (Finding 8). An offender engaged in treatment is more likely to be considered for early release and community supervision by the Parole Board. However there will always be a proportion of prisoners not released to Community Supervision because they have been denied parole, served their full sentence or their sentence structure does not have a supervision component such as partially suspended sentences. It should be noted that a proportion of those sex offenders not released to community supervision will have reporting and monitoring conditions in accordance with their Australian National Child Offender Register requirements. QCS is therefore implementing a range of initiatives to strengthen its assessment and engagement processes to engage sexual offenders in treatment. In cases where a sexual offender remains resistant to treatment and is considered to be of a high risk of sexual reoffending, the offender may be referred to the Attorney-General for a continuing detention order to be made under the *Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act 2003*.

What do the recommendations mean for the Department?

DCS accepts all recommendations and is working towards introducing a range of initiatives in response to the Evaluation Report recommendations.

Based on recommendations made in the Report QCS has already commenced:

- the development of training modules for staff to enhance motivational interviewing with resistant and high-risk sexual offenders;
- coaching, mentoring, and clinical support meetings for program delivery officers working with all sexual offenders;
- the development of a cultural supervision framework and clinical support meetings specifically tailored to program delivery officers working with Indigenous sexual offenders;
- review of support materials for the Indigenous Sexual Offending Program; and

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- development of an engagement strategy to improve treatment outcomes for Indigenous people who commit sexual crimes.

In addition to the Report's specific recommendations QCS will continue to improve and strengthen its practices in the management of sexual offenders to reduce their risk to the community.

DCS has committed to a further evaluation being undertaken in 2012-2014.