

Media statement

25 November 2014

Mental Health Commissioner raises concerns about shootings

Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Dr Lesley van Schoubroeck today expressed deep concern at the number of shootings by police in Queensland.

Dr van Schoubroeck said the use of a firearm should be a last resort, whether a person was suspected of a mental illness or not.

"I understand that in a high pressured situation, it is almost impossible for operational Police to determine whether a person has a mental illness or other substance abuse issue," Dr van Schoubroeck said.

"There have been too many deaths, and while the circumstances behind each incident are no doubt complex and will be investigated by the Coroner, I have raised my concerns directly with the Commissioner of Police, and endorse his comments and planned actions outlined today.

"I particularly acknowledge the need for de-escalation strategies to be the primary response in high risk interactions such as these.

"I will meet the Commissioner of Police this afternoon to discuss what steps we can jointly take to minimise the recurrence of such tragic events.

"I want to acknowledge the terrible loss and trauma of the family and friends of those who have been killed or injured, and also the impact on the Police officers themselves and their families, colleagues and friends.

"While there is general recognition that Police need to conduct their duties protecting the public in safety, and to go home to their families at the end of the day, it appears that something is failing and a systemic review may be required."

Dr van Schoubroeck said in light of the shootings the Queensland Mental Health Commission would be bringing forward its work on the interaction of people with a mental illness, drug and alcohol issues with the criminal justice system.

"I look forward to working with Police and other relevant organisations to look at international best practice, and to examine current policies and procedures, training, and culture to determine a way forward," Dr van Schoubroeck said.

"I have already invited the Victorian Auditor-General to Queensland in January to discuss the findings of his recent report *Mental Health Strategies for the Justice System*, and to consider the relevance of his findings to Queensland."

Improving the interaction between the mental health and the criminal justice systems is a priority action area under the *Queensland Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Plan 2014-2019*.

Dr van Schoubroeck said work on this action had been brought forward from 2015-16 to address the current situation, and improve the outcomes for those with mental illness, drug and alcohol use problems and the broader community.

ENDS

About QMHC — The Queensland Mental Health Commission was established in July 2013 to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders by driving ongoing reform.

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