

## Annual Report

2024-  
2025



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## Acknowledgements

The Victims of Crime Commissioner (referred to as 'the Commissioner', 'the VOCC' and 'they' interchangeably throughout this report) acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and pays respect to Elders past and present. The Commissioner acknowledges Aboriginal people as Australia's First Nations people and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work. They recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and embrace their spirit of self-determination, self-management and reconciliation. They acknowledge the leadership of Victorian Aboriginal organisations in understanding and promoting healing from trauma across generations. The Commissioner acknowledges the diverse and distinct cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Commissioner also acknowledges that many people have experienced trauma and discrimination through a range of adverse circumstances and events. These include women, people with disability, First Nations people, people in LGBTIQ+ communities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and other displaced people living in our community. The Commissioner recognises the strength, resilience and resourcefulness of victims and survivors of trauma and welcomes the expertise that people with lived experience bring to help shape better systems and a better future. Their knowledge and insights are essential to improving the responses of justice agencies and victims' services, in line with the Victims' Charter.

## Freedom of Information

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* provides the public with a right of access to documents held by the Commissioner and the VOCC Office (referred to as 'the VOCC Office' and 'the Commissioner's Office' interchangeably throughout this report).

## Accessibility

The Commissioner aims to make their information and publications accessible to all. This annual report has been designed in both a PDF and accessible Word format. If you require an alternative format please call the Commissioner's Office on 1800 010 017 or email [enquiries@vocc.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@vocc.vic.gov.au). If you are deaf or find it hard to hear or speak with people who use a phone, the National Relay Service can help. Contact the National Relay Service on 133 677 or [visit their website for more information](#). This document can also be found on our website: [victimsofcrimecommissioner.vic.gov.au](http://victimsofcrimecommissioner.vic.gov.au)

## Disclaimer

The case studies presented in this Report are drawn from information received through calls and emails to the Commissioner. These case studies reflect some of the main difficulties that victims of crime who have contacted the Commissioner have experienced. They also reflect some of the critical issues identified through the Commissioner's Victims' Charter Review (referred to as 'the Charter Review' and 'the Review' interchangeably throughout this report).

These case studies do not represent one story but a collection of similar stories that have been shared with the Commissioner. Pseudonyms are used, and details (such as ages and locations) have been changed to ensure that the cases are not identifiable. In presenting these case studies the Commissioner aims to inform and raise awareness about the difficulties commonly experienced by victims of crime.

## A word on terminology

The Commissioner recognises that there are many terms that are used to describe those who have experienced crime and are dealing with its impact. These include affected family members, survivors, victim-survivors, complainants and witnesses. Some people identify with one of these terms more than others, and some people do not identify with any of these terms. For example, there are complexities in language used by Aboriginal communities in the context of referring to family violence and family members. Some terms used are "affected family member and user of violence" and in other contexts, the phrases used are "people who use violence" and "people who experience violence" in relation to family violence.

The Victims' Charter and the VOCC Act apply to victims of all types of crime and each victim's experience is different. It is not possible to find a simple phrase that captures the experiences of everyone.

The Commissioner talks about 'victims', 'victims of crime' and 'people adversely affected by crime' because these are the terms currently used in the Victims' Charter, the VOCC Act and the *Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance) Act 2022*, and because these terms specifically refer to people's experience of crime.

The Victims' Charter covers both people adversely affected by crime and victims. The phrase 'people adversely affected by crime' includes victims, victims' family members and people who have witnessed a crime.

# Acronyms and shortened forms

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## **Agency/agencies**

Investigatory agencies (such as Victoria Police), prosecuting agencies (such as the Office of Public Prosecutions) and victims' services agencies (such as the Victims Assistance Program) that are required to treat victims of crime in accordance with the Victims' Charter

## **FAS**

Financial Assistance Scheme

## **Justice agency/agencies**

Agencies that operate within the justice system that may or may not be subject to the VOCC Act or Victims' Charter (such as the Court Services Victoria or Corrections Victoria)

## **Justice system**

The system that includes activities such as policymaking and law reform, policing, dispute resolution and restorative justice, as well as agencies such as courts and tribunals, prisons, corrections and legal assistance

## **LGBTIQA+**

An evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and other sexuality- or gender-diverse people

## **Prescribed agency**

The Victim of Crime Commissioner Regulations 2020 (VOCC Regulations) define the agencies and services that are required by law to comply with the Victims' Charter.

## **Regulations**

*Victims of Crime Commissioner Regulations 2020*

## **Victims' Charter**

*Victims' Charter Act 2006*

## **Victims' services**

Services that provide support to victims of crime that may or may not be subject to the VOCC Act, Regulations or Victims' Charter

## **Victims' services system**

Victim support services delivered by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety's Victim Services, Support and Reform unit (Victims of Crime Helpline, Victims Assistance Program, Victims Register and restorative justice services). Also includes community legal services and specialist sexual assault and family violence services funded by the Victorian Government

## **VOCAT**

Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal

## **VOCC/ the Commissioner**

Victims of Crime Commissioner

## **VOCC Act**

*Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015*

## **VOCCC**

Victims of Crime Consultative Committee

## **VOCC Office/ the Commissioner's Office**

Victims of Crime Commissioner's Office staff



The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny  
MP Attorney-General

Dear Attorney-General

**Victims of Crime Commissioner: Annual Report 2024–25**

In accordance with the *Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015* (the VOCC Act), I am pleased to present to you the Victims of Crime Commissioner's Annual Report for the financial year ending 30 June 2025 for tabling in Parliament.

This Report documents the performance of the functions of the Victims of Crime Commissioner and the exercise of the Commissioner's powers under the VOCC Act.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth' followed by a long, flowing horizontal stroke.

**Elizabeth Langdon**  
Victims of Crime Commissioner

# Message from the Victims of Crime Commissioner



This past year has been a time of significant change and activity for the Victims of Crime Commissioner's Office. When I commenced as Commissioner in August 2024, I was provided with the exciting opportunity to build upon the important work of my predecessor, Fiona McCormack, who implemented the compliance and victim survivor engagement functions of the role, and developed systemic policy advice to government to support victims of crime.

My focus for 2024-25, and in looking ahead to future priorities, had three key themes:

- engaging with victims of crime and embedding their experience in all aspects of our work;
- strategic planning and advice to government to advance the needs of victim survivors and the operations of the VOCC Office; and
- influential, cooperative and transparent engagement with relevant departments and agencies to ensure their compliance with the Charter.

The work of the Lived Experience Advisory Group and the Lived Experience Experts Network has been fundamental to elevating the voice of victims and underpinning my engagement and advocacy work across the justice system. These groups of experts have provided clear and direct advice and evidence about their experience of the system. The members of these groups have given their time selflessly and with great care and courage, and their expertise in the operation of the Victim's Charter 'on the ground' has been invaluable.

The inaugural Review of the operation of the *Victims' Charter Act 2006* (Victims Charter) and its benefits to victims has been an important and significant project. It commenced in November 2024 and is required by the VOCC Act to be presented to the Attorney-General in September 2025.

The Charter Review has proven insightful and valuable in revealing how well the Charter supports victim survivors in practice. It has also demonstrated with renewed clarity how critically important it is to ensure that victims survivors participate fully and meaningfully in all justice system processes that impact on them. It has shown that their voice must be heard and followed when decisions are made – whether in individual cases or when seeking to improve the system as a whole.



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The Review examines how victim survivors are treated within the justice system, identifies where the legislation is working well and where it falls short. During the Charter Review consultation process, whether I spoke to people with lived experience or others working in the justice system, they all provided valuable insights about how we can make the Charter better for victim survivors.

To ensure compliance with the Charter, my Office has had a strong focus this year on our processes and ensuring that we build on our trauma-informed complaints processes. This year enquiries and complaints to the VOCC increased significantly, in part because of the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) which commenced in November 2024. The FAS falls within the remit of the Charter and the Commissioner's oversight.

The challenges faced by the FAS are concerning, including the delays experienced by victim survivors who apply for financial assistance. These challenges have led to many applicants raising enquiries and complaints with the VOCC. The FAS is an important reform to support victim survivors and I acknowledge the dedication and commitment of those who work in the FAS, and their work to improve the operation of the scheme and its support for victim survivors.

My Office and I have engaged regularly and positively with the FAS, as well as with the other large, prescribed agencies such as Victoria Police (VicPol), the Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) and Victorian Legal Aid (VLA). I am grateful for the spirit of cooperation and a shared priority to provide the best possible experience and support for victims of crime across justice agencies.

**Elizabeth Langdon**

Victims of Crime Commissioner

## Key highlights for 2024-25

Important work was undertaken during the year to deliver the Commissioner's core functions under the *Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015* (the VOCC Act) to:

- advocate for victim survivors of crime,
- identify and report on systemic victim of crime issues,
- receive and respond to complaints,
- monitor and report on prescribed agencies' compliance with the *Victims' Charter Act 2006* (the Victims Charter),
- report to the Attorney-General on any systemic victim of crime matter, and
- provide advice to the Attorney-General and government departments and agencies regarding improvements to the justice system to meet the needs of victims of crime.

### Advocating for victim survivors of crime

As part of a victim-centred approach to law, policy and practice, the Commissioner's Office developed and implemented a Lived Experience model. This has provided significant opportunities to embed lived experience into the broader work of the Office. Key work has included:

- Appointment of the Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) and Lived Experience Experts Network (LEEN).
- The significant contribution of lived experience into the Review of the operation of the Victims' Charter, information sessions and webinars, and development of resources.
- The continued development of trauma-informed practice within the VOCC Office.

Since commencing as Commissioner in August 2024, the Commissioner has met regularly with the Minister for Victims to provide advice regarding improvements to the justice system to meet the needs of victim survivors of crime.

The VOCC Office introduced an electronic case-management system to effectively assess and respond to complaints and harness data across teams to better support the work of advocating for victim survivors with agencies and government.

## Systemic inquiries and advice to Government

In 2024-2025 the Commissioner was required under s 29A of the VOCC Act, to review the operation of the Victims' Charter and its benefit to victims.

From November 2024 until May 2025, the Commissioner consulted with over 150 victim survivors and lived experience representatives, and over 50 criminal justice and victims' service stakeholders. This consultation included:

- Surveying and interviewing victim survivors about their experience of the Victims' Charter and its operation,
- Receiving written submissions from victim survivors and criminal justice and victim service stakeholders,
- Engaging with the LEAG and Victims of Crime Consultative Committee (VOCCC), and speaking with stakeholders during consultations and roundtable discussions, in metropolitan and regional Victoria.

## Victim survivor complaints about their treatment in the justice system

In the reporting period, the Commissioner received 303 enquiries, eight of which progressed to the formal complaints process and two of these progressed to an investigation. Dealing with an enquiry in a respectful and trauma-informed way takes considerable time. While complaints cannot be progressed if a victim-survivor has not already complained to the agency, intensive assistance is provided to ensure that we support victim-survivors through the process and provide opportunities for the VOCC to gather information about compliance with the Charter.

## Monitoring prescribed agency compliance with the Charter

The Commissioner designed a new approach to agency engagement, which focussed on delivering regular information sessions and the creation of guidance tools for agencies to assist with complying with obligations under the Victims' Charter. The Commissioner met regularly with agencies including VicPol, OPP, Victims Services Support and Reform and WorkSafe.

In the course of both responding to complaints by victim survivors, and commencing the Commissioner's Review of the Victims' Charter, a significant volume of information was compiled about the extent of compliance with the Victims' Charter, and instances of non-compliance, by prescribed agencies.

## About the Commissioner



The Victims of Crime Commissioner is an independent statutory officer who advocates for the needs of victim survivors to government to ensure their inclusion and active participation in the justice system.

The Commissioner is dedicated to improving the justice system for victim survivors. This involves influencing systemic changes that will significantly enhance victim survivors' experiences, recognising the importance of victim survivors' participation in the justice system.

The Commissioner advocates for the respect, recognition and inclusion of victims of crime in the justice system and represents their concerns to government. Underpinning the Commissioner's work is a commitment to championing cultural change to recognise and advance victims' interests in the justice system through law reform and policy and program development processes.

The Commissioner's work is consistent with functions set out in the VOCC Act. This legislation outlines the Commissioner's diverse responsibilities, which include:

- advocating for the respect, recognition and inclusion of victim survivors of crime in the Victorian justice system
- conducting inquiries into systemic issues that affect large numbers or particular groups of victim survivors of crime
- reporting on how agencies fulfil their legal obligations under the Victims' Charter
- reporting to the Attorney-General on any systemic victim of crime matter
- providing advice to the Attorney-General and government departments and agencies regarding improvements to the justice system to meet the needs of victims of crime
- representing the concerns of victim survivors of crime to government and other decision-making bodies; and
- investigating complaints from victim survivors of crime who believe their rights and entitlements under the Victims' Charter have not been met by an investigatory body, prosecuting agency or victims' service.

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## The Victims' Charter

The Victims' Charter was introduced in legislation in 2006. It establishes principles to ensure that justice agencies and victims' services acknowledge, respect and appropriately support victim survivors.

The Victims' Charter formally recognises the role of victim survivors in the criminal justice process. It acknowledges that, while not parties in proceedings, victim survivors should be recognised as participants in proceedings for criminal offences, and the justice system should not re-traumatise victim survivors. The Victims' Charter also recognises that victim survivors have an inherent interest in the justice system and therefore aims to give them a voice and a place in the process.

The Victims' Charter sets out principles that apply to all investigatory, prosecuting and victims' services agencies in Victoria. The principles that these agencies must adhere to include:

- treating victim survivors with courtesy, respect and dignity
- responding to the particular needs of victim survivors, and especially those who experience disadvantage
- providing victim survivors with information about services, entitlements and assistance
- communicating with and responding to victim survivors in a way that recognises their preferences and needs
- protecting victim survivors' personal information, and
- responding to complaints from victim survivors who believe an agency has breached the Victims' Charter.

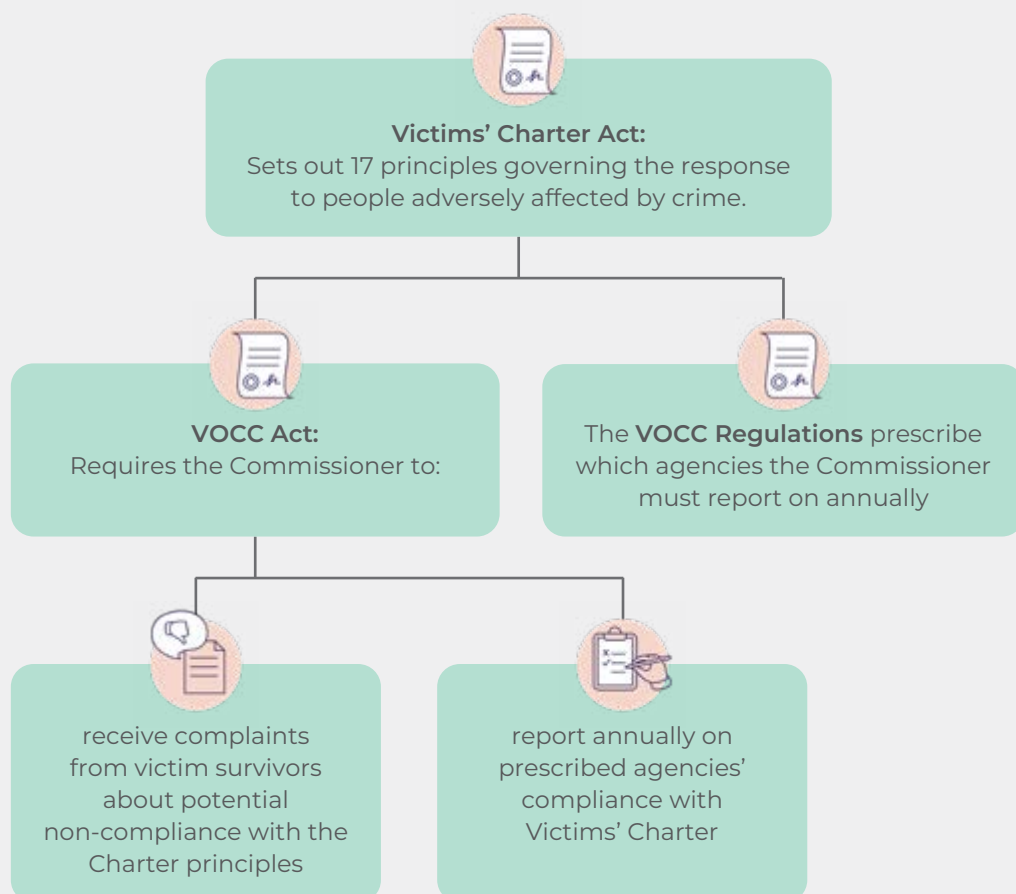
The level of agency compliance with the Victims' Charter directly affects the experiences of victim survivors in the justice and victims' services systems.

The Victims' Charter gives victim survivors the legal right to complain to the agency or the Commissioner if they believe an agency has not followed one or more Victims' Charter principle.

## A framework of rights for victim survivors

The Victims Charter, the VOCC Act and the *Victims of Crime Regulations 2020* (VOCC Regulations) combine to provide a framework of rights for victim survivors:

Figure 1: Legal framework for victim survivors





## Vision and values

The Commissioner's vision is that victim survivors of crime are empowered by a justice system that respects them as participants and values their contribution.

Victim survivors play a pivotal role in the justice system. They have the right to be recognised in legal processes, and this recognition is crucial for the system to function effectively.

The Commissioner's purpose is to improve the experience for victim survivors of crime in the justice system by strengthening victims' rights, elevating their knowledge, monitoring their experiences and advocating for systemic improvements within the justice system in line with the VOCC Act and the Victims' Charter.

The values of trust, respect, recognition, empowerment and courage guide the Commissioner's work. They shape the culture and work of the VOCC Office, ensuring that all the work that is carried out is in line with the Commissioner's commitment to victim survivors of crime.

Figure 2: Our values

### Our values

#### Trust

We use authority responsibly and transparently.

#### Respect

We model the Victims' Charter principles of courtesy, respect and dignity.

#### Recognition

We represent the concerns of victims of crime across Victoria's diverse community.

#### Empowerment

We build collective capacity to improve the justice system.

#### Courage

We honour the courage of victims by advocating to the best of our ability.

## Commissioner's Office

The Commissioner's Office comprises a small, dedicated team with expertise and a commitment to victim survivors and improving the justice system.

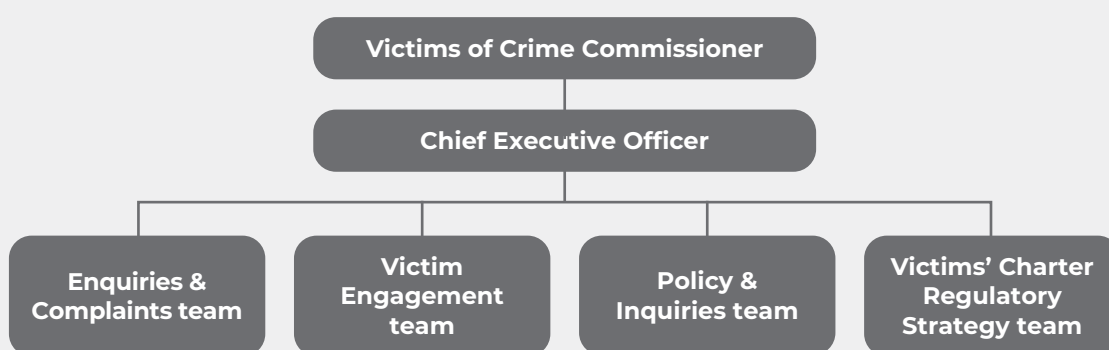
Within available funding, and supporting the Commissioner in fulfilling the statutory functions of the role, the Commissioner's Office is structured around four work streams:

- Victims' Charter Regulatory Strategy
- Victim Engagement
- Policy and Systemic Inquiries
- Enquiries and Complaints

In 2024-2025, The Commissioner continued her focus on her key function to advocate for the rights and needs of victims of crime, and their participation in the justice process. This function was supported by all streams of the Commissioner's work, particularly the VOCC Office's engagement with victims, their articulation of their experience of the process, and their treatment by the key agencies.

The Commissioner also undertook public communication about issues of community and media concern that fell within the scope of her responsibilities. In light of the constrained budget of the Commissioner's Office, this work was supported by targeted communications advice when required.

Figure 3: VOCC Organisational structure







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## Strategic Plan

During 2024-2025 the Commissioner undertook a number of initiatives and activities to strengthen the Office's operational effectiveness and ensure its activities were aligned with delivery expectations.

A key element of this was the finalisation in April 2025 of a two-year Strategic Plan, which recognises the significance of the Commissioner's Review of the Victims' Charter and its recommendations for the VOCC Office.

The Strategic Plan is the culmination of listening and engagement across the justice system, victim survivors and staff. It provides a clear direction, building on the foundation of the last ten years of the Commissioner's work and sets out the following key priorities:

1. **Advocate for reforms**

Champion changes to the justice system to improve victim survivors' experience, through advocacy and targeted inquiry.

2. **Strengthen agencies**

Help justice agencies understand and comply with victim survivors' rights through training, education, and regulation.

3. **Build relationships**

Work closely with government and agencies to connect victim survivors' voices and enhance victim-centred approaches.

4. **Improve our practice**

Continuously develop and review our methods to better support victim survivors and influence the justice system.

The Strategic Plan sets out supports to achieve this, including:

- Independent and objective oversight to ensure the justice system respects victim survivors.
- A strong culture of collaboration across the justice system.
- Well-equipped and supported teams in the VOCC Office.

# 2

## Sector and victim engagement



### Engagement with victims of crime

During the reporting period, the Commissioner had a strong focus on engagement activities.

Listening to victim survivors' needs and experiences enabled the Commissioner to advocate for those impacted by crime. This understanding also helped the Commissioner fulfil their day-to-day responsibilities, including their advocacy and complaint review functions.

Importantly, the Commissioner is a member of the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee (VOCCC), a committee established in law in the VOCC Act to provide advice to the Attorney-General and promote the interests of victims of crime in the justice system. VOCCC membership includes members of the community who have been victims of crime or who are family members of victims of crime. The Commissioner was an active member of the VOCCC over the past year.

In 2024-2025, a key focus of the Commissioner was on embedding a robust, contemporary and evidence-informed pilot Lived Experience Program. The Commissioner launched the Lived Experience Program in May 2024, designed to enable victims of crime to use their experiences to provide feedback about key issues affecting victims of crime which fall within the VOCC's functions. The Program has two participation options:

#### **Lived Experience Experts Network (LEEN)**

– a group of community members who are called on as required to provide feedback, advice and input on issues and topics affecting victims.

#### **Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG)**

– a small group which meets more regularly to discuss priority issues.

This program played a crucial role in ensuring that the Commissioner heard from a diverse range of victim survivors and that their experiences were at the heart of the work of the Commissioner and the VOCC Office. Since the launch of the Commissioner's Lived Experience Program, both the LEAG and the LEEN made significant contributions, for example providing detailed advice about the Office's activities, materials for agencies developed by the VOCC, key issues affecting victim survivors of crime, and input into the Victims' Charter Review.

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The Commissioner valued the detailed advice provided by the LEAG in its regular meetings. As of 30 June 2025, six lived experience advocates were active members of the LEAG, and 58 victim survivors were active members of the LEEN.

The Commissioner released five newsletters during the reporting period to members of the LEEN, seeking their input into the work of the VOCC Office, providing updates on the Commissioner's focus and informing LEEN members about various initiatives across the justice sector.

The Victim Engagement Team received regular referrals from the Enquiries and Complaints Team across 2024-2025. Victim survivors were offered available options, such as providing an account of their experience, expressing interest in meeting with the Commissioner and were provided with information about how to join the LEEN.

## Ensuring awareness of the Victims' Charter

In 2024-2025, the Commissioner had a significant focus on ensuring victims and agencies have greater awareness of the Victims' Charter by :

- providing information to victim survivors about their rights and entitlements under the Victims' Charter throughout the process of making an enquiry or complaint, through phone and email communications, consultations and via resources on the VOCC website.
- educating agencies on their obligations under the Victims' Charter, encouraging them to comply, through information sessions and webinars.

The Commissioner also represents the voices and experiences of victim survivors and advocates for them with entities, agencies and government departments. Throughout the year the Commissioner met with leaders including Ministers, Chief members of Victoria's judiciary, the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, senior government officials and community sector CEOs. The Commissioner has a strong commitment to an active advocacy agenda.

As part of ensuring victim survivors' rights in the justice system are upheld, the Commissioner addressed various forums across Victoria to promote the importance of rights and entitlements enshrined in legislation.

A basic Charter principle that underpins Victoria's justice system is that victim survivors must be treated with respect. While this is well understood in parts of the justice system, the Commissioner heard that there is low awareness amongst victim survivors of their rights.

The Commissioner continues to provide information to victim survivors about their rights, educate agencies about their obligations and address forums to increase awareness, and compliance with, the Victims' Charter.

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## Building awareness and sharing information

The Commissioner actively participated in committees, including with interstate counterparts. These forums provided invaluable opportunities to hear the experience of victim survivors in Victoria and raise issues of common concern.

Hearing from victim survivors of crime about their experiences in the justice system is a core part of the Commissioner's role. In 2024–2025, the Commissioner heard from many people who had been victim survivors of crime and consulted with individual victim survivors, and victims' advisory and community groups. A central focus of these consultations was to understand and learn about the unique barriers and issues victims face as they navigate the justice system. The Commissioner also heard about potential changes to the Victims' Charter that could make the system more accessible, trauma-informed and safe.

The insights gained from these consultations align with what the Commissioner heard from victim survivors and stakeholders during consultations for the Victims' Charter Review. Throughout the year, the Commissioner continued to focus on the experience of victim survivors who face additional barriers to justice and are less likely or able to report a crime to police. These barriers are particularly concerning given that Aboriginal people, people with disability, people with limited English, children and young people, older people and people from the LGBTIQ+ community are at greater risk of being targeted as victims of crime.

During the reporting period, the Commissioner also spoke at external events and was particularly pleased to engage with university law students who are learning about the justice system and the experience and rights of victims in Victoria. These future leaders will contribute to reforms to current practices, cultures and attitudes in the justice system.

## Spotlight on



## Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG)

The Victims of Crime Commissioner's Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) held its inaugural meeting on the 28 August 2024. LEAG members met five times across the financial year. The Commissioner attended every LEAG meeting. Members gave advice to the Commissioner on specific issues that affect victims of crime.

In addition to regular attendance at meetings, where between six and eight LEAG members provided advice in relation to key issues affecting victim survivors of crime, they also played a critical role in the development of resources for prescribed agencies. This included the creation of guidance documents and videos published on the website.

Videos produced by LEAG members in 2024-2025 included a piece on VOCC principles 6 and 7A 'A welcoming environment' and another providing guidance from a Lived Experience perspective on VOCC principles 6 and 7A 'What does good treatment look like?'.

Associated written guidance in relation to VOCC principles 6 and 7A was also created with the expertise and input of the Lived Experience Advisory Group.

LEAG members performed a crucial role throughout the Victims' Charter Review, alongside other victim survivors.

The LEAG was consulted early in the process of the Victims' Charter Review, guiding the process of consultation, including through facilitated feedback, promotional videos, and in the development of the survey.

# 3

## Systemic inquiries and advice to government



An important part of the Commissioner's statutory role is to undertake inquiries into systemic issues affecting victims of crime when they engage with the justice system.

During the reporting period, the Commissioner focussed on the establishment and roll out of a statutory review into the Victims' Charter.

### Victims' Charter Review

Section 29A of the VOCC Act requires the Commissioner to review the operation of the Victims' Charter and its benefits for victim survivors and produce a Report for the Attorney-General by 7 September 2025.

The Report was tabled in Parliament in October 2025 and a copy of the Report was published on the VOCC website following its tabling.

The legislative requirement to review the Victims' Charter came from a recommendation of the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) in its report, *The role of victims of crime in the criminal trial process*.

The Review is the first legislative review of the Victims' Charter since it was enacted 19 years ago. The Review focused on answering the question: "Is the Victims' Charter operating for the benefit of victim survivors?"

To answer this question, from November 2024 until May 2025, the Commissioner's Office consulted with over 150 victim survivors, lived experience representatives, and over 50 criminal justice and victim service stakeholders. This included:

- surveying victim-survivors
- interviewing victim survivors about their experience of the Victims' Charter
- receiving written submissions from victim survivors, criminal justice and victim service stakeholders in response to specific issues detailed in a Consultation Paper
- engaging with the LEAG and VOCCC in relation to the Victims' Charter, and
- speaking with stakeholders during consultations and roundtable discussions, in metropolitan and regional Victoria, about the current operation of the Victims' Charter.

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The Commissioner heard that while the Victims' Charter provides a useful framework for victims' rights, there is currently very low awareness amongst victim survivors and agencies of the Victims' Charter principles. The Commissioner also heard that the Victims' Charter is not easy to understand, it does not provide sufficient protections for victim survivors from secondary victimisation by the criminal justice system (which is one of its stated objectives) and many victim survivors are not able to enforce their Charter rights in a meaningful way.

The Commissioner heard many suggestions from victim survivors, criminal justice and victims' service agencies about how the legislation can be reformed to ensure that it is operating more effectively for the benefit of victim survivors. Many of these suggestions formed the basis of the recommendations in the Review's Report which will be reported on in 2025-2026.

## 4

## Victim complaints about their treatment in the justice system



Complaints from victims of crime can shape improvements to the justice system's treatment of victims. They provide insights that help agencies respond to victims' concerns and improve victims' interactions with the justice system. The Commissioner assesses and investigates these complaints to advocate for better victim experiences. Low complaint levels may indicate a lack of victim awareness of their rights under the Victims' Charter or concerns about the consequences of making complaints.

In the reporting period, many enquiries received related to victims' engagement with the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) which commenced in November 2024. The Commissioner and their Office have actively engaged with the FAS about the issues raised with the Commissioner. The Commissioner's Office established governance mechanisms to ensure regular engagement. The Commissioner also raised these concerns with government and advocated about the experience of FAS reported by victims.

The Commissioner's Office supports victims submitting complaints about agencies that fail to comply with the Victims' Charter. Information and resources about the complaint review process are available on the Commissioner's website.

### The enquiries and complaints process

The VOCC Office received 303 enquiries in 2024–25, a **48 per cent increase on 2023–24.**

All complaints received by the VOCC Office begin as an enquiry, with many enquiries not progressing to the complaints process. A victim survivor may make a complaint if they believe a justice or victim service agency has breached the Victim's Charter and they are dissatisfied with the agency's response to that complaint. Figure 4 as follows details the two stages in the enquiries and complaints process.



Figure 4. Enquiries and complaints process



## Enquiries

Many victims and other people affected by crime contact the VOCC Office to talk about their experiences with justice agencies and victims' services. Dealing with an enquiry in a respectful and trauma-informed way takes considerable time. The Office reviews the information and may give them information about other services or consider whether their concerns should be progressed to a formal complaint about an agency.

## Complaints

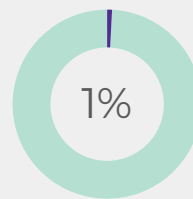
- **Intake** – A victim of crime makes a formal complaint to the VOCC Office. The Office will assess the context of the complaint, ask further follow-up questions of both the agency and victim survivor (if required) and consider whether the information provided meets the Commissioner's power to investigate.
- **Assessment** – The VOCC Office then reviews the information provided by the victim survivor and agency, to which the Commissioner has 28 days to decide whether to investigate the complaint.
- **Investigation** – The Commissioner investigates the conduct of the agency against the principles and other requirements set out in the Victims' Charter.

## Enquiries and complaints 2024-2025

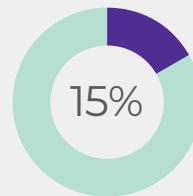
The VOCC Office received 303 enquiries in 2024–25, a 48 per cent increase on 2023–24. This compared to a 4 per cent increase between 2022–23 and 2023–24. This increase in matters received is due to multiple factors, including the implementation of the FAS and the Victims' Charter Review consultations. Of the 303 enquiries, 157 wanted to make a complaint, a 44 per cent increase from 2023–24. Of the 303 enquiries received, 202 were via email, 99 via phone and 2 via letters posted.

Out of the 157 matters received by people wanting to make a complaint, eight enquiries transitioned to the complaints process, which is discussed further in the next section. Staff in the Commissioner's Office refer to the Victims' Charter to determine whether concerns fall within the Commissioner's powers to investigate.

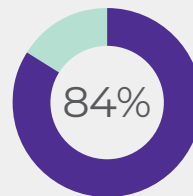
Figure 5. Percentage of enquiries within scope of the Commissioner's investigatory powers



1 per cent of enquiries related to matters that fell completely within the Commissioner's powers to investigate



15 per cent of enquiries were about matters that partially fell within the Commissioner's powers to investigate



84 per cent of enquiries related to matters that were wholly outside the scope of the Commissioner's powers to investigate



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The most common reasons the Commissioner could not investigate a matter included:

- The victim survivor contacted the Commissioner's Office to make an enquiry or seek support and/ or information
- The complainant sought an outcome that was outside the VOCC's scope or raised issues that did not constitute a breach of the Victims' Charter
- The issue raised was not related to an agency that falls under the Victims' Charter

Other reasons included:

- No complaint was made to the agency before contacting the VOCC Office
- There was an active or ongoing investigation underway within the agency
- Not meeting the definition of a victim
- Act of violence occurred outside of Victoria
- Out of time

Among the agencies referred to in enquiries to the VOCC, Victoria Police was the most frequently cited agency with which people reported being dissatisfied (included in 102 enquiries). The FAS was second most cited agency (46 enquiries).

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## Outcomes of enquiries and complaints

During the reporting period:

- Eight enquiries progressed to the formal complaints process.
- Two complaints went to investigation. The investigations are detailed processes which consider possible breaches related to communication with victims of crime. At the time of writing, these matters are still under consideration and recommendations are currently being formulated.
- Three matters currently being investigated by the Office were received in the latter part of 2023-24.

## Review of complaints processes

In 2024-25 the Commissioner's Office undertook an external review of its complaints processes for continuous improvement, ensuring a trauma-informed complaints process. The Commissioner implemented a new case management system for efficiency and oversight.

Both the Victims' Charter Review consultations and the complaints review identified significant issues which contribute to low numbers of complaints and investigations. In particular, the requirement for a victim survivor to complain first to the agency is seen as a major barrier for victims to be able to have a complaint considered by the Commissioner.



The number of enquiries and complaints the Commissioner receives remain only a small fraction of the many thousands of victims of crime each year. During the Review of the Victims' Charter consultation process, the Commissioner heard clearly that awareness of the Victims' Charter among victims and agencies is very low, and that complaints processes are also not well known, inaccessible and not trauma informed. The case study below highlights the obstacles that many victims experience in making a complaint about non-compliance with their rights under the Victims' Charter.

## Case study\*\*



# Emily

*Emily is a 34 year old working professional living in metropolitan Melbourne. She was a victim of stalking, intimidation and threats by her neighbour. Emily contacted the Commissioner distressed by how the police had communicated with her and their lack of responsiveness when reporting her matter. Emily was left feeling as though her concerns were “an inconvenience” rather than an important part of the justice process.*

*When Emily initially contacted the Commissioner’s Office, she had not yet made a formal complaint to Victoria Police. Under the Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015, the Commissioner cannot investigate her complaint unless a complaint has first been made to the agency. The Office advised Emily on the process of making a complaint to the agency and provided support services that may be able to assist her in the process. Emily then advised the Office that she did not feel comfortable contacting Victoria Police to complain as she felt the process of repeating her story would cause further trauma and highlighted the issues she may face from complaining to the agency directly. Emily outlined that she had lost trust in Victoria Police, and she had a fear of reprisal if she were to contact them to complain. Despite these fears, Emily indicated that she would proceed with her complaint to Victoria Police as she felt strongly about the way she was treated.*

*Several months later, Emily contacted the Commissioner’s Office again to advise that she was still experiencing ongoing issues with her neighbour however the process of communicating with Victoria Police was retraumatising her and taking a toll on her mental health. The impacts of having to repeat her story and having to deal with further communication issues led Emily to seek further advice on if her complaint could proceed with the Commissioner in the case where she had not yet made a complaint with Victoria Police.*

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*Due to legislative limits, the Commissioner was unable to investigate in the scenario where a complaint had not yet been made to the agency first. Emily decided that she did not wish to pursue a complaint with Victoria Police or the Commissioner and withdrew her complaints.*

*Emily's story highlights some of the challenges experienced by victims seeking safety and justice. This case highlights systematic barriers, specifically where victims are required to complain to the agency first, even where the process may be retraumatising or difficult to access. The Commissioner's Office notes that for victim survivors, the challenges of navigating the impacts of crime on top of procedural hurdles can contribute to feelings of exclusion in the justice process.*

**\*\*This case study does not represent one story but a collection of similar stories shared with the Commissioner. See Disclaimer on page 2 for further details.**

# 5

## Prescribed agencies' compliance with the Victims' Charter

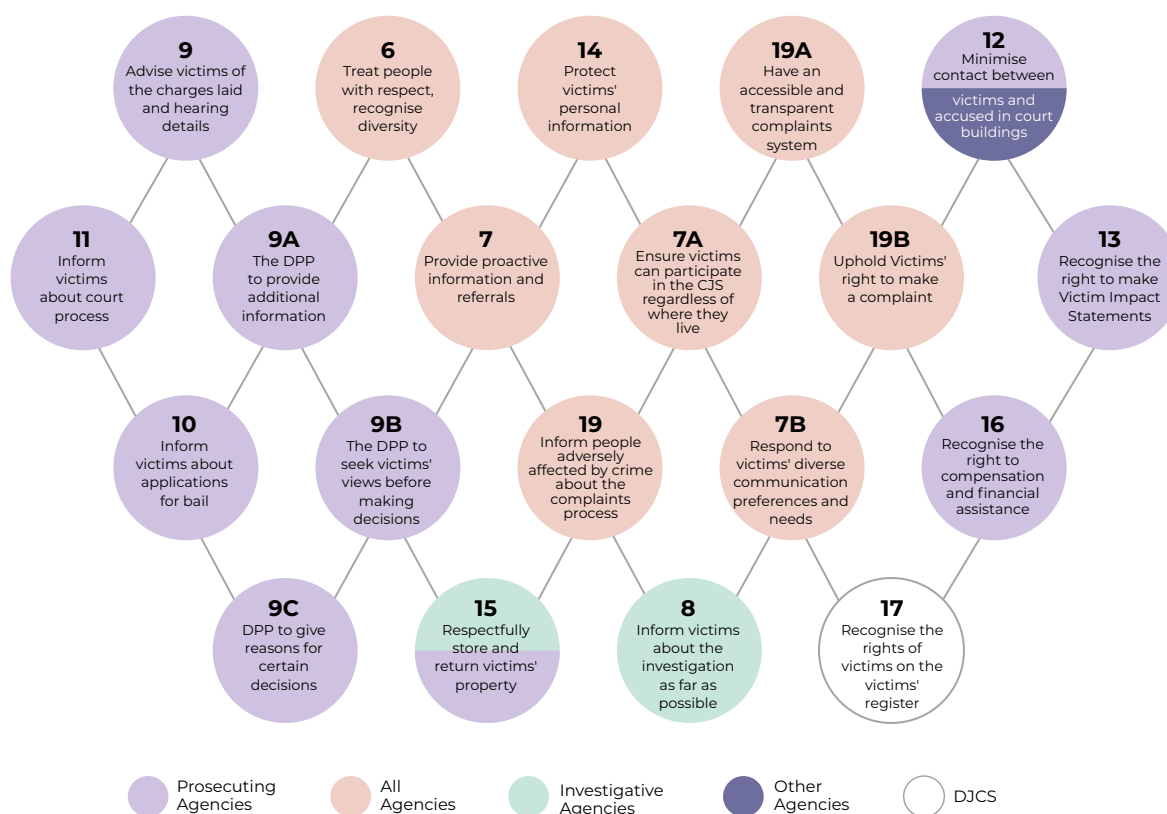


The Victims' Charter sets out 17 principles relevant to government agencies and victim support services. The Victims' Charter aims to:

- Recognise the negative impact that crime has on victim survivors and their families, witnesses and the broader community.
- Treat all persons affected by crime with respect and provide them with information to access appropriate services to aid in their recovery.
- Recognise that victim survivors have a legitimate interest in the response of the criminal justice system to the crime, and that they play a role as participants (but not parties) in criminal proceedings.
- Prevent further harm to victim survivors from the criminal justice system

**Figure 6: Charter principles and associated agencies**

The figure below shows the Charter Principles and which agency is associated with that principle. The numbers indicate the section of the Victim's Charter that relates to that principle.





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At the heart of these principles is recognition that it is a benefit to all in the justice system, and not a cost, for victim survivors of crime to be treated with courtesy, respect and dignity and respect.

Three types of agencies must comply with the Victims' Charter:

- An investigatory agency such as Victoria Police and WorkSafe Victoria.
- A prosecution agency such as the Office of the Public Prosecutions, Victoria Police and WorkSafe.
- A victims' services agency, for example Legal Aid, Community legal services, Family violence services, the Financial Assistance Scheme, and Victims Assistance Programs.

Regular monitoring is undertaken to ensure prescribed agencies comply with the Victims' Charter. Over the past five years the Commission used survey data, in conjunction with information from enquiries and complaints, to report on compliance with the Victims' Charter. This compliance monitoring informed the Commission's approach to developing and providing guidance and tools for agencies.

In 2024-2025 the Commissioner and her Office refined their approach to monitoring compliance with the Charter to consider the extensive information provided by prescribed agencies and people with lived experience during the Victims' Charter Review, in addition to information gathered from enquiries and complaints.

The complaint review function outlined in the VOCC Act provides victims with a mechanism to raise issues about their treatment and holds agencies to account, with the objective of driving better services to victim survivors. Complaints and investigations allow the Commissioner to consider allegations that agencies have not complied with the principles of the Victims' Charter in their treatment of victim survivors.

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## Information about prescribed agencies' compliance with the Charter Act

Over the previous five-year period, the Commissioner requested that prescribed agencies provide information about their compliance with the Victims' Charter. This information allowed the Commissioner to build understanding about how prescribed agencies were complying with the Victims' Charter and where to focus education and support to assist with compliance. Reporting over five years demonstrated an increasing understanding of obligations of prescribed agencies under the Victims' Charter.

This year, in reporting on prescribed agencies' compliance with the Victims' Charter for 2024-2025, the Commissioner focused on feedback from people with lived experience and agencies, primarily gathered during the Charter Review.

This approach acknowledged valuable contributions from prescribed agencies over the past five years and the extensive contributions through consultations and submissions during the Victims' Charter Review. It also acknowledged that the self-report on compliance does not provide information on the experience of victim survivors in the justice system.

During the reporting period the Commissioner initiated an anonymous online survey to better understand victim survivors' views about the Victims' Charter. The survey was available via a link on the Commissioner's website from 19 November 2024 until 31 March 2025. The Commissioner acknowledges and thanks the many organisations that forwarded the survey throughout their networks.

The Commissioner received 95 responses to the survey. Data and information from these surveys informed the Victims' Charter Review and provided detail on compliance with the Charter by prescribed agencies.

Although the compliance data showed that prescribed agencies' understanding of their obligations has improved significantly over the past five years, we heard during the Victims' Charter Review consultation process that:

- 80% of victim survivors had not been told about the Victims' Charter after experiencing crime
- 72% of victim survivors said they were not told about the complaints processes within justice agencies / victim service agencies, and
- 58% of survey respondents were not aware that the Commissioner could hear complaints about the way they were treated.



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This data is consistent with the *Systemic inquiry: Silenced and sidelined* which found that 75% of victim survivors reported they had not been told about the Victims' Charter. As part of the Systemic Inquiry, an anonymous survey (the Commissioner's Victims' Professionals Survey) asked victims' professionals who worked directly with victims of crime about their views on victims' participation in the justice and victims' services system. Surveyed victims' services agencies reported a lack of awareness of the Victims' Charter. Fifty-seven percent of respondents to the Commissioner's Victims' Professionals Survey also said they did not believe victim survivors were aware of:

- their rights and entitlements under the Charter
- how to access victims' services, and
- where to go if the Charter is not complied with.

## Promotion of the Victims' Charter Guidelines

To assist agencies to comply with their obligations under the Victims' Charter, in 2024-2025, the Commissioner continued to promote the Victims' Charter Guidelines among agencies. At every opportunity, a link or connection to the Guidelines was provided, whether via email or a formal letter. The Guidelines were also promoted during in-person discussions with agencies and at the information sessions.

The Victims' Charter Guidelines provide agencies with good practice indicators relevant to the principles set out in the Victims' Charter. In 2024-2025 the Commission held two information sessions for agencies to increase their understanding of obligations under the Victims' Charter.



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