

## Youth Justice Reform Select Committee inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland

**Submission No:** 98  
**Submitted by:** Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union  
**Publication:** Making the submission and your name public  
**Attachments:** See attachment  
**Submitter Comments:**

# Submission to Youth Justice Reform Select Committee

*Youth Justice Reform in Queensland*

January 2024

## Contents

Introduction.....	3
Summary of recommendations .....	3
Role of nurses and midwives in youth justice services .....	4
Opportunities to strengthen the provision of health services .....	4
References .....	5

## **Introduction**

The Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) thanks the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee for the opportunity to comment on the inquiry to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime.

Nursing and midwifery is the largest occupational group in Queensland Health (QH) and one of the largest across the Queensland government. The QNMU is the principal health union in Queensland covering all classifications of workers that make up the nursing and midwifery workforce including registered nurses (RN), midwives, nurse practitioners (NP) enrolled nurses (EN) and assistants in nursing (AIN) who are employed in the public, private and not-for-profit health sectors including aged care.

Our 71,000 members work across a variety of settings from single person operations to large health and non-health institutions, and in a full range of classifications from entry level trainees to senior management. The vast majority of nurses and midwives in Queensland are members of the QNMU. As the Queensland state branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the QNMU is the peak professional body for nurses and midwives in Queensland.

Through our submissions and other initiatives, the QNMU expresses our commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve health equity and ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are heard. The QNMU supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the call for a First Nations Voice enshrined in our Constitution. The QNMU acknowledges the lands on which we work and meet always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

Our submission focuses on the role of nurses and midwives in the health and social care of children and young people who encounter the youth justice system.

## **Summary of recommendations**

The QNMU recommends:

- Ensuring the provision of adequate nurse staffing numbers and skill-mix in youth justice services.
- Implementing nurse-led models of care targeting high risk transitional periods.
- Investing in equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services for children and young people in the youth justice system.

## **Right to equitable access to high quality health and social care**

Youth justice services in Queensland have a duty of care to ensure that offenders have equitable access to healthcare. The QNMU is supportive of reforms that improve the health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders, regardless of age or social circumstances. We firmly believe that the right to receive high quality health and social care extends to those in the youth justice system and, further, that the care provided must be of comparable standard to that which is provided in the public health system, in accordance with the *Nelson Mandela Rules* (UNODC, 2015).

## **Role of nurses and midwives in youth justice services**

As one of the few professions that may have contact with youth offenders on a regular or semi-regular basis, nurses and midwives are in a unique position to positively impact a young person's health and wellbeing.

The role of nurses employed in the youth justice system may include:

- Conducting physical health assessments to identify and address health issues and needs of youth in the justice system.
- Planning, delivering, and evaluating health interventions.
- Conduct mental health assessments and risk assessments.
- Medication management, which includes administering and monitoring medications.
- Providing health education and health awareness, including topics such as substance misuse, sexual health, and general health and wellbeing.
- Co-ordinating and engaging in multidisciplinary care with other professionals, such as social workers, psychologists, and corrections officers.
- Delivering substance misuse assessment and treatment programs, which may encompass prevention, education, treatment and monitoring e.g. managing withdrawal symptoms or substance replacement programs.

## **Opportunities to strengthen the provision of health services**

The QNMU considers that the positive impact of nurses in the youth justice system could be further strengthened. Our members who are employed by or work in the justice system have raised some concerns regarding the provision of health services. We therefore make the following recommendations.

1. *Ensuring the provision of adequate nurse staffing numbers and skill-mix in youth justice services.*

In areas of high demand, this could include streamlining recruitment processes and fast-tracking applications to nursing positions. For example, nurses already

undergo an exhaustive police and background check every year as part of maintaining their Ahpra registration and therefore additional police checks as part of the recruiting process may be unnecessary.

2. *Implementing nurse-led models of care targeting high risk transitional periods.*

Models of care incorporating the skill, expertise, and knowledge of specialist nurses (such as Nurse Navigators, Nurse Practitioners, and Mental Health Nurses) should be implemented in high-risk areas in the youth justice system where young people are most vulnerable, including the transitional period between youth justice system to general community, or from child and adolescent health services to early adulthood health services.

3. *Investing in equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services for children and young people in the youth justice system.*

Responsive health services must acknowledge and address the sexual and reproductive health needs of children and young people in the youth justice system. For example, the *Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce Report (2022)* details girls in Queensland prisons who have experienced pregnancy, miscarriage, inter-uterine foetal demise (IUD) or a stillbirth. The provision of specialist midwifery services and sexual and reproductive health nursing services, including education, should be a priority.

## **References**

UN General Assembly, *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 8 January 2016, A/RES/70/175*

Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. (2022). *Hear Her Voice: Women's and girls experiences across the criminal justice system (Report Two, Volume One)*.