

2023

Briefing e-Book

Key issues from the **59th Parliament**

Research & Inquiries unit

This publication has been prepared by the Research & Inquiries unit for use by Members of the Victorian Parliament. Research publications are prepared for Parliament in response to Members, in anticipation of their requirements, and in areas of interest to the Victorian legislature.

Information was current as at the time of printing. This publication should not be considered as a complete guide to the particular subjects and legislation covered. While it is intended that all information provided is accurate, it does not represent professional legal opinion.

Some hyperlinks may only be accessible on the Parliament of Victoria intranet. All links were current and available at the time of publication.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Legislative Assembly, Legislative Council and parliamentary committee staff for their help in the preparation of this paper.

The Parliament of Victoria Library acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and knowledge.

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2023 Briefing e-Book

This Briefing e-Book was compiled by staff in the Parliamentary Library's Research unit. It is designed as an overview of issues that were prominent during the 59th Parliament, as shown through developments in legislation, parliamentary debate, media coverage and public research. The following briefings should not be considered comprehensive guides to each subject area, but rather they are intended to be a reference guide to key issues, publications and resources to inform future debate. This Briefing e-Book provides links to sources, some of which can only be accessed on the Parliamentary network. For further information, readers are directed to contact the Parliamentary Library.

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Foreword

Welcome to the Library

The Parliamentary Library welcomes and supports all Members in their roles as elected representatives.

We understand how busy Members of Parliament can be. We are here to support your work in legislating for our vibrant democracy and representing your diverse constituencies.

The Library has a range of services and resources to help you operate effectively at Parliament and in your electorate. Most of our resources are provided online, so you can find what you need at a time and place that suits you: in your office, via your mobile devices or on the parliamentary network.

To keep you up to date with breaking news and current issues, the Library offers a range of news and media resources. News monitoring includes print media, TV and radio news, and media releases, with alerts that can be customised to your needs. We also provide access to a range of online resources, including journal articles, government agencies information, former Members' biographical data, a policies archive and legal resources.

You can lodge requests with us on virtually any subject. The information we provide is timely, confidential and impartial.

With your information needs in mind, the Research team prepares research publications on upcoming Bills before Parliament, publishes statistical surveys, and provides confidential individual briefings for Members. Publications produced include research papers, Bill Briefs and InfoLinks on Bills before Parliament.

This Briefing e-Book provides a snapshot of key issues by portfolio from the 59th Parliament, compiled from resources including the legislative program, parliamentary committee reports, Library publications and reports by agencies. We have also included relevant statistical information. We hope this provides you with useful background for your current work.

I warmly invite you all to visit the Library where professional staff are ready to assist. Call the Library Enquiry Desk on **9651 8640**, or email research@parliament.vic.gov.au.



Carolyn Macvean
Manager, Parliamentary Library
April 2023

Parliamentary Library services

Enquiry Desk

The Library's Enquiry Desk can answer Members' requests for information on a wide range of topics. We also provide access to:

- Media monitoring services and online newspapers
- Newspaper, broadcast news and media releases archives
- Books, academic journal articles and legal information resources
- Government, academic and independent research and policy reports
- Statistical information and maps
- Background information for speeches
- Biographical, historical, and heritage information
- Legislative and government information
- Financial, property and business information.

This service is confidential and impartial and is provided in a timely manner. It is important to let us know how much information you require and your time frame, so we can deliver material that best suits your needs.

Hours

- Non-sitting days: 9am – 5pm
- Sitting days: 9am – House Rise (open from 8:30am on Wednesday and Thursday)

Contact

- Telephone: (03) 9651 8640
- Email: research@parliament.vic.gov.au

Research service

The Research Service undertakes in-depth research on areas of interest to Members in relation to legislation, electorate issues, or wider policy matters. The Research team provides:

- Client Briefings – confidential information and analysis on particular issues upon request
- Research Papers – in-depth analysis of selected topical issues
- Bill Briefs – analysis on selected components of new Bills
- New Bills 'InfoLinks' – links to key information on all new Bills.

Additional services

- Electorate and regional maps, data and information
- Key links on topical issues
- Library seminars – regular seminars on topical issues
- Library Fellowships – academics conducting research on key issues
- Heritage Services – related to the history of the Parliament
- The Library catalogue.

Parliamentary interns

The [Parliamentary Internship Program](#) provides participating Members with a third-year political science student who completes an evidence-based research report on a selected topic commissioned by the Member. Their report forms an assessable component of their university degree, the equivalent of two subjects. This program has proven to be most successful and enters its 34th year in 2023. Over 1,300 interns

have now undertaken the program. Intern reports are available in PDF format on the Library [catalogue](#) and in hardcopy from the Library's Deakin Gallery.

News and media

The Library provides access to a range of news and media resources to keep you up to date with breaking news and current issues. Assistance with news and media resources can be obtained through the Enquiry Desk.

- Mediaportal – personalised, private email alerts for news and current events
- News Archive – newspaper articles archive from November 2002 to present
- Broadcast News – radio and TV news clips archive from December 2000 to present
- Media Releases – all party and independent media releases archive from 1992 to present
- Online editions of print newspapers and online newspaper and journal websites.

Online resources

The Library provides additional information resources to assist your research.

- EBSCO Discovery Service and Academic Search Complete (academic journal articles)
- Informit's Australian Public Affairs, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Literature and Culture databases
- WestlawAU and Lawlex legal resources
- Victorian election policies (1930s – present)
- Government agencies and departments (1800s – present)
- Biographies of former and current Victorian MPs (1851 – present).

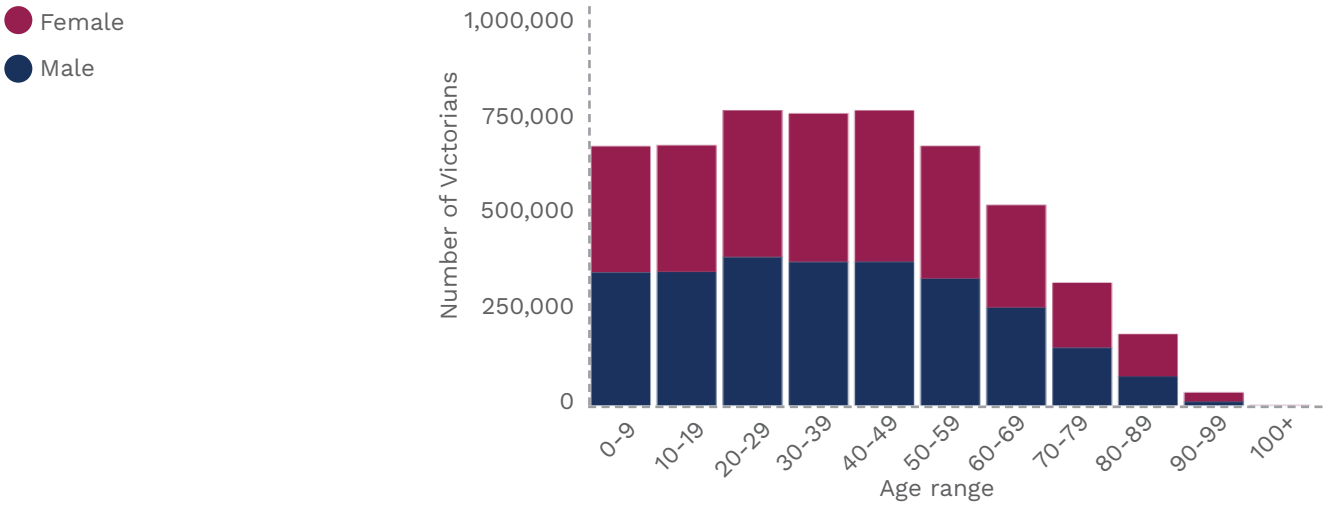
These can all be accessed from the Library's [intranet page](#).

Borrowing from the Library

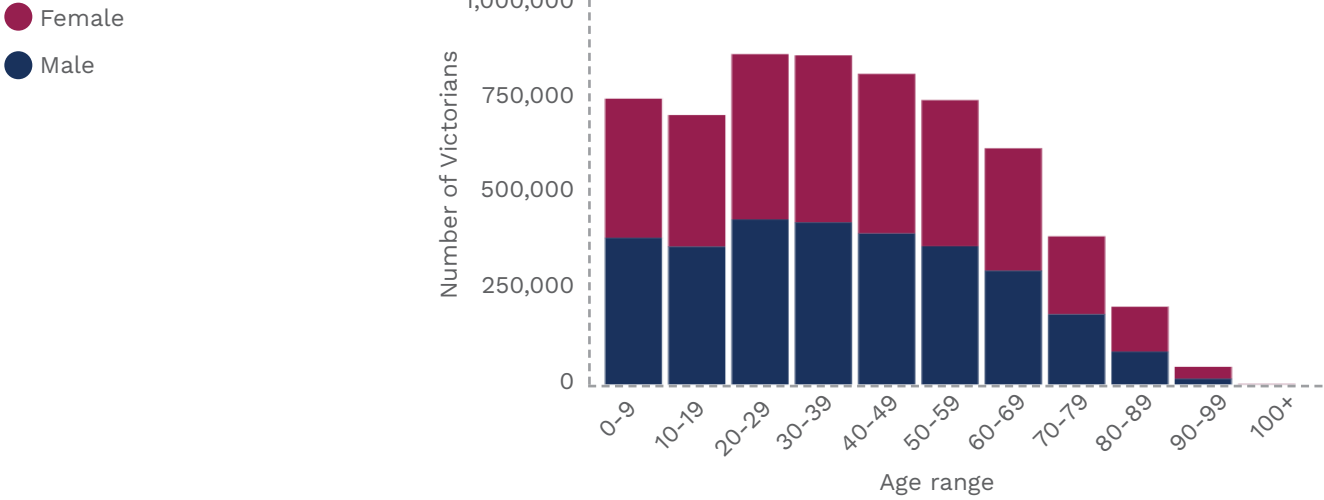
A comprehensive collection of non-fiction material, including print copies of many government reports, is available for loan. Items may be reserved or renewed through the [online catalogue](#) and can be collected from the Library or posted to your electorate office if required. If the Library doesn't have an item you need, we may be able to purchase or borrow a copy. Many publications are now available as downloadable PDF attachments via the Library catalogue on the intranet.

Victoria in numbers

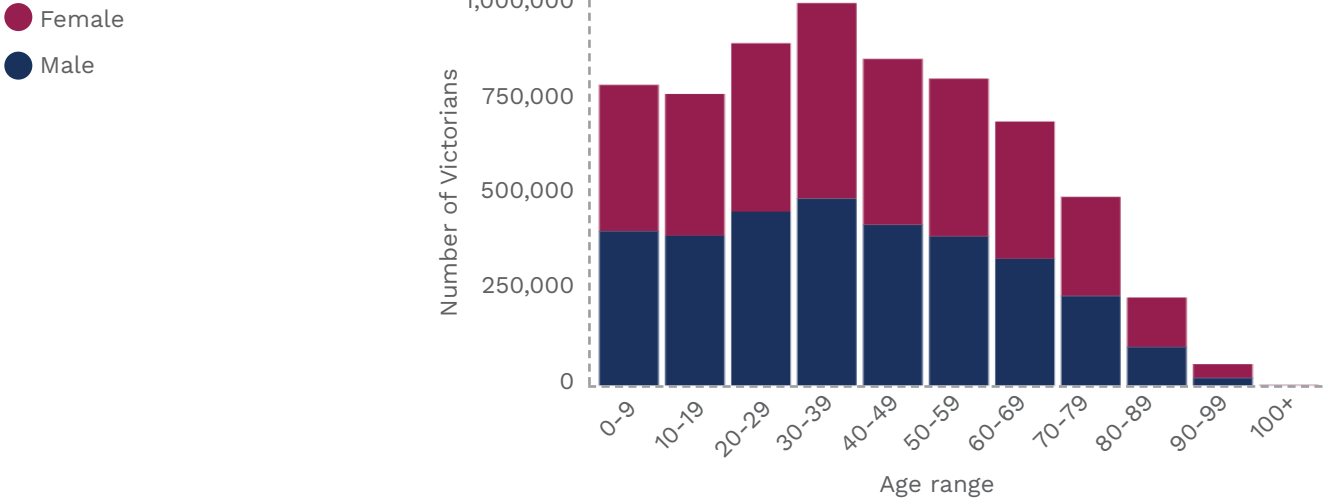
Victoria by age and sex, 2011



Victoria by age and sex, 2016



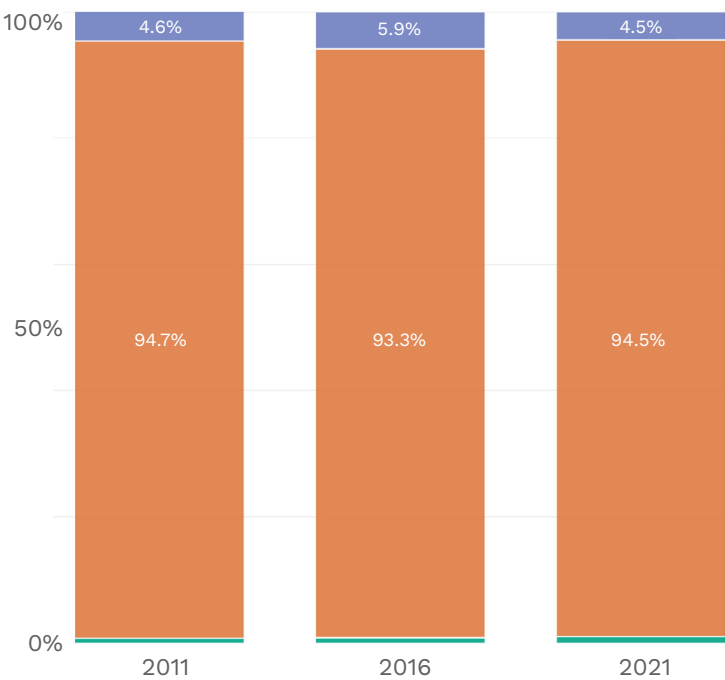
Victoria by age and sex, 2021



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
*To view the Victoria in numbers interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

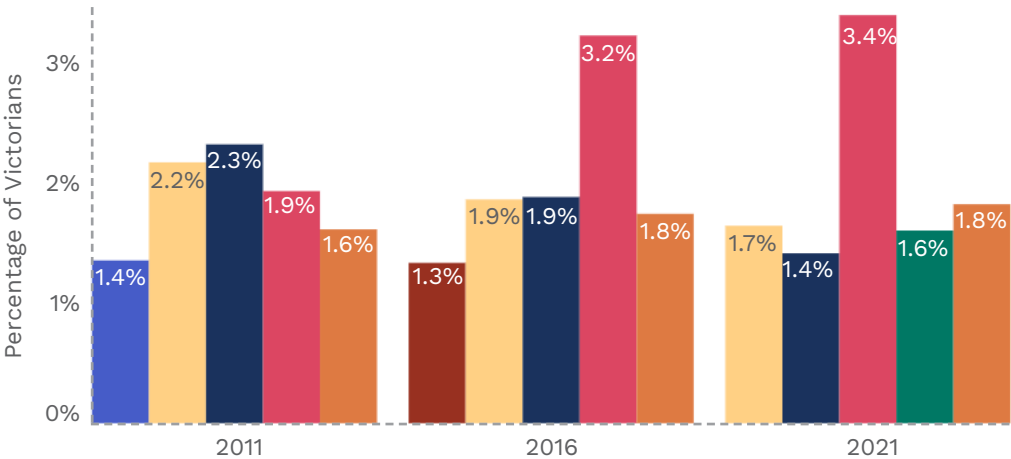
Proportion of Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population per census year

- Not Stated
- Not Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



Top five languages other than English spoken at home per census year

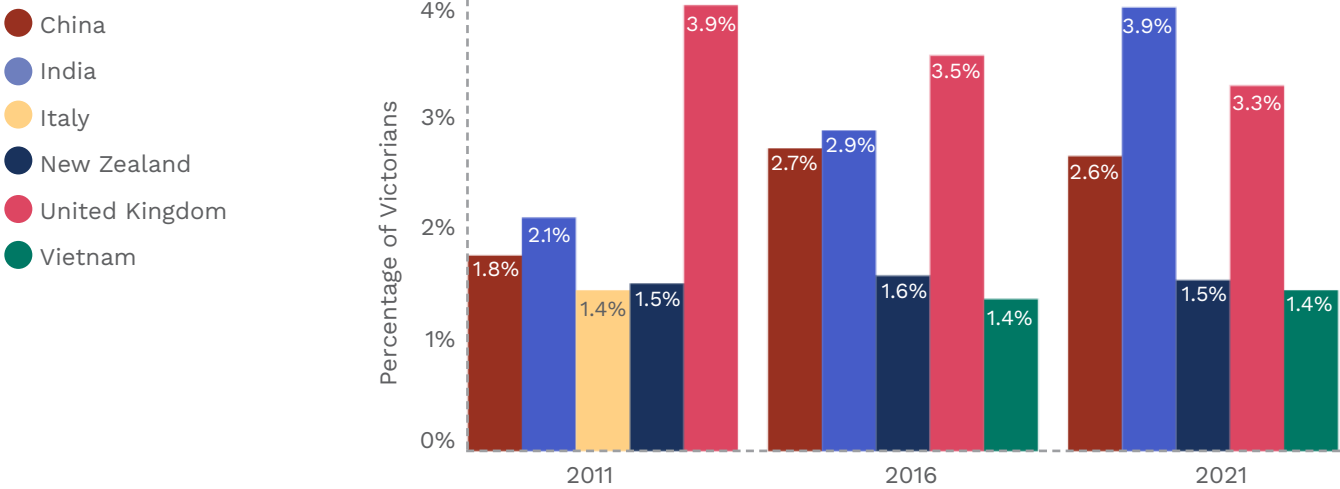
- Arabic
- Cantonese
- Greek
- Italian
- Mandarin
- Punjabi
- Vietnamese



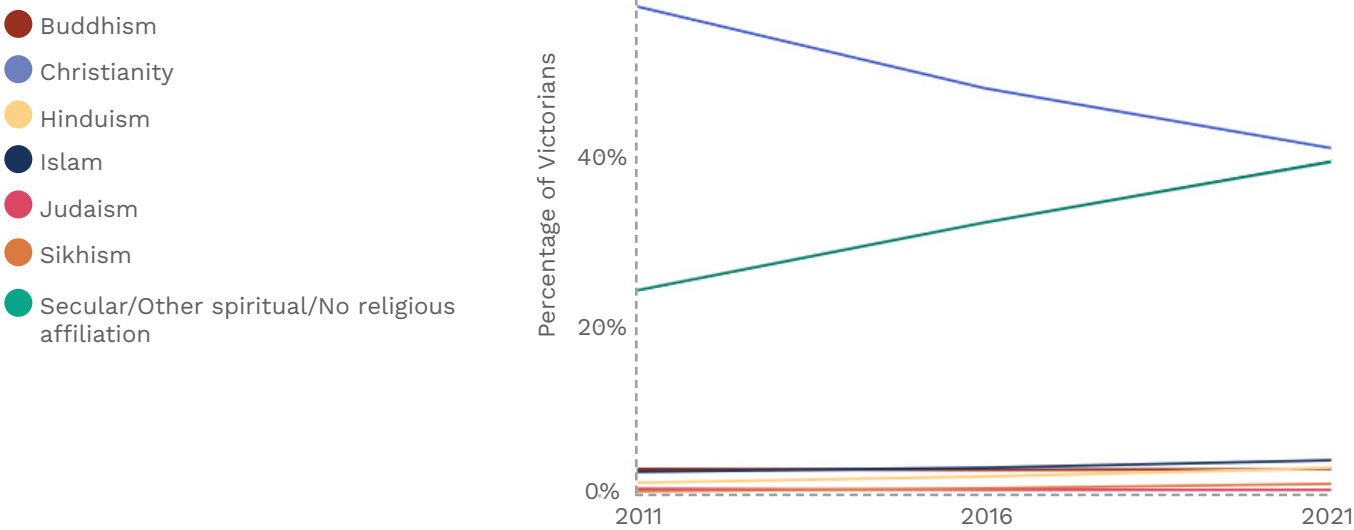
Source: ABS

*To view the Victoria in numbers interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Top five countries of birth (excl. Australia) per census year



Religion in Victoria per census year



Source: ABS

*To view the Victoria in numbers interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

The 59th Parliament of Victoria

An overview of parliamentary events and developments relating to the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including parliamentary composition, key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports.

Elections, by-elections and joint sittings

The Australian Labor Party, led by Premier Daniel Andrews, was returned to government after gaining a majority in the Legislative Assembly at the 2018 state election on 24 November. The Premier and his ministry were sworn in later the same month.

Labor gained eight additional seats in the Legislative Assembly compared to 2014, taking the total to 55, and gained four extra seats in the Legislative Council to hold 18.

There were no by-elections in the Legislative Assembly over the course of the 59th Parliament of Victoria. However, there were a number of casual vacancies in the Legislative Council, which were filled at joint sittings. These sittings made the following appointments:

- Matthew Bach for Eastern Metropolitan Region in March 2020 (replacing Mary Wooldridge)
- Lee Tarlamis for South Eastern Metropolitan Region in April 2020 (replacing Gavin Jennings)
- Enver Erdogan for Southern Metropolitan Region in August 2020 (replacing Philip Dalidakis)
- Sheena Watt for Northern Metropolitan Region in October 2020 (replacing Jenny Mikakos)
- Cathrine Burnett-Wake for Eastern Victoria Region in December 2021 (replacing Ed O'Donohue)
- Tom McIntosh for Eastern Victoria Region in August 2022 (replacing the late Jane Garrett).

David Limbrick also resigned from the Legislative Council to contest the 2022 federal election. He was reappointed to the Legislative Council at a joint sitting after unsuccessfully running for a federal seat.

Since the 2018 state election, some Members of Parliament (MPs) changed their party alignments. Former Liberal MP Bernie Finn joined the Democratic Labour Party, while former Labor MPs Adem Somyurek and Kaushaliya Vaghela and Derryn Hinch's Justice Party's Catherine Cumming became independents.

Work of the Parliament

Remuneration Tribunal

In 2019 the Victorian Government enacted the [Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019](#). The Act created an independent entity to determine remuneration and allowances for Members, Victorian public service executives, executives from prescribed public entities and councillors of local governments. It also established a compliance officer to hear and determine appeals regarding parliamentary allowance claims.

Before the remuneration tribunal's establishment, Members' salaries were adjusted annually in accordance with average weekly ordinary time earnings of Victorians. Before that, they were tied to the salaries of Commonwealth MPs.

The Andrews government had previously introduced the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Bill 2017, but the Bill lapsed at the end of the 58th Parliament. The remuneration tribunal sits within the Department of Premier and Cabinet and reports to the Minister for Government Services.

Committees

Several Parliamentary Committees were abolished over the course of the 59th Parliament as a result of the [Parliamentary Committees Amendment Act 2019](#).

These included the following joint house committees:

- Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee
- Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee
- Family and Community Development Committee
- Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee.

The rationale behind abolishing these committees was that standing committees in the Legislative Assembly would take their place.

The *Parliamentary Committees Amendment Act 2019* also granted an additional salary to chairs of standing committees from either house, as well as the chair of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee.

There were no select committees established during the 59th Parliament. However, the Parliament did establish the Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee in December 2021 to review orders made by the Minister for Health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee ceased operation when the pandemic declaration expired on 12 October 2022.

Standing and sessional orders

Sessional orders are temporary procedural rules that last for the duration of the current session of Parliament, or until the Parliament expires. Sessional orders can expand on or supersede the permanent standing orders of either house. Both the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council introduced sessional orders.

The Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee and Legislative Council Procedure Committee both considered amendments to their respective rules over the course of the 59th Parliament. A report from the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee made several recommendations for amendments to the standing orders around condolences, ministerial statements, committee procedure and broadcast rules.

Following discussion by the Legislative Council regarding Standing Order 4.02, which requires each sitting to commence with the Lord's Prayer, the Leader of the Government recommended the Procedure Committee discuss the matter. The committee pointed out the house has the power to change the commencement of sitting day proceedings through a resolution and decided not to take further action.

The Legislative Assembly added a sessional order to accept electronic petitions in 2021, following the Legislative Council's adoption of a new standing order permitting electronic petitions in 2017. The Legislative Assembly also adopted a sessional order giving the Standing Orders Committee the ability to make redactions from documents published by the house, Assembly Hansard, official broadcast footage of the Assembly chamber or an Assembly committee, a petition or a tabled document on safety or security grounds.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislative Assembly proposed a joint sessional order to require a joint sitting whenever a Member gave notice of a motion to disallow in whole or part a pandemic order.

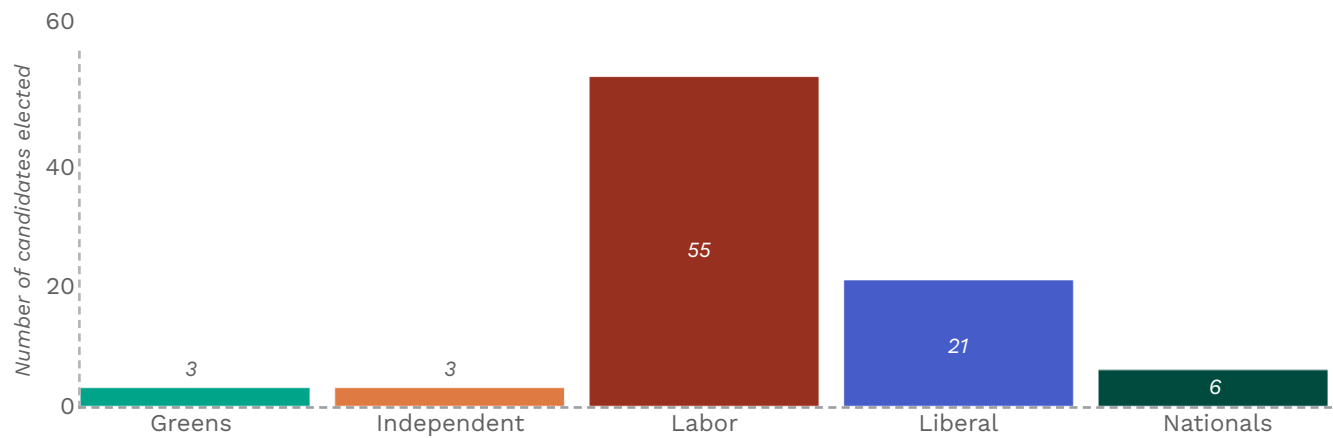
In September 2022 the Legislative Council Procedure Committee proposed a new set of standing orders, recommending they be adopted by the 60th Parliament.

COVID-19

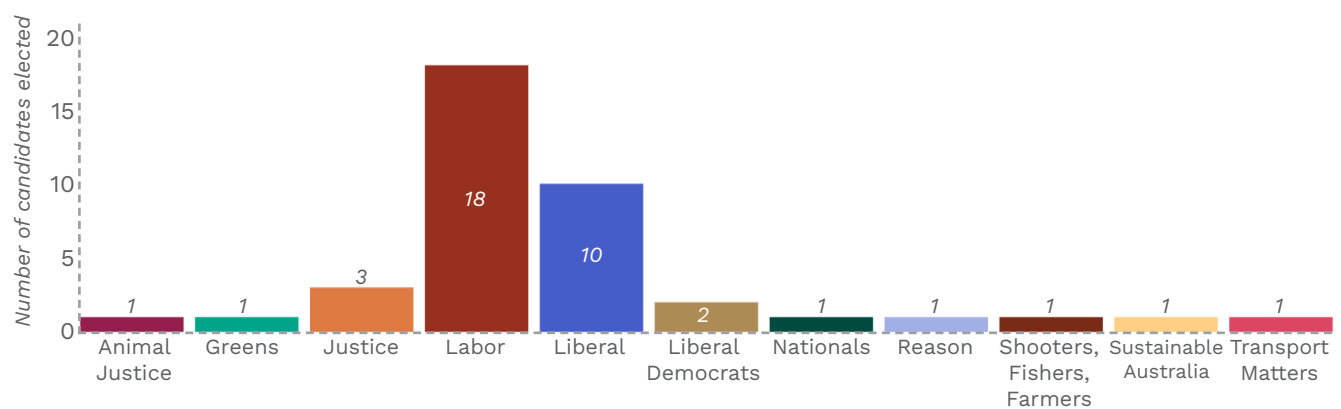
In October 2021 the Legislative Assembly introduced temporary arrangements requiring face masks in the chamber, reducing the number of Members sitting at any given time and allowing remote participation using an audio or video link. The Legislative Council had amended standing, session and temporary orders to allow Members to remotely participate in sittings in September 2021.

The Legislative Assembly also passed a motion proposed by Leader of the House Jacinta Allan to require all Members of the house to provide evidence to the Clerk of having had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, or a valid exemption, by 26 November 2021. Otherwise they would be unable to access the parliamentary precinct and be suspended from the chamber until the second sitting day of 2022. See the 'COVID-19' chapter for more detail on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the 59th Parliament.

59th Legislative Assembly Election Results

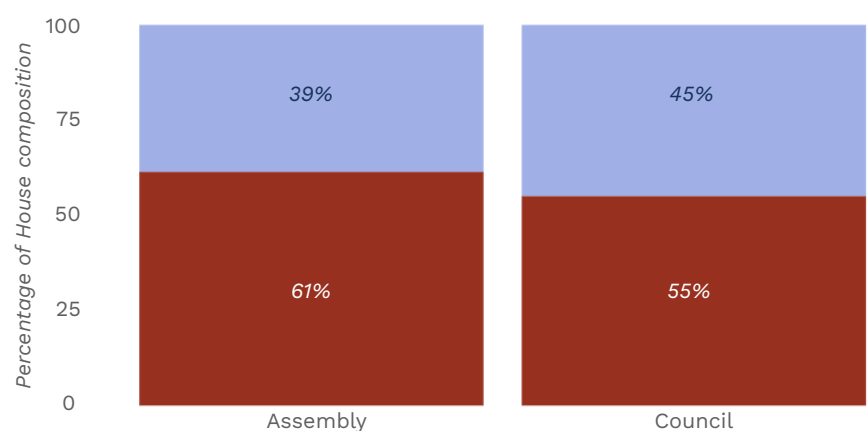


59th Legislative Council Election Results



Gender composition of the 59th Parliament

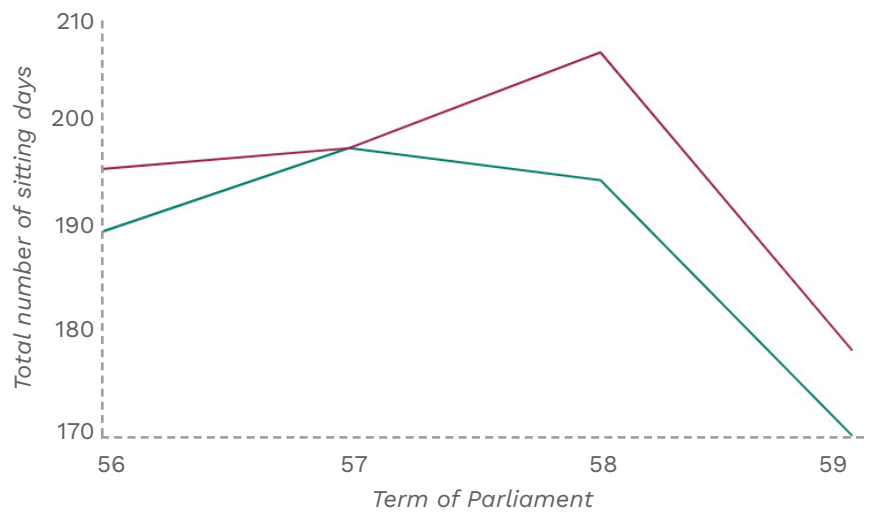
- Female
- Male



**To view the 59th Parliament interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.*

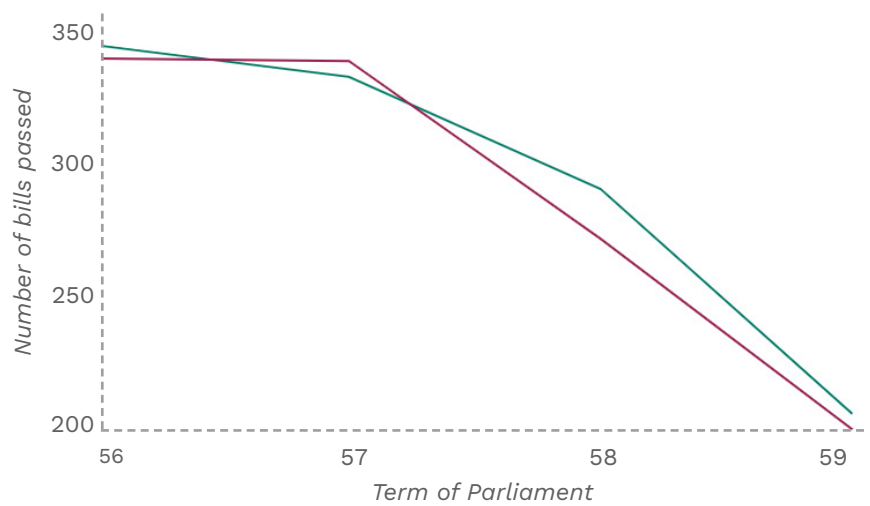
Time series of sitting day counts

- Assembly
- Council



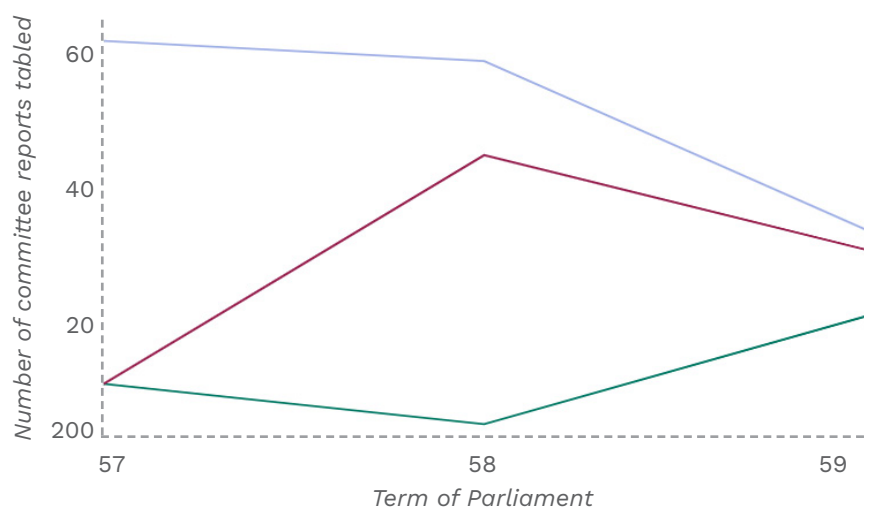
Time series of bills passed

- Assembly
- Council



Number of committee reports tabled (excl. SARC digests)

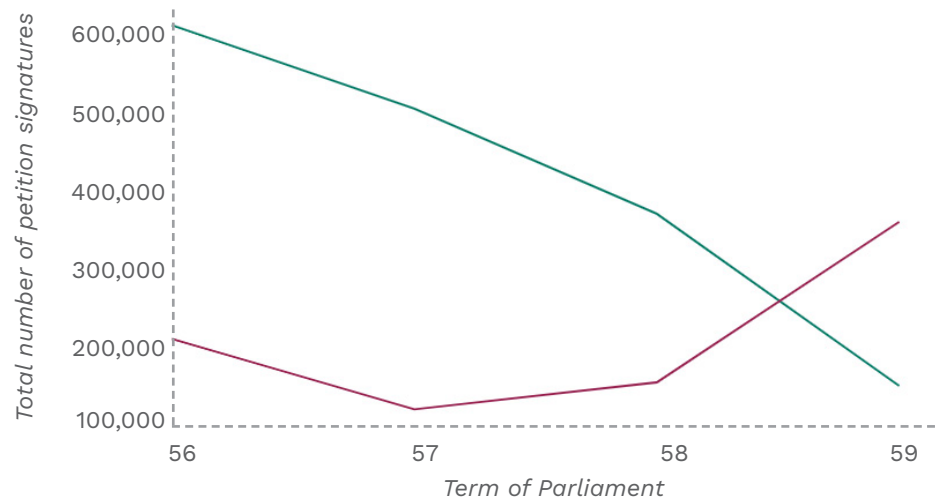
- Assembly
- Council
- Joint



*To view the 59th Parliament interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

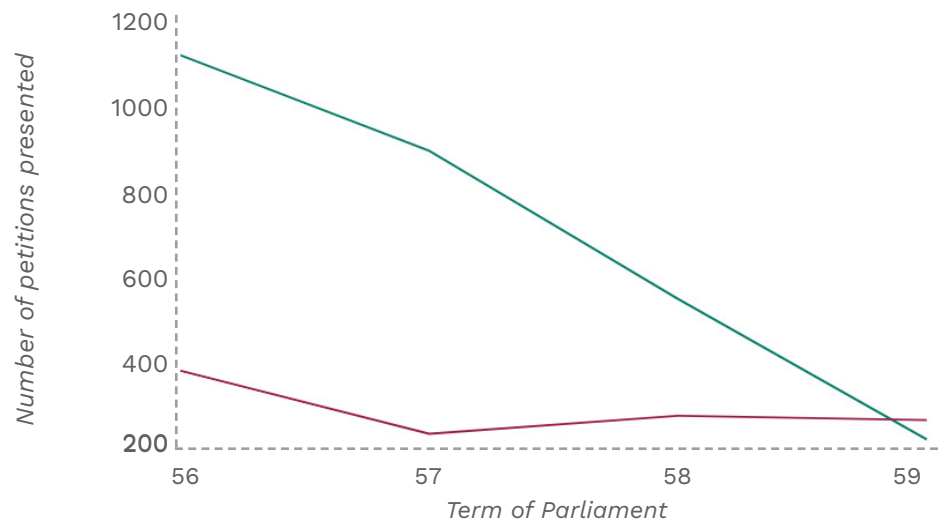
Time series of petition signatures

- Assembly
- Council



Time series of tabled petitions

- Assembly
- Council



*To view the 59th Parliament interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation](#) website.

- [Parliamentary Committees Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019](#)
- [Parliamentary Committees Amendment \(SARC Protection Against Rights Curtailment by Urgent Bills\) Bill 2020](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Members of Parliament \(Standards\) Amendment Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [The 2018 Victorian State Election](#), Research paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)
- [2019 Briefing e-Book](#), Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Alert Digests](#), Scrutiny Acts and Regulations Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019–22)
- [Commencement of sitting day proceedings](#), Legislative Council Procedure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Dealing with alleged contraventions of the Code of Conduct and the Register of Interests](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Person referred to in the Legislative Assembly—Cr Peter Clarke](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Report on a review of the Standing Orders](#), Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Report on the appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee and Legislative Council Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Inquiry into the conduct of the 2018 Victorian state election](#), Electoral Matters Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Officer](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)

- [Report on e-petitions, responding to statements made in the Legislative Council and supplementary questions](#), Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into breach of committee deliberations and report contents](#), Legislative Council Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into Mr Adem Somyurek's use of government resources](#), Legislative Council Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into whether Victoria should participate in a national electoral roll platform](#), Electoral Matters Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Person referred to in the Legislative Assembly—Ms Sarah Rees](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Person referred to in the Legislative Assembly—Professor David Lindenmayer AO](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (April 2022)
- [Person referred to in the Legislative Assembly—Professor David Lindenmayer AO](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (September 2022)
- [Report on certain complaints under Part 3 of the Members of Parliament \(Standards\) Act 1978](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Report on the complaint by the Member for Polwarth](#), Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Report on procedures for joint sittings under section 165AU of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#), Legislative Assembly Standing Orders Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Standing Orders review 2022](#), Legislative Council Procedure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

COVID-19

COVID-19

An overview of parliamentary events and developments relating to COVID-19 during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports.

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic dominated the headlines as the disease emerged around the world in January 2020. The first Australian case was [confirmed](#) at Monash Medical Centre, Clayton, on 25 January. On 11 March, the same day the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic, the Victorian Government's response to the pandemic began with the [activation](#) of the State Control Centre. The *COVID-19 Pandemic Plan for the Victorian Health Sector* was then [launched](#) to outline how the Government planned to stop the spread of the virus.

On 16 March 2020 the Minister for Health [declared](#) a state of emergency, which allowed the Chief Health Officer, Professor Brett Sutton, to make pandemic-related health orders. Two days later, the federal Governor-General declared a human biosecurity emergency across Australia under the [Biosecurity Act 2015 \(Cth\)](#). On 3 April a Crisis Council of Cabinet was [established](#). The council was to be the 'core decision making forum for the Victorian Government' and consisted of the Premier and seven ministers, all with new portfolios to lead the pandemic response in their departments. The council was [disbanded](#) on 9 November 2020.

The powers given to the Chief Health Officer allowed him to make directions on quarantine and isolation for those who were ill or who had been exposed to someone who was ill, determine the number of people allowed at gatherings and eventually impose curfew and travel restrictions. The first public health order under the emergency declaration were made on 18 March 2020—the [Airport Arrivals Direction](#) and the [Mass Gatherings Direction](#). The first three deaths in Victoria [were recorded](#) on 26 March 2020. In addition to the state of emergency, a state of disaster was [declared](#) on 2 August 2020.

Under section 198 of the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#), a state of emergency could be in place for four weeks and then renewed in four-week increments for up to six months. Six months after the state of emergency was first declared, the Government was required to ask Parliament for an extension. With the introduction of the [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(State of Emergency Extension and Other Matters\) Bill 2020](#) in September 2020, a six-month extension was agreed to, meaning another extension would need to be [sought](#) in March 2021. At that time the state of emergency was further extended to December 2021 through the [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(State of Emergency Extension\) Act 2021](#).

The Government introduced the [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(Pandemic Management\) Bill 2021](#) on 27 October 2021. It [passed](#) the Legislative Council on 2 December 2021 after a marathon [21-hour debate](#). The Bill transferred the powers to declare a pandemic emergency and create public health orders to the Minister for Health and the Premier. The Premier extended the pandemic declaration three times over the course of 2021–22. In October 2022 the Premier [announced](#) that the declaration would not be renewed again, and it lapsed along with most restrictions at 11:59 pm, 14 October 2022. See the 'Health' chapter in the COVID-19 section for more detail on the legislation mentioned above.

Lockdowns

One of the major Government strategies for dealing with outbreaks of COVID-19 was imposing lockdowns. Although for much of 2020 and 2021 there were public health restrictions in place, the most severe were spread across six lockdowns in metropolitan Victoria. Regional Victoria had different restrictions to metropolitan Melbourne at some points as a reflection of lower case numbers.

Border closures

Another key infection mitigation strategy used by both state and federal governments was to impose border closures. On 19 March 2020 then Prime Minister Scott Morrison [announced](#) that from 9 pm on 20 March the Australian border would be closed to non-citizens and non-residents. This was not lifted until 15 December 2021 for [visa holders](#) and international students and 21 February 2022 for all [fully vaccinated visitors](#).

Victoria did not close the border in 2020 and implemented a ‘[traffic light system](#)’ in 2021 to respond to outbreaks in other states. Victorians, however, were [restricted](#) in their movements to other states for much of 2020–22. Communities living close to the borders of South Australia and New South Wales were deemed to be in ‘border bubbles’ to allow for interstate movement. This was necessary as often the closest services such as hospitals and schools were in another state. See the [Library’s paper on border closures](#) for more details.

National Cabinet and coordination with other states

A new National Cabinet was [established](#) on 13 March 2020 to replace the Council of Australian Governments. Created by the Prime Minister, the cabinet is a committee of the Commonwealth Cabinet, and its membership consists of each state’s premier or first minister and the Prime Minister. The cabinet met [regularly](#), sometimes weekly, to discuss the pandemic, often receiving briefings from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and the chief health officers and hearing their recommendations on how to address the pandemic. In an attempt to have a cohesive national strategy for pandemic restrictions, the cabinet [agreed](#) to several national plans, which were then implemented by each state in response to their specific circumstances. The different responses by premiers and state health authorities [led to tensions](#) between members of the cabinet, especially when it came to Victoria’s contact tracing system and reliance on lockdowns.

The [National Partnership on COVID-19 Response](#) was signed on 13 March 2020. It split the cost of diagnosing and treating COVID-19 patients equally between the states and territories and the Australian Government. An upfront payment of \$100 million was paid to the states (on a population share basis). In June 2022 the agreement was [extended](#) until 31 December 2022, when a federal spokesperson indicated it had been replaced with a new ‘[National Partnership for Priority Populations for Testing and Vaccination](#)’.

Victorian Parliament and COVID-19

The Victorian Parliament continued to sit throughout the pandemic, as it was classed as an essential workplace. The sitting schedule was amended, especially in the Government-controlled Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Council, which was not controlled by the Government, sat on occasion without the Legislative Assembly—on 4 August 2020, 18 August 2020, 29 April 2020 and 17 August 2021.

Both chambers implemented changes to voting procedures to allow for social distancing. In the Legislative Assembly the number of Members allowed on the floor of the house at one time [fluctuated](#) across 2020. In September 2020 the division procedure was [altered](#) to allow all Members to vote in ‘shifts’ to maintain social distancing. In February 2021 the upper and lower galleries were [declared](#) part of the chamber to allow Members to vote from there. These rules remained in place until 29 November 2021. Changes were made for a set period—usually a sitting period.

In the Legislative Council, Members [were asked](#) to remain in their seats to be counted during votes, rather than moving around the chamber to reflect their vote. The public and lower galleries were also taken to be part of the Legislative Council to allow for greater social distancing.

On 14 October 2021, after vaccines became widely available, both chambers passed requirements that only those who were fully vaccinated, those who had their first vaccination appointment booked in and those who had proof of a valid exemption could enter the parliamentary precinct. Those who did not comply with the requirements were suspended from attending the chamber until the second day of the 2022 parliamentary sitting year and had their security passes revoked. All but five Members, who objected to either taking a vaccine or having their vaccination status publicly declared, complied with this requirement. In the [Legislative Assembly](#), only Neil Angus of the Liberal Party opposed the motion, and in the [Legislative Council](#), the Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party’s Jeff Bourman, the Liberal Democrats’ David Limbrick and Tim Quilty and independent crossbench MP Catherine Cumming voted no. Independent Member Adem Somyurek was not present for the vote.

Inquiries into Victoria’s response

Several inquiries have been held to examine different aspects of Victoria’s response to the pandemic. These include parliamentary committees and independent bodies. The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues

Committee completed an [inquiry into the Victorian Government's COVID-19 contact tracing system and testing regime](#). The [final report](#) was published in December 2020, with 19 recommendations, of which the Government supported 14 in full and five in principle. The Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee reported on the [impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors](#). The Public Accounts and Estimate Committee published an interim report on its [inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#) in August 2020 and a final report in February 2021.

The [Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee](#) was established with the enactment of the [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(Pandemic Management\) Act 2021](#). Its mandate was to examine the public health orders made by the Minister for Health. By July 2022 the committee had tabled two reports: [Review of the pandemic \(visitors to hospitals and care facilities\) orders](#) and [Review of the pandemic \(quarantine, isolation and testing\) orders](#). The committee ceased operation on 12 October 2022 with the pandemic declaration expiring.

In 2020 in response to outbreaks from the [hotel quarantine system](#), the Premier announced an inquiry to be run by the Hon. Jennifer Coate AO. After releasing an [interim report](#) containing 69 recommendations in November 2020, including the establishment of a quarantine program in Victoria in anticipation of international arrivals, her report was released in December 2020 with an additional 12 recommendations, all of which were [accepted by the Government](#).

The Victorian Ombudsman [investigated](#) the treatment of public housing residents during the snap lockdown in July 2020 and [decisions](#) made as to who was granted permission to enter the state under the border crossing permit directions. See page 25 for more details on these investigations.

Health

The state of emergency, declared in March 2020, provided the Chief Health Officer with the powers needed to enforce 14-day isolation requirements for all travellers entering Australia and to cancel mass gatherings of more than 500 people. This state of emergency was extended by four-week increments for six months—the limit for state of emergency declarations under the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#).

In the background of the state of emergency, the [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) Act 2020](#) made a range of temporary changes and established limited powers for the Minister for Health to temporarily suspend the operation of nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios as required.

On 1 September 2020 the [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(State of Emergency Extension and Other Matters\) Bill 2020](#) was introduced to amend the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#). The controversial Bill, labelled a 'power grab' by the opposition, sought to:

- extend the state of emergency period from six months to 12 months;
- alter the circumstances in which the Chief Health Officer may permit authorised officers to exercise certain powers;
- clarify the power of the Chief Health Officer in respect of directions;
- clarify the application of the definition of serious risk to public health for the purposes relating to emergency declarations and the exercise of certain powers; and
- enhance reporting requirements when a state of emergency declaration in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic is extended beyond six months.

The Government had wanted a 12-month extension, but that [was not supported by the opposition or the crossbench](#). A compromise was reached with three crossbench MPs—the Greens leader Dr Samantha Ratnam, the Reason Party's Fiona Patten and Animal Justice Party's Andy Meddick—on a one-off six-month extension on the condition that MPs were briefed on the health situation each time a new four-week state of emergency was declared. The Bill [narrowly passed](#), with 20 MPs voting in favour and 19 against.

In December 2020 the *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Quarantine Fees) Act 2020* established fees for people undergoing COVID-19 hotel quarantine after arriving in Victoria from overseas.

Following the controversy from the first state of emergency extension, the *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (State of Emergency Extension) Act 2021*, assented in March 2021, further extended the maximum duration of the state of emergency from 12 months to 21 months, prolonging it until December 2021. However, the crossbench members who supported the extension stated that they had done so under the condition that specific legislation for managing COVID-19 be prepared for when the state of emergency expired.

On 9 June 2021 the Shadow Minister for Health introduced the *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Greater Transparency and Accountability) Bill 2021* to amend the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. The Bill sought to bring greater transparency to decisions made by the Government about state of emergency restrictions and lockdowns. The Bill was defeated in the Legislative Council.

On 26 October 2021, as the state of emergency expiration loomed, the *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (Pandemic Management) Bill 2021* was introduced to make a suite of amendments, most notably replacing the state of emergency powers and enabling the Premier and the Minister for Health to declare pandemics and enforce health directions, an arrangement more in keeping with other Australian jurisdictions. Previously, the state's Chief Health Officer, not an elected official, held these powers. Two committees were also established, an *Independent Pandemic Management Committee* and *Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee* (a joint parliamentary committee), and the Government was required to table health advice upon which restrictions and public health orders were based.

The Bill, dubbed by some Victorian lawyers 'a blank cheque to rule by decree', was extremely controversial, triggering protests in Melbourne which included signs advocating violence against politicians and threats sent to MPs. When the Bill passed through the Council on 2 December 2021, after crossbench MPs Andy Meddick, Fiona Patten, Samantha Ratnam and Transport Matters' Rod Barton voted with the Government, Victoria became the first state in Australia with pandemic-specific laws. In order to obtain the support of Barton, the Government made significant amendments to the proposed Bill, including the creation of the joint parliamentary committee that could review public health orders and recommend they be overruled by a majority of both houses of Parliament. The Act came into effect on 16 December 2021—the day the state of emergency expired.

Crime and justice

With the state of emergency and the human biosecurity emergency being declared in March 2020 under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and *Biosecurity Act 2015 (Cth)* respectively, COVID-19 marked the first time that such emergency powers had been activated under these Acts. On 2 August a state of disaster was also declared in Victoria under the *Emergency Management Act 1986*, expanding police power to enforce public health directions.

Under the state of emergency, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) delegated enforcement of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* to Victoria Police, enabling them to act as authorised officers and enforce directions of the Chief Health Officer.

In April 2020 the *COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Act 2020* amended Acts across numerous portfolios. In relation to justice and community safety, the Act made changes to enable the courts, corrections and the wider legal system to continue to deliver vital justice services while complying with COVID-19 related restrictions.

In September 2020 emergency measures were extended for a further six months through the *COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) and Other Acts Amendment Act 2020*. The Act also broadened the type of people able to be appointed as authorised officers to enforce public health interventions. Several Victorian civil rights groups expressed concern over the expansion of authorised officer criteria and authorised officers' amended power to detain people likely to refuse or failing to comply with quarantine directions.

Following these temporary reforms, the *Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2022* made permanent some regulatory changes to strengthen the ability of Victorian regulators and regulatory systems to respond to emergencies similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Courts during the COVID-19 pandemic

Various legislative amendments were also introduced to enable court operations during the pandemic. The *Justice Legislation Amendment (System Enhancements and Other Matters) Act 2021* provided for the ongoing operation of certain processes and procedures implemented during the pandemic. Similarly, the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters) Act 2022* introduced measures to reduce court backlogs and case wait times, while keeping courtrooms safe from COVID-19.

Education

Public health directions aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19 disrupted the whole education sector. For much of 2020–21, tertiary institutions and schools were required to move to remote or online learning and kindergartens were required to close.

Universities were further impacted by the loss of international student enrolments, as many students could not enter the country after the Australian Government closed the borders. Additionally, universities faced [tough eligibility conditions](#) for the JobKeeper program, which essentially excluded them from receiving any federal financial assistance. Many institutions [laid off staff](#) in response to decreased revenue.

The Victorian Government aided the university sector in the form of several grant programs. In May 2020, the \$350 million [Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund](#) was announced. The fund provided money for capital work, applied research and research partnerships. Universities also received \$110 million in payroll tax deferrals. In April 2020, \$260.8 million in funding was [announced](#) for the TAFE sector to counter the expected drop in revenue due to decreased student numbers. In addition, \$55 million from the [Building Works](#) package was allocated for maintenance works at TAFEs.

To mitigate the risk of the virus spreading, schools were [required](#) to teach remotely for much of 2020 and 2021 (see the [Library publication on school closures](#)). In April 2020, 26,000 internet dongles and 5,000 sim cards [were provided](#) to students without reliable internet at home to assist with home learning. Other mitigation strategies included [distributing](#) 111,000 air purifiers to all public schools across the state in February 2022 and encouraging students and teachers to voluntarily take a rapid antigen test (RAT) twice a week. Students' temperatures were also checked each morning. Final-year results were [modified](#) to consider how the disruptions to the school year may have negatively impacted some students' performance. [Cleaning grants](#) of up to \$900 were made available to kindergartens and early childhood services with less than 50 children, while \$1,500 grants were made available to those with more than 50 enrolments, so services could remain open but also prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In May 2020 a \$2.7 billion Building Works package was [announced](#) to 'get shovels in the ground and thousands of people back to work'. At the core was \$1.18 billion for education infrastructure projects, including ten new schools, upgrades to 57 schools and modifications for students with disability.

Human services

Family violence

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Victorian Government to mobilise a swathe of initiatives to protect those at risk of family violence. The Government had accepted, on evidence, the view that gendered violence is driven in the main by gender inequalities. This was the underlying basis of its policy responses. It was also keenly aware that other factors such as financial pressures, alcohol and drug abuse and social exclusion are also risk factors, and that these are '[heightened during and following emergencies and crises](#)'. The public health measures requiring people to stay at home—the place where victim survivors were most at risk—increased the challenges and complexities for family violence frontline services.

The [responses](#) included:

- increased emergency accommodation for those unable to stay at home safely, as well as accommodation for perpetrators to leave the family home
- implementing the Multicultural COVID-19 Family Violence Program supporting a partnership with multicultural, faith-based and culturally specific organisations

- Victoria Police's Operation Ribbon—a proactive checking on victim survivor safety as well as monitoring of perpetrators.

Family violence intervention orders through the Magistrates' Court were also [moved online](#). The [public health messaging](#) during the pandemic continuously emphasised that leaving home to escape family violence was a legal exception regardless of the restrictions in place.

Homelessness

In April 2020 the [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) Act 2020](#) introduced protections for tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic under a moratorium agreed to by the National Cabinet. The Governor in Council was provided with regulation-making powers to implement principles on the moratorium. Rent increases were suspended, and provisions were made concerning termination of tenancies and dispute resolutions. The regulations were due to sunset within six months but were extended in September 2020 by another six months to 28 March 2021 through the [COVID-19 Commercial and Residential Tenancies Legislation Amendment \(Extension\) Act 2020](#).

Provisions under the *Residential Tenancies Act 2018* due to come into operation were postponed for six months, with the exception of reforms protecting victims of family violence, which were preserved in the omnibus Act.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the accommodation of homeless and rough sleepers became a critical issue. With homelessness numbers [increasing](#), stay-at-home orders being enforced and the virus spreading about the state, the Government introduced a temporary hotel accommodation scheme that would begin on 8 July 2020 and eventually be wound back in [November 2021](#) with the pandemic emergency response. See the 'Human services' chapter for more detail.

Employment

The COVID-19 pandemic affected employment across all sectors to varying degrees. At its worst point, the Australian Bureau of Statistics recorded a seasonally adjusted decline of 4.37 per cent in employment between March 2020, when the pandemic was declared, and September 2020. Employment in Victoria appears to have recovered over the course of the 2020–21 and 2021–22 financial years.

In addition to the Australian Government's JobKeeper and JobSeeker schemes, the Victorian Government provided financial relief to businesses and workers through a series of funding streams. These included the following:

- [Business Continuity Fund](#)
- [Business Costs Assistance Program](#)
- [Commercial Landlord Hardship Fund](#)
- [First Peoples' COVID-19 Business Support Fund](#)
- [Licenced Hospitality Venue Fund](#)
- [Small Business COVID Hardship Fund](#)
- [Sustainable Event Business Program](#).

Uncertainty around future disruptions to events led the Victorian Government to establish the COVID-19 Event Insurance scheme through the Victorian Managed Insurance Agency. The scheme provided cover for creative, business, sporting and community events hosted in the state that needed to be cancelled or have their capacity reduced due to pandemic-related restrictions.

Arts, sport and recreation

Arts

The Victorian arts industry was heavily impacted by the public health orders introduced to protect Victorians against COVID-19. As a considerable proportion of the industry rely on short-term and casual contracts, or are self-employed, the restrictions on running events and density quotients limited the ways the industry

could continue to operate. In 2020 a [Victorian survey of arts and music workers](#) highlighted this impact: 74 per cent of music workers reported a decrease in income; the number of people employed in full-time work decreased from 34 per cent to seven per cent; and 44 per cent of respondents reported losing all their music-related income. To support the industry, several grants were announced, and voucher programs were introduced to encourage Victorians to attend events and engage with the sector when public health orders allowed for it.

The \$13 million [Strategic Investment Fund](#) and the [Sustaining Creative Workers](#) Fund provided up to \$5,000 for individuals and \$10,000 for small organisations. Larger organisations, such as the Geelong Arts Centre, Museums Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria, Arts Centre Melbourne and the Melbourne Recital Centre, all benefited from \$32 million in [assistance](#) announced in May 2020. In addition to those programs and funds detailed in the 'Employment' section above, grants and support packages announced by the Government to support the arts industry include the following:

- [COVIDSafe Outdoor Activation Voucher Program](#)
- [Independent Cinema Support Program](#)
- [Live Performance Support Program \(Suppliers\)](#)
- [Live Performance Support Program \(Presenters\)](#)
- [Sustaining Creative Workers initiative](#)
- [Victorian Events Support Package](#)
- [Impacted Public Events Support Program.](#)

The Government also organised a number of collaborations with the arts and recreation industry to help provide work for those in the entertainment industries impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and to '[keep Victorians connected](#)'. This included the [Victoria Together](#) online platform, which showcased everything 'from live music and comedy, to the amazing animals at Melbourne Zoo'. This platform also played host to a series of events organised by late music industry icon Michael Gudinski AM and his Mushroom Group, including [Music from the Home Front](#) for Anzac Day eve in 2020 and a number of weekly concerts showcasing local acts.

Sport and recreation

The 2020 Melbourne Grand Prix was the first major Australian event [cancelled](#) due to concerns about the threat of COVID-19. Over the next two years, [many of the usual sporting events](#), including much of the AFL, A-League, NRL and netball seasons, were cancelled, moved interstate or played without crowds or with restricted crowds. In both [2021](#) and [2022](#) the Australian Open was played in front of restricted crowds.

Community sport was also restricted due to public health orders. The [Community Sport Sector COVID-19 Survival Package](#) was announced in 2021. Clubs were able to apply for \$1,500 and local leagues \$2,500 to offset losses caused by restrictions on training and competitions. Other sports grants included the [Local Sports Infrastructure Fund](#) and the [Emergency Sporting Equipment Grant Program](#).

Tourism

In response to the pandemic's impact on the tourism sector, with severely reduced visitor numbers, Victorians were encouraged to travel to the regions through the '[Stay Close. Go Further](#)' campaign launched in November 2020, which aimed to 'encourage more Victorians to experience everything [Victoria] ... has to offer'. This campaign complemented the [Click for Vic](#) initiative, which had encouraged people to purchase items from local suppliers. The first round of the Victorian Travel Voucher Scheme was [announced](#) on 21 February 2021. Recipients of vouchers could receive \$200 to subsidise accommodation, tours or attractions in regional Victoria if they spent over \$400 in total. By 2022 over 116,000 claims had been made and over \$159 million reimbursed. In the 2020–21 budget, \$465 million was [allocated](#) for the Victorian Tourism Recovery Package 'to get people out of the house and into regional Victoria and the city, supporting local businesses and local jobs'. The package included \$150 million for the Regional Tourism Investment Fund and nearly \$150 million for improvements to visitor accommodation and tourist trails. See also the 'Arts, sports and recreation' chapter.

Integrity

The Victorian Ombudsman undertook two investigations into aspects of the pandemic response.

Investigation into Flemington and North Melbourne towers lockdown

After receiving more than 85 complaints, the Victorian Ombudsman [investigated the Victorian Government's decision to place nine public housing towers suddenly into lockdown](#) in July 2020. The Government's direction to place approximately 3,000 residents of the towers into hard lockdown immediately was sparked by concern of a COVID-19 outbreak. In its investigation, while acknowledging that the detention and isolation measures had worked in halting the rapid growth of cases, the Ombudsman found the detention of the residents was 'incompatible with human rights, including the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty recognised in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic)'.

The Government in [its response](#), while acknowledging the distress of residents—particularly from the initial use of Victoria Police—defended its actions as being necessary in an emergency and critical in saving lives, given the vulnerabilities of the residents. Much has been written to date debating various aspects of the decisions and actions of the Government.

Investigation into decision-making under the Victorian Border Crossing Permit Directions

The Ombudsman [received more than 80 complaints](#) in relation to how the Victorian Government handled border crossing permits over the course of 2021.

The Victorian Government implemented a 'traffic light' system for all domestic travel into the state in January 2021. The type of permit required to enter Victoria depended on the colour-coded zone the person was attempting to travel from (red, orange or green). In July 2021, when COVID-19 cases in New South Wales escalated, Victorians with permits in interstate red zones were given approximately 12 hours to return to their home state.

The Government subsequently introduced 'extreme risk zones' from which no-one would be able to enter Victoria without an exemption. This effectively prevented thousands of Victorians from being able to enter the state from New South Wales or the ACT. Between 9 July and 14 September, 33,252 exemption applications were submitted to the Department of Health, of which only eight per cent were approved. It was found that most applications were not specifically rejected but 'closed for other reasons'.

When investigating the complaints, the Ombudsman found 'the narrow exercise of discretion under the Victorian Border Crossing Permit Directions resulted in unjust outcomes'.

Planning and Environment

Planning

Specific planning measures were put in place to support business and industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020 essential businesses were [exempted](#) from existing noise restrictions to allow for the 24-hour dispatch and delivery of goods to supermarkets, hospitals, pharmacies and other essential businesses in order to meet demand.

The [Building Victoria's Recovery Taskforce](#) was established in April 2020 to investigate planning and investment opportunities to boost the recovery of the building and development industry. The taskforce initially oversaw the fast-tracking of planning approvals using ministerial powers, including four new projects at Southbank, Collins Street and Flemington. The taskforce's work concluded in August 2020, with the Minister for Planning establishing the [Development Facilitation Program](#) to carry on the work of identifying priority projects for the construction industry.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Victorian Planning Authority activated a [program to fast-track](#) existing projects to provide a pipeline of development for industry, as well as future jobs and homes for Victorians. They also released a document detailing their [response to COVID-19](#) in July 2021.

Local government

The first major COVID-19 omnibus legislation April 2020 (extended in September) amended the *Local Government Act 2020* to allow councils to hold virtual council meetings, ensuring the continuation of service delivery and decision-making. Assistance with [ICT infrastructure support](#) was provided to rural councils to facilitate remote governance and community engagement. Funding rounds were opened to [help councils](#) expand hospitality businesses outdoors and promote COVID-safe practices with local businesses. COVID-safe assistance was also provided to support culturally and linguistically diverse communities, as was relief funding to help councils provide food, health care and other relief to people who were in quarantine or were required to isolate. Economic stimulus was also provided with an expansion of the [Growing Suburbs Fund](#), which funded a number of local infrastructure projects to support jobs and businesses during the pandemic.

Rural and regional

During the COVID-19 pandemic, metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria operated under different restrictions for extended periods of time. A number of support and assistance measures were activated from 2020 to help regions affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Victorian Government's stay-at-home orders, which limited travel to country Victoria. A \$5 million fund supported regional accommodation businesses—including motels, caravan parks and short-term rentals—that could demonstrate losses due to cancellations and pandemic restrictions. The 2020–21 state budget invested heavily in a [Victorian Tourism Recovery Package](#). Grants of up to \$10,000 were fast-tracked from the Business Support Fund, and the Regional Jobs Fund supported Med-Con, an Australian company based near Shepparton, to produce personal protective equipment, including face masks.

The nine regional partnerships conducted COVID-19 recovery roundtables to identify pandemic impacts and future strategies appropriate for their own communities. Several rounds of the Regional Travel Voucher Scheme provided \$200 vouchers that could be claimed by households that spent at least two nights in paid accommodation in regional Victoria within specified periods. [Further support](#) was available from the state and federal governments in 2021, following the extension of Victorian lockdowns.

A team of locally based '[border brokers](#)' was deployed in September 2021 to assist the Cross Border Commissioner in helping towns impacted by border restrictions with New South Wales and South Australia. The Government also addressed worker shortages in critical businesses and industries with the [Regional Workforce Pilots](#) program, to help tackle housing shortages and other barriers to regional workforce attraction. Pilot programs were established in the Grampians, the Great South Coast, the High Country and Robinvale.

The [Victorian Connection](#) website, created by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, includes insights from across the state regarding new ways of working and doing business following the pandemic.

Transport

Following the initial COVID-19 restrictions imposed from March to May 2020, according to the Department of Transport's [2019–20 annual report](#), Melbourne saw a reduction in road traffic of 40 per cent, while public transport patronage was 90 per cent below normal levels. By late June, easing of restrictions meant road traffic was only around 20 per cent below normal levels, while public transport patronage was 70 per cent lower than normal.

The Department of Transport implemented several major responses in managing the pandemic, which are detailed in the department's [annual report](#):

- Driver testing was suspended, and more transactions were made available online.
- Cleaning across the network was significantly bolstered with the deployment of extra crews to clean stops and stations, and surfaces inside buses, trams and trains.
- Hygiene sanitising stations were rolled out at key sites.
- A Major Transport Infrastructure Authority (MTIA) safety team conducted spot checks across all Big Build worksites.

- In January 2021 the biggest timetable change since the opening of the City Loop was made, with 280 metropolitan services and 170 regional services added to spread peak usage.
- QR codes were installed at key locations, including at tram stops, stations and replacement bus stops, on 7,600 trams, trains and buses, and in 35,000 ride share vehicles and taxis.
- Transport users were encouraged to register their Mykiss to enhance contact tracing.
- To reduce pressure on global supply chains and support local business, online ordering and home delivery, delivery trucks were exempted from the curfew.
- In February 2022 public transport authorised officers encouraged face mask compliance by giving out 35,000 masks in the first 12 weeks.

Transport was a major focus of the Victorian Government's \$2.7 billion [Building Works package](#), announced in May 2020, aimed at getting thousands of people back to work through the pandemic. The package included \$328 million investment into roads, public transport, jetties and piers, with critical maintenance and upgrades to support more than 600 jobs. Half the investment was targeted at regional Victoria.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation website](#).

2020

- [COVID-19 Commercial and Residential Tenancies Legislation Amendment \(Extension\) Act 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 \(Emergency Measures\) Act 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) and Other Acts Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Health Services Amendment \(Mandatory Vaccination of Healthcare Workers\) Act 2020](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(Quarantine Fees\) Act 2020](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(State of Emergency Extension and Other Matters\) Act 2020](#)

2021

- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(System Enhancements and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(Pandemic Management\) Act 2021](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(State of Emergency Extension\) Act 2021](#)
- [Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and Other Acts Amendment \(Federal Jurisdiction and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#)
- [Constitution Amendment \(State of Emergency and State of Disaster\) Bill 2021 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)
- [Emergency Powers Safeguards Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)

2022

- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [Emergency Powers, Public Health and COVID-19](#), B. Huf & H. McLean, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Epidemics and pandemics in Victoria: Historical perspectives](#), B. Huf & H. McLean, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Chronology of primary and secondary school closures in Victoria due to COVID-19](#), A. Wright, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)

- [Chronology of Victorian border closures due to COVID-19](#), A. Wright, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)
- [COVID-19 Vaccination Rates and Victoria's Arts Sector](#), C. Triscari, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)
- [COVID and Job Seeker Recipients by Electorate, 2020-2021](#), B. Reid, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)
- [Visualising the population impacts of COVID-19 in Victoria](#), B. Reid, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry](#), J. Coate AO (2020)
- [COVID-19 hotel quarantine inquiry: interim report and recommendations](#), Victorian Government (2020)
- [COVID-19 hotel quarantine inquiry final report and recommendations](#), Victorian Government (2020)
- [Independent review of COVID-19 outbreaks at St Basil's and Epping Gardens aged care facilities](#), Department of Health (2020)
- [Investigation into the detention and treatment of public housing residents arising from a COVID-19 'hard lockdown' in July 2020](#), Victorian Ombudsman (2020)
- [Newmarch House COVID-19 Outbreak Independent Review](#), Department of Health (2020)
- [Report of the Independent Review of COVID-19 outbreaks at St Basil's and Epping Gardens aged care facilities](#), Commonwealth Department of Health (2020)
- [Report of the inquiry into the Victorian on-demand workforce](#), Industrial Relations Victoria (2020)
- [Report to Parliament on the Declaration of State of Disaster: Report under section 23\(7\) of the Emergency Management Act 1986](#)
 - 4th report (10 November 2020)
 - 3rd report (15 October 2020)
 - 2nd report (17 September 2020)
 - 1st report (3 September 2020)
- [Review of Dorothy Henderson Lodge COVID-19](#), Department of Health (2020)
- [Building back better: Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service COVID-19 recovery plan](#), Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (2021)

- [Independent review of COVID-19 outbreaks in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities](#), Department of Health (2021)
- [Investigation into decision-making under the Victorian Border Crossing Permit Directions](#), Victorian Ombudsman (2021)
- [Management of spending in response to COVID-19](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office, (2021)
- Report to Parliament on the Declaration of a State of Emergency: Report under section 198(8) of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
 - [20th report](#) (21 October 2021)
 - [19th report](#) (23 September 2021)
 - [18th report](#) (26 August 2021)
 - [17th report](#) (29 July 2021)
 - [16th report](#) (1 July 2021)
 - [15th report](#) (3 June 2021)
 - [14th report](#)
 - [13th report](#) (9 April 2021)
 - [12th report](#) (15 March 2021)
 - [11th report](#) (3 March 2021)
 - [10th report](#) (3 February 2021)
 - [9th report](#) (29 January 2021)
 - [8th report](#) (9 December 2021)
 - [7th report](#) (11 November 2020)
 - [6th report](#) (14 October 2020)
 - [5th report](#) (17 September 2020)
 - [4th report](#) (3 September 2020)
 - [3rd report](#) (2 June 2020)
 - [2nd report](#) (23 April 2020)
 - [1st report](#) (17 March 2020)
- [Response to the independent review of COVID-19 outbreaks in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities](#), Victorian Government (2021)
- [Business Continuity During COVID-19](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)
- [Review of Victoria's emergency ambulance call answer performance—COVID-19 pandemic-related 000 demand surge](#), Inspector-General for Emergency Management (2022)
- [Review of Victoria's preparedness for major public health emergencies, including pandemics](#), Inspector General for Emergency Management (2022)
- [Disability Royal Commission and COVID-19](#), Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (no date)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into the Victorian Government's COVID-19 contact tracing system and testing regime](#), Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Review of pandemic orders](#), Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
 - [Review of the pandemic \(quarantine, isolation and testing\) orders](#) (2022)
 - [Review of the pandemic \(visitors to hospitals and care facilities\) orders](#) (2022)

Treasury and finance

Treasury and finance

The following is an overview of developments within the treasury and finance portfolios during the 59th Parliament, including key issues, legislation passed, committee inquiries and reports.

Budgets

The Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) handed down four budgets in the 59th Parliament. As was the case across Australia, the Victorian budgets in this period were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 response.

The [2019–20 state budget](#) was delivered on 27 May 2019 and themed ‘[Delivering for all Victorians](#)’. The budget included major infrastructure funding packages for suburban rail projects and the North East Link, as well as in kindergarten education and dental care.

The [2020–21 state budget](#) was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and delivered on 24 November 2020. It was themed ‘[Putting People First](#)’. The Treasurer reported a \$23.3 billion operating deficit in consequence of emergency measures following the 2019–20 bushfires and 2020 COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. It included a Jobs Plan to create 400,000 new jobs by 2025.

The [2021–22 state budget](#) was delivered on 20 May 2021 and themed ‘[Creating Jobs, Caring for Victorians](#)’. It was headlined by a \$3.8 billion investment in mental health, following the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, including the creation of a Mental Health and Wellbeing levy applied to big businesses.

The [2022–23 state budget](#) was delivered on 3 May 2020 and themed ‘[Putting Patients First](#)’. It included a [pandemic repair plan](#), a \$12 billion investment in the Victorian health system.

Economic indicators

Gross state product

Following steady growth over the past decade, Victoria’s gross state product fell by 0.5 per cent in [2019–20](#), and a further 0.4 per cent in [2020–21](#), as economic activity was impacted by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. In 2020–21, the [largest contractions by industry](#) in Victoria were in Construction (–4.6%), Administrative and Support Services (–9.0%) and Transport, Postal and Warehousing (–8.7%). In [2021–22](#), Victoria registered a significant rebound, growing by 5.6 per cent, well above Australia’s GDP of 3.6 per cent. Construction grew at 7.6 per cent in this period, and Transport, Postal and Warehousing at 12.5 per cent.

Population

At [June 2022](#), Victoria had a population of 6,613,700, an increase of 1.0 per cent over the previous twelve months. At the beginning of the 59th Parliament, in [December 2018](#), the population of Victoria was 6,526,400, meaning there was an overall increase of 1.01 per cent over the term of the Parliament. Victoria recorded a net decrease of 0.6 per cent over the 12 months to March 2021, largely due to net overseas and interstate migration. See the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), ‘[National, state and territory population](#)’.

Employment

At the beginning of the 59th Parliament, in [December 2018](#), Victoria’s unemployment rate was (seasonally-adjusted) 4.2 per cent. By the end of the 59th Parliament, in [December 2022](#), it had decreased to 3.5 per cent. It reached a high of 7.4 per cent in [June 2020](#), and in [July 2022](#) reached a low of 3.1 per cent, the lowest unemployment rate in Victorian in a half century.

The underemployment rate—the share of workers who want and are available to work additional hours—was 8.3 per cent in December 2018 and 5.8 per cent in August 2022, reaching a high of 14.9 per cent in September 2020.

The total number of employed persons in Victoria was severely impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and their easing: 126,000 people left the workforce in April 2020, while 123,500 left the workforce in September 2021. These declines were offset by 154,200 people returning to employment in November 2021.

Wages and inflation

Wages and prices mostly grew steadily in tandem over the period of the 59th Parliament before a significant bout of inflation in 2022. For the 12 months to June 2019, the consumer price index (CPI) increased by 1.2 per cent and the wage price index (WPI) by 2.9 per cent; for the year to June 2020, CPI increased 0.3 per cent and the WPI by 1.7 per cent; for the year to June 2021, CPI increased by 2.9 per cent and WPI by 1.8 per cent; and for the year to June 2022, CPI increased by 6.1 per cent and WPI by 2.5 per cent.

Government net debt

In 2018, government net debt was \$21.6 billion. The first state budget of the 59th Parliament, the [2019–20 budget](#) delivered in May 2019, estimated net debt would reach \$54.9 billion by 2022–23. The following year, at the [2020–21 state budget](#) as pandemic restrictions were established, these estimates were significantly revised, with net debt forecast to be \$132.9 billion in 2023, and \$154.8 billion in 2024. By the end of 2022, Victoria's net debt was \$100 billion. The [2022–23 state budget](#), delivered in May 2022, forecast net debt to reach \$167.5 billion by 2025–26. For historical totals, see [DTF's data on net debt](#).

Revenue and taxation

Victorian state revenue is derived from a range of federal grants (48.3 per cent in 2022–23), state taxes (37.2 per cent), sales of goods and services (7.8 per cent), and other interest income, dividends and revenue. Victoria's total budgeted revenue in 2022–23 was \$81.87 billion.

Taxation

State taxation comprises payroll taxes, land transfer duties, and gambling, vehicle and land taxes:

		2019-20 actual	2020-21 actual	2021-22 revised	2022-23 budget
Payroll tax	\$m	5 803	6 181	6 518	6 815
	change %	-7.6	6.5	5.4	4.6
Mental health and wellbeing levy	\$m			328	819
	change %				149.6
Land transfer duty	\$m	6 143	6 424	10 195	8 226
	change %	2.2	4.6	58.7	-19.3
Gambling taxes	\$m	1 711	1 627	1 961	2 437
	change %	-14.8	-4.9	20.5	24.3
Insurance taxes	\$m	1 484	1 540	1 713	1 829
	change %	8.1	3.8	11.2	6.7
Motor vehicle taxes	\$m	2 670	2 686	2 935	3 071
	change %	4.5	0.6	9.3	4.6
Land tax	\$m	3 447	3 234	4 171	4 836
	change %	-1.8	-6.2	29.0	15.9
Fire services property levy	\$m	708	729	759	800
	change %	9.3	2.9	4.1	5.4
Other taxes	\$m	1 202	1 191	1 482	1 654
	change %	-0.4	-0.9	24.5	11.6
Total taxation	\$m	23 167	23 613	30 063	30 488
	change %	- 1.8	1.9	27.3	1.4

Source: Various Budget Papers, No. 5.

Impacts of COVID-19 on revenue

The COVID-19 responses significantly impacted Victorian state finances. Both the economic slowdown, effected through restrictions, and support measures to Victorian businesses, households and workers reduced Victoria's taxation revenue relative to pre-pandemic levels and expectations. Taxation revenues were impacted from the last quarter of 2019–20, with revenue in 2019–20 \$1.2 billion lower than forecast. The 2020–21 budget included a \$9.4 billion downgrade in total tax revenue from 2019–20 expectations. These reductions were primarily driven by payroll tax relief for small and medium business, while gambling, land and motor vehicle tax receipts were all weaker than expected. These reductions were partially offset by an increase in land transfer duty revenues following a boom in property prices before and during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. For details, see [2019–20 budget paper no. 5, pages 162–63](#), and [2021–22 budget paper no. 5, pages 168–69](#).

Cost of DTF COVID-19 relief measures

Relief measures [provided by DTF](#) and their estimated cost are summarised below:

2019-20

Relief Measure	Cost (\$m)
Payroll tax relief for small and medium businesses	673.0
Targeted JobKeeper exemption from payroll tax	46.5
Land tax relief for landlords and tenants	37.7
Economic Survival Package – Refund of liquor licenses	22.6
Cenitex to support remote working	2.8
Economic Survival Package – Implementation	0.3
	782.9

2020-21

Relief Measure	Cost (\$m)
Big Housing Build: Land transfer duty waiver for residential property transactions of up to \$1 million	336.6
Payroll tax relief for small and medium businesses	284.4
Land tax relief for landlords and tenants	247.5
Hotel quarantine costs – interstate reimbursement	53.2
Extension of the regional First Home Owner Grant	43.8
Congestion levy waiver	26.3
Support businesses to open, relocate and expand in regional Victoria	16.4
Additional facilities management and accommodation costs due to COVID-19	15.3
Regulatory reform package	14.0
Economic Survival Package – Implementation	13.2
Commercial passenger vehicle services levy waiver	5.8
Big Housing Build: Expanded Social Housing Growth Fund	3.8
Big Housing Build: Victorian Homebuyer Fund	2.3
Working from home arrangement Cenitex expenses	0.5
Venture Growth Fund	0.3
Supporting COVID-19 recovery through procurement	0.1
Research and development cash low loans	0.1
	1063.6

Motor vehicle taxes

From 1 July 2019 used passenger vehicles valued above the luxury threshold were aligned with the rate for new cars, making a consistent tax rate on new and used cars regardless of value. Two new ‘super-luxury’ thresholds were also introduced from 1 July 2019 (See [2019–20 budget paper no. 5](#), page 170).

Zero and low emission vehicle road-user charge

From 1 July 2021 a new [user-pays charge](#) was levied on Victorian-registered zero and low emission vehicles as a contribution for using Victorian roads, similar to, but at a lower rate than, fuel excise paid by other road users for maintaining Australian roads. The charge to zero and low emission vehicle drivers would initially be between 2 cents and 2.5 cents for every kilometre driven. The Treasurer defended the charge as a ‘very minor impost’ that would help to pay for the use of the roads. VicRoads collects the charge on behalf of the Government. See the ‘Planning and environment’ chapter for more detail on electric cars.

Land taxes

From the 2020 land tax year, a loophole was closed that had allowed a tax exemption to be claimed on adjoining vacant land in Melbourne, simply because it is next to a principal place of residence, but on a separate title. The absentee landowner surcharge and foreign purchaser duty surcharge were also harmonised, in line with New South Wales rates (See [2019–20 budget paper no. 5](#), page 167).

Mental health and wellbeing levy

Announced in the 2021–22 state budget as a dedicated stream of mental health funding, and applicable from 1 January 2022, the [mental health and wellbeing levy](#) operates as a payroll tax surcharge on wages paid in Victoria by businesses with payrolls over \$10 million a year.

Windfall gains tax

Announced in the 2022–23 budget, and applicable from 1 July 2023, a [windfall gains tax](#) will apply to large windfall gains associated with planning decisions to rezone land that create an uplift in land valuations above \$100,000, reaching a maximum of 50 per cent for value uplifts above \$500,000.

DTF funds and program taxes

In the 2021–21 state budget, \$2 billion was invested in a [Breakthrough Victoria Fund](#) to support research and innovation across eligible industries and sectors.

The [Victorian Future Fund](#), announced in the 2022–23 state budget, is a fund to support the state’s debt stabilisation strategy, established using proceeds from the VicRoads Modernisation joint venture. It is projected to have a balance of \$10 billion in the medium term. It is managed by the Victorian Funds Management Corporation.

The [Homebuyer Fund](#) is a shared equity scheme, announced in [October 2021](#). Prospective homebuyers with a five per cent deposit can apply to the Victorian Government to receive a contribution of up to 25 per cent of the purchase price for an equivalent share in the property.

Commonwealth–state financial relations

Under the [federal financial framework](#), state governments receive funding from the Australian Government in two forms: general purpose grants (made from GST revenue, and for allocation at the discretion of state governments) and specific purpose grants, which are tied to specific objectives, national agreements and national partnerships. GST revenue is Victoria’s largest source of funding, comprising about 24 per cent of Victoria’s total revenue.

GST distribution

Since the introduction of GST in 2000, the [Commonwealth Grants Commission](#) (CGC) distributed GST revenue to the states based on a ‘horizontal fiscal equalisation’ formula assessed on a state’s capacity to generate its own revenue. This is to afford each state with the same fiscal capacity to provide public services. Accordingly, states such as Victoria received less revenue than they would if GST was distributed on a per capita basis.

Significant changes were made to the rules for distributing GST funding among the states and territories following the passing of the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Making Sure Every State and Territory Gets Their Fair Share of GST) Act 2018 (Cth)*, which came into effect from 2020–21. The new changes move from ‘full’ fiscal equalisation (equalised to the strongest state or territory) to ‘reasonable’ fiscal equalisation (equalised to the stronger of New South Wales or Victoria). The new measures also introduce minimum GST revenue-sharing relativity (or a ‘relativity floor’), initially set at 0.70 and rising to 0.75 in 2024–25. [Announcing the new measures](#) in November 2018, then federal Treasurer the Hon. Josh Frydenberg said the former distribution system of full equalisation was not working as intended, with Western Australia receiving only ‘30 cents in the dollar, while other states and territories with far smaller populations received more’.

The Victorian Government and other states have been critical of the changes. In response to the new equalisation arrangements, the states successfully argued for the inclusion of a [no-worse-off guarantee](#) in the 2018 legislation. This ensures no state is disadvantaged from the shift to the new system by ensuring the GST revenue each state receives is based on the better of the old or new system. The guarantee is in place until 2026–27 when the transition period ends. In 2026 the Productivity Commission will review whether the changes to fiscal equalisation rules are working effectively.

In each of the budgets delivered in the 59th Parliament, DTF warned of the negative impacts to Victoria’s revenue base if the no-worse-off guarantee was not extended after 2026–27. In the 2021–22 budget, DTF said Victoria would have lost an extra \$2.3 billion in GST revenue over the next four years if the guarantee was not in place and that Victoria stands to lose \$1.2 billion in 2027–28 after the guarantee expires ([budget paper no. 5](#), pages 184–85). These issues were also the topic of the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee’s *Inquiry into Commonwealth support for Victoria* report, which recommended the guarantee be extended after 2026–27.

Gender responsive budgeting

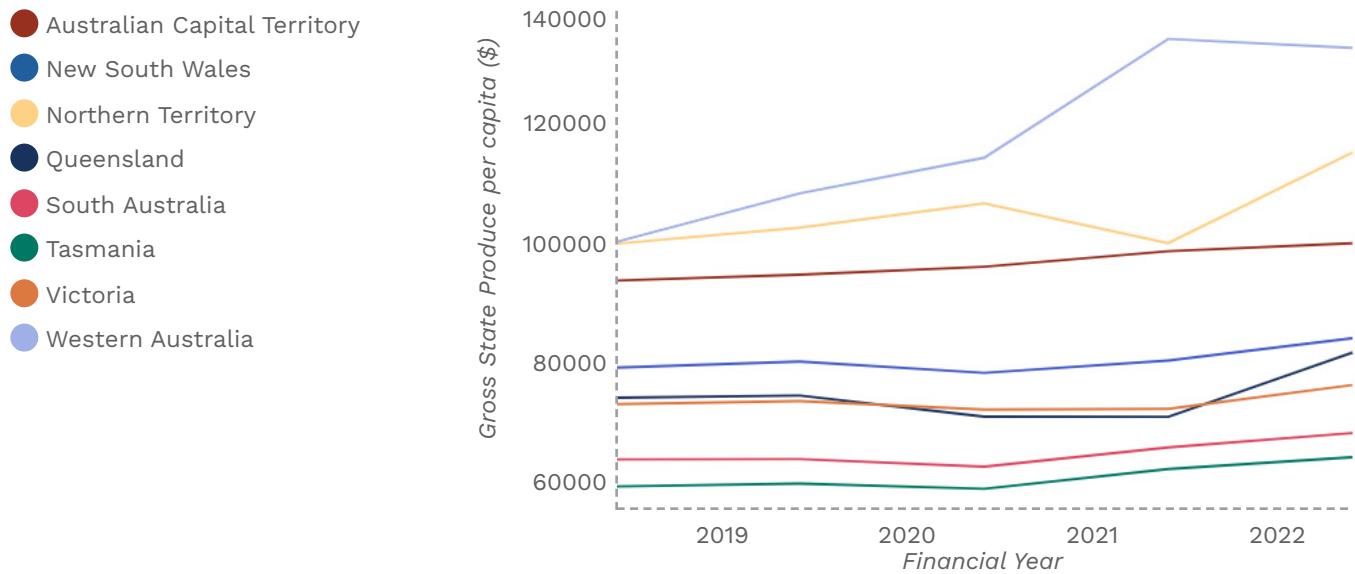
Following the launch of the Victorian Government’s wider gender equality strategy, *Safe and Strong*, in response to the 2015 *Royal Commission into Family Violence*, gender responsive budgeting (GRB) was a key feature of the 59th Parliament. Previously, gender equality budget statements were reintroduced from 2017–18. Similar statements had been published in Victoria from 1986 to 1996, and federally from 1983 to 2013. For details, see the [Public Accounts and Estimates Committee](#) (PAEC) inquiry, pages 6–8, mentioned below.

The *Gender Equality Act 2020*, effective from 31 March 2021, required specific public sector organisations to take positive action towards achieving workplace equality, including undertaking a gender impact assessment for every new or reviewed policy, program or service.

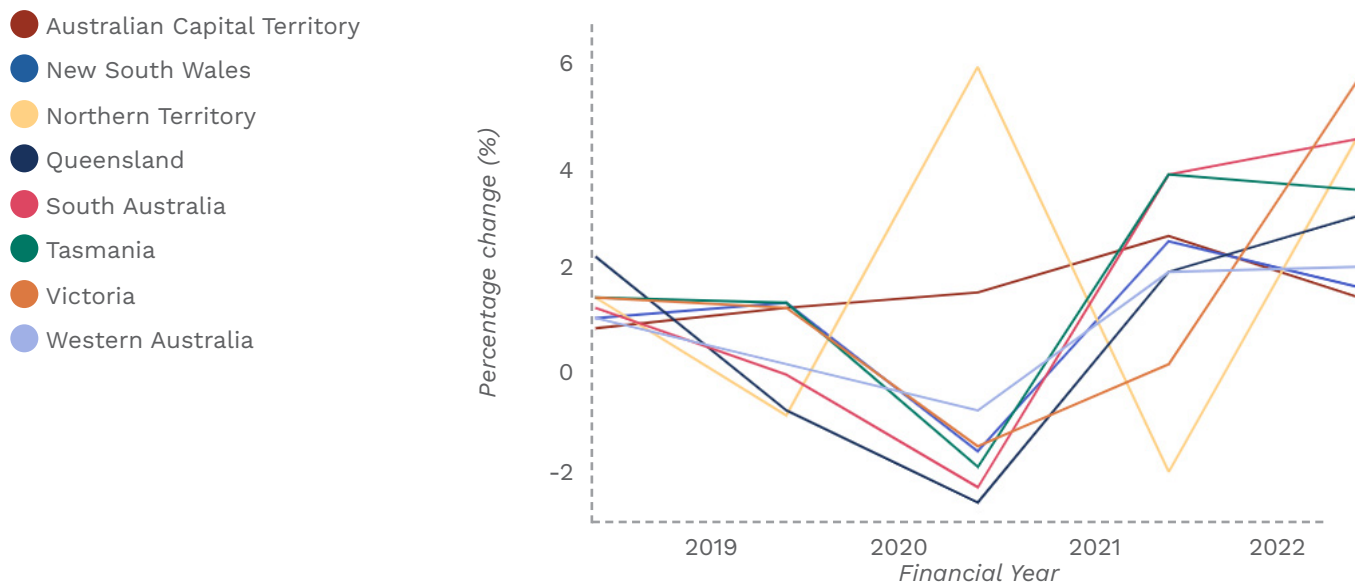
The 2021–22 state budget [allocated \\$4.3 million](#) for measures to ensure the needs of women are considered in policy decisions, including the establishment of a [gender-responsive budgeting unit](#) in DTF.

Gender responsive budgeting was the topic of a [PAEC inquiry](#), with its report tabled in March 2022. The inquiry report recommended fully defining all targets of the *Safe and Strong* strategy and linking them to departmental budgetary outcomes, as well as enshrining GRB in legislation.

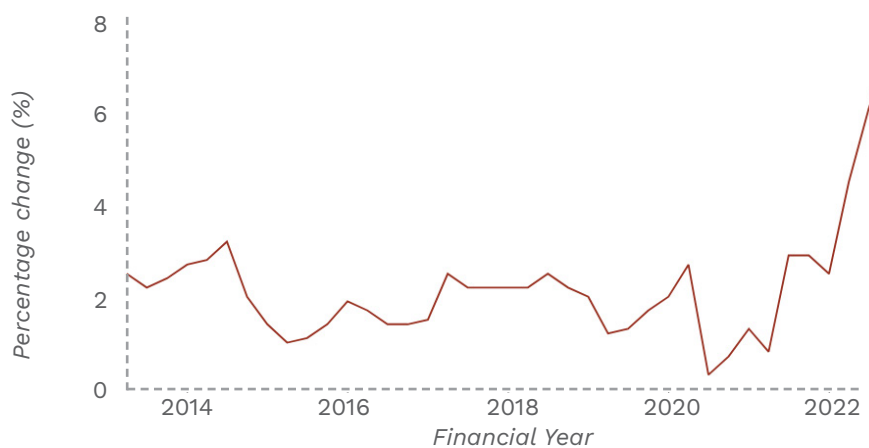
Gross state produce per capita per State/Territory



Changes in gross state product per capita per State/Territory



Quarterly consumer price index changes in Melbourne

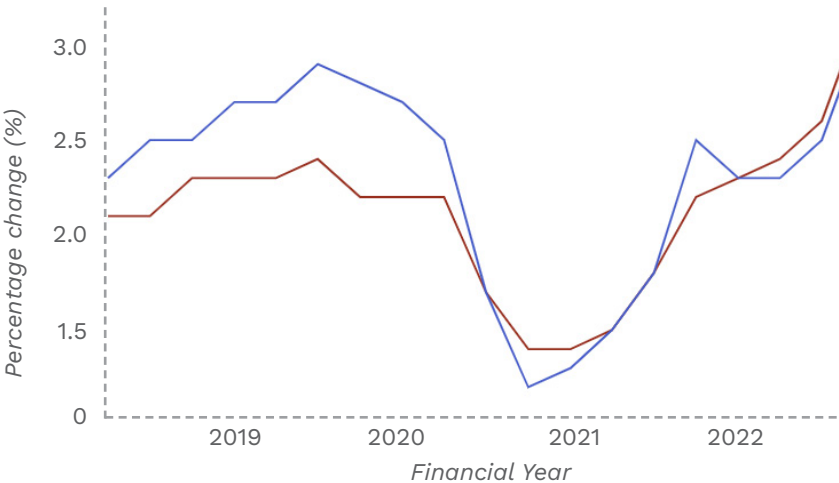


Source: ABS

*To view the treasury and finance interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

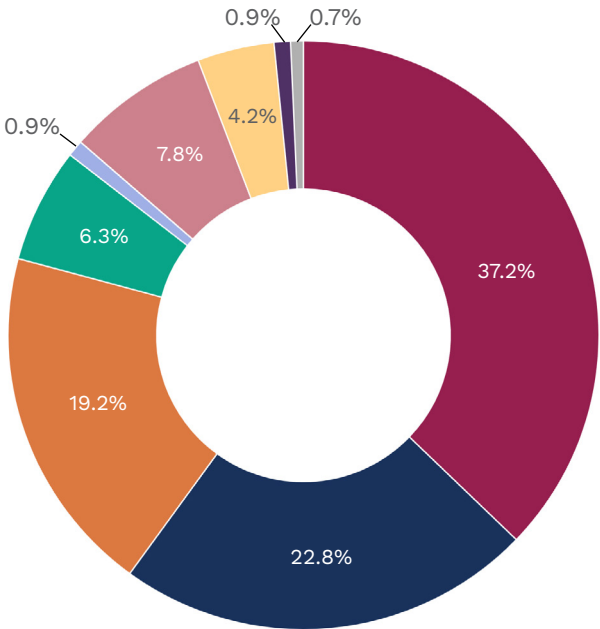
Quarterly wage price index changes

- Australia
- Victoria



Composition of general Victorian Government sector revenue, 2022-2023

- Taxation
- General purpose grants
- Grants for specific purposes
- Specific purpose grants for on-passing
- Interest income
- Sales of goods and services
- Other revenue and income
- Other contributions and grants
- Dividends, income tax equivalents and rate equivalent income



Source: ABS; Budget Paper No. 5: 2022–23

*To view the treasury and finance interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation](#) website.

2019

- [Appropriation \(2019–2020\) Act 2019](#)
- [Appropriation \(Parliament 2019–2020\) Act 2019](#)
- [State Taxation Acts Further Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2019](#)

2020

- [Appropriation \(Interim\) Act 2020](#)
- [Appropriation \(Parliament\) \(Interim\) Act 2020](#)
- [Appropriation \(2020–2021\) Act 2020](#)
- [Appropriation \(Parliament 2020–2021\) Act 2020](#)
- [State Taxation Acts Amendment \(Relief Measures\) Act 2020](#)
- [State Taxation Acts Amendment Act 2020](#)

2021

- [Appropriation \(2021–2022\) Act 2021](#)
- [Appropriation \(Parliament 2021–2022\) Act 2021](#)
- [State Taxation and Mental Health Acts Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Windfall Gains Tax and State Taxation and Other Acts Further Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Zero and Low Emission Vehicle Distance-based Charge Act 2021](#)

2022

- [Appropriation \(2022–2023\) Act 2022](#)
- [Appropriation \(Parliament 2022–2023\) Act 2022](#)
- [State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [2019–20 state budget](#), Budget overview, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)
- [Behind the budget: Background media and resources](#), Electronic resource, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Victorian economic snapshot 2020](#), Quick guide, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Inflation and the cost of living: Policy debates and practices](#), Research Note, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [Victoria's economic bulletin](#), Department of Treasury and Finance
- [State financial reports](#), Department of Treasury and Finance
- [Victorian economic and fiscal indicators](#), Parliamentary Budget Office
- [Report on the annual financial report of the state of victoria: 2018–19](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2018)
- [Report on the annual financial report of the state of victoria: 2019–20](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- [Report on the annual financial report of the state of victoria: 2020–21](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- [Report on the annual financial report of the state of victoria: 2021–22](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2021)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into the 2019–20 budget estimates](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Recommendation on the appointment of a person to conduct the performance audit of the Auditor-General and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Inquiry into the 2017–18 and 2018–19 financial and performance outcomes](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Report on the appointment of a person to conduct the financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into the 2019–20 financial and performance outcomes](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into the 2020–21 budget estimates](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into the 2021–22 budget estimates](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)

- [Inquiry into the Parliamentary Budget Officer](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into 2020–21 financial and performance outcomes](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into Commonwealth support for Victoria](#), Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee (2022)
- [Inquiry into gender responsive budgeting](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into the 2022–23 budget estimates](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Public Accounts and Estimates Committee End of Term Report for the 59th Parliament](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Arts, sport and recreation

Arts, sport and recreation

An overview of developments relating to arts, sport and recreation during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on these portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Arts

Contemporary Art Gallery and Melbourne Arts Precinct redevelopment

The Government committed \$1.7 billion for the redevelopment of the Melbourne Arts Precinct, including a new contemporary arts gallery. The new gallery will be called The Fox: NGV Contemporary, after Lindsay and Paula Fox, who donated \$100 million for its development. The gallery will be opened in 2028, with the building designed by Angelo Candalepas and Associates. The winning design has 13,000 square metres of display space and a rooftop sculpture terrace and restaurant. Eleven thousand jobs are expected to be created over the life of the project.

VicScreen and incentives to film in Victoria

In May 2022 Film Victoria was rebranded to VicScreen to better reflect the diversity of Victoria's screen creative industry. The new agency will promote Victoria's strengths in film, television, online content and, for the first-time, digital games. The VicScreen strategy is supported by \$191.5 million in funding, including the \$40 million Victorian Production Fund. The Fund is expected to create the equivalent of 3,700 full-time jobs over four years and inject \$130.5 million into the economy annually. Projects which already have a market attachment from a distributor, broadcaster or major online content provider can apply for between three and ten per cent of the money spent in Victoria, capped at \$500,000. Those projects deemed exceptional may be eligible for more than ten per cent or \$500,000.

Creative Victoria

In 2021 the Government released *Creative State 2025* to guide the creative industries in Victoria over four years. The 25 actions and five interconnected objectives build on the *Creative State* strategy (2016–20) to 'address longstanding and new challenges facing' the sector. Actions include 'Develop and promote First Peoples leadership and practice' and 'Position Victoria as a global powerhouse for screen'. In the 2021–22 budget, the Government announced \$288 million for the creative industries, including a \$167.3 million *Creative State* funding package.

Geelong Arts Centre

Funding for the final stages of the Geelong Arts Centre redevelopment, involving 500-seat, 250-seat and black box theatres, an outdoor atrium and dining options, was promised by Labor before the 2018 election. The Government allocated \$140 million for the project, which will be completed by 2023.

Sport

Commonwealth Games

In February 2022 the Victorian Government announced that they had entered negotiations with the Commonwealth Games Federation and Commonwealth Games Australia to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games. Unlike the 2006 games, which were held primarily in Melbourne, these games will be held at venues across regional Victoria. When the successful bid was announced, the Minister for Regional Development said: 'We've always known the value of regional Victoria, and the 2026 Commonwealth Games will provide a chance to showcase all we have to offer to the world.' The 2022–23 budget included \$2.6 billion for the games with regional hubs being built in Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat and Gippsland, each with their own athlete villages and sporting programs. Shepparton will also host sporting and cultural events. The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions estimates that the games will contribute more than \$3 billion to the economy, including more than 600 full-time-equivalent jobs before the games, 3,900 jobs during the games and 3,000 jobs after the games. Victorians have been asked to contribute their ideas for the best ways to showcase the regions.

Recreation

Tourism

Public health orders and border closures had a significant impact on the Victorian tourism industry. In the year ending June 2019, the industry brought in \$22.416 billion through domestic overnight and day trip visitors. By the year ending June 2021 this had dropped to \$12.649 billion. The overall three-year change in domestic visitor spend was down by 19 per cent, but the 2021–22 year was better than 2020–21. In response to these numbers, the Victorian Government announced a series of initiatives across the pandemic years to encourage domestic tourism and spending in the regions. See the COVID-19 section for more details.

In March 2019 the Minister for Tourism, Sports and Major Events and the Minister for Regional Development [commissioned](#) a Regional Tourism Review (see also the ‘Planning and environment’ chapter). A consultation report was published in July 2019 and the final report published in December 2019. The review was finalised in the [Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan](#), which was developed in response to the impact the pandemic and the 2019–20 summer bushfires had on the industry. The report, published in April 2022, outlines a strategy for restoring and growing the sector by attracting more international, interstate and intrastate visitors.

Anti-scalping laws

The Government has been attempting to address issues relating to ticket scalping for several years. In 2018, the *Major Events Act 2009* [replaced](#) the *Major Sporting Events Act 2009*, which restricted tickets for declared major events from being resold for more than ten per cent over the original costs. However, resellers began to hide the inflated costs inside packages involving hospitality, experiences and merchandise through ‘back room bundling’. Seeking to strengthen the changes made in 2018, the [Major Events Legislation Amendment \(Unauthorised Ticket Packages and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#) was assented in February 2022. The legislation amended the *Major Events Act 2009* to further protect customers from grossly inflated resale prices. Under new requirements, tickets for declared major events must state the face value, asking price and seat details in the advertisement.

Fishing and hunting

The new fishing and hunting plans were released during the 59th Parliament. The [Victorian Recreational Fishing Tourism Strategy](#) was published in 2021. The strategy was [an election commitment](#) in 2018 and is part of the [Go Fishing Victoria Plan](#). This \$35 million plan aims to ‘position Victoria as Australia’s premier recreational fishing destination’. The Government has committed to implementing all 53 recommendations over the next five years. See also the ‘Primary industries’ chapter for the Target One Million strategy.

The [Sustainable Hunting Action Plan 2021–2024](#) and the [Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy](#) were released in November 2021 and March 2021, respectively. The *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan 2021–2024* is a \$5.3 million investment to ‘deliver new programs to support safe, responsible and sustainable hunting’. The *Traditional Owner Game Management Strategy* ‘sets out how Victorian Government departments and agencies will partner with Traditional Owners to deliver practical actions to build Traditional Owner participation in hunting, land management and conservation’. In May 2022 the Minister for Agriculture [announced](#) a new grant program to fund hunting-related activities. Individual grants of up to \$80,000 were made available to ‘increase the role of all participants in the hunting industry in the promotion of responsible, safe and sustainable game hunting practices’.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation](#) website.

- [Major Events Legislation Amendment \(Unauthorised Ticket Packages and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022](#)
- [Racing Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Service Victoria Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [State Sport Centres Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Racing Amendment \(Unauthorised Access\) Bill 2022](#) (lapsed)
- [Land Amendment \(Accessing Licensed Water Frontages\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Wildlife Amendment \(Duck Hunting\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [COVID-19 vaccination rates and Victoria's arts sector](#), Research paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [Creative State 2025](#), Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)
- [VicScreen: Victoria's screen industry strategy 2021–2025](#), Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and event sectors](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)

Crime and justice

Crime and justice

An overview of developments within the crime and justice portfolios during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation and reports. For COVID-19-related information on these portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Crime

Homicide

In April 2013 Melbourne man [Nelson Lai](#) fatally shot his partner and was found guilty of manslaughter—a sentence with a minimum penalty of five years. In 2017 [Brandon Osborn](#), who fatally shot his partner, was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to a maximum of nine years. Each of the accused argued they were unaware the weapon was loaded. Following these incidents and a series of similar cases, the [Crimes Amendment \(Manslaughter and Related Offences\) Act 2020](#) created a new offence of homicide by firearm, clarified the relationship between certain offences and increased the maximum penalties for certain offences.

Spent convictions

Before 2021 Victoria was the only state without spent conviction laws, meaning a criminal conviction, regardless of degree, showed up on police checks in perpetuity. In every other jurisdiction, laws prevented the disclosure of minor convictions after a period if the person had committed no other crimes. In 2015 the [Law Institute of Victoria](#) wrote to then Attorney-General the Hon. Martin Pakula urging the Victorian Government to introduce a scheme for spent convictions. In 2019 the matter was referred to the [Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee](#) to inquire into and report on the impact of laws in Victoria to govern the disclosure of criminal history records. The final report was tabled in August 2019, and in February 2020 the Government presented its response, supporting the recommendations to introduce a spent convictions scheme in Victoria. In March 2021 the [Spent Convictions Act 2021](#) came into effect, establishing a scheme for certain convictions to become spent in Victoria and non-disclosable on a person's criminal record unless in specific circumstances.

Decriminalisation of sex work

In November 2019 the Victorian Government commissioned the [Reason Party's Fiona Patten to lead a review](#) on the decriminalisation of sex work. The review consulted legal, health and education support service providers, commercial operators and industry organisations, sex workers, sex worker peer organisations, workplace safety agencies, local government and federal government agencies, law enforcement agencies, and other community and expert organisations. In response to the recommendations of the review—which the Victorian Government accepted—a proposed model for decriminalisation of sex work was released for community [consultation](#) in August 2021, before legislation was drafted.

In February 2022 Victoria joined [NSW and the Northern Territory](#) in decriminalising the sex industry through the [Sex Work Decriminalisation Act 2022](#). The Act repealed the [Sex Work Act 1994](#) to remove offences and criminal penalties for participating in consensual sex work, including partially abolishing street-based sex work offences and repealing public health offences associated with sex work. The Act also facilitates regulation of the sex work industry through existing agencies such as WorkSafe, the Department of Health and the Victorian Commission for Gaming and Liquor Regulation.

Nazi symbol prohibition

In May 2022 Victoria became the [first Australian jurisdiction to ban the public display of the Nazi symbol](#) through the [Summary Offences Amendment \(Nazi Symbol Prohibition\) Act 2022](#). Specifically, the Act prohibits the intentional displaying of a Nazi symbol in public places or in public view. As [Attorney-General the Hon. Jaclyn Symes said](#), 'The Nazi symbol glorified one of the most hateful ideologies in history—its public display does nothing but cause further pain and division'. See also the 'Human Services' chapter.

Offensive behaviour

In June 2022 the Victorian Government introduced the [Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2022](#) to clarify laws surrounding serious and offensive public behaviour. The Bill responded to a campaign regarding Richard Pusey's offensive behaviour after the Eastern Freeway crash in 2020 during which four police officers were

killed. Pusey spent ten months in prison for reckless conduct endangering life, failing to render assistance, destroying evidence and—for three of those ten months—the common law offence of outraging public decency. The legitimacy of the common law offence was questioned by Pusey’s lawyers, revealing the law was ‘archaic, unclear in its scope and [did] not have a clear maximum penalty’.

The [Law Institute of Victoria](#) expressed concern with the Bill’s lack of clarity around grossly offensive behaviour and argued that the law would adversely affect vulnerable people, including those with mental health issues. The [Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service](#) also opposed the new law, arguing that ‘the Government should not be spending resources creating more criminal offences, when it continues to ignore much needed reforms that will have far greater impacts, particularly on marginalised and racialised people’. Despite these concerns, the [Bill](#) passed with no amendments in August 2022.

Affirmative consent model

The [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Sexual Offences and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#) came into effect as the first tranche of legislative reform responding to the [Victorian Law Reform Commission’s Improving the justice system response to sexual offences](#) report in relation to sexual offences, evidence and procedure. The new legislation adopted an affirmative consent model and clarified the circumstances where there is no consent to an act, including the removal of, non-use of or tampering with a condom. Alongside this change, the Act also made stronger laws targeting image-based sexual abuse and provided better protection for victim-survivors of sexual offences. About the reforms [Attorney-General the Hon. Jaclyn Symes](#) said, ‘An affirmative consent model is an important part of changing community attitudes towards sexual offences—moving away from victim-blaming and reducing the shame and trauma often felt by victim-survivors’.

Victims of crime

In November 2016 the Victorian Government announced a review of suppression order laws. The [report](#), completed in 2017, recommended that, following an offender’s conviction, adult victims of sexual assault or family violence should be able to disclose their identity as desired, including in cases where they were abused as a child. In response to this, in August 2018 the Attorney-General introduced the [Open Courts and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2018](#), which would enable courts to make an order lifting the prohibition on publishing the identity of a sexual assault victim if the victim consented to that information being disclosed. It also established a range of processes around the provision of reasons for the making of suppression orders. The Bill lapsed at the conclusion of the 58th Parliament but, following the Labor Party’s re-election, was [reintroduced in February 2019](#) and came into effect in February 2020.

The law received criticism from victim-survivors in that it effectively created a costly and potentially traumatising requirement for all victim-survivors to seek a court order to be able to speak out under their own names. The [#LetUsSpeak](#) campaign was subsequently launched in August 2020 in response to the perceived lack of action by the Victorian Government. Responding to the campaign, the Government announced that it would be fast-tracking reforms to enable victim-survivors to speak out about their experiences without a court order.

Thus, the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Supporting Victims and Other Matters\) Act 2020](#) made it easier for victim-survivors of sexual violence to speak publicly about their experiences and to determine when and how their stories are published. For more information on the legislation, see the [Victorian Parliamentary Library’s publication](#) on the Bill.

To further support victim-survivors of sexual offences and their families, the [Judicial Proceedings Reports Amendment Act 2021](#) amended the [Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958](#) to provide that the publication prohibition on details likely to identify a person as a victim of sexual offence (or alleged offence) ceases upon the death of that person, providing it does not identify another victim-survivor who wishes to remain anonymous. The Act also introduced a new mechanism to allow persons close to a deceased sexual offence victim, such as family members, to apply for a court order restricting or prohibiting the publication of identifying details about the deceased victim to prevent undue distress.

In November 2021 the [Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Act 2021](#) limited the ability of criminals to oversee their victims’ burials, graves and memorials. The legislation responded to Borce Ristevski’s plan to be buried next to his wife, [whom he killed in 2016](#). Specifically, the discretionary power enables the Department

of Health's Secretary to vary or force the surrender of a right of interment to protect people directly affected by an indictable offence or a death in circumstances including murder-suicide, from further harm, pain or suffering that may occur if a right of interment were exercised by or in favour of an offender or a deceased person responsible for causing a death.

Finally, the *Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Act 2022* delivered on an election commitment to significantly progress the recommendations of a review by the Victorian Law Reform Commission addressing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Through the legislation a more streamlined scheme was established to provide financial assistance to victims of crime. In particular, the Act replaced the *Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal* (VOCAT) with the Financial Assistance Scheme, meaning victims no longer need apply to VOCAT to have their applications determined.

Courts, juries and sentencing

At the beginning of the 59th Parliament the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019* amended the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* in relation to certain appeals and the powers of the Court of Appeal, as well as making consequential amendments to the *Supreme Court Act 1986*. In particular, the Act abolished 'de novo' appeals of criminal cases to the County Court. Then Attorney-General the Hon. Jill Hennessy was quoted as saying, 'for a victim, having to repeatedly provide evidence can be extremely traumatising. We are modernising the appeals system to better support victims, while also ensuring convicted people have access to justice.'

The *Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2020* introduced an Australian-first amendment to improve 'access to justice' by enabling the court to make a 'group cost order' in class action proceedings whereby plaintiff lawyers can receive a percentage—set by the court—of the settlement as payment for legal costs. Similar to US-style contingency fees in class action cases, the change saw that all members of a class action case share liability for the payment of those costs and that the lead plaintiff, in turn, is indemnified for any adverse costs. Previously, in both federal and state courts, class actions could only proceed if a law firm agreed to act on a no-win, no-fee basis or if another party agreed to cover the costs in return for a percentage of the settlement. The Victorian Law Reform Commission recommended the change in the *Access to Justice* report.

In early March 2020 the Attorney-General introduced new legislation to make it more challenging to avoid a jail term following the assault of an emergency worker. The *Sentencing Amendment (Emergency Worker Harm) Act 2020* came after James Haberfield successfully claimed in Melbourne Magistrates' Court in December 2019 that a drug-induced psychotic state was grounds for not being jailed following his attack on a female paramedic. The legislation forces courts to impose a sentence of imprisonment in all cases, except in very narrow circumstances of mental impairment, where an offender recklessly or intentionally injures an emergency worker on duty.

The *Justice Legislation Amendment (Drug Court and Other Matters) Act 2020* expanded Victoria's Drug Court program within the County Court of Victoria. Following the successful rollout of the first Drug Court in Dandenong in 2002 and Melbourne in 2017, the Drug Court attempts to address the underlying factors involved in the cycle of drug and alcohol dependency and substance-related offending.

The *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and Other Acts Amendment (Federal Jurisdiction and Other Matters) Act 2021* amended the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* in relation to federal subject matter, addressing certain gaps that were identified in High Court and Victorian Court of Appeal cases.

In response to the inquiry into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria and the Szoke review of sexual harassment in Victorian courts and VCAT, the *Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2022* made reforms relating to courts, historical forced adoptions, gender-inclusive language and maritime boundaries. For more information on the legislative response to the 2021 inquiry into responses to historical forced adoption in Victoria, see the Human services chapter.

In relation to courts, the Act increased diversity and amended the governance arrangements of the Judicial College of Victoria Board. This change responded to one of the 20 recommendations in the review of sexual

[harassment in Victorian courts report](#) to increase the number of appointed directors to the board to ensure a more culturally diverse and community-based board of directors. The review, which began in 2020 and was led by former Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, Dr Helen Szoke AO, was triggered by the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commission's 2019 [Sexual Harassment in the Victorian Legal Sector report](#).

Police powers

In 2016 the Victorian Government published its first [Community safety statement](#), setting out five key priority areas for community safety and a range of reforms. In 2018 a follow-up [Community safety statement 2018/19](#) was published, which recommitted the Government and Victoria Police to the key priority areas outlined in the initial statement. To deliver on these commitments, in 2018 the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Police and Other Matters\) Bill](#) was introduced. However, it lapsed at the conclusion of the 58th Parliament.

At the beginning of the 59th Parliament, the Bill was reintroduced with some amendments through the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Police and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#). The Act amended the [Crimes Act 1958](#) to:

- enable police to take DNA samples from certain suspects and offenders without a court order
- introduce new criminal offences and sanctions for acts that harm or threaten harm to police officers, protective services officers (PSOs) and police custody officers
- increase penalties for commercial drug trafficking
- facilitate the creation of a standalone restorative engagement process to support Victoria Police employees who have been victims of sexual harassment or discrimination by another Victoria Police employee and exempt such victims from any sanction if they do not report the conduct.

The Act also made amendments relating to firearms, sex offender registration, second-hand dealers and maternity leave within the Victoria Police. For further information, see the [Parliamentary Library's Bill brief](#) publication.

In 2019 a [legal loophole was found](#) in arrest powers, revealing that PSOs did not have the power to make arrests over warrants for skipping a court date, despite PSOs making about 500 such arrests annually during the preceding eight years. This was described in a [Government media release](#) as a 'drafting error from 2011 under the previous Liberal Government'. The [Police Legislation Amendment \(Road Safety Camera Commissioner and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#) responded to this error. Additionally, the Act strengthened the Road Safety Commissioner's role, responded to recommendations from the investigation into the WannaCry computer virus and enabled Victoria Police to undertake the timely disposal of unclaimed property items.

In delivering on the [Community safety statement 2019/20](#) to expand the functions and powers of PSOs, the [Police and Emergency Legislation Amendment Act 2020](#) enabled Victoria Police to deploy PSOs to more public spaces, made amendments to police powers and updated fire district map references and station addresses. [Liberty Victoria expressed concerns](#) about the expansion of PSO powers due to their limited training.

In 2018 the Victorian Government established the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants—an inquiry into [Victoria Police's use of former criminal defence barrister Nicola Gobbo as a human source](#). It was recommended that the Victorian Government appoint an independent Implementation Monitor to oversee the implementation of all the royal commission recommendations, which was subsequently established in the [Police Informants Royal Commission Implementation Monitor Act 2021](#). Alongside the Act, the Government released an [implementation plan and an \\$87.9 million funding package](#).

The [Special Investigator Act 2021](#) and the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Criminal Procedure Disclosure and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#) further implemented the royal commission's recommendations. The [Special Investigator Act 2021](#) established the Office of the Special Investigator to investigate potential criminal conduct and breaches of discipline relating to the recruitment, management and use by Victoria Police of Nicola Gobbo as a human source. Meanwhile, the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Criminal Procedure Disclosure and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#) made a range of amendments to criminal procedure and justice legislation, including changes to disclosure obligations, sentence indications and personal safety intervention

orders. The Act also responded to two outstanding recommendations from the [Royal Commission into Family Violence](#), enabling family violence matters to be delivered remotely.

In February 2022 an administrative error arising from legislative changes in 2014 was found, revealing that more than 1,000 police officers, PSOs and custody officers were incorrectly sworn in. In response to this, in early March 2022 the [Victoria Police Amendment Act 2022](#) amended the *Victoria Police Act 2013* to address the issue of appointment of police officers as Acting Assistant Commissioners (AACs) under section 26, and retrospectively validate the appointment of AACs by Deputy Commissioners between 1 July 2014 and 31 August 2021.

Towards the end of the 59th Parliament, police powers were further reformed through the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Police and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#) and the [Major Crime and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#). The latter amended the *Confiscation Act 1997* to enhance law enforcement's powers to address organised crime's growing use of cryptocurrencies, and clarify investigation and enforcement powers, including powers to gather information, restrain property and enforce confiscation outcomes. The *Crimes Act 1958* and the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004* were also amended to streamline Victoria Police's search warrant powers and ability to retain, use and disclose fingerprints, as well as modernise the delegation powers of the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, and requirements for the authorisation of Victoria Police employees.

Emergency services

In May 2017 the [Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment \(Reform\) Bill 2017](#) was introduced to reform Victoria's fire services. After the Bill was introduced, the Legislative Council agreed to a committee inquiry into the impact of the restructuring proposed by the Bill. The report was tabled in August 2017 with ten recommendations, three of which the Government did not support. After several amendments were proposed, the Bill was finally defeated in March 2018 due to concerns from several Liberal MPs that volunteer firefighters were being discriminated against.

As part of their election commitments, the re-elected Labor government re-introduced the reforms as the [Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment \(Reform\) Bill 2019](#) in May 2019. The Bill proposed to change the structure of Victoria's fire services, abolishing the MFB and career CFA services to establish [Fire Rescue Victoria](#), and introduce presumptive rights for cancer compensation for career and volunteer firefighters relating to certain types of cancers arising from their emergency service. As part of this, the CFA was established as a volunteer-only organisation and the Fire Services Implementation Monitor was set up to oversee the implementation of the reforms. The Bill passed in June 2019.

Similarly, the [Forests Amendment \(Forest Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation\) Act 2021](#) provided rights to firefighters, suffering from specific forms of cancer presumed to be due to their duties, enabling them to claim compensation under the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*.

The [Superannuation Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#) increased the benefits paid to police and emergency service members. Alongside this, the 2019–20 budget provided [\\$60 million over four years](#) to improve retirement benefits.

Finally, the [Workplace Safety Legislation and Other Matters Amendment Act 2022](#) made amendments to the [Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment \(Reform\) Act 2019](#) to extend firefighters' presumptive rights to cover certain vehicle and equipment maintenance workers employed by Fire Rescue Victoria and Country Fire Authority.

Legal profession

In 1993 a uniform regulatory scheme for lawyers was first flagged in the [Hilmer report](#) to harmonise regulation of the legal profession, cut red tape and create a single system to govern legal practice. In 2015 Victoria and New South Wales took the first steps toward a national legal scheme by establishing an inter-jurisdictional [Legal Services Council](#) to regulate common legal services across the two states under a Uniform Law. Then Attorney-General, the Hon. Martin Pakula, said, 'The introduction of Uniform Law in Victoria and NSW is

the first step towards a national scheme, and we look forward to other states coming on board'. The [Legal Professional Uniform Law Application Amendment Act 2019](#) facilitated Western Australia's participation in the Uniform Law scheme, as well as prepared for the participation of other states and territories in the future.

Counter-terrorism

The [Terrorism \(Community Protection\) Amendment Act 2021](#) delivered on the [Expert Panel on Terrorism and Violent Extremism Prevention and Response Powers' recommendations](#) on the effectiveness of state legislation and Victorian and Commonwealth agencies to manage terrorism following the [2017 Brighton siege incident](#). The Act amended the [Terrorism \(Community Protection\) Act 2003](#) in relation to radicalisation towards violent extremism and the protection of counter-terrorism intelligence to establish a voluntary case management scheme for [people at risk or radicalising towards violent extremism](#). For individuals who cannot be engaged voluntarily and require intervention, the Act also sets out a support and engagement order (SEO) scheme. Thereby, the Act allows the courts to impose conditions on a person identified to be radicalising towards violent extremism so that they comply with a tailored support and engagement plan.

Fines

In 2019 the Victorian Government launched the [Fines Reform Advisory Board](#) to provide advice on the operation of the fines system and opportunities for improvements after the commencement of the [Fines Reform Act 2014](#). In the [board's final report](#), 24 recommendations were made, 12 of which required legislative changes. Responding to these recommendations, the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Fines Reform and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#):

- clarified the objectives of fines reform and the reporting requirements by the Attorney-General on the infringements system
- ensured a more accessible time served scheme for prisoners, allowing prisoners to expiate their unpaid fines through time spent in prison
- allowed for the Director's discretion in relation to enforcement review, including allowing an extension of time for applicants to obtain additional evidence
- created new powers for toll operators to request Victoria Police withdraw tolling infringement fines.

Firearms

In May 2019 the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee was self-referenced to [inquire into the operation of the Firearms Amendment Act 2018](#) in relation to prohibition orders and explore ways to strengthen its effectiveness in reducing the incidence of illicit or illegally possessed firearms. In November 2019 the final report was tabled, making five recommendations.

In September 2021, after it was revealed that PSOs had been carrying pepper spray for two decades without legal authority, the [Firearms and Other Acts Amendment Act 2021](#) clarified the equipment used by PSOs and strengthened [laws around the safe use of firearms](#). To reduce the incidence of firearm thefts, the Act enhanced firearms storage requirements and tightened regulatory standards for when licensed dealers hire, loan, send and dispose of firearms. In addition, the Act improved the operation of various aspects of the criminal justice system, including bringing consistency to Victorian and Commonwealth legislation, clarifying the rank structure of PSOs, enabling the use of audiovisual technology and expanding the trial for digitally recorded evidence-in-chief.

In June 2022 Jeff Bourman of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party introduced the [Firearms Amendment Bill 2022](#) to amend classifications of firearms. The Bill was defeated in the Legislative Council.

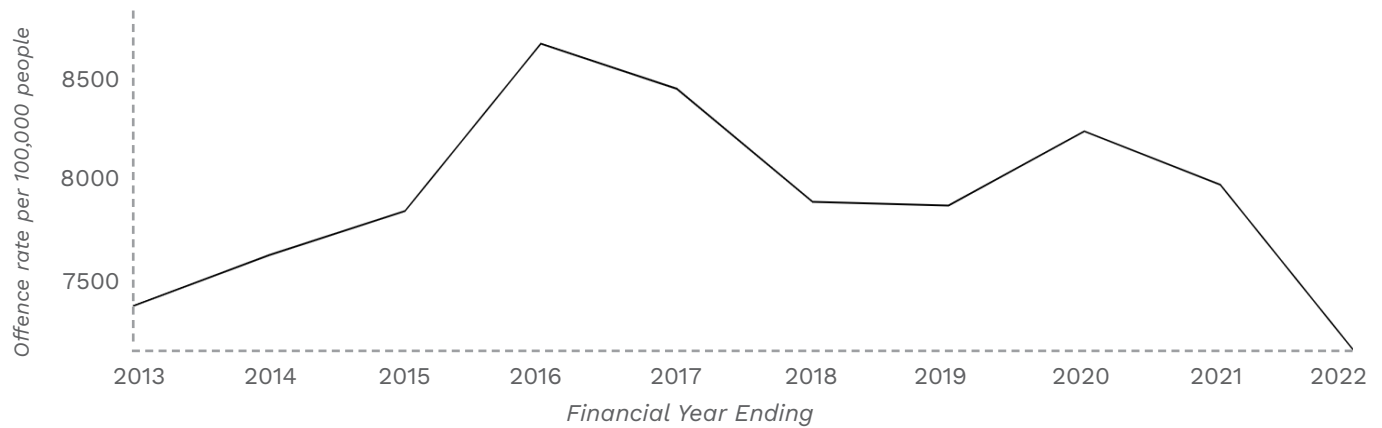
Corrections

In October 2019 a range of legislative changes relating to the operation of prisons, parole and the post-sentence supervision scheme were [introduced](#) under the [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Serious Offenders and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#). The Act made a range of legislative changes relating to the operation of prisons, parole and the post-sentence supervision scheme.

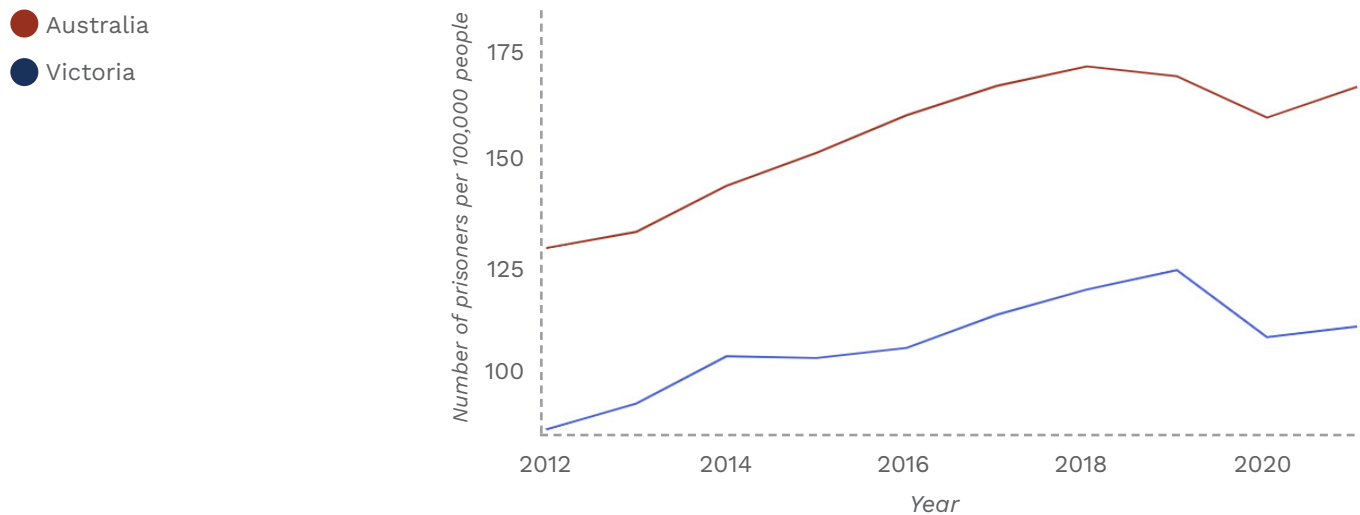
The *Monitoring of Places of Detention by the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (OPCAT) Act 2022* embedded measures directed by the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture to enable UN experts unfettered access to places of detention, such as prisons and immigration detention centres, and to establish independent oversight bodies to conduct proactive inspections. The Australian Government had a coordination role in this, and each state and territory was responsible for establishing their own independent inspectors and facilitating the UN visits.

In October 2022 Australia [breached its obligations under OPCAT](#) after the UN torture prevention subcommittee delegation was forced to suspend their visit to Australia due to access and information obstructions about places of detention within [Queensland and New South Wales](#).

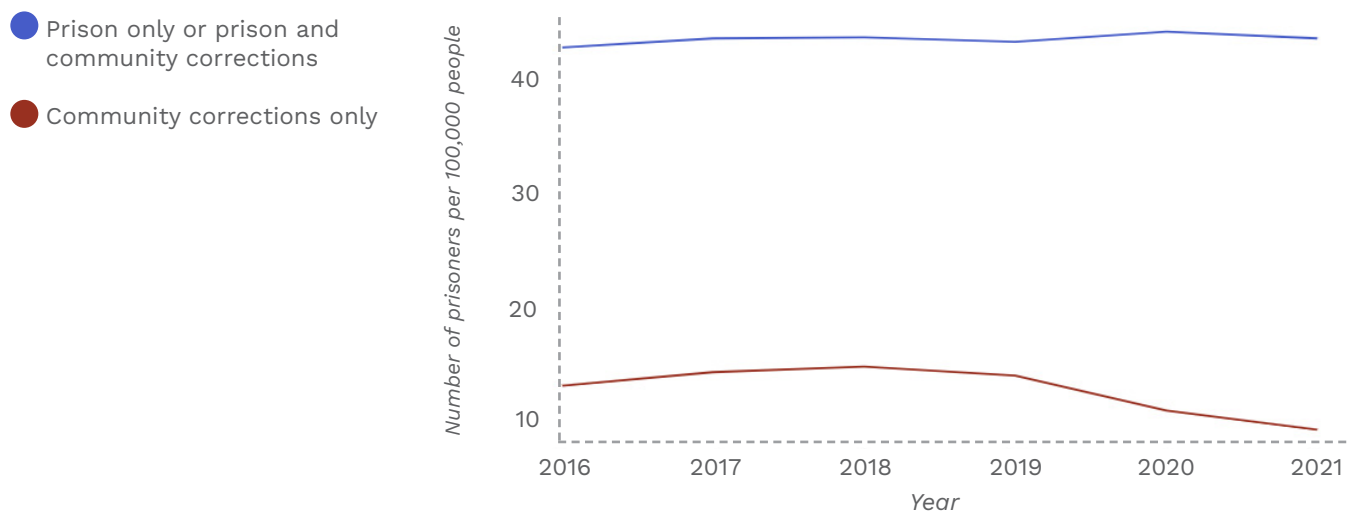
Time series of recorded offences in Victoria



Time series of imprisonment rates



Time series of Victorian recidivism rates

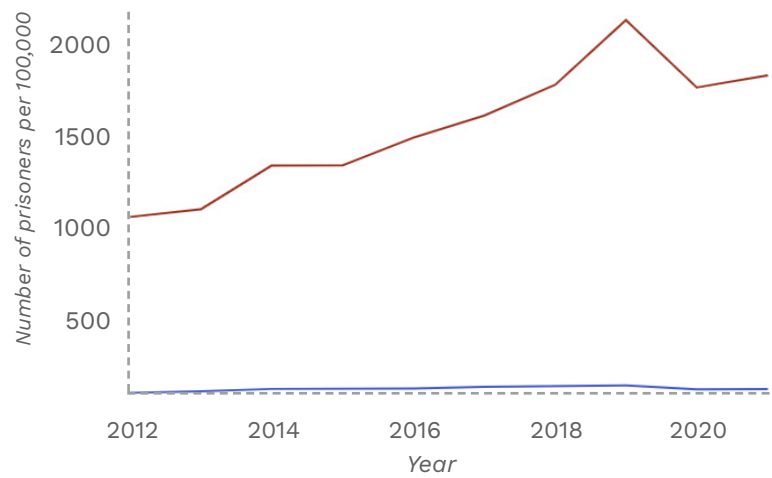


Source: Crime Statistics Agency Victoria; ABS; Productivity Commission

*To view the crime and justice interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

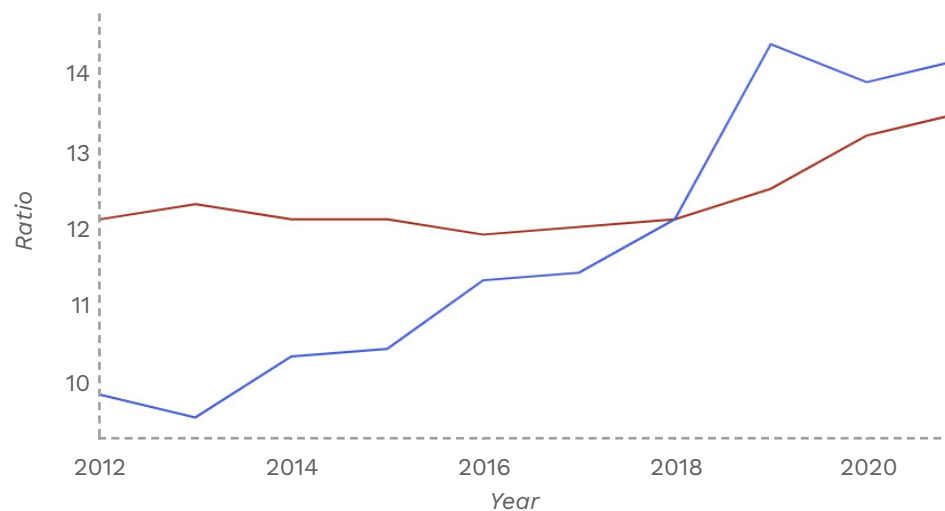
Time series of Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment rates

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



Ratio of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment rates

- Australia
- Victoria



Source: ABS

*To view the crime and justice interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation website](#).

2019

- [Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment \(Reform\) Act 2019](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Criminal Appeals\) Act 2019](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Police and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Serious Offenders and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#)
- [Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Open Courts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Police Legislation Amendment \(Road Safety Camera Commissioner and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#)
- [Superannuation Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Crimes Amendment \(Trespass\) Bill 2019](#) (defeated)
- [Crimes Amendment \(Abolition of Blasphemy\) Bill 2019](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Spent Convictions Bill 2019](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Summary Offences Amendment \(Move-on Laws\) Bill 2019](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

2020

- [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) Act 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) and Other Acts Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Crimes Amendment \(Manslaughter and Related Offences\) Act 2020](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Drug Court and Other Matters\) Act 2020](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Supporting Victims and Other Matters\) Act 2020](#)
- [Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2020](#)
- [Police and Emergency Legislation Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Sentencing Amendment \(Emergency Worker Harm\) Act 2020](#)
- [Crimes \(Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried\) Amendment Bill 2020](#) (lapsed)
- [Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Amendment Bill 2020](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

- [Victorian Law Reform Commission Amendment Bill 2020](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

2021

- [Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Firearms and Other Acts Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Forests Amendment \(Forest Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation\) Act 2021](#)
- [Judicial Proceedings Reports Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(System Enhancements and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#)
- [Police Informants Royal Commission Implementation Monitor Act 2021](#)
- [Special Investigator Act 2021](#)
- [Spent Convictions Act 2021](#)
- [Terrorism \(Community Protection\) Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and Other Acts Amendment \(Federal Jurisdiction and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#)
- [Bail Amendment \(Reducing Pre-trial Imprisonment of Women, Aboriginal, and Vulnerable Persons\) Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Children, Youth and Families \(Raise the Age\) Amendment Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

2022

- [Crimes Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Criminal Procedure Disclosure and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Fines Reform and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Police and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Sexual Offences and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Trial by Judge Alone and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Major Crime and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Monitoring of Places of Detention by the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture \(OPCAT\) Act 2022](#)
- [Regulatory Legislation Amendment \(Reform\) Act 2022](#)
- [Sex Work Decriminalisation Act 2022](#)
- [Summary Offences Amendment \(Nazi Symbol Prohibition\) Act 2022](#)
- [Victims of Crime \(Financial Assistance Scheme\) Act 2022](#)

- *Victoria Police Amendment Act 2022*
- Human Source Management Bill 2022 (lapsed)
- Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence) Bill 2022 (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- Firearms Amendment Bill 2022 (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)
- Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- *Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2019*, Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)
- *No bail, more jail? Breaking the nexus between community protection and escalating pre-trial detention*, Library Fellowship paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)
- *Justice Legislation Amendment (Supporting Victims and Other Matters) Bill 2020*, Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- *Emergency powers, public health and COVID-19*, Research paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- *Animal cruelty offences in Victoria*, Sentencing Advisory Council (Vic) (2019)
- *Cross-border justice: exploring ways to improve access to legal assistance along the NSW/Victorian border*, Victorian Legal Aid (2019)
- *Expert Advisory Committee on Perpetrator Interventions: final report*, Victorian Government (2019)
- *Firearms offences: current sentencing practices*, Sentencing Advisory Council (Vic) (2019)
- *Follow up of regulating gambling and liquor*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- *Managing registered sex offenders*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)

- *OPCAT in Victoria: a thematic investigation of practices related to solitary confinement of children and young people*, Victorian Ombudsman (2019)
- *Rethinking sentencing for young adult offenders*, Sentencing Advisory Council (Vic) (2019)
- *Sexism and gender inequality in the Victorian legal and justice sector*, Women's Legal Service Victoria (2019)
- *Sexual harassment in the Victorian public service*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- *Submission to the inquiry into a legislated spent convictions scheme*, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (2019)
- *Insights into contemporary young offender behaviour in Victoria*, National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (2020)
- *Time served prison sentences in Victoria*, Sentencing Advisory Council (Vic) (2020)
- *Building back better: Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service COVID-19 recovery plan*, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (2021)
- *Child witnesses of family violence: an examination of Victoria Police family violence data*, Crime Statistics Agency (Vic) (2021)
- *Improving the justice system response to sexual offences: report*, Victorian Law Reform Commission (2021)
- *Our youth, our way*, Commission for Children and Young People (Vic) (2021)
- *Report to the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission from the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria*, First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria (2021)
- *Review of Victoria's emergency ambulance call answer performance—COVID-19 pandemic-related 000 demand surge*, Inspector-General for Emergency Management (2022)
- *Review of Victoria's preparedness for major public health emergencies, including pandemics*, Inspector-General for Emergency Management (2022)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- *Inquiry into a legislated spent convictions scheme*, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- *Inquiry into firearms prohibition legislation*, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)

- [Inquiry into anti-vilification protections](#), Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into management of child sex offender information](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into children affected by parental incarceration](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into extremism in Victoria](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Royal commissions

The following royal commissions were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants](#), Hon. M. McMurdo AC (2020)

Education

Education

An overview of developments relating to education during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on these portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Mental health professionals in all schools

In 2022 the [Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022](#) replaced the [Mental Health Act 2014](#), to address recommendations from the [Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System](#). The Victorian Government committed \$200 million in June 2022 to expand the Mental Health in Primary Schools program to every government and low-fee non-government primary school in Victoria by 2026. Every school will employ a mental health and wellbeing leader to 'implement a whole-school approach to wellbeing'. The [Schools Mental Health Menu](#) is a list of evidence-based programs that will be available to schools according to the needs and requirements of the students. Disaster, grief and loss programs, counselling, arts and music therapy, and therapy dogs are some of the options available across three tiers of intervention—positive mental health promotion, early intervention, and cohort-specific and targeted support.

The [implementation](#) of the mental health practitioners program was brought forward to the end of 2021 in recognition of the impact that pandemic-related school closures had on students. A mental health professional will be available at all government secondary schools between one and five days a week depending on their size.

Access to assistance programs

During the 59th Parliament, the Government introduced and funded several free programs aimed at addressing gaps for school students. These include \$321.9 million in the 2019–20 budget for [free dental care](#) for all school students. The [Smile Squad](#) vans were progressively rolled out between 2019 and 2022, providing free check-ups and treatments including teeth cleaning, fluoride applications, fillings, root canals and non-cosmetic treatment to school children.

During the 2018 election campaign, Labor committed to [providing free pads and tampons](#) for all students in government secondary schools, to reduce 'the discomfort and embarrassment around periods for girls and saving families hundreds of dollars every year'. The program was first rolled out in term 3 of 2019 and completed by July 2020, making Victoria the first state or territory in Australia to implement such a policy. The School Breakfast Clubs program, which provides free breakfast for students who would otherwise go without—impacting on their ability to learn and concentrate in class—was [expanded](#) in 2021 to reach 1,000 schools with an investment from the Government of \$58 million.

The 2020–21 budget included \$1.6 billion for the [Disability Inclusion package](#). With this funding, schools will be able to implement programs to improve inclusion for students with learning difficulties, including receiving access to specialist expertise, coaching, professional learning, evidence-based guidance and resources and scholarships. The package will be [rolled out](#) progressively to all public schools by 2025 and is expected to create up to 1,730 jobs.

Free TAFE, nursing and midwifery courses

To encourage the uptake of certain courses, the Government made a number of announcements across the 59th Parliament to indicate that selected TAFE courses and midwifery and nursing courses will be free.

The Free TAFE program first [announced](#) in the 2018–19 budget was [launched](#) in 2019. [From 2023](#) more than 70 courses in early childhood education, health, construction and infrastructure, agriculture, hospitality and community and disability will be free for people who meet the requirements (such as those under 20, those who are upskilling or those who are unemployed or looking to change careers).

In August 2022 the Government [announced](#) \$270 million for more than 17,000 new nurses and midwives to 'be recruited and trained as part of a massive hiring and upskilling initiative—building an army of home-grown health workers'. The [package](#) includes funding for prospective nurses and midwives to undertake undergraduate nursing and midwifery courses for free (provided they work in the public health service for

two years upon graduation), funding for former nurses and midwives to update their qualifications and funding for current enrolled nurses to become registered nurses for free.

Domestic students who enrol in professional-entry nursing or midwifery courses in 2023 and 2024 will [receive](#) a scholarship of up to \$16,500—\$9,000 while they study and \$7,500 after two years of working in a Victorian public health service.

New school-based vocational education

The *Review into vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling* (the Firth review), [completed](#) by John Firth in November 2020, recommended that an integrated senior secondary certificate should replace the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The review found, ‘Over time, the VCE and VCAL have become stereotyped as academic and theoretical versus vocational and applied, respectively, which has unhelpfully narrowed the perceived scope of both programs’.

The Government accepted the recommendation and [announced](#) that VCAL would be phased out from 2023 and by 2025 it will be fully integrated into the senior secondary certificate. Final-year students will have increased flexibility to study both academic and applied learning subjects. The *Education and Training Reform Amendment (Senior Secondary Pathways Reform and Other Matters) Act 2021* passed Parliament in 2021 to introduce these changes. The 2020–21 budget allocated \$38 million in support of jobs, skills and pathways co-ordinators within government schools.

Three-year-old kindergarten

At the 2018 election, the Labor Party [committed](#) to funding free three-year-old kindergarten under the ‘Ready for School: Kinder for every three-year-old’ program. Over ten years, \$5 billion will be invested into the program so all Victorian pre-schoolers can attend two years of funded kindergarten. Beginning in 2022, three-year-olds had access to 5 hours of kindergarten a week, with the program increasing to a full 15-hour program by 2029. The [Building Blocks](#) funding program was introduced to ensure that all kindergartens have the necessary buildings and services.

Child safety

Throughout the Parliament, several Bills were passed to protect children and increase the standard of care. The *Children Legislation Amendment Act 2019* ensured that people in religious ministry would become mandatory reporters to child protection services and removed the religious confession [exemption](#) from the ‘failure to disclose’ offence. See also the ‘Human services’ chapter for more details on this legislation.

In 2019 a review of the [Child Safe Standards](#) was completed, which found that organisations were committed to following the standards but that the regulatory framework was not fit for purpose. The *Child Wellbeing and Safety (Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement) Amendment Act 2021* strengthened the Victorian Child Safe Standards scheme by providing regulators of the standards with monitoring and enforcement powers and facilitating the sharing of information between regulators. The changes to the Act also provided stronger protections to people reporting concerns about children’s safety so that they can do so without fear of retribution.

The *Education and Training Reform Amendment (Regulation of Student Accommodation) Act 2020* addressed some of the issues raised in the [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#) to ensure that all students who reside in boarding houses are safe from abuse. A framework for regulation and registration of school boarding premises was established.

Teacher safety

The *Education and Training Reform Amendment (Protect of School Communities) Act 2021* empowers certain decision makers to issue [school community safety orders](#). These orders will prevent a person from entering the school premises or approaching staff members if it is believed they pose a threat to teachers or other school staff.

Teacher registration

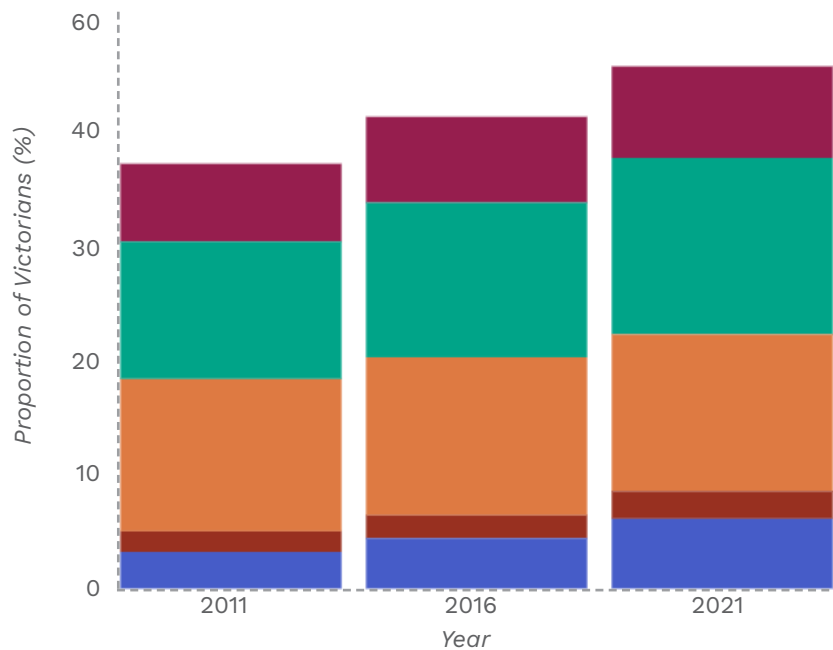
In the second-reading speech for the [Education and Training Reform Amendment \(Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership\) Bill 2021](#), the changes introduced in the Bill were described by the Government as ‘one of the most significant education reforms of this Government’. The resultant Act established the [Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership](#) and is a response to the 2019 Victorian Auditor-General’s Office report into [Professional learning for school teachers](#). The academy will provide specialist teaching and leadership excellence programs and professional learning pathways for exceptional teachers and school leaders. The flagship program will be named the Teaching Excellence Program.

FutureSkills

In November 2019 a former federal minister, the Hon. Jenny Macklin, was commissioned to examine Victoria’s post-secondary education and training system. The report, [Skills for Victoria’s growing economy](#), made 30 recommendations for how to improve the vocational education and training (VET) sector and also examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector. The cornerstone recommendation was for the Government to create a new independent body, FutureSkills Victoria, to ‘act as a champion and steward of the skills system’.

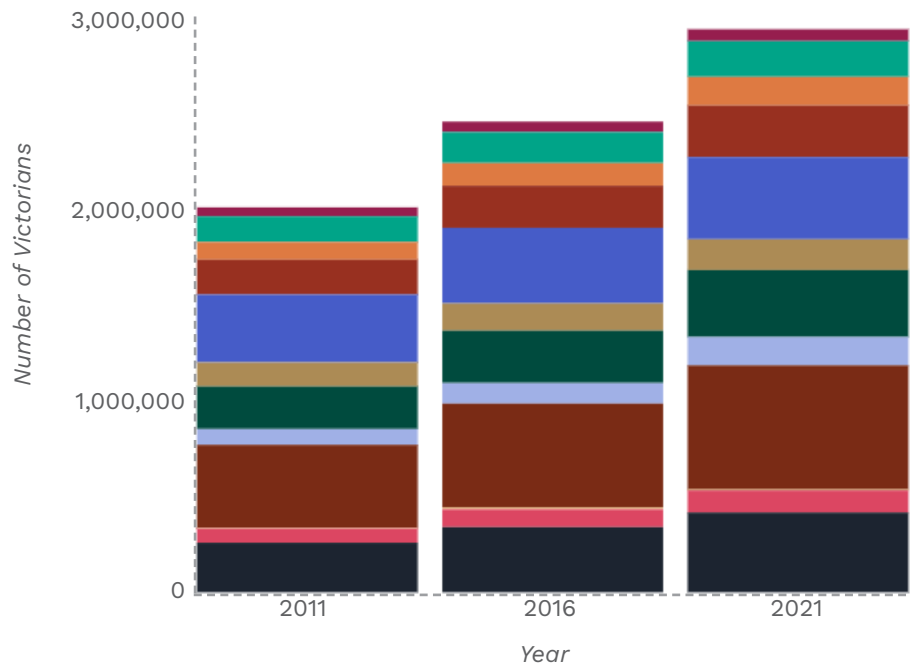
Qualification level of Victorians

- Advanced Diploma and Diploma Level
- Bachelor Degree Level
- Certificate Level
- Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate Level
- Postgraduate Degree Level



Fields of study within Victoria

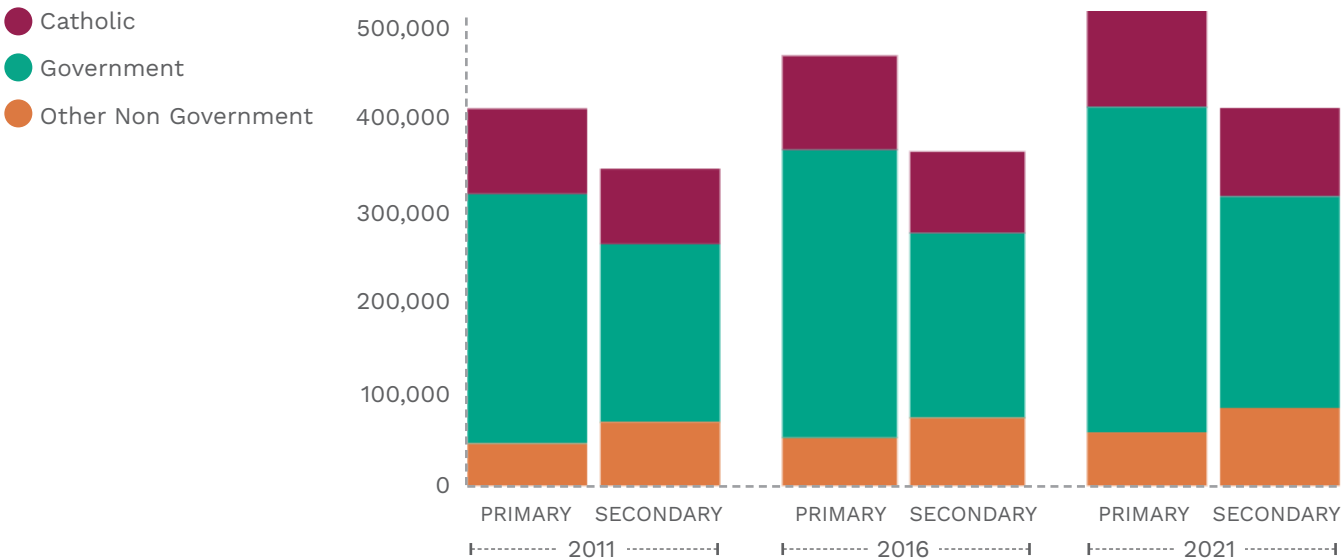
- Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies
- Architecture and Building
- Creative Arts
- Education
- Engineering and Related Technologies
- Food, Hospitality and Personal Services
- Health
- Information Technology
- Management and Commerce
- Mixed Field Programmes
- Natural and Physical Sciences
- Society and Culture



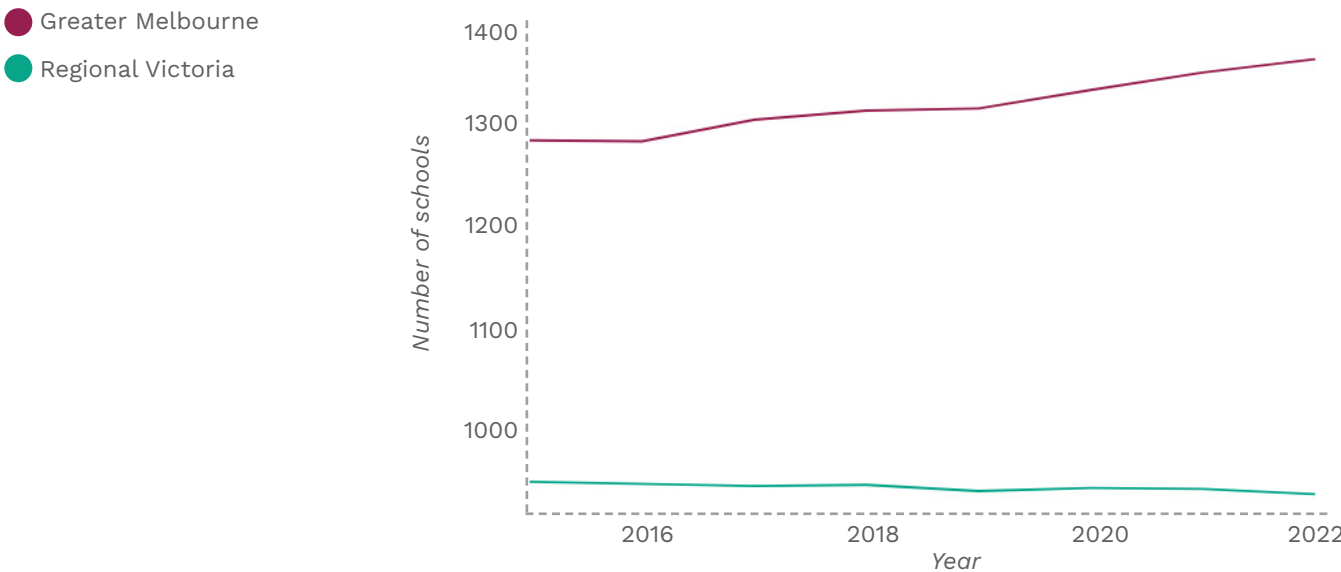
Source: ABS

*To view the education interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

School sector attendance numbers



Time series of school numbers in Victoria



Source: ABS; Department of Education

*To view the education interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation](#) website.

- [Children Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Children's Services Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) Act 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) And Other Acts Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Education And Training Reform Amendment \(Regulation Of Student Accommodation\) Act 2020](#)
- [Child Wellbeing and Safety \(Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement\) Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Amendment \(Miscellaneous\) Act 2021](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Amendment \(Protection of School Communities\) Act 2021](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Amendment \(Senior Secondary Pathways Reforms and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Amendment \(Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership\) Act 2021](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Education Legislation Amendment \(Adult and Community Education and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Education and Training Reform Amendment \(School Employment\) Bill 2020](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [Review of Victoria's Child Safe Standards: final report](#), Department of Health and Human Services (2019)
- [School compliance with Victoria's Child Safe Standards](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- [Early years management in Victorian sessional kindergartens](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- [Investigations into allegations of nepotism in government schools](#), Victorian Ombudsman (2020)
- [ICT provisioning in schools](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)

- [Quality of child protection data](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into early childhood engagement of CALD communities](#), Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with disability](#), Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into Auditor-General's report no. 253: Managing school infrastructure](#), Public Accounts and Estimate Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into Victorian universities' investment in skills](#), Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Health

Health

An overview of developments within the health portfolio during the 59th Parliament, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on the relevant portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Mental health

In February 2019 the [Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System](#) was formally established. By the time the commission published its final report, the 2019–20 bushfire season and the COVID-19 pandemic had further revealed the limitations of Victoria's mental health system. In finding that the '[state's mental health system was failing to support those who needed it](#)', the interim report made nine recommendations, including the establishment of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health to bring researchers, experts and people with lived experience together. The final report, which was released in February 2021, made 65 recommendations building on the interim report's recommendations.

The [Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2021](#) established the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing as an independent body corporate, setting out its functions, powers, governance structure and reporting requirements. The [Victorian budget 2021–22](#) allocated \$3.8 million, of the \$3.8 billion assigned to support Victoria's health and wellbeing reform, to establish the centre.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, in October 2021 the Liberal-National Coalition introduced the [Mental Health Amendment \(Counsellors\) Bill 2021](#). The Bill sought to amend the *Mental Health Act 2014* to include counsellors in the definition of mental health practitioners to 'deliver an immediate boost to the mental health workforce' in schools, because the legislation prevented those qualified as counsellors from offering guidance counselling at Victorian schools. The Bill was defeated in the Legislative Council.

In further delivering on the recommendations of the royal commission, in June 2022 the [Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022](#) was introduced by the Minister for Mental Health. As recommended by the royal commission, the Bill repealed and replaced the *Mental Health Act 2014*. The Bill, which passed Parliament in August 2022, also repealed and incorporated the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2021*. Specifically, the legislation:

- introduced rights-based mental health principles to guide service providers and decision-makers, including a 'diversity of care' principle and 'less restrictive care' principle, as well as a focus on the health, wellbeing and autonomy of children and young people;
- included a statement of recognition and acknowledgment of the treaty process;
- established the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission as an independent statutory body to monitor and report on the mental health and wellbeing system;
- established Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria as a new statutory entity, regional mental health and wellbeing boards, regional and statewide multiagency panels and a Chief Officer for Mental Health and Wellbeing; and
- retained the criteria for compulsory treatment and continues to regulate restrictive interventions.

In June 2022 the [Victorian Government also announced](#) that \$20 million from the Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Facilities Renewal Fund would support 31 Victorian mental health care and alcohol and other drug services. Following other recommendations made by the royal commission, the Government invested \$120 million in [Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing](#). In September 2022 the Government also announced that \$5.6 million would be invested over five years to support the [Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Scholarship program](#). The program would provide training and professional development opportunities to Aboriginal people wishing to work in the mental health sector.

Disability

Early in the 59th Parliament, the [Guardianship and Administration Bill 2018](#) was introduced by the Attorney-General. The Bill sought to implement key recommendations from the [Victorian Law Reform Commission's](#)

[2012 Guardianship: Final report 24](#) and complemented other reforms in the *Powers of Attorney Act 2014* and the *Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act 2016*. Specifically, the Bill sought to replace the *Guardianship and Administration Act 1986* and provide a new framework for the appointment of a guardian or administrator. The Bill also clarified definitions around decision-making capacity, including the presumption that a person has the capacity to make decisions unless evidence to the contrary is provided, and gave further statutory recognition to supported decision-making. The Bill passed with amendments from the Animal Justice Party to include mention of companion animals.

Under the former Liberal-National government, the [National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#) first launched [as a trial in Victoria in 2013](#) with agreements to extend the scheme to the whole state in July 2016, with the full rollout planned for July 2019. In response to the full scheme rollout, the [Disability \(National Disability Insurance Scheme Transition\) Amendment Act 2019](#) amended the *Disability Act 2006* and the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* to allow arrangements for Disability Support Providers to transition to registration by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. It also included amendments for worker screening arrangements and continuing the existing functions and powers of community visitors.

Alongside this, the Labor government invested [\\$2.5 billion in 2019–20](#) towards the NDIS and announced that [\\$1.3 million](#) would be provided to the Victorian Regional Readiness Fund for one-off grants for organisations across regional Victoria to help build up the NDIS workforce.

Finally, the [Disability Service Safeguards Amendment Act 2020](#) made four technical clarifications to the *Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018*.

Drug law reform

In October 2019 the [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment \(Pill Testing Pilot for Drug Harm Reduction\) Bill 2019](#) was introduced by the Victorian Greens and the Reason Party as the [first ever co-sponsored Bill](#). The introduction of the Bill followed the release of the 2018 Victorian [Inquiry into drug law reform report](#), which made two recommendations regarding pill testing. The Bill proposed to create a new legislative scheme to allow for a pill testing pilot program to reduce drug harm through the licensing and operation of both a mobile pill testing service and a fixed-premises pill testing service. The Bill was supported by neither the Government nor the Liberal Party and lapsed with the expiration of the 59th Parliament. For more information, see the [Victorian Parliamentary Library Bill brief](#).

As well as strengthening existing e-cigarette and tobacco prohibitions, the [Health Legislation Amendment and Repeal Act 2019](#) repealed the *Access to Medicinal Cannabis Act 2016*. As explained in the [explanatory memorandum](#), not long after the Act was passed, the Commonwealth introduced its own legislation by amending the *Narcotics Drugs Act 1967* to regulate the cultivation, production and manufacture of cannabis for medical and scientific use. As such, the *Access to Medicinal Cannabis Act 2016* was repealed to avoid regulatory duplication.

At much the same time, the Legislative Council was undertaking an [inquiry into the use of cannabis in Victoria](#). The motion for the inquiry was passed in May 2019 and [the final report tabled in August 2021](#). The committee made 21 recommendations. The Government [failed to respond within the six-month deadline](#) and had not responded by the expiration of the Parliament.

Following an increase in opioid overdoses in Victoria, the [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment Act 2020](#) came into effect in May 2021. The Act delivered on Government commitments made in response to the [2018 inquiry into drug law reform](#). The Act expanded community access to naloxone (a substance used to counteract opioid overdoses), decriminalised peer distribution of sterile injecting needles and syringes and allowed peer distribution of sterile injecting equipment to prevent the transmission of bloodborne diseases.

In February 2022 the Reason Party's Fiona Patten introduced the [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment \(Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence\) Bill 2022](#). The Bill sought to amend the *Drug, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* to provide for certain offences to be dealt with by way of drug education and treatment programs rather than the criminal justice system. The Bill was [not supported by the major parties](#) and lapsed with the expiration of the 59th Parliament.

Health care

The *Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Act 2018* amended the *Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015* to enshrine minimum nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios. The Government also announced that it would deliver on its commitment to create a \$50 million Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Development Fund. Subsequently, the legislation was amended further through the *Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Act 2020*. The Act amended the rounding method used to determine staffing requirements, nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios on specified shifts in certain wards, reclassified Warrnambool Base Hospital as a level two hospital and amended the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* to protect the qualifications of maternal and child health nurses. In their media release, the Government announced that more than \$64 million would be invested to support these changes over five years, in addition to the \$50 million allocated for the development fund.

The *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2019* responded to the *Victorian HIV strategy 2017–2020* by removing certain requirements around information provided before and after HIV testing to increase access to peer-led HIV testing and home-based self-testing and modernising the requirements for testing providers. Under the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009, this information included medical and psychosocial consequences of the test and positive test results, and ways to prevent the transmission of the HIV virus to other persons. Through this the Government sought to normalise regular screening for HIV and remove a barrier to the expansion of cost-effective peer-led testing models, particularly in rural and regional Victoria.

In March 2020 the *Health Services Amendment (Mandatory Vaccination of Healthcare Workers) Act 2020* came into effect. The Act amended the *Health Services Act 1988* and the *Ambulances Act 1986* to require all healthcare workers in public and private hospitals with direct patient contact to be vaccinated or prove immunity to specified diseases such as flu, whooping cough, measles, chicken pox and hepatitis B.

The following year the *Non-Emergency Patient Transport Amendment Act 2021* strengthened the existing licensing system for providers of non-emergency patient transport services, introduced licensing and regulation of the commercial first aid sector, abolished the accreditation scheme for licence holders who operate stand-by services, created new offences and increased penalties for certain other offences. The catalyst for the Act was a review, undertaken by the Government, of non-emergency patient transport and reports of non-emergency transport teams being dispatched to medical emergencies.

In response to a recommendation from an independent review commissioned by the Government in 2015 following a series of potentially preventable infant deaths, in October 2021 the Government introduced the *Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2021*. The Bill amended the *Health Services Act 1988* to establish a centralised electronic system to enable public hospitals and other specified hospitals and health services to share specified patient health information. The Bill, however, was widely criticised for security and privacy reasons and lapsed on the expiration of the 59th Parliament.

In March 2022 the *Health Legislation Amendment (Quality and Safety) Act 2021* amended the *Health Services Act 1998*, the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, the *Ambulance Services Act 1986*, the *Mental Health Act 2014* and the *Health Complaints Act 2016*. The Act supported the last tranche of legislative reforms recommended by the Review of Hospital Safety and Quality Assurance in Victoria's *Targeting zero report* and the expert working group on the legislative reforms arising from the review's report. Specifically, the Act established a Chief Quality and Safety Officer and a statutory duty of candour, extended protections for apologies offered by health service entities for harm suffered by patients and made a range of consequential amendments.

The *Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2022* made a comprehensive range of changes to the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. In particular, the Act responded to cross-portfolio commitments relating to prescribed labour accommodation, enabled expanded testing data collection to improve infectious disease management and expanded analysis processes to identify infectious disease. It also expanded the circumstances in which the Chief Health Officer may make examinations and testing orders to better understand risks to public health, removed references to HIV and Hepatitis C in the Act to remove stigma, and provided statutory immunity to the Chief Health Officer and certain other officers acting in good faith.

In June 2022 the Reason Party's Fiona Patten introduced the [Health Legislation Amendment \(Conscientious Objection\) Bill 2022](#) to make legislative amendments surrounding the *Health Service Act 1988*. The Bill sought to ensure that registered health practitioners could not be directed by denominational hospitals to refuse:

- services related to contraception;
- the supply of contraception from in-house pharmacies;
- termination of pregnancies; and
- voluntary assisted dying services.

The Bill would not have applied to private hospitals or individual practitioners. Patten argued that hospitals that receive public funding have no right to refuse legally enshrined medical services. The Bill was defeated in the Legislative Council.

Aged care

As described in the [Parliamentary Library's quick guide to residential aged care in Victoria](#), aged care facilities were at the centre of several major outbreaks in Australia. In 2020 the first COVID-19 case in aged care was at BaptistCare's Dorothy Henderson Lodge in early March, with significant outbreaks at Anglicare's Newmarch House in Western Sydney in April and multiple outbreaks in Victorian facilities throughout June, July and August.

In response to these outbreaks, on 27 July 2020, the Commonwealth and Victorian governments jointly established the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre to coordinate resources, located at Victoria's State Control Centre in Melbourne.

Reproductive health

In the lead-up to the 2018 state election the [Government announced](#) that an independent review of Victoria's assisted reproductive services would be commissioned and undertaken by Michael Gorton. The review was the first since the 2008 legislative changes that removed discrimination against same-sex couples and single people in accessing assisted reproductive treatment.

Against the backdrop of this review, in September 2018 a landmark case set a new legal precedent for assisted reproductive services in Victoria. At the time, the legislation meant that any woman seeking reproductive services needed the consent of her husband, regardless of their marital status, meaning women separated from their husbands still required their husband's consent. The Federal Court ruled in favour of allowing a woman to undergo in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) using her own eggs and donor sperm without the consent of her estranged husband and argued that the law was inconsistent with sex discrimination laws.

In May 2019 the final report of the [review of assisted reproductive treatment](#) was released. In combination with the interim report, the review made 80 recommendations. One of these recommendations was 'that the Act be amended to remove any discrimination against married women ... [to] ensure that where a married couple have separated, the consent of a person who would otherwise meet the definition of a partner is not required to undertake treatment'.

Subsequently, the [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment \(Consent\) Act 2019](#) amended the *Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008* to:

- remove the requirement that women seek approval from former partners if they want to undergo IVF with a sperm donor;
- amend the *Status of Children Act 1974* so that the presumed parentage of a child born under these circumstances is the same as those of a child born to a woman who does not have a partner (removes the requirement that allowed a former or estranged partner to be recognised or presumed to be the parent of the child for the purpose of being recorded on a birth certificate); and
- allow a surrogate mother who is separated but not divorced to have the same access to counselling and legal advice as a surrogate mother separated from a domestic partner.

The independent review also revealed discrimination in the requirement for police checks for those undergoing IVF treatment. It was also found that the establishment of public fertility services was critical to making the system more inclusive and accessible. The final report made recommendations specific to the establishment of public assisted reproductive treatment services and a public sperm and egg bank.

Responding to these recommendations, the [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2020](#) removed requirements for criminal record checks and child protection order checks to be carried out before a woman may undergo a treatment procedure.

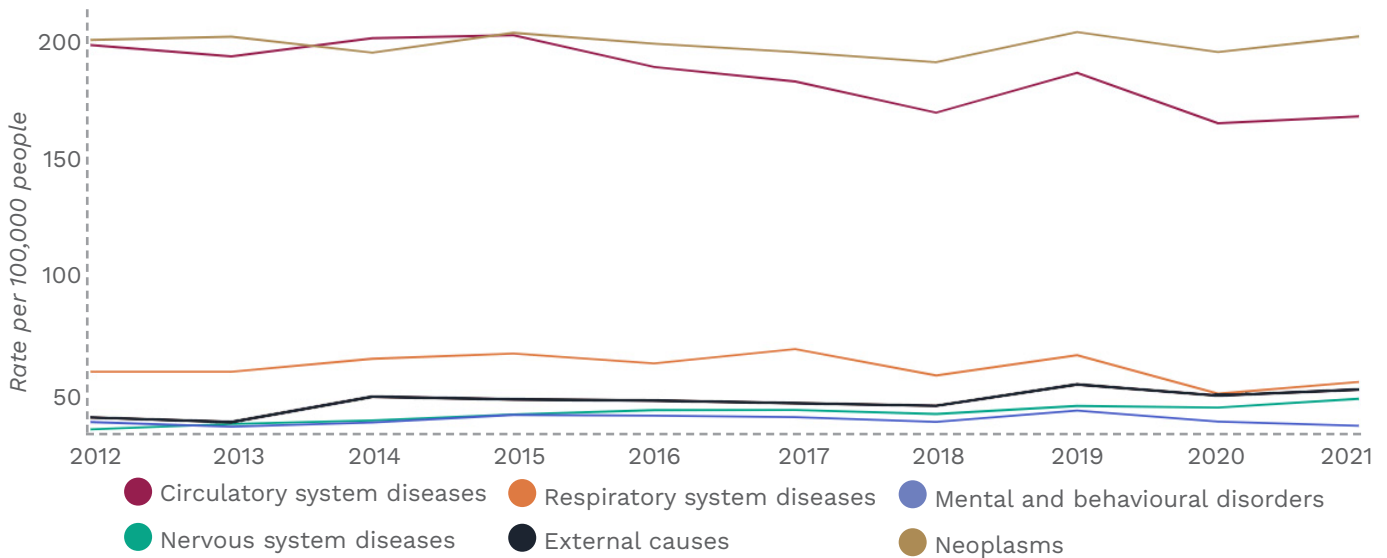
The following year, the [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2021](#) amended the [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Act 2008](#) to implement a further ten recommendations from the Gorton review. Several of the amendments sought to further reduce discrimination, make IVF treatment easier to access for people living in rural and regional areas and clarify the rights of surrogate mothers. Additionally, certain exceptions were made on the number of women accessing a single donor, allowing women in same-sex relationships to have genetically related siblings for their existing families using the same donor. Further, the Act clarified legislation and removed discrimination by enabling all people whose partners have died to use their eggs, sperm or embryos, in accordance with their deceased partner's wishes, in surrogacy arrangements.

The Gorton review identified that cost was the biggest barrier to accessing assisted reproductive treatment in Victoria. To address this and fulfill a 2018 election commitment, the [Victorian budget 2021–22](#) invested \$70 million to establish public fertility care services to assist 4,000 Victorians annually to access IVF services. The funding included \$20 million to improve public hospital facilities to deliver the services and \$50 million to provide up to 2,700 free treatment cycles and a range of other fertility care services. About the investment, then [Minister for Health the Hon. Martin Foley](#) said, 'We're removing the financial barrier faced by too many families and making IVF easier, fairer and more affordable—it will be life changing for thousands of Victorian families every year'. In October 2022 the [first public IVF clinic opened in Melbourne](#).

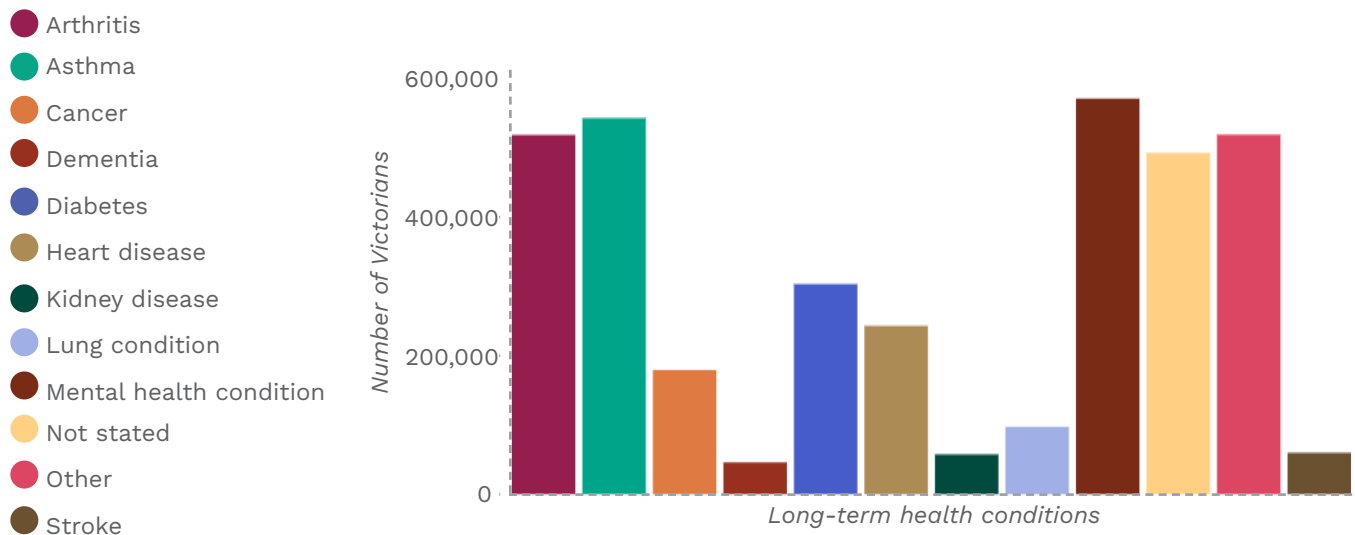
Other developments

- The [Health Legislation Amendment and Repeal Act 2019](#) tightened Victoria's tobacco advertising laws. The Act ensured overseas-based Formula 1 teams could not display tobacco advertising on their cars and uniforms. Then Minister for Health the Hon. Jenny Mikakos said the Government was acting to stop tobacco companies from using 'sneaky tactics' to circumvent laws.
- The [Human Tissue Amendment Act 2020](#) amended the [Human Tissue Act 1982](#) to remove ambiguity and clarify consent for ante-mortem procedures for potential organ and tissue donors. Ante-mortem procedures are treatments given to a potential organ donor before their death, which delays the degradation of the organs that occurs with the withdrawal of life support.
- The [Food Amendment Act 2020](#) amended the [Food Act 1984](#) and the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#) to support more consistent and transparent regulatory practices across Victoria's 79 local governments to make public health regulatory requirements as '[uncomplicated and supportive](#)' for businesses as possible.
- The [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2021](#) transferred administration of complaints about noise and emissions from wind turbines at wind energy facilities from local councils to the Environmental Protection Authority.
- The [Children and Health Legislation Amendment \(Statement of Recognition and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#), which was introduced on 7 June 2022, sought to enshrine commitments to Aboriginal self-determination in the [Health Services Act 1988](#) and the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#). The Bill lapsed on the expiration of the Parliament.

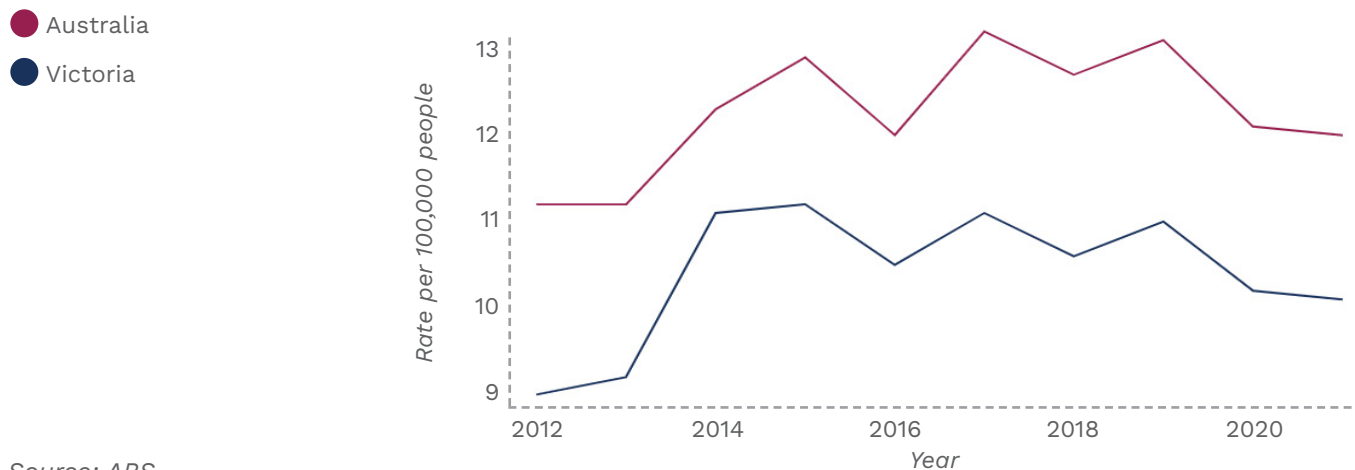
Main causes of death in Victoria, 2012-2021



Victorians with long-term health conditions, 2021



Suicide rates time series in Australia and Victoria



Source: ABS

*To view the health interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation website](#).

2019

- [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment \(Consent\) Act 2019](#)
- [Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Disability \(National Disability Insurance Scheme Transition\) Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Guardianship and Administration Act 2019](#)
- [Health Legislation Amendment and Repeal Act 2019](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Safe Patient Care \(Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios\) Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment \(Pill Testing Pilot for Drug Harm Reduction\) Bill 2019](#) (co-sponsored Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

2020

- [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Disability Service Safeguards Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Food Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Health Services Amendment \(Mandatory Vaccination of Healthcare Workers\) Act 2020](#)
- [Human Tissue Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(Quarantine Fees\) Act 2020](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(State of Emergency Extension and Other Matters\) Act 2020](#)
- [Safe Patient Care \(Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios\) Amendment Act 2020](#)

2021

- [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Change or Suppression \(Conversion\) Practices Prohibition Act 2021](#)
- [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Non-Emergency Patient Transport Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(State of Emergency Extension\) Act 2021](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(Pandemic Management\) Act 2021](#)

- [Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2021](#)
- [Health Legislation Amendment \(Information Sharing\) Bill 2021](#) (lapsed)
- [Mental Health Amendment \(Counsellors\) Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment \(Greater Transparency and Accountability\) Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)

2022

- [Health Legislation Amendment \(Quality and Safety\) Act 2022](#)
- [Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022](#)
- [Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Children and Health Legislation Amendment \(Statement of Recognition and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#) (lapsed)
- [Disability Amendment Bill 2022](#) (lapsed)
- [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment \(Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Health Legislation Amendment \(Conscientious Objection\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment \(Pill Testing Pilot for Drug Harm Reduction\) Bill 2019: Bill brief](#), Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)
- [Safe Patient Care \(Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios\) Amendment Bill 2018: Bill brief](#), Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)
- [Epidemics and pandemics in Victoria: historical perspectives](#), Research paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Residential aged care in Victoria](#), Quick guide, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Change or Suppression \(Conversion\) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020: Bill brief](#), Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2021)
- [Chronology of Victorian border closures due to COVID-19](#), Research paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2021)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [A theory of change in sexual and reproductive health for Victorian women](#), Gender Equity Victoria (2019)
- [Access to mental health services](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- [Child and youth mental health](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- [Equally well in Victoria](#), Department of Health and Human Services (2019)
- [Follow up of access to public dental services in Victoria](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- [Managing private medical practice in public hospitals](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- [Security of patients' hospital data](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- [Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2019–2023](#), Department of Health and Human Services (2019)
- [COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry: interim report and recommendations](#), Victorian Government (2020)
- [COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry: final report and recommendations](#), Victorian Government (2020)
- [Report of the independent review of COVID-19 outbreaks at St Basil's and Epping Gardens aged care facilities](#), Department of Health (Cth) (2020)
- [Victoria's mental health and wellbeing workforce strategy 2021–2024](#), Department of Health (2021)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into the Victorian Government's COVID-19 contact tracing system and testing regime](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into the closure of I Cook Foods Pty Limited](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into the use of cannabis in Victoria](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)

Royal commissions

The following royal commissions were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System](#), P. Armytage, Prof. A. Fels, Dr A. Cockram & Prof. B. McSherry (2021)

Human services

Human services

An overview of developments relating to human services during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on the relevant portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Aboriginal Victoria

Treaty

The re-elected Labor government, having successfully enacted the [Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018](#) (the 'Treaty Act') in its previous term, looked to continue with the treaty process in Victoria in the 59th Parliament. In a [NAIDOC week message](#) on 5 July 2019, then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs the Hon. Gavin Jennings flagged the establishment of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria as a representative 'voice' of the Aboriginal community. The Assembly would be an elected body of Victorian Traditional Owners that would work with the state on the next steps in the treaty process.

The Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission, an independent office which commenced in January 2018 with Jill Gallagher AO as chief commissioner, would oversee and expedite the election of the Assembly.

Thirty thousand Aboriginal Victorians were eligible to vote in the poll, which took place between 16 September and 20 October 2019, to elect the First Peoples' Assembly. The advancement commission went to great lengths to ensure participation, including lowering the voting age to 16. However, it was [reported](#) in the media that only 7 per cent of those eligible voted.

On 9 December 2019 following the Aboriginal community elections and recommendation of the Victorian Treaty Advancement Commissioner, the minister [declared](#) the First Peoples' Assembly to be the Aboriginal representative body as required under the Treaty Act. The Assembly comprised 31 members, with a seat reserved for each of the 11 formally recognised Traditional Owner groups in Victoria, and 21 general seats elected through votes held in six voting regions. While the Assembly is not the treaty negotiating body, it will work with the Victorian Government to establish the elements to support treaty negotiations. These included an independent Treaty Authority, a treaty negotiation framework and dispute resolution process, and a self-determination fund.

The historic [inaugural meeting](#) of the Assembly was held in the Legislative Council chamber at Parliament House on 10 December 2019.

Yoorrook Justice Commission

The theme of the [2019 NAIDOC](#) week was 'Voice. Treaty. Truth.'—the intention being that there could be no treaty without a process of reconciliation through truth-telling. In June 2020 the First Peoples' Assembly [passed a resolution](#) seeking a commitment from the state to establish a truth and justice process, to which the Victorian Government agreed. Following work in partnership between the state and the Assembly, the Governor of Victoria signed [letters patent](#) on 12 May 2021, establishing the [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#) as a royal commission and setting its terms of reference.

The findings of Victoria's truth inquiry—the Yoorrook Justice Commission—will also inform the state's treaty process. The commission delivered an interim report on its progress to date on 30 June 2022, in fulfillment of requirements under the letters patent.

Treaty Authority

The Treaty Authority was established by agreement, legally executed by the state and the First Peoples' Assembly on [6 June 2022](#). The agreement was marked at an exchange ceremony and ceremonial signing with the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, and Co-Chair of the First Peoples' Assembly Marcus Stewart held on Gadubanud Country at Lorne on [10 June 2022](#).

On 22 June 2022 the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly [addressed](#) the Legislative Assembly ahead of the second-reading [debate](#) of the [Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Bill 2022](#). Geraldine Atkinson, a Bangerang and Wiradjuri Elder, and Marcus Stewart, a Nira illim bulluk man of the Taungurung Nation, addressed the House in both English and Aboriginal languages.

The Bill addressed the functions, powers and legal capacity, as well as funding certainty into the future, of the Treaty Authority. As a sign of the independence of the authority, it will not be required to report to a minister.

While the establishment of the Treaty Authority received bipartisan support, a number of members of the Liberal-National opposition [expressed](#) concerns about the need for an independent body in the treaty process and about the exclusive membership of the authority.

The Bill passed the Parliament on 16 August 2022 by 31 votes to three in the Legislative Council. Victoria became the only jurisdiction in Australia to have enacted the treaty and truth-telling components of the 2017 [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#).

Framework

On [20 October 2022](#) the final elements to support treaty negotiations were enabled. The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Victorian Government reached an agreement on the *Treaty Negotiation Framework* to guide the way negotiations for treaty would take place. It provides Traditional Owners of Country with support to negotiate Treaties across the state and support for the First Peoples' Assembly to negotiate a statewide treaty.

Water and Land

Aboriginal water values were given legislative form in Victoria when the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 made its way through Parliament in June 2019 (see also the 'Primary industries' chapter). The legislation provided for Aboriginal inclusion and participation in the water sector.

In March 2022 the Government [announced](#) that the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation would receive a water entitlement for the first time, comprising 2.5 gigalitres of unallocated water in the Palawarra (Fitzroy River) system in south-west Victoria. It is the intention of the corporation to use the water for the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape located in the traditional Country of the Gunditjmara Aboriginal people. The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape had received [UNESCO World Heritage listing](#) in August 2019 for 'Outstanding Universal Value' and is recognised for its cultural values to the Gunditjmara community.

In a ceremony held on [18 February 2022](#), the Attorney-General handed over the Golden Square High School in Hattam Street, Bendigo, to the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. The site was recommended as part of Professor Mick Dodson's review of the 2013 [Recognition and Settlement Agreement](#).

Youth Justice

Minimum age of criminal responsibility

In March 2021 the Greens' Dr Samantha Ratnam introduced a Private Member's Bill in the Legislative Council—the [Children, Youth and Families \(Raise the Age\) Amendment Bill 2021](#)—to raise the age of criminal responsibility from ten to 14 years of age. This issue had been on the national agenda around Australia and advocated by groups such as the [Law Council of Australia](#), the [Australian Council of Social Service](#) and the [Australian Medical Association](#), and subject to a [review](#) by the Council of Attorneys-General, stemming from concerns with the rates of incarceration of children. The Bill was second read in May 2021 but did not progress further.

Raising the legal minimum age of criminal responsibility was a recommendation of the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee from its [inquiry into Victoria's criminal justice system](#), which began in April 2021 and reported in March 2022. The committee's far-ranging inquiry looked at early interventions to reduce the risks of young people ending up in the criminal justice system. The committee stated that raising the age was 'consistent with evidence about child development, international norms and human rights standards, and will help divert children into social services rather than trapping them in the criminal justice system from an early age'. The committee's recommendation was that the Victorian Government raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, but it noted 'that this is being considered by several jurisdictions via the Meeting of Attorneys-General'.

In November 2021 the [Meeting of Attorneys-General](#) agreed to support the development of a proposal to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility from ten to 12 years. While the possibility of changing the age was welcomed by some, [justice groups](#) argued that this would barely make a difference given the data available on the number of children incarcerated who were under 12 years of age compared to those under 14 years of age.

The committee acknowledged that Victoria had agreed, through the Meeting of Attorneys-General, to contribute to the proposal to raise the minimum age to 12 years, but it was the committee's view that it represented a missed opportunity to achieve the benefits that had been raised in evidence presented to the committee and that it supported raising the minimum age to at least 14 years. In their view, there also needed to be a concurrent expansion in community-based support services to address the factors leading to such behaviours.

A [petition](#) to raise the age from ten to 14 years signed by over 65,000 Victorians was presented by the Smart Justice for Young People coalition to the Reason Party's Fiona Patten on the front steps of Parliament in August 2022. Ms Patten raised the [question](#) in the Legislative Council on the day, asking whether any progress had been made on this issue at the August 2022 Meeting of Attorneys-General. In a [response](#), the Attorney-General reiterated that it was not about a number (age) but about the need to ensure support services were available and an assurance that there were alternative pathways for those currently caught in the justice system. The Attorney-General also stated that national consistency would be good and reported that there were no children aged 11 or 12 in custodial settings in Victoria at the time.

The 2021 Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into the criminal justice system had received [submissions](#) from youth justice advocacy, community legal centres and social services groups who raised concerns about the numbers of children in youth detention centres who were being held on remand. The numbers had increased since the reforms to bail laws were introduced in 2017 and 2018, following the [Bail review](#), conducted by a former Director of Public Prosecutions and Supreme Court justice, Paul Coughlan QC, in 2017. In particular, the reverse onus test provisions, which also apply to children and young people, appear to have had unintended consequences for vulnerable children and young people. Most are on remand in relation to non-violent offences, and many are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

The committee [recommended](#) a 'state-wide, 24-hour bail system specifically for children, with accompanying support services including in relation to accommodation and the provision of independent support during any time in police custody'. The Government were yet to respond by the expiration of the Parliament.

Child protection

On 14 August 2019 the Minister for Child Protection introduced the [Children Legislation Amendment Bill 2019](#) as part of the Victorian Government's response to the recommendation from the [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse's report](#), which was released in December 2017. The Bill sought to include individuals in religious ministries as 'mandatory reporters' of physical or sexual child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. Professional groups listed under the Act have a legal obligation to report such abuse to authorities; these groups include registered medical practitioners, nurses, police officers, registered teachers and school counsellors. The resulting [Children Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#) removed the privilege for information acquired by members of the clergy in religious confessions and removed the exemptions for 'failure to disclose' offences regarding informing police of sexual abuse of children under 16.

Out-of-home care

In January 2020 the [Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care](#) was endorsed by the Department of Health and Human Services (later the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing), the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Victoria Police. The framework, launched by the Minister for Child Protection in February 2020, was the culmination of many years of advocacy by Aboriginal controlled community organisations and the legal profession as well as research that showed a 'pipeline' of 'crossover kids'—children and young people placed in state care for their own safety and protection—from residential care into the criminal justice system. The framework supports an approach that aims to reduce the reliance on police intervention for young people in residential care, seek options other than criminal charges, promote

and encourage young people's participation in the decision-making process and support connections to culture and community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

In February 2020 the Reason Party's Fiona Patten introduced a Private Member's Bill in the Legislative Council, the [Children Youth and Families \(Out of Home Care Age\) Bill 2020](#), to extend out-of-home care to young people up to 20 years old, up from 18. At the time, exit care planning for children in statutory care of the state began at 15 years of age and ended at their 18th birthday, when financial and emotional care and support by the state was withdrawn. Ms Patten quoted a [Deloitte Access Economics report](#) that estimated continuing care to 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds would halve homelessness, reduce hospitalisation, mental illness and other harms such as alcohol and drug dependence, and increase engagement in education among care leavers. The community sector had advocated strongly for this change for many years. The Bill did not progress further than the second reading.

In January 2021, however, the Government extended the [Home Stretch](#) program to provide young people transitioning from out-of-home care with an allowance and a key worker to support them toward housing, employment, education and other support services up to the age of 21. This program was given legislative force with the introduction in October 2021 of the [Children, Youth and Families Amendment \(Child Protection\) Bill 2021](#).

The Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Child Protection) Bill also provided for extending eligibility for statutory intervention to 17-year-olds in need of protection. This cohort found that they could not access services available for children 16 years and younger and were not eligible for adult services until they turned 18. While the Bill did receive support across Parliament, as well as from the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the Victorian Council of Social Service and Berry Street, it progressed as far as the second-reading stage in the Legislative Council in February 2022 but lapsed on the expiration of the Parliament.

In June 2022 the [Children and Health Legislation Amendment \(Statement of Recognition and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#) sought to introduce the Aboriginal statement of recognition and ten recognition principles into the decision-making framework concerning Aboriginal children. In essence, the statement recognised Aboriginal peoples as the First Nations people of Australia and recognised the consequences of a child protection system that facilitated policies that led to the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, culture and Country. The ten recognition principles included rights to self-determination, consideration of cultural rights and connections with Country as well as historic and ongoing biases. The acknowledgment of the impact of past wrongs, such as forced removal, and the importance of self-determination being embedded in legislation would provide an essential lens for framing policies and accountabilities in plans concerning Aboriginal children being removed from families. In providing for greater self-determination, Aboriginal agencies would have wider authorisation under the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program.

The Bill also sought to bring labour hire arrangements, secondments and independent contractors into the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

The Bill passed through the Legislative Assembly but progressed only as far as the second-reading stage in the Legislative Council in June 2022 before it lapsed on the expiration of the Parliament.

Auditor-General and Ombudsman reports

The Auditor-General reviewed the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's [Client Relationship Information System \(CRIS\)](#) and whether the department had adequate controls to ensure the quality of the data it collects on vulnerable children, completing its report in September 2022. The information system is central to enabling the department to fulfil its obligations to deliver child protection services. The Auditor-General found examples of incomplete and inconsistent data, which may hamper the monitoring of children in out-of-home care. According to the report, the department had told the Auditor-General that it was aware of the factors affecting the quality of the data and was in the process of addressing them.

The Auditor-General also assessed the [new kinship care model](#) introduced by the department in 2018 to accommodate the fastest-growing form of out-of-home care in Victoria. The model is designed to identify kinship networks of children and young people at risk and quickly provide them with a stable and quality

placement. The department and three other kinship care providers were examined. The Auditor-General found that the department needed to systematically monitor and report on the model's effectiveness in achieving its objectives—which are essentially to ensure children are in a safe home—of maintaining the continued wellbeing of the child and ensuring that carers are supported. The 12 recommendations from the report included identifying kinship networks early, completing mandatory assessments and providing support for carers.

Between July 2018 and March 2019 the Victorian Ombudsman received complaints alleging five children were victims of physical and sexual assaults while in residential care, either by other children in care or by people in the community. This prompted the Ombudsman to [investigate the Department of Health and Human Services child protection unit](#), which places the children in residential care, and the six community service organisations that are funded and regulated by the department to provide the care. The department's decision-making and the actions of the organisations were examined in the context of the nature of the complaints received. Essentially this included the safety, care and supervision of the children, the suitability of the placements, and responses to alleged assaults. The report, submitted in October 2020, recommended two key potential solutions to part of the problem: a move away from the four-bed model to a new two-bed residential care model; and an independent advocate to promote the rights of the child in care. In the Ombudsman's opinion, the independent advocacy function would sit well within the Commission for Children and Young People. In their respective responses, the Minister for Child Protection and the department accepted the recommendations.

Family violence

On 3 March 2020 the Shadow Attorney-General introduced a Private Member's Bill in the Legislative Council. The [Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Amendment Bill 2020](#) sought to establish the Implementation Monitor as an independent entity and extend its scope and reporting period for another four years until November 2024. The Bill would enable the development of performance measurement indicators for the *Family Violence Outcomes Framework*, to be measured against the recommendations of the [2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence](#), and these would be included in the reporting by the monitor. The Bill did not progress further than its second reading.

In August 2019 Jan Shuard PSM was appointed as the new Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, replacing Tim Cartwright. Under the *Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Act 2016*, a monitor was appointed for four years and reported to Parliament on the progress of reforms each year from 2017 to 2020. Ms Shuard tabled the fourth report in May 2021. The function of the monitor was subsequently extended by 18 months, from July 2021 to December 2022. With the requirement to produce annual reports to be tabled in the Parliament ending, the office committed to a [monitoring plan](#) that would focus on seven high-level topics. These were reached after consultation with Government department and agency heads and with the family violence sector, as well as consultation with the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum to include a topic chosen by the Koori Caucus. The monitor has completed and [reported](#) on four of the topics to date.

Reporting on the Government's family violence reforms continued in the form of annual reporting on the *Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan 2020–2023* and the *Family Violence Outcomes Framework*. The COVID-19 pandemic did delay and necessarily reprioritise parts of the action plan.

Coercive control

In November 2021 Derryn Hinch's Justice Party's Tania Maxwell brought a [motion](#) to the Legislative Council to recognise the prevalence of coercive control in family violence offending and called on the Government to review the legislative framework to consider evidence of coercive control behaviours in the justice system. Several members across the Legislative Council spoke on the issue, and the motion—which received bipartisan support—was agreed to.

Several other jurisdictions around Australia are considering including coercive control in their family violence legislative framework. The issue was [discussed](#) at the Meeting of Attorneys-General in August 2022, and in September 2022 the federal [Attorney-General](#) opened public consultation on a draft of national principles

to address coercive control. See also the Library papers explaining [coercive control](#) and the [intersectional complexities of coercive control](#).

Social reform

On the social reform side of the ledger, the Labor government progressed its agenda on addressing past forced adoption, assisted reproductive rights, gender diversity and reassignment, and the contentious issues of conversion therapy and the decriminalisation of sex work (see also the 'Crime and justice' chapter for more detail).

Adoption

In November 2019 the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee launched an [inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria](#). The committee held public hearings in Melbourne and regional Victoria. The terms of reference were left intentionally broad, allowing for the public hearings and submissions to lead the issues to be considered by the committee. The committee was of a view that historical forced adoptions were not a reflection of the attitudes of society at the time but a result of deliberate policy decisions made at government and institutional levels. The committee acknowledged the formal apology made on behalf of the Victoria Parliament in 2012 by former Victorian Premier, the Hon. Ted Baillieu. While some institutions that had been involved in this practice had apologised, many had not. At the public hearings and in submissions, the committee heard that apologies necessarily needed to be more than words and that responses had been inadequate to date.

The option for integrated birth certificates was a recommendation of the committee, as was streamlining access to adoption records for children and parents, including centralising all adoption information requests through a single agency—a government adoption information service. The committee also recommended government funding for post-adoption support services, improved reporting of adoption statistics, strengthening the child placement principles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the *Adoption Act 1984* and restricting adoption as an option in the context of child protection.

The committee made 56 recommendations in its final report, tabled in September 2021. The Government [responded to the report](#) in March 2022, and, in response to recommendation 18, announced a commitment to design a redress scheme to support mothers whose babies were taken under forced adoption. The government supported 33 of the recommendations either in full, in part or in principle while indicating all others required further consideration.

In April 2022 the [Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#) introduced an amendment to the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Act 1996* to provide for the issuing of an integrated birth certificate to adopted persons—at their own discretion. This was recommendation 26 from the committee.

LGBTIQ+

Addressing issues facing the LGBTIQ+ community, several Bills were introduced to enable and protect this cohort, including the ability for a person to change their birth certificate.

During its previous term, the Government had introduced the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Bill 2016—an equality agenda commitment ahead of the 2014 election—which was defeated in the Legislative Council. The Bill sought to enable transgender, gender-diverse and intersex adults and children to alter the record of sex in their Victorian birth registration without requiring individuals to be unmarried and undergo sex-affirmative surgery.

In June 2019 the Government reintroduced the Bill, which passed Parliament in September 2019 and commenced in May 2020. The [Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Act 2019](#) brought Victoria in line with the ACT, the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. It removed the requirement for a person to have undergone sex-affirmative surgery before being able to apply to alter the sex recorded in their Victorian birth registration or to obtain a document acknowledging their sex from the Victorian Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The change allows applicants to self-nominate the sex listed on their birth registration as male, female or any other gender-diverse or non-binary descriptor of their own choice. The Act also allows children, with parental support, to alter the sex recorded on their birth certificate.

In February 2020 an LGBTIQ+ taskforce was established to produce a strategy that would guide policies in Victoria. The first ten-year LGBTIQ+ plan, *Pride in our Future: Victoria's LGBTIQ+ Strategy 2022–32*, was released in February 2022.

Alongside these equality reforms was the parliamentary debate around change or suppression practices (also known as 'conversion' practices). In May 2018 the Minister for Health referred the matter of 'gay conversion therapy' or 'ex-gay ideology' to the Health Complaints Commissioner. The commissioner was tasked with investigating conversion practices and the context in which they were occurring. A [summary of the commissioner's findings](#) was published in February 2019 and observed that conversion practices were still being offered in Victoria, despite the long-term and significant harm they are said to cause. The commissioner recommended that the Minister for Health consider introducing legislation to ban conversion practices and provide support for survivors.

In response, the Government introduced the [Change or Suppression \(Conversion\) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020](#) in November 2020, criminalising conversion therapies. Specifically, the Bill created new criminal offences relating to change or suppression practices, amended definitions of sexual orientation and gender identity in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* to include sex characteristics as a protected attribute, established a civil response scheme within the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, included suppression or conversion practices as a form of family violence or harassment, and ensured that those affected have access to relevant protections under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* and the *Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010*.

The Bill attracted polarising commentary in the media and energised debate in its passage through Parliament, including a petition presented in the Legislative Council calling for the Bill to be defeated. Several members made impassioned and emotional contributions to the debate, and a number of amendments were moved. The Shadow Attorney-General moved to refer the Bill to the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee to examine what implications the UK case [Quincy Bell and A v Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and others \[2020\] EWHC 3274 \(Admin\)](#) would have for Victoria. The motion was debated but was defeated. The amended Bill finally passed the Legislative Council with on 4 February 2021. See also the [Library Bill brief](#) on the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020.

Members of Parliament and LGBTIQ+ support groups expressed concerns that such debates would bring unwelcome pressure to an already vulnerable cohort. The State Coroner, Judge John Cain, released a [report](#) in October 2022 on suicide among LQBTIQ+ Victorians in the last ten years. It is the first analysis of its kind and was also the first time the Victorian Coroner had made such data publicly available, noting that the figure of 208 deaths by suicide in this cohort would most likely 'represent an undercount'. Young people aged 18 to 34 were shown to be over-represented in the data.

Religious exceptions

Employment protections were welcomed by the LGBTIQ+ community when the [Equal Opportunity \(Religious Exceptions\) Amendment Bill 2021](#) was introduced in the Parliament in October 2021. The Bill proposed to remove the exception afforded religious bodies and religious educational institutions to discriminate against those they employed, dismissed or provided services to on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, lawful sexual activity, marital status, parental status and gender identity. This was part of the Government's 2018 election commitment. Exceptions would still hold if conforming to 'the doctrines, beliefs and principles' of the organisation is an 'inherent requirement' of the role—as in the case of priests, ministers, religious leaders, etc. The opposition and crossbench moved various amendments in the Legislative Council, including a motion to postpone the Bill, pending further consultation with affected organisations, and a motion to delay the Bill until the federal Religious Discrimination Bill 2021 passed the Australian Parliament. The Bill eventually passed the Legislative Council without amendment on 3 December 2021.

Multicultural affairs

A number of parliamentary committees examined issues concerning culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Victoria. The Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee looked at issues impacting CALD communities at both ends of the age spectrum. In September 2020 the committee reported on an inquiry into the participation and engagement of 0–8-year-olds in various programs, including

health and early learning, play groups, sport and recreation, family centres and libraries. Later, in August 2022, the committee [reported](#) on an inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds and the unique challenges of this cohort, such as social isolation, digital literacy, elder abuse and access to aged care. On the latter inquiry, the committee reflected that they found a level of ‘engagement fatigue’ in its consultations with community leaders, who were relied on extensively during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic response to liaise between the Government and their communities. Included in the 71 recommendations was a need to recognise and provide for ethno-specific aged-care services, including in residential aged care. The Government [responded](#) in March 2021, supporting and acknowledging the recommendations and outlining what it was already doing to address them.

The committee also examined the troubling issue of vilification and hate conduct in Victoria, and whether the current *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* was effective enough in protecting communities. While the Act makes it unlawful to vilify an individual on the basis of religion and race, the committee sought to examine whether there was evidence of an increase in such incidences, whether pathways to redress for victims were appropriate, whether additional protected attributes could be included under the Act—such as sexual orientation, gender and disability—and additionally whether there were any current efforts to engage with social media and technology companies to protect Victorians. In considering the online social media space, the committee recognised that collaboration with the Australian Government was necessary to better regulate social media platforms.

The committee determined that, on the evidence received, Victoria’s anti-vilification framework needed to be strengthened and that the legal threshold for complaints and enforcement was too high. During the inquiry process, the committee found that the LGBTIQ+ community, women and people with a disability were groups commonly targeted with hate. The [final report](#) with 36 recommendations was tabled in March 2021, and the Government provided its [response](#) in September 2021.

To implement recommendation 24 of the report, the [Summary Offences Amendment \(Nazi Symbol Prohibition\) Bill 2022](#), passed in June 2022, made it a criminal offence to intentionally display a Nazi symbol in a public place or in public view. Victoria [became](#) the first jurisdiction in Australia to legislate this ban. See also the ‘Crime and justice’ chapter for more detail.

In March 2022 the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee additionally examined the worrying rise of far-right extremist movements in Victoria. While they were not new in Australia or Victoria, the committee found there was a re-emergence, most notably from 2015 and 2016 onwards. In the context of racist ‘scapegoating’, the committee considered the risks that the plans and actions of such groups pose to Victoria and particularly to Victoria’s multicultural communities. The committee also noted the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw the growth in the influence of far-right extremist ideology. The committee’s [final report](#), with an extensive list of recommendations, was tabled in August 2022 and was still awaiting the Government’s response at the expiration of the Parliament.

Homelessness

[Victoria’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#) was released by the Government in January 2018, during its previous term, in response to recommendations for a long-term strategy to reduce the incidence and impact of rough sleeping in Victoria. The Government made an [initial funding commitment](#) of more than \$45 million to implement the plan, and the program to deliver the services was launched in January 2019.

The Auditor-General [reported](#) on the progress of the plan in September 2020, auditing the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the specialist homelessness services funded by the department to deliver the program. The report found flaws in the department’s implementation of the plan in relation to governance arrangements and risk management, the timely development of program guidance before its commencement in January 2019, and the design elements of the program itself. The department accepted all 13 recommendations of the Auditor-General in its [response](#) and provided an action plan to address them.

A parliamentary committee also examined the issue of homelessness. The Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee was referred terms of reference on 7 June 2019 for an inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. It tabled its interim report in August 2020 and its [final report](#) on 4 March 2021. The committee’s

final report, while wideranging in its suite of recommendations, had at its heart a belief that there needed to be a two-pronged approach: the need to strengthen early intervention measures to identify those at risk and prevent them from becoming homeless; and the provision of long-term housing for the homeless.

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly focused the Government's attention concerning the accommodation of homeless and rough sleepers. There were indications that numbers of rough sleepers had [increased](#), including among international students. As stay-at-home public health directions were introduced in March 2020, homeless people and rough sleepers were moved into hotel accommodation. Around 2,000 people, including 220 children and 500 women, as well as 1100 single households, were accommodated. See also the 'COVID-19' chapter for more detail.

On 28 July 2020 funding for the From Homelessness to a Home (H2H) program was [introduced](#) for those moving out of emergency hotel accommodation into housing as well as for the extension of the hotel accommodation scheme until April 2021. This funding included money for leases of properties in the private rental market, new social housing units—promised in the 2018 state election—becoming available and private rental assistance support. Programs that included mental health, drug and alcohol and family violence support provided in hotel emergency accommodation would also continue for those moving into long-term housing.

The 2022–23 state budget [flagged cuts](#) to the H2H program, which had been extended into 2022. However, funding was [reinstated](#) for head-leases and support services and extended for existing participants into 2022–23. In [June 2022](#) it was reported that there were 13 households remaining in hotels and waiting to move into long-term housing under the program.

The Greens' Dr Samantha Ratnam introduced a Private Member's Bill in the Legislative Council in February 2022 to establish the right to adequate housing within the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. The [Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment \(Ending Homelessness\) Bill 2022](#) sought to introduce a definition of 'adequate housing' under the charter based on guidance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Bill also proposed to set a target for ending homelessness in Victoria by 2030—'zero by 2030'—within the *Housing Act 1983*, requiring planning and reporting on progress to meet the target. In her [second-reading speech](#) on 9 March 2022, Dr Ratnam stated that 'ongoing homelessness is one of the biggest failures of our state'. The Bill lapsed on the expiration of the Parliament.

Social housing

In November 2020 the Government [announced](#) its Big Housing Build, a \$5.3 billion social housing construction project. Together with the existing Public Housing Renewal Program—which had attracted [criticism](#) in the previous term—and the Social Housing Growth Fund, the Big Housing Build anticipated the construction of more than 15,800 new homes over the following four years. Accompanying the investment commitment was the establishment of Homes Victoria—a new government agency to manage the delivery of public housing (see discussion of the [Residential Tenancies, Housing and Social Services Regulation Amendment \(Administration and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#) below).

In tandem with the construction commitment, an independent review of [social housing regulation](#) was also commissioned by the Government to consider the need to modify regulation governing social and affordable housing. The review panel, chaired by Professor David Hayward, with Dr David Cousins and Dr Heather Holst, was scheduled to commence in December 2020, develop an interim report for consultation by June 2021 and deliver its final report by December 2021. The [terms of reference](#) issued in November 2020 stated that consideration should be given to modifying regulation to best support the long-term wellbeing of tenants, emphasising that the focus should be on long-term housing.

The problems identified for the review to consider included issues of inequities for tenants and complexities encountered by tenants, advocates and dispute resolution bodies. Differing regulatory and reporting requirements had led to inconsistency in transparency and accountability between public and community housing, and the panel would consider if the solution should be a single regulator to oversee both sectors. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic event, timelines were amended, and the Social Housing Regulation Review

panel presented an extensive list of proposals and priorities, with accompanying papers, in its [interim report](#) of December 2021. The papers dealt with the content, design and implementation of the regulatory arrangements for social, affordable and public housing. The panel acknowledged that the proposals for reform were significant when considering a hybrid system and embedding the infrastructure for tenant consultation and codesign. The panel delivered its final report to the Minister for Housing on 31 May 2022, which at the time of publication had not been released.

The July 2022 Victorian Ombudsman [report](#) on complaints handling in the social housing sector also recommended a ‘Social Housing Ombudsman’ within the office of the Victorian Ombudsman, as the Ombudsman ‘already has known jurisdiction over public housing’.

The *Residential Tenancies, Housing and Social Services Regulation Amendment (Administration and Other Matters) Act 2022*, which was enacted in September 2022, established the legislative framework for Homes Victoria and the Homes Victoria Advisory Board. Homes Victoria was enabled to bring a more commercial way of operating in the housing system, akin to the property investment and financing market.

The legislation also addressed the pressing issue of affordable housing, providing a legislative framework for the Victorian Affordable Housing Program, with the [Affordable Housing Rental Scheme](#) being the first in the program. The scheme is part of the Big Housing Build, offering government-owned rental properties for eligible low-income to middle-income earners to rent for a period of at least three years.

At the committee stage of the Bill, the Legislative Council also considered [amendments](#) by the Greens’ Dr Samantha Ratnam to amend the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* to provide for a limit to rent increases in accordance with the wage price index for Victoria. The amendments, however, failed to be incorporated and the Bill passed without amendment.

Social Services Regulator

The [Social Services Regulation Bill 2021](#) was introduced in August 2021 to overhaul the regulation of the social services sector in recognition of the problems and risks posed by fragmented schemes, many of which were not subject to a legislated regulatory framework. The regulatory regime administered by the Human Services Regulator, as a delegate of the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, did not have the necessary powers to respond to non-compliance by service providers and was seen to hamper early preventative intervention. These shortcomings were evident during the COVID-19 pandemic where there were insufficient regulatory powers to suspend the operation of certain supported residential facilities that posed unacceptable risks to residents. The Bill sought to establish the Social Services Regulator to replace the Human Services Regulator as a separate statutory body, establish mandatory registration of service providers and introduce the Social Services Standards. In-scope services such as family violence and homelessness services would be required to comply with the standards.

The Bill was passed in September 2021, and a taskforce was formed in April 2022 to guide the implementation of the new regulatory framework. The commencement of the new scheme—due on 31 December 2023—was delayed until 1 July 2024 with the passing of the [Residential Tenancies, Housing and Social Services Regulation Amendment \(Administration and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#).

Public housing and the COVID-19 state of emergency

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic brought public housing in Victoria into focus. The handling of an outbreak of COVID-19 in nine public housing towers in North Melbourne and Flemington in July 2020 in particular attracted widespread media coverage and a critical [report](#) from the Victorian Ombudsman. See the ‘COVID-19’ chapter for more detail.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation website](#).

2019

- [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment \(Consent\) Act 2019](#)
- [Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Children Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Children's Services Amendment Act 2019 \(National Quality Framework\)](#)
- [Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Racial and Religious Tolerance Amendment Bill 2019 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)

2020

- [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Change or Suppression \(Conversion\) Practices Prohibition Act 2021](#)
- [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) Act 2020](#)
- [Children Youth and Families \(Out of Home Care Age\) Bill 2020 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)
- [Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Amendment Bill 2020 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)

2021

- [Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Equal Opportunity \(Religious Exceptions\) Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Social Services Regulation Act 2021](#)
- [Children, Youth and Families Amendment \(Child Protection\) Bill 2021 \(lapsed\)](#)
- [Children, Youth and Families \(Raise the Age\) Amendment Bill 2021 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)

2022

- [Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Residential Tenancies, Housing and Social Services Regulation Amendment \(Administration and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Summary Offences Amendment \(Nazi Symbol Prohibition\) Act 2022](#)
- [Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Act 2022](#)
- [Children and Health Legislation Amendment \(Statement of Recognition and Other Matters\) Bill 2022 \(lapsed\)](#)

- [Human Rights and Housing Amendment \(Ending Homelessness\) Bill 2022 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)
- [Multicultural Victoria Amendment \(Independence\) Bill 2022 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(defeated\)](#)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [Change or Suppression \(Conversion\) Practices Prohibition Bill 2020](#), Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2021)
- [Intersectional complexities of coercive control](#), Research paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)
- [What is coercive control?](#), Research paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [Helping Victorians create families with assisted reproductive treatment: interim report \('Gorton Review'\)](#), Independent Review of Assisted Reproductive Treatment (2018)
- [Investigation into complaints about assaults of five children living in child protection residential care units](#), Victorian Ombudsman (2020)
- [Investigation into the detention and treatment of public housing residents arising from a COVID-19 'hard lockdown' in July 2020](#), Victorian Ombudsman (2020)
- [Victoria's homelessness response](#), Victorian Auditor-General (2020)
- [Social Housing Regulation Review: interim report](#), Independent Review Panel (2021)
- [Interim report](#), Yoorrook Justice Commission (2022)
- [Investigation into complaint handling in the Victorian social housing sector](#), Victorian Ombudsman (2022)
- [Kinship care](#), Victorian Auditor-General (2022)
- [Quality of child protection data](#), Victorian Auditor-General (2022)
- [Suicide among LGBTIQ+ people](#), Coroners Court of Victoria (2022)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into early childhood engagement of CALD communities](#), Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into anti-vilification protections](#), Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Inquiry into children affected by parental incarceration](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds](#), Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into Victoria's criminal justice system](#), Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Policies

- [Victoria's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#), Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government (2018)
- [Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care](#), Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Victorian Government (2020)
- [Home Stretch program](#) [Online resource], Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Victorian Government (2022)
- [Pride in our Future: Victoria's LGBTIQ+ Strategy 2022–23](#), Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Victorian Government (2022)

Industry, innovation and employment

Industry, innovation and employment

An overview of parliamentary events and developments relating to industry, innovation and employment during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on the relevant portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Industrial relations and labour

In January 2019, near the beginning of the 59th Parliament, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Victoria was 4.6 per cent, according to the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#).

In April 2022 Australia's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate decreased to 3.9 per cent, the lowest it had been since 1974. In June 2022 the Victorian unemployment rate dropped to 3.2 per cent and the national rate fell to 3.5 per cent. See also the 'COVID-19' section for more detail.

Wage theft

In March 2020 the Victorian Government introduced the [Wage Theft Bill 2020](#) after first indicating its intent to criminalise wage theft in May 2018. The Bill's introduction into Parliament followed a [consultation paper](#) released in February 2020, which outlined the scope, offences and enforcement of the new legislation.

The Bill, which was passed by Parliament in June 2020, established the Wage Inspectorate Victoria, which aims to inform, promote and enforce wage theft laws. The Wage Inspectorate also has the capacity to bring criminal proceedings in relation to employee entitlement breaches. See the [Library publication](#) on the Wage Theft Bill for more detail.

Casual sick leave

In March 2022 the Government began trialling a two-year [sick leave scheme](#) for casual workers, who are generally not entitled to it through their employer. Under the first tranche of the scheme, estimated to have cost around \$245 million, employees in sectors with highly casualised workforces would be eligible to claim up to five days of sick leave per year. Casual workers from the hospitality, retail, cleaning and aged-care sectors were among those eligible. Following the two-year period, the scheme could be funded through a levy applied to businesses. As of late July 2022, more than 30,000 people had signed up to the program.

Workplace manslaughter

Amendments made to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* in 2019 through the [Workplace Safety Legislation Amendment \(Workplace Manslaughter and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#) saw the criminalisation of workplace manslaughter the following year, which was an election promise from Labor. Employers who are found to negligently cause a workplace death will face maximum fines of \$16.5 million and individuals will face a maximum jail sentence of 20 years.

Gender equality

In 2019 the Government introduced the [Gender Equality Bill 2019](#), which passed the following year as the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. The legislation required Victorian public sector agencies, local councils and universities (also known as 'defined entities') to promote and take positive action towards gender equality.

A cornerstone of the legislation is a requirement for defined entities to submit a gender equality action plan (GEAP) every four years for approval. This includes a workplace gender audit, which involves collecting workforce and employee experience data on areas including gender pay equity, gender composition at all workforce levels, workplace sexual harassment and flexible working arrangements.

The Act also established the [Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector](#) to oversee and promote the objectives of the legislation, provide advice and resolve disputes where necessary. Dr Niki Vincent was subsequently appointed as the inaugural Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner.

Alcohol and gambling

Crown Melbourne

In February 2021 the Victorian Government [announced](#) a royal commission into Crown Melbourne's suitability to hold a casino licence. The [Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence](#) was established following an [inquiry](#) by the NSW Independent Liquor and Gaming Authority around similar concerns.

The [report](#), handed down in October 2021, detailed how Crown Melbourne was not suited to holding the casino licence. In response, the Government passed the [Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2021](#) in line with the inquiry's recommendations, banning junkets and increasing the maximum penalty from \$1 million to \$100 million.

The Government also established the Special Manager role, initially held by Stephen O'Bryan QC, to oversee Crown for the next two years. The Special Manager would then deliver a recommendation on whether Crown's casino licence should be revoked. The Government made the decision not to cancel Crown's licence outright, in line with the inquiry's findings, as it could jeopardise up to 12,000 jobs.

The legislation also replaced the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation with the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC). The liquor regulatory functions of the VGCCC were spun out into its own entity, the Victorian Liquor Commission.

Consumer protection

Tenants' rights

The Victorian Government made amendments to renting laws which allowed for new protections for tenants. The [Consumer Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#) amended the *Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2018* to make the following provisions:

- Landlords will be unable to refuse pets unless through an order from the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.
- Tenants will be allowed to make minor changes to the property such as nailing hooks into the wall or installing anchors for furniture.
- Tenants can apply to have their rental bond released without written consent from the landlord, who will have 14 days to raise a dispute.
- Tenants will be able to terminate their rental agreement in cases of family violence.
- Increases to rent prices will be capped at once a year.

Land sales

The [Sale of Land Amendment Act 2019](#) made changes to 'sunset clauses' in off-the-plan property contracts, which were being used by developers to cancel agreements with homebuyers and re-sell properties for a higher price. These restrictions were backdated to 23 August 2018, the date the legislation was first announced.

The Act also prohibited public land auctions before 1 pm on Anzac Day, strengthened disclosure requirements for vendors about properties, added protections for buyers who purchase land as part of a land banking scheme and prohibited rent-to-buy schemes (with some exemptions).

Sharing economy

Multi Purpose Taxi Program inquiry

In February 2021 the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee was instructed to hold an [inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program](#), a scheme administered by Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria that subsidises commercial passenger vehicle (taxi) fares for Victorians with a disability, including accessibility or mobility needs. Hearings began in October 2021.

The committee found that data from Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria and other relevant parties was lacking, making it difficult to completely understand how well the program was performing. Also discussed

was Uber's involvement as a participant in the Multi Purpose Taxi Program, which the committee found 'increased consumer choice and service availability for many Multi Purpose Taxi Program members'. Overall the committee found the program's viability was difficult to assess due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unknown long-term impact of increased competition on service supply.

In its report tabled in April 2022, the committee made 20 recommendations, a number of which related to collecting and managing data that could be used to improve the program's services. At the time of publication it was still awaiting the Government's response.

Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 inquiry

In November 2019 the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee completed its [inquiry into the reforms of the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017](#).

The Act abolished the former taxi and hire car licensing framework, broadened regulatory coverage to encompass ridesharing providers such as Uber, and introduced a \$1 levy per trip paid by the business. Funds raised from the levy would go toward transition and hardship payments assisting former licence holders who were experiencing significant financial difficulty resulting from the reforms.

Further reforms later in 2017 included the introduction of a vehicle registration system to replace taxis and hire cars with a single category: commercial passenger vehicle. Flexible fares were also introduced to allow providers of booked services to set their own fares for trips.

In the inquiry report, the committee detailed criticisms from stakeholders around the fairness of the regulatory reforms. There were several testimonies from taxi licence holders who experienced 'significant financial, emotional and psychological difficulties' as a result of the reforms. Others believed the financial compensation and tax-related consequences given to licence holders through the transition assistance payments scheme and the Fairness Fund were insufficient.

The committee made 13 recommendations, including counselling and financial advice for affected stakeholders, further clarification around driver standards and pricing, and reintroduction of the offence of touting.

Innovation

Medical Technology

A series of medical technology announcements were made during the 59th Parliament.

Along with the University of Melbourne, the Doherty Institute and the Burnet Institute, the Victorian Government announced funding for the [Australian Institute for Infectious Disease](#) in 2020, which is to be established in Parkville. Construction of the facility is expected to be completed in 2025.

Around the same time, Seqirus, a subsidiary of biopharmaceutical company CSL, announced plans to invest \$800 million into a new cell-based vaccine facility near Tullamarine. The facility will produce vaccines for use in both influenza pandemics and seasonal vaccination programs. It is expected to be operational by 2026.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victorian Government announced plans in May 2021 to begin manufacturing mRNA vaccines in the state. The entity [mRNA Victoria](#) was subsequently established, with Michael Kapel appointed the inaugural CEO. Following the initial announcement, the state government formed [an agreement](#) with the Australian Government and Moderna, confirming the pharmaceutical company's new manufacturing and finishing facilities and Australian research centre will be based in Victoria.

In April 2022 the Victorian Government announced planning approval for the [Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery](#), a hospital-based biomedical engineering research centre. Nine medical organisations and universities joined as initial partners. The new facility is expected to open in 2024.

Cremorne Digital Hub

In 2020 the Victorian Government first announced its intent to develop the suburb of Cremorne as a ‘[centre for research and development in advanced technology sectors like cyber security and artificial intelligence](#)’. The [Cremorne Place Implementation Plan](#) outlined how the Government would develop Cremorne into an innovation precinct. The 2020–21 state budget allocated \$12 million for the hub’s development.

In August 2022 Artesian Venture Partners, the University of Melbourne, RMIT University, Deakin University and La Trobe University were announced as foundation members. The five organisations proposed to invest \$40.9 million in-kind and \$6.25 million in cash over the next decade. Cremorne is already the home of large technology companies including SEEK, MYOB, Tesla, REA Group, Carsales and the Walt Disney Company.

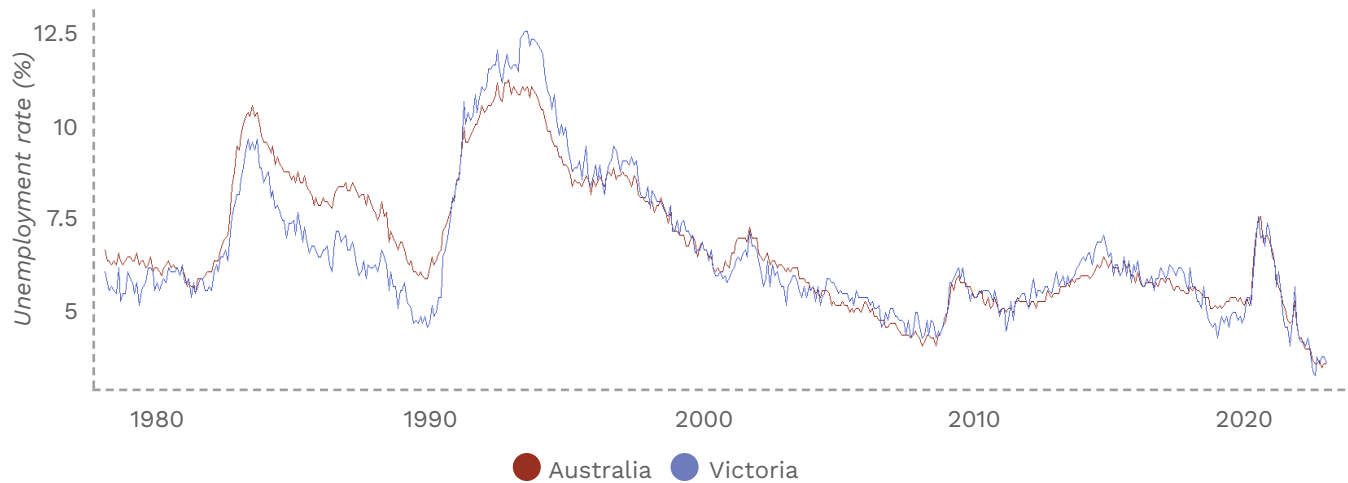
Service Victoria and digital tokens

The [Service Victorian Amendment Act 2022](#) made several amendments to the operation of [Service Victoria](#), the Government’s digital service platform for members of the public. Notably, the Act allowed for the delivery or issuing of ‘digital tokens’, the digital version of an official information document such as a working with children check. The Act also expanded the range of functions and services that Service Victoria can perform and permitted Service Victoria to establish and maintain databases on behalf of a government department or agency.

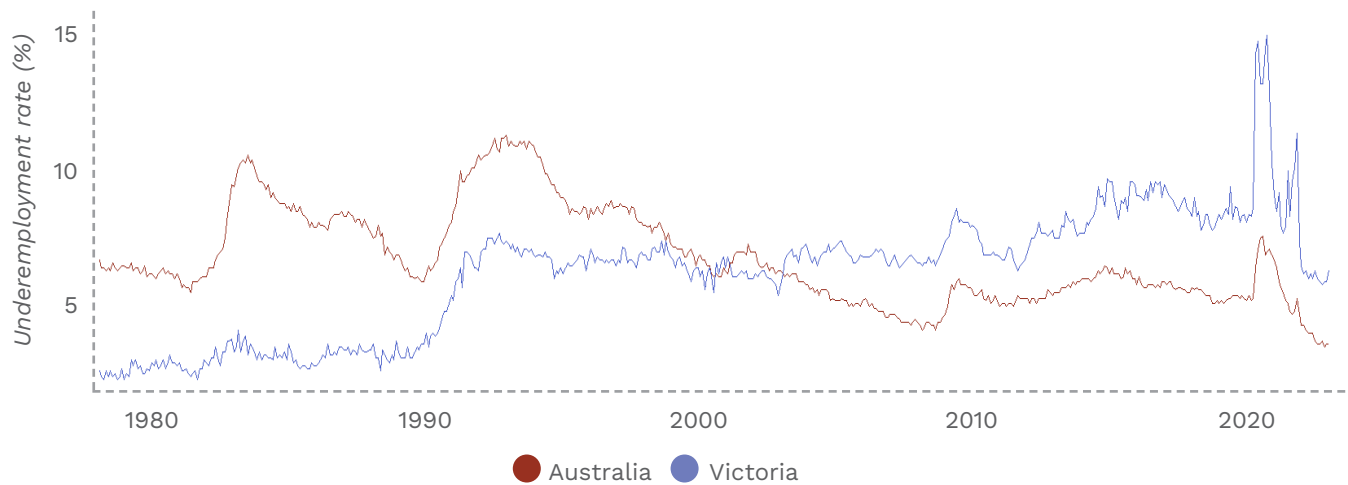
Other developments

- A register of professional engineers was established under the [Professional Engineers Registration Act 2019](#).
- Following a review of the [Child Employment Act 2003](#), the [Child Employment Amendment Act 2022](#) streamlined the child employment licensing system and provided additional clarity around people who engage children aged under 15 in Victoria.
- In 2021 the Victorian Government raised the wagering and betting tax rate from eight per cent to ten per cent in line with New South Wales. This was done through the [Gambling Regulation Amendment \(Wagering and Betting Tax\) Act 2021](#).
- In response to the pandemic, the Victorian Government also waived liquor licence fees for 2020 and 2021, and applications for temporary limited licences were expedited to allow venues to provide liquor as a takeaway option.

Unemployment rate time series



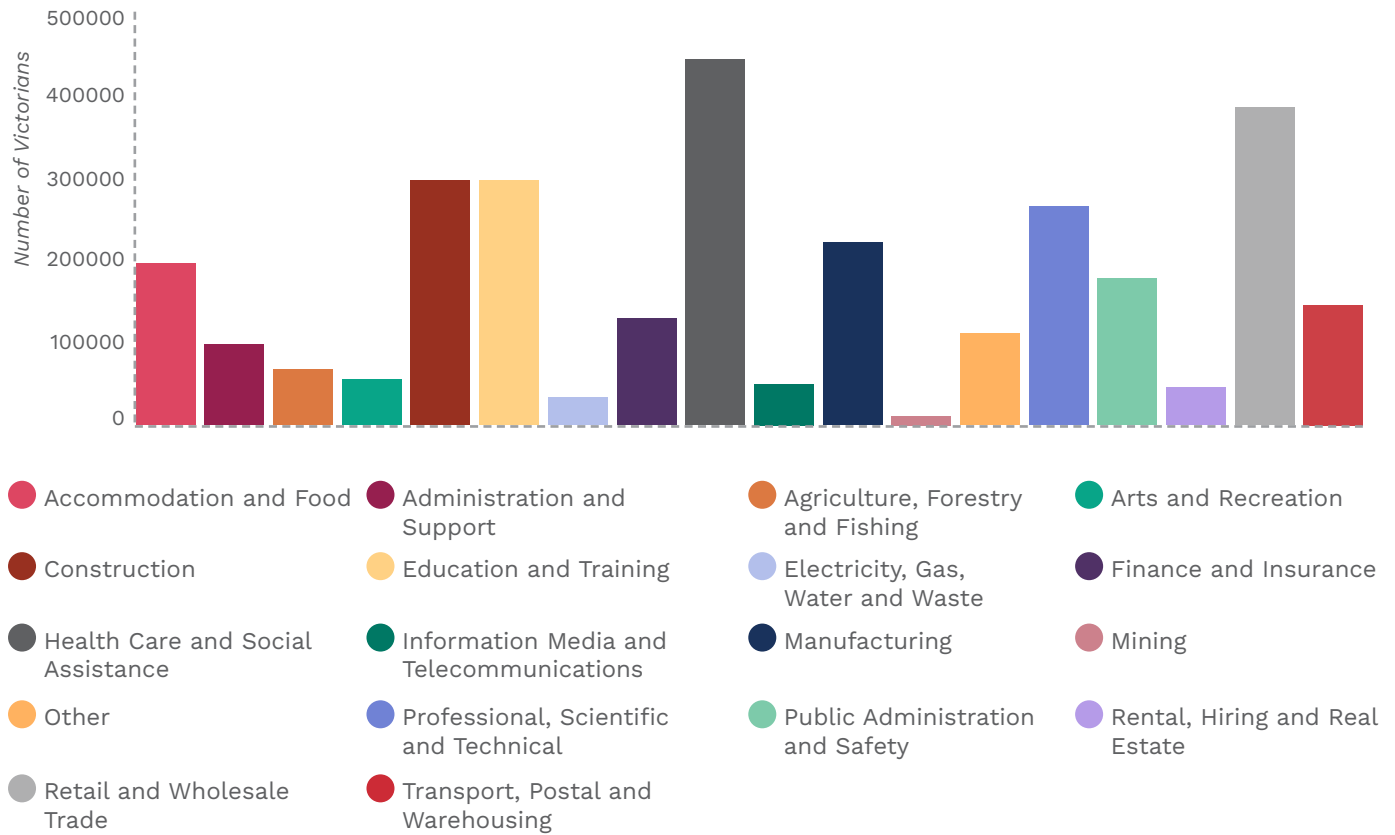
Underemployment rate time series



Source: ABS

*To view the employment interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Employment by Industry in Victoria



Source: ABS

*To view the employment interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation website](#).

2019

- [Consumer Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Fair Work \(Commonwealth Powers\) Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Professional Engineers Registration Act 2019](#)
- [Public Holidays Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Sale of Land Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Workplace Safety Legislation Amendment \(Workplace Manslaughter and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#)
- [Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Amendment Bill 2019 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)

2020

- [Gender Equality Act 2020](#)
- [Wage Theft Act 2020](#)

2021

- [Casino and Gambling Legislation Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme Act 2021](#)
- [Consumer and Other Acts Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2021](#)
- [Gambling Regulation Amendment \(Wagering and Betting Tax\) Act 2021](#)
- [Industrial Relations Legislation Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Liquor Control Reform Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Mutual Recognition \(Victoria\) Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Occupational Health and Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Owners Corporations and Other Acts Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment \(Arbitration\) Act 2021](#)
- [Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment \(Provisional Payments\) Act 2021](#)

2022

- [Casino and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Casino Legislation Amendment \(Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Child Employment Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)

- [Workplace Safety Legislation and Other Matters Amendment Act 2022](#)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [Possible impossibles: the past, present and future of science in Victoria](#), Research note, Victorian Parliamentary & Information Service (2020)
- [The promise of social procurement](#), Fellowship paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Wage Theft Bill 2020](#), Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [COVID and Job Seeker recipients by electorate, 2020–2021](#), Dashboard, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)
- [Quantum technology and Victoria](#), Research note, Victorian Parliamentary Library & information Service (2022)
- [Space technology in Australia](#), Research note, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [Annual report 2019](#), Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2019)
- [Annual report 2020](#), Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2020)
- [Discussion paper for a renewed Victorian social enterprise strategy](#), Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2020)
- [Report of the inquiry into the Victorian on-demand workforce](#), Industrial Relations Victoria (2020)
- [Review of the point of consumption tax on wagering and betting](#), Department of Treasury and Finance (2020)
- [Yuma Yirramboi: Victorian Aboriginal employment and economic strategy](#), Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2020)
- [A future-ready Victoria: Victorian Government digital strategy 2021–2026](#), Victorian Government (2021)
- [Annual report 2020–2021](#), Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)

- *Equal pay matters: achieving gender pay equality in small-to-medium enterprises*, Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission (2021)
- *Secure work pilot scheme: consultation paper*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)
- *Secure work pilot scheme public consultation summary report*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)
- *Victorian social enterprise strategy 2021–2025: creating greater opportunity, inclusion and impact*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- *Inquiry into the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 reforms*, Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- *Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers*, Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- *Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors*, Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- *Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP)*, Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Integrity and oversight

Integrity and oversight

An overview of developments relating to integrity and oversight during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on the relevant portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC)

The Hon. Robert Redlich AM KC was appointed as the IBAC Commissioner for a five-year term in 2018. On 28 October 2022 IBAC Deputy Commissioner Stephen Farrow was [appointed as the interim commissioner](#) commencing 17 December, and he will oversee the agency through the caretaker period while a recruitment process is carried out.

Operation Esperance

IBAC held public hearings for [Operation Esperance](#) in 2020 and 2021 following allegations of 'serious corrupt conduct during the tendering, procurement and subsequent management of major contracts within V/Line and Metro'. Operation Esperance is an ongoing investigation. The third round of hearings adjourned in July 2021.

Operation Sandon

In 2019 and 2020 IBAC held public hearings for [Operation Sandon](#), an investigation into allegations of corrupt conduct involving councillors and property developers in the City of Casey. Operation Sandon is an ongoing investigation. Public hearings concluded in December 2020.

Operation Watts

In 2022 IBAC, in partnership with the Victorian Ombudsman, delivered its findings of [Operation Watts](#), an investigation into 'allegations of misuse of electorate offices, ministerial office staff and resources for branch stacking and other party-related activities'.

Operation Watts commenced in 2020 as an own-motion investigation under the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011* (the IBAC Act). After subsequent referrals from the Attorney-General to IBAC, and from the Legislative Council to the Ombudsman, IBAC and the Ombudsman decided to conduct a coordinated investigation.

In its conclusions, the investigation found that:

- staff were '[extensively] misused' for factional or party-specific purposes during business hours;
- though unethical, the conduct was 'not sufficiently clearly captured by any existing statutory provision or the common law offence of misconduct in public office'; and
- two former ministers had breached elements of the *Ministerial Code of Conduct* and the *Members of Parliament Code of Conduct*.

The investigation also made a series of recommendations, including:

- the establishment of a parliamentary ethics committee to monitor the *Members of Parliament Code of Conduct*, as well as a parliamentary integrity commissioner to investigate complaints about non-criminal breaches of the code;
- the prohibition of MPs employing close family members in their electorate office; and
- the creation of an offence for MPs or ministers who direct or allow a person to undertake party-specific activities while the person is employed to help the MP or minister with public duties.

Report into corruption risks associated with donations and lobbying

In October 2022 IBAC released a [special report pointing out several 'areas of risk' in Victoria's political system](#), including the state's 'very limited regulation' of lobbying compared to New South Wales and Queensland. IBAC made four overarching recommendations in its report:

- a review of the existing regulations for political donations to improve transparency and accountability
- the Department of Premier and Cabinet and Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions develop best practice models for monitoring and enforcing donation laws at the state and local levels of government
- legislation be introduced to regulate lobbying at the state and local levels of government in a way that increases transparency and accountability
- the Department of Premier and Cabinet recommend a preferred model for a new lobbying regulator.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO)

The Auditor-General is Andrew Greaves, who was appointed for a seven-year term in 2016. Over the course of the 59th Parliament, VAGO released 103 financial and performance audits covering state and local government services. The Auditor-General tables an [annual plan](#) which details VAGO's proposed work program for the next financial year. Below are two of the inquiries VAGO reported on, with more detail provided on the [VAGO website](#).

Audit into quality of major transport infrastructure project business cases

In September 2022 VAGO tabled its [investigation of four transport infrastructure business cases](#) against the Department of Treasury and Finance's [Investment Lifecycle and High Value High Risk Guidelines](#). These projects were the Suburban Rail Loop, Melbourne Airport Rail, the Barwon Heads Road Upgrade and the Mickleham Road Upgrade.

The audit found that all projects, except the Mickleham Road Upgrade, 'did not support informed investment decisions' and that the three business cases in question lacked sufficient analysis of alternative project options.

Audit into accessibility of tram services

VAGO tabled its audit into the accessibility of Melbourne's tram network in 2020. In accordance with the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#), all tram stops need to be compliant with the [Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 \(Cth\)](#) by the end of 2022. Additionally, all trams need to be compliant with the standards by 2032.

The [audit](#) found only 15 per cent of tram services 'delivered a low-floor tram at a level-access stop' in 2018–19 and that the Department of Transport cannot comply with the 2022 legislated target. This could put the department at risk of discrimination complaints and/or financial risk through the Australian Human Rights Commission or the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. VAGO noted the department is also at risk of not meeting the 2032 compliance requirement.

Victorian Ombudsman

The Victorian Ombudsman is Deborah Glass OBE, who was appointed for a ten-year term in 2014. The Ombudsman tabled 35 reports during the 59th Parliament. The Ombudsman [reports](#) every two years on progress made by authorities in implementing the Ombudsman's recommendations. In her most recent report, published on 28 September 2022, she noted a number of 'key impacts' under the themes of ensuring fairness, enhancing integrity and accountability, supporting improvement and innovation and protecting human rights. These include developments in how local councils respond to homeowners who have fallen into debt, how the City of Melbourne handles parking fines and the way the child protection residential care system protects children. For more detail on COVID-19-related investigations, see the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Victorian Inspectorate

The Victorian Inspectorate (VI) is the key oversight body for IBAC, the Ombudsman, VAGO and other integrity bodies. The Inspector is Eamonn Moran PSM KC, who was appointed for a five-year term in January 2018.

Investigation into IBAC's handling of a family violence matter by a police officer

The [Victorian Inspectorate investigated how IBAC handled two complaints](#) against Victoria Police by a woman known only as 'Emma', who was being abused by her partner, a policeman. Emma alleged a member of Victorian Police leaked her plan to leave the relationship to the perpetrator's friends and colleagues. IBAC referred this complaint to Victoria Police, which allocated the responsibility to a police member working in the same division as the members who were being investigated. After IBAC requested a re-investigation of the complaint, Victoria Police appointed a different investigator, who also worked in the same division as those under investigation.

Emma registered a second complaint with IBAC almost two years after the first, concerning inappropriate allocation of the Professional Standards Command investigation to a general duties member and failure to exhibit an expected duty of care towards her and her children. Like the first complaint, IBAC referred it to Victoria Police as the more appropriate body to deal with it.

Following the Inspectorate's investigation, it made four recommendations to IBAC, including that it 'amend its formal processes to provide for better recording and documentation of its consideration of whether to refer a matter to an external body or person'.

Legislative Changes

VAGO

In December 2018 the Victorian Government introduced the [Audit Amendment Bill 2018](#). According to the Attorney-General, the Bill sought to strengthen and clarify VAGO's duties, powers and functions. The Bill had been reintroduced after an earlier Bill had lapsed at the expiration of the previous Parliament, and it was passed in May 2019.

IBAC, VI and Ombudsman

In December 2018 the Attorney-General introduced the [Integrity and Accountability Legislation Amendment \(Public Interest Disclosures, Oversight and Independence\) Bill 2018](#). The Bill proposed amendments to legislation governing several integrity bodies and was passed in March 2019.

IBAC was already only allowed to hold public examinations under certain exceptional circumstances. The Bill would also require IBAC to consider on reasonable grounds that the conduct being investigated is serious or systemic corrupt conduct, or serious or systemic police personnel misconduct. IBAC would also be required to provide the Victorian Inspectorate with reasons for holding a public examination ten business days in advance, rather than seven days.

The Bill also sought to give IBAC the power to override all public officers' statutory secrecy obligations and annul the Crown's privileges, strengthening its ability to collect information that otherwise may be unavailable to access.

Legislation governing the Victorian Inspectorate was amended to require that complaints be made in writing. The bodies the Inspectorate oversees were also required to provide transcripts and recordings of any coercive examinations and a written report three days after being issued with a notice to produce or attend.

The Bill clarified the role of the Ombudsman, allowed it greater flexibility to refer complaints and gave it new functions to resolve complaints, including an alternative dispute resolution capability. It also allowed people aged ten to 16 to voluntarily provide information to the Ombudsman.

Oversight committees

The IBAC Committee and the Accountability and Oversight Committee were merged under the Bill, and the Integrity and Oversight Committee was established in their place. The new committee had the same functions of the previous two committees, with no loss of coverage.

Other developments

- The Privileges Committees of both houses carried out an [inquiry into the appointment of a Parliamentary Integrity Adviser](#), the first of its kind in Victoria. Former Clerk of the Legislative Assembly Ray Purdey was subsequently appointed to the role, with his tenure lasting until four months after the 2022 state election.
- In October 2022 the Integrity and Oversight Committee released its [report](#) into the performance of integrity agencies, focusing on witness welfare. The committee made multiple recommendations regarding IBAC, the Ombudsman and the Inspectorate with the aims of improving the welfare of witnesses called to hearings.
- Also in October 2022 VAGO, IBAC and the Ombudsman released [a joint report examining how the independent agencies are currently funded through the state budget](#). The report observed how the Government is involved in determining funding for the agencies, stating that there are ‘no formal mechanisms for the three independent officers to question or challenge funding decisions’. The agencies recommended the establishment of an independent tribunal, similar to the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal, to hold responsibility for funding decisions concerning these agencies and to recommend agency budgets to the Parliament.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation](#) website.

- [Audit Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Integrity and Accountability Legislation Amendment \(Public Interest Disclosures, Oversight and Independence\) Act 2019](#)
- [Public Administration Amendment Bill 2019](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)
- [Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment \(Facilitating Timely Reporting\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)
- [Anti-corruption and Higher Parliamentary Standards \(Strengthening Integrity\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment \(Restoration of Powers\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- View all the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's reports [here](#).
- View all the Victorian Auditor-General's Office's reports [here](#).
- View all the Victorian Inspectorate's reports [here](#).
- View all the Victorian Ombudsman's reports [here](#).

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Report on the appointment of a person to conduct the financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office](#), Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Performance of Victorian integrity agencies, 2017/18–2018/19](#), Integrity and Oversight Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Performance of Victorian integrity agencies, 2019/20](#), Integrity and Oversight Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- [Report on the appointment of a person to conduct the independent performance audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate](#), Integrity and Oversight Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)

- [Inquiry into the education and prevention functions of Victoria's integrity agencies](#), Integrity and Oversight Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into the performance of Victorian integrity agencies 2020/21: focus on witness welfare](#), Integrity and Oversight Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Planning and environment

Planning and environment

An overview of developments within the planning, environment, local government, and rural and regional portfolios during the 59th Parliament of Victoria, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on the relevant portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Planning

Combustible cladding

Cladding Safety Victoria (CSV) was established as a business unit within the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) in 2019 to address ongoing issues with combustible aluminium composite building cladding. The [Building Amendment \(Cladding Rectification\) Act 2019](#), assented in November 2019, enabled the Government to pursue builders through legal action on behalf of the owners of affected apartments and introduced a change to the permit building levy to help fund the works. CSV was given oversight of a \$600 million, five-year rectification package, in line with recommendations of the [final report of the Victorian Cladding Taskforce](#).

Early in 2020 the Government extended professional indemnity insurance exemptions for combustible cladding work within the construction industry, which helped to address a growing insurance issue. The [Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020](#) established CSV as the responsible authority for delivering the [Cladding Rectification Program](#), and increased the time limit to 12 years (later extended to 15) for building owners to make compensation claims over the use of non-compliant cladding. In February 2021 the Minister for Planning prohibited the use of flammable aluminium composite panels and rendered expanded polystyrene as external wall cladding on all future multi-storey developments. The VBA continued its Statewide Cladding Audit Intensive Inspection Initiative, referring priority buildings to CSV for rectification and liaising with councils and surveyors.

Apartment design

The Government announced new planning rules to improve the external amenity of apartments in February 2021. The changes to the [Better Apartments Design Standards](#) followed a 2019 consultation that reviewed green space in common areas, building façades, wind impacts and the integration of buildings with the street. Updated [Apartment Design Guidelines for Victoria](#) were released in 2021, along with new resources for industry.

In August 2021 the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee began an inquiry into apartment design standards, with a focus on improving liveability and understanding global context. The committee [reported](#) in August 2022. Among its 34 recommendations, the committee said that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning should provide a minimum size for apartments in its next review of the design standards. The committee also recommended that the definition of accessibility be broadened, that the concept of 'adequate daylight' be defined, that electric vehicle infrastructure be considered and that design innovation be promoted.

Planning reforms

The Building Ministers Forum [reached agreement](#) to raise building standards across Australia at their Sydney meeting in July 2019. The agreement meant the expansion of the Australian Building Codes Board, with better resourcing and engagement with industry, in order to guide implementation of the recommendations of the 2018 (Shergold Weir) [Building Confidence](#) report.

The [Building and Environment Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#) made several amendments to improve the regulatory regime in the Victorian building and construction industry. The changes included modernising the Architects Registration Board of Victoria, improving building industry engagement and advice to the minister, winding up the Building Practitioners Board and strengthening financial probity requirements for building practitioners.

The Government introduced a new registration and licensing scheme for tradespeople in Victoria with the [Building Amendment \(Registration and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#). Among other changes, the legislation introduced a new streamlined pathway to registration for subcontractors and clarified the role of trade contractors.

A number of [planning reforms](#) are underway. A [Regional Planning Hub](#) was launched in July 2021 as a new program for rural and regional councils, providing strategic planning support and resources to help with peak workloads and planning capacity. ‘Better Planning Approvals’ began as a pilot with ten councils in August 2021, with the aim being to clarify and modernise the planning approvals process. Councils are further supported by the [Streamlining for Growth Program](#), which provides grant funding and aims to facilitate faster, permit-ready jobs and housing across Victoria. An updated digital version of [Planning Schemes Online](#) has been released, with improved search and navigation options.

Frameworks

Work continued on [Melbourne’s Future Planning Framework](#), with the identification of six areas requiring land use framework plans to guide strategic land use and infrastructure development for the next 30 years. Currently in stage six of the consultation process, the finalised plans will support the application of [Plan Melbourne 2017–2050](#) at regional and local levels.

The Legislative Council’s Environment and Planning Committee tabled an [interim report](#) in August 2022 on its inquiry into the protections within the Victorian planning framework. The wide-ranging terms of reference included housing costs, environmental sustainability, the fairness of planning decisions, heritage protections and residential zones. The committee acknowledged that there were numerous planning reviews, reforms and strategies that were either recently completed or in progress at the time of their inquiry. Due to time constraints, the committee did not hold hearings but based its report on submissions, with its sole recommendation being that an inquiry with the same terms of reference be undertaken at the start of the 60th Parliament, including a full schedule of public hearings.

Planning and building approvals process review

In March 2019 the Treasurer and the Minister for Planning asked the Red Tape Commissioner to complete a review of Victoria’s building and planning approval processes to streamline local and state government planning systems. A [discussion paper](#) was released for consultation in October 2019, setting out the approval chain difficulties that were contributing to delays and increased costs. A [final report](#) was submitted to the Victorian Government in November 2021, with 27 recommendations based around five areas: planning rules, processes, reporting, capabilities and building approvals.

Building system review

An independent Building Reform Expert Panel was [appointed](#) in December 2019 to make recommendations to the Government on ways to update the *Building Act 1993*. The aims of the review included addressing regulatory failures identified by the Victorian Cladding Taskforce and modernising the legislative and regulatory framework to address contemporary building design, construction and maintenance. The reforms will comprise three stages, to be delivered over two years from 2021. The [discussion paper](#) released for consultation by the panel in April 2021 outlined possible improvements to practitioner registration, building approvals, regulatory oversight and consumer protections.

The [Building, Planning and Heritage Legislation Amendment \(Administration and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#) was introduced into Parliament on 21 June 2022. The Bill was intended to address some of the reforms to Victoria’s building system considered by the expert panel, including the establishment of a Building Monitor and expansion of the registration framework for building practitioners. The Bill passed the Legislative Assembly but lapsed on the expiration of the Parliament.

Supply chain review

A review was undertaken by the Commissioner for Better Regulation in June 2021 to identify regulatory barriers in the supply chain for building materials, particularly structural timber. Spikes in demand, combined with pandemic-related supply chain disruptions, were having a major impact on the availability and cost of materials. After consultation with stakeholders, the [final report](#) made ten recommendations. While the report said that the impact of the disruptions would ease as market conditions corrected, its recommendations focused on alleviating supply issues in the short term, managing market conditions and further research.

In its response, the Victorian Government did not support the recommendation for the development of a [cost escalation clause](#) for domestic building contracts below \$500,000, saying it would increase uncertainty for

consumers. However, it did establish a Residential Construction Costs Working Group, with representatives from industry, unions and the Government.

Yarra River, Birrarung

The Minister for Planning announced permanent controls for the Yarra River in April 2021, replacing the interim measures of 2017. The controls ([Amendment VC197](#)) impose mandatory height limits for new developments along the river between Richmond and Warrandyte, and apply minimum setbacks of 30 metres to protect the river's landscape, environment and character.

A ten-year strategic plan for the Yarra River was released in February 2022—[Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo](#)—in partnership with Traditional Owners, the Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung. Developed over four years, the final plan incorporates the vision of the Yarra River Community Assembly, feedback from the 2020 consultation process and the recommendations of the independent panel appointed by the Minister for Water. The plan outlines 40 actions reflecting community values for the protection of the river, including the expansion of parklands, habitat restoration and revegetation works.

Digital Twin Victoria

The Victorian Government announced funding for [Digital Twin Victoria](#) (DTV) in July 2021, which was designed to transform planning by modelling complex construction and infrastructure projects. The CSIRO partnered with the Victorian Government to develop the online platform to host Victoria's digital twin, which is a 'data-based digital replica' of the state, using geospatial data and spatial innovation. The announcement followed an earlier pilot that successfully mapped and modelled the Fishermans Bend urban renewal project. Ararat Rural City Council launched its own collaboration with DTV in December 2021 to trial smart farming technologies, with a focus on weather and climate. The official launch of DTV was in August 2022, drawing together over 4,000 local, state and national datasets.

Heritage

In August 2019 the Government [denied](#) an application from the Halim Group for a fourth permit extension for the \$330 million redevelopment of the historic Hotel Windsor. The redevelopment proposed a 26-storey hotel at the rear of the heritage-listed building. Several planning scheme amendments had occurred since the original application, limiting building heights to 25 metres on Spring Street and 40 metres on Windsor Place.

Also in August 2019 Hardware and Guildford lanes were granted permanent heritage protection through a new planning scheme amendment ([C271](#) in the Melbourne Planning Scheme). The amendments complemented the work being done by the City of Melbourne's long-running [Hoddle Grid Heritage Review](#), which was approved in October 2022.

In 2020 the Heritage Council of Victoria [produced a report](#) on local cultural heritage recognition, protection and management arrangements. It followed a statewide survey of councils and the heritage community that commenced in 2018. While identifying many areas that worked well, the survey results found that there was room for improvement where councils did not prioritise local heritage and that increased guidance and support would help councils to understand and comply with their responsibilities.

The Government moved to provide greater protection for heritage-listed places with the [Planning and Environment Amendment Act 2021](#). The legislation was designed to stop developers profiting from unlawfully demolishing heritage buildings, with a ten-year ban on the development of affected sites and the revocation of permits held by site owners. The changes followed on from the [illegal demolition of the Corkman Irish Pub](#) in Carlton in 2016; the cleared site has been converted into a temporary park.

Other developments

- The Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) released its report [Managing Development Contributions](#) in March 2020. The VAGO investigation found that development contributions were not delivering the required infrastructure to new and growing communities as intended, mainly because they were not being managed strategically to maximise their value and impact. The report made recommendations that included improving the overarching framework with a strategic direction, accountability and governance arrangements, and ongoing evaluation and reporting on outcomes.

- A consultation process was launched in 2020 to seek feedback on permanent protections for Melbourne's 12 green wedges (including peri-urban areas) and agricultural land. It followed on from separate consultations for agricultural land, and land use planning challenges for councils in the green wedges. The reform options in the [consultation paper](#) proposed strengthening legislative and policy frameworks for the valuable green areas within 100 kilometres of Melbourne, strengthening rural zones and overlays to support agriculture, managing green wedge and peri-urban land with consistent land use decision-making, and improving design and development guidelines.
- The Government produced a [roadmap](#) in 2020 for consultation on the environmentally sustainable development of buildings and subdivisions, in order to update the Planning Policy Framework. In response to urban growth and a changing climate, the roadmap outlines a program that facilitates improvements such as recycling, the reduction of urban heat impacts, reduced exposure to air and noise pollution, and stormwater management. Energy efficiency and sustainable transport are also included.
- A [draft Arden structure plan](#) was released for consultation in June 2020, in partnership with the City of Melbourne. Developed by the Victorian Planning Authority, the plan outlines the new Arden precinct, which will be a new 44.6-hectare urban renewal precinct in North Melbourne based around the Metro Tunnel Project's new Arden Station. The structure plan was [subsequently updated](#) in 2021 to incorporate community feedback and expert technical analysis.
- Following the Bass Coast, Bellarine Peninsula and Surf Coast being declared as [Distinctive Areas and Landscapes](#) in 2019 under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the consultation processes began to prepare the required statements of planning policy (SPP) for endorsement. The final draft SPPs have reached the last endorsement stage for the Surf Coast and the Bellarine Peninsula and are intended to guide the future use and development of land in the declared areas for the next 50 years.
- With the commencement of [new environment protection legislation](#) on 1 July 2021 the Victorian Planning System was updated to [integrate environment protection reforms into land use planning](#).

Environment

Great Ocean Road

In 2020 the Victorian Government passed legislation to reform the management of the Great Ocean Road, recognising the state significance of the area and its landscapes and treating it as a 'single, integrated and living entity'. The [Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020](#) established the [Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority](#) to deliver better protection and management of the coasts and parks of the Great Ocean Road. The 2018 [Great Ocean Road Action Plan](#), completed after a taskforce consultation, formed the basis for the changes. The authority (operational from 1 December 2020) partners with Traditional Owners to protect the natural, cultural and heritage values of the land and waters, and seeks to simplify the fragmented governance of the Great Ocean Road.

The [Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Amendment Act 2021](#) provided the authority with functions, powers and obligations for the Great Ocean Road similar to Parks Victoria's, with the transfer of land management from other entities (approximately 1,000 parcels of land and assets) to be a gradual process through to 2025. The authority has adopted the [Coastal and Marine Management Plan: 2020–2025](#).

Flora and fauna

The Government reintroduced legislation in 2019 to promote Victoria's biodiversity after an equivalent Bill lapsed in the previous parliament. The [Flora and Fauna Guarantee Amendment Act 2019](#) is designed to modernise and strengthen the Act. It includes consideration of the rights and interests of Traditional Owners and the impacts of climate change, consideration of biodiversity across government, clarification of powers to determine critical habitat, a commitment to assessing and listing threatened species using the [common assessment method](#), and stronger penalties for offences. [Protecting Victoria's Environment—Biodiversity 2037](#) (2017) is the biodiversity strategy under the Act.

Environmental mitigation levy

The [Melbourne Strategic Assessment \(Environment Mitigation Levy\) Act 2020](#) establishes a new Victorian legislative framework for the existing [Melbourne Strategic Assessment](#) program. The purpose of the Act, which took effect on 1 July 2020, is to impose a levy that will fund measures to mitigate impacts on

biodiversity caused by the development of land in Melbourne's growth corridors. Liability to pay a levy is triggered by actions in a designated levy area such as applying for a building permit or construction of a road on Crown land.

Biodiversity Response Planning

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) established a [Biodiversity Response Planning](#) scheme to build networks and share information among those working in the biodiversity area, including government, Traditional Owners, non-government agencies and the community. It is designed as a long-term, area-based planning approach for biodiversity conservation in Victoria and is the implementation arm of the biodiversity strategy. DELWP provides program funding across its six regions to reduce threats to key landscapes and at-risk flora and fauna species.

Bushfire biodiversity response and recovery

The 2019–20 'Black Summer' bushfires in Victoria burnt over 1.5 million hectares of public and private land in Gippsland and north-eastern Victoria, causing five Victorian deaths and the loss of more than 400 homes. The fires had a significant impact on wildlife and biodiversity, including the destruction of forests, critical animal habitats and water catchments. DELWP reported on the impact of the bushfire emergency in January 2020 and continued to [update the report](#) to plan recovery measures. The report assessed the impact of the fires on over 4,000 species, finding that 244 species of plants and animals (including 215 rare or threatened species) had more than half of their likely statewide habitat burnt.

Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV), established in January 2020, led a large reforestation effort in October 2020, when 4.5 tonnes of seeds (including Mountain and Alpine Ash varieties) were dispersed by helicopter across fire damaged forests. The actions were part of BRV's [Eastern Victorian Fires 2019–20 State Recovery Plan](#). In December 2020 the Government published the [Wildlife Welfare Bushfire Response 2020 Action Plan](#) in partnership with the wildlife welfare sector. The plan was developed in response to the huge loss of native animal life in the fires—it was later [estimated](#) that over 1 billion animals nationwide had been killed or displaced. The Victorian plan included new guidelines for wildlife rehabilitation, improved communications and coordinated veterinary services.

Ecosystem decline

The Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee held an inquiry into the [decline of Victoria's ecosystems](#), tabling its report in December 2021. During its inquiry, the committee received over 950 submissions and made 74 recommendations to address a range of problems associated with noxious weeds, invasive species, climate change, habitat loss and fragmentation. It found that climate change is adversely affecting the ecosystem, with devastating consequences for flora and fauna. The committee also made recommendations for the protection of threatened species, land management and improving monitoring, compliance and enforcement.

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) had also reported in October 2021 on [Victoria's biodiversity](#), finding that DELWP could not demonstrate how well it was halting further decline in threatened species populations. VAGO recommended that DELWP improve its monitoring and reporting on its actions, currency and comprehensiveness of its data, use of available legislative tools and advice to government about funding needs and species prioritisation.

Wildlife Act review

A review of the *Wildlife Act 1975*, to be led by an independent expert advisory panel, was announced by the Government in May 2020. The panel's considerations included contemporary values and expectations around wildlife and benchmarking the Wildlife Act against other jurisdictions, including best practice regulatory frameworks. A [public consultation](#) was held between April and October 2021, and the consultation [summary report](#) was published in October 2021. The review's final report was delivered to the Government in December 2021, but the Government's response is still being finalised.

Predators and pests

A new [Victorian Deer Control Strategy](#) was released in 2020, in response to the rapid rise of wild deer numbers across the state, which are posing risks to biodiversity, water quality and agricultural assets. Developed

under the Biodiversity 2037 strategy and the [Sustainable Hunting Action Plan 2016–2020](#), the strategy also responded to the recommendations of a [2017 parliamentary inquiry](#). Funding of \$18.5 million was announced in the 2020–21 state budget for the development and delivery of regional deer control plans under the strategy. The [Peri-urban Deer Control Plan 2021–26](#) was released in March 2022.

A 10-kilometre predator exclusion fence across the Yanakie Isthmus was [announced](#) for Wilsons Promontory National Park in November 2020. The fence was part of a plan to establish a 50,000-hectare [biodiversity sanctuary](#) to protect the Prom's unique native wildlife and threatened species. Tenders opened for the project in February 2022, as part of a broader [Wilson's Promontory revitalisation project](#) that includes upgrades to trails and facilities.

Bushbank

The \$77 million [Bushbank program](#) is part of the Government's effort to meet targets to restore and revegetate private and public land. It includes an initial \$7 million in grants available to Traditional Owner corporations to lead restoration on Country. The planting of millions of trees and shrubs, weeding, fencing and seed collection will help restore biodiversity, create habitats for wildlife and capture carbon. The preferred delivery partner for the program, Cassinia Environmental, was announced in September 2022. The Government also established the [Nature Fund](#) to support projects that improve biodiversity and help stop the decline of native plants and animals.

Ramsar wetlands

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) held an inquiry into the 2016 VAGO report about DELWP meeting its obligations to protect [Victoria's 12 Ramsar wetlands](#). The [inquiry report](#) was tabled in mid-2020, finding there were opportunities to improve wetlands management, particularly through better engagement with Traditional Owners. Although some of the VAGO recommendations had already been addressed by the time of the PAEC report, PAEC's recommendations included the update of management plans, the clarification of funding and making public the monitoring, evaluation framework and plans for individual sites.

Alpine areas

The Government released the [Protection of the Alpine National Park: Feral Horse Action Plan 2021](#) in November 2021. The plan outlines a ten-year approach to managing feral horses in the Alpine National Park and adjacent state forests. The plan aims to reduce the damage caused by growing populations of hoofed animals to threatened alpine vegetation and the native flora and fauna, particularly riverine wetlands, alpine peatlands and streambanks. It built upon an earlier strategic action plan and followed both a [public consultation](#) and consultation with veterinary, welfare, and ecology experts. In May 2020 the Federal Court of Australia [ruled](#) against an attempt by the Australian Brumby Alliance to stop Parks Victoria culling feral horses on the Bogong High Plains. A further bid to stop the cull was rejected by the Supreme Court of Victoria later the same month.

The [Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#) establishes [Alpine Resorts Victoria](#) as the entity responsible for managing Victoria's six alpine resorts: Falls Creek, Lake Mountain, Mount Baw Baw, Mount Buller, Mount Hotham and Mount Stirling. The legislation recognised that the alpine industry had been badly impacted by the Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, with severely reduced winter visitor levels in 2020 and 2021. Appointed in August 2022, the new board was charged with providing strategic leadership to continue developing Victoria's \$1.1 billion alpine sector and support its response to [climate change](#). A stakeholder reference group was established to ensure that key interests, including Traditional Owners, have input during the transition phase. The Act commenced operation on 1 October 2022.

Parks

Consultation on a [draft land management strategy](#) for Parks Victoria was opened in September 2021. The draft strategy sets out statewide priorities for the protection, management and use of Parks Victoria managed land for the next ten years. The draft strategy was informed by earlier stakeholder and community engagement undertaken in 2019. The implementation of the finalised strategy will be tracked with an outcomes reporting framework.

Permanent protections for three new national parks were created in 2022. The new parks will be created by linking existing state forests, parks and reserves. The largest, the [Wombat-Lerderderg National Park](#), between Daylesford and Bacchus Marsh, will be over 44,000 hectares in size. A 15,000-hectare Pyrenees National Park will be created west of Avoca, and the 5,282-hectare Mount Buangor National Park will double the size of the existing state park. The announcement of the parks follows the Government's 2021 response to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's [Central West Investigation report](#). The council's recommendations aimed to protect areas of high natural and cultural value, and to restore the health of the forests to be more resilient to challenges such as climate change, population pressures and habitat deterioration.

Forests

DELWP established the [Office of the Conservation Regulator](#) (OCR) in 2019, following a [review of timber harvesting regulation](#) in 2018. The OCR oversees the regulation of wildlife, forests and public land, with its regulatory priorities reviewed annually.

The [Victorian Forestry Plan](#) was updated in 2021, after a review of the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014*, to address supply issues resulting from legal challenges by environmental groups. The plan provides support for industry and environmental protections to enable the transition away from native timber harvesting (by 2030) to plantations and farmed timber. The plan included [immediate protection](#) for 96,000 hectares of state forest to protect the future of the greater glider, the Leadbeater's possum and 35 other threatened species. The associated Victorian [Timber Innovation Fund](#) is designed to help timber businesses diversify for the future.

A report by VAGO on [regulating Victoria's native forests](#) was tabled in October 2022. The investigation found that the OCR was making headway with improvements to timber harvesting regulation, but that the agency had more work to do to address deficiencies in its systems, processes and reporting. The ten recommendations in the report were accepted (in full or in principle) by DELWP.

The [Conservation, Forests and Lands Amendment Act 2022](#) expands the head of power to make a [code of practice](#) under section 31, enabling documents to be incorporated, and confers discretionary authority on the minister or the secretary. A coalition of environmental groups [expressed their concerns](#) to the minister, saying the new powers included in the legislation could be used to accelerate logging. VicForests was reported to be defending allegations of illegal logging at the time. The Act specifies that timber harvesters must meet the requirements of the 'precautionary principle', particularly when natural disasters, such as bushfires, have [threatened endangered species](#). The [precautionary principle](#) means that the 'benefit of the doubt' should be given to environmental protection where the possibility of serious or irreversible damage exists.

Suburban parks and open space

The importance of access to open green space became more prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Government announced funding for new pocket parks and off-leash dog parks during 2020. In October 2022, 28 of the planned 31 dog park locations across Victoria had been completed, funded by the [Suburban Parks Program](#) and the [Building Works](#) stimulus package as part of the post-pandemic recovery. Walking and bike trails were also created and upgraded as part of the program. A number of [parks revitalisation grants](#) were also made available, with the aim of increasing recreation opportunities by providing park amenities such as shelters and seating areas.

In 2021 the Government launched the [Open Space for Everyone Strategy](#), for managing Melbourne's open spaces. The need for such a strategy had been identified as part of [Plan Melbourne 2020–2050](#). Later that year, the minister announced grants available through the [More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West](#) initiative. The plan aims to boost the low tree canopy cover in Melbourne's urban west (5.5 per cent in 2018) by enabling the planting of 500,000 young and mature trees to provide shade, reduce the urban heat island effect and improve air quality. The Government supported planting on Country for the program with grants awarded to the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

Funding was made available over four years for [Victoria's Great Outdoors](#) program in the 2019–20 state budget. The program focused on the upgrade of camping sites and facilities, reductions in camping fees and improvements to 4WD tracks and walking trails.

Environmental infrastructure

The Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee reported on current and future arrangements for [environmental infrastructure](#) for growing urban and regional populations. The committee's report, tabled in February 2022, made 57 recommendations for preserving and expanding the networks of parks and open space, encouraging innovation in the provision of that space and addressing environmental infrastructure challenges particular to different parts of the state. The report highlighted the importance of access to green spaces for people's physical health and mental wellbeing, as well as for Victoria's ecology and biodiversity.

Marine and coastal areas

The Government honoured an election commitment when it introduced legislation to create a new marine and coastal park along the Bass Coast in 2019 and to enable camping along some of Victoria's licensed river frontages. The [Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park](#) is designed to protect the parks and reserves between San Remo and Inverloch on Bunurong Country. Consultation on an access and infrastructure plan was completed in November 2021 with the release of the [final report](#). The legislation also created the Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area (later renamed the Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area) under the *National Parks Act 1975*, for nature conservation, recreation and education. The new Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park was launched with a smoking ceremony in June 2021.

In 2020 the Government [invited public comment](#) on a new draft marine and coastal policy, which was a key action required under the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*. The [final policy](#) was released later that year. The policy includes all private and public land and waters between the outer limit of Victorian coastal water and five kilometres inland of the high-water mark. The key drivers for change identified in the marine and coastal environment include the challenges of climate change, population growth and ageing infrastructure.

The first [State of the Marine and Coastal Environment 2021 Report](#) for Victoria was released by the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability in December 2021. The report presented key findings by theme including water quality, litter pollution, biodiversity (fish and invertebrates), pests and invasive species, and sea floor integrity and health. The report emphasises that many of the pressures on the coasts, bays, estuaries, lakes and ocean are from land-based activities.

The [Marine and Coastal Strategy](#), a five-year action plan to start the implementation of the policy, was released in May 2022. It sets out six priority actions which include supporting Traditional Owners to care for Country, enhancing coastal habitats and improving coordination between government, industry and the community.

In August 2022 VAGO followed up on their 2018 report that made recommendations about [protecting Victoria's coastal assets](#) (seawalls, groynes, revetments and breakwaters). The report found that DELWP had improved its collection and management of coastal protection assets data and its asset management practices. It found there was still some progress to be made on oversight and support for coastal managers and the development of a sustainable funding model.

Emissions reduction targets

The tabling of an independent expert panel's report on [Interim Emissions Reduction Targets for Victoria \(2021–2030\)](#) in June 2019 triggered a broad consultation to inform the Victorian Government's decision on interim emissions targets for 2025 and 2030, as required under the *Climate Change Act 2017*. The interim targets are intended to help plan the transition to a low-emissions economy. Over 3,300 submissions were received during the [consultation](#) period.

The Legislative Assembly Planning and Environment Committee tabled a final report on its [inquiry into tackling climate change in Victorian communities](#) in November 2020. The report made 72 recommendations, including collaborations to produce local emissions inventories for Victorian regions, action on plans for regional renewable energy and support for local government to strengthen Greenhouse Alliances. The committee recommended that knowledge sharing and education form part of the plans for communities and that all levels of government pursue a 'just transition', to minimise the impact of changes on groups and individuals who might otherwise have to bear an unfair share of the costs. In its [response](#), the Government supported 67 recommendations in full, in part or in principle, but did not support two and indicated the remaining three were under review.

In May 2021 the Victorian Government announced that its emissions reduction targets would be 28–33 per cent by 2025 and 45–50 per cent by 2030. At the time, the Government said that Victoria had already [cut emissions](#) by 24.8 per cent, based on 2005 levels, achieving the 2020 emissions reduction target two years early. The Government released [Victoria's Climate Change Strategy](#) in 2021 as a roadmap towards the target of net zero emissions by 2050. The strategy was accompanied by a range of emissions reduction pledges for all sectors, including the largest emitters—energy generation, transport and agriculture—with funding programs for specific activities.

A whole of Victorian Government [emissions reduction pledge](#) was released in 2021, with actions directed towards achieving a climate-neutral public sector. In January 2022 a new independent expert panel was announced to provide advice on [interim emissions reduction targets](#) for the next five-year target of 2035. The panel's advice to the minister is due by March 2023. The accompanying [public consultation](#) opened in April 2022.

The Government released seven [climate change adaptation action plans](#) and a new report, [Building Victoria's Climate Resilience](#), in February 2022. The plans outline the actions being taken in seven key sectors, such as transport, the built environment and primary production, to adapt and develop ways to cope with climate change. The accompanying report outlines what the state is doing to build climate resilience across the sectors and with communities.

Electric vehicles

[Victoria's Zero Emissions Vehicles Roadmap](#) was released in May 2021, supported by a \$100 million package of programs to make the zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) more affordable, build charging infrastructure and boost numbers in government and commercial fleets. The Government's ZEV plan [included grants](#) for the installation of electric vehicle charging stations across the state, with over 100 planned or underway under several funding programs, as well as research and development [collaboration](#) with RMIT, Monash and La Trobe universities and other partners. A pilot program was established to support the training and upskilling of electricians to work on electric vehicle technology. Zero emission buses are planned to be introduced to the public transport network, with the first fully electric bus charging [depot](#) underway in Ivanhoe with bus operator Ventura.

Although it introduced a subsidy for new electric vehicles and committed to a target of half of all light vehicle sales being ZEVs by 2030, the Government drew criticism for [imposing a new tax on ZEVs](#). See the 'Treasury and finance' chapter for more detail on the levy.

Waste management

A series of challenges beset councils, recycling and the waste management sector when China began to enforce its ban on importing low-quality mixed recyclable materials in January 2018. Although the ban had been [flagged much earlier](#), 33 Victorian councils had contracts with SKM Recycling (who had been exporting to China) when the crisis hit. The collapse of SKM in 2019 meant that thousands of tonnes of waste and recyclables were diverted to landfill. In the immediate aftermath, the Government provided support for kerbside collection, established a taskforce and drew up a strategic plan for the recycling industry.

In June 2019 VAGO produced a report, [Recovering and reprocessing resources from waste](#), which found that the responsible Victorian agencies in the waste sector were not responding strategically to waste and resource recovery issues and were not helped by the lack of an overarching statewide policy. VAGO also found the existing strategies for the sector were not well implemented, and the available waste data was incomplete and unreliable.

Lightweight, single-use plastic shopping bags were banned in Victoria from 1 November 2019, following the passage of the [Environment Protection Amendment Act 2019](#). The ban was seen as an important step in reducing plastic pollution and the associated damage to the environment. The ban had been strongly supported by the public during the consultation stage. The [National Retail Association](#) delivered an education and engagement program to retailers for 12 months before the ban took effect. Other single-use plastics will be [banned](#) from sale or supply in Victoria from February 2023, following [public consultation](#).

The [Dangerous Goods Amendment \(Penalty Reform\) Act 2019](#) introduced new penalties and prison terms of up to ten years for the illegal stockpiling of [dangerous goods](#), such as waste chemicals. Reckless stockpiling

had been responsible for several hazardous industrial fires, including one at the SKM facility in Coolaroo. There had subsequently been two more large fires—one at a warehouse in West Footscray and another at a chemical waste processing facility in Campbellfield.

In August 2019 the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee published an [interim report](#) on its inquiry into recycling and waste management. The committee's [final report](#) was tabled in November 2019, making 46 recommendations, all of which were supported in part, in principle or in full by the Government in its [response](#). They included the need to reduce waste and landfill, the importance of sorting recycling, education of the community and discussion of the complexity of governance arrangements between different levels of government. Also among the recommendations were separate glass recycling bins and the introduction of a container deposit scheme.

The Government announced the introduction of electronic monitoring for chemical waste from July 2019, with the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) investing \$5.5 million to switch to a fully electronic GPS tracking system to better record the production, movement and receipt of industrial waste. A package of recycling reforms was [announced in June 2019](#), including the Recycling Industry Development Fund. The [Essential Services Commission](#) was asked to review recycling services in Victoria to determine whether the sector should be regulated as an essential service.

The Special Minister of State provided terms of reference to Infrastructure Victoria, requesting advice by April 2020 on recycling and resource recovery infrastructure. Infrastructure Victoria produced [a report](#) after consultation with stakeholders. The authority made 13 recommendations that included improving infrastructure capacity and capability for recovering and reprocessing priority materials, increasing the diversion of organic waste from landfills, providing clarity to the waste-to-energy sector and reducing contamination in material streams.

In February 2020 the Government released its circular economy policy and action plan, [Recycling Victoria: A new economy](#). It followed the release of an earlier issues paper and a [public consultation](#). The Government described the plan as building on its investment in waste and resource recovery initiatives and responding to global recycling challenges. Actions in the plan include a new four-stream waste and recycling system for all households, a cash for cans scheme, new infrastructure and waste management solutions for the recycling industry, new recycling laws and governance, and a statewide ban on single-use plastics. The rollout of a fourth, purple-lidded bin for [glass recycling](#) was scheduled to begin in 2021. The Victorian landfill levy (later renamed the [waste levy](#)) was flagged to increase in stages, bringing it in line with other states. A new [Waste Crime Prevention Inspectorate](#) was established by the EPA in 2020 to target illegal waste dumping, unsafe storage and transport of waste, and landfill levy fraud.

An [independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985](#) was undertaken from April 2020, with Andrew Palmer KC producing the [final report](#) in January 2022. The report found the regulatory framework to be outdated and inconsistent with other regulatory frameworks that apply to dangerous goods duty holders, particularly the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*. Of the 44 recommendations, the [Government](#) supported 22 in full and 15 in principle, committing to further exploring the two recommended alternative options for structural legislative reform.

The [Circular Economy \(Waste Reduction and Recycling\) Act 2021](#) enacted the Government's commitment in the *Recycling Victoria* plan to establish a legislative framework for the transition to a circular economy. A new business unit within DELWP, [Recycling Victoria](#), took responsibility for the waste and recycling sector from July 2022. The Act, which will be fully operational by December 2023, provides for stronger regulation of Victoria's waste and recycling services, leading to less waste and landfill. It includes the introduction of a container deposit scheme (to be funded by the beverage industry), four domestic waste streams for kerbside collection, a range of support for councils in procuring and contracting waste and recycling services, and improved data collection, reporting and compliance measures.

The Government held a public consultation with community and industry on 'waste to energy' as part of the circular economy policy, releasing [a framework in 2021](#). The [Environment Legislation Amendment \(Circular Economy and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#) made several amendments to the legislative framework for Recycling

Victoria and established a legislative basis for a thermal waste-to-energy scheme. An annual cap has been set on the waste that can be used in waste-to-energy facilities in Victoria, discouraging the undermining of recycling efforts. The cap, prescribed by regulation, is set at 1 million tonnes per year for waste that can be sent to thermal waste to energy until 2040 and will be reviewed in 2023. The Act also moved responsibility for relevant infrastructure planning from Sustainability Victoria to Recycling Victoria, requiring the production of a new 30-year Victorian recycling infrastructure plan. See also the [Library's Bill brief](#) on this legislation.

Other developments

- A new [Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy](#) was released in 2021. The strategy provides direction to the Victorian Government about how it can enable and empower Traditional Owner self-determination in land management. The strategy is the first of its kind in Australia. In 2020 the Government had announced joint management plans across ten parks and reserves in Gippsland, as well as the [Barmah National Park](#), working with the Gunaikurnai people and the Yorta Yorta people. To further support training and knowledge sharing, a [Cultural Burning Knowledge Hub](#) was also launched.
- An inquiry into the health impacts of air pollution was conducted by the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee, with the [report tabled](#) in November 2021. The committee made 35 recommendations for improving the monitoring of air pollution and mitigation of its impacts on the community, including stricter air quality enforcement measures and is awaiting the Government's response. Issues canvassed by the committee included wood smoke from domestic heaters, the impacts of heavy industry, vehicle emissions, and bushfires and planned burns. The 16 findings of the report highlighted gaps in air pollution management and encouraged improvements to mitigation strategies. The Government released [Clean Air for All Victorians: Victoria's Air Quality Strategy](#) in October 2022, outlining plans to reduce air pollution and address major pollution sources.
- The Government launched a new online mapping tool, [Victoria Unearthed](#), in March 2019. Developed in partnership with the Environment Protection Authority, the mapping tool provides information about potential land and groundwater contamination by location and includes historical business listings.
- In January 2022 the Government opened the first round of the [Regional Recycling Fund](#), with grants available to upgrade significant resource recovery centres and to support infrastructure upgrades for smaller facilities.

Local government

Reporting framework

In 2019 a [strategic directions paper](#) was released on the Know Your Council website for a local government reporting performance framework. The issues raised in the paper were designed to open discussion with councils around setting performance targets, enabling councils to benchmark their performance against similar councils. The reforms were planned to be introduced in stages over three years. In May 2019 VAGO reviewed [reporting on local government performance](#), choosing three service areas to audit. The audit found that the system was 'not yet realising its full potential because it lacks good outcome measures, data is reported inconsistently between councils, and some of the reported data is unreliable'.

Rating system review

A review of the [local government rating system](#) was initiated by the Minister for Local Government in April 2019. The review stemmed from the recommendations of a parliamentary [inquiry into the sustainability and operational challenges of Victoria's rural and regional councils](#). A ministerial panel, led by Dr Kathy Alexander, received terms of reference to review issues such as the fairness and equity of the current system, local government rates and charges, rating exemptions and concessions, and council autonomy to incorporate local factors. A [consultation process](#) followed. The rate cap was not within the scope of the review. The panel's [final report](#) in March 2020 made 56 recommendations, with 36 of those supported in part or in full by the Victorian Government in [its response](#) later that year. The response noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had shaped the Government's immediate approach to rating reform, with priority given to supporting ratepayers in financial hardship.

The Victorian Ombudsman conducted [an investigation](#) into how local councils respond to ratepayers, reporting in May 2021. The report found that, while councils made some accommodation for payment relief during COVID-19, hardship policies varied greatly between councils and their practices compared poorly with

other sectors, such as banking and utilities. Key recommendations in the report included capping councils' ability to charge high penalty interest, stronger oversight of debt collectors and a requirement to publish hardship information to inform ratepayers about their rights.

The Government introduced legislation in June 2022 to address the hardship policies of councils for ratepayers in need. The [Local Government Legislation Amendment \(Rating and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#) introduced the option to pay rates via a payment plan, and a maximum rate of interest (to be advised by the Essential Services Commission) that could be levied on unpaid rates and charges. Other changes emphasised the fair treatment of ratepayers, with court actions or the sale of property to be used only as a last resort.

Local Government Act

The Victorian Government sought feedback for a proposed new 'Local Government Bill' in mid-2019. The legislation followed a lengthy consultation with councils, peak bodies, ratepayers and communities. An earlier Bill had lapsed when the previous Parliament expired in 2018. The [Local Government Act 2020](#) received royal assent in March 2020 and was proclaimed in four stages between April 2020 and July 2021. The Act was intended to improve service delivery with better financial management and community engagement, define standards of conduct, mandate greater accountability, update election processes and improve transparency for council decisions. A range of [governance resources](#) were made available online to support councils' implementation of the Act.

Council elections

The [Local Government Act 2020](#) introduced a preference for single-member wards to be the 'default' electoral structure for council elections. The proposed change was not universally supported. The Municipal Association of Victoria had raised objections to the single-member system in its [earlier submission](#), and the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC) [report on representation and subdivision reviews](#) had recommended single-member wards in only two of the 31 councils that it reviewed. However, ten councils changed their [electoral structure](#) for the October 2020 elections: eight moved to single-member wards, and two councils moved to an unsubdivided structure. The Government appointed two [electoral representation advisory panels in October 2022](#), supported by the VEC, to conduct future electoral structure reviews (for the 39 councils with non-compliant structures) before the 2024 elections.

The local government [elections](#), held on 24 October 2020, were conducted completely by postal vote for the first time, due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. A record number of women were elected—272—representing 43.8 per cent of councillors. One measure in the Government's gender equality strategy, [Safe and Strong](#), was a commitment to achieving 50 per cent female councillors and mayors at the October 2024 local government elections. Several programs were run in advance of the 2020 elections to encourage diversity in candidates—including the Victorian Government's 'It's our time' campaign, aimed at women. In 2021 the Government formed a [Gender Equality Advisory Committee](#) to work towards gender equality across Victoria's 79 councils. The [Women Leading Locally](#) program was opened to applications in April 2022, providing leadership skills and mentoring for women, with priority given to those wishing to stand in the local government elections in 2024.

Monitoring

City of Greater Geelong

Municipal monitors appointed in 2017 to work with the City of Greater Geelong (after a commission of inquiry) continued with a 'watching brief' and remained in place until 2020. The monitors were helping the council to address the inquiry recommendations and oversee a new governance framework. Their [final report](#) was completed in November 2020, and the newly elected council had its first meeting the same month. [Reviews and reports](#) by municipal monitors and commissions of inquiry are available on the Department of Job, Precincts and Regions website.

South Gippsland Shire

South Gippsland Shire Council was [put on notice](#) in April 2019 when the Minister for Local Government received the report of municipal monitor Peter Stephenson about the governance and performance of the council and recommended suspension. The council was given 28 days to provide information and address

issues. A commission of inquiry into the council was announced the following month, with the Hon. Frank Vincent AO QC appointed as chair. The final report found that conflict and tension had undermined the council's reputation and impacted decision-making. The [Local Government \(South Gippsland Shire Council\) Bill 2019](#) was introduced and passed both houses on 19 June 2019, dismissing the council, with a panel of three administrators appointed for at least two years. The council returned to holding elections in October 2021. Prue Digby was appointed for a 12-month term as municipal monitor in November 2021 to support the shire's transition back to elected representation.

City of Whittlesea

A monitor was [appointed](#) to examine governance and operations at the City of Whittlesea in December 2019. The monitor, in place until mid-2020, was to assist with decision-making at council and advise the minister on progress. The monitor brought forward the report due to the 'collapsing governance' of the council, noting that the council was effectively broken by internal division, factionalism and personality conflicts. The [Local Government \(Whittlesea City Council\) Bill 2020](#) passed Parliament in February 2020, dismissing the council and recommending the appointment of administrators.

City of Casey

The Casey City Council was dismissed in February 2020 following the passage of the [Local Government \(Casey City Council\) Bill 2020](#). A monitor, Laurinda Gardiner, was [appointed](#) in November 2019 in light of Operation Sandon, an Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) investigation into allegations of corrupt conduct involving councillors and property developers in the City of Casey. The monitor found significant governance failures, including failure to manage conflicts of interest, poor behaviour including bullying and damage to the reputation of the council. The legislation provided for the next election to be held at the council in 2024, with a panel of administrators appointed in May 2020.

Strathbogie Shire

In September 2021 a municipal monitor was [appointed](#) to the Strathbogie Shire Council for six months to help guide good governance. The assistance was requested by the council's mayor and CEO to help guide the council in their roles and responsibilities under the *Local Government Act 2020*.

City of Yarra

Yehudi Blacher was [appointed](#) as municipal monitor to Yarra City Council in November 2021, following the election of a new mayor at the council. Council officers had raised concerns with the department about the council's governance and its ability to make decisions in the best interests of the community. The council's CEO had resigned the previous month. The council had come to the attention of the Local Government Inspectorate over a councillor involved in a court case, and it was also thought to have made several controversial decisions since the last election. Mr Blacher's term as monitor was later extended until September 2022.

Other councils

In April 2022 the Minister for Local Government [announced](#) that three councils—Darebin City Council, Moira Shire Council and Wodonga City Council—would be receiving municipal monitors to support good governance. All the monitors will report regularly to the minister to recommend any further actions, and those monitors working with Darebin and Wodonga councils would also guide them through the appointment of a CEO.

The [appointment](#) of a municipal monitor to the Horsham Rural City Council was announced in July 2022. The monitor was appointed for six months, until the end of January 2023. The appointment was made at the council's request, concerned about their ability to serve the community effectively.

Local Government Culture Project

Local Government Victoria commissioned a review by PricewaterhouseCoopers into [behaviour and culture in councils \(the Local Government Culture Project\)](#) in mid-2021, with a view to promoting a more positive, inclusive work environment and to make local government a safer space for women. VAGO [had found](#) in their audit of five councils that more than one in four women had experienced workplace sexual harassment in the previous 12 months. A [discussion paper](#) was released in December 2021 for the local government culture project and opened to feedback. A final [insights report](#) was released in May 2022, highlighting that poor behaviour could be more effectively addressed with a range of actions, including leadership skills

training, increased support for mayors, improved diversity and representation, positive social media and early dispute resolution.

Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy

A new strategy was released in March 2022 to provide practical advice to councils when developing reconciliation action plans, recognising the need for a collaborative partnership approach. [Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021–2026: Pathway to Stronger Partnerships](#) came about following consultation with Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal organisations. It was developed to support the alignment of the local government sector with the [Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018–2023](#), the Victorian treaty process, the [Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2021–2023](#) and the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. A [ministerial good practice guideline](#) for councils engaging with Aboriginal Victorians was also released.

Infrastructure loans

In September 2019 the Minister for Local Government announced a new \$100 million [Community Infrastructure Loans Scheme](#) for councils, with low-interest subsidised loans of between \$500,000 and \$10 million available per project. The scheme came into being after requests from councils and [Regional Cities Victoria](#), with eligible projects including community centres and hubs, cultural facilities, public libraries, kindergartens and early learning facilities, heritage building restoration for community use, parks, reserves and trails. In September 2021, access was provided to low-interest loans financed through the Treasury Corporation of Victoria. The [local council lending framework](#) extended the earlier scheme, enabling councils to access borrowing for general working capital requirements, as well as project-specific infrastructure investments.

Other developments

- The 2020–21 Victorian budget funded the [Women Building Surveyors Program](#), funding 40 positions for women who wanted to re-train as municipal building surveyors at councils and improve gender balance in the construction industry. The program was delivered in partnership with LGPro.
- VAGO audited a selection of councils in 2019 to assess the value and effectiveness of [library services](#). It found that not all councils were operating their libraries as efficiently and effectively as possible with gaps in how they planned, monitored and reviewed their services. The review also noted that Local Government Victoria did not have a strategy to determine the impact of their funding contributions to libraries, and that delays in obtaining library management software had slowed the improvements.
- Other reports by VAGO during the life of the Parliament reviewed [fraud and corruption](#) involving senior council staff and councillors, and fraud control over [local government grants](#) to individuals, businesses and community groups.
- In June 2020 the Premier announced the appointment of new ministers and changes to ministerial portfolios, with associated machinery of government changes. On 1 July 2020 Local Government Victoria joined the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions and became part of the new 'Local Government and Suburban Development' group.
- Local councils faced a lengthy clean-up and recovery process after severe storms in June 2021 brought down thousands of trees, particularly in the [Yarra Ranges](#), causing widespread damage and prolonged power outages. In August the Victorian Government made further investment in the [Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program](#). The program funding goes toward planning, communication and co-ordination work to make sure communities are well prepared and resilient.

Rural and Regional

Funding and organisation

As the Victorian Government's lead agency responsible for rural and regional economic development, Regional Development Victoria (RDV) provides support primarily through the [Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund](#) (RJIF). The fund is the key regional development package and administers three further programs: the [Regional Infrastructure Fund](#), the [Regional Jobs Fund](#) and the [Investment Fast Track Fund](#). [Regional Development Australia](#) (RDA), a nationwide partnership supported by the three levels of government, also helps to drive economic growth and development in the regions. Victoria has six RDA committees that are co-located with RDV offices around the state.

VAGO reviewed [outcomes of investing in regional Victoria](#) in its 2019 report. The report made seven recommendations to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, focused on improving the management and evaluation of regional grant funds and public transparency of allocated grants. It found that RDV had improved its management of the RJIF, after serious issues were found with two prior audits, but that its evaluation framework was incomplete and it had not adopted a risk-based approach to grant assessment.

In October 2019 the minister released [updated guidelines](#) for the RJIF, which helps businesses create jobs in regional Victoria, supports community projects and assists councils to build necessary infrastructure. The fund changed to a competitive round-based process, with grants of up to \$500,000 available to councils and council-sponsored projects, and more generous funding ratios to allow smaller councils to access funding. The Investment Fast-Track Fund was opened in June 2021 to support the development of new proposals, helping to establish a statewide pipeline of new projects to encourage ongoing private sector investment.

Nine [regional partnerships](#), comprised of community/business leaders and council and government representatives, were established in 2016 so the community could connect more directly with the Victorian Government. The partnership areas are the Mallee, Wimmera Southern Mallee, Great South Coast, Central Highlands, Loddon Campaspe, Barwon, Goulburn, Ovens Murray and Gippsland. A series of regional assemblies ran from 2016 to 2018 in each area to allow local people to have their say and provide input for their own regions. A further evolution of that process was the creation of '[outcomes roadmaps](#)' for each partnership in 2019, which summarise the long-term strategic focus areas for each region.

In May 2022 the Government released nine [Regional Economic Development Strategies](#), one for each of Victoria's nine regional partnerships. The strategies recognise the unique attributes, challenges and opportunities found in each region and provide an evidence base for a new approach to regional economic development.

Bushfires

The Premier declared a [state of disaster](#) on 2 January 2020 for six regional local government areas in eastern Victoria and the Alpine resorts while the devastating Black Summer bushfires were still burning in the east of the state. The fires continued to burn for weeks, with the last fire finally contained in the Snowy Complex on 27 February. A bushfire appeal was launched, and a new permanent agency, Bushfire Recovery Victoria, was established to coordinate efforts and plan for the recovery of the fire-affected communities.

A range of initiatives were put in place to support people in bushfire-affected regions. The initial focus was on assistance with the clean-up, the provision of recovery centres and the provision of case support coordinators to help people connect with services such as mental health support, financial counselling, grant funding and insurance claims. The case support coordinators were jointly funded by the Victorian Government in partnership with the joint Commonwealth-state Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

The [Business and Sport for Bushfire Recovery](#) program received backing from organisations pledging to hold conferences and events in regional Victoria. Visit Victoria ran a campaign to encourage Victorians to visit all parts of the state. A special bushfire recovery round of grants funding was launched for the [Regional Events Fund](#), with the first event being the 'Rise from the Ashes' concert in Cudgewa in late February 2020.

A new e-commerce platform, the Victorian Country Market, was announced in May 2020 to host a range of small businesses and producers through virtual stalls. A [Creative Recovery](#) grants package was made available, helping to boost tourism-based projects and events to support the recovery of local creative industries. [Community Recovery Committees](#) were also established to ensure that local input was possible in each affected area. The [Regional Industry Groups and Chambers of Commerce Program](#) began in January 2022, offering \$10,000 grants for the hosting of networking events and collaboration on disaster recovery ideas.

Floods

A series of major rain events in October 2022 caused a flood emergency in many parts of regional Victoria, with many waterways, including the [Goulburn, Murray, Maribyrnong, Campaspe and Avoca rivers](#), bursting their banks. In response, the Government committed [\\$150 million to a coordinated clean-up program](#) and established the [Council Flood Support Fund](#) to assist rural and regional local government areas, especially in Northern Victoria, as well as the Maribyrnong City Council, which also saw many houses inundated. The

Victorian Government also [waived the waste levy](#) for flood waste in the '46 worst-affected local government areas' until the end of 2022 so that waste from affected properties could be disposed of without charge. Joint funding from the Commonwealth-state Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements was made available to an expanded list of councils to prioritise hazard assessments and clean-up operations, coordinated by Emergency Recovery Victoria. [Further support](#) was provided to people who were displaced, having lost their homes, businesses, or livestock and crops in the floods.

Regional tourism

The Government conducted a Regional Tourism Review in March 2019 to find new ways to develop tourism and support regional Victoria after declining visitation and expenditure in the sector. A [discussion paper](#) was released in July 2019. The review, which received 533 submissions, consulted widely with local businesses, industry leaders, local government, regional tourism boards, regional partnerships, Traditional Owners, community groups and residents. The [consultation](#) page notes that regional tourism was further impacted by the Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, and the review findings would inform a new plan. Recommendations included building a new pipeline of tourism products (informed by a new regional master plan), supporting new private investment in significant projects, new government investment in infrastructure projects, better regional marketing and the reform of regional tourism boards.

The four-year [Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan](#) was released at the Victorian Tourism Conference in April 2021. The plan detailed a roadmap to support a rapid recovery for the domestic market and a framework to build resilience in the sector for long-term growth. The plan is supported by an investment of \$633 million, which includes \$465 million in initiatives announced in the [Victorian Tourism Recovery Package](#) (state budget 2020–21) and a \$152 million boost to the Major Events Fund to secure more popular attractions.

Budj Bim

The [Budj Bim Cultural Landscape](#) in south-west Victoria opened to the public in April 2022 after the completion of major works, led by the Gunditjmara Traditional Owners. Budj Bim is home to fish traps and weirs used for farming eels, as well as the remains of over 300 Aboriginal stone houses, showing how the Traditional Owners have worked with the natural resources and environment for over 30,000 years. The site has been enhanced with an aquaculture education centre, art installations, upgraded outdoor infrastructure and an improved information centre. The Victorian Government's Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund supported the project. The Government also backed Budj Bim's successful bid to become a [UNESCO](#) World Heritage listed site in 2019, making it the only site to be listed solely for its Aboriginal cultural values.

Geelong City Deal

A joint commitment from the Commonwealth and Victorian governments and the City of Greater Geelong, the [Geelong City Deal](#), was signed in March 2019. An [implementation plan](#) was launched in October 2019. The deal is a ten-year plan worth over \$380 million to support Geelong and the Great Ocean Road region. The aim of the investment is to revitalise central Geelong and develop its infrastructure, support growth in the visitor economy and encourage economic diversification and employment opportunities. Many local developments are contained within the plan, including a 'green spine' to transform Malop Street into a linear park, a laneways project and the redevelopment of the Queenscliff Ferry Terminal. The Wadawurrung Traditional Owners are taking a central role in the planning, design and implementation of a range of projects in central Geelong.

Planning began in late 2019 for the largest project of the Geelong City Deal, the [Geelong Convention and Exhibition Centre](#) (GCEC), and early works started in January 2022. A [public consultation](#) seeking feedback on the GCEC closed in August 2022. The GCEC precinct will include a 200-room luxury hotel, commercial spaces and a 1,000-seat convention venue, with 3,700 square metres of flexible multipurpose space allowing for multiple events to run concurrently. The GCEC is being developed on a 1.6-hectare waterfront site, between Western Beach Road and Smythe Street in central Geelong. The project is expected to be completed in 2026.

Selected projects

GovHubs

Construction began on the \$100 million [Ballarat GovHub](#) in January 2019 and was completed in April 2021. The GovHub has the capacity for 1,000 Victorian Government employees, including relocations from

Melbourne and 400 positions already based in Ballarat. The new development is intended to revitalise the Civic Hall site in the Ballarat CBD, generate long-term jobs growth and encourage business confidence and private sector investment. A range of government activities and functions will work at the GovHub, including Consumer Affairs Victoria, the State Revenue Office and VicRoads. Development Victoria managed the development in partnership with Regional Development Victoria, the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the City of Ballarat.

The [Latrobe GovHub](#) opened in Morwell in July 2021, providing 200 public sector jobs in the Latrobe Valley. The 14-month build cost \$30 million and was expected to deliver opportunities to the region, with the relocation of government agencies such as Solar Victoria and Parks Victoria. The energy-efficient building includes a community hub, business incubator zones and an exhibition space. The GovHub is part of the Government's Latrobe Valley transition package to support economic growth and create jobs.

A third GovHub is being built in Bendigo, on the site of the council's former offices. The \$90 million development, [Galkangu-Bendigo GovHub](#), will be able to accommodate 900 City of Greater Bendigo and Victorian Government workers. The project team collaborated with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation to include Indigenous design elements and language in the architecture, landscaping and spaces. The concept was finalised in 2019, with main works started on site in August 2021. Construction was due to be completed by late 2022, with the new building ready to be occupied early in 2023.

Ballarat Station

The [Ballarat Station Precinct Redevelopment Project](#) was completed and opened to the public in February 2022. It was funded with \$28.3 million from the Regional Infrastructure Fund, in partnership with the private sector. The redevelopment includes a public plaza, a multilevel commuter carpark with 405 free spaces, an additional 150 car parks for the Quest Apartment Hotel, the Goods Shed conference centre and a bus interchange. Heritage Victoria approved all necessary permits for the Ballarat Station site, which was originally built in 1862.

Gippsland Performing Arts Centre

The [Gippsland Performing Arts Centre](#) opened in March 2022, a major part of the Latrobe Creative Precinct that was jointly funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth governments and the Latrobe City Council. The centre has a 750-seat theatre, meeting rooms, a box office, a visitor information centre, a café and a bar and is surrounded by open air event spaces. The precinct includes the existing Traralgon Library and the Little Theatre, which is also being refurbished.

Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory

The stage one completion of the [Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory](#) in August 2022 opened the way for Australia to join the global hunt for 'dark matter', one of the universe's biggest mysteries. The underground physics laboratory (within the Stawell Gold Mine) is co-owned by the University of Melbourne, Australia's Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO), the Australian National University, Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Adelaide. The new facility was jointly funded by the state and federal governments.

Other major funded projects can be found on the [RDA website](#).

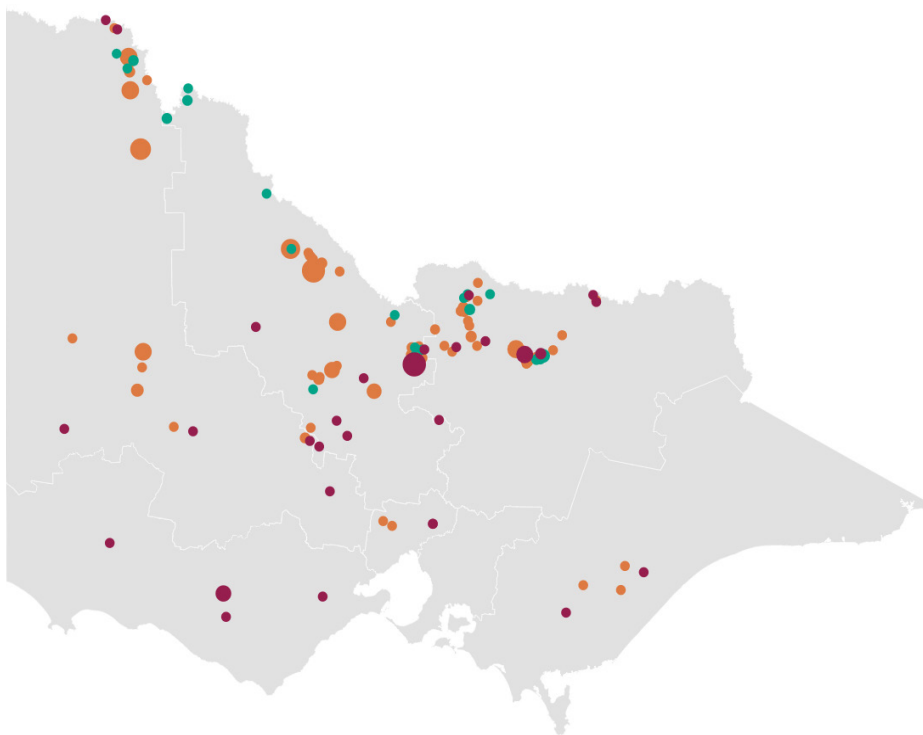
Other developments

- Victoria's first [Cross Border Commissioner](#), Luke Wilson, was appointed in October 2018. The appointment was championed by the Mallee Regional Partnership to address regulatory hurdles faced by border communities. The commissioner is responsible for promoting the interests of Victorian border communities, resolving issues and developing common approaches with neighbouring states.
- The [Rural Councils Transformation Program](#) was announced in 2019 to encourage the sharing of knowledge, costs and resources at a regional scale so that local governments can deliver more efficient, effective and sustainable services for their communities. A second round opened in October 2021, focused on smaller projects that include new and ongoing collaboration and resource sharing, such as shared workforce planning and asset management systems.

- A new visitor centre opened at the popular [Phillip Island Penguin Parade](#) in July 2019. The new development was supported by \$48.2 million from the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund.
- The [Regional Digital Fund](#) supports a range of small-scale digital projects identified as priorities by the local regional partnerships. The funding aims to build digital technology infrastructure, skills and capability in regional Victoria. The [Great South Coast Partnership](#) launched its digital plan in March 2020, identifying gaps in the region's digital infrastructure. The Ovens Murray Regional Partnership supported the new e-commerce platform, Buy from North East Vic, now Buy High Country, which hosts local companies in one marketplace. Other regions also have projects underway that address digital connectivity skills and help both communities and businesses to develop.

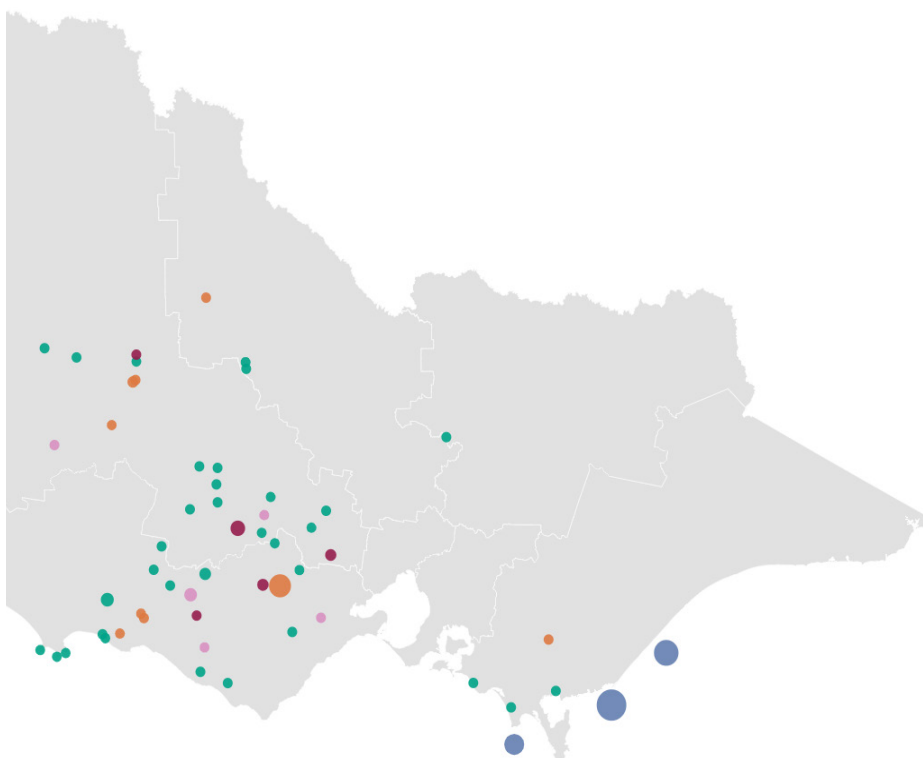
Victorian solar farms

- Approved
- Operating
- Under Consideration



Victorian wind farms

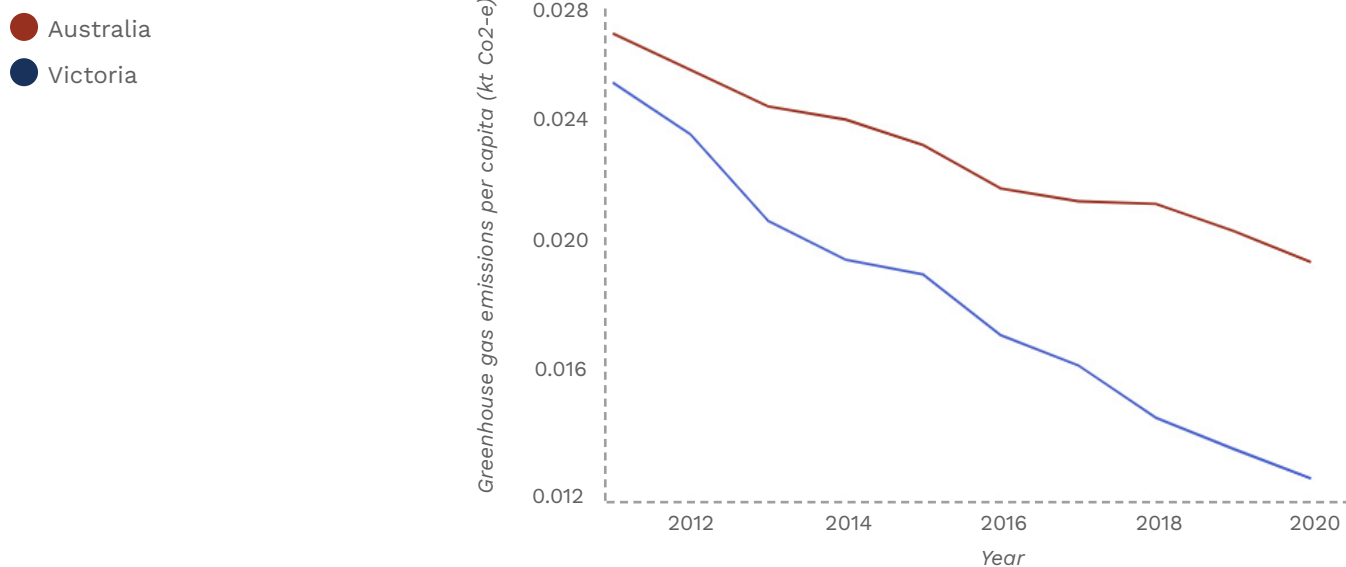
- Approved
- Operating
- Under Consideration
- Planning permit application lodged
- Potential offshore wind projects



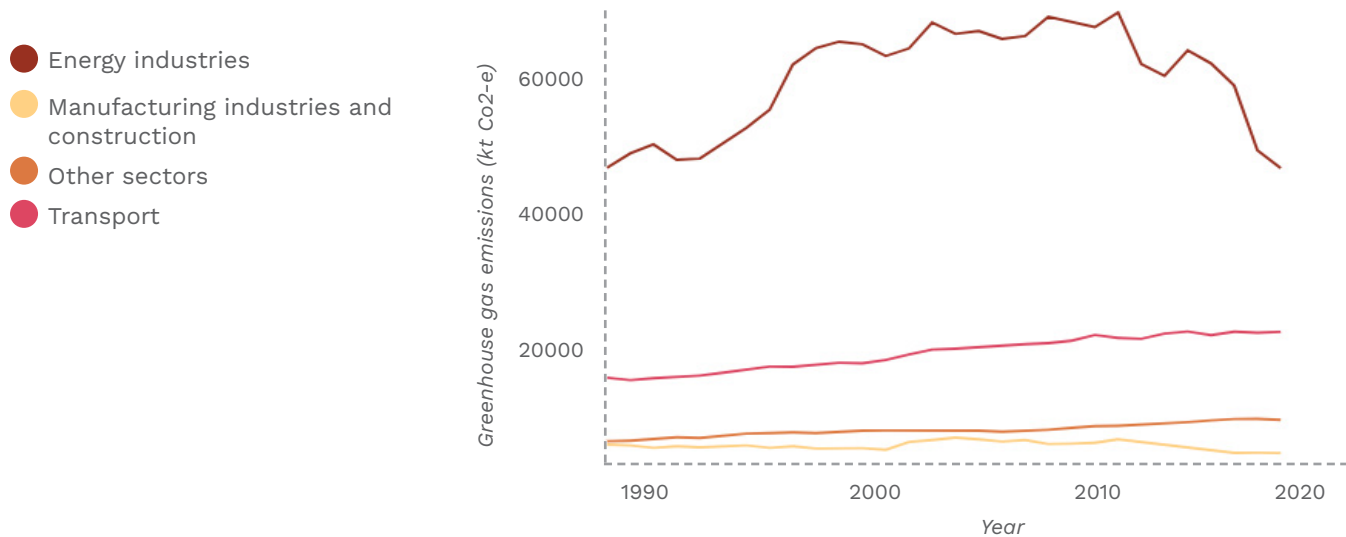
Source: Department of Transport and Planning

*To view the environment interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Time series of greenhouse gas emissions per capita



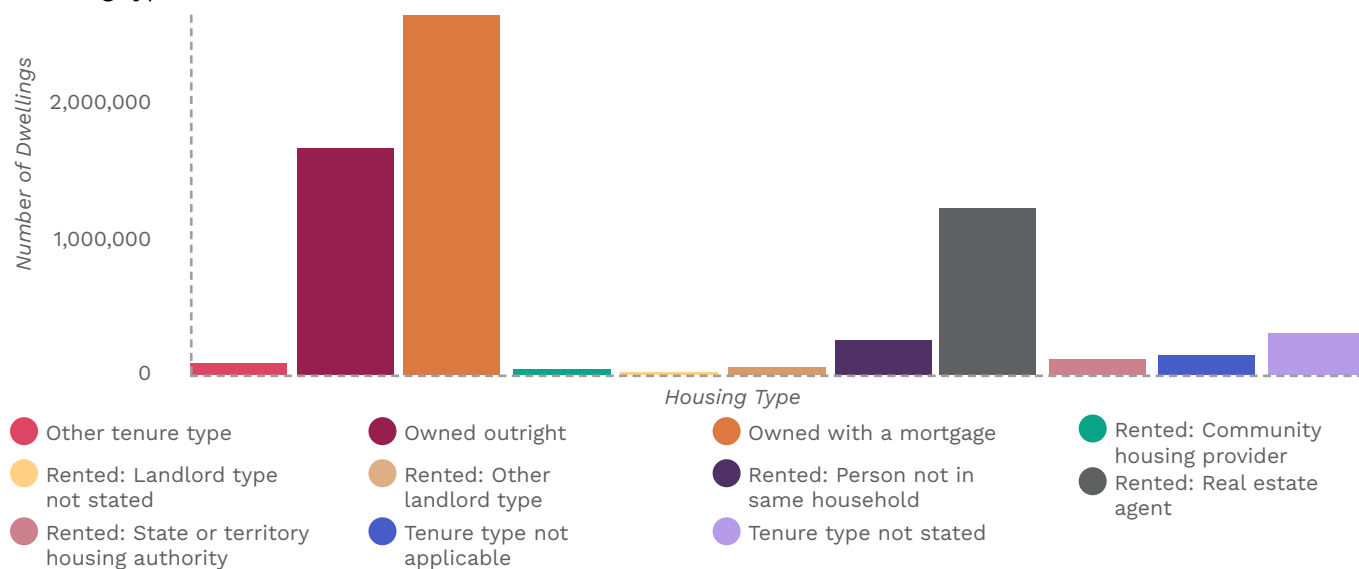
Time series of greenhouse gas inventories, Victoria



Source: State and Territory Greenhouse Gas Inventories

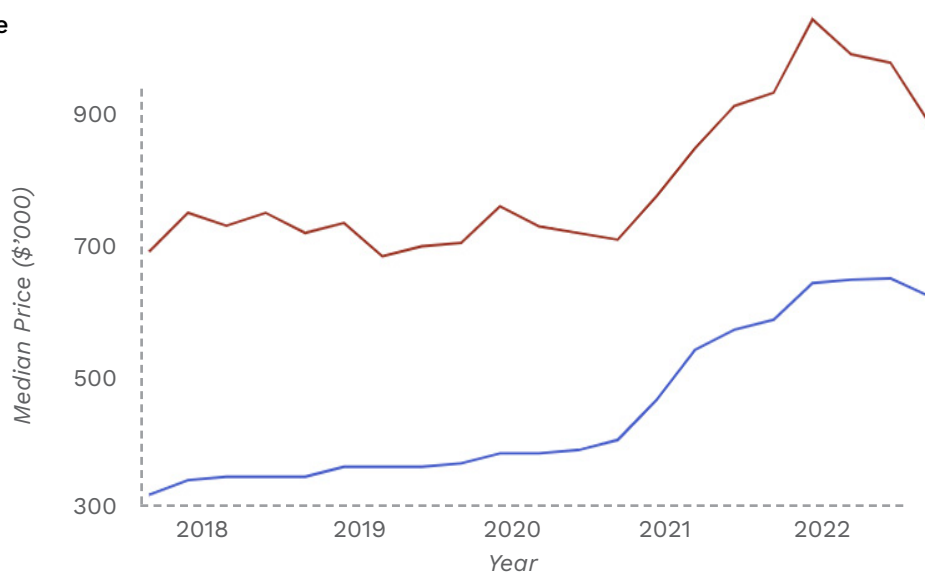
*To view the environment interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Dwelling types in Victoria



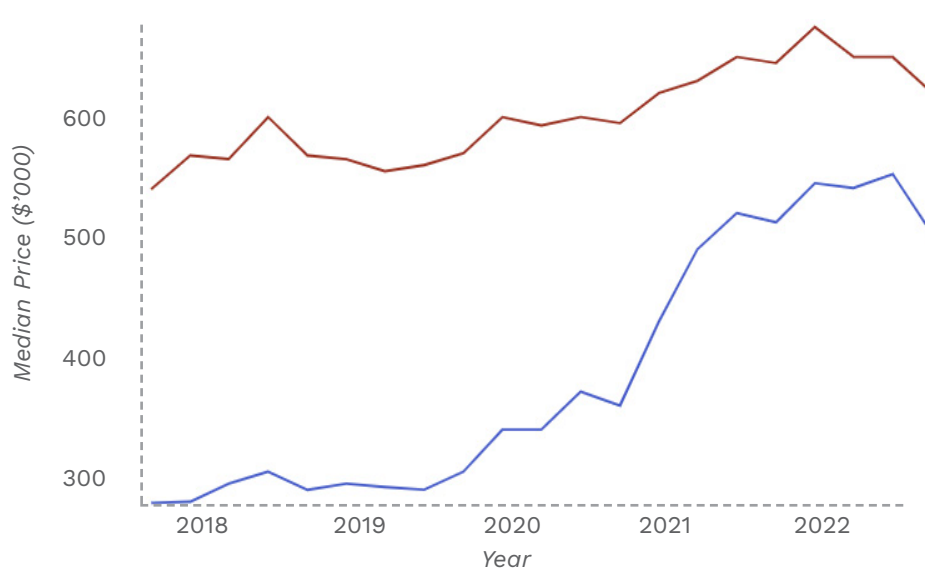
Median Detached Dwelling Price

- Melbourne
- Rest of Victoria



Median Attached Dwelling Price

- Melbourne
- Rest of Victoria



Source: ABS

*To view the housing interactive dashboard, click on the above visualisations.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation website](#).

Planning

- [Building Amendment \(Cladding Rectification\) Act 2019](#)
- [Building and Environment Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020](#)
- [Building Amendment \(Registration and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#)
- [Planning and Environment Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Building, Planning and Heritage Legislation Amendment \(Administration and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#) (lapsed)
- [Planning and Environment Amendment \(Local Democracy\) Bill 2019](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)
- [Planning and Environment Amendment Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)
- [Planning and Environment Amendment \(Wake Up to Climate Change\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (defeated)

Environment

- [Dangerous Goods Amendment \(Penalty Reform\) Act 2019](#)
- [Environment Protection Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Circular Economy \(Waste Reduction and Recycling\) Act 2021](#)
- [Environment Legislation Amendment \(Circular Economy and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)
- [Environment Protection Amendment \(Refund on Bottles and Cans\) Bill 2019](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Wildlife Amendment \(Protection of Birds\) Bill 2019](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)
- [Wildlife Rescue Victoria Bill 2020](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Local government

- [Local Government \(South Gippsland Shire Council\) Act 2019](#)
- [COVID-19 Omnibus \(Emergency Measures\) Act 2020](#)
- [Local Government Act 2020](#)
- [Local Government \(Casey City Council\) Act 2020](#)
- [Local Government \(Whittlesea City Council\) Act 2020](#)
- [Local Government Legislation Amendment \(Rating and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)

- [Local Government Amendment \(Rates and Charges\) Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [Towards good environmental governance? Assessing the evolution of Victoria's environment portfolio](#), Fellowship paper, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2019)
- [2019–20 bushfires](#), Quick guide, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)
- [Environment Legislation Amendment \(Circular Economy and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#), Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)
- [Microplastics in biosolids: definitions and implications](#), Research note, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2022)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

Planning

- [Building confidence: improving the effectiveness of compliance and enforcement system for the building and construction industry across Australia](#), P. Shergold and B. Weir (2018)
- [Planning and building approvals process review: Discussion paper](#), Better Regulation Victoria (2019)
- [Victorian cladding taskforce: report from the co-chairs](#), E. Baillieu and J. Thwaites, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2019)
- [Environmentally sustainable development of buildings and subdivisions: a roadmap for Victoria's planning system](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- [Managing development contributions](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- [Planning for Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land: consultation paper](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- [State of heritage review: local heritage](#), Heritage Council of Victoria (2020)
- [Addressing supply chain challenges: review into issues facing Victoria's building and construction industries](#), Better Regulation Victoria (2021)—and Government response

- *Apartment design guidelines for Victoria*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- *Arden structure plan: August 2021 (part 1); (part 2)*, Victorian Planning Authority (2021)
- *Framework for reform: modernising Victoria's building system*, Independent Building Reform Expert Panel, Victoria State Government (2021)
- *Shaping urban Victoria: VPA's response to COVID-19*, Victorian Planning Authority (2021)
- *Turning best practice into common practice: planning and building approvals process review report to Government*, Better Regulation Victoria (2021)
- *Yarra strategic plan (Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo): A 10-year plan for the Yarra River corridor 2022 to 2032*, Melbourne Water Corporation (2022)

Environment

- *Protecting Victoria's environment—Biodiversity 2037*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017)
- *Great Ocean Road action plan: protecting our iconic coasts and parks*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2018)
- *Independent review of timber harvesting regulation: panel report to the Secretary of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning*, J. Brockington, N. Finegan and P. Rozen, The Panel (2018)
- *Central West investigation: final report*, Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (2019)
- *Interim emissions reduction targets for Victoria (2021–2030)*, Independent Expert Panel (2019)
- *Recovering and reprocessing resources from waste*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- *Waste and recycling services review 2019*, Essential Services Commission (2019)
- *Advice on recycling and resource recovery infrastructure*, Infrastructure Victoria (2020)
- *Coast and marine management plan: 2020–2025*, Great Ocean Road Coast & Parks Authority (2020)
- *Eastern Victorian fires 2019–20 state recovery plan*, Bushfire Recovery Victoria (2020)
- *Marine and coastal policy*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- *Recycling Victoria: a new economy*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- *Victoria's bushfire emergency: biodiversity response and recovery (version 2)*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- *Victorian deer control strategy*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- *Wildlife welfare bushfire response 2020: action plan*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- *Expert advisory panel's review of the Wildlife Act 1975: consultation summary report*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- *Land management strategy: protecting our natural and cultural heritage for future generations—draft*, Parks Victoria (2021)
- *Peri-urban deer control plan 2021–26*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- *Protecting Victoria's biodiversity*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2021)
- *Protection of the Alpine National Park: feral horse action plan November 2021*, Parks Victoria (2021)
- *Regulating Victoria's native forests*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2021)
- *State of the marine and coastal environment 2021 report*, Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (2021)
- *Victorian forestry plan*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)
- *Victorian Traditional Owner cultural landscapes strategy*, (in partnership with) Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations, and Parks Victoria (2021)
- *Victorian waste to energy framework: supporting sustainable and appropriate investment*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- *Victoria's climate change strategy*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- *Victoria's zero emissions vehicle roadmap*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- *Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park access and infrastructure plan*, Parks Victoria (2021)
- *Building Victoria's climate resilience*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2022)
- *Clean air for all Victorians: Victoria's air quality strategy*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2022)
- *Follow-up of protecting Victoria's coastal assets*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)
- *Independent review of the Dangerous Goods Act 1985 and associated regulations: final report*, A. Palmer (2022)
- *Marine and coastal strategy*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2022)

Local government

- *Safe and strong: a Victorian gender equality strategy*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian Government (2016)
- *Local government reporting performance framework: strategic directions paper 2018–21*, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2018)
- *Council libraries*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- *Fraud and corruption control—local government*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- *MAV submission to the local government proposed reforms*, Municipal Association of Victoria (2019)
- *Reporting on local government performance*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- *Final report*, Municipal Monitor for the City of Greater Geelong (2020)
- *Local council representation and subdivision review 2019–20: program report*, Victorian Electoral Commission (2020)
- *Local government rating system review: report of the ministerial panel*, K. Alexander on behalf of the Panel (2020)
- *Sexual harassment in local government*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- *Victorian Aboriginal and local government strategy 2021–2026: pathways to stronger partnerships*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2020)
- *Victorian Government response to the local government rating system review final report*, Victorian Government (2020)
- *Investigation into how local councils respond to ratepayers in financial hardship*, Victorian Ombudsman (2021)
- *Local government culture project: discussion paper*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)
- *Fraud control over local government grants*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)
- *Local government culture project: insights report*, PwC (2022)
- *Ministerial good practice guideline and general guidance for councils engaging with Aboriginal Victorians*, Local Government Victoria, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2022)

Rural and regional

- *Budj Bim cultural landscape: World Heritage nomination*, Department of Environment and Energy, Commonwealth of Australia (2017)
- *Geelong City deal: implementation plan*, Australian Government, Victorian Government and City of Geelong (2019)

- *Outcomes of investing in regional Victoria*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2019)
- *Regional partnerships outcomes roadmaps*, (authored by each Partnership) (2019)
- *Regional tourism review: discussion paper*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2019)
- *Regional economic development strategies* (authored by each Partnership) (2022)
- *Visitor economy recovery and reform plan*, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (2021)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- *Inquiry into recycling and waste management*, Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- *Inquiry into Auditor-General's report no. 202: Meeting obligations to protect Ramsar wetlands (2016)*, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- *Inquiry into tackling climate change in Victorian communities*, Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- *Inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria*, Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- *Inquiry into the health impacts of air pollution in Victoria*, Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)
- *Inquiry into apartment design standards*, Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- *Inquiry into the environmental infrastructure for growing populations*, Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- *Inquiry into the protections within the Victorian Planning Framework*, Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Primary industries

Primary industries

An overview of developments within the agriculture, energy and resources, and water portfolios during the 59th Parliament, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on the relevant portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

Energy

The 59th Parliament devoted considerable attention to the energy sector, focusing on renewables and sustainability, as well as market operation and equity.

The 58th Parliament's *Climate Change Act 2017* and *Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017*, as well as the *Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2017–2020*, had already established a long-term emissions reduction target of net zero by 2050. In keeping with requirements for five-yearly interim targets and an updated climate change strategy every five years, the Victorian Government implemented a range of reforms.

Greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy uptake

The Government continued to move forward on its *Renewable Energy Action Plan*, implementing a range of new and established renewable energy technologies. The *Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report* established the following:

- In 2020 total net greenhouse gas emissions were 24.7 per cent below 1990 levels.
- Victoria's total net emissions in 2020 were 29.8 per cent below the baseline level of 2005. The 29.8 per cent reduction means Victoria significantly exceeded its target to reduce emissions by 15–20 per cent below 2005 levels.
- Victoria's per capita emissions (12.4 tonnes CO₂-e in 2020) have declined steadily since 2011 and are now less than half the level they were in 1990.
- In 2019 and 2020 Victoria's emissions declined by 5.8 per cent. A decrease in coal-fired generation and an increase in renewable electricity production (from 21.7 per cent of total electricity generation in 2019 to 24.8 per cent in 2020) drove much of the reduction.
- Underlying the decline in emissions from electricity generation in Victoria is a transformation of the state's electricity system. Victoria's brown coal powered electricity generators are being decommissioned. Renewables' contribution to electricity generation increased from 24.3 per cent in the 2020 financial year to 29.3 per cent in the 2021 financial year, overtaking the renewable energy target of 25 per cent by 2020 and putting Victoria on track to reach 40 per cent by 2025.
- A total of 9,624 megawatts (MW) of renewable capacity operating in Victoria is made up of 2,479 MW of wind, 1,243 MW of large-scale and commercial-scale solar, 3,446 MW of rooftop solar photovoltaic, 2,306 MW of hydroelectricity and 150 MW of biomass.
- Up to 2018, 384,000 household small-scale rooftop solar systems, with a combined capacity of 1,564 MW, had been installed in Victoria, with an additional 236,000 systems, totalling 1,845 MW in capacity, installed between January 2019 and May 2022.
- New integrated approaches to generation and transmission—energy storage technologies—are increasingly being implemented. The 300 MW Victorian Big Battery, for example, stores energy when power sources are abundant and increases grid reliability. Households and neighbourhoods are also installing batteries. The Solar Homes solar battery rebate allowed more than 8,600 households to install a battery to store their excess solar energy by July 2022.
- The Government is developing an offshore wind strategy to meet its targets of 2,000 MW from offshore wind by 2032, 4,000 MW by 2035 and 9,000 MW by 2040.

In keeping with the periodic review of interim targets approach, the *Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Amendment Act 2019* established an increased renewable energy target for Victoria to 50 per cent by 2030.

Market operation and regulation

In terms of market operation and efficiency, the *Energy Legislation Amendment (Victorian Default Offer) Act 2019* reformed energy retail contract pricing, introducing a mandatory requirement for a 'Victorian default offer'. Retailers must present a 'best offer' to households as determined by the Essential Services Commission (ESC). Undertaken in response to the *Independent review of the electricity and gas markets in Victoria* of 2018, the reform aims to ensure households are informed about the best value products available.

The *Essential Services Commission Amendment (Governance, Procedural and Administrative Improvements) Act 2019* repealed provisions for hearing appeals concerning the ESC's decisions or determinations. The Act inserted new provisions conferring a review jurisdiction on the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and enabling the minister to appoint a person to act as chairperson of the ESC. Further provisions were made requiring the ESC to report on the market structure and performance of regulated industries, with a further review of the Act to be completed by the end of 2026.

Stronger regulation was embodied in the *Energy Legislation Amendment (Licence Conditions) Act 2020*, which enabled the responsible minister to impose conditions for issuing licences to energy providers involved in generating, transmitting, supplying and selling electricity and suppliers and retailers of gas. The *Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Fairness) Act 2021* prohibited certain sales practices. These included 'save and win-back' offers, door-to-door sales and cold calling. The Act also created offences for the wrongful disconnection of electricity and gas and offences relating to providing false or misleading information to the ESC.

The *Energy Safety Legislation Amendment (Victorian Energy Safety Commission and Other Matters) Act 2020* provides for the licensing of line workers and provides for electrical inspection and installation work. The legislation abolished Energy Safe Victoria and established the *Victorian Energy Safety Commission*.

The *Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2021* amended the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* and *Gas Industry Act 2001* to provide trial waiver exemptions from Victorian regulatory arrangements for trial projects that test an approach concerning the supply of, or demand for, electricity and gas.

Mining and exploration

The *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Act 2019* set up a Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority, set out mine rehabilitation, closure and post-closure obligations and established post-closure funds obligations.

Changes also took place regarding gas and petroleum exploration. On the one hand, the *Petroleum Legislation Amendment Act 2020* allowed the restart of onshore conventional exploration and development from 1 July 2021. It overturned Victoria's moratorium on onshore conventional gas production imposed in 2017. On the other hand, the *Constitution Amendment (Fracking Ban) Act 2021* enshrined Victoria's ban on unconventional gas extraction—which includes hydraulic fracturing and coal seam gas exploration—in Victoria's Constitution. The latter decision was met with support from environmental campaigners and organisations such as the Victorian Farmers Federation but found opposition in the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association and some within the Australian Workers Union.

Parliamentary committee inquiries

Three relevant parliamentary committee inquiries took place. The Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee undertook an *inquiry into nuclear prohibition* in 2020. The committee made no recommendations, finding that 'priority should be given to the security, stability and accessibility of energy supply and the need to lower carbon emissions due to climate change and to ensure affordable energy', that 'nuclear power is significantly more expensive than other forms of power generation' and that a 'business case is unlikely to be undertaken, given its costs and resources required, while a prohibition of nuclear energy activities remains and there is no likelihood of a plant being able to be built'.

The *inquiry into renewable energy in Victoria* in 2022 offered a range of findings and recommendations related to completing a just transition to renewable energy sources and providing market certainty.

Finally, the inquiry into the closure of the [Hazelwood and Yallourn power stations](#) in 2022 assessed the role of the Latrobe Valley Authority and the Worker Transition Service in providing support and re-deployment of skilled workers affected by the closure of these energy facilities.

At the time of publication, the last two of these reports were still awaiting the Government's response.

Agriculture and animal welfare

The 59th Parliament focused on creating appropriate legislation aimed at developing a strong, innovative and sustainable agricultural sector. The main legislation and committee inquiries aimed to improve land management, veterinary and biosecurity practices.

Agriculture and fisheries constitute one of the central foundations of Victoria's economy, with total output being the equivalent of 4.9 per cent of gross state product. Importantly, it remains a key driver of employment in many regional areas and constitutes a considerable component of the state's exports. According to the Victorian Government, which adopted its [food and fibre](#) strategy document during the 58th Parliament in 2016, 'Victoria is Australia's largest producer and exporter of food and fibre products'. Given the state's strengths in the area, a 'new strategy for Victorian agriculture in a world of change' was adopted in 2020. The strategies and policies contained in [Strong, Innovative, Sustainable: A New Strategy for Agriculture in Victoria](#) aim to increase the resilience of the sector in the face of shocks, such as climate change and epidemics.

The health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic placed additional strains on the sector in addition to the longer run challenges of climate change and market unpredictability. However, the state's agriculture sector continued to perform well, with Victoria contributing just under 25 per cent of the total [value of Australia's agricultural production](#) in 2020–21. Victoria's contribution to total livestock production was 44.9 per cent of the total value for Australia, with Victoria responsible for over 60 per cent of Australia's dairy produce.

The *Strong, Innovative, Sustainable* strategy outlines a series of goals for the sector to achieve by 2030 aimed at developing the sector as an 'engine of growth' focused on becoming a 'front runner in low-emission food and fibre production'. It aims to make Victoria 'Australia's agriculture exports centre, providing high-quality, sought-after agriculture produce to diverse markets around the world'. Recovery from COVID-19, bushfires and other disruptions will be aided through strengthening of local supply chains and supporting farmers. Growth and modernisation of the sector aim to enable further expansion of export markets.

These adopted goals were complemented by the introduction of a variety of Acts and an inquiry conducted by the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee.

The [Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#) amended Acts concerning land management notices. It allows for the recovery of costs during the sentencing phase of criminal proceedings for offences of non-compliance and a range of other issues.

In May 2019, following several incidents involving animal activist activities on businesses and farms, the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee conducted an [inquiry into the impact of animal rights activism on Victorian agriculture](#). Despite this, in September 2019, before the report was tabled, Jeff Bourman of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party introduced the [Crimes Amendment \(Trespass\) Bill 2019](#) to enhance protections for industries pertaining to animal enterprise and animal recreational activities, create specific offences relating to trespassing on land with intent to interfere with activities involving animals, and outline increased penalties for new offences relating to trespass. The Bill was defeated in the Legislative Council.

In February 2020 the committee concluded that some recent protests caused genuine harm to farmers, their families and other animal agriculture workers. It also concluded that animal rights activists trespassing onto agricultural facilities pose a biosecurity risk. In its [response](#), the Government supported all but one recommendation, which was that 'the Victorian Government consider the need to codify public interest exemptions in the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*'.

Subsequently, the [Livestock Management Amendment \(Animal Activism\) Act 2021](#) amended the *Livestock Management Act 2010* to provide for voluntary biosecurity management plans (BMP) for premises where

livestock activities occur. It introduced offences and penalties relating to contravening prescribed biosecurity measures and made other miscellaneous amendments.

The *Agriculture Legislation Amendment Act 2022* made a range of amendments to the *Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992* regarding the operation of the new inspection and enforcement powers. It provides for the power to regulate the identification, transport, sale, management and handling of any stock or agricultural produce, fertilisers or stock food if there is a reasonable belief that it is contaminated, and provides new and expanded compliance, inspection and testing powers.

Finally, the *Domestic Animals Amendment (Reuniting Pets and Other Matters) Act 2022* amended the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* to enable animal shelters and consenting veterinary clinics to receive lost cats and dogs and reunite them with their owners, thereby reducing reliance on councils.

Fisheries

The focus of fisheries management centred on widening participation for recreational anglers and ensuring the sector's sustainability. As outlined in the Victorian Fishing Authority's *2019–2024 Strategic Plan*, the Victorian Government maintained its commitment to recreational fishers by building on its Target One Million plan to grow participation to 1 million anglers by 2020. The *Target One Million* initiative concluded on 30 June 2019. A *second phase* began later that year. Initiatives included a new fish hatchery near Shepparton and restocking of waterways.

The *Marine and Fisheries Legislation Amendment Act 2019* amended the *Fisheries Act 1995* to provide for the cancellation of and subsequent compensation for Gippsland Lakes Fishery access licences by 1 April 2021. The Bill also amended the *Marine Safety Act 2010* regarding pilotage services.

Water

Managing the state's water resources remains an ongoing challenge. The main contours of policy were developed by the 58th Parliament in 2016. The *Water for Victoria* strategic plan established a comprehensive approach to managing water resources. The 59th Parliament continued to monitor the plan's implementation and passed additional legislation related to water rights and enforcement.

The most recent *status report* on the implementation of the strategic plan noted action being undertaken across 69 areas. Notable components included the following:

- Nineteen regional projects were delivered to strengthen integrated catchment management.
- The formulation of the 2021 *Our Catchments, Our Communities* document enshrines a number of community-based natural resource management across ten areas of the state.
- Ten large-scale flagship waterways projects with new approaches to monitoring and reporting back to communities were trialled, along with the completion of the *Regional Riparian Action Plan*.
- The Angler Riparian Partnerships Program allowed 1,000 volunteers to participate in 39 separate projects.
- *Victoria's Sustainable Irrigation Program* continues to be delivered in partnership with strengthened catchment management authorities.
- Salinity management and monitoring programs in irrigation and dryland areas are underway, and a new *Victorian Irrigation Drainage Program—Strategic Directions 2021–2024* document has been completed.
- *Urban water strategies* now assist water corporations to identify ways to meet future demand through diversification of water supplies.
- Eight projects supported Traditional Owners to explore cultural mapping, seasonal watering plans, water management plans, research into cultural and environmental flows, and an additional eight *Aboriginal waterway assessments* were funded.
- Annual water accounts continue to report on significant uses of water. A *long-term water resource assessment* (LTRWA) and *sustainable water strategies* will review risks to Victoria's water resources.
- An LTWRA for southern Victoria was released in March 2020.

Several changes were implemented as a result of the following legislation. The [Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#) introduced new compliance and enforcement provisions around the unauthorised taking of water and other offences and enhanced the protection of the environment, water rights, public safety and property. It allows for the findings of LTWRAs to be considered. The Act also enshrined the consideration of Aboriginal cultural values (see also the 'Human Services' section) and required water corporations to consider waterways' social and recreational uses and values. Also, the [Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021](#) changed the regulation of the places, rates and times when water can be taken. It provides new ministerial powers to deal with instances where someone takes more than their authorised amount of water.

In 2021 the Western Water and City West Water service providers were amalgamated into [Greater Western Water](#).

Forestry

Considerable attention and controversy continued around Victoria's forestry industry, especially timber logging and harvesting in native forests.

The main policy focus was the formulation of the [Victorian Forestry Plan](#) in November 2019, aiming to fully transition away from logging native forests towards plantations by 2030. It assists timber workers and firms and remains guided by the 2014 (updated in 2022) code of conduct. See also the 'Planning and environment' chapter.

The [Forests Legislation Amendment \(Compliance and Enforcement\) Act 2021](#) updated offences for unauthorised harvesting, taking or collecting timber or firewood in state forests. It also strengthened the enforcement of codes of practice relating to timber harvesting and introduced the power for authorised officers to require the production of documents for monitoring and compliance. Likewise, the [Sustainable Forests Timber Amendment \(Timber Harvesting Safety Zones\) Act 2022](#) increased penalties for offences, expanded the definition of what is a prohibited 'thing' in a timber harvesting safety zone and provided for greater search and seizure powers.

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced in the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian Legislation website](#).

2019

- [Energy Legislation Amendment \(Victorian Default Offer\) Act 2019](#)
- [Energy Safety Legislation Amendment \(Victorian Energy Safety Commission and Other Matters\) Act 2019](#)
- [Essential Services Commission Amendment \(Governance, Procedural and Administrative Improvements\) Act 2019](#)
- [Marine and Fisheries Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Mineral Resources \(Sustainable Development\) Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Renewable Energy \(Jobs and Investment\) Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Crimes Amendment \(Trespass\) Bill 2019](#) (defeated)

2020

- [Energy Legislation Amendment \(Licence Conditions\) Act 2020](#)
- [Marine Safety Amendment \(Better Boating Fund\) Act 2020](#)
- [National Electricity \(Victoria\) Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [National Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Petroleum Legislation Amendment Act 2020](#)

2021

- [Constitution Amendment \(Fracking Ban\) Act 2021](#)
- [Domestic Animals Amendment \(Reuniting Pets and Other Matters\) Act 2021](#)
- [Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Energy Legislation Amendment \(Energy Fairness\) Act 2021](#)
- [Essential Services Commission \(Compliance and Enforcement Powers\) Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Forests Legislation Amendment \(Compliance and Enforcement\) Act 2021](#)
- [Livestock Management Amendment \(Animal Activism\) Act 2021](#)
- [Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage \(Cross-boundary Greenhouse Gas Titles and Other Matters\) Amendment Act 2021](#)
- [Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021](#)

- [Meat Industry Amendment \(Rabbit Farms\) Bill 2021](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

2022

- [Agriculture Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Sustainable Forests Timber Amendment \(Timber Harvesting Safety Zones\) Act 2022](#)
- [Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Energy Legislation Amendment \(Transition from Coal\) Bill 2022](#) (Private Member's Bill) (lapsed)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [Hydrogen as an energy source](#), Fact sheet, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2021)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

- [Aboriginal waterways assessment program](#), Murray-Darling Basin Authority (2015)
- [Regional Riparian Action Plan](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2015)
- [Water for Victoria](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2016)
- [Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2017–2020](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017)
- [Independent review into the electricity and gas retail markets in Victoria: final report](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2020)
- [Action status report July 2021, Water for Victoria](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- [Our Catchments, Our Communities: Building on The Legacy for Better Stewardship](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- [Strong, Innovative, Sustainable: A New Strategy for Agriculture in Victoria](#), Victorian Government (2021)
- [Victorian greenhouse gas emissions report 2020](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- [Victorian Irrigation Drainage Program—Strategic Directions 2021–2024](#), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2021)
- [2019–2024 Strategic Plan](#), Victorian Fisheries Authority (2022)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into nuclear prohibition](#), Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into the impact of animal rights activism on Victorian agriculture](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee (2020)
- [Inquiry into renewable energy in Victoria](#), Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)
- [Inquiry into the closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn power stations](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2022)

Transport

Transport

An overview of developments within the portfolios of public transport, roads and ports during the 59th Parliament, including key issues, legislation, committee inquiries and reports. For COVID-19-related information on the relevant portfolios, refer to the 'COVID-19' chapter.

During the 59th Parliament the Victorian Government continued to oversee its [\\$90 billion investment in major transport infrastructure](#) and smart technology projects to build capacity on existing networks and fund improvements across road, rail and port systems. This investment funded [165 major road and rail projects](#), including the Metro Tunnel, the removal of 85 level crossings, the West Gate Tunnel, North East Link, major road upgrades, Melbourne Airport Rail, the Suburban Rail Loop and upgrades to every regional passenger line.

Departmental changes and strategies

In January 2019 the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) became the [Department of Transport](#) (DoT). From 1 July 2019, the Public Transport Development Authority (Public Transport Victoria, or PTV) and the Roads Corporation of Victoria (VicRoads) were merged and integrated into the department.

On 1 January 2019 the [Major Transport Infrastructure Authority](#) (MTIA) was established to oversee major transport projects' planning and construction, bringing the Level Crossing Removal Project, Major Road Projects Victoria, North East Link Project, Rail Projects Victoria and the West Gate Tunnel Project into one agency. In March 2019, [Better Boating Victoria](#) was established to oversee recreational boating. It became a division of the Victorian Fisheries Authority on 1 February 2021. In August 2019, Road Safety Victoria was established as a team within the department's Network Planning division to strengthen Victoria's road safety capability. It brings together the functions undertaken by previous department and VicRoads teams.

In December 2019 the [Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#) abolished VicRoads, PTV, the Linking Melbourne Authority and the Transport Infrastructure Authority as statutory bodies. It also established a new overarching transport agency, Transport for Victoria (TfV), a corporate body to coordinate Victoria's roads and public transport system and plan for its future. The functions of the abolished bodies were reallocated between the Secretary of the Department of Transport and the new TfV. In October 2020 the [Project Development and Construction Amendment Act 2020](#) set out a process for the transfer of property, rights and liabilities in relation to certain transport projects to the Head, Transport for Victoria.

In August 2021 the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) investigated the Department of Transport's [Integrated Transport Planning](#) to assess if it was fulfilling its obligations under the *Transportation Integration Act 2010*. It found the department's assertion that its 40 separate plans and strategies met the Act's requirements of creating an integrated transport system did not withstand scrutiny, and that the absence of a transport plan created risks.

As part of the Victorian Government's [climate change strategy](#), in May 2021 the Department of Transport, in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, issued a [transport sector emissions reduction pledge](#). The pledge included:

- zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) to make up 50 per cent of new light vehicle sales by 2030
- all new public transport bus purchases to be ZEVs by 2025
- 400 ZEVs added to the Victorian Government fleet by 2023
- active transport making up 25 per cent of mode share by 2030.

Major projects

With the continuing expansion of major projects across Victoria's transport network, the Victorian Government introduced several pieces of legislation to facilitate construction and management in the 59th Parliament. In May 2019 the [Major Transport Projects Facilitation \(Amendment\) Act 2019](#) made amendments to the *Major*

Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009, which informs agreements between project authorities and utility companies. The amendments improved aspects of the negotiation process.

In 2020 the *Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2020* came into effect, amending various aspects of transport legislation to improve its operation and support Victoria's extensive transport infrastructure development and works program.

The *Suburban Rail Loop*, a proposed new underground rail link connecting Melbourne's middle suburbs, was announced as part of *Labor's 2018 election campaign*. In September 2019 the Suburban Rail Loop Authority was established as an administrative office of the department to plan and coordinate the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop project. In August 2021 a *business case* for the project was released. In December 2021 the Suburban Rail Loop Authority was established as a statutory authority under the *Suburban Rail Loop Act 2021*. The Victorian Government allocated \$2.2 billion in the 2020–21 budget and \$9.6 billion in 2021–22 for initial works on the line section between Cheltenham and Box Hill. Tunnelling for the project commences in 2026.

The *Metro Tunnel project* is a new tunnel designed to relieve congestion in the City Loop. It will deliver twin 9-kilometre rail tunnels between Kensington and South Yarra to create a new end-to-end line from the west of the city (Sunbury) to the south-east (Cranbourne/Pakenham). It includes five new underground railway stations. After the project was initiated in 2018, the tunnelling began in 2019 and was completed in May 2021. Laying of new tracks and testing of a new *high capacity signalling system* took place in 2022. Phase 2 of the Metro Tunnel project was the subject of a *VAGO report* in June 2022, following amendments to the project contract in December 2020.

The *Melbourne Airport Rail project* is a proposed railway linked between Melbourne Airport at Tullamarine and the Melbourne CBD. Proposals for the railway have been made since 1963. The Victorian Government committed funding towards a business case at the end of the 58th Parliament. In the 59th Parliament, site investigations commenced in March 2020, and in November 2020 the Commonwealth and Victorian governments agreed on the route for the railway, via the Metro Tunnel and Sunshine. A *business case* for the rail project was submitted to the Australian Government and Infrastructure Australia in April 2021 and made public in September 2022. Construction started in 2022 and, it is set to be completed by 2029. (See the *Library research paper* for the project's longer history.)

In September 2022 VAGO reported on the *Quality of Major Transport Infrastructure Project Business Cases*, which included critiques of both the Suburban Rail Loop and Melbourne Airport Rail project business cases as untimely and insufficient in content.

The *North East Link* is a 26-kilometre freeway connecting an upgraded Eastern Freeway to the M80 Ring Road in Melbourne's north-east. Proposals for the road have been made since 1969 to complete the city's orbital connection. Having committed to the project in the 2017–18 state budget, an *environment effects statement* was made in 2019 and the *North East Link Act 2020* established the framework for the operation of the North East Link, including the creation of the state-owned North East Link State Tolling Corporation, and for the authorisation, collection and enforcement of tolls on the North East Link. Tunnelling contracts were awarded in October 2021, and a *North East Link Skills and Jobs Centre* was established in July 2021 to connect locals to training and employment opportunities.

The *West Gate Tunnel* has been designed to stop over-reliance on the West Gate Bridge and deliver a dedicated route to the Melbourne Port, moving trucks off local streets and out of residential areas. The *West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019* enabled amendment, modification and tabling of the West Gate Tunnel Agreement, provided for the collection and enforcement of tolls for the use of the West Gate Tunnel tollway, and established the Better Freight Outcomes Fund into which the proceeds of infringement fines are to be paid. Construction of the tunnel was delayed for two years by contract disputes over contaminated soil, but tunnelling began in early 2022.

The level crossing removal project is an eight-year program announced by the Victorian Government in 2015 to reduce congestion and improve safety across Victoria's transport system. At the end of the 58th Parliament, in November 2018, 29 level crossings had been removed. A further six were removed in 2019–20, 11 in 2020–21

and 18 in 2021–22 (see [DoT annual reports](#)). By the end of the 59th Parliament, the program had upgraded or built 30 new stations and removed 66 level crossings. The program was subject to a follow-up report by VAGO in October 2021, assessing the implementation of recommendations to a 2017 audit. It found the department had fully addressed seven recommendations, partially addressed one and was yet to address two.

The Department of Transport's major projects were also subject to VAGO inquiries on [Major infrastructure program delivery capability](#) (August 2021), [Major projects performance](#) (September 2021), and [Major projects performance reporting 2022](#) (September 2022).

Roads and road safety

Major road upgrades and construction completed during the 59th Parliament included:

- in 2019–20, the Drysdale Bypass, Plenty Road stage 2, South Gippsland Highway's 'Black Spur', western roads upgrades, Yan Yean Road, Mordialloc Freeway and Princes Highway West from Winchelsea to Colac
- in 2020–21, the Echuca-Moama bridge, M80 upgrade and Princes Highway East between Traralgon and Sale
- in 2021–22, a Monash Freeway upgrade (see DoT annual reports).

The [Mordialloc Freeway](#) included the world's first 75 per cent recycled plastic noise walls and used almost 800,000 tonnes of recycled and reused materials, including plastic, glass, reclaimed asphalt and rubble. The [M80 ring road upgrade between Sydney Road and Edgars Road](#) become Victoria's first major road project with recycled content (over 66 per cent) in every layer of the road pavement.

In 2021 the Department of Transport released [Victoria's Bus Plan](#), a blueprint for transitioning to all new bus purchases in Victoria as zero emission buses. In 2020–21, the Victorian Government invested [\\$20 million in statewide trials](#), with five bus operators trialling 41 electric buses. In October 2021 Kinetic, which operates SkyBus, was [awarded a \\$2.3 billion contract](#) for the Metropolitan Bus Franchise until 2031, with 431 of the 537 network buses to be replaced with low or zero emission vehicles over the franchise term.

In November 2021 the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee reported on its [inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria](#). While the inquiry did not recommend any major changes to the operation of the School Bus Program, it did encourage the Government to investigate ways to make it easier for the general public to use school buses where capacity exists, and to implement further measures to enhance safety for children. The report was still awaiting a Government response at the conclusion of the Parliament.

Early in the 59th Parliament, the [Transport Legislation Amendment \(Better Roads Victoria and Other Amendments\) Act 2019](#) amended several Acts relating to various transport matters, including clarifying funding for repair and upgrades of outer suburban and country roads from the Better Roads Victoria Trust, amending administration of the alcohol interlock program by VicRoads and managing the movement of large vehicles over railway and tram tracks.

As part of the [Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#), new laws were also introduced banning vehicles from displaying offensive images or slogans from travelling on Victorian roads. The policy responded to offensive slogans displayed on camper vans, such as Wicked Campers, operating around Australia.

The [Transport Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2021](#) made further amendments to various transport Acts. Specifically, the Act made amendments relating to the compulsory acquisition of land, vehicle immobilisation and impoundment, information sharing and information-gathering powers, accreditation of bus operators, disqualification of certain driver's licence and permit holders, and prohibitions on abusing or insulting certain authorised officers.

Road safety

According to the [Transport Accident Commission](#) (TAC), the year-by-year death tolls on Victorian roads during the 59th Parliament were 213 in 2018, 266 in 2019, 211 in 2020, 234 in 2021 and 240 in 2022.

In 2019 for the first time in a decade, no lives were lost on the Hume Freeway, following installation of safety barriers and rumble strips all the way from Melbourne to the New South Wales border. In June 2020 VAGO tabled its report, *Safety on Victoria's roads—regional road barriers*, which assessed the installation of flexible barriers as part of the TAC's *Towards Zero 2016–2020 Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan*. It found the barriers to be effective in reducing serious incidents but not as cost-effective as VicRoads and the TAC intended.

Following their commitment to address threats to community safety posed by dangerous drivers, the Government introduced legislation through the *Road Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020* to enable immediate driver's licence suspensions for excessive speeding offences and incidents where someone has been charged with using a motor vehicle as a weapon to commit a serious offence. The Act also ensured that a person who commits a serious motor vehicle offence while under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs will be subject to mandatory licence sanctions.

In 2020 the TAC released its *Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030*, which supersedes the *Towards Zero* strategy. It aims to halve road deaths by 2030 and eliminate all road deaths by 2050. It also seeks to reduce the incidence of serious injury resulting from road crashes.

In March 2021 the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee tabled its report *Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll*. The report made 36 recommendations, 28 of which were supported by the Government (ten in full, five in part and 13 in principle).

Supporting the road safety strategy, the *Road Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2022* enabled better enforcement of distracted driving and seatbelt wearing offences by giving evidential status to images from new types of road safety cameras. The Act also added to the list of serious offences that Victoria Police may use to trigger immediate licence suspension and disqualification from driving when charges are laid.

Rail

Highlights included the ordering of 65 *High Capacity Metro Trains*, to be built in Victoria, and an additional five new trains to service the Melbourne Airport Rail link. In April 2022 Bombardier was awarded a contract to deliver 100 *Next Generation trams*, the 'largest investment in locally-made trams in Australia's history'.

First announced in the 2017–18 state budget, the \$4 billion *Regional Rail Revival* program continued during the 59th Parliament, with works on the Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Gippsland, North-East, Shepparton and Warrnambool lines.

The *Rail Safety Legislation Amendment (National Services Delivery and Related Reforms) Act 2019* transferred all safety regulatory functions for rail and tram infrastructure and rolling stock from Transport Services Victoria to the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator under the Rail Safety National Law.

In March 2020 VAGO published its report, *Freight outcomes from regional rail upgrades*, which focused on the Murray Basin Rail Project (commenced 2014), the Freight-Passenger Rail Separation Project (2018) and the Regional Rail Revival Program (2018). The inquiry found the upgrades were not yet improving freight outcomes in a timely and cost-efficient way.

In November 2020 the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee tabled its report *Inquiry into expanding Melbourne's free tram zone*, recommending the free tram zone be extended to the Arts Precinct on St Kilda Road and to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. The Government did not support the recommendations for extending the tram zone, but in its *response* expressed support for others, including recommendations around data gathering and management.

Freight and ports

In July 2020 a \$24 million *Better Piers and Waterside Facilities* program was launched, including a \$10 million redevelopment of Altona Pier.

In November 2020 an [independent review of the Victorian ports system](#) was completed, with the report [making 63 recommendations](#), including recommending a new Victorian ports authority, reclassification of Corner Inlet in Gippsland as a commercial port, new safety measures and new management and planning arrangements. In response, a new agency, [Ports Victoria](#), which combined the old Victorian Ports Corporation and Victorian Regional Channels Authority, commenced operations in July 2021 to lead the strategic management of Victoria's commercial ports and waterways.

The [Transport Legislation Amendment \(Port Reforms and Other Matters\) Bill 2022](#) was introduced in March 2022 to embed [Ports Victoria in legislation](#) and provide in its charter that it should promote and facilitate trade, undertake operational activities and provide technical and consultancy services concerning the Victorian ports system. The Bill passed Parliament in [May 2022](#).

Fishing and boating

In October 2019 every public boat ramp in Victoria was [made free](#) for parking and launching.

The [Marine Safety Amendment \(Better Boating Fund\) Act 2020](#) established the Better Boating Fund to hold fees and revenue collected from marine licensing and vessel registration under the *Marine Safety Act 2010*. The fund provides urgent boat ramp upgrades in the first instance, and maintenance and promotion of Victoria's boating infrastructure into the future. The fund contributed to [a range of projects across the state](#) aimed at improving boating safety and providing better facilities.

Major works were completed on Nyerimilang Jetty on the Gippsland Lakes and began at St Kilda Pier.

Bushfire response

In early January 2020 the Port of Hastings Authority and the Victorian Regional Channels Authority helped plan the [naval evacuation of 1,000 people from Mallacoota](#).

The 2019–20 bushfires damaged nearly 1,000 kilometres of Victoria roads. Department staff worked with local councils, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Forest Fire Management, Parks Victoria, VicForests, Victoria State Emergency Service and the Australian Defence Force to clear the roads and undertake emergency repairs to make them safe for locals to quickly regain access to their properties. By May, four months after the fires had been contained, all arterial roads had been restored and reopened. By mid-2020 [crews had replaced 1,299 road signs and 17,479 guideposts](#). Through 2020 the Bushfire Roads to Recovery Program, completed in December 2020, also [reopened 100 local council roads and cleared fire-damaged trees](#).

Legislation

The following selection of legislation was introduced during the 59th Parliament. For further information, see the [Victorian legislation](#) website.

2019

- [Major Transport Projects Facilitation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Rail Safety Legislation Amendment \(National Services Delivery and Related Reforms\) Act 2019](#)
- [Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2019](#)
- [Transport Legislation Amendment \(Better Roads Victoria and Other Amendments\) Act 2019](#)
- [West Gate Tunnel \(Truck Bans and Traffic Management\) Act 2019](#)
- [Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Amendment Bill 2019 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)
- [Road Safety Amendment \(Medicinal Cannabis\) Bill 2019 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)

2020

- [Marine Safety Amendment \(Better Boating Fund\) Act 2020](#)
- [North East Link Act 2020](#)
- [Project Development and Construction Management Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Road Safety and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2020](#)
- [Transport Legislation Amendment Act 2020](#)

2021

- [Suburban Rail Loop Act 2021](#)
- [Transport Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Act 2021](#)
- [Zero and Low Emission Vehicle Distance-based Charge Act 2021](#)
- [Road Safety Amendment \(Hoon Events\) Bill 2021 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)
- [Transport Legislation Amendment \(Transport Plan\) Bill 2021 \(Private Member's Bill\) \(lapsed\)](#)

2022

- [Road Safety Legislation Amendment Act 2022](#)
- [Transport Legislation Amendment \(Port Reforms and Other Matters\) Act 2022](#)

Library research publications

The Parliamentary Library Research unit produced the following research publications during the 59th Parliament.

- [North East Link Bill 2020](#), Bill brief, Victorian Parliamentary Library & Information Service (2020)

Reports

The following selection of reports was produced during the 59th Parliament. For further reports, see the [Library catalogue](#).

Department of Transport annual reports

- [Annual report 2018–19](#), Department of Transport (2019)
- [Annual report 2019–20](#), Department of Transport (2020)
- [Annual report 2020–21](#), Department of Transport (2021)
- [Annual report 2021–22](#), Department of Transport (2022)

Victorian Auditor-General's Office reports

- [Freight outcomes from regional rail upgrades](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- [Safety on Victoria's roads—Regional road barriers](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- [Follow up of managing the Level Crossing Removal Program](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- [Accessibility of tram services](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2020)
- [Integrated transport planning](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2021)
- [Major Infrastructure Program Delivery Capability](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2021)
- [Major projects performance](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2021)
- [Major projects performance reporting 2022](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)
- [Melbourne Metro Tunnel project Phase 2: Main works](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)
- [Quality of Major Transport Infrastructure Project Business Cases](#), Victorian Auditor-General's Office (2022)

Committee inquiries

The following committee inquiries were conducted during the 59th Parliament.

- [Inquiry into the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017 reforms](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2019)
- [Inquiry into expanding Melbourne's free tram zone](#), Legislative Council Economy and

Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)

- [Inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2020)
- [Inquiry into the Multi Purpose Taxi Program \(MPTP\)](#), Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee, Parliament of Victoria (2021)



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