

18 March 2026

Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee

Submission to the Inquiry into the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026

Overview

Q Shelter urges reconsideration of these laws because of their potential and disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged and vulnerable people while the housing crisis continues and sustainable housing solutions are unavailable for people with complex and enduring needs.

We make a number of recommendations but first and foremost encourage a summit to immediately discuss a system-wide response offering a support and housing guarantee, building on the substantial work already underway to integrated service delivery to people in public space.

We are concerned that these laws will be costly to implement and that the investment by the State and other key sectors could have greater impact if we consider how to improve the early successes of integrated outreach with accommodation options, support guarantees and permanent housing solutions.

Introduction

Q Shelter is Queensland's peak body working to address unmet housing needs and homelessness. We envision a future in which every Queenslanders has a home. Incorporated in 1993, Q Shelter is a membership-based organisation that works to strengthen system capacity and influence policy and investment to support effective and sustainable solutions. We engage across all levels of government and work collaboratively with the public and private sectors, the community services sector, and the wider community to support solutions that are practical, evidence-informed, and capable of successful implementation.

Our membership includes Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), Community Housing Providers (CHPs), the broader human services sector, academic institutions, other peak organisations, people with lived experience of homelessness, and private sector stakeholders. Q Shelter maintains ongoing engagement with the sector and community to inform our policy positions. Our approach to policy development draws on both evidence and stakeholder engagement, ensuring our work reflects lived experience, service delivery insights, and system-level understanding.

We acknowledge the intent of the Bill to improve community safety and address community concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour. We also recognise the importance of supporting victims of crime and ensuring that public spaces are safe and inclusive for all Queenslanders.

This submission builds on [Q Shelter's previous submission](#) to the Making Queensland Safer Bill (2024) and reflects our ongoing focus on prevention, early intervention, and system-level responses to complex social issues.

From a housing and homelessness perspective, we are concerned that some elements of the Bill may have unintended consequences, particularly for people experiencing homelessness and First Nations people. These risks arise not from legislative intent, but from how expanded enforcement mechanisms may interact with structural disadvantage.

Context: Housing, disadvantage and public space

People experiencing homelessness often rely on public spaces due to a lack of access to safe and affordable housing. Their presence in public places is typically driven by necessity rather than choice.

As outlined in our previous submission, there is a strong relationship between exposure to adverse life events, system involvement, and later life homelessness. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are strongly associated with poorer life outcomes, including higher engagement with justice systems and increased risk of homelessness ([Lui et al., 2021](#); [Nelson, 2020](#)).

Neuroscience and longitudinal research show that early exposure to trauma can result in lasting cognitive, behavioural and health impacts, influencing engagement with education, employment, and community life ([Heckman](#)).

Responses that focus primarily on enforcement, without addressing underlying drivers such as housing instability, trauma, and access to support, risk entrenching disadvantage over time ([Homelessness NSW & Public Interest Advocacy Centre](#)).

We consider it important that legislative and policy responses recognise these structural factors and support pathways out of disadvantage, rather than unintentionally reinforcing cycles of contact with enforcement systems.

Q Shelter's most recent pre-budget submission outlines data showing that:

- Demand for homelessness services has increased
- Rental affordability and availability have decreased
- The complexity of needs is considerable with intersections between mental health, alcohol and other drugs, disability, poverty and domestic and family violence causing enduring exclusion from access to services and housing.

Key considerations: Potential unintended consequences

While the Bill is framed around community safety and accountability, there are several areas where implementation may create disproportionate impacts.

- Expanded policing powers in public space: New powers in designated precincts, including directions, banning notices, and requirements to provide personal details, may disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness who rely on public space due to a lack of access to housing. Evidence indicates that discretionary public space powers are frequently applied to vulnerable groups, including people experiencing homelessness. These powers may result in exclusion from areas where essential services, community connections, and support are located
- Escalation from presence to exclusion: The Bill enables a pathway in which a person's presence in public space may lead to a direction to move on, followed by the potential for banning notices restricting return to an area. For people experiencing homelessness, whose presence in these spaces is often unavoidable, this creates a risk of repeated displacement. Evidence shows that such enforcement approaches often result in displacement rather than resolution ([LawRight report](#)). When people experiencing homelessness move or are forced to move, it can also be harder for services to find them to assist with support, treatment and housing pathways
- Safeguards for access to essential services: The Bill recognises that individuals may need to access essential services. While provisions allowing entry for "necessary tasks" are important, they operate as a defence after enforcement action has occurred. Evidence suggests enforcement approaches can still create barriers to accessing services ([Homelessness NSW & Public Interest Advocacy Centre](#))

- Shift from diversion to infringement-based responses: The transition from diversion-based approaches to more enforcement-oriented responses for minor offences assumes a level of capacity to comply, including having a stable address, the ability to pay fines, and the ability to engage with administrative processes. For people experiencing homelessness or housing instability, these conditions often do not hold, creating a risk of escalation through non-compliance rather than improved access to support
- Fine enforcement and escalation pathways: Infringement systems are structurally regressive and may disproportionately impact people experiencing financial hardship. For those without the capacity to pay, fines may escalate through enforcement processes, increasing contact with the justice system due to the inability to comply rather than the original conduct
- Criminalisation of presence rather than harm: Provisions that enable enforcement based on presence or perceived behaviour may disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness, whose presence in public space is often driven by necessity. This raises concerns about regulatory responses addressing visible disadvantage rather than harmful conduct
- Compounding and cumulative impacts: Banning notices, breach offences, and fines may interact to create cycles of enforcement. These cumulative effects can increase contact with the justice system without addressing underlying housing or support needs, potentially contributing to ongoing disadvantage
- Community services and community legal services will be further taxed through higher demand from clients needing assistance to address legal and other issues that emerge from the application of these laws. In particular, the accumulation of debts from fines already serves as a barrier to housing solutions.

Strengthening the evidence base: prevention and early intervention

Evidence demonstrates that children exposed to trauma are more likely to experience homelessness and justice system involvement later in life ([Koh & Montgomery, 2021](#)).

High-quality early intervention programs such as the Nurse-Family Partnership and the Abecedarian Project demonstrate improved long-term outcomes and strong return on investment ([Nurse-Family Partnership](#); [Abecedarian Project](#)). This reinforces the importance of prevention and integrated system responses. The intersection with the current Child Safety Inquiry is critical in defining measures to prevent complex homelessness and intoxication later in life. This must ensure access to early screening and assessment (from pregnancy and birth), intensive in-home visiting support, a food security guarantee, guaranteed support to access education and child care, and reduced exposure to violence.

Gaps in the Explanatory Notes

The Explanatory Notes provide an overview of the Bill's intent and high-level human rights considerations. However, they do not appear to include:

- a homelessness-specific impact assessment
- a detailed First Nations-specific analysis of likely impacts
- substantive consideration of how enforcement powers may be applied in practice, including the risk of disproportionate impacts on vulnerable cohorts.

In the absence of this analysis, there is limited visibility of how the proposed measures may interact with structural disadvantage, including housing instability, poverty, and over-representation of First Nations people in justice systems. This may create an implementation gap, where the real-world impacts of the legislation are not fully understood or anticipated.

Strengthening the evidence base in this area, including through impact assessment and ongoing monitoring, may assist in identifying unintended consequences early and supporting more equitable and effective policy responses over time.

Implementation considerations

Q Shelter suggests that careful attention be given to how the Bill is implemented in practice, including opportunities to support equitable outcomes and mitigate unintended impacts.

Areas that may warrant particular attention include:

- Monitoring enforcement and displacement patterns, including how often move-on directions and banning notices are used, and whether they result in repeated displacement from public spaces without connection to support or housing pathways
- Use of discretion, including how frontline officers apply powers in practice and the balance between enforcement and diversion, particularly in situations involving vulnerability
- Data collection and transparency, including the systematic collection of data on housing status, First Nations status, and repeat interactions, to enable identification of disproportionate impacts and inform policy refinement
- Accessible diversion pathways, ensuring that diversion options are practical, culturally appropriate, and accessible to people without a fixed address or stable means of engagement
- Barriers to compliance, including lack of identification, unstable contact details, financial hardship, and challenges navigating administrative processes
- Fine enforcement and escalation impacts, including how infringement notices progress through enforcement systems and whether escalation pathways are contributing to increased justice system contact
- Operation of safeguards, particularly provisions relating to access to essential services, and whether these are consistently applied in practice
- System coordination, including alignment between housing, health, justice, and community services to ensure that enforcement responses are complemented by pathways to support and stability
- The costs of these interventions could be deployed to additional skilled outreach with associated support and housing guarantees.

These considerations may assist in identifying emerging impacts early and supporting more effective, proportionate, and equitable responses over time.

System-level perspective: Prevention and integration

Consistent with Q Shelter's previous submissions, improving community safety requires a strong focus on prevention and early intervention.

We consider that effective and sustainable responses are supported by:

- Early identification of vulnerability, including recognising families and individuals at risk of exposure to adverse life events and providing timely support
- Access to stable and appropriate housing, as a foundational component of wellbeing, safety, and participation in community life
- Integrated system responses, bringing together housing, health, mental health, justice, and community services to provide coordinated and person-centred support.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that investment in prevention and early intervention delivers stronger long-term outcomes, both for individuals and for communities. By addressing the underlying

drivers of disadvantage, these approaches can reduce contact with enforcement systems and contribute to improved community safety over time.

Recommendations

To support effective implementation and minimise unintended impacts, Q Shelter recommends:

1. **A reconsideration of passing these laws** in favour of designing system level responses to increase the effectiveness of outreach, support and housing solutions
2. **An urgent summit** involving key community services and government agencies to build on and further design integrated responses to ensure that people are offered housing and support pathways and to design system responses that do not further criminalise people experiencing homelessness and people with complex needs driven by disability, exposure to adverse experiences, mental health, domestic and family violence, trauma and substance use
3. **Ensure appropriate assessment of needs** when engaging with people in public space to understand factors such as domestic and family violence, exclusion from housing options due to age and low incomes, visiting regions for hospital treatment and lack of eligibility for social housing
4. **Ensure continued access to immediate accommodation** as a basis for assisting people through support and a permanent housing pathway
5. **Accelerate efforts to identify** additional safe sleeping options and crisis accommodation in urban centres and regional towns
6. **Ensure accelerated delivery of supportive housing** and commit to a target of 5,600 supportive homes throughout key locations in Queensland
7. **Maintain and expand integrated service delivery responses outreaching to public spaces** involving local government, the Department of Health (including mental health services), Police, the Department of Housing and community services
8. **Develop a protocol for responding to the needs of young people and children in public spaces**, ensuring they are supported and provided access to a housing guarantee to improve their safety rather than being displaced
9. **Establish a monitoring and reporting framework on public space enforcement**, including use of move-on directions and banning notices, with data on housing status, age, First Nations status, and repeat interactions
10. **Review and limit escalation pathways from presence to exclusion**, to ensure enforcement responses do not result in repeated displacement without access to support or housing pathways
11. **Strengthen diversion pathways and reduce reliance on infringement-based responses**, including ensuring accessibility for people without stable housing and reducing escalation linked to non-compliance
12. **Ensure safeguards for access to essential services operate effectively in practice** through clear operational guidance, training, and collaboration with the housing and homelessness sector
13. **Invest in prevention and early intervention as a core community safety strategy**, including evidence-based programs that reduce exposure to adverse childhood experiences and improve long-term outcomes.

Conclusion

Q Shelter acknowledges the importance of community safety and the need for effective responses to anti-social behaviour and harm. We support the shared goal that public spaces are safe, inclusive, and welcoming for all members of the community, including those who rely on these spaces due to a lack of access to safe and secure housing.

At the same time, we consider it important that policy and legislative responses recognise that homelessness is not a compliance issue, but reflects structural disadvantage and the need for prevention, early intervention, and integrated system responses.

We encourage careful consideration of how the Bill is implemented in practice, particularly regarding public space enforcement, pathways to exclusion, and the operation of safeguards. Ongoing monitoring, data collection, and coordination across systems will be important to ensure responses support equitable outcomes and do not unintentionally reinforce cycles of disadvantage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide Q Shelter's input to this submission.

Further contact

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry into the *Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026*. For further questions or contact, please liaise with our Policy & Strategic Engagement Lead, Maya Glassman, at Maya.Glassman@qshelter.asn.au, in the first instance.

Yours sincerely



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