

## **Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025**

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**Submitted by:** Women's Health and Equality Queensland  
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*Women's Health and Equality Queensland*

15/04/2025

## **Re: Making Queensland Safe (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025**

Women's Health and Equality Queensland (WHEQ) are leaders in women's health, gender equity and the primary prevention of violence in Queensland. We provide counselling, therapeutic groups, and health services for women and gender-diverse people with experiences of violence, as well as professional education, community programs, health promotion and policy advice. With over 40 years of experience improving health outcomes and delivering statewide health and wellbeing services to women, our purpose is to advance the health and wellbeing of Queensland women.

WHEQ welcomes the government's commitment to reviewing the legislative lens for addressing youth crime and takes this opportunity to raise recommendations about the suggested amendments to the Making Queensland Safe (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025 ('the Bill'). In particular, we draw on the established body of evidence that demonstrates punitive measures for young people who commit criminal acts have negligible impacts on rates of offending and reoffending and by extension, community safety. We also hold concern for the disproportionate impact the proposed amendments may have on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, who are a high representation of the people in juvenile detention.

### **Human rights and evidence-based approaches**

WHEQ notes that the amendments proposed by the Bill in increasing the incarceration time for young people do not align with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UNICEF, 2025). WHEQ further notes that while some community perception considers youth crime to be increasing, statistics reveal a steady decrease in youth offending across Australia over the past ten years (ABS, 2024).

The CRC and the Beijing rules both provide that detention should be considered a last resort when undertaking actions against young people and their criminal behaviour (UNICEF, 2025; Cunneen, 2020). The CRC and the Beijing rules also advise that a variety of sentencing options are required as alternative options, which include community supports, supervision, intensive care, or placement with family or in an educational setting (UNICEF, 2025).

In noting the evidence, WHEQ draws attention to research that has shown that young people who experienced their first supervision between the ages of 10-14 years are significantly more likely to experience all types of supervision in their older years (AIHW, 2013). In essence, the earlier a child is exposed to the justice system the more likely they are to reoffend.

We also draw attention to the higher rates of poor health experienced by adults who were incarcerated as young people, as compared to adults who have never been incarcerated (Barnert et al., 2018). Future impacts from incarceration further include higher risk of adult depressive symptoms and suicidality (Barnert et al., 2018). It is a concern that this Bill could raise the number

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of young people who will go on to experience poorer health outcomes and require greater levels of health service need across the remainder of their youth and subsequent adult life.

Incarcerated young people are also more likely to experience poverty, unemployment, limited access to adequate and appropriate housing, disengagement from the education system and substance addiction and abuse (House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011).

WHEQ suggests that alternative, supportive strategies to those suggested in the Bill will better place government in a position to achieve both greater community safety and wellbeing.

### **Impacts for First Nations communities**

WHEQ is aware that First Nations young people are overrepresented in the justice system, and that the current amendments to the Bill will disproportionately impact this group of young people. We note that in 2023, 63% of young people in detention aged 10-17 years old were First Nations (AIHW, 2023). The younger a person is to have first contact with a punitive justice system, the more likely they are to have multiple interactions, and experience numerous cases of supervision (Price et al., 2024).

We are concerned that any incarceration time for First Nations young people overwhelmingly leads to a loss of connection and access to cultural knowledge across communities and families. It has been noted as having “disrupted traditional values and norms of appropriate social behaviour from being transferred from one generation to the next” (House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2011, p. 7). Increasing incarceration periods as the Bill has proposed exacerbates this concern.

The overrepresentation of First Nations young people in the justice system is widely accepted as a systemic issue stemming from ongoing racism, discrimination, a history of genocide, trauma from colonisation, generational poverty and social disadvantage (Milroy, et al., 2021 & Price et al., 2024). Equipped with this understanding, it is integral that legislative solutions to support both the reduction in volume and severity of youth offending, reference the responsibility to ensure systemic disadvantage is not continued – particularly where alternative responses are available.

### **Recommendations**

With a healthy families and community safety lens and informed by an evidence-base, WHEQ encourages government to consider alternative strategies to those provided in the Bill. Where families are supported to stay together and where greater investment in preventative measures delivers material improvements to community safety.

WHEQ is grateful to support the consideration of the Bill and take the opportunity to make the following recommendations:

1. Detention as a last resort

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*WHEQ recommends that detention of young offenders is considered only as a last resort, with first consideration given to restorative justice concepts and practices.*

Restorative justice ensures that communities are safer while ensuring the wellbeing of young people (Price, 2023; Larsen, 2014). Restorative processes are proven to be more effective compared to court processes in reducing the seriousness and frequency of offending, helped victims more in their healing and recovery, and supported young offenders to take accountability for their actions (Wemmers et al., 2022). They are also more cost effective and efficient than court processes (Restorative Justice Evaluative Team, 2018).

## 2. Invest in prevention and early intervention

*WHEQ recommends an increased investment in evidence-based prevention and early intervention initiatives for at-risk and vulnerable youth to prevent offences or reduce the likelihood of re-offending.*

Taking a healing-centred and trauma-informed approach, prevention and early intervention initiatives promote recovery from past experiences including child abuse or neglect and exposure to family violence, which are key indicators for the likelihood of a young person committing an offence. We strongly encourage funding of prevention and early intervention initiatives for at-risk and vulnerable youth which adequately address the root causes of offending and are evidence based in their approach.

## 3. Improve post-release support to young offenders

*WHEQ recommends that post-release support is improved, such that there is the implementation of a 12-month transition program for young people released from youth detention which incorporates in-home family interventions, case management, and effective engagement in education, training, and employment.*

As proposed by the Queensland Family & Child Commission, WHEQ supports the improvement and implementation of a comprehensive post-release support program for young people exiting youth detention (QFCC, 2024). The widespread implementation of a post-release support program for young people serves to support the health and wellbeing of young people, support an effective transition home, and limits the likelihood of re-offending, by promoting protective factors including family cohesion, education, employment, and training.

WHEQ thank the Queensland Government for the opportunity to contribute to the review and welcome further enquiries in relation to the Bill.

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