

# Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2023-24

## Budget Estimates Hearings

Jaclyn Symes MP  
Attorney-General

Friday 9 June 2023



# Improving access to justice and inclusion across Victoria by supporting the legal assistance sector



**\$13.95 million** to provide legal assistance and supporting Victorians with disability over two years for Victorian community legal centres to deliver integrated and early intervention services to Victorians experiencing vulnerabilities including family violence. A component of this funding will also support people with a cognitive impairment to participate in police interviews through the **Office of the Public Advocate's Independent Third Person program**



**\$5.48 million** to help community sector organisations support and retain their workforce



**\$1.90 million** for pre-court assistance to reduce delays and adjournments via the Victoria Legal Aid Help Before Court program. This will continue support for court users prior to their hearing date, to resolve legal issues earlier and reduce continued contact with the courts and justice system



# Improving access to justice with better victim-survivor services



**\$19.47 million**

**over four years to the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine** to enable it to implement a new and sustainable clinical forensic medicine service model that meets victim-survivor needs and improves access to services



**\$6.62 million**

to enable the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal to continue to support victims as part of the transition to a **new financial assistance scheme** under the *Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Act 2022*



# Therapeutic court programs – Supporting outcome focused justice across Victoria

The 2023-24 Budget continues the Victorian Government's commitment to support vulnerable court users and improve community safety including:

- **\$20.23 million** to continue the **Drug Courts** in **Shepparton, Ballarat**, and the **County Court**, and fund the indictable **Court Integrated Services Program pilot** to address the drivers of offending, provide access to housing, mental health, and drug treatment
- **\$13.28 million** for the **new Bendigo Law Courts** to ensure safety and accessibility for all court users, including security and interpreter services
- **\$25.67 million** to complete implementation of a **new case management system** for the Magistrates' and Children's Courts to improve efficient management of court operations



## Expanded access to specialist courts and programs:

- **Koori Court** launched in April 2023 at the new Bendigo Law Courts to help reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system
- **Assessment and Referral Court** being expanded to 8 additional headquarter Magistrates' Courts to support accused persons experiencing mental ill-health and/or cognitive impairment
- **Navigation and Triage** pilot at Magistrates' Courts in Melbourne and Bendigo to provide supports to court users with complex or multiple needs



Broadmeadows Koori Court

# Improving outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians

The 2023-24 Victorian Budget includes an overall record investment of **\$475 million** to improve outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians



## Yoorrook Justice Commission

- First formal truth telling process into injustices experienced by First Peoples
- Current focus on the criminal justice and child protection systems - with State witnesses appearing at hearings in May 2023
- Critical Issues Report due 30 August 2023, with a final report due 30 June 2025

Funding of **\$16.79m** to improve justice outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians from the **Reducing Future Justice Demand and Keeping the Community Safe** initiative. This includes:



Enable the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service to expand their regional hub model, with new culturally safe legal services offices in regional Victoria and outer-suburban Melbourne



Increased funding to the Aboriginal Community Justice Panel workforce



Enhance the Aboriginal Youth Cautioning Program, led by Victoria Police

Further funding has been provided across the justice system, including to continue Aboriginal-specific initiatives within Corrections and Youth Justice portfolios which aim to reduce recidivism, improve cultural supports and target social and economic benefits

# Better supporting victim-survivors of family violence – Specialist Family Violence Courts

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**Specialist Family Violence Courts** now operating state-wide and **hearing 70% of all family violence matters**

\$22.83  
million

to provide **specialist family violence legal assistance** to resolve cases quickly and reduce stress

\$3.27  
million

to continue **remote hearings**, enabling victim survivors to appear in court remotely and receive support services

Specialist family violence services delivered in 2022-23 include:



**140,335** enquiries received by the Family Violence Contact Centre at the Magistrates' Court



**5,413** online Family Violence Intervention Order applications



**Umalek Balit** providing culturally safe support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in court proceedings



**LGBTIQ family violence practitioner support** available statewide via the Magistrates' Court



**1,645** referrals to the Remote Hearing Support Service since the pilot commenced, providing trauma-informed court support to victim survivors

# Deliver fit-for-purpose court infrastructure

## Courts infrastructure:

- New **Bendigo Law Courts** opened in February 2023 – includes a Koori Court, Specialist Family Violence Court and Assessment and Referral Court
- Purpose-built and user-centric facility informed by extensive consultation with local community members and the justice sector

## Court developments underway:

- New **Dandenong Children's Court** opening in June 2023 to support vulnerable children and families in Melbourne's south-east
- Expansion of **Sunshine Law Courts**, including a new Specialist Family Violence Court – for completion by mid 2024 – addressing significant demand pressures to meet local justice needs
- New **Wyndham Law Courts** – on track to open in early 2025 - will provide multi-jurisdictional court services, to deliver more equitable and connected access to justice in Melbourne's rapidly growing west



Bendigo Law Courts

# Court backlog recovery continues



**6% reduction** of the total pending case load across courts and VCAT

*(year to date)*



Supreme Court pending criminal jury trials **reducing by 19%**

County Court pending criminal jury trials **reducing by 4%**

*(year to date)*



**Case clearance rate – criminal matters** expected in 2022-23:

Magistrates' Court: **115%**

Supreme and Children's Courts: **100%**

County Court: **99%**



**12% reduction** in the Magistrates' Court and

**6% reduction** in the Children's Court pending caseloads

*(year to date)*



**On time case processing – criminal matters**

Supreme, Magistrates' and Children's Courts expected outcomes are above 2021-22 results



VCAT finalised **over 59,000 cases** in the year to date & expects a **97% case clearance rate**





# Legislative priorities



## Raising the age of criminal responsibility

- Victoria will legislate to raise the age of criminal responsibility in two stages:
- **Stage 1:** From 10 to 12 years without exceptions in 2024 (legislation expected to be introduced later this year)
- **Stage 2:** From 12 to 14 years with exceptions by 2027, subject to design and implementation of an alternative service model

Raising the age will reduce offending and make the community safer in the long-term



## Bail reform

- Victoria is developing reforms to make our bail laws fairer and safer, while maintaining an appropriately tough approach to those accused of serious offending or who pose a risk to community safety
- The reforms will align with key recommendations of the Coronial inquest into the passing of Veronica Nelson, as well as matters raised in the ongoing hearings of the Yoorrook Justice Commission



## Anti-vilification reform

- Victoria will strengthen laws to prevent hatred and vilification, guided by recommendations made by the Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections in Victoria
- Victoria has already banned the Hakenkreuz as recommended, and will ban the Nazi salute this year
- These reforms will also fulfil a 2022 election commitment to strengthen the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*



**Thank you.**

