

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



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NEW FAMILY VIOLENCE COURT DELIVERS SAFER ACCESS TO JUSTICE

People experiencing family violence will have more support closer to home, with a new Specialist Family Violence Court in Melbourne's southeast.

Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes visited the new court at Frankston to mark its official opening – the fifth since the rollout began in 2019.

The court has been designed with the rights, safety and comfort of victim-survivors front of mind, providing greater support and security. It includes a secure waiting area for victim-survivors and their families, with its own separate entrance, private interview rooms and child-friendly facilities.

Victim-survivors will have options on how they give evidence, either via audio-visual link or to appear in court from behind a privacy screen – empowering them to choose how they participate in their hearing.

The court is staffed by expert magistrates, operational staff and family violence practitioners who benefit from ongoing specialist training so they are well-equipped to meet the needs of court users. Co-location with vital legal assistance and community services ensures victim-survivors have access to the holistic support they need.

The Frankston site is the fifth Specialist Family Violence Court to open in Victoria, following Shepparton, Ballarat, Moorabbin and Heidelberg.

Their establishment was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Andrews Labor Government has invested more than \$3 billion to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission, including the initial investment of \$130 million to transform the court system.

Work is underway to deliver two more Specialist Family Violence Courts as part of new justice complexes in Bendigo and Wyndham, while a further \$77.6 million in the *Victorian Budget 2021/22* will see the sites rolled out to seven additional locations – Broadmeadows, Dandenong, Geelong, Latrobe Valley, Melbourne, Ringwood and Sunshine.

The investment will also expand remote hearing services, as well as the Court Mandated Counselling Order Program across the state, which empowers Magistrates to direct perpetrators to attend men's behaviour change programs, holding them accountable for their use of violence towards family members.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"These courts and the accompanying services are a vital tool in helping victim-survivors seek justice in a safe and meaningful way."

"We know our work is far from done – that's why we're continuing to invest strongly in programs and services that make the court experience safer and less confronting for Victorians living with family violence."

Quote attributable to Member for Frankston Paul Edbrooke

"It's fantastic to mark the official opening of Frankston's Specialist Family Violence Court, which is delivering tailored support, advice and services to those in our community that need it most."