

Victorian Government Response

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO VICTORIA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Victorian Government welcomes the report of the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee's *Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System* (the Inquiry).

The Government thanks the Committee for its comprehensive review of Victoria's criminal justice system, and those who provided submissions and evidence to the Inquiry. The Inquiry's recommendations are wide-ranging and provide valuable insights into Victoria's criminal justice system.

The Victorian Government is committed to a continuous reform agenda that seeks to deliver community safety and prevent crime, intervene as early as possible where people are at risk of offending, address the needs of victims and, where contact with the criminal justice system occurs, ensure that interventions are as positive and rehabilitative as possible.

Each of the Inquiry's recommendations are under review. The recommendations are being considered as part of the Government's justice work program.

The Government is already taking actions that address many of the Inquiry's recommendations. This includes a commitment to introduce legislation into Parliament this year to make Victoria's bail laws fairer and safer for groups experiencing vulnerability, while maintaining an appropriate approach to those accused of serious offending or who pose a risk to community safety.

Victoria will be the first state to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to 12, and to 14 years old by 2027 – bolstering the Victorian Government's work to divert young people from the criminal justice system and keep the community safe.

Victoria is also developing a new Victims of Crime Financial Assistance Scheme which will be built around the needs of victims and aims to minimise the trauma they experience. In the meantime, Government has provided the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal with funding to increase capacity to process the backlog of applications.

The Victorian Government has in place a significant program of work, including (but not limited to):

- The Crime Prevention Strategy, which sets out a clear, long-term approach for how we intervene early and prevent crime.
- The Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020 – 2030, which sets out the government's vision for a leading youth justice system; Wirkara Kulpa, Victoria's first Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy; and the Youth Diversion Statement.
- The fourth phase of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement – *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja*, which continues to guide work in partnership with Aboriginal communities, on a range of initiatives and programs to address the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system.
- The response to the Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial System, which was informed by and supports the findings of the Inquiry.

- Reforms that provide greater support to victims of crime and give them a stronger voice in our justice system. This includes commencement of work on the development of Victoria's first Aboriginal Victims of Crime Strategy. This strategy will identify ways the victim support system can better respond to the needs of Aboriginal victims of crime.
- Consideration of reforms to Victoria's system for the oversight of police and the police complaints system.
- Recruitment is underway for an additional 75 bail justice to reduce resourcing pressure and improve access to after-hour bail decision makers.
- Supporting integrated programs delivered through community legal centres, including health justice partnerships, to provide more Victorians with early access to legal services, including legal education.

This program of work is backed by investment across the justice system, including funding in the 2023/24 Victorian Budget that contributes to addressing recommendations in the report, including:

- \$13.64m over three years to prevent youth offending via early intervention, continuing the Youth Crime Prevention Program
- \$144.17m to support people in custody and reduce recidivism, including enhancing women's custodial health services
- \$7.08m to expand the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service's regional hub model providing culturally safe legal services
- \$17.39m for the financial assistance scheme for victims of crime, and
- funding to enhance Victoria Police's Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program and the Embedded Youth Outreach Program

The Government acknowledges that more work must still be done to further strengthen Victoria's criminal justice system. Work will be guided and informed by recommendations from other reports and inquiries, including the Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, and others. The Government will continue to be guided in its work through partnership with key stakeholders including the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, Yoorrook Justice Commission and Treaty processes.