

18 August 2023

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care  
Safe Standards Scoping Study

Via email: [comms.forsafety@health.gov.au](mailto:comms.forsafety@health.gov.au)

### **Safe Spaces Standards Scoping Study Consultation**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment during the Safe Spaces Standards Scoping Study Consultation.

As the Public Advocate for Queensland, I undertake systemic advocacy to promote and protect the rights and interests of Queensland adults with impaired decision-making ability.<sup>1</sup> There are several conditions that may affect a person's decision-making ability, including intellectual disability, acquired brain injury, mental illness, neurological disorders (such as dementia) or alcohol and drug misuse.

Many adults who require the supports that can be provided in non-traditional and non-clinical environments like Safe Spaces may have impaired decision-making ability or may experience this at some point in their life, potentially when accessing these types of services.

With this in mind I would like to draw attention to a report I prepared in August 2022: [Better Pathways: Improving Queensland's delivery of acute mental health services](#).

This report includes commentary regarding the use of safe spaces (also known as crisis support spaces) to divert people experiencing a mental health crisis from emergency departments, where the clinical environment and the general levels of noise and distress can exacerbate conditions and lead to escalating behaviours.

The report included a recommendation specifically in regard to Safe Spaces, as follows:

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Queensland Government should extend Queensland Health's Crisis Support Spaces program to provide:

- a) a 7 day a week service, with opening hours consistent with peak periods for mental health presentations at hospital emergency departments;
- b) referral via General Practitioners, the Queensland Ambulance Service or patient self-presentation;
- c) home-like, safe, and calming environments to enhance the patient care experience; and
- d) best practice crisis and stabilisation services, delivered by a combined peer lived experience and clinical workforce

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<sup>1</sup> *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000 (Qld) s 209.*

Other related recommendations included in the report relate to the experience of people in emergency departments and include:

**Recommendation 5**

Hospital and Health Services should engage people with lived experience to co-design spaces in emergency departments for patients presenting with a mental illness. These areas need to be quiet, calm, and facilitate a trauma-informed therapeutic approach to care.

**Recommendation 6**

Hospital and Health Services should provide people with a mental illness with appropriate access to a peer lived experience worker in emergency departments.

**Recommendation 7**


Hospital and Health Services should expand their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workforce, enabling improved access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who present to emergency departments or who are admitted into inpatient Authorised Mental Health Services.

I also note that these recommendations are consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Queensland Mental Health Select Committee's report on its 'Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders' (June 2022).<sup>2</sup>

It would be appreciated if these recommendations and other commentary regarding safe spaces included in the report (pp. 22-23, 31-32, 34) could be considered as part of this consultation.

Thank you for considering these comments as part of the consultation process associated with the Safe Spaces Standards Scoping Study. Should you require further information or would like to discuss any of the matters raised in this letter please do not hesitate to contact my office on 07 3738 9513 or [public.advocate@justice.qld.gov.au](mailto:public.advocate@justice.qld.gov.au).

Yours faithfully,



John Chesterman (Dr)  
**Public Advocate**

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<sup>2</sup> Queensland Government, *Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders*, Report No. 1, 57<sup>th</sup> Parliament, Mental Health Select Committee, June 2022  
< <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tableoffice/tabledpapers/2022/5722T743-64F1.pdf>>.