

QPS response to COVID-19

During 2020-21, the COVID-19 global health pandemic continued to present significant challenges for the Queensland community. Since the declaration of the public health emergency for Queensland on 29 January 2020, the QPS has performed a pivotal role in the whole-of-government COVID-19 response to protect the community from the spread and impacts of COVID-19. This role has focused on providing support to Queensland Health as lead agency, particularly through promoting compliance with the public health directions issued by the Chief Health Officer and undertaking associated enforcement activities.

The extensive and ongoing QPS contribution to the Queensland Government's COVID-19 response has comprised the following (to 30 June 2021):

- domestic and international border controls
- working with various government departments to develop and implement a border pass system to facilitate entry into Queensland
- restricting access to Queensland's most vulnerable communities
- public health emergency direction compliance checks for individuals and businesses
- issuing quarantine directions and investigating any breaches in relation to these directions
- security overlay at quarantine hotels
- supporting the activities undertaken within the Queensland Disaster Management Framework
- rapid response planning and coordination to contain outbreaks of COVID-19 in Queensland
- supporting Queensland Health's contact tracing activities
- supporting various multi-agency reviews including investigations into COVID-19 outbreaks.

Taskforce Sierra Linnnet has retained responsibility for the coordination of these key activities and continues to operate from the State Police Operations Centre in Brisbane.

Throughout the pandemic, the QPS has deployed police officers and staff members to COVID-19 related duties across the state. As at 30 June 2021, it is estimated that over 285,100 shifts dedicated to COVID-19 duties have been completed. One of the largest contributions by the QPS during this time has been the provision of security overlays at Queensland's quarantine hotels in support of the quarantine requirements set out by the Chief Health Officer. As at 30 June 2021, approximately 98,190 people had completed hotel quarantine in Queensland with the QPS providing security overlay at 15 hotels across the State.

As all police officers have been appointed as emergency officers (general) under the *Public Health Act 2005* (Qld), as well as many staff members and Protective Services Officers (PSOs), the QPS has retained a critical function in performing emergency officer roles during the pandemic. The QPS also continued to fulfil its legislated functions under the *Disaster Management Act 2003* (Qld), and in supporting the State's Disaster Management Arrangements. This included supporting the State Disaster Coordination Centre in coordinating Queensland's disaster operations and assisting whole-of-government planning activities. The QPS continues to work closely with its partner agencies and internal and external stakeholders to ensure an effective and holistic response that adequately meets the needs of the Queensland community.

In addition to ongoing COVID-19 response functions, the QPS performed a significant role in responding to three community lockdowns in parts of Queensland and associated restrictions for these areas including:

- a three-day lockdown in the Greater Brisbane area commencing on 8 January 2021, in response to the infection of a hotel worker at the Hotel Grand Chancellor
- a three-day lockdown in the Greater Brisbane area commencing on 29 March 2021, in response to a COVID-19 outbreak linked to the Princess Alexandra Hospital

- a two-phase lockdown in South-East Queensland, Townsville and Palm Island commencing on 29 June 2021, in response to increasing rates of COVID-19 community transmission.

During these periods, impacted areas were subject to greater restrictions, such as mandatory face masks, limits on movement and gatherings, and restrictions on business operations. In supporting these enhanced restrictions, the QPS retained its longstanding approach in operating under the principles of compassion, communication and compliance. This involved handing out masks to the community where appropriate and providing education on the new restrictions.

While community compliance with the public health directions has generally been very high throughout the entire pandemic, there have been some occasions where blatant and reckless disregard has been shown. In these circumstances, police have responded with necessary enforcement action (either by way of Penalty Infringement Notice, Notice to Appear, or other enforcement action) to keep the community safe from the spread of COVID-19.

Recognising the need to maintain community safety on all fronts, the QPS has balanced the COVID-19 response with priority policing activities throughout the state. Taskforce Sierra Linnet has regularly reviewed the QPS's staffing commitment to the COVID-19 response and sought to identify opportunities to relieve pressure on frontline staffing requirements where practicable. In moving towards a sustainable workforce model, large numbers of police initially required for the earlier stages of the COVID-19 response were returned to frontline policing roles and this work continues to identify means to reduce frontline pressure on the Service.

Business-as-usual policing operations have been maintained with some adjustments to certain activities as necessary to reduce the risk of potential COVID-19 infection and transmission. Large-scale static roadside breath testing and drug testing operations have been periodically suspended and resumed throughout 2020-21 following risk-based assessments of the public health environment at the time and associated safety considerations for QPS members and the community. During high-risk periods, testing has continued through vehicle interceptions.

The Service continues to explore ways to enhance member and community safety throughout the pandemic response by reviewing and adapting its operational capabilities and priorities based on the risk profile of COVID-19 in the community. During 2020-21, this included:

- reviewing and modifying the operational procedures to reduce physical contact in the community
- continuing to supply personal protective equipment to safeguard member wellbeing and ensure effective service delivery in Queensland communities
- additional protections for officers working in quarantine environments identified as high-risk such as quarantine hotels and international airports including mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, regular testing and enhanced PPQ requirements for the safety of their families and the broader community.

The QPS acknowledges the COVID-19 public health emergency pandemic is likely to continue for the foreseeable future and the need to support and sustain the long-term operation of QPS's COVID-19 response activities will be imperative. The QPS remains committed to supporting Queensland's COVID-19 response through its law enforcement functions and public safety capabilities to ensure the safety of Queenslanders remains of highest priority.