

Making the justice system work

SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES

- **Improving access to justice for vulnerable victims of crime**
\$3.2m in 2026-27 (\$6.4/2yrs) to continue the Victims' Legal Service, a dedicated statewide specialist legal service for victims of crime.
- **Supporting a safe and effective corrections system**
\$21.4m in 2026-27 (\$42.1/2yrs) to support the operation of the corrections system, reduce recidivism and enhance prisoners' reintegration into the community.
- **Supporting a safe and effective youth justice system**
\$5.1m in 2026-27 (\$8.5/2yrs) to increase funding to support the operation of the youth justice system including early intervention programs, funding for Victoria Legal Aid to represent young people in contact with the criminal justice system, and upgrade Victoria Police's information and technology systems for requirements under the *Youth Justice Act 2024*.
- **Delivering serious consequences and keeping the community safe**
\$78.3 in 2026 –27 (\$272.3/4yrs) to increase custodial capacity in the youth justice and adult corrections systems and to establish a specialised County Court youth list to fast-track serious matters to be heard in the County Court.
- **Violence Reduction unit – Local crime prevention solutions**
\$15m in 2026-27 (\$33.4/4yrs) to support Violence Reduction Unit programs which will work with local communities and young people to take preventative measures to address the root causes of violent youth crime.
- **Youth crime prevention package**
\$6.6m in 2026-27 (\$8.1/2yrs) to support young people who are at risk of offending and involvement with the justice system through continuing the Youth Crime Prevention Program and supporting WestJustice to work with Victoria Police to reduce youth offending through the Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Program.

WHAT'S GOOD

- This Budget allocates \$33.3 million towards the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The establishment of the VRU provides a unique opportunity for the Victorian Government to lead a whole-of-system coordinated approach to tackling the drivers of youth offending. VCOSS strongly supports the VRU taking a public health approach in addressing youth offending, and stands ready as Victoria's peak body for social and community services to work closely with the VRU to drive improved outcomes for young people who are underserved in community support and overrepresented in the youth justice system, including through evidence-based prevention and early intervention.
- This Budget makes some important investments in early intervention programs including:
 - *The South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group* (2.3m in 2025-26/ 5.5m over 2yrs) to implement key recommendations of the Working Group which focuses on addressing the over-representation of South Sudanese Australian young people in the criminal justice system.
 - *The Youth Crime Prevention Package* \$6.6m in 2026-27 (\$8.1/2yrs) allocates funding to continue the Youth Crime Prevention Program and supporting *WestJustice* to work with Victoria Police to reduce youth offending through the *Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Program*, part of the youth crime prevention package \$6.6m in 2026-27 (\$8.1/2yrs).
 - *Supporting students at risk of suspension, expulsion and contact with youth justice through early intervention* \$3.6m in 2025-26 (23.4m/4yrs) to continue early intervention supports for children and young people involved in, or at-risk of involvement in, the youth justice system.
- The Victims Legal Service has averted wholesale funding cuts, with this Budget allocating \$6.4 million of funding over the next two years for the service to continue to enable victims of crime to access the financial assistance they are entitled to. However, with no indexation provided, the real value of the investment in this program has diminished.
- Access to justice is a cornerstone of a fair and equal society. This Budget provides \$4.0m in 2026-27 (\$10.1/3yrs) of funding to continue critical legal services which support marginalised Victorians including *Q+ Law*, a dedicated legal service for LGBTQIA+ Victorians operated by *Fitzroy Legal Service* which has become a lifeline for many people in the LGBTQIA+ community.

WHAT'S MISSING

- This Budget continues to disproportionately prioritise carceral youth justice responses, with at least \$273 million directed to implement the *Adult Time for Violent Crime* and Bail legislation reforms. Both are not evidence-based and are likely to increase the over-representation of marginalised young people in the justice system. The Smart Justice for Young People coalition's

[Working Together Action Plan](#) provides a ready framework to redirect investment towards coordinated, whole-of-system reform focused on prevention, accountability and long-term community safety. This is where Government's focus should be.

- While the Budget acknowledges increased demand from recent bail reforms, it overwhelmingly invests in prison capacity rather than support. Of the funding under *Supporting a safe and effective corrections system* (\$21.4m in 2026–27 / \$42.1m over two years), only around 15% is directed to family connection and mentoring programs, compared with much larger investment in expanding prison capacity and implementing *Adult Time for Violent Crime*. This falls short of VCOSS' pre-Budget call for greater investment in on-remand and in-prison family violence counselling, targeted behaviour change programs, and a public health model for custodial health services. VCOSS is also disappointed the Budget includes no funding for an Aboriginal-led model of care in custody, despite long-standing recommendations since the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*.
- The Budget allocates funding under the measure '*Supporting a safe and effective corrections system*' (\$21.4m in 2026-27; \$42.1/2yrs) for people in prison to remain connected with their family and mentoring programs for women in contact with the justice system. However, this investment represents just 27.3% of the funding allocated to the measure '*Delivering serious consequences and keeping the community safe*' – which is focused on increasing prison capacity and implementing *Adult Time for Violent Crime*. This falls short of VCOSS' pre-Budget call for greater investment in on-remand and in-prison family violence counselling and other targeted programs for people who use violence, and a public health model for delivery and oversight of health services.
- This Budget allocates \$108.6m to recruit up to 200 police reservists and an additional 50 Protective Services Officers (PSOs) to increase policing activity in the community. While community safety is a key priority, a concentrated focus on proactive policing will not achieve community care and safety. This funding would be more effectively directed to community-based youth, family, mental health, alcohol and other drug services, and housing as upstream investment in community safety.
- In the context of tightening bail laws and the *Adult Time for Serious Crime* laws, VCOSS is disappointed this Budget does not fund a new independent police oversight body. The [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#) found that First Peoples fear police and lack confidence in complaint mechanisms due to the absence of independence. VCOSS understands that the [Victorian Government is currently considering this recommendation](#) and calls on the Government to urgently implement this reform to strengthen accountability, integrity, and community trust in the justice system.
- The Budget includes no new investment in Aboriginal Legal Services, which is particularly concerning in a law-enforcement heavy Budget. First Nations communities continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system, currently 17% of the total Youth Justice

population, and 26% of the total adult justice population are Aboriginal¹. Access to culturally appropriate legal services for First Nations communities is a critical safety net that must be prioritised.

¹ Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service 2026, 'Victoria's first budget delivered in Treaty era ignores self-determined justice solutions', <https://www.vals.org.au/news/media-release/victorias-first-budget-delivered-in-treaty-era-ignores-self-determined-justice-solutions/>.