

# Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into the 2026-27 Budget Estimates

**Sonya Kilkeny MP**

Minister for Violence Reduction

Friday 22 May 2026



# The 2025-26 Budget Update provided funding to establish the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)



The 2025-26 Budget Update allocated \$19.80 million over two years to establish the VRU and deliver a range of programs as part of the 'Community Safety Package'.

## Overview of the VRU

The VRU is a statewide prevention unit with a mission to stop crime before it starts by driving a public health approach to reducing violence.

The VRU will do this by:

- Taking a preventative approach to address the root causes of violence
- Coordinating across government and local services
- Using data and intelligence to target its interventions
- Investing in and delivering evidence-based programs
- Engaging directly with Victorian communities most impacted by violence

The VRU is based on the Violence Reduction Unit models in Glasgow and London.

- Scotland's VRU saw a 60% reduction in violent crime within 10 years
- Over 7 years, London's VRU had a 31% drop in homicides and a 28% drop in knife crime resulting in injury among young people



# Spotlight on Lived experience mentoring programs



## Lived experience mentoring programs

### Overview

- The VRU is partnering with the Department of Justice and Community Safety to support the expansion of Lived experience mentoring programs.
- The purpose of these programs is to reduce the over-representation of at-risk young people in the justice system.
- This suite of programs are delivered by the Centre for Multicultural Youth, Jesuit Social Services, and 16 Yards, among other providers.

### Case study: 16 Yards

- The 16 Yards lived experience group-based mentoring program supports the critical transition of young people from custody to community.
- It is delivered by lived experience facilitators in custodial Youth Justice services, to support young people approaching parole or release by strengthening their identity, building on existing strengths, and establishing practical routines for life in the community.
- 16 Yards has completed its first cycle, supporting eight young people in Parkville Youth Justice Precinct. All eight have completed the 14-week program.
- The first cycle has identified early outcomes, including growth and change in identity and self-perception and critical reflection on peer networks.



# Spotlight on Anti-gang grooming and exploitation campaign



## Anti-gang grooming and exploitation campaign

### Overview

- The VRU is partnering with Think Village to deliver an anti-gang grooming and exploitation campaign.
- The project takes a grassroots approach to prevent grooming and exploitation of young people by delivering a targeted campaign that strengthens awareness, capability and protective behaviours among young people, families, and communities.
- \$0.50 million has been provided over 2 years in the 2025-26 Budget Update, as part of the \$19.80 million initial investment in the VRU.

### Further detail

- The campaign and resources will be co-designed by young people, families, and practitioners, to ensure that it is culturally informed, relevant, and practical.
- The project will support young people to recognise grooming tactics, resist coercion, and confidentially seek help for themselves or their peers.
- It will also seek to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to identify early signs of grooming and exploitation, engage in informed and protective conversations with young people, and better understand support and reporting pathways.



# The 2026-27 Budget provides the VRU with \$33.45 million over 4 years



**Project Restore**



**Community  
Connections Project**



**Targeted mental  
health supports**



**Quality activities and  
sport for at-risk  
school-aged children**



**New local crime  
prevention solutions**

# Spotlight on Project Restore



## Project Restore

### Overview

- The 2026-27 Budget provides **\$3.71 million over 2 years for Project Restore**, a globally recognised community-based gang violence intervention program.
- This builds on an initial investment of \$0.50 million through the 2025-26 Budget Update to develop and adapt the youth gang disruption model to the Victorian context.

### Further detail

- The program is being designed to directly address conflict and reconnect young people with community through mentorship, intensive wraparound support, pathways to education, training and employment, and supporting young people to gain life skills.
- The program is based on Project Restore Bed-Stuy, a successful US gang intervention program, which the VRU is adapting. An evaluation of this program demonstrated a range of positive outcomes, including an estimated 28% reduction in shooting victims and 22% reduction in felony assaults.



**Thank you.**

