

INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT PROVIDED TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

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Submission written by sister of Victim who was murdered 22/08/2020, offender received 10 yrs non revocation period under Mental Health Act.

- 1. Better coordination of state-wide services to ensure there is trauma informed, victim centric and timely support for victims, from the time of the incident and throughout the subsequent investigation and any prosecution, including;**
 - a. How the criminal justice system, including the QPS, the ODPP and court services current support victims; and how restorative justice conferences and processes may be improved upon**
 - b. How to ensure victims are kept informed and included in an appropriate and timely way throughout the investigation, prosecution and parole period**
- Public access to 'support pathways' need to be directly available (transparent & easy to find) via website (or as many channels possible) to all public and linked directly from incident (first response) and stewarded via process through the relative stakeholders/support organisations.
 - There isn't a clear person or organisation that leads the 'care' of victims, leaving victims to navigation many systems, organisations and processes
 - We experienced gaps where locally our family connected with Qld Victim Homicide Assist Service, however immediate family in New Zealand were connected sooner with Qld Health Victim Support months prior to local immediate family (mentioned no history of other family provided), despite our mum currently working for Qld Health, and significant history of engagement with Qld Health.
 - We experience absolutely no contact or communication from ODPP and minimal information was available via QVHAS regarding developments or expectations of offenders court activities, and turned up to the Mental Health hearing blindsided, with expectations that it was the start of a process, and heavily devastated that not even 2 hours later, my sisters case had been filed closed.
 - Despite numerous contacts to QPS for update and detail around personal possessions being held or queries around the case activity, we often didn't receive response, responses were vague, incorrect or misleading. No representative was present at the Mental Health hearing.
 - Queries regarding the handling of the case and due diligence in processing evidence or medical testing have been disregarded under the premise of 'short staff'
 - [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was a lifeline in navigating such a disaster of a system, doing her best to feed as much information across services as she could.
- Improved multidisciplinary care/case work between support services and organisations would ensure that victims care is coordinated cohesively. It is unacceptable and impractical for victims to have key persons (sometimes multiple) of contact across numerous organisations (QPS, ODPP, QVHS, QHVSS) and have to coordinate information, activities whilst managing trauma personally and widespread through their family.
 - This act of managing 'support contact' and relative information from each is stressful and adds to the trauma and injury, often repeating traumatic information and detail numerous times over.

- Access to information or pathway for updates regarding the case, developments and upcoming dates is convoluted and often confronted to barriers, inaccuracy, and vague detail.
- The victim/s should have a right to an acknowledgement of identity regardless of whether they survive the 'act of crime' or not;
 - In the case they have not survived, who advocates on the victims behalf? The Mental Health court does advocate or 'hear' for the victim/s of the crime. The existing support and systems allow for these people (victims) to disappear into consequence. The ODPP is limited to 'what is fair for the recovery' of the offender, without ability to consider the recovery/likelihood of offending after the maximum 10yr revocation period.
 - Legislation state certain persons are considered victims of crime (ie. as immediate family) of a person who did not survive, yet the current support and care that exists for those navigating the Mental Health Court does not adequately provide acknowledgement to the loss of life but focuses rather on the rights of the individual under the Mental Health recovery framework. Perception is a personal alive is afforded more consideration than a life lost
 - Our family 'impact statements' were lost and not heard at the hearing. Whilst we acknowledge court was reopened to 'hear' them after complaint, the statement impact played no consideration to the decision and outcome of the mental health hearing. How does a victim/family feel considered or acknowledged if the process isn't built equally for the victims?

2. The operation and effectiveness of the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009 (the Act) for victims of violence, including;

- a. Expanding the eligible victims category**
 - b. Mapping victims experience through financial assistance application process**
 - c. Review Charter of Victims rights to identify common complaint themes**
 - d. Revising the existing government initiatives in relation to the Acts operation and effectiveness**
- The notes shared in this submission does not cover all aspects of issues/complaint we experienced after losing my sister to homicide. I strongly recommend a review of Charter of Victims rights from common complaint themes. Despite advising issues/complaints the only acknowledgement we have received has been from the Vice Director of ODPP regarding the handling and care of the case. No further follow up to confirm process improvements have been advised.
 - Financial aid in the first response period is a significant support to covering cost of funeral, as is the cost of physiologist or care. However, improved access to information and case management may decrease the financial need of families if they felt better supported.
 - The revision of the existing government initiatives in relation to the Act operation and effectiveness is strongly encouraged, as is the consultation as amendments are developed.

The experience of losing a loved as a victim of crime is heinous and sentences to life of trauma to manage and if possible, overcome. The fragmented state of the support service network, and cohesion between stakeholders result lack of information, guidance, increased stress and as a

result additional trauma incurred from the experience of navigating the 'system', compounding the loss and trauma of homicide.