



Annual plan

2025-26

**The Ombudsman acknowledges
the Traditional Custodians of
Country throughout Victoria
and pays respect to their
Elders past and present.**

We recognise the enduring connection of First Peoples to land, water and culture, over which sovereignty was never ceded.

As the human rights complaint handler and investigator, we often see the imbalance of power between individuals and the State. We acknowledge the profound injustices and systemic discrimination experienced by First Peoples, often amplified by this power imbalance.

Through our commitment to fairness and human rights, we strive to listen, learn and advance outcomes that contribute to justice in pursuit of a Victoria that is fair for everyone.

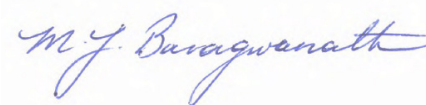
Artwork by Maddison Laws, a proud Yorta Yorta woman from Cummeragunja and member of the Victorian Ombudsman team.

To
The Honourable the President of the Legislative Council
and
The Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Dear Presiding Officers

In accordance with the provisions of the *Ombudsman Act 1973*,
I am pleased to transmit my *Annual plan 2025–26* to Parliament.

Yours sincerely



Marlo Baragwanath
Victorian Ombudsman
25 June 2025

About the Victorian Ombudsman

In 1973, Parliament established the Victorian Ombudsman as a mechanism for fairness in what is an inherently unequal relationship between the State and its citizens. In this sense, the protection and promotion of human rights is central to our work. The Victorian Ombudsman operates under the *Ombudsman Act 1973* and is a constitutionally independent officer of the Parliament.

Our vision and intent

The future we strive to create is simply captured in our vision:

Victoria is fair

That means that:

- human rights are protected and promoted
- people are kept at the centre of decision making
- public bodies are open and accountable

In practice, it means that, through our work, we:

- protect human rights as the independent complaint handler and investigator, and by making it easier for those experiencing disadvantage to complain
- enhance integrity by investigating serious matters and exposing maladministration and improper conduct
- ensure fairness through independent and impartial complaint resolution and by promoting fair and reasonable decision making
- champion continuous improvement and assist public bodies to learn from complaints and investigations and work constructively to identify solutions.

Our work

In performing our functions under the Ombudsman Act, we oversee the actions and decisions of more than 1,000 public bodies.

These bodies include:

- state government departments and administrative offices
- bodies established by legislation, such as the Transport Accident Commission
- local councils
- prisons – both public and private
- some private or community-run organisations that are publicly funded.

We do not advocate for members of the public or for authorities. We make decisions based on evidence and operate in accordance with the Ombudsman Act.

Most of our work takes place in private in accordance with our legislation, but the Ombudsman can decide to make our work public in certain circumstances.

Human rights

Human rights principles have always been central to our work. The introduction of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (the Charter) in 2006 articulated 20 rights and freedoms that are protected in Victoria. It recognised that all people are equal in dignity and rights, which can only be limited in accordance with the Charter.

The Charter also amended the Ombudsman Act and empowered us to make explicit what had always been implicit in our work. We are Victoria’s independent human rights investigator and complaint handler.

By looking at public administration through the lens of human rights, we can promote a culture of human rights compliance across the public sector and ensure people remain at the centre of public sector decision-making.

In our day-to-day work we use a wide range of tools and approaches based on our discretion and consideration of the situation.



Facilitating complaints

We speak with tens of thousands of people every year and help where we can. Sometimes this means taking on their complaint ourselves or, where we can’t help, pointing them in the right direction.



Making enquiries

Either on a complaint or our own motion, we can make enquiries to decide whether an issue may be informally resolved or should be investigated further. Our enquiries are informal and can involve speaking to the parties, undertaking research, obtaining records or inspecting files.



Conciliating complaints

We can conciliate complaints at any stage of an enquiry or investigation by bringing the parties together in a facilitated and structured setting to find sustainable solutions to problems.



Complaint System Review

We proactively review public bodies’ complaint-handling practices and processes to help them improve and, ultimately, reduce the number of complaints to the Ombudsman about others’ complaint handling.



Investigations

Using Royal Commission-style powers, we formally investigate public bodies’ actions and decisions and make remedial recommendations for improvement. We investigate complaints (including Public Interest (whistleblower) complaints), on our own motion, or any matter referred by the Victorian Parliament.



Education

We provide education and training to empower public bodies to improve the quality of their administration and complaint-handling practices.

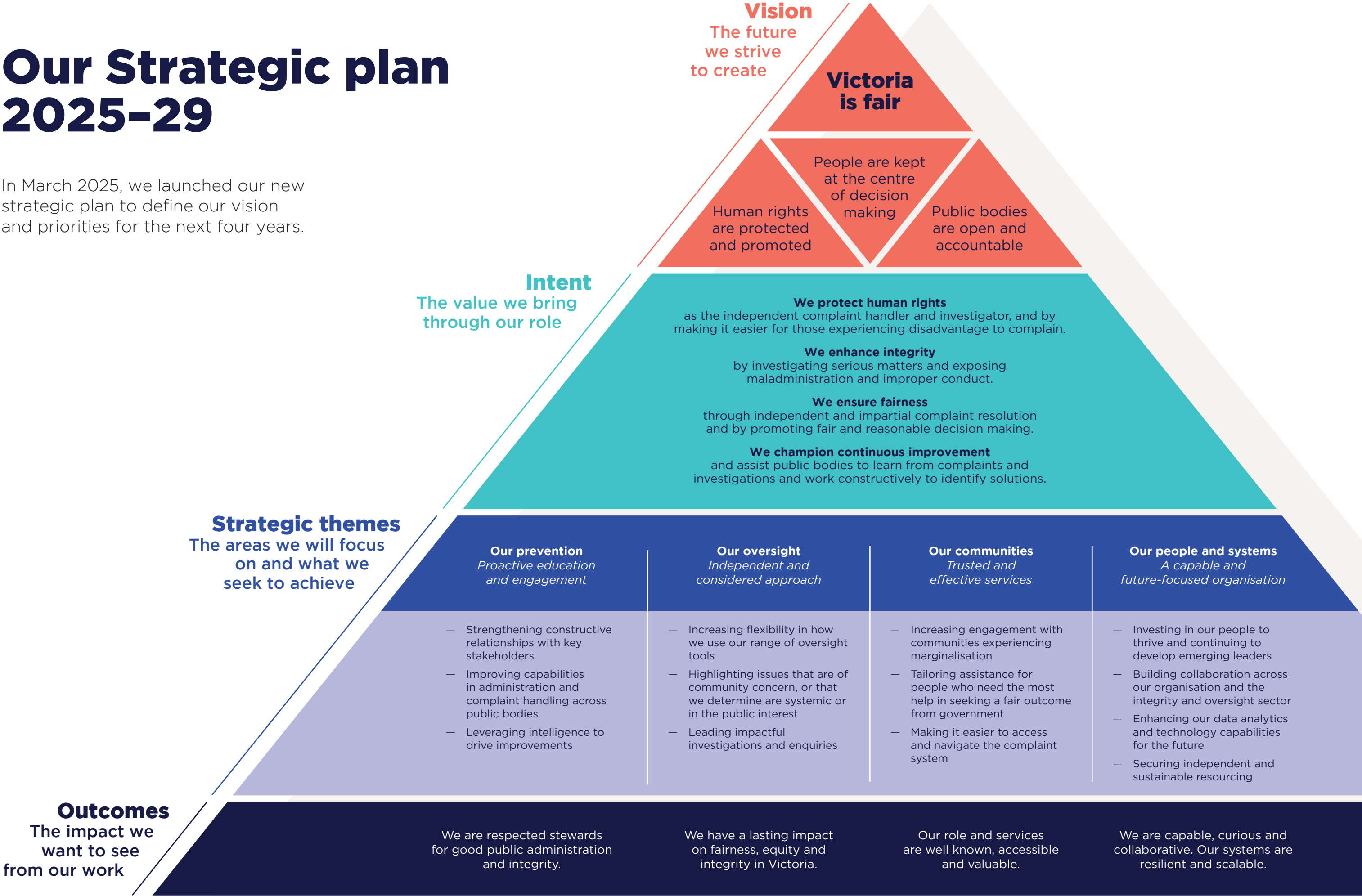


Engagement

We seek to engage with public bodies to disseminate lessons and integrity insights and inform potential recommendations for improvement. We also engage with diverse communities to help navigate a complicated landscape and make effective complaints that will ultimately be easier for public bodies to deal with.

Our Strategic plan 2025-29

In March 2025, we launched our new strategic plan to define our vision and priorities for the next four years.



Key initiatives for 2025–26

This annual plan brings our strategic plan’s four-year outlook into a one-year horizon by identifying the activities we will initiate in the year ahead to work towards our strategic outcomes. The key initiatives for 2025–26 are grouped under the four strategic themes. These actions are in addition to our substantial ‘business as usual’ activities and will lay the foundation for achieving our strategic goals in the coming years.

Our prevention

The best response to unfairness in public administration is to prevent it from occurring in the first place. By demonstrating what good public administration and complaint handling looks like, we can guide public bodies to improve their practices. Active engagement and education with our stakeholders is core to our stewardship role, and to shape improved public service delivery for the community.

Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Embed the Prevention Framework through ongoing implementation	30 June 2026
Trial a complaints community of practice across the Victorian Public Service	30 June 2026

▲ Actions anticipated to be delivered over multiple years.

Our oversight

Accountable public bodies are an essential component of democracy. Our independent and considered oversight helps to ensure public bodies are accountable to the communities they serve, shines a light on maladministration and breaches of human rights, and provides pathways for issues to be resolved.

Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Define and publish an annual set of focus areas to align organisational effort and engagement	30 September 2025
Develop and trial a prioritisation framework to inform decisions on how we use our range of oversight tools and allocate our resources	30 June 2026
Maintain a structured engagement approach with senior stakeholders (including relevant elected officials) to share lessons and integrity insights from our operations	30 June 2026
Deliver a pipeline of regular publications to share guidance and integrity insights, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">— a referral from Parliament about VMIA’s handling of Domestic Building Insurance claims— a referral from Parliament about flooding in Kensington Banks and Rivervue— an investigation into a human rights issue— one casebook on complaints— one good practice guide	30 June 2026

▲ Actions anticipated to be delivered over multiple years.

Key initiatives for 2025–26

Our communities

It is critical that we keep people at the centre of decision making. To have the greatest impact, we need to ensure that we are reaching the right people. Every individual who needs us should be able to access our services in a way that is simple, meaningful and valuable to them, and that means some people will need more help than others.

Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Develop a First Nations engagement and complaints-handling strategy	30 June 2026
Develop education and engagement activities for members of communities experiencing marginalisation to help them make more effective complaints	30 June 2026
Establish and embed a framework for identifying and tailoring assistance for complainants that need the most support in navigating the complaints system	30 June 2026
Pursue improvements to the Public Interest Disclosure/ Public Interest Complaints scheme as it relates to the Victorian Ombudsman’s mandate	30 June 2026

▲ Actions anticipated to be delivered over multiple years.

Our people and systems

People are at the heart of our success. Our people and teams need the right resources, skills, and support to thrive and grow into future leaders. By fostering collaboration within our organisation and across the integrity and oversight sector, we can empower our people to excel. Ensuring they have what they need to succeed also means providing systems and digital infrastructure that work seamlessly and reliably.

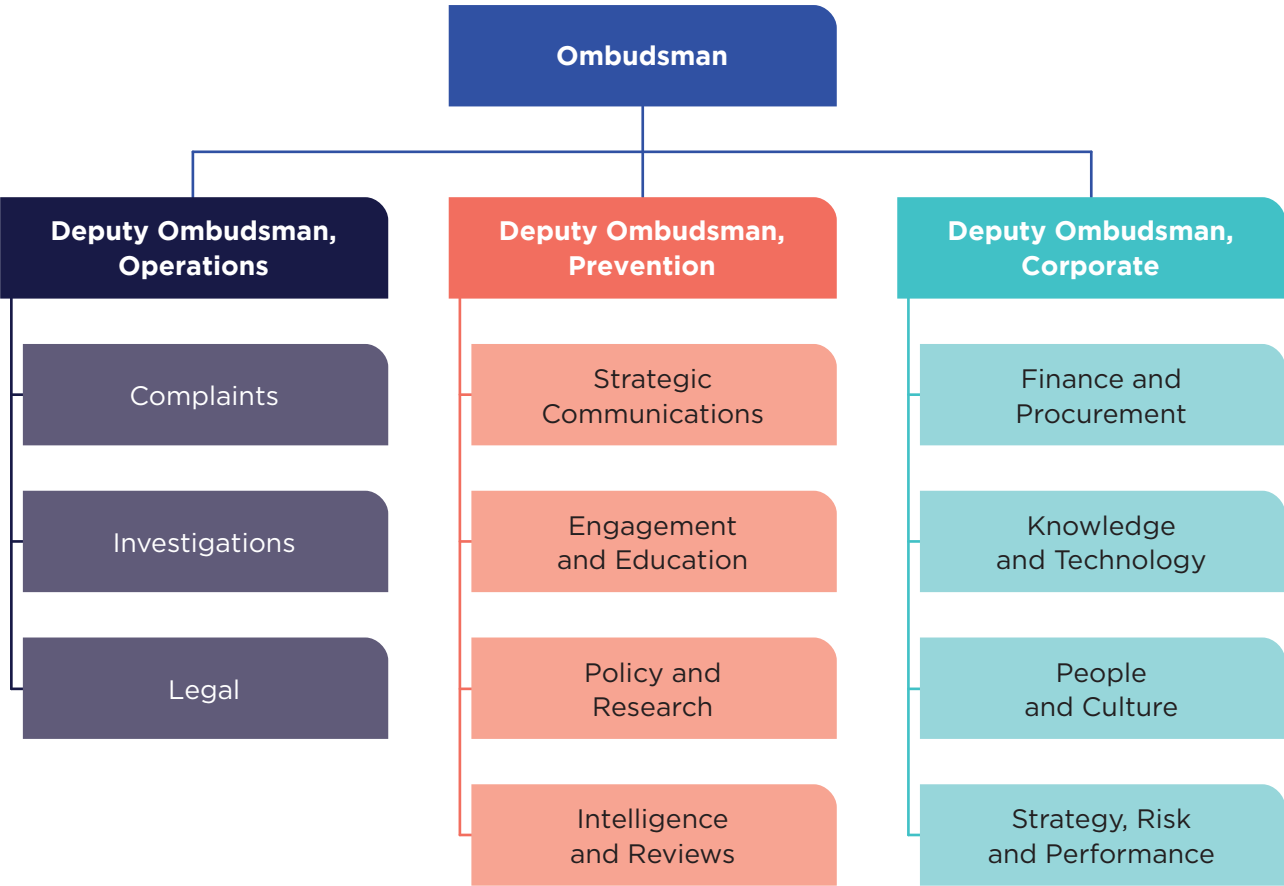
Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Develop and commence implementation of a comprehensive People Strategy encompassing safety and wellbeing, culture and contemporary capabilities required as an integrity agency	30 June 2026
Commence development of a holistic Information and Communications Technology (ICT) strategy and roadmap with a focus on information management and security, systems capabilities, data analytics and technologies for the future	30 June 2026
Conduct a controlled trial of an artificial intelligence tool to help people work more effectively, capturing insights to inform further consideration of how AI tools could support our functions	30 June 2026
Develop a suite of metrics to better inform measurement of the organisation’s impact in improving public administration	31 December 2025

▲ Actions anticipated to be delivered over multiple years.

Our structure

Our organisation is made up of three divisions. We coordinate and collaborate across these divisions to achieve our outcomes.



Operations

The Operations division leads our complaint handling, investigation and legal teams to deliver our principal functions under the Ombudsman Act.

The Complaints team works to assess, prioritise and resolve matters quickly and informally, often preventing small issues from growing into larger ones. More complex complaints can involve further enquiries and analysis and meeting with the parties to discuss key issues and suggest improvements.

We also have trained conciliators who seek to resolve complaints by getting parties together to find solutions, in a supported and structured setting using alternative dispute resolution techniques.

Our Investigations team formally investigates authorities' actions and decisions either on a complaint or, where we identify systemic issues of public interest, on our 'own motion' (without a complaint). We also enquire into and investigate public interest (or whistleblower) complaints about improper conduct and detrimental action and must investigate matters referred by the Victorian Parliament.

Our Legal team supports the whole organisation on a variety of operational and corporate matters, ensuring our compliance with legislative requirements and assisting us to navigate our broad jurisdiction and use of powers.

Prevention

Our Prevention division draws together our Policy, Strategic Communications, Engagement and Education, and Intelligence and Reviews teams to deliver our other functions under the Ombudsman Act, which seek to proactively improve public sector administration.

To complement our operations and achieve our legislative objectives, we will engage broadly to develop and refine a body of preventive work to:

- identify, expose and prevent maladministration and improper conduct
- assist authorities to improve their administration and complaint handling through reviews of their complaints-handling practices
- educate the Victorian community and the public sector about Ombudsman matters.

Corporate Services

The purpose of the Corporate Services division is to ensure that the resources, capabilities and infrastructure the our organisation requires to deliver on its legislative obligations and strategic plan are effectively planned for and managed. The Corporate Services division leads our strategic planning and manages our finance, procurement, governance, risk and compliance, people and culture, and knowledge and technology services.

Collaborating across the organisation, the distinct teams within Corporate Services work to ensure we have the financial resources, skilled personnel, and support needed to fulfil our mandate. It also oversees the implementation of effective technology and information systems and fosters a culture of continuous improvement to develop our people and maintain an inclusive, values-driven workplace.

Performance measures

As part of our accountability to the Victorian Parliament, we are expected to achieve the following performance targets in 2025-26, as set out in the State Budget Paper No. 3 (BP3).

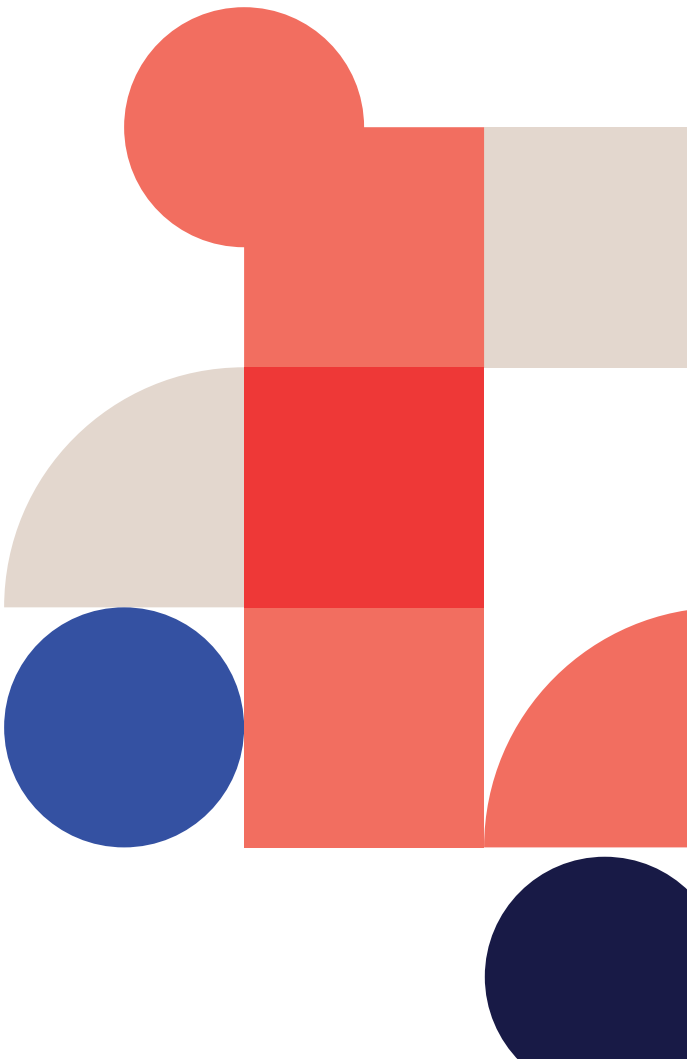
Performance measure	Type	Unit	2025-26 target
Number of jurisdictional cases opened	Quantity	Number	18,000
Jurisdictional cases selected for enquiry/ investigation	Quantity	Per cent	27
Education and training participants	Quantity	Number	750
Jurisdictional cases that lead to an agreed improvement	Quality	Per cent	55
Public sector education program satisfaction rate	Quality	Per cent	90
Complaint service satisfaction	Quality	Per cent	60
Complaints closed within 30 days	Timeliness	Per cent	90
Investigations closed within 12 months	Timeliness	Per cent	75
Total cost output	Cost	\$m	22.71

Limitations

Our achievement of BP3 target levels may be affected by various factors influencing performance, including:

- volume of complaints and notifications received
- number of enquiries and investigations ongoing
- public sector funding impacting the number of training participants
- resource constraints tied to funding affecting service levels
- community sentiment with the Victorian public sector
- receipt of Parliamentary referrals.

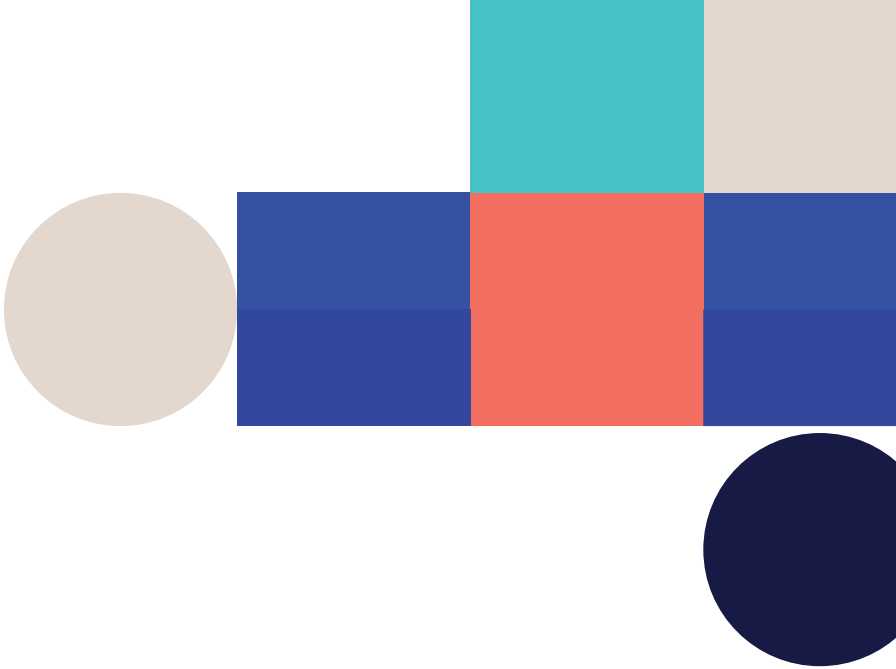
Following our recent strategic planning process and in response to recent Integrity and Oversight Committee performance audit recommendations, we are continuing to develop and baseline new measures to better evaluate our impact and outcomes.



Strategic challenges

Our dynamic and complex operating environment includes a wide range of challenges that present risks to our operations and strategic outcomes.

The Victorian Ombudsman is required to apply the Victorian Government Risk Management Framework (VGRMF). In line with our risk management obligations – and upholding strong risk management practices – we have an Enterprise Risk Management Framework, developed in accordance with the Australian Standard, to provide the foundation for clear and systematic management of risk across the organisation. The current strategic risks are summarised in the below table:



Challenge		Analysis			Link to annual plan actions
		Likelihood	Impact	Rating	
Securing financial resources	Inadequate sustainable funding to deliver on our legislative mandate and key strategic initiatives	Possible ●●●○○	Major ●●●○○	High ●●●●○	Our <i>Annual plan 2025-26</i> has been developed in line with the funding bid submitted as part of the Budget process. Should this funding not be achieved, the plan will need to be revised.
Upholding public confidence	Inability to maintain credibility and trust as an integrity agency and effectively manage strategic stakeholder relationships	Possible ●●●○○	Major ●●●○○	High ●●●●○	Maintaining a structured engagement approach with senior stakeholders, enhancing our engagement and prevention functions; and establishing a suite of metrics to better demonstrate our impact.
Maintaining contemporary information systems	Systems that are outdated and unable to deliver required functionality, and ineffective cyber and information security resulting in a significant security breach, or disruption of operations	Possible ●●●○○	Major ●●●○○	High ●●●●○	Development of a holistic ICT strategy and roadmap; implementation of ongoing improvements to security and information management.
Supporting strong capability and culture	Inability to attract, retain and develop staff with required skills and capability to deliver on our legislative mandate and our strategy	Possible ●●●○○	Moderate ●●●○○	Medium ●●●○○	Development of a comprehensive People Strategy, incorporating skills, capability and wellbeing.
Ensuring conformance with legislative obligations	Non-conformance with legislative obligations including the Ombudsman Act, Public Interest Disclosure scheme and relevant financial and compliance legislation	Possible ●●●○○	Moderate ●●●○○	Medium ●●●○○	We remain committed to assurance and legal compliance as part of our core business.

Funding

The below table summarises our funding provisions for the next four years.

Funding component	Budget (\$m)			
	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Forward estimates	22.70	23.35	24.01	24.33
Outcome of 2025-26 business case funding bid to improve public administration and manage critical risks	0.01
Total funding	22.71	23.35	24.01	24.33

Operating budget

The confirmed funding for 2025-26 is \$22.71m. As per previous years, we submitted a budget bid for consideration as part of the state government’s budget process. The budget bid was to increase our base funding to enable us to fulfil our mandate to improve public administration and to address critical business risks. Our budget bid was largely unsuccessful and, while we remain committed to our new *Strategic plan 2025-29*, with increasing costs and wages we have had to be realistic in terms of what we can deliver. In the short term, we will work to find efficiencies, but for the longer term, we will need to continue advocating for adequate and sustainable funding.

Capital expenditure

Capital expenditure of \$300k for FY2025-26 will be supporting asset replacement and investment program of works.



Strategic plan 2025–29



Informed by engagement with our people and stakeholders, our *Strategic plan 2025–29* sets out our ambitions for the next four years, and our priorities for realising them.

Find out more at
ombudsman.vic.gov.au



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