

Thursday, 13 May 2021

SUPPORTING OUR COURTS TO DRIVE DOWN COVID-19 BACKLOGS

The Andrews Labor Government is providing a funding boost for Victoria's legal system to help drive down COVID-19 court backlogs and bolster resources in courts across the state.

The *Victorian Budget 2021/22* will invest \$210 million to speed up the resolution of court and tribunal matters, through appointments of new judicial officers, expanding IT and digital upgrades, and further support for case management services we know are working.

We will help the justice system drive down wait times by providing \$34.8 million for extra resources in our courts, including innovative case management programs, expanded online services, the appointment of additional judicial officers, court support staff, and remote-hearing services.

As part of this, the Labor Government will bring forward the appointment of up to four County Court judges ahead of upcoming retirements, meaning there will be extra judges to hear cases awaiting trial, as well as funding for two additional judicial registrars and accommodation.

Funding is also provided for a range of other initiatives to help the courts run swiftly and smoothly, such as additional support staff, continued help for self-represented litigants and better health and wellbeing programs.

The Children's Court will also receive three more judicial registrars, and its online case management pilot will be continued – boosting its capacity to hear more matters virtually – as well as increased resources to reduce delays in expert assessments of children and families.

The Online Magistrates' Court – which was previously expanded during the pandemic – will receive \$40.9 million in funding, including two new magistrates to preside over the court and additional courtrooms.

The benefits of digitalisation in our courts and tribunals will be further accelerated with \$56.7 million for VCAT to transition more of its hearings online – providing quicker, easier resolution for the community.

More than \$22.9 million will continue measures that have helped courts better manage their caseload, including active case management at the Supreme and County courts, which involves court and registry staff working with parties to identify issues early and overseeing compliance with orders – reducing the load on judges.

Funding will also go towards continuing Children's Court programs that support young people involved in the justice system and support families experiencing trauma, including Cubby House, which provides a safe, calm and engaging space for children and young people, reducing the stress associated with attending court.

In recognition of the flow-on impacts for other parts of government, these court investments are complemented by \$55.3 million for Victoria Legal Aid, Victoria Police, the Office of Public Prosecutions, Corrections Victoria and victim services, ensuring they have the resources they need to play their part in reducing the backlogs.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"The coronavirus pandemic showed that court services can be delivered differently, and we want to see that continue – with more digital services delivering a faster and more flexible justice system for more Victorians."

"Courts and tribunals did a great job getting through the pandemic and they learnt a lot. Now they've told us what funding, resources and staff they need to drive down the resulting backlogs – and we have listened."

"This funding is about supporting innovative, agile responses to court backlogs – allowing our judicial officers to focus on what's important."

Media contact: Nikki Mott 0416 311 214 | nikki.mott@minstaff.vic.gov.au