



Victim Support Update



Justice
and Community
Safety



How to access support

If you have been a victim of crime and require information or support, you can contact the Victims of Crime Helpline on **1800 819 817** or by texting **0427 767 891** from 8am to 11pm, seven days per week.

If you would like to apply to receive updates about offenders who have been sentenced to prison, you can complete an application form online at **victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au**.

If you believe an organisation or agency has not complied with their obligations under the Victims' Charter and would like to make a complaint, you can contact the Victims of Crime Commissioner on **1800 010 017** or via email at **enquiries@vocc.vic.gov.au**.

Authorised and published by the
Victorian Government,
1 Treasury Place, Melbourne

December 2021

ISBN 978-1-922262-67-7 (pdf/online/MS word)

Unless indicated otherwise, this work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license. To view a copy of this licence, visit **creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0**

It is a condition of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license that you must give credit to the original author who is the State of Victoria.

Language used in the Victim Support Update

In Victoria, the term 'victim' is used in legislation, for example in the Victims' Charter, to describe someone who has experienced crime. The term 'victim' has been used in this document for that reason. However, we acknowledge that the term 'victim' is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms 'victim-survivor' or 'survivor'. The term 'survivor' reflects the resilience and strength of people who have survived an experience of crime, and the term 'victim' may not resonate with everyone. In using the term 'victim', the government is in no way intending to diminish the strength, identity or diversity of people who have experienced crime or other forms of harm.

In addition, the phrase 'recovery' is often used when referring to victim support services, including in the literature on victimisation and trauma. We acknowledge that the term 'recovery' may not resonate with all victims. Many victims of crime never 'recover', instead they try to live as best they can with its impacts. We have minimised the use of the word 'recovery' throughout this document to reflect this specific feedback from victims. However, the word 'recovery' remains in some places to emphasise the impact that improvements can have on victims in managing the effects of crime.



Minister's foreword



There has been a tremendous shift in community expectations about how victims of crime should be treated. This is largely due to the courage and advocacy of victims who are saying 'let us speak' about our experiences and listen to what we need to try and heal from the impacts of crime.

When I speak with victims, they often express concern about not being heard or consulted. Victims tell me they feel distress from being subjected to lengthy and confusing criminal justice processes, and they feel let down by service supports that don't always travel the course with them through the justice system and beyond. They also raise concerns about the harm experienced by family members and loved ones who support victims in the aftermath of crime, as well as the impact of crime on communities.

As the Minister for Victim Support, I am listening to their voices. I know more can, and must, be done. I want victims to feel recognised and heard. Victims deserve to receive appropriate support from a skilled workforce to help them address the harm caused by crime. We must continue to empower victims to exercise their rights to participate in decisions and processes that affect them. We know that providing the right support at the right time can prevent longer term harm, as well as further victimisation.

That is why the 2021-22 State Budget provided a record investment of \$64.5 million over the next four years to provide the essential building blocks to reform the victim support system. We will give victims of crime the support system they deserve – one that reaches out and offers the help they need sooner and keeps victims in sight beyond their initial experience of crime.

This investment will help to build an entirely new trauma-informed and accessible financial assistance scheme for victims of crime. The new Financial Assistance Scheme will replace the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) and be supported by a dedicated legal service for victims of crime seeking financial assistance. While the Financial Assistance Scheme is being established the government is investing nearly \$10 million to address the backlog at VOCAT.

The government is also expanding restorative justice options available to victims of crime by introducing the Victim-Centred Restorative Justice Program. In addition, we are committed to enhancing access to victim support services for Aboriginal victims of crime and the LGBTIQ+ community.

We are also developing a whole of Victorian Government 10-year strategy to address sexual violence and harm. This strategy will develop a reform agenda to improve the outcomes and experiences of victim-survivors of sexual violence and harm and prevent sexual offending.

This update helps to show that we are dedicated to providing a victim-centred, accountable, innovative, culturally safe, accessible and inclusive support system.

To victims of crime – thank you for your advocacy and sharing your stories. Your voices really are driving reform. When tragedy occurs, you deserve to feel that your rights and entitlements are upheld by the system. As the Minister for Victim Support, I will continue to listen to you, and I am determined to deliver an improved system.

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Victim Support



The principles that inform what we do

The principles that govern our response to victims of crime are enshrined in the *Victims' Charter Act 2015* (the Victims' Charter). The Victims' Charter aims to reduce the likelihood of victims and their families being further traumatised by the criminal justice system. It recognises the impact of crime on victims, their families and the broader community. The Victims' Charter acknowledges that victims of crime are participants in the criminal justice process and should be engaged with and treated with respect.

The following pages outline the vision that is driving the government's reform agenda. It also includes a summary of our key achievements over recent years, and the actions we are taking to reform the service system to enable better outcomes for victims of crime.

Strategic Vision

An innovative and integrated victim support service system that is responsive and empowers victims.



Victim Centered

We have

- / Delivered a suite of victim support services, including the Victims of Crime Helpline, the Victims Assistance Program and the Victims Register
- / Independently reviewed the victim support system to inform changes

We will

- / Deliver a new Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) for victims of crime
- / Deliver a new Victims Legal Service for FAS applicants and victims seeking restitution and compensation orders
- / Significantly reduce the backlog at VOCAT



Accountable

We have

- / Increased accountability through the Victims of Crime Commissioner
- / Listened to and strengthened the voices of victims through the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee

We will

- / Implement a Victim Support Outcomes Framework, to underpin service design and delivery, ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement
- / Promote the availability of the Victims Register



Innovative

We have

- / Established a Victim Support Workforce Capability Framework
- / Continued to provide specialist and rapid support following critical incidents

We will

- / Establish a new Victim-Centred Restorative Justice Program
- / Deliver the Virtual Court Support Program



Culturally safe, accessible and inclusive

We have

- / Recruited a Cultural Safety Practice Lead and additional Koori Engagement Workers
- / Established the Intermediary Program following a successful pilot
- / Introduced Kiki the Court Support Dog to provide support to child witnesses

We will

- / Deliver an Aboriginal Victims of Crime Strategy
- / Seek Rainbow Tick accreditation to meet the needs of LGBTIQ+ victims



Timeline of key activities

/ An independent Victims of Crime Commissioner formally established through the *Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015*.

2015

/ Royal Commission into Family Violence report delivered.

/ VLRC's report on the Role of Victims of Crime in the Criminal Trial Process released.

2016

/ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse report delivered.

2017

/ Intermediary Pilot Program commenced.

/ Family Violence Restorative Justice Service launched.

/ VLRC's review of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996* completed.

/ First ever dedicated Minister for Victim Support appointed.

/ National Redress Scheme commenced.

/ *Victims and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2018* commenced to implement several recommendations of the Role of Victims of Crime in the Criminal Trial Process review.

2018



/ The expanded powers of the Victims of Crime Commissioner commenced to support systems' accountability to victims of crime.

/ Comprehensive review of the victim services system conducted by RMIT University's Centre for Innovative Justice delivered.

/ Amendments to the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996* commenced to assist addressing the backlog at VOCAT.

/ Record investment of \$64.5 million in the State Budget to further address the VOCAT backlog, build the new Financial Assistance Scheme, establish a new Victims Legal Service and transition the Intermediary Program from a pilot to an ongoing service.

- / Deliver the new Victim-Centred Restorative Justice Program.
- / Implement the new Victim Support Outcomes Framework.
- / Promote availability of the Victims Register.
- / Deliver the Virtual Court Support Program.
- / Consult with Aboriginal victims of crime on a strategy for addressing their specific needs.
- / Provide safe and inclusive services for LGBTIQ+ victims of crime and a gender diverse victim support workforce by achieving and maintaining Rainbow Tick accreditation.

- / Establish the new Financial Assistance Scheme in consultation with victims of crime.
- / Deliver the new Victims Legal Service for applicants of the new Financial Assistance Scheme and victims seeking restitution and compensation orders.
- / Transition from VOCAT to the new Financial Assistance Scheme.

2019

2020

2021-22
State
Budget

2022

Going
forward



Reforms we will deliver to support victims of crime



Delivering a new Financial Assistance Scheme for victims of crime

For too long victims have faced delays when trying to access the financial support they need to recover from the impacts of crime. For many victims, going to a court-based tribunal exacerbates their trauma. As a result, far too many victims give up or just do not apply for the help they need. Negative experiences with the current system are one of the most frequent complaints made by victims of crime.

The message from victims is clear, the current judicial model administered by VOCAT does not serve them well. That is why the 2021-22 State Budget invested \$54.6 million to develop a new Financial Assistance Scheme for victims of crime to replace VOCAT and give victims meaningful and long-anticipated reform.

The new Financial Assistance Scheme will enable victims to access the support they need to recover from injuries sustained from the impact of violent crime. Financial assistance enables victims to access funding for a range of purposes including safety related expenses, funerals, counselling and other health related expenses.

The new Financial Assistance Scheme is a landmark reform for Victoria. It will transform victims' experiences by delivering financial assistance that is timely, trauma-informed and accessible. It will reduce the re-traumatisation of victims by removing formal hearings, dealing with applications much more quickly and better integrating the scheme with the victim support system. The Financial Assistance Scheme will provide a better way to acknowledge the harm victims have experienced and will also reduce the need for lawyers by making the application process simpler and easier to navigate. We will continue to consult closely with key stakeholders on the design of the new scheme ahead of its implementation.

In the meantime, VOCAT has been provided \$9.9 million to help clear the current backlog of cases and enable a smooth transition to the new scheme. In November 2020, amendments to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act commenced to increase flexibility in decision-making at VOCAT and to ensure current cases can be considered in a more timely way.

As of 30 June 2021, there were 7717 pending applications at VOCAT (down 5.5 per cent from 2019-20). Work is underway to redirect pending matters to newly recruited Tribunal Officers. Demand for financial assistance remains high, with 7075 new applications made in 2020-21. During this same period, VOCAT finalised 7817 applications and awarded assistance to 5319 victims of crime.



Making VOCAT safer while we build the Financial Assistance Scheme

To assist victims prior to the Financial Assistance Scheme commencing, amendments will also be made to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act to introduce a prohibition on alleged offenders being notified of, or attending, hearings at VOCAT in family violence or sexual offence matters. These amendments are consistent with findings from the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria and the VLRC's review of the Victims of Crime Assistance Act and VOCAT.

Victims have said the prospect of an offender being notified or appearing at hearings is a significant barrier to them making an application to VOCAT. Introducing these amendments before the new scheme gets underway means we are making a start on things that matter most to victims. Victims can now feel safe in the knowledge that their offender will not be notified or attend VOCAT hearings when they seek financial assistance to deal with the impacts of crime on their lives.





Improving the system for victim-survivors of sexual offences and their families

We are committed to improving the criminal justice system for victims of sexual offences. The *Judicial Proceedings Reports Amendment Act 2021* provides families and friends of deceased sexual offence victims with the right to tell their loved one's story, and the ability to apply for a victim privacy order to protect their identity if this is preferred. This follows laws passed in 2020 to enable victim-survivors of sexual offences to speak publicly about their experience without having to seek court permission.

Further reforms will also be considered through the development of a new whole of Victorian Government strategy to address sexual violence and harm due in the first half of 2022. This strategy will include a strong focus on improving outcomes for victim-survivors. The strategy will consider reforms in response to the VLRC's 2021 report on improving the response of the justice system to sexual offences, as well as its pending report on legal responses to stalking, harassment and similar conduct. The strategy will recognise that transformation needs to go beyond the justice system and

so will seek to deliver improvements from prevention through to tertiary responses. Importantly, the design of the strategy will include consultation with victim-survivors to ensure that reforms place victim-survivors at the centre.

Informed by the voices of victim-survivors, the strategy will focus on improving the experiences and outcomes for victim-survivors through enhancing and expanding legal supports for victim-survivors, providing better access to information, more choice in justice pathways, improved court processes, and a strong focus on prevention and early intervention.

Victim-survivors will have improved access to the range of supports and services they need to recover from crime. More details about the improved victim-survivor supports and pathway to improve responses to sexual offending will be contained within the strategy due for release in 2022.



Delivering a new Victims Legal Service

Funding for the Financial Assistance Scheme in the 2021-22 State Budget included \$7.3 million to establish a new, dedicated Victims Legal Service. The service will provide legal advice and assistance to victims applying to the new Financial Assistance Scheme as well as victims applying for restitution and compensation orders. The service will be delivered by Victoria Legal Aid and community legal centres from 2022-23.

This will be the first dedicated legal service for victims in Victoria. Victims will have access to timely, trauma-informed legal advice and support delivered by specialist staff who have a comprehensive understanding of the laws governing financial assistance and compensation for victims and a deep understanding of the criminal justice system experience for victims. Although the new Financial Assistance Scheme will reduce the need for lawyers in many cases by making the application process simpler and easier to navigate, the Victims Legal Service will help ensure victims with complex needs are provided with the legal advice they need, if they need it.





Establishing a new Victim-Centred Restorative Justice Program

The new Victim-Centred Restorative Justice Program will provide eligible victims with greater opportunity to feel heard and participate in restorative justice processes.

Restorative justice allows people to come together to share their perspectives on what has happened, how they have been affected, and what can be done to improve the outcome. This approach focuses on the harm caused to people, to relationships and to the community, and places reparation of harm at the forefront. This contrasts with conventional criminal justice system responses.

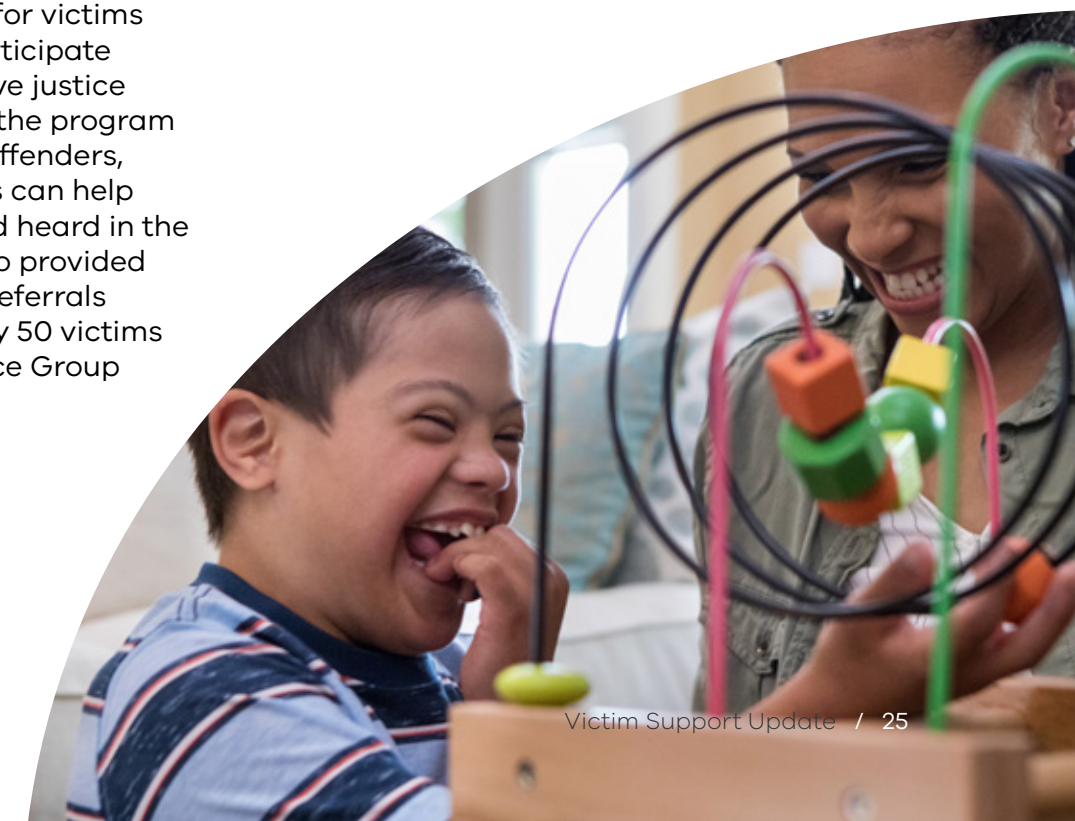
In victim-centred restorative justice, all elements of the process revolve around the victim and are informed by their needs and preferences. The restorative process gives the victim a safe and supported opportunity to tell their story to people that are important to them to reach a shared understanding about what has happened, its impact on them, and what might make the situation better. For some people, this might involve talking with the person who has harmed them. While more traditional restorative justice outcomes related to the offender such as reducing future offending may occur, this is not the core focus of victim-centred restorative justice programs.

The Victim-Centred Restorative Justice Program will build on the Family Violence Restorative Justice Service and victim support for Youth Justice Group Conferencing currently being delivered by Victim Services, Support and Reform (VSSR) in the Department of Justice and Community Safety (the department).

The Family Violence Restorative Justice Service provides victims, family members and others who have experienced family violence with another option to feel heard, receive support and manage the impacts of family violence. This innovative service has received 55 referrals and enquiries, which is consistent with take up levels when establishing a new restorative justice service in a sensitive area like family violence.

The Youth Justice Group Conferencing Program provides support for victims of young offenders who participate in a pre-sentence restorative justice process. While the focus of the program is on rehabilitating young offenders, support provided to victims can help victims to feel informed and heard in the conference. Victims are also provided with ongoing support and referrals after the conference. Nearly 50 victims participated in Youth Justice Group Conferencing in 2020-21.

The Victim-Centred Restorative Justice Program is expected to commence in March 2022. It will establish new restorative justice streams for families of adolescents using violence in the home, victims seeking a restorative process with offenders under sentence, and applicants to the new Financial Assistance Scheme for victims of crime. The program will also include a new Restorative Justice Knowledge Hub to position the department as a leader in victim-centred restorative justice design and innovation. In addition, a new restorative justice pathway for victim-survivors of sexual offences will be explored in consultation with victim-survivors and other stakeholders in 2022 to provide people with more choice and flexibility in how they access justice outcomes, based on their individual needs and preferences.





Enhancing services for adults with a cognitive disability and children and young people

We know that adults with a cognitive disability and children and young people routinely face barriers to accessing justice, including reporting crime to police and giving evidence in court.

This is why the 2021-22 State Budget provided \$9.9 million for the continuation of the Intermediary Program following a successful pilot. This program helps police, lawyers and the judiciary plan their questioning so that victims can feel safe and confident and provide better quality evidence. Over 400 adults with a cognitive disability and children and young people were assisted by the Intermediary Program in 2020-21.

The Child Witness Service provides specialist support for children, young people and their families to prepare them for being witnesses. The service also provides debriefing to families and referrals to other community agencies and services. More than 1000 children and their families were assisted by the Child Witness Service last financial year. In early 2021, we welcomed Kiki the Court Support Dog to the Child Witness Service. Kiki is trained to provide calming support and help reduce further traumatisation.

The Victorian Government has also funded new remote witness rooms through the Virtual Court Support Program. This investment will provide flexible options for victims and witnesses a part of the Child Witness Service and Intermediary Program to engage safely in court hearings online. Co-locating these services has already improved coordination, streamlined referrals and allowed skills to be shared between the programs. In addition, these services are working to embed best practice in cultural safety and whole-of-family care.





A dedicated strategy for Aboriginal victims of crime

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are overrepresented as victims of crime but are underrepresented in accessing victim support services. This is why the Victorian Government is developing a dedicated Aboriginal victims of crime strategy. This strategy will be informed by key principles of cultural safety and self-determination. We will work with the Aboriginal community, including the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, to identify how the victim support system can better respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This strategy supports the work the government is already prioritising through the fourth iteration of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja* (AJA4). Under this agreement, VSSR has recruited a Cultural Safety Practice Lead to provide leadership and support for all our victim support workers, such as Victims of Crime Helpline staff and Koori Engagement Workers through the Aboriginal Engagement Network. Koori Engagement Workers provide confidential and culturally sensitive support to Aboriginal victims of crime in the community through the Victims Assistance Program. There are currently 10 full-time equivalent Koori Engagement Worker positions funded across the state, surpassing the target established under AJA4.



Gaining Rainbow Tick accreditation to meet diverse needs

Members of the LGBTIQ+ community will not seek the support they need unless we can demonstrate our commitment to delivering a safe, inclusive and affirming victim support system. This is why we are working towards Rainbow Tick accreditation for all victim support programs and services. Achieving accreditation will help to ensure LGBTIQ+ people feel safe and supported to access the victim service system and receive a tailored response that meets their needs. It will also help to ensure our workforce feels safe, valued and supported in all of its diversity as well.

Rainbow Tick is a national accreditation program for organisations that are committed to safe and inclusive practice and service delivery for LGBTIQ+ people. Rainbow Tick consists of six standards developed by Rainbow Health Victoria and are designed to build lasting LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Organisations are assessed against each standard and accredited by an independent assessor.

Rainbow Tick accreditation for all family violence services was recommended by the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Victims of Crime Helpline is the sole referral pathway for male victims of family violence.

While we anticipate that initial accreditation will be achieved by May 2022, maintaining accreditation is an ongoing commitment. VSSR's accreditation status will be subject to regular quality assurance reviews to ensure it continues to deliver programs and services consistent with the Rainbow Tick standards.

More information about Rainbow Tick can be found at rainbowhealthvic.org.au.





Measuring the impact of our efforts through a Victim Support Outcomes Framework

Our achievements and reforms are intended to deliver services to the standard victims rightly expect. Victim services will ensure that all our work is designed, delivered and accountable to these outcomes. This is why VSSR is developing a Victim Support Outcomes Framework informed by contemporary understandings of victims' service needs, rights and entitlements. This will measure and report on what victim services do, not by volume or activity, but by the difference these services make to victims' experiences.

The Victim Support Outcomes Framework will consist of four service domains, including:

- / **Safety, recovery and resilience:** victims are supported so that they can recover and thrive
- / **Agency, access and equity:** victim services are accessible, equitable and tailored to meet specific and diverse needs
- / **Inform and empower:** victims can participate and have agency in the justice system

- / **Reduce risk and respond:** victim services collaborate with the wider justice system to reduce risk and minimise harm

The Victim Support Outcomes Framework will be rolled out across victim services programs and will also underpin the new Financial Assistance Scheme for victims of crime.

Case study: Intermediary Program

Jessie (aged 3 ½) was referred to the Intermediary Program by police after her young age posed some challenges during a police interview. The intermediary supported police to conduct the interview in a neutral, comfortable environment (a quiet room in Jessie's childcare). The intermediary and police officer sat with Jessie on the floor and explored her understanding of words and concepts through play. Based on her observations, the intermediary made several recommendations to the police officer to suit Jessie's communication skills and phrase their questions in an age-appropriate way. Jessie was then able to disclose what had happened to her.



Last financial year:



Around
23,000
victims were referred to the
Victims of Crime Helpline
by Victoria Police



More than
16,000
victims were supported by the
Victims Assistance Program



More than
13,000
people called the
Victims of Crime Helpline
for support



Nearly
1000
victims on the
Victims Register



What we are doing now to support victims of crime

Effectively delivering a suite of victim support services

In recognition of the extensive and often enduring impacts of crime, the Victorian Government provides a suite of support services through VSSR. Alongside the Intermediary Program and the Child Witness Service, these programs include:

- / Victims of Crime Helpline:** An information and referral point for all victims of reported and unreported crime, available from 8am-11pm every day of the year. Last financial year, more than 13,000 people called the Helpline for support and Victoria Police referred around 23,000 victims to the Helpline.
- / Victims Assistance Program:** Flexible case management services meet the practical, emotional, and psychological needs of victims. Last financial year, the Victims Assistance Program supported more than 16,000 victims of crime.
- / Victims Register:** Eligible victims can apply to receive certain information about an offender's sentence and be supported to make submissions to the Adult Parole Board and the Post Sentence Authority. Victims on the register can also be notified if they are eligible to make claims against compensation payments from the Victorian Government to prisoners, for injuries sustained while in custody. There are nearly 1000 victims on the register.
- / Critical incident support:** Specialist in-house capability, which can quickly and effectively be mobilised to support victims following a critical incident caused by a criminal act, such as the Bourke Street tragedies. VSSR has developed a Critical Incident Response Framework that provides a co-ordinated service response to victims and their families and identifies the types of services needed to manage the impacts of the crime over time. While the particular needs of victims may vary, support generally includes specialised trauma services, practical assistance to support victims access what they need in the immediate aftermath of an event, support through the criminal justice system and coronial proceedings and help with referrals to address other longer-term needs as they arise.
- / Victoria's participation in the National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse:** This scheme acknowledges that many children were sexually abused in institutions, recognises the suffering they endured, and holds institutions accountable. People who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse can gain access to a redress payment, counselling and psychological care, and a direct personal response from the responsible institution/s. While the National Redress Scheme is run by the Commonwealth Government, VSSR coordinates Victoria's participation.

Implementing the Victim Support Workforce Capability Framework

The community expects the victim support workforce to be highly skilled and have the capabilities required to meet the diverse and changing needs of victims of crime. They expect the approach to be trauma-informed and responsive, and that it can support victims to understand and participate in multiple systems, including interaction with police and the courts. Dealing with the impacts of crime rarely occurs in a 'straight line' due to the nature of trauma, with some needs arising immediately after the incident and others presenting later and requiring longer-term support. Staying the course with victims is therefore critical as they endeavour to work through the harm caused to them.

In 2021, VSSR developed the Victim Support Workforce Capability Framework to guide the recruitment, training and development of its workforce. The Framework sets out a standardised and common language to describe core capabilities needed for a specialist and skilled workforce, using contemporary and evolving understandings of victimisation and trauma. The Framework will support uplift of workforce capability across victim services and guide continued investment in professional practice. Specialist practice leads have also been employed to build workforce capability in areas of complex service delivery, including in family violence victim support.

Implementation of the Victim Support Workforce Capability Framework will commence in early 2022.



Listening to the voices of victims through the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee

Victims' lived experience of crime and the systems that respond to their experiences are at the heart of our approach to reform. The Victorian Government is committed to listening to the voices of victims of crime, including through the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee.

The Committee provides an important forum for the Minister for Victim Support and the Attorney-General to discuss improvements to policies, practices and service delivery relating to victims of crime with people with lived experience. Chaired by the Hon. Jennifer Coate AO, the Committee also includes members of the judiciary, justice agencies and service organisations. It therefore brings decision makers in the justice system to the same table as people who have lived experience of the system to consider reforms that place victims' interests at the forefront.

The Committee has a strategic program of work and victim representatives on the Committee are regularly consulted on major policy, service and legislative reforms. In the last year, this has included reforms to the *Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958* to allow victims of sexual assault to speak about their experiences, the VLRC's review into improving the justice system response to sexual offences, and the design of the new Financial Assistance Scheme for victims of crime.

In 2020, the government strengthened the role of victim representatives on the Committee, including extending their terms to three years and ensuring they are remunerated. This recognises both the extensive time commitment and expertise victim representatives bring to the Committee. The current victim representatives are on the Committee until mid-2023.

More information about the Committee can be found at www.victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au/victims-of-crime-consultative-committee.





Increasing system accountability to victims through the Victims of Crime Commissioner

The Victims of Crime Commissioner is independent of government, the justice system and victim services and acts as a regulator. The Commissioner plays a vital role in holding agencies in the justice system accountable for how they treat victims of crime. Under the *Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015*, the Commissioner is empowered to meet with and hear from victims of crime, conduct inquiries into systemic issues within the victim services system, and provide advice to government about improvements to the justice system. The Commissioner's Strategic Plan 2020-23 sets out the strategic direction for advocacy for improved experiences for victims of crime.

In November 2019, the government extended the Commissioner's powers to include monitoring and reporting on justice agency compliance with the Victims' Charter, as well as the ability to investigate individual complaints about compliance. With the additional oversight and scrutiny of the victim service system under these expanded powers, the community's expectations for high quality, comprehensive supports are higher than ever.

In June 2021, the Commissioner announced her first systemic inquiry, which will focus on victim participation in the justice system. The inquiry is an opportunity for victims of crime to voice their views about support services and justice agencies, and what new laws, policies or programs might be needed to help victims participate in the justice system.

Independently reviewing the victim support system to inform change

The *Strengthening Victoria's Victim Support System: Victim Services Review*, conducted by the Centre for Innovative Justice (RMIT University), comprehensively examined the strengths and limitations of the system. It included extensive consultations with victims of crime, specialist family violence services and sexual assault services, courts and tribunals, legal and health providers and other specialist services. The review also conducted consultations with the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee.

The review found that victim support workers perform highly specialised and skilled work, and it is the personal, one-on-one-support that makes the greatest difference to victims. However, it also found the system to be complex and fragmented, which could compound victim trauma and that of their families. The review suggests an ambitious 'once in a generation' reform agenda that will take time to fully consider and implement.

The first critical steps for progressing these reforms are included in this document.



How to access support

If you have been a victim of crime and require information or support, you can contact the Victims of Crime Helpline on **1800 819 817** or by texting **0427 767 891** from 8am to 11pm, seven days per week.

If you would like to apply to receive updates about offenders who have been sentenced to prison, you can complete an application form online at **victimsofcrime.vic.gov.au**.

If you believe an organisation or agency has not complied with their obligations under the Victims' Charter and would like to make a complaint, you can contact the Victims of Crime Commissioner on **1800 010 017** or via email at **enquiries@vocc.vic.gov.au**.



Justice
and Community
Safety