

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Anti-LGBTIQA+ Hate Crimes in Victoria

Melbourne – Thursday 25 June 2026

MEMBERS

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Michael Galea – Deputy Chair

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WITNESSES

Assistant Commissioner Brett Curran, Partnerships and Safe Communities, and

Jeremy Oliver, Manager, LGBTIQ+ Communities Portfolio, Priority and Safer Communities Division, Victoria Police.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Welcome back to the next session of the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into anti-LGBTIQ+ hate. I am Joe McCracken, Chair of the inquiry, and we will go through and introduce our committee members.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Hi. Aiv Puglielli, North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Michael GALEA: Hello. Michael Galea, South-Eastern Metropolitan Region and Deputy Chair.

The CHAIR: And we have got some online as well. I will go to Ann-Marie and then Sheena.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Hi. I am Ann-Marie Hermans. I am also a Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Sheena WATT: Hello. I am Sheena Watt from Northern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Also, we have got Anasina Gray-Barberio –

Michael GALEA: She has stepped out.

The CHAIR: She has stepped out? Thank God I have got a Deputy Chair. Is she coming in later, for the next session, or –

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Possibly later in the afternoon.

The CHAIR: Okay, we will see. Anyway, we have got members online.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearings, but if you go elsewhere and say the same thing, you may not necessarily be protected by that same privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript, but ultimately that will be made public because it will be put on the committee's website.

Just for the Hansard record, are you able to say your name, your title and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of, please? I will go from my left to my right.

Brett CURRAN: I am Brett John Curran, Assistant Commissioner of Partnerships and Safe Communities with Victoria Police.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Jeremy OLIVER: I am Jeremy Oliver, LGBTIQ+ Communities Portfolio Manager at Victoria Police.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I will hand it over to you guys now for a verbal submission – as I said, about 10 minutes, but if you go over or under, that is all cool. Thank you, again, firstly, for appearing today. We really appreciate your time. I will hand over to you.

Brett CURRAN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this inquiry to provide a policing perspective on anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes in Victoria. On behalf of Victoria Police I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I would like to

extend that respect to all Aboriginal people with us today or anyone that is online or viewing the streaming service.

I am an Assistant Commissioner of Partnerships and Safe Communities within Victoria Police, a role that sits over 15 different divisions of Victoria Police, including Priority and Safer Communities. I have approximately 38 years experience as a police officer for Victoria Police, having worked in a variety of roles across the organisation, including as Assistant Commissioner for Gender Equality and Inclusion Command from 2019 to 2022 and as an Assistant Commissioner of North-West Metropolitan Region from February 2022 until March 2026. That incorporates the city CBD and the north-western suburbs of Melbourne – 38 workplaces, 3800 police under my command then. In March 2026 I took on my current role as the Assistant Commissioner for Partnerships and Safe Communities. Since 2019 I have been the chair of the LGBTIQ+ portfolio reference group in Victoria Police, and I am the executive champion for VP Pride network, which is a Victoria Police Pride network for our employees.

Joining me today is my colleague Jeremy Oliver, the LGBTIQ+ Communities Portfolio Manager within the Priority and Safer Communities Division. Jeremy has been with Victoria Police for nine years and in their current role for 3½ years, and their core function includes providing strategic advice to the organisation on the development and implementation of policies, initiatives and service delivery that supports rainbow communities, including the management of LGBTIQ+ liaison officer programs, or LLOs, as they are commonly known. Jeremy has been instrumental in the identification of the increase of tech-facilitated violence against gay and bisexual men and coordinated the response from Victoria Police.

Victoria Police serves the community and upholds the law to promote a safe, secure and orderly society. Victoria Police is responsible for detecting, apprehending and disrupting offenders who commit crimes in Victoria or against Victorians. Our role is to ensure offenders are held to account, that victims are supported through victim-centric policing and that the community is and feels safe. Our *A Safe Victoria* strategy seeks to follow the principles of a prevention mindset, where every interaction is an opportunity for us to reduce crime and harm. We do this through building partnerships with LGBTIQ+ community members and other priority community members. This creates opportunities for early intervention into crimes through trust and intelligence. With this prevention mindset we are enabled to detect and disrupt crimes. Our actions also include a victim focus that is prioritising the needs and safety of people who have experienced harm through crime. We are also improving the education of our members through training that is constantly reflective to seek improvements towards the outcome of harm minimisation in the community.

Anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes are a significant concern for Victoria Police, and we recognise that this type of hate crime can take many forms including verbal abuse and threats, physical assaults, vandalism and discrimination. In recognition of the distinct barriers, disproportionate impacts and specific vulnerabilities faced by LGBTIQ+ people, since 2014 Victoria Police has had a dedicated permanent LGBTIQ+ community portfolio embedded within the priority and safer communities division, or PSCD as the acronym, responsible for the development and implementation of targeted strategies to respond to hate crimes in Victoria. In addition to this, this portfolio is responsible for managing specialised programs including the Victoria Police LLO program to improve access to affirming and accessible services; conducting community outreach, consultation and collaboration; developing and delivering awareness training for police employees; building and strengthening strategic partnerships and relationships within the organisation and leaders; supporting victims and investigators; and monitoring hate crimes and trends and using that data to inform strategic responses. Victoria Police recognises that hate crimes disproportionately affect marginalised communities. Examples of anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes include using dating apps to facilitate violent offending, targeting events hosted by or attended by LGBTIQ+ people such as drag story time, anti-LGBTIQ+ graffiti and vandalism targeting LGBTIQ+ venues, street-based violent attacks, escalating anti-trans sentiment linked to recent protests and reports of harassment on public transport. Victoria Police is dedicated to enhancing trust and improving relationships with LGBTIQ+ communities. Victoria Police's role is important in supporting efforts with our external stakeholders to counter violence, abuse, harassment and vilification against LGBTIQ+ people.

In relation to the increase in tech-facilitated violence against gay and bisexual men Victoria Police responded promptly by identifying the incidents and liaising with the Victorian Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities, the equality branch, the eSafety Commissioner, Thorne Harbour Health, Grindr and other law enforcement agencies to understand the emerging issue and respond promptly; publishing a number of internal communications to ensure the organisation was briefed on the rise of these crimes; publishing community

safety messaging on Grindr, media articles, social media content, interviews on Joy FM and podcasts relating to the issue; providing guidance to police members supporting victims by way of an internal fact sheet titled 'Victimisation through dating apps fact sheet'; participating in community safety forums at the Laird in June 2025 and March 2026; assisting Switchboard Victoria in the development of internal guidance on their dedicated helpline for victims; formed the New Zealand and Australia police Pride network to understand the breadth of violence across Victoria and New Zealand; and presenting to the Better Together conference exploring how community organisations and government agencies can collaborate to understand and respond to anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crime trends.

Our other proactive measures to support LGBTIQA+ communities include managing the Victoria Police LLO program, which comprises over 600 liaison officers dedicated to supporting community members across the state; conducting and facilitating community engagement, which includes representation on the LGBTQA+ portfolio reference group and the Victorian government's LGBTIQA+ justice working group; and promoting LGBTIQA+ inclusion in the workplace. Victoria Police has been recognised this year with four awards at the Victorian Public Sector Pride Awards and were awarded gold accreditation for the Pride in Diversity Australian Workplace Equality Index. Victoria Police welcomes the committee's questions and thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide a policing perspective on this inquiry.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will go first, and we will go through our committee members as well. I guess we have heard a lot about this sort of behaviour and how it threatens people. From your perspective, how do you receive reports of this sort of criminal conduct?

Brett CURRAN: There are a range of ways in which we will receive reports: people will phone up and call for police attendance at an event, we may detect the crimes through our patrols on the streets, people may contact the police assistance line or online reporting or they may call into a police station. There are a range of ways that can occur. We also receive complaints from third parties, advocates for different people in relation to this. Or we might detect it through our own investigations, identifying other victims of an offence that an offender may have been involved with. If I could just ask Jeremy: is there anything that I have missed there?

Jeremy OLIVER: No, that is fine.

Brett CURRAN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Once a report is received, once you have got that information, what is the process then to action that?

Brett CURRAN: This is broadly as well as for this kind of theme.

The CHAIR: Yes, of course.

Brett CURRAN: When a person makes a report of any crime, it is first assessed to see whether it is a crime, so whether there is prima facie evidence that a crime has been committed. There are some activities which are not okay but they do not actually meet the threshold of a crime. Then depending on the severity of that incident or crime, it may be investigated by the police member who has detected it or had it reported to them; or it might be handed on to a criminal investigator at one of our criminal investigation units, which are spread across the state; or it may go to one of our specialist areas, such as somewhere in the crime department, depending on the nature of the crime.

The CHAIR: One of the things that has been raised, and we touched on it with Grindr this morning, is the fact that sometimes it can be difficult to get data. Sometimes it is deleted – for example, if Victoria Police get a report but the incident happened perhaps over a month ago. I think they said they only keep data for maybe up to 28 days. I guess the question I want to ask you is: what evidence do you need from organisations like Grindr and other dating apps to come to a determination about whether something is a crime or not?

Brett CURRAN: In the first instance, we will generally determine that from the report of the victim of the crime and other witnesses. That would be our primary source of information. Then we may investigate different platforms for crime that is tech enabled to determine what information we can glean from that platform. This occurs across many, many different crime themes where it is tech enabled. We would, where necessary, contact that platform to see what steps we had to take, if we did not already know, in order to access their information.

That might be a search warrant; that might be voluntarily given by them. Jeremy, have you got anything to add to that?

Jeremy OLIVER: I think in this particular instance, because they were physical assaults, they were robberies and they were extortion cases, it is pretty evident that these are criminal offences. What we do need from online platforms, though, is support in identifying who is actually the perpetrator. So we need things like who created the profile and any specific information related to their identity, and that is where there are challenges. If they are deleting that after 28 days and that information is lost, then we have challenges trying to identify who the perpetrator is. But certainly by all means it is very evident that criminal offending is happening. It is just obtaining the right evidence to support the investigation.

The CHAIR: That is what I am trying to get to. When you have situations where someone feels incredibly vulnerable and they do not feel comfortable coming forward directly after the incident and, it might be, for a period of time afterwards, it must be incredibly challenging to sometimes identify who is the perpetrator. How do you go about finding out that when you have got limited information?

Brett CURRAN: Well, the profile may be a source of identifying people, but there are a range of investigative techniques that we would use to identify offenders, as we do with all crime themes. We would look for other witnesses who might be able to identify the people. There would be accessing CCTV networks and identifying a range of things that are open for our avenues of inquiry, which, while not limitless, are many faceted in what we do – some of which we talk about, some of which we do not – which enable us to identify where people are.

The CHAIR: Would it help to have stronger standards around the verification of identity when someone signs up to a website or a dating app?

Brett CURRAN: I would preface that by saying that is a matter for various governments, be they state or federal.

The CHAIR: But to do your work, though?

Brett CURRAN: Anything that would assist us in being able to identify people who commit crimes using platforms would be beneficial.

The CHAIR: Okay. I have only got about 5 seconds left, but you mentioned a fact sheet before that you provide about supporting app-based violence that you give out to your officers. Are you happy to provide that to us so we can see?

Brett CURRAN: I believe so. I will just check that we are able to, but I cannot see why we could not.

The CHAIR: If you can, are you able to?

Brett CURRAN: Yes, we will.

The CHAIR: Okay, cool. Thank you. That is my time up, I am afraid. I will hand over to you, Michael.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you both very much for joining us today. I would also at the outset like to acknowledge the overwhelming recognition amongst community for your work, Jeremy, in identifying and allowing a very fast response to some of these app-based attacks in Victoria. I want to acknowledge you for that. Can I ask you both some questions about the nuts and bolts of these app-based attacks. We have heard the data of 95 offences and 42 arrests. Is that correct? Have those figures changed in the last few months? Has there been an uptick or a decrease since March this year?

Brett CURRAN: The issue for us is reporting on unverified crime stats, which is the domain of the crime stats agency. What I can say in broad terms is we have not seen an uptick in offending. It is not to say that the offending ceased, but it is not as prevalent as it was following the work that we have done.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. And can I ask about the geographic breakdown of where this offending is happening as well? We had some –

Brett CURRAN: Mainly peri-urban areas is where they are occurring.

Michael GALEA: We heard outer north and outer south-east yesterday. Does that align with your understanding?

Jeremy OLIVER: Yes.

Michael GALEA: Is there data that you could provide for these offences broken down by LGA, PSA or even postcode?

Brett CURRAN: I would have to take that on notice, but I will take that on notice.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. If you can, that would be terrific. The interaction with apps – this is following on from some of the Chair’s line of questioning, and we did hear from Grindr this morning about the protocols with which they deal with various police agencies across Australia. Can I ask you to speak to your interactions with Grindr but also with the other apps? Are there differences in how different apps engage? Do you have difficulty engaging with some apps?

Jeremy OLIVER: When we identified the first lot of incidents against community, we approached Grindr, and they were quite prompt in responding to us. We were able to design and publish a safety notification on Grindr, so when every user opened up the app, they were met with a safety notification saying, ‘We’ve seen an increase in violence against app users.’ There were some links to support services and safety messaging. They were quite forthcoming in supporting us with developing that, and we had that up and running for several months. The challenge we have experienced, though, is obtaining information. When we need information that breaches privacy protocols, we have to do a search warrant, and search warrants can take up to 12 months to receive information back. So any opportunity to expedite waiting periods to receive information – but I do understand they are bound by privacy laws.

I do know that there are portals that exist for other dating apps. I believe Bumble and other apps have a portal set up with law enforcement agencies around Australia where you can access information much faster and respond to enquiries. I do know that exists.

Michael GALEA: So there are other protocols in place which could be used as an example for –

Jeremy OLIVER: It is worth exploring, yes.

Michael GALEA: Excellent. Thank you. To what extent does the federal eSafety Commissioner work in this space as well when it comes to interacting on these cases and the privacy considerations with police dealing with apps such as Grindr and others?

Jeremy OLIVER: In this case the eSafety Commissioner supported us and was really useful in terms of any videos or online harm that was posted. They were able to remove the posts or the images and also supply information for investigations. I do not believe they have the ability to stop any of this from happening or have a lot to do with prevention work. It is more around if someone posts a video or posts an image, then they can take it down, which has been really useful for the post-and-boast crimes or incidents.

Michael GALEA: Just on that point, have the new post-and-boast laws come into play with any of the offences that the police have prosecuted, the new post-and-boast provisions under the *Crimes Act*?

Jeremy OLIVER: I cannot really speak to that, but I imagine it has, because it will also form a criminal offence. If we do see someone, for example, assaulting someone and then posting about it online, then that would just be an additional criminal offence, so I believe it is a proactive measure that we are in support of.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. Taking a broader picture of hate crimes in general, we did hear, as you probably would have seen, mixed evidence yesterday from individual witnesses, some very complimentary to police and some that had some significant challenges in dealing with police. The role of LLOs being deployed across Victoria: can you give us a bit of a snapshot of what that looks like, but also the training? One of the positive experiences was with regular police, if I can say, not LLOs, who had clearly been trained in terminology and ways to support. Can you talk to me about how that is rolled out across the state?

Jeremy OLIVER: Just to clarify, is that for LLOs or for the general police?

Michael GALEA: LLOs and broader training, yes.

Jeremy OLIVER: Great. Our 600 LLOs are spread across all of Victoria and are police officers, PSOs, PCOs and VPS staff.

Brett CURRAN: Do you need assistance with those acronyms?

Michael GALEA: I think most of them I knew. PCOs, sorry?

Brett CURRAN: Police custody officers.

Jeremy OLIVER: Maybe I will start with our broader policing organisation. In January of this year we implemented mandatory LGBTIQ+ awareness training, which we have heard came out of a recommendation from the coroner's inquest, and that was developed with our LGBTIQ+ community stakeholders. That was rolled out in January, and we have seen a completion rate of 80 per cent of our organisation that has done that since January. We expect all of our LLOs to have done that. In addition to becoming an LLO, we then have a mandatory workshop that all LLOs have to do within a set amount of time. Over the last two years I have been prioritising regional communities, so I go out once every quarter to a different region to deliver the training.

Michael GALEA: Apologies, I am out of time, but was that 80 per cent figure 80 per cent of LLOs or of the broader sworn force?

Jeremy OLIVER: Of the entire organisation.

Michael GALEA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Mr Puglielli, over to you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for appearing before us as part of this inquiry. Can I ask, specifically building on some of the questions that have already been raised, where the apps are providing information to Victoria Police regarding tech facilitated or enabled attacks that have occurred, what types of information generally are they sharing with you?

Jeremy OLIVER: Look, I probably cannot answer it that well. I would need to be looking into the investigations and tracking them as they are going along. But to my knowledge and with my policing background, they would be asking for things like anything to identify or support evidence, so conversations; images; identifying details like names, email addresses or phone numbers that are attached to the profiles – anything that can be supported as evidence to use in the investigation.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Is there anything else that you would be aware of on the back end that the apps are in a position to share or are currently sharing with Victoria Police?

Brett CURRAN: We have an e-crime squad that assists with those sorts of things. So if they obtain the back-end information, they can use that to identify people that have been using that as well.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes. As they are not in person with us today, is that something you would be able to take away and come back to the committee on?

Brett CURRAN: Yes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Just to build on some of the earlier questions, where are we seeing gaps in data or in intelligence that would be required to ultimately hold a perpetrator of one of these attacks to account? Obviously they are in a heavily anonymised space in some of these platforms, like Grindr, but are there any cases that you could identify, even as a trend, where there are elements that can be identified but there are still gaps that are missing that perhaps with further regulation on the platforms themselves could help piece things together going forward so that more people are able to seek justice?

Brett CURRAN: I suppose, to go back to the initial point, most of the crimes are identified – the victims are identified – through a report or some other means of identifying a victim through investigating another matter.

The gaps that exist in relation to the apps themselves I think Jeremy has already outlined, which are where there is not a profile of a user, which creates a difficulty, or where that is non-verified, where you have essentially an anonymous user. That creates a difficulty in the app being used to be able to identify the offender simply, without having, as you described it, the background – you know, the back-of-house information that might lead us to an IP address or something similar like that. That is a difficulty in itself. So the standards of verification of user that apply to an app or a platform are very important in that regard to assist us in being able to identify who that person might be.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

Brett CURRAN: Does that assist?

Aiv PUGLIELLI: It does, yes, and I appreciate the difficulty.

Brett CURRAN: And that is any platform for any crime.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes. Jeremy, just to come to you, you are speaking with many community members around some of these issues, some of the attacks that are occurring. And we know that many of them are ultimately not reported. That has been part of the evidence we have heard through this process. What are some of the barriers that people have been raising with you if they are concerned about how they wish to raise what has happened to them, and how are you navigating those barriers that they are raising to help them seek justice?

Jeremy OLIVER: There are several barriers. One thing that we hear from victims is the shame which they experience through what has been happening. I think that that feeling of shame in reporting it to anyone in general, including police, is very evident. Also, we recognise that there is a complex relationship with the queer community with Victoria Police. So there are obviously going to be challenges in people coming forward and reporting it to police because of the historical relationship. Also there is an element to the crimes where the victims are threatened that their information will be shared with family members or their workplace, so threats are a real live issue, and people would not report things because they fear that there is going to be further offending or retaliation. Some people think that what has happened to them might not be worthy of reporting or might not constitute a criminal offence. But again, that is where we would encourage everyone to say something and report something. Those are the main barriers that I can think of.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Speaking more broadly, we heard yesterday – beyond the context of these specific tech-facilitated incidents we are talking about – about the cancellation of rainbow family events and events that are inclusive, for example, of trans and gender-diverse people. In the absence of these cancelled events, we heard testimony that a vacuum is then created, which can then be filled with hate, effectively. I am aware that Victoria Police may give advice in relation to safety concerns for attendees of particular events in some instances, but can I ask: in Victoria Police's view, what is the role of VicPol in ensuring that those events can proceed?

Brett CURRAN: Our role is to ensure that they proceed, just as you said, and I am not being glib when I say that. We do not advise events not to proceed. In north-west metro, when I was there, there were many events which proceeded because we put a policing footprint in and around the events to make sure that they did not stop. One of the difficulties with that, frankly, is that if you are having a drag time event and we have a significant number of police, we try to do that in the most unobtrusive way we can, to keep out people that might try and protest against that event occurring. Sometimes the location will make it difficult, but our job is to make sure that we create a safe environment for those events to proceed. Sometimes organisers decide not to do that. There have been occasions when those events have been cancelled and it has been said that Victoria Police advised them to be cancelled. We did not provide that advice. I think the other thing to talk about there is there were other things that the actors, not even from this state, were using – like reporting WorkCover complaints and various things like that, which were not reported but were fabricated, to give an indication. Then workplaces took the approach of saying, 'Well, we can't risk that. We'll cancel the event.' I hope that answers your question.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will now go to Mrs Hermans. Over to you, Ann-Marie.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you. And thank you to Brett and Jeremy for coming in today; I really appreciate it.

Brett CURRAN: Thank you.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Congratulations on an 80 per cent mandatory workshop for the entire police force in Victoria. Eighty per cent getting through is quite a phenomenal achievement for the police force. Can I just ask: we have had different information coming through. I wonder: how many hours of training? Obviously it is ongoing because you provide fact sheets. I am from an education background. That is ongoing training, providing 'This is the current stuff; this is what's new'. How many hours of training? Is it an hour of training that people go through for this mandatory workshop that is being done by the police force at the moment or is it a little bit longer? Is it once a year? What does it look like?

Brett CURRAN: Thank you for the question. I might go to the overarching, and then I will hand to Jeremy for the particular.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Sure.

Brett CURRAN: Our recruits all receive foundation training at the academy, and Jeremy can talk to the length of that training. The other thing is that there is the formal training, which Jeremy will talk to, but there is also the information that we continually provide around these issues at operational briefings for events. We have had a number of significant protests in the city, where many, many police have come through there, and they are re-educated on hate crime and on the issues dealing with anti-LGBTIQA+ matters as well. I will hand to Jeremy now to talk about the specific training.

Jeremy OLIVER: As Brett mentioned, we have a lot of LGBTIQA+ content in our foundational training at academy. That is either delivered in the classrooms or via our community encounters program, where our police recruits actually meet and sit down and ask questions to our rainbow community members, and it is also embedded in our family violence training through scenarios and content at academy. So we have a lot of embedded curriculum at that foundational level. In terms of when police recruits then come out of academy, we have now got our mandatory rainbow awareness training since January of this year. We also have our LLO training, which we deliver to our LLOs. We have training content and management training, so when you go above the rank of senior sergeant and above, we have got embedded curriculum in those programs.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Can I just interrupt, just to clarify, because I am online and it is a little bit difficult. That training that you do that is the mandatory one, not the LLO – I am assuming the LLO one is more intense. But the training that is mandatory across the board – is that a unit that they do, an online unit? What does that look like? I am just trying to get an idea.

Jeremy OLIVER: It is an e-learning course. It is approximately 30 minutes of training.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Okay. And that is pretty much a standard thing that every policeman would probably do, like the teachers do, maybe once a year? Is that a unit that you do? I do not know – PD?

Jeremy OLIVER: It was launched in January, but there will be annual updates to the program. But we do have that foundational one that every employee will need to do, whether you are VPS, custody officer, PSO or police.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: So this is a developing space that you guys are working on at the moment. You have got that pretty much – overseeing it. That is good. I am just also looking at this training you do also embedded in family violence. There are two things – there are actually a few; I hope I get time to mention them. Are you finding that there are family violence arrests that are also happening within the context of the LGBTIQ community that are struggles within – I suppose it is not a hate crime. But is that getting counted into the statistics, or is that completely separate?

Brett CURRAN: Are you saying: are family violence offences between intimate partners that are of the same sex included in this issue? I very much doubt it, but I would have to take that on notice. But certainly there are instances of same-sex partner family violence investigations that we have undertaken, and intervention orders have been taken out. Yes, that is certainly the case.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Sure. Thank you for that. I am looking at the 42. Obviously, I represent the south-east, so we have a very high amount of crime, and I have got so many questions for you. In my area – I was just looking it up – there have been obviously tensions between parents and drag queen presentations to children. To what extent does the police consider it to be – you are not saying that parents cannot have their rights to be able to say ‘I don’t agree with this’, but where does it become a hate crime? My concern is I do not want to take away voice from people of all different people groups. To me, I want to stop violence and criminal behaviour, and hate behaviour has no place in society for any group of people, as far as I am concerned. But –

The CHAIR: I will just say, Ann-Marie, your time is up, but if you want to finish this point, and then the response.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Just one thing: is there a way? What do the police do in this? Because I do not want to have people saying this is a hate crime when actually it is just an everyday. We have got a lot of criminal activity. How do you discern? There are some things that are very obvious, but are there those blurred situations where it can be misconstrued or where we need to really put something in place? I am just trying to get a feel for it.

Brett CURRAN: I suppose generally someone would have to undertake a criminal activity in the context of a protected attribute, and that would make it a crime. Not agreeing with something is not a crime. However, committing a criminal act in displaying your disagreement with that activity when it is a protected attribute is a crime, as well as the act you have undertaken. So if you vandalised, if you assaulted someone, if you used insulting words, if you engaged in offensive behaviour, all of those things constitute criminal activity. As with anything we investigate, as I said in my opening, the first thing is: is there prima facie evidence of a criminal offence? If there is, we investigate to gather evidence and then identify the perpetrator to hold them to account before the courts.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Sorry, did you want to add to that?

Jeremy OLIVER: Can I just quickly add: I think also when we look at anti-LGBTIQA+ hate crimes we need to look at the pathways of escalation. A hate crime – you have to start right from the beginning. When someone holds a negative view about someone, they then go online and it kind of escalates to writing commentary. It then kind of leaps to attending a protest against a drag story time. Then it becomes an actual attack against community. I think we need to look at it holistically, that there are different levels of hate and different levels of escalation, and that is where we see these crimes happening against the community. Does that make sense?

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. I will now hand over to Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Thank you, Chair. Can I thank the Assistant Commissioner and Mr Oliver for joining us today. Before I begin with my questions, can I take a moment to acknowledge Sergeant Geoffrey Kwist from the Merri-bek police area. He recently was awarded some recognition of his efforts in my community in the Northern Metropolitan Region supporting LGBTQA+ folks. I just want to acknowledge that effort.

Can I go to extortion. What I have heard you speak about a little bit – and it has come up with previous witnesses – are reports of extortion, particularly with video content and threats of retaliation. I am really concerned about the extortion that is happening towards with victims. Could you tell me a little bit about what we are seeing? Do we have any evidence or data around what elements of these attacks include extortion – wanting cash, releasing evidence, releasing video? Can you talk a little bit more about that, because I am particularly interested in that.

Brett CURRAN: As to the data, we would have to take that on notice as to what data we could release on those.

Jeremy OLIVER: Generally speaking from my observation of incidents, what is occurring is a victim will be lured to a space, and usually it is a public space, and then the offender will confront them and tell them to transfer money to a bank account. Then they are threatened with assault or release of video or information or things like that. They are being asked to transfer money on the spot or else there will be consequences.

Sheena WATT: Is it really a single perpetrator rolling up and saying, 'Here you go'? It is not a group of offenders getting video content of the actual crime and then –

Jeremy OLIVER: No.

Sheena WATT: What I am seeing overseas and in other evidence is that there are actually group attacks on people. Is the case in Victoria more that it is individuals –

Jeremy OLIVER: No, no. Most of the attacks in Victoria are groups of young adolescent boys and men.

Sheena WATT: Okay. So when this is happening, is it –

Jeremy OLIVER: Yes. One person will approach the victim sort of enacting a meet-up, but then once they start the conversation, that is when the rest of the offenders will come in and film or assault or threaten the victim. So in most cases it is a group of people.

Sheena WATT: Okay. That checks out with my understanding of these cases. What are we seeing? Is there a level of sophistication with this? Is it internationally organised? I just cannot help but think that it seems really easy: 'Please put the money in my bank account.' It does not seem like a particularly sophisticated level of criminality here. This seems easy to trace. I am just trying to understand if we have got international players and actors involved in this, if there are in fact international elements to what is going on and how that presents itself.

Brett CURRAN: The platform is international. I do not believe we have seen evidence of the offending being driven from international –

Sheena WATT: So it is like 'Hi. I've turned up. I've taken video content of you. Please put money in my bank account. Here's my BSB and account number'? Because that is a pretty easy way to find a perpetrator. Is there some level of complexity here?

Jeremy OLIVER: Yes. There is a level of sophistication where we have seen offending groups perpetrate on more than one occasion. They have actually set up an organisation of how they – one person creates a profile, another one manages the bank account, another is the one that enacts the meet-up. So there is that sort of sophistication. But in terms of a bank account, the extortion element actually supports our investigations, because you are right, finding a bank account is actually better and faster for us than putting in a search warrant to Grindr for identification. In terms of extortion cases, it really assists our investigations and speeds them up a bit. But there are occasions when they might use a business or an undisclosed bank account, but when they are putting it into a bank account it does support our investigations.

Sheena WATT: That was actually the point that I was trying to make – is it not easier to investigate when it is simply 'Please put money into this bank account' than bitcoin or cryptocurrency or any level of sophisticated financial international arrangements that we are seeing with other organised crime elements? I had assumed a level of sophistication in the way that this was being financially organised that clearly perhaps is not there. I just want to thank you for clarifying that, because in fact the simplicity of, frankly, the way they want the cash means that it is actually a lot easier for police to do their job and find the perpetrators, it seems.

Jeremy OLIVER: Absolutely. Yes, extortion is one group of crime. We have also seen a lot of robberies where they will just want to ask for the cash and their phone and belongings that are on them. There are other instances when it is purely homophobic and they are being assaulted for being gay. But certainly for the extortion one, it does support our investigations.

Sheena WATT: Yes, which I just wanted to really go into. I think that is it for my time, Chair. If we have more, come on back. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Sheena. I appreciate that. We have got a little bit of time left, so I have put a minute and 30 on the clock for everyone. We will go around again and just have another quick last bite of the cherry before we finish up. I will fire off first. We have heard a lot of evidence from people that suggests that there should be a hate crimes unit in VicPol. Do you have a view on that at all?

Brett CURRAN: We have just undergone a significant organisational review. One of the recommendations was not to create such a unit. I have been made aware of the submissions that have been made. We, with the programs that we have talked about here, believe that the best approach is to have a statewide policing footprint with people that are aware of the nature of this offending and can escalate that, depending on the seriousness of it, in accordance with all our other things. Of course with any crime theme, if there is a need to create a taskforce or something else, then that is something that we always consider, but it is not something that we are considering at the moment. But that does not mean –

The CHAIR: Was the creation of a hate crimes unit considered as part of the organisational structure review?

Brett CURRAN: I cannot speak to that. We have a range of specialist areas in Victoria Police that look at this particular type of offending, and they investigate it very well. My understanding is that Victoria Police has led the country in our investigative approach to this offending.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. I have got some quick questions if I can try and get through them. Firstly, grooming: from any of the cases of the app-based attacks, have you seen evidence of an adult within the state of Victoria grooming a young person to commit these offences, or is it much more –

Brett CURRAN: I do not believe so. Jeremy?

Jeremy OLIVER: You mean – sorry, can you please clarify?

Michael GALEA: As in, is an adult involved with some of these younger people trying to organise these offences?

Brett CURRAN: Are you talking similar to organised crime, where people are tasking younger people to commit these offences and then benefit from them?

Michael GALEA: Yes.

Jeremy OLIVER: Look, I think there is some type of group. Because it is a group, it is a group of offenders in most of the circumstances, so I think there is an element of probably, I would imagine, the older person in that group of offenders.

Brett CURRAN: We probably should not speculate on that if we do not have –

Jeremy OLIVER: We would need the data and the –

Michael GALEA: Yes, sure. Can you talk in broad terms, without going to cases, about the types of offences these offenders are charged with? What are the actual charges that you are pressing when they are being pressed?

Jeremy OLIVER: It would be assault. There are a number of different assault charges, but mainly assault, robbery and extortion. Robbery is when demands are made or things are taken from you, usually money or belongings or a phone and things like that, and extortion is the transferring of money.

Michael GALEA: Thank you. If I may very quickly, Chair –

The CHAIR: Because I am so generous.

Michael GALEA: You are very generous to me. You talked about the protocols you have with apps like Bumble. Would you be able to provide us with some information about what that looks like, to inform any recommendations that we may wish to make for other apps?

Jeremy OLIVER: We will take that on notice and work with our cybercrime team, who can support us with that.

Michael GALEA: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Mr Puglielli, over to you.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Just briefly, even anecdotally I am aware of situations where there is a migration of the exchange between the victim and the perpetrator, where they are moving on to a different app than the dating app – for example, onto Snapchat – which then opens up a whole range of issues around the geolocation services within that application. Can you take us through what, particularly with Snapchat, one of those instances might look like in practice, where you are engaging with someone where you have got that much more location-specific information that is available to the person who then goes on to commit one of these offences?

Jeremy OLIVER: In some circumstances we have seen the initial interaction starting on Grindr, and then what can happen is the conversation will then migrate to Snapchat because then you can send quicker messages, photos and things like that. But unfortunately Snapchat has the geolocation feature, and we have seen in a couple of instances where the perpetrators have then been able to identify where the victim lives, because you can narrow their geolocation right down to within metres. We have seen home invasions occur where perpetrators have turned up to their house and then assaulted and home-invaded them. I also heard yesterday questions around what other apps have been used in these crimes. The majority of them have been Grindr, but we have seen, I estimate, about 10 other apps. So when we talk around app safety, we should be looking at the entire online platform landscape rather than just focusing in on one particular app, because there are apps like Scruff, Daddyhunt, Locanto, secret encounters, Snapchat, Facebook, Reddit. It is happening across a wide number; they are just highly concentrated in Grindr.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you.

The CHAIR: All right. Mrs Hermans, back over to you. I think Mrs Hermans might be away from her device, so I will go to Ms Watt.

Sheena WATT: Thank you, Chair. I just want to go back to the point – sorry, Ann-Marie – about extortions. I am rather concerned that folks might be too afraid to go to police when in fact they are being extorted by these perpetrators. Is there anything the police could do around this issue? I just sometimes feel that victims think it is perhaps easier to just pay the money and the problem goes away. Do you have any sort of message about what we can do to improve the cases around extortion in particular, which is the one that I am concerned about?

Brett CURRAN: Jeremy can talk to the activities he has undertaken with community to encourage reporting.

Jeremy OLIVER: It is public awareness. With the help of the community partners that we mentioned at the start in our opening remarks, we have been talking about this for two years, and we have been trying to raise public awareness. We have gone out with safety messaging. You name it, we have done it – on the radio and media podcasts. It is raising that profile. This is where we really rely on the other sectors, like councils, whoever can support –

Sheena WATT: That message that pops up at the beginning of Grindr that you worked towards – have you had any luck with any of the other apps in getting that pop-up message about safety issues or whatnot that might draw greater awareness?

Jeremy OLIVER: No. We have only had success with Grindr and their engagement.

Sheena WATT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mrs Hermans, I will now go to you.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Again, thank you. You have been very, very thorough in your answers, and you have given us a great deal of your time. We do have tremendous concerns about these very, very overt hate crimes that are violent – obviously extortion of money, threats, safety. These things are all huge. Again, I want to make sure that we are very careful in what we are defining as a hate crime. Some of these things are very, very obvious, but then there are these other ones that could end up having legs of their own and going all over the place. What things are going to help in terms of how much we should be legislating here in terms of the police having to do their duty? Some of these crimes are crimes that are happening to everybody, not just the

LGBTQ community, in the south-east. The reality is that we have a lot of violence, but there are some things that are specific to the community because they are LGBTIQ. To me, that is what we should be focusing on, and that is what we are trying to look at. Is there anything in particular that you feel has not been covered or that you want to say that you feel is going to be helpful to us if we were to make recommendations to the government?

Brett CURRAN: The legislation is pretty clear and was amended to make it clearer to us and to prosecuting agencies around what constitutes a hate crime – so that is if someone is offended against because of their particular attribute, the protected attribute that they have. I think that is clear. There is offending and then there is behaviour. There is behaviour that does not meet the threshold of an offence, as I have mentioned a few times in our evidence today, but that is not the domain of the police, other than to care for the victims and to refer them to other people. We do not police for priority communities with the exception of the broader community; we police for everybody. It is just that there is a particular kind of offending which is based on a person's protected attribute that we need to take account of and make sure our workforce is aware of and attending to.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Is there an extent to which a crime could be considered to be a hate crime but in actual fact be a crime or, vice versa, could be considered to be a crime but actually have the intention of hate?

Brett CURRAN: Do you mean legally a hate crime?

Ann-Marie HERMANS: When you have people that come to you about a victim or you have arrested someone and they have offended, how do you determine that level of motive for the crime? There is obviously some data on some of these things, but some of these things could end up in different categories. You have your LLOs. What is the process here?

Brett CURRAN: There is the education program. There is prejudice-motivated crime, a sentencing provision that if a person is the victim of a crime that is motivated by prejudice, then that is a thing that the court can take into account in determining a sentence. Then there is the actual offending, a hate crime, which is an actual offence in itself, which is a matter we investigate and we forward to the OPP to determine whether or not a charge is laid. That is the difference between the two things. Then there is criminal offending which would not meet the threshold of involving a hate crime, which is another category again. I hope I have explained that adequately.

The CHAIR: I think Ann-Marie was just trying to get out what the difference is between a hate crime and a normal crime. Would that be fair to say, Ann-Marie?

Ann-Marie HERMANS: To some degree. It is more to do with how the police are handling that understanding and that motivation. You have got people that go into prison, and when they are in prison they are maybe engaged in a gay community, but outside of prison they are not.

The CHAIR: We have to finish up, Ann-Marie. I am so sorry. We will take that as a comment.

That brings an end to this session. Thank you very much for your time and the evidence that you have given. You will be given a proof version of the transcript before it is all approved. But from us, thank you. We appreciate it.

Witnesses withdrew.