

Questions taken on notice

Portfolio:	Crime Prevention
Witness:	Ms Natalie Hutchins
Committee member:	Mr James Newbury
Page of transcript:	4

Relevant text:

Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Minister, over the last number of reporting periods stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour have been increasing, and they are obviously very concerning crimes. I do note the investment in the budget, but I do not notice anything in relation to those particular crimes, which are moving upwards. Is there anything in the budget for those particular issues?

Ms HUTCHINS: Yes, there is. There are actually some current programs that are in place and are yet playing out in terms of their delivery. Certainly there is a project that is underway that has continued its work jointly with the Melbourne City Council, which is called the night justice project. That is a project targeting nightclubs, restaurants and a whole range of facilities across the city to look at ways we can make women, girls and gender-diverse people feel safer and be safer in the city. We know that it is those groups that experience much higher levels of sexual harassment and violence in the community, so this project has been developing a toolkit for those venues, delivering training for those venues and also a campaign in conjunction with Crime Stoppers to basically look at ways to educate bystanders as well to step into that space and report and to try and offer assistance where needed, because quite often with that sort of behaviour we find that bystanders tend to not report and not think it is their issue. That is just an example of one project that we have got underway. There are other projects that we are working on with other organisations under the crime prevention space as well.

Mr NEWBURY: Any of those programs that you would like to provide on notice in that regard, please feel free.

Answer:

It is essential that women are safe, and feel safe, in their communities.

It is important to note that reported offences against women in 2021 were at their lowest rate in over ten years (2690 per 100,000 of the population, compared with 3137 in 2012).

While the incident rate (per 100,000 population) for stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour has been increasing over the past reporting periods, the number of these offences recorded has remained steady, with an overall minor decrease recorded in 2021 (down 1.6 per cent, or 222 offences), mostly due to a decrease in non-family stalking. But we know there is a lot more to be done.

In addition to the Night Justice Project, other projects that were funded through the first round of our Building Safer Communities Program (approved in June 2021) to create safer, more welcoming and inclusive spaces for all community members, are outlined on our

website at [Funded projects: Creating Safer Places Grants | Community Crime Prevention Victoria](#) .In June 2021, a Building Safer Communities forum was held in Ballarat which focused on the safety of women, girls and gender diverse people in public spaces. More information can be found on our website: [Building Safer Communities Forums | Community Crime Prevention Victoria](#)

Portfolio:	Crime Prevention
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Committee member:	Mr James Newbury
Page of transcript:	5

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Mr NEWBURY: And separately on Neighbourhood Watch, as well, if there is anything in terms of supporting them ongoingly and the work they have done for a very, very long time. Has the government done any work or provided any support in relation to CCTV?

Ms HUTCHINS: Just touching on your previous question, we are partnering with Neighbourhood Watch and Crime Stoppers on a number of initiatives, not specifically with Neighbourhood Watch around the issues that you raised but a little bit more with Crime Stoppers in their social media development of their work. But in terms of public safety infrastructure grants that include CCTV investments, there have been quite a few across the state. In a \$31 million investment comprising \$18 million for metropolitan Victoria and \$13 million for regional Victoria, \$8 million of that has been invested in CCTV projects, including \$3.8 million to support metropolitan CCTV projects. Forty-one per cent of that investment was put into metro and 59 per cent into regional. So they have been rolling out in partnership predominantly with councils, and I am happy to go into any details you want.

Mr NEWBURY: Feel free to provide anything on notice that you would like to.

Answer:**Support for Neighbourhood Watch Victoria**

The Victorian Government has supported Neighbourhood Watch Victoria since 2015-16 with a total investment of \$3.133 million, including \$1.425 million over four years provided in the 2021-22 State Budget to continue delivery of its crime prevention program.

Further detail on the activities undertaken by Neighbourhood Watch can be found on their website: [Our work – Neighbourhood Watch Victoria | Let's watch out for each other \(nhw.com.au\)](https://www.nhw.com.au)

Funding for CCTV

Since 2015 the State Government has funded 45 projects resulting in around 500 CCTV being installed.

Between 2015 and 2020, Victorian councils were able to apply for funding under the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund, which provided grants of up to \$250,000 to improve safety in public places through design upgrades to pathways, lighting, and toilet blocks, and installation and upgrade of public safety technology such as CCTV.

This grants program was restructured in 2021, and under the new Building Safer Communities Program Victorian councils have been able to apply for a larger amount of funding through the Creating Safer Places grants, with up to \$300,000 available to install

and upgrade safety infrastructure and improve community spaces to increase public safety. This can include CCTV.

Further detail on grants provided can be found at [Funded projects: Creating Safer Places Grants | Community Crime Prevention Victoria](#). More information on CCTV can be found on our website: [CCTV | Community Crime Prevention Victoria](#)

Portfolio:	Crime Prevention
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Page of transcript:	5

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Mr NEWBURY: Thank you. Minister, I know it is a difficult issue: radicalisation. What work is being done in terms of, for example, how many people have been identified as radicalised?

Ms HUTCHINS: Thanks. The group that I touched on in my presentation, the Northern Community Support Group, have been one of the key providers in helping us deter this sort of radicalisation. They were established back in 2018 and auspiced by the Australian Multicultural Foundation to work across two key sites, one in Broadmeadows and one at the Preston mosque. I just went through all of the programs that they have delivered, but specifically in the deradicalisation space we refer to it as comprehensive case management and intervention for clients that are identified as showing that kind of antisocial behaviour of radicalisation.

Mr NEWBURY: And what was the number that you had with you?

Ms HUTCHINS: 1871 referrals have been made to basically get the support needed where it has been identified—during that entire period, not in the last 12 months.

Mr NEWBURY: What was the period, sorry?

Ms HUTCHINS: Since 2018. Some of those behaviours might be risks of antisocial behaviour towards mainstream criminal offences and some may be broken down into the violent extremism category. I do not have a breakdown of those in front of me.

Mr NEWBURY: Any of that data that you can provide on notice, including things like whether or not those people referred are people in the community or in a facility, would be terrific.

Answer:

The Victorian Government has continued its strong focus on prevention of the threat of terrorism and violent extremism by bolstering early intervention efforts to promote social cohesion and support people to prevent radicalisation.

The Northern Community Support Group (NCSG) within the Crime Prevention portfolio is a key initiative working with communities in Melbourne's northern suburbs to provide activities and supports for young people, women and families to build social cohesion and connection, and link people with relevant services.

The NCSG was established in 2018 and has provided support to over 100,000 people from more than 49 different language groups.

The NCSG has expertise in providing early intervention case management for people who are experiencing risk factors, such as disengagement, to connect them with key services and help them stay on the right path.

Since 2018, the NCSG has received 1871 referrals to deliver case management support. The vast majority of these referrals relate to the provision of mental health support, social isolation and engagement support, and drug and alcohol support. A very small proportion of these referrals (less than 1 per cent) specifically relate to early intervention to address risks of violent extremism.

The NCSG has also played an important role during COVID-19, providing support for families in need and delivering projects around vaccine awareness.

An evaluation of the NCSG shows that social connection, community support and access to the right services can help increase individual and community safety and promote greater social cohesion.

The government is also working to establish a new Countering Violent Extremism case management scheme to provide early intervention support to individuals and help prevent all forms of ideologically motivated extremism.

Victoria Police also play an important role in addressing risks of radicalisation, including through the Network for Intervention and Tailored Engagement program, which delivers interventions to those displaying behaviours consistent with ideologically motivated violent extremism.