

Offender Health Services Governance Improvement Project - Communique 1



What is the project?

The Department of Health in consultation with key stakeholders is conducting a project to improve the governance of offender health services in Queensland.

The purpose of this project is **not** about centralising the delivery of offender health services but to improve the Department of Health's oversight of offender health services in accordance with its system manager responsibilities.

Why is the Department conducting this project?

In 2012 with the implementation of the national hospital and health reforms, public offender health services in Queensland were devolved to relevant Hospital and Health Services (HHSs). Whilst the delivery of offender health services was devolved, there was no coordinated central governance arrangement established to address state-wide or systemic issues.

The lack of a coordinated central governance arrangement has meant that there has been a limited system level response to a range of challenges including the significant growth in the prisoner population across Queensland over the last five years. This growth in the prisoner population and the resultant crowding within the prison system has affected the capacity to provide effective and efficient health services for the prisoner population. Despite these challenges offender health services have continued to deliver essential health services for prisoners across Queensland in conjunction with Queensland Corrective Services staff.

Why is prisoner health important?

The prison population is one of the most stigmatised and socially disadvantaged groups in Australia. Typically they are poorly educated, social isolated, financially dependent and experience high levels of poor physical health, psychiatric illness and engage in risky behaviours such as tobacco use, violence, increased alcohol consumption and illicit drug use. Improving the health of prisoners is a hallmark of a just society. It is also an important public health measure given that the prisoner population moves between prisons and the wider community.

Prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community, and should have access to necessary health-care services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status.ⁱ

What will the project involve and when will it be completed?

The project is to be conducted in two phases.

Phase 1 is to conduct a review of offender health services and to develop a plan to improve the governance arrangements for publicly provided offender health services. The review will be wide ranging and include matters such as: the nature of services, models of care, workforce issues, workforce safety, quality of care, service demand and funding issues. Phase 1 is expected to be completed around the middle of 2018.

Phase 2 will be the implementation of the approved plan. The timeframe for the completion of Phase 2 is contingent on the details and nature of the approved plan.

Consultation and information

Key to the success of this project will be broad and deep consultation with people and organisations who play a key role in the provision of offender health services. In relation to Phase 1, consultation will occur as part of the review and will include the identification of future options.

The project will be guided by the Offender Health Services Steering Committee Alliance (OHSSCA, pronounced “Oscar”) chaired by the Dr John Wakefield, Deputy Director-General of the Clinical Excellence Division. Membership of the steering committee is cross-sectorial and includes representatives from:

- Hospital and Health Services
- Queensland Corrective Services
- Office of the Health Ombudsman
- Health Consumers Queensland
- The Queensland Nurses and Midwives’ Union

The members of OHSSCA will each play a key role in ensuring that their stakeholders are kept informed about the project as it progresses.

Offender Health Services Steering Committee Alliance (OHSSCA)

The first meeting of OHSSCA was held on 25 January 2018. At this meeting members discussed and agreed upon its Terms of Reference and considered some background information regarding the prisoner health services including current challenges and opportunities to improve services. OHSSCA also agreed to a process to finalise the scope and elements to be considered in an independent review of offender health services and agreed to conduct a site visit to a correctional centre to gain a stronger understanding of the environment in which these services operate.

If you would like further information about this project please email offenderhealth@health.qld.gov.au

Dated: 25 January 2018

ⁱ The Nelson Mandela Rules, Rule 31: The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015