



Final Outcomes and Impact Evaluation Report

Evaluation of Court Link – Department of Justice and
Attorney-General

June 2023

Preface

In 2019 Siggins Miller Consultants was engaged by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) to evaluate the Court Link program. In 2021 the Siggins Miller team joined Deloitte and the contract was transferred to them to continue the evaluation. The Court Link evaluation framework includes three phases that are intended to identify and determine:

- **Phase 1 Rapid Response Evaluation** – whether the appropriate systems and processes are in place to support the delivery of program activities.
- **Phase 2 Process Evaluation** – whether the Court Link program is being implemented as intended to the right people when it benefits them the most, in a way that works for them, as well as identifying what improvements or changes could be made to support differing local, individual, group or cultural needs.
- **Phase 3 Outcomes and Impact Evaluation** – whether the Court Link program is resulting in or contributing to improved outcomes to population groups in particular circumstances, as well as what program elements are working or not working in which circumstances or with which population groups and what changes could be made to support better outcomes for these groups.

The Rapid Response Evaluation (Phase 1) was conducted by DJAG prior to the engagement of Siggins Miller Consultants, between August and December 2018. The first Process Evaluation was conducted by the Siggins Miller Consultants evaluation team between June 2019 and February 2020. The final Outcomes and Impact Evaluation was completed by the Siggins Miller Consultants team who joined Deloitte and was completed under the Deloitte banner.

During the completion of the evaluation additional Court Link sites were also established (Mount Isa, Maroochydore, Caboolture and Redcliffe). A variation to the contract was executed to commission a process evaluation report for these sites.

This current report outlines the final Outcomes and Impact Evaluation of all eight Court Link sites which was conducted between October 2022 and April 2023.¹

¹ The 9th Court Link site (Pine Rivers) was established in March 2023 but was not within scope of the evaluation. It is mentioned in the report as it was discussed by stakeholders, but the site itself was not evaluated.

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Glossary

ACT	Assertive Community Treatment
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
ATSILS	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service
BCM	Standard or Brokered Case Management
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CIP	Courts Innovation Program
CISP	Court Integrated Services Program
CJG	Community Justice Group
CL	Court Link
CM	Case Manager
DFV	Domestic and Family Violence
DID	Difference-in-Difference/s
DJAG	Department of Justice and Attorney-General
GLM	Good Lives Model
HRA	Human Rights Act
ICM	Intensive Case Management
LAQ	Legal Aid Queensland
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and all other gender identities and sexual orientations
LS	Level of Services
MNHHS	Metro North Hospital and Health Service
MSC	Most Significant Change
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
OR	Odds Ratio
QASOC	Australian Standard Offence Classification (Queensland Extension)
QCS	Queensland Corrective Services
QDAC	Queensland Drug and Alcohol Court
QH	Queensland Health
QICR	Queensland Integrated Court Referral
QMERIT	Queensland Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment
QPS	Queensland Police Service
QWIC	Queensland-wide Integrated Courts
RNR	Risk-need-Responsivity
SCHHS	Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service
SPI	Single Person Identifier

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Executive summary

Project overview

This report is submitted in fulfilment of the deliverable for the Final Outcomes and Impact Evaluation Report focusing on the outcomes and impact of the Court Link program. The purpose of this report is to provide findings and recommendations in relation to the agreed Outcome Evaluation questions, outlined in the data strategy matrix. The overarching questions for this evaluation are:

- does Court Link meet the intended quality standards?
- does Court Link improve the circumstances of defendants?
- does Court Link have any measurable impact on participants' offending behaviour?
- what elements of Court Link are working or not working?

The development and implementation of the Court Link program was a response to Recommendation 6 of the Queensland Drug and Specialist Courts Review Final Report to introduce a single, generic integrated court assessment, referral, and support program for Queensland. The program is underpinned by a therapeutic approach and a risk-need-responsivity model (RNR) which seeks to improve community safety by working with defendants to address individual needs. The program was modelled on a similar established program in Victoria (Court Integrated Services Program).

Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed-methods evaluation design, incorporating aspects of realist evaluation processes, scenario analysis, most-significant change, and comparative analysis to evaluate the program itself and the impact of the program on participant outcomes. A detailed overview of the methodology is presented in *Section 1.4*. The data sources that were analysed as part of this outcomes and impact evaluation included:

- a literature review (completed at the commencement of the project and updated iteratively throughout with the last full update in 2022);
- a desktop review (including program documentation, participant surveys and supervision observations);
- analysis of the DJAG administrative data sets InfoXchange (from October 2017 to October 2022) and Queensland-wide Integrated Courts (QWIC) (to October 2022);
- analysis of data from Queensland Corrective Services (from November 2015 to November 2022);
- consultations (interviews and focus groups) with key stakeholders;
- ethnographic observations of triage, case management and court proceedings completed early in the project as part of the Process Evaluation;
- case studies developed through a review of case notes, court recordings and administrative data;
- analysis of provided financial data for key stakeholders relevant to the program (Courts Innovation Program, Queensland Health (QH), Queensland Police Service, Legal Aid Queensland).

Key findings and outcomes

This report represents the conclusion of a four-year evaluation of the Court Link program completed collaboratively with the Department and other key stakeholders. We commend the Department, Magistrates, operational staff, policy teams and evaluation and data teams who have dedicated time, energy, effort, and good will into the design and implementation of Court Link with real diligence and openness to feedback and evaluation.

We found that the Court Link program has achieved significant results for participants in relation to:

- improving their lives and wellbeing; and
- reducing the seriousness and frequency of their offending.

The following sub-sections present high level summaries of the key findings of this Court Link evaluation, which is supported by additional information in the body of the report.

Referrals to Court Link (*Section 3.1.1*)

Referrals to Court Link have grown over time since the program's inception in November 2017. Between October 2017 and October 2022, there have been a total of 4,241 referrals to the program, representing 3,499 individuals (with 16% of people referred to the program at least twice).

- referrals to Court Link can come from a range of sources, however the majority are from duty lawyers and legal representatives (48%), and self-referrals (16%).
- Brisbane accounts for the largest proportion of all referrals at 32% of the total, followed by Southport at 18% and Ipswich at 14% (three of the initial four sites).
- demographic cluster analysis highlighted 5 key 'personas' that are most commonly referred to Court Link, and the largest cluster (43% of people referred) were men, who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, were mostly born in Australia, spoke English at home, are not Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, and had below a Grade 12 level of education.
- 3,827 (90%) of referrals progressed to triage. The remaining 10% did not complete the triage process².

Triage assessment and outcomes (*Section 3.1.2*)

Referrals that progress to triage undergo an assessment by a Court Link officer to determine the appropriate level of service for the individual, comprising case management, community referral, or no action. The triage process involves Court Link Officer using professional judgement to assess, in collaboration with the person, the person's risk of re-offending, needs, and responsivity. Of the 3,827 referrals that proceeded to triage, 81% were assessed as suitable for case management, 14% received a community referral, and 5% were assessed as not needing any action.

- there were some differences across sites, for example, Southport had the highest number of referrals to case management (88%) and Cairns had the lowest (64%).
- the majority of people assessed as suitable for case management had moderate to high risk of reoffending scores (82%) and almost half had over 3 reported areas of need (46%).
- logistic regressions were run to see if there were any demographic variables that meant a person was more or less likely to be assessed as suitable for case management. These found that:

² A referral may not progress to triage for various reasons including the individual was unable to be contacted, did not consent to participate in the triage assessment, was remanded in custody, a warrant was issued prior to triage, or the triage assessment was in progress and had yet to be finalised.

- people aged 55 and over were 64% less likely (OR=0.36³, p<0.001) to be assessed as suitable for case management compared to other age groups
- people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were 1.6 times more likely (OR=1.58, p=0.001) to be assessed as suitable for case management
- people who completed Grade 12 or higher were 58% less likely (OR=0.42, p<0.001) to be assessed as suitable for case management
- of the 2,571 people who were assessed as suitable for case management, 1,933 (75%) were then admitted to the program by the Magistrate. The remaining 25% did not progress for a range of reasons including being remanded in custody, having a warrant issued, or in a few cases where the person chose not to participate.
- the following demographics describe the people who are admitted to case management (n=1933):
 - **age** – the average age of Court Link participants is 35, ranging from 18 to 70 years.
 - **sex** – 66% of participants are male (34% female and 0.2% not stated)
 - **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status** – 75% of participants are non-Indigenous, 23% Aboriginal, 0.8% Torres Strait Islander, and 2% both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
 - **cultural and linguistic diversity** – 91% of participants are born in Australia, and 99% speak English at home. Approximately 4% identified as coming from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background
 - **education status** – only 13% of participants had completed Grade 12 or higher education, with 32% completing less than Grade 12, 43% less than grade 10, and 6% less than high school.
- logistic regressions were run to see if there were any demographic variables that meant a person was more or less likely to complete the program (when assessed as suitable for case management), these found that people aged 45 to 54 were 1.7 times more likely (OR=1.66, p=0.004) to complete the program and people aged 55 and above were 2.7 times more likely (OR=2.74, p=0.004) to complete the program than people aged 18 to 44.
- those who participated in more than 11 weeks of the program were considered to have ‘completed’ Court Link⁴. Of those admitted to case management, 1084 (56.1%) completed the program, 131 (6.8%) exited between 9 and 11 weeks, 288 (14.9%) exited between 5 and 9 weeks, and 298 participants (15.4%) exited within 5 weeks.

Court Link Process Evaluation

A process evaluation of the Court Link program was conducted to evaluate the early implementation of the program across all 8 sites (between June 2019 and March 2021). It found that Court Link was largely being implemented as intended and delivered in all locations. There were also some early indicators of Court Link contributing to positive experiences and outcomes for participants in the program. Findings suggested that Court Link Officers assist participants to access support services that can make positive changes in their lives. The report highlighted instances where Magistrates supported participants’ progress in the program by utilising therapeutic jurisprudence principles.

Additionally, there was evidence of Court Link Officers working with external support services to support participants to make positive changes in their lives through participant-led goal-setting activities aimed at addressing the underlying factors that contribute to their offending behaviour.

³ See the Key Definitions table in Appendix A.

⁴ We note that while the *InfoXchange* system now included a ‘completed’ field to indicate a participant has completed the program, this was only introduced partway through the Court Link evaluation. Therefore, through discussion with DJAG, we categorised completion as being > 11 weeks participating in the program.

Overall, at the early implementation stage, the program was largely running smoothly in most sites with some initial challenges and opportunities identified and addressed. There was evidence that the program design and operation aligned with the program’s intended principles and values (see *Section 2.4*) and an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, both from a quality and operational perspective, was apparent. The continuous review of implementation processes and practices has led to improvements to program delivery.

Court Link outcomes (*Sections 3.3.2, 3.3.3 and 4.1.1*)

Court Link was intended to contribute to a range of outcomes for participants and the system. All of the data relating to outcomes of the project is described in detail in the body of the report. Overall, based on a triangulation of activity data, consultations, most significant change analysis, surveys, and all other information available to the evaluation, there was evidence of:

- participants’ increased knowledge of and access to treatment and support services:
 - of those who have completed case management and who responded to the following questions in Participant Survey 2⁵, 78% stated that they have learned a lot about ‘where I can get help’ and 60% about ‘how to get through court’.⁶
 - Case Manager reports also indicated 57% of participants demonstrated ‘a lot’ or ‘some’ change in knowing how to stop offending.

“[Court Link staff] had a lot of resources and the right sort of knowledge and connections to make whatever issue that popped up along the way, even if it was minor they knew how to fix it...Where I was at when I first started Court Link compared to when I finished it – leaps and bounds. Right before I started I was pretty much homeless with a baby with nothing and no money and nothing and I was like ‘I want to sort my [life] out and without them I don’t know how I would have done it to be honest. Through the program I got my own place, they helped me get furniture and essentials and [to access] drug counselling.”

- Participant

- participants attending and engaging with treatment and support services (and for some people, continuing to engage with these services even when they have completed the Court Link program). It was difficult to get clear data on how many referrals were made to treatment and support services, and to what extent participants engaged, but of those who responded to the participant engagement survey:
 - 81% stated they had been referred to services in the community, and
 - 66% stated they had attended at least 1 session.
- building knowledge of how to reduce offending, including:
 - 75% who responded to Participant Survey 2⁷ said they had learned a lot about ‘how to stay on track and make changes’
- improving the health and wellbeing of those who participate in the program. Participants reported a range of improvements in various areas of their life, including:
 - the most significant change analysis finding that the three most significant changes reported included:
 - (1) reduction in, or abstinence from, alcohol and other drug use,
 - (2) behavioural, attitudinal, or lifestyle changes, and
 - (3) health and/or wellbeing

⁵ Participant Survey 2 is offered to participants at program completion (either 12 weeks, or at their last case management appointment).

⁶ Source: Second participant survey, for those who completed case management, disseminated by DJAG.

⁷ Participant Survey 2 is offered to participants at program completion (either 12 weeks, or at their last case management appointment).

“[Court Link] has helped with my health cause I’m not using heroin anymore. My wellbeing too, cause I just feel like I’ve got someone I can call or talk to which is a good thing – and I’m more positive now.... [My case manager] helped me work out replacement behaviours [for drug use] like working at the Salvos.”

- Participant

- for those who responded to Participant Survey 27, some of the outcomes noted as important to them included:
 - their mental health was a lot better (78%), and 19% reported it was a little better
 - their physical health was a lot better (72%), and 23% that it was a little better
 - they were a lot better at taking less drugs (83%), and 14% were a little better
 - they were a lot better at connecting with their culture (60%), and 20% that they were a little better
 - they were a lot better at using their time (73%), and 20% were a little better.
- addressing factors that contribute to reoffending, with:
 - Case manager reports indicating 56% of participants showed ‘a lot’ or ‘some change’ in gaining skills to stop the causes of offending.

During consultation, most participants and staff reported that case management sessions and access to broader treatment and support services can assist with reducing offending behaviour, particularly drug-related offending.

Impacts on reoffending (Section 3.4)

Court Link also aims to help support people to reduce the seriousness and frequency of their offending. To examine the impact of the program on seriousness, frequency and patterns of offending, a number of analyses were completed. Full details of the analysis and methodology are provided in *Section 3.4*.

Overall, these analyses suggest that:

- Court Link reduces the frequency of offending. The observed reduction is robust to different definitions of frequency (i.e., number of charges, number of days spent offending), inclusion of sociodemographic controls (e.g., age, sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, educational attainment), and the use of a matched sample (see Appendix A).
 - the Difference-in-Difference (DID) estimates from a range of models consistently showed that those who completed Court Link committed fewer offences than the synthetic comparison group in the 2-years post Court Link, suggesting that Court Link reduced offending by approximately 14 offences per participant.
- Court Link reduces the seriousness of offending. Results from both the transition matrices and logistic regression models show that the treatment group was more likely to commit less serious offences (i.e., to transition from committing an ‘offence against a person’ to an ‘offence against property’) after Court Link than the comparison group⁸. The results were also robust to various categorisation of drug offences⁹.

⁸ We defined seriousness of offending based off the Australian Standard Offence Classification (Queensland Extension) or QASOC codes provided in the QWIC dataset. We categorised offences in four discrete groups: 1) offences against a person, 2) offences against property, 3) drug related offences, and 4) offences against public order to determine changes in seriousness across these offence types.

⁹ To test our categorisation of the QASOC codes, we also ran our analyses based on three discrete groups: 1) offences against a person, 2) offences against property, and 3) offences against public order where drug offences were included in ‘offences against public order’.

- Court Link delays reoffending. Results from two different types of survival analysis showed that time to reoffend (i.e., the time it takes for an individual to reoffend, if at all, after the case closure date for both the treatment and comparison group) was significantly longer for the treatment group than the comparison group. The median time to reoffend was longer for the treatment group at 138 days than the comparison group at 90 days. Moreover, a larger proportion of people in the treatment group (33%) did not offend in the 2-year period following Court Link relative to the comparison group (26%). Finally, people in the treatment group had a 15% lower probability of offending in the 2-year period after Court Link relative to the comparison group¹⁰.

“Court Link helped me put into place everything that I could to help me not break the law again and stay off the drugs and I think the judge realised I couldn’t put any more into place by going into jail and coming out again. I’m proactive in going to counselling now, I’m seeking help now, I’ve got a home now. [My case manager] helped me get a home and everything.”

- Participant

Economic outcomes (Section 3.5)

The estimation of costs and benefits for a program like Court Link are complex and were beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, a breakeven analysis was undertaken to estimate the amount that would need to be recouped for the program to ‘break even’. Based on this analysis:

- the majority of the costs related to frontline service delivery of the program;
- the yearly cost per capita fluctuated per year, and across sites, with the average total cost per capita over the five years of the program approximately \$3,451;¹¹
- using the cost of incarceration in FY2022 as a basis, the breakeven analysis estimated that Court Link needs to decrease a participant’s days in custody by approximately 11 days (compared to the control group / no Court Link program). The results from the DID analysis estimate that the change in days in custody for those who complete Court Link is significantly different from those who do not complete the program, and our analyses suggest this exceeds the required reduction for ‘breakeven’. Given the results of a DID analysis (in relation to the difference in days in custody between both groups)¹², there is a statistically significant likelihood of this occurring. Our findings suggest the program will lead to savings based off the calculation of a reduction in incarceration. We note that the analysis only takes into consideration the incarceration savings for the year following participation in Court Link. It is anticipated that the effects of Court Link on a participant will likely be maintained to some effect in the years following and therefore, our analysis will likely provide a conservative estimate.

Based on research, evidence and experience, we know that similar programs have a range of impacts on health and wellbeing and on the wider health and justice system which likely equate to cost savings in areas such as housing, health, employment, and the and costs of custody and sentencing.¹ These include, for example:

- cost associated with sentencing defendants (e.g., court costs, imprisonment costs, etc.);
- costs of custodial sentences including length of custody;
- costs associated with breach of Court orders, including locating and re-sentencing;

¹⁰ Results from Cox regression [HR=0.85, p=0.033].

¹¹ The per-capita cost of Court Link was calculated by dividing the total expenditure over the five years by the number of participants that used Court Link over the same period.

¹² Note: This analysis was not part of the core analyses due to a range of limitations but was used to inform the breakeven analysis.

- cost savings attributed to better working relationships between stakeholders;
- potential costs and cost savings of people accessing the right care at the right time, in relation to health and wellbeing;
- potential cost savings and benefits in relation to housing, social connections and workforce participation.

In a full Cost-Benefit Analysis, there would also be consideration of the cumulative costs of higher reoffending and more contact with the criminal justice system over time. We note that the qualitative benefits of the program described by stakeholders can be difficult to measure or monetise, and it was not possible to calculate the impact of the program on sentencing.

Key conclusions and recommendations

Court Link is being delivered as intended, is having significant and positive impacts on the health and wellbeing of people who participate in the program and contributes to a reduction in the frequency and seriousness of offending. There is good evidence that the program contributes to cost-savings to the criminal justice system. The program is highly valued by the range of stakeholders who engage with it, including participants, magistrates, legal representatives, police, and so on. Court Link also works well alongside other specialist courts, and in some locations (such as Mount Isa) can be delivered in addition to Murri Court. This provides an opportunity to leverage other specialised responses, including responses to Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) and culturally appropriate responses through supports offered by Community Justice Groups (CJGs).

The program has achieved significant contributions to improving participants lives and wellbeing and reducing severity and frequency of offending.

The following section presents the high-level recommendations at the end of a 4-year evaluation of the Court Link program which has progressed from design to implementation. These recommendations may guide future work to embed the program in the Queensland criminal justice system.

Expansion and future direction of Court Link

We recommend that the Queensland Government and Department:

1. prioritise resourcing and expansion of the Court Link program in recognition of the contribution by the program to improving the experiences, lives, wellbeing and outcomes of participants and the likely social and cost saving impact of the program¹³
2. develop and undertake an analysis of need across sites to inform the selection of future locations for the Court Link program to ensure that the program is rolled out with the most impact
3. ensure that any expansions of Court Link are appropriately funded, and include sufficient lead-in time for project and change management, consultation, place-based design (and local collaboration where possible) and implementation
4. consider opportunities to test elements of the Court Link model in new criminal justice initiatives to address underlying causes of offending behaviour beyond the existing Court Link bail-based cohort, as appropriate¹⁴

¹³ The evaluation highlighted a number of quantitative and qualitative benefits of the program including contributing to a reduction in frequency and severity of offending for those who participate in Court Link compared to those that did not.

¹⁴ For example, this could involve consideration of how to provide a state-wide Court Link service, a low-intensity pre-charge program, inclusion of participants who have been sentenced but not subject to supervision, or expansion to higher courts.

5. highlight and champion the contribution of Court Link to the delivery of strategic objectives of other relevant agencies across government, including achieving outcomes to address, for example, mental health, homelessness, and alcohol and other drug use.

Opportunities for improvements

We recommend that the Department:

6. supports the sustainability of governance, staffing, capacity and resourcing in order to respond to service demands. This should consider, among other things, investment in training, tools and support to Court Link staff to ensure sustainable workloads, evidence-based practice, decision-making and appropriate use of professional judgement to flexibly meet the needs of participants
7. enhance formal and informal connections with treatment and support services, guided by their availability and the needs of the population within a location. For example: outreach community support services, diversion programs, housing support options, health services and AOD pathways with Queensland Health
8. strengthen the capability of Court Link to deliver accessible services that respond to the individual needs of participants, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disability, women, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and young adults
9. continue to support the delivery of Court Link by:
 - a) providing clear information about the program to all stakeholders, to ensure a common understanding of the program's purpose, scope, eligibility, intended outcomes and roles and responsibilities
 - b) maintaining up-to-date policies and practice guidelines as the program develops to guide front-line staff in the delivery of trauma-informed, culturally safe person-centred services
 - c) streamlining and enhancing data collection and management to ensure usability and responsiveness of data systems and readiness for further program development and to support monitoring and evaluation efforts
 - d) using regular analysis and reporting of Court Link output and outcome data, participant and stakeholder feedback to monitor, guide and enhance quality service delivery
10. undertake reviews, evaluations and research to identify and respond to emerging issues and to support Court Link in maximising its value. This may include linking with data sets of other justice agencies.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Court Link program aimed to address Recommendation 6 of the *Queensland Drug and Specialist Courts Review Final Report* to introduce a single, generic integrated court assessment, referral and support program for Queensland. This recommendation is outlined below this text. The program is underpinned by a therapeutic approach and a risk-need-responsivity model which seeks to improve community safety by working with defendants to address individual needs (see Section 2.3.6), noting that improvement should consider both emerging practice and research evidence including considerations of a participant’s cultural and other individual needs. The program was modelled on a similar existing program in Victoria (Court Integrated Services Program).

Recommendation 6:

“A single generic integrated court assessment, referral and support program for Queensland [with] consideration be given to the introduction of a generic integrated assessment, referral and support scheme to be named the Queensland Integrated Assessment and Referral Program based on the Victorian Court Integrated Services Program (CISP) that aims to address a range of problems faced by offenders including drugs, alcohol, mental health issues, impaired decision-making capacity, housing, employment and other issues.”

The new program was intended to replace the existing Queensland Integrated Court Referral (QICR) program and bring other programs, such as the Queensland Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment (QMERIT), under the one program framework. Proposed features included:

- operating pre-plea and preferably be no more than 16 weeks, but longer if required
- including a statutory power to defer sentence for up to 12 months where a range of assessments are required
- engaging suitably qualified court case managers employed by the court to:
 - *“conduct initial screening of eligibility and comprehensive assessments;*
 - *work with participants to develop individual case management plans that link participants into treatment and other support services and to meet regularly with those participants;*
 - *as part of the case management of the participant, to coordinate and negotiate delivery of a range of services, including accommodation, alcohol and other drug treatment, mental health, disability, domestic and family violence and other relevant services;*
 - *compile reports for courts on the progress of participants and, where required, give advice to, and evidence in, court;*
 - *maintain strong linkages with the community services sector and other key stakeholders;*
 - *work collaboratively within a multi-disciplinary team on issues relevant to the management of participants and develop and maintain a working relationship with other court programs;*
 - *provide education and professional development to judicial officers and court staff in relation to relevant issues experienced by court users.*

The model would allow in-house court-based assessments to be undertaken and other assessment providers to be engaged, as necessary, to conduct specialised assessments (e.g., neuropsychological reports). Some forms of brief interventions, such as motivational interviewing, could also be delivered by the team.

In larger locations (e.g., Brisbane), a number of case managers could be recruited to address specialist areas of expertise, such as alcohol and other drugs, mental health, disability, and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, as is the case in Victoria. This team could be built over time, subject to available funding.

In smaller centres, a single case manager might be employed to provide support to participants. Participants on the program could be subject to regular judicial monitoring. The level of service provision (e.g., judicial monitoring and level of case management) could be determined based on a needs assessment. Once established, this program and services delivered under it could also support specialist courts, such as the Southport Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Court and Murri Courtⁱⁱ.”

The design and implementation of Court Link is aligned with a number of other Queensland Government strategies and priorities, that is Court Link supports and is supported by the Queensland Government’s Priorities of ‘good jobs, better services and great lifestyle’. Court Link supports participants to develop their skills and find meaningful jobs, improving social outcomes, and facilitating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland to achieve positive outcomes.

Court Link also supports and is supported by strategies aimed at reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This includes *Closing the Gap*, the *Framework for Stronger Community Justice Groups*, *Our Way*, *Changing Tracks* and *Local Thriving Communities*. Improvement in social connection, reduced frequency and severity of offending, and positive impacts on bail compliance, is demonstrative of Court Link’s alignment with the objectives of these strategies.

Through regular referrals to AOD treatment and support services, and participants reporting reduced AOD use, Court Link positively supports and is supported by the objectives of *Better Care Together: A plan for Queensland’s state-funded mental health alcohol and other drug services to 2027*.

Court Link also aligns with the objectives of the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027*. Court Link assists participants with housing support referrals and supporting participants to access housing or improve their living circumstances.

Court Link’s accessibility for all population groups aligns with *Our Story, Our Future - Queensland’s Multicultural Policy*, which promotes an inclusive, harmonious and united Queensland, as well as *Queensland’s Disability Plan 2022-27* and *Closing the Gap*.

Court Link aims to achieve the following direct outcomes for participants:

- increase their knowledge of, and access to, treatment and support services;
- attend and engage with treatment and support services;
- comply with bail orders;
- know what to do to reduce their offending;
- improve their health and wellbeing, including reduced alcohol and/or drug use, and improved living circumstances;
- address factors that are contributing to offending behaviour;
- progress their readiness to change.

The program also aims to contribute to broader system outcomes:

- fewer and less serious offences are committed;
- increased meaningful accountability of offenders.

The Court Link model was refined with key stakeholders, such as Queensland Police Service (QPS), legal representatives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS), Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) and the Chief Magistrate.

The Court Link program has been implemented across nine sites between November 2017 and March 2023 (see Figure 1.1). The implementation of Court Link in the following three sites (Cairns, Southport and Ipswich) was led by Courts Innovation Program. At the commencement of the first process evaluation, four Court Link sites were in operation. Brisbane was the first site, commencing

Court Link in November 2017, followed by Cairns in June 2018 and Ipswich and Southport in November 2018. During the course of the first process evaluation four additional sites also launched with Redcliffe, Maroochydore and Caboolture commencing in December 2019 and Mount Isa in January 2020. Court Link replaced the QMERIT program in the Maroochydore and Redcliffe sites and the QICR program in Brisbane, Cairns, Southport, Ipswich and Mount Isa. Court Link has also recently (March 2023) established a pilot satellite site in Pine Rivers with support from case managers based in Redcliffe.

Figure 1.1: Implementation of the Court Link program (2017-2023)



1.2 Overview of the evaluation

The evaluation team was engaged by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) to conduct an evaluation of the Queensland Court Link program. The Court Link evaluation includes three phases:

- Phase 1 Rapid Response Evaluation
- Phase 2 Process Evaluation
- **Phase 3 Outcomes and Impact Evaluation (current phase)**

The evaluation of Court Link is intended to identify and determine that the appropriate systems and processes are in place to support the delivery of program activities (Phase 1); whether the Court Link program is being implemented as intended to the right people when it benefits them the most, in a way that works for them, as well as identifying what improvements or changes could be made to support differing local, individual, group or cultural needs (Phase 2); and whether the Court Link program is resulting in or contributing to improved outcomes for population groups in particular circumstances, as well as what program elements are working or not working, in which circumstances or with which population groups, and what changes could be made to support better outcomes for these circumstances and groups (Phase 3).

The Rapid Response Evaluation was conducted prior to the engagement of Deloitte, between August and December 2018, to evaluate Phase 1 as outlined above.

A process evaluation of the Court Link program was conducted to evaluate the early implementation of the program across all 8 sites (between June 2019 and March 2021). It found that Court Link was largely being implemented as intended and delivered in all locations. Broadly, the process evaluation findings included:

- some early indications that Court Link contributed to positive experiences and outcomes for participants in the program;
- evidence that Court Link Officers assisted participants to access support services that could make positive changes in their lives;
- instances where magistrates support participants' progress in the program utilising therapeutic jurisprudence principles;
- evidence of Court Link Officers working with external services to support participants to make positive changes in their lives;

- at early implementation, the program was largely running smoothly in most sites, with some challenges and opportunities identified and addressed;
- there was evidence that the program design and operation aligned with the program’s intended principles and values (see Section 2.4); and
- evidence of continuous improvement, both from a quality and operational perspectives.

The timelines for Phase 2 and Phase 3 were as follows:

June 2019 – April 2020	<i>Phase 2 Process Evaluation – Existing Sites</i>
February 2021 – April 2021	<i>Phase 2 Process Evaluation – Additional Sites</i>
June 2020 – April 2023	<i>Phase 3 Outcomes and Impact Evaluation – All Sites (current report)</i>

The Court Link Evaluation uses a participatory co-design approach, which involves welcoming and inviting all stakeholders who are involved with, or are beneficiaries of, the program to have a voice and be actively involved in the design of the evaluation, its implementation and data collection activities, as well as the identification of local requirements, program benefits, risks and gaps, and the development of modifications when systemic or local unmet needs or barriers are identified.

1.3 Purpose of this report

This report is submitted in fulfilment of the deliverables for Phase 3 Outcomes and Impact Evaluation. The purpose of this report is to provide findings and recommendations in relation to the agreed Outcomes and Impact Evaluation questions for the eight sites.

The overarching questions for this evaluation are:

- does Court Link meet the intended quality standards?
- does Court Link improve the circumstances of defendants?
- does Court Link have any measurable impact on participants’ offending behaviour?
- what elements of Court Link are working or not working?

1.4 Methodology

The evaluation team used a mixed-method evaluation design, incorporating a range of qualitative and quantitative data analyses (described in detail below) to evaluate the program itself and the impact of the program on participant outcomes.

1.4.1 Data sources and approach

The following section provides an overview of the data sources available to answer the outcomes and impact evaluation.

1.4.1.1 Literature review

A literature review was completed early in the project and updated iteratively throughout when appropriate. The last full update was in mid-2022, but additional information has been added as relevant to this report. The literature review is provided in *Attachment A*.

1.4.1.2 Desktop review

A review was conducted to analyse the program activity data and other administrative by-product data related to the development, implementation, outcomes and impact of the Court Link program. This included program documentation such as the Court Link Handbook. We note that the Handbook

is currently in the process of being updated, but that this will not be completed prior to the finalisation of this evaluation report.

The findings from the desktop review were used in the final outcomes and impact evaluation to inform analysis and consideration of the alignment to intended quality standards and any recommendations for future implementation and delivery of the program.

1.4.1.3 Analysis of datasets

A range of quantitative analyses were undertaken during this evaluation to help answer key questions using *InfoXchange* data (from October 2017 to October 2022), the *Queensland-wide Integrated Courts (QWIC)* data (to October 2022¹⁵) and administrative data from Queensland Corrective Services (from November 2015 to November 2022).

1.4.1.4 Stakeholder consultation

Consultation with key stakeholders represents an essential part of determining whether the Court Link program is meeting the intended quality standards, whether it improves the circumstances of defendants (including how), and in determining which elements of the program are working or not working. Stakeholder consultations provide in-depth insight into the outcomes and impact of a program from the perspective of key stakeholders.

Consultations were conducted virtually between November 2022 and March 2023 for the final outcomes and impact evaluation. Interviews and focus groups occurred based on the availability of stakeholders, and all efforts were made by Deloitte to meet their availability and needs. Consultations were conducted via both teleconference and face-to-face. Stakeholders who were unable to participate in teleconference and face-to-face interviews were offered the opportunity to provide a written response to the evaluation question protocol.

In total, 56 people were consulted across 11 different stakeholder groups. These consultations consisted of 33 interviews, 5 focus groups, and 9 written responses. Full details of the stakeholder group consultations are provided in Section 4.1.

In addition, two finding workshops were held with key stakeholder groups to reflect on the emerging data. These included:

- Findings workshop – Operational Local Stakeholder Group (20 March 2023)
- Findings workshop – Strategic Reference Group (20 March 2023)

Two more workshops discussed findings and key recommendations with project stakeholders, including:

- Recommendations workshop with key staff (April 2023)
- Findings workshop – Court Link staff (April 2023)

In accordance with the communication and consultation plan, a survey was distributed to external stakeholders that engage with Court Link participants. The survey aimed to determine stakeholder perspectives about the outcomes and impact of the Court Link program, including whether the program meets the intended quality standards, whether it improves the circumstances of defendants, whether it has any measurable impact on participants' offending behaviour and what elements of the program are working and not working. In January 2023 the survey was distributed online. Eight responses were received.

¹⁵ The earliest offence date captured in QWIC was May 1992. However, 98% of QWIC records were between January 2015 and October 2022.

1.4.1.5 Ethnographic observations

Ethnographic observations were incorporated in the Process Evaluation methodology. When using ethnographic approaches, the evaluator is immersed in the target participants' environment in order to understand their goals, cultures, challenges, motivations and to identify themes that may impact on their program participation and the benefits they may obtain from it. Rather than only relying on interviews and surveys, the evaluator experiences the environment first-hand as an observer. This was used to identify how participants interact with the program, during callover, triage and case management, as well as informing the development of evaluation methodologies that support inclusive participation in the evaluation. Site visits were conducted, and ethnographic observations were recorded at all Court Link sites during the process evaluation.

1.4.1.6 Case studies

Case studies were developed to inform evaluation findings. Data were triangulated for each participant from *InfoXchange*, case notes and court recordings. For the case studies, we used a partially randomised stratified sampling method whereby the data was divided by site, and case studies (using case study identifiers) were selected randomly per site. Randomly selected cases were checked to see if they represented diversity across gender, age, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, and completion status categories, and were replaced with different randomly selected cases when there was not diversity across these categories. All identifying information, including names, locations and support service names, were removed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

1.4.1.7 Financial data

Financial data was provided by key stakeholders relevant to the program (Courts Innovation Program, Queensland Health (QH), Queensland Police Service, Legal Aid Queensland, noting that Queensland Corrective Services did not supply costing information as they reported there is no additional cost to the Court Link program over and above general court processes).

1.4.2 Overview of analyses

1.4.2.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted across consultations to identify common themes and ideas and provide an in-depth understanding about the experience and context of participants, the nuances of program success, and to inform the evaluation findings and conclusions.

1.4.2.2 Most Significant Change analysis

Most Significant Change (MSC) is an evaluation approach that involves asking participants to share their personal stories and anecdotes of the most significant change they have experienced as a result of their participation in the program being evaluated. It can be useful when trying to determine how different stakeholder groups define the "value" of the program in terms of "what success looks like" for them.

1.4.2.3 Quantitative analyses

A range of quantitative analyses were completed as part of the evaluation. The detail of the quantitative analysis is included in *Section 3*, but in general included:

- descriptive statistics – to describe the available activity data across sites;
- cluster analyses and regression analyses – to examine the sociodemographic profiles of people who were referred, admitted and completed Court Link;
- breakeven analysis – to estimate the cost that would need to be avoided in order for the program to break even.

In addition, for some analyses, we created synthetic ‘treatment’ and ‘comparison’ groups within the data to explore more complex questions. This was also paired with outcome data provided by QCS showing participants’ custodial and community supervision periods under court orders. The treatment group were those who completed more than 11 weeks of the program and the comparison group comprised all those referred who were not admitted to case management (e.g., did not progress to triage, were assessed for community referral or no action, or were assessed as suitable for case management but not admitted by the court). With these groups, we conducted:

- a Difference-in-Difference (DID) analysis – to explore changes in frequency of offending;
- survival analysis – to explore desistence.

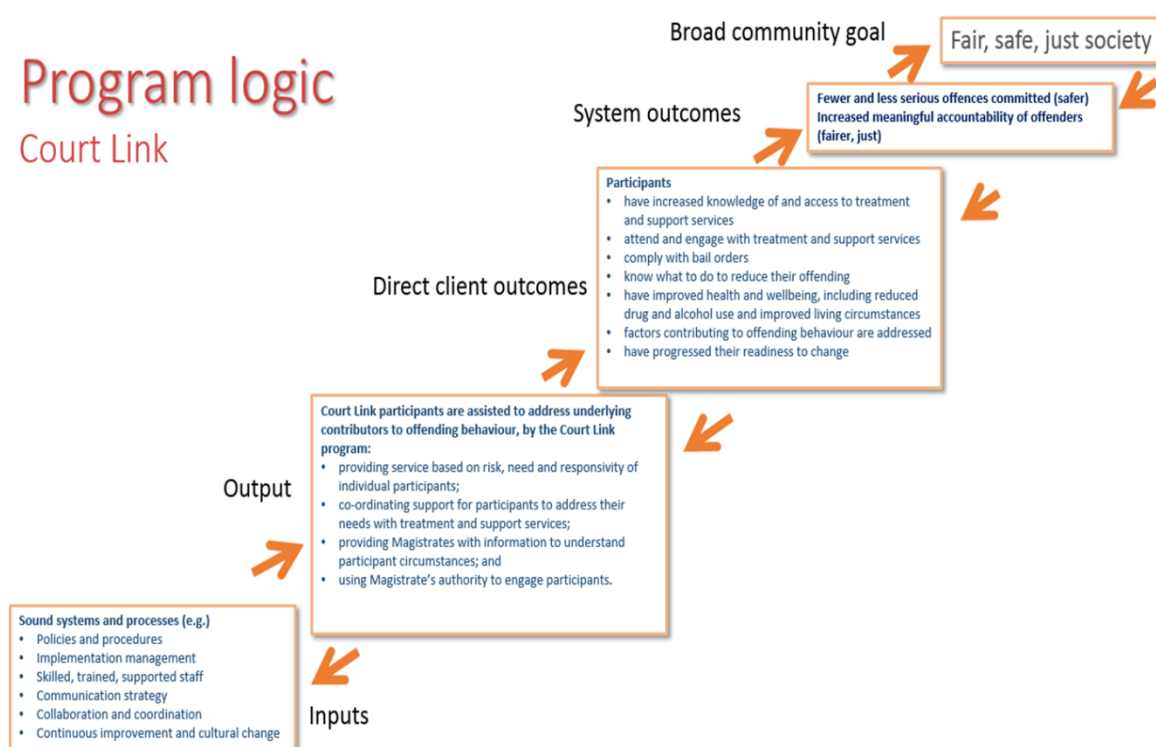
In analyses, we also controlled for a range of factors including: age (at time of referral), sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, country of birth, level of education, and age at first offence. By accessing QCS data, we also controlled for time in custody to ensure both groups had the same ‘opportunity’ to offend.

2 Overview of the program

Court Link is a voluntary integrated court assessment and support program for people who are referred for triage following a criminal offenceⁱⁱⁱ. The purpose of Court Link is to provide referral, support and rehabilitation services to people charged with a criminal offence so that the underlying contributors to their offending are addressed and their risk of re-offending is reduced. Case management is provided to people who are granted bail following a court hearing and are deemed to have medium-to-high risk of re-offending and medium-to-high level support needs. The objectives of Court Link are to aid and support eligible participants to^{iv}:

- increase their knowledge of, and access to, treatment and support services;
- attend and engage with treatment and support services;
- comply with bail orders;
- know what to do to reduce their offending;
- improve their health and wellbeing, including reduced alcohol and/or drug use, and improved living circumstances;
- address factors that are contributing to offending behaviour;
- progress their readiness to change;
- commit fewer and less serious offences (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Program logic for Court Link



The design of the program seeks to support the achievement of these objectives by matching participants with a Court Link Officer who works with the individual to develop an individualised case management plan and links them with relevant treatment and support services. The key focus of this program is ensuring that the Court Link Officer assesses, focuses on, and progresses the unique needs of the participant through regular engagement and the fostering of a supportive interpersonal relationship.

Court Link was developed based on the need to establish alternative solutions in the criminal justice system to support people to address underlying contributing factors to their offending by providing case management and supported referral to assist participants with issues that may include housing instability, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, mental illness and impaired decision-making capacity. As mentioned earlier, Court Link also aims to address Recommendation 6 of the 2016 Queensland Drug and Specialist Courts Review Final Report^v, although the program's design is broader than this recommendation with some additional key features of the program described throughout the report (for example, dedicated pathways for AOD treatment, cognitive screenings for participants, and so forth).

Court Link is a bail-based diversion program that is provided to persons who have entered the court system. Persons are eligible to be referred to Court Link if they have been charged with a criminal offence. Referrals to the program can come from legal representatives, police, treatment or support programs, court staff, the judiciary, family or friends, and self-referrals. An initial step in the program is a triage assessment to assess the person's risks and needs. The purpose of triage is to gather information about the presenting person's issues, criminal and legal history, social and economic support needs, drug and alcohol use, and physical and mental health. The outcomes of this triage assessment are as follows:

- case management (up to 12-week engagement with an allocated case manager);
- community referral (person will be referred to community-based treatment and support services and proceed per the usual court process);
- no action.

In contrast to other programs that have specific eligibility requirements, such as the Queensland Drug and Alcohol Court, Court Link can assist clients who present with a broader spectrum of issues and offending. These include^{vi}, but are not limited to:

- drug and alcohol dependency or use;
- physical and/or mental health issues;
- impaired decision-making capacity; and
- homelessness or risk of homelessness.

Another unique element of Court Link is that the program has professionally qualified and experienced DJAG staff to provide case management to participants including brief interventions during their case management sessions.

2.1 Judicial monitoring

Progress Reports are provided before each additional court mention while the participant is on case management until:

- the client has achieved their case management goals and is ready to exit Court Link;
- the court decides Court Link is no longer appropriate;
- the participant decides to leave without achieving their goals;
- or other issues arise, such as disengagement, breach of bail and additional criminal charges where the defendant is placed in remand.

On completion, which is usually after 11 weeks, the Magistrates Court is provided with a Final Report. The Final Report summarises the progress the participant has made in the program and explains the next steps required to transition the participant out of Court Link.

While there are limitations with studies which have examined the effect of judicial supervision in problem-solving courts in Australia and New Zealand, findings suggest that judicial supervision has a positive impact on both the chance and frequency of recidivism.^{vii}

2.2 Voluntary pre-sentence program

Court Link operates as a voluntary program that operates pre-sentence and typically pre-plea. This means that if defendants are sentenced or not granted bail, they no longer become eligible for participation in Court Link services. Early pilots of bail programs, such as the Court Referral and Evaluation for Drug Intervention and Treatment program in Victoria, were developed in response to higher rates of re-offending while defendants were on bail. In this sense, bail programs are also a risk mitigation strategy to reduce the likelihood of participants on bail re-offending during their bail period^{viii}.

The program is a court based medium intensity program not designed to support access to bail. Defendants are expected to satisfy eligibility for bail independently of the availability of Court Link with a magistrate determining whether the defendant is an acceptable risk to the community. Court Link Officers do not have any statutory powers, in that should a person's risk to community elevate or be identified then Court Link Officers will work with partnering agencies (such as QPS or QCS) to mitigate any risk.

2.3 Case management model

In the context of Court Link, the main choices that will be assessed in this literature review include whether 12 weeks of case management for those who are moderate-high need and moderate-high risk is beneficial or adequate. While not related to the Court Link program, historically, there was some feedback from New South Wales case management service providers that some clients may "fall apart" when support services suddenly cease^{ix}. Court Link has as part of its case management model, a transition planning phase where defendants are linked in with or continue on with other services upon the cessation of Court Link case management services^x, recognising that at sentencing, some participants will likely transit to supervision by QCS. This could operate as a potential mitigator for any unintended consequences that may be experienced by Court Link participants as a result of exiting the program.

2.3.1 Case management activities

Case management models for court diversion operate as a community-based intervention that is intended to divert individuals away from the criminal justice system by bridging the gap between systems of care and access to required resources and rehabilitation^{xi}. Case management can take on multiple forms, and vary in definition, understanding and application depending on the context and organisation^{xii}. Within court diversion, the three popular forms of case management include Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Intensive Case Management (ICM) and standard or brokered case management (BCM).

The ACT model involves full services being provided by a team of individuals to a small client case load (usually at the client to staff ratio of 10:1) with all services such as mental health support, residential services, housing and vocational services accessible to the client through the case manager. The ICM model is a less intensive version of ACT model with some of the services the client needs being provided by the case manager but not all, and the ratio of client to staff is usually larger (between 10-20:1). The third case management model, BCM, involves case managers working with larger caseloads and linking individuals with available services through brokerage as opposed to providing the services themselves^{xiii}. The Court Link case management model seems to sit somewhere in between the ICM and BCM model, with some brief interventions provided by the

Court Link Officer, and other services being provided by external service providers through brokerage or government supported services.

The effectiveness of certain case management approaches over others is dependent on a range of factors, including the internal structure of the service (e.g., the selection of participants, funding, and staff) and care system variables, specifically, the availability of effective community services. For example, ACT Mental Health Courts (MHCs) were found to reduce re-offending both in instances where MHCs were delivered alone and when combined with ACT case management. Research also suggests that ICM is another effective intervention which is associated with reduced violent offending, re-arrest and time spent imprisoned^{xiv}. Similarly, research indicates that BCM can lead to less time being incarcerated and increased service use^{xv}. In each study, the service delivery model differed which suggests that case management activities will vary depending on a program's design and intent.^{xvi}

It is important to note that much of the existing research on the effectiveness of case management within court diversion relates to how case management can be beneficial to offenders with a history of mental health or problematic substance use^{xvii,xviii}. This is not completely out of scope of Court Link, however, as the RNR framework suggests that many offending behaviours of individuals that are moderate-high risk and need can be linked back to underlying needs that could be mental health related. However, this is not the case for all participants.

Other factors that dictate the effectiveness of case management include how successful the case manager or team of case managers are at delivering best practice activities related to assessing, planning, coordinating service delivery, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the progress of their participant^{xix}.

Overall, it appears the case management model is effective. An evaluation of CISP, which Court Link was modelled after, suggests that the CISP model decreases the rate of re-offending behaviour by 10% more than the control^{xx}. However, whether the CISP framework is more effective than other frameworks in reducing re-offending behaviour for all populations is not yet known. Further, elements in the design of Court Link (such as a focus on addressing alcohol and drug use, harm minimisation and therapeutic groups) have previously been shown in correctional settings such as prison to have positive outcomes for participants^{xxi}.

2.3.2 Voluntary

Engaging in Court Link case management services is considered to be a voluntary process. This means that participants can choose not to engage in the program if they do not want to or are advised not to by their legal representatives.

To mitigate potential disadvantage, withdrawal from or exit from Court Link is not a 'breachable' condition to the participant's bail.

2.3.3 Strengths-based

Court Link case management is expected to operate with a strengths-based approach. According to Brun and Rapp (2001), this refers to the belief that participants can utilise their inherent strengths, inspirations, and abilities to overcome the challenges that they are facing^{xxii}. Within case management this means the case worker is often drawing attention to the participants abilities as opposed to their shortcomings^{xxiii}. This approach is also supported by the Good Lives Model (GLM)^{xxiv}. Strengths-based approaches are intended to assist the participant to be self-directive and empowered to overcome the challenges they are facing. This is done by utilising informal support systems, encouraging community involvement, and developing the relationship between the participant and the case manager^{xxv}. In terms of its utility in improving outcomes for participants, it has been found to be associated with a decrease in substance-use problems amongst participants^{xxv}

and has been found to be more effective in reducing re-offending behaviours in juvenile youth on probation^{xxvi}. Overall, the strength-based approach is supported by evidence to have value within case management.

2.3.4 Collaborative

Court Link works collaboratively with participants to conceptualise and formulate a case management plan. This involves exploring, discussing, and negotiating the case management plan, with the choices weighing more heavily on what the participant suggests with possible revisions at a later date if the person’s circumstances change^{xxvii}. Often the means by which collaboration happens is by using aspects of motivational interviewing to move the participant through a process of change^{xxviii}. Collaboration is active within specific boundaries of progress that is dictated partially by the Court Link Officer or the level of tolerance for increased timeframes for progressing the case by the judicial officer. This situation can be beneficial as experts highlight that the level of autonomy, volunteerism and choice that is given to individuals who engage in case management is relative to the level of insight into the consequences and level of investment into those choices. If the level of insight is low, it could in fact create harm or cause anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed^{xxix}.

Additionally, if given the choice to work on specific problems, defendants might choose to resolve non-criminogenic as opposed to criminogenic needs. While this might be helpful, it could (as mentioned earlier) be counterproductive to the goals of reducing re-offending behaviour. This means that while collaboration is important, the overarching goals should be monitored and guided by the Court Link Officer to ensure they are the most beneficial for the participant, while also ensuring the participant is engaged and motivated to achieve their goals. Additionally, the collaborative approach with Court Link is related to the strengths based approach, Motivational Interviewing and GLM where in order to understand exactly what resources and tools will assist the participant, the case worker must be able to elicit this information from the participant^{xxx}. This is supported by general psychological principles related to therapeutic alliance, which suggests that strong collaboration to agree on treatment goals, and affective bonds between the client and therapist have been strongly correlated with positive outcomes^{xxxi}.

2.3.5 Focused on offender rehabilitation

The aims of Court Link case management are to address the underlying causes of offending, in order for the defendant to improve their outcomes and reduce recidivism. This approach is in line with the RNR approach and in line with therapeutic jurisprudence. Rehabilitation, as opposed to punishment, has consistently been found in the literature to reduce the number of offenders who end up incarcerated^{xxxii}. Research by Gelb (2019) suggests that imprisonment, parole and suspended sentencing are not as effective in reducing offending behaviour as the RNR approach, cognitive behavioural therapies and drug treatment for rehabilitation^{xxxiii}.

2.3.6 Individualised approach

Court Link emphasises an individualised approach to ensure that the goals of case management are targeted and address the unique strengths, preferences and situation of the participant. An individualised approach enables Court Link to tackle problems and provide solutions in ways that specified problem-solving courts may struggle with^{xxxiv}. This approach is supported by forensic psychology and the RNR framework in establishing support and motivation for self-determination by targeting the participants specific psychological needs^{xxxv}. While the importance of taking on an individualised approach within case management has been discussed extensively when describing the RNR framework, this section will outline the benefits and considerations for adopting an individualised approach within the court, and within the services that participants are referred to.

While the individualised approach in case management is beneficial in being targeted to the specific individuals’ needs, it can be susceptible to having variability in its effectiveness for different people

because case plans are tailored depending on individual circumstances and may be impacted by human error. Because of this, some aspect of standardisation when delivering interventions may assist in ensuring that a fair and equitable approach is provided to all participants. We understand there is difficulty in standardising treatment approaches as different approaches may still lead to the same outcome for participants. Additionally, a review of Court Link documents suggests that the collective effect of training, program guidelines, supervision, auditing, visibility of case management to the courts will likely help mitigate the risk of human error or interventions being conducted inconsistently with the program design.

2.3.7 Within the courts

The individualised approach for Court Link extends beyond case management and into the Magistrates Court. Structurally this is achieved through the progress reviews that occur at each court hearing where the Court Link Officer presents the progress of the participant back to the magistrate. This is particularly important for justice as research suggests that when participants are evaluated on their behaviour and progress, they consider whether the decisions made on their case have taken into account their unique individual factors and experiences, in order to assess whether the process was fair and respectful^{xxxvi}.

2.3.8 Services referral management

The individualisation of the services available to clients refers to ensuring that all presented cases with their unique requirements can access the services that they need in order to achieve their case management goals. In practice, the provision of this service, to some extent, is impacted by the availability of services and the protocols and processes between local service providers and Court Link at each location.

2.3.9 Length of the Program

Court Link is generally delivered over a 12-week period with case management planned for 30 minute to 1 hour sessions each week, with attendance at other referral services additional to this (depending on participant engagement and needs). It is important to consider the extent to which a 12-week period with this level of intervention can significantly impact on the complex nature of offending for some participants. Some stakeholders also noted during the evaluation that the extent to which specialised intervention or responses for very specific and nuanced types of offending (e.g., complex DVF offending) may be limited in this length of time, especially given the length of time required to complete many of the referred treatment and support services prior to exit from the Court Link program (due to, for example, program length, availability and waiting lists). It is important that the findings and recommendations of the current report were considered in this context, especially in relation to future policy or program responses. This is important for maximising the benefit to participants while also limiting risk to community and other potential or unintended consequences.

2.4 Underpinning principles and values of Court Link

Court Link is based on the following principles.

2.4.1 Human Rights (including equality before the law)

Court Link has been underpinned by a human rights focus since its initiation. In 2019, the Parliament of Queensland passed the *Human Rights Act 2019* (HRA). Court Link actively promotes rights expressly provided by the HRA, including the right to recognition and equality before the law, regardless of age, race, gender or other circumstances, cultural rights, and the right to access health services. It also promotes other rights not provided for by the HRA, such as the right to work and the right to adequate housing. The facilitation of access to appropriate support services for participants

which address factors which may contribute to offending behaviour (such as a lack of housing, lack of employment, and difficulties engaging with treatment and support services) also promotes rights of the community.

The promotion of the right to equality before the law and cultural rights are particularly significant for persons who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Currently, there is an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the criminal justice system^{xxxvii}. Specifically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples tend to appear more often in court and have higher incarceration rates than other people in Queensland, and DJAG runs a number of programs that aim to reduce this disparity including Court Link.^{xxxviii} This evaluation found that approximately 24% (840) of referrals received (see *Section 3.2.1*) were for First Nations people, with 740 defendants identifying as Aboriginal, 33 defendants identifying as Torres Strait Islander, and 67 defendants identifying as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. There was a limited number of participants who identified as Torres Strait Islander (although this is proportionate to this group's contact with the wider criminal justice system), and participants who were recorded as being born outside of Australia or who spoke languages other than English at home.

2.4.2 Therapeutic jurisprudence

Therapeutic jurisprudence is an approach to court proceedings in which the broader needs of a defendant are centred to address offending behaviour. The approach seeks to counter the potential negative outcomes that may be observed in a traditional, adversarial court environment. Court Link takes a therapeutic approach by seeking to address the underlying factors that may contribute to a defendant's offending behaviours rather than focusing only on the punishment for the offence. Court Link operates in accordance with the principle that the emphasis of engagement with defendants should be on rehabilitation.

While historically, the legal system has focused on sentencing and punishment, there has been no empirical support to suggest this method is the most effective method for reducing crime, and in some situations, has increased the rates of recidivism^{xxxix}. The objectives of therapeutic jurisprudence are to ensure that the overall rules, procedures and roles of the legal system result in decisions that have a therapeutic impact^{xl}. This means that the aim of the legal interaction is to maximise a person's wellbeing by minimising corrective punishment and increasing corrective and structured programs of intervention. These interventions focus on building a bond with the client to collaboratively develop goals related to behavioural and cognitive change. These can involve the integration of services from psychologists, social workers, or judges to treat the individual and address the underlying problem. This process has been shown to have empirical validity^{xxxv} and has reduced costs of the criminal justice system and effectively reduced the cycle of drug-related re-offending for some clients^{xxxv}. The Court Link program embodies a therapeutic jurisprudence approach in a variety of ways including: employing staff from multidisciplinary backgrounds, engaging with specialist services and practitioners in the broader community, and judicial monitoring of participants in the program. Court Link staff work with key stakeholders to ensure they are taking a consistent approach to therapeutic jurisprudence through Local Stakeholder Group meetings, team meetings, and supervision/observation of Court Link staff.

Court Link does not seem to encounter the same criticisms directed to the policy discourse of other forms of therapeutic justice (such as problem-solving courts) which it has been argued, may problematise and criminalise certain populations, such as AOD users or those with a mental illness^{xli}.

2.4.3 Risk-need-responsivity (RNR) approach

The RNR approach is a framework adapted in Court Link to assess the risks and needs of participants based on their presenting criminogenic factors. According to Andrews, Bonta and Wormith^{xlii} the RNR approach to assessment incorporates the use of various standardised and validated risk assessment measures that assess a broad range of risk factors, accounting for systemic intervention

and monitoring. We note that the new end-to-end QCS strategy relies almost solely on the risk-need-responsivity model which is intended to be a catch-all for an individual’s needs whereby the intervention is responsive to their presenting needs. There are three core principles that guide intervention needs. The **risk principle** states that the level of service provided should match the individual’s risk of re-offending. For individuals with a high risk of re-offending, there needs to be a high level of service. The **need principle** refers to the utility of assessing criminogenic needs and then directly targeting them in the subsequent intervention. This includes evaluating the static and dynamic, personal, environmental and historical factors that might predict the risk of re-offending (e.g. antisocial personality, pro-criminal attitudes, social supports for crime, relationship issues, poor school performance, lack of prosocial activities). Finally, the **responsivity principle** proposes that treatment should maximise an individual’s ability to engage in from the intervention by being tailored to their unique learning style, motivation, culture, literacy and verbal skills, gender, ethnicity and strengths. The interventions should also be developed utilising cognitive social learning strategies (such as prosocial modelling).

With the use of appropriate tools and measures, it is possible to identify and assess risk and need effectively. The challenge in using the RNR approach is being able to select and implement the right intervention and translating the model from theory into practice^{xliii}. To address this challenge, Court Link has incorporated the GLM of Offender Rehabilitation as a framework for treatment or intervention options. This framework operates on the assumption that offenders aim to satisfy their life values, but often do not have the internal or external resources to help them achieve life satisfaction using prosocial means^{xliv}. GLM operates under the definitions of prosocial behaviour categorised under primary and secondary goods.

The GLM identifies eleven ‘primary goods’ which humans seek out to achieve fulfilling lives. They are:

- life (including healthy living and functioning);
- knowledge (how well informed one feels about things important to them);
- excellence in play (hobbies and recreational pursuits);
- excellence in work (including mastery experiences);
- excellence in agency (autonomy and self-directedness);
- inner peace (freedom from emotional turmoil and stress);
- relatedness (including intimate, romantic, and familial relationships);
- community (connection to wider social groups);
- spirituality (in the broad sense of finding meaning and purpose in life);
- pleasure (the state of happiness or feeling good in the here and now); and
- creativity (expressing oneself through alternative forms).^{xliv}

Individuals can use secondary goods to achieve primary goods. Secondary goods refer to the prosocial activities undertaken by the individual to satisfy their primary good.

Inconsistencies between an individual’s planned and actualised way of life occur due to limitations in internal or external capacity, failing to create scope or breadth for the achievement of all goods, securing one good at the cost of another, and achieving goods in inappropriate or harmful ways.

The GLM approach is used by Court Link case managers to brainstorm secondary goods that can be used to satisfy a participant’s primary goods in socially acceptable ways^{xliii,xlvii}. In terms of its effectiveness, the GLM approach has been shown to have an impact on the creation of a positive, future-focused mindset for offenders who have participated in the program^{xvii}. Given its positive approach, it might have some utility, to meet the presenting needs of the participants as in Table 2.1. including reflecting culturally safe and trauma-informed approaches.

As a framework, RNR paired with GLM is an effective model available for practicing therapeutic jurisprudence and rehabilitative practice for court diversion. The level of effectiveness of the model depends largely on the training, tools, structures and resources available to the providers. This is described in greater detail in the following sections.

We acknowledge that new research and improved practice is constantly emerging with this model. While the case managers maintain currency in their professional roles and drive continuous improvement through their expertise in responding to individualised needs, ongoing development of Court Link should be informed by the evolving research and policy context.

Some research (particularly in the field of forensic psychiatry) demonstrates that the RNR and GLM models may overlook important principles such as strengths-based approaches, recovery models, relationship skill development and community support and may overestimate the role of personal development and personal agency in criminal behaviour.

The Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSIR), Multi-Health Systems suite of tools have been recognised as an alternative model/tool for assessments. These tools have also been internationally recognised and used for various participant groups (i.e., women, participants with mental health, violent and sexual offending behaviours). Additionally, the design of the LSIR was built on RNR principles.

Lutz et al. (2022) conclude that a recovery model that includes aspects of RNR And GLM may be a moderate and practical framework to support defendants with a mental illness.^{xvii} Further, the study could not identify any randomized-controlled trial which tested the outcome of RNR or GLM.

Overall, it is suggested that the models should consider the diversity of participant groups and be applicable to participants with various needs (e.g., People with Disability, utilising trauma informed care, people impacted by Domestic and Family Violence, CALD people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples). It should also recognise the participants needs such as accessibility of the services and considerations for human rights. This would allow the Court Link program to better respond to the needs of the participants and enables the various participant groups to access the programs with fewer barriers.

Court Link values

In line with the theoretical principles above, the Court Link model operates under the following values (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Court Link values

Value	Description
Therapeutic effect of the law	Court Link will seek to maximise the therapeutic effects of the law by adopting processes and procedures to maximise a person’s well-being.
Needs-based services	Court Link will ensure more intense services are provided to those at the highest risk of re-offending and with needs that have not been addressed. Court Link will assess an individual’s risk, need and readiness to change.
Responsive service	When providing services, Court Link will consider an individual’s unique characteristics, including their cultural identity, cognitive abilities and gender.
Individualised service	Court Link will tailor services, including referrals, to consider each participant’s needs as well as their values, strengths, preferences and context.

Collaborative approach	Court Link will work collaboratively with other agencies to assist participants in achieving their goals.
Maintain program integrity	Court Link will be continually monitored, reviewed and evaluated to ensure activities are consistent with program design and outcomes are achieved.

2.5 Expansion to additional sites

In late 2019 three additional sites (Redcliffe, Maroochydore and Caboolture) commenced, and Mount Isa commenced in January 2020. The Court Link program expansion to the additional sites in 2019-2020 have some differences in program design, comparative to the existing sites. These variations emerged from significant consultation work conducted by the DJAG Policy Team, recognising that there were site specific considerations that needed to be accounted for.

Consultations were conducted with various stakeholder groups prior to the implementation of Court Link in all additional sites. The topics followed a clear consultation plan which included discussions about the program model, confirmation about how each stakeholder group could work with Court Link, and other specifics relevant to each stakeholder group (for example, by asking CJGs what case management role they see Court Link playing). Consultations with stakeholders included groups such as:

- Legal Aid Queensland
- Magistrates
- CJGs
- ATSILS
- QPS Prosecutors and Watchhouse staff
- Court Registry.

The following section outlines the process undertaken in the design and implementation of Court Link in these sites and outlines the key differences in the program model.

2.5.1 North Coast sites – Maroochydore, Redcliffe and Caboolture

In the North Coast region (Maroochydore, Redcliffe and Caboolture) funding was provided to both DJAG and QH to expand Court Link while leveraging the existing processes and procedures that were in place for the QMERIT program (which Court Link replaced in the Maroochydore and Redcliffe sites). The Court Link North Coast model operates in line with the existing design of Court Link, but includes two key additional variations, namely:

- dedicated QH resources providing specialist Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) treatment services –including individual and group programs (which can include a Urine Drug Screening process); and
- in limited circumstances, QH may undertake a rapid assessment for suitability for AOD residential rehabilitation services for prospective Court Link clients, detained in a watch-house.

Specialist Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) treatment is provided by Metro North Hospital and Health Service (MNHHS) for Redcliffe and Caboolture sites and Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) for the Maroochydore site. Treatment is aimed at reducing problematic substance use and related harms, managing other associated health issues and contributes to addressing the underlying causes of substance dependence and offending behaviour.

Recognising the complexity of launching a new site in Caboolture and transitioning an existing, longstanding program (QMERIT), consultations were held with local stakeholders and DJAG worked collaboratively with QH policy teams to finalise the site-specific design of the program. In these sites, two rounds of stakeholder consultations were undertaken in October 2019 with key stakeholders including QPS, QCS, ATSILS, Legal Aid Queensland (LAQ), legal practitioners and Magistrates. The purpose of this work provided an opportunity for the Courts Innovation Program (CIP) to develop relationships with key stakeholders while introducing the Court Link program and to explain the transition from QMERIT to Court Link at Redcliffe and Maroochydore. The second round facilitated discussion of the rollout and operational relationship and interface with key organisations.

Participants at Court Link sites other than North Coast, can be referred to AOD treatment services through the integrated court referral pathway. Queensland Health delivers statewide specialist AOD treatment services through a mix of HHS and NGO providers.

2.5.2 Mount Isa

In Mount Isa, Court Link replaced the QICR program. A notable feature associated with the expansion of Court Link to Mount Isa in 2020 is that it is designed to fit in with the local context, does not duplicate existing services and formally integrates with existing specialist court programs in Mount Isa such as the Murri Court, and the Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Court.

In contrast to other Court Link locations, Mount Isa is an isolated regional centre with one court with a service system that is limited due to significantly smaller volumes of lodgements and town limits. Despite a smaller volume of lodgements, there is a high crime rate and persistent disadvantage amongst a subset of the population that is largely made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While there is a lower volume of offences compared to other Court Link sites, those attending court are expected to have a high complexity of needs.

Triage of Court Link participants in Mount Isa is consistent with other areas, with some exceptions as:

- participants can participate simultaneously in both Murri Court and Court Link, where they will be also be supported by the Mount Isa CJG;
- Murri Court can refer participants into the Court Link program; and
- participants eligible for community referral and case management can participate in the Murri Court program, and their Triage Outcome Report is provided by the Court Link Officer to a CJG as part of the handover process.

When participants attend both programs, Court Link Officers will attend Murri Court mentions if required. Court Link Officers will also provide reports to Murri Court mentions when required.

While the approach is still under development, the types of supports that Court Link could offer Murri Court include:

- working with CJGs and Elders to devise participant case plans;
- including Elders in participant meetings to work towards case plan goals;
- organising and/or coordinating community referrals to local support services;
- providing input on progress reports to support the Murri Court program and mentions; and
- attending Murri Court mentions to provide verbal updates as required.

Integration is a location-specific program variation now available in all locations where Court Link and Murri Court are both offered and designed to ensure the needs of court users are met, although Court Link Officer appearance in Murri Court is limited to Mount Isa. Court Link Officers are equipped with knowledge of all specialist courts and can communicate the differences and benefits of different programs as related to individual needs. The program model is still underpinned by the

three core program pillars of Court Link in other sites: referrals to support services, case management and judicial monitoring. This includes the physical presence of a Court Link officer at the courthouse which provides increased access for people to self-refer for triage when they attend the court and allows for efficient triage processes. In this integration, the Court Link Officer may act as a central point for access to or providing support to the other specialist courts. Additionally, a participant who is suitable for Court Link case management who wants to participate in Murri Court may be flexibly supported by the Court Link Officer with case management activities.

The model at Mount Isa has a focus on the implementation of efficient processes that support participants and the court to determine the appropriate level of support required for each person (subject to usual program level eligibility requirements). The triage process is client-focused and aims to optimise participant engagement, highlighting the benefits of Court Link, through a simplified process. More specifically, the triage process involves collecting personal details, assessing the level of service required and identifying underlying needs to ensure information can be provided to other specialist courts (with consent from participants) to reduce the likelihood of participants having to repeat their story for different programs.

To ensure Court Link is appropriately integrated with Murri Court, the model was co-designed with the Mount Isa Community Justice Group (CJG) where trust was developed between the Court Link Officers and the CJG. This is an iterative process that can be adapted over time and learnings from the Mount Isa context will be used to inform any future specialist court integrations at other locations.

2.5.3 Pine Rivers site

In October 2022, a request was put forward to expand the delivery of the Court Link program to the Pine Rivers Magistrates Court (under the current funding model). In the context of identified capacity at the Redcliffe site under current resourcing, an analysis of court user demographics, site demand, access to required facilities (e.g., dedicated workspace, access to private room, lockable cabinet, etc.) and referral pathways was conducted, and it was proposed that there was a demonstrated need to justify a satellite site at Pine Rivers. Due to the reduced referrals to the Redcliffe site, the Court Link Officer at this site works part-time across the Pine Rivers and Redcliffe site and the schedule of this worker will be provided to local stakeholders to ensure they know where and when they can contact a Court Link Officer across both sites.

2.6 Overview of training and the Supervision Framework

To support quality practice and a continuous improvement service delivery ethos, the Senior Practitioner and Team Leaders conduct regular supervision with Court Link Officers. Additionally, the Senior Practitioner will advise senior management and staff on techniques for best practice case management and service delivery, generally. Induction training ensures staff are aware of the program model and safety requirements.

Court Link team members are provided with training on a range of topics, including, for example DFV training which assists them to identify presenting factors, assess suitable referral options and identify if a person is high risk in this area. Ongoing, training is conducted through team meetings, in case reviews, feedback and literature review sessions and twice yearly two-day professional development workshops. To assist Court Link team members to manage exposure to participants' personal trauma and stress, they are provided with vicarious trauma training which is provided by Queensland Courts through a contracted service provider. Staff are also encouraged to openly discuss vicarious trauma with their supervisor/s regularly.

Supervision is a key feature of the Court Link program model, ensuring that service delivery and case management is of high quality. It is also intended to ensure that the program maintains integrity and

effectiveness. The focus of supervision activities is to improve the professional skills and competencies of Court Link staff, and to achieve the following benefits:

- improved service delivery to participants;
- improved job satisfaction;
- reduced risk of burnout and high staff turnover;
- improved sharing of knowledge, skills, experience; and
- improved staff communication.

The Supervision Framework is designed as a flexible tool to be implemented with professional judgement by the supervisor and depends on what aspect of Court Link service delivery is being reviewed. Supervision follows a structured process including:

- practice observations;
- evaluation/assessment against a checklist of skills, knowledge and behaviours that align to best practice principles and the Court Link handbook;
- feedback (two-way) with examples of sound practice and/or areas for development;
- support for the acquisition of knowledge and skills by the Senior Practitioner, Team Leaders and/or other source depending on the nature and extent of the training and support required.

Individual supervision sessions occur monthly at a minimum. During additional practice observations, supervisors use a checklist with relevant behavioral indicators (ranging from 13-24 depending on the area of practice) and a review of data entry pertinent to each area of practice including:

- triage assessment;
- case assessment and case plan;
- case management meetings.

Court duties (for the Court Officer and Court Support Officer) On the relevant checklist, ratings are indicated as either ‘present’, ‘not applicable’, or ‘opportunity to improve practice’. As the behavioural indicators are anchored on that which is observable and in the control of the case manager (as opposed to being influenced by the presentation of participant), it is possible for a case manager to perform well during their practice observation, regardless of how willing the participant is at the time. The checklists are intended to support the Senior Practitioner or Team Leader in gaining an understanding of how the case manager generally works, accounting for individual style and to allow for the development of goals for improved practice and general professional development. The supervision checklists also include a section to promote reflection and feedback with the supervisor and any further actions or comments to improve learning. Case managers, the Senior Practitioner and Team Leaders all contribute to supervision processes and outcomes (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Roles and responsibilities of Court Link team members in the supervision process

Role	Responsibilities
Senior Practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focusing on program integrity oversight and enhancing case management practice as a whole team by collating de-identified team feedback based on the observations highlighting areas that the team are doing well and areas for improvement; • ensuring Team Leaders complete observations and that Team Leaders are also observed to support development of skills and identify areas for practice development;

Role	Responsibilities
Team Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitating the Team Leaders to reflect on their practice and management of CMs and their development; and • sourcing training to meet staff development needs collaboratively with the Team Leader.
Case Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintaining strong and contemporary professional skills and knowledge to achieve the most effective results from their engagement with participants; • reflecting on their practice to identify areas of strength, interest and development; and • proactively engaging in supervision to contribute to their professional development including developing goals for supervision.

3 Quantitative findings

This section presents our quantitative findings based on seven key data sources available to the evaluation. Overall, it presents our insights from Court Link activity data across a range of data sources and our findings from a suite of analyses to explore key components of the program (e.g., participant profiles, program impact and potential program value). A description of the key questions, analyses and sample sizes is presented in Table 3.1 below. Importantly, due to a range of steps in the data preparation processes across our analyses (e.g., merging and matching datasets, creation of variables, creation of synthetic ‘treatment’ and ‘comparison’ group, general data cleaning and preparation, etc.), the groups for comparison in our analyses about the ‘impact on re-offending behaviour’, the number of individuals in these sub-samples differs for a range of reasons (described throughout Appendices B-F)¹⁶.

Table 3.1. Description of quantitative analyses, data sources, and sample sizes

Question (Data source/s)	Analysis	Full sample size	Description of any sub-samples	Relevant section in report
Program participants				
How many referrals were there to Court Link? (InfoXchange)	Frequency	4,241	Unique referrals = 3,499	3.1
What were the sociodemographic profiles of people at different stages of the program? (InfoXchange)	Cluster analysis	3,499	Admitted = 1,933 Not admitted = 632 Completed case management ¹⁷ = 1,084 Early exit = 346	3.2
Participant experiences and outcomes				
What were the experiences of participants in the program? (Participant Survey 1)	Frequency	305	<i>As the survey is voluntary in nature, not all questions were answered by respondents, therefore the numbers of respondents</i>	3.3.1
What were the outcomes for participants of the program?	Frequency	459		3.3.2

¹⁶ Reasons include: for the survival analysis, not all individuals were offending in the observation window; inability to match data between QWIC/InfoXchange and QCS data; the length of time on program unable to be determined for some groups, data dropped during analyses due to missing variables, etc.

¹⁷ Those who had completed >=11 weeks of Court Link.

Question (Data source/s)	Analysis	Full sample size	Description of any sub-samples	Relevant section in report
(Participant Survey 2)			<i>between questions will differ in text.</i>	
What participant improvements were reported by case managers? (Case manager reports)	Frequency	1,508¹⁸	<i>Question sub-samples are reported as 'Total N' in text.</i>	3.3.3
What were the outcomes for participants attending dedicated AOD services? (QH Metro North provided insights)	Frequency	142	Completed ¹⁹ = 80	3.3.4
Impact on reoffending behaviour				
Did Court Link reduce frequency of offending? (QWIC, QCS, InfoXchange)	DID		Treatment = 1,064 Comparison = 1,362	3.4.1
Did Court Link reduce the seriousness of offending? (QWIC, QCS, InfoXchange)	Logistic regression	2,426	Treatment = 1,064 Comparison = 1,362	3.4.2
Did Court Link delay re-offending? (QWIC, QCS, InfoXchange)	Survival analysis	1,337	Treatment = 530 Comparison = 807	3.4.3
Potential program value				
What are the costs of the program and what is the potential 'break-even' point? (Financial data from a range of stakeholders)	Breakeven analysis	n/a		3.5.2

¹⁸ This data source does not cover the full evaluation period as it was only brought in after the evaluation had commenced.

¹⁹ Those who had completed the Queensland Health AOD treatment.

3.1 Referral, triage and triage assessment outcomes

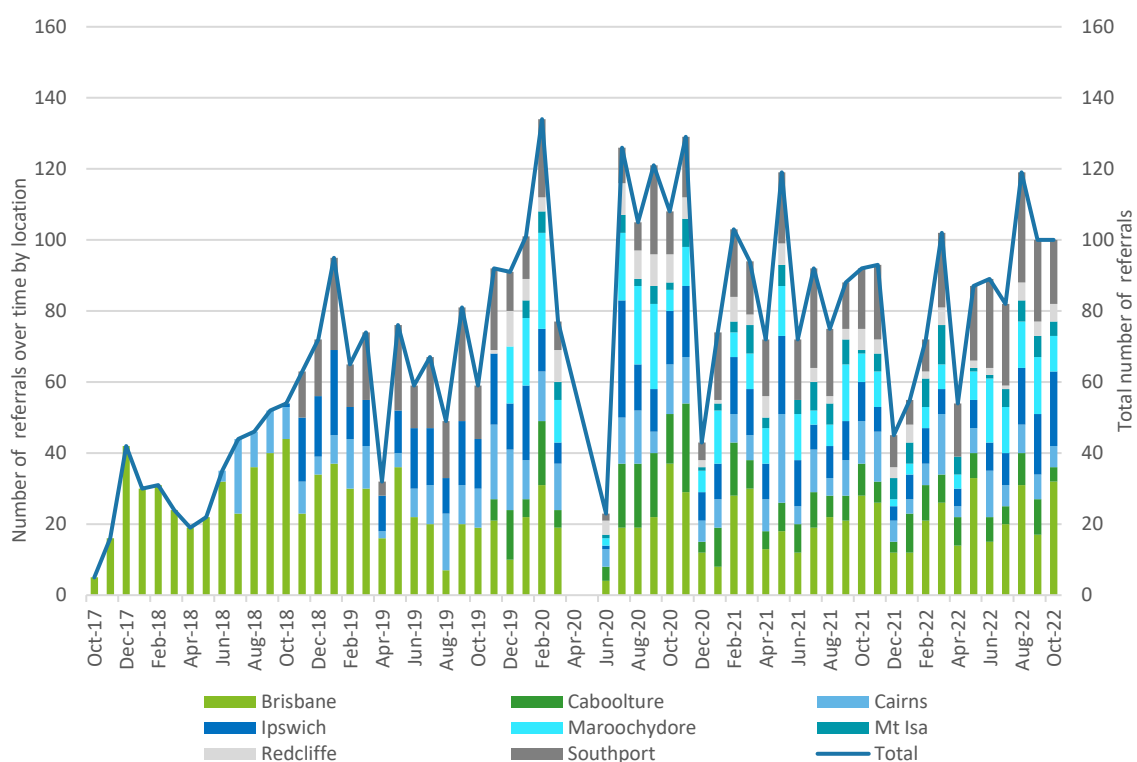
This section provides an overview of Court Link activities based on *InfoXchange* data shared by DJAG. The *InfoXchange* data contains de-identified information about all activities related to Court Link, including referrals, triage and assessment outcomes, admission, and case management activities. For the purpose of this Final Report, we analysed *InfoXchange* data from 25 October 2017 to 31 October 2022 shared by DJAG. The data covers all eight Court Link locations.

3.1.1 Referrals to Court Link

Referrals to Court Link have grown significantly since the program’s inception in November 2017 (Figure 3.1).²⁰ Between October 2017 and October 2022, there have been a total of 4,241 referrals corresponding to 3,499 people.²¹ Brisbane accounts for the largest proportion of all referrals at 32% of the total, followed by Southport at 18% and Ipswich at 14%. In contrast, Mount Isa and Redcliffe which only have one case manager each account for only 4% of referrals.

Referrals peaked in February 2020, one month after all eight Court Link sites became operational.²² Shortly after, sites were forced to close to new referrals temporarily due to COVID-19, while case management continued for participants already on the program. Since reopening in June 2020, there have been an average of 87 referrals to Court Link per month.

Figure 3.1: Referrals to Court Link over time and by location



Referrals come from a wide range of sources (Figure 3.2). The largest source of referrals originates from legal representatives and duty lawyers (2,038, 48%). This was followed by self-referrals (671,

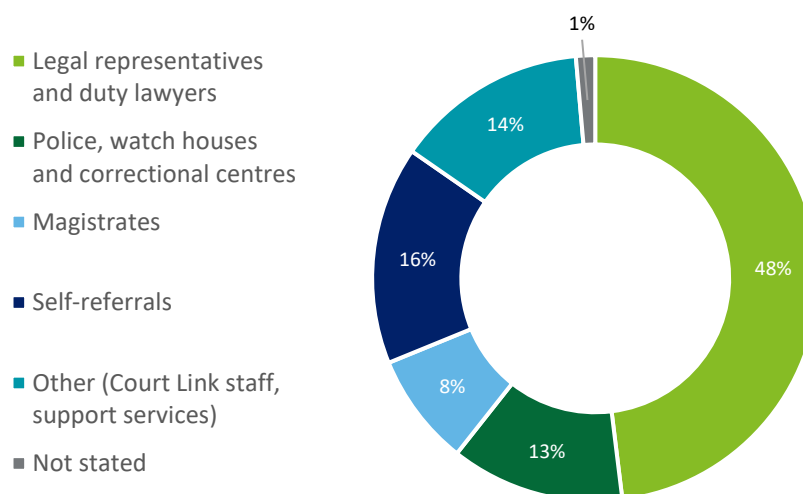
²⁰ There were 5 referrals in October 2017 – one month before the Brisbane site became operational – from the Queensland Integrated Court Referral (QICR) Program. QICR was eventually replaced by Court Link.

²¹ Individuals may be referred to Court Link more than once. Of the 3,499 people referred to Court Link, roughly 16% had been referred to the program at least twice. One individual had 6 referral records over three years and was admitted twice – the maximum number of referrals in the dataset.

²² Mount Isa opened in January 2020 and was Court Link’s eighth site.

16%), other sources of referrals (e.g., Court Link staff, support services) (592, 14%), police, watchhouses and correctional centres (534, 13%) and magistrates (347, 8%).

Figure 3.2: Distribution of referrals by source



3.1.2 Triage and assessment

Of the 4,241 referrals recorded, 3,827 (90%) progressed to triage. The remaining 10% did not progress to triage²³.

Defendants who progress to triage undergo an assessment to determine their required level of service. Two main factors are considered during assessment, namely the individual’s reoffending risk and their level of need (see Section 2.4.3 for more details). In line with RNR principles, people who have the highest levels of reoffending risk and need are recommended to the highest level of service available in the form of case management. In comparison, people with lower levels of risk and need either are recommended for a community referral or no action (includes those who decline support at the point of triage). Court Link Officers make a professional judgement on the outcome of triage in line with the assessment results, participant’s circumstances, and discussion with the person about what is best for them at this point in time.

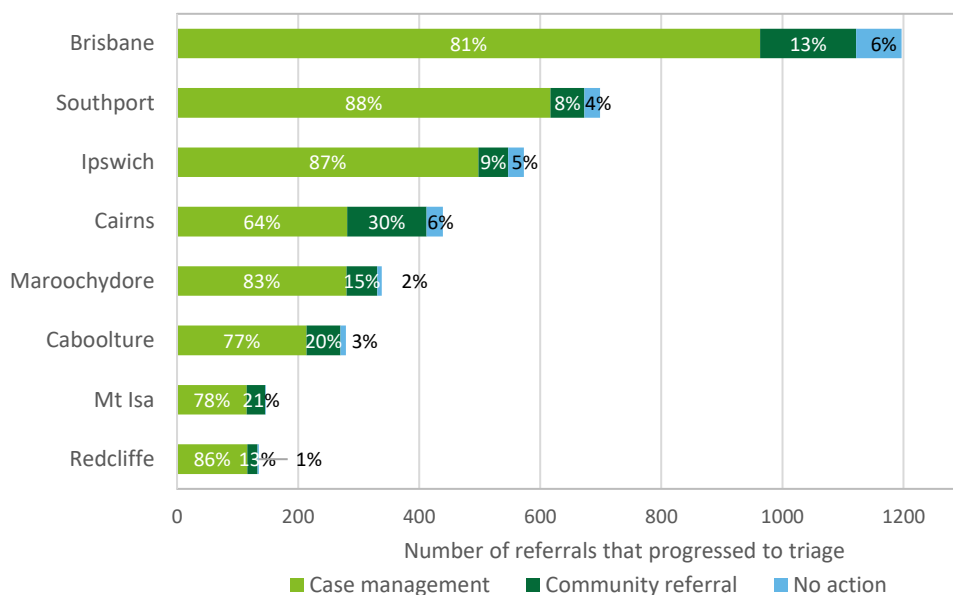
3.1.2.1 Triage assessment outcomes

Data on triage assessment outcomes suggests that case management is the most common level of service recommended for people who undergo the triage assessment process. Of the 3,827 referrals that proceeded to triage, 81% were assessed as suitable for case management, 14% were assessed as suitable for a community referral, and 5% were assessed as not needing any action. However, there are some differences in the recommended level of service across locations. As shown in Figure 3.3, Southport has the highest share of its referrals considered suitable for case management (88%), followed by Redcliffe (86%). In contrast, only 64% of referrals in Cairns are recommended for case management. Across locations, Cairns also has the highest share of community referrals at 30%²⁴.

²³ Did not progress to triage occurs for a range of reasons including being remanded in custody, having a warrant issued, or in a few cases where the person chose not to participate.

²⁴ The rationale for the recommended level of service can be dependent on non-program factors (i.e., access to transport which is a barrier to accessing services in the Cairns site).

Figure 3.3: Distribution of triage assessment outcomes by Court Link location

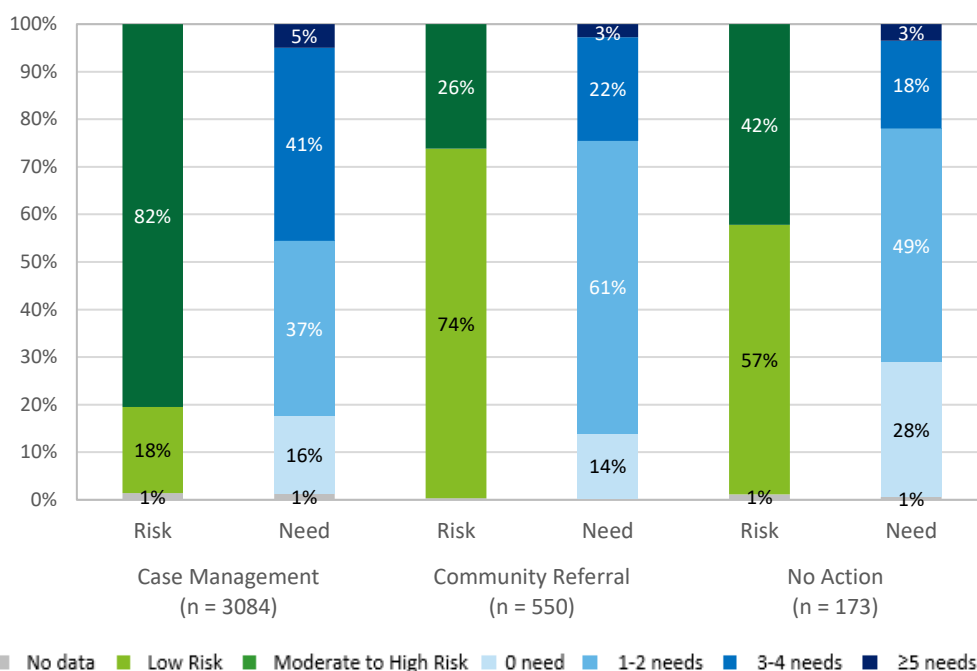


We also examined how triage assessment outcomes varied according to the level of reoffending risk and need (Figure 3.4). The vast majority of people assessed for case management have a moderate to high risk of reoffending, while the opposite is true for those who receive a community referral or no action where the majority are considered low risk.²⁵ Similarly, close to half of people in case management have moderate to high levels of need (i.e., 3 or more needs) compared to other groups where most people have fewer needs²⁶. These patterns are broadly consistent with RNR principles.

²⁵ Based on consideration of factors including previous offending patterns and access to support services to address underlying factors contributing to offending.

²⁶ We note that there is ongoing data cleaning due to changes in the *Infoxchange* system which may account for some cases with no data (i.e., people with 0 needs). DJAG investigated additional data points in *Infoxchange* confirming that all those recommended for Case Management had need areas to address.

Figure 3.4: Distribution of triage assessment outcomes by reoffending risk and level of need



Note: Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Following the triage assessment process, a decision is made by a Magistrate regarding whether a defendant is admitted to case management or not. Of the 3,084 referrals that were assessed as suitable for case management, the majority – 73% – were admitted to the program. The remaining 27% did not progress further for various reasons, including being remanded into custody, having a warrant issued, or in some cases, due to people declining Court Link.

As mentioned earlier, case management itself is carried out over a 12-week period, whereby participants are encouraged to set goals and to work towards them with the assistance of case managers and engagement with other service providers. However, the actual length of participation in the program varies due to the timing of callovers. Early exits of participants may occur due to a range of factors, such as the participant’s case plan was addressed, lack of engagement with the program or external factors such as having an outstanding warrant, being remanded into custody, or being sentenced. Data recording of early exits is difficult to interpret as there is some lack of consistency about how early exits are recorded. In general, however, some of the main reasons for early exits included:

- failure to appear / warrant issued (42%)
- non-engagement (27%)
- remanded in custody (16%)
- withdrew consent (8%)
- case plan addressed (3%)
- charges withdrawn (no evidence to offer on all charges (1%)).

In the following section, we examine the profiles and characteristics of people who have engaged with Court Link.

3.2 Court Link participant demographics

In this section, we examine the sociodemographic profiles of people who have participated in Court Link with the aim of identifying specific groups who may or may not have benefited from the program. Our analysis is again based on the *InfoXchange* dataset. The *InfoXchange* dataset contains

information on the sociodemographic characteristics of people who are referred to, and participate in, Court Link. These sociodemographic characteristics include sex, date of birth (used to calculate age), Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, country of birth, language spoken at home, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) status, and highest level of education. Altogether, these characteristics form the basis of the analysis presented in this section.

To identify the different groups who have engaged with Court Link, we aimed to address the following sub-questions in this section:

- what were the sociodemographic profiles of people who were referred into Court Link, and how were they distributed across locations?
- what were the differences in sociodemographic characteristics of people who were assessed as needing case management versus other levels of service (e.g., community referral, no action)?
- what were the differences in sociodemographic characteristics of people who were admitted to the program versus those who were not admitted?
- which sociodemographic groups were more likely to complete case management?

To answer these questions, we applied a range of statistical methods such as cluster analysis and regression modelling. To ensure only one Court Link record was included per person, we followed a series of data cleaning and preparation steps, as guided by DJAG. After applying these rules, we were left with a sample of 3,499. For a detailed description of the data cleaning and preparation, see Appendix C. To answer these questions, we applied a range of statistical methods such as cluster analysis and regression modelling (See Appendix A).

3.2.1 Summary statistics

Table 3.2 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the 3,499 individuals referred to Court Link between 2017 and 2022 across all eight sites. We note that the sociodemographic characteristics are self-reported by participants. The summary statistics indicated the following:

- the average age of people referred to Court Link was 34 years (range 17-75 years²⁷);
- men accounted for the majority of referrals at 68% of the total;
- there was a considerable proportion of people referred to Court Link with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background. In particular, 21% of people identify as Aboriginal, 1% as Torres Strait Islander, and 2% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
- a little over 9% of people referred to Court Link were born overseas, while the remaining 91% were born in Australia;
- more than 99% of people referred to Court Link speak English at home;
- roughly 5% of people referred to Court Link come from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background;
- only a minority of referrals (17%) to Court Link completed Grade 12 or higher.

Table 3.2: Summary statistics for individuals referred to Court Link

Sociodemographic characteristic	Categories	n
Age at referral (mean, SD, range)	-	34.29 (10.02, 17-75)
Sex (n, %)	Male	2375 (68.0%)
	Female	1120 (32.0%)
	Not stated	4 (< 0.1%)

²⁷ From February 2018, criminal matters for 17 year olds were heard in Childrens Courts and are not subsequently included in the Court Link data range.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status (n, %) ²⁸	Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	2657 (75.9%)
	Aboriginal	740 (21.1%)
	Torres Strait Islander	33 (0.9%)
	Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	67 (1.9%)
	Unknown/Not stated	2 (0.1%)
Country of birth (n, %)	Born in Australia	3171 (90.7%)
	Born overseas	325 (9.3%)
Language at home (n, %)	English	3068 (99.3%)
	Other language	22 (0.7%)
CALD status (n, %)	Non-CALD background	3333 (95.3%)
	CALD background	166 (4.7%)
Highest educational qualification (n, %)	Grade 12 or more	524 (17.3%)
	Less than Grade 12	1035 (34.1%)
	Less than Grade 10	1299 (42.8%)
	Less than High School	177 (5.8%)
N		3,499

Note: The sum of observations per characteristic may not sum up to the total number of observations (i.e., 3,499) due to some data being not recorded as it is not mandatory. Percentages are based on the total number of non-missing observations per characteristic.

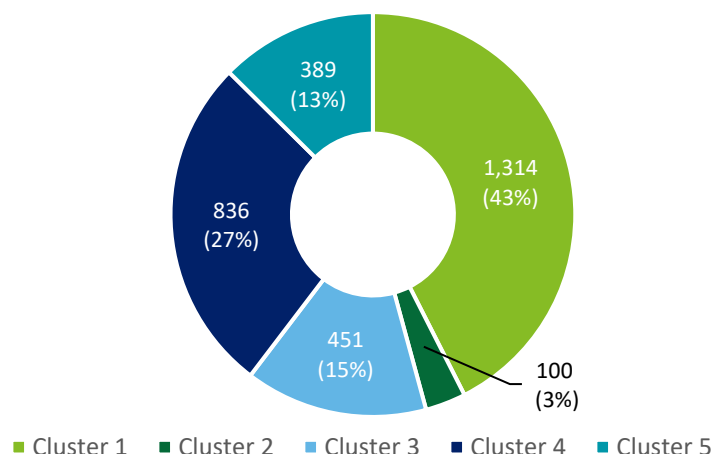
Because the summary statistics presented above does not distinguish between potential subgroups in the data, we conducted a cluster analysis. As mentioned earlier, the aim of cluster analysis in this context is to identify whether there are different profiles or ‘personas’ of individuals being referred to Court Link. Based on the analysis, we can identify: (1) how many clusters or subgroups of individuals there are in the data, (2) the size of each cluster based on how many people there are in each cluster, and (3) the sociodemographic characteristics distinguishing each of the clusters.

3.2.2 What were the sociodemographic profiles of people who were referred to Court Link, and how were they distributed across sites?

Results from the cluster analysis suggest that there are five different profiles or ‘personas’ of people who are referred to Court Link.²⁹ The size of these profiles are shown in Figure 3.5.

²⁹ We estimated models of up to 10 clusters to identify the optimal number of clusters that best fit the data. A range of metrics (i.e., within sum of squares, eta-squared coefficient, Proportional Reduction of Error) were used, all of which pointed to the 5-cluster model as the best fit for the data.

Figure 3.5: Summary statistics for individuals referred to Court Link



Note: 409 individuals could not be assigned to a cluster as they did not self-report about their language spoken at home.

To understand how the profiles differ from each other, Table 3.3 presents the sociodemographic composition of individuals in each of the five clusters. Of note, three of the clusters identified account for 85% of all individuals referred to Court Link as described below:

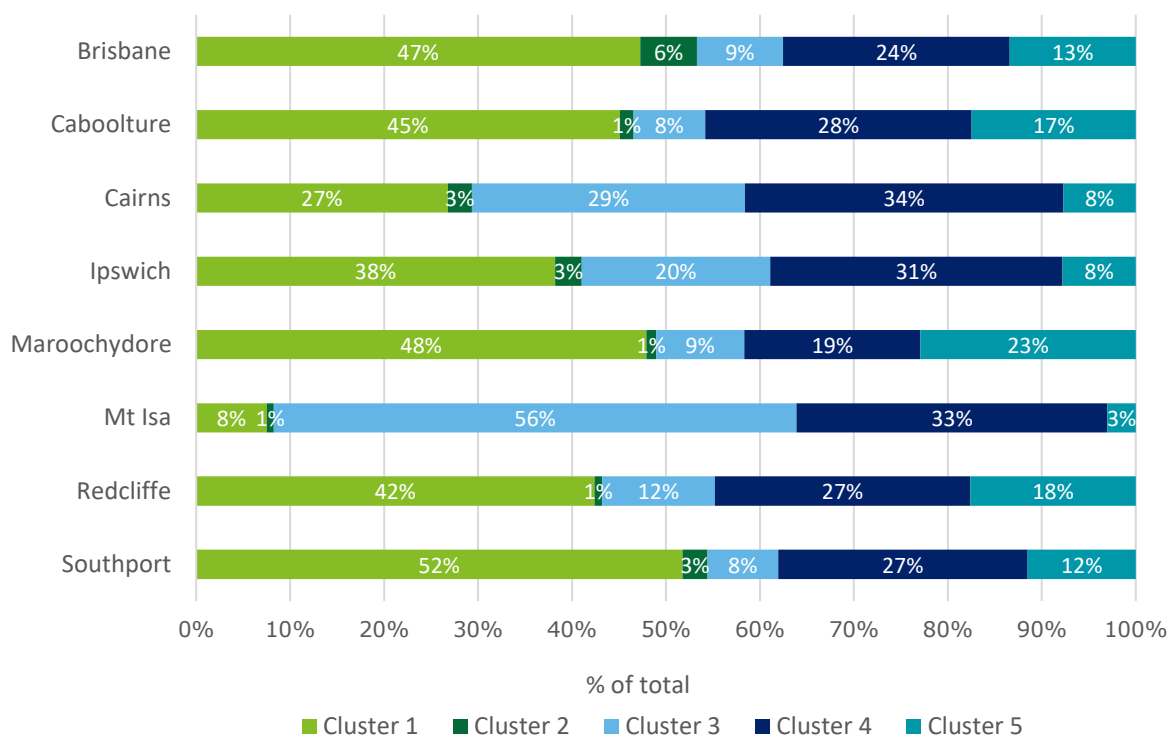
- the biggest cluster (Cluster 1), which accounts for 43% of people referred to Court Link, was comprised of men (100%), all of whom do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, are mostly born in Australia (93%), speak English at home (100%), are not culturally and linguistically diverse (100%), and do not have a Grade 12 education or above (100%);
- the second biggest cluster (Cluster 4), which accounts for 27% of people referred to Court Link, was comprised of women (100%), some of whom identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (31%), are mostly born in Australia (94%), speak English at home (100%), are primarily not culturally and linguistically diverse (99%), and do not have a Grade 12 education or above (100%);
- the third biggest cluster (Cluster 3), which accounts for 15% of people referred to Court Link, was comprised entirely of men (100%), all of whom identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, are all born in Australia (100%), primarily speak English at home (98%), and most of whom (91%) do not have a Grade 12 education or above.

Table 3.3: Sociodemographic characteristics of the five clusters

Sociodemographic characteristic	Cluster 1 (43%)	Cluster 2 (3%)	Cluster 3 (15%)	Cluster 4 (27%)	Cluster 5 (13%)
Age at referral (mean)	35 years	34 years	34 years	33 years	35 years
Sex (%)					
Male	100%	77%	100%	0%	61%
Female	0%	23%	0%	100%	39%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status (%)					
Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	100%	100%	0%	69%	93%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	0%	0%	100%	31%	7%
Country of birth (%)					
Born in Australia	93%	0%	100%	94%	92%
Born overseas	7%	100%	0%	6%	8%
Language at home (%)					
English	100%	90%	98%	100%	100%
Other language	0%	10%	2%	0%	0%
CALD status (%)					
Non-CALD background	100%	0%	97%	99%	99%
CALD background	0%	100%	3%	1%	1%
Highest educational qualification (%)					
Grade 12 or more	0%	26%	9%	0%	100%
Less than Grade 12	100%	74%	91%	100%	0%
N	1,314	100	451	836	389

We also examined the distribution of clusters across the eight Court Link locations. As shown in Figure 3.6, Cluster 1 accounted for the largest share of referrals across all locations with the exception of Mount Isa and Cairns. In both these locations, Clusters 3 and 4 comprised the majority of referrals at 89% and 63%, respectively. Across all sites, Mount Isa had the largest share of referrals from Cluster 3 followed by Cairns. Meanwhile in Southport, only 8% of referrals were from Cluster 3 and more than half were from Cluster 1.

Figure 3.6: Distribution of sociodemographic clusters across Court Link locations



3.2.3 What were the differences in sociodemographic characteristics of people who were assessed as needing case management versus other levels of service (e.g., community referral, no action)?

Of the 3,499 referrals to Court Link, 3,194 (91%) progressed to triage for further assessment. Of these individuals:

- 2,571 (80%) were assessed as suitable for case management
- 472 (15%) were assessed as suitable for the community referral level of service
- 139 (4%) received no action
- 12 (0.9%) either failed to attend triage or had another/unknown outcome.

As discussed previously, RNR principles mean that individuals with the highest levels of reoffending risk and need are recommended for case management. In this section, we explore what differentiates these individuals from other people referred to Court Link in terms of their sociodemographic characteristics.

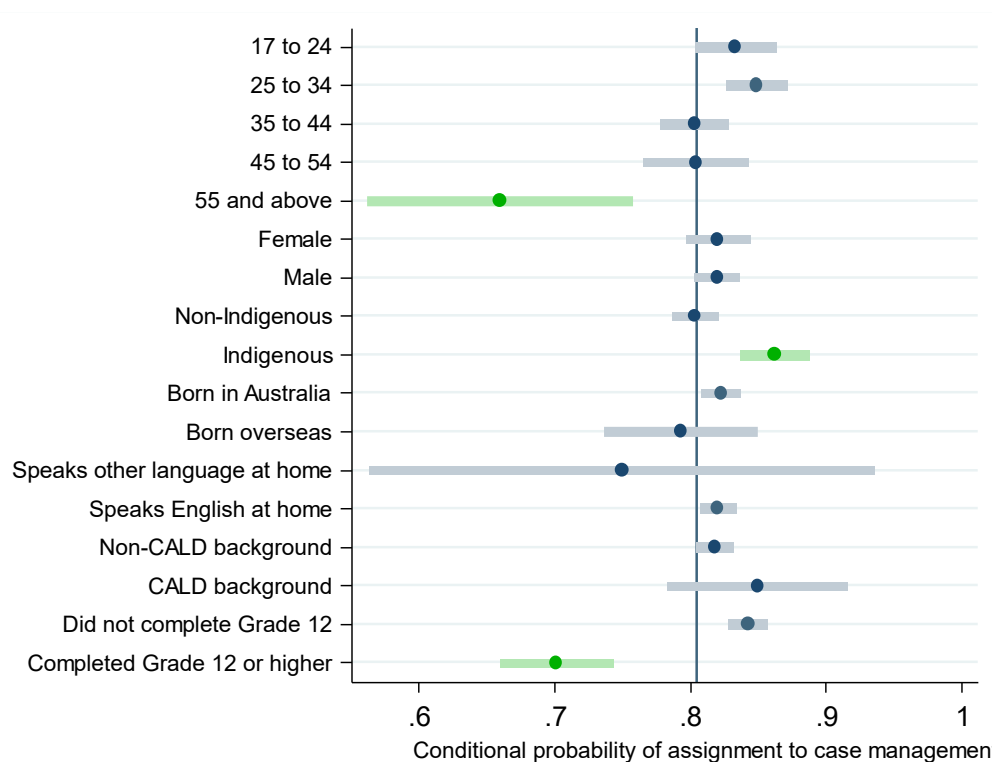
Results from a logistic regression model with case management as the triage outcome revealed the following statistically significant patterns:

- people aged 55 and above are **64% less likely** (OR=0.36, p<0.001) to be assessed as suitable for case management compared to other age groups;
- people identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were **1.6 times more likely** (OR=1.58, p=0.001) to be assessed as suitable for case management compared to those who were not of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background;

- people who completed Grade 12 or higher were **58% less likely** (OR=0.42, p<0.001) to be assessed as suitable for case management compared to those who had lower levels of educational attainment.

Figure 3.7 presents the predicted probabilities of assignment to case management by sociodemographic characteristic based on the logistic regression model. Statistically significant differences are denoted in green.

Figure 3.7: Probability of assignment to case management by sociodemographic characteristic



Note: Circles represent predicted probabilities of assignment to case management based on a logistic regression model with sociodemographic characteristics as predictors. Shaded bars denote 95% confidence intervals. The vertical line represents the unconditional probability of assignment to case management for the overall sample.

3.2.4 What were the differences in sociodemographic characteristics of people who were admitted to the program versus those who were not admitted?

Following triage assessment, individuals who are assessed as suitable for case management are either admitted or not admitted to the program by the magistrate. There can be a number of reasons for non-admission, including being remanded into custody, having a warrant issued, or in a few cases, people declining Court Link. Data from *InfoXchange* indicates that of the 2,571 people who were assessed as suitable for case management:

- 1,933 (75%) were admitted to case management
- 632 (24%) were not admitted to case management
- 6 (1%) had another/unknown outcome.

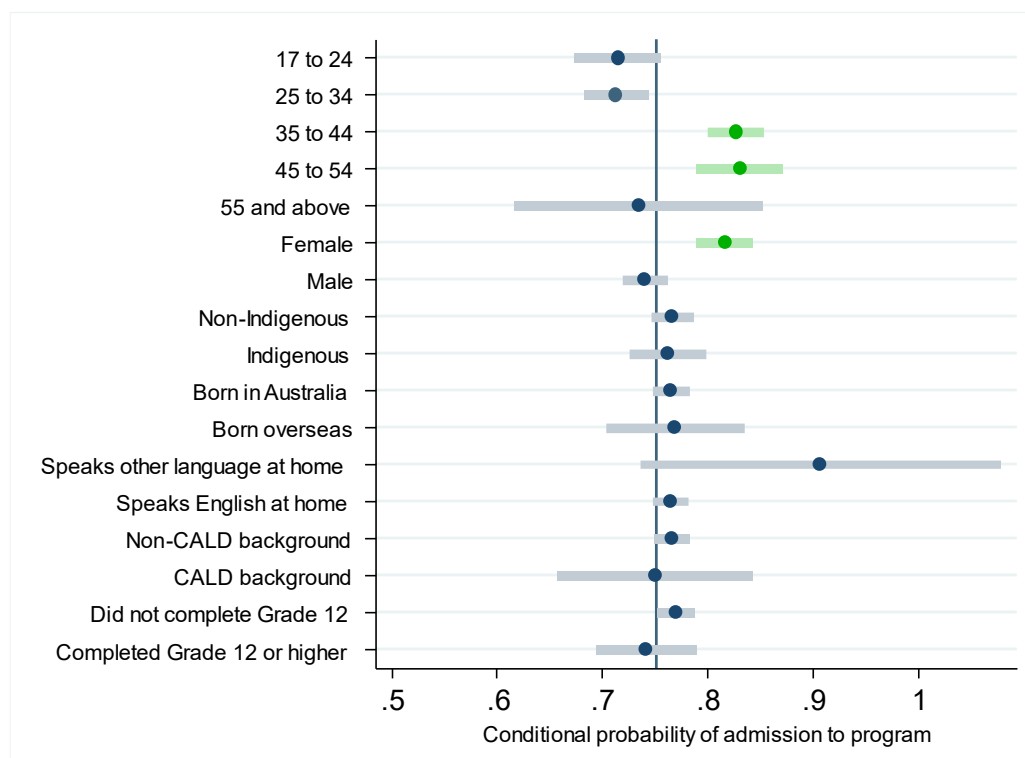
To determine whether there were differences in the sociodemographic characteristics of people admitted to case management and those who were not, we estimated another logistic regression model with admission as the outcome. The results from the model yielded the following statistically significant results:

- people in the 35 to 44 (OR=1.95, p<0.001) and 45 to 54 (OR=2.01, p<0.001) age groups were both **twice as likely** to be admitted to case management as other age groups

- women were **1.6 times more likely** than men (OR=1.59, p<0.001) to be admitted to case management despite the fact that they account for 32% of referrals to Court Link.

Figure 3.8 presents the predicted probabilities of admission by sociodemographic characteristic based on the logistic regression model. Statistically significant differences are denoted in green.

Figure 3.8: Probability of admission to program by sociodemographic characteristic



Note: Circles represent predicted probabilities of admission to case management based on a logistic regression model with sociodemographic characteristics as predictors. Shaded bars denote 95% confidence intervals. The vertical line represents the unconditional probability of admission to the program for the overall sample.

3.2.4.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of those admitted to case management

Table 3.4 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the 1,933 individuals admitted to Court Link between 2017 and 2022 across all eight sites. The summary statistics indicate the following:

- the average age of people admitted to case management is 35 years (range 18-70 years);
- men account for the majority of those admitted to case management at 66% of the total;
- there is a considerable proportion of people admitted to case management with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background. In particular, 23% of people identify as Aboriginal, 1% as Torres Strait Islander, and 2% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
- a little under 9% of people admitted to case management were born overseas, while the remaining 91% were born in Australia;
- more than 99% of people admitted to case management speak English at home;
- roughly 4% of people admitted to case management come from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background; and
- only a minority of those admitted to case management (14%) to Court Link completed Grade 12.

Table 3.4: Summary statistics for individuals admitted to case management

Sociodemographic characteristic Categories	n
Age at referral (mean, SD, range) -	34.51 (9.75, 18-70)

Sex (n, %)	Male	1270 (65.7%)
	Female	659 (34.1%)
	Not stated	4 (0.2%)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status (n, %)	Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1440 (74.5%)
	Aboriginal	446 (23.1%)
	Torres Strait Islander	15 (0.8%)
	Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	32 (1.7%)
Country of birth (n, %)	Born in Australia	1765 (91.3%)
	Born overseas	168 (8.7%)
Language at home (n, %)	English	1919 (99.3%)
	Other language	14 (0.7%)
CALD status (n, %)	Non-CALD background	1850 (95.7%)
	CALD background	83 (4.3%)
Highest educational qualification (n, %)	Grade 12 or more	264 (13.7%)
	Less than Grade 12	614 (31.8%)
	Less than Grade 10	833 (43.1%)
	Less than High School	121 (6.3%)
N		1,933

Note: The sum of observations per characteristic may not sum up to the total number of observations (i.e., 1,933) due to some data being not recorded as it is not mandatory. Percentages are based on the total number of non-missing observations per characteristic. SD = Standard Deviation.

3.2.5 Which sociodemographic groups were more likely to complete case management as opposed to ‘exiting’ the program?

Not all of the individuals admitted to case management complete the program for a range of reasons (see Section 3.1.2.1). The *InfoXchange* data provides some examples of reasons for early exit, such as having the matter transferred to a location where Court Link is not offered, being sentenced or remanded into custody, having a warrant issued, or lack of engagement with the program.

As a final piece of analysis in this section, we examined whether some groups were more likely to complete the program than others. We followed the key definition of completion used in our preparatory studies to test data analysis, where completion was based on: (1) whether an individual was listed as having completed the program, or in the absence of this data (2) had their final report tendered, or in the absence of this data (3) spent 12 or more weeks on the program (n = 1,084).

We then estimated a third logistic regression model with completion as the outcome and the same set of sociodemographic characteristics as the independent variables. The results showed that:

- people aged 45 to 54 were **1.7 times more likely** (OR=1.66, p=0.004) to complete the program than people between the ages of 17 to 44
- people aged 55 and above were **2.7 times more likely** (OR=2.74, p=0.004) to complete the program than people between the ages of 17 to 44.

These patterns suggest that holding other factors constant, older individuals have a greater chance of completing case management in Court Link compared to younger groups. This finding is supported by the literature as Higley et al. (2019) found that in incarcerated males that participated in rehabilitation programs, both older participants and participants with higher pre-program motivation had greater successful program outcomes (program performance and future recidivism).^{xlvii}

Importantly, this means that while there were some age groups who were less likely to be exited from the program, there were no other sociodemographic characteristics which predicted an individual's likelihood to be exited from the program.

Table 3.5 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the 346 individuals who were identified as 'early exits' from Court Link between 2017 and 2022 across all eight sites. The summary statistics indicate the following:

- the average age of people exited from case management was 32 years (range 18-70 years);
- men accounted for the majority of those exited from case management at 69% of the total;
- the proportion of people exited from case management with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background were similar to those admitted to case management. In particular, 24% of people identify as Aboriginal, 1% as Torres Strait Islander, and 1% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander;
- a little under 12% of people exited from case management were born overseas, while the remaining 88% were born in Australia;
- more than 99% of people exited from case management speak English at home;
- roughly 5% of people exited from case management come from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background; and
- only a minority of those exited from case management (13%) completed Grade 12.

Table 3.5: Summary statistics for individuals who exited early

Sociodemographic characteristic	Categories	n
Age at referral (mean, SD, range)	-	32.23 (10.0, 18-70)
Sex (n, %)	Male	240 (69.0%)
	Female	106 (31.0%)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status (n, %) ³⁰	Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	256 (73.9%)
	Aboriginal	83 (23.9%)
	Torres Strait Islander	3 (0.9%)
	Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	4 (1.2%)
Country of birth (n, %)	Born in Australia	304 (87.9%)
	Born overseas	42 (12.1%)
Language at home (n, %)	English	302 (99.3%)
	Other language	2 (0.7%)
CALD status (n, %)	Non-CALD background	329 (95.1%)
	CALD background	17 (4.9%)
Highest educational qualification (n, %)	Grade 12 or more	39 (12.7%)
	Less than Grade 12	93 (30.2%)
	Less than Grade 10	149 (49.4%)
	Less than High School	27 (8.8%)
N		346

Note: The sum of observations per characteristic may not sum up to the total number of observations (i.e., 346) due to some data being not recorded as it is not mandatory. Percentages are based on the total number of non-missing observations per characteristic.

3.3 Participant experiences and reported outcomes

In this section, we present insights from three distinct data sources aimed at understanding Court Link’s impact on participants. We begin by presenting findings from two voluntary surveys of participants. Participant Survey 1 is administered approximately 4 weeks after participants were admitted to the program, while Participant Survey 2 is administered at either the 12-week mark or during the participant’s last appointment with their case manager. As the two surveys are voluntary in nature, the number of respondents in both surveys is smaller compared to the actual number of people admitted to case management. In Participant Survey 1, there were a total of 305 respondents, while in Participant Survey 2 there were a total of 459 respondents. However, as the surveys are voluntary in nature, participants did not always respond to all questions, therefore the numbers reported below may differ from the total respondents reported here (305 and 459). Responses were received from participants in all eight Court Link locations for both surveys.

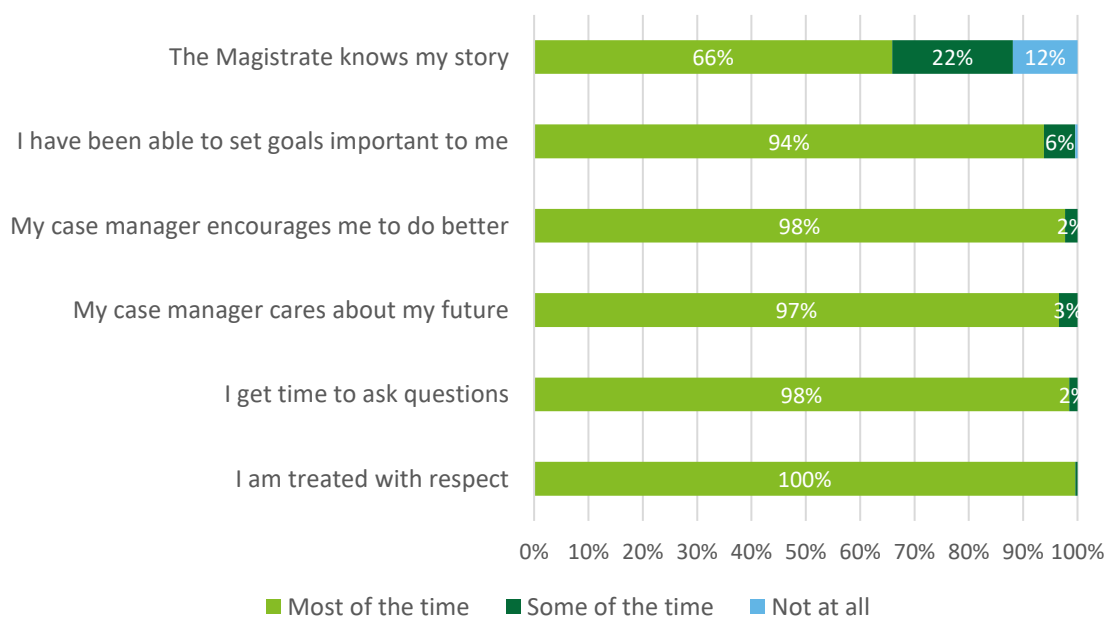
In addition to the two surveys, we also provide an overview of participant outcomes from the perspective of case managers. The *InfoXchange* data, in particular, contains a record of case managers’ assessments of how much participants have changed in terms of the following: (1) knowing how to stop offending, (2) gaining skills to stop the causes of offending, and (3) committing to change their behaviour. 1,508 responses were recorded and analysed for the purpose of this Final Report.

This section also includes some key insights from a review of service information and data was conducted by the Metro North sites (Redcliffe and Caboolture) about the outcomes of AOD treatment intervention for Court Link participants and a summary was provided by Queensland Health to inform the Court Link evaluation.

3.3.1 Insights from Participant Survey 1

The first survey aimed to gather information about participants’ early experiences of Court Link. To capture this, one of the questions in the survey asked respondents to rate their experiences in a number of domains as illustrated in Figure 3.9; between 261 and 264 participants responded to this section of the survey.

Figure 3.9: Respondents’ ratings of their experience of Court Link by domain



Note: The total number of responses may vary per domain due to missing responses in some questions. Percentages are calculated based on the total number of non-missing responses to each question.

Overall, respondents had a highly positive assessment of their early experiences of Court Link. The only notable difference from this general pattern relates to respondents' experiences with the Magistrate, in which 22% (n=58, total N=261) of respondents stated that the Magistrate knew their story only 'some of the time' and another 12% (n=31, total N=261) stated that they had not experienced this at all. We note, however, that as the survey is taken after only 4 weeks into the program, participants will likely have attended only one callover session with a Magistrate.

The survey also gathered information about participants' engagement with services during their early days in the program. Out of 267 respondents, 215 (81%) said that they had been referred to services in the community. When asked how many times they had attended the services in which they were referred, 61 of 265 respondents (23%) said they had been to more than 2 sessions, and 115 (43%) said they had attended 1 or 2 sessions. This suggests that among survey respondents, the majority were engaging with services as part of case management.

3.3.2 Insights from Participant Survey 2

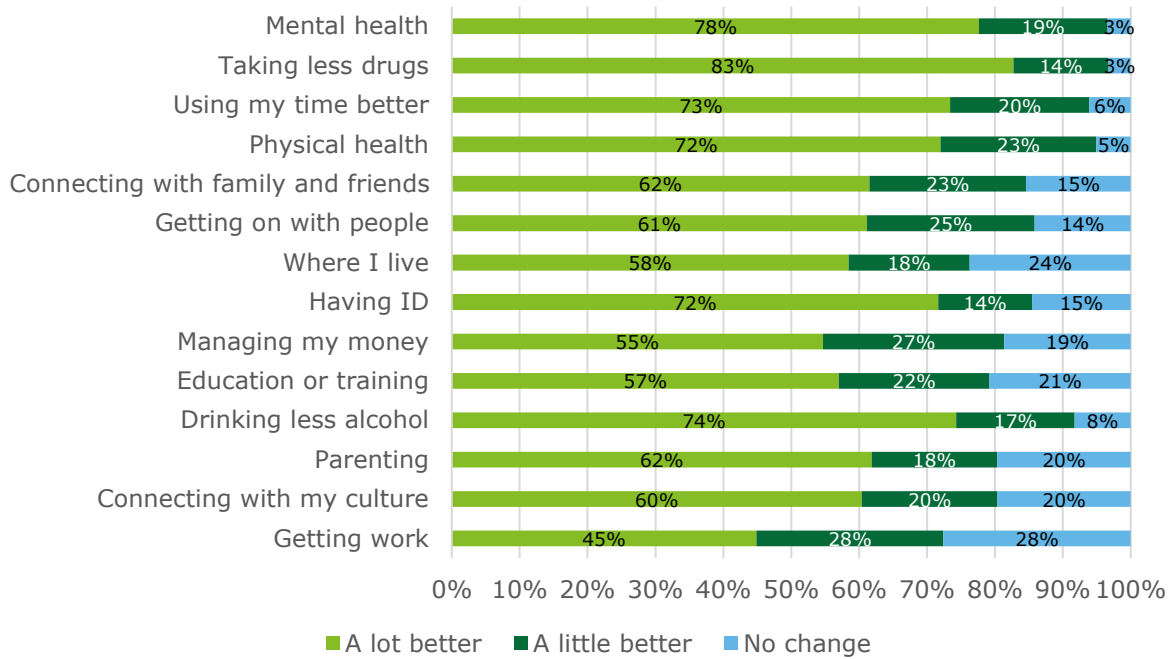
In this section, we present insights from the second survey which aimed to understand Court Link's impact on participants who had completed (or were close to completing) case management. The survey included questions about what participants have learned through the program, what changes they have made, what services they intend to keep using after the program, as well as their self-rated likelihood of reoffending in the future.

Between 392 and 401 participants reported about the range of topics they had learned about through the program. Overall, respondents stated that they had learned 'a lot' or 'quite a bit' about a range of topics through their participation in Court Link. Of the different topics (e.g., where to get help, how to cut down drinking and drugs, how to stay out of trouble) identified in the survey, and of those who responded to this part of the survey, the following received the highest ratings from respondents:

- 78% (n=311, total N=401) of respondents said they had learned a lot about 'where I can get help'
- 75% (n=300, total N=399) of respondents said they had learned a lot about 'how to stay on track and make changes'
- 60% of respondents said they had learned a lot about 'how to keep healthy' (n=278, total N=401) and 'how to get through Court' (n=277, total N=400).

In addition to their learnings, respondents were also asked to identify areas of their life that have improved since being admitted to the program. As shown in Figure 3.10, reduced drug use emerged as the area with the biggest improvement with 83% (n=278, total N=336) of respondents describing it as 'a lot better'. This was followed by mental health, which was cited as being 'a lot better' by 78% (n=295, total N=380) of respondents. In addition to these two areas, more than 70% of respondents reported time management (n=265, total N=361), physical health (n=257, total N=357), drinking less alcohol (n=162, total N=218) and having ID (n=192, total N=268) as being 'a lot better' as a result of the program.

Figure 3.10: Respondents’ self-rated improvements in various areas of their life

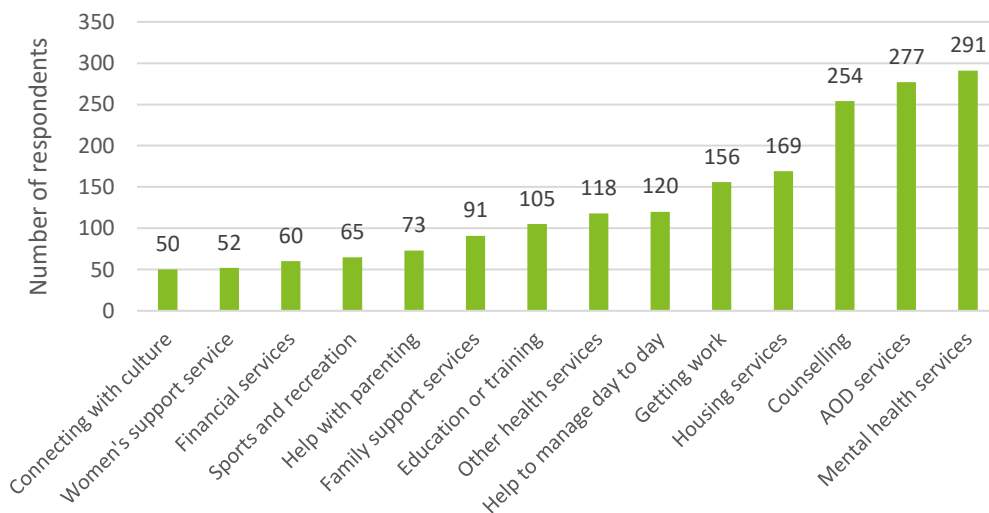


Respondents’ self-rated improvements in various areas of their life

Note: The total number of responses may vary per area due to missing responses in some questions. Percentages are calculated based on the total number of non-missing responses to each question and for people who reported that this was an ‘area of improvement’ for them.

The survey also asked respondents which services they intend to keep using after Court Link. Consistent with the themes identified earlier, there appears to be interest among respondents in continuing to use the following services: (1) mental health services (n=291), (2) alcohol and other drugs services (n=277), and (3) counselling services (n=254). Figure 3.11 provides a more detailed summary of the responses by type of services.

Figure 3.11: Types of services that respondents intend to use after Court Link



Finally, respondents were also asked to rate how likely they were to stop offending. Of the 379 responses received, 336 (89%) stated that there was ‘a good chance’ they would stop offending, and 30 (8%) who stated there was ‘some chance’. In contrast, only 13 (3%) respondents said that there was no chance they would stop offending in the future.

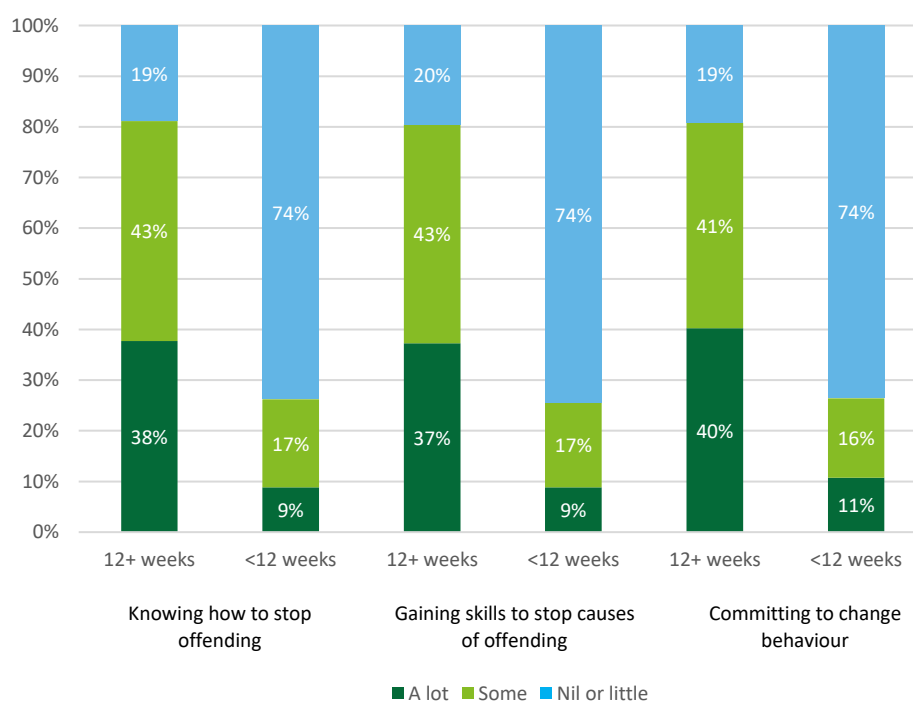
3.3.3 Insights from case manager ratings

As mentioned earlier, case managers were also asked to assess how much participants had changed in terms of their skills and behaviours in relation to offending. The results showed that:

- 25% (n=369, total N=1507) of participants showed ‘a lot’ of change in knowing how to stop offending, 32% (n=475, total N=1507) showed ‘some’ change, and 44% (n=663, total N=1507) showed little to no change
- 25% (n=366, total N=1508) of participants showed ‘a lot’ of change in gaining skills to stop the causes of offending, 31% (n=468, total N=1508) showed ‘some’ change, and 45% (n=674, total N=1508) showed little to no change
- 27% (n=403, total N=1507) of participants showed ‘a lot’ of change in committing to change their behaviour, 29% (n=440, total N=1507) showed ‘some’ change, and 44% (n=664, total N=1507) showed little to no change.

The data suggests that there is a relationship between the changes made by participants and their time spent on the program. As Figure 3.12 indicates, participants who spent 12 or more weeks on the program showed more substantial improvements across the three areas assessed by case managers compared to other participants. For example, 38% (n=308, total N=817) of participants who completed the program showed ‘a lot’ of change in knowing how to stop offending compared to only 9% (n=61, total N=690) of participants who spent less time on the program. While these reports do not describe the full range of benefits to participants, a review of participant case plans is described in the case studies developed and presented in *Section 4.1.1*.

Figure 3.12: Changes in participant skills and behaviours according to time spent on the program



3.3.4 Insights about dedicated AOD treatment pathways and resources

As described earlier (see *Section 2.5.1*), in Caboolture, Redcliffe and Maroochydore there are dedicated pathways for participants to engage in specialist AOD treatment (delivered by QH). Court Link staff report that having dedicated resources has improved access to AOD treatment. One theme which emerged during consultation was the idea that helping people to engage with health services like AOD programs mean that they were not only addressing their acute needs, but that it was providing participants with a positive experience in the health system and increasing their likelihood of engaging with health services into the future. There was clear value of the AOD programs expressed by participants and other stakeholders including Court Link staff. The impact of these

programs was supported by the significant existing expertise and capability within QH AOD teams. A review of treatment outcome data (n = 142) from the summary highlighted some key findings for participants with complex AOD needs who had attended a treatment program, including:

- of those who had completed the intervention (n = 80), the majority (80%) showed significant clinical improvements in functioning (psychological health, physical health and quality of life)³¹; and
- the majority of participants who completed the intervention no longer met the criteria of clinically significant psychological distress.

In addition to improved clinical outcomes for participants, over 30% of participants continued with their AOD treatment after completing Court Link case management. Another 25% of participants who completed, returned to the service some time later. The above outcomes support the value of the dedicated AOD pathways and treatment as part of the Court Link program.

3.4 Impact of Court Link on reoffending behaviour

To determine Court Link's impact on reoffending, we examined three outcomes: (1) frequency of offending, (2) seriousness of offending, and (3) time to first offence after exiting Court Link. Three separate data sources were used for the analysis. These are:

- *InfoXchange data from 25 October 2017 to 31 October 2022*, which contains de-identified Court Link data including people's referral into the program, their triage outcomes, admission outcomes, and participation and exit from the program;
- *QWIC data³² from 1 June 2015 to 31 October 2022*, which contains de-identified data on people's offences, including the specific type of offence and offence date;
- *QCS data from 2 November 2015 to 1 November 2022*, which contains de-identified data on time spent in custody or community supervision.

For these analyses, a synthetic 'treatment' and 'comparison' group were created. We followed the same criteria as in our preparatory studies to test data analysis. People who spent at least 11 weeks in the program were considered to be in the 'treatment' group, while those who did not spend any time in the program (i.e., referrals that did not progress to triage, those assessed as not suitable for case management, those who were assigned to case management but not admitted to the program) were considered to be in the 'comparison' group. Activity data from Court Link was then merged with QCS data to ensure that any impact on reoffending was not due to an individual being in custody and therefore not having the 'opportunity' to offend. The creation of these groups and merging of datasets were complex, and all steps of the process were guided by DJAG. A full description of the data cleaning, preparation and calculation of variables is presented in Appendices B-F.

3.4.1 Did Court Link reduce frequency of offending?

To determine whether Court Link reduced the frequency of offending, we conducted a Difference-in-Difference (DID) analysis on the frequency of offending (operationalised by both 'number of charges' and 'days in which an offence was committed'). This was a comparison of the 'treatment' (n=1,064) and 'comparison' (1,362) group pre- and post- the 'case closure date' in 2 year observation windows, utilising matched sampling (see Appendix A) to compare people with similar sociodemographic characteristics. The DID analysis compares the change in frequency of offending for the treatment group over and above changes in the comparison group.

³¹ Using the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) (Miller et al 2003) to monitor treatment outcomes.

³² The earliest offence date captured in QWIC was 31 May 1992. However, 98% of QWIC records were concentrated between 1 January 2015 and 8 October 2022.

In this section, we present results from our analysis of Court Link’s impact on the frequency of offending. As discussed earlier, we used data from three separate sources – *InfoXchange*, *QWIC*, and *QCS* – to address this question. We also present summary statistics for the treatment and comparison group.

Table 3.6 provides a number of key insights on offending behaviour pre- and post-Court Link based on summary statistics. First, there were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and comparison groups in either the number of charges (24.94 and 25.36 charges respectively) or the number of days spent offending (12.22 and 12.23 days respectively) in the 2 years prior to Court Link referral. This suggests that the treatment and comparison groups had similar offending volume and frequency prior to the program. Second, both the treatment and comparison groups had a fewer number of charges (from 24.94 to 11.08 for the treatment group and from 25.36 to 14.52 for the comparison group) and spent fewer days offending (from 12.22 to 5.54 for the treatment group and from 12.23 to 7.23 for the comparison group) in the 2-year period following Court Link. However, the reduction in offending was significantly larger for the treatment group than the comparison group. Depending on the measure of frequency used (i.e., number of charges, number of days spent offending), the treatment group committed 1.69 to 3.44 less offences than the comparison group. Additionally, both the ‘treatment’ and ‘comparison’ groups’ median days in custody in the two years prior to Court Link was 0. However, in the 2-year period following Court Link, while the median number of days in custody remained constant for the ‘treatment’ group (0), the ‘comparison’ group’s median days in custody increased to 136.

The third key insight relates to the proportion of people that spent time in custody. There is no statistically significant difference in the proportion of people that spent time in custody between the ‘treatment’ and ‘comparison’ groups in the 2 years prior to Court Link referral. In the 2 years post-Court Link referral, the proportion of people that spent time in custody in the treatment group stays constant, while the rate increases in the comparison group by approximately 30 percentage points. This indicates that participation in Court Link program had reduces the likelihood of future incarceration. A histogram of days spent in custody for both groups (across both observation windows) is included in Appendix H.

An interesting finding of the analysis is that the average number of days spent in custody, for those that do spend time in custody across the treatment and comparison group increases in the 2 years post Court Link. This is likely reflective of the nature of offences for those that reoffend, as well as a potential contribution of a person’s record on decisions on the duration of custody of individuals, rather than an indication of the impact of the Court Link program; however it was beyond the scope of the data and information available to this evaluation to make any strong observations about these findings.

Ultimately the DID analysis indicates that the increase in days in custody is significantly less for those who participate in Court Link compared to the comparison group.

Table 3.6: Summary statistics on offending behaviour based on *QWIC* and *QCS* data

	Treatment	Comparison	Difference
Pre-Court Link (2 years)			
Average number of charges per person	24.94	25.36	-0.42
Average number of days spent offending	12.22	12.23	-0.01
Average number of days in custody	62 (SD 99.0)	93 (SD 152.1)	31***
Median days in custody	0	0	
Proportion of people that spend time in custody	46.21%	49.61%	-3.40%
Post-Court Link (2 years)			

Average number of charges per person	11.08	14.52	-3.44***
Average number of days spent offending	5.54	7.23	-1.69***
Average number of days in custody	122 (SD 141.7)	225 (SD 199.9)	-103***
Median days in custody	0	136	
Proportion of people that spend time in custody	48.14%	80.05%	-32.37%***

Note: Average differences between treatment and comparison groups were tested for statistical significance using two-sided t-tests. *p=0.90, **p=0.95, ***p=0.99

Further, this analysis highlights the importance of accounting for time spent in custody as this ensures that the reduction in offending is not due to having fewer opportunities to offend. As discussed earlier, we used QCS data to adjust the frequency of offences by time spent in custody. Table 3.7 summarises the results from a range of model specifications.

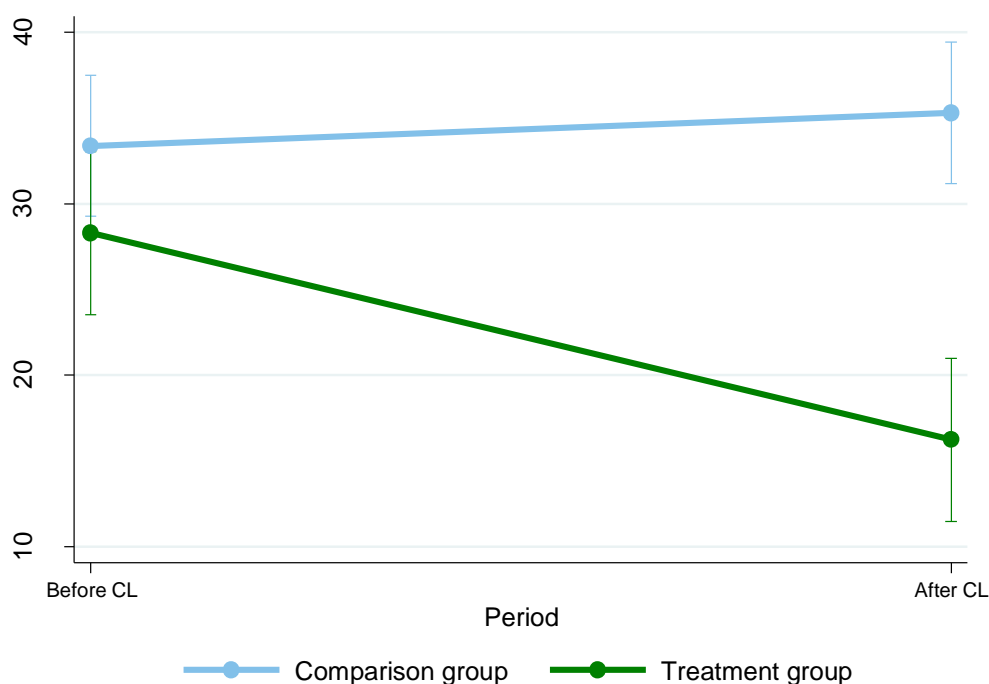
Table 3.7: Results from DID models with frequency of offending as the outcome

Frequency of offending	Number of charges			Number of days spent offending		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
DID estimate	-13.99***	-13.06***	-17.16***	-5.96***	-5.74***	-7.06***
(Standard Error)	(4.50)	(4.97)	(5.78)	(-1.77)	(1.90)	(2.24)
Full comparison group	Yes	-	-	Yes	-	-
Matched sample only	-	Yes	-	-	Yes	-
Not admitted only	-	-	Yes	-	-	Yes
N	2,680	1,842	1,984	2,680	1,842	1,984

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. The ‘not admitted only’ model includes those who were not admitted to Court Link as the comparison group. All models control for age at referral, age at first offence, sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, country of birth, highest educational attainment, and Court Link location. *p=0.90, **p=0.95, ***p=0.99.

DID estimates from a range of models consistently show that the treatment group committed fewer offences than the comparison group in the 2 years after Court Link. Using the number of charges as a measure of frequency and the full comparison group (column 1, Table 3.7), the DID estimate suggests that Court Link reduced offending by 14 offences per participant over a 2-year period (Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.13: Marginal effects from a DID model of frequency of offending using the number of charges and full comparison group



Note: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3.13 shows that even after adjusting for time spent in custody, there were no statistically significant differences in offending behaviour between the two groups prior to Court Link. However, the two groups diverged considerably after Court Link – while the comparison group remained on a similar path as the previous period, the treatment group showed a significant reduction in offending after the program.

Based on the more conservative measure of days spent offending, Court Link appears to have resulted in a reduction of 6 offending days per person over a 2-year period (column 4, Table 3.7). Of note, the DID estimates based on a matched sample was highly similar as the estimates using the full comparison group (columns 2 and 5, Table 3.7). The reduction in offending appears larger when we limit the comparison group to only people who were not admitted to Court Link (i.e., 7 to 17 offences per person over 2 years). This means that our estimates based on either the full sample or the matched sample represent lower-bound estimates of the reduction in the frequency of offending as a result of Court Link.

As a final step in the analysis, we estimated the same set of models for a range of subpopulations (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, women, young people) in the sample. While the DID coefficients were largely negative consistent with a reduction in offending, they were not statistically significant. This is most likely due to insufficient statistical power resulting from small sample sizes. In future, larger samples will be needed to confirm whether Court Link had an impact on the frequency of offending among different population groups.

3.4.2 Did Court Link reduce the seriousness of offending?

To determine whether there were any changes in the seriousness of offending between the ‘treatment’ (n=1,064) and ‘comparison’ (n=1,362) group we analysed changes in offence ‘types’ in 2 year windows pre- and post- the ‘case closure date’. We defined seriousness of offending based off the Australian Standard Offence Classification (Queensland Extension) or QASOC codes provided in the QWIC dataset. Offence types were categorised by four discrete groups: 1) *offences against a person*, 2) *offences against property*, 3) *drug related offences*, and 4) *offences against public order* (see Figure 3.14 below) to determine changes in severity across these offence types (the description of each offence type and corresponding QASOC codes is presented in Appendix E).

Figure 3.14. Categorisation of four offence 'types'.



*We also tested categorising 'drug offences' within 'offences against public order' and our findings were largely similar (described in text below).

In this section, we present results from our analysis of how Court Link has impacted the seriousness of offending. We first present two sets of transition matrices, which show how the distribution of offence seriousness changed before and after Court Link for the treatment and comparison groups. Diagonal entries shaded in grey denote the number and share of people who committed offences in the same category 2 years after Court Link, while the off-diagonal entries represent the number and share of people who transitioned into other offence categories.

Overall, the treatment group was 51% more likely (OR=1.51, $p < .001$) to reduce the seriousness of their offending after Court Link relative to the comparison group, when using the four offence type categories. For example, an individual may shift from committing offences against another person, to offences against property (see Figure 3.15). A full description of the transition matrices used to describe changes in seriousness of offending is presented below.

Figure 3.15: Offence type categories and reduction in seriousness of offending



The first set of transition matrices show changes in offence seriousness with 4 offence categories. The figures shown in Table 3.8 indicate that a larger proportion of individuals in the treatment group committed less serious offences after Court Link relative to the comparison group (for those who offended in both periods). This was particularly true for offences against property and persons. For instance, 38% of people in the treatment group with an offence against property committed a less severe offence after the program. In contrast, only 33% of people in the comparison group with an offence against property committed a less severe offence after the program. Similarly, 63% of people in the treatment group with an offence against persons committed a less serious offence after Court Link. This was the case for only 51% of people in the comparison group, resulting in a 10-percentage point differential. We note that the numbers in the matrices below are not from the full sample. It does not include people who had no charges in the pre- and post- window (i.e., individuals with historical charges outside the window for analysis or those who were removed from analysis due to issues with data matching). Section 3.4.3 includes a description of the proportion that did not offend in the post- Court Link window for both the treatment and comparison groups.

Table 3.8: Transition matrices of seriousness of offending with 4 offence categories (4-year observation window)

Treatment group

2 years before Court Link ↓	2 years after Court Link →				Total
	Offence against public order	Drug offences	Offence against property	Offence against persons	
Offence against public order	14 56%	2 8%	3 12%	6 24%	25 100%
Drug offences	11 27%	10 24%	12 29%	8 20%	41 100%
Offence against property	50 23%	33 15%	87 40%	48 22%	218 100%
Offence against persons	68 21%	43 13%	95 29%	120 37%	326 100%

Comparison group

2 years before Court Link ↓	2 years after Court Link →				Total
	Offence against public order	Drug offences	Offence against property	Offence against persons	
Offence against public order	23 53%	2 5%	8 19%	10 23%	43 100%
Drug offences	26 44%	11 19%	11 19%	11 19%	59 100%
Offence against property	50 17%	48 16%	105 35%	98 33%	301 100%
Offence against persons	104 19%	41 7%	140 25%	274 49%	559 100%

We also ran a set of transition matrices where drug offences were considered as an offence against public order, meaning there were 3 offence types (against public order, against property and against persons). Our results were largely similar to the three offence types where people in the treatment group committed less serious offences after Court Link relative to the comparison group. This pattern is most apparent for offences against property and persons. This was particularly true for more serious offences (i.e., offences against property and persons). For instance, 38% of people in the treatment group who committed an offence against property 2 years before Court Link committed a less serious offence in the 2 year-period after Court Link. In contrast, this was the case for only 33% of people in the comparison group. It is also worth noting that of the people in the treatment group (326) with offences against persons, 37% committed a similar offence after Court Link. This is considerably lower than the 49% of people in the comparison group (559) who committed offences against persons in both time periods.

As a final step in our analysis of Court Link’s impact on the seriousness of offending, we estimated a logistic regression model (see Appendix A) with a decrease in offence seriousness as the main outcome. For our purpose, a decrease in offence seriousness was defined as either: (1) a transition from a more serious to a less serious offence (e.g., from offence against persons to offence against public order), or (2) a transition from one offence category to not committing an offence after Court Link. Similar to our analysis on the frequency of offending, our models control for sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 3.9 summarises the results of logistic regressions models. The odds ratio (see Appendix A) for the treatment group in column 2 suggests that the treatment group is **52% more likely** (OR=1.52, p<0.001) to experience a reduction in offence seriousness after Court Link relative to the comparison group even after controlling for a range of sociodemographic characteristics. The results are highly similar when we consider drug offences as a separate offence category. As shown in column 4 (and described earlier), the treatment group is **51% more likely** (OR=1.51, p<0.001) to reduce their seriousness of offending after Court Link relative to the comparison group.

Table 3.9: Results from logistic regression models with decrease in offence seriousness as the outcome (Odds Ratios)

Decrease in offence seriousness	3 offence categories		4 offence categories	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment (odds ratio)	1.41***	1.52***	1.38***	1.51***
Standard Error	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.15)
With controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	2,492	2,090	2,492	2,090

Note: Controls include age at referral, age at first offence, sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, country of birth, highest educational attainment, and Court Link location. *p=0.90, **p=0.95, ***p=0.99.

3.4.3 Did Court Link delay re-offending?

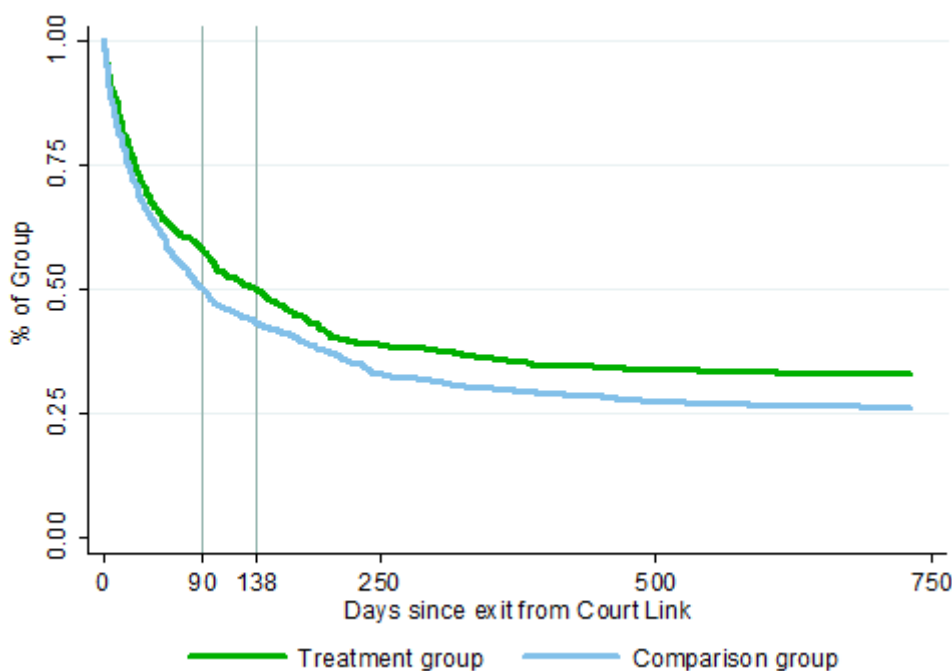
The third and final measure used to analyse the impact of Court Link on reoffending was a comparison of the ‘time to first offence’ after exiting the program for the ‘treatment’ and ‘comparison’ groups. We conducted survival analyses to determine any statistically significant differences between the groups and conducted further analyses to control for sociodemographic characteristics. ‘Time to first offence’ was defined as the number of days between the case closure date and the date of first offence since exiting the program. Unlike the first two outcomes which were analysed over a 4-year observation window (2 years pre- and post-), these particular analyses only focused on the 2-year period after Court Link.

We did this by estimating the number of days it took for each individual in the treatment (n = 530) and comparison (n = 807) groups to commit their first offence after Court Link. We adjusted for ‘opportunity’ to offend by subtracting the number of days spent in custody prior to the first offence

post-Court Link from the total number of days it took for the first offence to be committed (see Appendix C).

The first part of the analysis involved the estimation of survival curves for the treatment and comparison groups. Survival curves are a graphical representation of the proportion of people in the sample who have not experienced the event of interest (i.e., reoffending) over a period of observation. The survival curves depicted in Figure 3.16 provide two key insights. First, it shows that the median time to reoffend is longer for the treatment group at 138 days than the comparison group at 90 days. This is equivalent to a statistically significant difference of 48 days in median reoffending time between the two groups.

Figure 3.16 Kaplan-Meier survival estimates of time to first offence since exiting Court Link



The second piece of information relates to the proportion of people in both groups who had not offended by the end of the 2-year observation period following Court Link. By the end of the observation period, 33% of people in the treatment group had not yet committed an offence as compared to 26% in the comparison group.

To ensure that these results are not driven by differences in the sociodemographic composition of the two groups, we conducted a second survival analysis which allowed us to add controls to our model. Results from Cox regressions confirm that people in the treatment group have a 15% (HR=0.85, p=0.033) lower probability of offending in the 2-year period after Court Link relative to the comparison group.

3.4.4 Summary of key findings and limitations

In summary, results from our quantitative analysis suggest that:

- Court Link reduced the frequency of offending. The observed reduction is robust to different definitions of frequency (i.e., number of charges, number of days spent offending), inclusion of sociodemographic controls (e.g., age, sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, educational attainment), and the use of a matched sample. Of note, we observe larger reductions in the frequency of offending when limiting the comparison group to only those who were not admitted to Court Link. DID estimates based on the 2-year and 4-year

observation windows also suggest that there is a decay in the effect of Court Link, as the reduction in offending is larger in the 2-year period compared to the 4-year period³³;

- Court Link reduced the seriousness of offending. Results from both the transition matrices and logistic regression models show that the treatment group was less likely to commit more serious offences after Court Link than the comparison group. The results were also robust to various categorisations of drug offences within the models;
- Court Link delayed reoffending. Results from a survival analysis showed that time to reoffend was significantly longer for the treatment group than the comparison group. Moreover, a larger proportion of people in the treatment group did not offend in the 2-year period following Court Link relative to the comparison group (33% and 26%, respectively). This result was also robust to the inclusion of sociodemographic controls. The median time to reoffend was longer for the treatment group than the comparison group (138 and 90 days, respectively). This is equivalent to a statistically significant difference of 48 days in median reoffending time between the two groups.

Overall, these findings suggest Court Link had a positive impact on the offending behaviours of participants. Future evaluations of the program may benefit from having a wider range of controls in addition to sociodemographic characteristics, as well as larger sample sizes that may enable the analysis of program effects on various subgroups.

3.5 Breakeven analysis

The breakeven analysis has been undertaken to estimate the amount that would need to be returned in order for the program to break even and to quantify the potential value of the program. The break-even analysis models all the costs and calculates a per capita funding amount that incorporates the full cost of the program across various stakeholders and provides a basis per capita cost that must be 'recouped' in order for the program to break even.

Under this approach, the break-even point can be analysed through two variables:

- Reduction of Days in custody: Firstly, assuming there is a fixed number of participants that have accessed the program, the breakeven analysis estimates how much of a reduction of days in custody per participant is required for the program to break even;
- Number of Participants: Alternatively, leveraging the results of the DID model and assuming a fixed reduction of days in custody, the breakeven analysis can estimate the number of participants required for the program to breakeven.

Due to the program's success being largely the result of the scale of the program (i.e., the outcomes of the program would not be as substantial under a smaller scale), we have focused the breakeven analysis on the required reduction of days in custody in the year following Court Link rather than the number of participants required.

3.5.1 Methodology

To undertake the breakeven analysis, a cost per capita and savings per capita have been calculated. To estimate the average cost per capita, we have incorporated the full cost of Court Link from FY2018 – FY2022 (Table 3.10). To account for the variability in costs by location, the total costs have also been modelled per location. For costs that have been provided at the State-level, we have proportioned the costs based on the number of participants per location per financial year. Once the total costs have been modelled, we apply the total number of participants per annum to calculate a yearly per capita cost of the program at each location:

³³ We note that the 4-year period expands the window for who is included in the analyses, therefore it includes those in the 2-year window as well. Deloitte analysis *Supporting Information for Quantitative Findings* provided to DJAG.

$$\text{Average Per Capita Cost}_i = \frac{\text{Total Cost}_i}{\text{Total Participants}_i}$$

There are a range of historical estimates within Australia that calculate the net cost of imprisonment. These costs commonly relate to calculating the cost of imprisonment relative to the cost of community services.^{xlviii} For the purpose of providing the most accurate and representative data, we have chosen to utilise the Productivity Commission’s 2022 Report on Government Services (hereby referred to as the “Productivity Commission’s Report”) to estimate the daily cost per capita for incarceration.³⁴ The Productivity Commission’s Report provides data tables relating to real expenditure requirements and headcount for corrective services in all States for FY2022 and provides a whole-of-correction-services cost estimate:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Average Per Capita Incarceration Savings} \\ = \text{Reduced Number of Days in Custody} \\ \times \text{Daily Per Capita Cost for Incarceration} \end{aligned}$$

Using the Productivity Commission’s Data Tables, it is estimated that the daily cost for incarceration in FY2022 is \$325 per person. It is to note that though COVID-19 is likely to have an impact on expenditure data for FY2022, the average daily cost for incarceration has not varied significantly across financial years.³⁵ Following the calculation of the daily per capita cost for incarceration, we ‘flex’ the number of days incarcerated to provide a range of incarceration savings per capita. Our methodology has the following limitations:

- the analysis only takes into consideration the incarceration savings for the year following participation in Court Link. It is anticipated that the effects of Court Link on a participant will continue in the years following and therefore, our analysis will likely provide a conservative estimate; and
- the daily incarceration cost per capita is likely to differ across location, prisoner type, and correction services used. We have taken a whole-of-correction-services approach in calculating an average daily cost for the entire State. This allows for a simple cost calculation without the challenges associated with identifying all characteristics of each prisoner.

3.5.2 Findings

Table 3.10 and Figure 3.17 presents the breakdown of costs and average per capita cost for Court Link between 2017 and 2022. The breakdown of costs indicates the following:

- majority of the cost relates to the frontline service delivery of the program;
- the yearly cost per capita fluctuates between \$2,800 - \$4,000 with the total cost per capita over the five years being \$3,451;³⁶
- Brisbane had the lowest total cost per capita (\$2,990) compared to Redcliffe (\$4,220). This is likely the result of a combination of location, number of participants and the number of years the program has been active.

³⁴ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Report on Government Services 2022*.

³⁵ Since 2018, the daily cost per incarceration has ranged from \$312-\$330 per person.

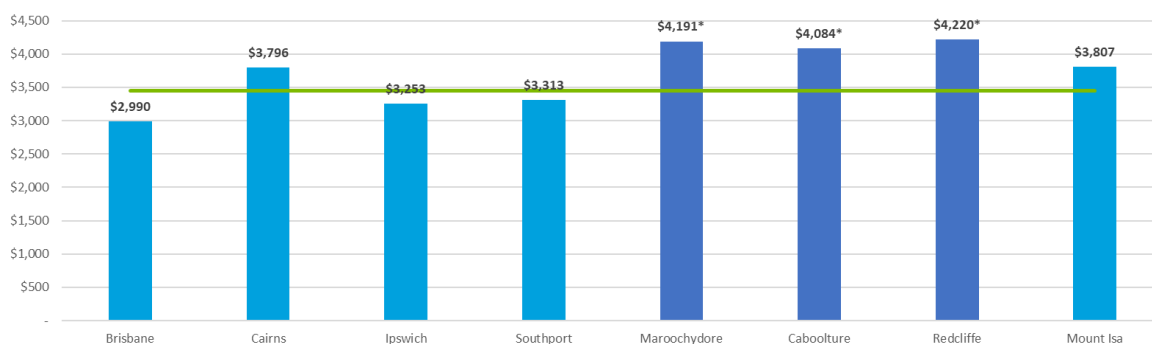
³⁶ Individuals may be referred to Court Link more than once. Therefore, the 5-year cost per capita is calculated based on headcount rather than referrals.

Table 3.10: Summary 5-year cost for Court Link

Costs	5-Year Total
Program delivery cost	\$10,799,675
# of Participants	3,129
Per Capita Cost	\$3,451

Note: The number of participants compared to the number of cases has been chosen to allow for comparability to the DID analysis on days in custody. Further, as Court Link locations were established throughout the 5-years, accurate start-up costs cannot be calculated. Ancillary costs not directly related, such as evaluation costs, were not included.

Figure 3.17: Location breakdown – cost per capita³⁷



**Maroochydore, Caboolture and Redcliffe sites have additional costs due to the funding for Queensland Health (to provide dedicated AOD services).*

From FY2018 to FY2022, Court Link has seen a total of 3,129 participants including triage and case management. Based on this, the breakeven analysis estimates that participants must reduce their number of days incarcerated in the year following Court Link by approximately 11 days (a total of 34,319 days across the five years) for the program to breakeven. Given the results of a DID analysis (in relation to the difference in days in custody between both groups)³⁸, there is a statistically significant likelihood of this occurring. The DID analysis estimates that the number of days a participant reduces their incarceration in the year following Court Link ranges from 32 to 46 days (a total of 100,128-143,934 days across the five years). As this estimate only considers the changes to a participant’s incarceration days in the year following Court Link, it is anticipated that the benefits of Court Link will continue in the years following – though at a diminishing rate. The results of the breakeven analysis indicate the following:

- for Court Link to breakeven, participants must reduce their number of days incarcerated by 11 days in the year following Court Link;
- the number of days required to breakeven at each location varies between 9-13 days.

Other potential costs and savings are presented in Section 5.1.3.1.

³⁷ Maroochydore, Redcliffe and Caboolture have additional costs due to the dedicated AOD pathways through QH.

³⁸ This analysis was not part of the core analyses due to a range of limitations but was used to inform the breakeven analysis.

4 Qualitative findings

4.1 Stakeholder consultations

In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with key stakeholders (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Final Outcomes and Impact Evaluation stakeholder consultations overview

Stakeholder Group	Number of Consultations	Total Number of Interviewees
Participants		
Court Link Participants	13 x interviews	13 x interviewees
Court Link / DJAG staff		
Court Link Officers	6 x interviews, 2 x focus group	10 x interviewees
Court Link Management	8 x interviews	8 x interviewees
Policy Team		
Policy, Research and Evaluation Team, Courts Innovation Program	1 x focus group	6 x interviewees
Court stakeholders		
Magistrates	4 x interviews, 1 x written response	5 x interviewees
Legal Aid Queensland / Legal Representatives	1 x focus group	2 x interviewees
External agencies		
Queensland Health Team	2 x interviews, 1 x focus group	4 x interviewees
Treatment and Support Services / Department of Housing and other Government and non-government agencies involved in the delivery of treatment and support to Court Link Participants	8 x written responses	8 x interviewees
Total	33 x interviews, 5 x focus groups, 9 x written responses	56 x interviewees

4.1.1 High-level themes from stakeholder consultations

A total of 56 interviewees were consulted with for the outcomes and impact evaluation of the Court Link program. Interview responses were coded for commonly occurring themes. A high-level description of the commonly occurring themes within the broad headings of 'service design and delivery' (Table 4.2), 'program enablers and barriers' (Table 4.3), 'non-program enablers and barriers' (Table 4.4), and 'outcomes' (Table 4.5) are presented below.

Table 4.2. Themes and observations from stakeholder consultations – service design and delivery

Service design and delivery	
Referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Link Officers report that they are receiving referrals from appropriate sources across sites • Court Link Officers at some sites also noted that they may go out to actively seek potential participants when referrals are low • seeking referrals is time consuming and cumbersome when Case Managers could be undertaking triages and case management, and highlighted the importance of maintained effort to inform key stakeholder of Court Link to ensure that referrals are being made by appropriate external sources.
Triage assessment processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all sites reported that, in their view, triage assessment process are operating as intended • no noted barriers to triage assessment processes raised.
Community referrals and referrals to case management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all sites reported that, in their view, participants are triaged and referred as appropriate to case management and community referrals • Court Link Officers highlighted that RNR principles support decision-making for triaging outcomes • no noted barriers to triage outcomes for community referrals or case management (beyond availability of services which is discussed more in following sections).
Case management interventions and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many stakeholders noted that the flexibility of the program, so case management interventions and activities were adapted to suit participant needs, were an important part of supporting positive outcomes for participants • there were some mixed views from participants on worksheets to complete away from session (some found it useful in understanding their offending behaviour, other did not find it useful), however Court Link Officers were seen to be responsive to the preferences of participants • case managers used a range of activities to help participants (e.g., motivational interviewing, cost-benefit mapping, relapse prevention activities, etc.). <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Activities for facilitating motivation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceived benefits of the program was a commonly reported motivator for engagement by participants • use of the ‘stages of change’ model can help Court Link Officers to understand participant readiness to change • increasing participant agency facilitates their motivation to engage in the program.

Engagement with treatment and support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the program helps to provide warm referrals and support access to treatment and support services which may have been difficult to access prior to engagement in the program case collaboration between Court Link staff and treatment and support services was seen by a range of different stakeholder groups to support participant engagement with these external services the quality relationship between Court Link Officers and participants of the program was reported to increase trust in both the court system and in external services, ultimately contributing to better engagement and outcomes.
Management and supervision of staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> staff highlighted some leadership and skill development opportunities through peer-peer observation sessions (i.e., observation between Court Link Officers, in lieu of an available Team Leader) were an important part of the continued professional development Court Link staff reported a preference for in-person observation sessions where possible to support good engagement with Team Leaders.
Program length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> many staff reported instances where participants could benefit from flexibility in program length, however noted that there are some current ways for participants to access the program for longer than 12 weeks (noting that this did not seem to be consistent, or consistently understood, across sites).
Design adaptations since implementation	<p><i>Cognitive assessments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Court Link Officers report that they have been able to utilise brokerage funds to provide cognitive assessment by a psychologist to participants and that this was a significant benefit to those participants and the program use of cognitive assessments (e.g., Hayes Ability Screening Index) help to identify participants with cognitive impairment needs, which was recognised as an important area of need earlier in the program’s establishment. <p><i>Drug screening at AOD services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> external agencies support harm reduction approaches to AOD treatment rather than mandatory screening; however, screening is available to participants who seek it some stakeholders have varying views about the importance, value and necessity of mandatory screening.

Table 4.3. Themes from stakeholder consultations – program enablers and barriers

Program factors

Enablers

Staff

- stakeholders reported that the Court Link staff have been key to the successful delivery of program; specifically the rigour and quality of their work, engagement and energy, and relationships with other stakeholders
- participants and external agencies regularly reported that Court Link Officers worked diligently to support participants in the program and that this was perceived to be a real strength of the staff and the program.

Collaboration with participants

- staff and external agencies report that the individualised and collaborative approach to case management by Court Link Officers supports positive engagement and outcomes for participants.

Access to brokerage funds

- Court Link officers described how participants have been provided a range of supports through access to brokerage funds as intended (e.g., attending rehabilitation and training programs, accessing identification, mobile phones to support engagement with other services, material aid, household essentials, etc.)
- as reported earlier, staff also described that as the program matures, they are increasingly using brokerage funds to support an expanded the range of supports for participants (e.g., psychological assessments, cognitive assessments, a pilot to provide outreach services to participants in some sites, etc.).

Engagement with other agencies

- external agencies and staff reported that communication and follow up with external agencies by Court Link Officers is important as part of providing wraparound holistic care to participants
- external agencies and staff described instances where, through Court Link, participants have gained fast tracked access to some treatment and support services (e.g., rehabilitation, outreach support and welfare checks).

CJGs

- Court Link Officers reported that, in their view, the collaboration with CJGs enhances the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that participate in the program (e.g., assisting their connection to culture and understanding of their heritage).

Judicial support

- stakeholders regularly reported that judicial support for the program is a crucial factor to successful delivery of the program
-

- in some sites there are additional opportunities to brief judicial staff about participants as per the judicial officer's preference, which Court Link Officers report is beneficial to the experiences of participants in Court Link mentions (Court Link callovers)
- staff report that dedicated magistrates and Court Link callovers can provide a good opportunity to uphold Therapeutic Jurisprudence principles
- for a range of stakeholders, it was noted that dedicated magistrates and Court Link callovers were, in their view, the most effective way of supporting participants. And that the involvement of the same magistrate across the participants journey and in sentencing was an important part of the program. While this is not currently implemented in all sites, it remains a consideration for Court Link as to the practicality of having a dedicated magistrate balanced with the perceived value add by a range of stakeholders.

Continuous improvement

- staff report that the program is responsive to the needs of participants and staff and has a strong commitment to continuous improvement where adaptations can be made in a timely manner, as guided by data and insights about changing needs
- staff support the ongoing employment of a third Team Leader. They reported that this additional role has provided necessary support Court Link Officers
- staff noted that should there be additional site expansions, additional Team Leader/s would help support staff to meet the extra demand from additional sites
- Court Link Officers reported that the supervision and observation sessions help with their professional development, and also provides an opportunity for debriefing and providing peer support. It was also noted that, while these sessions can happen at a distance when necessary (e.g., COVID-19, challenges with travel, etc.), these sessions can be more suitable in person for both development and the comfort of participants
- Court Link Officers report that they provide support to one another across sites as needed and when they have capacity (e.g., providing advice, debrief opportunities, assisting with tasks as appropriate).

Policy environment

- the program is supported by state government policy which funds the program to deliver services as intended. Staff report that the Court Link team is supported by a policy team who ensure alignment with the policy environment, however this policy team supports a number of CIP teams.

Program flexibility

- participants reported that the program’s flexibility allows them to engage with the Court Link site that was the most accessible to them and that transfers between sites did not cause a barrier to engagement
 - participants can attend case management sessions flexibly (i.e., at a time and in a way that suits them and their schedule) and Court Link Officers noted that this supports their engagement in the program and with other services.
-

Challenges for supervision and observation

- staff noted a reduced ability for observation and supervision sessions due to turnover, competing demands and a lack of available resources, noting that interviews occurred around the time the pilot of the third Team Leader commenced.

Rotating magistrate/ no dedicated Court Link callover

- having dedicated magistrates who engage with the program and preside over dedicated Court Link callovers at some sites was seen as an important part of supporting participants and many stakeholders noted it can contribute to the success of the program in that site.

Current data system

- staff noted that current data system inefficiencies can lead to undue process burden, but reported there is work underway to improve the system
- it was raised that there needs to be a balance between ensuring adequate data collection for reporting, monitoring and future evaluation and the consideration for the extent and nature of the administrative burden that data entry causes for Court Link Officers.

Barriers

Caseloads

- staff reported that the maximum caseload of 20 can mean that they have to de-prioritise other important work (e.g., stakeholder engagement) and suggested the maximum caseload should be reviewed
- it was also raised that it is important for planning purposes that it is kept in mind that some cases are more intensive and time consuming than others, depending on the needs and engagement of the participant. This was important for stakeholders in relation to future planning and workforce modelling and was suggested that work to understand this would be important as part of future rollouts.

Limited understanding from stakeholders

- staff reported that in some cases referrals to the program have been impacted by a lack of understanding about the program from some stakeholders (e.g., when there is turnover). They noted that it is important that there is sustained efforts to educate and connect with local stakeholders even once the
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program has been implemented and entrenched. A few stakeholders noted that this might be part of the continued, but evolving, role of LSGs.

Table 4.4. Themes from stakeholder consultations – non-program enablers and barriers

Non-program factors	
Enablers	<p><i>Increased access to legal aid through new pilot</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a pilot run by LAQ in the Brisbane site since July 2020 to support more timely access to funding for legal services is expected to improve access to legal advice and representation for vulnerable persons.
	<p><i>Networks and connections to other agencies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Link staff attend and run Local Stakeholder Group meetings to discuss the program and other relevant topics (e.g., local AOD trends, access to services) with external agencies • staff report that Local Stakeholder Group meetings promote collaboration and understanding about the program • staff in some sites report that they attend network meetings (e.g., housing, case coordination meetings with QH) that also provide useful opportunities for connection, case management, and work across organisations.
	<p><i>Availability of treatment and support services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff engage readily with local treatment and support services and report that this can assist them with catering to the individualised needs of participants and to support their engagement in the program (e.g., addressing barriers to engagement, supporting referrals, reinforcing learning from other programs and services).
	<p><i>Availability of skilled workforce</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff and some stakeholders report that lived experience was an important workforce consideration for supporting positive participant experiences, especially in high density Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples population areas • in addition, staff with experience working in the criminal justice system was seen as valuable to enhance participant experiences in the program (i.e., as they can assist with understanding and navigation of the criminal justice system).
	<p><i>Participant readiness to change</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Court Link Officers report that the engagement of participants in the program is often dependant on their readiness to change which can be a key factor supporting participant outcomes (e.g., in making changes, addressing their goals).

Funding and resourcing for partner organisations and departments

- Court Link works with a variety of strategic and working groups (i.e., Local Stakeholder Groups, Strategic Reference Group, Specialist Court Evaluation Working Group, etc.) to discuss and address local challenges, as required and appropriate. Some noted that this was in part due to appropriate resourcing within other departments.

Brokerage policies

- staff report that brokerage funding over \$500 requires staff to follow additional processes which Court Link Officers report they may not always have time for. This has in the past limited the ability of Court Link Officers to use available brokerage funds.

Limited availability of local treatment and support services

- staff report that access to additional dedicated mental health services would be beneficial for the program due to often long wait times for other external services
- Court Link Officers report that the lack of public transport options in some sites inhibits access to treatment and support services and transport to and from services can be very difficult, especially outside of the metro area
- staff report that a lack of suitable and accessible services can sometimes impact the ability to offer the specific services required to meet the needs of participants.

Barriers

Personal circumstances of participants

- Court Link Officers report that experience of homelessness or housing instability can hinder a participant’s engagement with the program
- Court Link Officers reported that changes in a participant’s personal circumstances during the program can affect their ability to engage.

Competition for workforce

- staff and some stakeholders report that competition for skilled workforce can lead to staff turnover in sites which increases the burden of recruitment and training.

Table 4.5. Themes from stakeholder consultations – outcomes

Outcomes

Addressing factors contributing to offending

Offending behaviours

- staff and some stakeholders report that the program supports participants to make positive changes in offending behaviour by addressing the factors contributing to offending (e.g.,

- through interventions and activities during case management, access to and engagement with broader treatment and support services, and a therapeutic court setting)
- some participants reported that they were able to maintain their positive changes in offending behaviour post-program
 - Court Link Officers report that the interpersonal relationships of participants (i.e., the relationships they have with others) can be an enabler or barrier to changing offending behaviour. For instance, if a participant changes their attitude towards offending during the program, the presence of others in their life who also offend, could cause a barrier to positive outcomes. Conversely, the presence of positive interpersonal relationships (i.e., those which promote prosocial behaviours) can support participants to make positive choices in relation to their offending.

Changing attitudes towards re-offending

- Court Link Officers and participants report that the program can help change attitudes towards re-offending through discussion of the consequences of offending and other case management activities
- Court Link Officers, participants and some external agencies report that access to certain treatment and support services can also help to address participant attitudes towards offending (e.g., Queensland Traffic Offenders Program, AOD treatment and support services, behaviour change programs, etc.)
- some stakeholders report that, in their view, the quality of the relationship between Court Link Officers and participants can mean that participants who are well-engaged in the program are less likely to offend
- different stakeholders had different views about the demographics of participants which meant they were more likely to be engaged and motivated to change. Some noted that younger participants can be very engaged and others that older participants can be very engaged due to the life stages that they are at and the presence of external motivators to support the change journey (e.g., family).

Reducing offending behaviour

- Court Link Officers report that access to General Practitioners was an important part of helping to reduce drug-related offending (that is, through exploring opportunities to obtain prescriptions for medication, as appropriate)
 - Court Link Officers and participants report that, in their experiences, positive interactions with Court Link Officers can help prevent relapse due to the support provided
 - staff provided many anecdotal examples of participants either reducing the frequency or seriousness of their offending behaviour (e.g., from stealing to drug related offences) following their engagement with the program.
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Compliance with bail orders

- Court Link Officers reported some instances where they have assisted participants to understand bail non-compliance rules.
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Increased health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing

- Court Link Officers and participants report that the emotional support from Court Link Officers provides a positive impact on participant wellbeing
 - some stakeholders report that general rapport building and provision of a 'safe space' can be very important for supporting participants and their wellbeing
 - participants report that Court Link Officers are available to them outside of case management sessions to provide support, as appropriate
 - staff, participants and external stakeholders described that participants may have an increased knowledge of health services available to them and that, following engagement with these services through Court Link, they may be accessing these services more regularly, which in turn likely supports current and future health outcomes
 - some participants also provided examples of the ways in which reducing substance use has had health and wellbeing benefits.
-

Reduced substance use

AOD use

- Court Link staff, participants and external agencies reported many instances where participants have reduced their AOD use
 - Court Link Officers and external agencies often take a harm minimisation approach to AOD use.
-

Improved living circumstances

Social and emotional supports

- staff and external agencies report that participants are supported by their Court Link Officer to access housing, where possible (noting however that this is an area of great need, significant demand, and that it can be difficult for participants to secure housing in a 12-week program).
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Increased life skills

Other

- Court Link Officers describe the ways in which they assist participants in developing life skills to assist with their ability to address small day-to-day challenges and to maintain the positive changes they are making in the program
 - Court Link Officers also described a range of life skill exercises they conduct with participants through the program including budgeting, future planning and time management
 - participants who identified they had worked on life skills during case management (e.g., budgeting and future planning) reported that these had been helpful for assisting to make
-

choices which ultimately reduced their risk of reoffending reported that some life skills help reduce offending.

Increased service navigation and access

- stakeholders noted that in their view, one of the biggest benefits of the program are the ways in which Court Link Officers assist participants to access treatment and support services through service navigation, by addressing the barriers to access, and by increasing their knowledge of what help is available
- staff noted that there have been a range of treatment and support services accessed by participants of the program (e.g., AOD services with dedicated pathways in some sites, DFV support services/behaviour change, anger management courses, mental health services, health services, crisis accommodation, NDIS, Centrelink, family relationship services, etc.) and that in general all of these types of services are important in supporting positive outcomes for participants
- stakeholders and staff reported that Court Link Officers were highly supportive in assisting participants to identify and access the range of services available to them
- staff reported that the maintenance of stakeholder relationships can assist with service navigation and access.

Positive experience within the Criminal Justice System

- staff and some participants reported that regular attendance at case management appointments can be an important factor in supporting participants to maintain accountability, commit to positive improvements and engage with the program
- participants noted that Court Link Officers can assist them with navigation of the criminal justice system and that this was important for helping them feel more comfortable and have a better understanding of the system and what that means for them
- stakeholders noted that the opportunity for a reduced sentence can help individuals break the prison cycle. Some noted that the 12 weeks of the program provides the court system a good opportunity to assess how likely a participant might be able to comply with conditions imposed as part of a non-custodial sentence (e.g., community-based orders, etc.)
- Court Link Officers can advocate for participants during Court Link mentions, which some stakeholders noted was especially effective in upholding the program's values, especially in sites where there is strong judicial support for the program
- staff and participants reported that encouragement from the magistrates provides a positive experience of the criminal justice system and can motivate participants to make positive changes in their lives.

Changes in sentencing

- staff noted that positive engagement with the Court Link program can, when appropriate, lead to a reduced sentence for defendants who complete the program
 - participants reported that reduced sentencing (and particularly a lack of incarceration) can help them maintain positive changes post-program
 - there are ongoing challenges reported about the program’s design and the extent to which there are (a) dedicated magistrates, and (b) the same magistrates are involved in the sentencing decisions. While this is outside of the control of the program (and is ultimately a decision of each court at the site-level), many stakeholders reported that, in their view, where the same magistrate hears all matters involving the participant including sentence that this had the most positive impact on participants, their experiences of the criminal justice system, and their outcomes.
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Outcomes for population groups

- stakeholders reported there were no program-related barriers which negatively impacted outcomes for any specific population group (including people of all genders, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people of all ages, people with disability, people from diverse cultures, people with low literacy or limited education, and people with mental health concerns)
 - staff and external agencies reported that, in their view, the person-centred program approach helps to support all population groups in the community
 - staff reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participating in the program are particularly well supported in sites where there is access to culturally responsive support/services and/or opportunities to connect Court Link into other cultural court programs (e.g., Murri Court)
 - stakeholders noted that access to services that meet the needs of specific population groups is ultimately limited by available services in the area and that this is a wider consideration alongside the general issues with limited availability and places in local services.
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4.2 Case studies

A total of eight case studies were prepared to provide rich insight into the experiences and outcomes of participants who engaged in the Court Link program for at least 12 weeks. One participant from each of the eight Court Link locations was selected for the case studies.

The case studies were prepared using information from a participant’s case notes including the referral and triage assessment, case management plans, court progress mention reports, and their final report. The case studies provide a detailed account of a participant’s journey through the Court Link program and highlights their key achievements and outcomes. No identifying information was included in the case studies. The case studies are to be treated by DJAG as confidential, internal documents.

4.2.1 Overview of demographics

The participants age range was 20-61. Six participants were male, and two participants were female. Two participants identified as Aboriginal but not Torres Strait Islander and one participant identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

4.2.2 Observations

The key observations from the case studies were:

1. Most participants were admitted to the program on the same or following day as their triage assessment. This suggests that there is adequate availability of Court Link services to ensure participants can receive timely access to important supports.
2. Case management appointments were held in-person at the Court Link office or via the phone. Phone appointments were necessary during times of COVID-19 lockdowns or to accommodate the needs of the participant (e.g., health issues). Case managers were consistent in contacting participants as necessary and receiving phone calls and correspondence from participants.
3. Case management appointments were missed by participants for reasons such as transportation issues, health issues, court hearing attendance, a conflicting appointment with an external provider, and personal choice. Reminder text messages were sent to participants. It is unclear from case management notes if this occurs prior to every appointment or only for some (and may vary across Court Link Officers).
4. Weekly case management appointments were structured to allow participants to provide updates regarding their situation and any progress being made towards goals. Appointments were also used to fill out important applications and for completing assessments. Interventions were also performed during sessions. However, this was either occurring infrequently or was not being recorded consistently in participant case notes.
5. A range of psychological, rehabilitative, and accommodation services were used for participant referral. Both private, non-government and government (i.e., QH) services were used. Case managers played an active role in facilitating and assisting with referrals to appropriate services.
6. Magistrates often reviewed or acknowledged tendered progress reports at participant progress mentions. Magistrates typically provided positive feedback and reinforcement of varying depth to participants. Key magistrate quotes and comments are provided below.

“Keep it up and don't blow it now. Make sure you attend every appointment. See you back here for final.”

“You are engaging in therapeutic interventions which is good to see, I encourage you to do all you can and keep looking forward”

“It is heartening to see such a good report”

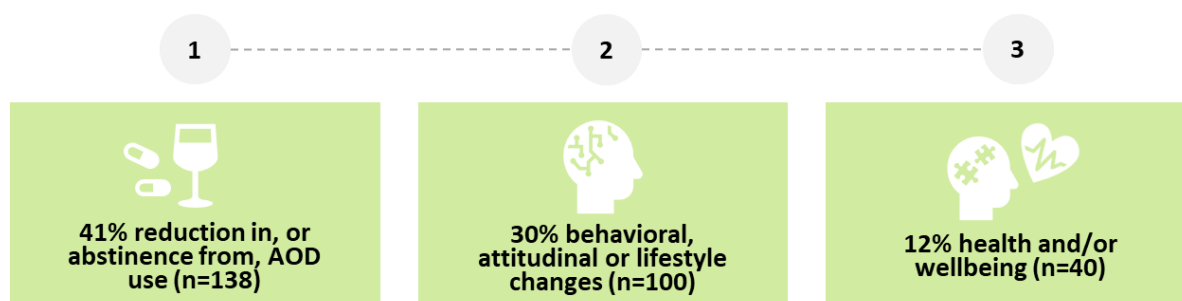
- Stakeholder

7. A review of case study reports noted the following likely benefits from Court Link to participants:
 - a) Gaining referrals to external providers/services (e.g., rehabilitation)
 - b) Case managers listening to the participant and providing guidance and support
 - c) Perspective changes related to AOD use
 - d) Completing structured interventions during case management appointments.

4.3 Most Significant Change analysis

Based on analysis of the qualitative data from both Participant Survey 1³⁹ and Participant Survey 2⁴⁰ (collected by DJAG), there were three core outcomes of the program. These were: 1) a reduction in, or abstinence from, alcohol and other drug use, 2) behavioural attitudinal and lifestyle changes, and 3) learning strategies to manage day-to-day life (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Most significant changes reported by participants



Respondents to the survey were given an opportunity to identify the most significant change they have made in their lives during their time in Court Link. A total of 334 free-text responses (noting that some have been coded as two different categories equalling a total of 391 ratings) were received and coded into overarching themes (see Table 4.6 below).

The most common theme identified was a reduction in, or abstinence from, alcohol and other drug use (n=138). Another highly common theme that emerged related to behavioural, attitudinal, and lifestyle changes (n=100). For example, a number of people said that they had a more positive outlook about the future as well as themselves. Many also learned strategies to manage their day-to-day life, including attending appointments and engaging with support services. Health, particularly mental health, was another recurring theme (n=40). Some respondents talked about being able to get counselling, learning coping strategies, and in some cases, accessing medication as appropriate.

Table 4.6: Most Significant Change of the program, as reported by participants

Most Significant Change	Number of topics	Proportion of topics (%)
AOD reduction/abstinence	138	35.29
Behaviour/Mindset/Self improvement	100	25.58
Physical and mental health	41	10.49
Housing/Accommodation	28	7.16
Social connections	25	6.39
Work/employment	23	5.88
Desistance/Court	18	4.60
ID/records	9	2.30
Other	9	2.30
Total	391	100%

³⁹ Participant Survey 1 is offered to participants approximately 4 weeks into the program.

⁴⁰ Participant Survey 2 is offered to participants at program completion (either 12 weeks, or at their last case management appointment).

5 Discussion

This section presents our triangulation of data to address the agreed evaluation questions.

5.1 Does Court Link meet the intended quality standards?

In the broad, the Court Link program is being delivered as intended and contributes to cost savings to the criminal justice system. There is good evidence that the expected outputs (i.e., providing services based on RNR, coordinating support with broader services, and assisting magistrates to increase understanding of participant circumstances and promote program engagement) and the expected outcomes (e.g., participants commit fewer and less serious offence and are on a desistance journey) of the program have been realised. Additionally, there is evidence that the development and delivery of the program has been conducted in line with the program’s intended values.

5.1.1 Are the intended values evident in program delivery?

Court Link is based on the principles of human rights, therapeutic jurisprudence and rehabilitation. Program documentation available to the evaluation states that the intended values of the Court Link program are a therapeutic effect of the law; needs-based, responsive and individualised services; collaborative approaches and a commitment to maintaining program integrity. A detailed description of the program’s intended values is presented below. In the broad, triangulation of data from all sources suggests that the program’s values are being upheld through a therapeutic court setting, delivery of appropriate services, collaboration with key stakeholders, and a commitment to program integrity and continuous improvement.

- **Therapeutic effect of the law.** Court Link utilises the therapeutic effects of the law by “adopting processes and procedures to maximise a person’s wellbeing”^{xlix}. There is evidence of this in the program through judicial monitoring across the program (see Section 5.4.4.3), and within Court Link court mentions (see Section 5.4.4.3).
- **Needs-based services.** Court Link provides more intense services to those at higher risk of reoffending and with needs that have not been addressed. During triage assessments, Court Link Officers appropriately assess an individual’s risk, need and readiness to change and recommend them for an appropriate level of service (i.e., case management, community referral, no action) (see Section 5.4.3).
- **Responsive service.** When providing services, Court Link takes into account an individual’s unique characteristics, including their cultural identity, cognitive abilities and gender. Triangulation of data suggests there do not seem to be significant demographic-specific barriers to entry or completion of the program (see Section 5.2.5).
- **Individualised service.** Court Link tailors services, including referrals, to take into account each participant’s needs as well as their values, strengths, preferences and context. Triangulation of data highlights the range of activities and interventions provided during case management to meet the preferences of participants. Additionally, participants reported that they work collaboratively with their case manager in case management sessions (see Section 5.4.4.1).
- **Collaborative approach.** Court Link works collaboratively with other agencies to assist participants to achieve their goals through case coordination with other services (as appropriate) and Local Stakeholder Group meetings (see Section 5.4.4.5).
- **Maintain program integrity.** Court Link is monitored, reviewed and evaluated to ensure activities are consistent with program design and outcomes are achieved (see Section 5.4.1.3). Evidence of continuous quality improvement, staff supervision and support, and team professional development is also discussed in further sections below.

5.1.2 Are the program outputs contributing to the expected outcomes?

Court Link program outputs are contributing to the expected client outcomes including increased knowledge of and access to treatment and support services (see *Section 5.2.3*), increased attendance and engagement with treatment and support services (see *Section 5.4.4.2*), compliance with bail orders (see *Section 5.3.3*), increased knowledge about what to do to reduce offending (see *Section 5.3.1*), improved health and wellbeing (see *Section 5.2.2*), reduced AOD use (see *Section 5.2.2.2*), improved living circumstances (see *Section 5.2.2.4*), addressing factors contributing to offending (see *Section 5.2.1*), and progressing readiness to change (see *Section 5.4.4*). These outputs and outcomes are described in the Court Link program logic (see Figure 2.1).

Importantly, a range of analyses about participant offending behaviour suggests that participation in Court Link contributes to the hoped for broader system outcome, that is those who participate in the program commit fewer and less serious offences. The data also suggests that a further positive consequence is that participants appear to be on a desistance journey (see *Section 5.3.2.1*).

“We certainly see the change in participants behaviour in 12 weeks and see them being openly happy with the support they’re getting and their engagement with the magistrates is very different to a regular court. You see it as soon as they realise they’re in a therapeutic environment rather than one that is designed to punish them.”

- Stakeholder

5.1.3 What are the costs of the program and what is the ‘break-even’ point?

A breakeven analysis was conducted to estimate the cost that would need to be returned for the program to break even and to quantify the potential savings that could be attributed to the program (see *Section 3.5*). The break-even analysis models all the estimated costs (provided to us by DJAG) and calculates a per capita funding amount that incorporates the full estimated cost of the program across various stakeholders (CIP, QPS, LAQ, QH, QCS [no cost]) and provides a basis for estimating a per capita cost that must be ‘recouped’ if the program is to break even. We focused the breakeven analysis on a reduction of days in custody in the year following the program.

Using the Productivity Commission’s Data Tables, it is estimated that the daily cost for incarceration in FY2022 is \$325 per person. This has been used as a high-level potential ‘saving’ value for the break-even analysis. This does not include any other potential savings to the health and criminal justice system. For Court Link to break-even based on incarceration cost only, participants must reduce their number of days incarcerated by 11 days in the year following Court Link (ranging from 9-13 days per site).

5.1.3.1 Based on broader evidence, what are the other potential costs and savings of the program?

Based on research, evidence and experience, we know that similar programs have a range of impacts on health and wellbeing and on the wider health and justice system which likely equate to cost savings in areas such as housing, health, employment, and the and costs of custody and sentencing.¹ These include, for example:

- cost associated with sentencing defendants (e.g., court costs, imprisonment costs, etc.);
- costs of custodial sentences including length of custody;
- costs associated with breach of Court Orders, including locating and re-sentencing;
- cost savings attributed to better working relationships between stakeholders;
- potential costs and cost savings of people accessing the right care at the right time, in relation to health and wellbeing;^{li}
- potential cost savings and benefits in relation to housing, social connection and participation in workforce.

In a full Cost-Benefit Analysis, there would also potentially be consideration as to the cumulative costs of higher reoffending and more entries into the criminal justice system over time. It is important to note that every offence, sentencing and custody occurrence has associated costs, but in addition there are lost benefits when participants then inevitably have to reintegrate into society.

The scope of conducting a full Cost-Benefit Analysis that attempts to quantify these costs and the likely impact for Court Link is outside the scope of the project. However, as indicated in the breakeven analysis it is likely that the project represents significant value in terms of cost savings and more importantly, improving the health, wellbeing and experience of people in the criminal justice system. We also note that the qualitative benefits of the program described by stakeholders can be difficult to measure or monetise. Additionally, that it is not possible to calculate the impact of the program on sentencing.

This analysis concludes that ‘savings’ are likely as supported by the DID analysis which estimated a significant difference in incarceration in the year following Court Link ranging from between 32 and 46 days across sites.

5.2 Does Court Link improve the circumstances of defendants? (How and in what way?)

5.2.1 Were factors contributing to participant’s offending behaviour addressed?

There are a range of factors which contribute to offending behaviour including financial disadvantage, education deficits, access to resources such as affordable and safe housing, unemployment, AOD use and mental health^{lii,liiii}. These factors are complex and inter-connected and understanding their relative contribution to any one person’s offending behaviour is difficult.^{liv}In line with research on court-based interventions to address the factors contributing to offending behaviour, the Court Link program was designed with three core pillars: case management, referrals to support services and judicial monitoring.

“Court Link helped me put into place everything that I could to help me not break the law again and stay off the drugs and I think the judge realised I couldn’t put any more into place by going into jail and coming out again. Court Link was good in relaying into him that I was doing everything I possibly can...I don t think I could’ve made the judge look at things like that. The judge didn’t really feel justified in locking me up – I’m proactive in going to counselling now, I’m seeking help now, I’ve got a home now. [My case manager] helped me get a home and everything.”

- Participant

As described in the following sections, case plans are developed with participants to address their individual needs holistically through access to a range of supports. During case management appointments, Court Link Officers conduct a range of activities and brief interventions with participants to address any acute and emerging needs (e.g., provision of brokerage including material aid, interventions such as motivational interviewing, access to wider supports). Court Link Officers also work with participants collaboratively to support their involvement in the development of case goals that are relevant to them. Stakeholders reported that this provides participants with a sense of control and supports their motivation in the program. More broadly, in sites where magistrates are especially supportive of the program, participants also more often believed that the criminal justice system is a fair and ‘more just’ process. Taken together, the data suggests that these supports are associated with the intended participant outcomes of the program (e.g., supporting their understanding of where and how to access supports; learning strategies to reduce offending; access to wraparound support and care relevant to their case goals and nascent needs).

“You’re getting some dignity I guess. The final outcome is you get a just trial or a fair trial you’re getting treated like a human and you’re encouraged to do the right thing. You’re doing

probation and parole in reverse and you're doing it at the start to prove yourself. Being accountable means I've put myself in rehab again, because just after I've committed crimes, I've hit rock bottom again. [Court Link staff] do a lot of good for the community. It's a really hard place to be in. The sentence is reduced so that's a massive plus, but they don't give it to you for free. I think dignity's a big word."

- Participant

5.2.2 As a result of participating in the program, do defendants report experiencing increased health, wellbeing (including reduced drug and alcohol use) and living circumstances?

As noted above, Court Link aims to support people with various aspects of their health and wellbeing through case management and through making connections with local treatment and support services. The following section discusses four key domains of health and wellbeing outcomes for participants, including:

- mental and physical health;
- AOD use;
- social connection;
- other (e.g., living circumstances, life skills).

5.2.2.1 Mental and physical health

Improvements in mental and physical health was a commonly reported significant change for people in the Court Link program (3rd highest rated significant change). There were several clear examples of support to participants which contributed to improvements in health and wellbeing. Most participants reported that mental health was a relevant issue for them (97%), with the vast majority reporting an improvement in this domain (97%). Similarly, physical health was another area of importance (91%), with many reporting an improvement (95%).

Participants were linked with a range of treatment and support services relevant to health and wellbeing (e.g., counselling, mental health services, allied health services), and many reported an intention to continue to use these services. They also noted that because of Court Link, they had learned a considerable amount about how to stay healthy (91%).

"It has helped with my health cause I'm not using heroin anymore. My wellbeing too, cause I just feel like I've got someone I can call or talk to which is a good thing – and I'm more positive now. Because I'm getting a lot of things done, that's making me feel more positive."

- Participant

5.2.2.2 Reduced AOD use

Participants are regularly referred to AOD treatment and support services as well as working with their Court Link case manager to implement strategies to reduce their AOD use (e.g., relapse prevention, delay strategies, etc.). Stakeholders reported that in these ways, Court Link Officers assist participants to better understand their behaviour (i.e., in what situations they may be likely to use), the consequences of their behaviour (e.g., through cost-benefit mapping) and to implement strategies to reduce their AOD use (e.g., to take fewer substances, less regularly). The majority of participants who noted that reducing AOD use was an area for improvement reported that they were reducing either their alcohol (92%) or drug use (97%) as a result of the program. Some stakeholders noted that this can also have an impact on their contact with the criminal justice system as they highlighted examples where AOD use was related to, or the subject of, their offending.

“[My case manager] helped me work out replacement behaviours [for drug use] like working at the salvos. Things I could do to meet different types of people, because boredom is one of the worst triggers.”

- Participant

Additionally, in sites where there are dedicated pathways and specialist AOD treatment service for Court Link clients (delivered through QH), it was reported that this is providing participants with a positive experience in the health system and increasing their likelihood of engaging with health services into the future. Participants, Court Link staff and other stakeholders noted the clear value of dedicated AOD pathways. The data and information available to the evaluation (i.e., from 2 of 3 sites) suggests that for sites with dedicated AOD treatment pathways and resources, the majority of participants who completed their treatment (80%) showed significant clinical improvements in functioning (psychological health, physical health and quality of life) and no longer met the criteria of clinically significant psychological distress. There also appears to be ongoing value for participants who engaged in these AOD treatment programs with over 30% of Court Link participants continuing treatment after program completion and a further 25% re-engaging with the AOD treatment service at a later stage.

“Since the age of 18, [the participant] was referred for public nuisance, bad behaviour and aggression in the context of alcohol dependence. He was drinking seven days a week, 60 standard drinks a day...associating with other people, using alcohol, other drugs. He was doing this seven days a week...Since he's been with us. He's coming to the end of his 12 weeks now...his offending is down to zero...He's no longer drinking as much. He's now only on 15 standard drinks a day, only drinks two days a week, only drinks at home. So, he's not going out to drink, no longer offending. And he's agreed to continue with another one of our services, to address aggression in the context of alcohol use. So that's a continuation of a building from what he's doing.”

- Stakeholder

5.2.2.3 Social connection

Their level of social connectedness (i.e., with family and friends; with wider culture) was noted as an area of improvement by most participants where this domain was relevant to their case goals (85% and 73% respectively). Participants are linked in with a range of services that either address their social connections directly (e.g., services that conduct interventions to promote healthy interpersonal relationships) or those that broadly support a personal connection to their culture (e.g., culturally safe services, connections with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elders, etc.). During case management, Court Link staff will also work with participants to promote healthy relationships through motivational interviewing and ‘best self’ brief interventions (i.e., encouraging behaviours which support social connections by challenging current behaviours).

5.2.2.4 Other outcomes (i.e., housing)

Unstable housing was regularly reported by stakeholders to be a key contributor to offending behaviour. Case managers support participants with warm referrals to housing supports and stakeholders noted some good examples of participants accessing housing where they had previously been unsuccessful. The majority of participants who reported that housing outcomes were an area of improvement for them noted that their living circumstances had improved because of the program (76%). Participants also reported improvements in general life skills (e.g., budgeting (81%), time management (94%), etc.). However, stakeholders also reported that housing can be a difficult goal to support participants with due to a lack of available housing and the time it can take to access it (which can be greater than intended the duration of the Court Link).

“They wrote a support letter to help [access housing]. I was talking to other organisations as well, but when I put the Court Link letter in, I got housing the next week.”

- Participant

There were some also clear instances noted in interviews where Court Link Officers assist participants in developing life skills to support their ability to address small day-to-day challenges and to maintain the positive changes they are making in the program. For instance, case managers assist participants with time management, budgeting, future planning, stress management, and support them to attend social events to develop positive interpersonal relationships.

“[Discussions with the case manager about budgeting, future-planning and impulse control] made me aware. My awareness was lacking in my day-to-day doings. It’s made me more aware of [impulse control]. [Previously] I’d spend money without thinking. So [Court Link] helped with my impulse control. I might have a few bucks on me so I go past a [pokies room], I [would] normally step inside but instead I just keep walking, saving and holding on. I don’t gamble as much as I used to on the pokies; I don’t recall when the last [time] was.”

“I don’t have much emotional support, I didn’t have friends I had been very isolated so they helped me find some mothers groups or activities and get back into normality as well.”

- Participant

Additionally, Court Link referrals reflect the program is accessed by a range of defendants including those in custody at the time of referral. In the view of some stakeholders this program is accessing a number of vulnerable groups who might not otherwise engage with similar sorts of services and that has value.

5.2.3 Did defendants’ knowledge and access to treatment and support services increase?

Court Link Officers assist participants with service navigation of the treatment and support service system to support their understanding of what services are available to them and how to best engage with services (e.g., assisting with filling out paperwork, booking appointments, addressing barriers to engagement, providing referrals, etc.). There were a few good examples where participants were helped to access services they had previously struggled to engage with (e.g., opioid dependence treatment, housing support, crisis support). Additionally, some external agencies reported that participants were more willing to engage with treatment and support services after participation in the Court Link program. Some stakeholders also reported that the quality of the relationship between Court Link Officers and participants can increase a participant’s willingness to seek help and engage with services both during the program and post-completion.

“They hooked me up with an [AOD] treatment program. A methadone program. I was waiting for a year and couldn’t get on but [my case manager] managed to get me on.”

- Participant

5.2.4 Did participation in the program support defendants’ transition to probation and parole, community service orders, or intensive corrections orders?

Court Link offers ‘transition appointments’ to all participants, which for those who receive a community-based order includes Court Link providing their final report and outstanding case plan goals to QCS to support them in continuing towards identified goals.

The data available to this evaluation makes it difficult to determine with accuracy whether or not those who participate in Court Link transition to probation and court ordered parole, community service orders, or intensive corrections orders. This is partly due to the visibility of what happens to

people after they leave the program⁴¹. We also note that it is probably not appropriate to suggest that a 12-week case management program can directly influence changes such as adherence to parole conditions, especially if a period of custody is served, noting the observation from some stakeholders that incarceration may negate the impact of Court Link participation. However, Court Link staff and participants did note instances where participants were not incarcerated after completion of the program.

In locations where there were dedicated magistrates, program stakeholders, participants and other external key stakeholders noted that in their view, Court Link was a good opportunity for participants to demonstrate their ability and willingness to engage with community-based programs, which in turn helped the Magistrate consider sentencing options other than custody.

“In some ways, everyone knows in the back of their mind if you send someone to prison, that's probably going to result in a setback in the rehabilitative areas...where someone's on the cusp...that's perfect. I really think that's where [Court Link] works significantly.”

- Stakeholder

5.2.5 Did all participant/population groups have the opportunity to benefit from the program?

The Court Link program provides support that is responsive to all population groups (e.g., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and all other gender identities and sexual orientations (LGBTQIA+) people, women, people with a disability). When considering the opportunity to benefit from the program, the following section considers demographic groups referred to the program, progression and completion of the program, and the ability to engage with appropriate treatment and support services. We note that triage allows for a broad assessment of need to inform the recommended level of service (along with other eligibility criteria). For those that enter the program responses are tailored to meet individual needs and preferences.

“The workers in the program are aware when different population groups need additional support and who to refer to.”

- Stakeholder

5.2.5.1 Are different participant / population groups referred to the program?

As outlined in *Section 3.2.2* there are some common clusters of people who are referred to the program. Most of the people (43%) who were referred to Court Link were men, who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, were mostly born in Australia, spoke English at home, are not Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, and had below a Grade 12 level of education.

There were no concerns raised in consultations by stakeholders about the equity of referrals to Court Link, however, a few noted that some people might be appropriately referred to other specialist court programs such as Murri Court in the first instance.

5.2.5.2 Do participant / population groups progress through Court Link differently?

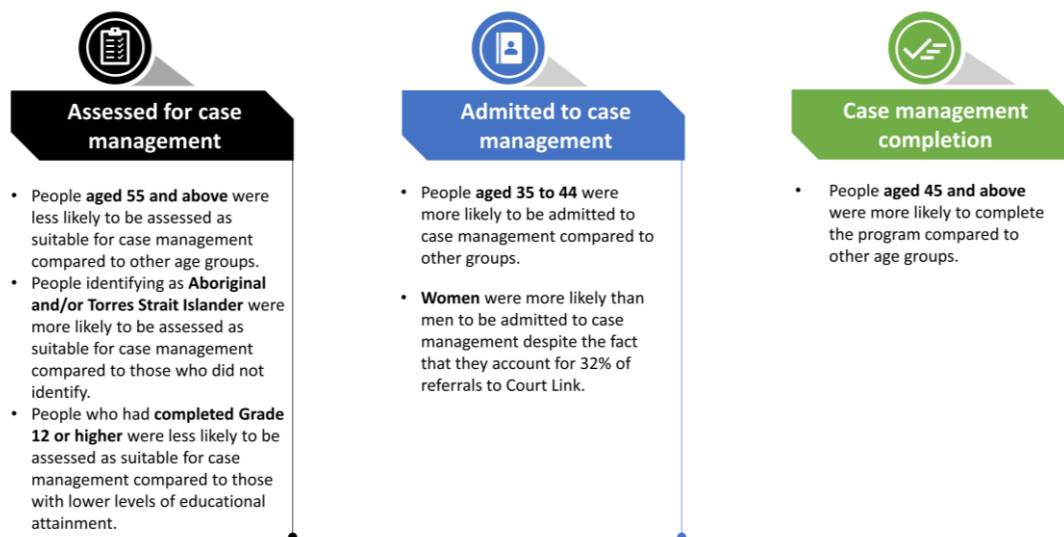
Stakeholders consulted reported that, in the broad, the program was equally accessible for all population groups. No stakeholders consulted reported any program-related factors that inhibited the achievement of outcomes for specific population groups. This includes people of all genders, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people of

⁴¹ We note that most people are adjourned for sentence resulting in a ‘matter transferred’ outcome and Court Link officers have no visibility of their sentence.

all ages, people with disability, people from diverse cultures, people with low literacy or limited education, and people with mental health concerns.

There are no major differences in sociodemographic characteristics of individuals who are referred to Court Link compared to those who are later admitted to case management. To investigate the impact of demographics on the program, a range of logistic regressions (see *Section 3.2.3*, *Section 3.2.4* and *Section 3.2.5*) were completed to assess for any demographic differences at different stages of the program, as summarised in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Significant relationships between demographic groups and different stages of case management



While there were some significant relationships between demographic characteristics and participation in different stages of the program (i.e., assessed for case management, admitted to case management, and case management completion) it may be likely that this is the result of the extent and nature of those groups' need for and ability to engage in the program. The fact of a statistical relationship does not in of itself mean that there are equity concerns for the program.

For example, the fact that people over 55 were less likely to be assessed as suitable for case management may be due to them not requiring the intensity of intervention compared with other age groups. When the significant findings are triangulated with consultation data, it suggests that there are no concerns about different levels of access for different groups, and that, overall, the program is accessible to all.

“...because you get the people who are over 40 are like ‘I’m done with this lifestyle I really want to change, I’m tired and old’ and I do see a lot of positive changes from that demographic.”

- Court Link staff

One thing stakeholders did note, was that success in the program was more dependent on a participant’s personal circumstances (e.g., life circumstances such as housing status, employment status, etc.) as opposed to their demographic characteristics.

5.2.5.3 Do participant / population groups have access to appropriate programs and services?

Staff reported that the individualised approach of the program allows case managers to provide services and facilitate access to others (when they are locally available) that are responsive to the needs of diverse populations. For instance, Court Link Officers will refer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the program to culturally specific services, as appropriate (noting that not all participants request these services when offered) and available (i.e., access to services is dependent on what is available at each site). There is also collaboration with CJGs and Murri Court which some

stakeholders report has enhanced the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participating in the program. There was some suggestion, however, that the program could benefit from additional resources to support participants who are from CALD backgrounds or who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (i.e., some reported that the program could benefit from additional case managers who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or as those from culturally diverse backgrounds). However, we do note that as mentioned earlier, the dedicated AOD pathways available to Court Link participants in some sites provides prioritised access to additional support that they may not have been able to access otherwise.

“I think this depends on the location, as to how the program benefits people. I think in the South-East Queensland corner, six of the seven categories are well supported – whilst say in Mount Isa, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are really well supported.”

- Stakeholder

5.3 Does Court Link have any measurable impact on participants’ offending behaviour?

5.3.1 Did defendants’ knowledge of strategies to reduce offending increase?

Court Link supports participants to better understand what drives their own offending behaviour and it reinforces those strategies that are gained from participants’ contact with external treatment and support services. Case managers refer participants to behaviour change programs to assist them to better understand and address factors which have contributed to their offending behaviours. Case managers also conduct brief interventions (e.g., best self, motivational interviewing) to assist participants in better understanding their offending behaviour and to encourage pro-social activities (e.g., developing new interpersonal relationships, sports and recreation, delaying/reducing AOD use).

“The fact that they're not treated like they're criminals and so they are able to potentially go to services and address the underlying issues which are leading to the criminal behaviour, then they're less likely to commit those offences.”

- Court Link staff

A view shared by multiple case managers is that Court Link’s role is to provide participants with supports that address their needs, which, in turn, helps to target their offending.

“We have feedback from participants through participant surveys saying that they feel like they're on the right path now, that they've finally got some support that they've never felt like they've had. We have participants that also write letters to magistrates to say how their attitudes have changed and, you know, they could be just saying that, but the fact that they're able to reflect and give some real examples is really promising to us”

- Court Link staff

5.3.2 Does Court Link have any measurable impact on the participant’s offending behaviour (frequency and seriousness of offending)?

To determine whether participation in the Court Link program has contributed to any measurable impact on a participants’ offending behaviour, a range of statistical analyses were conducted to compare the frequency and seriousness of offending behaviour of participants in the program, with a comparison group (see Section 3.3.4). In these analyses a synthetic ‘treatment’ and ‘comparison group’ were created:

- ‘Treatment’ (Group A) – Those who completed > 11 weeks of the program

- ‘Comparison’ (Group E) – Those who did not progress to triage, those who were not admitted, community referrals, no action, those who failed to attend triage, ‘other’ and ‘missing’ data.

We analysed two measures of frequency (number of charges and number of days in which 1 or more charges occurred). We also defined seriousness of offending based on the QASOC codes provided in the QWIC dataset. We categorised offences in four discrete groups: 1) offences against a person, 2) offences against property, 3) drug related offences, and 4) offences against public order to determine changes in seriousness across these offence types.

We then triangulated the findings of these analyses with relevant qualitative data, to develop a narrative about how the Court Link program is contributing to changes in offending behaviour for those who participate in the program. Overall, the findings suggest that Court Link had a positive impact on the offending behaviours of participants.

“I try not to break the law as much as I used to. I think the only thing that I do wrong is my drug addiction. That’s the only law I break. I don’t steal or anything anymore. Don’t have any victims [of theft] anymore.”

- Participant

5.3.2.1 Frequency of offending

We conducted a DID analysis on the frequency of offending. This was a comparison of both groups pre- and post- Court Link in a 2-year observation window following Court Link and using matched sampling to compare people with similar sociodemographic characteristics. The DID analysis compares the degree of change for the treatment group to the degree of change in the comparison group. We also analysed changes in the seriousness of offending behaviour through changes in offence ‘types’ (against person, against property, drug offences, and against public order).

These analyses suggest that participation in Court Link reduces the frequency of offending. The DID estimate suggests that Court Link reduced offending by 6-14 offences over a 2-year period. The observed reduction is robust to different definitions of frequency (i.e., number of charges, number of days spent offending), inclusion of sociodemographic controls (e.g., age, sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, educational attainment), and the use of a matched sample. Of note, we observe larger reductions in the frequency of offending when limiting the comparison group to only those who were not admitted to Court Link.

5.3.2.2 Seriousness of offending

Court Link also appeared to reduce the seriousness of offending. Results from both the transition matrices and logistic regression models suggest that the treatment group was more likely to commit less serious offences after Court Link than the comparison group. The results were also robust to various categorisation of drug offences. The treatment group is 51% more likely (OR=1.51, p<0.001) to reduce their seriousness of offending after Court Link relative to the comparison group.

We also conducted a survival analysis of ‘time to offend’ in both groups for a 2-year observation window following the case closure date. To determine differences between the two groups, we conducted two analyses. The first was descriptive, comparing the frequency of offences for both groups within the observation windows (i.e., before and after Court Link). The second involved a multivariate Cox regression on the ‘time to first offence’ to determine if there are differences between the groups. Results from the survival analyses suggest that ‘time to reoffend’ was significantly longer for the treatment group than the comparison group. Moreover, a larger proportion of people in the treatment group did not offend in the 2-year period following Court Link relative to the comparison group. This result was also robust to the inclusion of sociodemographic controls.

“There were times where I would have had a bad relapse and fallen into using every day if it wasn’t for [my case manager] helping me. She was actually aware of situations that would come up, how hard it was, that it was compounding problems. She’d just ask the right questions. She’s switched on.”

- Participant

5.3.3 Did defendants comply with bail orders? If not, why not?

Of all defendants referred to the program, very few appeared to be remanded due to a bail breach. In some cases, Court Link Officers support defendants to comply with their bail orders by increasing their understanding about their bail conditions. Stakeholders also reported that the quality of the relationship between Court Link Officers and participants in the program can assist with reducing bail breaches.

“The connection between the case worker and the client is encouraging and instils hope and enthusiasm in the client, and this reduces the risk of bail breaches.”

- Stakeholder

5.4 What elements of Court Link are working or not working?

In the broad, the Court Link program is highly valued by stakeholders who described the range of factors that support program delivery and the achievement of outcomes (see Table 5.1). These include program design considerations (i.e., collaboration with participants, access to brokerage funds, program flexibility), an effective staffing profile and working relationships (i.e., engaged staff, engagement with other agencies, judicial support), a commitment to continuous improvement and support from the broader policy environment.

“I think it's that individualised and responsive service, I think that's what works for people... What this program is about is saying, ‘well, where are you at? What are your strengths and capabilities now and what are your goals?... OK, well what can we do right now to get you kind of on that path?’ And then that relationship with the case manager is how that comes to life.”

- Court Link staff

Table 5.1. Key factors supporting delivery of the program

Key program factor	Description
Staff	Staff are engaged in program delivery and provide peer support and engage well with participants, agencies and other staff to support participant outcomes. Stakeholders reported that staff commitment and capability is a key factor in the successful delivery of case management activities, which supports participant outcomes.
Collaboration with participants	Court Link Officers take a co-design approach to case management to ensure participants are involved in the development of case plans (including goal-setting). Stakeholders reported that this promotes participant engagement and ensures that case management activities are responsive to the emergent and ongoing needs of participants.
Brokerage funds	Court Link Officers utilise brokerage funds to provide additional support (e.g., psychological assessments, material aid, etc.) to participants to help complete their case goals. As the program has matured, staff have expanded the use of brokerage funds to further address identified needs for participants through

	<p>additional supports. For instance, staff can now conduct cognitive screening assessments to help identify participants with cognitive impairment needs (noting this was a recommendation from the Court Link process evaluation). Additionally, participants in some sites will have access to outreach support, noting that this could help participant engagement in an area where transport can be a barrier to accessing the program and other services.</p>
Engagement with other agencies	<p>Staff engage with other relevant services (e.g., dedicated AOD referral pathways with QH, CJGs, treatment and support services, legal representatives, police and corrections) to support participants and the program more broadly. Court Link Officers communicate and follow up with external agencies to provide holistic and wraparound care to clients and, in some cases, participants have been able to access some treatment and support services faster than they would have been able to otherwise (e.g., rehabilitation, outreach support and welfare checks).</p>
Judicial support	<p>Support from the Magistrate in a site was seen to be an important enabler of program delivery and of helping participants to achieve positive outcomes (e.g., through therapeutic jurisprudence). Having dedicated magistrates who engage with the program and conduct dedicated callovers at some sites was seen as an important part of supporting participants and the success of the program in that site. Participants reported that when there is strong judicial support (i.e., when magistrates are able to engage with participants during callover sessions and over time) this can provide a positive experience in the criminal justice system which enables positive engagement within the program.</p>
Continuous improvement	<p>The commitment to continuous quality improvement means that the program is able to be updated in line with reflections, data, need, etc. This has included staff changes (i.e., trial of a third Team Leader to support Court Link Officers), a site expansion to Pine Rivers, changes to the data system, additional options for brokerage spending (described above), and general support for the development of staff (e.g., through training, observation and supervision, peer support between Court Link Officers).</p>
Policy environment	<p>The program is supported by state government policy which funds the program to deliver services as intended. The CIP team is also supported by a policy team who ensure alignment with the policy environment.</p>
Program flexibility	<p>Participants benefit from the flexibility of the program which supports their engagement in a way that suits them, at a time that suits them. Stakeholders reported that participants can effectively transfer between sites if their circumstances change. Additionally, Court Link Officers work with participants to schedule appointments at times that suit them (e.g., on the same days other appointments) which promotes engagement. Participants report that this helps to reduce any travel burden.</p>

5.4.1 Overarching delivery of the Court Link program

5.4.1.1 Broader DJAG capacity to support delivery

The program works with the support of broader policy, research and evaluation team members (who support Court Link as well as other Courts Innovation Programs). The support includes approving, developing, or updating program materials and policy documents (e.g., the Handbook, protocols, policies and procedures, etc.) and broader program development (e.g., conducting the Rapid Response Evaluation, providing support to the Deloitte evaluation team, monitoring the strategic direction of the program).

Those teams as well as the Courts Innovations teams are responsible for relevant projects within the range of major reform environment which impacts on their resource capability (e.g., there are some substantial initiatives such as DFV [Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce] YJ reforms [Youth Justice Taskforce], Closing the Gap, Criminal Justice legislative review). These teams are all involved in that effort, but stakeholders highlighted there is limited resourcing and pressures with other priorities within DJAG that impact on the internal capacity to support for the program, highlighting the importance of the foundations to enable sound evidence-based policy and program management. As the environment continues to progress and reforms are more demanding, due to the complexity and range of initiatives (to respond to these reforms), attention needs to be paid to make sure both service delivery and administrative teams have adequate resourcing to cover the needs of all programs.

5.4.1.2 Case management

Caseload

The maximum caseload for Court Link Officers is 20 participants per person. All staff consulted reported that the current caseload is too burdensome for case managers. This is supported by a Time in Motion study which found that staff do not have enough time in each working week to complete the tasks required for a 20-participant caseload. Staff reported that when they are at capacity (i.e., a caseload of 20), they de-prioritise other work which is crucial to program delivery (i.e., stakeholder engagement, researching specific interventions, data entry and report writing) to conduct participant triages and case management appointments and to appear in court. Staff reported that while they can rely on their peers in some cases to help with their work (i.e., Team Leaders and other staff who may have capacity due to reduced caseloads will assist their peers with report writing), they are less able to access support for site-specific activities such as stakeholder engagement (with key stakeholder groups including legal representatives and treatment and support service staff). This can cause a barrier to referrals into the program (due to lack of understanding about the program) and referrals to treatment and support services (as the collaboration with other treatment and support services can be limited). All staff reported that a maximum caseload of 15 would allow Court Link Officers enough time to manage their own caseload, engage with key stakeholders and to enter data regularly (rather than retrospectively).

“I am barely scraping through with my case management because I just don't have time to see 20+ people. I'm on 17 at the moment and I don't even have time to see 17 people a week, let alone do court every single week. Or just the little administrative stuff that comes with that. We can't even do the stakeholder engagement stuff because I don't have time to leave the office.”

- Court Link staff

Program length

Case management for the program is intended to run for approximately 12 weeks (noting that this time can change slightly depending on the timing of Court Link callovers or mentions). The fact that magistrates will in some circumstances need to exit participants from the program at the end of 12 weeks and then readmit them so they can have more time, suggest that there should be more flexibility in the length of the program. Having said that, some stakeholders suggest that this flexibility would need to be balanced with a defendant’s right to having access to a timely outcome of their court case.

“All the Court Link [staff] from the top-down have a really good understanding of [AOD use], they understand it’s not a quick fix, years of trauma, years of coping and it’s not going to be solved in 12-weeks. Some less educated people might not realise that and haven’t had the training Court Link have. However, the Court Link [staff] are great, all about engaging with services, working on this stuff over time. They are really good, I’ve had positive feedback from clients about how invested the case managers are in their recovery.”

- Stakeholder

5.4.1.3 Governance

Court Link has a range of program governance processes (as outlined in the Court Link Handbook) including a reporting and management structure for staff, support from the Specialist Courts Steering Committee (statewide executive), Referral and Support Services Strategic Reference Group (statewide governance) and Local Stakeholder Groups (site governance). Senior staff reported that while there are systems and data collection processes in place, to this point in the program’s development, the main use of the data collected has been for accountability and evaluation rather than supporting continuous improvement in program delivery or consideration of things that could affect the strategic direction of it.

“We’re still trying to develop a governance system. We get data, reports and things now, but as to how we’re using them and what they’re reviewing them for is pretty well driven by what data needs to be provided for evaluation purposes. There’s not a lot that we’re using strategically and there’s not a real process for case managers to utilise that data in the management of their caseloads. That’s definitely something we need to do. We’ve got these things we need to develop but there’s only so many hours in the day. For the Senior Practitioner and Team Leaders, when you’re trying to do your job and also continue to assist in this developing program, there’s not always time to do both. You need to keep on developing and improving the program so that it gets better but trying to juggle all of that is near impossible.”

- Court Link staff

Continuous improvement

Consultation with staff highlighted the range of ways that the program has demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement in the design of the program to better meet need and maximise outcomes for participants. As described earlier, staff have expanded the use of brokerage funds to provide cognitive assessments, contract an outreach service (to provide additional support to participants who may struggle to travel to appointments) and to provide taxi services in one site where there is very limited public transport. Additionally, the program has rolled out a pilot site in Pine Rivers (from the 27th of March). Noting that there has been a reduced caseload in one site, the Court Link Officer will work part-time at their original site and part-time in Pine Rivers to ensure their capacity is utilised to reach a wider range of participants. Court Link have also recently sought the inclusion of a specialist women’s case manager (as part of the Women’s Early Intervention Service pilot funded by Office of Women) that is in response to a recommendation from the Women’s Safety Justice Taskforce. As part of the implementation of recommendations from the first process evaluation for Court Link, DJAG has also explored the accessibility of the program for all population groups. As a result, as part of the Court Link program, referrals may be made to:

- the Assessment and Referral Team who can provide support to participants to the access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS); or
- the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) or NDIA partners (such as Carers Queensland or Mission Australia) who can provide support to participants to manage, implement or review their NDIS plans.

The program is also responsive to meeting the needs of staff. For instance, the program is currently trialling the addition of a third Team Leader which is intended to provide additional support to case managers in their day-to-day activities. Court Link is conducting an internal review of this trial to ensure it is operating as intended. All staff consulted are supportive of the addition of this third Team Leader and said that due to the wide geographic coverage of the program, it is not possible to provide adequate support to Court Link Officers in 9 sites (which includes Pine Rivers) with only two Team Leaders. Staff also reported that if the program were to roll out to additional sites, this could require a fourth Team Leader.

At a local level, continuous improvement is also supported by the Local Stakeholder Groups and discussion with local stakeholders about barriers and required changes.

5.4.1.4 Workforce

Management and supervision of staff

“Adding in the third Team Leader has been important, so I'm really glad we've taken a risk on that and again I'll be doing my best to try and keep that permanently going forward...I'm proud of the Practice Supervision Framework we've got, but to make it come to life you need to have time and you just can't have too many sites with too many staff. You just won't do it justice. We've definitely suffered from that at different times when we've been down staff so that all comes back to that ongoing resourcing and making sure we get that right.”

- Court Link staff

Staff are also supported through supervision and observation (from Team Leaders) as well as broader internal and external training opportunities. Staff reported that while there have been some challenges to providing supervision and observation as intended, the training supervision framework provides an opportunity for staff to develop their professional capabilities, discuss their self-care practices, debrief about appointments, and provide feedback to management staff, as needed. Court Link Officers also reported that they support their peers across sites as needed (e.g., to discuss their cases and provide broader support to one another through debriefing and assistance with tasks, as appropriate). Court Link Officers are also given the opportunity to meet in-person twice a year to receive training. Program management staff suggest that the cadence of these group face-to-face opportunities would ideally be every 6 months. Staff are also supported to attend external training (e.g., in Domestic and Family Violence). Court Link Officers report that these opportunities for supervision, training and development are key to the success of the program and the retention of staff. We also note that there is an ongoing challenge in meeting the need to backfill staff on leave without reducing support for other staff.

Progression opportunities

There are some progression opportunities within the Court Link program (and to other areas in the Courts Innovation Program), which staff reported can contribute to their satisfaction and ultimate retention. For instance, staff can progress from a Court Link Officer to Team Leader and Team Leader to Senior Practitioner. Staff can also apply to move to other relevant areas in DJAG (i.e., the Policy, Research and Evaluation team). While these opportunities are available, they are limited comparative to the number of Court Link Officers and may not suit the needs of staff (as they may not be willing or able to travel or relocate to the Brisbane site). Staff reported that including additional roles to the organisational chart below the Court Link Officer could not only provide additional progression opportunities, but could help to reduce demands on the workforce (i.e., PO2s could conduct triage intake sessions, assist with report writing, etc.).

5.4.1.5 Data system and requirements

Court Link uses an information management system (*InfoXchange*) to record participant information crucial to program delivery (e.g., demographic characteristics, case planning information, case notes, participant interactions, etc.). Staff noted that the data system is not always user-centred in its

design (i.e., cannot send out bulk texts, staff have to enter data multiple times, staff are unable to pull reports easily to see what tasks are outstanding) which limits efficiency and usability of the system. Staff also report that data entry is one task which can become de-prioritised when they are at capacity. They also suggest that the information system should only require staff to input what is required for program delivery and development. We note that at the conclusion of the evaluation period, Court Link had commenced mapping of the case management system to explore how the system could be adjusted to be more user-friendly, to avoid duplication, and to remove superfluous data entry requirements.

5.4.2 Referrals to Court Link

Court Link receives referrals from a range of sources including legal representatives/duty lawyers, police/watch houses, magistrates, self-referrals, other support services, and Court Link staff. Overall, the number of referrals to the program has increased considerably since November 2017 and the program is receiving referrals from all intended sources (at the program-level).

Staff reported that in most sites, referrals to the program are operating as intended (i.e., sites are receiving referrals from appropriate sources such as legal representatives, police, etc.). However, in some sites (Maroochydore, Ipswich and Redcliffe) staff report that they seek their own referrals (i.e., by checking the daily court listings) due to a lack of referrals from other sources (e.g., legal representatives, duty lawyers, police, magistrates, etc.). Staff reported that reduced referrals could be due to a lack of understanding about the program (due to staff turnover). Some stakeholders noted that, in their view, it may be a disincentive for legal practitioners to refer to the program due to a delay in payments of grants of aid if they refer people to Court Link, unless the defendant is looking at serving a custodial sentence. While the extent of this issue was not clear to the evaluation, it highlights the need for all agencies to have clear communication, especially in relation to potential barriers such as funding. Discussions about these and changes to mitigate them (e.g., the Pilot in Brisbane to increase access to Legal Aid, see Table 4.4) appear to happen as required, and changes, where possible and necessary could and should be rolled out to additional sites.

5.4.3 Triage assessment processes and outcomes

As described earlier, triage assessment processes involve an assessment of a defendant's presenting risks, needs and abilities. This requires Court Link Officers to review information about a defendant and to complete a triage assessment based on RNR principles (i.e., the defendant's presenting issues, criminal and legal history, social and economic support needs, AOD use and physical and mental health). A Court Link Officer will then provide a level of service recommendation (i.e., case management, community referral, no action) to the Magistrate for consideration.

Staff reported and quantitative data supports that in all sites triage assessment processes are operating as intended where potential participants progress to triage in a timely way, and information about the defendant is used to recommend an appropriate level of service for them.

5.4.4 Program delivery and outcomes

5.4.4.1 Case management

During case management, Court Link Officers provide the range of brief interventions and activities required to respond to participant needs (i.e., to address both presenting needs and case plan goals). Brief interventions are evidence-based and have been beneficial for:

- prompting self-reflection, self-awareness and introspection;
- improving capacity to identify triggers for certain behaviours (e.g., AOD use);
- encouraging discussion about emotions, thoughts and feelings;
- setting a participant up for success in later life (e.g., utilising time management and budgeting techniques);
- building confidence in participants (i.e., through identification of their strengths); and

- developing rapport and supporting a participant’s involvement in the program.

“I think they have more agency and if they’re self-motivated they’ll know what’s accessible to them in the future...What I’ve had in the past especially with people who come back to the program ... is that because they feel that they have this past self who was really motivated and got things done, they know they could do it again in the future. They know that they’re capable of it...”

- Court Link staff

Stakeholders (including participants and external agencies) reported that Court Link Officers develop meaningful rapport with participants during case management which promotes engagement in the program. Participants and external agencies regularly reported that Court Link Officers work diligently to support participant needs during the program and that the engagement from staff was key to the successful delivery of the program. This can include regular follow ups with participants, working with them to identify their unique and individual needs, and being responsive to any changes in their circumstances.

“It’s huge follow up with [the participants], you know, constant sort of reminders, real efforts at that engagement and rapport. That’s one of the most important things with this clientele.”

- Stakeholder

Case managers collaborate with participants to ensure the activities are reflective of participant strengths, values, needs, personal circumstances and ultimately their choice/s. Participants highly regarded their Court Link Officers and reported that they are treated with respect (100%) and able to ask questions (98%) and set goals that are important to them (94%). Case managers are perceived by participants as both encouraging of (98%) and invested in their progress (97%).

“I just think the attitude of [the Court Link Officer] is really good. You’re not treated like rubbish you’re treated well”

- Participant

5.4.4.2 Referrals to appropriate treatment and support services (community referrals and case management)

Referral to treatment and support services is a critical component of the program which supports the needs of participants, helps to stabilise them during the court process, and achieves program outcomes. Court Link Officers facilitate participants’ access to other services by:

- advocating for participants to services;
- identifying and reducing barriers to engagement (e.g., transport, lack of identification documents);
- case collaboration with other services, as appropriate;
- challenging any participant misconceptions about services;
- conducting collateral checks to ensure participants are attending services and to ascertain if there are skills or knowledge that can be reinforced in Court Link case management appointments.

“For those who engage in the program I have seen many breakthroughs in behavioural patterns and self care, the program offers hope and pathways to a better quality of life by both offering support in informed decisions to address the identified issues of the individual clients needs. The genuine compassion and care shown by the case workers empowers the client, and I regularly hear very positive feedback from the Court Link clients!”

- Stakeholder

Staff reported that participants are referred to treatment and support services, as appropriate (i.e., when assigned to a ‘community referral’ during triage, and during case management appointments to meet the identified needs and preferences of participants). Stakeholders reported that participants are referred to a range of services to meet the presenting needs of participants (e.g., health and wellbeing services, housing services, etc.) as well as to services that more directly address their offending behaviour (e.g., AOD services, behaviour change programs, traffic offender programs). One stakeholder reported that this supports clients to better understand their circumstances and how they can get positive outcomes from the program (i.e., reduce their return to the criminal justice system).

“Court Link works with other providers to identify opportunities for individuals to reduce their return to the criminal justice system. Court Link works to ensure clients get the best possible chance and understand their circumstances and how best to succeed.”

- Stakeholder

Although referrals are operating as intended, we note that it can be difficult to determine the objective outcomes and impact of a participant’s engagement with support services due to available data and the ability to relate outcomes to one particular service (noting that participants are supported in a range of ways which, taken together, could work to support their holistic needs). We understand that at an operational level, some outcomes are reported in progress and final reports which are difficult to pull systematically and collate at a whole-of-program level. To determine the outcomes and impact of participant engagement with other services, DJAG could explore ways in which this valuable data can be made available at a program level for an overall picture of connections with services and possible gaps. DJAG would need to assess whether the amount of effort required to do this would result in a commensurate amount of benefit for informing the future of the program.

“We find that if participants have a positive experience with our service they are more likely to re-engage in the future or contact us should there be changes to their circumstances. Given the nature of addiction and chronic nature of relapse for some participants this is very important.”

- Stakeholder

Additionally, the ability to refer participants to treatment and support services is ultimately dependant on the range and availability of services in and around Court Link sites. This can include the type of service, the suitability to the participant sub-population (e.g., culturally safe services, LGBTQIA+-friendly services, men’s/women’s programs, etc.), and the extent to which services are accepting referrals (noting that waiting lists for certain services can be quite long). This highlights the need for Court Link Officers to remain up-to-date about the range of local services and how best to engage with them (i.e., referral pathways and requirements such as identification or other documents). We note that the competition for skilled workforce in the current environment and the resulting level of staff turnover means that at any particular site keeping in touch with the availability of services is continuous across staff and across time. This emphasises the importance of the time commitment that Court Link staff make in keeping magistrates informed about the program

and maintaining relationships with Local Stakeholder Groups as a vehicle for information sharing about sector pressures and changes.

5.4.4.3 Judicial monitoring of participants in case management (and the presence of Court Link Officers during callovers)

Judicial support for the program is a critical factor to successful delivery. Support from the Magistrate in a site was seen to be an important enabler of program delivery and of helping participants to achieve positive outcomes through therapeutic jurisprudence. Court Link Officers also provide reports to magistrates to promote understanding of a participant's personal circumstances during court mentions (e.g., progress reports, final reports, confidential addendums with confidential information not to be discussed in open court).

"It's a critical factor that can really help us or it can hinder us. When we've got that judicial support, it's just easy. It's so easy. It means that legal practitioners are on board. It means prosecutors are on board. It means that we've got enough space, we get a spot in the court calendar. That again symbolises to everyone that it's in this is something we're doing. This is important. This is a feature at this particular location. All of that sends a message to the stakeholders that this is here, this is here to stay and this is important."

- Court Link staff

Ultimately, many reported that a meaningful and engaging experience in the court (where there is judicial support) helps keep participants accountable throughout the program. Participants reported that it provides an opportunity for their case manager to advocate for their personal circumstances, as well as to show the positive changes they are making in their lives.

"Having somebody that can mediate for the judge [is really helpful]. Someone who can help speak for you...to pinpoint on a weekly, regular basis, the efforts that you've made in order to try and stay clean. It's a good person to speak on your behalf to the judge. It was good for that – for making the judge look at you like you're a human...and to understand that addiction is an illness."

- Participants

The number of progress mentions is ultimately determined at the discretion of the magistrate and in some cases a magistrates assigns additional progress mentions to promote engagement and a higher level of judicial monitoring. Staff at some sites reported that participant engagement in the program can be greatest after their first progress mention, due to a positive experience of the criminal justice system where they may only previously have had a negative experience.

Having dedicated magistrates and callovers at some sites was seen as an important part of supporting participants and the success of the program in that site. However, at the Mount Isa site, it was reported that the decision to not have a dedicated callover was seen to allow for the level of flexibility that ensured a higher level of engagement the capacity to better meet the needs of participating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

5.4.4.4 Early exits from Court Link

Court Link participants are "exited" from the program, when appropriate by the court or when they are not granted bail (which means that they are no longer eligible for the program and case management). Stakeholders reported that this is beneficial for both the program and participants. Firstly, it allows another person to be admitted to the program. Additionally, it means that the program is responsive to the needs of participants such that they can engage with the program at a time that best suits them. Early exits most commonly occurred due to arrest warrants (148, 4.41%), a lack of engagement (95, 2.83%), or due to an individual being remanded on other matters (90,

2.68%). This suggests that there are no program-related barriers to ongoing engagement with the program.

Our quantitative analyses found that while people aged 45 to 54 and 55 and above were more likely to complete the program compared to those between the ages of 17 to 44, there were no other sociodemographic characteristics which predicted an individual's early exit from the program. This suggests that there are no groups who are at risk of early exit from the program, but that older individuals may be more likely to complete it. This is supported by our qualitative findings where no stakeholders reported any program-related barriers to program completion across sociodemographic characteristics. Additionally, some stakeholders (including participants) reported that due to motivations at later life stages (i.e., wanting to break the prison cycle, not wanting to be separated from family members), those who are older may be more likely to engage in the program through to completion. Court Link staff do monitor the reasons for early exit through routine data collection which will help to determine any changes in these patterns into the future.

“Prison gives you kind of a disdain for authority cause it’s really degrading. As you get older, it’s so degrading what you have to do in there. It’s just not a place I want to be going back to at this stage in my life”

- Participant

5.4.4.5 Coordination with Specialist Courts (and other government agencies)

Coordination with, and support from, key stakeholders in the criminal justice system was seen as critical to ensure that participants experience the program as intended. Stakeholder support in the program was reported to promote both effective collaboration with stakeholders and program outcomes for participants. Staff highlighted that effective coordination and collaboration occurs when there is a good understanding about the program and when services in the broader system are complementary rather than duplicative.

There is evidence of coordination with other Specialist Courts to promote effective collaboration through policies and procedures in place to support participants who may be eligible for support from multiple agencies (i.e., Murri Court, Queensland Drug and Alcohol Court [QDAC], and Mental Health Court Liaison Team). Court Link Officers engage with these agencies to recommend services that are best suited to a participant's needs, individual circumstances and preferences.

Court Link is also working with CJGs at the local level to develop and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, identify opportunities for cross-referrals and to develop place-based responses to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who participate in the program. Court Link Officers refer interested participants to Men's and Women's yarning circles and other cultural activities organised by CJGs. Court Link is also exploring options with individual CJGs for cultural reports to be provided to the court for Court Link participants, where appropriate.

Court Link has a number of Local Stakeholder Groups and an overarching Strategic Reference Group along with representation at the Specialist Court Evaluation Working Group and the Specialist Court and Referral Services Steering Committee. Members of these various groups include frontline staff, Director-level representatives and where appropriate Executive Director/Senior Executive Officer representatives from a range of government departments and other key stakeholders (e.g., QPS, QCS, LAQ, Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, QH, representatives from other specialist courts and programs, representatives from local treatment and support services, etc.). Broadly, participation from other agencies has been good across the life of the program with local challenges discussed and handled as required. It was a reflection of a few stakeholders that this in part has been due to good resourcing within other departments, but it is noted that any future work with other agencies and stakeholders is reliant on the adequacy of their funding and resourcing to engage in such collaborative activities.

5.4.4.6 Non-program enablers and barriers

Through consultation with stakeholders, we also identified a number of key non-program related factors that are outside of the control of the Court Link program (see Table 4.4), but that have the potential to affect program delivery and effectiveness. Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 outline the enablers and barriers to the program and provide a description of each.

Table 5.2. Non-program enablers to the Court Link program

Enabler	Description
Increased access to Legal Aid	A pilot run by LAQ in the Brisbane site since July 2020 supports more timely access to funding for legal services and is expected to improve access to legal advice and representation for participants in the program, including vulnerable persons.
Networks and connections to other agencies	Staff in some sites attend network meetings (e.g., housing, case coordination meetings with QH), which many noted provides an opportunity for case collaboration, connection, and collaborative work across organisations.
Availability of local treatment and support services	Staff engage readily with local treatment and support services to support participant engagement with the program (e.g., addressing barriers to engagement, supporting referrals, reinforcing learning from other programs and services).
Availability of skilled workforce	The employment of staff with experience working in the criminal justice system was an important workforce consideration to support the positive experiences of participants (through their understanding of the sector). In one site, the program is also supported by court staff who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which improves the experiences of participants who also identify (noting this location has a high density of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples).
Participant readiness to change	Court Link Officers note that the engagement of participants in the program is often dependant on their readiness to change which can be a key factor supporting participant outcomes (e.g., in making changes, addressing their goals).
Funding and resourcing for partner organisations and departments	Court Link works with a variety of strategic and working groups (i.e., Local Stakeholder Groups, Strategic Reference Group, Specialist Court Evaluation Working Group, etc.) to discuss and address local challenges, as required and appropriate. Some noted that this was in part due to appropriate resourcing within other departments.

Table 5.3. Non-program barriers to the Court Link program

Barrier	Description
Brokerage policies	There are policies and procedures that Court Link must adhere to, to cover the provision of brokerage funds to participants such as increased authorisation processes for the use of brokerage funding greater than \$500. These processes, while safeguarding the appropriate use of public funds, can be burdensome, particularly when staff are at capacity and may not always have time to follow the required processes. Staff noted that this has limited the ability of Court Link Officers to use available brokerage funds.

Limited availability of local treatment and support services	In some sites there is limited availability of local treatment and support services to refer clients to (e.g., bulk-billing psychologists, Domestic and Family Violence services, housing services). As this is a key part of the program, a lack of suitable and accessible services can sometimes impact the ability to offer services to meet the needs of participants.
Personal circumstances of participants	Participant engagement is ultimately dependant on their personal circumstances (e.g., lack of stable housing, other co-morbidities such as mental illness or AOD use) which can sometimes hinder their engagement in the program.
Workforce competition	Competition for skilled workforce in the sector means that there is a considerable amount of staff turnover which causes an increase in the level of resourcing needed for recruitment and training in sites. Additionally, some sites have had reduced case managers available which affects program delivery.
Lack of transport options	In some sites, there is limited access to transport (i.e., public transport) which can affect participants' engagement as they have a reduced ability to easily attend both Court Link and treatment and support service appointments.

6 Recommendations

We commend the Department, Magistrates, operational, policy and evaluation staff who have dedicated time, energy, effort, and good will into the design and implementation of Court Link with real diligence and openness to feedback and evaluation. The program has achieved significant contributions to improving participants lives and wellbeing and reducing severity and frequency of offending.

The following section presents the high-level recommendations at the end of a 4-year evaluation of the Court Link program which has progressed from design to implementation. These recommendations may guide future work to embed the program in the Queensland criminal justice system.

Expansion and future direction of Court Link

We recommend that the Queensland Government and Department:

1. prioritise resourcing and expansion of the Court Link program in recognition of the contribution by the program to improving the experiences, lives, wellbeing and outcomes of participants and the likely social and cost saving impact of the program⁴²
2. develop and undertake an analysis of need across sites to inform the selection of future locations for the Court Link program to ensure that the program is rolled out with the most impact
3. ensure that any expansions of Court Link are appropriately funded, and include sufficient lead-in time for project and change management, consultation, place-based design (and local collaboration where possible) and implementation
4. consider opportunities to test elements of the Court Link model in new criminal justice initiatives to address underlying causes of offending behaviour beyond the existing Court Link bail-based cohort, as appropriate⁴³
5. highlight and champion the contribution of Court Link to the delivery of strategic objectives of other relevant agencies across government, including achieving outcomes to address, for example, mental health, homelessness, and alcohol and other drug use.

Opportunities for improvements

We recommend that the Department:

6. supports the sustainability of governance, staffing, capacity and resourcing in order to respond to service demands. This should consider, among other things, investment in training, tools and support to Court Link staff to ensure sustainable workloads, evidence-based practice, decision-making and appropriate use of professional judgement to flexibly meet the needs of participants
7. enhance formal and informal connections with treatment and support services, guided by their availability and the needs of the population within a location. For example: outreach community support services, diversion programs, housing support options, health services and AOD pathways with Queensland Health
8. strengthen the capability of Court Link to deliver accessible services that respond to the individual needs of participants, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,

⁴² The evaluation highlighted a number of quantitative and qualitative benefits of the program including contributing to a reduction in frequency and severity of offending for those who participate in Court Link compared to those that did not.

⁴³ For example, this could involve consideration of how to provide a state-wide Court Link service, a low-intensity pre-charge program, inclusion of participants who have been sentenced but not subject to supervision, or expansion to higher courts.

LGBTQIA+ people, people with disability, women, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and young adults

9. continue to support the delivery of Court Link by:
 - e) providing clear information about the program to all stakeholders, to ensure a common understanding of the program’s purpose, scope, eligibility, intended outcomes and roles and responsibilities
 - f) maintaining up-to-date policies and practice guidelines as the program develops to guide front-line staff in the delivery of trauma-informed, culturally safe person-centred services
 - g) streamlining and enhancing data collection and management to ensure usability and responsiveness of data systems and readiness for further program development and to support monitoring and evaluation efforts
 - h) using regular analysis and reporting of Court Link output and outcome data, participant and stakeholder feedback to monitor, guide and enhance quality service delivery
10. undertake reviews, evaluations and research to identify and respond to emerging issues and to support Court Link in maximising its value. This may include linking with data sets of other justice agencies.

Appendix A: Key definitions

Term	Definition
Odds Ratio	<p>An Odds Ratio measures the association between a variable of interest and an outcome. It represents the odds that the outcome will occur given the associated exposure (variable), as compared to the odds of the outcome occurring in absence of that exposure. Odds Ratios compare the relative odds of the occurrence of the outcome of interest (e.g., a participant being assessed as suitable for case management), given exposure to the variable of interest (e.g., demographic characteristic).</p> <p>OR=1 means that the variable does not affect odds of outcome.</p> <p>OR>1 means that the variable is associated with higher odds of outcome.</p> <p>OR<1 means that the variable is associated with lower odds of outcome^{iv}.</p>
Difference-in-differences	<p>Difference-in-differences (DID) is a statistical technique that attempts to mimic an experimental research design using observational study data, by assessing the differential effect of a treatment on a ‘treatment group’ versus a ‘comparison group’ in a natural experiment.</p> <p>The design of the DID model used in this analysis takes data from individuals in periods of time (before and after treatment), and from two groups (treated and non-treated). For each individual, the first difference of the dependent variable is taken from each individual. This first difference is then regressed on a dummy variable indicating 1 if the individual is treated and 0 otherwise. The model is specified as:</p> $\Delta y_i = \delta D_i + \mathbf{X}_i \boldsymbol{\beta} + \varepsilon_i$ <p>where Δy_i denotes the first difference of the dependent variable for individual i, δ denotes the treatment effect, or the regression coefficient on the dummy variable for an individual’s treatment status, D_i denotes the treatment status for individual i, \mathbf{X}_i is a vector of covariates, $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ is a vector of regression coefficients for these covariates, and ε_i is the error term.</p>

Matched sampling (using the nearest neighbour matching technique)

Matching is a statistical technique used to reduce the bias of an estimated treatment effect in an observational-data study by finding, for every treated unit, one non-treated unit with similar observable characteristics, against which the covariates are balanced out.

In the analysis for this report, we used nearest neighbour matching with replacement, which means that each treated individual was matched with the individual from the comparison group that is the smallest 5 ‘distance’ from it. In this instance, ‘distance’ refers to the Mahalanobis distance between two objects, which is defined as:

$$d_{ij} = (x_i - x_j)' \widehat{\Omega}_X^{-1} (x_i - x_j)$$

where d_{ij} is the Mahalanobis distance, x_i and x_j are two vectors of covariates for an individual and $\widehat{\Omega}_X$ is the sample covariance matrix of the covariates.

Logistic regression model

A logistic regression is a statistical model that predicts the likelihood of an event occurring by having the odds of standard logistical distribution (probability of success divided by probability of failure) of an event be linear in combination with one or more independent variables. Put simply, it estimates the probability of one binary (one option or the other) dependant event occurring based on data of independent variables.

Cluster analysis

A technique used to identify distinct groupings of individuals based on their similarities across a range of characteristics.

Appendix B: Participant demographic data cleaning and preparation

Prior to the analysis, we undertook a number of data cleaning and preparation steps. With assistance from DJAG, we first removed duplicate referral records. Because the analysis focuses on people’s sociodemographic characteristics, it was necessary that only one Court Link record be retained for each individual to avoid double-counting.

Upon checking, 561 (16%) people in the *InfoXchange* dataset have multiple Court Link records. To select which record to retain for each of these individuals, we applied the same rules as in our preparatory studies to test data analysis, as summarised below:

- **if all referrals did not proceed** – count the latest one (by referral date)
- **if only one referral goes to triage** – count this one
- **if all referrals progress to triage** – count the case with the highest level of service (i.e., case management as opposed to community referral) and the latest date (by referral date)
- **if only one record is admitted to Court Link** – count this case
- **if more than one record is admitted to Court Link** – count the one with the latest triage outcome date.

After applying these rules, we were left with 3,499 records corresponding to the same number of individuals in the sample.

Appendix C: Data preparation for impact on reoffending behaviour

While data from *InfoXchange* and *QWIC* have been analysed as part of our preparatory studies to test data analysis, this is the first time QCS data has been used in the evaluation. Information from QCS data will be used to ensure that any reduction in reoffending is not due to individuals being in custody and therefore not having the ‘opportunity’ to offend.

Data cleaning and preparation for all analyses

This section provides an overview of the key steps undertaken as part of the data cleaning and preparation process.

Selecting one Court Link record per person

As described in *Section 3.1.1*, 16% of people in the *InfoXchange* dataset have more than one Court Link record. As the analysis involves comparisons of offending behaviour before and after Court Link, it was decided with DJAG that only one Court Link record would be retained for each individual in the data.

We applied the same rules used in our preparatory studies to test data analysis to select the Court Link record to be retained for individuals with multiple records (Appendix B). Based on these rules, we removed a total of 748 records from the *InfoXchange* dataset, leaving a total of 3,499 records for analysis.

Determining treatment and comparison groups (prior to further data matching and analysis)

The next step in the data cleaning and preparation process involved the identification of the treatment and comparison groups. We again followed the same criteria as our ‘preparatory studies to test data analysis’ report, where people who spent at least 11 weeks in the program were considered to be in the treatment group (Group A), while those who did not spend any time in the program (Group E) were considered to be in the comparison group. As shown in the below table (see Table 6.1), this resulted in a total of 1,084 people in Group A (i.e., the treatment group) and 1,555 people in Group E (i.e., the comparison group). Individuals in Groups B to D were excluded from the analysis.

Table 6.1 Groupings based on the amount of service received as defined by the length of time on the program

Group	Amount of Service	Length of time	N
A (Treatment)	Full	>=11 weeks	1,084*
B	A fair bit	9 to <11 weeks	131
C	Some	5 to <9 weeks	288
D	Very little	< 5 weeks	298
E (Comparison)	Nil	0	1,555*
Total			3,356

*The treatment and comparison samples listed here were not the final sample sizes for analysis due to a range of other factors (e.g., for the survival analysis, not all individuals were offending in the observation window; inability to match data between QWIC/InfoXchange and QCS data; the length of time on program unable to be determined for some groups, data dropped during analyses due to missing variables, etc.).

Note: Length of time in Court Link could not be determined for 132 (4%) cases. These appear to be ongoing based on their triage outcome date (i.e., July 2022 onwards). A further 11 cases (0.3%) were also dropped due to missing data.

It is also worth noting that Group E is comprised of various subgroups. Of the 1,555 individuals in this group:

- **300 (19%)** were referred to Court Link but did not progress to triage
- **623 (40%)** progressed to triage and were assessed as not suitable for case management (i.e., community referral, no action, other, missing)
- **632 (41%)** were assessed as suitable for case management but were not admitted to the program for various reasons.

In discussions with DJAG, it was agreed that the third subgroup – those not admitted to Court Link – may represent the most appropriate comparison group as these individuals have similar levels of reoffending risk and need as those who were admitted to Court Link. However, given potential limitations in sample size, it was agreed that the analysis would use the full comparison group (N=1,555) with the ‘not admitted’ group to be used as an additional sensitivity check.

Merging and restructuring datasets

A critical step in the data cleaning and preparation process was the merging of datasets, particularly the *InfoXchange* and *QWIC* datasets. This allowed us to link people’s Court Link information (e.g., triage outcomes, level of service received, length of participation in program) as captured in the *InfoXchange* dataset to their court records from the *QWIC* dataset.

Merging de-identified datasets requires an identifier that: (1) is unique to each individual, and (2) is available in all datasets that need to be merged. The Single Person Identifier (SPI) fulfilled these criteria and was used as the key variable to merge data from *InfoXchange*, *QWIC*, and QCS. Following this process, we successfully merged data from *InfoXchange* and *QWIC* for the vast majority of people in the sample.⁴⁴ The merged *InfoXchange* and *QWIC* datasets therefore comprised 131,614 records in total, of which 56,811 (43%) belonged to individuals in Group A, and the remaining 74,803 (57%) to individuals in Group E.⁴⁵ To facilitate the analysis, we restructured the data and retained only a maximum of 2 records per person – one record summarising offending behaviour (e.g., number of offences, most serious offence) prior to Court Link, and another one for offending behaviour after Court Link.⁴⁶ The longitudinal structure of the dataset explains why the total number of observations exceeded the total number of individuals in the sample.

In addition to the above issue, we also note that there were 1,164 records in the QCS dataset where the SPI field was blank. Correspondence with QCS suggested that for these records, the SPIs were missing in the system and could not be retrieved. These records were therefore excluded from the analysis.

⁴⁴ 112 unmatched records were excluded from analyses.

⁴⁵ The number of observations is greater in the merged dataset compared to the *InfoXchange* dataset as individuals can have multiple charges recorded in *QWIC*.

⁴⁶ Alternatively, the dataset can be structured in a cross-sectional format with offending behaviour before and after Court Link as independent variables. For robustness, we also created another version of the dataset in this format and the analysis using the cross-sectional dataset produced identical results as the longitudinal dataset.

Controlling for correlates of recidivism

There are a range of factors associated with recidivism. Some of these factors relate to the sociodemographic characteristics of an individual, such as their age, educational attainment, employment status, and socioeconomic status. Particularly, research has shown that the probability of reoffending is greatest between the ages of 17 and 21. Recidivism is also higher among people who are unemployed and have lower levels of educational attainment and socioeconomic status. In addition to sociodemographic factors, recidivism is also associated with an individual’s criminal history. For example, research suggests that the younger a person is during their first offence, the more likely they are to reoffend. Those who offend more frequently and more severely also face a higher risk of recidivism than others.

The research evidence on correlates of recidivism suggests that it is important to account for these factors when evaluating the impact of Court Link on reoffending. One way to do this is through multivariate regression techniques, which allow us to model the relationship between Court Link participation and reoffending behaviour while controlling for a range of individual-level characteristics. We therefore extracted sociodemographic information from the *InfoXchange* data such as age at time of referral, sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, country of birth, educational attainment, and self-reported age at first offence. By incorporating these characteristics into our models, we can ensure that the observed differences in reoffending behaviour between the treatment and comparison groups are not due to any of these observed factors.

Observation windows for frequency and seriousness of offending

Total treatment group: 1084*

Total treatment group (1-years pre / post window): 986*

Total treatment group (2-year pre / post window): 1024*

*The treatment groups listed here were not the final sample sizes for analysis due to a range of other factors (e.g., for the survival analysis, not all individuals were *offending* in the observation window; inability to match data between QWIC/InfoXchange and QCS data; the length of time on program unable to be determined for some groups, data dropped during analyses due to missing variables, etc.).

For each individual in our sample, we calculated two observations windows. The first spanned 2 years, divided into 1-year intervals before and after Court Link. The second observation window was double the size of the first and spanned a total of 4 years. In the second window, individuals are observed 2 years before and 2 years after Court Link. We used the longer observation window for our main analysis and the shorter window for additional sensitivity checks.

We identified the pre- and post- time periods for each individual based on their case closure date, which in most cases was provided in the *InfoXchange* dataset. Where the case closure date was missing, we applied the following rules as agreed with DJAG:

- for those who were assessed as suitable for case management but not admitted to Court Link, use the triage outcome date
- for those who progressed to triage and were not assessed as suitable for case management, use the triage assessment date
- for those who did not progress to triage, use the date of referral to Court Link.

We note that there were 289 records of offences corresponding to 178 individuals where the case closure date in *InfoXchange* coincided with the offence date in *QWIC*. Discussions with DJAG suggest that there could be several reasons for this. A quick scan of the records showed that some of the

offences were classified as breaches of justice orders (e.g., failure to appear in Court). In discussions with DJAG, it was agreed that these 289 records would be classified under the post- time period.

The following table is included to provide further description of the sample size for analyses (see Table 6.2). It includes a summary of the number of participants who completed Court Link before each of the following time periods and aligns to the time period of the agreed data collection (i.e., between October 2017 and October 2022).

Table 6.2 Treatment group sample size by completion date

Completed before	Sample size
31/10/2018	26
31/10/2019	127
31/10/2020	206
31/10/2021	345
31/10/2022	320
Total	1,024

Appendix D: Methodology for frequency of offending

The first outcome we examined was the frequency of offending. As discussed extensively with DJAG, there is no single way to define frequency in this context. We therefore built on this so frequency of offending was operationalised in two ways: (1) based on the number of individual charges against an individual, and (2) based on the number of days in which an offence was committed. Of the two, the second definition represents the more conservative approach as an individual can commit multiple offences on the same day.

The main difference between the approach used in the previous preparatory studies used to test data analysis and this Final Report is the inclusion of QCS data into the analysis. As noted earlier, QCS data provides individual-level information on time spent in custody. Because people in custody do not have as much ‘opportunity’ to offend as those who are not in custody, it is crucial that we account for time spent in custody in our model. Because a significant share of the sample (68%) were in custody at some point during the 4-year observation window, excluding them from the analysis would substantially reduce the sample size and potentially lead to biased estimates. It was therefore necessary to create a new outcome variable that could account for time spent in custody. A description of defining the outcome variable is presented in Appendix B, but a simplified version is 1) dividing the total number of offences per period by the total number of days not spent in custody during that period and 2) multiplying this by 365 or by 730 yields the number of offences for a 1-year or 2-year period, respectively. We defined this new outcome variable as follows:

$$\text{Adjusted number of offences}_{it} = \frac{\text{Total \# of offences}_{it}}{\frac{730 - \# \text{ of days in custody}_{it}}{730}}$$

In the above formula, i represents the individual and t represents the period (i.e., before or after Court Link). The denominator represents the proportion of the 2-year period before or after Court Link that was not spent in custody.

To determine Court Link’s impact on the frequency of offending, we estimated a Difference-in-Difference (DID) model which compared the number of offences per day not in custody before and after Court Link for the treatment and comparison groups. In other words, the DID estimate represents the change in the frequency of offending for the treatment group over and above the change in the frequency of offending for the comparison group. All DID models included the full range of sociodemographic controls from *InfoXchange* as discussed previously.

To further ensure the robustness of our results, we also estimated DID models using: (1) a matched sample, and (2) using only people who were not admitted to Court Link as the comparison group. The matched sample was derived using the ‘nearest-neighbour’ matching technique. Put simply, this technique matched people in the treatment group with people in the comparison group who shared the same sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, educational attainment). A description of the matching technique is presented in Appendix A.

Appendix E: Methodology for Seriousness of offending

Following advice received from DJAG in the previous preparatory studies used to test data analysis, the QASOC codes were categorised into three main offence groups, namely: (1) offences against person, (2) offences against property, and (3) offences against public order. Of these categories, offences against person are considered the most severe followed by offences against property.

We note that for most offences, we have followed the same groupings as the previous preparatory studies used to test data analysis. The only exception to this are illicit drug offences, which were previously categorised as offences against property as per DJAG advice. For this Final Report, we have classified all drug offences as offences against public order. Table 6.3 below provides a summary.

Table 6.3: QASOC codes and corresponding offence classification

Offence classification	QASOC code	Division	Sub-divisions
Offences against person	01xxx	Homicide and related offences	Murder; attempted murder; manslaughter and driving causing death
	02xxx	Acts intended to cause injury	Assault; other acts intended to cause injury
	03xxx	Sexual assault and related offences	Sexual assault; non-assaultive sexual offences
	04xxx	Dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons	Dangerous or negligent operation of a vehicle; other dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons
	05xxx	Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person	Abduction and kidnapping; deprivation of liberty/false imprisonment; harassment and threatening behaviour
	06xxx	Robbery, extortion and related offences	Robbery; blackmail and extortion
	07xxx	Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter	Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter
Offences against property	08xxx	Theft and related offences	Motor vehicle theft and related offences; theft (except motor vehicles); receive or handle proceeds of crime; illegal use of property (except motor vehicles)

	09xxx	Fraud, deception and related offences	Obtain benefit by deception; forgery and counterfeiting; deceptive business/government practices; other fraud and deception offences
	11xxx	Prohibited and regulated weapons and explosives offences	Prohibited weapons/explosives offences
	12xxx	Property damage and environmental pollution	Property damage; environmental pollution
	10xxx	Illicit drug offences	Import or export illicit drugs; deal or traffic in illicit drugs; manufacture or cultivate illicit drugs; possess and/or use illicit drugs; other illicit drug offences
	13xxx	Public order offences	Disorderly conduct; regulated public order offences; offensive conduct
	14xxx	Traffic and vehicle regulatory offences	Driver licence offences; vehicle registration and roadworthiness offences regulatory driving offences; pedestrian offences
Offences against public order	15xxx	Offences against justice procedures, government security and government operations	Breach of custodial order offences; breach of community-based orders; breach of violence and non-violence orders; offences against government operations; offences against government security; offences against justice procedures
	16xxx	Miscellaneous offences	Defamation, libel and privacy offences; public health and safety offences; commercial/industry/financial regulation; other miscellaneous offences

We note that there is some grey literature which considers drug offences as a separate offence category.^{lvi} We therefore conducted additional analysis using four categories – offences against person, offences against property, drug offences, and offences against public order.

We examined changes in the seriousness of offending by comparing the most serious offence before and after Court Link for both the treatment and comparison groups. As a first step in our analysis, we looked at how the overall distribution of offences across the main offence categories changed before and after Court Link for both groups. We then conducted more advanced modelling by estimating a multivariate logistic regression model with the decrease in seriousness of offending as the outcome variable. In this model, a decrease in seriousness of offending is defined as either committing a less serious offence (e.g., from offence against person to offence against public order) or not committing an offence during the period of observation after Court Link.

Appendix F: Methodology for delay in re-offending

Similar to the frequency of offending, time to first offence is also influenced by one's 'opportunity' to offend. Not accounting for this factor may make durations appear longer than they are. That is, an individual who was remanded into custody after Court Link may have a longer time to first offence than someone who was not in custody during the 2-year observation window. It is therefore necessary to account for the time spent in custody before the first offence to obtain a more accurate measure of desistance. We accomplished this by using QCS data to adjust our outcome variable using the following formula:

$$\text{Adjusted time to first offence}_i = (\text{Date of first offence since CL exit}_i - \text{Case closure date}_i) - \# \text{ of days in custody prior to first offence}_i$$

Based on this formula, an individual who offended 100 days after Court Link and was in custody for 20 days before that would have an adjusted time to first offence of 80 days.

To determine whether time to first offence differed between treatment and comparison groups, we conducted two types of survival analysis. The first was a descriptive analysis of the survival curves⁴⁷ of the two groups, which allowed us to compare the following statistics: (1) the share of people in each group who offended within the first 2 years of exiting the program, and (2) median times to first offence. The second type of survival analysis involved a multivariate Cox regression with time to first offence as the outcome variable. This allowed us to estimate the difference in post-Court Link offending rates between the treatment and comparison groups while controlling for the observed correlates of recidivism.

⁴⁷ Survival curves are a graphical representation of the proportion of people in the sample who have not experienced the event of interest (i.e., reoffending) over a period of observation.

Appendix G: Transition matrices of seriousness of offending with 3 offence categories

Table 6.4: Transition matrices of seriousness of offending with 3 offence categories (4-year observation window)

Treatment group

2 years before Court Link ↓	2 years after Court Link →			Total
	Offence against public order	Offence against property	Offence against persons	
Offence against public order (n)	37	15	14	66
(%)	56%	23%	21%	100%
Offence against property (n)	83	87	48	218
(%)	38%	40%	22%	100%
Offence against persons (n)	111	95	120	326
(%)	34%	29%	37%	100%

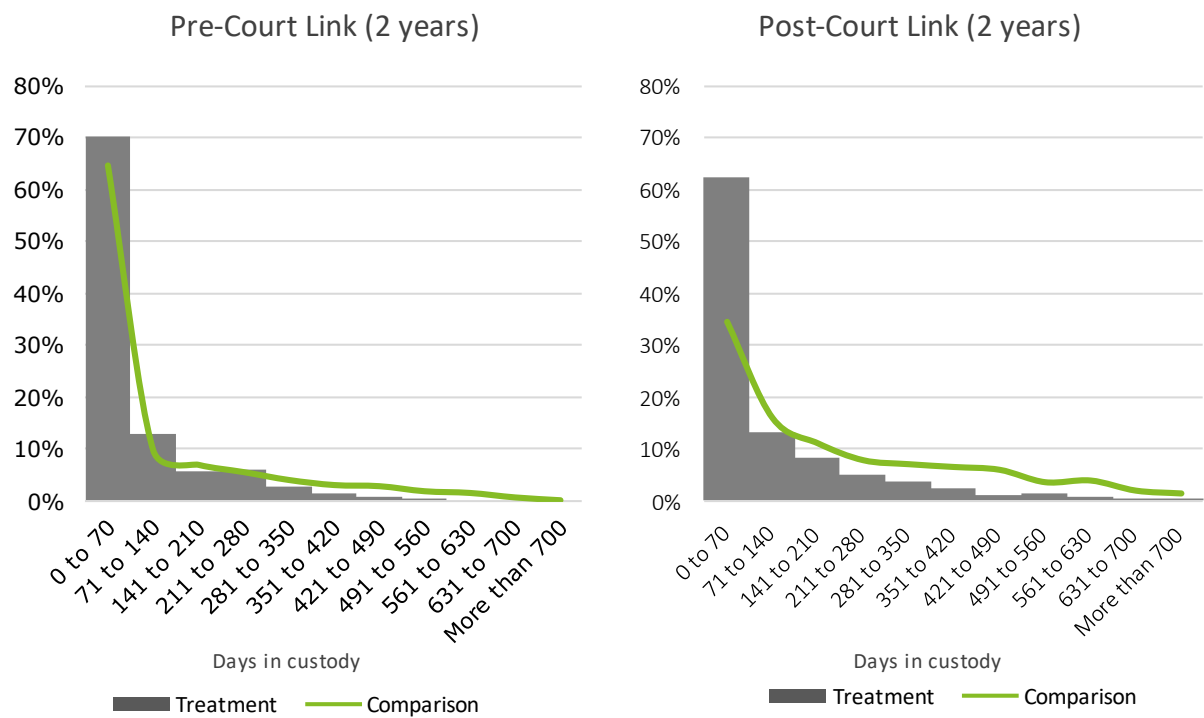
Comparison group

2 years before Court Link ↓	2 years after Court Link →			Total
	Offence against public order	Offence against property	Offence against persons	
Offence against public order (n)	62	19	21	102
(%)	61%	19%	21%	100%
Offence against property (n)	98	105	98	301
(%)	33%	35%	33%	100%
Offence against persons (n)	145	140	274	559
(%)	26%	25%	49%	100%

Appendix H: Histograms of the days in custody

Figure 6.1 below presents histograms of both groups in the pre- and post- observation windows. It shows that while the distribution of the ‘treatment’ group does not change much across the observation periods, the curve of the ‘comparison’ group flattens, meaning that more people in the ‘comparison’ group spend time in custody in the post-Court Link observation window.

Figure 6.1. Distribution of observations by days in custody



Limitation of our work

General use restriction

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