



**Victorian Equal Opportunity
& Human Rights Commission**

2023-24

Annual Report

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October 2024.

Contact us

Enquiry line	1300 292 153
Fax	1300 891 858
NRS voice relay	1300 555 727 then quote 1300 292 153
Interpreters	1300 152 494
Email	enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au
Find us on Facebook	facebook.com/veohrc
Follow us on Instagram	instagram.com/veohrc
Follow us on X	x.com/veohrc
Web	humanrights.vic.gov.au

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October 2024



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& Human Rights Commission**

2023–24

Annual Report

Responsible body's declaration

In accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1994*, I am pleased to present the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 2024.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sandie de Wolf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sandie" and last name "de Wolf" clearly distinguishable.

Sandie de Wolf AM
Chair, Audit and Risk Management Committee
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

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Foreword

Every year, the Commission speaks with thousands of Victorians.

We hear from people who have faced discrimination because of what they believe, what they look like or who they love. We hear from people who have experienced sexual harassment at work or been victimised for speaking up. We hear from people who have been subjected to hate speech because of their racial background or religious beliefs.

And we also hear from many organisations and individuals seeking to better understand their rights and responsibilities, so they can effect positive change and ensure every Victorian is treated fairly.

Addressing these issues – via information and education, dispute resolution, and reviews and investigations targeting systemic issues – is a vital part of progressing our vision for a fair, safe and inclusive Victoria where every person is respected and treated with dignity.

In a year marked by ongoing global conflict and social and political tensions, we saw sustained demand for our services. We responded to 5,286 enquiries from Victorians seeking information about their rights and responsibilities under Victoria's equal opportunity and human rights laws. In parallel, 845 people brought complaints to the Commission, raising 1,851 issues of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification. We continued to provide critical education on equality and human rights, delivering 1,723 education sessions to 26,649 people.

As for many parts of the public sector, constrained resourcing this year required us to refocus our efforts on the projects, programs and services that would most impact on the lives of Victorians in tangible ways.

We harnessed innovative technologies to reach more Victorians, including the release of the first set of easy-to-use digital tools in our Pay equality toolkit for small and medium enterprises. We also refreshed our suite of digital learning programs, bringing together video and interactive microlearning activities to help workplaces and individuals build their knowledge and improve their practices.

During the year, we continued to advocate for more effective legal protections. We drew upon our expertise regulating the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act to advocate for stronger protections from vilification, including extending protections to more groups targeted by hate and including legal tests that better recognise the harm caused by vilification. We also contributed to the national conversation underway about the need for a federal Human Rights Act, which would ensure important protections for human rights across the country.

It goes without saying that much of this work would not have been realised without close collaboration with stakeholders, peers, supporters and government. We continued our partnership with WorkSafe Victoria, to ensure effective regulation of sexual harassment and clearer pathways for victim-survivors to make complaints. We collaborated with Vixen, Victoria's peer-only sex worker organisation, to raise awareness of the new anti-discrimination protections for

sex workers. We continued our work with Switchboard and Rainbow Door, to promote support services for LGBTIQ+ people of faith who may be vulnerable to or experiencing change or suppression practices. Finally, we entered a formal partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service to strengthen our engagement with Victoria's First Peoples and advance important work to embed self-determination and Aboriginal cultural rights under the Charter.

In December, we were also proud to launch our new Strategic plan 2024–26. Underpinning the plan are our 4 strategic priorities for the years ahead – embedding a human rights culture, preventing inequality, eliminating racism and vilification, and promoting the rights of First Peoples. The plan benefited enormously from the input of the many stakeholders who shared their reflections with us.

Our achievements this year relied on the support of the Victorian Government and the Department of Justice and Community Safety, which both helped bring important work to fruition and amplify our reach across the public sector and the community.

We thank the Commission's staff and executive team for their unwavering commitment to advancing human rights and equality in this state. In every part of the organisation, we are fortunate to have individuals with deep expertise across the breadth of the Commission's remit and a genuine passion for ensuring all Victorians are treated with respect and dignity.

We also thank the members of the Commission Board for their work this year to guide the Commission's strategic direction and performance of its function. We farewelled the Chair of our Board, Taryn Lee, and express our heartfelt thanks for her leadership, wise counsel and commitment to ensuring our organisation positively impacts the lives of Victorians. Taryn joined the Board in 2020 and was appointed Chair in April 2022. We also farewelled Laurinda Gardner, who first joined the Board in 2017. Throughout her tenure, Laurinda provided considered advice and valuable insights drawing on her broad governance experience across the public sector. We also welcomed four new members to the Board – Dhanush Girish, Rabbi Gabi Kaltmann and Tass Mousaferiadis (from July 2023) and Sandie de Wolf AM (from September 2023). Their wealth of experience and expertise has already proved invaluable for the Commission's strategic direction.

As we look back on the year, we are pleased to share with you some highlights from 2023–24.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ro Allen'.

Ro Allen
Victorian Equal
Opportunity
and Human Rights
Commissioner



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tass Mousaferiadis'.

Tass Mousaferiadis
Acting Chair,
Commission Board

A snapshot of our impact

In 2023–24:

**We responded to
5,286 enquiries,
raising 8,093 issues
of discrimination,
harassment, human
rights, racial and religious
vilification and change
or suppression practices.**

We received
complaints from
845 people, raising
1,851 instances of:

- **discrimination**
- **sexual harassment**
- **victimisation**
- **vilification**
- **change or suppression
(conversion) practices**

Resolved

54%

of complaints through
our conciliation process

Finalised

52%

of complaints
within six months

Received

97%

satisfaction rating from
people accessing our
complaints service

We delivered **1,723** education sessions,
to **26,649** people via:



1,596

**e-learning
sessions**



127

**face-to-face
sessions**

Participants gave our education
sessions a **93%** satisfaction rating

**Our vision is for a fair, safe,
and inclusive Victoria where
every person is respected
and treated with dignity.**

**Our mission is to engage
and influence law and
policymakers, institutions,
communities and individuals
to protect and promote
human rights in Victoria.**

Our principles are to ensure that:

**we make human
rights real for
all Victorians**

**we lead with
evidence, drawing
on our own and
other's research**

**our work creates
enduring change**

**we invest in our
people to be the
best human rights
organisation we
can be**

Victoria's human rights laws

As an independent statutory body, we have responsibilities under Victoria's 4 human rights laws.

<i>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (EOA)</i>	<p>The EOA makes it against the law to discriminate against people in specific areas of public life on the basis of a number of personal characteristics. It also prohibits sexual harassment and victimisation.</p> <p>The EOA includes a positive duty, which requires all organisations covered by the law (including government, business, employers and service providers) to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation as far as possible.</p>
<i>Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (RRTA)</i>	<p>The RRTA makes it against the law to vilify people because of their race or religion.</p>
<i>Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Charter)</i>	<p>The Charter identifies 20 human rights applicable to all Victorians and requires government and public bodies to consider these rights when making laws and providing services.</p>
<i>Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021 (CSP Act)</i>	<p>The CSP Act bans practices that seek to change or suppress a person's gender identity or sexual orientation and provides a range of options for preventing and responding to these practices.</p>

What we do

We protect and promote human rights and equality in Victoria through a range of functions under our 4 laws.

Advocacy

We advise and influence to make equality and human rights central to policy and law, while raising awareness about their importance across all parts of the community. We encourage meaningful debate, lead public discussion and challenge discriminatory views and behaviours.

Complaints service

We resolve complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation under the EOA and complaints of racial and religious vilification under the RRTA by providing a free and confidential complaints service.

Change or suppression practices civil response scheme

We consider and respond to reports of practices from any person, as well as undertaking investigations and enforcing outcomes where there is evidence of serious or systemic practices occurring.

Education, training and reviews

We provide education and training to build awareness of rights and duties. We conduct reviews of programs and practices to help organisations comply with their equal opportunity and human rights obligations. We provide an education and consultancy service to government, business and the community to drive leading practice in equality, diversity and human rights, including a collaborative approach to developing equal opportunity action plans.

Enforcement

We intervene in court proceedings to bring an expert independent perspective to cases raising equal opportunity and human rights issues. We conduct investigations to identify and eliminate systemic discrimination.

Information

We provide information services to help people understand and assert their rights and duties. Our free Enquiry Line is open to all people in Victoria, and we host regular events to spark conversation about human rights.

Monitoring

We monitor the operation of the Charter and track Victoria's progress in protecting fundamental rights.

Research

We undertake research to understand and find solutions to systemic causes of discrimination and human rights breaches.



Almost 8,000 Victorians accessed our services

Information and enquiries: Helping the community understand their rights and responsibilities

Our information and enquiry service provides a free and confidential information service to all people in Victoria seeking information about discrimination, victimisation, sexual harassment, racial or religious vilification, human rights and change or suppression practices. Our services can be accessed by phone, email and in writing.

In 2023–24, we received 5,286 enquiries, raising 8,093 issues related to discrimination, harassment, human rights, racial and religious vilification, and change or suppression practices. The five most common issues people raised in enquiries were:

Disability discrimination	Sexual harassment	Race discrimination	Discriminatory information requests	Sex discrimination
1,414	709	510	230	229

These most common issues raised were consistent with recent trends.

Accessibility remained a priority for the enquiry service this year. The service has received Communications Access accreditation from Scope, attesting to the service’s focus on supporting those with communication difficulties and providing a range of accessibility options to meet their needs. During the year, we continued to provide a telephone interpreter and relay service for enquirers.

Supporting our enquiry service, we provided a wide range of written information on our website, alongside interactive chatbots providing information about sexual harassment and flexible work requests.

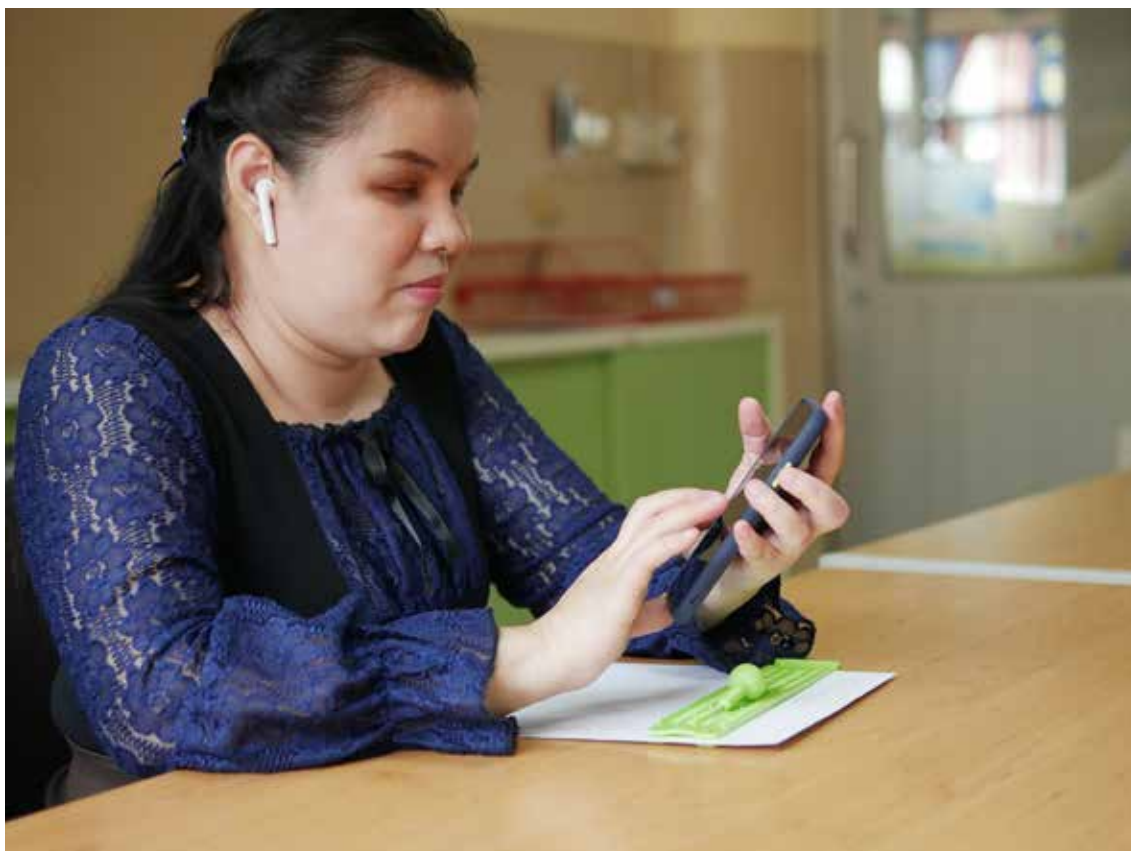
The community reporting tool – a simple online form for reporting experiences of discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation – continued to provide an important avenue for people to request information or make an anonymous report if they do not wish to make a formal complaint. This year, reports via the community reporting tool increased by 22 per cent, with 249 reports received. In the year ahead, we will continue to promote the tool and work with other organisations that host it on their websites to drive awareness of this flexible reporting pathway.

Our enquiries data continued to inform the Commission's strategic work, including our published guidelines, law reform agenda and website content. We also shared de-identified trends with external stakeholders to enhance the work of agencies within Victoria's human rights framework.

'I spoke with an information officer today and explained events that led me to feel discriminated against. I was given information which made me feel much better as I was very upset about the whole experience. Thank you for the outstanding help for myself and others who may be experiencing discrimination.'

– Feedback from enquirer

Over the course of the year, we received 738 enquiries out of our jurisdiction, which we referred to appropriate bodies.



Complaints: Resolving experiences of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification

If Victorians experience discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation or vilification, they can make a complaint via our free and confidential dispute resolution service. Our conciliators work with both the complainant and the respondent to try to reach a mutually agreed outcome. We also receive reports about change or suppression practices, leading to facilitation between the people involved, targeted education or further investigation.

In 2023–24, we received 845 complaints and reports, raising 1,851 instances of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation, vilification, and change or suppression practices.

Each complaint can raise either a single issue of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation or vilification or, as in many cases, may raise multiple issues. For example, a complaint of sexual harassment may also raise related issues of sex discrimination or discrimination based on age.

Our process and legislation allow us to take a flexible and tailored approach to dispute resolution that recognises the intersectional nature of discrimination and inequality. Intersectional discrimination occurs when people experience multiple forms of inequality and discrimination that overlap and intersect in a unique way. This can occur across multiple characteristics, such as sex, age, race, disability, employment activity or gender identity.

Over the course of the year, we:

- **finalised 52% of complaints and reports within six months**
- **resolved 54% of complaints**
- **received a 97% satisfaction rate from people accessing our complaints service.**

Alongside the overall number of complaints, complaints to us about discrimination due to disability, political belief/activity and industrial activity are reflective of pre-pandemic levels.

Five most common issues raised in complaints	Most common settings where discrimination occurred <i>% of all issues</i>	Issues on the rise <i>% change on prior year</i>
Disability (579)	Employment (53%)	Age (+40%)
Race (202)	Goods and services (27%)	Gender identity (+57%)
Sex (134)	Accommodation (6%)	Race (+25%)
Employment Activity (104)		Sex (+24%)
Age (103)		

See the appendix to view a full breakdown of issues and settings for enquiries and complaints in 2023–24.

Education: Building knowledge and skills in equal opportunity and human rights

Our education services support government, organisations, businesses and service providers to develop, adopt and drive leading practice in human rights and equal opportunity. We also help individuals, communities and organisations build their knowledge of human rights.

In 2023–24, we delivered 1,723 education sessions to 26,649 people via:

- **127 face-to-face sessions**
- **1,596 e-learning sessions.**

Participants gave our education sessions a 93 per cent satisfaction rating over the course of the year.

Our e-learning programs focused on:	Our face-to-face education comprised:
Human rights	40 sessions on the Charter
Sexual harassment	56 sessions on the EOA
EOA	17 sessions on the CSP Act

The launch of a suite of new digital learning programs this year enabled us to deliver some programs through a blended learning methodology, which combines digital and face-to-face components. This blended learning model aligns with contemporary adult learning principles, ensuring our programs are engaging and accessible.

Alongside our digital learning programs, we continued to deliver a schedule of high-quality education courses for workplace contact officers, union and industrial advocates, human resources professionals and disability advocates, exploring rights and obligations under the EOA and opportunities to foster fair, safe and inclusive workplaces.

'I wanted to thank you for that training. It was really fabulous. We covered so much and the way you explained everything to such a diverse group of participants was excellent. The scenarios were great and allowed for heaps of useful discussion.'

– Participant in the 'Workplace equality: Contact officer essentials' session

People and culture: An intersectional approach to support a safe, diverse and inclusive workforce

Achieving our vision for a fair, safe and inclusive Victoria relies on our organisation having a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Victoria's diverse community, including those who are marginalised, vulnerable to discrimination or under-represented in public life. We are proud to celebrate the diverse backgrounds, identities and lived experiences of our team, and we strive to ensure our workforce represents the diversity of the community.

During the year, we developed our inaugural ***People and culture plan 2024–26***, a critical roadmap for how we will continue to achieve a thriving workforce and an inclusive workplace culture.

For the first time, the plan synthesises our obligations under a broad range of diversity and inclusion action plans, with actions focused on disability inclusion, addressing racism and gender equality. Streamlining our approach ensures our efforts to build a positive workplace culture are comprehensive, impactful and intersectional.

The plan groups our objectives into four core pillars of work focused on championing belonging and inclusion; driving a culture of respect; enhancing our team's health, safety and wellbeing; and prioritising openness and trust.

Aligned to the Commission's *Strategic plan 2024–26*, the ***People and culture plan 2024–26*** is a foundation for delivering our key projects and services in the years ahead. The plan also enables longer-term focus on ensuring the skills and experience of our workforce respond to the needs of Victorians.



People and culture plan 2024–26

Media and communications: Keeping human rights on the public agenda

In 2023–24, we continued to lead and stimulate wider dialogue to engage audiences in conversations for a fair, safe and inclusive Victoria.

A broad range of human rights issues made the headlines over the course of the year, and we engaged with the media to shape public discourse on equality, discrimination and human rights.

We commented on a wide range of topics, including:

- how the EOA protects multicultural and multifaith communities from discrimination, and experiences of racism in hospitality settings and on public transport
- how Victorians' right to peaceful assembly is protected by the Charter
- reforming Victoria's anti-hate protections
- discrimination on the basis of mental health and breastfeeding
- our ongoing work to implement the CSP Act and engage with faith communities, health professionals and survivor groups
- opportunities to advance LGBTIQ+ inclusion at work
- the Yoorrook Justice Commission's critical work to examine systemic human rights issues in Victoria's child protection and criminal justice systems.

Conversations about neurodiversity and workplace culture

Over the course of year, our program of public sector and community events were a valuable opportunity to engage, educate and drive important conversations about human rights and equality.

In late 2023, we co-hosted a panel discussion to launch the newly established ADHD Growth Network, representing the needs, interests and concerns of public sector staff with a lived experience of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. More than 900 people registered for the event, signalling the strong need for sector-wide leadership to make public sector workplaces more inclusive for people of all abilities.

The panel discussion featured Victorian Public Sector Commissioner Brigid Monagle, diversity and inclusion experts from the Department of Education and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and staff with lived experience. Our event provided insights into the experiences of people with ADHD at work and explained employer responsibilities, reasonable adjustments and the supports and resources available to public sector staff.

Human Rights Week

In December, Human Rights Week marked a week of action, inviting Victorians to complete a daily activity to further their understanding of human rights and put their knowledge into practice.

As in previous years, we partnered with peer organisations to deliver this year's actions, including the Office of the Public Advocate, the Victorian Disability Workers' Commission, the Commission for Children and Young People, the Mental Health Complaints Commission and the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

During the week, we also hosted a human rights-focused panel discussion in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) Victoria, with support from Diversity Council Australia. The event, 'Creating safe spaces for staff in troubling times: Human rights, leadership and workplace culture' attracted nearly 400 registrations. Participants heard compelling reflections on how human rights principles can act as a foundation for supportive and empathetic leadership, with practical ideas for people leaders and professionals to create a psychologically safe workplace.



Promotional materials: 'Creating safe spaces for staff in troubling times: Human rights, leadership and workplace culture.'



A snapshot of the events we attended over the year, engaging with communities from across the state to celebrate events and occasions.



Left to right:

- Play by the Rules
- Drive with Heart
- Australian Council of Human Rights Authorities, October 2023
- National Council of Women of Victoria conference
- Travel Paws



Left to right:

- Swinburne Pride event
- VEOHRC Capability Development Program for Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission
- Renaming our meeting rooms to the names of Registered Aboriginal Parties with the Office of the Public Advocate
- Victorian Mosque Open Day 2024
- Africa Day Gala Dinner 2024





First Peoples data report

Accurate data about the experiences of First Peoples is critical for ensuring policy decisions and public services meet the needs of First Peoples communities. With a strategic focus on promoting the rights of First Peoples, we are continually working to improve the data we collect from our enquiries and complaints services and how we share it with other organisations serving First Peoples.

Artwork: Gorakor Wunbuni Yingurni 'Walk gently today' (Dja Dja Wurrung) by Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung and Gamilaroi artist Madison Connors.

Our second First Peoples data report is a result of our **First Peoples data strategy** under the **Aboriginal community engagement strategy 2020–22**. The data strategy is underpinned by principles of privacy and consent, respecting self-determination and data sovereignty, supporting cultural rights, and ensuring transparency and accountability.

We acknowledge that the complaints and enquiries we have received represent just a fraction of the instances of discrimination experienced by First Peoples. This data should not be seen or published as representative of all experiences of discrimination experienced by First Peoples.

Even when people know about our services, there are many barriers that may deter First Peoples from reporting what they have experienced. This includes mistrust of government services and systems due to past government policies, including displacement and separation of families. This mistrust also results from a history of poor complaint-handling across public services and genuine fear that making a complaint may result in retribution. In addition, First Peoples experience other barriers such as disempowerment and internalised racism. In recent years, we have made changes to ensure we continually improve the cultural safety of our services for First Peoples and actively promote how we practise cultural safety in our reporting pathways to First Peoples communities. However, it will take time and ongoing improvements to our services to ensure First Peoples feel confident reporting their experiences of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification.

We also acknowledge that there are some limitations in the data we have available. While our complaints team started recording whether someone identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in 2017–18, we only started asking this question explicitly in 2019–20. Our previous approach was to minimise the number of mandatory questions we ask to avoid over-collection of data, but we recognise that providing a culturally safe way for people to identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is important for collecting data and ensuring our service responds to their needs.

We'll continue to publish this data report each year and provide it directly to our key First Peoples stakeholders. In doing so, we hope to help identify emerging issues for First Peoples communities and continue to shape effective policies and services.

Key findings

Since 2017–18, 201 First Peoples have made complaints to the Commission.

Since 2017–18, we've received 249 enquiries from First Peoples, raising 462 issues of discrimination.

Racism and disability discrimination continued to be the most common types of discrimination in the complaints and enquiries we received.

The most common places where First Peoples experienced discrimination continued to be in the provision of goods and services and at work.

Discrimination against First Peoples often occurred in interactions with retail businesses and state government agencies.

In the last 3 reporting years, just over half of First Peoples who made complaints were women.

Complaints about discrimination in accommodation rose significantly in 2023–24, with double the number of complaints from the prior year.

About our complaints process

We can help resolve complaints under two Victorian laws: *the Equal Opportunity Act 2010* and *the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*. We also have a separate process to receive reports under the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021*.

Under these laws, anyone (of any age – usually those under 18 are supported by a parent or carer) can make a complaint if they believe they have experienced discrimination, sexual harassment, racial or religious vilification or victimisation.

Complaints are normally about individual experiences. We can also accept representative complaints which are issues affecting a lot of people, but these are less common.

Generally, we may receive up to two of these a year but are yet to receive any representative complaints from First Peoples.

By making a complaint, First Peoples can seek a positive outcome for themselves and show others in their community how to speak up and seek a positive outcome too.

[Read more about our complaints process.](#)

Sometimes we become aware of systemic issues, where laws, policies or practices discriminate against a group of people because of their personal attributes. In those situations, we may use our investigation function to look at whether the organisation involved is fulfilling its obligations under the EOA and recommend changes to ensure they are treating people fairly.

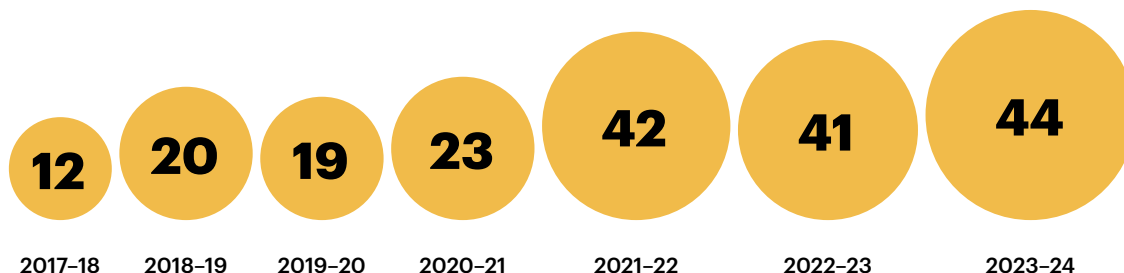
[Read more about our investigations.](#)

Complaints

How many First Peoples made complaints to the Commission?

Since 2017–18, 201 First Peoples have made complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification to the Commission. This includes 44 people who made complaints in 2023–24. The number of complaints received from First Peoples has continued to rise over the last 7 years. The Commission will continue to raise awareness of this service within the community.

Figure 1. Complaints from First Peoples, 2017–18 to 2023–24



About our complaints data

When a person makes a complaint about discrimination, we record some key details including:

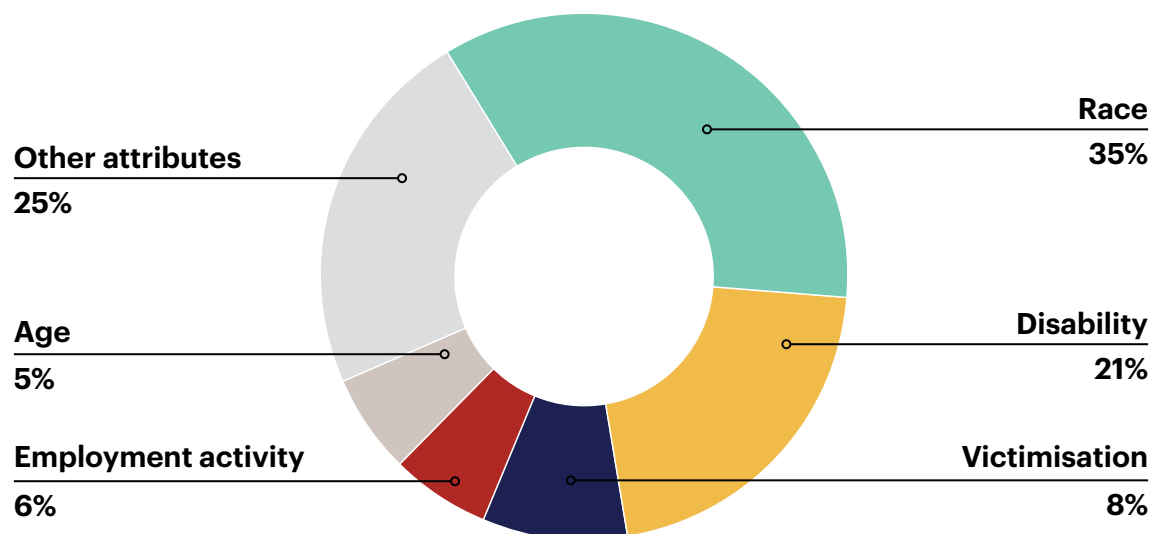
- what type of discrimination the person experienced – for example, discrimination based on race, sex, disability, age or sexual orientation (these characteristics are known as protected attributes)
- where the discrimination occurred – for example, in employment, in education or in the provision of goods and services (these places are known as areas of public life).

A single complaint can include more than one type of discrimination.

What types of discrimination did First Peoples experience?

In 2023–24, race discrimination (32% of issues raised in complaints) and disability discrimination (19%) were the most common issues First Peoples reported in complaints. The results for this year were broadly consistent with issues raised in complaints since 2017–18 (below).

Figure 2. Most common issues raised in complaints from First Peoples, 2017–18 to 2023–24



While we receive anecdotal reports that racial vilification and discrimination on the basis of spent convictions are common experiences, we only receive a small number of complaints raising these issues – typically 1 or 2 complaints each year.

Where did First Peoples experience discrimination?

In 2023–24, employment and provision of goods and services were the most common places where First Peoples experienced discrimination, consistent with previous years. There was an increase in the number of complaints related to accommodation, doubling from last year.

Figure 3. Most common areas of public life where First Peoples experienced discrimination, 2017–18 to 2023–24

2023–24



2022–23



2021–22



2020–21



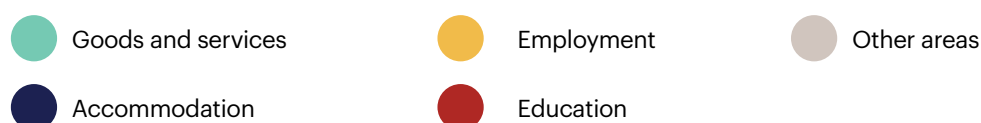
2019–20



2018–19



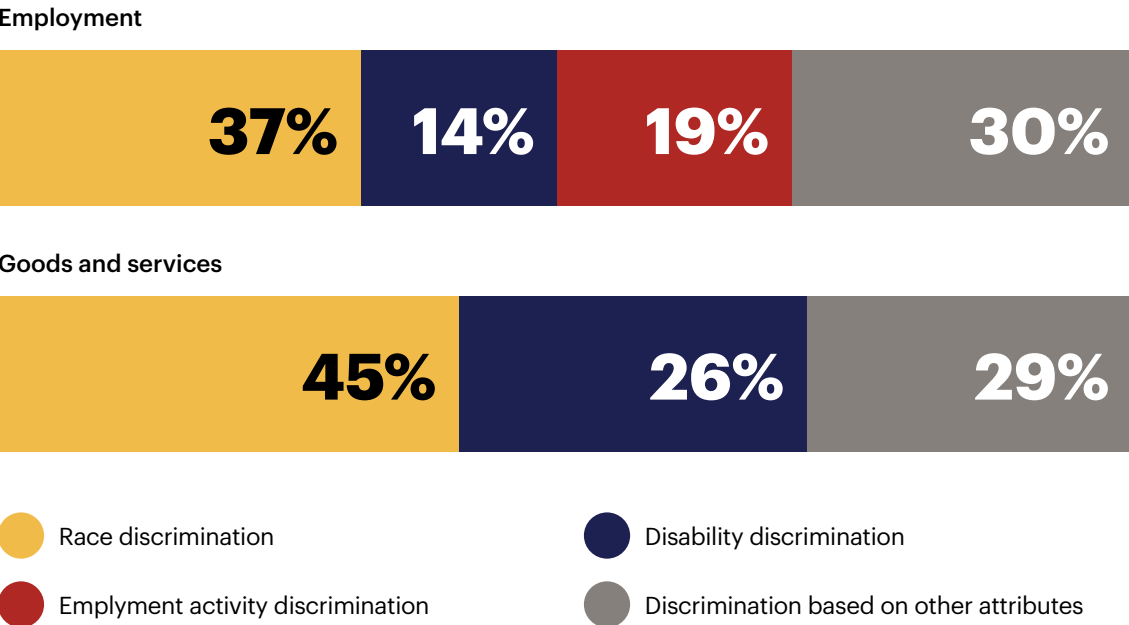
2017–18



While we hear anecdotally that sports clubs are a common place for people to experience discrimination, we have received very few complaints related to that area of public life over the last 7 years.

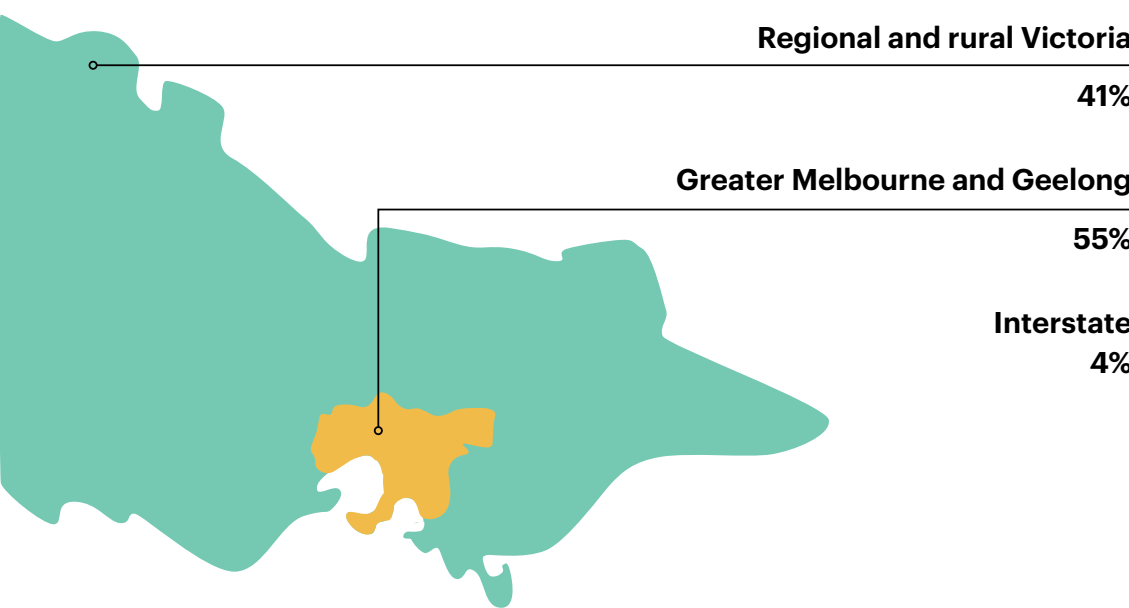
Focusing on goods and services, and employment as the areas of public life where First Peoples most commonly experienced discrimination, we can see that race discrimination and disability discrimination accounted for a significant proportion of complaints in these areas.

Figure 4. Race discrimination and disability discrimination as a proportion of all employment and goods and services complaints, 2017–18 to 2023–24



Nearly 60 per cent of complaints from First Peoples related to the metropolitan region and Geelong over the last 3 years.

Figure 5. Where First Peoples made complaints across the state, 2021–22 to 2023–24



What organisations did First Peoples make complaints about?

Over the last 3 years, retail businesses, state government organisations, First Peoples organisations, real estate providers and health/medical services were the most common organisations that First Peoples made complaints about.

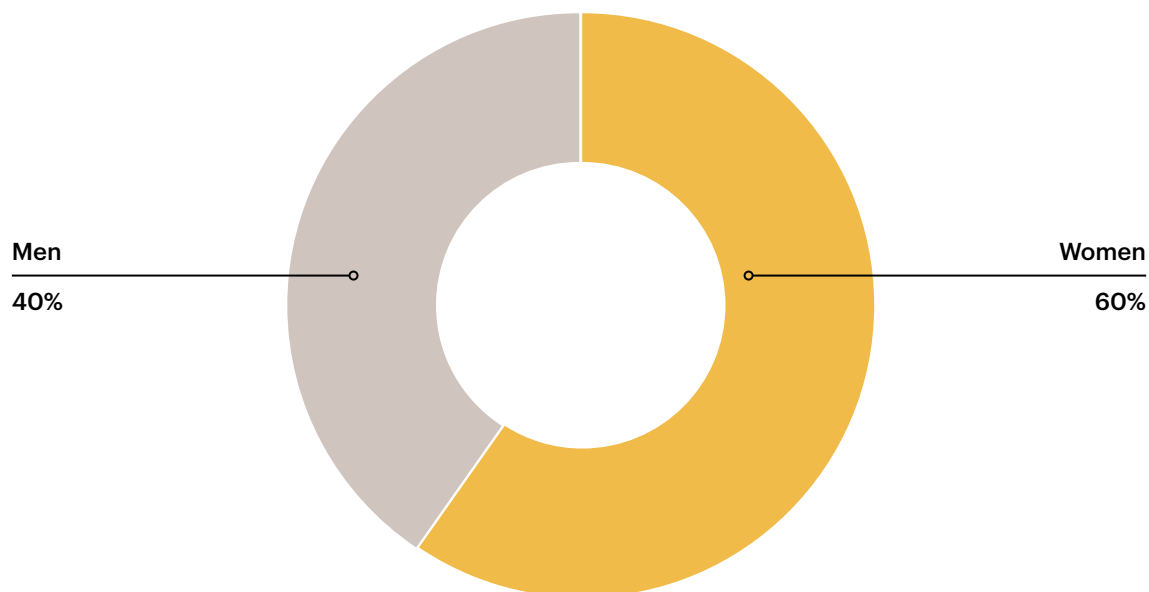
Figure 6. The most common organisations First Peoples made complaints about, 2021–22 to 2023–24



Who made complaints to the Commission?

Over the last 3 years, 60 per cent of First Peoples who made a complaint were women.

Figure 7. Gender of First Peoples who made a complaint, 2021–22 to 2023–24



What outcomes do people seek from complaints?

When someone makes a complaint to the Commission, they may seek a range of different outcomes important to them and their community. Some common outcomes people seek include:

- an acknowledgement of their experience
- an apology to them or their community
- a promise to change or stop the behaviour
- compensation
- being given their job back
- a statement of service or reference from an employer
- accessing a service where access was denied
- cultural awareness or cultural safety training
- training in equal opportunity laws so the respondent is educated about their legal obligations
- reviewing and updating equal opportunity and diversity policies.



Enquiries

About our enquiries data

When someone makes an enquiry, we record the issue they are enquiring about. Our list includes around 30 issues such as human rights, discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation. A single enquiry can raise multiple issues.

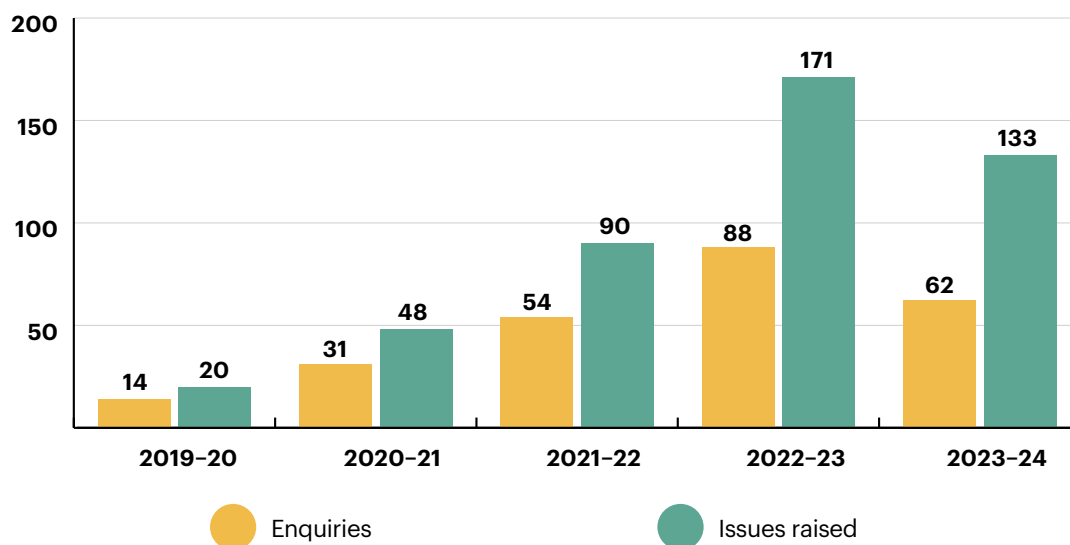
Enquiries, and issues raised in them, have continued to increase over the last 5 years.

We will continue to promote this service to First Peoples and increase awareness of how we employ culturally safe practices to receive enquiries.

How many enquiries did we receive from First Peoples?

In 2023–24, First Peoples made 62 enquiries, raising 133 issues.

Figure 8. Enquiries and issues raised by First Peoples



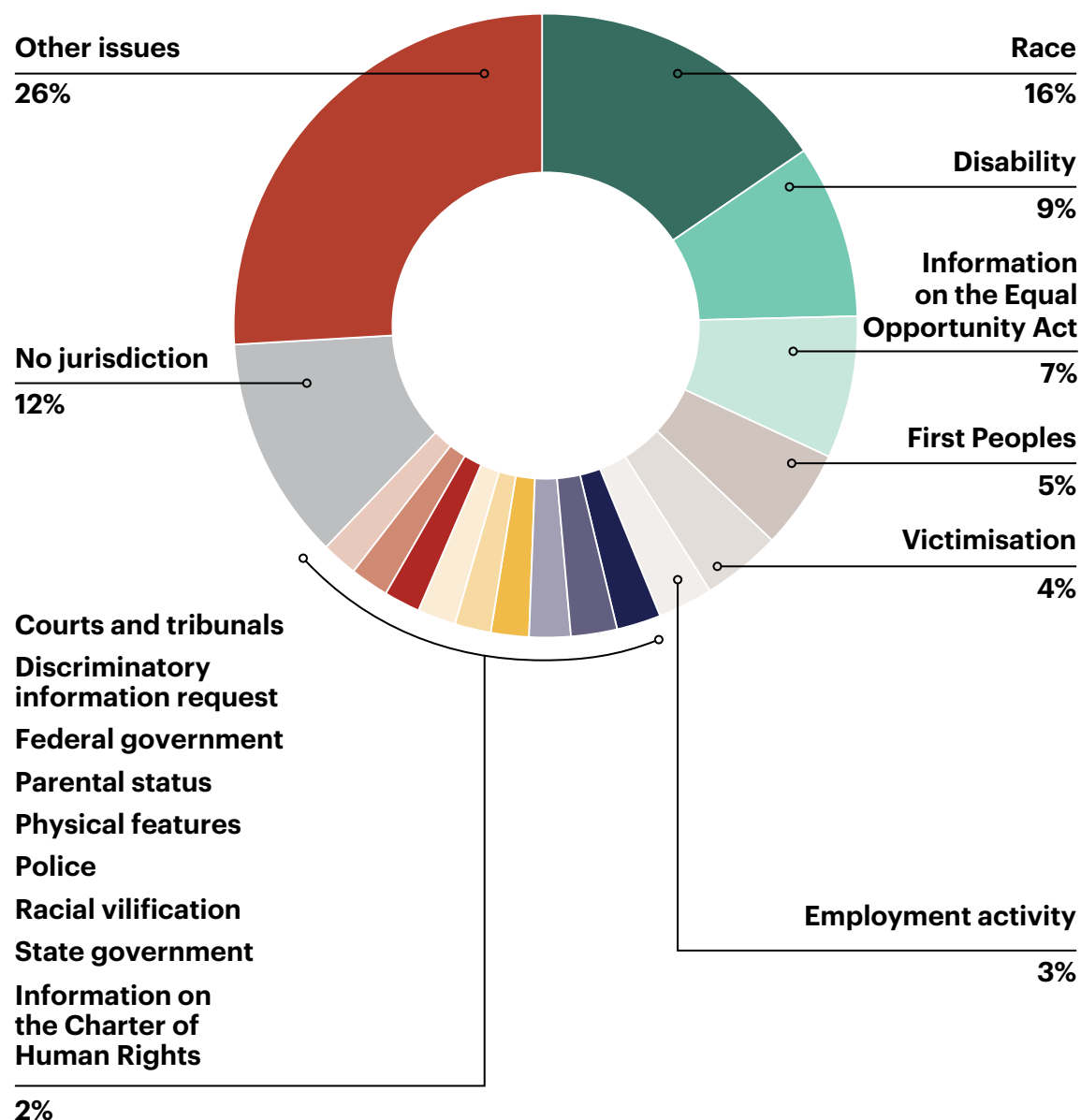
Improving the data we collect from enquiries

While we have traditionally minimised the number of questions we ask people when they make an enquiry to avoid over-collecting data, we recognised that this limited the data we collected about particular cohorts and our ability to tailor our enquiry service to their needs. In late 2020, we began asking enquirers the 'optional to answer' question of whether they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. People can opt not to answer and remain anonymous.

What types of discrimination did First Peoples enquire about?

Since 2019–20, race discrimination and disability discrimination have been the most common issues raised in enquiries. This continued in 2023–24.

Figure 9. Most common issues raised in enquiries from First Peoples, 2020–21 to 2023–24



Making our services more accessible for First Peoples

In recent years, we have been working to make our services more accessible and culturally safe for First Peoples – by fast-tracking complaints from First Peoples and providing additional support to start the process. Since these improvements, we have seen a significant increase in the number of complaints we have received from First Peoples. Streamlining our services in this way has made the process more flexible and removed some barriers to making a complaint.

We've also focused on making it easier for First Peoples to make a complaint to us by establishing pathways for warm referrals to the Commission from relevant stakeholders including:

- Aboriginal Housing Victoria
- Dispute Settlement Centre
- Fair Work Ombudsman
- JobWatch
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- Victorian Ombudsman
- Disability Discrimination Legal Service
- E-Safety Commissioner
- Health Complaints Commissioner
- Mental Health Complaints Commissioner
- Victoria Legal Aid
- WorkSafe Victoria

Further data

First Peoples organisations: More data detailing the types and number of issues raised from each complaint may be available, email us to discuss further.





Delivering our 4 strategic priorities

In December 2023, we were proud to launch our new Strategic plan 2024–26. The strategic priorities identified in this plan allow us to mobilise our vision for a fair, safe and inclusive Victoria. They focus on where we can best contribute to the change we want to see, considering our mandate, expertise and the needs of the community:

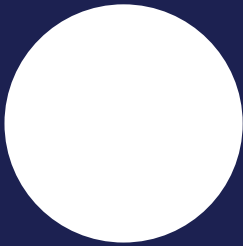
- **Embed a culture of human rights**
- **Prevent inequality**
- **Eliminate racism and hate speech**
- **Promote the rights of First Peoples.**



Embed a culture of human rights



We protect human rights in Victoria by supporting public authorities to embed a culture that reflects the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter), while continuing to uphold and strengthen human rights protections. Our work this year prioritised continuing to build the capability of Victoria's public sector, undertaking consultation about how to reform the Charter and keeping up our advocacy for a National Human Rights Act.



Charter Education Program

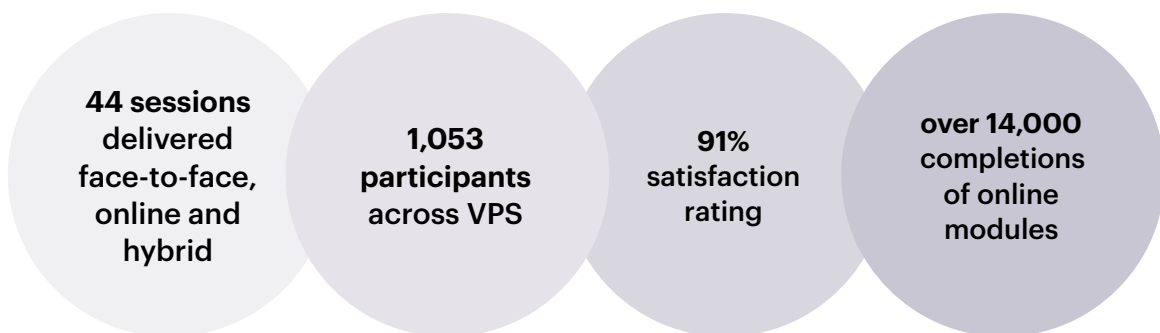
Educating the Victorian public sector (VPS) to understand the Charter and apply it in their day-to-day work was an essential foundation for this strategic priority in 2023–24. We offered a range of high-quality education services for VPS workers to lift their knowledge of human rights in the Charter and learn how to uphold them in everything they do.

The Charter Education Program is the state's leading initiative to foster a human rights culture in the Victorian public sector. The 2023 program comprised:

- **executive briefings**, targeting senior public sector staff to support leadership on Charter compliance and practice
- **general sessions**, targeting teams with specific needs across the public sector
- **Charter Capability Program (CCP)**, an intensive 4–5 part iterative education program focusing on capability development and action planning
- **a suite of 6 e-learning modules**, introducing public sector staff to the Charter and their obligations.

In November 2023, renewed whole-of-government funding allowed the program to continue for a further 2 years, underpinned by the key pillars of leadership, capability and resources.

In 2023–24:



Dr. Farinaz Zamani, Manager, Human Rights Education, presenting a Charter Leadership Briefing in May 2024.

Charter Champions seminar series

In May 2024, the Commission hosted the first seminar in our new Charter Champions seminar series to motivate, inspire and support Victorian public sector workers to make human rights central to their work. The series brings together leading human rights experts, academics, practitioners, and advocates to share knowledge, experience and strategies on a broad range of human rights issues.

Featuring one of Australia's preeminent human rights scholars, Professor Paula Gerber, the first seminar generated strong interest, with over 200 public sector workers in attendance. Participants heard Professor Gerber's insights into the scope of children's rights in Australia and Victoria, including reflections on children's rights within the work of the Victorian public sector.

Following a strong start to the series, we look forward to continuing to roll out further seminars in the year ahead.



The graphic has an orange header with a white speech bubble containing the text 'KEY TAKEAWAYS'. To the right of the speech bubble is a small video frame showing Professor Paula Gerber. Below the header is a blue section containing a numbered list of three key takeaways.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Professor Paula Gerber

1. When you are making decisions that affect children, are you involving children in that process?
2. Are you using a human rights based approach? This means making children's rights an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programs.
3. Your approach to children's rights needs to be substantive/meaningful not superficial, incidental or selective.

Professor Paula Gerber presenting the first webinar in the Charter Champions Seminar Series in May 2024.

Reforming the Charter

For nearly two decades, the Charter has provided Victorians with an important tool for upholding the rights of every individual and shaping government policy and decisions. The human rights landscape has evolved considerably since the Charter came into effect, and there is now a need to strengthen this once-trailblazing law to keep pace with other Australian jurisdictions. In 2023–24, we began the first stages of consultation on how the Charter could better protect the rights of Victorians. The insights will underpin our continued advocacy for Charter reform and for a national Human Rights Act.

Seeking insights from Victoria's legal community

We delivered the first of these consultations in partnership with the Victorian Bar in May 2024. The event brought together 50 barristers, judges and former politicians to articulate the legal wants, needs and challenges to achieving Charter reform. A robust discussion revealed considerable appetite for reform among participants, who considered:

- the inclusion of progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights
- introducing a standalone cause of action
- ensuring the availability of alternative dispute resolution for Charter complaints
- reconsidering the lack of damages as a remedy
- the availability of representative complaints
- the need for further education for lawyers, the public sector and the community.

'Victoria's experience of a formal human rights instrument is only just beginning. It will be a matter for us as a community to determine, in light of Victoria's experience with this Charter, whether further rights should be protected by the Charter in the future.'

– Former Attorney-General Rob Hulls, Second Reading Speech, 4 May 2006



Consultation participants, Charter reform workshop with the Victorian Bar.

Advocating for a National Human Rights Act

In collaboration with other human rights advocacy organisations, we have continued to call for a federal Human Rights Act to sit alongside the Victorian Charter. This much-needed reform would strengthen protections by ensuring both state and federal public authorities are obligated to act in accordance with people's human rights.

In July 2023, our submission to the federal Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' Inquiry into the National Human Rights Framework drew on lessons from the Victorian Charter and supported the Australian Human Rights Commission's Free and Equal model for a federal Human Rights Act.

Commissioner Ro Allen and members of our leadership team appeared before the inquiry at its Melbourne hearing on 25 August 2023, to share lessons from Victoria's experience of Charter implementation which could inform federal legislation. Our appearance explored opportunities to protect economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights; the benefits of a standalone causes of action; and how the role of the Australian Human Rights Commission could be expanded.

The Commission's reflections featured prominently in the Parliamentary Joint Committee's final report in May 2024, which endorsed the Free and Equal model and proposed a draft bill to be considered by parliament.

'A Human Rights Act provides overarching principles and protections that safeguard the rights and freedoms of every person, no matter where they live, what they look like or what they believe. It sends a strong statement that the rights of people are valued, respected and prioritised over the day-to-day political context.'

– VEOHRC submission to the Inquiry into Australia's National Human Rights Framework



Commissioner Ro Allen and members of the leadership team appeared before the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' Inquiry into the National Human Rights Framework at its Melbourne hearing on 25 August 2023.

Prevent inequality

The background of the page is a solid red color. A large, white, curved shape, resembling a thick arc or a partial circle, spans across the middle of the page. In the lower right quadrant, there is a smaller, solid red curved shape that partially overlaps the white arc. Within this red shape is a white circle.

Achieving equality is about more than just fixing the problems as they arise. It requires prevention *and* response. This new strategic priority steers our work to help organisations to take preventative action and create an environment where everyone is safe and respected. This year, our work to realise this priority involved equipping employers across Victoria with the right tools to eliminate and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. In parallel, we worked to improve our regulation of workplace sexual harassment through stronger collaboration.

Preventing sexual harassment

Employment continues to be the most common place where people experience sexual harassment. In 2023–24, 9 in 10 sexual harassment complaints we received related to the workplace. This data confirms that supporting organisations of all sizes to comply with their positive duty to prevent sexual harassment remains a critical area of work.

Sexual harassment prevention plan

This year, we created new tools for employers to help them plan to meet their legal obligation to not just respond to sexual harassment if it arises, but to stop it occurring in the first place.

In January 2024, we released a new prevention plan guide and template to help employers identify and manage risk factors that contribute to workplace sexual harassment, within their responsibilities under the EOA. In pairing guidance with the template, the guide encourages employers to consider specific organisational or industry characteristics and consult with employees to develop prevention actions.

The launch of our prevention plan guide and template complemented the introduction of a federal positive duty to eliminate sexual harassment under the federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth). Our approach supported reaching employers in Victoria and across Australia with a comprehensive set of resources for making workplaces safer and more respectful.

The new resources follow the Commission's 2020 **Guideline: Preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment**. With essential information on sexual harassment in the workplace, the guideline features minimum standards for small, medium and large organisations to comply with their positive duty to eliminate sexual harassment as far as possible.

Sexual harassment prevention plan guide

How to write a prevention plan

How to write a prevention plan

Drivers	Risks	Response
The first step to preventing sexual harassment involves identifying and addressing the drivers. It is also called primary prevention.	This step involves identifying the risk factors that create sexual harassment in your organisation. It is also called secondary prevention.	This step involves ensuring measures to prevent harassment are appropriate and effective. It is also called tertiary prevention.

This guide outlines primary, secondary and tertiary prevention approaches to ensure sexual harassment prevention is comprehensive and best practice.

Step 1. Identify drivers, risks and gaps

- Identify the means of sexual harassment.
- Identify the risks specific to the workplace or industry.
- Identify the gaps in responses to sexual harassment.

Step 2. Respond to drivers, risks and gaps

- Consult with employees and employee representatives on actions to address the drivers, risks and gaps, and identify any additional risks.
- Develop these actions and measures into a comprehensive prevention plan.

Step 3. Implement the prevention plan

- Communicate the prevention plan with employees and ensure it's understood by all staff.
- Monitor the success of implementation through regular reviews of progress and completed data, and any relevant trends.

For more information on prevention plans, take a look at the Commission's [Guideline: Preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment](#) (Guideline).

Download the Guideline at [humanrights.vic.gov.au/sexual-harassment](#).



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What are the drivers for sexual harassment in your workplace?

Drivers include gender inequality, power disparities, and stereotypes.

What specific drivers are in your workplace?

Consider drivers, see our Guideline – [Standard 3.3: Sexual harassment at work](#).

Are there any relevant plans, policies or training that address these drivers?

Is there an internal strategic plan or strategies for equality in the workplace?

Are there any relevant internal strategic plans or policies for addressing inequality in the workplace?

Are there any relevant policies and procedures on sexual harassment, see our Guideline – [Standard 3.3: Sexual harassment at work](#) and [Standard 3.4: Sexual harassment at work](#).

Have you conducted a risk assessment of your workplace?

Identify the likelihood of sexual harassment at the potential business for individuals reporting an experience characterised by such as a protected area of the office.

Is there a process with a reliance on reporting? Results for securing the risk into a prevention plan.

For a risk assessment template and information on how to complete, see our Guideline – [Appendix: Risk assessment and risk register](#).

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Ground

Sexual harassment in your workplace.

Sexual harassment in your workplace? It occurs?

How can it be on staff?

Sexual harassment be prevented?

By writing this plan? What will it do?

Monitor on sexual harassment in the workplace. Guideline – [Chapter 3: Understanding workplace harassment](#).

Framework

The legal framework you are following.

Consider on when your organisation

your obligations under state and federal law?

Consider on the legal context in Victoria and federally. Guideline – [Chapter 3: Understanding the law on harassment](#).

Page 11

Preventing sexual harassment: compliance with our retail franchise investigation

Under the EOA, the Commission's investigation function is a powerful tool for examining systemic issues. In 2023–24, we revisited our 2022 investigation into sexual harassment in the retail industry, and Bakers Delight Holdings reported that it had met its obligations in our compliance agreement.

The investigation into Bakers Delight Holdings explored whether the company had complied with its positive duty to prevent sexual harassment, under section 15 of the EOA. Our investigation was launched in response to evidence that the retail industry can be a high-risk workplace for sexual harassment and franchise arrangements can pose complexities for prevention and response.

During the investigation, Bakers Delight Holdings, a head franchisor with operations across Australia, cooperated in full and had already begun to take steps to keep workers safe from workplace sexual harassment during the investigation. After entering into a compliance agreement with the Commission to take further steps towards prevention, the company confirmed its fulfilment of all obligations in August 2023.

While achieving a positive outcome for the company, this also sets an example for all employers in the retail industry and among franchise businesses about how they can prevent sexual harassment at work.

Collaborating with WorkSafe Victoria to regulate sexual harassment

To implement recommendations from the Victorian Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment (the Taskforce), we continued our partnership with WorkSafe Victoria to develop a strategy that will improve our respective efforts to regulate workplace sexual harassment in Victoria.

Supported by our memorandum of understanding, WorkSafe and the Commission commenced development of a parallel enforcement strategy to realise recommendation 12 of the Taskforce. Due to be released in 2024–25, the strategy will explain how both organisations will enhance our mutual capability to regulate workplace sexual harassment by improving our information-sharing, referral processes and coordination, and increasing community awareness of what each body can do to respond to workplace sexual harassment.

In our wide-ranging consultations and feedback processes to develop the strategy, we heard from organisations including unions, community organisations, community legal centres and members of the legal profession.

We also participated in early planning with WorkSafe Victoria on recommendation 6 of the Taskforce, which proposed the development of industry-specific guidance on work-related sexual harassment. We intend to commence this work in 2024–25.

Blended education to eliminate sexual harassment

In 2023–24, we partnered with RMIT University to deliver a comprehensive blended learning program to build staff capability in eliminating sexual harassment.

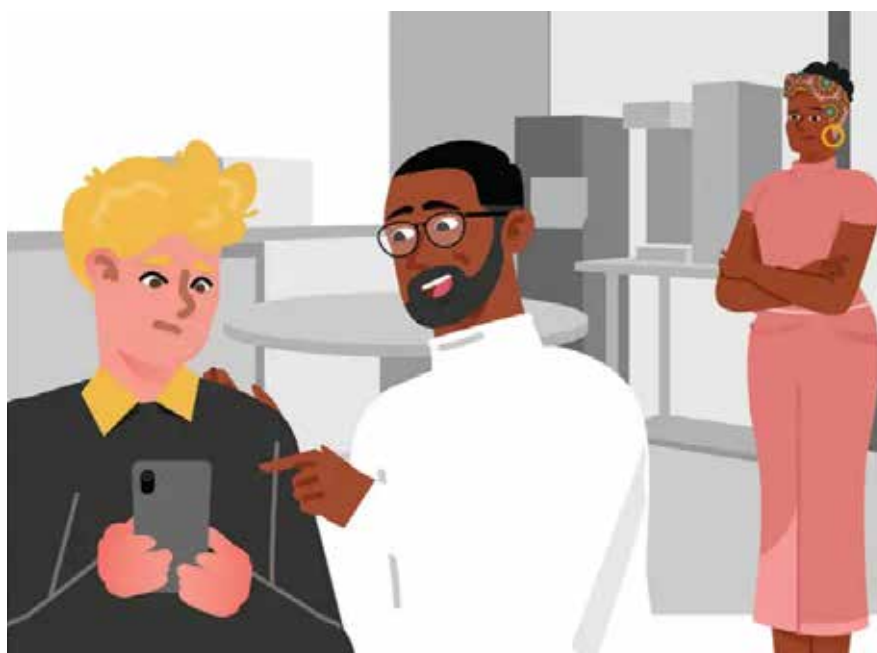
In 2021, the National Student Safety Survey highlighted the prevalence of sexual harassment in universities, finding 1 in 2 (48 per cent) university students had experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime. Female students (63 per cent), transgender students (63 per cent) and non-binary and gender-diverse students (77 per cent) were more likely to have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime than male students (26 per cent).

Combining a 3-part digital education suite and customised face-to-face learning, our program equips senior people managers and leaders with the skills to identify, prevent and respond to sexual harassment. The program embeds contemporary trauma-informed and intersectional approaches, led by victim-survivors, to ensure best practice.

Approximately 10,000 RMIT staff have completed the Commission's digital learning modules, and 180 people managers will have undertaken the face-to-face component by the end of 2024. To date, 90 per cent of participants who have completed the program indicated that it has significantly improved their knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent and respond to sexual harassment in their teams.

'We value our partnership with the Commission to effect the deep and sustained change we need to eradicate gender-based violence from our university community. The program is nuanced, evidence-based and provides practical tools for managers to readily take action to prevent gender-based harm, and support those who have experienced sexual harassment.'

– Trina Howley, Senior Manager, Prevention of Gender-based Violence, RMIT University



The Commission's 'Preventing sexual harassment in the workplace' digital education module.

Supporting pay equality in small and medium enterprises

The gender pay gap is an ongoing issue for Australian workplaces. The latest data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency estimates Australia's gender pay gap at 12 per cent – meaning women working full-time need to work, on average, an extra 50 days per year to earn the same as men. With support from Industrial Relations Victoria, the Commission has been working over the last 3 years to better understand the drivers of pay inequality and create practical resources to support small and medium enterprises to take action.

In 2023–24, we undertook the third phase of this project – the development of an innovative Pay equality toolkit, a suite of action-oriented digital tools that respond to the unique issues that small businesses face in seeking to achieve pay equality. The development of the toolkit was underpinned by consultation with business owners representing a diverse range of industries to ensure the tools were relevant, accessible and informed by best practice.

The first 6 tools in the toolkit were launched on International Women's Day in March 2024, in partnership with the Geelong Chamber of Commerce. Attendees had an opportunity to try out the tools during the launch, starting with the Pay equality compass. Other tools in the toolkit include a sample equal pay policy, a model for handling complaints and a capability matrix.

The toolkit will be expanded with additional tools in 2024–25, to help business owners to conduct gender-neutral job evaluations and facilitate equal access to professional development.

'Closing the gender pay gap is a win for everyone. Equitable workplaces are more productive, have less staff turnover, higher morale and are more profitable.'

– Minister for Industrial Relations Tim Pallas



Icons that visualise sections in the Pay equality toolkit about how to conduct an equal pay audit (left), how to create an equal pay action plan (middle) and how to create an equal pay policy (right).



Commissioner Ro Allen and Jeremy Crawford, CEO Geelong Chamber of Commerce, with guest speakers Ruth Holdaway, CEO Geelong Mums (far left) and Mark Neeld, CEO Geelong United Basketball (far right).



The Commission's Director of Programs, Lauren Matthews, with Lissa Zass, Executive Director Industrial Relations Victoria (left) and Jeremy Crawford, CEO Geelong Chamber of Commerce (right).



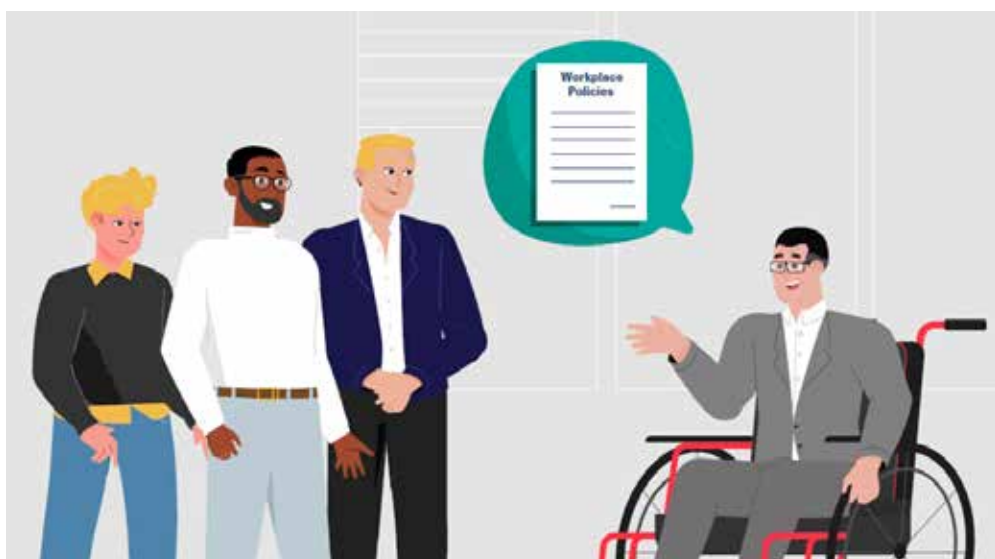
Lisa Sweeney, CEO of Business in Heels and Emma Carter, Customer Service for Business in Heels explore the Pay equality toolkit online with assistance from the Commission's Director of Programs, Lauren Matthews.

Expanding digital education

Increasing the reach of our digital learning has been an important priority for our education services in recent years. To date, 24,084 staff in the Victorian public and non-government sectors have completed our digital learning programs.

Our new fee-for-service set of digital learning will support more people in Victoria to understand discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation, build their confidence to report and take action, and enable fair, safe and inclusive workplace cultures.

The modules complement our existing digital education programs focused on building small business owners' understanding of equal pay and helping public sector staff apply the Charter to their day-to-day work.



The Commission's 'Preventing sexual harassment in the workplace' digital education module.

Preventing discrimination against sex workers

Beginning in 2022, work has been underway in Victoria to decriminalise sex work and add a new protected attribute – ‘profession, trade or occupation’ – to the EOA to prohibit discrimination against sex workers.

Following the publication of our **Guideline: Sex work discrimination** in 2022–23, this year we shifted our focus to educating sex workers about their rights.

Partnering with industry organisations Vixen and Scarlet Alliance, we co-designed and delivered a series of education programs and suite of tailored resources to support sex workers and their advocates. We delivered 4 education programs with our partner organisations and health and social support services that provide essential health and wellbeing services for sex workers.

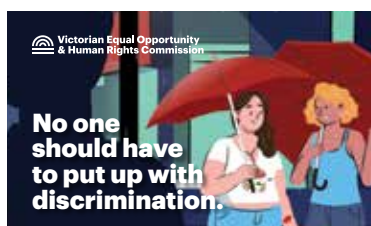
In addition, we worked with Vixen to co-design a resource pack for sex workers and their advocates which includes:

- 5 videos depicting common scenarios of discrimination against sex workers and outlining pathways for resolution and support
- a comprehensive manual for sex worker peer educators and advocates that provides plain language advice on how the law protects sex workers from discrimination
- discreet business cards with support details for peer educators to disseminate to sex workers in various working contexts, available in English, Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and Korean
- posters for services to promote sex workers’ rights to freedom from discrimination as well as details for making a complaint.

We also delivered the second instalment of an intensive education program with sex worker peer educators, promoting our tailored resource pack for use.

‘When non-sex worker agencies partner with us, they often take over, and don’t amplify our voices. The co-design process with the Commission has resulted in engaging, relevant and sex work-affirming resources that we can use to support sex workers realise their rights to safe working conditions free from discrimination, and to be treated with dignity and respect. Listening to us not only makes the resources more relatable, but it gives them legitimacy in the sex worker community that the information can be trusted.’

– Lena Van Hale, Operations Manager, Vixen.



Some of the discreet business cards with support details in different languages for peer educators to disseminate.

Addressing change or suppression practices

In 2023–24, we continued to implement our functions under the CSP Act, enacted in 2022. Our ongoing work to drive awareness and understanding of this new law has been shaped by individuals with lived experience, including our expert reference group and engagement with survivors and other specialists.

This year, we conducted education sessions for a range of audiences to build their understanding of rights and responsibilities under the CSP Act. We developed resources for faith bodies and Victorian LGBTQA+ people of faith to enhance their understanding of how the CSP Act supports people of faith to hold their beliefs without being exposed to harmful practices. We also worked closely with the health sector to assist medical practitioners to better fulfill their obligations under the CSP Act.

Additionally, the Commission met with bodies across a number of states to share the concepts and practices of Victoria's CSP Act and its civil scheme to inform the development of similar legislation in other jurisdictions.

Collaborating with Switchboard Victoria

Recognising that those who experience change or suppressions practices require trauma-informed support, we worked with the community service Switchboard to develop a web page that informs Victorian LGBTIQ+ people of faith about supports and affirms their identity and right to be a part of faith, family and community.

To promote the Switchboard web page, we developed 4 TikTok animations, tested with young queer and trans people and shared across social media platforms. Informed by the Commission's research with young queer and trans people, including workshops with Transcend Australia, the animations aimed to drive awareness of conversion practices, misgendering, queer and trans youth rights and how to seek supports through Switchboard's Rainbow Door service.

In complement, the Commission ran training sessions for Switchboard staff and volunteers on how to recognise and assist queer and trans people of faith, including providing a flow chart to help provide support.

Education highlights

- 15 sessions delivered face-to-face, online and hybrid
- 550 participants
- Ongoing engagements with faith leaders, health providers, integrity/complaint bodies, academics and survivors of change and suppression practices



Stickers produced with Switchboard Victoria to support our shared campaign to promote the Rainbow Door website with supports for LGBTQIA+ people of faith.



The Commission's TikTok animation 'The Game'

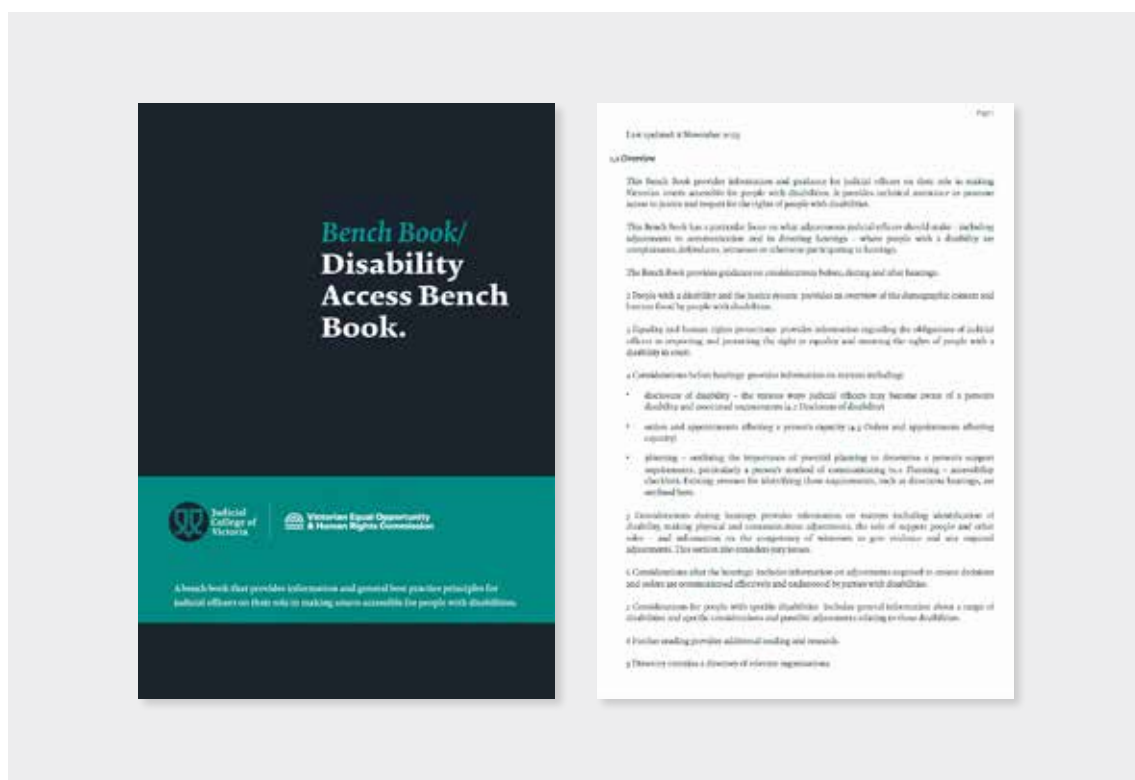
Promoting disability access in the court system

This year, we updated a key resource that helps ensure judicial officers follow leading practice when people with disability come in contact with courts and tribunals – before, during and after hearings.

Developed in partnership with the Judicial College of Victoria in 2016, the Commission's ***Disability access bench book*** provides information and guidance for judicial officers to make the Victorian court system accessible for people with disability. We consulted with relevant stakeholders to formally update the resource and ensure it reflects current best practice in disability inclusion, including significant updates to:

- language and terminology to reflect the social model of disability, such as additional references to neurodiversity
- legislation, caselaw and refreshed Charter information
- demographics and key resources
- guardianship and administration in line with the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*.

The bench book will also serve as a resource for people from other professions to guide their actions when providing services to people with disabilities.



The Disability access bench book

Independent review into workplace equality in Ambulance Victoria

In June 2024, we commenced Phase 3 of our independent review into workplace equality in Ambulance Victoria – a progress evaluation audit examining the organisation’s work to implement 25 priority recommendations made in the initial phase of the review. This phase will involve additional field research, including expert interviews, focus groups and a workforce survey.

In 2021, Ambulance Victoria requested that the Commission undertake an independent review to assess workplace equality following public allegations of serious and widespread discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation within Ambulance Victoria. The reports from Phase 1 of the review were published in November 2021 and March 2022.

While the timeline for Phase 3 has been delayed by 1 year, in recognition of the major scale of reforms recommended in Phase 1, the progress evaluation audit will result in a public report in late 2024 detailing our findings and any further guidance to support Ambulance Victoria to deliver organisational change.

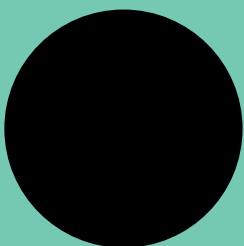


Workplace Equality in Ambulance Victoria reports

Eliminate racism and hate speech



Racism is a persistent and corrosive problem in Victoria. It causes significant harm to Victorians and is a barrier to many people reaching their potential and being able to participate fully in public life. Our work this year prioritised helping policymakers understand the drivers of hate, supporting complaints bodies to better recognise racism, and equipping employers with practical guidance to prevent and respond to racism in their workplaces.



A new guideline to tackle race discrimination at work

When an employee experiences race discrimination at work, it can undermine their self-confidence, reduce their trust in the workplace, convince them to internalise or accept racist beliefs, and compromise their personal or cultural identity. Of the race discrimination complaints we received this year, nearly half occurred in the workplace.

In 2023–24, we developed our **Guideline: Race discrimination in the workplace**, an essential tool to help employers comply with their obligations under the EOA and create safer and more respectful workplaces that are free from racism.

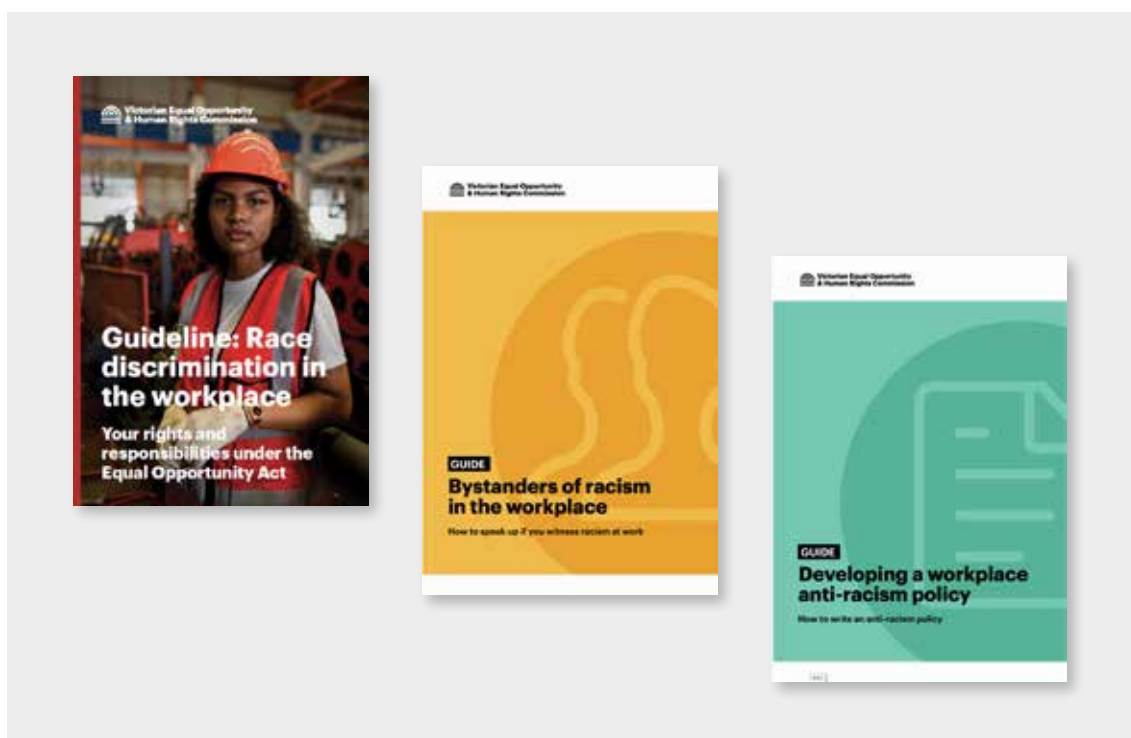
The guideline outlines the impacts of racism in the workplace, explains employers' legal obligations and includes important information for First Peoples and other racialised employees about their rights. To help employers comply with their positive duty to prevent racism, the guideline identifies 5 minimum standards, setting out expectations and practical actions for organisations to ensure an anti-racist workplace.

Funded by the Victorian Government, the guideline was developed through consultation with stakeholders and communities on the drivers and impact of racism in Victorian workplaces. Stakeholders and community members described how racism impacts individuals' health, wellbeing, employment, income and their sense of place in the community. It can also have flow on impacts for the organisation and the broader community through low morale, productivity or performance.

In addition to the guideline, the Commission developed a suite of resources to support both employers and employees to create anti-racist workplaces. The suite includes fact sheets for employers and employees, information on racial literacy and being an active bystander, and guidance on developing an anti-racism policy and prevention plan.

'I think that employees have a really clear definition of what overt race discrimination is when it comes to things like "I'm not hiring this person because they have an accent" or "because they dress like this" or "because XY&Z". But I think when it comes to more covert or systemic instances of race discrimination, there is less of an understanding or even inclination to describe it as race discrimination.'

– Consultation participant



Guideline: Race discrimination in the workplace, and some of the range of supporting resources.



Presenters and attendees of the August 2024 launch of Guideline: Race discrimination in the workplace (left to right): Krushnadevsinh (Kano) Ravalji, Founder of Third Culture Australia and VMC Youth Commissioner; Renee Imbesi, Principal Advisor, Cultural Diversity – Victorian Public Sector Commission; Rosie Ward, Senior Policy and Research Officer, VEOHRC; Commissioner Ro Allen; Bonnie Dukakis, CEO, Koorie Youth Council; Florine Baerlocher, Co-Chair, Victorian Public Service Women of Colour Network; and Sheena Watt MP, Co-Chair, Anti-Racism Taskforce.

Building racial literacy in complaints bodies

In early 2024, we commenced a capability-building project with 7 Victorian complaints bodies, to help them better identify, understand and respond to racial discrimination.

Funded by the Victorian Government, the racial literacy in complaint bodies project seeks to improve outcomes for First Peoples and multicultural and multifaith people who make a complaint with these bodies, by helping complaint bodies identify and address underlying racial discrimination. Our work aims to improve reporting processes and racial literacy of complaints staff to embed person-centred human rights practices.

In the year ahead, we will work with the complaints bodies to deliver a flexible learning program customised to the particular context of each organisation, accompanied by a framework to support efforts to address racism.

‘Improving racial literacy for all complaints staff including at the triage level, would greatly help referral to the right people within our organisation quicker, resulting in a more streamlined process for complainants. This accords with our need to be person-focused and trauma-informed.’

– Complaints body representative who participated in our consultation.

Bigger Than This

In collaboration with VicHealth, the Department of Education and Victoria University, we delivered the Bigger Than This pilot education program in Victorian secondary schools, a program co-designed with young people to build understanding of the harmful impacts of racism on young people's mental health and wellbeing. The program is part of VicHealth's Future Healthy initiative, which aims to support social cohesion and mental health.

The program's innovative model draws on the lived experience of young people from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds who facilitate an incursion in schools. The program engaged students in discussions about racial literacy and responding to racism through prompt cards, posters and stories of people from a range of cultural backgrounds. As part of the program, students are invited to apply their learning through a creative response which saw students present songs, role plays, posters and murals.

The program had strong demand from across Victorian secondary schools, and the pilot ran 20 incursion sessions in 10 schools, reaching over 200 Year 9 students as part of the pilot. Victoria University is currently conducting an evaluation of the program, and early indicators show that participation in the program is a valuable action schools can take to address racism.

The education content for the Bigger Than This program will be refined by Victoria University and informed by evaluation findings.



The Bigger Than This Anti-Racism Youth Working Group and Commissioner Ro Allen at a project design workshop in 2022.

Strengthening Victoria's anti-vilification protections

In 2021, the Victorian Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee (the Committee) concluded its Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections for Victoria. The Committee found that vilification is common for many Victorians, including people from multicultural backgrounds, First Peoples, particular faith groups, LGBTIQ+ people and people with a disability. It found vilification occurs in schools, sporting grounds, workplaces, services and online. The Committee made 36 recommendations including reforms to legal protections against vilification.

This year, the Commission continued to advocate for stronger protections from hate speech and provided expert advice to the Victorian Government on directions for anti-vilification reform. We provided 3 submissions in response to the Victorian Government's 2023 multi-stage consultation on how to strengthen anti-hate protections, in response to the findings of the 2021 parliamentary inquiry.

We recommended:

- that anti-hate protections be extended to other attributes such as disability and gender identity, in addition to the current protections for race and religion
- introducing an additional test to determine when vilification has occurred, focused on the harm a person experiences from hate, to complement the existing incitement test
- introducing a positive duty on organisations to take preventative action to stop vilification from occurring in the first place
- strengthening our enforcement powers to reduce the burden on those who experience vilification to enforce the law.

The Commission will continue to work with the Victorian Government to advocate for these important reforms.



Promote the rights of First Peoples

We promote the rights of Victoria's First Peoples by working with public authorities to uphold self-determination and cultural rights. In parallel, we support the community to exercise their rights, amplify First Peoples' voices and make our services culturally safe. We progressed our new strategic priority this year by continuing to strengthen our engagement and partnerships with First Peoples, supporting truth-telling, building the capacity of Victoria's public sector to promote First Peoples' rights and raising awareness of our services with communities.

Engaging with First Peoples communities

During 2023–24, the Commissioner continued to participate in the Aboriginal Justice Forum, joining community leaders, peak bodies, representatives from Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees and key government departments, and other stakeholders. The forum convenes 3 times per year and facilitates a rich exchange of ideas and critical oversight of the implementation of *Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja*, the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

We also established a formal, ongoing partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) to strengthen our engagement with First Peoples and our advocacy on the human rights and equality issues that matter to the First Peoples community. To guide this work, the partnership established a dedicated Senior Community Engagement Officer role, who acts as a conduit between the 2 organisations and guides our community engagement and strategic advocacy.

In the first few months of the partnership, the Senior Community Engagement Officer visited a number of metropolitan and regional locations and a range of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, advisory groups and networks to facilitate information sessions and raise awareness of our services and advocacy. In addition, the Senior Community Engagement Officer has worked with teams across the Commission to shape our advocacy direction and continue embedding cultural safety in our services.

Ensuring a culturally responsive enquiry and complaints service

Throughout 2023–24, we continued to focus on ensuring our enquiry and complaints services responds to the cultural needs of First Peoples. Supported by the dispute resolution branch's *Cultural safety guideline*, we continued to practice and improve cultural safety in our dispute resolution service, based on feedback from First Peoples' experiences of it.

Providing a fast-track pathway for First Peoples complainants, we continued to ensure the complaints process is flexible and provides opportunities for First Peoples to decide how they wish to participate in dispute resolution.

Enquiry and dispute resolution staff provide referrals to a range of First Peoples services and other organisations where required and strengthen pathways for warm referrals with key stakeholders.

See the First Peoples data report (page 27) for further detail on complaints and enquiries we received from First Peoples this year.

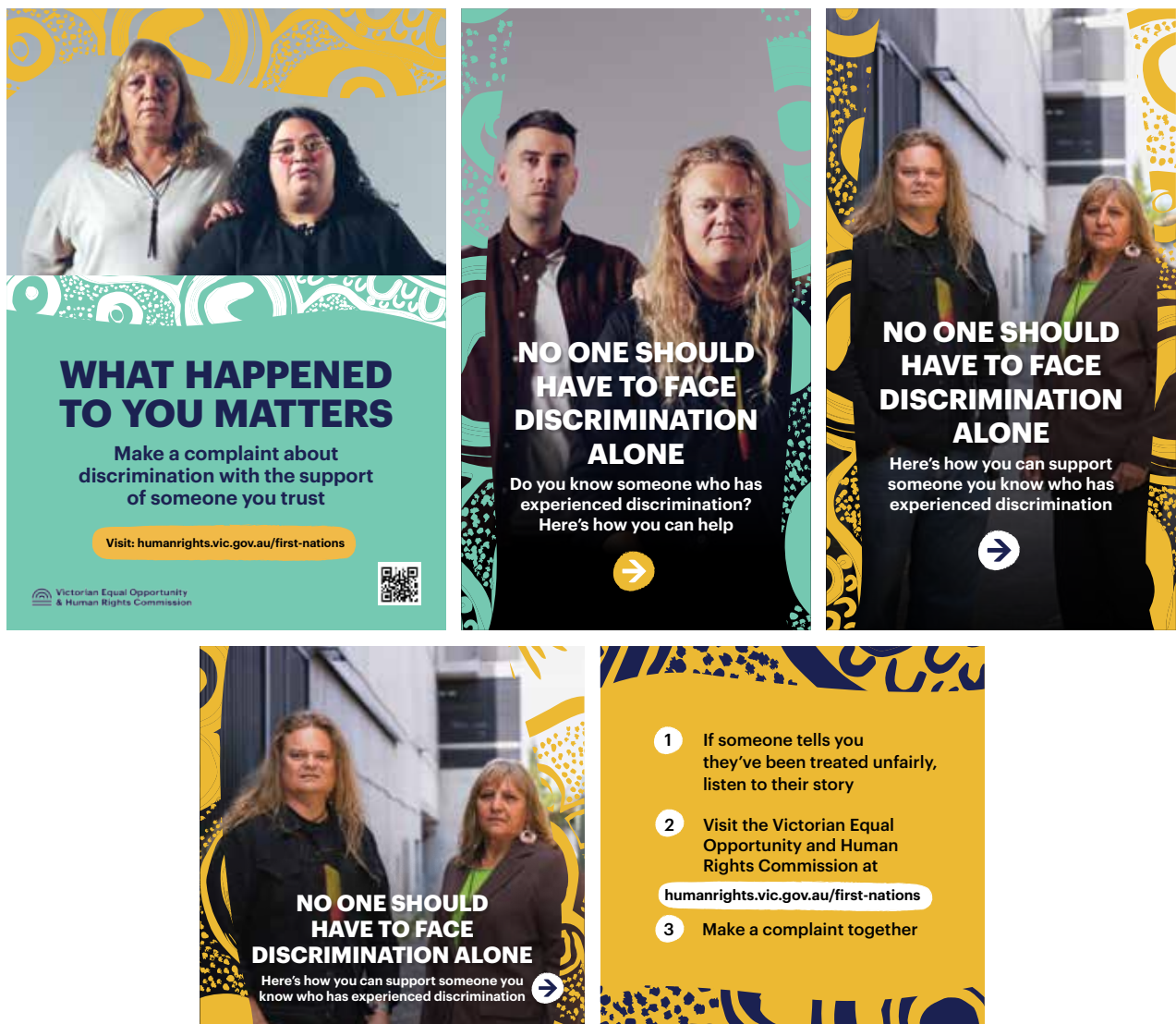


‘What happened to you matters’ – supporting First Peoples to make complaints

In parallel with ongoing work to ensure our services are culturally safe, we focused on raising awareness of our services within First Peoples communities. We partnered with Aboriginal-led agency Little Rocket to develop a public awareness campaign, ‘What happened to you matters’, launched on International Human Rights Day in December 2023 as part of Human Rights Week.

Acknowledging that a formal complaints process can be a daunting prospect, the campaign’s messaging focuses on allyship – encouraging prospective complaints to make a complaint with the support of someone they trust, such as a friend, family member or Elder. The campaign’s visual identity draws on original artwork by Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung and Gamilaroi artist Madison Connors.

The campaign brings together social media assets, short videos featuring stories of discrimination, and printed products such as posters and postcards. We have appreciated support from key stakeholders across the sector to amplify these messages and will continue the roll-out of the campaign in 2024–25.



'What happened to you matters' campaign assets

Supporting the Yoorrook Justice Commission

This year, we continued to support inquiries overseen by the Yoorrook Justice Commission, Australia's first truth-telling body seeking justice for First Peoples.

In August 2023, Yoorrook's report into Victoria's child protection and criminal justice systems reflected the Commission's first submission by recommending that Victoria should seek to prohibit race and other forms of discrimination in the administration of state laws and programs under the EOA.

In February 2024, our second submission to Yoorrook's inquiry into housing, secondary and tertiary education, and health, explored opportunities to strengthen protections for First Peoples.

Drawing on the complaints and enquiries we receive from First Peoples in the areas of housing, education and health, our submission reflected on the prevalence of discrimination against First Peoples. We called for sustained funding to address racism against First Peoples, increased enforcement powers under the EOA and reforms to the Charter.

'These changes [that we recommend] would play a pivotal role in addressing inequality and upholding the human rights of First Nations people in Victoria.'

– Commissioner Ro Allen, submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission



The Commission's submission to the inquiry into housing, secondary and tertiary education.

Building understanding of Charter rights in public authorities

In line with our strategic plan, we prioritised building the capacity of Victoria's public sector this year, to promote and protect First People's rights through our Charter Education Program.

First Peoples Self-Determination Division in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

During the year, we delivered our iterative training package, the Charter Capability Program, for the First Peoples Self-Determination division at the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Focusing on Aboriginal cultural rights, we supported the division's staff to develop nuanced understanding and necessary skills to promote and protect the rights of Traditional Custodians and First Peoples in Victoria.

As part of the program, we hosted Professor Melissa Castan, Director of the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University, to present international human rights best practice for Aboriginal self-determination and cultural safety with lessons for the Victorian context.

Treaty Authority

We also hosted a roundtable dialogue with the Treaty Authority to explore how human rights in the Charter apply to the Treaty Authority's role and functions. The dialogue explored the crucial role of the Treaty Authority in upholding human rights and self-determination within its work, and the interconnectedness of human rights in the Treaty Authority's mission.

'Our continuing dialogue and expertise sharing with the Commission is pivotal to the role of the Treaty Authority, both to comply with the obligations under the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and to build knowledge of human rights for First Peoples across Victoria.'

– Jidah Clark, Chair, Treaty Authority

Educating about First Peoples renters' rights

During 2023–24, we continued our partnership with Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV) to raise awareness of the rights of First Peoples when seeking rental properties and response pathways to address discrimination. We delivered an education program for 30 AHV staff and Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program (APRAP) workers as part of the 2024 APRAP forum held on the banks of Birrarung Marr in the heart of Naarm.

Our program aimed to increase APRAP workers' understanding of the rights of First Peoples when renting and the obligations of private rental providers. By building capability, the program aimed to ensure First Peoples who experience discrimination in the private rental market receive information about the Commission's reporting and complaints pathways and referrals.

Participants highlighted the importance of the program to enable them to educate and advocate for the rights of First Peoples in the tenancy market, a need highlighted in [Swinburne University's research](#) report from 2021 detailing discrimination against First Peoples renters. Throughout the program, workers echoed the research reflections showing that First People experience significant intersectional barriers, stereotyping, racial discrimination and a lack of culturally safe processes when seeking to rent a property.

This work was complemented by our First Peoples engagement campaign, educating community members about how to how they can make a complaint about discrimination if they experience it.



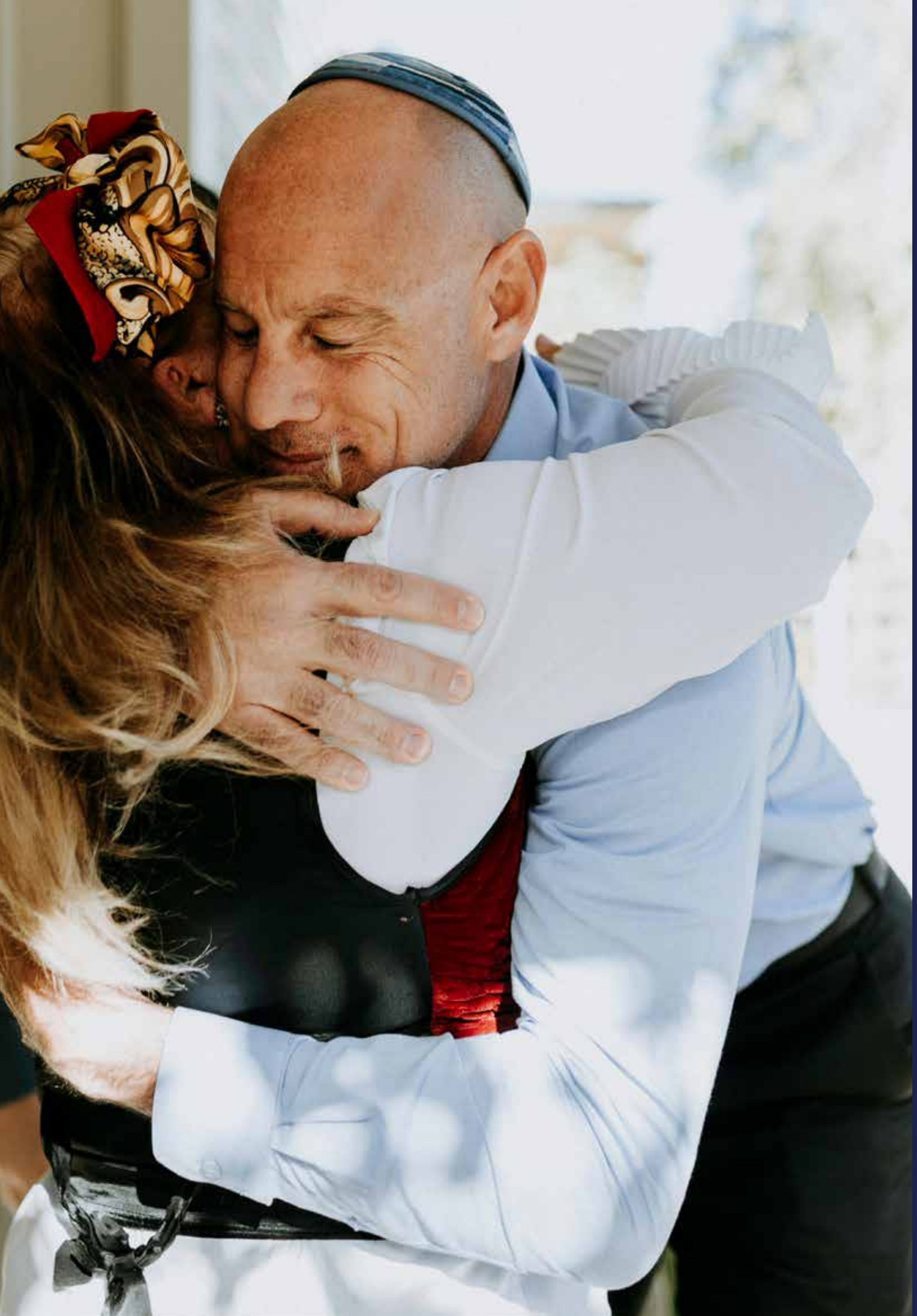
Members of the Treaty Authority with Commissioner Ro Allen.





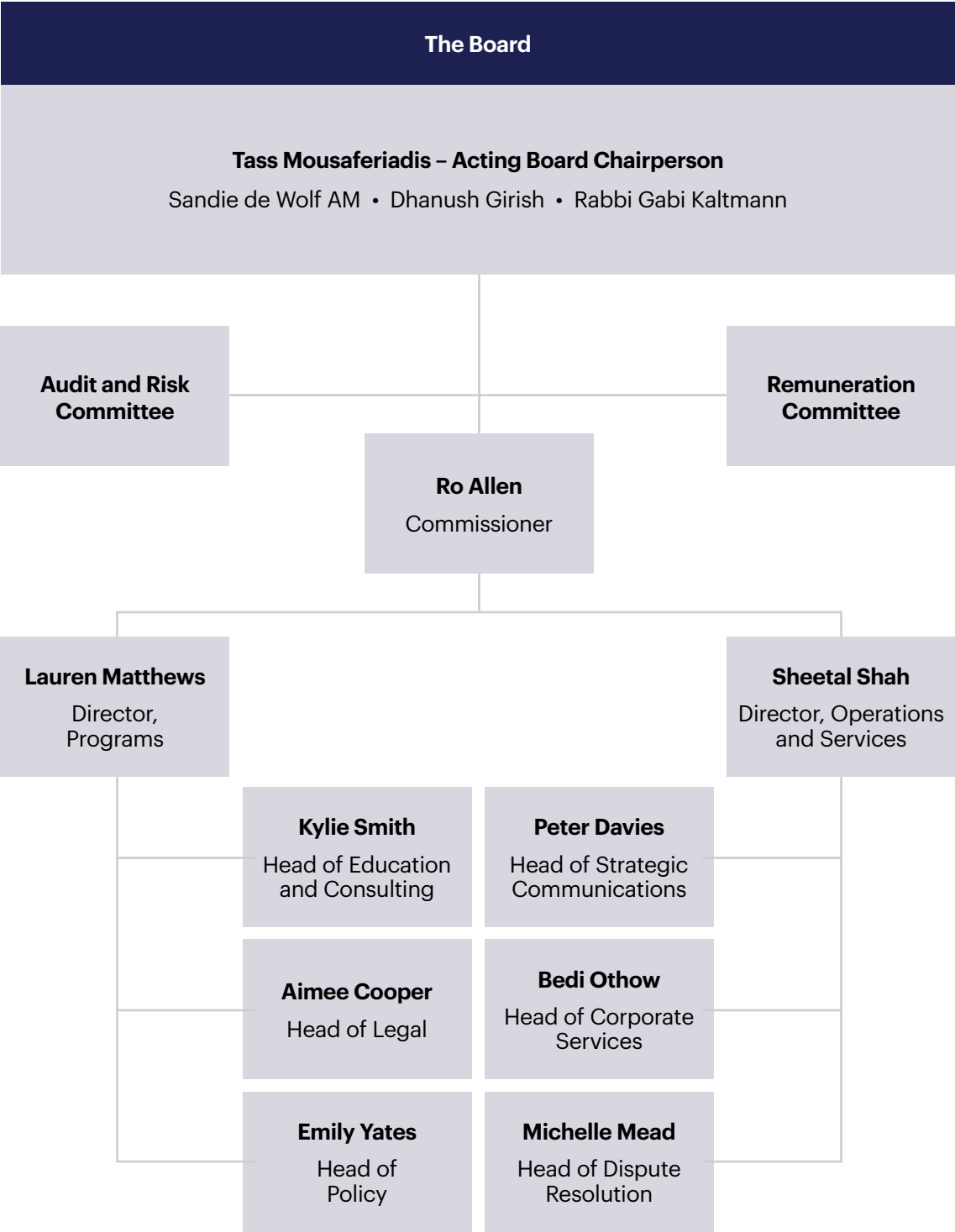
Report of operations





Our organisation structure

As at 30 June 2024



The Board



Taryn Lee

(Chairperson, until November 2023)

Taryn is a proud Yawuru woman from Broome who has lived in Melbourne for the past 20 years. Taryn is the Executive General Manager Social Impact and Policy at Collingwood Football Club and is working on organisational change to address racism. Prior to this, Taryn held senior executive roles PWC and the Victorian Government in the design, development and delivery of policy frameworks that have been central to positioning Aboriginal self-determination as the centrepiece to improve outcomes for Aboriginal communities. In 2018, Taryn was acknowledged in the Top 50 Women in the Public Sector by Davidson. Taryn completed her first MA in Human Rights Law (University of London).



Laurinda Gardner

(Presiding Member, November 2023 to February 2024;
board member until June 2024)

Laurinda is a board director, organisational reform and change management consultant and career coach. Laurinda has more than 25 years of senior executive experience and was formerly a Deputy Secretary with the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance and a Director at the City of Melbourne. Laurinda has led large operational teams in diverse areas including strategic and business planning, HR, IT, communications, town planning, stakeholder engagement, finance and risk. Laurinda has performed the role of trusted adviser to several CEOs, undertaken a number of reviews for the Victorian Government, is currently on the board of the Victorian Planning Authority and a member of several remuneration, and audit and risk committees. Laurinda is a Fellow of the Institute of Public Administration (Victoria) and a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Tass Mousaferiadis

(Acting Chairperson, February 2024 to June 2024;
board member since July 2023)

As Board Chair of Eastern Health, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and the Southeastern Metro Mental Health and Wellbeing Interim Regional Body, Tass has extensive experience in leadership and in governance. He has a background in health and social policy, program development and strategy with the Victorian Government and health and community sectors. Tass is a consultant to health and community agencies on public health policy, strategy, and development.



Rabbi Gabi Kaltmann

(Board member since July 2023)

A leader in Victoria's Jewish community, Rabbi Gabi is the senior Rabbi of the Ark Centre, a Jewish community centre and synagogue. He is also an executive member of the Victorian Government's Anti-Racism Task Force and Combating Antisemitism with Education Consultative Group. Rabbi Gabi is an Elder on the Parkville College Elder Advisory Council and the chairman of the Melbourne Fight back Against Parkinson's charity. Rabbi Gabi holds a Masters in Social Work from Deakin University.



Dhanush Girish

(Board member since July 2023)

Dhanush is an experienced strategy and finance professional, currently working as a Management Consultant at the Boston Consulting Group in their Public Sector and Social Impact practices. He was previously the non-executive Board Director of Global Voices, which provides leadership opportunities for students to attend multilateral forums, and the non-executive treasurer of Cire Services, which provides wrap-around education services. His previous roles include Chief Financial Officer, Executive Director, and Company Secretary of The Oaktree Foundation and a Tax Consultant at Ernst and Young. Dhanish holds a Bachelor of Commerce (Economics and Finance) with First Class Honors from the University of Melbourne and is pursuing a Masters of Business Administration at Stanford Graduate School of Business and a Masters of Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.



Sandie de Wolf AM

(Board member since September 2023)

Sandie has spent her professional life working with, and advocating for, vulnerable children, young people, women and families, initially in the Department of Justice and, since 1989, the community sector. Sandie was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2009, received the Robin Clark Inspirational Award, the Vida Goldstein Award and a La Trobe University Distinguished Alumni Award and is a life member of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and Victorian Council of Social Service. Sandie left Berry Street in December 2017 after 26 years as CEO, having significantly grown its reach, impact and reputation. Since leaving Berry Street, Sandie has continued her contribution as interim CEO at DV Vic/Safe and Equal; deputy chair of the Victorian Children's Council; chair of the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee; chair of FVREE; chair of YouMatter; board director of Emma House; and mentor at Kilfinan.

Audit and Risk Management Committee Report

The primary role of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) is to provide oversight and governance of the Commission's business processes, risk management and financial management, performance, and sustainability. The ARC considers reports from the Commission and auditors that provide assurance about the integrity of the financial controls, processes, systems, and reporting of the Commission. It also monitors the Commission's compliance with the *Financial Management Act 1994* and the 2018 Standing Directions of the Minister for Finance. The ARC advises the Board and the Commission on matters of compliance, accountability, risk management and internal controls affecting operations.

The 2023–24 ARC consisted of:

- Laurinda Gardner (Chair to June 2024)
- Taryn Lee (to November 2023)
- Kevin Lee (independent member).

Sandie de Wolf (Chair), Dhanush Girish and Tass Mousaferiadis were appointed to the ARC on 7 May 2024.

Annual Financial Statements

On 26 June 2024, the Commission received a determination from the Assistant Treasurer in accordance with section 53(1)(b) of the *Financial Management Act 1994*, that the financial statements of the Commission may be consolidated with those of the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) for the 2023–24 financial year and future financial years.

The Commission will continue to be responsible for producing a separate annual report of operations compliant with the FMA, as well as the annual reporting requirements under section 179 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*.

For the 2023–24 financial year, the Commission was audited as part of DJCS and its annual financial statements have been consolidated into DJCS's annual financial statements pursuant to determinations made by the Minister for Finance under section 53(i)(b) of the *Financial Management Act 1994*. For further information please refer to DJCS's Annual Report.

A summary of the Commission's 2023–24 financial performance is provided below.

2023–24 financial performance summary

The Victorian Government considers the net result from transactions to be the appropriate measure of financial management that can be directly attributed to government policy. This measure excludes the effects of revaluations (holding gains or losses) arising from changes in market prices and other changes in the volume of assets shown under 'other economic flows' on the comprehensive operating statement, which are outside the control of the Commission.

As per prior years, the Commission's comprehensive Operating Statement includes combination of appropriation and trust financial data to show the Commission's financial performance.

In 2023–24 the Commission's comprehensive Operating Statement reported a net result from transactions of a surplus \$637,144 representing an increase of \$1,368,562 from 2022–23. Total income increased by 10% whilst total expenses decreased by 4% from the previous year. This resulted in an increase of \$1,390,989 in the overall net result.

The comprehensive surplus resulted from increase in grants by \$756,851, which relates to funds received for programs that spread across more than one financial period. These surplus funds will continue to be utilised to deliver ongoing programs across future years.

Note that in 2023–24 the net expenditure against the output annual appropriation funding (for provision of services) resulted in a small surplus of \$3,692.

A high level audited comprehensive operating statement for the Commission is provided below, which includes income and expenditure from all funding sources.

Comprehensive operating statement

	Financial Period ended 30 June 2024 \$	Financial Period ended 30 June 2023 \$
Income from transactions		
Appropriation	9,375,277	9,163,512
Grants	1,525,778	768,927
Total income from transactions	10,901,055	9,932,439

Expenses from transactions		
Employee expenses	(7,744,328)	(7,391,100)
Depreciation and amortisation	(38,467)	(95,528)
Interest expense	(1,867)	(714)
Other operating expenses	(2,479,247)	(3,176,514)
Total expenses from transactions	(10,263,909)	(10,663,856)
Net results from transactions	637,144	(731,418)

Performance measures: Budget Paper No. 3 (BP3) Service Delivery

The annual state budget papers contain performance measures for our key public services. The table below shows our performance against these targets in 2023–24.

Performance measure	2023–24	
	Actual	Target
Quantity		
Conciliation and facilitation activities delivered by VEOHRC (by number)	845	900–1050
Education and information sessions delivered by VEOHRC (by number)	1723	1500
Information and advice provided by VEOHRC (by number)	5286	7500
Quality		
Customer satisfaction rating – Conciliation and facilitation delivered VEOHRC (by percentage)	97%	95%
Customer satisfaction rating – Education and information sessions delivered by VEOHRC (by percentage)	93%	90%
Settlement rate of conciliation and facilitation (VEOHRC) (by percentage)	52%	65%
Timeliness		
VEOHRC complaints and reports of change or suppression practices finalised within six months (by percentage)	54%	85%

HR and Workforce

Occupational health, safety and wellbeing

The Commission's occupational health, safety and wellbeing (OHS&W) focus is to embed a safety and wellbeing culture into everything we do to ensure employees feel safe, healthy and empowered at work. The Commission has its own OH&S processes and aligns to the Department of Justice and Community Safety's Justice Incidents Management System (JIMS) to record, manage and monitor workplace incidents. Additionally, the Commission utilises a local Incident Management Team (IMT) and Incident Management Plan, aimed at enhancing workplace safety and security and ensuring safe systems and processes when incidents arise at work.

To ensure there is a preventative approach toward safety at the Commission, additional first aiders, mental health first aiders, fire wardens and contact officers have been trained to champion and support staff with embedding a safe and respectful culture. The Commission continues to utilise employee wellbeing service providers Converge International to support staff with psychological and wellbeing concerns as well as an additional vicarious trauma service provider that has been engaged to support staff who are working on sensitive and triggering projects.

The Commission continues to have a very low level of OH&S incidents each year. After any incident, the IMT assesses whether there are or could be any OH&S implications and acts accordingly. This year there were total of zero incidents recorded and managed in JIMS (Note *23 incidents in 2021-22 were COVID related).

Justice incident management statistics

*As related to employees (therefore excluding members of the public, contractors, etc). Incidents are defined as including hazards, near misses and injuries.

	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Incidents*	0	3	24	2
Injuries requiring first aid or medical treatment	0	0	1	1
Injuries resulting in WorkCover claims	0	0	0	0
WorkCover claims resulting in lost work time	0	0	0	0

Employment and conduct principles

The Commission is aligned to the department's and VPS wide recruitment and selection policies and guidelines. The selection processes ensure that applicants are assessed and evaluated equitably and fairly based on the key selection criteria, Jobs and Skills Exchange policy, Review of Action policy and other accountabilities without discrimination. These policies and procedures support the Commission's commitment to merit and equity principles when making recruitment and selection decisions.

The Commission remains committed to increasing underrepresented diverse talent to ensure its work and services incorporate diversity of thought and lived experience to reach wider communities across Victoria. The Commission has a key focus on increasing underrepresented diverse talent from First Nations and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Public sector values and employment principles

In addition to the Victorian Public Sector Commission's (VPSC) role under the *Public Administration Act 2004* to advocate for public sector professionalism and integrity and to strengthen overall Victorian public sector efficiency, effectiveness and capability, the Commission also has a broad role under its four governing Acts, to protect and promote human rights and equal opportunity in employment and related areas for all Victorian organisations.

During 2023–24 we worked to centralise our recruitment process and create an inclusive recruitment process and actions to implement as part of the implementation of the *People and culture plan 2024-26*.

The Commission is aligned with the broader Victorian public sector, our values are a crucial underpinning for the way we work – they guide how we treat each other and how we engage with the Victorian community to set the standard for integrity and accountability.

The 4 Acts governing the work of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission are the:

- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*;
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*;
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*; and
- the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021*.

Workforce inclusion policy

The Commission has an inclusive working environment where equal opportunity and diversity are valued. We continue to deliver these priorities, including:

- continuing to attract and develop diverse talent
- collaborating with diversity and inclusion networks to lead and deliver on key focus areas
- holding internal events to celebrate days and weeks of significance that support staff expression of identity
- delivering external events, such as ‘Creating safe spaces for staff in troubling times: Human rights, leadership and workplace culture’ and co-hosting a panel discussion to launch the newly established ADHD Growth Network, which staff can attend and participate in.
- delivering all staff and leadership training on key diversity and inclusion topics such as cultural intelligence and inclusive leadership and culture
- delivering our inaugural *People and culture plan 2024–26* – a critical roadmap for how we will continue to achieve a thriving workforce and an inclusive workplace culture with an intersectional approach – by enabling shared responsibility and ownership of its actions for staff and leaders.

Comparative workforce data

The following tables disclose the head count and full-time equivalent (FTE) of all active public service employees of the Commission, employed in the last full pay period in June of the current reporting period (2024), and in the last full pay period in June of the previous reporting period (2023).

Workforce data trends

	Ongoing		Fixed term*		Casual		Total	
	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE
June 2023	37	35.03	14	13.4	0	0	51	48.43
June 2024	36	34.83	11	10.80	4	4.00	51	49.63

*Fixed term includes staff on secondment to the Commission

Details of employment levels in June 2024

		All employees		Ongoing		Fixed term and casual*	
		Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE
Demographic data	Gender						
	Male	14	13.40	10	9.4	4	4.00
	Female	36	35.23	25	24.43	11	10.80
	Self-described	1	1.00	1	1	0	0.00
	Age						
	Under 25	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	25 – 34	14	14.00	8	8.00	6	6.00
	35 – 44	16	15.20	12	11.40	4	3.80
	45 – 54	14	13.63	11	10.63	3	3.00
	55 – 64	6	5.80	4	3.80	2	2.00
	Over 64	1	1.00	1	1.00	0	0.00
Classification data	Classification						
	Executive Officers	3	3.00	3	3.00	0	0.00
	Solicitor 3	1	0.63	1	0.63	0	0.00
	VPS 1	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	VPS 2	1	1.00	1	1.00	0	0.00
	VPS 3	5	5.00	4	4.00	1	1.00
	VPS 4	9	9.00	6	6.00	3	3.00
	VPS 5	21	20.20	14	13.40	7	6.80
	VPS 6	11	10.80	7	6.80	4	4.00
	Total active employees	51	49.63	36	34.83	15	14.80

*Fixed term includes staff on secondment to the Commission

Note: 'Active employees' has the same meaning as in Financial Reporting Direction 29C and includes employees on WorkCover leave receiving make up pay. Active employee numbers do not include:

- I. Separated employees that ceased employment with your organisation during the 12 months from the first pay period of July 2021 until the end of the last full pay period of June 2022.
- II. Casual employees who were not employed and paid for work in the final full pay period of June 2022.
- III. People who are added to the payroll in the last full pay period in June 2022 solely for the purpose of paying outstanding entitlements.
- IV. Volunteers, employment agency staff, contractors, consultants, or board members.

Other disclosures

Local Jobs First

The *Local Jobs First Act 2003* introduced in August 2018 brings together the Victorian Industry Participation Policy (VIPP) and Major Project Skills Guarantee (MPSG) policy which were previously administered separately. Departments and public sector bodies are required to apply the Local Jobs First policy in all projects valued at \$3 million or more in Metropolitan Melbourne or for state-wide projects, or \$1 million or more for projects in regional Victoria. MPSG applies to all construction projects valued at \$20 million or more. The MPSG guidelines and VIPP guidelines will continue to apply to MPSG-applicable and VIPP-applicable projects respectively where contracts have been entered prior to 15 August 2018. In 2023–24 the Commission did not have any projects of a scale that required the application of this policy.

Government advertising expenditure

In 2023–24, there were no government advertising campaigns with total media spends of \$100,000 or greater (exclusive of GST).

Consultancy expenditure

In 2023–24 there were 13 consultancies where the total fees payable to the consultants were \$10,000 or greater. The total expenditure incurred during 2023–24 in relation to these consultancies is \$330,636.42

Consultant	Purpose of consultancy	Start date	End date	Total approved project fee (excl. GST)	Expenditure 2022–23 (excl. GST)	Future expenditure (excl. GST)
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY	Bigger Than This, Anti-racism Project Evaluation.	22/11/22	30/06/24	44,599.30	22,299.65	0
LIST A BARRISTERS	Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act Brief Frances Gordon & Jack Maxwell.	5/06/23	30/06/24	15,000.00	13,330.91	0
YOUNGS LIST PTY LTD	Advice on privacy issues relevant to the Commission to improve our ability to ensure compliance with the PDPA.	27/06/23	30/06/24	14,545.46	14,545.46	0
THE LIST G BARRISTERS	Advice and drafting written submissions in the matter of William Albon v National Australia Bank Limited.	17/10/23	30/06/24	22,281.80	22,281.80	0
ADONGWOT WAL MANYOUL	Bigger Than This, Youth Facilitator.	31/10/23	30/06/24	15,000.00	14,164.00	0
INTERMIX WORKFORCE PTY LTD	People and Culture Plan Consultation-Intermix Consulting.	9/06/23	30/06/24	30,000.00	27,509.56	0

FIONA COLLIS RESEARCH & CONSULTING	Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act consultation.	07/06/24	30/06/24	22,610.00	22,610.00	0
VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE	Consultancy - promote the rights of First Peoples.	02/05/24	30/06/24	98,850.91	98,850.91	0
THE LIST G BARRISTERS	Lawton intervention.	05/10/23	30/06/24	11,295.44	11,295.44	0
ORIMA RESEARCH PTY LTD	Workforce survey.	02/05/24	30/06/24	25,000.00	25,000.00	0
PUNCHY DIGITAL MEDIA	Pay equality toolkit illustrations and animations.	19/12/23	30/06/24	11,700.00	11,700.00	0
EDUCATION FOR EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS	Education Program - Design and delivery of Sexual Harassment Prevention & Response program for HR Professionals.	31/05/24	30/06/24	30,000.00	22,140.00	0
VICTORIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY	Pay equality toolkit dissemination campaign: industry leader.	1/07/23	30/06/24	24,909.09	24,909.09	0

Information and communication technology expenditure

All operational ICT expenditure business as usual ICT expenditure (excl. GST)	ICT expenditure related to projects to create or enhance ICT capabilities		
	Non-business as usual ICT expenditure (excl. GST)	Operational expenditure (excl. GST)	Capital expenditure (excl. GST)
103,887.00	30,080.00	5,217.13	0

Disclosure of major contracts

The Commission had no major contracts valued at over \$10 million during the financial year ended 30 June 2024.

Freedom of information

Victoria's *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) gives members of the public the right to apply for access to information we hold and is an important part of promoting transparency and accountability.

The Commission holds documents relating to procedures and policy, projects, litigation, dispute resolution, staff, operational and administrative responsibilities, and general correspondence.

The Commission also proactively publishes information about its activities and decision-making on its website, where it can be accessed without a FOI request.

Before making a freedom of information request, we encourage you to just ask us for the information you want. If it is straightforward to access and not private or confidential, we will give it to you. If we consider more work or consideration will be involved, we will help you to make a formal freedom of information request.

How to make a request

Section 17 of the FOI Act requires requests to be:

- in writing
- clear enough to identify which documents are sought
- accompanied by the appropriate application fee, or a request to have the fee waived on hardship grounds

Request to the Commission can be made by:

- email to foi@veohrc.vic.gov.au
- post to: FOI Officer, Level 3, 204 Lygon Street, Carlton Vic 3053

The Commission will charge an access fee in some cases (for example, for photocopying and search and retrieval). Applicants can contact the Commission's Legal Unit on 1300 292 153 for assistance making a FOI request.

You can access more information about how to make an FOI request by reading the Commission's hyperlinked **Freedom of Information Policy** and **Freedom of information statement**

Received FOI requests

The Commission received two formal FOI requests during 2023–24.

Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner

If requesters are unhappy about the Commission's handling of a FOI request, they can complain or seek review of our decision to the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC). The Commission is committed to accountability for its actions and cooperates fully with all OVIC reviews.

In 2023–24 OVIC did not notify the Commission of any reviews of an FOI decision.

Further information

Further information on making a request to the Commission can be found on our website: **www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/about-us/policies/freedomof-information-policy**.

Compliance with the Building Act

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

Compliance with Competitive Neutrality Policy

Competitive neutrality requires government businesses to ensure where services compete, or potentially compete with the private sector, any advantage arising solely from their government ownership be removed if it is not in the public interest. Government businesses are required to cost and price these services as if they were privately owned. Competitive neutrality policy supports fair competition between public and private businesses and provides government businesses with a tool to enhance decisions on resource allocation. This policy does not override other policy objectives of government and focuses on efficiency in the provision of service. The Commission works to ensure it fulfils its requirements on competitive neutrality reporting as required under the Competition Principles Agreement and Competition and Infrastructure Reform Agreement.

Compliance with the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012

The *Protected Disclosure Act 2012* encourages and assists people in making disclosures of improper conduct by public officers and public bodies. The Act provides protection to people who make disclosures in accordance with the Act and establishes a system for the matters disclosed to be investigated and rectifying action to be taken. The Commission does not tolerate improper conduct by employees, nor the taking of reprisals against those who come forward to disclose such conduct. We are committed to ensuring transparency and accountability in administrative and management practices. We support the making of disclosures that reveal:

- corrupt conduct
- conduct involving a substantial mismanagement of public resources
- conduct involving a substantial risk to public health and safety or the environment.

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

Reporting Procedures

Disclosures about the Commission or any of its employees can be made to the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission. Address: Level 1, North Tower, 459 Collins Street Melbourne, VIC 3000; Phone: 1300 735 135; Internet: www.ibac.vic.gov.au; Email: info@ibac.vic.gov.au.

Compliance with the Carers Recognition Act

The Commission has taken all practical measures to comply with its obligations under the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*. Externally, these obligations include promoting the principles of the Act to people in care relationships who receive our services, and to the wider community, by:

- promoting the principles of the Act to people in care relationships who receive our services and to the wider community
- continuing to educate the community about the rights of carers under the EOA through social media channels, project initiatives and training workshops
- providing a publicly available Enquiry Line for members of the public to make complaints about discrimination, including based on their status as carer, as well as the opportunity to participate in our complaints resolution process.

Internally the Commission meets its obligations through flexible work and personal carers leave policies to support staff with carer obligations.

Compliance with the Disability Act

The *Disability Act 2006* reaffirms and strengthens the rights of people with a disability and recognises that this requires support across the government sector and within the community. The Act requires public sector bodies to prepare a disability action plan and report on its implementation in their annual report.

The Commission's Disability Action Plan (DAP) actions have been incorporated into the Commission's *People and culture plan 2024–26* for implementation

Key activities undertaken in 2023–24 that continue to fulfil our commitments under the DAP include:

- working with the Commission's internal Disability Enablers Network
- maintaining Scope accreditation for Communication Access
- continuing our journey to becoming an inclusive employer of choice for people with disability.

Office based environmental impacts

We are committed to minimising our environmental impact. The Commission occupies 1406 sqm of office floorspace which is managed by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and any consumption reduction targets and infrastructure initiatives to achieve those targets are reported in the department's Annual Report. The facilities management system for the building occupied by the Commission cannot isolate the Commission's floorspace. Therefore, no separate electricity or water consumption performance can be reported here, although it is captured in the overall departmental statistics. When offices are open, we do assist in power consumption reduction by requiring staff to turn off lights when meetings are finished and turn off desktop computers and monitors, filter systems at the end of the day. All Commission computer monitors also have timed screensavers.

To minimise waste and consumables, we:

- require all staff to use office landfill, and recycle bins (and provides compost bins for biodegradable waste)
- collect mobile phones, corks, and batteries for e-waste recycling.

We use updated energy-efficient printers and recycled paper. All staff are also encouraged to use the option of double-sided printing wherever possible.

We also encourage paper-less meetings and virtual information sharing as an alternative to printing.

To reduce fuel consumption and transport costs, our two vehicles have hybrid electric/petrol motors, and staff are encouraged to use public transport for work travel where possible.

Additional Commission information available on request

In compliance with the requirements of the Standing Directions of the Minister for Finance, details in respect of the items listed below have been retained by the Commission and are available on request, subject to the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

5. Declarations of pecuniary interests that have been duly completed by all relevant officers of the Commission
6. Details of shares held by senior officers of the Commission as nominee or held beneficially in a statutory authority or subsidiary
7. Details of all consultancies and contractors including: — consultants/contractors engaged — services provided — expenditure committed to for each engagement.

The information is available on request from foi@veohrc.vic.gov.au

Attestation for financial management compliance with Standing Direction 5.1.4

I, Sandie de Wolf AM, on behalf of the Board, certify that the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission has no Material Compliance Deficiency with respect to the applicable Standing Directions under the Financial Management Act 1994 and Instructions.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sandie de Wolf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sandie" and last name "de Wolf" clearly distinguishable.

Sandie de Wolf AM
Chair, Audit and Risk Management Committee
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Appendix: Issues raised in enquiries and complaints



Issues raised in enquiries 2021–22 to 2023–24

Issue	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Disability	2416	1982	1414
Information on the Equal Opportunity Act	2461	1638	1198
No jurisdiction	730	1023	738
Information provided	1351	780	737
Sexual harassment	909	1235	709
Race	369	477	510
Discriminatory information request	478	321	230
Sex	226	212	229
Employment activity	303	322	226
Age	179	194	212
Victimisation	223	300	205
Information on the Charter of Human Rights	777	190	129
Carer status	121	99	127
Parental status	127	110	123
Gender identity	75	110	118
Racial vilification	65	44	107
Physical features	77	95	100
Religious belief or activity	284	127	91
Pregnancy	113	94	74
Sexual orientation	53	78	74
Police	85	91	61
State government	220	151	53
Personal association	16	50	48
Political belief or activity	22	413	47
Profession, trade or occupation	4	22	43
Employment law	142	122	37
Religious vilification	18	23	36
Tenancy	44	60	36
Industrial activity	13	403	33
Education	74	52	31
Federal government	52	52	31

Issue	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Court	79	51	30
Marital status	37	26	30
Information on the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act	26	19	30
Child protection	37	31	22
Spent criminal conviction	1	48	19
Prisons	38	33	17
Sex characteristics	4	15	17
Authorising and assisting	19	20	15
Local government	16	19	15
Change or suppression practices	16	9	12
Breastfeeding	19	27	11
Lawful sexual activity	14	12	11
Indigenous	9	13	10
Involuntary patient	31	20	9
Criminal record	16	16	8
Media	9	17	7
Training requests	32	5	7
Homelessness	5	22	6
Family Court	21	25	4
Privacy	37	28	2
Expunged homosexual conviction	3	4	1
Commission publications and resources	0	9	1
Religious	0	2	1
Transport	0	6	1
Discriminatory advertising	0	0	0
Medical/health	1	1	0
Services	0	1	0
WorkCover	2	5	0
Total issues raised	12,499	11,354	8,093

Issues raised in complaints 2021–22 to 2023–24

	Accommodation			Clubs			Education			Employment			
	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	
Age	1	7	7	1		1	3	5	1	37	46	53	
Authorising and assisting													
Breastfeeding										6	11	2	
Carer status	5	4	2				1		3	56	45	57	
Disability	34	93	57	5	1	2	80	54	55	207	685	254	
Discriminatory information request									2				
Employment activity										97	82	104	
Expunged homosexual conviction													
Gender identity	4	1	1				9	1	1	4	12	11	
Industrial activity							7			7	404	35	
Lawful sexual activity			2							4	8	4	
Marital status	1								1	13	10	13	
Parental status	4	4	1				1	1		38	45	53	
Personal association	1	2	3					2	1	3	4	9	
Physical features							3	5	6	14	26	27	
Political belief or activity										1	404	30	
Pregnancy	1								1	34	37	25	
Profession, trade or occupation			9								5	1	
Race	2	2	17			1	18	12	12	51	75	97	
Racial vilification													
Religious belief or activity		2	4				14	7	6	13	60	24	
Religious vilification													
Sex		6	1	2		1	2	2	3	87	57	93	
Sex characteristics		1										4	
Sexual harassment		3						1	2	74	53	65	
Sexual orientation		2	1				11	3	1	16	17	12	
Spent conviction				1	1						4	1	
Victimisation													
Grand total	53	127	105	9	2	5	149	93	95	762	2,090	974	

	Goods and services			Local government			No area required			Sport			Change or suppression practices reports			Total		
	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24
	23	22	39							2		2				67	80	103
							13	8	10							13	8	10
	1	1	2													7	12	4
	10	8	13									2				72	57	77
	445	220	200		1	1				1	5	4				772	1059	573
							19	24	15							19	24	17
																97	82	104
	4	12	31			1						2				21	26	47
																14	404	35
	6	2	3													10	10	9
	9	7	2									1				23	17	17
	5	8	10									2				48	58	66
	7	9	14									2				11	17	29
	11	24	25									4				28	55	62
		3	1													1	407	31
	3	3	3													38	40	29
	2	6	12													2	11	22
	56	67	74							2		1				129	156	202
							10	9	7							10	9	7
	9	7	13								2	1				36	78	48
							2	13	7							2	13	7
	22	38	34							3	2	2				116	105	134
	2	3	5													2	4	9
	2	12	4													76	69	71
	1	8	11										1	2	2	29	32	27
	1	1	1													1	6	2
							88	106	109							88	106	109
	618	461	497	0	1	2	132	160	148	8	9	23	1	2	2	1,732	2,945	1,851





Contact us

Enquiry line	1300 292 153
Fax	1300 891 858
NRS voice relay	1300 555 727 then quote 1300 292 153
Interpreters	1300 152 494
Email	enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au
Find us on Facebook	facebook.com/veohrc
Follow us on Instagram	instagram.com/veohrc
Follow us on X	x.com/veohrc
Web	humanrights.vic.gov.au