

RIGHTS. RECOVERY. RESPECT.

SASVIC'S CALL TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN VICTORIA

About us

Sexual Assault Services Victoria (SASVic) is the peak body for specialist sexual assault and harmful sexual behaviour services. Our members provide support to 20,000 survivors and young people a year. Together, we work to promote rights, recovery and respect for survivors and other people impacted by sexual violence.

Where are we now?

Meaningful action on sexual violence is long overdue.

In 2021, the Victorian government commissioned the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) to undertake a ground-breaking inquiry to establish what is needed to improve justice system response to sexual offences. We welcome the government's subsequent introduction of an affirmative consent model, investment in consent education for young people and funding boost for the specialist sexual assault sector (our sector). The government stated that these reforms were part of the initial response to the VLRC report and committed to deliver a 10-year strategy to address sexual violence in 2022.

We are now approaching the end of 2023 and although the vast majority of VLRC recommendations are yet to be implemented, there is still no public delivery date for this urgently needed strategy. While we await government action, more and more survivors of recent and historic sexual violence are coming forward, and waitlists for specialist counselling and advocacy continue to grow.

That's why SASVic is calling on the Victorian government to:

- improve justice options and outcomes for people impacted by sexual violence
- fully fund and deliver a comprehensive strategy to address all forms of sexual violence
- grow and resource a strong peak and sector, as the VLRC recommended.

1. Improve justice options and outcomes for people impacted by sexual violence

Sexual violence is common but highly underreported. When survivors engage with the justice system it can be a confronting and disempowering experience. Too often the burden is on them to navigate a complex and punitive system that fails them by compounding trauma and making recovery more difficult.

We need a justice system that enables survivors to access support, consider and act on their reporting options, secure a justice outcome (if that's what they want) and recover. We need to build community confidence that the justice system will uphold the rights of survivors when they make the difficult decision to report.

What we're calling for:

- Improved experiences for survivors seeking justice, whether that be through civil, criminal or restorative justice processes, including better access, clearer information, more options (such as providing prerecorded evidence) and greater accountability.
- Resourcing for development of dedicated and ongoing 'Justice Navigator' roles embedded into specialist sexual assault services across Victoria. Justice Navigators would provide additional case management and advocacy for survivors to understand and exercise their rights and help them navigate the various support, compensation, recovery and justice options available to them.
- Ongoing funding for our sector to develop and deliver an education and training program on sexual violence for police, lawyers, judges and magistrates. Engaging the justice 'setting' in efforts to prevent and address sexual violence is crucial. Topics should include misconceptions about sexual violence, barriers to disclosure, how to reduce risk of further trauma, and the therapeutic treatment order system.



2. Fully fund and deliver a Victorian sexual violence strategy

Sexual violence is harmful and far too prevalent. It is also preventable. Yet in Victoria, we don't have a strategy to end it. The Victorian government has invested and led the way on family violence and gender equality, but it risks falling behind on sexual violence.

The delivery of a well-resourced whole-of-government strategy is an important milestone towards preventing and addressing sexual violence. We need an ambitious plan that sets out at least 10 years of systemic reform and societal transformation that paves the way for a measurable reduction in the prevalence of sexual violence.

What we're calling for:

A fully funded, up-to-date and comprehensive 10-year Victorian strategy to address sexual violence that will:

- Encompass and address the continuum of sexual violence that survivors experience, including (but not limited to) child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, image-based sexual abuse, and children and young people exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours.
- Develop and strengthen evidence-based and survivor-led models that enable effective early intervention and support healing and recovery.
- Address the criminalisation of survivors and disrupt the pathway that too often occurs between being a survivor of sexual violence and involvement with the criminal justice system as an offender.
- Ensure equity of access for all people impacted by sexual violence by addressing barriers related to cultural safety, accessibility and inclusion. This should include investing in training for language services in family and sexual violence, extending the pool of trained interpreters and strengthening the use of language services.
- Fund the modernisation of data systems for services within our sector and beyond to identify and address key gaps in data, research and evaluation.

3. Strong peak, strong sector

The specialist sexual assault sector supports nearly 20,000 survivors of sexual violence and children and young people who exhibit harmful sexual behaviours every year. But due to historic underfunding, workforce shortages and pressures like short-term contracts, our services struggle to meet growing demand.

The government's initial investment in SASVic as the new peak body for our sector has allowed us to play a critical role in training, developing and resourcing our specialist workforce, as well as the wider community. However, despite the VLRC recommending ongoing funding for SASVic, our funding is about to run out.

What we're calling for:

- Immediate increased funding for our sector to be able meet demand and extend the capacity of other parts of the service system to respond to sexual violence, as recommended by the VLRC. More funding would enable us to address critical issues like waitlists, service accessibility, as well as helping us to retain, support and develop our specialist workforce.
- A new long-term funding model that encompasses the full scope of our work. A new funding model would facilitate service innovation and greater flexibility in the supports we are able to offer to victim survivors, fast-tracking healing and recovery through effective early intervention.
- Resourcing to continue to build the evidence base for effective multi-disciplinary centres, to ensure survivors across Victoria have access to an multi-disciplinary centre.
- Resourcing for our sector to strengthen provision of specialist support, information and resources online and over the phone to make it easier for survivors to understand and navigate their options. This should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Ongoing funding to ensure that SASVic can continue to be a strong, state-wide voice for our sector and all those impacted by sexual violence. The government's investment in a peak body has allowed us to progress important work, such as workforce development, consent education, and stronger integration between our sector and the specialist family violence sector. Without urgent investment, SASVic could lose most of its funding mid-2024.

