



**Examination of Queensland Audit  
Office Report 2: 2017-18**  
*Managing the mental health of  
Queensland Police employees*

**Report No. 47, 56<sup>th</sup> Parliament**  
**Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee**  
**September 2019**

## **Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee**

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### **Acknowledgements**

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## Abbreviations

Auditor-General	Queensland Auditor-General
committee	Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
QAO	Queensland Audit Office
QAO report	Queensland Audit Office Report to Parliament 2: 2017-18 <i>Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees</i>
QPS	Queensland Police Service
this report	Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, Report No. 47, 56 <sup>th</sup> Parliament, Examination of Queensland Audit Office Report 2: 2017-18 <i>Managing the mental health of Queensland Parliament employees</i>

## Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee's examination of Queensland Audit Office Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Queensland Audit Office, the Queensland Police Service and the committee's secretariat for their assistance with the committee's examination of this Queensland Audit Office report.

I commend this report to the House.



Peter Russo MP

Chair

## Recommendation

### Recommendation

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The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly notes the contents of this report.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Role of the committee

The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee (committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>1</sup> The committee's primary areas of responsibility are:

- Justice and Attorney-General
- Police and Corrective Services
- Fire and Emergency Services.<sup>2</sup>

One of the committee's roles is to consider the reports of the Queensland Auditor-General (Auditor-General) that fall within its portfolio area.<sup>3</sup> The committee may examine and inquire into the reports, and make recommendations and report on them to the Legislative Assembly.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 Role of the Auditor-General

The Auditor-General conducts independent audits—financial audits and performance audits—of the Queensland public sector and certain other entities.<sup>5</sup> The Auditor-General makes recommendations to improve service delivery, accountability and transparency in reports to Parliament on the audits.<sup>6</sup> The Queensland Audit Office (QAO) supports the Auditor-General.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 Referral of Queensland Audit Office Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*

The Queensland Audit Office Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees* (QAO report) was tabled on 10 October 2017 during the 55<sup>th</sup> Parliament. The QAO report was referred to the former Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee on that day. It was re-referred to the committee on 3 May 2018 following the commencement of the 56<sup>th</sup> Parliament.

### 1.4 Committee's inquiry process

On 28 May 2018, in response to a request from the committee, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) provided an update on its progress of the implementation of the recommendations in the QAO report. Given that the QPS envisaged that most of the audit recommendations would be implemented by February 2019, the committee sought further advice as to the QPS' progress in this regard, seeking a response by 20 February 2019. The correspondence from the QPS is available on the committee's website.

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<sup>1</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88 and Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly, standing order 194.

<sup>2</sup> Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly, schedule 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 94(1); standing order 194B.

<sup>4</sup> *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, ss 79, 92.

<sup>5</sup> *Auditor-General Act 2009*, s 3. A financial audit assesses the financial statements of a public sector entity: *Auditor-General Act 2009*, ss 40, 58. A performance audit evaluates whether any or all of a public sector entity's activities are achieving their objectives economically, efficiently and effectively, and are compliant with relevant legislation. It does not question the merits of government policy: *Auditor-General Act 2009*, s 37A.

<sup>6</sup> Queensland Audit Office, 'The Queensland Audit Office', <https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Auditor-General Act 2009*, s 6.

## 2 Examination of the Queensland Audit Office report

### 2.1 Audit objective

The objective of the *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees* performance audit was to determine whether the QPS is effective in preventing mental illness and monitoring and managing the mental health of its employees. The QAO considered recruits, sworn police officers and unsworn (civilian) staff.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.2 Background

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as:

*... a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.*<sup>9</sup>

The QAO report explained that '[m]ental illness differs from poor mental health, because it refers to a *recognised, medically diagnosed illness, which impacts an individual's cognitive, affective and relational abilities.*'<sup>10</sup>

Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>11</sup>

The QAO report noted that '[t]he work environment can contribute positively or negatively to employees' mental health.'<sup>12</sup> First responders to emergencies and critical incidents, such as police, paramedics and firefighters, are considered more susceptible to mental illness than the general population because of the nature of their work.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3 Audit conclusions and recommendations

The QAO found that while the QPS has certain measures in place to monitor and manage the mental health of its employees and to prevent mental illness, they are not always effective.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, the QAO recommended that the QPS:

- better coordinates and enhances its staff wellbeing and mental health support services and information within a clear strategy and integrated framework
- acts to understand and address the mistrust of some employees in its current mental health frameworks and support services
- improves how it designs, coordinates, delivers, and records its mental health training

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<sup>8</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, p 1.

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization, 'Mental health: a state of well-being', [https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/).

<sup>10</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, p 15.

<sup>11</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, p 15.

<sup>12</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, p 15.

<sup>13</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, pp 1, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, pp 4-5.



- assesses options for screening employees prior to them leaving the service, and for enhancing post-service support
- develops processes and measures for analysing its data for trends and to assess the effectiveness of support services so they can be continuously improved
- improves the consistency and coverage of mental health screening and monitoring.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.4 Queensland Police Service response to the Queensland Audit Office recommendations

In October 2017, the QPS agreed to fully implement all the recommendations in the QAO report and noted that implementation had already commenced.<sup>16</sup>

The committee wrote to the QPS on 1 May 2018 to request a progress update on the implementation of the recommendations from the QAO report. The committee received a response from the QPS on 28 May 2018 which confirmed that the QPS had commenced work on the recommendations. A progress summary table was also provided to the committee as an attachment to this correspondence.

On 6 December 2018, the committee wrote again to the QPS to request a further progress update by mid-February 2019. The QPS response dated 14 February 2019 noted:

*The Queensland Police Service (QPS) has worked on all six recommendations, with recommendations either finalised and implemented, or near finalisation with implementation subject to the availability of resourcing.*

*Extensive consultation with Australian Police agencies, front-line responder agencies such as Queensland Fire and Emergency Services; Queensland Ambulance Service and the Australian Defence Force has been integral in consideration of the recommendations.*

*The QPS has also sought advice from expert authority's Beyond Blue, and Phoenix Australia (Formerly the Australian Centre for Post Traumatic Mental Health).*

*On 21 December 2018, Mr Paul Casey, Executive Director Recruiting, Safety and Wellbeing and Mr Colin Anderson, Director Safety and Wellbeing met with Mr Darren Brown, Queensland Audit Office (QAO) Director, Performance Audit, to provide a briefing on the implementation of the recommendations.*

*Mr Brown acknowledged the significant work undertaken in implementing the recommendations, indicating the QPS could reference his satisfaction with the review in future correspondence to the QAO.<sup>17</sup>*

The QPS also attached to its letter of 14 February 2019 a table summarising the status of each of the recommendations.<sup>18</sup> As noted above, the QPS correspondence is available on the committee's website.

## 2.5 Committee recommendation

### Recommendation

The Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly notes the contents of this report.

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<sup>15</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, p 13.

<sup>16</sup> Queensland Audit Office, Report 2: 2017-18 *Managing the mental health of Queensland Police employees*, 2017, p 64.

<sup>17</sup> Queensland Police Service, correspondence dated 14 February 2019, p 1.

<sup>18</sup> Queensland Police Service, correspondence dated 14 February 2019, attachment.