

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

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Committee Secretary  
Youth Justice Reform Select Committee  
Parliament House  
Brisbane Qld 4000

Email: youthjustice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

### **Youth justice reform in Queensland**

Triple P International welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland.

This written submission focuses on:

*2a. The prevention of entry and diversion of youth offenders from the justice system with specific consideration of risk and protective factors that reduce crime; and*

*2c. The efficacy of:*

*iii. evidence-based early intervention and prevention programs.*

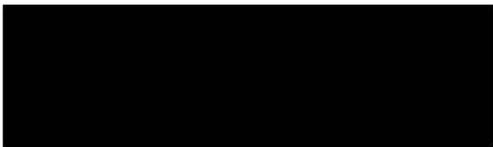
The Triple P – Positive Parenting Program® is an evidence-based suite of parenting programmes designed to improve the health and wellbeing of entire communities by building stronger families and protecting against risk factors associated with poor social, emotional and behavioural outcomes across childhood and adolescence, including youth offending.

Through adoption of the **Every Family** public health model of evidence-based parenting, we recommend leveraging the strong and robust foundation of Triple P currently available across Queensland, with enhanced implementation support to intensify community reach and engagement in high-risk areas with increased youth offender vulnerability to meaningfully influence youth crime.

We believe a multi-tiered approach to parenting support, based on best available evidence, is an integral part of the Government's response to Youth Justice Reform to reduce youth offending.

We sincerely value the opportunity to contribute to the important work the Committee is undertaking and express our gratitude for consideration of our late submission. We warmly welcome an opportunity to discuss our submission further at any stage or provide further information upon your request.

Sincerely



Carol Markie-Dadds  
Country Director - Australia

**Backed by research. Proven by parents.**

# TRIPLE P – POSITIVE PARENTING PROGRAM

## SUBMISSION

### QUEENSLAND PARLIAMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

### YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM

January 2024

Triple P is ranked by the United Nations as the world's most extensively researched parenting program.

It is backed by four decades of ongoing research which has involved 820 trials, 410 evaluation papers and 198 Randomised Controlled Trials.

Its effectiveness has been proved across cultures, socioeconomic groups and in many different family structures.

Triple P has helped millions of children and their families across more than 30 countries. It has been translated into 23 languages other than English. More than 100,000 practitioners globally have been trained in its delivery.

The University of Queensland is the owner of the copyright of the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program, which was created by Professor Matt Sanders and colleagues from The University of Queensland's Parenting and Family Support Centre. The University of Queensland's technology transfer arm, UniQuest, has granted a worldwide licence (under strict quality assurance requirements) to Triple P International to disseminate the Triple P suite of programs.

Triple P International Pty Ltd (TPI) partners with governments, agencies, NGOs, and individuals to help them get the best results from their family support initiative. Using implementation science and on the ground experience, TPI supports agencies and individuals as they plan for, train in, and deliver Triple P. Working towards supporting all families, TPI shares its experience of flexibly implementing Triple P to meet the needs of individual parents through to entire communities. TPI delivers Triple P Provider Training Courses and publishes digital and print resources for providers and parents.

A Certified B Corporation® headquartered in Brisbane, Australia, Triple P International (TPI) aims at creating global positive social change by disseminating the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program® and putting evidence-based parenting in the hands of every parent.

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## OVERVIEW

Statement to the Select Committee at its public briefing, Brisbane, December 5, 2023.

*There is a new phenomenon around these young people. They exhibit chronic disadvantage—often intergenerational. We will do whatever it takes in the short term and medium term, **but, if we as a community want to get ahead of this, the real answer lies in supporting families and young people, particularly from zero to eight.***

Director General, Department of Youth Justice – Robert Gee APM

A child's family, particularly the kind of parenting they experience, plays a crucial role in determining children's life trajectory.

Parenting, and the parent-child relationship, is one of the most significant, yet modifiable, risk factors that impact child wellbeing, development, and behaviour.

The issues of child and youth antisocial and criminal behaviour the committee is considering are complex, and remedies and reforms are difficult, time-consuming, resource intensive, and require a multi-faceted response.

Among them must be a determined focus on the child-parent-family relationship.

As the Director General, and others, have recognised, **the 'real answer'** to ameliorating the youth crime problem long term lies in supporting families and young people.

Parenting programs that take a tiered multi-level approach to parenting support and are based on best available evidence are part of that 'real answer'.

They should be embedded as part of any approach that advocates a model of early intervention and prevention.

A solution is required that takes a long term, preventive view, while at the same time addressing the immediate and pressing needs of vulnerable families that are at risk of youth offending or are already involved in the youth justice system.

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## Risk and protective factors in youth offending: The crucial role of parenting

**There is a wide consensus that of all the potentially modifiable factors contributing to youth offending, a child's family and, specifically, the type and quality of parenting children and young people experience, plays an important role in the causal pathway leading to chronic offending.**

Specifically, children raised in family environments that expose them to inadequate parenting characterised by harsh, coercive, neglectful and inconsistent parenting, poor parental supervision and family violence are at greater risk of poor impulse control and impaired self-regulatory capability.<sup>11-12</sup> This places them at greater risk for early-onset conduct problems, learning difficulties, poor school attendance, truancy, mental health problems and later antisocial behaviour, as well as offending in adolescence.<sup>13-16</sup>

Children who are maltreated are particularly at risk of becoming involved in juvenile offending.<sup>17</sup> Children also exposed to other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as social disadvantage, poverty, homelessness, parental mental health and substance abuse problems, separation or divorce of parents, and parental criminality are at greater risk of involvement with delinquent peers and persistent antisocial behaviour and offending in adolescence.<sup>18-19</sup>

Indigenous children are more likely to live in socially disadvantaged communities and experience higher levels of ACEs in their families than non-Indigenous Australians, and are over-represented in the juvenile justice system.<sup>20-21</sup>

In turn, common protective factors associated with reduced rates of youth offending include caring relationships with adults, positive parenting practices, parental monitoring, perceived emotional support, a warm family environment, positive peer relationships, and reduced substance use.<sup>22-24</sup>

Of all the potentially modifiable factors contributing to youth offending, robust evidence supports the important role that a child's family, and the type and quality of parenting, plays in the causal pathway leading to chronic offending.<sup>25</sup>

As many of the risk factors cannot be screened for, and a targeted approach alone may stigmatise accessing services, a population approach based on Proportionate Universalism is required. This is where all families can access parenting support that is suited to their level of need and requires enhanced support for vulnerable families and communities at risk.

The Australian *National Action Plan for Health of Children and Young People 2020-2030* recognises, "**families, parents and caregivers are the most powerful influence on a child's life**" (p10) and "**the healthy development of children ... is directly related to the nature and quality of parenting**" (p15).<sup>26</sup>

**Parenting interventions must be considered as a crucial strategy in any evidence-based approach to reduce youth offending in Queensland, embedded as part of a population-based approach that advocates a model of prevention and early intervention.**<sup>27</sup>

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## Triple P and Queensland: Current support for Queensland families

Triple P International has a longstanding relationship with the Queensland Government under the auspices of the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services.

Since mid-2015, TPI has received recurrent funding to offer free professional development, resources and implementation support to Queensland-based practitioners offering family support services at no direct charge to parents/caregivers and online programs direct to parents/caregivers.

The current service delivery model encompasses the following:

- 1. Providing a multi-level, population-based approach to evidence-based parenting support that blends universal and targeted parenting programs**,<sup>28</sup> incorporating the principles of “Proportionate Universalism” where all families can access parenting support that is suited to their level of need, with enhanced support for vulnerable families and communities at risk.<sup>29-30</sup>
- 2. Providing parenting support in line with principles of prevention and early intervention**, to ensure concerns about children’s behaviour can be addressed early and foster the development of parental skills and confidence to raise healthy, well-adjusted children in a stable, loving, and low-conflict environment.<sup>31-33</sup>
- 3. Engaging vulnerable and at-risk families**, such as sole parents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (ATSI), families speaking a language other than English (LOTE), and health care card holders. These groups have been represented in Triple P programs at rates above their estimated proportion of the Queensland population and these participation rates have continued to rise each year.
- 4. Recognises the need to provide ongoing, flexible, and dynamic parenting support continuously over the course of childhood and adolescence**, acknowledging that level of family risk, vulnerability, and exposure to adversity and childhood development challenges will ebb and flow for different families at different stages with cumulative effects over time. This means parents may engage, disengage, and re-engage with a system of parenting programs at different times for different purposes depending on a range of family and child factors.<sup>27</sup>
- 5. Offering prompt and ready access to a range of evidence-based parenting support**, with a range of options to suit diverse parent needs and preferences, offering broad parent support in addition to tailored support to help navigate challenging life events in real-time (e.g., children, teenagers, child neurodiversity, navigating family breakdown through separation or divorce), and considering level of intensity and parental engagement preferences (e.g., online, seminar, small group, one-on-one).<sup>34</sup>
- 6. Providing access to workforce training and supervision and implementation support** to increase the availability and skills of local practitioners to provide evidence-based parenting support across the state, recognising the limitations of government and non-government organisations and workforces to invest in such activities.<sup>35,36</sup>
- 7. Statewide availability of support through digital interventions**, with initial funding from the Queensland Government. In mid-2022, the Australian Government took responsibility for funding nationwide access to online programs for families with children under 12 years (via its *Parenting Education and Support Program* grant). For those families with older children, the Queensland Government continues to fund access to **Teen Triple P Online**.

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The current funding is sufficient to provide a foundation of support, however there are limitations on the number of families and professionals who can participate or receive programs on an annual basis.

It has been a very significant initiative for families in Queensland, but it is **not sufficient for systematic implementation across the state**.

While many families in Queensland have experienced the benefits of positive parenting, **there is the potential for greater reach, engagement and impact among families at risk of youth offending**.

**New evidence highlights the benefit of enhanced and targeted delivery support of the *Every Family* model to increase reach and engagement with the most socially disadvantaged families at high risk of poor outcomes for children and young people, including youth offending.**<sup>37</sup>

### **Every Family: An essential part of the solution**

*Every Family* was a place-based trial (2017-2019) funded by the *Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence of Children and Families over the Life Course* and aimed to extend the available evidence on the population-level effects of Triple P programs in 32 highly disadvantaged communities in Queensland.

It targeted vulnerable families with children aged three to eight years living in socially disadvantaged communities and compared child maltreatment outcomes to 32 closely matched socially disadvantaged communities in New South Wales which received care as usual.<sup>38</sup>

It involved delivery of programs from the Triple P system, along with intensive implementation in trial communities that were strongly grounded in principles of place-based co-design.

The *Every Family* initiative included dedicated funding to facilitate extensive coordination and proactive collaborative partnerships to increase engagement with socially disadvantaged parents.

The project team actively sought and fostered relationships with diverse organisations and community agencies, including existing service provider networks, schools and early childhood centres, non-government organisations, health services, sporting and religious organisations, local businesses, and local or state government.

Findings indicated **a significantly greater decrease in child maltreatment substantiations** (medium effect size) **and child maltreatment notification rates** (large effect size) over the two-year period for the intervention communities in Queensland in comparison to the matched communities in New South Wales.<sup>37</sup>

These findings mirror those from international Triple P population-based rollouts, most notably in the United States, where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] funded a trial in South Carolina that significantly reduced rates of substantiated child maltreatment, hospitalisation due to child maltreatment injuries, and out-of-home placements.<sup>39</sup>

These outcomes demonstrate the value of a public health approach to parenting support for preventing child maltreatment among children living in socially disadvantaged communities that are at higher risk of youth offending.

Findings also highlight the influence of well-coordinated, co-designed, and place-based community implementation partnerships in enhancing the access, reach and engagement in parenting support to have meaningful and impactful outcomes for young people, particularly where it is needed most.

We recommend leveraging the strong and robust foundation of the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program® currently available across Queensland, with enhanced implementation support and direct services to parents, as evidenced by the recent *Every Family* population trial.

This approach would expand community reach and engagement in high-risk areas with increased youth offender vulnerability to meaningfully target youth crime.

Key features of this recommendation include:

- **Offering high-quality evidence-based universal and targeted programs for parents of children at all ages from infancy through to adolescence, across varying intensities of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention**,<sup>27</sup> tailored to family needs and based on principles of Proportionate Universalism.<sup>29-30</sup> This ensures the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged families at highest risk of involvement in youth crime have multiple pathways to access parenting programs across all ages and stages of development.
- **Demonstrated robust effectiveness in addressing modifiable risk factors for preventing youth offending**, including through preventing or reducing the negative effects of ACEs, as evidenced by one of only two programs to be given a 'very high' evidence rating in a recent Australian review,<sup>40</sup> in addition to local Queensland<sup>37</sup> and international evidence supporting effectiveness in reducing rates of child maltreatment.<sup>39</sup>
- **Demonstrated program acceptability and effectiveness among vulnerable and high risk groups**, including parents of neurodiverse children with a range of developmental disabilities,<sup>41-42</sup> custodial families,<sup>43</sup> refugee families,<sup>44</sup> parents with serious mental health and substance abuse problems,<sup>45</sup> parents living in homeless shelters following family violence,<sup>45</sup> parents experiencing separation and divorce,<sup>45</sup> parents who have been incarcerated,<sup>45</sup> socially disadvantaged parents,<sup>46</sup> and parents with high levels of family of origin ACEs.<sup>45</sup>
- **Evidence of effectiveness in increasing child protective factors** through improving children's prosocial behaviour, reducing disruptive behaviour, improving school attendance, and promoting healthy peer relationships.<sup>47</sup>
- **Safe and effective complementary program delivery as part of a trauma-informed approach**, to support parents to develop specific skills to help build and improve their relationships with their children, create a safe and predictable environment, and respond consistently to day-to-day issues without using coercive parenting strategies.<sup>45</sup>
- **Experience working with local communities applying place-based and co-designed principles**, including Community of Practice design, to ensure the delivery of culturally appropriate and acceptable programs, including for Indigenous parents in urban, rural and remote communities such as Fitzroy Crossing.<sup>48-52</sup>
- **Experts in providing enhanced implementation support based on Implementation Science**,<sup>53</sup> and two decades of experience supporting organisations globally, to support practitioners and managers delivering the programs in multidisciplinary settings across the community. In Queensland, we currently work with more than 170 partner agencies to support workforce training and delivery, including 15 organisations that primarily support First Nations families, and partner agencies across the Department of Child Safety.
- **Successful communications strategies to normalise and destigmatise parenting support**, increasing receptivity of parents to reach out, seek support, and respond to recommendations from professionals.<sup>54</sup>

- **Approach is collaborative**, developing partnerships and networks to work together to support families and link effectively to existing national and state policy priorities involved in supporting families with evidence-based parenting programs.
- **A broad and extensive evidence-based program foundation**, with Triple P ranked by the United Nations as the world's most extensively researched parenting program,<sup>55</sup> with more than 820 trials, studies, and published papers, including more than 410 evaluation papers (198 of which are randomised controlled trials), with evidence of effectiveness across cultures, socioeconomic groups, and in many different family structures from over the last 40 years.
- **A cost-effective model suited for delivery at scale**, as demonstrated by the identification of Triple P as one of the best evaluated parenting programs for young children in Australia (reporting a \$13.83 return for every dollar spent, an overall 1283% return on investment),<sup>56</sup> and also internationally where a cost analysis of a population trial estimated the program establishment infrastructure could be recouped in one year if a 10% reduction in child abuse and neglect was achieved.<sup>57</sup>

#### Our recommendations:

1. A comprehensive response to the prevention and treatment of youth offending, including recidivism, needs to be child-centric and family focused.
2. A tiered multi-level public health approach to parenting support, based on best available evidence, becomes an integral part of the Youth Justice reform to reduce youth offending.
3. **Enhance the current universal offer with the implementation of the *Every Family* approach, including the systematic availability of universal services across the state as well as targeted support for families in socially disadvantaged communities.**
4. **Enhanced and intensive program implementation support, including the provision of dedicated efforts to build and/or support existing community networks and local implementation strategies to coordinate delivery of Triple P that is tailored to the local community needs and available stakeholders and resources.**

NB: The above provides a brief summary of the benefits of the Triple P System and of the impact and outcomes of the intensive *Every Family* model. We would be happy to expand as needed, respond to questions and/or make appropriate staff available to discuss this submission and wider context of the benefits positive parenting can provide to the cohort of problematic youth/families and the wider community as a whole.

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