

SAFIR CAIRNS – RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER 3 OF THE WOMEN’S SAFETY AND JUSTICE
TASKFORCE

APRIL 8 2022

I write on behalf of SAFIR, the Cairns Sexual Assault Forensic-Integrated Response Network. SAFIR is a diverse group of Cairns residents, including doctors, nurses, midwives, social workers, counsellors, Indigenous health professionals, and people with lived experience, formed following a meeting held in Cairns in June 2021. The members of SAFIR are people interested in the provision of safe and accessible care for victims-survivors of sexual assault in both Cairns and regional Queensland; many of us have worked in this field, both in Far North Queensland (FNQ) and elsewhere in Australia although none of us is currently employed in the provision of care within Queensland Health (QH) or True Family Planning.

We have read Discussion Paper 3 of the Taskforce with great interest, particularly the sections on pages 46 and 47 dealing with the provision of services for victims-survivors of sexual assault in Cairns and the much larger region of rural and remote Far North Queensland. Members of SAFIR met on 6th April with Detective Senior Sergeant Alina Bell, OIC Cairns CIB, to inform themselves of how the service has run since our submission in July 2021.

We note that there is now a roster of ED doctors and Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) for the Cairns Hospital (CH) ED although we have not seen any copies of this. We note that there are now quarterly meetings being held between police, ED and True counselling staff to discuss service provision (and presumably, how this might be improved).

We note that QH has provided \$1.39 million for the training of doctors and nurses in basic sexual assault forensic examination and that by mid-2021 68 people had completed this training. We note that Cairns True has recently appointed a new manager for the Cairns Sexual Assault Service, to replace Ella Morter.

What is not clear is how many of these people, and others, are currently providing adequate and timely sexual assault forensic examination and related care, of a high standard, including after-hours and in weekends, in Cairns. As far as we are aware there has not been any independent evaluation of sexual assault victims-survivors in Cairns, as has been undertaken in Townsville, and we have anecdotal reports of difficulties of SANEs providing services while also fulfilling their normal duties in CH, especially out-of-hours.

While we appreciate the efforts and concerns of the Director of CH ED over the past nine months, we reiterate our recommendations to the Taskforce, first made in July 2021:

- **We believe an integrated model of service, a 'hub' incorporating acute care, police duties, counselling and follow-up, should be the aim in future provision of sexual assault response services for Cairns and the region. Currently services and care remain as fragmented as they were when we made our submission last July. We believe that the current services see only a fraction of the victims-survivors in the region and that if a more effective response service were established more would present, with longterm benefits to themselves and to the population generally.**
- **More training of Queensland doctors in forensic examination is required and a course, either a post-graduate certificate or a Master's degree, should be instituted in a Queensland university to provide this.**
- **We believe involvement of First Nations' health services in all planning and advocacy is essential, and a close working relationship with domestic violence services is also recommended**

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Caroline de Costa