

Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020–2030

Working together to reduce youth
offending and meet the needs of
children and young people



The Victorian Government acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and waterways upon which our lives depend.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to ancestors of this country, Elders, knowledge holders and leaders – past, present and emerging. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are steeped in culture and lore having existed within Australia continuously for some 65,000 years.

We acknowledge the ongoing leadership of Aboriginal communities across Victoria in striving to build on these strengths to address inequalities and improve Aboriginal justice outcomes.

Art by Dixon Patten
Yorta Yorta, Gunnai and Gunditjmara

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Printed by Doculink Australia, Port Melbourne

Authorised and published by the
Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place,
Melbourne

May 2020

ISBN 978-1-922262-24-0 (Print)

ISBN 978-1-922262-25-7 (pdf/online/MS word)



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1 Minister's foreword

Victoria's Youth Justice system has undergone significant reform in recent years. This has been backed by over \$1 billion in investment from the Andrews Labor Government.

Our roadmap for reform is the *Youth justice review and strategy* by Penny Armytage and Professor James Ogloff AM.

This was the first comprehensive review into the system in nearly two decades. It made clear that Youth Justice needed a robust and considered plan for the future.

This strategic plan delivers on that recommendation.

The safety of the Victorian community is the primary focus of this plan.

We will build on successes that have seen youth offending decline over the past ten years, particularly efforts to divert young people from the justice system and into support services.

For the small cohort of young people who engage in serious offending and end up in custody, we will deliver a safer and more secure custodial system with more effective interventions. This complements our investments in police and new laws focused on keeping the community safe.

We will recognise the harm caused to victims by giving them more opportunities to participate and have a say in our system.

And our approach also recognises that the children and young people who do end up in Youth Justice have often experienced the worst of life.

Many are victims of abuse, trauma and neglect at home, many experience serious mental health or drug and alcohol issues, and too many are not engaged in education, training or a job.

A disproportionate number of these young people are Aboriginal Victorians or members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

To prevent crime before it happens and to stop reoffending, we need to do more to tackle the causes of criminal behaviour in our young people.

We can improve community safety by supporting young people to rehabilitate through access to housing, an education, health care, mental health care, a job and through this – an enriched, life of purpose.

This strategic plan aims to bring together all areas of government in partnership with the community – to tackle the underlying causes of their offending, rehabilitate those young people or divert them

from any criminal behaviour. Importantly, it is guided by and complements *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja: the Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4*.

At the heart of all of our efforts are our frontline staff who are absolutely committed to changing the lives of these young people and keeping Victorians safe.

Without these committed professionals, in our custodial system and in the community, we cannot achieve our vision for a leading youth justice system.

That is why this strategic plan will see us enhance our recruitment, professional development and health and safety systems so that staff feel safe at work and can be more effective in their roles.

I want to thank our staff, and all our other partners across the youth justice system for their contributions to the development of this strategic plan.

I look forward to working together to achieve this vision.



The Hon Ben Carroll MP
Minister for Youth Justice

2 The challenges and the opportunities





What Youth Justice does

Youth Justice is responsible for the statutory supervision of young people in the criminal justice system in Victoria. This includes children as young as 10 years old, young people aged 15 to 18, through to young adults up to 24 years of age who may serve their sentence in Youth Justice as part of Victoria's unique 'dual track' system for young adults.

Children and young people involved in Youth Justice are either supervised in the community, by community youth justice workers located at Justice Service Centres across seven regions in Victoria, or within custodial services.

Youth Justice funds organisations that deliver supports and interventions to children and young people in both the community and custody to assist with their rehabilitation efforts. Youth Justice also partners with the Department of Education and Training to deliver education services to support children and young people to engage with education.





Children and young people involved with Youth Justice

The rate of youth offender incidents in Victoria has fallen almost 35 per cent since the year ending March 2010. Over the same period, the number of alleged youth offender incidents has also fallen by more than 26 per cent.

This is evident in the reduction in the number of young people supervised by Youth Justice year-on-year, which is down by more than 20 per cent in the community and 15 per cent across the system during the past five years. This reflects the well-established focus on diversion.

Despite this reduction, there remain on average around 718 children and young people in Youth Justice on an average day. Most of these young people are supervised in the community.

A very small proportion of young people are in Youth Justice custodial services on any given night. This group of children and young people have often committed serious offences, or they have a history of offending and most likely have complex needs.

Children and young people's involvement in the criminal justice system as a proportion of all children and young people in Victoria aged 10 to 17 years in 2017–18:

585,000 IN VICTORIA

7,410 PROCESSED BY POLICE

2,364 FOUND GUILTY OF A CRIMINAL CHARGE

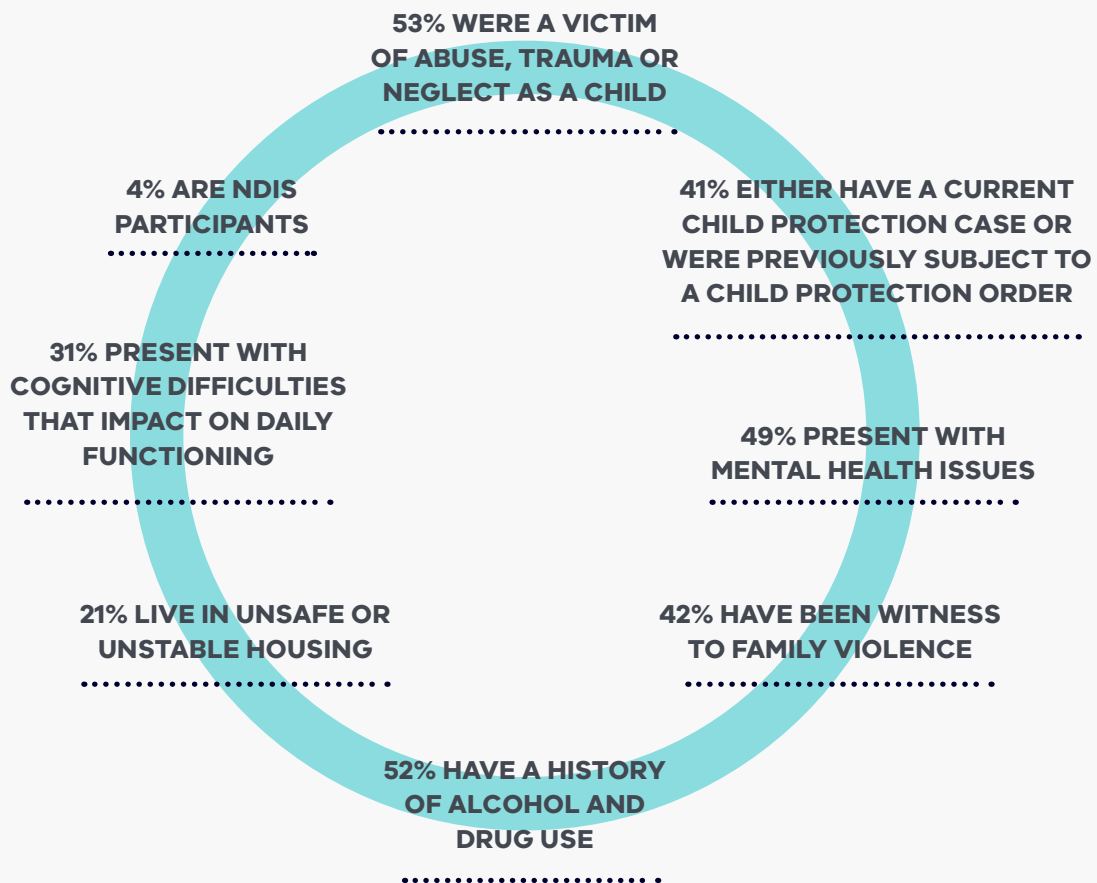
718 IN YOUTH JUSTICE ON AN AVERAGE DAY

128 IN CUSTODY ON AN AVERAGE DAY

On an average day in Youth Justice, **18 per cent of young people identify as Aboriginal, 39 per cent identify as culturally and linguistically diverse Australians and 44 per cent identify as non-Aboriginal Australian.**

Young people in Youth Justice also have complex backgrounds and circumstances and intersecting needs as highlighted in the figure below.

Characteristics of children and young people in Youth Justice





The evidence on youth offending

The Victorian criminal justice system, like other Australian and international jurisdictions, responds to children and young people differently to adults.

This is based on evidence about the differences in the causes and trajectories of youth offending and an understanding of adolescent brain development. Children and young people also have greater potential to rehabilitate and all have inherent strengths that can be built on to support them to live positive, prosocial lives.

Children and young people's development

Adolescent brains do not fully develop until young people are well into their early 20s. This means that children and young people have a greater capacity for rehabilitation and change.

However, it also means they have less capacity to understand the consequences of their decisions, and less ability to regulate their emotions.

Legally, immaturity in adolescent brain development is recognised as a factor that affects youth offending. This is because children and young people lack the insight, judgment and self-control of a rational adult.

This, combined with an increased susceptibility to peer influence, means children and young people are more likely to engage in risky behaviour and come to the attention of police and the criminal justice system.

Those children and young people also often experience complex and intersecting issues at much higher rates than found in the general community.

These issues can include socioeconomic disadvantage, disrupted education, unstable housing, disengagement from the community, alcohol and drug misuse, violent or abusive family environments, physical or intellectual impairment, poor health and mental health, or a history of contact with child protection and out-of-home care.

These experiences can have a significant influence on a child or young person's risk of committing crime, and on their successful rehabilitation.

This means that we must provide services that are coordinated and interconnected to support children and young people's rehabilitation and reduce their risk of reoffending.

Young people who offend generally grow out of offending behaviour

Most children and young people in the community do not offend.

Those who do offend often engage in low-level antisocial behaviour that they grow out of naturally as they mature, with little or no criminal justice intervention. Some level of intervention may be required, but it should be limited.

Evidence shows that these young people typically do not go on to offend as adults. Disproportionate interventions at this point increase the risk a young person will become entrenched in the criminal justice system.

There is, however, a small but high-impact proportion of children and young people who have early and ongoing contact with the criminal justice system. Children and young people in this cohort commit serious offences and reoffend more often.

This means that Youth Justice resources must be targeted at the young people who are most likely to persist in offending behaviour and to cause the most harm to the community.

To do this effectively, we need to have a comprehensive understanding of what causes this behaviour, and to tailor interventions that target those causes.

The youth justice system must also support young people to take responsibility for their behaviour and the harm caused to victims and the community, and promote community safety.





The current context

The past few years have been a period of significant change and transformation for Youth Justice in Victoria. The Armytage Ogloff review provided insights into what works, what needs to change, and what values should underpin a future youth justice system.

At its heart, the review recognised the need for a different approach to Youth Justice, achieved through a differential response to working with young people. It recommends focusing on age-appropriate responses and remaining conscious of the evidence on youth offending. The review sets out ways to improve on many fronts. This strategic plan focuses on four main opportunities.



1/ Improving the approach to diversion and early intervention. This provides the greatest opportunity to address youth crime. Currently, most young people do not progress into Youth Justice due to diversionary initiatives at different points in the system – for example, when they are in contact with police and the courts. We can strengthen diversion and early intervention by identifying why a young person is offending and putting a plan in place to address this at the earliest opportunity. These efforts would focus on keeping children and young people in the community, close to school, family, culture and recreation, where rehabilitation is more effective.

2/ Using tailored rehabilitation efforts that address a child or young person's assessed risks and needs and support them to reduce offending. The new case management framework will help to ensure a consistent, evidence-based approach for every child and young person. We need to build the capability of the workforce to bring this to life and put in place the right interventions to target the causes of offending.

3/ Enhancing and formalising partnerships between Youth Justice and other services to improve rehabilitation and life outcomes. Addressing the different and diverse needs of children and young people in Youth Justice can only be successful if there is a unified effort across services and professionals, in an environment where professionals are encouraged to learn from each other. We need to involve young people and families more in the decisions that affect them, and to improve multidisciplinary rehabilitation efforts.

4/ Improving end-to-end career support for the Youth Justice workforce. Youth Justice workers are the key drivers of change for children and young people, and they deserve to feel supported and safe at work. We need to improve recruitment and retention, and focus on professional learning and development. We also need to embed a culture of sharing practice and learning from each other, and to ensure we are providing a safe custodial operating environment for our workers and children and young people.



3

The way forward





The strategic vision for Youth Justice in Victoria

Our vision for Youth Justice in Victoria is for a leading youth justice system that:

- reduces offending by children and young people and improves community safety
- works with others to provide genuine opportunities for children and young people to turn their lives around.



The principles of Youth Justice in Victoria

Ten principles underpin the approach to Youth Justice in Victoria and this strategic plan. In this context, Youth Justice:

- 1 / Recognises that children and young people must be treated differently to adults and delivers developmentally distinct and appropriate services
- 2 / Understands that prevention, diversion and early intervention are the most effective and fiscally responsible ways of reducing youth crime in the long term
- 3 / Builds community confidence in the system and enhances community safety by delivering evidence-based programs that reduce young people's offending
- 4 / Understands that Aboriginal self-determination and Aboriginal communities must be at the centre of efforts to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in Youth Justice
- 5 / Recognises that young people should be subject to the least restrictive intervention appropriate in the circumstances, with custody an option of last resort, cognisant of the need to keep the community safe in both the immediate and longer term
- 6 / Partners with families, services, police and the wider community to address the underlying causes of offending
- 7 / Builds on the strengths of children and young people to support their positive growth and development
- 8 / Supports young people to take responsibility for their actions and acknowledge the impacts of their offending on the victim and the community
- 9 / Delivers individualised services that are cognisant of young people's age, gender, Aboriginal status, cultural background, family circumstances, health, mental health, disability and social needs, and sexuality and gender identity
- 10 / Recognises that our people are our strength and provides a safe and supported workplace, safe systems of work, as well as equipping staff with the skills and resources required to work effectively.



Reform directions for Youth Justice in Victoria

Over the next 10 years, we will focus on four reform directions:

1

Improving diversion and supporting early intervention and crime prevention.

2

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around.

3

Strengthening partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals who support their rehabilitation and positive development.

4

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system and safe systems of work.

Each of these directions will contain a set of objectives and supporting key actions for 2020–24. Throughout this plan, there are eight identified areas of focus for Youth Justice, each of which contain their own key actions mapped against the above reform directions. While presented as areas of focus, Youth Justice responds holistically to each child and young person, including addressing their intersecting needs and multiple layers of identity.

Improving diversion and supporting early intervention and crime prevention

This reform direction involves early intervention and diverting children and young people from the criminal justice system by addressing the causes of their offending behaviours.

This means coordination between police and the broader service system to address developmental needs and factors such as childhood trauma, family violence, health issues, housing insecurity and other forms of disadvantage.

This will ensure that children and young people who experience disadvantage have their needs met in the community, rather than defaulting to the youth justice system.

When young people do have contact with police and the criminal justice system, we must ensure there are effective cautioning and diversion processes in place to reduce further offending, including through the Children's Court Youth Diversion Service. Appropriate cautioning processes should provide children and young people with early access to health and social supports, as well as ongoing connection to education. Similarly, effective diversion practices encourage young people to take responsibility for their behaviour and understand the harm they have caused, while preventing them from forming early associations with the criminal justice system.

Objectives

- 1/ Supporting the effective diversion of young people from contact with police and the criminal justice system, and encouraging them to take responsibility for their behaviour.
- 2/ Delivering quality court advice to inform bail decisions and delivering effective support and supervision to young people on bail.
- 3/ Supporting effective whole-of-government and community efforts to intervene early with young people who experience disadvantage and are at risk of offending, and to minimise their contact with the justice system.

Supporting effective diversion and crime prevention efforts

Youth Justice already diverts young people who engage in lower-level offending to targeted local support services. More than half of young people involved in offending incidents are cautioned by police, and there have been more than 4,600 diversions overseen by the Children's Court Youth Diversion Service since it commenced as a statewide service in January 2017. This service has been enshrined in legislation and strengthens a young person's existing relationships and community connections.

The success of diversionary work is reflected in the continuing decline in young people being sentenced in the Children's Court and young people on community-based Youth Justice orders.

The Children's Court Youth Diversion Service works closely with the statewide Education Justice Initiative, which assisted 829 young people appearing in the Children's Court in 2018–19, including the Children's Koori Court, to reengage with education.

Youth Justice will work with Victoria Police, the courts and community agencies to maintain a strong diversionary focus, so that young people are diverted from Youth Justice and receive the supports and services they need, in the place they live. This includes Youth Justice community case managers working with the Department of Education and Training through local schools and regional supports to ensure children and young people are engaged in learning.

This diversionary focus is even more important for children aged 10 to 14. We must ensure they do not progress further into the youth justice system.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Support young people to take responsibility for their behaviour and the harm caused through the state wide Children's Court Youth Diversion Service. This includes developing a diversion plan that may involve engaging young people on the emotional and physical harm they have caused to victims, writing a letter of apology to the victim or coordinating their reengagement with family and school.

- Review the statewide Children’s Court Youth Diversion Service by 2021 to ensure it is delivering the right outcomes for young people, their families, victims and the community. This will include addressing overrepresented groups.
- Support the work of the more than 3,000 extra police in Victoria, including to increase connections with community and engage and divert young people from the system early, wherever they may be in the state.
- Support proactive police cautions and Victoria Police’s current Embedded Youth Outreach Project to provide additional support for at-risk and vulnerable young people encountering the criminal justice system. This project involves police teaming up with youth workers to provide immediate assessment and response to young people.
- Help Victoria Police reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people coming into Youth Justice through the Koori Youth Cautioning Program, developed with community as part of Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja.
- Give young people and their families the support they need, in their community, to stay out of the youth justice system through a review and strengthening of the Youth Support Service and Aboriginal Youth Support Service.
- Participate in the national review of the age of criminal responsibility through the Council of Attorneys-General. This process will include investigating alternatives to custody for this cohort, and in particular for Aboriginal children aged 10 to 14 years, who make up almost one-quarter of all children aged 10 to 14 under supervision.

Delivering quality court advice to inform bail decisions and effective bail support and supervision

Young people who are alleged to be involved in more serious offences may be supervised by Youth Justice, including through supervised or intensive bail, or remand. Youth Justice provides community supervision options as an alternative to remand, particularly for children aged 10 to 14 years.

Youth Justice is committed to supporting the courts by giving decision makers quality advice to inform appropriate and timely bail decisions. Our case managers, the Youth Justice Court Advice Service (during business hours) and the Central After Hours Assessment and Bail Placement Service (after hours) are critical to ensure young people receive the right bail outcome for their circumstances.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Review the court advice service to strengthen the quality of advice provided by Youth Justice to the courts. This will give courts relevant and timely information so they can consider each child’s and young person’s risks and needs.
- Strengthen supports for young people on bail to ensure they receive the services and interventions they need so they can meet their bail conditions and minimise future contact. This will involve:
 - > young people on supervised and intensive bail having a dedicated community case manager to provide intensive supervision and coordinate services, supports and interventions. This includes supporting family reconnection, links to stable accommodation, engagement in education, training and employment, and links to services to have their health, wellbeing and mental health needs met
 - > complementary intensive case management provided through the Youth Justice Community Support Service
 - > for Aboriginal young people, working collaboratively with Aboriginal community controlled organisations, to strengthen the child’s and young person’s connection to family, culture and country through their cultural plan.
- Reduce remand numbers by analysing the factors contributing to current rates of remand. This remand-drivers project aims to prevent young people entering remand where it is appropriate and safe to do so. It will also provide an alternative intensive service response for those who do need to be remanded, so they can be supported to reintegrate with the community.

- Minimise time spent on remand by supporting the courts to make efficient bail decisions and determine matters as quickly as possible through the Fast Track Remand Court.
- Maximise the supports available on remand by expanding non–offence specific programs to make the most of the time young people spend on remand. The programs cover anger management, emotional regulation, healthy relationships, communication skills, alcohol and drug issues and alcohol and drug treatment readiness support.
- Support the transformation of the child and family system under *The Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children* and *Ending family violence: Victoria's plan for change*.
- Support delivery of government's new crime prevention strategy, to prevent and intervene early to help young people avoid offending and any contact with police, the courts or Youth Justice. This includes assessing and refining the Out for Good job-pathway model, considering opportunities to build and expand programs that seek to keep young people engaged in education and ensuring access to early intervention support services to vulnerable young people across Victoria.

Supporting effective whole-of-government and community early intervention efforts

Effective early responses can address disadvantage and inequality and prevent a young person's escalation in offending and contact with the criminal justice system. While Youth Justice does not directly control many of these opportunities for early intervention, we engage with other government and community organisations to boost supports for at-risk children and young people. This builds on young people's strengths and positive family, cultural and community connections.

- Fund community-led initiatives to address offending and recidivism by young people who have had contact, or are at risk of involvement, with the criminal justice system
- Support Victoria Police to identify and respond to young people at risk of radicalising or engaging in violent extremism, including responding to the parts of the Expert Panel on Terrorism and Violent Extremism Prevention and Response Powers reports relevant to Youth Justice.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will work with other parts of government and the community to:

- Support implementation of Education State reforms to prevent children and young people entering the youth justice system. These reforms include delivering Three-Year-Old kindergarten, the statewide Navigator Program to increase engagement for unenrolled and disengaged young people, reducing expulsion rates through improved expulsion processes, and providing education support and information at the Children's Court through the Education Justice Initiative to steer young people towards enrolment in schools and vocational courses.



Furthering Aboriginal self-determination and addressing overrepresentation

Most Aboriginal young people will never be involved with Youth Justice, and the numbers of those who enter the system are falling, with fewer Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system in 2019 than five years ago.

Nevertheless, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in Youth Justice is unacceptably high and is an ongoing concern.

The government is working with Aboriginal communities on a number of fronts to address the entrenched disadvantage faced by Aboriginal communities in Victoria. This includes the First People's Assembly of Victoria that will be the voice of Aboriginal people in Victoria in the future treaty process.

Our work aims to ensure that Aboriginal young people are strong in their culture, connected to their families and communities, and are enabled to live healthy, safe, resilient, thriving and culturally rich lives. Our work also recognises that these strong connections, and traditional knowledge systems, are the foundations needed for Aboriginal children and young people to thrive, and that children who commit offences should be dealt with in a way that upholds their cultural rights and sustains their ties to family, community, culture and country.

To engender this response in Youth Justice, we are engaging with the families and communities of young people, as well as listening to the voices of young people themselves. The Koori Youth Council's Ngaga-dji (hear me) project outlines a vision for Aboriginal children in Youth Justice that enables them to thrive. These young people have shared stories about love, trauma, strength, discrimination and healing that inform our work across Youth Justice.

Recognising the foundational principle of self-determination, we are developing an Aboriginal Youth Justice strategy, led by the Aboriginal Justice Caucus. This work includes an increased focus

on decision making, accountability, governance and oversight, as well as specific initiatives to strengthen an Aboriginal community-led response. The strategy aims to strengthen young people's connection to family, community and culture, and it will put in place the interventions and supports needed to reduce offending.

The Aboriginal Youth Justice strategy will be informed by, and will respond to, the Koori Youth Justice Taskforce, led by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in partnership with Youth Justice.

This will build on the dedicated culturally specific services, programs and supports currently in place for Aboriginal young people in Youth Justice.

Improving diversion and supporting early intervention and crime prevention

- Support the Aboriginal Youth Support Service, delivered by Aboriginal organisations and designed to establish a cultural connection with young people and their family and limit further progression into the criminal justice system.
- Continue the Community-Based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program, an early intervention and prevention response that provides culturally safe support for Aboriginal young people at risk of entering, or reentering, the justice system.
- Help Victoria Police reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people coming into Youth Justice through the Koori Youth Cautioning Program, developed with community as part of Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja.
- The Aboriginal Youth Justice strategy will complement the ground-breaking Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement, which aims to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people

in out-of-home care. This will benefit Aboriginal young people in the youth justice system, who have higher rates of child protection involvement than non-Aboriginal young people.

- The Children's Koori Court aims to reduce offending behaviour and reduce the number of young Aboriginal people on custodial sentences through the participation of Elders and respected persons.
- Embed the use of Aboriginal cultural plans for Aboriginal young people as the first step in the case management planning process.

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

- Deliver and respond to the Koori Youth Justice Taskforce. This taskforce held 13 forums across the state with community and government stakeholders and examined the cases of all Aboriginal young people on Youth Justice orders across Victoria between 1 October 2018 and 31 March 2019. This whole-of-system examination has been designed to:
 - > address issues that affect the cultural connectedness and social and emotional wellbeing of the young person
 - > review, update and strengthen the interventions and supports offered to young people currently in Youth Justice, across government and service providers
 - > identify and address the systemic issues contributing to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in Youth Justice.
- The taskforce is being complemented by a Commission for Children and Young People statutory inquiry, which is hearing directly from young people in the youth justice system. The findings and recommendations are to be combined in a single report entitled *Our Youth, Our Way*, to be tabled in Parliament in 2020.
- The outcomes of the taskforce will also inform the forthcoming Aboriginal Youth Justice strategy.

Strengthening partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals who support their rehabilitation and positive development

- Expand the Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program, ensuring Aboriginal young people will have more opportunities to strengthen their connection to culture through community-led mentorship programs.
- Establish an in-reach Elders Support Program to strengthen cultural protective factors for young Aboriginal people and deliver a cultural and leadership program to Aboriginal girls and young women in custody.
- Maintain and improve the Indigenous Garden at Parkville Youth Justice Centre.

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system, and safe systems of work

- Continue to support the Aboriginal liaison officers and a team leader who are available 24 hours a day to advise non-Aboriginal custodial staff about their work with Aboriginal young people, inform critical decision making about their care and directly support Aboriginal young people.
- Focus on engaging Aboriginal communities to encourage more Aboriginal people to take up a career in Youth Justice.
- Train our community and custodial staff in Aboriginal cultural awareness and how to deliver a culturally safe and responsive Youth Justice service.

Delivering age-appropriate responses for 10 to 14 year olds

Victorian law establishes a statutory bar to children aged under 10 years of age being held criminally responsible for their actions.

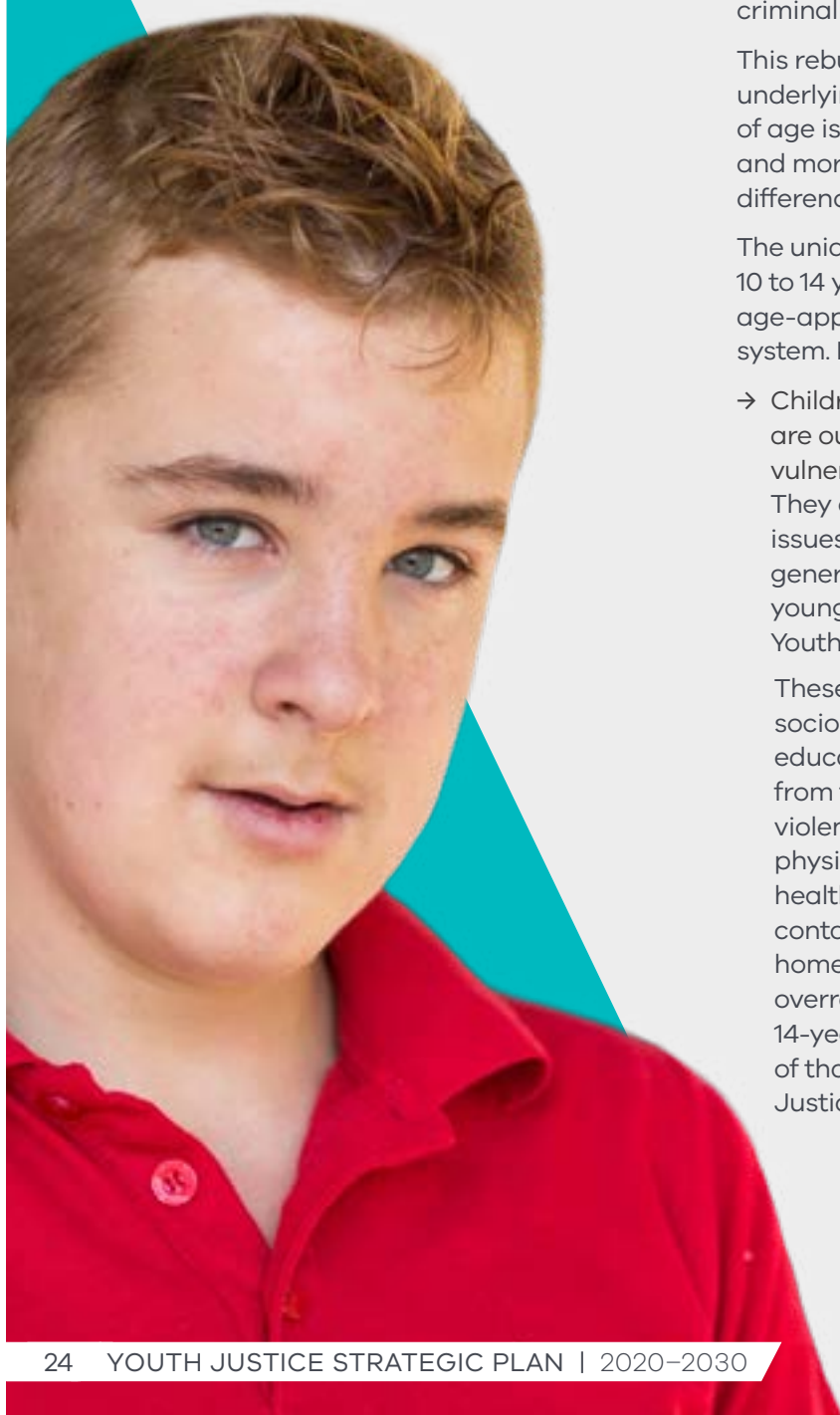
Children aged between 10 and 14 years are further presumed at law, through the principle of *doli incapax*, to lack the capacity to be criminally responsible for their conduct.

This rebuttable presumption reflects the underlying rationale that a child under 14 years of age is generally not sufficiently intellectually and morally developed to appreciate the difference between right and wrong.

The unique developmental state of children aged 10 to 14 years necessitates a differentiated and age-appropriate response by the criminal justice system. In particular:

→ Children aged 10 to 14 years in Youth Justice are our youngest, and often our most vulnerable and disadvantaged group. They often have complex and intersecting issues at much higher rates than found in the general community, and at higher rates than young people who first come into contact with Youth Justice at an older age.

These issues can include higher rates of socioeconomic disadvantage, disrupted education, unstable housing, disengagement from the community, alcohol and drug misuse, violent or abusive family environments, physical or intellectual impairment, poor health and mental health, or a history of contact with child protection and out-of-home care. Aboriginal children are also overrepresented at a higher rate in the 10 to 14-year-old age group (almost 25 per cent of that group) than for older groups in Youth Justice.



→ Adolescent brains are not fully developed. Children lack the degree of insight, judgment and self-control of a rational adult. This, combined with an increased susceptibility to peer influence, means children are more likely to engage in risky behaviour and come to the attention of police and the criminal justice system. However, this also means that children have a greater capacity for rehabilitation and change.

→ Children who do come into contact with the criminal justice system at this early age are more likely to go on to offend again and stay in the criminal justice system. The Sentencing Advisory Council's report *Reoffending by children and young people in Victoria* found that in Victoria, young people aged 10 to 14 years have the highest reoffending rates of all ages in the criminal justice system, with more than 80 per cent reoffending at some time, and more than 60 per cent reoffending with an offence against the person. The report showed that for every year a child was older when they appeared before the criminal court, there was an 18 per cent decline in the likelihood of reoffending.

Given the complexity of this cohort, their capacity for genuine change, and the reoffending risks posed by their entrenchment in the criminal justice system, the government is committed to developing new and safe approaches that keep them out of the Youth Justice system, and support them to live lawful and purposeful lives.

Improving diversion and supporting early intervention and crime prevention

→ Make every effort to support children staying in school and at home with their family or significant others and diverted away from the criminal justice system. To that end, we are diverting children away from the courts through police cautioning, away

from Youth Justice through the Children's Court Youth Diversion Service, and into the supports they need through the Youth Support Service, Aboriginal Youth Support Service, and child and family services and education more broadly.

→ Participate in a national review of the age of criminal responsibility, through the Council of Attorneys-General and implement the recommendations from the review.

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

→ While children should be kept out of custody wherever possible, the new interim three-precinct approach will enable a more age-appropriate custodial response for our youngest cohort, by providing a dedicated sub-precinct at Parkville to better support their unique needs.

→ The new operating model will allow us to provide a differentiated response to this cohort while in custody.

Strengthening partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals who support rehabilitation

→ For those young people who do have contact with Youth Justice, we are strengthening our focus on engaging them in the community, with their families and schools, to help keep them on track for a healthy and fulfilling life away from crime.

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system, and safe systems of work

→ Our staff will be trained and supported to work effectively with children, including through the new custodial operating philosophy and practice framework for custodial staff.

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

Our interventions and supports need to respond to individual risks and needs so we can harness young people's strengths, promote rehabilitation, minimise reoffending risks and protect the community.

Objectives

- 1/ Delivering individualised case management for each child and young person.
- 2/ Delivering strengthened programs and interventions.
- 3/ Providing an effective and safe Youth Justice custodial system.
- 4/ Introducing a new youth justice facility and implementing an interim three-precinct custodial system.
- 5/ Developing a new legislative framework for Youth Justice.

Delivering individualised case management for every child and young person

Each child and young person in Youth Justice has unique risks and needs. Recognising this diversity, we launched a new case management approach in February 2019. This involves a more structured, individualised and whole-of-system way of working. The new approach responds to a young person's assessed risks and needs and ensures continuity of care throughout their contact with Youth Justice.

Young people in Youth Justice emphasise how important family is in their lives, and they are concerned about the disconnection that can occur when they offend.

Engaging with families is not always straightforward. Families or parents may be absent, unable to provide safe care or have experienced their own trauma and disadvantage. One-third of the young people surveyed for the Armitage Ogloff Youth Justice review said family was the main driver for engaging in serious or violent offending. The new case management approach sets up structures to engage, empower and establish trust with families to assist them to improve their child's behaviour.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Deliver an integrated model of case management to ensure continuity and consistency of care across Youth Justice community and custodial systems, led by community case managers.
- Through case management, ensure every effort is made to consult with and involve families and significant others in planning and decision making for their child or young person, including during case planning, at court and if the young person is in custody. This includes:
 - > providing regular and clear information to families and significant others on what is happening for children and young people at each stage, what they can expect from Youth Justice, and what is expected from them and the child or young person
 - > improving relationships between young people and their families, and reducing offending, by trialling evidence-based family therapeutic interventions, such as Multi-systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy.
- Embed the new assessment process, using validated assessment tools to inform case management.

- Use the risk–need–responsivity approach to address young people’s needs and reduce their risk of reoffending. This approach matches services to risk, addresses offending-related needs and responds to individual characteristics.
- Build partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals to support effective rehabilitation.
- This includes establishing links with young people and their families through a network of community supports. Community Support Groups in Victoria’s south-east and west currently work closely with the Sudanese community and connect young people and their families to existing and new activities to improve health and wellbeing, education, training and employment outcomes and community participation.
- Ensure that case managers commence reintegration planning as soon as the young person enters custody. This involves building transition strategies into each young person’s case plan that:
 - > support their transition from Parkville College into schools, including through the Parkville College Transitions Team and other Department of Education and Training local area and regional supports, including the Youth Justice education pathway coordinator
 - > engage them in employment services, including referrals to the Justice Employment Training and Transition Service to develop an individualised training and employment plan for them
 - > ensure young people continue to address outstanding offence-related issues in the community by engaging with Youth Offending Programs
 - > maintain their connection to supports in the community that build on their strengths, for example, family and positive relationships with friends, or sports, music, arts or other community-based clubs
- > address reintegration needs that have arisen because they have been in custody, for example, ensuring housing is available
- > help them secure personal identification documents that will allow them to engage in school and jobs and assist them to meet the requirements associated with accessing government support after they are released
- > ensure young people in custody participate in community reintegration activities to support their effective transition back into the community.
- Strengthen the approach to parole planning. This will involve providing additional support to the Youth Parole Board to enable it to continue its important work and robust decision making. This includes providing validated risk assessments, ensuring the views of victims are considered by the Youth Parole Board, and creating comprehensive parole plans.

Delivering strengthened programs and interventions

Youth Justice will deliver stronger, evidence-based and appropriately targeted programs and interventions to young people to address offending behaviour.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Bring a multidisciplinary and cross-sector approach to address the needs of young people from each region who are at high risk of offending and causing serious harm. Multi-Agency Panels currently operate in different regions of Victoria, which bring together place-specific representatives from schools, Victoria Police and relevant department and agency representatives.
- Deliver a High Risk Panel to oversee and support the most complex and high-risk young people in custody and the community. The High Risk Panel is chaired by the Commissioner for Youth Justice and includes senior operational and clinical representatives, ensuring robust planning for this group of young people.
- Work with partners to review and improve the Youth Justice Community Support Service, to support young people to not reoffend, and to connect with family, education, training, employment and the community. This service also involves integrated access and supported referrals to a wide range of services, as well as after-hours support.
- Expand the youth offender program offering, introducing five offence-specific programs for sentenced young people that are designed to target violent offending, sexual offending, substance-use related offending and motor-vehicle related offending.
- Deliver cognitive behaviour interventions to help change the way young people think about offending and support them to solve problems and identify different, positive solutions to challenging situations.
- Establish the Youth Justice Accreditation and Evaluation Panel to oversee the evaluation of all rehabilitative programs in Youth Justice.

Providing an effective and safe Youth Justice custodial system

Young people's rehabilitation depends on an effective and safe custodial system. This objective is underpinned by a number of ongoing operational reform activities, which have been developed in partnership with key Youth Justice representatives, experts and stakeholders on the Custodial Facilities Working Group.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Introduce a new system configuration for the Parkville and Malmsbury Youth Justice precincts in the lead up to the opening of the new custodial facility at Cherry Creek. The key pillars of the new system are:
 - > the Classification and Placement Unit administering new security rating tools in relation to all young people in custody, which use objective criteria to determine their potential safety and security risks and needs, both when they enter custody and dynamically throughout their stay
 - > a single point of entry into the custodial system based at Parkville, enabling consistent assessment, security rating and classification of young people entering the system
 - > more sophisticated placement decisions for young people entering custody and throughout their stay in custody, informed by their assessed risks and needs
 - > a greater number of placement options within custody that allow for differentiated operating models and communities to meet the different needs and risks of children and young people. These will also allow for targeted interventions and supports, and provide incentives for good behaviour through opportunities to progress to less-restrictive accommodation units.
- Implement a new operating philosophy for our custodial system. Developed in consultation with staff, young people and key service partners and stakeholders, the operating philosophy establishes the overarching principles, and

a new shared vision, for the future operation of our Youth Justice custodial system.

- Develop and use a new practice framework. The framework helps custodial staff to embed the operating philosophy into their practice, so they are equipped with an evidence-based, practical and accessible way to work together and with young people.
- Introduce new differentiated operating models to support a new communities in custody approach. These operating models will be context specific, and different communities will have different operating parameters depending on need and risk. Key to this work is a separate operating model for girls and young women to support gender-responsive interventions and their equal access to education, health, recreation and treatment services.
- Embed and improve a fully structured day as part of the new operating models, centred around education delivered by the Department of Education and Training, and training and programs.
- Deliver custodial-specific programs as part of the structured day, in addition to the offence-specific programs offered. These programs involve engagement in positive and therapeutic activity such as the Lort Smith Animal Therapy Pilot Program, as well as physical exercise, legal education, skills building and gender and cultural-specific activities.
- Introduce an Intensive Intervention Unit into the custodial system, to be a therapeutic environment to manage the behaviour of young people who cause harm in custody, and provide intensive intervention to reduce the risk of violent offending.
- Establish a new social enterprise, STREAT café, at the Parkville precinct. Run in partnership with the Department of Justice and Community Safety, STREAT hospitality social enterprise and Parkville College, the café will deliver hospitality training and employment pathways for young people involved in Youth Justice, providing young people with the skills they need to get sustainable employment. This partnership also reflects the government's commitment to supporting social enterprises, consistent with the Victorian Social Enterprises Strategy.
- Expand health and mental health services through the primary health and mental health service in custody to respond to young people's complex health and mental health needs. This service means that:
 - > every young person entering a Youth Justice centre receives a health and mental health screen within 24 hours of entry (within 12 hours for Aboriginal young people), and a comprehensive health and mental health assessment within three days
 - > young people have 24-hour access to primary mental health nursing, access to general practitioner services and have mandatory at-risk assessments within two hours of presenting behaviours that indicate a risk of suicide or self-harm
 - > culturally relevant supports are provided through an Aboriginal health worker and a health promotion officer.
- Deliver specialist mental health responses through the Custodial Forensic Youth Mental Health Service. This service consists of a multidisciplinary team of psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health clinicians operating on site at our centres five days a week and on call seven days a week.



Introducing a new Youth Justice facility at Cherry Creek and implementing an interim three-precinct custodial system

International practice and Victoria's expert reviews of Youth Justice, including the Armytage Ogloff Youth Justice review, advise that custodial settings are more settled, safe and effective when young people are placed in smaller, more rehabilitative and normalised environments that promote security through positive relationships, as opposed to large facilities that are like adult prisons.

To address this, the government has revised the scale and design of the new Cherry Creek Youth Justice facility.

The new 140-bed facility will now be a smaller, more specialised and contemporary facility for the most complex and challenging young people – namely our older teenage males – both on remand and undergoing sentence.

The Parkville and Malmsbury sites will be retained, resulting in a three-precinct approach to accommodate children and young people in custody in Victoria. The three-precinct approach will initially apply on an interim basis pending longer-term demand forecasting and consideration of the optimal configuration to ensure a safe, stable and effective youth justice system.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Build a new 140-bed Youth Justice facility at Cherry Creek that will include:
 - > a dedicated health and mental health facility
 - > alcohol and drug treatment capability
 - > a purpose-built Intensive Intervention Unit to deliver therapeutic and intensive interventions to support young people presenting with violent behaviours in custody
 - > an education and vocational campus on site, to deliver the education and training young people need to transition effectively into the community and lead productive lives.
- Ensure the new centre is secure and safe for young people, for staff and the Victorian community. The design will deliver on the key safety and security recommendations from a number of reviews undertaken in recent years of existing Youth Justice infrastructure.
- Design a thoughtful facility that is age appropriate and as 'normal' as possible to provide a safe environment for children and young people, visiting families and professionals and community members.
- Build a facility that provides a culturally safe and appropriate environment for both Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people, in partnership with relevant communities.
- Introduce new rooms at Parkville and Malmsbury to trial the new communities in custody approach, to respond to different communities based on their risks and needs, and to meet anticipated demand in the lead up to the opening of the new Cherry Creek facility.
- Implement an interim three-precinct approach to custodial facilities when the new Cherry Creek Youth Justice facility is built, involving:
 - > the new purpose-built Cherry Creek facility for young males aged 15 to 18 years on longer-term remand and undergoing sentence
 - > simplifying Parkville Youth Justice Centre so that it is a less complex facility, with separate sub-precincts for girls and young women, young males aged 10 to 14, and young males aged 15 to 18 years on short-term remand. Parkville will continue to be a single point of entry into the custodial system under the interim three-precinct approach
 - > making Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre a dedicated precinct for young males aged 15 to 18 serving sentence, and for young people aged 18 and over serving dual-track sentences, and continuing to provide step-down and semi-independent living options for young people transitioning into the community. Over the coming years, Malmsbury will have a dedicated focus on vocational training
- Expand the new communities in custody approach to all three precincts, once the Cherry Creek Youth Justice facility comes online.

Developing a new legislative framework for Youth Justice

We are developing a new legislative framework for Youth Justice in Victoria. The new framework will be a chance to reset the fundamental principles and foundations for Youth Justice. The framework will assist with reducing reoffending and ensuring community safety through an emphasis on diversion and early intervention, the rehabilitation and positive development of children and young people, supporting restoration of harm done to victims by offending, and promoting system-wide collaboration and cooperation.

Key action 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Develop a new legislative framework for Youth Justice in Victoria.



Delivering a gender-responsive system for girls and young women

Girls and young women make up a small percentage of young people who offend. However, they often present with complex needs and significant trauma histories, including abuse, family violence, self-harm and higher rates of mental illness.

This is especially the case with Aboriginal girls and young women, who have higher levels of complexity and vulnerability through socioeconomic disadvantage and exposure to the effects of intergenerational trauma.

Girls' and young women's offending pathways and trajectories are also distinct. They are often involved in offending for a shorter period, commit fewer offences than young men, and, overall, commit less serious offences.

To meet the specific needs of girls and young women, we are taking a gender-responsive, strengths-based approach.

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

- Our case management approach will have gender responsiveness at its centre. It will respond to the specific needs and risks of girls and young women, and focus on building relationships to support their rehabilitation and positive development, including building connections with their family and significant others.



- As part of the future interim three-precinct custodial system, we will establish a dedicated sub-precinct for girls and young women at the Parkville Youth Justice Centre to provide equitable access to education, health and other supports.
- The gender-responsive custodial operating model for girls and young women takes into account their particular needs and risks, and helps support them to reintegrate with the community. The operating model provides for gender-specific health screening and admission procedures that respond to the predominance of trauma and sexual assault among girls and young women, and supports the delivery of gender-responsive programs and interventions that address the specific issues, risks and needs of girls and young women.

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system, and safe systems of work

- Our staff will be trained and supported to work effectively with girls and young women, including through the new custodial operating philosophy and new practice framework for custodial staff that will have gender responsiveness as a key component.

Supporting LGBTIQ children and young people

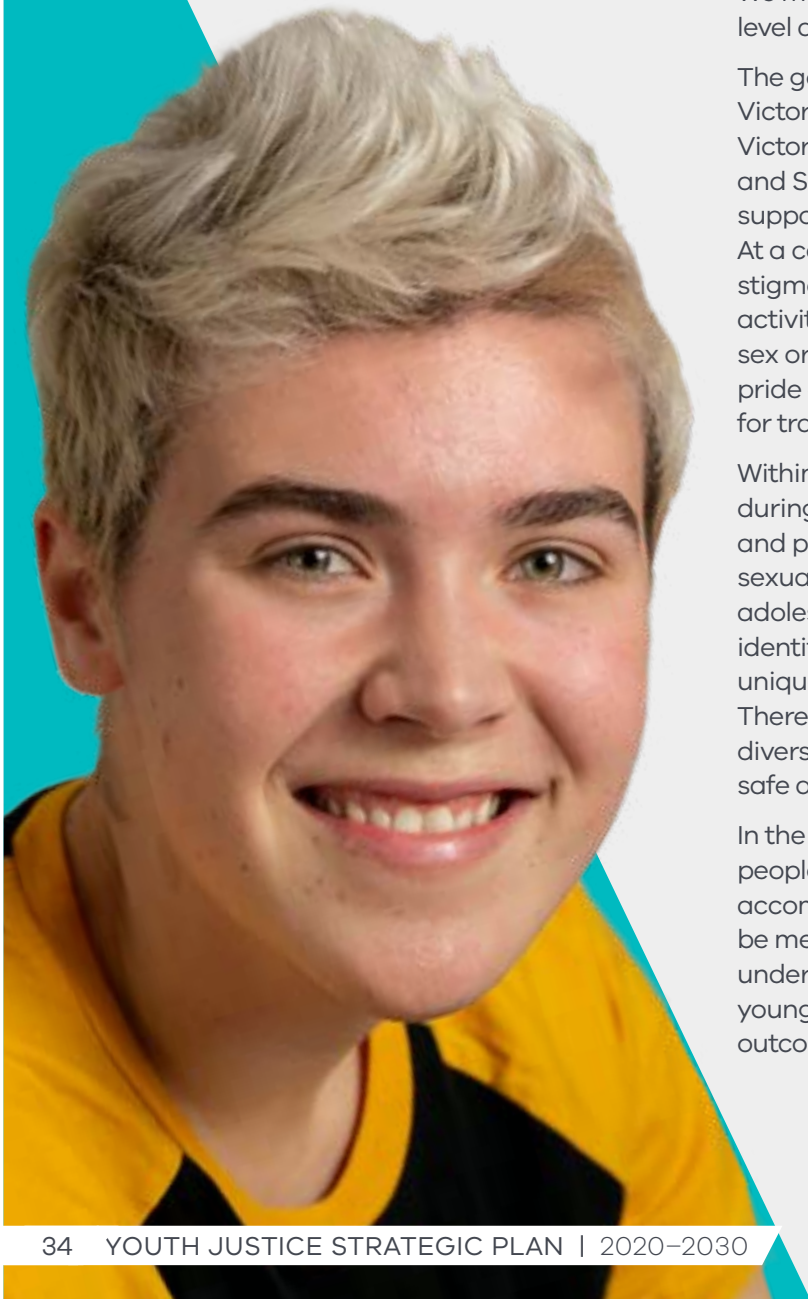
LGBTIQ children and young people experience higher rates of substance misuse and self-harm, and are at higher risk of family disruption, homelessness and education disengagement. They also experience poorer physical and mental health outcomes. This is not inherent to their sexuality or gender diversity, but stems from family, community or structural responses to LGBTIQ young people.

We must respond holistically, both at a community level and within Youth Justice.

The government is committed to creating a fairer Victoria. Led by the first Minister for Equality in Victoria and supported by Victoria's first Gender and Sexuality Commissioner, the government is supporting every LGBTIQ person in Victoria. At a community level, this includes removing the stigma of old criminal convictions for homosexual activity, allowing couples to adopt regardless of sex or gender identity, establishing Victoria's first pride centre and making birth certificates fairer for trans and gender diverse Victorians.

Within Youth Justice, we work with young people during a time of significant physical, emotional and psychological development. Gender and sexual identity are normal parts of child and adolescent development. Young people who identify as sexually or gender diverse may have unique health, mental health and support needs. There is a need for Youth Justice to ensure that all diverse young people and staff feel comfortable, safe and appropriately supported.

In the custodial environment, LGBTIQ young people may have particular medical or accommodation considerations that need to be met. Creating a youth justice system that understands, responds to and celebrates LGBTIQ young people is an important step to improving outcomes for young people and LGBTIQ staff.



Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

- Review our custodial policies and procedures to reflect the needs of LGBTIQ young people. As part of this, our staff will be trained and supported to work inclusively with LGBTIQ young people, including through a practice framework that responds to this cohort of young people.
- Work with custodial health and support services to ensure that the needs of LGBTIQ young people are recognised and accommodated, including the specific health and mental health needs of this group.

Strengthening partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals who support rehabilitation

- Work with Parkville College to embed the Safe Schools program into their curriculum.
- Collaborate with experts and stakeholders on the LGBTIQ Justice Working Group to ensure that our practice and any emerging issues are informed by relevant knowledge holders.

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system, and safe systems of work

- Develop and embed LGBTIQ awareness and inclusive practice in our workforce learning and development program, including as part of the new custodial operating philosophy, and new practice framework for custodial staff.

Strengthening partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals who support their rehabilitation and positive development

Children and young people in Youth Justice often present with complex needs, have been exposed to trauma and family violence, and frequently experience inequality and disadvantage across one or more social and economic indicators.

This underscores the need for close collaboration with service delivery partners and a coordinated, multiagency and multisystem service response to reduce reoffending.

These collaborative efforts require effective information sharing, multiagency case management practices and clear roles, responsibilities and accountability for agreed actions for each and every child and young person in Youth Justice.

Rehabilitative efforts and the effectiveness of Youth Justice will also be enhanced by close engagement with children and young people and their families and significant others.

Objectives

- 1/ Supporting the effective delivery of education and skills, and educational pathways, for every child and young person in Youth Justice.
- 2/ Supporting young people in Youth Justice to be prepared for and linked into a sustainable employment pathway.
- 3/ Supporting young people in Youth Justice to reside in safe and stable housing.
- 4/ Supporting the delivery of services to address the mental health, disability and alcohol and other drug dependence needs of young people in Youth Justice.
- 5/ Strengthening the voice and participation of young people and their families in Youth Justice.

Supporting effective education, skills and educational pathways for every child and young person

Addressing educational disadvantage and disengagement for young people involved in Youth Justice improves life outcomes, reduces the likelihood of reoffending and improves community safety.

Young people in Youth Justice custody receive education services delivered by the Department of Education and Training's Parkville College. Parkville College operates at both the Parkville and Malmsbury precincts.

Key actions 2020–2024

In partnership with the Department of Education and Training and key service delivery providers, Youth Justice will:

- Improve attendance, participation and access to education and resources to support educational outcomes. This will involve building on the existing memorandum of understanding between Youth Justice and the Department of Education and Training.
- Introduce a new measurement system to gauge children and young people's engagement in education while in custody.
- Link young people in contact with Youth Justice to free government-subsidised accredited training through the Skills First Youth Access Initiative, and support high-need young people aged 17 years and over to access vocational training to increase their employability through Reconnect.
- Support concurrent enrolment processes to maintain students' existing relationships with community-based educators when a young person is in custody, and provide funding to support late enrolments for at-risk and vulnerable children.
- Consider how to improve age-appropriate education options for young people aged 18 to 24 involved in the dual-track system at the Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre.
- Embed parent teacher interviews with Parkville College, engaging with young people's parents to support their education in custody.

Supporting sustainable employment pathways

Young people in Youth Justice can face additional barriers to employment, due to interrupted education, lack of experience, or the soft skills required to navigate paid employment.

To help overcome these barriers, Youth Justice works collaboratively with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions to link young people to services designed to meet their employment needs and to improve the work readiness of children and young people in Youth Justice.

Key actions 2020–2024

In partnership with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions and key service delivery providers, Youth Justice will:

- Find jobs and mentoring and training opportunities for young people on Victorian Government funded projects through the Out for Good partnership, a new alliance between government, private industry and the community sector.
- Register more young people in Youth Justice with employment services, and help more young people to be supported into jobs. This includes work to increase young people's job readiness through helping them to secure personal identification documents that will allow them to engage with employment services and supporting them to identify suitable future employment goals.
- Continue four regional employment pathways brokers to identify local vocational training options for young people and refer them to local Registered Training Organisations.
- Address system-level barriers to employment, including employer recruitment practices, by formalising collaborative service delivery between the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions and Youth Justice through a new Partnering Agreement.

Supporting safe and stable housing

Children and young people need safe, stable and supported housing if they are to successfully rehabilitate in the community. Housing is a crucial issue, and we are considering ways to address the varied housing and support needs of young people.

Key actions 2020–2024

In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services and key service delivery providers, Youth Justice will:

- Explore options to support young people to stay in the family home where it is safe to do so.
- Deliver the Youth Justice Transitional Housing Program and review and improve it so it meets the developmental needs of young people. Consider the support arrangements through the program as part of the review of the Youth Justice Community Support Service.
- Embed the Youth Justice Homelessness Assistance Service provided through VincentCare, which supports young people exiting custody to find accommodation and access housing and homelessness supports and services.
- Trial the Link Youth Justice Housing Program (through Jesuit Social Services and VincentCare). This is a head-lease arrangement, which provides intensive case management support and housing to young people in Youth Justice.
- Provide accommodation options through Perry House and Dillon House. This involves supervised and supported accommodation for young adults involved, or at risk of involvement, with the criminal justice system.
- Support young people to access mainstream housing and homelessness services available to all young people in the community, such as crisis and medium-term housing, and longer-term social and public housing.

Supporting mental health, disability and alcohol and other drug dependence needs

Mental health

Strengthening mental health responses and services for all Victorians is a key priority for the government, and the subject of the ongoing Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Young people in Youth Justice frequently present with complex mental health needs.

Key actions 2020–2024

In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services and key service delivery providers, Youth Justice will:

- Inform and respond to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which is examining how the current mental health system operates and the way the system connects with the broader social service and justice systems, including Youth Justice. The Royal Commission's interim report made recommendations that will benefit young people in Victoria, including to fund additional acute mental health beds and a new assertive outreach and follow up care service for children and young people who have self-harmed or are at risk of suicide.
- Support early intervention services for at-risk young people through the Community Forensic Youth Mental Health Service.
- Improve access to mental health services for young people in Youth Justice through the Youth Justice Mental Health Initiative, which helps young people get relevant mental health services and provides expert support to case managers.
- Support provision of mental health advice and information to the Children's Court to inform bail, remand and sentencing decisions through the Mental Health Advice and Response Service.
- Design the Cherry Creek Youth Justice facility with a dedicated health and mental health facility to ensure young people who need more intensive mental health assessment, treatment and monitoring can receive it in custody.

- Consider opportunities for additional responses to meet the mental health needs of other young people in Youth Justice, including girls and young women, in parallel with the ongoing work of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.
- Support young people to address complex mental health needs and offending risks through access to primary mental health services and acute inpatient mental health services.
- Support the delivery of three youth forensic beds at Footscray Hospital.

Disability

Children and young people with disability in Youth Justice need specialised services and supports so they can participate in a way that they understand, supports their rehabilitation and reduces their risk of reoffending.

Key actions 2020–2024

In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Disability Insurance Agency and key service delivery providers, Youth Justice will:

- Support the operation of the Forensic Disability Program to support young people with cognitive impairment to address their offending behaviour, including through specialist assessment, intake, referral, accommodation and services.
- Employ a Youth Justice senior disability adviser so young people are supported in custody to address their disability needs. This role provides information and advice to staff on disability issues and services.
- Embed the Child and Adolescent Intellectual Disability Screening Questionnaire (CAIDS-Q). This will allow Youth Justice staff to identify young people with intellectual disability and refer them for clinical assessment and further support.
- Maximise the benefits of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) by referring young people with disability to the NDIS Complex Support Needs pathway. This will also involve

piloting a specialist service response to facilitate access to the NDIS and to maximise supports.

- Improve coordination and integration of NDIS processes and funded supports with the justice system.

Alcohol and other drug use and dependence

Addressing the harmful use of alcohol and other drugs among young people involved with Youth Justice is essential to improving their health, promoting their development and reducing the likelihood of further offending.

Key actions 2020–2024

In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services and key service delivery providers, Youth Justice will:

- Support young people in Youth Justice to access alcohol and other drug services and supports designed and delivered to meet their particular needs. These include new offence-specific and non-offence specific alcohol and other drug programs being delivered in custody and the community as part of the new suite of youth offending programs.
- Embed on-site alcohol and drug treatment capability at the new Cherry Creek Youth Justice facility.
- Refer and support young people to access outreach, withdrawal services, supported accommodation services and residential rehabilitation.
- Support young people to access regional support through the development of a new 20-bed youth residential rehabilitation facility being developed in Traralgon. This will provide 24-hour services to young people aged 16 to 21 years old experiencing problematic substance use. It will support behavioural change through social and life skills development, relapse prevention, individual counselling and group work.

Strengthening the voice and participation of young people and their families

Respecting the agency of young people, supporting their families, and ensuring they have a voice in Youth Justice is fundamental to delivering a child-centred response. This means engaging regularly, providing information that is understood and relevant, and being genuinely open to their participation. It is not only a key ingredient for promoting the rehabilitation of each child and young person, but also the ongoing improvement of the youth justice system. We also need to recognise the importance of a trauma-informed approach and the need to strengthen connection to culture.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Develop options to more regularly engage with children, young people and their families to inform future directions and the implementation of the key actions in this strategic plan, and the construction of the new Cherry Creek Youth Justice facility. This includes direct engagement with children and young people in Youth Justice about initiatives that affect them through the Parkville Youth Congress and Youth Leadership Council.
- Using the findings from the Ngaga-dji (hear me) project, engage with Aboriginal children and young people in policy, practice and program design and implementation.

Delivering culturally appropriate interventions and supports to address the overrepresentation of cultural groups in Youth Justice



Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups are overrepresented in Youth Justice, particularly those from Sudanese, Maori and Pacific Islander backgrounds.

Delivering effective interventions and services, and delivering real change to the overrepresentation of CALD young people in Youth Justice, requires an understanding of the specific risk factors for these groups, the role and structure of their families and communities, their customs and beliefs and their history, including any history of trauma.

We heard from Sudanese, Maori and Pacific Islander community members and young people of the importance of family and community involvement and for Youth Justice staff, programs and interventions, and supports and services to reflect an understanding of their cultural backgrounds. Both groups told us that families need to better understand and be involved in the system in order to help young people stay out of the courts and Youth Justice.

Beyond the current context, tackling CALD overrepresentation in Youth Justice in the longer term – regardless of prevailing cultural and ethnic demographics – requires an understanding of the sociodemographic factors and social disadvantage that contribute to offending. This includes an understanding of the effects of intergenerational trauma and social and economic exclusion, as well as the need for strong family and community supports to build prosocial connections.

For these reasons, we will undertake priority work to:

- Explore opportunities to partner with organisations and institutions to undertake contemporary research to deepen our understanding of the different cultural contexts of CALD children and young

people in Youth Justice, and their families and communities, and what interventions and supports will be most effective at preventing and reducing their further offending.

- Consider opportunities to examine individual cases of Sudanese children and young people in Youth Justice to identify ways to strengthen their supports, and supports for their families, and identify and address the issues contributing to their overrepresentation.
- Establish separate Sudanese and Maori and Pacific Islander advisory forums to inform Youth Justice of key issues facing these communities and how best to support young people and their families in Youth Justice.

The key actions for each reform direction listed below will be informed by the outcomes of this priority work to better understand and connect with Sudanese, Maori and Pacific Islander young people, their families and communities.

Improving diversion and supporting early intervention and crime prevention

- Review, reform and redesign diversion, crime prevention and early intervention services so they more specifically address the risks, needs and strengths of CALD children and young people. This will include engaging with CALD children and young people, and their communities, to reform the:
 - > Children's Court Youth Diversion Service to promote the diversion away from Youth Justice and into community networks and services.
 - > Youth Justice Group Conferencing Service to promote engagement with restorative processes.
 - > Youth Support Service to ensure the program effectively engages children and young people from CALD backgrounds early and before they enter Youth Justice, and supports them to connect with family, education, training and employment.
- Consider options to build on Community Support Groups to assist with the diversion of and early intervention with children and young people from CALD backgrounds, and prevent crime. These locally based groups are currently working with

the Sudanese community to support families and link young people with programs and activities including education, training, employment pathways, health and mental health services, and sport and recreation.

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

- Put cultural factors at the centre of assessment and case planning (including transition planning on exit from custody) as part of Youth Justice's new case management framework. This will include clear practice guidance to support case managers to better understand what has driven CALD young people's contact with the system and how to communicate and engage effectively to support rehabilitation efforts.
- Deliver targeted and intensive interventions in partnership with community providers, including by:
 - > Delivering family therapies like Multi-systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy to build awareness among CALD families and parents about balancing cultural obligations with the experiences of young people growing up in a different culture to that of their parents.
 - > Reviewing and reforming the Youth Justice Community Support Service to embed cultural responsiveness as a key component of this intensive case management service, having regard to the voices of CALD children and young people and their communities.
 - > Delivering new youth offending programs with cultural responsiveness as a core component, which will help us to create more effective interventions for CALD children and young people.
- Review the existing cultural program offering in custody to assess their effectiveness and to inform their delivery in the future, including opportunities for cultural-specific mentors and supports.
- Continue to focus on children and young people from CALD backgrounds who are at high risk of offending through multidisciplinary and cross-sector collaborative efforts to ensure effective service delivery responses.

Strengthening partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals who support their rehabilitation and positive development

- Support the Department of Education and Training to deliver culturally responsive teaching and vocational training at Parkville College to better ensure teaching practices respond to students' cultural needs and students have access to cultural education. This will support improved educational engagement and strengthen reintegration prospects.
- As part of a new partnering agreement between the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions and Youth Justice, address system-level barriers to employment faced by CALD young people in Youth Justice.
- Support the Children's Court in its efforts to provide cultural guides to make the court process easier to understand for families of Sudanese young people, including through its current Sudanese Cultural Support Pilot.

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system, and safe systems of work

- Attract and recruit a representative workforce by engaging Sudanese, Maori and Pacific Islander communities and encouraging them to take up a career in Youth Justice.
- Undertake dedicated training for Youth Justice staff to equip them with the skills to work more effectively with children and young people from CALD backgrounds. This will include:
 - > Training community and custodial staff in culturally appropriate and responsive case management as part of a future program of case management training.
 - > Training custodial staff in the custodial operating philosophy, which has a key principle ensuring culturally strong and safe responses.

- Support culturally appropriate practices in custody, including through:
 - > Dedicated cultural liaison officers to support custodial staff to engage with children and young people from Sudanese, Maori and Pacific Islander backgrounds.
 - > Developing and embedding a new practice framework for custodial staff, with guidance on child-centred, trauma-informed practice for CALD young people.
 - > Ensuring that behaviour support in custody is culturally appropriate and assists staff to work more effectively with CALD young people.
- Consider options to provide further whole-of-system support for CALD young people and staff, across the spectrum of a young person's contact with Youth Justice.

Supporting children and young people with a child protection background



A significant number of children and young people involved with Youth Justice also have backgrounds in the child protection system. Some of these children offend at an earlier age (for example, when they are aged 10 to 14 years of age) than the rest of the population.

Aboriginal young people and girls and young women are also consistently overrepresented among those who have had involvement with both child protection and Youth Justice.

To address these issues, we need to strengthen our approach to diversion and early intervention for children and young people on child protection and Youth Justice orders. We also need to recognise the importance of a trauma-informed approach and the need to strengthen connection to culture.

Improving diversion and supporting early intervention and crime prevention

- Consider more effective approaches to diversion and early intervention for young people involved in child protection through strengthening practice, advice and training, including in relation to the Children's Court Youth Diversion Service and the Youth Justice Group Conferencing Service.
- Promote the use of Youth Justice Group Conferencing and support the use of supervised and intensive bail. This includes development of a restorative justice initiative by the East Metropolitan and Hume Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees as part of a community-led place-based initiative in Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja.
- Address the criminalisation of young people in out-of-home care through *A framework*

to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care with the Department of Health and Human Services, Victoria Police, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. This will look at alternatives to a police response for young people in residential care, including through the development of an 18-month action plan to support implementation of the framework.

Strengthening partnerships with children and young people, families and all services and professionals who support their rehabilitation and positive development

- Explore how Victoria's justice and social service agencies can work better together, to improve the justice, health and wellbeing outcomes for Victorians. Priority cohorts for this reform include young people in residential care at high risk of contact with the justice system and young men in Youth Justice who have complex mental health and alcohol and drug issues. Service delivery demonstration sites will roll out from early 2020, with the first four locations targeting Brimbank-Melton, Southern Melbourne, Goulburn and Central Highlands.
- Improve accountability for children and young people through a revised memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health and Human Services, which will set out clear roles and responsibilities and practice guidance for staff.

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system, and safe systems of work

- Enable greater workforce collaboration through joint training and improved information sharing around case plans, assessments and interventions.



Delivering restorative interventions that recognise the harm caused to victims

A dedicated suite of services is provided in Victoria to support victims of crime, in recognition of the far-reaching impacts and complex support needs of victims. These include:

- Delivering the Victims of Crime Helpline, available to all victims of crime and providing needs assessments, information, support and referrals seven days a week.
- Supporting community services organisations to deliver the Victims Assistance Program across Victoria. The Program provides a range of supports, including case coordination, assistance to navigate criminal justice processes, and brokerage funding.
- Reforming the way financial assistance is provided to victims of crime to make it easier and simpler for people to get the help they need.
- Delivering the Child Witness Service, which provides specialist support to child witnesses and their families to prepare them for the role of being a witness, supports them throughout the criminal trial process and provides debriefing and referral to community agencies.

Consistent with the Victorian Victims' Charter, we recognise the significant impact that youth offending has on victims. We also recognise that victims have the right to know about opportunities to participate in Youth Justice processes, supported by victim support agencies. Victims also experience crime differently and have varied preferences for participating in the criminal justice system and engaging with Youth Justice. These individual decisions need to be respected.

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

Youth Justice will deliver opportunities for young people to repair harm through restorative interventions. These opportunities will help develop a young person's understanding of the harm their actions cause their victims.

In particular, Youth Justice will:

- Offer group conferencing in appropriate circumstances, which involves a meeting between the victim (supported by a victim support officer) and the young person, in circumstances where the young person has pleaded guilty to the offence and is awaiting sentencing. Group conferences are intended to help the young person understand the impact of their offending on the victim through a restorative process.
- Support the Youth Parole Board's and Victoria Police's work with victims and their families to ensure the views of victims are considered as part of the Youth Parole Board's decision-making processes. This ensures the board is aware of the need for victim conditions to be applied to a parole order to avoid a victim being retraumatised by a young person's release.
- Evaluate and strengthen the new family violence restorative approach with Family Safety Victoria, which links the Youth Justice Group Conferencing Service with an adolescent family violence program across three locations.
- Recognise the work of criminal justice and victim support agencies to ensure victims can exercise their right to make a victim impact statement.
- Explore options to expand the availability of restorative approaches and group conferencing to other stages of the criminal justice process to provide more avenues for young people to take responsibility for their behaviours and give victims opportunities to engage with young people on the impacts of their offending.

Investing in a skilled, safe and stable Youth Justice system and safe systems of work

Staff in Youth Justice undertake complex and challenging work. They must be safe and empowered to effectively perform their roles. To do this there must exist safe systems of work across Youth Justice's operations and a culture of workplace safety.

A capable and high-performing workforce will ensure that young people in Youth Justice are in the best position to turn their lives around and not reoffend.

Objectives

- 1/ Delivering an end-to-end Youth Justice workforce plan, focusing on attraction, retention and the professional development of the workforce.
- 2/ Continuing a proactive approach to attract and retain workers, including through rewards and improving recognition.
- 3/ Strengthening professional learning opportunities and pre-service training.
- 4/ Strengthening health and safety, embedding safe systems of work, and promoting safe environments.

Delivering an end-to-end workforce plan

An effective and highly skilled Youth Justice workforce is the most important ingredient in addressing the offending needs of young people. This means we must focus on both the community and custodial Youth Justice workforces, including how they work in partnership with other professionals and settings.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Develop a workforce plan by the end of 2020 to improve each stage of our employees' experience with Youth Justice. This will focus on the right settings to:
 - > attract, recruit and retain the workforce
 - > focus on professionalisation and quality of practice
 - > build the workforce's multidisciplinary engagement and understanding of how they work with other professionals to address needs.

Continuing proactive recruitment and retention initiatives

We need to make sure prospective employees – and the community more broadly – know the value of the work we do in Youth Justice. Our workforce has a real impact on the lives of children and young people, helping them get back on track.

We also need to give new staff the training they need to do their job well and thrive in their roles.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Continue the proactive recruitment campaign so that the community understands the nature of our work. This supports prospective staff to make an informed decision about a career in Youth Justice.
- Refine our recruitment approach for custodial staff to make sure we get the right people, with the right skills, in the right roles.
- Develop an employee value proposition to strengthen and better target our recruitment drivers.
- Focus on attracting a more representative workforce to better reflect and support the young people in Youth Justice, including engaging both Aboriginal communities and specific CALD communities to encourage more Aboriginal people, as well as Sudanese and Maori and Pacific Islander people, to take up a career in Youth Justice. It also means a focus on attracting a more diverse and

inclusive workforce, including engaging more people with disability and LGBTIQ staff.

- Introduce a reward and recognition scheme to acknowledge and reflect our appreciation of the exceptional and complex work our community and custodial staff undertake.
- In custodial services, introduce more structured and regular communication between staff and senior managers, including through a Youth Justice Custodial Reform Committee, staff town halls, and through exit interviews to better understand why some staff leave, so that we can continuously improve the workforce experience.
- Engage in a pilot project in partnership with the University of South Australia, WorkSafe and the Community and Public Sector Union to improve the mental health and wellbeing of custodial staff. We will use the results of staff surveys to introduce targeted initiatives that support staff health and wellbeing by recognising and responding to their needs and the challenging nature of their work.

Strengthening professional learning opportunities and pre-service training

Supporting staff with the skills they need to do their job effectively, including building their behaviour support skills, is critical to engendering relational security and delivering effective interventions to young people.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will:

- Maximise opportunities for multidisciplinary skills exchange between Youth Justice staff and community service workforces. This will support our staff to build their capability, including across mental health, disability and culturally appropriate practices, to more effectively rehabilitate and improve the behaviours of young people.
- Conduct operational debriefs and root cause analysis of serious incidents and create a culture of learning and improving.
- Embed behavioural support in both the Parkville and Malmsbury precincts. This will support custodial staff to engage and work effectively with complex young people, trauma-informed practice, debriefing and reflective practice, de-escalation techniques, and evidence-based and person-centred interventions.
- Equip staff with the training and skills they need to understand the complexities of, and trauma often experienced by, young people in custody, and to anticipate, defuse and respond effectively to challenging behaviours. Youth Justice will also consider options for a potential new vocational qualification for custodial staff to support their skills and training needs, and enable better mobility and career pathways across a range of social services and systems.
- Train our new community staff in a mixture of theoretical and on-the-job learning (including shadow shifts), covering modules on conducting risk and needs assessments, undertaking case management, court and sentencing practices, Aboriginal cultural awareness and safety, CALD and disability awareness.
- Train our new custodial staff in a range of modules spanning negotiation, communication and engagement with young people, situational awareness, relational and dynamic security, Aboriginal cultural awareness and safety, culturally appropriate interventions and supports, mental health, trauma, suicide and self-harm, substance use and disability, incident management, and LGBTIQ inclusivity.
- Strengthen supervision skills and enhanced risk management approaches for our custodial unit supervisors through the Supervisor's Leadership Program.
- Support the professional development of community general managers to provide practice and strategic leadership to their staff.
- Train all custodial staff in emergency response training, situational awareness and the ACE (Achieve, Challenge, Encourage) behaviour management model. This will improve the effectiveness of incident response, prevent the escalation of incidents and incentivise good behaviour in children and young people.

Strengthening health and safety, embedding safe systems of work and promoting safe environments

Youth Justice staff work in complex, challenging and demanding environments. Health and safety in the workplace is fundamental. Youth Justice is committed to building a safety culture and safe systems of work, and preventing occupational violence, across its community and custodial operations, as well as ensuring safe environments for children and young people.

Key actions 2020–2024

Youth Justice will develop an occupational violence prevention strategy to support a safe and healthy workplace for all staff, promote a safety culture and safe systems of work, and safeguard children and young people from violence. The strategy will bring together a number of reforms outlined in other parts of this strategic plan, including the delivery of:

- Enhanced induction and learning and development for staff, through a focus on training and skills for new recruits and existing staff in custody, further case management training, and behaviour support in custody.
- Key operational reforms, namely implementing a new 'communities in custody' approach for configuring the custodial system, supported by differentiated operating models and single entry point, and introducing an intensive intervention unit into the system.
- Strengthened youth offending programs, services and interventions, and strengthened case management to better identify and respond to the individual risks and needs of each child and young person under the supervision of Youth Justice.
- Key infrastructure actions, including the new facility at Cherry Creek and future interim three precinct configuration, and additional capacity at Parkville and Malmsbury in the meantime.

In addition, Youth Justice will also:

- Communicate critical information to staff at the start of the day, including safety alerts, movements of young people across the precinct, incidents, and behaviour management plans.
- Implement dynamic risk assessments in custody, enabling custodial staff to make informed staffing and placement decisions based on the prevailing security environment.
- Embed the Staff Wellbeing Program in custodial services, including providing a dedicated health and wellbeing team to support the physical and mental health of staff. The program will help manage psychological health and stress and provide mental health support and access to individual counselling and crisis support.
- Introduce and strengthen mentoring and coaching opportunities for new staff. This includes engaging squad leaders to lead, support and guide new starters through induction and pre-service training processes, and mentors to provide practical training on the ground to staff in their new role.
- Continue a peer support program for Youth Justice custodial staff. The program is available to all custodial staff who are experiencing work or personal challenges and need assistance to navigate more formal pathways of support. It is an extension of the Staff Wellbeing Program, and complements other departmental employee support services such as clinical and operational supervision, and the Employee Assistance Program. All peer support workers have a comprehensive understanding of confidentiality, role boundaries and skills in personal support and referral.
- Trial ways to build relational trust with young people in custody, including restorative approaches.

Strengthening the dual-track system

The dual-track sentencing system is unique to Youth Justice in Victoria. It allows adult courts to sentence young adults aged 18 to 20 years to serve a custodial sentence in a Youth Justice centre rather than an adult prison if the young person is particularly impressionable, immature or likely to be subject to undesirable influences in adult prison.

In this way, the dual-track system operates as a genuine alternative to adult custody. It acknowledges the evidence that young adults can still be developing and have good prospects of rehabilitation, and that adult prison may not be the most suitable environment to maximise those prospects.

The Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre caters to the dual-track male cohort, and the Parkville Youth Justice Centre caters to the female cohort. They do this through a range of different accommodation options, including lower security and semi-independent living, vocational pathways, programs and supports.

As the Armytage Ogloff Youth Justice review notes, young adults sentenced under the dual-track system constitute a very small proportion of all young adults sentenced to adult prison or community orders.

However, it is critical that the system is effective, and we are committed to maintaining and enhancing it, and ensuring its integrity.

Reducing reoffending and promoting community safety by supporting children and young people to turn their lives around

- Ensure that the effectiveness of the dual-track system is not undermined by young adults whose behaviour poses an unacceptable risk of serious harm, or who are repeatedly disruptive to the good order of Youth Justice's custodial precincts.
- As part of developing a gender-responsive operating model for girls and young women in custody, we will use age-appropriate ways of working with dual-track and other young adult women.
- Establish a dedicated focus on vocational training at Malmsbury over the coming years, to support young people's skill development and job pathways.



4

How we will work together to realise the vision

This Youth Justice strategic plan is deliberately ambitious. It responds to every recommendation made by the Armytage Ogloff Youth Justice review, and it will be the guide to help us realise our vision.





Working in partnership

We cannot achieve the ambitions of this strategic plan in isolation. Success depends on the strength of partnerships between departments, service providers and professionals and children and young people and their families.

We must deepen these relationships over the life of the strategic plan to intervene early and reduce offending.

Our relationship with the Aboriginal community, including through the Aboriginal Justice Forum, Aboriginal Justice Caucus and Aboriginal Youth Justice Steering Committee, is integral to reduce offending among Aboriginal children and young people.

We extend our thanks to the members of the Youth Justice Reference Group, which is the primary advisory and consultation body on the Youth Justice reform program, including implementation of the Armytage Ogloff Youth Justice review recommendations. The guidance and contributions of the members have shaped our reform directions and will inform our reforms into the future.

Several governance groups have also been crucial to this strategic plan:

- Youth Justice Custodial Facilities Working Group – an advisory and consultation body established to oversee and collaborate on actions to address key challenges relating to Youth Justice’s custodial system.
- Youth Justice Education Steering Committee – providing oversight and implementation of key reforms aimed at achieving the effective, integrated delivery of education services to young people in Youth Justice.
- Youth Justice Custodial Reform Committee – a representative group of custodial staff from both the Parkville and Malmsbury Youth Justice Centres who are engaged and consulted on key reform initiatives relating to Youth Justice.
- The Leadership Council of young people and the Parkville Youth Congress – these are forums involving children and young people and custodial management to improve two-way communication and custodial operations and inform the delivery of services and supports to young people in custody. The Council operates during the school term, delivered with the Department of Education and Training, with Youth Justice supporting the Parkville Youth Congress during school holidays.



Monitoring success and continuously improving

The Armytage Ogloff Youth Justice review pointed to the need for both system-level strategic planning, as well as transparent mechanisms for holding the system to account for the impact it has on young people and its contribution to community safety.

This strategic plan provides the foundation for a transparent 10-year blueprint for Youth Justice, detailing the reform directions, objectives and key actions for the system to realise its strategic vision. However, it is not an exercise in setting and forgetting. Over the life of the strategic plan, Youth Justice will continue to monitor its progress and continuously improve itself by undertaking the following:

- Track and model demand to inform demand management activities, including forecasting custodial system demand for individual cohorts of children and young people.
- Develop a new performance measurement framework for the system, reflecting the objectives and key actions in this strategic plan.
- Continue our workforce planning activities.
- Build up and track key data sets, evaluating trends and gleaning insights to improve service-delivery approaches.
- Engage actively with contemporary research and best practice by partnering with key stakeholders, experts and institutions, to drive continuous improvement.
- Review our performance against the 2020–2024 key actions in this strategic plan, and re-setting our priorities for the forthcoming years through a midway action plan.

