

	Question on Notice	VO Response
1	<p><b>To what extent is investigation timeliness affected by complexity, use of coercive powers, or contested decisions?</b></p> <p><b>What capability investments are being made to manage that?</b></p>	<p>The timeliness of investigations is significantly impacted by case complexity. Common factors affecting the complexity of an investigation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple, complex allegations</li> <li>• technical and/or sensitive subject matter</li> <li>• multiple related disclosures/complaints which require concurrent investigation</li> <li>• complex stakeholder welfare issues</li> <li>• lengthy procedural fairness processes involving large numbers of individuals and agencies, which often cannot be conducted concurrently</li> <li>• the need to use coercive powers to obtain evidence and manage confidentiality (and associated compliance and oversight requirements).</li> </ul> <p>VO has a continued focus on training and professional development for our investigation staff to manage these complexities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• delivering fortnightly internal training on investigations practices through our Tier 3 training program</li> <li>• providing a Certificate IV in Government Investigations to a group of our staff in 25/26 through VO's Career Development and Progression Pathway program</li> <li>• external training and support for staff in relation to welfare management challenges, such as vicarious trauma and dealing with child safety matters involving sensitive content</li> <li>• new procedures and training in relation to coercive powers (developed and delivered in 2025)</li> <li>• investment in increased legal support in relation to the exercise of these powers and other aspects of the investigation process</li> <li>• rigorous recruitment processes to ensure we are engaging staff with appropriate capabilities.</li> </ul> <p>Where needed, we also engage external technical subject matter experts to advise investigations on a case-by-case basis.</p>

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2	<p><b>The independent performance audit, undertaken in 2024 by OCM on behalf of the Parliament, recommended a technology roadmap — particularly for VO’s legacy complaints management system.</b></p> <p><b>Where is that roadmap up to, what will it deliver, and what risks remain?</b></p>	<p><u>Progress to date</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VO’s FY25/26 Annual Plan includes an initiative to commence the development of a holistic ICT Strategy and Roadmap.</li> <li>• This work has started with a current state assessment including the development of Business Reference and Technology Reference Architectures (including Application lifecycle assessments), Current State Network and Infrastructure topologies, and Conceptual Architectures.</li> <li>• The ICT Strategy will be accompanied by a prioritised roadmap of technology, data, digital, cybersecurity, process and people initiatives to uplift the VO’s overall technology and cybersecurity environment.</li> <li>• The development of the ICT Strategy and Roadmap is scheduled to complete in FY26/27 Q2.</li> </ul> <p><u>What the roadmap deliver</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VO has also approved the development of an Information Management (IM) Strategy, aligned with the technology strategy.</li> <li>• This strategy will set the organisational IM target state maturity aligned with PROV standards and include a roadmap of initiatives, prioritised taking a risk-based approach to implementation and business enablement.</li> </ul> <p><u>Remaining risks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risks currently remain across Cybersecurity, Information Management, Data Management, and legacy systems.</li> <li>• The VO is taking a best efforts and risk-based approach to uplifting maturity and implementing relevant controls across these domains, to the extent possible within current resourcing. Additional resources have been requested to complete this work and address critical risks.</li> </ul>

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3	<p><b>What mechanisms do you use to convert complaints or feedback about VO's service into operational improvements, and how do you track whether the changes work?</b></p>	<p>The VO receives feedback about our complaints-handling service through a number of sources. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• external surveys of complainants and respondent agencies about their experience of our complaint processes</li> <li>• responses to complaint outcomes received directly from complainants – these include notes of appreciation where a matter has been successfully resolved or expressions of dissatisfaction where a matter was not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction</li> <li>• complaints about our service delivery</li> <li>• complaints about decisions made</li> <li>• outcomes of complaints made to and assessed by Integrity Oversight Victoria.</li> </ul> <p>The VO has several mechanisms in place to review feedback and consider what changes should be made to our processes.</p> <p><u>External satisfaction surveys</u></p> <p>The outcomes of these surveys help to inform our ongoing quality assurance. Where responses indicate a potential systemic concern about our complaint handling processes, we may undertake a Thematic Audit of a sample of complaints with a focus on specific areas of our practice. Thematic audits generally result in recommendations for additional support to our complaint handlers such as guidance notes, and training. Recommendations may also lead to changes to procedure where it is established that an existing practice is not meeting the needs or expectations of the community.</p> <p>Following implementation of recommendations, we consider later external satisfaction surveys to detect whether there has been a measurable change in survey results. This may indicate the implementation was successful. We also may undertake a follow-up thematic audit to gather information about changes in our practice.</p>

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		<p><u>Complaints/feedback about our service and decisions</u>  Formal processes exist within the Complaints Group to deal with concerns raised by people who have lodged complaints with the Ombudsman’s office. Service delivery complaints, about how our staff engaged with complainants, are handled by Managers.</p> <p>Concerns about the decision on a complaint are assessed through our Internal Review process. This considers whether a complaint was handled in a way that is consistent with our established procedures and is viewed through a procedural fairness lens. We receive a relatively small number of requests for internal review compared with the number of complaints we receive annually.  The outcomes of service delivery complaints and internal reviews are recorded and opportunities for system improvement are considered and implemented as appropriate.</p> <p><u>External review</u>  Feedback received from Integrity Oversight Victoria through its consideration of complaints made about our office is recorded and opportunities for system improvement are considered and implemented as appropriate.</p> <p><u>Tracking the success of change</u>  The predominant tool we have to measure whether changes have been successfully implemented is through quality assurance audits as noted earlier. We also monitor trends in new complaints we receive about our service and decisions.</p> <p>We are also in the process of establishing an improvement register to record and track issues and changes made to improve. Once we decide to make a change, we decide on an individual issue basis what follow up actions to take in order to measure the success of a change.</p>

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		We also closely monitor results in external surveys of complainants and organisations to understand whether changes we have made to improve our practices have been successful.
4	<p><b>The Strategic Plan foreshadows a data-led, risk-based prevention program.</b></p> <p><b>How are you using complaint data and intelligence to select priority sectors and design interventions?</b></p>	<p>To ensure the VO’s intelligence holdings are harnessed and deployed effectively, the VO is embedding a dedicated intelligence function to improve how we target our prevention efforts, as well as identify potential systemic issues and better enable appropriate and proportionate selection of our oversight tools.</p> <p>While it has limitations, complaints data is an important source of intelligence that is currently used to inform our priorities for education, engagement and communication campaigns.</p> <p>Noting that the VO’s prevention function remains unfunded, we have established cross-organisational structures to ensure that we have a coordinated approach to harnessing other intelligence held across our organisation (obtained through casework, stakeholder engagement, media monitoring etc) and using this strategically to inform how we use our prevention and oversight tools.</p>
5	<p><b>What escalation options does the VO consider when implementation of its recommendations stalls, or outcomes do not improve?</b></p> <p><b>For example, will it conduct a</b></p>	<p>As a part of our natural justice process, we consult on the feasibility of our draft recommendations. When final recommendations are made, an update to their implementation is requested within a specified time period. If no contact is made within the time agreed, follow up is undertaken to seek a response.</p> <p>These responses are then assessed to determine progress and whether further follow up is required to ensure implementation is completed, or:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alternative action has been taken by the respondent that met the intention of the recommendation (‘met the intention’); or</li> </ul>

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	<p><b>follow-up investigation, system review, or are there other public reporting mechanisms?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some of the required actions have been completed as described in the recommendation, no further action is intended by the respondent and ongoing monitoring is not practical (partially implemented); or</li> <li>• no, or very little, action has taken place, or we have not received enough information to form a view on implementation status, no further action is intended by the respondent and ongoing monitoring is not practical (not implemented).</li> </ul> <p>In some situations, we may also engage directly with responding agencies to understand any barriers to implementation of recommendations and influence solutions.</p> <p>In addition, the VO may publish information on the acceptance and implementation of recommendations in our annual report (<i>Ombudsman Act</i>, section 25(1)) or at any other time in a special report tabled in parliament (<i>Ombudsman Act</i>, section 25(2)). The VO may also send the investigation report, recommendations and any additional comment to the Governor in Council and, where the investigation relates to a council or councillor, to the relevant Mayor (<i>Ombudsman Act</i>, section 23(5)). When this occurs, the VO may also report to the Parliament on the matter.</p> <p>The VO does not have the power to enforce implementation of recommendations.</p>
6	<p><b>The audit emphasised cascading outcomes-based measures from the strategic plan into annual plans</b></p>	<p>The VO has been refreshing its performance measures throughout 2025-26. This has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing a logic model to show how outputs contribute to short, medium &amp; long-term outcomes</li> <li>• reviewing our BP3 output measures</li> <li>• broadening our performance criteria to include accessibility, equity and effectiveness measures.</li> </ul> <p>In December 2025, the Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman Corporate presented to IOC our draft 2026-27 BP3 output performance measures and objective indicators (outcome measures).</p>

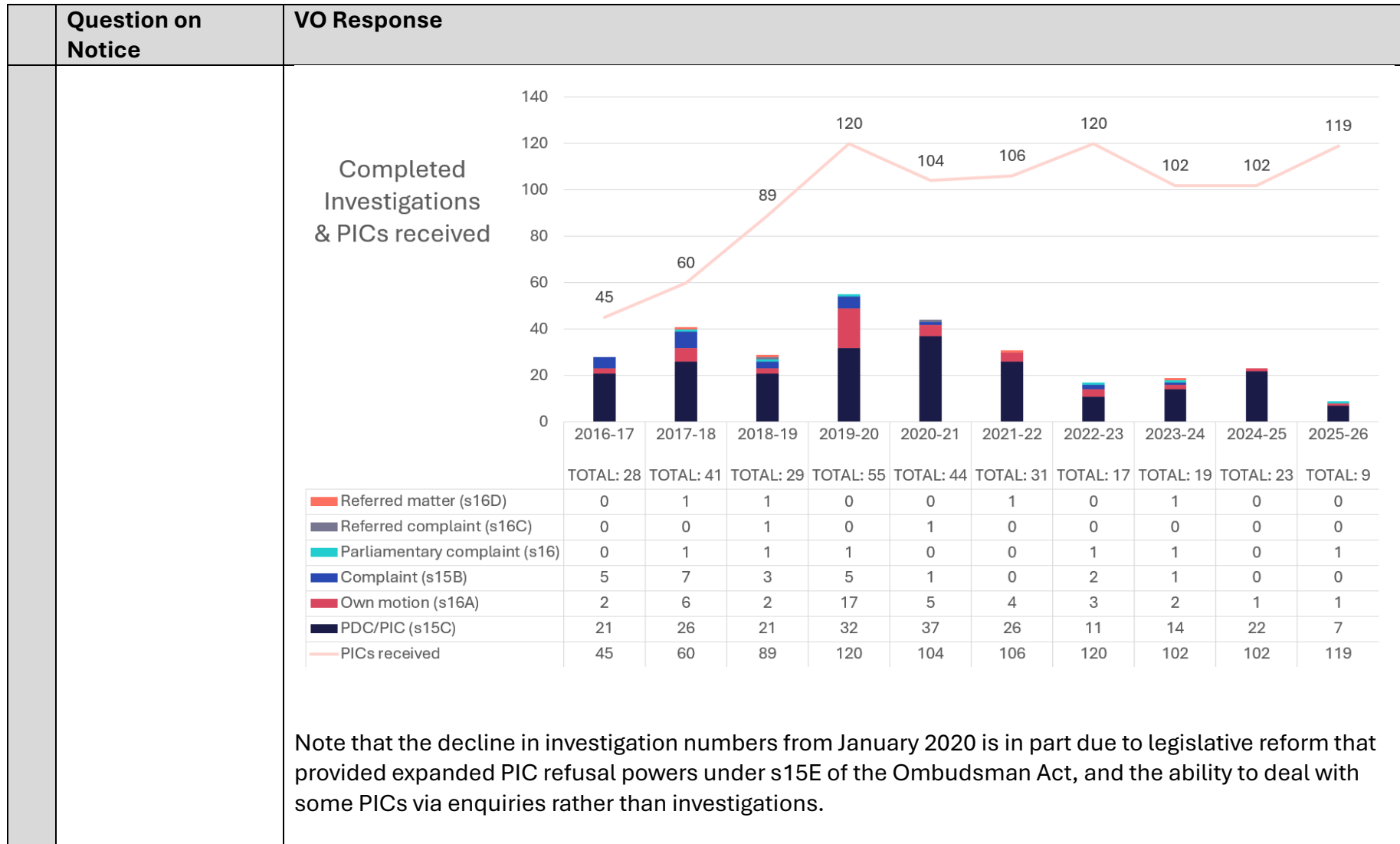
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	<p><b>and performance plans.</b></p> <p><b>What new outcome measures are you introducing (or refining) to demonstrate impact beyond volume metrics?</b></p>	<p>All proposed changes to measures were endorsed by the Minister for Finance, with three measure descriptions slightly refined for clarity.</p>
7	<p><b>The VO has advocated, with Victoria’s other integrity agencies, for budget independence and co-authored a report in 2022 about this issue.</b></p> <p><b>What is the VO’s current position in respect of budget independence?</b></p>	<p>The VO (and the co-authors of the 2022 paper) remain strongly of the view that budget independence is critical.</p> <p>Increasing budget independence and transparency would help ensure the VO is adequately funded by strengthening Parliament’s ability to understand, scrutinise and support the resources required to deliver the statutory functions it has set.</p> <p>At present, neither the VO nor the parliamentary committee that oversees it has visibility of the advice that informs funding decisions or the rationale for those decisions. This means there is no opportunity to correct misunderstandings, and no formal mechanism for integrity agencies to engage with their oversight committees on resourcing needs. This opacity reduces Parliament’s capacity to assess whether funding is sufficient and contributes to structural under-resourcing.</p>

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		<p>Budget independence and transparency also strengthen institutional independence. As an integrity body responsible for scrutinising the Executive, the VO must be, and be seen to be, free from real or perceived influence over its resourcing.</p> <p>Transparency also improves public confidence. When the community can see how integrity agencies are funded, it strengthens trust that oversight bodies have the resources they need to operate effectively and without fear or favour.</p> <p>Other jurisdictions demonstrate how transparency and independence support adequacy. Reforms in New South Wales, the ACT, the Commonwealth, Queensland and New Zealand provide mechanisms such as written reasons for funding decisions, visibility of Treasury advice, parliamentary involvement in appropriations and specialist units to assess integrity agency needs. These models give Parliament clearer sight of the resourcing required to maintain effective oversight and reduce the risk of structural under-funding over time.</p> <p>As emphasised in the more recent 2026 paper focussing on Budget Transparency reforms, while budget transparency is an important first step, the 2022 recommendations remain highly relevant as budget independence is the ultimate goal.</p>
8	<p><b>You have stated that you receive a Treasurer's advance at the end of each financial year to cover the cost of investigations into</b></p>	<p>To ensure transparency in financial reporting, the VO discloses its Treasurer's Advance amounts as a note in its Annual Financial Statements (AFS) under Section 2.3 summary of compliance. The published AFS as part of the Annual report has these notes available.</p> <p>For 2023-24, \$613,071 was reimbursed for the parliamentary referral: "Alleged politicisation of the Victorian Public Service".</p> <p>For 2024-25, \$1,181,431 was reimbursed for two parliamentary referrals: "Flooding at Kensington Banks and Rivervue estates"; and "Management of domestic building insurance by Victorian Managed</p>

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	<b>matters referred by parliament.</b>  <b>What was the cost of the parliamentary referrals received and/or processes in the reporting period?</b>	Insurance Authority (VMIA)” (noting that additional funds will need to be reimbursed for these two investigations as they continued into 2025-26).

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<b>9</b>	<b>Can you provide the Committee with the year-on-year data of the percentage of investigations conducted by the Ombudsman that were commenced from a parliamentary referral, a public interest complaint referral, a complaint to the Ombudsman or on the Commission's own motion?</b>	<b>FY</b>	<b>Completed investigations</b>	<b>PIC s15C</b>		<b>Own Motion s16A</b>		<b>Parliamentary Complaints s16</b>		<b>Referred Complaints s16c</b>		<b>Referred Matters s16D</b>		<b>Complaints s15B</b>	
			<b>#</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
		2016-17	28	21	75%	2	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5	18%
		2017-18	41	26	65%	6	15%	1	2.5%	0	0%	1	2%	7	17.5%
		2018-19	29	21	75%	2	7%	1	3.5%	1	3.5%	1	3.5%	3	11%
		2019-20	55	32	58%	17	31%	1	2%	0	0%	0	0%	5	9%
		2020-21	44	37	84%	5	11%	0	0%	1	2.5%	0	0%	1	2.5%
		2021-22	31	26	87%	4	13%	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%	0	0%
		2022-23	17	11	65%	3	18%	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	2	12%
		2023-24	19	14	78%	2	11%	1	5.5%	0	0%	1	5%	1	5.5%
		2024-25	23	22	96%	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
		2025-26 @7/4/26	9	7	78%	1	11%	1	11%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8%</b>
		Please note that these are only the completed investigations, there are still investigations that were commenced in this period but are not yet complete (for example, there are two more Parliamentary referrals currently under investigation).													
<b>10</b>	<b>Has the Ombudsman's</b>	PIC referrals from IBAC to VO climbed steadily between 2016-17 and 2019-20 and have remained at between 100 and 120 referrals per year since then.													

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	<b>ability to conduct investigations on its own motion changed over time?</b>	<p>In 2025-26 we are expecting to receive the largest number of PIC referrals from IBAC that we have seen in the last decade.</p> <p>Since February 2022, we have also received six parliamentary complaints. Parliamentary complaint investigations tend to be resource-intensive given that they are required to be completed ‘forthwith’. They require dedicated project teams led by experienced officers and usually take more than 12 months to complete. We have had 1-2 of these investigations open at any given time since February 2022.</p> <p>Both PIC referrals and parliamentary complaint investigations have limited our capacity to commence systemic own motion investigations due to the resource requirements.</p>



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11	<p><b>You have stated that some of the public interest complaints referred to you for investigation could potentially be dealt with through internal investigations, with oversight from the Ombudsman or IBAC.</b></p> <p><b>What information can you provide about the types of public interest complaint referrals you are receiving, and how they might be more effectively investigated?</b></p>	<p>A large number of the public interest complaints we receive relate to less serious examples/allegations of improper conduct. Many of these cases involve concerns about procurement, recruitment processes or interpersonal issues.</p> <p>Often the most efficient and effective way to have these types of matters addressed is through the agency (or a parent body such as a department)'s existing internal processes, with independent oversight from VO. VO goes through a careful process in determining whether this is the preferred way for the allegations in a PIC to be dealt with.</p> <p>However, at present we do not have a formal referral power that would enables us to refer PICs to authorities to deal with.</p> <p>Rather, to enable this to happen informally, the VO is required to commence and then suspend an investigation, while the agency dealt with the allegations in the PIC. If, with VO's support and supervision, the agency adequately deals with the allegations in the PIC, VO can then discontinue its investigation.</p> <p>Giving the VO a formal referral power would make this process much more inefficient and clear for disclosers and agencies. It would also enable VO and IBAC to collect data that more accurately reflects what is being done in relation to these PICs.</p>

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12	<p><b>Can you provide the Committee with data on service outcomes and satisfaction by cohort, such as Aboriginal complainants, people in prison, regional Victorians and CARM communities, and explain what this data suggests about the Ombudsman's interactions with different cohorts?</b></p>	<p>The VO does not currently collect demographic data that would allow us to confidently record complainants' cultural and racial backgrounds beyond First Nations identification. We are able to reliably identify complainants who are contacting us from prison through a dedicated Closed Environment free line that the VO operates.</p> <p>The below data is derived from the Complainant satisfaction survey for FY 2024-2025.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the survey, people who report a disability, and those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, are significantly more likely to have previously complained to the Victorian Ombudsman than other complainants. This suggests these groups engage with the VO repeatedly, although the data does not explain the reasons for this (for example, whether it reflects trust in the VO or unmet needs at the time of their initial complaint).</li> <li>• Complainants with a disability and those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are less likely to prefer the online complaint form compared with other complainants. These groups, alongside people who are unemployed are also much more likely to use the telephone to make their initial complaint.</li> </ul> <p>Survey findings suggest that complainants who make their complaint via telephone generally report a more positive experience. Taken together, the results suggest that complainants with a disability and those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander may be more likely to have a positive experience when engaging with the VO, in part due to their greater use of supported, telephone-based complaint pathways.</p> <p><u>Perceptions of fairness</u></p> <p>While people in prison are more likely to “strongly agree” the VO process was fair in 2024–25, the unchanged net agreement suggests a shift in the intensity of agreement rather than an overall</p>

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		<p>improvement. Perceptions of fairness otherwise remained stable across general community and people in prison.</p> <p><u>Perceptions of service satisfaction and satisfaction with outcome</u>  When asked to assess how the Victorian Ombudsman handled their complaint, excluding the outcome, satisfaction was similar across the general community (51%) and people in prison (49%). However, people in prison (41%) were found to be more likely to be satisfied with the outcome of their complaints compared to the general community (34%).</p> <p><u>What this data suggests about VO's interactions with different cohorts</u>  The presented data reflects historical arrangements and does not yet capture the impact of recent and emerging improvements within Complaints. While people in prison are visible in the data, this should be interpreted cautiously, as current figures pre-date the more recent initiatives aimed at improving accessibility and quality service delivery. This includes the specialised closed environment stream within Complaints group aimed at providing a more dedicated, trauma-informed and culturally safe complaint handling of complaints from prisons and youth justice centres.</p> <p>Similarly, the establishment of a First Nations team and the development of a First Nations complaint handling strategy acknowledge existing gaps and are intended to improve cultural safety, trust and engagement over time. As these reforms mature, future data is expected to provide a more accurate picture of how different cohorts interact with the Ombudsman.</p> <p>While the VO does not collect or report on disaggregated service outcomes and satisfaction by cultural or racial background or by postcode, relevant proxy indicators in the future could include interpreter usage/language assistance access and complaints relating to cultural rights, discrimination or service barriers due to religious beliefs.</p>