

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



Friday, 12 November 2021

STRONGER LAWS FOR VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Andrews Labor Government will overhaul the way sexual offences are reported and dealt with – announcing major reforms that make it clear there is no place for sexual violence of any kind in Victoria.

In response to key recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission's (VLRC) report *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences*, the Government will adopt an affirmative consent model.

The proposed changes to the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) will mean a person must confirm they have received consent, shifting scrutiny from the actions of the victim-survivor to those of the accused.

The Government will also amend laws to make it explicit that stealthing is a crime. Stealthing is the removal of a condom or other protection during sex without the other person's knowledge or consent.

As part of the initial response, the Government will deliver a \$5.2 million funding boost to specialist sexual assault services, to help respond to increasing reporting and demand. The funding will allow services to hire extra staff, provide more specialist support sessions and help to hundreds more women and children.

This investment builds on the nation leading work already underway across Victoria to end all forms of gendered and family violence, backed by more than \$3.5 billion funding since our landmark Royal Commission.

The VLRC's review was commissioned in recognition that more must be done to make sure that our laws and institutions effectively deliver justice to victim-survivors and keep our community safe.

The report highlights the need for wide-ranging reform, finding that sexual violence is widespread, causes serious harm and is significantly under-reported. Even when reports are made, many cases don't make it to court – and few that do result in conviction.

All of the VLRC's recommendations will be considered in detail, including how criminal investigations and trials can be improved to minimise trauma, how the system can better support victim-survivors and keep them informed, and how education and outreach can shift community attitudes about sexual offending and consent.

They will shape the Government's 10-year strategy to address sexual violence and harm, to be delivered next year.

The Government will consult extensively with victim-survivors, law enforcement agencies, the courts and other stakeholders in developing legislation. It will also work closely with specialist and community sector services, and ensure that lived experience is at the centre of these reforms to build effective and long-lasting change.

Legislation to give effect to the reforms will be introduced next year.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"This landmark report highlights just how much work there is to do to deliver a justice system that works for victim-survivors. It's an enormous job – and we'll work closely with those who know this issue best to get it done."

"To victim-survivors, we hear you. The system must change. This is too important not to act."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Prevention of Family Violence Gabrielle Williams

"Sexual assault violates trust, autonomy and respect in some of our most vulnerable moments – too often perpetrated by those who are supposed to love us the most."

"Victim-survivors have lived silently with the trauma of sexual violence for too long. Today, we honour their strength, resilience and courage – delivering reform that will assist in getting the justice they deserve."

Media contact: Casey Lodge 0410 964 928 | casey.lodge@minstaff.vic.gov.au