

From General Duties to Criminal Investigations

ACT Policing is refining the way its specialist investigations teams operate, to make the most of the resources and knowledge it has at its fingertips.

Even in a small geographic area such as the Australian Capital Territory there can be a broad range of criminal activity. The ACT Policing arm of the AFP is responsible for maintaining law and order in the Territory through general policing activities and the investigation of serious crime including murder, child abuse and fraud.

To do this it has a range of specialist teams, including Criminal Investigations (CI). With more than 130 officers, CI is responsible for investigating aggravated robbery, serious assaults, arson, homicides, coronial matters, sexual assault and child abuse, missing persons, internet based crime, proceeds of crime, illicit drug distribution, ACT and Commonwealth fraud and vehicle theft.

It works closely with other areas of ACT Policing, including General Duties, and has teams at each of Canberra's local stations. The decision to geographically allocate teams

to various areas of the Territory was one welcomed by ACT Crime Manager, Detective Sergeant David Harrison. He said the importance of the regionally split model is to ensure the investigation teams work with other ACT Policing units to create a collaborative approach to tackling crime.

"We have them based at stations so that they still have the tie-in with patrols and a good ongoing relationship with General Duties," he said.

"This means they continue to have an understanding of local crime issues and recidivists in the area."



01: Canberra City Police Station. **02:** Constable Matthew Elliot liaises with Constable David Hawke and other General Duties officers at City Station.



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03: Constable Matthew Elliot and General Duties Constable David Hawke. **04:** High-visibility jacket worn by Criminal Investigators. **05:** An interview room at City Station. **06:** General Duties Constable Matthew McVicar. **07:** Criminal Investigator Carly Neilson. **08:** Criminal Investigations Carly Neilson and Constable Matthew Elliot.

The model also involves separating CI units into specific crime target teams, which operate across all ACT Policing regions. So while there are general criminal response teams at every police station, there are specialist teams based at the Winchester Police Centre, Belconnen, responsible for targeting child sexual abuse, homicide, fraud and criminal asset investigations. Teams with a long-term investigative focus, such as the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team (SACAT) are also based at the Winchester Centre.

Detective Sergeant Harrison said the size of the ACT means this type of arrangement works successfully.

"Canberra is small enough that we have the advantage of being fairly close to any crime scene. And we're not restricted by jurisdictional zoning, which means that if you're stationed at Woden you have the ability to work on a job in another area," he said.

"So if the Tuggeranong Response Team is on an afternoon shift and a job comes in at Belconnen or Gungahlin they will respond."

This also means that teams which have slower moving investigations can help on major response investigations if needed.

The distribution of CI teams across the Territory also acknowledges the important role of General Duties officers during the investigative process. Patrols are the first to respond to all crime scenes and may be responsible for collecting the initial evidence vital to any investigation. General Duties officers are often called on to help with processing information, collecting further evidence, developing briefs and guarding crime scenes.

Detective Sergeant Harrison said an improvement in the ACT's crime statistics, including a decrease in motor vehicle thefts by 40 per cent during the last financial year, shows how successful the interaction between General Duties officers and Criminal Investigations has been in combating crime. He uses the Crime Targeting Teams from City station as an example.

"Interacting with the patrols helps the Criminal Investigations teams understand why crooks are doing what they're doing and alerts us to the main recidivists," he said.





"The General Duties officers have a really good understanding of what's happening on a day to day basis in their local area, which can be of vital importance to an investigation. This is an important link and we promote close interaction with the patrols. There is an open door policy at City station which means patrols and the Crime Targeting Teams are constantly sharing information about persons of interest and other intelligence that may assist an investigation."

The Crime Targeting Teams are responsible for investigating burglaries, thefts and stolen motor vehicle matters. Set up in 2006 to target repeat offenders, two teams

work simultaneously on investigations. General Duties officers from across the Territory are seconded to the teams on a rotational basis.

Constable Matthew Elliot transferred to Crime Targeting Team 1 six months ago, after completing a secondment from General Duties. He said moving over to an investigative role has helped him to understand the roles of both General Duties officers and criminal investigators.

"It is very important that we interact with General Duties on a daily basis," he said.

"This includes following up on a burglary or clarifying aspects of a job. And sometimes you'll be approached for advice about a

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particular job that may not be an investigation yet, but isn't a straightforward crime, either."

Constable Elliot said his skills as a police officer have improved since making the move to Criminal Investigations. But he's also realised that the work General Duties does is imperative to a successful outcome.

"The initial work done by the General Duties officers is crucial and critical with regard to what charges we can lay, or if we have enough evidence," he said.

And the exchange of information and ideas helps to develop the skills needed throughout a career in policing. Detective Sergeant Craig Marriot from Crime Targeting Team 1 said the positive impact of the regional model can be seen across the ACT, regardless of rank or designation.



"As a constable, working in Criminal Investigations can help you to develop the skills sets you need to act in a Sergeant's role or gain a permanent promotion," he said.

"Gaining a Detective's designation can also provide you with a range of enhanced investigative skills that will help you in all aspects of policing. And having these skills, and the skills developed through working in CI, provides a strong foundation for a career in either the ACT or national operations."

An overview of Criminal Investigations

ACT Criminal Investigations is the primary portfolio responsible for investigating serious and major crime in the ACT.

Criminal Investigations also contributes to managing content on the ACT Crime Stoppers website.

Members of ACT Criminal Investigations are involved in the investigation of:

- Homicide, aggravated robbery, serious assault, arson and suicide
- Sexual assault and child abuse matters
- All coronial matters referred to police by the ACT Coroner
- Internet based crime including fraud and online child sexual assault
- Monitoring and compliance checks of offenders on the Australian National Child Sex Offender Register
- Organised crime and drug investigations
- ACT and Commonwealth fraud
- Corruption by public officials
- Proceeds of Crime investigations to trace, restrain and confiscate funds acquired as a result of criminal activity
- Serial burglary, motor vehicle theft and the organised rebirthing of stolen motor vehicles

09: Canberra City Police Station

