

Victorian Budget 2022/23



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Attorney-General

Tuesday, 3 May 2022

HELPING MORE VICTORIANS GET FASTER, FAIRER JUSTICE

Victorians will get better access to important legal services, life-changing support and faster access to fair and open justice – no matter where they live or how much they earn.

The *Victorian Budget 2022/23* will invest more than \$300 million to improve court systems, respond to demand across the justice system, improve community safety, support victims and provide better court services in regional areas.

Victoria's courts will receive more than \$41 million in funding to help clear case backlogs caused by the pandemic, when a number of in-person court services were deferred to keep the community safe.

Central Victorians will have access to specialist courts and services closer to home thanks to nearly \$20 million for the new purpose-built Bendigo Law Courts.

A new Assessment and Referral Court (ARC) and Koori Court will be set up – increasing the number of court rooms and judicial staff, resolving disputes faster and better responding to mental health and cultural needs.

In response to a key recommendation from the *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System*, more than \$20 million will expand the ARC List to more Magistrates' Court of Victoria headquarter locations – giving people with complex mental health concerns a better way to have their justice and other needs addressed appropriately.

This expansion will create jobs, help people get specialist mental health support to address their offending and decrease response times within the justice system.

Having a responsive VCAT system that delivers outcomes quickly for Victorians is vital, especially for those with residential tenancy matters. To tackle growing case lists, the Budget will invest \$21 million for VCAT members to hear more matters.

Frontline services like Victoria Legal Aid, the Office of Public Prosecutions, Victoria Police and Corrections Victoria will also share in a further \$59 million to support the new resources provided to courts and VCAT.

The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission will receive \$32.1 million to provide certainty of funding and ensure it operates effectively into the future.

An additional \$15.8 million will increase the base funding for the Victorian Inspectorate to continue to drive systemic improvements across all integrity bodies under its oversight.

The Budget also ensures that the Victorian Ombudsman can continue its important work.

Our system should work to protect victims and not drive them away. Funding of \$14 million will help survivors of sexual offending get the support they need to seek justice in a way that doesn't retraumatise them. A new online reporting system for sexual offences will be designed, giving victims another way to record their experience.

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The Budget provides more than \$5 million to continue life-changing therapeutic justice programs, including the Ballarat and Shepparton Drug Courts. This investment will also continue the Court Integrated Services Program pilot at the County Court – helping more Victorians break the cycle of reoffending and get their lives back on track.

Community legal centres will receive \$6.5 million to keep helping vulnerable Victorians navigate the justice system so they don't have to do it on their own.

To keep holding offenders to account and supporting victims of crime, the Office of Public Prosecutions will receive nearly \$22 million to create new positions for more solicitors, paralegals and legal clerks to help the courts drive down criminal trial backlogs, and upgrades to digital systems to meet demand for digital evidence processing.

We've driven down the number of children in custody and as part of this continuing effort, the Labor Government will improve access to justice for children and their families by investing \$8 million to support the Youth Control Order and Intensive Bail Order programs and registry staff to continue active case management.

A further \$1.6 million will go towards a new after-hours online Children's Court to help children who have offended stay out of custody and get their lives back on track.

Victorians with a disability who require guardianship and support services will be supported with more than \$13 million to continue the Office of the Public Advocate's services, including specialist disability advisers and the independent third person program.

The Budget will fund a specialist LGBTIQ+ Legal Service at the Pride Centre that will provide legal advice and representation and outreach services across a range of areas for LGBTIQ+ people experiencing discrimination and disadvantage, including those otherwise unable to afford legal services.

The Worker Screening and Births Deaths and Marriages units will receive more than \$12 million to meet call-taking demand to protect children and help Victorians get access to some of the most important documents they need in life.

The Budget delivers on the Labor Government's promise of more than \$4 million to shape a redress scheme for people subjected to historical forced adoptions, provide crisis counselling and establish a hardship fund for mothers affected by forced adoption in exceptional circumstances.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes

"Every Victorian should be able to navigate justice services quickly and easily. We're making sure Victorians can get the specialist help and advice they need, when they need it – no matter where they live or what they earn."

"The way our justice system has adapted to the challenges of the pandemic has been nothing short of extraordinary – we'll keep working with the courts and VCAT to clear backlogs and deliver faster outcomes for Victorians."