

Fair and equal justice

Significant initiatives

- \$7m in 2023-24 (\$14m/2 yrs) for targeted programs delivered by community legal centres, including the CLC Family Violence Assistance Fund and early intervention health justice partnerships.
- \$7.8m in 2023-24 (\$22.8m/4 yrs) to expand legal assistance across Victoria's Specialist Family Violence Court network.
- \$5m in 2023-24 under the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF) for early intervention, diversion and family therapy programs for 10- to 11-year-olds who are in contact, or at risk of contact, with the justice system.
- \$18m in 2023-24 (\$18.3m/2 yrs under the EIIF) to provide a range of supports in the corrections system to reduce recidivism and enhance reintegration for over-represented groups, including:
 - Support for family strengthening programs.
 - The KickStart program, for men and women on community-based orders to access alcohol and other drug treatment.
 - Trauma-informed, gender-responsive supports for women in custody.
 - Culturally safe support programs for Aboriginal people in custody.
- \$8.5m in 2022-23 (\$24.2m/4 yrs under the EIIF) for programs that reduce justice system demand, including:
 - Supporting forensic disability and complex needs supports for people with cognitive disabilities who have been in custody.
 - To expand the Embedded Youth Outreach Program to two new locations (Brimbank/Melton and Greater Shepparton).
 - Implementing a regional hub model for Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services in regional Aboriginal communities.

What's good

- 12 Specialist Family Violence Courts have been established since 2019, following the Royal Commission recommendation that all family violence matters be heard in specialist courts to improve safety of victim survivors and strengthen accountability mechanisms for people who use family violence through the court process. This Budget provides welcome investment in legal services throughout this court network, to ensure victim-survivors can navigate the legal system and achieve good outcomes in court.
- The Victorian Government has committed to raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 now, and has established a pathway

What's missing

- VCOSS welcomes funding for a range of programs that improve the quality of healthcare in custody and respond to the specific support needs of people over-represented in the justice system, as part of their broader approach to driving down demand for acute services under the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF).
- However, although providing specialist support is welcome, we consider support provided to people already in contact with police or corrections a *late* intervention. VCOSS will continue advocacy to ensure people access supports in community to prevent them from becoming involved with the justice system in the first place. This can

to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 by 2027. As part of this reform, this Budget provides modest investment in support services for children and their families to address issues underlying children's behaviours and to prevent further contact with the justice system.

occur by adopting a justice reinvestment strategy, which would strengthen the EIFF by incorporating a community-led approach to identifying priorities and implementing solutions to address the issues that place people at risk of becoming involved with the justice system.

- Urgent reform to Victoria's bail laws is also needed to reduce the number of people, especially First Nations people and women, in custody. We look forward to this reform progressing as part of the Government response to the Coronial investigation into the death of Veronica Nelson.