

# Media Release

**The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP**

Minister for Crime Prevention

Minister for Corrections

Minister for Youth Justice

Minister for Victim Support



Thursday, 26 May 2022

## LANDMARK REFORMS PASS TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF CRIME

New laws to radically transform the process for providing financial assistance to victims of crime and make it easier for people to get the critical help they need to recover from acts of violence have today passed the Victorian Parliament.

The change 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 scheme has been backed by a \$39 million investment over four years in the *Victorian Budget 2022/23*. This is on top of a \$54.6 million investment in the Victorian Budget 21/22.

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 reform, 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, victims will be able 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 reform 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 access to 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, these new laws will also increase the time limit to apply to three years for initial applications and 10 years for variations. Victim-survivors of sexual assault or family violence have up to 10 years to make an application. The Scheme will be regulated by the Victims of Crime Commissioner.

### Quotes attributable Minister for Victim Support Natalie Hutchins

*"This is most significant change in 50 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 by giving them the support they need to recover."*

**Media contact:** Steph Jones 0448 359 507 | [stephanie.jones@minstaff.vic.gov.au](mailto:stephanie.jones@minstaff.vic.gov.au)