

Report on a page

All victims of sexual assault should be able to access clinical care (which is focused on their medical wellbeing and health) and forensic medical examinations (which gathers forensic medical evidence to support an investigation and potential prosecution) that are timely and responsive to their needs.

Queensland Health has a statewide all-hours service to provide sexual assault victims with clinical and forensic care and support. In June 2019, in our audit *Delivering forensic services*, we found opportunities to improve these services. This audit examines whether Queensland Health has effectively planned and progressed implementing recommendations and directions to improve the delivery of forensic medical examinations. These include:

- recommendation 4 from our report *Delivering forensic services* (Report 21: 2018–19)
- recommendations 32 to 37 from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (the Taskforce) *Hear her voice – Report two*
- the Ministerial Direction – *Crisis Care Process* issued by the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women on 17 November 2023.

We did not follow up the other recommendations from our 2018–19 report, including those related to deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) testing. The government announced changes resulting from the 2022 Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA Testing in Queensland, which meant it was not an appropriate time for us to follow up on related recommendations.

Queensland Health continues to improve its services

Queensland Health has continued to improve the services that it delivers to victims of sexual assault since our 2018–19 report. It now has service delivery agreements with each hospital and health service (HHS), new forensic medical examination kits, and new reporting pathways for victims. It has fully implemented 4 of the 6 recommendations made by the Taskforce and is continuing to implement the remaining 2 recommendations. It still needs to implement an overall strategy to ensure there are enough forensic medical examiners across the state, enhance its monitoring and reporting, and increase the availability of paediatric services for child victims.

There is a greater focus on providing early clinical care to victims

The *Crisis Care Process* ministerial direction issued in November 2023 requires 13 of the 16 HHSs (those with the most emergency department presentations) to ensure victims of sexual assault start receiving clinical care within 10 minutes of presenting to hospital. The direction appears to have prompted HHSs to prioritise more timely care to victims. HHSs have adopted differing practices in the clinical care they provide to victims across the state. This is reasonable, as practices need to differ based on the specific medical needs of the victim and the clinical judgement of those providing care. Queensland Health is implementing a new reporting framework to improve consistency in the information HHSs capture and monitor whether they are complying with the direction.

Queensland Health does not know how many victims experience delays obtaining forensic medical examinations

We found instances where some victims could not obtain a timely forensic medical examination. However, an absence of data meant we could not determine how isolated these instances are. Queensland Health acknowledges that gaps still exist in its service for some victims. It plans to implement new frameworks and use the \$56 million announced in the 2024–25 state budget to recruit more dedicated forensic medical examiners. In this report, we make 3 further recommendations to improve the clinical care and forensic medical examinations that Queensland Health provides to victims of sexual assault.

