BACKGROUND

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) is committed to providing a safe and secure environment that supports the Government’s Toward Q2 ambitions including Fair – Safe and Caring Communities. This includes working collaboratively with communities to enhance confidence in, and satisfaction with, policing in Queensland.

Over recent years the QPS has significantly improved the way it responds to vulnerable people, by:

- Improving access to victim support by working with the Victim Support Service.
- Enhancing the investigation and prosecution process in relation to sexual offences.
- Improving the treatment of child witnesses.
- Participating in numerous Specialist Court Programs.
- Improving training for police and staff members in dealing with vulnerable people including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with mental illnesses and people with disabilities.
- Implementing the QPS Disability Service Plan (the Plan) and establishing the Disability Reference Group to oversee the Plan’s implementation.
- Implementing a range of projects involving vulnerable people including the Coordinated Response to Young People at Risk project and STANDBY, a project to support persons bereaved by suicide.

Despite these initiatives, the QPS recognises that a range of people who are vulnerable could still encounter difficulties in accessing or receiving equitable or fair treatment during their contact with the QPS as a victim, witness or suspect.

Identifying a Vulnerable Person

While it is not possible to supply an exhaustive list of persons who may be vulnerable in the criminal justice system, the following could be considered a guide:

(i) immaturity, either in terms of age or development;
(ii) any infirmity, including early dementia or disease;
(iii) mental illness;
(iv) intellectual disability;
(v) illiteracy or limited education which may impair a person's capacity to understand police questions;
(vi) inability or limited ability to speak or understand the English language;
(vii) chronic alcoholism;
(viii) physical disabilities including deafness or loss of sight;
(ix) drug dependence;
(x) cultural, ethnic or religious factors including those relating to gender attitudes;
(xi) intoxication, if at the time of contact with police the person is under the influence of alcohol or a drug to such an extent as to make them unable to look after or manage their own needs;
(xii) Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders;
(xiii) children; and
(xiv) persons with impaired capacity.
When can a person become vulnerable in the criminal justice system?
People come into contact with the criminal justice system as victims, witnesses or defendants. Any form of contact may have significant consequences for vulnerable people.

**Victims and Witnesses**
Victims and witnesses of crimes may be traumatised by what has happened to them. They may not want to report a crime because of their past experiences or a fear they may not be believed or treated well.

Victims and witnesses may feel intimidated by the court process or may not understand or know what is required of them.

When giving evidence a victim or witness will have to relive the experience and may fear having to face the defendant.

Providing appropriate information and support about the court process will empower victims and witnesses, and help them participate in the criminal justice system.

**Defendants**
While defendants must be held accountable for their actions, it is equally important that they receive fair treatment from people they have contact with in the criminal justice system.

A defendant must be given procedural fairness or natural justice - the ability to participate in the defence of the charges brought against them, the ability to understand what is happening and being given the opportunity to be heard and present a defence.

**STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY AMBITIONS**

**Statement of commitment**
The QPS is committed to pursuing the continuous improvement of policing services provided to vulnerable people, consistent with the following ambitions.

**Ambitions**
The QPS will seek to:
1. Reduce crime against vulnerable people and hold offenders accountable for their actions.
2. Support vulnerable people to understand and participate in criminal justice system processes.
3. Treat vulnerable people with dignity, respecting their individual needs, challenges and circumstances.
4. Facilitate access by vulnerable people to appropriate support services, including support persons and victim assistance.
IMPLEMENTATION

Who is responsible for implementing this policy?
Every employee of the Service will seek to improve service delivery to vulnerable people in line with the ambitions of this policy.

Organisational units within the Service will review and monitor how their business activities impact on vulnerable people as victims, witnesses and defendants.

The QPS Annual Report will report on the success of the strategies.

RESOURCES

The QPS has a range of specialist officers and units that specifically focus on improving responses to vulnerable persons. These include:
- District Mental Health Intervention Coordinators
- Cross-Cultural Liaison Officers
- Police Liaison Officers
- Child Protection and Investigation Unit officers
- Specialist Court and Diversion Unit

A range of training programs assist QPS members in improving their skills and knowledge in dealing with vulnerable persons. These include:
- Elements of the Police Recruit Operational Vocation Education (PROVE) Program, First Year Constable (FYC) Program, the Constable Development (CDP) Program and Detective training.
- Competency Acquisition Program (CAP) training on disability and mental health issues.
- First Response Officer training on mental health intervention
- Courses on forensic interviewing of children and people with an intellectual disability as witnesses
- Police Liaison Officer training.

Both the police records system (QPRIME) and the complaints system are capable of capturing information about police dealings with vulnerable persons. However, QPS acknowledges that both systems can be enhanced and will undertake further work to improve the consistency of data recording.

The QPS also undertakes a range of surveys of its clients including victims of crime and people with a disability, their families and carers.