

Media Release

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP

Minister for Crime Prevention

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Minister for Youth Justice

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LANDMARK REFORMS TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF CRIME

New laws introduced into Parliament today will radically transform the process for providing financial assistance to victims of crime, making it easier for people to get the critical help they need to recover from acts of violence.

The Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Bill 2022 will see the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) replaced with an administrative Financial Assistance Scheme that is built around the needs of victims and aims to minimise trauma – representing the most significant change for victims of crime in 50 years.

The reforms deliver an election commitment to significantly progress the recommendations of a review by the Victorian Law Reform Commission which addressed a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Once in place, victims will no longer have to apply to VOCAT to have their applications determined. Under the new scheme, applications will be simplified to make the process easier to navigate for victims, with no need for a hearing or to face perpetrators.

Under the Andrews Labor Government's Bill, victims will be able to receive a victim recognition statement that acknowledges the effects of the crime as well as a plain language, written statement of reasons for decisions.

In an Australian first, the Bill also allows victims to request a victim recognition meeting where they can talk about the harm caused to them and have their experience acknowledged by a scheme representative, expressing their condolences on behalf of the government.

Other improvements include expanding the eligibility for people who can apply for assistance to recognise Aboriginal kinship relations, LGBTQI chosen families and other family members that an applicant may consider to be close family. The scheme will also recognise children exposed to family violence as victims in their own right.

The Bill also removes the current harmful practice of pooling financial assistance for bereaved families. This will significantly reduce trauma and conflict between family members, who will now be able to seek assistance for their individual needs.

The reforms, which are expected to commence operation in the second half of 2023, also create financial assistance for harms caused by a range of criminal offences that are not currently covered by existing law, including sex offences such as upskirting, grooming and image-based abuse offences.

Importantly, the Bill will also increase the time limit in which victim-survivors of sexual assault or family violence can make a claim from two years to 10 years and provides an oversight role for the Victims of Crime Commissioner.

Quotes attributable Minister for Victim Support Natalie Hutchins

"These reforms represent the most significant change in fifty years for victims of crime who are injured as a result of an act of violence – with more victims to become eligible and a more supportive system."

"For many victims, going to a court-based tribunal exacerbates their trauma and far too many victims give up or just do not apply for the help they need – we're fixing that."

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