



Domestic and Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Units

Capability Framework

Strategic context

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) is committed to contributing to the achievement of the vision and key outcomes of whole-of-Government strategies for the support of all vulnerable community members across Queensland.

This includes, but is not limited to, the *Queensland Government's Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy 2016-2026* which aspires to a Queensland free from domestic and family violence (DFV) and for all Queenslanders to feel safe in their own homes and children to grow and develop in safe and secure environments. As well as the shared vision of the *Shifting minds: Queensland Mental Health, Alcohol and other Drugs Strategic Plan 2018-2023* and *Every Life: The Queensland Suicide Prevention Plan 2019-2029*, for a healthy, fair and inclusive Queensland where all people can access appropriate support and can achieve positive mental health and wellbeing and live lives with meaning and purpose.

The aspirations of these strategies are reflected in the QPS Strategic Plan 2021-2025, particularly the objective focused on building community safety through partnerships and responding to vulnerable persons.

In recent years, several districts have created internal units to provide tailored policing responses to DFV, mental health crisis and complex incidents involving community members with vulnerabilities. The QPS Executive Leadership Team resolved in May 2021 to establish and implement Domestic and Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Units (DFVVPUs) in all 15 police districts to move from internal/ad-hoc arrangements to a cohesive, overarching, and well governed approach of best practice. This decision appears as a key activity within the QPS 2021-2022 Operational Priorities to, *continue to implement DFVVPUs in partnership with other agencies to enhance an integrated response strategy in regional areas.*

To ensure consistency, this framework provides guidance on the essential capability elements, core principles and functions for the effective operation of these units. The fundamental resourcing described is based on research and practice evaluations, the learnings from existing DFVVPUs in Queensland and other jurisdictions, as well as the practice wisdom shared by our people and partners.

Principles of the DFVVPU

DFVVPUs are to be based upon the policing principle of a 'person centric' approach which considers the safety, welfare and well-being of the individual. This 'vulnerability first' approach has been used in other policing jurisdictions and assists officers in determining the type and level of response required.

Vulnerability has often been discussed in silos, for example DFV is seen as one issue, mental health crises is seen as a separate issue, as is homelessness, disability and marginalisation. Research has shown that vulnerable persons are likely to experience multiple forms of disadvantage, making their needs complex and multi-faceted. In these cases, a one size fits all approach does not adequately address the needs of the individual. Instead, an integrated service model comprised of multiple agencies is required to provide a holistic response.

These responses should be focussed on early detection, intervention and prevention to ensure vulnerable persons are provided timely, efficient, effective and appropriate supports. Vulnerable persons who come to the attention of police may not necessarily be involved in crime or behaviours which require a law enforcement response. However, where offenders or respondents experience vulnerabilities, police and partner agencies must work collaboratively to ensure these individuals are held to account for their actions, while also providing support for behaviour change and the resources to seek out necessary help. This holistic approach will provide greater safety and security for communities.

A finite number of policing resources requires the QPS to look for innovative responses to calls for service. Development of a DFVVPU must be strategic in approach to ensure efficient use of the police resources available. Developing and strengthening community partnerships will enhance the person focussed response and provide holistic support to the community.

While the volume of calls for service provides some indication of demand on policing services, understanding the composition and intersections of vulnerability within the community will better inform policing priorities at a district level and provide direction on how resources should be utilised. DFVVPU's must be adaptable and innovative in their practices and responses to vulnerable persons; and demonstrate relevance in the community and the wider police service. Ongoing assessment of the DFVVPU will build an evidence-base to develop and embed best practice across the Service. In turn, this will inform the strategic direction of the Service and ensure continual improvements in practice.

Functions of the DFVVPU

DFVVPU's offer an important contribution to the community and our strategic stakeholders by enhancing police responses to vulnerable persons. The day-to-day operation of DFVVPU's are likely to differ across districts, as each unit should be responsive to the unique needs of their community, and available resources. While it is unlikely that no one DFVVPU will operate exactly the same as another, it is expected they will perform a number of core functions that align with and support the strategic objectives of the QPS. That is, they will be focused on prevention, support existing police procedures, develop effective partnerships, identify and utilise collaborative responses and strategies, and provide case management.

Resourcing

Domestic and Family Violence Coordinators (DFVCs) are specialist officers appointed in all police districts to coordinate the policing response to DFV, including leading multi-agency collaborations to achieve real and effective outcomes for those affected by DFV. DFVCs possess a unique skill set, have a higher level of understanding of the complexities and dynamics of DFV and have an aptitude for developing and working in partnership with internal and external stakeholders. The volume and specialist nature of this incident type requires the undivided attention of DFVCs, and they should not have responsibility for delivery of additional capabilities.

Mental Health Intervention Coordinators (MHICs) similarly possess high level expertise and specialisation in their field. Only a small number of MHICs perform the role in a permanent full-time capacity. MHICs work with key partners, including Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Health, to deliver progressive and dynamic responses that reduce harm, and enhance the safety of persons impacted by or experiencing mental health crises within the community. MHICs work within more than one legislative framework and have expertise in the application of relevant policies and guidance of the Chief Psychiatrist and agreements with partners, including safe transport. Given their critical role in supporting vulnerable persons, consideration should be given to supporting the establishment of a permanent MHIC in a DFVVPUs.

At a station level, it has become practice (and is provisioned within the QPS Operational Procedures Manual) for an Officer in Charge (OIC) to appoint Domestic Violence Liaison Officers (DVLOs) to contribute to a multi-layered approach to managing the day-to-day policing response to DFV. The OIC is responsible for the performance and supervision of the officer and should allow adequate time and resources for the officer to perform these duties. Exposure to the operations of a DFVVPUs, on a rotational basis, has proven beneficial in increasing the knowledge and expertise of DVLOs in some districts.

Quality investigations contribute to holding perpetrators accountable through the criminal justice system and building victims' confidence to report further DFV incidents to police¹. It is crucial that where criminal investigations are beyond the capabilities expected of first responders, that specialist investigative expertise is engaged early. Criminal Investigation Branch and Child Protection and Investigation Unit personnel have the required skills to conduct a thorough and complete investigation, the capacity to complete protracted and complex investigations, effectively manage witness/es and prepare court documentation.

Investigative resources should be readily available to provide advice and support to first responders, with a view to ensuring a thorough response to DFV related criminal offending. Building upon these relationships will also develop the expertise of the first response. Where access to investigative resources to undertake DFV related criminal investigations is prevented, whether due to distance or capacity, consideration should be given to virtual support. Technology enhancements and innovative practice to promote access to specialist support for the benefit of those impacted by DFV is encouraged.

In a court setting, supporting aggrieved persons through proceedings and the successful prosecution of breaches of domestic violence orders and DFV related criminal offences will be enhanced by prosecutors with some expertise in understanding the dynamics of DFV. Some districts are fortunate to have access to specialist courts, DFV sector court support resources and victim liaison officers and DFVVPUs should be leveraging their access to this unique support. Where formal arrangements to support court proceedings are not available, the appointment of victim liaison officers for DFV court days may be a consideration. Again, early engagement is key and as a system, each district should develop relationships and processes to best support those affected by DFV.

MHICs can also assist in providing support to persons suffering mental health crisis through judicial processes by engaging with specialised mental health services such as Court Liaison Officers, Forensic Mental Health Liaisons, Mental Health Tribunals and Queensland Health Victim Support Services.

¹ Mazerolle, L., Eggins, E., Sydes, M., Hine, L., McEwan, J., Norrie, G., & Somerville, A. (2018). Criminal Justice Responses to Domestic and Family Violence: a rapid review of the evaluation literature: final report.

Access to an internal intelligence capability, as a shared district resource, has demonstrated potential in districts which have invested in focussed deterrence strategies to proactively engage and disrupt the behaviours of high risk/high harm and recidivist DFV perpetrators. Providing these members with additional training to enhance their understanding of the dynamics and complexities of DFV may prove of further benefit.

Supporting our people

Our organisation is committed to prioritising the health, safety and wellbeing of all employees and their families. It is recognised that all police personnel, whether working in specialised areas such as DFVVPUs, as first responders or supporting the frontline, are confronted with the complexities, volume and often traumatic events associated with DFV incidents as part of their day-to-day work and this may detrimentally affect their physical and emotional health and wellbeing. Delivering a strong and supportive organisational environment that acknowledges and addresses the seriousness, complexity and impact of DFV is critical to the welfare and care of our people.

Organisation

Members of the community engaged by DFVVPUs are often experiencing a range of vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities may include psychosocial factors such as impaired capacity, disability, mental ill-health, homelessness, DFV, social isolation and loneliness, members from LGBTIQ and Indigenous communities, high-risk employment and PTSD. To meet the needs of vulnerable Queenslanders and to perform all functions effectively, it is envisaged that a DFVVPUs will include an Officer in Charge, at the level required to manage assigned personnel and service delivery expectations; DFVCs and DVLOs, proportionate to demand; a MHIC; integrated investigative capability; and access to shared intelligence expertise. These resources are to operate in collaboration with support and engagement from available government agencies and non-government service sector partnerships and where available, other personnel, including Police Referral partners and High Risk Teams.



Support and case management

Effective multi-agency case management of individuals and families will strengthen the reach and impact of police responses to vulnerable community members and contribute to the broader service system response. Engagement of government and non-government agencies, and other stakeholders at a district level is essential.

Case management involves correctly identifying the needs of individuals and coordinating their immediate and short-term connection with adequate, accessible and appropriate support and interventions in a timely manner to reduce the current risk of harm and prevent additional risks from occurring.

The aim of a multi-agency case management approach is to:

- determine whether the individual poses a significant risk to others;
- jointly construct and implement a multi-agency safety plan that includes risk management, in the context of mental health this could include Police and Ambulance Intervention Plans and Acute Management Plans;
- apply support strategies to improve immediate safety for those at risk;
- reduce repeat victimisation;
- reduce re-offending by promoting behavioural change and holding individuals to account for perpetration of violence;
- support those involved (to access additional support services to address psycho-social factors (i.e. alcohol and drug use, mental health issues and homelessness); and
- improve agency accountability and mutual understanding of roles, frameworks, capacity and limitations.²

High Risk Teams or HRTs have been established in eight locations and are able to contribute to the case management of high risk DFV. To support the operation of HRTs and integrated service responses, the [Domestic and Family Violence Common Risk and Safety Framework](#) has been developed for use by government and non-government agencies. It sets out a shared understanding, language and common approach to recognising, assessing and responding to DFV risk and safety action planning, including common minimum standards and approaches. It is intended to provide guidance and a sound platform for the further development of integrated responses to DFV across the state, while being flexible enough to support local initiatives, place-based strategies and innovation in responses.

The Framework can be used as part of formal or informal integrated responses to recognising, assessing and responding to DFV and should be considered alongside the [Information Sharing Guidelines](#) to support the receiving/sharing of information for the purpose of risk assessment and management.

In terms of the operational work environment, co-location of agency representatives, where possible, will enhance outcomes through more timely and intensive collaboration. Co-location of agency

² Practice Tool 3 – Guidelines for multi-agency case management
<https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Documents/2015/PracticeTool3Guidelinesformultiagencycasemanagement.pdf>

representatives does not necessarily need to be facilitated at a police establishment and alternative arrangements should be explored, including integrating police resources with support services.

Queensland is a diverse and sparse state and there is a need to develop DFVVPUs based on local needs. In parts of Queensland resources may be limited and geographically dispersed, therefore building mutual understanding and trust with service sector partners will be more critical. The use of technological platforms such as Teams may assist in overcoming geographic limitations however DFVVPUs need to remain agile and flexible to respond to specific challenges and needs within their districts.