

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2022-23 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne—Wednesday, 18 May 2022

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor



**WITNESSES**

Ms Lisa Neville MP, Minister for Police,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Secretary, and

Ms Corri McKenzie, Deputy Secretary, Police, Fines and Crime Prevention, Department of Justice and Community Safety;

Ms Michelle Osborne, Acting Commissioner, COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria; and

Mr Rick Nugent, Deputy Commissioner, Regional Operations, Victoria Police, and

Mr Byron Crawford, Chief Financial Officer, Victoria Police.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging, as well as elders from other communities who may be with us today.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2022–23 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

We welcome Minister Neville in the first instance as Minister for Police. We welcome the commissioners and officers of your department and invite you to make a 10-minute presentation. Thank you.

**Ms NEVILLE:** Thank you very much, Chair. Can I just as a starting point acknowledge that today we have got Deputy Commissioner Rick Nugent here. The Chief Commissioner is attending an international anti-terrorism conference. It is one that is usually held once every two years. It has not been held for a while, and it is a very significant meeting of the Five Eyes and it is in London, so unfortunately that had been booked in. But we have Rick, who is acting, and he is also in charge of regional operations, so he has a very good knowledge across Victoria Police. So I thought I would let you know that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Visual presentation.**

**Ms NEVILLE:** I have got some slides I will just take you through. If I go to the first one, this is really outlining what is in this year's budget and the range of measures, but I would just say that since we have come to government we have increased the budget to \$4.5 billion in policing and this budget continues that commitment. It funds \$342 million over the four years for 502 police and 50 PSOs, and that is out of our staff allocation model. That is over a two-year period, not four, and I am sure we will get to talk about that as we go forward.

We are investing in police station infrastructure; we are continuing to do that. I think we have had record investment in police stations. This one sees Point Cook and South Melbourne with \$47 million. Both of these stations have land. This is now the money to build those facilities.

There is \$14.9 million to meet a commitment we gave to TPA to extend death and disability benefits to those members who are aged 55 to 60, and there are a number of members who have been eagerly awaiting that. It is

about 1400 people that are impacted by that, and over time, as people stay in the workforce longer than they have before, this will make sure they have got the right protections and we do not lose good people unnecessarily.

It also sees the full rollout of the tasers program—I mean the CED program, but I call it the tasers program—which will see all frontline police officers and PSOs hold them. That builds on what we did rolling that out to regional stations previously.

There is money for countering violent extremism and money for the Northern Community Support Group, which has been exceptionally successful, and also continuing the countering violent extremism program, which is delivering an early intervention framework. So it continues that and builds on last year's \$82.7 million to continue the fixated threat assessment centre. It also continues funding of \$5 million for the Early Intervention and Prevention Fund around mental health. We know our first responders, police included, have much higher rates of mental health injury as well as PTSD and suicide rates. Next slide.

Just a little bit more detail in relation to the police resources, firstly. These numbers will bring to effect an additional 3637 sworn police members since we came to government, so a significant investment over that period of time, taking us to leading the country in terms of dollars spent per head of population on policing. It is based on the staff allocation model which we signed up to with TPA back in 2016. It guided this investment. It is only over a two-year period. As we know, we have had a pandemic and that has impacted on a couple of the measures that are critical to determining the numbers that you might need over a four-year period, so we have kept it at two years whilst we get back to something that is more business as usual in relation to population growth and crime statistics. I am pleased to say that that agreement for those two years, and for ongoing use of the SAM to move from boom to bust, has been signed and sealed by all four parties—the Premier and myself, TPA and the Chief Commissioner. That has been signed and agreed to, which is a great outcome. We have really focused our attention on being able to put these members in regional areas—I do not mean the regions, I mean out in our PSAs, our police service areas, in order to assist with the neighbourhood policing model. That is the back-to-basics model that the Chief Commissioner recently launched.

The next slide just gives you a real sense of where they have been deployed—so as you can see, the police officers, since 2016 where they have been deployed—and as you can see, they have been deployed across every region as well as within every PSA. There have been additional police officers right across the state since 2016, including in each PSA. You are seeing the benefits of that in terms of some of the policing work. We certainly saw the benefits of this investment in terms of how police were able to manage and deal with the bushfire response back in 2019–20, as well as through the COVID period and the number of resources that that took, as well as through the hotel quarantine program from December in 2020.

In addition to that, what you do not see is the specialist deployments, so additional specialists in the Public Order Response Team, in the gang squads, police prosecutors and, of course, the 415 that were put into family violence—specialist family violence officers—as well. So there has been quite a significant deployment of additional resources in the specialist commands. As you can see up there 667 full-time effective in those specialist commands have also been funded through this process.

If we have a look at, as I mentioned before, the issue of our investment over time—a record investment of \$4.5 billion over the eight years—you can see the significant growth that has occurred. If I just quickly touch on each of those investments, the first one back in 2015–16 was to deliver the PCOs, the police custody officers, to free up police from managing and having to run the police cells in police stations. We then start the rollout of the mobile technology—iPads, iPhones—to our members. We continue that through family violence investment, youth offending, the first year's prevention grants, some of the new interventions that police have used there—body worn cameras, firearms, longarms, all of those. As you continue down that process—counterterrorism commands, all of that through those investments—our biggest one was 2017–18, which was what funded the 2729 police at that time. That was the biggest—new air wing, water police. So right across the board we have been able to uplift the capability and capacity of Victoria Police to do what it needs to do in our communities right across the state.

Finally, I thought I would just have a look at the COVID response. I think it is worth noting the significant investment that Victoria Police put in in terms of working to try and keep us safe and to enforce the chief health officer's directives at the time. As you can see, the state's police operations centre was operational for 680 days.

I think that would be a record. Most times it would be used for bushfires or for floods or a terrorism issue or New Year's Eve and those kinds of events rather than 24/7. Over a million checks were done from 21 March 2020, so police did an extraordinary job out there. Operation Ribbon, their work in family violence, was making sure people were not lost in terms of being unable to reach out because they were at home for a lot longer with partners, and that was extremely successful. That gives you a sense, aside from the work they did on borders and hotel quarantine as well. I will just touch on that in the last slide briefly around the CQV program.

Obviously we have moved on from our hotels, of which we had 17. They accommodated 32 000 residents between July 2021 and March 2022, and since the inception nearly 71 000 residents were managed through the hotels. They played a significant role in keeping Victorians safe. From April 2021 to April 2022 there were no CQV-attributed COVID transmission events. There was a lot of work in infection prevention and control, and I think there are probably very few organisations that have as much knowledge now as CQV does. Of course we have now got the quarantine hub, purpose built. We have had over 1000 residents through that. Most of those were community members, and most of those were positive.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Deputy Chair.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Minister and team. Deputy Commissioner, can I start with you. Budget paper 3, page 285, has the police operations output. Can you tell me how many 24-hour stations have not offered counter services across the state for a period of 8 hours or more this current financial year?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** I might need to get back to you on the actual amount. It would be very few. This financial year there may have been, during lockdown last year, a number of police stations that did close counters. There were two components to that. Some were over night shift, where a nearby station would remain open but a neighbouring station would close to enable us to support the COVID operations, the border operations particularly. If I can take that on notice to get back to you—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** If you could come back to me on the data in particular, that would be good. Has VicPol done any measurement of the impact on community safety of those closures?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** We have monitored closely crime data and community satisfaction and confidence data. We monitor that very, very closely. It is a bit hard to measure whether someone went to a neighbouring station as opposed to going to that particular station that was closed. But it was necessary for us at times to provide the capacity to service the response to COVID, and we did it in a way that really looked at stations that had another station nearby that could remain open. But in terms of actually assessing the impact of whether or not people would go to that station or did not, no, we have not.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** In terms of the impact on crime data and everything, you said you monitor that.

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** Yes.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Is that information in a report that can be provided to the committee, on notice obviously?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** We look at our own internal data, but the Crime Statistics Agency data is the most relevant that shows us the decreases in areas as well as across the state. We know through COVID we had some quite pleasing reductions across the board in crime over the last two years, but it is fair to say that the limitations in movement of people contributed to that as well.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Yes, of course. Why has the Laverton station been closed for quite a number of months, when it is supposed to be a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week station?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** I am not aware that it is closed at the moment. It may have closed during COVID for the same purpose that the others were. I am not aware of it currently being closed at all.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I understand it has been closed to the public for some time.

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** I can take that on notice and find that out. I am not aware of Laverton being closed to the public.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. Perhaps on notice too, could you advise whether any other 24-hour stations have been closed for extended periods?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** No, not that I am aware of. My understanding is all current 24-hour police stations are open to the public.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay, righto. Minister, can I ask: what is the status of the proposed Clyde North police station? Why has it not been delivered?

**Ms NEVILLE:** We made an election commitment around Clyde North, and funding has been provided in relation to Clyde North station. It is a growth corridor; we absolutely need to have a new station out there, no question. One of the issues with these growth corridors is that there is often difficulty in actually finding land that is available.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Have you found a site?

**Ms NEVILLE:** We have now found a piece of land. We believe we will sign the contract for it in June this year and that the station will be completed by June of about 2025.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I understand no funding has been allocated for the build, though, as yet.

**Ms NEVILLE:** No. There have been two budgets that allocated for both the land and the build.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. How much is allocated for the build?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Let me just have a quick look. \$68 million has been allocated for Narre Warren and Clyde North.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Sixteen point?

**Ms NEVILLE:** \$68 million.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Oh, \$68 million. Righto. And, most importantly, when will local residents be able to walk through the door and police be on site?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Well, as I said, assuming the contract goes through on 30 June this year, we would hope by June 2025.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So, what, a three-year build?

**Ms NEVILLE:** It needs to be designed and built.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay. Thank you.

**Ms NEVILLE:** And I would just say that in fact all of the police stations that we have built—which have been a record number—have been done on time and in budget. The member for—I am sorry, Bev, I cannot remember. The western region—

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Your electorate, Minister.

**Ms NEVILLE:** No, my electorate is Bellarine.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** And I am also in that electorate.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr Maas.

**Mr MAAS:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Deputy Commissioner and department officials, for your time today. I will take you to the topic of supporting our police officers and the work that they do, and to that end I refer to budget paper 3, page 90. In the output initiatives there are several line items that refer to policing and community safety. One of those line items refers to tasers, as you like to call them, noted there as conducted-energy devices, or CEDs, and they are being rolled out to all frontline police officers

as per your presentation. Could you outline for the committee how those tasers will improve community safety outcomes and what police are doing to ready themselves for the new resource?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Yes. That is a good question, and the reason we are not supposed to call them tasers is that that is actually a brand.

**Mr MAAS:** Oh, I see.

**Ms NEVILLE:** I use it just because everyone understands what they are, rather than conducted-energy devices—I think people would get a bit lost in what that means. This is a really significant and important investment. It is something we have committed to have a look at once we had rolled it out to regional stations. Our SOG and our CIRT teams have had them for quite a period of time, and then we rolled them out to our 24/7 regional stations back in 2018. We have looked at the business case and looked at how they have operated, and there was no question that they stacked up as providing another non-lethal option for Victoria Police members to use when confronted with often violent and difficult situations, whether they are protests or particular individuals. It is an investment of \$215 million over the four years, and it will go to all frontline police and PSOs. We are looking currently at what the best product will be. We are hoping to have one that is linked to the body-worn cameras so that there is a trigger from both so that if there are issues or concerns around the use of them, there is footage that is contained. That is one of the options that we are currently looking at through the procurement process.

But one of the really interesting things about the use of tasers, what the evidence has shown, is that where they have been deployed, because they keep a record of when they have been used—and there are different ways, you know; from the time you take it out there is a record kept of what happened with that—in most cases just taking out the taser itself and pointing it at someone is enough to get them to change their behaviour. So in fact most use of those tasers is in that situation, and that is a great outcome. It helps the police feel safer, but it is also great for the community, and it means that any offenders in that position are also able to be picked up pretty quickly without a big confrontation.

Police have a number of tactical options available to them, including a baton, capsicum spray, foam and a firearm—and obviously the last thing we want police to have to use is a firearm, unless they are absolutely necessary. That is what these tasers will be able to do—really provide another option to them, to every police officer around the state, to be able to de-escalate issues and keep themselves safe. Unfortunately we have lost five lives in the last two years. We do not want to have police injured and die in the line of duty. So if we can provide them with a range of non-lethal pieces of equipment, that is what we have been doing, and that is what we have been doing over the last few years.

**Mr MAAS:** Terrific. Thank you. In the time I have left I will go to another line item, the death and disability benefits. Could you briefly outline what that means for older police officers and their families?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Yes. When the ESSS scheme was first established it was always assumed police officers would leave the job prior to turning 55, and most did, but we have got an increasing range of police who are entering later in life and we have got 1400 currently who are serving who are over 55. This will give them and their families a sense of reassurance that if anything was to happen after that period of time and they are continuing to work, they will be protected and their families will be protected. So we are working with TPA in a working group on what is the best way of doing this, whether it is through expansion of ESSS or through some other contingency fund.

**Mr MAAS:** Great. Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Maas. Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and the team, for appearing today. I want to ask about the systemic review of police oversight that is currently underway. Are you able to provide an update to the committee on the review and its time frames?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Look, I understand why you asking the question. Police are contributing to that process. It is quite a substantive process that is going on. There are a number of papers and discussion papers that are being, through legal services as well as through police, participated in. It really is a matter for the Attorney when that

is brought forward and when we are in a position to be able to land that. I would say that police have fully cooperated and believe strongly in the need to continue to improve integrity measures both internally but also through that oversight. But I cannot give you that; I am sorry. That might be something that the Secretary can take on notice.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. Thank you. My understanding is that legislation was supposed to be introduced this year. If that is still on track, that would be good to know as well. Obviously we are coming to the end of the parliamentary term as well.

**Ms NEVILLE:** Yes. We have got to get it right too. That is a really critical part of the work that is going on.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes, of course. I want to ask now about a number of inclusion strategies that the police force have had. In the *Aboriginal Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan* I believe there was a target to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation to 1 per cent. Has that target been reached?

**Ms NEVILLE:** I would have to take that on notice. Do you have that, Rick?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** No. I know most of our plans are in the process of being updated. If you give me a moment, I can have a look. I think I might have some information on that.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Similarly with the CALD inclusion strategy as well, I think there was a target to improve CALD leadership to 1.6 per cent.

**Ms NEVILLE:** Is this in terms of interactions?

**Mr HIBBINS:** I am just reading from what was in the strategy and action plan. I will allow you to provide further detail.

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** No, I will have to come back to you on those numbers.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay, all right. Thank you. Budget paper 3, page 96 has \$8.9 million to be spent on the ‘Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants—human source management and disclosure obligations’, including additional support staff for investigations in the Court of Appeals. Does that mean support for Victoria Police’s legal team in cases where people are seeking to have their convictions overturned due to the Lawyer X matter?

**Ms NEVILLE:** That is not my understanding. This is money that has been given to Victoria Police to implement the recommendations from the royal commission. It is not being used in that regard, and that would be something that would be a matter for the Attorney. It is not Victoria Police money that is being utilised for any of that.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Is there a total for the legal bill for Victoria Police that has been spent on the Lawyer X matter so far?

**Ms FALKINGHAM:** Mr Hibbins, we have released that publicly previously. I do not have it with me, but I am happy to bring it back to you on notice.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you. I want to ask now about—I will just use the term ‘tasers’ as well. When is the full rollout expected to be completed?

**Ms NEVILLE:** It is a four-year program, so it will take that period, and there are number of reasons for that. Firstly, we have got to procure the right one, and I think the right one being with a body-worn camera is a good option. But it is also about training and kitting up every police station to be able to manage them.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Well, that is actually something I wanted to ask about—what the actual brand and the manufacturer of the devices will be.

**Ms NEVILLE:** We do not know yet; that is the procurement process.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Do you know: will they be single-shot or multiple-shot devices? Has that been decided?

**Ms NEVILLE:** No, all of that is what will be worked through the procurement process.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay, thank you. Thanks, Minister. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hibbins. Ms Richards.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Minister and officials and assistant commissioner as well. I would like to explore mental health and refer you to budget paper 3, page 90 and the line item, 'Better mental healthcare for police'. Mental health has emerged as an area of concern across the Victorian community and including among our police and emergency services workforce. I am interested in understanding what the government is doing to increase mental health awareness and improve the mental health outcomes for Victoria's police officers.

**Ms NEVILLE:** Thank you, Ms Richards, for that question. As I indicated, there was some work that was done by Beyond Blue that clearly showed that first responders, including police, were at much higher risk of PTSD and mental health issues, and also suicide rates are much higher as well. You will see it in the mental health claims that are also through WorkCover that come from our emergency services agencies. That has led us to do a number of things.

We funded, firstly, back in July 2020 an Early Intervention and Prevention Fund for Victoria Police. This was to help them design programs that are about getting in early, helping to prevent and training up people to be able to do that. Some of that money has gone into increasing awareness, particularly at local police stations. You know that, for example, in road policing particularly, for people who see and witness deaths long-term deaths and injuries on our roads, there is a cumulative development around mental health issues. Being able to get in early in terms of debriefing and training and having the right people to help you do that can help reduce some of that cumulative impact. I have met many who have been in that position who then were unable to continue to work. I should say we have extended in this budget the funding of that early intervention fund.

The other big change that we worked on was with the WorkCover scheme. One of the things that was an issue for WorkCover and for Victoria Police members in terms of mental health was that often there were significant delays in having your claim assessed and that actually made it worse. What we knew and what we know is that the earlier you can get the support you need, the earlier that you are more likely to be able to actually recover and get back to work and hopefully over time see a reduction in the WorkCover premiums as well. This now applies to all workers. In fact we trialled it for police, for emergency services workers, but legislation has now changed this. An emergency worker, police and others can now access payments straightaway for up to 13 weeks while the claim is being assessed. It means that people are getting the services that they need much more quickly, and we are hoping to see the benefits of that over time in terms of WorkCover premiums. We are really encouraging people to take that up. That is one of the challenges we do have—making sure that Victoria Police members feel they can take that up, can come forward, can say they are struggling so that we can get people back at work as quickly as possible and as healthy as possible.

**Ms RICHARDS:** It is an opportunity for us to ask you to pass on our appreciation to the people who are at the front line. I am really conscious of that. I will quickly move on to another area, which is police numbers, and refer you to budget paper 3, page 90, and the investment in new police and PSOs. Perhaps if you could commence by exploring how these investments are growing Victoria Police numbers and how they will contribute to increased community safety.

**Ms NEVILLE:** As I indicated in my presentation, this budget provides an additional 502 police officers and 50 PSOs. It has come out of the SAM model—the regional operations model, out of how the SAM operates. When we came to government police expenditure per head of population was the lowest in the country. We are now the highest. Were sitting above the national average as well as being the highest, so \$610 per head population compared to when we came to government, which was \$394, which was well below the national average as well. When I became police minister I did a series of visits across the state. It was clear to me that we needed more police, and we started that process back then.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Secretary, in relation to the presentation earlier, do you have any data with you on the number of bills residents of the quarantine facility received—how many residents have received a bill?

**Ms FALKINGHAM:** I might check with Ms Osborne if she has that information.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Your name was, sorry?

**Ms OSBORNE:** I am Michelle Osborne. I am the Acting Commissioner for CQV. Thank you.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Oh, hi. Sorry, I did not hear you. Thank you.

**Ms OSBORNE:** Yes, I do. We have issued about 20 500 invoices, and close to \$38 million has been paid from that.

**Mr NEWBURY:** As a number—rather than the value—out of the 20 000, how many is that that have been paid?

**Ms OSBORNE:** We have had about 11 000 paid.

**Mr NEWBURY:** So just over half have been paid?

**Ms OSBORNE:** Yes.

**Mr NEWBURY:** And I presume there is recourse being taken in relation to the other—

**Ms OSBORNE:** Yes. About 4300 of those invoices that have been waived on various grounds, and there is a scheme for people claiming that. For the remainder, they have either not fallen due yet or there are payment plans in place. Then if we need to we also seek debt recovery for the outstanding invoices.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Secretary, are you aware of the private speed camera operator—a spate of attacks on their vehicles? You are aware of that? I understand there has been quite a spate. Is the government doing anything about that, or is there anything being done on that?

**Ms FALKINGHAM:** Yes, we are aware of that, Mr Newbury. As the police commissioner has pointed out, it is not tolerable on any front that those speed camera operators are being put in danger. We are obviously working very closely with both the industrial partner and Serco in relation to the management of those contracts and ensuring that we are doing everything to keep those individuals safe, and we are obviously reaching out and meeting with those individuals. Victoria Police have made some very strong comments as well in relation to follow-up in relation to those incidents.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Deputy Commissioner, if I can refer you to the department's questionnaire, page 107, there has been a reduction in the number of PSOs and police custody officers. I would be interested in why there has been a cut in both of those.

**Ms NEVILLE:** I do not believe that is the case. There are periods of time of attrition at particular—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Could I refer you to page 107?

**Ms NEVILLE:** There has been an overall increase in all of those. It is 396 PCOs at the moment, and that is because we go through a constant recruitment; same with PSOs—we are going through a constant recruitment. There is about a 6 per cent attrition rate with PSOs and only about 3 per cent for police, so we will at any one time have numbers that go up and down depending on attrition, and we have got a group in at the moment at the academy to fill those positions.

**Mr NEWBURY:** With due respect, Minister, in the department's own questionnaire there has been a cut.

**Ms NEVILLE:** There has been no cut. Did you not see the graph that was up there on the screen? There has been no cut. At any one particular time we may have people who have left the job, which is not unusual in terms of this period of time as many have, and we have to go through filling those positions, and that attrition process occurs constantly.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Deputy Commissioner, can I take you to page 72, which shows combined required savings, if you add the two numbers on page 72, of \$34.1 million. What is Victoria Police expected to cut with that \$34.1 million?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** We, like all other agencies, are looking for efficiencies that enable us to be more effective in what we are doing. We have certainly, in support of some budget initiatives around this, looked at some functions that are no longer necessary. There are certainly some projects and some other types of activities we were undertaking within central commands that we have ceased to undertake a make a lot of savings. We had a Victoria Police finance board established, which is co-chaired by the Secretary of DTF and the chief commissioner. Underneath that we have a cost control board that really actually is focused on financial management and appropriate spending across all parts of policing. It is actually quite an effective model. We also have a financial sustainability program office, so we have undertaken a lot of savings through some of this work, and Byron might be able to take you through it a little bit further. Byron sits underneath the financial management—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Feel free to take it on notice, considering the time.

**The CHAIR:** The time has expired. Thank you, Mr Newbury. Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Thank you, Minister, deputy and acting commissioners, and officials for being here today. I would like to look, for the benefit of the committee, at the investment in new police and PSOs. If I can refer you to budget paper 3, page 90, can you outline how these investments are growing Victoria Police numbers and how they will contribute to increased community safety?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Yes. I think it is, given the question before, a really important one to follow up again on. Since 2016 we have increased Victoria Police numbers by over 3200. The investment in the budget will take us up to 3600 overall, so 6037 new police and obviously additional PSOs as well. It has been a 26 per cent increase in investment in Victoria Police numbers, which is a really significant uplift. As I was saying just before, one of the things that was clear to me when I did visits out to police stations was the pressure that police were under after having had a period of time with no additional police and very little additional investment. There was massive pressure, and without the investment that we made there was no way that Victoria Police would have been in the position that it has been in terms of both stabilising crime rates—the rate came down during COVID, but it had also at that point in time been able to stabilise crime rates that had been on the increase—nor would it have been able to respond to the bushfires or to COVID at the time.

What I know is that when you talk to police officers about the pressures, they want to be in a position to be able to respond to community calls for assistance, they want to be able to do those other extras that they do—events et cetera and be able to keep up with their paperwork—and they want to do it with the least stress they can. I think the combination of the staffing allocation model, which takes account of baseline staffing numbers, will assist in being able to do that. So we have got numbers up to here; in the next two years the SAM has told us we need 502 more and 50 PSOs, which we can use flexibly now under the legislation—those extra 50. And on top of the SAM, we have had an MOU agreed between the Chief Commissioner and TPA around those baseline staffing requirements at stations—so how many vans, how many people overnight at a 24-hour station, all of those things that actually put the pressure on police. This means that not only will we have the right number of police we need to respond to what is happening now but in the future also make sure that we are taking some of the pressure off local police in the work that they do.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Thank you. Given in the pandemic we are in a tight labour market, what work is Victoria Police doing with its workforce to attract and keep the very best staff?

**Ms NEVILLE:** So I mentioned before that we have a pretty good, low attrition rate compared to other emergency services and other workforces at the moment—for police officers of about 3 per cent, but for PSOs it is a bit higher. Often that is because PSOs move into policing, so they will take up the chance to take on the extra hours and training and move up to do policing. So there is a sense that it is a pretty stable workforce—but, you know, 3 per cent; we continue to keep up with that attrition rate. But things like baseline staffing requirements, knowing that there are more police coming; giving them the equipment that they need; and the EBA talked about better conditions, more flexibility, about working hours, given it is a 24/7 job—all of those things go towards trying to maintain lower attrition rates and improving the conditions and quality of work of our police officers.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Have we got 20 seconds? No, that will not cut it.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Taylor. Mrs McArthur.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. Regarding mental health critical situations, what is the number of events recorded in the leaked database over each of the last four calendar years with psychiatric crisis as the reason? Perhaps you could take it on notice. And what is the number of mental health transfers attended by police in each of the last four calendar years? Perhaps that should be on notice as well. And on hospital guard shifts, how many hours were spent by operational police members in hospitals related to section 351 transfers over each of the last four calendar years? And finally, in each of the last four calendar years, how many people have taken long-term leave periods exceeding four weeks, and could you provide a breakdown of the types of leave also, so sick leave, personal leave et cetera?

**Ms NEVILLE:** I think if that information is available, we can do that. I would not want to be providing LEAP data. That is not appropriate, and we have a Crime Statistics Agency now for that reason—they are the ones who actually work through that. I do know that police attend a mental health incident about every 12 minutes, I think it is—a bit less than family violence, which is about every 6 minutes. So it is a substantial part of their work. But the mental health royal commission also looked at this, and you will see through various legislation changes about who should be first responders in relation to mental health issues going forward and how they are managed at hospitals. I am not sure that some of that data is easily able to be obtained, but where it is, we will make sure that we provide that to you.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Much appreciated, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mrs McArthur; I would just remind members that public hearings are not an opportunity to read questions into the record to be taken on notice. If you could ask questions that the minister is here to answer, that would be appreciated.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Well, we cannot put questions on notice, Chair.

**Mr NEWBURY:** There is no format for questions on notice.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** How else are we meant to ask questions?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Chair, I will continue, if you do not mind.

**The CHAIR:** Deputy Chair, this is an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered, not read them into Hansard.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay. Commissioner, what is the current status of the implementation of the relaunched police in schools program?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** So that is live now. That is part of our new neighbourhood policing framework and our model, which is a schools engagement program. Different schools in different communities have different needs, which is quite appropriate. So each area is then tailoring its program according to local needs. Some schools, as you could imagine, are in quite disadvantaged communities, others less so. So it is really understanding, in each of the local areas, what are the specific needs. How do we best support local communities and assist our youth from entering, in any way, into the criminal justice system?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay. So how many schools have been visited since the announcement of the relaunch?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** I could take that one on notice, certainly, and get back to you. I do not have that.

**Ms NEVILLE:** As I understand it, every region—this is from my understanding from the chief commissioner—every PSA area has made contact with each of the local schools about how their programs will operate. So it has been quite a big outreach program to start that process of engaging with each of those schools in the PSAs.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Right. So what is the extent of the content being delivered, and how long are the sessions?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** Again, they differ on the needs of local schools. Some schools have police engagement almost daily, other schools maybe weekly or a little bit different. Again, it depends on the particular challenges. And this is a really good model in terms of an intelligence-led approach to the particular issues they have in working with them.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** So do you have a target for the number of students to be exposed to the program over the next 12 months?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** Not that I am aware of, but I can get more information on what the program is going to entail. But again, it is tailored to the specific needs of that area to ensure that we have a local-based approach to some of their specific needs.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you. Deputy Commissioner, do you support the safe injecting room?

**Deputy Comm. NUGENT:** Well, we certainly support the trial of the injecting rooms. It is a health-led initiative designed to save the lives of people with chronic dependency on drugs, most particularly heroin. So we support the trial. Anything that can assist in further improving community safety we are supportive of.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** So why is it, then, that the police association are against it on behalf of their membership?

**The CHAIR:** Sorry to interrupt you, Mrs McArthur, but your time has expired, and I will pass the call to Mr Richardson.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister and department representatives and Deputy Commissioner. I want to take you, Minister, to the topic of road safety, a really important topic in our communities. I refer you to budget paper 3, page 286, and the various performance measures in place to monitor road safety. Are you able, for the committee's benefit, to outline the government investments in road safety enforcement and how this is contributing to less road trauma in our communities?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Thank you, Mr Richardson. It is timely because this week it is National Road Safety Week. There are particular activities Victoria Police are doing today, as well as obviously every day of the year. I will particularly focus on a few of the things that we are looking at in terms of investments in road safety.

Our investments are very much framed by the advice from Monash University Accident Research Centre. What we do know is that there are a number of people and things that are causing these serious injuries on the road. Alcohol and drugs I will not talk about at the moment, but there are the measures that can actually assist in detecting people who either should not be on the roads, and they make up a large proportion of people who are killed or injured on our roads, or people who are doing the wrong thing, from speeding—speed absolutely kills—through to people who are using iPhones and iPads and, unfortunately, people not wearing seatbelts. It is an extraordinary number of people who do not wear seatbelts.

You may recall that in previous budget hearings we have talked a bit about the package we put into boosting mobile speed cameras by 75 per cent, with a further 96 new state-of-the-art ones. So these are the ones that can go across lanes and go between. You know, they are not blocked by any barriers; they are able to read those quickly. And that will ultimately see an increase, when it is fully implemented, of 16 000 hours per month out there on our roads.

Again, people say, 'Look at fines; is this revenue raising?'. Well, I would much prefer not to raise any revenue, but all revenue that is raised goes into the trust fund that is about better roads. But we know that the fact that a speed camera exists or that you get a speeding ticket does change behaviour. There is no question about that, and that is certainly what Monash University have indicated to us. The more mobile speed cameras the better. The more point-to-point the better. It does make a difference in terms of driver behaviour, so we have expanded that.

Also in Parliament recently members passed legislation to extend what was the immediate licence suspension scheme. So we had done a little bit of that, but recently in Parliament—I think in the last couple of weeks—the road safety Bill was passed and expanded that to include hit-and-run offences and other serious road safety offences. That means that we are getting off the road those people who are often the most dangerous on our roads as quickly as possible while they wait for court dates. Now, obviously the court has the final say, but I think for victims of hit-and-run—their families—seeing somebody still driving around after they have killed a loved one was something that was causing extreme distress.

In addition to that we have also got the distracted driving trial. We had the trial, which actually showed—I think it was—one in 41 people were using their iPhones or iPads or not wearing a seatbelt during that trial that we had of the new cameras, which are about trying to detect use of that technology or the not wearing of a

seatbelt. Again Monash Uni said this is one of the really big causes of issues on our roads. We are going through a procurement process in relation to these new cameras, and we are hoping that they can link with our speeding cameras as well so that we have got a very efficient system, but it is a \$33 million investment. We hope to start to roll that out soon. We know it will reduce road fatalities by about 11 per cent or 24 lives that are lost each year because of distracted driving—so again a really important piece of technology. We have recently passed legislation to enable that technology to be able to be used on our roads.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** Thanks, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Richardson. Mr Barton.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, team and Minister. My colleague has just gone to this area, so while we are on budget paper 3, page 286, this is a very important subject to the professional transport workers. I just want to talk about the impact of COVID-19 on the number of alcohol screening tests conducted by VicPol. Given that alcohol continues to be a major contributor to road trauma, can you please inform the committee how we are going with alcohol tests and booze bus operations?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Thank you very much, Mr Barton. This is another area where—and we were talking about road safety before—we know that booze buses and drug testing are also deterrents. We have seen over many years the alcohol and drug vehicles playing a really significant role in reducing alcohol use—people drinking and driving, basically. Unfortunately during the COVID period we did, from about 13 March, have to make some changes based on chief health officer advice and at the request of the TPA as well to have a look at whether it was safe to conduct on that large scale—given it is saliva, given it is breathing and given the nature of COVID, could we continue to utilise our alcohol and drug testing vehicles as a mechanism. And that is how we get most of our volume in terms of alcohol testing. So that has affected our numbers in reaching I think it is the 3 million level that we are supposed to meet, but since we have been able to reintroduce the alcohol and drug testing arrangements, which were reintroduced on 21 November I think it was, we have been able to do over a million preliminary breath tests during that time.

So we are catching up. We will not meet the target this year. There is no way to get to the 3 million, but we have had some targeted operations, Operation Compass, running through April, which again did a lot of testing. A lot of resources were put into that, police resources, to try and get the numbers up, and unfortunately what we have seen is—in a way what it proves is that they do work—some concerning figures of increasing numbers of people who are driving on our roads with alcohol in their system. In November 2021 it was one in 384 people, and in December one in every 364 were detected, compared to a pre-COVID average of one in 845. So being out there, getting these buses back on, has been really critical, and I am very confident we will be back at our usual, which is often way over the figure, in the next financial year. But it just shows, those figures show you, that if they think they can get away with it, people continue to take risks.

**Mr BARTON:** Thank you, Minister. What about drug testing? Given the risk that drugs are now being exposed in trauma and the amount of people getting tested there, have we got any strategies where we are moving forward there?

**Ms NEVILLE:** So our target on drug testing is 150 000, and I will talk about a couple of trials we have got that are underway that are trying to look at how we increase that. But we are on track to meet 150 000. This has been through the really incredible work that Victoria Police have done to bring us back up to close to—well, we will absolutely meet—150 000 by June of this year, so that is a great outcome, given the impact that drugs do have. We have done that through particular operations, but we have also got some work in the south east. We have done some trials where every police officer can do drug testing which they are being trained up to do, which has not been the case in the past; it was only the highway patrol et cetera. So every police officer as part of their normal routine, when they are doing breath testing or picking someone up for something else, now are doing drug testing. We are trialling that, as well as trialling issuing infringements on the spot, which has not been the case previously, and this goes to the issue of whether you can prove somebody is intoxicated or not. It is working on the basis that if you show positive, the onus of proof is then on you to not be intoxicated. So it has been a really impressive period for Victoria Police to get to that figure. We will be able to get to that figure, and I think this trial will also be really informative about where we go in the future. We need to get these numbers up because that is what is going to change behaviour.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Barton, and thank you, Minister. That concludes the time we have set aside for consideration of the police portfolio with you this afternoon. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today in this capacity. The committee will follow up on any questions which were taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within five working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take a break and resume with consideration of the water portfolio with you at 1.55.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Witnesses withdrew.**