

Commission for Children and Young People

Annual report

2025–26

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Commission respectfully acknowledges and celebrates the Traditional Owners of the lands throughout Victoria and pays its respects to their Elders, children and young people of past, current and future generations.

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Commission for Children and Young People

Level 16, 150 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000

Phone: 1300 78 29 78
Email: contact@ccyp.vic.gov.au
Web: ccyp.vic.gov.au

The cover artwork was created by a child from a childcare centre in Melbourne, who was invited to draw something that makes them happy and is a ‘snake swirling in a rainbow [of] shapes’. The drawing captures the simple, unfiltered joy of childhood, which reminds us of why our work matters and who it is for.

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

2 October 2026

The Hon. Lizzie Blandthorn MP
Minister for Children
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Minister

In accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1994*, I am pleased to present the Commission for Children and Young People's annual report for the year ending 30 June 2026.

Yours sincerely



Tracy Beaton
Principal Commissioner

From the

Principal Commissioner



Tracy Beaton
Principal Commissioner

> **…children and young people do better when systems respond early, work together effectively, and remain accountable for the quality and impact of their decisions.**

I commenced in December, 2025 as the third Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, and I have approached this role with both humility and a strong sense of responsibility. I have been deeply appreciative of the warm welcome I have received from colleagues, stakeholders, partners across the sector and Commission staff. I have also been struck by the shared commitment of so many people to improving the lives of children and young people in Victoria. I look forward to working with all those who share this commitment in the years ahead.

I want to begin by acknowledging the work of the previous Commissioners, Bernie Geary, Liana Buchanan, Andrew Jackomos, Justin Mohamed and Meena Singh, whose leadership and dedication helped shape the Commission's important role in promoting the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people. I also want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of Commission staff. This has been a significant year of transition and change, and throughout it staff have continued to carry out the Commission's work with professionalism, care and integrity.

Over the past year, the Commission has completed a number of important legacy pieces of work while also navigating substantial organisational change. This has included the Machinery of Government transfer of regulatory functions across to the Social Services Regulator (SSR). While change of this nature can be complex, it also creates the opportunity to clarify purpose and strengthen focus.

That focus is reflected in our new strategic plan, which sets out a clear ambition: to contribute to a Victoria where all children and young people can thrive. Central to that strategy is our commitment to amplifying the thoughts, views and experiences of children and young people and ensuring these guide our work.

Children and young people are experts in their own lives. Listening to them carefully, and ensuring their voices shape policy, practice and service responses is fundamental to achieving better outcomes. The Commission's work has been strengthened significantly through the contributions of the Commission's Youth Council as they guide our priorities into the future.

The new strategic plan we have finalised for 2026–29 commits us to amplify children and young people's voice and experience, focusing on early intervention to prevent harm, collaborating for impact, using evidence and data to inform our work, and carefully monitoring services in child protection and youth justice. These priorities reflect what

The work also reinforces the need for careful scrutiny of services and systems, particularly in child protection and youth justice, where the consequences of poor decisions, delay or inaction can be profound.

we know: that children and young people do better when systems respond early, work together effectively, and remain accountable for the quality and impact of their decisions.

In June, Dallas Widdicombe joined the Commission as the fourth Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. This partnership is important, and I value the opportunity to work together in ways that recognise the distinct experiences, strengths and rights of Aboriginal children and young people, and that support better outcomes through collaboration, respect and shared purpose.

In this annual report you will read that the Commission finalised two significant inquiries that will continue to shape our work. *Left behind* highlighted the experiences of children and young people who encounter multiple and intersecting service systems, and the ways in which gaps, fragmentation and delay can leave them without the support they need. It reinforced the importance of earlier intervention, better coordination and listening more closely to children and young people about what would make a difference in their lives.

With us, not against us provided a timely and important contribution to conversations about youth justice. At a time when public debate about youth crime has often been heightened, the inquiry underscored the importance of looking beyond behaviour alone to understand the circumstances that shape children and young people's experiences. It highlighted the need for responses that are therapeutic, evidence-informed and focused on support, connection and prevention, rather than simply drawing young people further into the criminal justice system.

These inquiries progressed in parallel with the Commission's continuing oversight and advocacy work. Across youth justice, out-of-home care and child protection our oversight was informed by monitoring of key data showing what is happening in these systems for vulnerable children. Our Independent Visitor Program in youth justice complemented this with the perspectives of children and young people themselves, as did our direct engagement in advocating for individual children in care.

As in past years, this report also presents data and thematic insights from our child death inquiries, which make a vital contribution to systemic change to strengthen support and reduce the risk in care.

The range of our work this year reinforces the importance of the Commission as an independent body that is dedicated to evidence, informed by data, and grounded in the voices of children and young people. The work also reinforces the need for careful scrutiny of services and systems, particularly in child protection and youth justice, where the consequences of poor decisions, delay or inaction can be profound.

I see the role of the Commission as both independent and collaborative. We must be prepared to speak clearly when systems are not meeting the needs of children and young people, but we must also work constructively with government, services, communities and advocates to achieve meaningful change.

> **Children and young people are experts in their own lives. Listening to them carefully, and ensuring their voices shape policy, practice and service responses is fundamental to achieving better outcomes.**

Lasting improvement depends on shared effort and a willingness to come together around what children and young people need to be safe, supported and able to thrive. We look forward to sharing our thoughts with the community.

As I begin in this role, I do so with optimism as well as determination. I am grateful for the strong foundations laid by those who came before me, for the dedication of the Commission's staff, and for the opportunity to work alongside children and young people, families, communities and partner organisations. I look forward to continuing this work together, and to improving the experiences and outcomes of children and young people across Victoria.

From the

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People



Dallas Widdicombe
Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

We know that connection with family, community and culture is central not just to Aboriginal children and young people, but to every child and young person who needs help and the hope of a better life.

Appointed Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People only in the last days of this reporting year, I commenced at a time of deep reflection, as we set a new direction with a changed role and, alongside me, a new Principal Commissioner, Tracy Beaton, who herself began only in December.

I am incredibly proud to begin at this time, and I'm keenly aware of my responsibility to build on the powerful legacies of Uncle Andrew Jackomos, Justin Mohamed and, most recently, Meena Singh in continuing the Commission's work for the Aboriginal children and young people of Victoria. In the early stages of my appointment, it is apparent to me that this aim depends crucially on working with children and young people themselves, not just to represent their voices, but to gain their often profound insights into addressing the issues that deeply affect their lives.

Already I have seen how the Commission advocates for children and young people. Beyond that, it also empowers them to advocate in their own right.

Too often we see children and young people denied agency in what happens to them, and it is a sad reality that this denial unjustly impacts Aboriginal children and young people more than their peers in the spheres of their greatest vulnerability – in child protection and out-of-home care, and in the youth justice system.

In working towards solutions to these injustices, it has been a privilege to meet the Commission's Youth Council, and particularly to connect with its Aboriginal members. With our youth engagement staff, they have enabled the privilege of engaging with children and young people in a diversity of settings.

That engagement is part of the fabric of the Commission's work. Every month, the volunteers from our Independent Visitor Program speak to children and young people in Victoria's youth justice centres. These confidential conversations can only exist on the trust our volunteers have built. That trust helps to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people in closed environments that exist largely beyond public scrutiny.

As you will read in Tracy's foreword and elsewhere in these pages, the perspectives of children and young people this year informed *Left behind*, our inquiry into referrals in the child protection system, and *With us, not against us*, our inquiry into the experiences of children under 14 who experience criminal justice involvement.

Despite the implementation of some recommendations, full realisation of the recommended reforms remains unfinished business in an increasingly politicised environment.

The Aboriginal children and young people we consulted with for these inquiries asked for systems to respond to what they actually need, to support them earlier, and for the chance to live free from harm, instability, and alienation. Their voices led our recommendations.

With Tracy, it will be my ongoing mission to pursue the full implementation of the recommendations from these inquiries, many of which directly address the specific injustices imposed upon Aboriginal children and young people in particular.

Too many of the recommendations, including to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14, have been repeated from our earlier inquiries, including *Our youth, our way*.

This year marked five years since the tabling of that inquiry, the Commission's most comprehensive account to date of what is necessary to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.

Despite the implementation of some recommendations, full realisation of the recommended reforms remains unfinished business in an increasingly politicised environment. This year saw punitive shifts in the youth justice landscape that in fact led to worsening outcomes in the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.

As we stated in the media following the launch of *With us, not against us*, this approach harms all children and young people, priming them to begin or keep offending, rather than addressing the fundamental and unjust causes of their criminal justice involvement.

In many ways, this is a crisis of evidence in the formation of critical public policy. The call to implement our recommendations is no less than a call to follow the evidence in framing solutions that work to provide not only wellbeing for children and young people, but also safer communities.

We also know that with more than 150,000 child protection reports every year, we face formidable challenges as a society – both to reduce the numbers coming to the attention of the system, and to ensure that those who do receive the support they need.

In the face of these challenges, there are significant reasons for hope.

This has been a historic year. The signing of Victoria's Statewide Treaty and establishment of Gellung Warl marks the first formalised relationship of its kind in Australia, with a First Peoples' representative body now holding real decision-making power and independent functions, including the ability to evaluate and monitor government progress towards outcomes directed to First Peoples.

For the Commission, this changes the landscape we work within. I look forward to seeing what this new relationship makes possible for the Aboriginal children and young people at the centre of our work.

This year our work once again highlighted the broader benefit of Aboriginal-led solutions for all children and young people in Victoria. To give just one example, the

The Aboriginal children and young people we consulted with for these inquiries asked for systems to respond to what they actually need, to support them earlier, and for the chance to live free from harm, instability, and alienation. Their voices led our recommendations.

Left behind inquiry found that the practice of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations leads to better engagement with the families who need support to flourish outside of the child protection system.

We know that connection with family, community and culture is central not just to Aboriginal children and young people, but to every child and young person who needs help and the hope of a better life.

These are the challenges, but also the hopes. This is the work ahead of us, and with Treaty now delivering a stronger vision for self-determined systems, I believe we are better positioned to take this on.

This work cannot be carried forward without the expertise and commitment of the Commission's staff. In my brief time as Commissioner, I have already seen the values and collegiality that drive their work to ensure a dedicated and independent focus on better lives for all children and young people. It is my honour to join them in that purpose.

From the

Commission Youth Council



Members of the Commission's Youth Council

The past year included many exciting opportunities for our Youth Council. Some memorable moments included speaking at large conferences alongside our commissioners, working with staff on systemic inquiries and policy submissions, and partnering wherever possible to make change and ensure all children and young people in Victoria are given the opportunity to live a safe and happy life.

In 2025–26, our Youth Council continued to grow and evolve. We expanded our membership and matured in the ways that we seek to ensure children and young people are directly influencing decisions that impact their lives.

New members bring new ideas. They bring new perspectives to the group and help us involve young people outside of the Youth Council in our work.

After reviewing the submissions for our *What matters most* project in 2025, it became clear to us that so many children and young people don't get the opportunity to have their say about what is important to them.

This inspired us to speak to as many young people as possible during the planning process for the Commission's Strategic Plan 2026–29. We connected with over 450 children and young people to understand their priorities, which directly informed the new plan.

Our involvement in the strategic planning process speaks to how we are valued by the Commission. Not only did we run our own workshop alongside commissioners and senior staff, but some of us also participated in the staff workshop to share our perspectives. After a draft plan was developed, the commissioners came to us directly for further feedback.

It is exciting to help shape the strategic direction of the Commission's work for the next three years, and we look forward to bringing the vision of this plan to life.

This year we have continued travelling down a path that excites us as a group. A path that shows when children and young people are given the space to help inform decisions, genuinely positive changes are possible for children who need it most. We don't want to stop here. And we won't.

Spotlight: Meena Singh



Meena Singh
Former Acting Principal Commissioner and Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

Meena Singh, a proud Yorta Yorta and Indian woman served as Victoria's third Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People from April 2022 to December 2025 and acted as Principal Commissioner from March 2025 to November 2025. Meena is celebrated for her depth of knowledge, her fierce leadership, and her genuine connection with Aboriginal children and young people across Victoria.

Meena's warmth and ability to relate with people in her time as Commissioner was remarkable, coupled with her strategic vision for creating lasting systemic change. Meena has a special way of making children and young people feel seen, heard, and supported. One of the biggest joys in her time as Commissioner was working with members of the Commission's Youth Council.

Meena spent time with Aboriginal children and young people across Victoria, visiting them in youth justice detention centres, residential care, secure welfare, youth groups, schools and childcare centres. As Commissioner, she carried the stories of children and young people into every engagement and conversation and advocated for their needs to be met.

From the beginning of her tenure, Meena had a strong focus on supporting organisations to establish culturally safe environments through the implementation of Child Safe Standard 1. Meena led the creation of the guide for *Understanding cultural safety for Aboriginal children and young people* and was uncompromising in her determination to see Aboriginal children and young people enjoying their cultural rights, expressing their cultural pride and feeling safe and supported to participate fully,

Meena cared deeply about supporting positive educational experiences for Aboriginal students. In 2022, she travelled around the state to hear from Aboriginal young people about their educational experiences and inform the *Let us learn* systemic inquiry. This inquiry made 47 recommendations to drive reform, including strengthening education support specifically for Aboriginal students in care.

Meena gave evidence on several occasions at the historic Yoorrook hearings where she amplified the voices and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people with strength and authenticity. Meena expertly shared evidence from the Commission about vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people in both the Child Protection and Youth Justice systems, influencing powerful recommendations in the Yoorrook for Justice report. In June 2024, Meena shared space at Yoorrook to elevate youth voices and gave evidence alongside the Commission's Youth Council member Elias Jarvis, highlighting the racism experienced by Aboriginal students in educational settings.

In 2025, while serving as both Principal Commissioner and Commissioner for Children and Young People Meena demonstrated outstanding leadership and commitment, navigating the Commission through significant change with kindness, care and integrity.

As the Commission farewells Meena and wishes her well in the next chapter of her journey, we thank her for her wisdom, her compassion and generosity of spirit, and her work advocating for systems that support all children and young people to thrive.

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Report terminology and conventions

Language in this report

The term ‘Aboriginal’ used in this report refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Case studies and thematic studies

Case studies and thematic studies have been included to illustrate the work of the Commission for Children and Young People and key themes. Pseudonyms have been used, and details altered, to protect personal privacy.

Rounding

In tables and figures in this report, rounding may result in percentages not adding up to 100.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Commission	Commission for Children and Young People
DE	Department of Education
DFFH	Department of Families Fairness and Housing
DJCS	Department of Justice and Community Safety
FRD	Financial Reporting Directions
SSR	Social Services Regulator

About the

Commission for Children and Young People

The Commission for Children and Young People is an independent statutory body that promotes improvement in policies and practices affecting the safety and wellbeing of Victorian children and young people.

We have a particular focus on Aboriginal children and young people and all children and young people in the out-of-home care and youth justice systems.

What we do

At the Commission we:

- promote the interests, safety and wellbeing of children and young people
- amplify children and young people's voices and experiences to influence decision making and community understanding
- provide independent oversight of the systems that impact children and young people, particularly child protection, out-of-home care and youth justice
- drive improvement in policy, legislation and practice.

Our vision

Children and young people in Victoria live safely and thrive, and their voices are heard, respected and acted on.

Our values

- We put the lived experience and rights of children and young people at the centre of everything we do, always engaging with respect and dignity.
- We are strong, considered and determined.
- We are transparent and accountable.
- We embrace the diversity of people, experiences and perspectives to strengthen our impact.
- We recognise the importance of our independence.
- We accomplish more when we work together.

Legislation

Our objectives, functions and powers are primarily outlined in the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012*.

Our priorities

The Commission's work focuses on the five outcomes set out in our *Strategic Plan 2026–29*.

Priority 1: Amplifying the voice and experience of children and young people

Place the voices, experiences and rights of children and young people at the centre of the services that impact them.

Priority 2: Shaping systems and driving better decisions

Advance understanding of the strengths and unique needs of children and young people to drive decisions and systemic change.

Priority 3: Promoting earlier support

Promote earlier and coordinated service system approaches to support children and young people to thrive.

Priority 4: Collaborating for impact

Promote connections across service systems and stakeholders to strengthen practice and improve outcomes.

Priority 5: Robust monitoring of service systems

Strengthen oversight of services that impact children and young people with a focus on child protection, out-of-home care and youth justice.

Highlights: our year in review

Inquiries provided systemic insights to guide reform

The Commission's inquiries this year cast a strong spotlight and called for action on critical issues impacting children and young people in child protection, out-of-home care and the youth justice systems.

Our *Left behind* systemic inquiry tabled in Parliament in June examined the effectiveness of referrals by Child Protection to services in managing risk to children and young people. When a report to Child Protection doesn't meet the threshold for statutory intervention, the child's family may be referred to other support services. These referrals are often unsuccessful, leaving some children and young people in unsafe situations and continuing to experience harm. The report makes 13 recommendations to reform systems to promote meaningful intervention earlier in children and young people's lives (see page 41).

We also conducted *With us, not against us*, which examined the experiences of children under 14 who enter the criminal justice system, proposing alternatives to an ineffective criminal justice response. This includes by raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14, together with earlier supports to keep children out of the criminal justice system and effective responses when a child engages in offending behaviour (see page 29). The inquiry was tabled in July 2026.

The Commission also completed an individual inquiry regarding services and conditions provided to an Aboriginal child in residential care and commenced an individual inquiry into a young person in youth justice custody focusing on safety issues.

Thirty-five child death inquiries completed through the year delivered 18 new recommendations to strengthen the service responses and reduce the risks of children in similar circumstances.

More broadly, the Commission also continued to monitor the implementation of previous inquiry recommendations. Update reports for the *Let us learn* and *Our youth, our way* systemic inquiries are published on our website, identifying the need for further work and a higher priority for action in some areas, and for further progress in others.

Monitoring and oversight brought key youth justice issues into focus

The Commission continued to conduct systemic and individual monitoring of youth justice centres via analysis of data and direct engagement with young people in custody. This work continues to play a vital role in identifying issues and informing improvements to the youth justice system (see page 31).

Our monitoring this year revealed the impact of harsher sentencing and bail laws that are leading to increased numbers of young people being held in custody and introducing more young people to the system for the first time. With 59 per cent held on remand awaiting trial or sentencing, many young people are waiting long periods in custody for legal matters to be resolved.

Demand created by holding more young people in custody is contributing to a pressured system with resulting significant increases in incidents and continuing use of lockdowns and isolations, despite improvements in some areas. These pressures contribute not only to the harms that impact young people in custody but reduce their access to programs and education that that are critical services to support rehabilitation.

Now in its fifteenth year, the Commission's Independent Visitor Program complemented our systemic monitoring through monthly visits to youth justice centres and individual contact with young people. Access to programs and education and access to leisure activities for greater activity and stimulation were the two most common issues raised. The Independent Visitor Program ensures that the Commission capture the individual perspectives of young people to support timely resolution of their concerns and needs in custody.

This year, the Commission also continued to work with the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) in the South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group. The Commission supported a Youth Advisory Group that was instrumental in broader engagement with children and young people on the issues and potential solutions related to the overrepresentation of South Sudanese Australian children and young people in the youth justice system. The Youth Advisory Group informed the recommendations put forward by the Expert Working Group in their final report.

Child and youth voices and experiences influenced ideas and action for change

The role of children and young people in the work of the Commission was consolidated and expanded this year. The voices and lived experiences of children and young people were amplified on multiple levels. Youth Council members collaborated on submissions and appearances at two parliamentary inquiries on youth engagement and education. They also spoke alongside our commissioners at events such as the MacKillop Institute's *Leading the way* conference.

Supported by our youth engagement project officers, children and young people also informed our two major systemic inquiries this year – *Left behind* and *With us, not against us*. Importantly, children and young people were not only engaged, but informed outcomes, including the findings and recommendations of these inquiries. Consultations for the South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group were also extensively guided by the perspectives of children and young people.

Our Youth Council and youth engagement project officers were also central to the development of our 2026–29 Strategic Plan, supporting around 450 children and young people to share their views about what matters most to them. Young people were also actively included in the Commission's media plans, further building their capacity to advocate in their own right.

As well as gaining the insight of children and young people to inform its work, the Commission's consultations provided opportunities for progression and leadership from Youth Advisory Group member to youth engagement project officer; from consultation participant to Youth Council member. Former Youth Council members also progressed to youth engagement roles in other organisations, further expanding the benefit of this work (see page 21).

Key operational changes

This year marked a period of significant change for the Commission with new leadership and the development of a new three-year strategic plan, office relocation and the transfer of regulatory functions.

New Commissioners

The Commission welcomed new leadership this financial year.

Tracy Beaton commenced as Victoria's new Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People on 22 December 2025. This followed the departure of Commissioner Meena Singh in December 2025 (see page 9 for our spotlight on Commissioner Singh) and Argiri Alisandratos, who was Acting Principal Commissioner in November and December 2025.

On 15 June 2026, Dallas Widdicombe commenced as Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.

New strategic plan

In March 2026 the Commission consulted with children, young people and sector stakeholders to inform our new strategic plan. The 2026–29 plan sets out strategic priorities to guide our work for the next three years and to strengthen our impact on the systems that affect Victoria's children and young people.

Office relocation

In August 2025 the Commission completed a major office relocation as part of the Victorian Government's consolidation of its central business district office footprint. The relocation and improvements to the new office were delivered on time, within budget and with minimal disruption to our operations.

Transfer of regulatory functions

On 2 July 2025 the then Premier commissioned an independent Rapid Child Safety Review in response to allegations of abuse in childcare centres. The Commission engaged with the review to help progress reform of child safety regulation focused on promoting the safest possible outcomes for children and young people (see 'Promoting the interests and rights of children and young people' on page 59).

In response to the Rapid Child Safety Review's findings and recommendations, the Victorian Government made several Machinery of Government changes. In February 2026, as part of these changes, the administration of the Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme moved from the Commission to the Social Services Regulator (SSR). Changes were also made to legislation, such as improved information-sharing provisions, with the intention of bolstering child safety outcomes. Recognising the importance of adequately resourcing the Reportable Conduct Scheme, SSR also received extra resources to enable it to effectively administer this framework.

In the lead-up to the transfer of functions, the Commission worked closely and collaboratively with DFFH and SSR to deliver this significant change project on time, ensuring a smooth transition of functions including associated staff, systems and records.

SSR will report on the administration of the Child Safe Standards and Reportable Conduct Scheme in its annual report.

The Commission will continue to deliver its critical oversight and monitoring functions. Our focus remains on promoting the interests, rights, safety and wellbeing of children in Victoria. We will also continue to work with all child safety regulators to strengthen and improve child safety outcomes.

Strengthening the engagement and participation of children and young people



Children and young people's views and lived experiences are fundamental to everything we do at the Commission. This year, we continued to strengthen the ways children and young people shape and deliver on our priorities and influence decisions of services and government that affect them.

The Commission's youth engagement project officers and Youth Council, along with the input of other children and young people across Victoria, have been central to our achievements in 2025–26.

Welcoming new faces and ideas



Members of the Commission's Youth Council and Commission staff

The Commission's Youth Council is an ever-evolving group of young people with significant capability and diverse experiences, including representation of proud Aboriginal young people. They inform, guide and support the delivery of the Commission's priorities, including by initiating and implementing their own projects that enhance the understanding of children and young people's needs and solutions to problems.

This year we farewelled several members who finished their terms in our Youth Council and have moved on to the next step in their journey. We thank each of them for their enormous impact and for sharing so much of themselves in the hopes of creating a better world for other children and young people. Several new members joined our Youth Council, bringing different ideas and perspectives to our work.

Reflection from a departing Youth Council member – Julia Hunt

Having been part of the Youth Council for almost four years, I have been lucky to watch it grow and evolve. I have seen new members arrive with different experiences and ideas, find their confidence and make their mark on the work of the Commission. What has stayed with me most is the trust that has been placed in us: to bring our experiences into rooms where decisions are being made about the lives of children and young people, and to know that what we say can help shape what happens next.

We often talk about giving young people a voice, but being part of the Youth Council has taught me that there is a difference between being heard and having influence. Some of the most meaningful moments in the Youth Council have been the quieter ones, when a question has shifted a conversation, an experience has challenged an assumption, or an idea has opened up a possibility that had not been considered before. This is what sharing power with young people can look like: not simply making room for us at the table, but being willing to let us change the conversation.

As I finish my time on the Youth Council, I feel incredibly grateful to have worked alongside such an outstanding group of young people. One of the best parts of this experience has been learning from one another, supporting each other, advocating for change together and seeing ideas move from a conversation into something that can make a difference. I am proud of what we have built together, but perhaps even more grateful for the people who have made the experience what it has been. The Youth Council has never belonged to any one person. Its strength is in the people who come through it, each bringing something of themselves and leaving it a little stronger for those who follow.

I hope the young people who join the Youth Council next feel what so many of us have felt here: that their experiences matter, their questions are worth asking, and their ideas can help shape what happens next.

'For me, my biggest highlight overall has been feeling like I belong somewhere, like my opinion matters – and not only that, but that my opinion is valued and seen as an expert within my own experience and my own right. The Youth Council has been an exceptionally safe space for me. I have loved doing the work that I do and the events I attend and speak at, but at the heart it's where I feel seen and heard – it's been really healing for me.
– Jasmine, Youth Council member

'When I joined the Commission's Youth Council, I didn't really know what to expect. I was delightfully surprised to receive calls and opportunities immediately and ways to engage in real, tangible change or projects I had never had the chance to contribute to before. The program is so rich and truly values young people's voices and ideas, and I feel truly heard and valued.'
– Shanay, Youth Council member

'Working alongside the Youth Council and within the Commission is always a highlight of my day or week, and this year was no exception. The public engagements and behind the scenes work on inquiries and ideas was amazing to be a part of, and I am excited to see what the next year holds.'
– Allegra, Youth Council member

The Commission's youth engagement project officer roles are designated for young people between the ages of 18 and 25 and are part of our ongoing approach to embedding young people in our work. This year, the young people in these roles have continued to have impact themselves while elevating the influence of children and young people across the Commission's functions. This has focused on driving improvements across the systems that impact them.

'As a young person, I was drawn to being part of the Commission because of the effort I could see they put into having children and young people's voices inform the work they do. I knew it wouldn't simply be a role to fill a seat but a chance to advocate and to empower the children and young people the Commission engages with – so my peers know there's someone further advocating for their voices to be heard and not altered to suit the palate of others.'
– Louisa, Youth Engagement Project Officer

'My transition from being a member of the Youth Advisory Group on the South Sudanese Expert Working Group to becoming a Youth Engagement Project Officer was incredibly important to me. The opportunity to move into an employment role validated my story, my insights and my advocacy as a young person, showing me that my experiences and contributions truly mattered. It demonstrated that the Commission values the voices of young people, not only by providing a platform for us to be heard, but also by creating opportunities for us to grow, develop our skills and build our capacity as advocates and leaders. Over the past nine months in this role, I've learnt so much and have loved building our connection with more children and young people, helping shape our inquiries and our strategic plan.'
– Lueth, Youth Engagement Project Officer

Shaping and delivering the Commission's priorities

Over the past 12 months, children and young people have contributed to and critically influenced the Commission's work across a range of issues impacting children's rights, safety and wellbeing. This includes:

- promoting child- and youth-centred systems reforms
- influencing policy and practice
- amplifying the views of children and young people to improve understanding about issues impacting them
- helping to shape the Commission's new strategic plan.

Supporting child- and youth-centred solutions to systems issues

Young people were actively involved in our two systemic inquiries: *Left behind* and *With us, not against us*. Members of our Youth Council were pivotal to both inquiries, assisting with the development of consultation questions and methods, connecting with and consulting with children and young people to hear their experiences and contributing to findings and recommendations.

Both inquiries include the generous and thoughtful contributions of children and young people with lived experience across Victoria. Their voices and experiences were critical in informing the solutions needed to improve systems and services for children and young people (see page 41 for more information about *Left behind* and page 29 for more information about *With us, not against us*).

'I'm really proud of all the inquiries we've tabled as they're direct issues that affect young people's lives immensely and are in their own words. Speaking of "In our own words", [it] was the very inquiry that connected me back to the Youth Council as I was asked when I was 15 in foster care to share my experience. I'm proud of the way the Commission and the Youth Council works together to forefront young people's voices.'
– Jasmine, Youth Council member

South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group Youth Advisory Group

This year, the Commission continued to support the Youth Advisory Group in the final stages of the South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group project. The Youth Advisory Group contributed to the Expert Working Group's final report, which seeks to address the over-representation of South Sudanese Australian young people in Victoria's youth justice system. The Commission also continued to support engagement with South Sudanese Australian young people in custody and the faith-based mentorship program operating in youth justice facilities

'Since joining the South Sudanese Australian expert working group over the past 12 months, the experience has been extraordinary ... I believe the most impactful work that I've been a part of is with the Commission's Youth Advisory Group...'
– Nachida, Youth Advisory Group member

Influencing policy and practice

Children and young people have shaped the Commission's submissions and advice and represented their views directly to decision-makers, informing Parliamentary findings and recommendations.

Youth Council members provided critical input into the Commission's submission and appeared alongside the Former Acting Principal Commissioner at a hearing for the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices. The inquiry's final report reflects the evidence provided by the Commission and Youth Council to help shape how Victoria can more meaningfully engage with children and young people. The inquiry found that young people are under-represented in engagement processes and that good engagement meets young people in their spaces, explains why their input counts, avoids stuffy formats, and adapts to the ways young people want to take part.



Former Commissioner Singh presenting alongside Youth Council members, Allegra and Julia at a Parliamentary inquiry hearing

'The highlight of this year in the Youth Council had to be speaking in parliament alongside Commissioner Meena Singh and Youth Council member Julia. Taking part in the inquiry and being able to provide a young voice to some of the most powerful ministers in the state was both a privilege and an honour.'
– Allegra, Youth Council member

Youth Council members promoted equitable and safe education by informing the content of the Commission's submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Public School Funding, participating in Education Equity Alliance workshops and providing advice on the Department of Education's PROTECT guidance about child safety for schools. See page 61 for more information about improving equity in education.

'I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to represent the Youth Council, where I actively contributed to Education Equity Alliance workshops focused on improving fairness and access in Victorian schools, particularly in lower socioeconomic areas. I collaborated with fellow Youth Council members, representatives from the Department of Education and others deeply engaged in the school system, including teachers and principals. It was inspiring to see how many people are committed to creating better outcomes for students and to work together on practical ways to bridge inequities and ensure young people are genuinely heard.'
– Emily, Youth Council member

Hearing from children and young people and amplifying their voices

In 2025–26 our youth engagement project officers and Youth Council members engaged directly with children and young people, including in education, out-of-home care and youth justice settings, to hear about the issues important to them informing areas of work across the Commission.

'One of my favourite moments the past year was visiting Wyndham Central College, where we were able to spend time with students who shared what matters most to them. Hearing directly from young people and sharing their experiences and ideas reminded me why this work is so rewarding. Another highlight was speaking at the Community of Practice, where I had the chance to share my perspective as a young person and connect with so many passionate people.'
– Riya, Youth Council member

Our youth engagement project officers and Youth Council members engaged with a broad range of government and sector stakeholders, presenting alongside Commissioners at several conferences and forums. These opportunities allowed young people to amplify what they heard and the broader work of the Commission and to improve outcomes across a range of areas impacting children's rights, safety and wellbeing.

Key issues that young people presented on over the past year included:

- meaningful collaboration with children and having challenging conversations with children about sexual safety at the MacKillop Institute's *Lead the Way* conference
- trauma-informed, rights-centred system for young people at the 54 Reasons *Accountable Together* child rights symposium
- children and young people's aspirations for their education at the Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education's *Doing School Differently* conference
- responding to family violence and child safety disclosures at the DE's Outer East Respectful Relationship and Child Safety Expo
- child-centred family violence reforms at the Goulburn Child and Family Services Alliance conference.

'The gift of the Youth Council is that I've been able to find my own voice – a voice that was once too scared to be heard – and use it to challenge systems and youth-centred workplaces that fail to partner with youth voices. It's been incredible attending events on behalf of the Youth Council and the Commission, including the Youth Strategy Forum (2025) and Doing Schools Differently (2026), where I've been able to directly contribute to discussions relating to youth. Presenting at the MacKillop Conference (2025) remains a highlight of my experience – by co-creating a powerful and moving keynote, the audience were moved to tears and motivated to meet children where they're at in their youth-centred roles. The number of people approaching and probing the Youth Council about our perspectives and beliefs was a testament to our impact; our voices ignited a curiosity for change in key stakeholders.'
– Gonya, Youth Council member

'Attending and speaking at the 54 Reasons child rights symposium is definitely a highlight for me in the past year, [where] I was able to network with a young, passionate advocate like myself. She presented before me with her group at the front of the room, and when it came to my turn to speak, I stood from my table, she encouraged me to come to the front where she stood.'
– Jasmine, Youth Council member

Shaping our 2026–29 Strategic Plan

The Commission's 2026–29 Strategic Plan was enhanced and shaped by the voices of children and young people. More than 450 children and young people from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences across Victoria informed the new plan and helped us define our priorities through in-person and online consultations, an online survey and Youth Council workshops. Their views will also inform our ongoing advocacy for systems improvements for children and young people.



Illustration of Youth Council Strategic Planning Workshop discussion

Oversight and monitoring of youth justice

When children and young people are detained in closed environments such as youth justice centres, independent oversight of the conditions of their confinement and their treatment is critical.

In 2025–26, our work in this area included:

- conducting a systemic inquiry into the experiences of children under 14 years of age in contact with the criminal justice system
- establishing an individual inquiry into service provision to a young person while in youth justice custody
- advocating for systemic improvements in youth justice custody
- monitoring trends and assessing responses to incidents in youth justice custody
- monitoring trends in the use of force, isolation and lockdowns
- operating a monthly Independent Visitor Program at each youth justice centre, including the reopened Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre
- providing a standby function in case children are detained by Victoria Police in preventative detention under the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*
- monitoring the exercise of Victoria Police powers to transport 10- and 11-year-olds under section 68 of the *Youth Justice Act 2024*.

With us, not against us: *A systemic inquiry to learn from the experiences of children who entered the criminal justice system before 14*



In December 2024, the Commission established a systemic inquiry into the experiences of children under 14 years of age in contact with the criminal justice system.

We established this inquiry because we see service provision that does not address the factors that lead to children being criminalised at a young age. The evidence tells us that when children and young people are in early contact with the criminal justice system, they are at a higher risk of becoming entrenched in the system as adolescents and adults.

As part of this inquiry, we:

- spoke with children and young people with lived experience of the justice system
- conducted targeted file reviews
- consulted with stakeholders
- analysed data from DJCS, DFFH, DE, the Crime Statistics Agency and Victoria Police.

The experiences of children and young people were central to the inquiry. We looked at what happened in their lives before they entered the criminal justice system. Many of them experienced significant harm and adversity and

moved in and out of systems and services that did not effectively meet their needs.

We found that too many children experiencing significant vulnerability are criminalised and channelled into a criminal justice response at an early age instead of receiving support that would make a difference in their lives. Once in contact with the criminal justice system, children are exposed to long-lasting harms, including from negative and sometimes violent interactions with police, multiple episodes of remand and harmful practices in custody.

The inquiry also highlighted that the criminal justice system disproportionately impacts Aboriginal children, their families and communities, as well as children from other communities that experience racism and marginalisation.

While we must work to prevent children entering the criminal justice system, the inquiry also outlined that children who are placed in youth justice facilities must have access to services that support rehabilitation and prevent reoffending. Custody needs to be safer, more effective and considered as a last resort.

The final report, *With us, not against us,* was tabled in the Victorian Parliament on 30 July 2026. Building on existing evidence, including our *Left behind* inquiry and the Yoorrook Justice Commission, the report sets out 15 recommendations about how systems can respond earlier, collectively and more effectively so Victoria can better support children, prevent future harm and build safer and stronger communities. The recommendations call for the Victorian Government to:

- work across systems to improve outcomes for children and prioritise prevention and early support to keep children out of the criminal justice system
- improve responses when a child engages in offending behaviour so they are timely, evidence-based, therapeutic and right for their age and development
- raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years and provide an alternative service response for children under 14
- make custody safer, more effective and rehabilitative for young people to reduce the likelihood of future offending.

As well as making recommendations to the Victorian Government, a key aim of the inquiry was to help improve community understanding of the issues and solutions. To support this, the Commission embedded several stories of children and young people throughout the final report and published an animation about 'Liam' https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/inquiries/systemic-inquiries/criminal-justice-inquiry/. Liam shared his story about what would have made a difference in his life in the hope of making things better for other children.

Inquiry into service provision to a young person in youth justice

In April 2026, the Commission established an individual inquiry into service provision to a young person while they were in youth justice custody in 2025. The inquiry seeks to understand the custodial conditions and experiences of the young person with a focus on staff supervision, assaults, risk and harm including sexual behaviour towards the young person by other young people, health responses and complaints management following incidents.

The inquiry will be finalised in 2026–27 and provided to relevant government ministers.

Advocating for system improvements in youth justice

This year, the Commission continued to draw attention to a range of issues impacting children and young people's safety and wellbeing in youth justice custody, including:

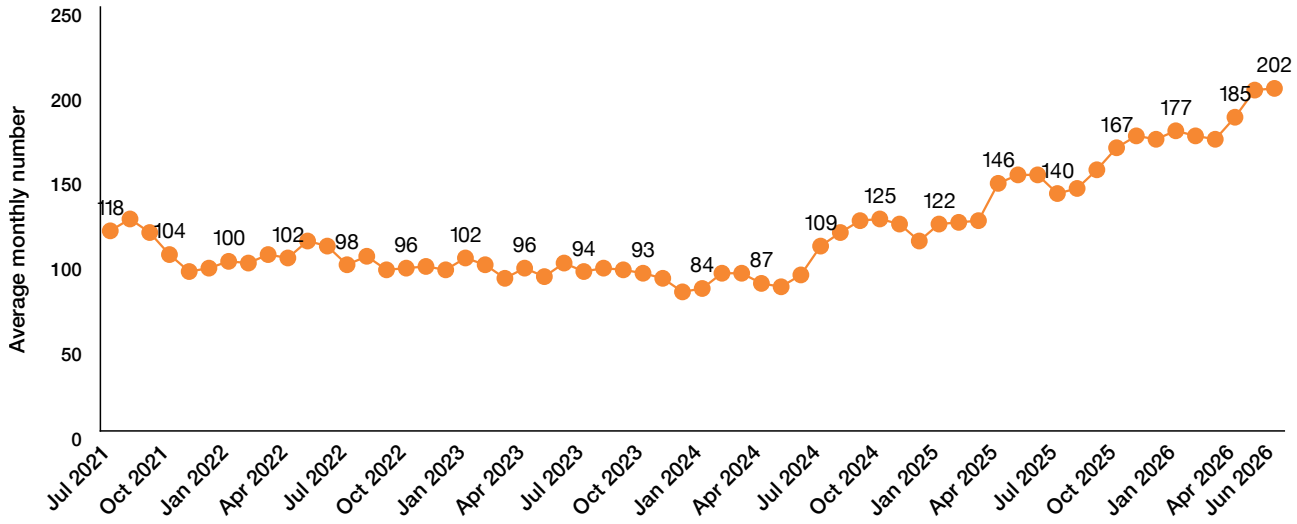
- changes to sentencing and bail laws, with flow-on effects for young people in custody including increasing population and system pressures
- prolonged isolations for young people
- restrictive practices following serious incidents.

Increasing population and system pressures due to impacts of sentencing and bail amendments

The number of children and young people being held in Victoria's youth justice centres (Parkville, Cherry Creek and Malmsbury) continues to rise (Figure 1). The Commission has previously raised concerns about the government's toughened bail laws because they would result in more young people being placed into custody. We maintain strong opposition to changes to legislation that children and young people aged 14 and above who are charged with certain serious offences can have their matters heard in adult courts, face adult sentences and be eligible to serve life sentences (see page 60 for more information). Together these changes to sentencing and bail laws have increased and will continue to increase the population in youth justice custodial centres. These changes have resulted in a broader group of children and young people being remanded into custody. While the government's stated intention surrounding new laws was to capture serious repeat offenders, in practice, it appears that the laws are capturing many children and young people with no prior criminal history. These children may then be remanded into custody without timely resolution of matters. Further, Aboriginal young people and young people from multicultural backgrounds continue to be over-represented in the custodial population.

In 2025–26, the average monthly population in youth justice custody increased by 35 per cent to 172 young people, up from 127 in the previous financial year. There has been a 36 per cent increase in the number of young people on remand and a 35 per cent increase in the number of sentenced young people in custody since 2024–25. Of the population in youth justice centres in 2025–26, 59 per cent were held on remand, meaning they were awaiting trial or sentencing. The number of unsentenced young people continues to impact the stability of the centres and is a key driver of the increasing number of children and young people being held in custody. The rising numbers in custody have also resulted in the need to re-open Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre, previously closed in December 2023.

Figure 1: Average monthly number of children and young people in youth justice custody, July 2021 to June 2026



The increasing number of children and young people in custody, together with workforce capability issues, infrastructure constraints and children and young people presenting with greater levels of complexity, is placing significant pressure on Victoria's youth justice custodial centres. The Commission is concerned that these factors are adversely impacting the safety and rehabilitative needs of children and young people being held in these environments including:

- fewer placement options for young people in youth justice centres resulting in potentially unsuitable placements, restrictive conditions and a greater risk of incidents
- the risk of increased use of isolations and lockdowns due to staff shortages to manage youth justice centres
- the potential for reduced access to appointments, programs, education and visits – which are essential to health, community connection and access to justice – due to services and staff being stretched
- a new cohort of young people being exposed to custodial environments.

In 2025–26, there was a 53 per cent increase in the number of Category One[1] incidents within youth justice centres from the previous year, noting that the population increased by only 35 per cent during this period. The Commission notes that this includes incidents that have not yet been substantiated. The rate of incidents has increased each year for the past three financial years, rising to 13.4 incidents per 10 young people in custody.[2]

The Commission notes that there have been some changes that have likely led to a greater number of Category One incidents in certain categories. For example, many sexualised behaviours have been reclassified as a Category One incident. The introduction of a Harmful Sexual Behaviours Framework may have also impacted reporting.

Noting these changes, there were substantial increases in certain types of incidents, including:[3]

- client-to-client physical assaults rose from 15 to 26
- client-to-client sexual assault rose from zero to 20

1 Incidents that are greater in severity and have a more serious impact on people involved or the potential for more serious consequences.
2 This rate is based on the number of incidents divided by the monthly average daily population for that financial year.
3 The Commission notes that reported incidents include matters that are subsequently substantiated and unsubstantiated.

- client-to-staff sexual assaults increasing from one to 11
- incidents involving sexualised behaviour increasing from two to 19.[4]

There was also an increase in incidents involving serious concerns about staff conduct and the quality of care provided,[5] including:

- staff-to-client physical assaults rose from nine to 28
- staff-to-client sexual assaults rose from three to eight
- poor quality of care incidents reaching their highest in five years, rising 65 per cent to a total of 28 incidents.[6]

Linked to the growth in incidents, there has been a continued rise in the unplanned use of force.[7] After substantial increases in the previous financial year, in 2025–26, there was a further increase of 59 per cent (outstripping the total population increase of 35 per cent). This is an average of eight instances of unplanned use of force each day (total of 3,063 instances). The rate per 10 young people in custody has risen from 151 the previous financial year to 178,[8] the highest it has been in five years. This suggests that staff are increasingly relying on unplanned force to respond to incidents.

These trends indicate that the custodial system is struggling to provide a safe and stable environment for children and young people in its care. The Independent Visitor Program has observed and experienced some of the challenges associated with managing the safety of a large population and the associated pressures impacting service provision. Movement across the precincts has become increasingly challenging. Young people are often observed on standby, waiting for approval to move from their units to classrooms and program areas. Movement disruptions often result in young people missing classes as they remain on standby, sometimes for long periods, and miss their allocated time to attend and complete a program. Independent visitors have noted the visible frustration of young people as they miss out on programs.

Youth Justice operates more effectively and in line with its operating philosophy when it is able to attract and retain experienced professionals with appropriate skills to manage young people with complex needs. The challenge of attracting and retaining experienced staff is likely to be amplified as the custodial population continues to increase due to bail and sentencing amendments.

Higher numbers of children and young people in custody with increasing complexities, coupled with capacity constraints, may require a recalibration of the current operating model. We need a system that provides differentiated responses according to risk profiles and responds to the needs and developmental stages of the children and young people in custody.

We know that spending time in custody is likely to enhance the risk of further offending. The Commission holds the view that the changes to bail and sentencing laws will not lead to greater community safety. We are particularly concerned about the impact on children and young people with limited offending histories who will be exposed to experiences that are not rehabilitative. The Commission will continue to closely monitor the ongoing impacts of the increased custodial population and new laws on young people's experiences in youth justice custodial centres.

Prolonged isolation desktop review

In March 2026, the Commission finalised a review of prolonged isolations in youth justice custodial centres (defined as two hours or less out of room per calendar day) over a six-month period (April to September 2025). It is well established in research that prolonged periods in isolation present risks to the mental health and wellbeing

4 These incidents refer to the incident type, 'Behaviour – sexual'.
5 This includes alleged incidents that are yet to be investigated and substantiated.
6 Poor quality of care incidents include actions or behaviour of staff where the care of children and young people is concerning, may breach procedures or policies and may impact or cause harm to children and young people.
7 Unplanned uses of force refer to responses to incidents rather than routine escorts or precinct movements.
8 This rate is based on the number of instances divided by the monthly average daily population for that financial year.

of those isolated.[9] The review considered data and other records, as well as a small number of consultations with children and young people.

In their own words, young people told us:

> ***'It's used as a punishment, it's called a "run out" and you're only allowed up for one hour and sometimes only 30 minutes.'***
> ***– Young person aged 17 years, Parkville Youth Justice Centre***

> ***'Sometimes we don't have staff. They'll put you in your room and you only have one hour up.'***
> ***– Young person aged 16 years, Parkville Youth Justice Centre***

> ***'Sometimes they play cards through the trap, sometimes they sit down and talk about how I'm going, but most of the time not really.'***
> ***– Young person aged 16 years, Parkville Youth Justice Centre***

> ***'It puts me in a bad place when I'm in the room for a long time. I feel sad and stuff.'***
> ***– Young person aged 16 years, Parkville Youth Justice Centre***

Key findings

- There were 119 instances of prolonged isolation during the period of the review, ranging from two to 49 instances per month. Prolonged isolations reduced after spiking in April and May 2025 but increased again in months that followed.
- One in five children and young people experienced prolonged isolation.
- Over two-thirds (68 per cent) of all prolonged isolations occurred solely or partly for behavioural reasons. Nearly one-third of all prolonged isolations occurred solely for security reasons.
- Children and young people from African and Pasifika backgrounds and young people with disability were over-represented in prolonged isolations.
- Younger children, despite their relative developmental immaturity, were no less likely to be isolated for prolonged periods.

Recommendations for Youth Justice

- Work to end the use of prolonged isolation (two hours or less out of room over a calendar day), given the known risks the practice presents to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Update the isolations policy to include definitions of key terms and clear risk assessment and authorisation processes.
- Review the workforce and behaviour support models to identify any opportunities to better support young people with complex needs and strengthen workforce capability in responding to challenging behaviours.
- Establish a clear and reliable approach to reporting all prolonged isolations in writing to the Commission within 48 hours of the isolation beginning.

DJCS completed an updated isolations policy in September 2026 coinciding with the introduction of the new Youth Justice Act. DJCS has also advised that a review of the Behaviour Support Specialist team is underway. The Commission welcomes these actions but

[9] Australian Human Rights Commission (2025) *Left Alone: A Review of Solitary Confinement and Similar Practices in Australia's Youth Justice Systems*, AHRC, Sydney, pp. 13–17; Commission for Children and Young People (2017) *The same four walls: Inquiry into the use of isolation, separation and lockdowns in the Victorian youth justice system*, CCYP, Melbourne.

remains concerned about the use of any prolonged isolation. We urge Youth Justice to work towards eliminating this practice given the known risks to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Use of restrictive practices

In June 2026 the Commission raised formal concerns with DJCS about the use of restrictive practices on a group of young people in custody after their involvement in a significant incident. These restrictive practices included extended periods of isolation, separation from the usual routine of the centres and the use of a handcuff regime without a plan to assess or reduce their use. The Commission highlighted the importance of there being clear documentation of the ongoing risks presented, of the rationale for continuation of a restrictive regime and of planning for reducing or ceasing these practices.

Monitoring isolations and lockdowns

Youth Justice practices that contain children and young people in their rooms for extended periods can have a serious and detrimental impact on mental health and wellbeing and access to education, exercise, fresh air, recreational activities and cultural and social support.

Isolations

Episodes of 'behavioural' isolations typically occur in response to an incident. The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* allows a child or young person to be held in a locked room, separate from others and away from the normal routine of the centre when:

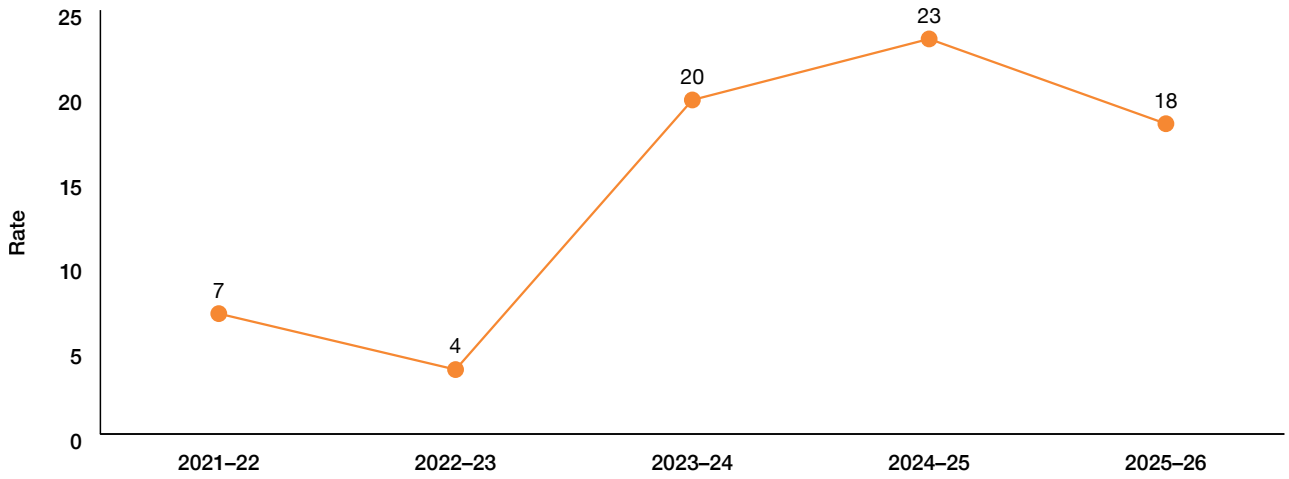
- all other reasonable steps have been taken to prevent the person from harming himself or herself or any other person, or from damaging property
- the young person's behaviour presents an immediate threat to themselves or others or property (section 488(2)).

The Act is clear that isolation is only to be used in certain circumstances (section 488(2)) and not as a punishment (section 487(a)).

While there was a small increase in behavioural isolation episodes this year (up six per cent from 2024–25), the rate of isolation decreased from 23 to 18 episodes (Figure 2).[10] While the Commission acknowledges this decrease, we note an upward trend in behavioural isolations since October 2023, which coincides with the opening of Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre.

[10] Calculated by episodes per individual child or young person isolated.

Figure 2: Annual rate of isolations for behavioural reasons per unique child or young person per year under section 488(2) of the Children, Youth and Families Act, 2021–22 to 2025–26



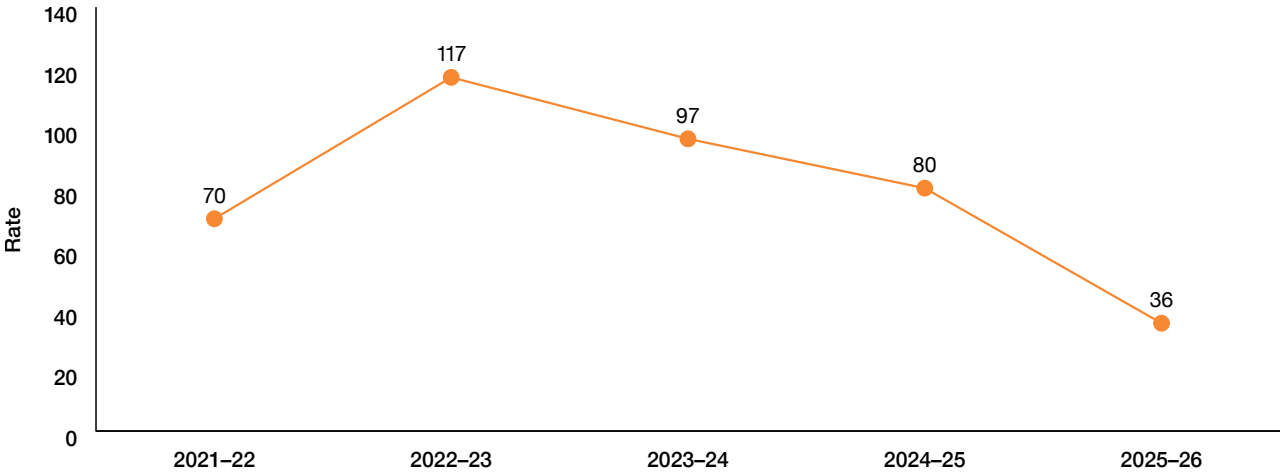
The Commission has previously raised concerns with Youth Justice about the increased use of isolations since October 2023 in response to incidents and the increasing reliance on isolations as a behavioural management tool. Positively, however, it is acknowledged that over the past year, Youth Justice has reduced the rate of isolations.

Lockdowns

The Children, Youth and Families Act also allows a child or young person to be held in their room or in an isolation cell when it is in the interests of the security of the centre (section 488(7)). These are referred to as 'lockdowns' and can be due to staff shortages.

This year, there was a substantial decrease in the rate of lockdown episodes from 80 to 36 per unique child or young person (Figure 3). These are the lowest rates of lockdowns recorded in the past five years. There was a 39 per cent decrease in the number of isolations under section 488(7) of the Act from 32,730 episodes in 2024–25 to 19,932 episodes in 2025–26. The Commission welcomes this progress and acknowledges the efforts made by Youth Justice to reduce security isolations. We encourage Youth Justice to continue to focus on decreasing the use of isolations over the coming 12 months and will be monitoring progress against this.

Figure 3: Annual rate of isolations for security reasons per unique child or young person per year under section 488(7) of the Children, Youth and Families Act, 2021–22 to 2025–26



Responding to the needs of individual children and young people

Independent Visitor Program

The Commission's Independent Visitor Program has been visiting Victoria's youth justice centres since 2012. The program continues to conduct monthly visits to Victoria's youth justice centres at Parkville, Cherry Creek and Malmsbury. The program also operates a phone system for young people to contact the Commission between in-person visits.

During visits, independent visitors observe conditions at the centres and talk to children and young people about their experiences in custody. All issues are promptly raised with Youth Justice for resolution, with more serious issues escalated when required.

The Independent Visitor Program provides young people with an opportunity to raise concerns, be heard and be assisted by the Commission to have their needs addressed while in custody, as well as providing important connections to the community. It is also a critical part of the Commission's monitoring of the youth justice system, allowing visitors' direct observations and young people's experiences and concerns to be monitored over time.



Independent visitors and Commission staff

Issues raised

Children and young people raised 775 issues with the Independent Visitor Program during visits in 2025–26, a 64 per cent increase from 473 issues raised the previous financial year. Of these, 455 issues were raised at Parkville Youth Justice Centre, 312 at Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre and eight in the short time Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre has been re-opened. This increase in issues raised is disproportionately higher than the increase in the custodial population over the same period. This year the Commission also received 42 phone calls from children and young people in custody, a 20 per cent increase from 35 calls the previous financial year.

Leisure activities

Of the 775 issues raised, 99 related to leisure activities (up from 27 in 2024–25), with young people expressing a need for greater activity and stimulation. This was the most common category of issues. Young people sought more opportunities to engage in activities to reduce boredom on units when unable to access programs and education.[11] Many of the issues raised related to young people's requests to access music players and speakers, games and movies and outdoor spaces and facilities.

Programs and education

In 2025–26, young people raised 89 issues relating to 'programs and education' (up from 58 in 2024–25), making it the second most common category of issues raised. Of these, 49 per cent related to concerns about the ability to access programs and education, which can be affected by lockdowns, staff vacancies and absences, emergency codes and delayed movements around the precinct. Young people often requested increased availability of and access to classes like hospitality, barbering and music.

These and other issues raised with the program have formed the basis for the Commission's ongoing promotion of continuous improvement in the youth justice system.

Monitoring children under 18 years in adult prison

The Commission monitors the treatment of any young person under 18 years serving a sentence in adult custody. Young people in Victoria may be placed in adult custody because of a transfer from a youth justice centre to adult prison by the Youth Parole Board, or after being sentenced to a term of adult imprisonment.

The Commission believes young people under 18 should not be held in the adult custodial system and has made repeated recommendations for legislative change to prevent this from occurring, including in an individual inquiry conducted in 2023 on a young person held in adult custody.

We have raised formal concerns with Youth Justice previously about the transfers of young people to adult custody, the placement limitations for under 18-year-olds who are transferred to adult custody (who cannot be placed with adults due to their age and vulnerability) and the impact that severe isolation regimes have on young people when they are placed in an adult prison.

This year, there were no under 18-year-olds transferred from Youth Justice to adult custody.

Monitoring of other confined environments – preventative detention

In 2018 the Commission received powers to monitor the safety and wellbeing of children and young people held in preventative detention in Victoria pursuant to a police detention decision or preventative detention order under the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act. The Commission's powers include:

- monitoring the treatment of a child or young person detained in the above circumstances
- promoting the interests of the child or young person
- accessing any document or information relating to their treatment while in detention
- providing advice to the Attorney General, other relevant ministers or the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police

[11] Education in youth justice centres is provided by Parkville College. Other programs and activities are delivered by Youth Justice staff and some external service providers.

about the child or young person's treatment while in detention.

Legislation requires that we report the number of times the Commission has performed its monitoring function under the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act in the relevant financial year and any general observations or conclusions we may want to include in the report.

In the 2025–26 financial year, the Commission did not exercise its preventative detention function.

Monitoring of police powers to transport 10- and 11-year-olds

In September 2025, new powers commenced under the Youth Justice Act allowing police officers to take into their care and transport children aged 10 or 11 if they pose a risk of serious harm to themselves or another person. Children may be transported under the powers:

- into the care of a suitable person
- to an appropriate health or welfare agency
- as a last resort, to a police station.

The Commission has a legislated role under the Youth Justice Act to monitor these transport powers and report annually on their use.

This year, the new transport powers reported by Victoria Police were exercised 14 times,[12] though it is noted that in six instances, the powers were exercised in relation to children older than 11.[13]

Table 1: Number of times transport powers were used by police, 2025–26

Use of transport powers	No.
Times transport powers used	14
Force was used	4
Transported to a police station	7
Total transports involving Aboriginal or multicultural children	4
Total transports involving multicultural children[14]	≤3

The Commission is pleased to see that following an initial establishment and training period in 2025, there has been no further use of force in transporting children under these powers in 2026.

The over-representation of Aboriginal children subject to transport powers this year is noted, and the Commission will continue to monitor trends in the use of the powers over time.

12 Occurrences here are based on individual children. Where children were in groups, each child is counted individually on the basis that they were transported.

13 Victoria Police advises that is some cases, transport powers may be exercised based on estimated age in the presence of limited information about a child's actual age, as permitted under the *Youth Justice Act 2024*.

14 In order to maintain confidentiality, person-based counts with a value of 1 to 3 are given a value of 2 to calculate totals and are denoted by '≤3'

Oversight and monitoring of child protection



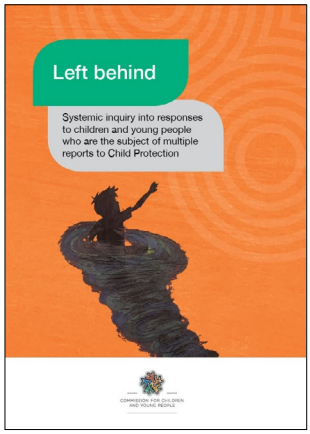
The Commission is responsible for monitoring and oversight of the child protection system. We do this by:

- reviewing the services provided to every child who was involved with Child Protection in the year prior to their death
- conducting inquiries into systemic issues affecting children in child protection
- conducting inquiries into service responses to individual children.

In 2025–26 our work in this area included:

- completing *Left behind: Systemic inquiry into responses to children and young people who are the subject of multiple reports to Child Protection*
- completing 35 child death inquiries, making 13 new recommendations to DFFH and five new recommendations to other government agencies and services
- identifying common themes and issues that arose from our child death inquiries
- monitoring the progress of recommendations from our child death inquiries and systemic inquiries.

Left behind: Systemic inquiry into responses to children and young people who are the subject of multiple reports to Child Protection



The cover artwork for *Left behind* was designed by former Youth Council member Samrawit Piolo.

On 4 June 2026, the Commission tabled the report, *Left behind: Systemic inquiry into responses to children and young people who are the subject of multiple reports to Child Protection* in the Victorian Parliament.

Left behind explores the experiences of children and young people who are caught between parts of the child and family system when safety or wellbeing concerns raised with Child Protection do not meet the threshold for legal (or statutory) intervention. In some circumstances, Child Protection refers the family to the voluntary system for support and to address the concerns – which may include family violence, neglect and inadequate care – and then conclude their involvement. In many instances, children and young people receive limited or no support, particularly when services are unable to engage their families and where there are long waitlists and service gaps. This can lead to further Child Protection reports, further service referrals and the same experience all over again. The inquiry highlighted that for too many children and young people, the consequences of delayed, fragmented or ineffective responses are not temporary – they shape the course of their lives.

The inquiry's 17 findings and 13 recommendations drew on contributions from 30 children and young people across Victoria about their experiences with Child Protection and other services and more than 140 stakeholders from DFFH, The Orange Door, community service organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. A detailed file review of 35 completed child death inquiries[15] and analysis of data and information from DFFH also informed the inquiry.

Left behind highlighted the importance of bringing children and young people to the centre of the child and family system. Children and young people told the Commission that their voices are neither sought nor given weight in the decisions that impact them. Instead, all parts of the system often seek to address children's needs indirectly by working with their parents. Services tailored specifically to children and young people were also identified as a critical service gap, especially for those experiencing family violence.

Left behind reported that across the child and family system, a mismatch between demand and available resources is perpetuating a cycle of reports to Child Protection, referrals and re-reports. This often leaves children and young people without any material change to their harmful family circumstances. In Child Protection, re-reports accounted for 75 per cent of all intake reports received in 2025, meaning that most children and young people in the system had previously been the subject of a report. From 2022 to 2025, there was a 23 per cent increase in reports to Child Protection and a 35 per cent increase in referrals to The Orange Door. Growing pressures on child and family services and family violence services were also evident, with families experiencing greater levels of complexity in their circumstances and demand for services continuing to outstrip supply across the state.

Early intervention was identified as essential to not only reducing demand on Child Protection but also the prevalence of child maltreatment by mitigating escalating risk before matters reach the level of statutory intervention. Strengthening efforts in universal services, such as schools and health services, to intervene earlier in children and young people's lives is key to enabling access to the right service at the right time for children, young people and their families.

Stakeholders commonly raised that demand adversely impacts Child Protection's risk assessments, including decisions about whether to progress reports at intake to investigation. This was particularly evident in cases involving neglect and cumulative harm. Other factors contributing to the premature closure of cases that potentially leave children and young people at risk of harm included:

- gaps in risk assessments
- referral quality issues
- referrals not considering the effectiveness of previous referrals
- limited communication between Child Protection, The Orange Door and services.

Like Child Protection, the inquiry found that high and increasing demand on The Orange Door impacts its ability to connect children, young people and their families with the supports they need. The data showed that referrals made by Child Protection to The Orange Door often do not result in a direct intervention for the family, with almost half of clients in these referrals either declining a service or being uncontactable by The Orange Door in 2025. This raises questions about the effectiveness of The Orange Door's current methods and processes for engaging and working with clients. The Commission found there is much to learn from the more flexible engagement methods used by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and The Orange Door when working with Aboriginal children, young people and their families.

[15] The *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012* (Vic) requires the Commission to conduct an inquiry in relation to a child who has died and who was a child protection client at the time, or within 12 months, of their death. The Commission makes no causal link between service provision and the death of a child as this is the role of the Coroner.

The inquiry's recommendations aim to strengthen the system's capacity to provide more meaningful support earlier in children and young people's lives, including to:

- improve the way statutory and voluntary parts of the system interact to better respond to risk in families
- strengthen the system's ability to engage children, young people and their families
- seek greater investment in services to support more equitable, effective and sustainable service delivery to children, young people and their families.

Child death inquiries

Under the Commission for Children and Young People Act, the Commission must conduct an inquiry into the services provided to any child who dies and was known to Child Protection in the 12 months before their death. These inquiries seek to identify opportunities for service system changes that will improve the experiences of children and young people. While the death of a child is a trigger for an inquiry, the Commission makes no findings as to the cause of death. Instead, the focus is on services provided to a child before they died.

Child deaths reported to the Commission

The Commission was notified of the deaths of 38 children and young people in 2025–26 (Table 2). Eight of the 38 children were Aboriginal, which reflects the continued over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system and in the deaths of children known to Child Protection.

Table 2: Child death notifications received by the Commission by Aboriginal status, 2021–22 to 2025–26

Aboriginal status	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26
Aboriginal	4	5	8	8	8
Non-Aboriginal	33	31	35	30	30
Total	**37**[16]	**36**	**43**	**38**	**38**

The category of death identified in the following tables is based on information available to the Commission either through Child Protection files or Coroners' formal determinations of the cause of death.

In 2025–26, the highest category of death was illness (12), followed by accident (10). Death by suicide (three) had the lowest numbers since 2021–22 (Table 5). The Commission will continue to examine emerging themes in these cases as inquiries are finalised.

Table 3: Child death notifications received by the Commission, by Aboriginal status and category of death, 2025–26

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Total	
Category of death	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Accident	3	38	7	23	10	26
Drug/substance-related	0	–	1	3	1	3
Illness	1	13	11	37	12	32
Non-accidental trauma	1	13	2	7	3	8
SIDS/SUDI17	0	–	1	3	1	3
Suicide	1	13	2	7	3	8
Unascertained (by Coroner)	0	–	1	3	1	3
Unclear from file	2	25	5	17	7	18
Total	**8**	**100**	**30**	**100**	**38**	**100**

Tables 4 and 5 provide further detail about category of death, Aboriginal status and the age of children and young people when they died. Consistent with last year, the highest number of child death notifications were in the 13 to 17 age group (20). There was also a high number of child death notifications for children from birth to three years (15).

16 The Commission's 2021–22 annual report identified 2 children as Aboriginal and 35 as non-Aboriginal. These have been subsequently corrected as they had been misidentified either by services or family members.

17 SIDS = sudden infant death syndrome; SUDI = sudden unexpected death in infancy.

Table 4: Child death notifications received by the Commission, by Aboriginal status and age, 2025–26

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Total	
Age	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0–5 months	3	38	3	10	6	16
6–11 months	0	–	3	10	3	8
1–3 years	1	13	5	17	6	16
4–12 years	0	–	3	10	3	8
13–17 years	4	50	16	53	20	53
Total	**8**	**100**	**30**	**100**	**38**	**100**

Table 5: Child death notifications received by the Commission, by category of death, 2017–18 to 2025–26[18]

Category of death	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26
Accident	3	8	8	9	14	9	9	13	10
Drug/substance-related	1	1	2	0	0	2	2	1	1
Illness	13	10	20	10	8	11	16	8	12
Malnutrition	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Non-accidental trauma	0	3	5	2	7	1	3	1	3
SIDS/SUDI	5	7	2	8	2	1	0	3	1
Suicide/self-harm	1	3	6	6	2	7	5	8	3
Unascertained (by Coroner)	2	2	8	8	4	4	6	1	1
Unclear from file	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	3	7
Total	**26**	**34**	**51**	**45**	**37**	**36**	**43**	**38**	**38**

Completed child death inquiries

In 2025–26, the Commission completed 35 child death inquiries of children and young people who mostly died between February 2024 and November 2025.[19] Overall, the children and young people in these inquiries had been the subject of, on average, five reports to Child Protection, an increase from last year's average of three reports. The number of reports per child ranged from one (10 children, 29 per cent) to 19 (one child). Over a third of children (12, 34 per cent) were the subject of five or more reports. At the time of their death, there were 20 children and young people who had open Child Protection matters. As in previous years, most children and young people (30) were living at home with their parent or parents when they died.

In 2025–26, the Commission made 18 new recommendations to strengthen practice and service delivery for children and young people experiencing vulnerability. Consistent with previous years, most recommendations were directed to DFFH

[18] Where numbers in this table differ from equivalent numbers published in past annual reports, this is because information has been received, including from the Coroner, that causes us to record an updated category of death for a child.

[19] Four of the completed inquiries were for children who died between December 2020 and October 2023, and a further three children died in August and November 2025.

(see Table 6) as Child Protection practice is an area of focus in all child death inquiries. Overall, 13 of the 18 recommendations were accepted in full, one in part and two are yet to receive a response (see Table 6). Two recommendations were not accepted by DFFH.

Of the 106 recommendations made in child death inquiries over the past 5 years, 56 have been fully implemented (19 across 2025–26) and 36 remain open.[20]

Table 6: Total number of recommendations, by responsible agency, 2021–22 to 2025–26

Responsible agency	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	Total
Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations	0	0	0	0	2	2
Community organisations[21]	0	1	1	1	0	3
Department of Education	3	2	1	0	0	6
Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	15	19	11	10	13	68
Department of Health	2	1	1	1	1	6
Department of Justice and Community Safety	0	0	1	3	0	4
Health services	3	2	0	2	0	7
Multiple agencies[22]	4	2	2	0	2	10
Total	**27**	**27**	**17**	**17**	**18**	**106**

Table 7: Responses to recommendations, 2021–22 to 2025–26

Response	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	Total
Accept	21	23	11	15	13	83
Accept in part	1	2	0	2	1	6
Accept in principle	1	1	1	0	0	3
Not accepted	4	1	5	0	2	12
Not yet responded[23]	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total	**27**	**27**	**17**	**17**	**18**	**106**

20 The remaining recommendations were either closed or retired. Two recommendations were accepted but not implemented and 12 were not accepted (including one that was redirected to a subsequent inquiry).

21 Community organisations does not include Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, as this has been categorised separately. The category includes a range of non-government organisations that provide services to children and families.

22 Some recommendations have more than one responsible agency, particularly where collaboration is required to effect change. In these instances, DFFH is one of the responsible agencies, alongside another government department or community organisations.

23 When an inquiry report is finalised, the Commission requests a response to any recommendation be provided within six weeks of receiving the report. The two recommendations reported for 2025–26 were finalised in late June 2026, and the departmental response was received after the completion of the financial year.

Practice themes and issues of concern

This year's completed child death inquiries highlighted both good practice and critical opportunities for improvement in areas, including:[24]

- assessment of risk
- practice in the intake phase
- referring to services
- coordination and collaboration between services
- responses to family violence.

Assessment of risk

Risk assessment is critical to child protection practice. It forms the basis of decisions about action to be taken to increase child safety. In Victoria, the SAFER Children Framework and the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (commonly referred to as MARAM) support Child Protection practitioners to assess risk and determine an intervention response. The application of these frameworks are complemented by the knowledge, skills and professional judgement of practitioners, leaders and managers.

The Commission observed positive Child Protection practice in risk assessments across seven child death inquiries. Child Protection practitioners conducted comprehensive and timely assessments that identified high-risk indicators and included collaborative approaches to determining risk for children and young people. These inquiries highlighted Child Protection's sound decision-making based on appropriate information gathering and assessment.

One child death inquiry involved a newborn infant who was at serious risk of harm due to parental substance use and family violence. Child Protection's comprehensive risk assessment appropriately recognised the pattern and history of harm and considered the impact on the infant if they were to live with either parent. There was evidence of sound professional judgement that considered the infant's unique vulnerabilities and provided a strong basis to support decision-making.

However, child death inquiries continued to identify issues with risk assessment practice across all phases of Child Protection involvement. Of the 35 inquiries completed, 14 found that Child Protection did not effectively assess the risks for the child. This included limited information gathering, which hindered decision-making, and inadequate consideration of the cumulative impact of known risk factors. In 11 inquiries, Child Protection prematurely closed the case, and the children and young people did not receive appropriate support and intervention.

Practice in the intake phase

Child Protection intake is the entry point for children and young people when they are the subject of a report to Child Protection. During the intake phase, Child Protection practitioners gather and assess information and conduct inquiries to determine the response to a report. This includes provision of advice to reporters, making referrals for support services for children and families, or progressing a case to investigation. It is important that intake practice includes consideration of the pattern and history for the child and their family (including previous Child Protection involvement) and each individual child's circumstances in the family unit. This is particularly important as it relates to the cumulative impact of harm on a child or young person's development and whether these matters are able to be addressed without intervention by a statutory service. Sufficient information gathering is essential to support risk assessment and make an informed decision about whether a Child Protection investigation is required.

In three child death inquiries, positive intake practice was observed, including appropriate information gathering and consultation with other professionals to support decision-making. Overall, however, inadequate information gathering at intake remains a persistent theme identified in child death inquiries.

[24] The number of instances of particular practices in our analysis do not add up to the total number of reports because multiple issues and themes were identified across all child death inquiry reports.

This year, the Commission identified that practice could have been strengthened in 13 inquiries. The predominant themes included:

- lack of information gathering to inform the intake risk assessment
- poor consideration of the pattern and history for the child and their family
- follow-up tasks identified for action not being completed before case closure (or the absence of records as to why those tasks were no longer required).

Poor intake practice can leave children and young people at risk of harm for long periods. These harms can accumulate over time, and the same concerns are often re-reported to Child Protection.

In eight of 13 inquiries, the child or young person was living with a disability, with many having an extended network of professionals around them. Child Protection could have further gathered information from these professionals to strengthen its intake risk assessment but did not. In response to a recommendation from the Commission made in 2024, DFFH has provided additional guidance for intake practitioners to gather information from relevant medical and allied health services about risk factors and parental capacity for children with a disability or complex medical needs.

The Commission acknowledges the increasing demand on the intake workforce and that DFFH continues to provide learning opportunities for this workforce to strengthen good practice. This includes rolling out Intake Phase Practice Workshops.

Case study:

Anne's story

Anne was the second child in a large sibling group. The children lived with their mother and stepfather. Anne had a mild intellectual disability, as did some of her siblings.

Child Protection received multiple reports involving the family and so consulted with community-based child and family services. The protective concerns identified severe and chronic neglect of Anne and her siblings, whose parents were not meeting their basic needs. Further concerns identified physical abuse of the children and parental substance abuse.

Child Protection closed some of the reports at intake after determining a family support service was involved and could address the issues of neglect. In other reports, Child Protection investigated but prematurely closed the cases. The inquiry found that the statutory and voluntary systems did not adequately assess the risk of severe neglect despite repeated concerns and indicators. Their response was disproportionate to the level of risk to which the children were exposed, leaving them highly vulnerable to significant harm. More assertive action at critical points should have been considered given years of intervention had not achieved long-lasting change for Anne's family.

The Commission recommended Child Protection and the community-based services who had been involved hold a reflective practice session to strengthen practice in assessing and responding to serious neglect.

Referring to services

Ensuring a child or young person and their family is meaningfully engaged with appropriate supports is critical to addressing the needs of children, young people and their families. As identified in previous annual reports, and most recently in our systemic inquiry, *Left behind*, the Commission continues to identify opportunities for strengthened practice between statutory and voluntary services to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Eight of the 35 child death inquiries found that while Child Protection referred children, young people and their families to services, this did not always result in support. Some inquiries identified that referrals were made to services that were ineffective at managing risk or reports were closed with referrals despite knowledge that families had not previously engaged with them.

In five of the nine inquiries, Child Protection repeatedly closed reports at intake with reliance on other services to address the identified support needs, only to have the same concerns re-reported to Child Protection. In one inquiry, a report was received the day after the previous report was closed, and in another inquiry, Child Protection continually closed reports at intake with referrals to The Orange Door, despite escalating high-risk behaviours, increasing protective concerns and professional views that community-based services were ineffective. The Commission identified two cases highlighting positive practice in relation to referrals to services. In one case, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation appropriately connected the young person to supports across multiple domains. The Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation was proactive in its efforts to engage the family, undertook a comprehensive needs assessment and provided tailored support. The child was connected to the Aboriginal organisations via the maternal and child health service. In the second case, Child Protection appropriately followed up with The Orange Door for support services, which had effectively engaged and supported the family.

Coordination and collaboration between services

Effective coordination and collaboration between services is critical to protecting children and young people and to achieving improved outcomes for them and their families. When done well, coordination and collaboration can:

- support a shared understanding of a child or young person's needs
- facilitate timely access to appropriate services
- promote a more integrated response to help keep them safe from harm.

The Commission continues to identify ongoing challenges with consistent information sharing and collaboration across services. This year, however, the Commission predominantly identified positive examples of collaboration and coordination in 10 child death inquiries, with Child Protection and services communicating with each other to share key information to inform risk assessment, planning and decision-making. This included:

- children and young people living with complex medical needs or disability where effective communication between Child Protection and other services had occurred
- information sharing between Child Protection and treating health services enabling practitioners to develop a comprehensive understanding of children's medical needs to inform appropriate intervention and support
- Child Protection seeking specialist advice about a child's disability, consulting with disability practice advisors and convening multidisciplinary care team meetings, ensuring decisions were informed by specialist expertise and supports were coordinated across services
- Child Protection and Victoria Police demonstrating effective interagency collaboration by holding case conferences and sharing information in a timely way to support coordinated safety planning for a child experiencing vulnerability.

Case study:

Tegan's story

Tegan was born with a complex medical condition that requires a high level of supervision and care. She was registered with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and received medical and allied health care, therapy and support through a range of services.

Child Protection became involved following concerns about her parents' capacity to meet her care needs, including concerns that medical advice was not being consistently followed.

Child Protection demonstrated effective coordination and collaboration by seeking specialist advice about Tegan's disability and available NDIS support. This enabled practitioners to develop a clear understanding of Tegan's medical needs, the level of care required and the support available to the family.

Child Protection also convened multidisciplinary care team meetings involving health and disability professionals. These informed assessment, planning and decision-making. Consultation with a disability practice advisor and a principal practitioner further strengthened the response by ensuring decisions were informed by specialist expertise and that services worked together to provide a coordinated approach to supporting Tegan and her family.

Responses to family violence

The 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence described children and young people as 'the silent victims of family violence' who are rarely treated as victims in their own right and require specialised supports to help them recover from trauma. This continues to be a significant issue impacting children and young people known to Child Protection.

Family violence was a common risk factor across most of the child death inquiries completed this year, identified in 27 inquiries. Many of the children and young people experienced family violence from a young age, with two children exposed to family violence in the prenatal phase. It was also common for children and young people to experience other risk factors alongside family violence, including parental mental health issues and substance abuse.

For several children and young people, the inquiries found that Child Protection did not adequately consider family violence contextual and/or risk factors. This included parents' own experience of family violence as children; parents' pattern and history of family violence in previous relationships; parents' use of family violence towards their child/ren; and a child's previous family violence experiences. A small number of child death inquiries involved young people who used violence at home, which tended to parallel the abusive and violent behaviours they experienced as children. Neither Child Protection nor other services took this into account and did not recognise the young people's use of violence as a distinct form of family violence that required a specialised response that recognised their lived experience.

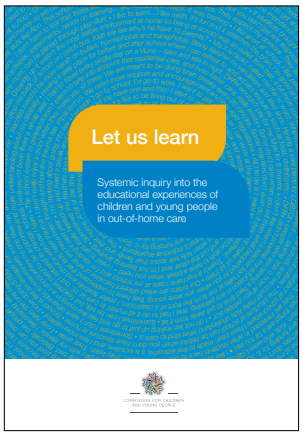
While the Commission acknowledges the significant shift in responses to family violence, more action is needed to strengthen Child Protection and other services' assessment of family violence risk factors impacting children and young people. We will continue to monitor this through our inquiries.

Oversight and monitoring of out-of-home care

The Commission is responsible for monitoring and oversight of the out-of-home care system. In 2025–26, our work in this area included:

- monitoring the progress of recommendations from previous inquiries
- court-ordered monitoring of a young person in a restricted environment
- monitoring serious incidents and identifying systemic issues in out-of-home care
- conducting onsite inspections of residential care services.

Let us learn: Systemic inquiry into the educational experiences of children and young people in out-of-home care



The Commission's *Let us learn* inquiry was tabled in the Victorian Parliament on 16 November 2023. The inquiry examined how living in out-of-home care impacts children and young people's experiences of education and the effectiveness of Victorian Government initiatives in supporting them to stay engaged in education. It revealed substantial disparities in educational outcomes for children and young people in care compared to their peers.

The inquiry made 47 recommendations aimed at:

- clarifying roles and responsibilities
- strengthening responses from Child Protection and schools
- increasing resourcing
- supporting different agencies to work together to better meet the needs of students in care.

The Victorian Government accepted most of the recommendations – 25 in full, 19 in principle and two in part. One recommendation is to be considered further.

In 2025–26, the Commission assessed seven recommendations to be complete, 21 as having made significant progress and 17 where some progress had been made. Two recommendations had not been

progressed in the current reporting year. The government's self-reported progress against each of the recommendations to 30 June 2026, and the Commission's assessment of this progress, is available on our website at: https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/inquiries/systemic-inquiries/education-inquiry/.

The Commission acknowledges the significant progress towards several recommendations, including:

- implementing initiatives to strengthen carers' capacity to support the educational engagement of children and young people in their care
- developing and implementing the modified timetable policy in Victorian Government Schools
- improving schools' knowledge of the out-of-home care system and how to better support participation and connection of students in care at school
- supporting children and young people in care who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school with one-on-one tutoring through the Education Supports for Children in Care pilot program.

The Commission acknowledges that the Victorian Government increased the carer allowance payment by 3.5 per cent in the 2026–27 State Budget. However, Victoria's care allowance remains one of the lowest in Australia. The Commission also calls on the Victorian Government to release the final report of the Complementary Education Settings review in recognition of the important role of flexible learning options and other alternative education settings in supporting some children and young people in care to remain engaged in education.

Ongoing monitoring of a young person's treatment and care

In 2024, the Commission sought and was granted leave to intervene in court proceedings as *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) relating to a young person. The court also authorised the Commission to monitor the young person's care and report to the court on the services provided to ensure that their rights and wellbeing are supported. This is the first time the Commission has intervened in court proceedings in this way.

Throughout 2025–26, the Commission continued its critical role in monitoring the young person's care and reporting to the court on the services provided to the young person.

Monitoring incidents in out-of-home care

The Commission monitors incidents in out-of-home care to identify trends and opportunities for systemic improvement to policy and practice.

There was a seven per cent increase in the number of out-of-home care incidents reported in 2025–26 compared with the previous year (Table 8).

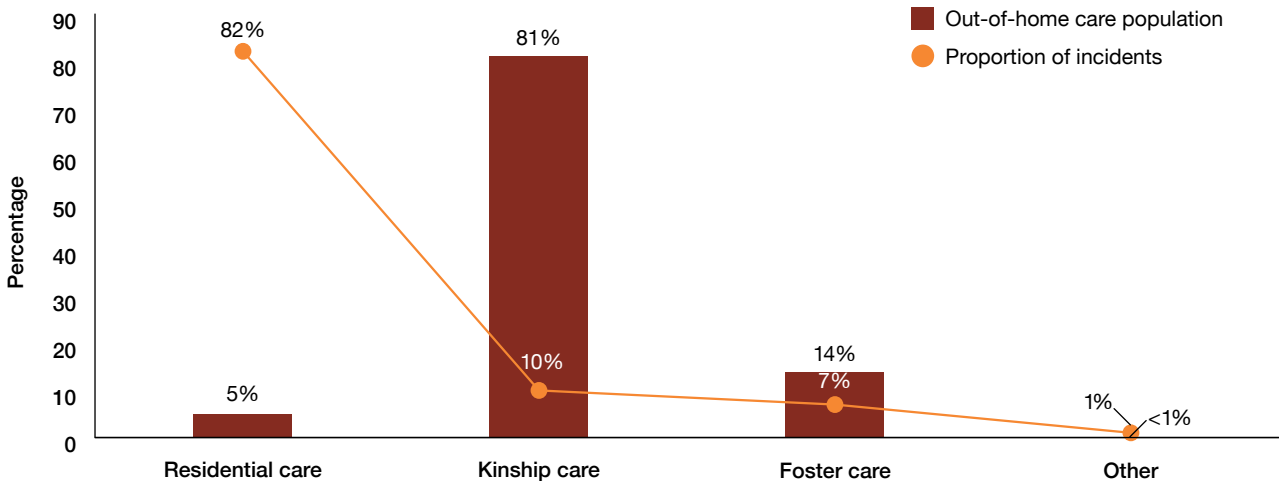
The greatest proportion of incidents reported in out-of-home care continue to come from residential care (82 per cent), despite this group of children and young people making up only five per cent of the out-of-home care population (Figure 4). The Commission continues to conduct onsite monitoring activities in residential care in reflection of its marked and ongoing over-representation in incidents affecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people (see 'Rights-based monitoring of residential care' on page 58).

Table 8: Incidents in out-of-home care (all care types), by incident type, 2023–24 to 2025–26[25]

Incident type	2023–24	2024–25	2025–26	Percentage change 2024–25 to 2025–26
Absent client	4,517	5,309	6,161	16
Self-harm	0	282	800	184
Injury	620	646	734	14
Inappropriate physical treatment	682	780	719	–8
Serious risk	0	247	642	160
Emotional/psychological harm	232	319	638	100
Physical abuse	624	572	622	9
Sexual abuse	342	334	367	10
Sexual exploitation – suspected	0	97	200	106
Medication error	1,697	750	197	–74
Emotional/psychological abuse	360	309	193	–38
Inappropriate sexual behaviour	190	156	165	6
Sexual exploitation – grooming	190	143	124	–13
Attempted suicide	0	47	115	145
Neglect	0	61	105	72
Financial abuse	7	9	6	–33
Dangerous actions – client	1,267	477	5	–99
Death	4	2	4	100
Poor quality of care	341	144	4	–97
Escape from a secure facility	1	1	2	100
Self-harm or attempted suicide	946	335	2	–99
Total	**12,020**	**11,020**	**11,805**	**7**

[25] These figures are extracted from DFFH's live database; small data variations may occur against last year's annual report figures. As noted, in December 2024, DFFH implemented an update to the categorisation of CIMS incident types. This has led to some new incident types being introduced for the 2024–25 financial year, including serious risk, neglect, sexual exploitation – suspected and the division of self-harm/attempted suicide into separate incident types. In some cases, such as in relation to self-harm, this creates the appearance of significant increases, where it is in fact an effect of incidents being moved into new categories.

Figure 4: Out-of-home care population and proportion of incidents, by care type, 2025–26



Section 60A of the Commission for Children and Young People Act requires the DFFH Secretary to inform the Commission about all adverse events involving children in out-of-home care. The Commission reviews each incident report to identify significant incidents and particularly vulnerable and at-risk children and young people in out-of-home care. We also highlight systemic issues requiring the department's attention.

This year, the Commission reviewed 10,855 incident reports[26] and initiated 93 incident queries. Aboriginal children and young people were involved in over a third of our incident queries (41 per cent). Most of our incident queries (77 per cent) related to children and young people in residential care. The Commission's focus on these children and young people reflects the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in care and the much greater rate of incidents recorded in residential care settings than in other care types.

Many of our incident queries sought to understand the strategies in place for children and young people who attempted suicide or were reported to be absent from placement for significant periods (Table 9). Many of the sexual assault and abuse incidents occur when children and young people are absent from placement and can often be within the broader context of child sexual exploitation. The Commission notes there has been further investment in responding to sexual exploitation and will continue to monitor progress.

[26] The number of incidents the Commission reviewed is lower than the number of incidents reported in out-of-home care because the Commission will not receive some incident reports by the end of the financial year. Therefore, some incidents reviewed in the current financial year occurred in the previous financial year.

Table 9: Commission-initiated out-of-home care incident queries, 2025–26

Incident type	No.	%
Suicide attempted	28	30
Absent/missing person – absent client	23	25
Self-harm	8	9
Serious risk	6	6
Physical assault/abuse	5	5
Sexual assault/abuse	5	5
Injury	5	5
Emotional/psychological – abuse	4	4
Sexual exploitation – grooming	4	4
Neglect	3	3
Illness	1	1
Sexual exploitation – suspected	1	1
Total	**93**	**100**

Issues identified through monitoring

Through our incident monitoring, the Commission identifies issues and raises these with DFFH in discussions or via formal correspondence. Our aim is to improve service responses to children and young people in out-of-home care.

Children and young people absent from placement

Children and young people are reported as being absent when their whereabouts is unknown, or is known but their absence is not approved, and is considered likely to result in harm. 'Absent client' has consistently been the most common incident type for children and young people in out-of-home care over several years. In 2025–26, over half of the 11,805 incidents recorded related to children and young people being absent or missing from placement (52 per cent). This is concerning because, when absent, children and young people are often at risk of harm, including exposure to alcohol and drugs, sexual exploitation, sexual or physical assault, and criminalisation.

The Commission sees cases where children and young people are absent from placement ranging from a few hours or days to much longer periods, including, in some instances, several months. We acknowledge the extensive efforts Child Protection and service providers make to locate children and young people when absent from placement, as well as the complex circumstances that often exist for children and young people in out-of-home care. However, the continued high rates of absence indicate the need for strengthened preventative measures that ensure children and young people feel safe and connected in their placements, as well as more effective interventions to support children and young people who are absent, particularly those who repeatedly leave their placement.

Case study:

Sienna's story

Sienna is a young person living in residential care. She came to the Commission's attention because she was repeatedly going missing, sometimes for long periods, and there had been a spike in absences over a relatively short period.

Sienna experienced several placement changes, and despite efforts by her carers and Child Protection, she continued to leave her placement and carers. This exposed her to harm, including substance use, criminal activity and sexual exploitation, and she disengaged from education. There were also instances of reported self-harm. While her school and services attempted to re-engage her in education, their effectiveness was limited by Sienna's continued and frequent absences. Therapeutic support was offered to Sienna and she was not able to take part. She disclosed to her carers that she felt unsafe in the company of her co-residents and peers in the community.

The Commission closely monitored Sienna's placement and management throughout the year, requesting information from and meeting with DFFH several times. We are pleased that she has settled into a new placement and started at a new school. At the time of writing, there have been no further incidents reported.

Sienna's case highlights the risks to children and young people when they go missing from care, and the perseverance often required to achieve stability for children and young people in residential care.

Children and young people as victims of sexual exploitation

The Commission holds longstanding concerns about the sexual exploitation of children and young people in out-of-home care. The 2024 introduction of two new Client Incident Management System incident categories, 'sexual exploitation – grooming' and 'sexual exploitation – suspected', made an important step towards strengthening information about child sexual exploitation.

However, sexual exploitation and grooming incidents remain too common. In 2025–26, there were 124 incidents where children and young people were reportedly being groomed for sexual exploitation. In another 200 incidents children and young people were suspected of being sexually exploited. The Commission supports the ongoing collaborative efforts between DFFH, Victoria Police and care providers to respond to persons of interest and support the disruption of the exploitation of children and young people living in out-of-home care. This must continue to be an ongoing priority.

Access to age-appropriate services

Through our incident monitoring, the Commission has continued to observe cases where service wait times or a lack of availability of services significantly affects the outcomes for children and young people experiencing risk and vulnerability in the out-of-home care system. In some cases, services are available, but children and young people do not wish to engage. The Commission continues to advocate for increased availability of age-appropriate treatment services – particularly alcohol and other drug treatment services and mental health services. These services need to embed an approach to engagement that responds to the complex trauma backgrounds of many children and young people living in out-of-home care. It is also critical that care providers, Child Protection and service providers continue to refine the way they encourage children and young people to engage with critical support services.

Rights-based monitoring of residential care

The Commission conducts onsite monitoring of a selection of residential care homes annually. In doing so, we draw on the Charter for children in out-of-home care[27] for specific themes for discussion with children and young people. We are grateful to the children and young people who welcome Commission staff into their homes and share their thoughts and experiences with us.

In late 2025, the Commission conducted a statewide residential care monitoring activity to understand children and young people's experiences of education while living in residential care. Commission staff met with 17 children and young people who were living in 11 residential care houses operated by six service providers across both metropolitan and regional Victoria.

Overall, children and young people told us they had a more positive experience of primary school and of transitioning to secondary school than of secondary school itself. Children and young people's views about school while living in residential care were mixed. Some described supportive school environments, strong relationships with workers and access to useful supports. Others described disrupted schooling, exclusion, stigma, lack of encouragement and barriers that made attending and engaging with school difficult.

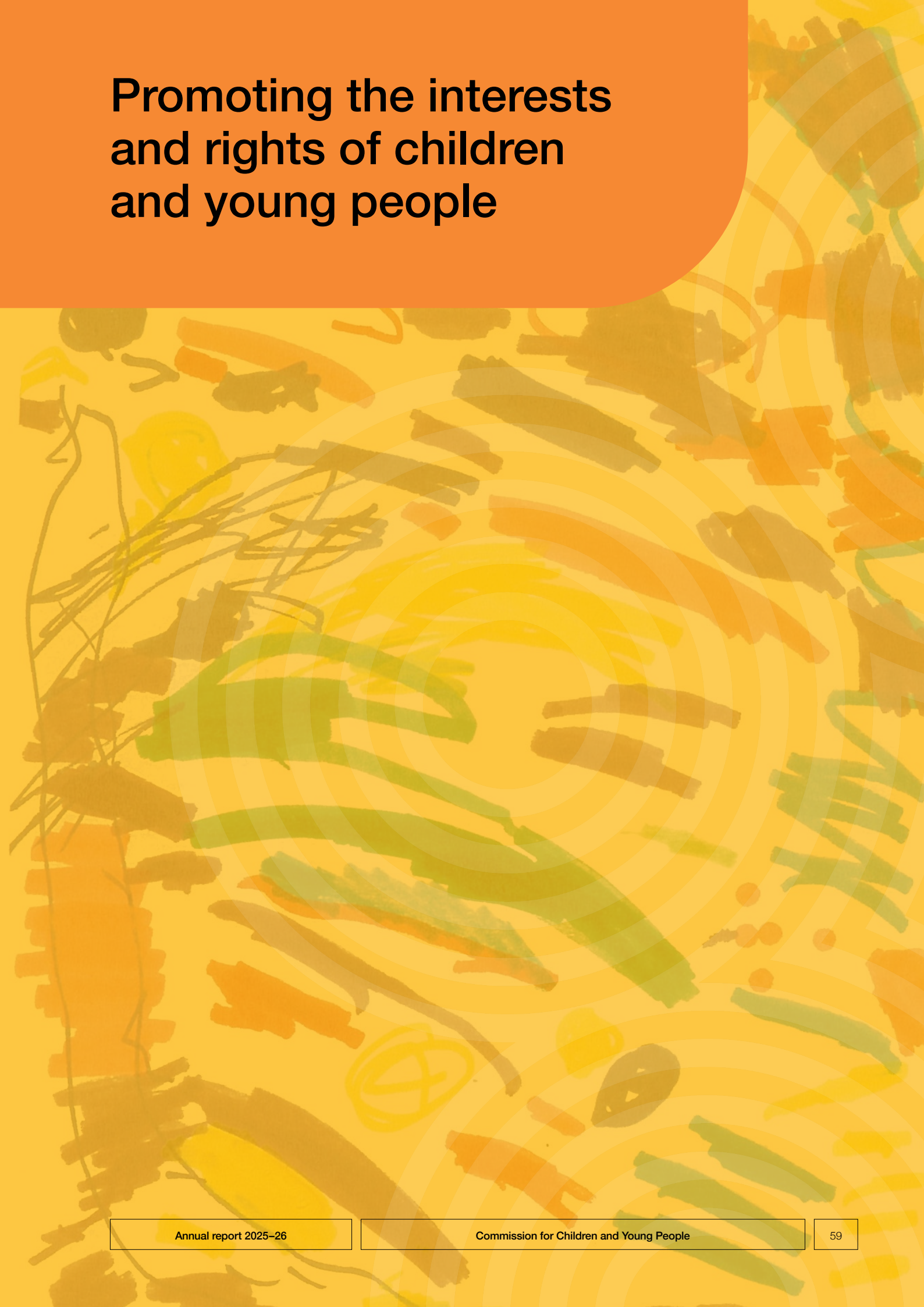
The Commission found children and young people consistently identified residential care workers as playing a critical role in supporting school attendance and engagement. Some also described the impact when this support was absent or inconsistent.

The report recommended that DFFH undertake an audit or other targeted monitoring activity focused on education support provided by residential care providers, including:

- for children and young people attending school, examining how residential care providers support their attendance and engagement, including:
  - participation in excursions, camps and extracurricular activities
  - helping them get ready for school
  - assisting with homework and other learning activities in the home.
- for children and young people who are not attending school, examining how residential care providers support them to re-engage in learning.

[27] Section 16(1)(f) of the Children, Youth and Families Act identifies that the Secretary, DFFH, has a responsibility to publish and promote a charter for children in out-of-home care to provide a framework of principles to promote the wellbeing of those children. See *Charter for children in out-of-home care*.

Promoting the interests and rights of children and young people



The Commission's functions include promoting the interests and rights of children and young people in vulnerable circumstances. We provide advice to government on improvements and innovation to policies, practices and services that affect children and young people, including in relation to the child protection, out-of-home care and youth justice systems. We advocate for action to improve the lives of children and young people through:

- engaging with government departments and ministers
- preparing submissions and letters on specific issues to government
- speaking at conferences, forums and in the media to advocate.

In 2025–26 our work advocating for systemic improvements for children and young people included:

- calling for better approaches in youth justice policy, to assist the Victorian Government with evidence that promotes community safety and appropriately supports children and young people
- supporting work to improve the equity of Victoria's education system for children and young people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage
- contributing to reforms to the Children, Youth and Families Act that will have a positive impact on the lives of children, young people and families
- assisting important reviews relating to the safety of children and young people
- participating in joint advocacy with the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates
- engaging with the public through public appearances and the media.

The Commission also advocated for the safety and rights of children and young people in child protection and out-of-home care through our individual advocacy function.

Systemic advocacy

Youth justice

In 2025–26 the Commission expressed significant concern over Victorian Government decisions that contradict overwhelming evidence. That evidence underpins the need for special safeguards and specific protections for children and young people in the criminal justice system. Our concerns were expressed publicly and directly to the government.

We urged the Victorian Government not to proceed with further changes to the *Bail Act 1977* (Vic) designed to incarcerate more children and young people on remand.

In November 2025 the Commission expressed strong opposition to the government's changes to legislation affecting children and young people. These changes mean that children and young people aged 14 or older who are charged with certain serious offences can have their matters heard in adult courts, face adult sentences and be eligible to serve life sentences. We strongly urged the government not to proceed with these laws. Our public statement highlighted our concerns that these changes will disproportionately impact the most vulnerable children and young people, including many who are known to Child Protection, and Aboriginal children and young people, who are starkly over-represented in the youth justice system.[28] As former Commissioner Singh stated:

> *'An increasingly pressured and violent youth justice environment will only further promote the criminalisation of children and young people. Without appropriate prevention, early intervention and rehabilitative support in custody, children will be primed to re-offend more seriously when they are released.*
>
> *The obligation of the Victorian Government is to follow the evidence in framing justice policies that recognise the critical differences between adults and children, and to properly invest in critically needed prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation. That is our best chance of solutions that make our communities safe.'*

[28] Refer to the Commission's 12 November statement.

This perspective was echoed by Australia's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates' First Nations Caucus, which issued a joint statement opposing the direction of youth justice reforms in Victoria.[29] Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates subsequently discussed the critical importance of prevention and early intervention at the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs' Inquiry into Australia's youth justice and incarceration system.

This year, we also expressed concern over the Victorian Government's decision to reopen the Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre, just two years after closing it, to manage the increased number of incarcerated children and young people as a result of its policy decisions. We urged the government to instead pursue funding alternate approaches based on evidence and that support the wellbeing and rights of children and young people that will help to reduce offending and make the community safer.[30]

The Commission continues to closely watch the impact of these decisions through our monitoring of youth justice custody and the conditions in which children and young people are held.

Alongside our concerns, the Commission notes the potential of the new Violence Reduction Unit to take a public health approach to address violence involving children and young people, noting this will take some time to have impact. It is imperative the unit focuses its efforts, funding and partnerships on initiatives grounded in primary prevention and early intervention.

Improving equity in Victoria's school system

All children and young people have a right to education and deserve the best possible education that sets them up for a life of success and achievement.

In 2025–26 the Commission and the Commission's Youth Council partnered to make a submission to the Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee for its inquiry into public school funding. The Committee's report reflected some of the Youth Council members' views and the Commission's concern that inadequate funding of schools can deepen inequality and further disadvantage under-resourced communities.

This year, the Commission also collaborated with colleagues across the education system on improving equity across Victorian schools. This included contributing to work led by the Education Equity Alliance. The Commission visited schools and learnt from those taking innovative, holistic approaches to supporting children and young people to learn, develop and belong, regardless of the challenges they have faced. The Commission engaged with DE on a range of issues to promote improved outcomes for students experiencing vulnerability and looks forward to continued collaboration.

Contributing to reforms to the Children, Youth and Families Act

Positive reforms introduced in 2025–26 restored some important elements to decision-making in the child protection system. The Children, Youth and Families Act was amended to give the Children's Court greater flexibility when making family reunification orders, and to focus on providing children and young people with 'stability' (rather than 'permanency'), with a more holistic understanding of 'stability' when making decisions. Changes to the Act aligned with recommendations from the Commission, made through consultations with DFFH and our 2017 *'…safe and wanted…'* inquiry. We look forward to understanding the outcomes of these reforms for children and young people, and their families.

[29] ANZCCGA First Nations Caucus, 13 November 2025 media release.
[30] Commission's 20 February 2026 media release.

New mechanisms were also added to the Act to share responsibility across government for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through the Supporting Stable and Strong Families scheme. The Commission welcomed the scheme's intent to strengthen collective responsibility across the Victorian Government to respond to the needs of children and young people experiencing vulnerability. We look forward to actively monitoring the implementation of this new scheme and driving accountability across systems to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Assisting child safety reviews

On 2 July 2025, the then Premier commissioned an independent Rapid Child Safety Review in response to allegations of abuse in childcare centres. The Commission engaged with the review, taking part in workshops and meetings. We also provided a submission and advice to help progress reforms in child safety regulation and ensure the safest possible outcomes for children and young people.

The Commission also contributed to the parliamentary inquiry into the early childhood education and care sector in Victoria. We made a submission to inform the Committee's consideration of a range of issues and challenges in child safety regulation and gave evidence at a public hearing.

In December 2025, we responded to a request for information from Parliament with Victorian Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee to assist its inquiry into the recruitment methods and impact of cults and organised fringe groups. Our advice focused on the challenges and barriers in addressing the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in cults and organised fringe groups. We highlighted that a system-wide, joined-up approach to preventing and responding to risk and harm was required and, crucially, a child-rights approach that centres children and young people's voices and experiences. The inquiry's final report was tabled in Parliament on 29 July 2026 and reflects the Commission's evidence in both its findings and recommendations.

Joint advocacy

Both commissioners are members of the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates. In 2025–26 joint advocacy by the group included:

- a second joint submission to the Australian Senate Inquiry into Australia's youth justice and incarceration system
- a joint submission to the Northern Territory Legislative Scrutiny Committee raising serious concerns about the Care and Protection of Children Legislation Amendment (Every Child Matters) Bill 2026 and its implications for Aboriginal children, families and communities in the Northern Territory
- a joint statement calling for immediate action and transformational reform to improve responses to child sexual abuse following the release of the Queensland Child Death Review Board's *In plain sight* report
- a joint statement about UNICEF's *State of Australia's children report 2025*, calling for Australian governments to address root causes of inequality, invest in wraparound supports for families and embed children's participation in policymaking.

Public engagements

This year our commissioners continued their broad range of engagements through public appearances and with the media.

Public appearances

Our commissioners delivered more than 26 engagements to promote the Commission's work, engage with our diverse stakeholders and advocate for reform across systems to improve outcomes for children and young people. In many instances, presentations were co-delivered with our Youth Council or youth engagement project officers.

Highlights this year included the following:

- Former Commissioner Singh presented at the Indigenous Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Forum about the strength that lives in our young people and how mental health and wellbeing is not just a personal issue but a collective one. Commissioner Singh highlighted that solutions to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people needed to come from the Aboriginal community.
- Former Commissioner Singh delivered the opening address and presented alongside Youth Council members for a keynote address at the MacKillop Institute's Lead the Way Conference. The Commissioner and Youth Council members talked about improving systems through genuine collaboration with children and young people and how to meet them where they are at.
- Commissioner Beaton co-presented with a Youth Council member at the Goulburn Child and Family Services Alliance and Goulburn Family Violence Regional Integration Committee conference. The presentation reflected on a decade of family violence reform and called for children to be recognised as primary victims and rights-holders, not secondary figures in a system designed around adult survivors.
- Commissioner Beaton joined a fireside chat at the Doing School Differently conference alongside Dr Kate Bower of the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and Commission Youth Council members. The discussion covered children's online privacy and safety, the impacts of the social media minimum age laws and embedding wellbeing and inclusion into everyday school practice.

Media coverage

This year we saw strong coverage on issues central to the Commission's work and issues impacting children and young people's safety, wellbeing and rights across digital, radio, television and print media.

Youth justice featured prominently in the Victorian and national public debate, with widespread media coverage of serious youth offending and significant new youth justice measures enacted by the Victorian Government. This included harsher bail and adult sentencing for young people for defined offences. Reports and commentary often framed children and young people through a narrow lens of criminality without acknowledging the circumstances and structural factors that shape their lives. Commissioners continued to make public statements to promote evidence-based solutions that work to address the drivers of offending and deliver positive long-term outcomes for children and the community.

The Commission's report, *Left behind: Systemic inquiry into responses to children and young people who are the subject of multiple reports to Child Protection* received strong coverage. The inquiry focused on strengthening the system of child protection referrals to voluntary family support services to improve engagement, address risk and achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

Child death inquiries and previous systemic inquiries also featured in the media, including the *Out of sight* systemic inquiry, highlighting the issue of sexual exploitation of children and young people in residential care.

This year also saw significant media attention on child safety in the childcare sector, the Victorian Government's Rapid Child Safety Review and resulting legislative changes including those impacting the Commission's former regulatory functions.

Supporting children and young people through individual advocacy

In addition to our systemic advocacy functions, the Commission has legislated powers to support and advocate for individual children and young people in contact with the child protection or out-of-home care systems.

This is the Commission's second year operating the individual advocacy function, which provides a unique and critically important avenue for children and young people's concerns to be heard and acted on. Unfortunately, the Commission has not received any dedicated funding for this advocacy function. Accepting these cases therefore requires our resources to be redistributed, pulling away from other important functions. Even so, we advocated for 19 children and young people in 2025–26, assisting and supporting them to have their concerns heard and addressed.

Our advocacy practice is evolving. This year, the Commission increasingly focused on ensuring the views of the child or young person are sought and communicated, typically through direct contact to clarify and better understand their concerns and their wishes. In 2025–26, a high proportion of advocacy matters (68 per cent) arose from direct contact from the child or young person.

More than half (58 per cent) of the children and young people involved in these advocacy matters were living in residential care; 37 per cent identified as Aboriginal.

Issues raised by children and young people generally related to case management, case planning and placement. The most common issues were about the child or young person's participation in planning and decision-making, their placement planning and placement safety.

Case study:

Dani's story

Dani, a young person living in residential care, sought assistance from the Commission after leaving their residential care house following an incident that left Dani feeling unsafe and vulnerable.

Dani's care provider made contact, asking them to return. Dani was concerned they would be expected to stay somewhere they did not feel safe or placed in secure welfare, despite being told this would not occur. Dani wanted their concerns about their residential placement properly addressed so they could return to live there.

Through collaboration and engagement with DFFH and the community service agency, Dani's care provider and Child Protection came to appreciate their concerns. The care provider worked with Dani on a plan to address these. Dani returned to their residential care placement feeling safe and comfortable.

Case study:

Shah's story

Shah, 17, lives in out-of-home care. He approached the Commission about ongoing communication difficulties he was having with his case worker that resulted in their relationship breaking down. Shah described having little contact from his worker, and when they did speak, Shah did not feel his worker understood and considered how his past trauma affected his behaviour and communication style. This impeded their ability to communicate effectively. Shah had attempted to voice his concerns with his worker's manager, but he had not felt heard and his concerns remained unaddressed.

In response to the Commission's advocacy for Shah, a senior Child Protection manager met with Shah to discuss his concerns and seek his input about potential solutions. As an outcome of this meeting, Shah was offered more-specialised case management support. Shah felt heard and supported to achieve meaningful change.

Responding to enquiries

Approaches from the public

As well as advocating for individual children and young people, the Commission responds to a wide variety of approaches and complaints from the community. These mostly concern the safety and wellbeing of children and young people known to Child Protection or in out-of-home care or complaints about DFFH or funded community service organisations.

The Commission does not have a legislative function to investigate these matters and provides an information and referral response with an emphasis on promoting the rights of children, connecting enquirers to the appropriate oversight or complaints handling body. This year, we responded to 490 approaches. Most approaches came from family members. Increasingly, we are receiving more approaches directly from children and young people. Of the 490 approaches, 18 per cent (90 approaches) were about Aboriginal children and young people.

General enquiries

The Commission responds to thousands of enquiries from the community. Throughout the year, the Commission received almost 4,000[31] enquiries via our general enquiry lines, representing a five per cent increase from the previous year (3,804).

The Commission aims to resolve 80 per cent of enquiries within three business days. This year, we exceeded that target, resolving 85 per cent of enquiries within this timeframe.

[31] This number includes approaches from the public.

Improving outcomes for Aboriginal children



Our advocacy to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people is grounded in ensuring the government understands their experiences, upholds their rights and provides appropriate responses and support.

In 2025–26, this included:

- elevating the voices and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people and providing advice into government and community sector consultation processes
- an individual inquiry into the experiences of an Aboriginal young person in residential care
- monitoring the implementation of recommendations from past inquiries.

Strategic advocacy

Submission to the federal inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In 2025–26, the Commission made a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' Inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. To inform the submission, we drew on our engagement with 69 Aboriginal children and young people in Mildura, Robinvale and Frankston, where we heard about experiences of racism in regional and outer-metropolitan areas. This was particularly evident surrounding the 2023 referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. Aboriginal children and young people described experiencing racism everywhere during daily activities, like going to school, to the shops, in local community spaces and online. Young people reported the failures of the adults and teachers around them to intervene, or minimising what had happened, and a constant experience of not being believed when reporting racism. The Commission drew attention to these harms, which teach children that adults and institutions will not protect them.

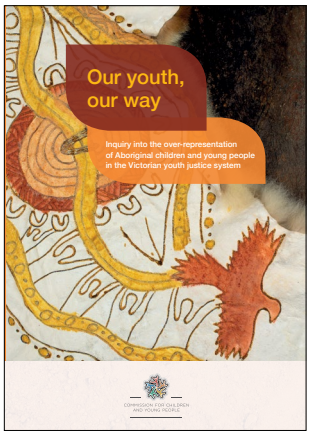
Aboriginal children and young people were equally clear about what they wanted to see change. They called for greater accountability for adults and teachers who witness or enable racism. They asked for more community events and educational curriculums that support learning about Aboriginal history and culture, delivered appropriately, instead of tokenistic gestures that feel like a tick-box exercise. Importantly, they told us that initiatives aimed at connecting and uniting communities will not succeed unless structural and systemic racism is also addressed.

Inquiry into service responses to an Aboriginal child – 'GW'

In late 2024, we initiated an inquiry into the services provided to an Aboriginal child, GW, in response to concerns we held about how risks to their safety and wellbeing were managed.

While many professionals and services were engaged to support GW, this inquiry helps us understand the areas of service provision to young people with complex needs that could be improved. This includes availability of mental health, addiction treatment and withdrawal services, particularly in regional areas; consistent connection to culture; and ongoing support for engagement in education. It also highlights aspects of the child protection and out-of-home care systems considered by the Commission in past systemic inquiries. It confirms that, in many of these areas, more work is needed to adequately address the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people and to provide them with a care environment in which they are safe from further harm and able to realise their potential.

Our youth, our way: Five years on



This year marks five years since the tabling of the Commission's *Our youth, our way: Inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system*. Our youth, our way's 41 findings and 75 recommendations remain the Commission's most comprehensive account to date of the systemic reform required to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.

The significance of *Our youth, our way* has grown in the years since tabling, informing the Yoorrook Justice Commission findings, Wirkara Kulpa (Victoria's 10-year Aboriginal youth justice strategy) and the Youth Justice Act. The inquiry's central premise, that self-determined justice systems and Aboriginal-led solutions are key, continues to challenge future policy development and serve as an important advocacy and accountability tool for government and all sector stakeholders. The Commission continues to assess and publicly report on government progress against its recommendations each year.

Several positive reforms have progressed in 2025–26, including:

- expanded Marram-Ngala Ganbu and Children's Koori Courts
- police oversight reform

- a partnership between the Aboriginal Children's Forum and Aboriginal Justice Forum to divert Aboriginal children in out-of-home care from entering or progressing into the youth justice system.

However, while 22 *Our youth, our way* recommendations are complete, some outcomes have worsened due to recent shifts in government policy and legislation negatively impacting Aboriginal children and young people.

Challenges to progress in 2025–26

The passing of 'Adult Time for Violent Crime' reforms under the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Act 2025* allows for children aged 14 or older to face trial and sentencing in adult County Courts. This increases the likelihood and length of a custodial sentence for children who fall within their scope. These reforms contradict recommendation 10 and recommendation 36 in the *Our youth, our way* report, which seek to:

- prohibit children under the age of 16 being sentenced to, or remanded in, youth justice custody
- ensure sentencing legislation requires judicial officers to consider the impact of various factors on a young person's behaviour, such as trauma, developmental issues and removal from family and community.

The Commission remains concerned that these sentencing reforms will lead to a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal children and young people in custody. *Our youth, our way* documents the detrimental effect of custodial experiences on Aboriginal children and young people, which reinforce cycles of entrenchment in the criminal justice system.

Taken together with the state's passing of bail reforms in March 2025 and its abandoned commitment to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 in August 2024, outcomes related to recommendations 8, 57, 59 and 61 have also regressed. These decisions ignore the evidence in *Our youth, our way* that government should invest in tackling the drivers of offending and support prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation. The Commission continues to hear from Aboriginal organisations and community members that now, more than ever, it is essential to recognise *Our youth, our way* as an accountability mechanism, and advocate for the full implementation of all recommendations.

Positive progress in 2025–26

Several recommendations in *Our youth, our way* continued to move forward in 2025–26. This includes:

- recorded data on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and young people at each point in their journey through the youth justice system, using indicators developed and approved in partnership with the Aboriginal community (relating to recommendation 3)
- collaboration between the Aboriginal Children's Forum, the Aboriginal Justice Forum and relevant departments to divert Aboriginal children in out-of-home care from entering or progressing in the youth justice system, including development of the first joint forum for the Aboriginal Children's Forum and Aboriginal Justice Forum (relating to recommendation 39)
- continued work towards establishing healing centres for Aboriginal children and young people (relating to recommendation 47)
- police oversight through the work of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission in establishing its Focused Police Complaints Team, a specialist unit that assesses and investigates single-incident complaints about Victoria Police by people from communities considered at a higher risk of experiencing police misconduct, such as children and Aboriginal people (relating to recommendation 54)
- expansion of the fully specialised Children's Court and Children's Koori Court to support their work with Aboriginal children and young people (relating to recommendation 62 and 63).

The Commission's 2025–26 assessment of progress in implementing the recommendations from *Our youth, our way* is available at https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/inquiries/systemic-inquiries/our-youth-our-way/. Addressing over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system must remain a priority, and we continue to advocate for the full implementation of all recommendations in *Our youth, our way.*

Corporate services and financial summary

On 20 July 2016, under section 53 of the *Financial Management Act 1994*, the Minister for Finance approved that the Commission's financial statements be included in the accounts of the former Department of Health and Human Services (now DFFH) in its annual report.

Table 10 summarises the Commission's expenditure for 2025–26.

Table 10: Commission expenditure, 2023–24 to 2025–26

Expenditure	2025–26 ($)	2024–25 ($)	2023–24 ($)
Salaries and on-costs	12,034,444	14,422,233	13,076,179
Grants and other transfers	–	–	–
Operating expenses	1,387,746	2,031,903	1,973,573
Depreciation	–	–	–
Total expenditure	**13,422,190**	**16,454,136**	**15,049,752**

Asset Management Accountability Framework maturity assessment

The Commission does not have any assets for the purposes of the Asset Management Accountability Framework.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Disclosure index

The Commission for Children and Young People's financial statements are now included in the accounts of DFFH and, therefore, disclosures under 'Financial statements required under Part 7 of the *Financial Management Act 1994*', 'Other requirements under Standing Direction 5.2' and 'Other disclosures are required by financial reporting directions (FRD) in notes to the financial statements' are referenced in DFFH's report of operations and disclosure index.

Table 11: Commission disclosures

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FRD 22	Manner of establishment and the relevant Ministers	2, 15
FRD 22	Purpose, functions, powers and duties	14–15
FRD 22	Key initiatives and projects	16–18
FRD 22	Nature and range of services provided	14
Management and structure		
FRD 22	Organisational structure	75
Financial and other information		
FRD 10	Disclosure index	73
FRD 12	Disclosure of major contracts	84
FRD 15	Executive disclosures	75, 81
FRD 22	Employment and conduct principles	77
FRD 22	Occupational health and safety policy	76
FRD 22	Summary of the financial results for the year	71
FRD 22	Significant changes in financial position during the year	N/A
FRD 22	Major changes or factors affecting performance	N/A
FRD 22	Subsequent events	N/A
FRD 22	Application and operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982	84–85
FRD 22	Compliance with building and maintenance provisions of Building Act 1993	85
FRD 22	Statement on National Competition Policy	N/A
FRD 22	Application and operation of the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012	85
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FRD 22	Disclosure of information and communication technology expenditure	83
FRD 22	Reviews and studies expenditure	N/A

Appendix 1. Disclosure index
continued

Legislation	Requirement	Page
Standing Directions and Financial Reporting Directions		
FRD 22	Statement of availability of other information	86
FRD 22	Asset Management Accountability Framework maturity assessment	71
FRD 22	Disclosure of emergency procurement	87
FRD 22	Disclosure of social procurement activities under the Social Procurement Framework	87
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Appendix 2: Governance and organisational structure

Commissioners

Principal Commissioner

The Principal Commissioner has all the functions and powers of the Commission and any other powers or functions conferred on her by the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012* (Vic) or any other Act. In December 2025 Tracy Beaton commenced as the Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People for a five-year term. Meena Singh and Argiri Alisandratos previously acted as Principal Commissioner until Ms Beaton's appointment.

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

The Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People is responsible for leading the functions of the Commission relating to Aboriginal children and young people. In June 2026 Dallas Widdicombe was appointed to the role of Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People for a five-year term.

Executive officers

Leanne Barnes

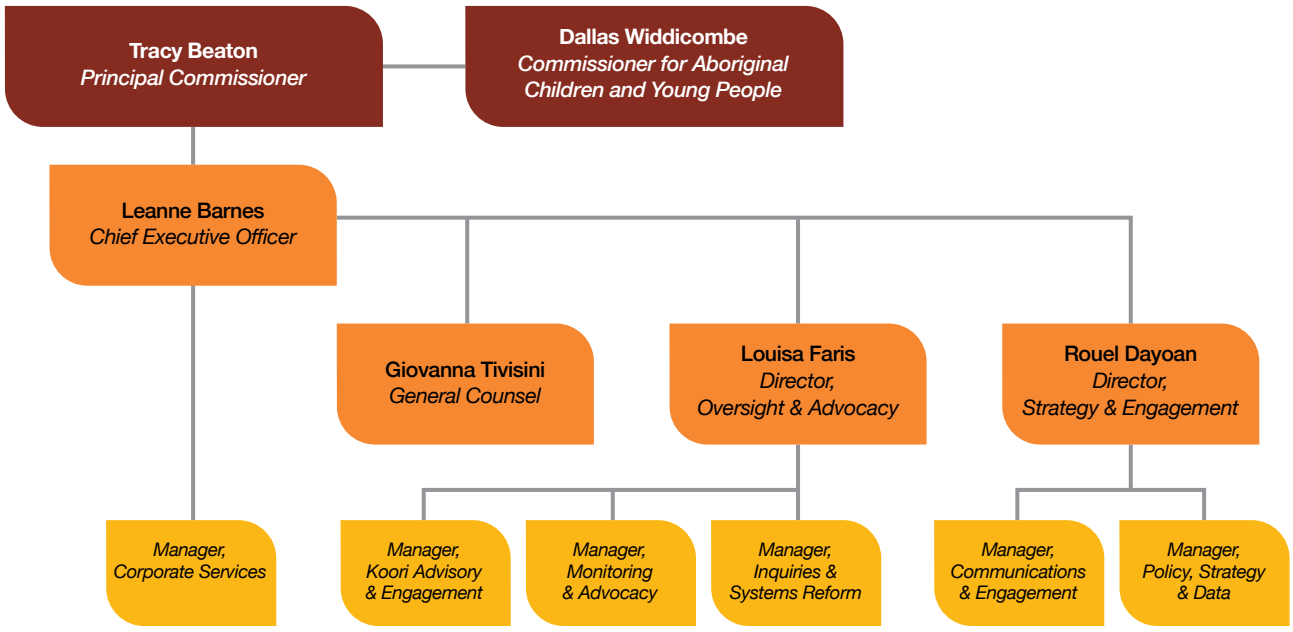
In February 2022 Leanne Barnes commenced as the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission and has recently been reappointed to the role until May 2031. Ms Barnes provides operational leadership to the Commission and ensures its effective and efficient management.

Giovanna Tivisini

Giovanna Tivisini was appointed to the executive role of General Counsel in 2019 and is responsible for the delivery of legal services across the Commission's portfolios.

Organisational structure as at 30 June 2026

Figure 5: Organisational chart



Audit and Risk Committee membership and roles

The Audit and Risk Committee consists of the following members:

- Fiona Green, Chairperson
- Mary Polis, Independent Member
- Michael Shatter, Independent Member.

The primary role of the Audit and Risk Committee is to review and advise the executive of the Commission on matters of financial accountability, internal financial and non-financial controls, and risk management.

The Audit and Risk Committee provides oversight and advice to the executive of the Commission in relation to:

- the Commission's financial performance
- the Commission's financial reporting processes
- the effective operation of the Commission's risk management framework
- the charter, scope of work, performance and independence of the Commission's internal audit function
- recommendations made by the internal auditor and the implementation of actions to resolve issues raised
- matters of accountability and internal controls affecting the financial operations of the Commission
- the effectiveness of management information systems and other systems of internal financial and non-financial controls
- the acceptability, disclosure of, and correct accounting treatment for, significant transactions that are not part of the Commission's normal course of business.

Occupational health and safety

The Commission is committed to ensuring all staff remain safe and healthy at work in line with our obligations under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007.

In 2025–26 the Commission moved from its office location at 570 Bourke Street to 150 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

Throughout the year, the Commission continued its ongoing internal safety reporting process, delivered a tailored employee wellbeing program and a dedicated vicarious trauma informed supervision program for interested staff. Many of these processes and programs were tailored to support staff working both in the office and at home (hybrid working).

The Commission continued our engagement with Medibank Health Solutions to deliver expert wellbeing support to our staff. The employee wellbeing program consists of bi-monthly telephone-based counselling for staff to discuss any issues they may be experiencing, either because of the subject matter they deal with at work, other work-related issues or any personal concerns. The frequency of counselling sessions can be increased if required.

In 2025–26 the Commission also continued to deliver a bespoke vicarious trauma-informed supervision program to teams at high-risk of exposure to vicarious trauma.

New starters at the Commission continue to receive an occupational health and safety induction program that includes a health and safety related tour of our office and demonstration of the evacuation process.

Occupational Health and Safety Committee meetings

The Commission has an Occupational Health and Safety Committee. The committee consists of elected management and staff representatives, the Commission's Health and Safety Representatives and Secretariat. The committee is chaired by the Commission's Manager, Corporate Services.

Four occupational health and safety committee meetings were held in 2025–26.

Injuries and incident management

There was one reported injury in 2025–26. There were no reported injuries in 2024–25.

The reported injury related to a Commission employee fainting in the office. The low number of reported injuries over the past two years can largely be attributed to staff continuing to work both in the office and at home rather than just in an office-based environment. However, staff are reminded that any injuries incurred at home while working for the Commission are reportable injuries. The Commission is pleased that despite moving office locations in 2025–26 there were no reported injuries from the move.

There were no WorkCover claims in 2025–26.

Employment and conduct principles

The Commission is committed to applying merit and equity principles when appointing staff. Our selection processes ensure applicants are assessed and evaluated fairly and equitably based on the key selection criteria and other accountabilities without discrimination.

Employees have been correctly classified in workforce data collections.

Our commitment to child safety

The Commission is committed to providing a child-safe and child-friendly environment, where children and young people with whom we have contact are safe, feel safe and can take part in decisions that affect them.

The Commission's *Child safety and wellbeing policy* and *Child safe code of conduct* apply to the commissioners, staff, contractors, volunteers and authorised persons engaged by the Commission.

Appendix 3: Workforce data

Public sector values and employment principles

The *Code of Conduct for Victorian public sector employees of special bodies* applies to the Commission.

Comparative workforce data

The Commission employed 48 people as at 30 June 2026, which is a decrease of 39 employees from the same time last year (Tables 12a and 12b). The significant decrease in numbers predominately relates to the transfer of the Commission's regulatory functions and associated staff to the Social Services Regulator on 23 February 2026. There has been a slight decrease to the number of employees aged 15 to 24 years compared with the previous year, however the Commission continues to employ additional project support officers to help with youth engagement work. Similar to previous years, most Commission staff are employed at the VPS 5 or 6 levels.

Table 12a: Workforce data as at 30 June 2026

	30 June 2026	All employees		Ongoing			Fixed-term and casual	
		Number (headcount)	FTE	Full-time (headcount)	Part-time (headcount)	FTE	Number (headcount)	FTE
Demographic data	**Gender**							
	Men	11	10.6	9	0	9	2	1.6
	Women	37	34.1	21	10	29	6	5.1
	Self-described	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
	Age							
	15–24	3	2.1	1	0	1	2	1.1
	25–34	10	9.6	6	0	6	4	3.6
	35–44	13	11.7	8	5	11.7	0	0
	45–54	11	10.7	9	2	10.7	0	0
	55–64	9	8.6	4	3	6.6	2	2
	65+	2	2	2	0	2	0	0
Classification data	**VPS 1–6 grades**	**44**	**40.8**	**29**	**9**	**36.1**	**6**	**4.7**
	VPS 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	VPS 3	2	1.1	0	0	0	2	1.1
	VPS 4	9	8.6	6	0	6	3	2.6
	VPS 5	18	16.2	10	8	16.2	0	0
	VPS 6	15	14.9	13	1	13.9	1	1
	Senior employees	**4**	**3.9**	**1**	**1**	**1.9**	**2**	**2**
	Executives	2	2	0	0	0	2	2
	STS	2	1.9	1	1	1.9	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total employees	**48**	**44.7**	**30**	**10**	**38**	**8**	**6.7**

Table 12b: Workforce data as at 30 June 2025

	30 June 2025	All employees		Ongoing			Fixed-term and casual	
		Number (headcount)	FTE	Full-time (headcount)	Part-time (headcount)	FTE	Number (headcount)	FTE
Demographic data	**Gender**							
	Men	18	17.1	14	0	14	4	3.1
	Women	69	63.2	37	20	52.8	12	10.4
	Self-described	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
	Age							
	15–24	7	4.5	1	0	1	6	3.5
	25–34	16	15.6	10	2	11.6	4	4
	35–44	24	22	15	9	22	0	0
	45–54	23	22.2	14	4	17.2	5	5
	55–64	12	11	6	5	10	1	1
	65+	5	5	5	0	5	0	0
Classification data	**VPS 1–6 grades**	**81**	**74.5**	**49**	**19**	**64**	**13**	**10.5**
	VPS 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	VPS 3	4	2.3	0	0	0	4	2.3
	VPS 4	19	17.1	12	3	13.9	4	3.2
	VPS 5	35	33.1	20	11	29.1	4	4
	VPS 6	23	22	17	5	21	1	1
	Senior employees	**6**	**5.8**	**2**	**1**	**2.8**	**3**	**3**
	Executives	3	3	0	0	0	3	3
	STS	3	2.8	2	1	2.8	0	0
	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total employees	**87**	**80.3**	**51**	**20**	**66.8**	**16**	**13.5**

The figures in Tables 12a and 12b exclude those on leave without pay or absent on secondment, external contractors/consultants, temporary staff employed by employment agencies, and a small number of people who are not employees but are appointees to a statutory office, as defined in the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

All figures reflect employment levels during the last full pay period of each year.

'Ongoing' employees means people engaged on an open-ended contract of employment and executives engaged on a standard executive contract who are active in the last full pay period of June.

Table 13 discloses the annualised total salary for senior employees of the Commission, categorised by classification. The salary amount is reported as the full-time annualised salary.

Table 13: Annualised total salary by $40,000 bands for executives and other senior non-executive staff as at 30 June 2026

Income band (salary)	Executives	STS*	Other
$160,000 – $199,999	0	1	0
$200,000 – $239,999	0	1	0
$240,000 – $279,999	1	0	0
$280,000 – $319,999	0	0	1
$320,000 – $359,999	1	0	0
$360,000 – $399,999	0	0	1
Total	**2**	**2**	**2**

*STS = senior technical specialist

Workforce inclusion

The Commission highly values equal opportunity, workforce diversity and inclusion.

In 2021–22 we undertook a workplace review under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* and in 2022, we developed our *Gender Equality Action Plan 2022–25*.

The Commission's four-year Gender Equality Action Plan included an analysis of available workforce data to identify and address any inequities evident from the data. Several strategies and actions were then developed to assist and further strengthen the Commission as a workplace that celebrates and promotes employee diversity and inclusion.

In 2025–26 we developed and submitted our second *Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–29*. This plan identified new strategies to further strengthen our commitment to gender equality. We look forward to working on and addressing these strategies over future years.

Executive data

For the Commission, a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES) is defined as a person employed as an executive under Part 3 of the Public Administration Act. All figures reflect employment levels at the last full pay period in June of the current and corresponding previous reporting year.

Table 14 discloses the total number of SES for the Commission, broken down by gender.

Table 14: Total number of SES for the Commission, broken down by gender

	Total		Men		Women		Self-described	
Class	No.	Var.	No.	Var.	No.	Var.	No.	Var.
SES-1	1	0	0	0	1	0	nil	nil
SES-2	1	0	0	0	1	0	nil	nil
Total	**2**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**nil**	**nil**

Table 15 lists the number of executive positions that were occupied at the end of the financial year compared with the previous year. The table lists the actual number of executives, non-executive senior staff (Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People) and accountable officers (Principal Commissioner) over the reporting period. Separations are those that have left the Commission during the reporting period.

Table 15: Reconciliation of executive numbers

	2025–26	2024–25
Executives	3	3
Non-executive senior staff	2	1
Accountable officer	1	1
Separations	2	1
Total at 30 June	**4**	**4**

Appendix 4: Other disclosures

Local jobs first

The *Local Jobs First Act 2003* introduced in August 2018 brings together the Victorian Industry Participation Policy and Major Project Skills Guarantee policy, which were previously administered separately.

Government departments and public sector bodies (which includes special bodies such as the Commission) must apply the Local Jobs First policy in all projects valued at $3 million or more in metropolitan Melbourne, or, for statewide projects, $1 million or more for projects in regional Victoria.

The Major Project Skills Guarantee applies to all construction projects valued at $20 million or more.

The Commission did not engage in any applicable tenders or projects during the reporting period.

Advertising expenditure

In 2025–26 the Commission did not commission any advertising campaigns with a total media spend of $100,000 or greater (excluding GST).

Consultancy expenditure

Consultancies $10,000 or greater

In 2025–26 the Commission engaged 13 consultancies with individual costs greater than $10,000. The total value of those consultancies was $409,656 (Table 16).

Investigations in Table 16 refer to own motion investigations concerning reportable allegations conducted under section 16O of the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*.

Table 16: Consultancies valued at $10,000 or greater, 2025–26

Consultant	Purpose of consultancy	Total approved project fee (excl. GST)	Expenditure 2025–26 (excl. GST)	Future expenditure (excl. GST)
FOI Solutions	Advice	31,818	17,078	–
FOI Solutions	Advice	70,000	25,926	–
FOI Solutions	Advice	35,454	13,910	–
Justitia Lawyers and Consultants	Investigation	31,588	17,228	–
Justitia Lawyers and Consultants	Investigation	25,584	10,129	–
Lauren Hodes	Criminal Justice Inquiry	44,650	44,650	–
List A Barristers	Advice	28,616	28,616	–
Portable	Youth Justice Story Telling Project	14,545	14,130	–
Safe Space Legal	Investigation	45,325	32,854	–
Shape Corrections	Corrections Inquiry Project	96,398	96,398	–
SociaLens Consulting	South Sudanese Australian Expert Working Group Project Report	40,000	31,450	–
Tilda Hum	South Sudanese Australian Expert Working Group Project Report	14,567	14,623	–
Viaggio Mather Consulting	Review of Reportable Conduct Scheme Processes	62,664	62,664	–
Total		**541,209**	**409,656**	**–**

Consultancies less than $10,000

In 2025–26 the Commission engaged 13 consultancies with individual costs less than $10,000. The total value of those consultancies was $49,559.

Information and communication technology expenditure

For the 2025–26 reporting period, the Commission had a total information and communication technology expenditure of $193,896 (Table 17).

Non-business-as-usual information and communication technology expenditure was $26,071. This related to case management system enhancements and decommissioning of defunct network drives. Business-as-usual expenditure predominantly related to system licences and hosting fees.

Table 17: Commission ICT expenditure, 2025–26

Business-as-usual (Total)	Non-business as usual (Total = Operational expenditure and capital expenditure)	Operational expenditure	Capital expenditure
$167,825	**$26,071**	**$26,071**	**$0**

Disclosure of major contracts

The Commission did not enter into any contracts greater than $10 million in value.

Freedom of information

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) allows the public a right of access to documents held by the Commission. The purpose of the FOI Act is to extend as far as possible the right of the community to access information held by government departments, local councils, ministers and other bodies subject to the FOI Act.

Documents subject to the FOI Act comprise those created by the Commission or supplied to the Commission by an external organisation or individual. These may also include maps, films, microfiche, photographs, computer printouts, computer discs, tape recordings and videotapes. Information about the type of material produced by the Commission is available on our website under the Part II Information Statement.

The FOI Act allows the Commission to refuse access, either fully or partially, to certain documents or information. Examples of documents that may not be accessed include cabinet documents; some internal working documents; law enforcement documents; documents covered by legal professional privilege, such as legal advice; personal information about other people; and information provided to the Commission in confidence and information that is confidential under another Act.

Under the FOI Act, the processing time is 30 days. However, when external consultation is required under sections 29, 29A, 31, 31A, 33, 34 or 35 of the FOI Act, the processing time is 45 days. Processing time may also be extended by periods of 30 days, in consultation with the applicant. With the applicant's agreement this may occur any number of times. However, obtaining an applicant's agreement for an extension cannot occur after the timeframe for deciding a request has expired.

If an applicant is not satisfied by a decision made by the Commission, under s 49A of the FOI Act, they have the right to seek a review by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner within 28 days of receiving a decision letter.

Making a freedom of information request

FOI requests can be made using the options available on our website. An application fee of $33.60 applied in 2025–26. Access charges may also be payable if the document pool is large and the search for material time consuming.

Access to documents can also be obtained through a written request to the Commission, as detailed in section 17 of the FOI Act.

When making an FOI request, applicants should ensure requests are in writing and clearly identify the documents sought.

Requests for documents in our possession should be addressed to:

Chief Executive Officer
Commission for Children and Young People
Level 16, 150 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Alternatively, email the Commission's Chief Executive Officer at contact@ccyp.vic.gov.au.

Freedom of information statistics

The Commission received 18 FOI applications in 2025–26. This is an increase compared with 2024–25 (11 received).

Of the 18 applications received and progressed, all decisions were made within the statutory 30-day period. For all applications that progressed, access to documents was either denied in full or the documents did not exist.

Two decisions made by the Commission during 2025–26 were reviewed by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC). One decision made in late 2024–25 was also reviewed by OVIC in early 2025–26. One individual who made a request also lodged a complaint to OVIC regarding the Commission's decision. All OVIC decisions were made in the Commission's favour.

No decisions made during 2025–26 were referred to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

More information

More information about the operation and scope of FOI requests is in the FOI Act, regulations made under the Act and on the OVIC website.

Compliance with the *Building Act 1993*

The Commission does not own or control any government buildings and is exempt from notifying its compliance with the building and maintenance provisions of the *Building Act 1993*.

Compliance with the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012*

The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* encourages and assists people in making disclosures of improper conduct by public officers and public bodies. The Act protects people who make disclosures in line with the provisions of the Act and establishes a system for the matters disclosed to be investigated and rectifying action to be taken.

The Commission does not tolerate improper conduct by employees, nor the taking of reprisal action against those who come forward to disclose such conduct. We are committed to ensuring transparency and accountability in our administrative and management practices. We support the making of disclosures that reveal corrupt conduct, conduct involving a substantial mismanagement of public resources, or conduct involving a substantial risk to public health and safety or the environment.

The Commission will take all reasonable steps to protect people who make such disclosures from any detrimental action in reprisal for making the disclosure. We will also afford natural justice to the person who is the subject of the disclosure to the extent it is legally possible.

Reporting procedures

Disclosures of improper conduct or detrimental action by the Commission or any employee may be made to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission:

Level 3, 2 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Phone: 1800 422 284
Website: www.ibac.vic.gov.au.

Public interest disclosures statistics

During 2025–26, the Commission was not made aware of any disclosures being made to the Independent Broad Based Anti-corruption Commission regarding the Commission or our staff in 2025–26.

Compliance with the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*

The Commission supports the principles of the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*. We demonstrate this through a commitment of providing flexible working arrangements for staff to support their roles as carers.

The Commission continued to offer staff flexible arrangements during 2025–26. Staff were supported to adopt hybrid working arrangements to work both at home and the office to support work-life balances.

Additional Commission information available on request

In compliance with the requirements of the Standing Directions of the Minister for Finance, details in respect of the items listed below have been retained by the Commission and are available on request, subject to the provisions of the FOI Act and any other relevant laws and Commission policies:

a) a statement that declarations of pecuniary interests have been duly completed by all relevant officers
b) details of shares held by a senior officer as nominee or held beneficially in a statutory authority or subsidiary
c) details of publications produced by the entity about itself, and how these can be obtained
d) details of changes in prices, fees, charges, rates and levies charged by the entity
e) details of any major external reviews carried out on the entity
f) details of major research and development activities undertaken by the entity
g) details of overseas visits undertaken including a summary of the objectives and outcomes of each visit
h) details of major promotional, public relations and marketing activities undertaken by the entity to develop community awareness of the entity and its services
i) details of assessments and measures undertaken to improve the occupational health and safety of employees
j) a general statement on industrial relations within the entity and details of time lost through industrial accidents and disputes
k) a list of major committees sponsored by the entity, the purposes of each committee and the extent to which the purposes have been achieved
l) details of all consultancies and contractors including:
   - consultants/contractors engaged
   - services provided
   - expenditure committed to for each engagement.

The information is available on request from:

Chief Executive Officer
Commission for Children and Young People
Level 16, 150 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Compliance with the *Disability Act 2006*

The Commission acknowledges the importance of strengthening the rights of people with a disability and is committed to creating and maintaining an accessible and inclusive environment for all people with a disability. This includes Commission employees, stakeholders or members of the public.

The Commission supports the whole-of-government *Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan 2022–2026*, a 4-year plan that outlines the actions the government will take to ensure the Victorian community is inclusive and accessible.

In 2025–26 the Commission developed our second *Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–29*, which has a focus on intersectionality, including disability. Several actions have been developed in this four-year plan to address potential gaps, including improved data collection relating to disability.

In 2025 the Commission moved to a new office and has identified particular improvements to address accessibility.

Disclosure of emergency procurement

The Commission did not activate any emergency procurement activities in 2025–26.

Disclosure of social procurement activities under the Social Procurement Framework

The Social Procurement Framework governs how the Victorian Government undertakes social procurement.

In 2019 we sought and received an exemption from developing our own social procurement strategy due to the memorandum of understanding and procurement related support provided by DFFH.

The department's Social Procurement Strategy 2023–25 applies to all procurement activities of both the department and the Commission. As such, the overall administration, monitoring and reporting of all social procurement activities for the Commission is managed by DFFH.

The Commission acknowledges the importance of DFFH's Social Procurement Strategy and works closely with the department to ensure procurement activities align with the Victorian Government's Social Enterprise Strategy and Inclusive Employment Framework.

Disclosure of procurement complaints

The Commission did not receive any formal procurement complaints in 2025–26.

Reporting of environmental data

The Commission is committed to environmental sustainability in its operations. Through the memorandum of understanding with DFFH, the department is responsible for managing our office lease and subsequent utilities.

The Commission notes that DFFH's Health and Human Services Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022–26 is progressing, and the reporting of all environmental data by DFFH includes the Commission in its reporting.

The Commission itself minimises the use of electricity and water by using efficient appliances and office equipment, including energy-efficient lighting. The Commission creates and stores records electronically and printing is generally discouraged. The Commission has also decreased its number of printers in 2025–26 from 3 to 1 printer. When printing documents, the Commission also uses 100 per cent recycled paper and encourages double-sided printing.

The Commission separates waste systems into recycled, landfill and compost, and bins are cleared daily. Takeaway coffee cups are also separated and recycled through a dedicated coffee cup recycling system.

In 2025–26 Commission staff continued to adopt hybrid working arrangements, working both at home and in the office. Office ceiling lights are set on timers to automatically turn off outside regular business hours. Water usage is minimised due to a reduction in full-time office attendance; power usage is minimised with devices either turned off when not in use or set to power-saving mode; and the purchase, consumption and disposal of perishables is reduced. In 2025–26 the Commission also cancelled weekly fresh milk deliveries and switched to long-life milk products.

As per the Commission's Domestic Travel and Expenses Policy, staff are encouraged to use public transport where possible when undertaking business activities. The Commission books government fleet vehicles for travel within Victoria rather than owning and managing our own vehicle fleet.

Attestation for financial management compliance with Standing Direction 5.1.4

Commission for Children and Young People Financial Management Compliance Attestation Statement

I, Tracy Beaton, certify that the Commission for Children and Young People has no Material Compliance Deficiency with respect to the applicable Standing Directions under the *Financial Management Act 1994* and Instructions.



Tracy Beaton
Principal Commissioner
Commission for Children and Young People





COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE