

Question on Notice
No. 351
Asked on 12 March 2008

MS STONE asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

QUESTION:

What is the State Government doing to support victims of crimes committed by persons with a mental illness?

ANSWER:

Queensland Health has a key role in the State Government's \$53 million response to recommendations of the 2006 Review of the *Mental Health Act 2000* by Brendan Butler AM SC. The final report of the review, "Promoting Balance in the Forensic Mental Health System", concluded that change was necessary to ensure victims of offenders with a mental illness receive up-to-date information and support to help them understand and negotiate the forensic mental health system, as well as assisting with their recovery and well-being.

Mr Butler recommended the establishment of a statewide Victim Support Service to provide a pro-active and coordinated approach to meeting victim support and information needs.

The Queensland Health Victim Support Service commenced operation in February 2008 and was officially launched by Ms Karen Struthers MP on 28 February 2008.

Statewide assistance is being provided to victims by experienced health professionals operating from a Brisbane office, with an additional office in Townsville to be established in the coming months. Visiting services will be provided by Brisbane based staff until the Townsville office is up and running. Outreach services will be provided throughout Queensland by six victim support coordinators from the Brisbane office and the Townsville office, when established, through face-to-face telephone and video-conference links.

The Victim Support Service provides information, support and assistance to the direct victims of an offence, the parents or guardians of a young victim or a victim who has legal incapacity, family members of a victim, and other people who have been directly harmed by the offence.

The Victim Support Service can assist victims in a number of ways by:

- providing information and support in understanding the forensic mental health system and processes;
- assisting victims to access entitlements, including making applications for Classified Patient and Forensic Patient Information Order;
- providing information in relation to the classified patient and forensic patient information registers. (A registered person may choose to receive the information by person, by telephone or in writing, and may nominate someone else to receive the information on their behalf);
- providing assistance with making submissions to the Mental Health Court and Mental Health Review Tribunal;

- offering court support, counselling and referral to appropriate services;
- raising awareness and understanding of the needs of victims with staff of mental health and other related services;
- collaborating with indigenous health organisations and workers in the provision of information and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims; and
- promoting coordination of services to victims, advocacy, research and training about the issues and rights of victims in the forensic mental health system.

Victims may request assistance from the service at any stage of the forensic mental health process. However, the Victim Support Service is proactive in the early identification of victims and promoting their access to assistance through collaborative service arrangements with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Queensland Police Service and other key stakeholders.

The amount of \$905,712 has been allocated in the State Budget to establish and operate the Victim Support Service in 2007-08.

On 31 October 2007, amendments to the *Mental Health Act 2000* were passed in the *Mental Health and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2007* with bi-partisan support, which authorise disclosure of patient information for the purposes of establishing victim information registers, in keeping with recommendations of the Butler Review.

The registers for classified patients and forensic patients commenced operation on 28 February 2008 and they enable victims to receive information relevant to their safety and well-being, for example when a patient is authorised to have limited community treatment or transferred to another mental health service.

The registers are managed by the Office of the Director of Mental Health with information provided to registered persons by the Queensland Health Victim Support Service.

This is a vital important service for our community and is deserving of the continuing support of the Queensland Government.