



VICTIMS OF
CRIME ASSISTANCE
TRIBUNAL

Annual Report

2023–2024



Year at a Glance

9,964 applications filed
UP BY 18.3%



9,632 orders finalising applications
UP BY 9.7%



9,340 pending applications
UP BY 14.3%



6,106 awards of assistance made
UP BY 7.1%



\$87.3 million awarded
UP BY 18%



116,075 unique visits to our website
DOWN BY 1.5%



3,118 online applications filed, being
31.3% OF ALL LODGEMENTS



Judicial Registrars made
22.9% OF FINAL ORDERS



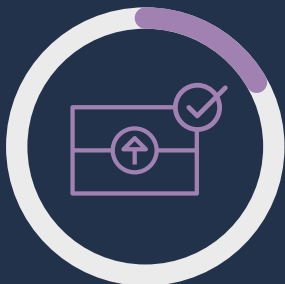
4,465 interim awards of
assistance **UP BY 28.9%**



Average award amount \$9,450
UP BY 2.9%



601 Koori List finalisations
UP BY 16.7%



588 Koori List applications
UP BY 1%



The Tribunal Officer List made
47.4% OF FINAL ORDERS



3,436 variation awards of
assistance **UP BY 39.4%**



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Letter to Minister

1 September 2024

The Honourable Jaclyn Symes MP
Attorney-General
121 Exhibition Street
Melbourne Vic 3000

Dear Attorney-General,

In accordance with the requirements of section 68 of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996*, I am pleased to present the annual report of the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal for the year ending 30 June 2024.

The report sets out the performance of the Tribunal's functions, powers and duties during the year under review.

Yours sincerely,



Justice Lisa Hannan
Chief Magistrate

Chief Magistrate's Message

THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE LISA HANNAN, CHIEF MAGISTRATE

The Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) sits within the Magistrates' Court of Victoria. The Tribunal considers applications from victims of crime for financial assistance throughout Victoria.

In preparation for the transition to the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS), the Tribunal has continued to consolidate its operations into a centralised registry. Almost all VOCAT applications have been transferred to this principal registry, with a small number of part-heard matters remaining at their original venues. Over the past 12 months, most of those have now been finalised or are in the process of being finalised.

The centralisation process has involved significant effort by regional and metropolitan courts, and by VOCAT, to prepare, move and commence work on over 9,300 files. Alongside this move, close to 40,000 finalised files have been archived from statewide court locations into secondary storage.

In May 2023, additional funding from the 2023/24 State Budget allowed for the expansion of the VOCAT workforce to increase the number of Tribunal Officers and registry staff, aligned with increasing demand and the need to finalise matters in the context of FAS commencement.

VOCAT received a record number of applications in the 2023/24 year (9,964) and finalised its highest number of applications (9,632). The Tribunal also awarded its highest number of interim awards and variation of awards. Victims of crime received financial assistance in the amount of \$79,363,243, which is the highest amount awarded in a financial year.

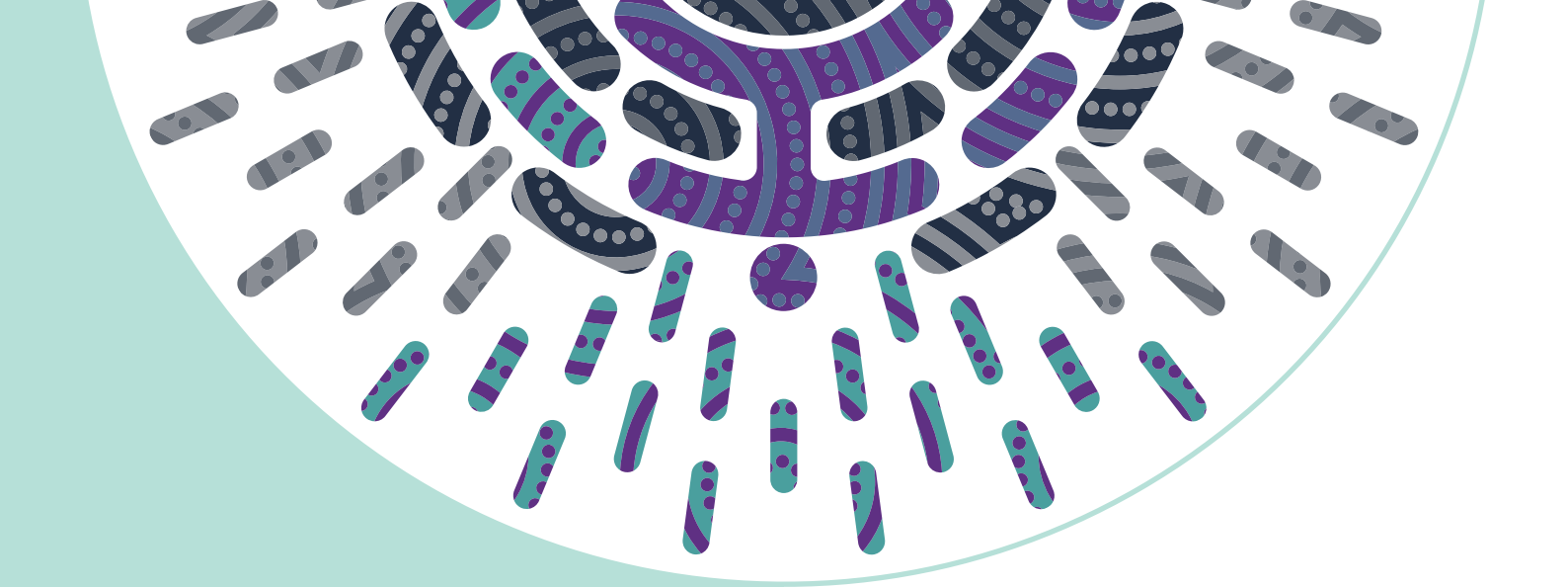
The time taken to finalise VOCAT matters has decreased, with more matters being finalised within nine months and within 12 months than in previous years.

Prior to the 2023/24 financial year, the Tribunal implemented two reforms to support the focus and timeliness of decision making.

The first was to create a Tribunal Officer List, in which primary victim applications other than those involving sex offences and family violence can be determined. Over the last 12 months, the Tribunal Officer List has managed 47.4% of the Tribunal's determinations.

The second reform related to increasing the powers of Judicial Registrars to deal with matters involving family violence and certain sex offence matters. Both reforms have resulted in high numbers of determinations by both Tribunal Officers and Judicial Registrars in this financial year.

The new Financial Assistance Scheme is due to commence by 1 December 2024, after which time, VOCAT will no longer receive applications. VOCAT will finalise all pending applications before it as at that time. The Tribunal has demonstrated its capacity to adapt its processes to ensure that applicants who remain before the Tribunal have their applications considered in a trauma-informed and timely way.



The Tribunal continues to work with the Victorian Government in preparation for the commencement of FAS, with transitional arrangements being an area of significant focus for the Tribunal.

I wish to acknowledge the leadership and commitment of Supervising Magistrate Fiona Hayes and Donna Caruana, Principal Registrar of VOCAT. Throughout this period of change, they have ensured that VOCAT continued to serve the people of Victoria and that victims of crime were able to access the essential services the Tribunal provides. Together they have expertly guided VOCAT and supported staff state-wide in adapting and continuing the important work of the Tribunal.

I also commend the outstanding work of the VOCAT staff over the last year and recognise their commitment and dedication to applicants in this jurisdiction. I thank them for their diligence in the centralisation process as well as in the transition process to the new scheme.

My thanks also to the VOCAT Coordinating Committee, which brings together Judicial Officers and the administrative team to plan, implement and respond to evolving issues in the work of the Tribunal. Their work has supported and assisted the Supervising Magistrate and leadership team, as well as Judicial Officers and staff who continue to serve the needs of Victorians who have been victims of crime.

Justice Lisa Hannan
Chief Magistrate



About VOCAT

The Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) is an integral part of Victoria's justice system and plays a pivotal role in the victim services sector. By providing assistance to help victims recover – and a forum in which they can fully express their experiences of violence – we acknowledge the effects of violent crime on our community.







Who we are

VOCAT was established by the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996* (the VOCA Act) and is now in its 27th year of operation. We are a part of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria and during this reporting period operated at all 51 court venues across the state. Each of the Court's 180 Magistrates including the Chief Magistrate, are also Tribunal Members. The Court's 16 Judicial Registrars and 14 Tribunal Officers also have Tribunal powers delegated to them by the Chief Magistrate to determine certain types of applications.

VOCAT is unique in being a tribunal within a court, constituted by Judicial Officers who also preside in the Magistrates' Court. This allows victims of crime to receive acknowledgement of their experiences by a Judicial Officer in the criminal justice system, in the more flexible, informal and intimate manner afforded by an administrative tribunal.

The Chief Magistrate is responsible for the arrangement of VOCAT's business and appoints a Supervising Magistrate to support VOCAT's effective operation. Magistrate Fiona Hayes has been the Supervising Magistrate for the Tribunal throughout 2023/24.

Supervising Magistrates encourage best practice across the regions, and are responsible for liaising with the judiciary, staff and community in relation to issues relevant to VOCAT. They provide feedback and make recommendations to improve the procedural framework within which VOCAT operates. Additionally, they have input into developments within the wider justice system that may affect victims of crime.

VOCAT has a Coordinating Committee that supports the Supervising Magistrate to carry out these duties. The Committee is constituted by the Supervising Magistrate, five other Magistrates, one Judicial Registrar, the Executive Director Specialist Courts and Programs, the Principal Registrar of VOCAT, two Standards and Compliance Officers, Learning and Development Advisor, Transition Project Lead, Senior Tribunal Officer, the Senior Registry Manager and Registry Manager, Melbourne.

The Chief Magistrate has delegated certain powers under the VOCA Act to Judicial Registrars and Tribunal Officer roles, VOCAT's Principal Registrar and other Registrars of VPS Grade 3 and above. For Registrars, this includes the power to grant an award of interim assistance of no more than \$5,000 and to make basic awards for variations.



What we do

VOCAT supports victims to recover from violent crimes committed in Victoria. We acknowledge their pain and suffering and provide assistance to help meet the costs of their recovery.

VOCAT determines who is eligible to receive financial assistance in accordance with the VOCA Act. We can make awards to cover:

- ▶ funeral expenses
- ▶ the reasonable costs of counselling
- ▶ medical and safety-related expenses
- ▶ loss of or damage to clothing worn at the time of the crime
- ▶ loss of earnings; and
- ▶ other expenses that will assist a victim (in exceptional circumstances).

VOCAT also has the power to make lump sum payments to certain victims of crime. These payments are offered as symbolic expressions of our community's recognition of – and empathy towards – victims and their distress.

In the last 27 years, VOCAT has received 150,188 applications for financial assistance, and awarded \$1.21 billion to victims of crime. This has included 110,640 awards of financial assistance, and tens of thousands of awards of interim financial assistance.

Pre-pandemic, applications to VOCAT had increased almost every year. Following a COVID-induced decrease to 7,075 in 2020/21, increases continued to 9,964 in the current reporting period. The number of applications filed this financial year is 18.3% higher than the highest number previously recorded by the Tribunal (8,421 applications in 2022/23).



Supervising Magistrate's Message

MAGISTRATE FIONA HAYES

The priorities of the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal in the 2023/24 financial year have been to:

1. consolidate the resources needed to give timely, trauma informed and culturally safe consideration to the applications lodged by victims of crime;
2. recruit, train and support a significant workforce to support Judicial Officers and Tribunal Officers in the consideration of claims; and
3. continue to share information on processes, procedures and transitional arrangements with the new Financial Assistance Scheme.

To call 2023/24 a busy year is something of an understatement. Having concluded the process of centralising over 9,300 files from courts all around the state, Tribunal staff immediately went about the task of familiarising themselves with all incoming files and prioritising those which were ready for consideration.

Tribunal Members and Tribunal Officers were involved in the consideration of those incoming files, as well as those already held in Melbourne, and all new applications. Tribunal staff also undertook the important task of prioritising the payment of outstanding and incoming authorised expenses, supported by the excellent work of the VOCAT Finance Team.

As the financial year progressed, the Tribunal recruited, trained and supported 35 new staff members, whose expertise have grown over that period. The Tribunal is fortunate to have an experienced and knowledgeable Learning and Development Team. Each new staff member has been integrated into teams with other experienced staff, which has ensured support and ongoing education.

The VOCAT leadership team have demonstrated calm assuredness in the planning and execution of our centralisation. Less obvious but no less important was the archiving of a very large number of files from around the state into secondary storage. This task was very ably undertaken by the Tribunal's archiving team.

There are many complex legal, factual and procedural issues in any legal jurisdiction and VOCAT is no exception. The Standards and Compliance team have continually demonstrated their in-depth knowledge and expertise. They have assisted applicants, legal representatives, service providers, Tribunal Members and staff in the resolution of complicated factual and financial matters. They have also liaised extensively with the new Financial Assistance Scheme to ensure that transitional arrangements are appropriately planned and managed.



Most decisions on applications are made by Tribunal Members, being Magistrates and Judicial Registrars. VOCAT's Tribunal Members have not only applied their considerable knowledge and skill to the consideration of applications, but they have trained, supported and assisted staff who have joined the Tribunal. I am deeply grateful to them for their commitment to the work of VOCAT and their support of the staff.

A significant number of decisions are also made by VOCAT Tribunal Officers, who have carried out over a quarter of the Tribunal's work and do so with careful consideration and expertise.

I wish to thank Donna Caruana, Principal Registrar of VOCAT, for her leadership and commitment.

I also wish to thank the VOCAT Committee for their ongoing support of the Tribunal, the Leadership Team and the staff of the Tribunal.

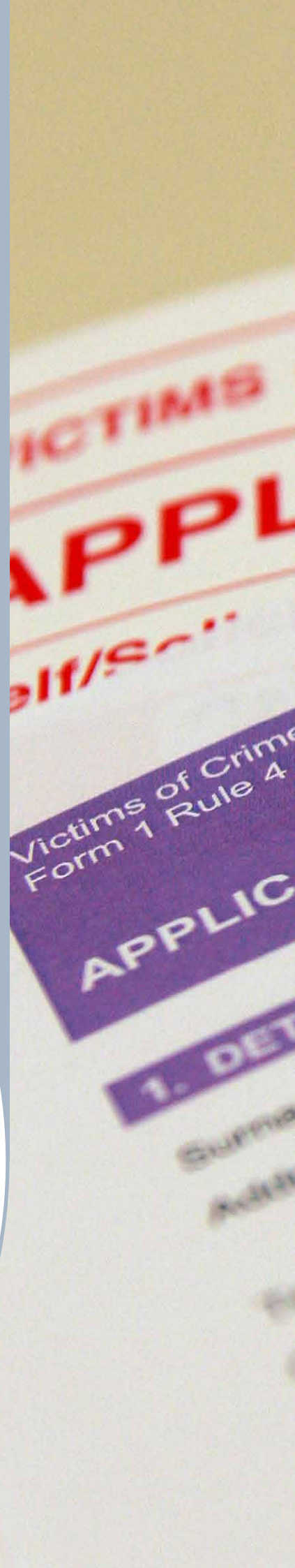
Fiona Hayes

Supervising Magistrate,
Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal



Supporting Victims of Crime

Before they seek VOCAT's assistance, victims may have spent months, or even years, dealing with the after-effects of violent crime. Apart from the physical or psychological impacts of crime, the process of helping police with investigations, being a witness in court, and trying to get their lives back on track can also affect victims' health and wellbeing. VOCAT can help to validate their experiences and restore a sense of dignity, while providing financial help to assist a victim's recovery.



OF CRIME ASSISTANCE TRIBUNAL

APPLICANT

Crime Assistance Act 1998

APPLICATION FOR ASSISTANCE

DETAILS OF PERSON WANTING ASSISTANCE

Name: [CITIZEN]
 Address: [22 MAIN STREET, CITYVILLE] (M) [9576 3434]
 Telephone: (M) [9576 5433]
 Occupation: [RETIRED] (M) [9576 3434]
 Sex: Male Female
 Date of Birth: [] (M) [9576 3434]
 Date of Application: [] (M) [9576 3434]
 Date of Decision: [] (M) [9576 3434]

Accessing VOCAT

VOCAT has strong links with Victim Services, Support and Reform (VSSR) within the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), who oversee the Victims of Crime Helpline and the statewide Victims Assistance Program. Many victims of crime learn about VOCAT either from the Victims of Crime Helpline, Victims Assistance Program, other victim support services or from Victoria Police. These services can support victims through the process of applying to VOCAT for financial assistance. Victims can also receive assistance from lawyers to prepare their claim without reducing the award amount.

Who can apply?

VOCAT can award financial assistance to primary, secondary, and related victims, or anyone else who has incurred funeral expenses for a person who died as the result of a violent crime.

A **primary victim** is a person who is injured or dies as a direct result of an act of violence or is injured or dies trying to assist a victim of a violent crime or trying to prevent a violent crime.

A **secondary victim** is a person who is injured as a result of:

- ▶ being present at and witnessing a violent crime; or
- ▶ being a parent or guardian of a child who is a primary victim.

Where a primary victim has died, a **related victim** is a person who was at the time of the crime:

- ▶ a close family member of the victim;
- ▶ in an intimate personal relationship with the victim; or
- ▶ a dependent of the victim.

An **injury** can be physical or psychological and includes pregnancy or the exacerbation of a pre-existing psychological illness or disorder. It does not include an injury resulting from property loss or damage.

The application process

There is no fee to make an application to VOCAT. All applicants must file an Application for Assistance form, this can be done online at the Tribunal's website vocat.vic.gov.au.

From 1 April 2023, all new VOCAT applications are filed with the Tribunal's Principal Registry at Melbourne. All application types are now managed centrally with separate lists established for claims where:

- ▶ the applicant identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (the VOCAT Koori List); or
- ▶ the applicant is a primary victim where the offence doesn't relate to sexual offending or family violence, and the applicant has reported the act of violence to police (the Tribunal Officer List).

Applications must generally be lodged within two years of the crime, however in some circumstances VOCAT can extend this timeframe. In making this decision, VOCAT will consider issues such as the applicant's age at the time of the crime, their mental health, and whether the person who committed the crime was in a position of power, influence or trust in relation to the applicant. In April 2018 Parliament amended the VOCA Act to remove the time limit for child victims of sexual and physical abuse.

Most applicants are legally represented, and the Victims Assistance Program or Law Institute of Victoria can help applicants find lawyers to assist with their applications. VOCAT usually covers the reasonable cost of the lawyer's fees, and lawyers cannot bill clients for a VOCAT application without VOCAT's approval.

The screenshot displays the 'Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal' website interface. On the left, a navigation menu lists steps: 'Before You Apply', 'Applicant Details', 'Offence Details', 'Your Application', 'Deceased Details', 'Authorisation', 'Supporting Material', 'Legal Representation', 'Acknowledgement', 'Review Application', and 'Confirmation'. The main content area is titled 'Application for Assistance' and contains a form for 'Applicant Details'. The form includes fields for Surname, Given Names, Former Names, State (a dropdown menu), Telephone (with a note to provide at least one phone number), Phone (After Hours / Home), Phone (Business Hours), Mobile, Occupation, and Date of Birth. A 'Login' link is visible in the top right corner of the page.

What happens after an application is lodged?

VOCAT has investigative powers to help make its decisions. Once an application is lodged, we ask Victoria Police for information to help determine whether a crime occurred, and whether the applicant is a victim of that crime. We also obtain from police the criminal history of the alleged offender and of the victim. In many cases, police can also provide information about a victim's injuries. The Tribunal can also obtain information from hospitals where the victim was treated.

We ask applicants to provide all supporting documents such as reports from treating health professionals and psychologists. Applicants have three months to provide this information but can request further time if needed. We provide every opportunity for applicants to file supporting documents, but if we do not receive them, the claim can be struck out. Applicants can ask to have claims reinstated if they subsequently provide supporting documents.

We may ask an applicant or, more usually, their lawyer to attend directions hearings to decide any preliminary questions, provide guidance about preparation of the application and to prepare for final hearing. This can assist us to make decisions more quickly without creating additional stress for applicants.

How long before a result?

The VOCA Act and general rules of procedural fairness mean VOCAT is required to consider matters that can impact on the time it takes to finalise an application. These may include:

- ▶ awaiting the outcome of a criminal investigation, trial or inquest;
- ▶ the need for further enquiries or, in some cases, for the alleged offender to be notified of the application;
- ▶ waiting for an injury to stabilise so an accurate prognosis can be provided; and
- ▶ in related victim applications, identifying and communicating with all potential related victims of the deceased to advise them of their rights in relation to VOCAT.

Applicants can request that VOCAT determine their application with or without a hearing. Many straightforward applications are decided without the need for a hearing, which is the best way to ensure victims receive the assistance they need without added delay.

Sometimes a hearing is necessary or desired by the applicant. If a hearing takes place, it is usually within six weeks of a VOCAT member deciding to conduct it. If an applicant asks for a hearing, it generally happens within six to ten weeks of the applicant filing all supporting material.

With the introduction of the Online Magistrates' Court (OMC), it has been possible to significantly reduce listing delays. It is now possible to list urgent matters for directions hearing within a fortnight of the decision to do so.

Applicants who need urgent assistance (such as for counselling, funeral or safety related expenses) can seek an interim award of financial assistance. If awarded either by a Tribunal Member, Tribunal Officer or a Registrar, this can be paid to the applicant before VOCAT makes a final decision on the merits of their application.

The hearing process

Our intention is to create a sympathetic and compassionate forum for applicants to relate their experiences as victims of crime. The hearing process can assist in restoring a victim's sense of dignity. It can enable applicants to explain directly the impact of the crime on them and the supports they seek and why. If they have not been awarded the level of assistance sought, the hearing affords the opportunity to hear the reasons why.

Although located in the Magistrates' Court, VOCAT is not a court. VOCAT hearings are less formal and do not have set rules about what evidence is allowed or how it can be given. Instead, Judicial Officers hearing applications can investigate, inquire, and gather any information needed to help make a decision in the way they think is most appropriate to the circumstances.

Tribunal Members and Judicial Registrars conduct hearings in a victim-centred way. For example, they may sit down at the table with applicants and encourage them to talk openly about their experiences. Engaging in this way allows them to address the emotional impact of crime on victims, and more carefully tailor financial assistance to help in their recovery. Applicants can also ask for hearings to be 'closed' (kept private) and can bring any support people they wish.

Hearings held in the OMC, by agreement with the applicant, continue to offer the opportunity for applicants to speak directly with a Tribunal Member. In addition, the OMC allows the applicant to remain in the comfort of their home with the support of family or friends during the hearing. This process reduces some of the anxiety involved in attending court in person and is hoped to be less intimidating for applicants.

Related victim hearings usually occur some time after the primary victim's death. A hearing can offer families the opportunity to talk together about the deceased family member, and the impact that the death and the criminal justice process has had on them.

On very rare occasions, where VOCAT is required to decide whether a crime occurred, the Tribunal Member may consider it appropriate to ask the alleged offender if they wish to be heard. To reduce any possible stress and anxiety for the victim, the hearing will be conducted in a manner which limits contact between the parties such as by having a party give evidence via a video-link. In March 2022, changes to the VOCA Act took effect prohibiting an alleged offender from being notified of a Tribunal hearing in matters that relate to family violence, sexual offences or offences related to stalking, threats to kill or threats to commit serious injury.

How we make decisions

VOCAT makes decisions in accordance with the VOCA Act. Our role is to ensure victims receive their full entitlement under the VOCA Act, however the legislation governing VOCAT also requires us to consider other factors such as the victim's level of co-operation with police, any conduct of the victim that contributed to the crime and the criminal history of the applicant.

As with other administrative tribunals, VOCAT decides questions of fact on the balance of probabilities (that is, more likely than not) rather than 'beyond reasonable doubt'. This means VOCAT can find that a crime occurred, even if a criminal court has found the alleged offender not guilty. This can provide a sense of closure for some victims.

VOCAT can therefore award financial assistance even though no one has been charged with, found guilty of, or convicted of an offence arising from the act of violence committed.

Before we award financial assistance, we must first be satisfied on the balance of probabilities that:

- ▶ a violent crime occurred;
- ▶ the applicant is a primary, secondary or related victim of that crime, or a person who has incurred funeral expenses;
- ▶ the applicant is eligible to receive the assistance; and
- ▶ the applicant does not qualify for financial assistance from another source for the loss or expense sought from VOCAT.

In deciding whether to make an award, or what amount should be awarded, we must also consider:

- ▶ whether the applicant reported the crime to police within a reasonable time, and to what extent the applicant assisted police in their investigations;
- ▶ the applicant's conduct and attitude before, during and after the crime, and their character, including any past criminal activity; and
- ▶ whether the offender will benefit from an award made to the applicant.

Any financial assistance available under the VOCA Act may be awarded only where compensation cannot be obtained from another source. We therefore consider any damages, compensation, assistance or payment the applicant has received, or is entitled to receive, from other sources such as claims against the offender, WorkCover, the Transport Accident Commission and insurance schemes.

VOCAT can require applicants to refund some, or all the financial assistance awarded to them if they later receive damages, compensation, assistance or payments of any kind for injuries suffered as a result of a violent crime.

What we can award

The type and amount of financial assistance we can award is set out in the VOCA Act and differs between primary, secondary and related victims. In all cases, the amount must be reasonable, and the expenses claimed must have directly resulted from the crime. We must also be satisfied on the evidence that the type and amount of assistance sought will help the victim recover from the effects of the crime.

Types of assistance

Where VOCAT finds an applicant is a victim of crime, it can award financial assistance for past or future reasonable expenses associated with:

- ▶ counselling;
- ▶ medical treatment, including dental, optometry, physiotherapy, hospital and ambulance;
- ▶ lost or damaged clothing worn at the time of the crime;
- ▶ measures to help a victim feel safe, for example, change of locks and other measures to increase home security;
- ▶ providing a funeral for a deceased victim; and
- ▶ in exceptional circumstances, VOCAT can award any other type of assistance that will go to the heart of assisting victims in their recovery. Examples include tutoring costs to assist child victims to refocus on their schooling, training to allow victims to return to work and some alternative approaches to healing.

We can authorise payment of future expenses such as ongoing counselling, surgery, or safety expenses. After such services or goods have been provided and we have received the invoice or receipt, we pay the service provider or reimburse the victim.

In addition to the expenses outlined above, we can award up to \$20,000 for lost earnings for primary or secondary victims, covering a period of up to two years after the crime. This is intended to help victims who are unable to work as a direct result of the crime.

We can also award a related victim an amount of money that, but for the death of the primary victim, the related victim would have been reasonably likely to receive from the primary victim during a period of up to two years after their death.

The Tribunal has adopted guidelines about the amounts payable for counsellor's fees, legal costs and funeral expenses. These guidelines help the Tribunal decide whether claims are reasonable and to ensure consistency.

Special financial assistance

In some cases, we can award a 'special financial assistance' lump sum (up to \$10,000) directly to a primary victim. This is not intended to reflect what could be obtained at common law or compensate for the harm a victim has suffered. It is meant as a tangible and symbolic expression by the State of the community's sympathy and concern for victims of violent crime.

We determine the amount of special financial assistance according to the category of crime as set out in the *Victims of Crime Assistance (Special Financial Assistance) Regulations 2021*, and the circumstances of the primary victim or the injury suffered.

Amount of financial assistance available

The amounts of financial assistance VOCAT can award are not intended to compensate victims for their loss. They are instead intended to provide a level of targeted assistance for victims' recovery, and an expression of the community's sympathy for, and recognition of, victims' suffering.

We can award:

- ▶ a **primary victim** up to \$60,000 for reasonable expenses and lost earnings, plus any special financial assistance up to an amount of \$10,000;
- ▶ a **secondary victim** up to \$50,000 for reasonable expenses, and, in exceptional circumstances, lost earnings suffered as a direct result of the crime and for some secondary victims, expenses to assist recovery; and
- ▶ a **related victim** financial assistance of up to \$50,000. Within this sum may be awarded an amount in recognition of their distress (or in the case of a child, likely future distress) as a result of the primary victim's death. Where there is more than one related victim of a deceased primary victim, the overall maximum amount of financial assistance we can award to all related victims is limited to \$100,000 unless exceptional circumstances exist. As much as possible, we involve families in decision-making to ensure we award assistance where it is most needed.

Awards held in trust

Awards of financial assistance to a child under 18 years, or a person incapable of managing their affairs due to injury, illness or physical or mental infirmity, will be held in trust until the child turns 18 or as the Tribunal otherwise orders.

Right of review

An applicant who is not satisfied with VOCAT's decision, where a Tribunal Member has presided, can apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) for a review of the decision. VCAT can conduct a new hearing, including considering any new evidence, and can:

- ▶ confirm or vary the original order;
- ▶ make a new order; or
- ▶ return the application to VOCAT to be reconsidered.

A review of a VOCAT decision made by a Judicial Registrar or Tribunal Officer is heard and determined by a Tribunal Member who is a Magistrate.

Tribunal Officer List

The VOCAT Tribunal Officer List (TOL) commenced in July 2021. The Chief Magistrate, Justice Hannan, signed the Instrument of Delegation to Tribunal Officers (TOs) on 9 March 2021, conferring decision making powers on TOs and establishing the limits of those powers. Practice Direction 3 of 2021 – Tribunal Officer List, was subsequently issued by the Chief Magistrate on 18 May 2021 which provided a practical framework for the delegated powers to be exercised.

Pursuant to the delegation of powers and Practice Direction, TOs have the power to determine primary victim applications pursuant to Section 33 of the VOCA Act, save for applications where the act of violence alleged is sex or family violence related or was not reported to police within a reasonable time. All new files statewide from 1 July 2021 that fall within the TO delegation are referred to and managed by the TOL.

In May 2021, the Victorian state budget provided an allocation of \$3.6 million over three years to establish the TOL. This allocation provided funding for the following roles on a fixed term basis until 31 December 2023:

- ▶ Senior Tribunal Officer (VPS 5)
- ▶ VOCAT Transition Lead (VPS 5)
- ▶ Learning and Development Advisor (VPS 5)
- ▶ Tribunal Officers (VPS 4)
- ▶ Administrative Deputy Registrars (VPS 2)
- ▶ Finance Officers (VPS 2)

The 2023/24 state budget provided funding for extension to these roles, as well as additional resources to increase backlog reduction across the Tribunal. As a result, the following additional roles have been established within TOL:

- ▶ Registry Manager, TOL (VPS 4)
- ▶ Additional Tribunal Officers (VPS 4)
- ▶ Additional Administrative Deputy Registrars (VPS 2)

With the additional roles, TOL has grown to 14 full-time equivalent (FTE) Tribunal Officers (TOs), 12 FTE Administrative Deputy Registrars (ADRs), 1 FTE Senior Tribunal Officer and 1 FTE Registry Manager.

This has also led to a change in structure with the ADRs now reporting to the Registry Manager, and the TOs and Registry Manager reporting to the Senior Tribunal Officer to ensure maximum efficiency and support for staff within the List.

With the increase in ADRs, there have been changes in how ADRs are utilised to support backlog reduction and areas of demand. All ADRs are now assigned to a TO to provide direct admin support. ADR resources can be shifted according to need, with targeted assistance provided to areas of the List that require additional support in addressing backlog.

Tasks completed by ADRs when assisting TOs typically involve the more administrative tasks of case management, including printing and filing material received from external parties, processing authorised future expense awards, sending out Section 33 advice and inputting orders onto Courtlink. This has allowed ADRs to diversify their skillset and gain experience in case management, as well as assisting TOs in progressing matters to determination and decreasing backlog within the List. This assistance continues to be in addition to their existing duties which includes initiating applications and clerking hearings.

The additional TOs has allowed for new caseloads to be established. These were created with a combination of new claims and pending applications re-allocated from other TOs. This has seen the individual caseloads of TOs stabilise, providing TOs with greater capacity to focus on determinations.

As both ADRs and TOs have grown in confidence and experience, the List has recorded significant increases in productivity, with increased ADR support enhancing TO determination capacity. During 2023/24, TOL saw a substantial increase in the number of applications determined each month. In May 2024, the List recorded its highest ever number of determinations, finalising 495 applications.

TOL continues to be supported by Judicial Registrars, with Ms Leah Hickey and Ms Samantha Dixon both working closely with TOs and providing valuable advice and assistance over 2023/24. TOL has also been fortunate to have additional Judicial Registrar support, with Judicial Registrars from across metropolitan Melbourne stepping in to support the List and help reduce backlog. In the past year, Judicial Registrars were responsible for 28.8% of the final determinations recorded on TOL matters. Matters are generally referred to Judicial Registrars in instances where a hearing is required or where a Section 33 advice proposed by a TO has been rejected.

TOL Performance Snapshot

In the last year, 4,569 final orders have been made on TOL applications. Final orders include final awards, strike outs, withdrawals and refusals. This represents 47.4% of the final orders made across the state during the 2023/24 period. Of this amount, 66.2% of final orders have been made by TOs. This demonstrates a significant volume of work that has been diverted from the judiciary.

With 44% (4,385) of all new applications being lodged with TOL, a significant volume of VOCAT workflow has also been diverted away from the Melbourne Registry. The performance snapshot for the third year of TOL operation demonstrates the contribution that TOL has made to backlog reduction and efficient processing of applications.

TOL is continuing to experience high numbers of new applications lodged within the List, with a total of 4,385 new applications lodged in 2023/24. This is an increase of 24.5% compared to 3,521 in the previous reporting period.

In 2023/24, TOL finalised a total of 4,569 applications. This is a significant increase from the previous year, in which TOL finalised 3,288 applications. While TOL has significantly increased its finalisations over the 2023/24 reporting period, the increased numbers of new applications have proven to be a barrier in decreasing TOL's overall pending applications. As at June 2024, the number of pending applications managed by the List was 2,383 which represents 25.5% of pending applications statewide.

TOL's overall capacity has substantially increased over the reporting period, with additional resources combined with increased productivity and efficiency across the List contributing to the increase in finalisations.

	Applications Lodged	Final Orders Made¹	Awards Made	Interim Awards	Variation Awards	Pending Applications
2023/24 TOL totals	4,385	4,569	2,765	1,288	580	2,383
As a percentage of state total	44% of 9,964	47.4% of 9,632	45.3% of 6,106	28.8% of 4,465	16.9% of 3,436	25.5% of 9,340

1. "Final orders" includes awards of assistance, applications refused, applications struck out and applications withdrawn

Focus on Judicial Registrars

In the 2023/24 financial year, Judicial Registrars heard and determined 2,204 VOCAT applications, up from 1,059 in the previous year. This figure constitutes 22.9% of all VOCAT final orders. Judicial Registrars also made 17.2% (592) of all variation awards and 19.3% (862) of all interim awards.

There are now 16 Judicial Registrars appointed to the Magistrates' Court, a large portion of whom determined a sizable amount of VOCAT applications prior to, and during, the VOCAT centralisation project. As a result of centralising VOCAT applications into the Principal Registry at Melbourne, the Tribunal now have dedicated Judicial Registrars that determine VOCAT applications, whilst also providing considerable support to Tribunal Officers and the Tribunal Officer List. Being co-located with the Tribunal's dedicated Judicial Registrars has resulted in significant efficiencies in claim referrals from registry staff and Tribunal Officers, in addition to an abundance of support for our Tribunal Officers in their determination responsibilities and management of more complex applications.

On 1 April 2023, the Chief Magistrate issued a new instrument of delegation for Judicial Registrars and VOCAT. The delegation has extended the powers of Judicial Registrars in determining applications for assistance. This includes the power to determine applications made by related victims and applications where the act of violence arises from circumstances of family violence, or sexual offences, where the offender has been found guilty of the act of violence (but still excludes applications for assistance within the Koori List).

The new delegation has significantly increased the range and volume of applications considered and determined by Judicial Registrars, relieving workload pressures on Magistrates, and increasing the efficiency in determination of applications for assistance. The delegation has statistically provided an increased output from the Judicial Registrars across all award types.

Through the Magistrates' Court of Victoria non-sitting period, from late December 2023 to early January 2024, all 16 Judicial Registrars were allocated to VOCAT to aid in the finalisation of claims and increased volume of judicial referrals. With this dedicated time and additional resources, along with the Judicial Registrars' extended powers under the new instrument of delegation, an above average number of awards were made and determined by Judicial Registrars over this period.

VOCAT Koori List

The VOCAT Koori List commenced operation in 2006 as a pilot and continues to operate as an ongoing and integral part of the Tribunal. With a focus on ensuring culturally safe access, the Koori List manages all matters where the applicant identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The administration of the Koori List is conducted at the Tribunal's Principal Registry in Melbourne. The applications are managed by a small group of dedicated Tribunal Members and staff to allow a culturally sensitive focus and consistent approach, with an emphasis on responding with maximum flexibility for Koori victims of crime.

The Koori List practices promote access to the assistance available through the Tribunal and address barriers which exist for Koori applicants. These include engaging with specific services, having Aboriginal flags and artworks displayed, having hearing rooms and registries ceremonially smoked, re-drafting of standard letters and publications, cultural awareness training and flexibility in listing practices.

The processes and procedures utilised within the VOCAT Koori List are continually updated by staff to ensure its effectiveness. To address the timely management of applications and mitigate the impact of limited resourcing, the Tribunal is constantly reviewing processes within the List to address delay and improve quality of service. The pandemic facilitated the introduction of new initiatives such as online hearings to allow more flexibility, and an increase in digital communication. With these new initiatives, the Tribunal Members and staff continue to work together to review processes to ensure the objectives of the List are still met.

At the conclusion of the financial year, the Tribunal was managing a record number of applications (730) in the Koori List at Melbourne. The Koori List saw 588 new applications, an increase of 1% compared to the previous financial year (582) and the highest number of new applications in a financial year since the List commenced.

The overall number of finalisations in the List increased by 16.7% to 601 matters (515 in 2022/23).



TITLE: Dhumbumana
ARTIST: Marcus Lee Design Pty Ltd



Dhumbumana Healing Strategy

The Tribunal's Dhumbumana Healing Strategy (pronounced thum-boo-mah-nah) was launched in late June 2022. The Strategy is focused on continuous improvement within the VOCAT Koori List and enhancing VOCAT's capacity to engage with Koori communities and assist in their journey to healing. The Strategy's initiatives have enhanced the Tribunal's delivery of a culturally appropriate service and will help to form a targeted outreach program to local Koori communities.

The Strategy creates opportunities for Koori applicants who have been affected by trauma to regain a sense of empowerment and control over their lives. It promotes reconnecting with culture to assist in establishing pathways back to Country to heal spiritually.

Initiatives under the Strategy aim to:

- ▶ increase awareness of VOCAT as a culturally specific financial assistance scheme for Koori victims of crime;
- ▶ recognise and reduce barriers to accessing VOCAT;
- ▶ better understand how Koori people use our services;
- ▶ improve our current practices to better promote cultural safety; and
- ▶ better support Koori victims of crime during VOCAT hearings.

Aligned with the Tribunal's Healing Strategy, a Cultural Support Plan was launched within the VOCAT Koori List, to capture significant cultural information for a Tribunal Member's consideration when making an award – acknowledging that an applicant's cultural journey affects their ability to heal from the act of violence.

Upon receiving an application for assistance, a return acknowledgment is sent together with a Dhumbumana Healing Strategy brochure and Cultural Support Plan. This information explains and encourages an applicant's participation. Where an applicant may not have the assistance of a solicitor, our Koori Engagement Registrar will personally connect with the applicant and explain VOCAT processes and the significance of the Cultural Support Plan, noting that participation is entirely voluntary. Within this financial year, the Tribunal has received fourteen completed Cultural Support Plans from applicants. Each returned plan is then affixed to the physical application and provided to a Tribunal Member. This information is vital for a Tribunal Member to understand the importance and depth of an applicant's cultural history, and how best to assist in their ongoing healing journey.

As part of the Strategy, the Tribunal has redeveloped external publications and presentation material to support engagement within the VOCAT Koori List. This information reiterates that the Dhumbumana Healing Strategy holds culturally symbolic and safe principles to assist Koori victims of crime and provides context on the meaning of 'Dhumbumana' and its origin from the language of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

This material has been actively distributed across Koori Support services, and new Dhumbumana branding forms the basis for many Tribunal publication designs such as our Annual Report and online hearing and meeting backdrops.

External publication material and information also speaks to the role of VOCAT's Koori List, the kind of assistance that can be awarded, and how this may assist a Koori applicant in their healing journey. New brochures were created and circulated to Koori List stakeholders for distribution within community. An engagement plan targeting Koori support services has also been formulated, and this schedule will continue into the 2024/25 financial year.

Also aligned to the Strategy, Tribunal staff have enhanced their cultural awareness and understanding by completing training programs and partaking in Court Services Victoria Koori Cultural Awareness webinars as part of the Tribunal's induction and training program. All staff have welcomed the addition of an Acknowledgment of Country at meetings and on email signatures, formal documentation and information sheets, and will continue learning about their place in Country with the assistance of our leadership team.

The Tribunal's registry displays artwork created with the contribution of staff during National Reconciliation Week celebrations, with each representing what Reconciliation means to them. Koori flags are also visible throughout the building in both public and registry spaces. In May 2023, an indoor smoking ceremony was conducted upon relocation of the Tribunal's Principal Registry to 555 Lonsdale Street to enhance cultural safety aligned with the Tribunal's Strategy commitments.

Into the next financial year, the Tribunal will continue to implement Strategy initiatives including further targeted community engagement as well as strengthening the use of Cultural Support Plans.

Legal and other professional help for applicants

Access to justice for victims of crime is of paramount importance, and VOCAT generally pays for victim legal representation. In this reporting period, we amended the Legal Costs Guideline (Guideline 1 of 2024), increasing the amount we can award to legal practitioners who represent VOCAT applicants. It is hoped this increase will recognise and encourage high quality legal services for victims of crime and that the use of legal practitioners will assist victims to receive the maximum award available under the current legislation. It must be noted that the amount of costs paid to legal practitioners is never deducted from the victim's award.

Lawyers are not the only professionals who help victims of crime to access VOCAT. The government-funded Victims Assistance Program, Victims Legal Service and non-government counselling services also play a role. As much as possible, we want to promote consistent ethical and professional standards for counsellors and health professionals assisting victims of crime to access VOCAT.

Demand and financial assistance awarded

9,964 applications filed
UP BY 18.3%



6,106 awards of assistance made
UP BY 7.1%



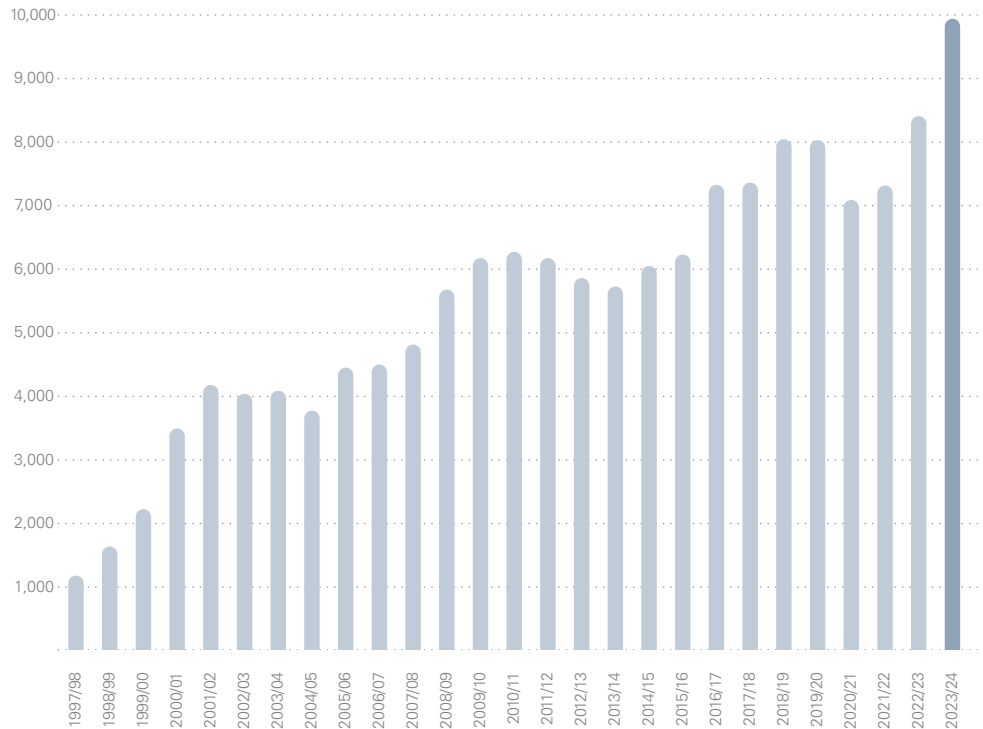
9,632 orders finalising applications
UP BY 9.7%



\$87.3 million awarded
UP BY 18%

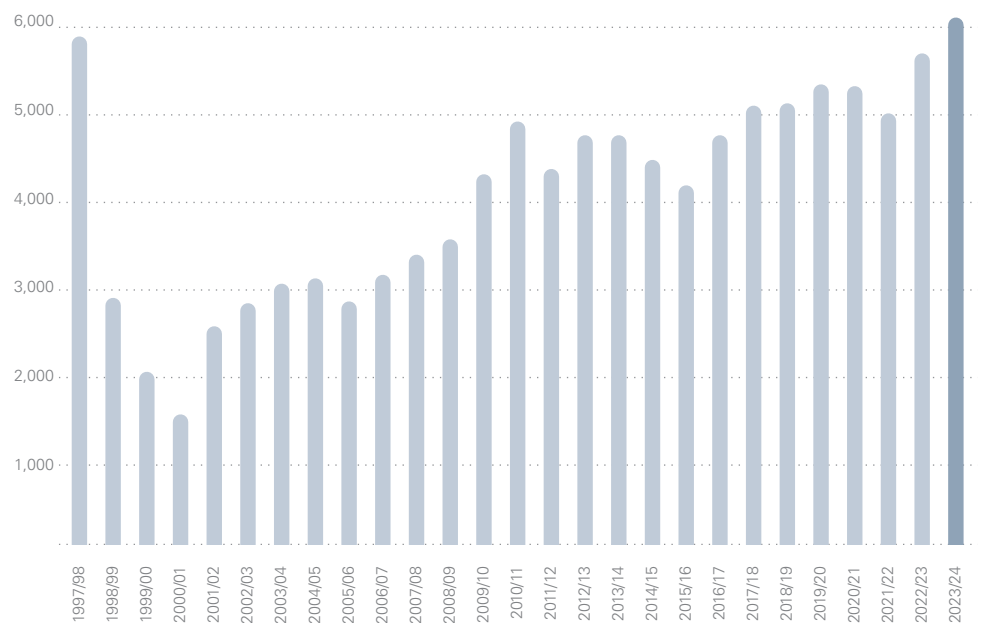


CHART 1: Number of applications for financial assistance lodged annually



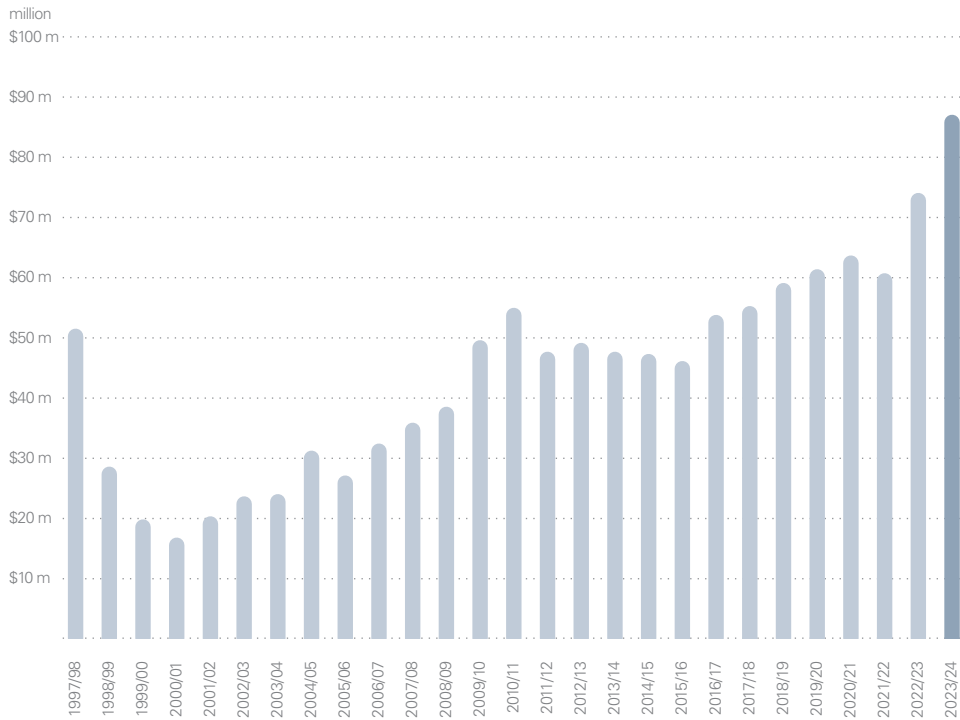
Demand for financial assistance has increased almost every year since the Tribunal commenced on 1 July 1997.

CHART 2: Number of awards made annually



This reporting period, the Tribunal recorded the highest number of awards annually since its commencement.

CHART 3: Total amount of financial assistance awarded including legal costs ordered annually



The Tribunal has awarded the most in its history this reporting period, largely attributed to the increase in determinations.

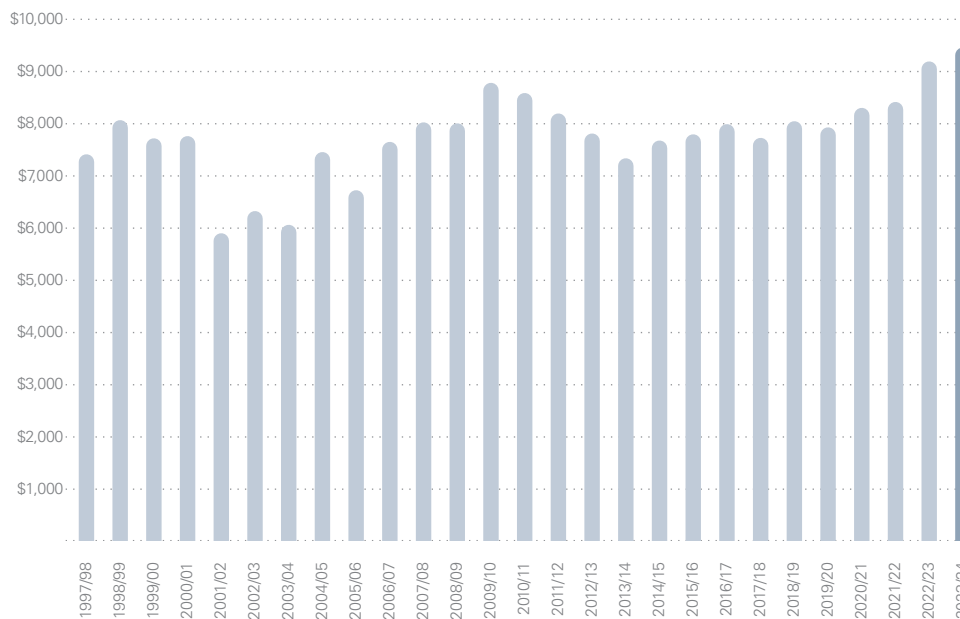
Average award amount
\$9,450 **UP BY 2.9%**



601 Koori List finalisations
UP BY 16.7%



CHART 4: Average amount of financial assistance awarded under the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996* on determination of applications



The average amount of financial assistance has remained steady over the past 10 years, increasing this reporting period to the highest on record.

4,465 Interim awards of assistance
UP BY 28.9%



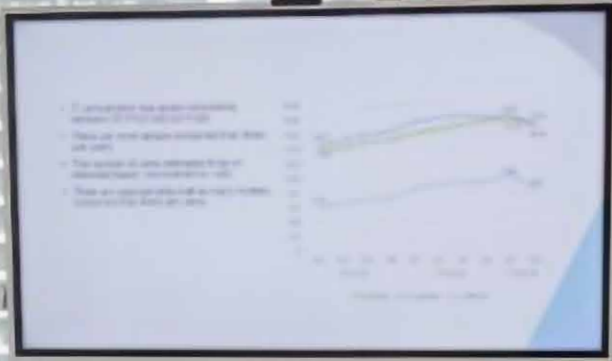
3,436 variation awards of assistance
UP BY 39.4%



The Tribunal – Year in Review

The Tribunal has experienced unprecedented demand this reporting period, recording the highest ever number of lodgements and finalisations, as well as higher than average interim and variation awards compared to last financial year.





Four people are seated around a long, light-colored conference table. On the left, a woman with blonde hair is wearing a blue top. On the right, a man with dark hair is wearing a dark jacket, a woman with long red hair is wearing a dark jacket, and a woman with blonde hair is wearing a dark blazer. They are all looking towards the large screen at the front of the room. Several laptops are open on the table, and a notebook is visible in the foreground. The room has large windows in the background, providing a view of a city with many buildings. The ceiling is white with recessed lighting.

Applications lodged

There were 9,964 applications filed in this reporting period which represents an increase of 18.3% compared to the previous year (8,421). The Tribunal recorded higher than average lodgements for ten months of the reporting period.

Less than one third of applications (32.2%) arise from an incident of family violence.

Within the 9,931 applications lodged with the Melbourne VOCAT Registry, 588 applications were filed within the Tribunal's Koori List, 4,385 applications within the Tribunal Officer List and 4,958 applications within the general registry list.

Application outcomes

VOCAT finalised 9,632 applications in the reporting period. This is 9.7% higher than the previous year (8,782), and the highest number of disposals ever recorded by the Tribunal.

VOCAT awarded 6,106 applicants financial assistance representing 63.4% of all final orders² made in 2023/24. In 2022/23, the 5,700 awards of assistance made up 64.9% of all finalisations.

Additionally:

- ▶ Applications were determined at hearings in 2.1% of cases (202) down from 3.3% in 2022/23.
- ▶ As in previous years, most awards (90.1%) went to primary victims, with 5,501 awards being made this reporting period, compared to 4,950 last year (an increase of 11.1%). Secondary victims made up 6.3% (up from 6.2% in 2022/23) and related victims made up 3.5% (down from 6.8% in 2022/23) of all awards of assistance upon final determination.

- ▶ The overall number of interim awards increased by 28.9% to 4,465 (up from 3,464). The average amount awarded per victim at the interim stage increased by 17% to \$2,640 from \$2,256.
- ▶ The number of variation awards increased by 39.4% in 2023/24 to 3,436 and the average amount awarded on variation increased by 7.7% to \$2,852 (\$2,647 in 2022/23). The Tribunal recorded above average numbers of variation requests for 11 out of 12 months this reporting period.
- ▶ The average final award increased by 2.9% to \$9,450, compared to \$9,180 in 2022/23. This is the highest this figure has been since the Tribunal's commencement and reflects the greater complexity of cases being finalised.

Active applications

One of the best indicators of VOCAT's current level of demand is the number of cases that are active or "pending" at any given time. Pending cases are applications that have been lodged with the Tribunal but not yet finalised. The number of pending cases increased by 14.3% from 8,169 at 30 June 2023 to 9,340 at 30 June 2024.

Pending cases increased this reporting period to a peak of 9,476 in January and remained stable for the balance of the financial year, despite concurrent above average finalisation rates. This trend in pending cases was largely driven by higher-than-average lodgements for 10 out of 12 months in 2023/24, equating to an 18.3% increase in application demand this reporting period.

In addition to higher-than-average lodgement demand, the Tribunal experienced unprecedentedly higher than average demand across interim, variation and payment of future authorised expense payments for the majority of the reporting period.

Despite the increase in demand, more than half of all files were completed within nine months of lodgement (55%, up from 52% in 2022/23). The age of the Tribunal's caseload remained consistent with last reporting period, with 39% of applications pending for more than nine months as at 30 June 2024 (up from 37.5%) and 28.6% pending for 12 months or more (down from 28.7% as at 30 June 2023). Decreased case processing times combined with steady age in caseload indicates the Tribunal is finalising newer, less complex claims faster and managing a higher volume of complex applications.

The pending cases data over the last 10 years shows an upward trend despite a decrease in 2020/21.

Financial assistance awarded

In this reporting period, VOCAT awarded a total of \$87.3 million in financial assistance and legal costs to victims of crime, up by 18% from the \$74 million awarded in the previous year.

The average amount of financial assistance awarded to each victim was \$9,450 compared to \$9,180 in the previous year, an increase of 2.9%. This figure has remained consistent over the past 10 years, increasing this reporting period to the highest on record.

2. "Final orders" includes awards of assistance, applications refused, applications struck out and applications withdrawn.

CHART 5: Pending cases 2023/24

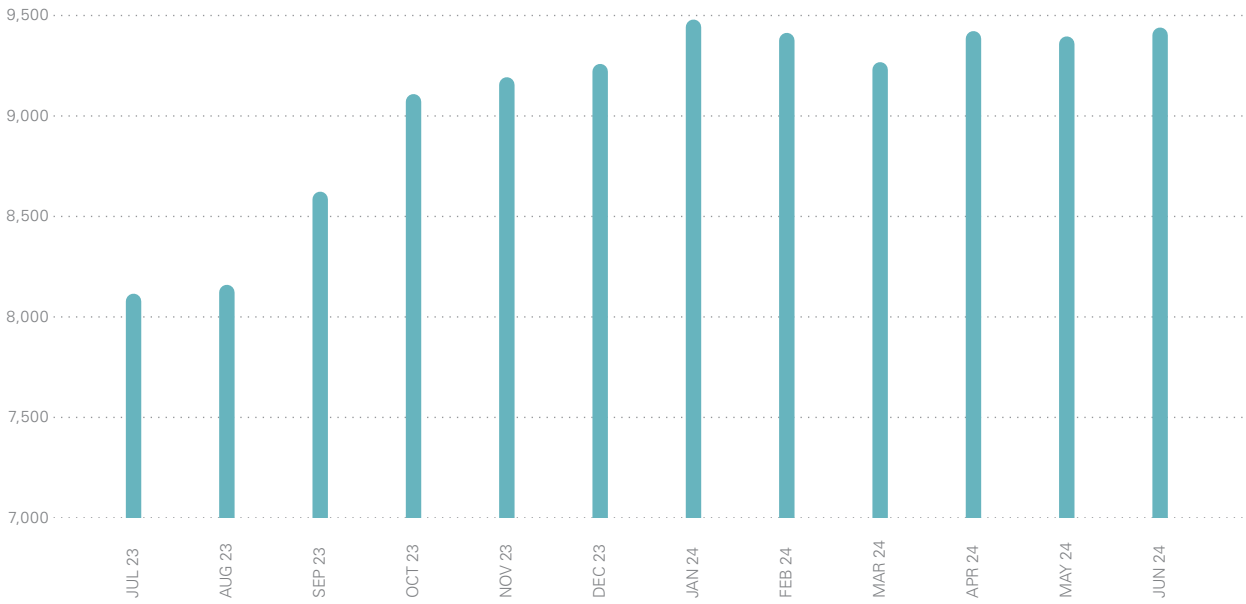
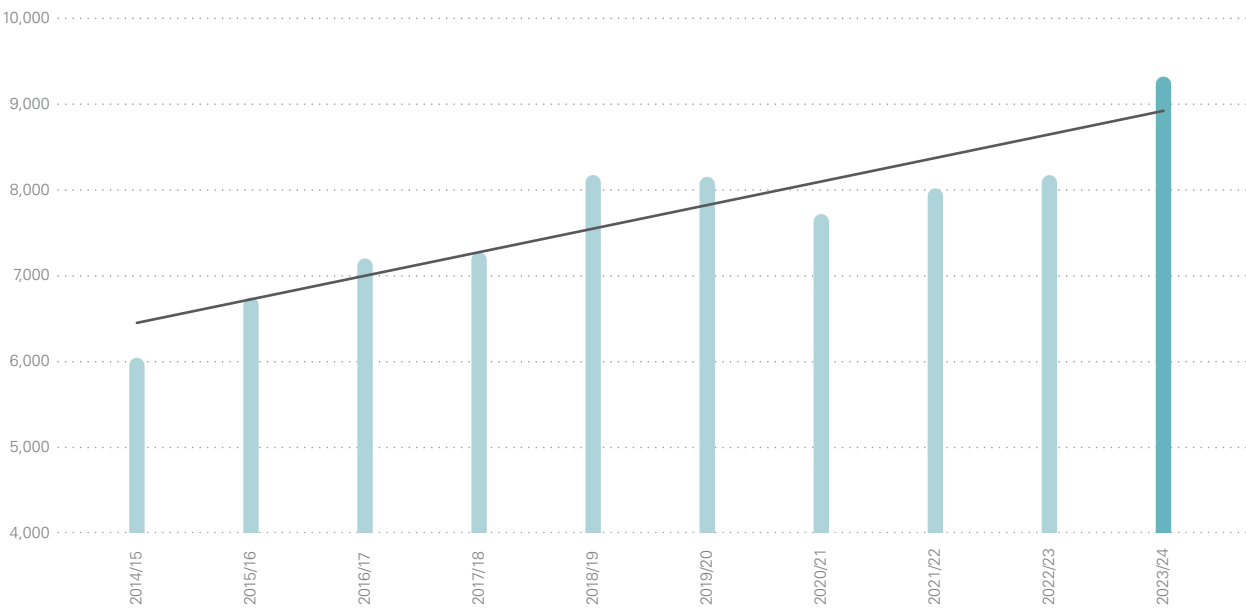


CHART 6: Ten year trend – Pending cases



Review applications from VOCAT

In this reporting period, fourteen applications for review of VOCAT decisions were determined by VCAT. The Victorian Government Solicitor's Office represents VOCAT (as the original decision maker) in all VCAT review matters. In three of those matters the Tribunal's decision was overturned or varied in some way and three more matters were remitted to VOCAT for reconsideration. These represent 0.06% of VOCAT's finalised cases varied on review.

Online applications

Applications for financial assistance can be completed and filed on our website. Hard copy forms are available from any court location but more and more people each year are choosing to utilise the electronic form. In this reporting period the Tribunal received 3,118 online applications. This constitutes 31.3% of VOCAT applications lodged online, down from 39.8% last year.

In addition to many other benefits, the form is designed to be user friendly and easy to complete. It contains electronic filters and rules to ensure that only questions relevant to a victim's application type are displayed and all required fields are accurately completed. The online form also provides relevant applicants with information regarding the requirements for matters not reported to police and applications for extension of time and enables supporting documents to be uploaded throughout the application process.

The program allows users to create a log-in enabling them to save incomplete applications as well as maintain a list of all submitted applications for regular users such as legal practitioners. The form is mobile-device-compatible so can be used on a smart phone or tablet, which means it can be accessed anywhere and at any time.

Upon submission, electronic applications are filed instantly with the Tribunal and an email confirmation is sent to the applicant and their legal representative (if applicable) enclosing a copy of the application and further information regarding the application for assistance.

VOCAT Transition

The Victorian Law Reform Commission conducted a review of the Victims of Crime Assistance Act in July 2017. A recommendation followed in September 2018 that a new Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) be established separate from the Magistrates' Court to replace the Tribunal.

Over the past two reporting periods the Tribunal's Transition Project Lead alongside the VOCAT leadership team have successfully undertaken four major interlinking transition projects:

1. The VOCAT Archiving and File Management (VAFM) Project
2. The Tribunal's Principal Registry relocation from the William Cooper Justice Centre (WCJC) to 555 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne
3. Centralisation of the Tribunal's operations as part of its backlog reduction strategy
4. The expansion of the Tribunal's workforce to meet increased demand and reduce pending ahead of the transition to FAS

The VAFM project included the consolidation of all statewide VOCAT records into a master file spreadsheet in preparation for the Tribunal's centralisation and transition, in addition to providing archiving assistance to 51 court locations to finalise the archiving of all historical applications into Grace Records secondary storage.

During this reporting period VOCAT worked with the Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV) to amend the VOCAT Records Disposal Authority to allow for destruction of eligible historical files prior to FAS commencement.

The Tribunal has also closed a project with Victoria Police to provide cold case police material from VOCAT files ahead of destruction and continues to work with the PROV to develop a process of transferring permanent electronic records.

In March 2023, the Tribunal relocated its principal registry from the WCJC to 555 Lonsdale Street Melbourne. The 555 Lonsdale Street relocation project facilitated a fully fit-for-purpose space to adequately support and accommodate the additional caseload and increased workforce in readiness for centralisation. Ahead of the centralisation of statewide operations, the Tribunal also restructured the composition of its principal registry workforce, including the creation of new central roles to support the increased statewide caseload. This resulted in a significant recruitment, onboarding and training schedule for the Tribunal.

The Tribunal centralised statewide operations into the principal registry between January and June 2023, with the majority of the 9,350 files centralised over the 12-week period between April and June. This has been the largest project in the Tribunal's history and was an outstanding success thanks to the dedication of the entire VOCAT team, in particular the VOCAT leadership team, judiciary, VOCAT archivists, Melbourne VOCAT staff and the headquarter and regional VOCAT teams.

The Tribunal's priority post-centralisation has been to reduce backlog, focusing on urgent applications for assistance and finalising claims ready to be determined. The Tribunal has restructured its principal registry workforce, adding operational teams and creating new roles to support the increased statewide caseload and demand experienced this reporting period. This has again resulted in significant recruitment, onboarding and training for the Tribunal.

VOCAT's archivist has significantly assisted operations by managing all file requests and returns from secondary storage at Grace Records, allowing more time for decision making and case management of applications by the Tribunal's registry staff. In the next financial year, the Tribunal's archiving team will ensure all finalised records are archived in readiness for FAS commencement, to enable FAS management of variations and authorised future expense payments.

The Tribunal is pleased to now have a registry space and workforce that is solely dedicated to the critical work of VOCAT, which has had a significant impact upon the quality of our application management and the Tribunal's transition planning. The Tribunal's leadership team continue to work with the DJCS FAS Reform team to support and prepare for the transition to FAS, including the exchange of records, recruitment and workforce planning, and the management of operational impacts and risks through to the Tribunal's closure.

Backlog reduction

In addition to the centralisation of Tribunal operations to enhance caseload efficiency, the Tribunal's backlog reduction strategy has focused on the targeted reduction of delay across various registry tasks throughout the reporting period. This has involved the creation and implementation of a backlog blitz plan, and the strengthening of backlog data, designed to monitor a variety of workload performance indicators and caseload pressures across the Tribunal's operational teams.

The data is supported by a monthly dashboard which is a visual tool to monitor the vital work within each of the 16 registry teams. The dashboard aids operational managers in supporting staff with time management and task prioritisation, given their competing workload pressures, whilst ensuring all elements of case management are equally allocated and managed.

These reports identify areas that may require additional training and resource allocation, while supporting teams to ensure adequate guidance and assistance is available.

In addition, these reports have been critical in acknowledging and celebrating the successes of staff, the copious amounts of work completed each month, keeping up with increased demand, and monitoring evolving changes.

During the Tribunal's successful centralisation project, vigorous pre-centralisation preparation tasks were undertaken to minimise operational impact but inherited workload from statewide locations was unavoidable.

Throughout this reporting period the Tribunal has strengthened processes to increase determination and processing capacity across both general registry and TOL, including monitoring and addressing areas of delay and inherited workload. This has included the implementation of optional weekend overtime hours for staff to focus on targeted areas of increased demand. This work outside of usual operational capacity has aided staff in clearing the inherited centralisation backlog as well as the ongoing management of varying demand across administrative responsibilities.

To further support the reduction of backlog and pending reduction, the Tribunal successfully onboarded 35 new positions across all areas of its operational team – resulting in the recruitment of over 60 roles due to backfill arrangements, between September 2023 to February 2024. This expanded the Tribunal's workforce to 81 staff and increased the general registry from 12 to 16 teams.

To complement these additional teams, floating staff were also introduced. Floating staff had the initial pivotal role of assessing areas of required assistance and shifting to different roles across different teams as required to alleviate workload and demand pressure. As the backlog became more manageable, floating staff were allocated their own caseload for broader and more consistent case management.

Throughout the centralisation project, and now with increased workforce capacity and all applications for assistance managed centrally, a significant and consistent Judicial presence has been required for the consideration and determination of applications. The Tribunal currently has a designated Judicial Officer allocation, adapted throughout the reporting period to meet increasing demand. These dedicated judicial resources have reduced the turnaround time for the Tribunal's judicial referral process, resulting in the faster determination of claims by the Tribunal and an increase in monthly determinations. Being co-located with Judicial Officers has also increased their accessibility to registry and TOL staff to problem-solve complex applications and seek daily support in managing applications.

Managing VOCAT

This reporting period a Principal Registrar, leadership team and staff across 51 venues throughout Victoria all supported VOCAT's goal of providing a timely, empathetic, informal and cost-effective service. Our Coordinating Committee is dedicated to continually improving our performance, including investing in professional development for all members, Tribunal Officers, Registrars and staff. This promotes a consistent, compassionate and responsive approach to the needs of victims of crime.





Our Coordinating Committee

VOCAT's Coordinating Committee drives many of the initiatives aimed at improving VOCAT's operation, increasing VOCAT's community presence and contributing to positive outcomes for victims of crime. Having decision makers as well as those who manage the administrative functions of VOCAT on the Committee promotes consistency between the judiciary, Tribunal Officers and Registrars and considers issues affecting them.

To support consistency across venues prior to the Tribunal's centralisation, the Coordinating Committee also regularly reviewed the Chief Magistrate's Practice Directions and Guidelines and made recommendations to the Chief Magistrate for the issue of new Practice Directions and Guidelines where necessary.

Committee Chair:

Supervising Magistrate Fiona Hayes

Members:

Judicial Head of Division

Pauline Spencer

Magistrates Felicity Broughton,

Jo Metcalf, Sharon McRae

and Simon Guthrie

Judicial Registrar Samantha Dixon

Executive Director, Specialist

Courts and Programs Jane Craig

Principal Registrar Donna Caruana

Standards and Compliance Officers

Stephanie Oliver and Melissa Smith

Transition Project Lead

Charlene Griffin

Learning and Development

Advisor Naomi Nolet

Senior Tribunal Officer

Madeleine Spain

Melbourne Senior Registry

Manager Damian James

Melbourne Registry Manager

Michelle Soares

The VOCAT Coordinating Committee met monthly over the reporting period and considered a range of matters including:

- ▶ The review and update of the Tribunal's legal cost and counselling fee guidelines
- ▶ Judicial resourcing for VOCAT post-centralisation
- ▶ Consideration of the FAS transition and data sharing provisions with DJCS
- ▶ Updates in relation to the FAS implementation and the Tribunal's operational transition
- ▶ Expansion of the Judicial Registrar instrument of delegation
- ▶ Discussions with the Legal Services Board regarding identified issues
- ▶ Discussion with the State Trustees regarding payments to VOCAT applicants
- ▶ Additional measures to support staff during the pre and post centralisation period
- ▶ Review and update of the Tribunal's Travel Expenses Practice Direction
- ▶ Continuation of the Koori Cultural Support Plans as part of the Tribunal's Dhumbumana Healing Strategy
- ▶ Expansion and training of the Tribunal's workforce
- ▶ Centralisation of statewide operations
- ▶ The issue of a new Chamber File Management Policy
- ▶ Introduction of the Victims Legal Service and provision of information to Tribunal staff and Judiciary
- ▶ The Tribunal's record management strategy, including plans for the management of archiving and disposal of Tribunal records
- ▶ Facilitating redraft of the Tribunal's Records Disposal Authority (RDA)
- ▶ Review and update of the Tribunal's witness summons procedures
- ▶ Staff well-being initiatives and the ongoing monitoring of the impact of increased work demand on Tribunal staff
- ▶ Monitoring of statistical information regarding the number of applications for assistance lodged and determined, awards of assistance made (including interim awards), pending caseload, types of pending matters across the Tribunal and the amount of assistance awarded

Members of the Committee also participated in:

- ▶ The provision of materials and information sessions about VOCAT for new Magistrates, Judicial Registrars and Tribunal Officers
- ▶ The provision of VOCAT training for new Magistrates' Court of Victoria staff
- ▶ Meetings with representatives of DJCS, the Victims of Crime Commissioner and VSSR to discuss issues relating to services for victims of crime
- ▶ Meetings with staff from the FAS to aid in new system development and plan for the operational transition
- ▶ Meetings with Magistrates' Court Executive Leaders to provide VOCAT updates
- ▶ The Whole of Government Steering Committee and working groups in relation to the proposed Financial Assistance Scheme
- ▶ The Koori Self Determination Committee and the Courts Collaborative Working Group
- ▶ The Specialist Courts and Programs Leadership Committee

Our Registries

VOCAT's Principal Registry is now located at 555 Lonsdale Street Melbourne. The registry functions as the Tribunal's public interface and administrative hub, helping it to operate in a more responsive, integrated and efficient manner.

This reporting period, the Tribunal funded 81 positions at the Melbourne Principal Registry of VOCAT as follows:

- ▶ The Tribunal's leadership team, comprising the Principal Registrar, Standards and Compliance Officers, Transition Project Lead, Learning and Development Advisor and Support Officer, Senior Registry Manager, three Registry Managers, Senior Tribunal Officer and Finance Team Manager
- ▶ Our general registry, consisting of 19 Registrars and 22 Admin Deputy Registrars
- ▶ Our Tribunal Officer List, inclusive of 14 Tribunal Officers and nine Admin Deputy Registrars
- ▶ Four Finance Officers and an archivist

The operation of the Tribunal's Principal Registry was also supported this reporting period by the engagement of fixed-term contract staff to assist in combatting increased backlog and rising caseload demand pressures.

The 2023/24 state budget provided \$6.6m for VOCAT over two years for Tribunal Officers, support staff and associated operating costs to help clear the Tribunal's pending caseload. This has allowed for the extension of current fixed-term Tribunal Officer List staff and associated transition support roles, in addition to the creation of 35 positions including training and finance support roles, and several Tribunal Officer, Registrar and Admin Deputy Registrar roles, until 31 December 2024 to target caseload reduction in readiness for the Tribunal's transition to the new FAS.

VOCAT Registrars and Administrative Deputy Registrars

Registrars and Administrative Deputy Registrars are the main points of contact for many victims, providing procedural advice and support throughout the application process. These roles also work closely with Tribunal Members and Judicial Registrars. In most cases, the Registrars and Administrative Deputy Registrars, who have been dealing with the file since it was initiated, review the content of the application and provide support to the Tribunal Members in their consideration of directions and awards.

Tribunal Members and Judicial Registrars still retain full discretion in the making of awards, but the work of these registry roles provides a solid foundation upon which to make those decisions.

The functions of the Registrars and Administrative Deputy Registrars include:

- ▶ obtaining medical and psychological reports, police information about an alleged offence, criminal histories, and prosecution outcomes;
- ▶ ensuring applicants file the documents needed to support their applications, and that the information provided is complete and comprehensible;
- ▶ making sure applicants receive their awards of financial assistance;
- ▶ providing administrative support in relation to applications for the variation of awards;
- ▶ ensuring that each file is progressed as expeditiously as possible to ensure that applicants receive their awards in a timely manner; and
- ▶ answering a high volume of counter and telephone enquiries.

VPS 3 Registrars also consider and determine applications for interim financial assistance up to \$5,000 and can make minor variations up to \$500.

Registrars and staff supporting residual VOCAT operations outside of the Melbourne Registry are accountable through their respective regional managers through to the Magistrates' Court of Victoria's Chief Executive Officer.

Learning and development

A Learning and Development Advisor position was created and commenced in August 2021. Over the reporting period, several notable outcomes have been achieved.

Centralisation of the Tribunal's operations included expansion of the workforce, and induction and training of the new staff was a critical activity for this period. A total of 61 staff, including new staff and backfill of existing positions, were inducted and trained from September 2023 to February 2024, expanding the Tribunal's workforce to 81 staff. To support the increased induction and training activities, a new Learning and Development Support Officer role was created in September 2023. This role has been a key support to the Learning and Development Advisor in providing staff with additional on-site support.

All new staff undergo an initial induction day and a nine-day training program. This program includes formal training on end-to-end case management and practical tasks.

In addition to case management, the training covers topics and tasks such as confidentiality, record-keeping, communicating with applicants, Koori cultural awareness, building and maintaining resilience, vicarious trauma and self-care. The modular nature of this package enables new staff to attend comprehensive training, or experienced staff to access components of the training as a refresher.

Training is also tailored to the unique responsibilities of each role, with Administrative Deputy Registrars focusing on bench clerking training, Registrars learning to make interim awards of assistance up to \$5,000, and Tribunal Officers exploring administrative law, legal research, and assessments on making final determinations. Ongoing professional development has also been facilitated by experienced Tribunal Members.

The Tribunal introduced a program to support current staff who are Law graduates to complete their practical legal training with the Tribunal, court tours of Melbourne Magistrates' Court to expand staff's understanding of jurisdictions which intersect with the Tribunal, and checklists to ensure consistency in competency of staff in completing core tasks. Well-being has continued to be prioritised, with staff completing Compassion Fatigue training and Foundations for Building Trauma Awareness training, as well as a focus on increasing wellbeing initiatives and awareness of support avenues for all staff.

The next priorities for learning and development within the Tribunal are to ensure the current number of staff in the workforce is maintained, continuing to upskill staff with case management and supporting the Tribunal's transition plans in the lead up to the commencement of the FAS.

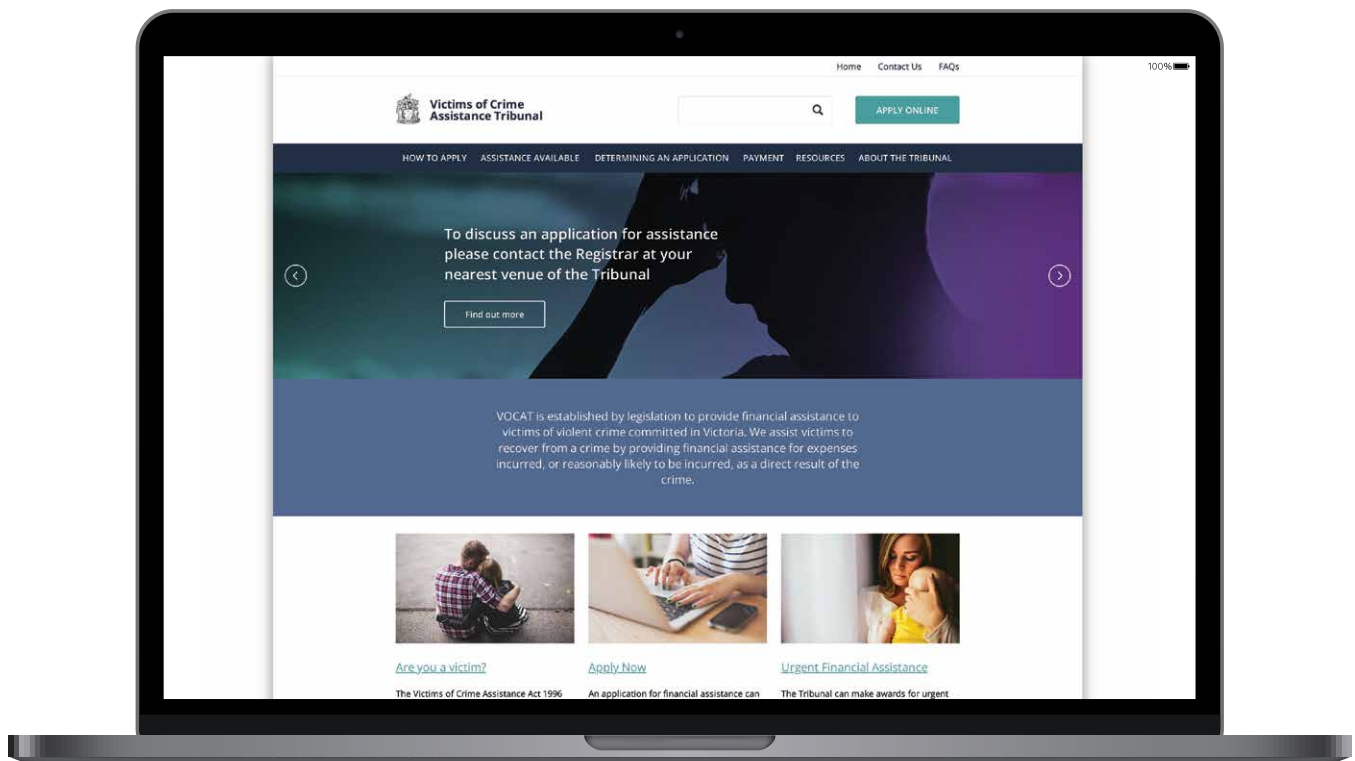
VOCAT website

The Tribunal's current website (vocat.vic.gov.au) contains useful information, including:

- ▶ Application forms and guides
- ▶ Information about what VOCAT does
- ▶ Links to victim support services and resources
- ▶ News items
- ▶ Practice directions and guidelines
- ▶ Publications such as reports and brochures
- ▶ Review decisions that VOCAT considers important

The VOCAT website can be used on any device including smart phones, tablets and PCs. This means it can be used anywhere and at any time. The ease of access and user-friendly experience saw a dramatic increase in visitors to the website after it was redeveloped in 2016. This year the website received 116,075 unique visits, compared to 117,796 in the previous year, a decrease of 1.5%.

As with the previous year, the Application for Assistance form was the most downloaded publication/form and most page views related to how to apply for financial assistance and victim categories. Website content can be translated into other languages. This reporting period the site was translated close to 400 times including 139 times into Chinese, 48 times to Japanese, and 33 times to the Spanish language.



Our Statistical Report

The tables in this section provide information about applicant demographics, awards of financial assistance made, appeals against VOCAT decisions, and case processing times.





TABLE 1: Summary – applications for assistance lodged, finalised and pending, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Caseload			
Number applications lodged	7,325	8,421	9,964
Number orders made finalising claims	7,441	8,782	9,632
Number applications pending on 30 June	8,018	8,169	9,340
Case processing times			
Proportion of applications finalised within nine months of lodgement	48.2%	52.0%	55.0%
Proportion of applications finalised within 12 months of lodgement	63.0%	65.3%	69.6%
Age of pending caseload			
Proportion of applications pending for nine months or more on 30 June	46.1%	37.5%	39.0%
Proportion of applications pending for 12 months or more on 30 June	35.6%	28.7%	28.6%

Applications lodged by applicant gender and category of crime

TABLE 2A AND 2B: Number of applications for financial assistance lodged by category of offence, and gender of applicant, 2023/24³

	Male		Female		Indeterminate/ Unspecified/ Intersex (X)		Total	
	Total Male	Male FV	Total Female	Female FV	Total X	X FV	Total	FV
Abduction/kidnap	20	5	29	10	0	0	49	15
Assault	2,030	229	1,513	550	12	2	3,555	781
Aggravated burglary	480	20	602	36	6	0	1,088	56
Criminal damage by fire	11	0	17	2	0	0	28	2
Family violence (FV)	252	252	993	993	1	1	1,246	1,246
Harassment	48	13	161	67	2	0	211	80
Homicide	145	25	247	40	2	0	394	65
Other	477	28	453	57	11	0	941	85
Robbery	247	0	102	0	0	0	349	0
Sex offences	233	85	1,386	616	5	3	1,624	704
Threats	195	50	281	128	3	1	479	179
Totals	4,138	707	5,784	2,499	42	7	9,964	3,213

3. The acts of violence for applicants have been grouped according to the broad offence categories used by Victoria Police in reporting crime statistics.

TABLE 2B:

	Distribution %				
	Male	Female	X	% of total applications lodged	FV
Abduction/kidnap	41%	59%	0.00%	0.5%	30.6%
Assault	57%	43%	0.34%	35.7%	22.0%
Aggravated burglary	44%	55%	0.55%	10.9%	5.1%
Criminal damage by fire	39%	61%	0.00%	0.3%	7.1%
Family violence (FV)	20%	80%	0.08%	12.5%	100%
Harassment	23%	76%	0.95%	2.1%	37.9%
Homicide	37%	63%	0.51%	4.0%	16.5%
Other	51%	48%	1.17%	9.4%	9.0%
Robbery	71%	29%	0.00%	3.5%	0.0%
Sex offences	14%	85%	0.31%	16.3%	43.3%
Threats	41%	59%	0.63%	4.8%	37.4%
Totals	42%	58%	0.42%	100%	32.2%

Outcome of finalised applications

TABLE 3: Number of orders made upon final determination of applications for financial assistance, by order type, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Application granted/award made	5,000	67.2%	5,700	64.9%	6,106	63.4%
Application refused	122	1.6%	101	1.2%	89	0.9%
Application struck out/withdrawn	2,319	31.2%	2,981	33.9%	3,437	35.7%
Total	7,441	100%	8,782	100%	9,632	100%

TABLE 4: Number of awards of financial assistance made upon final determination of applications for assistance, by award type, 2021/22 to 2023/24

Award Type	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Primary victim award	4,430	88.6%	4,950	86.8%	5,501	90.1%
Secondary victim award	318	6.4%	355	6.2%	384	6.3%
Related victim award	247	4.9%	386	6.8%	214	3.5%
Award for funeral expenses only	0	0.0%	6	0.1%	3	0.0%
Award made under <i>Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1983</i>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Other	5	0.1%	3	0.1%	4	0.1%
Total	5,000	100%	5,700	100%	6,106	100%

TABLE 5: Number of awards of financial assistance made, by age and gender of awarded applicants, 2023/24

Age at Award	No. applications				Distribution %			
	Male	Female	Other	Total	Male	Female	Other	Total
0 – 18 years	428	490	4	922	46.4%	53.1%	0.4%	15.1%
19 – 25 years	307	432	3	742	41.4%	58.2%	0.4%	12.2%
26 – 35 years	568	848	6	1,422	39.9%	59.6%	0.4%	23.3%
36 – 60 years	1,092	1,425	3	2,520	43.3%	56.5%	0.1%	41.3%
61 years +	249	246	2	497	50.1%	49.5%	0.0%	8.1%
Unknown	0	3	0	3	0.0%	100%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	2,644	3,444	18	6,106	43.3%	56.4%	0.3%	100%

TABLE 6: Number of active cases by Tribunal venue, 2021/22-2023/24

Region	Tribunal venues within region	Pending		
		No. of active cases as at 30 June 2022	No. of active cases as at 30 June 2023 ⁴	No. of active cases as at 30 June 2024 ⁵
Barwon Southwest	Colac	4	2	0
	Geelong	245	43	0
	Hamilton	15	3	0
	Portland	15	9	0
	Warrnambool	50	6	0
	Total	329	63	0
Broadmeadows	Broadmeadows	440	31	4
Dandenong	Dandenong	278	23	0
Frankston	Dromana	24	5	1
	Frankston	230	7	1
	Moorabbin	127	9	4
	Total	381	21	6
Gippsland	Bairnsdale	87	20	4
	Korumburra	17	1	0
	Latrobe Valley	185	19	1
	Moe	0	0	0
	Sale	58	17	1
	Wonthaggi	18	1	0
	Total	365	58	6

4. For regions outside of Melbourne, these figures demonstrate the number of files retained for local finalisation post centralisation of Tribunal operations.

5. For regions outside of Melbourne, these figures demonstrate the number of files retained for local finalisation post centralisation of Tribunal operations.

Pending

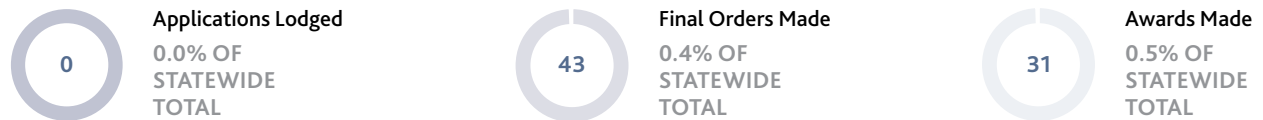
Region	Tribunal venues within region	No. of active cases as at 30 June 2022	No. of active cases as at 30 June 2023 ⁴	No. of active cases as at 30 June 2024 ⁵
Grampians	Ararat	18	3	0
	Ballarat	118	32	0
	Horsham	30	6	0
	Bacchus Marsh	54	13	2
	St Arnaud	14	2	0
	Stawell	3	1	0
	Total	237	57	2
Heidelberg	Heidelberg	263	59	3
Hume	Benalla	7	2	0
	Cobram	0	0	0
	Mansfield	5	1	0
	Seymour	27	8	0
	Shepparton	97	15	1
	Wangaratta	15	0	0
	Wodonga	44	11	3
	Total	195	37	4
Loddon Mallee	Bendigo	124	2	0
	Castlemaine	14	1	0
	Echuca	33	0	0
	Kerang	0	0	0
	Kyneton	0	0	0
	Maryborough	23	0	0
	Mildura	34	0	0
	Swan Hill	16	0	0
	Total	280	3	0
Melbourne	Melbourne	1,771	4,580	6,197
	Koori List	559	679	730
	Tribunal Officer List	1,921	2,453	2,383
	Total	4,251	7,712	9,310
Neighbourhood Justice Centre	Collingwood	31	5	2
Ringwood	Ringwood	503	60	1
Sunshine	Sunshine	403	29	0
	Werribee	62	11	2
	Total	465	40	2
Total		8,018	8,169	9,340

TABLE 7: Number of applications for assistance lodged, final orders and awards made by Tribunal region, 2023/24

Region: BARWON SOUTH WEST

Tribunal venues within region:	Colac	Geelong	Hamilton	Portland	Warrnambool
Applications Lodged	0	0	0	0	0
Final Orders Made	1	30	2	7	3
Awards Made	1	22	1	5	2

Barwon South West Totals

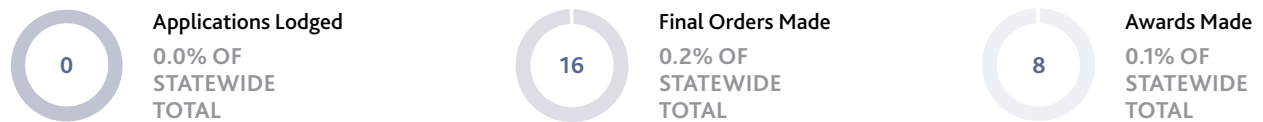


Region: BROADMEADOWS

Tribunal venues within region: **Broadmeadows**

Applications Lodged	0
Final Orders Made	16
Awards Made	8

Broadmeadows Totals



Region: DANDENONG

Tribunal venues within region: **Dandenong**

Applications Lodged	2
Final Orders Made	21
Awards Made	14

Dandenong Totals

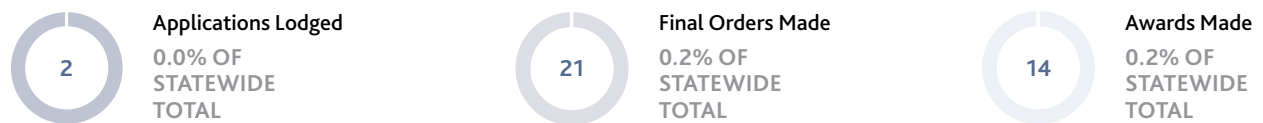


TABLE 7: Number of applications for assistance lodged, final orders and awards made by Tribunal region, 2023/24

Region: FRANKSTON

Tribunal venues within region:	Dromana	Frankston	Moorabbin
Applications Lodged	0	0	4
Final Orders Made	3	5	9
Awards Made	1	1	5

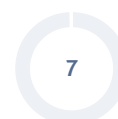
Frankston Totals



Applications Lodged
0.0% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL



Final Orders Made
0.2% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL



Awards Made
0.1% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL

Region: GIPPSLAND

Tribunal venues within region:	Bairnsdale	Korumburra	Latrobe Valley	Moe	Sale	Wonthaggi
Applications Lodged	6	1	1	0	1	1
Final Orders Made	11	4	12	0	10	1
Awards Made	11	3	8	0	8	1

Gippsland Totals



Applications Lodged
0.1% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL



Final Orders Made
0.4% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL



Awards Made
0.5% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL

Region: GRAMPPIANS

Tribunal venues within region:	Ararat	Bacchus Marsh	Ballarat	Horsham	St Arnaud	Stawell
Applications Lodged	0	0	0	12	0	0
Final Orders Made	1	5	16	1	0	1
Awards Made	1	5	14	1	0	1

Grampians Totals



Applications Lodged
0.1% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL



Final Orders Made
0.2% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL



Awards Made
0.4% OF STATEWIDE TOTAL

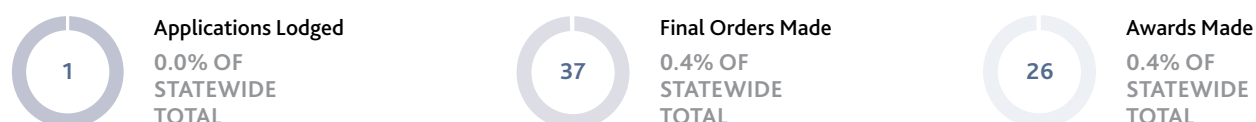
TABLE 7: Number of applications for assistance lodged, final orders and awards made by Tribunal region, 2023/24

Region: HEIDELBERG

Tribunal venues within region: Heidelberg

Applications Lodged	1
Final Orders Made	37
Awards Made	26

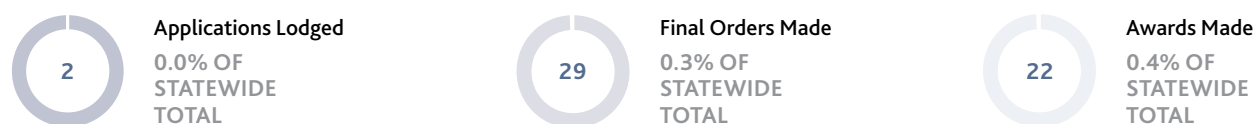
Heidelberg Totals



Region: HUME

Tribunal venues within region:	Benalla	Cobram	Mansfield	Seymour	Shepparton	Wangaratta	Wodonga
Applications Lodged	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Final Orders Made	1	0	1	8	11	0	8
Awards Made	1	0	0	8	10	0	3

Hume Totals



Region: LODDON MALLEE

Tribunal venues within region:	Bendigo	Castlemaine	Echuca	Kerang	Kyneton	Maryborough	Mildura	Swan Hill
Applications Lodged	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Final Orders Made	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	1
Awards Made	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Loddon Mallee Totals

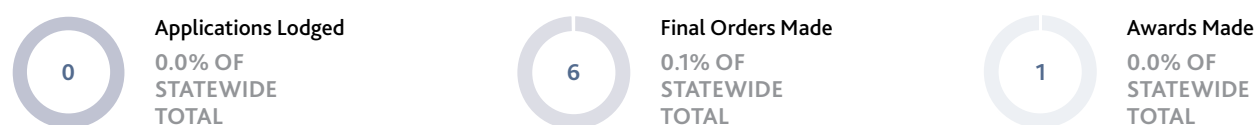
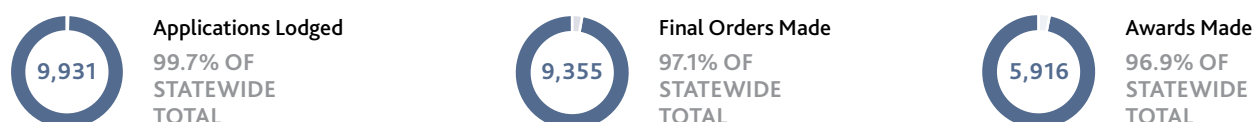


TABLE 7: Number of applications for assistance lodged, final orders and awards made by Tribunal region, 2023/24

Region: MELBOURNE

Tribunal venues within region:	Melbourne	%	Koori List	%	Tribunal Officer List	%
Applications Lodged	4,958	49.8%	588	5.9%	4,385	44.0%
Final Orders Made	4,185	43.4%	601	6.2%	4,569	47.4%
Awards Made	2,783	45.6%	368	6.0%	2,765	45.3%

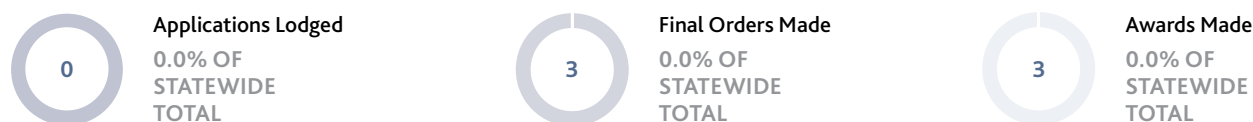
Melbourne Totals



Region: NEIGHBOURHOOD JUSTICE CENTRE

Tribunal venues within region:	Collingwood
Applications Lodged	0
Final Orders Made	3
Awards Made	3

Neighbourhood Justice Centre Totals



Region: RINGWOOD

Tribunal venues within region:	Ringwood
Applications Lodged	1
Final Orders Made	23
Awards Made	16

Ringwood Totals

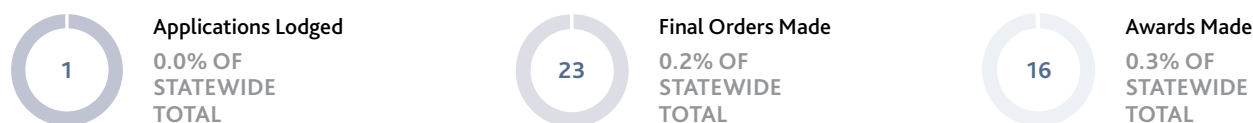


TABLE 7: Number of applications for assistance lodged, final orders and awards made by Tribunal region, 2023/24

Region: **SUNSHINE**

Tribunal venues within region:	Sunshine	Werribee
Applications Lodged	1	0
Final Orders Made	11	9
Awards Made	6	3

Sunshine Totals

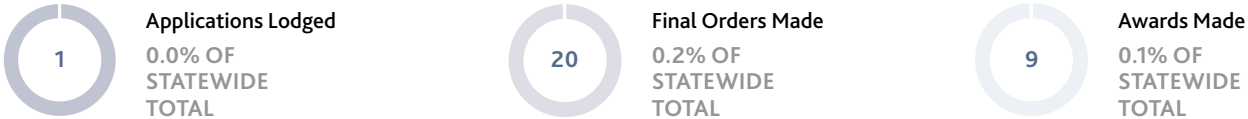
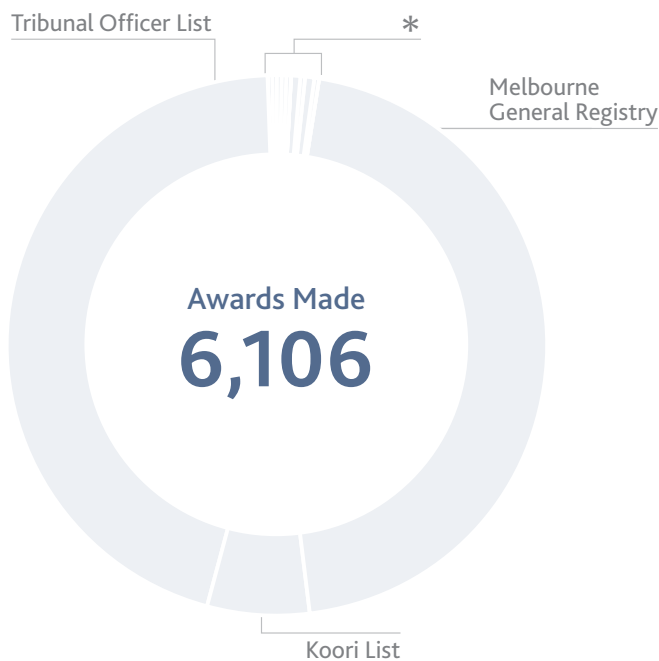
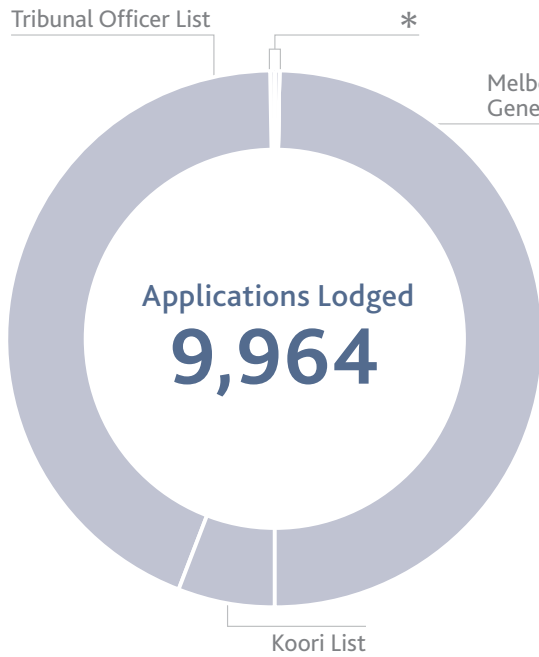


TABLE 7: Number of applications for assistance lodged, final orders and awards made by Tribunal region, 2023/24



- *
- Neighbourhood Justice Centre
 - Ringwood
 - Sunshine
 - Barwon South West
 - Broadmeadows
 - Dandenong
 - Frankston
 - Gippsland
 - Grampians
 - Heidelberg
 - Hume
 - Loddon Mallee

Financial assistance awarded and legal costs⁶

TABLE 8: Total amount of financial assistance awarded and legal costs ordered (interim, final determination, by variation and on review), 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
Financial assistance	\$54,435,121	89.6%	\$66,678,064	90.1%	\$79,363,243	90.9%
Legal costs	\$6,326,454	10.4%	\$7,333,386	9.9%	\$7,922,278	9.1%
Total	\$60,761,575	100%	\$74,011,450	100%	\$87,285,520	100%

TABLE 9: Total amount of financial assistance awarded, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
Financial assistance for expenses already incurred and lump sum payments (special financial assistance, distress, loss of earnings)	\$36,137,959	66.4%	\$42,972,218	64.4%	\$47,566,538	59.9%
Financial assistance for expenses not yet incurred	\$18,297,162	33.6%	\$23,705,846	35.6%	\$31,796,705	40.1%
Total	\$54,435,121	100%	\$66,678,064	100%	\$79,363,243	100%

TABLE 10: Total amount of financial assistance awarded by assistance type, and legal costs ordered, 2023/24

Assistance Type	Interim Award	Final Award	Award on Variation	Award on Review	Total \$	as %
Special financial assistance	\$23,250	\$15,656,141	\$84,195	\$15,500	\$15,779,086	18.1%
Pain and suffering	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.0%
Distress	\$80,000	\$3,949,186	\$0	\$0	\$4,029,186	4.6%
Funeral expenses	\$554,964	\$68,370	\$2,750	\$0	\$626,085	0.7%
Loss of earnings	\$127,655	\$4,383,584	\$517,847	\$0	\$5,029,086	5.8%
Dependency	\$0	\$5,455	\$0	\$0	\$5,455	0.0%
Loss/damage to clothing	\$12,573	\$195,703	\$3,376	\$45	\$211,696	0.2%
Counselling/ psychological/ psychiatric reports	\$1,300,370	\$1,800,094	\$278,780	\$4,414	\$3,383,658	3.9%
Counselling sessions	\$7,873,936	\$11,814,718	\$4,371,063	\$25,803	\$24,085,520	27.6%
Medical expenses	\$578,704	\$3,577,080	\$1,472,585	\$2,900	\$5,631,269	6.5%
Other expenses to assist recovery	\$492,786	\$10,353,572	\$2,270,767	\$25,808	\$13,142,933	15.1%
Safety related expenses	\$741,816	\$5,898,372	\$799,081	\$0	\$7,439,269	8.5%
Subtotal	\$11,786,054	\$57,702,276	\$9,800,443	\$74,470	\$79,363,243	90.9%
Legal costs	\$0	\$7,628,264	\$248,791	\$45,223	\$7,922,278	9.1%
Total	\$11,786,054	\$65,330,540	\$10,049,234	\$119,693	\$87,285,520	100%

6. Individual figures shown for amounts of financial assistance have been rounded to the nearest dollar.

TABLE 11: Amount of financial assistance awarded as a lump sum payment and for expenses already incurred, by type of assistance, 2023/24

Assistance Type	Interim Award	Final Award	Awarded on Variation	Awarded on Review	Total \$	as %
Special financial assistance	\$23,250	\$15,656,141	\$84,195	\$15,500	\$15,779,086	33.2%
Pain and suffering	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.0%
Distress	\$80,000	\$3,949,186	\$0	\$0	\$4,029,186	8.5%
Funeral expenses	\$532,156	\$68,370	\$2,750	\$0	\$603,277	1.3%
Loss of earnings	\$127,655	\$4,383,584	\$517,847	\$0	\$5,029,086	10.6%
Dependency	\$0	\$5,455	\$0	\$0	\$5,455	0.0%
Loss/damage to clothing	\$12,323	\$184,651	\$2,796	\$45	\$199,814	0.4%
Counselling/ psychological/ psychiatric reports	\$1,300,370	\$1,800,094	\$278,780	\$4,414	\$3,383,658	7.1%
Counselling sessions	\$894,684	\$3,501,969	\$1,674,726	\$6,603	\$6,077,982	12.8%
Medical expenses	\$232,795	\$2,239,236	\$802,019	\$0	\$3,274,050	6.9%
Other expenses to assist recovery	\$61,371	\$4,172,850	\$1,213,682	\$23,368	\$5,471,271	11.5%
Safety related expenses	\$158,536	\$3,088,434	\$466,703	\$0	\$3,713,673	7.8%
Total	\$3,423,140	\$39,049,971	\$5,043,497	\$49,930	\$47,566,538	100%

TABLE 12: Amount of financial assistance awarded for expenses not yet incurred, by type of assistance, 2023/24

Assistance Type	Interim Award	Final Award	Awarded on Variation	Awarded on Review	Total \$	as %
Counselling sessions	\$6,979,252	\$8,312,749	\$2,696,337	\$19,200	\$18,007,538	56.6%
Medical expenses	\$345,909	\$1,337,844	\$670,566	\$2,900	\$2,357,219	7.4%
Loss/damage to clothing	\$250	\$11,052	\$580	\$0	\$11,882	0.0%
Other expenses to assist recovery	\$431,415	\$6,180,722	\$1,057,085	\$2,440	\$7,671,662	24.1%
Funeral expenses	\$22,808	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$22,808	0.1%
Safety related expenses	\$583,280	\$2,809,938	\$332,378	\$0	\$3,725,596	11.7%
Total	\$8,362,914	\$18,652,305	\$4,756,946	\$24,540	\$31,796,705	100%

TABLE 13: Number of final awards of financial assistance made, and average amount of financial assistance awarded on final determination, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of awards of financial assistance made	5,000	5,700	6,106
Amount of financial assistance awarded	\$41,932,468	\$52,324,585	\$57,702,276
Average amount of financial assistance awarded	\$8,386	\$9,180	\$9,450

TABLE 14: Number of primary victims awarded special financial assistance and amount awarded on determination of application, by category, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	Number			Distribution		
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of primary victims who were awarded special financial assistance by category						
Category A	754	925	961	17.5%	19.1%	17.9%
Category B	1,034	1,130	1,451	24.0%	23.3%	27.0%
Category C	1,428	1,653	1,779	33.1%	34.1%	33.1%
Category D	1,100	1,142	1,191	25.5%	23.5%	22.1%
Total	4,316	4,850	5,382	100%	100%	100%
Amount of special financial assistance awarded by category						
Category A	\$6,519,154	\$8,106,670	\$8,479,905	53.8%	56.7%	54.2%
Category B	\$3,117,000	\$3,415,898	\$4,280,685	25.7%	23.9%	27.3%
Category C	\$1,800,155	\$2,075,816	\$2,183,441	14.9%	14.5%	13.9%
Category D	\$678,852	\$707,245	\$712,110	5.6%	4.9%	4.5%
Total	\$12,115,161	\$14,305,629	\$15,656,141	100%	100%	100%
Average amount of special financial assistance awarded by category						
Category A	\$8,646	\$8,764	\$8,824			
Category B	\$3,015	\$3,023	\$2,950			
Category C	\$1,261	\$1,256	\$1,227			
Category D	\$617	\$619	\$598			
Total	\$2,807	\$2,950	\$2,909			

TABLE 15: Number of related victims awarded financial assistance for distress and amount awarded on final determination, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of related victims who were awarded financial assistance for distress	237	368	211
Amount of financial assistance awarded to related victims for distress on determination of application	\$5,330,488	\$7,410,645	\$3,949,186
Average amount of financial assistance awarded to related victims for distress	\$22,492	\$20,138	\$18,717

TABLE 16: Amount of legal costs ordered to be paid on the final determination of applications for financial assistance, and average legal costs ordered, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of awards of financial assistance made	5,000	5,700	6,106
Amount ordered to be paid for legal costs	\$6,142,613	\$7,160,571	\$7,628,264
Average amount of legal costs ordered to be paid per awarded applicant	\$1,229	\$1,256	\$1,249

Interim financial assistance

TABLE 17: Number of interim awards of financial assistance made where financial assistance was awarded for expenses already incurred, and amount awarded 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Tribunal Members	995	1,040	1,052
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Judicial Registrars	237	134	457
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Tribunal Officers	331	410	477
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Registrars	325	246	347
Total number of interim awards of assistance made for expenses already incurred	1,888	1,830	2,333
Proportion of interim awards made by Tribunal Officers	17.5%	22.4%	20.4%
Proportion of interim awards made by Registrars	17.2%	13.4%	14.9%
Amount of interim financial assistance awarded for expenses already incurred	\$2,240,790	\$2,225,395	\$3,423,140
Average amount of interim financial assistance awarded for expenses already incurred	\$1,187	\$1,216	\$1,467

TABLE 18: Number of interim awards of financial assistance made where financial assistance was awarded for expenses not yet incurred, and amount awarded, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Tribunal Members	854	999	995
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Judicial Registrars	175	110	405
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Tribunal Officers	281	319	402
Number of interim awards of assistance made by Registrars	231	206	330
Total number of interim awards of assistance made for expenses not yet incurred	1,541	1,634	2,132
Proportion of interim awards made by Tribunal Officers	18.2%	19.5%	18.9%
Proportion of interim awards made by Registrars	15.0%	12.6%	15.5%
Amount of interim financial assistance awarded for expenses not yet incurred	\$4,295,916	\$5,587,792	\$8,362,914
Average amount of interim financial assistance awarded for expenses not yet incurred	\$2,788	\$3,420	\$3,923

Variation of awards

TABLE 19: Number of awards of financial assistance varied to award financial assistance for *expenses already incurred*, and average amount of financial assistance awarded, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of awards varied to award further financial assistance for expenses already incurred	1,792	1,599	2,241
Amount of financial assistance awarded on variation for expenses already incurred	\$3,132,674	\$3,439,924	\$5,043,497
Average amount of financial assistance awarded on variation for expenses already incurred	\$1,748	\$2,151	\$2,251

TABLE 20: Number of awards of financial assistance varied to award financial assistance for *expenses not yet incurred*, and average amount of financial assistance awarded, 2021/22 to 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of awards varied to award further financial assistance for expenses not yet incurred	865	865	1,195
Amount of financial assistance awarded on variation for expenses not yet incurred	\$2,757,183	\$3,081,304	\$4,756,946
Average amount of financial assistance awarded on variation for expenses not yet incurred	\$3,187	\$3,562	\$3,981



Applications for review of decisions

TABLE 21: Number of applications for review finalised by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, by outcome, 2021/22 to 2023/24

Outcome	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Original order/award set aside, and new award made on review	1	9.1%	1	12.5%	0	0.0%
Award varied on review	4	36.4%	0	0.0%	3	21.4%
Order affirmed on review	3	27.3%	2	25.0%	1	7.1%
Application for assistance remitted to original decision-maker for determination	2	18.2%	2	25.0%	3	21.4%
Application for review dismissed	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Application for review struck out / withdrawn / abandoned	1	9.1%	3	37.5%	7	50.0%
Total	11	100%	8	100%	14	100%

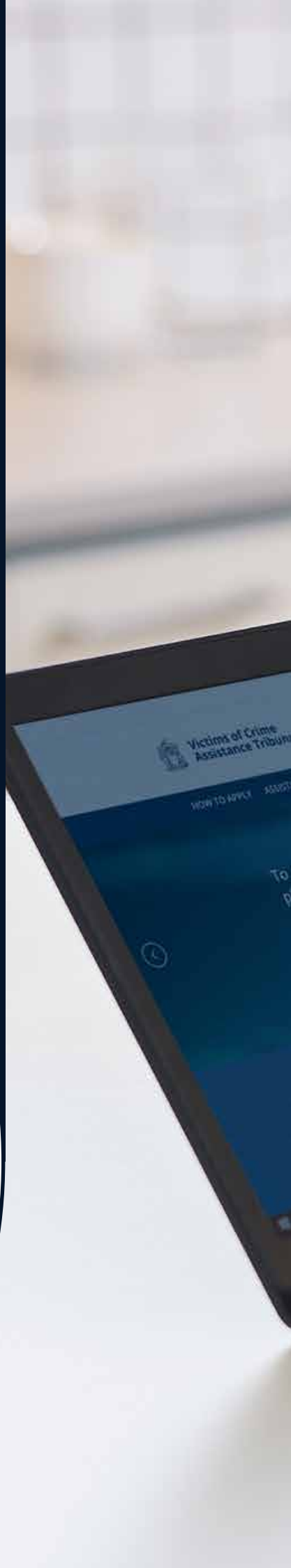
TABLE 22: Number of awards of financial assistance made or varied by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal on review, and average amount of financial assistance awarded on review, 2021/22 to 2023/24

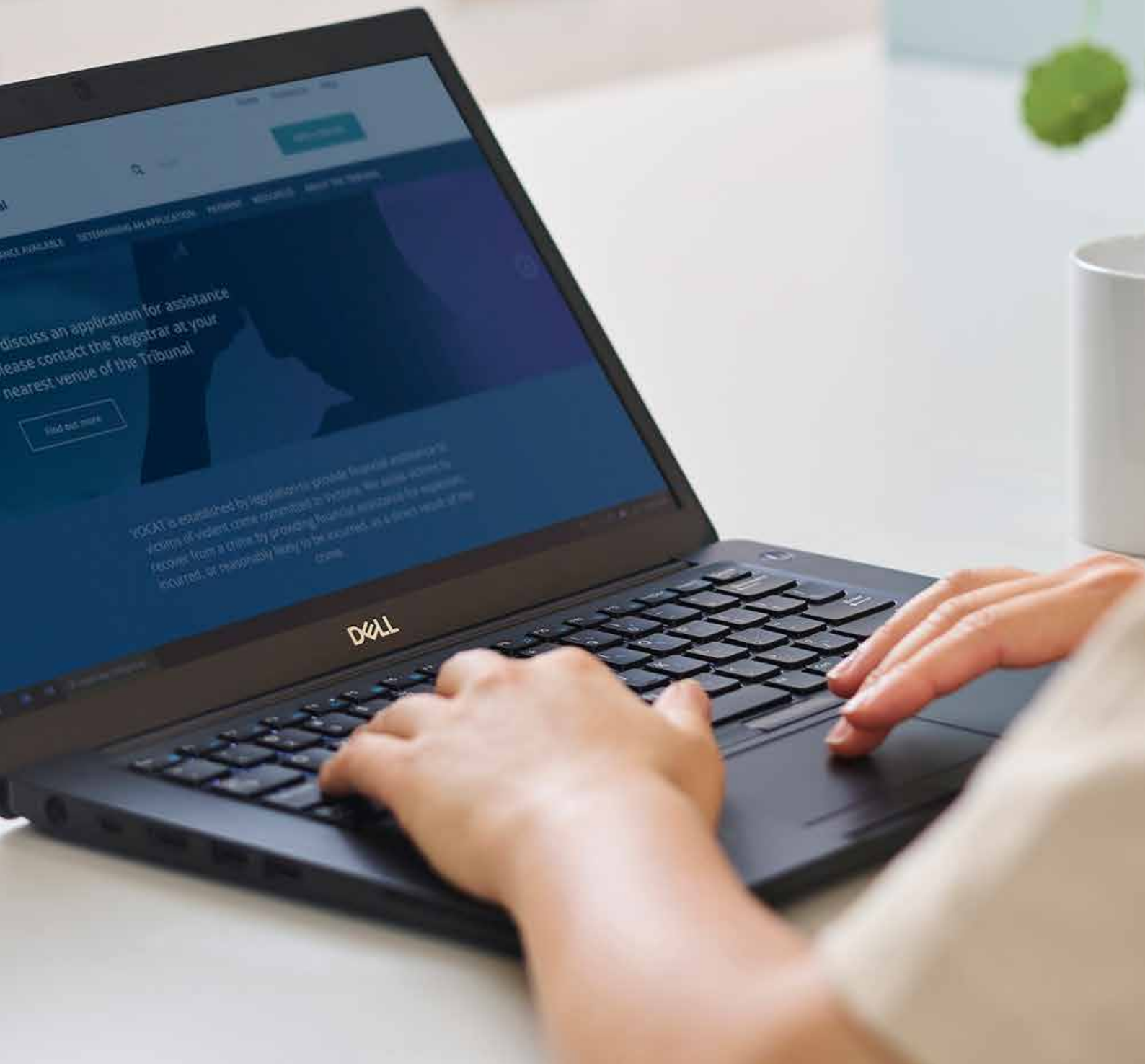
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number awards of assistance made or varied on review	5	1	3
Amount of financial assistance awarded on review	\$76,090	\$19,065	\$74,470
Average amount of financial assistance awarded on review	\$15,218	\$19,065	\$24,823



Our Financial Report

This year, VOCAT continues to operate as efficiently as possible. More than usual was spent on staffing, including temporary administrative staff to assist with backlog and increased caseload demand. Priority throughout the year was given to reducing backlog, and urgent matters including finalising older claims.







Funding source

The Consolidated Fund of the State of Victoria pays for VOCAT's operating costs. The amounts of financial assistance that the Tribunal awards are also paid out of the Consolidated Fund, which is appropriated to the necessary extent.⁷

Financial assistance paid

In the year ending 30 June 2024, the Tribunal paid a total amount of \$58,672,293 (compared to \$55,081,273 in the previous year). This amount comprises financial assistance paid to victims of crime and fees for service providers and legal practitioners and represents actual payments made in the reporting period. It therefore does not include amounts relating to awards made in the current or previous reporting periods that were not paid in the current reporting period. It also does not include financial assistance awarded for expenses not yet incurred or not used by applicants.

Operating costs

In the financial year ending 30 June 2024, VOCAT's operating costs were \$9,670,115. The 2023/24 state budget awarded an additional \$5.1m this reporting period to support the Tribunal's transition to the new scheme. Subsequently, a considerable increase in the Tribunal's staffing profile to meet increased demand and manage backlog, centralisation expenses and additional IT set-up costs account for much of the increase in operating costs this reporting period.

VOCAT's operating costs have historically been minimised as a result of having Magistrates and Judicial Registrars as decision-makers and being supported by Magistrates' Court Registrars across some locations. This reporting period the Magistrates' Court has absorbed a smaller proportion of VOCAT's operating costs post centralisation, including Tribunal Member salaries⁸.

Salaries and employee-related expenses for Tribunal-funded positions comprise most of VOCAT's operating costs. The balance is made up of expenses associated with the Tribunal's legal costs, training and development, and infrastructure costs such as rent and property services, utilities, repairs and maintenance, postage and communication, and stationery.

7. Section 69(1) of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996*.

8. Clause 10 of Schedule 1 to the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989* provides that the salaries, allowances and benefits payable to Magistrates are to be paid out of the Consolidated Fund.

Financial Statement for year ending 30 June 2024

	Note	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Special Appropriations				
	1			
Salaries, overtime and annual leave		\$3,368,335	\$3,407,535	\$5,839,806
Superannuation		\$286,107	\$370,839	\$618,964
Payroll tax		\$174,924	\$233,475	\$432,399
Provision For long service leave		\$118,230	\$97,394	\$131,033
Workcover levy		\$11,822	\$14,515	\$57,492
Fringe Benefits Taxation		–	–	\$134
Total Salaries and Associated Expenditure		\$3,959,418	\$4,123,758	\$7,079,828

Operating Expenditure				
Travel and personal expenses		\$4,553	\$48,901	\$5,545
Printing, stationery and subscriptions		\$69,907	\$59,136	\$111,533
Postage and communication		\$13,009	\$5,166	\$1,964
Contractors and professional services	2	\$833,795	\$412,667	\$490,373
Training and development		\$51,564	\$25,340	\$52,017
Motor vehicle expenses		–	\$50	–
Operating expenses		\$535,632	\$533,113	\$1,345,492
Information technology costs		\$107,804	\$79,155	\$448,232
Rent, utilities and property services		\$30,200	\$71,183	\$124,389
Repairs and maintenance		–	\$529	\$10,742
Total Operating Expenditure		\$1,646,464	\$1,235,240	\$2,590,287
Total Salaries and Operating Expenditure		\$5,605,882	\$5,358,998	\$9,670,115

Special Appropriations				
Award Payments		\$42,979,559	\$55,081,273	\$58,672,293
Total Awards	3	\$42,979,559	\$55,081,273	\$58,672,293

Notes to and forming part of the financial statement

This Financial statement is based upon financial data available as at 11 July 2024.

Note 1: The special appropriation for the salaries and on-costs of Tribunal Members (Magistrates) during the reporting period is reported in the annual report of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria for the year ending 30 June 2024.

Note 2: The expenditure for contractors and professional services relates predominantly to legal costs and contract labour hire.

Note 3: Award payments represent actual payments made for expenses, lump sum payments to applicants and legal costs paid in the reporting period. This does not include awards of financial assistance that were made in the reporting period but not paid as at 30 June 2024.

Our Directory of Tribunal Members and Judicial Registrars

Chief Magistrate

Justice Lisa Hannan

Deputy Chief Magistrates

Magistrate Susan Wakeling

Magistrate Tim Bourke

Magistrates

Magistrate Marita Altman

Magistrate Megan Aumair

Magistrate Julian Ayres

Magistrate Guillaume Bailin

Magistrate Donna Bakos

Magistrate Stephen Ballek

Magistrate Julia Barling

Magistrate Hayley Bate

Magistrate Luisa Bazzani

Magistrate John Bentley

Magistrate Amina Bhai

Magistrate Jacqueline Billings

Magistrate Angela Bolger

Magistrate Jade Bott

Magistrate Caroline Boulton

Magistrate Jennifer Bowles

Magistrate Felicity Broughton

Magistrate Gerard Bryant

Magistrate Abigail Burchill

Magistrate Tony Burns

Magistrate Carolyn Burnside

Magistrate Darrin Cain

Magistrate Vincenzo Caltabiano

Magistrate Suzanne Cameron

Magistrate Victoria Campbell

Magistrate Megan Casey

Magistrate Michael Coghlan

Magistrate Ann Collins

Magistrate Gregory Connellan

Magistrate Erica Contini

Magistrate Suzette Dootjes

Magistrate Peter Dotchin

Magistrate Alanna Duffy

Magistrate Peter Dunn

Magistrate Rosemary Falla

Magistrate Kathryn Fawcett

Magistrate Bernard Fitzgerald

Magistrate Lesley Fleming

Magistrate Leon Fluxman

Magistrate Justin Foster

Magistrate Majella Foster-Jones

Magistrate Belinda Franjic

Magistrate Timothy Gattuso

Magistrate Jane Gibson

Magistrate Kieran Gilligan

Magistrate Phillip Goldberg

Magistrate Julie Grainger

Magistrate Timothy Greenway

Magistrate Kirstie Grigor

Magistrate Jennifer Grubissa

Magistrate Michael Gurvich

Magistrate Simon Guthrie

Magistrate Andrew Halse

Magistrate Robyn Hamilton

Magistrate Tara Hartnett

Magistrate Annabel Hawkins

Magistrate Fiona Hayes
(VOCAT Supervising Magistrate)

Magistrate James Henderson

Magistrate Natalie Heynes

Magistrate Timothy Hoare

Magistrate Meghan Hoare

Magistrate Michelle Hodgson

Magistrate Cecily Hollingworth

Magistrate Franz Holzer

Magistrate Carolyn Howe

Magistrate Gail Hubble

Magistrate Trieu Huynh

Magistrate Graeme Keil

Magistrate Russell Kelly

Magistrate Meagan Keogh

Magistrate Costas Kilias

Magistrate Michael King

Magistrate Nunzio La Rosa

Magistrate Heather Lambrick

Magistrate Elizabeth Langdon

Magistrate David Langton

Magistrate Rohan Lawrence

Magistrate Stephen Lee

Magistrate Dominic Lennon

Magistrate Gerard Lethbridge

Magistrate Denise Livingstone

Magistrate Cynthia Lynch

Magistrate Mary-Anne MacCallum

Magistrate Jan Maclean

Magistrate Kay MacPherson

Magistrate Urfa Masood

Magistrate Ross Maxted

Magistrate Therese McCarthy

Magistrate Ann McGarvie

Magistrate Michael McNamara

Magistrate Sharon McRae

Magistrate Frances Medina

Magistrate Peter Mellas

Magistrate Johanna Metcalf

Magistrate Helen Murphy

Magistrate Michelle Mykytowycz

Magistrate John O'Callaghan

Magistrate Julie O'Donnell

Magistrate Jason Ong

Magistrate Kim Parkinson

Magistrate Shiva Pillai

Magistrate Roslyn Porter

Magistrate Samantha Poulter

Magistrate Vicky Prapas

Magistrate Jillian Prior

Magistrate Hugh Radford

Magistrate Lucia Raponi

Magistrate Michael Richards

Magistrate Kay Robertson

Magistrate Gregory Robinson

Magistrate Mark Sabljak

Magistrate Tim Schocker

Magistrate Adrian Serratore

Magistrate Andrew Sim

Magistrate Sharon Smith

Magistrate Brett Sonnet

Magistrate Patrick Southey

Magistrate Pauline Spencer
Magistrate Helen Spowart
Magistrate David Starvaggi
Magistrate Robert Stary
Magistrate Melissa Stead
Magistrate Fiona Stewart
Magistrate Mark Stratmann
Magistrate Jacinta Studham
Magistrate Stella Stuthridge
Magistrate Mia Stylianou
Magistrate Kimberley Swadesir
Magistrate Charles Tan
Magistrate Greg Thomas
Magistrate Malcolm Thomas
Magistrate Noreen Toohey
Magistrate Cynthia Toose
Magistrate Letizia Torres
Magistrate Jennifer Tregent
Magistrate Olivia Trumble
Magistrate Allison Vaughan
Magistrate Belinda Wallington
Magistrate Tim Walsh
Magistrate Nahrain Warda
Magistrate Mike Wardell
Magistrate Andrew Waters
Magistrate Ian Watkins
Magistrate Matthew White
Magistrate Siobhan Whittle
Magistrate Michael Wighton
Magistrate Louise Wildberger
Magistrate Jarrod Williams
Magistrate Christina Windisch
Magistrate Simon Zebrowski
Magistrate Francis Zemljak

Reserve Magistrates

Magistrate Ross Betts
Magistrate Barry Braun
Magistrate Andrew Capell
Magistrate John Doherty
Magistrate Michelle Ehrlich
Magistrate David Faram
Magistrate Anne Goldsbrough
Magistrate Margaret Harding
Magistrate Jonathan Klestadt
Magistrate Cathy Lamble
Magistrate John Lesser
Magistrate Lance Martin
Magistrate Andrew McKenna
Magistrate Gregory McNamara
Magistrate Peter Mithen
Magistrate Daniel Muling
Magistrate Jelena Popovic
Magistrate Steven Raleigh
Magistrate Peter Reardon
Magistrate Duncan Reynolds
Magistrate Charlie Rozencwajg
Magistrate Ron Saines
Magistrate Marc Sargent
Magistrate Michael Smith
Magistrate Brian Wright

Judicial Registrars

Judicial Registrar Julian Bartlett
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Judicial Registrar Shannon Dellamarta
Judicial Registrar Samantha Dixon
Judicial Registrar Kristie Eales
Judicial Registrar Gavin Green
Judicial Registrar Anthony Gwynne
Judicial Registrar Leah Hickey
Judicial Registrar Barry Johnstone
Judicial Registrar
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Judicial Registrar
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VICTIMS OF
CRIME ASSISTANCE
TRIBUNAL

vocat.vic.gov.au

Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal

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Authorised by the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal

555 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

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