

# Working Together

**Smart  
Justice**  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**Action Plan to end the over-representation  
of particular groups of young people in the  
criminal justice system**

October 2023

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# Glossary of terms

<b>First Nations</b>	On the advice of our First Nations member groups, we generally refer to First Nations people. We do use the terms Aboriginal or Indigenous people when we are drawing from a report or data where First Nations people have been described this way.
<b>Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance</b>	Indigenous Data Sovereignty 'refers to the right of Indigenous people to exercise ownership over Indigenous data' and Indigenous data governance 'refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to autonomously decide what, how and why Indigenous Data are collected, accessed and used'. <sup>1</sup> It can be contrasted with 'BADDR' data use that is Blaming, Aggregate, Decontextualised, Deficit, Restricted. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Māori and Pasifika</b>	Māori and Pasifika is used as a term to describe people who are of Māori and from Pacific Island Nation backgrounds e.g Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu.
<b>Multicultural children and young people</b>	This term is used to refer to children and young people who are of refugee and migrant backgrounds, including those born in Australia, and whose cultural, ethnic and racial diversity distinguishes them from those recognised as white people (see definition of 'White people' below).
<b>Over-criminalisation</b>	A person is over or unfairly criminalised if they are subject to police or legal system contact (including stop, question, search, arrest, prosecution, detention) when such contact is inappropriate, unnecessary, unjustified or an alternative non-criminalising response could or should have been made available.
<b>Over-representation</b>	A group of people is over-represented in the criminal legal system if they are more likely to be in contact with the system than their group's proportion in the population would predict.
<b>Racial profiling</b>	The disproportionate and unreasonable use of police investigative (or other such) powers against particular First Nations and racialised groups compared with white people.
<b>Racialised communities</b>	In this report the term 'racialised' is used to draw attention to the process of social construction in which some people are constructed as having a 'race', such as 'white' or 'black'. Racialised communities are communities of people who are constructed as non-white in Australian culture, where 'whiteness' is constructed as unremarkable.
<b>Restorative justice</b>	Restorative justice is a theory of justice that focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime and wrongdoing to the people most immediately affected and the community. It is an alternative to retributive justice which requires authorities to respond to crime with punishment to maintain social order, promote individual and collective deterrence and to denounce the harm.
<b>Under-representation</b>	A group of people are under-represented in housing, education, health or employment if they are less likely to be safely housed, educated, or employed or receive adequate healthcare than their group's proportion in the population would predict.
<b>Young person (up to 25yrs)</b>	Unless noted otherwise, 'young person' refers to a person who is 25 years or younger.
<b>White people</b>	In this report, we use the term 'white' people to refer to people who are racialised as white. We recognise that no terms that describe race, ethnicity or identity are sophisticated enough to capture all nuances.

# Executive summary

Victoria's overall youth incarceration rate is falling, but certain young people still come into contact with the justice system at disproportionately high rates. They are over-represented in police contacts and youth detention, and they are under-served by government and community services. Victoria's criminal justice system, and the systems that operate alongside it, are not working for these young people.<sup>3</sup>

This document contains an Action Plan to end the over-representation of these groups in our criminal justice system. It is based on two years of collective work and reflects our shared practice experience and the current evidence base. The benefits of implementing this Action Plan will extend to *all* Victorians, not just those directly harmed by over-representation.

**Every child and young person in Victoria deserves the care, opportunities and support necessary for them and their families to flourish. Right now, however, some Victorian children and young people are not getting this vital government and community support and are instead funnelled into the criminal justice system.**

In Victoria, five of the most over-represented groups in the criminal justice system are:

- First Nations children and young people;
- Multicultural children and young people;
- Children who live in out-of-home residential care;
- 18–25 year olds; and
- Girls and young women with complex needs.<sup>4</sup>



## The core of the problem

This Action Plan focuses on the common overlapping systemic and structural factors that cause the over-representation of these young people in the criminal justice system. We often talk about preventing 'youth crime' as if young people are the sole problem.

In contrast, this Action Plan focuses on the systems that are not working for these young people (10-25 years) and their families. Youth crime prevention is a necessary by-product of this focus.

We show that the over-representation of particular young people is due to failings in the current capacity of key government agencies, statutory institutions and community organisations to respond to the needs of these young people and their families. These young people are:

- **Over-represented** in police and criminal justice system contact
- **Under-represented** in the provision of essential services (such as access to housing, healthcare, education and employment).

This means that changes to the *criminal justice system alone* will not end over-representation. We need a response that is sufficiently sophisticated to address the entire range of intersecting systemic and structural issues that keep these five cohorts over-represented.

## What needs to be done?

To end the over-representation in the criminal justice system of the five identified youth cohorts, we have developed this Action Plan which contains nine (9) whole of government asks and forty (40) asks within six (6) individual portfolio areas.

Figure 1: Whole of government and six portfolio areas of focus in SJ4YP's Action Plan.



The over-representation of these five groups of young people in the criminal justice system is an **urgent problem that requires our immediate attention**. Our Action Plan is the most effective way to enable deep cross-sectoral collaboration; tackle shared systemic drivers; and redirect our efforts and finite resources to prevention and addressing under-representation.

By committing to this Action Plan, we acknowledge the urgency of this problem and the **collective action necessary to end it**.

This Action Plan is a culmination of the diverse practical experience of the members of Smart Justice for Young People (SJ4YP) and our current knowledge about over-representation and its systemic and structural drivers.<sup>5</sup>

The asks in our Action Plan address the six interdependent systemic and structural conditions that continue to maintain the over-representation of particular young people in the criminal justice system [see Figure 2]<sup>6</sup> at the key points of:

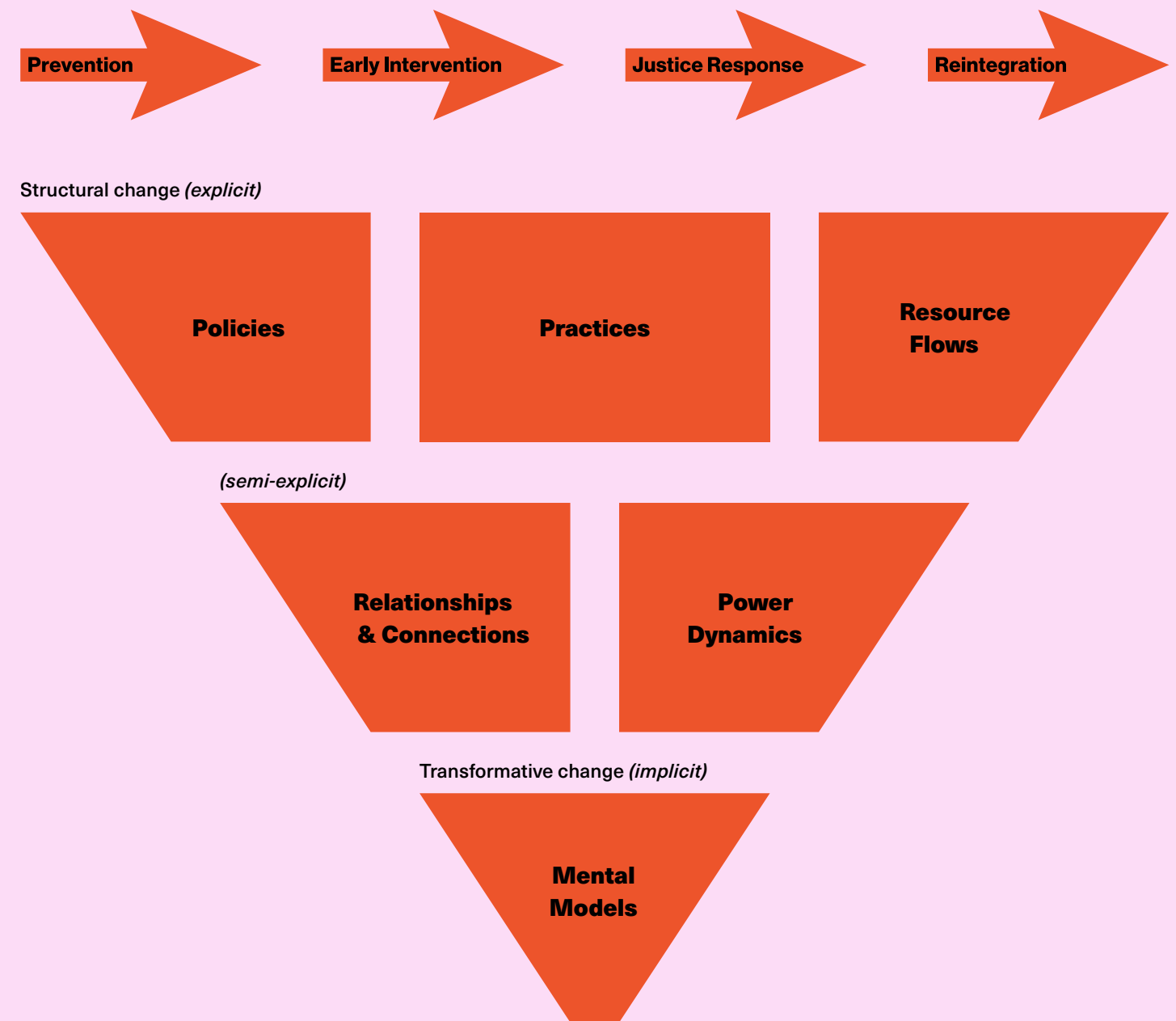
- crime prevention;
- early intervention;
- the civil and criminal justice response; and
- community reintegration.

They are also underpinned by the following five principles: non-discrimination; the best interests of a child; the right to life, survival and development; children's right to participate in decisions affecting them; and self-determination.





Figure 2: Six interdependent (structural and systemic) conditions that we need to positively shift to end the over-representation of the five youth cohorts in the criminal justice system.







## How to read this action plan

This Action Plan builds on crucial work demonstrating the structural, historical and colonial injustices that contribute to over-representation, and localised programming and service solutions.<sup>7</sup> It also acknowledges the important work already underway in response to these problems within the justice system, for example the Yoorrook Justice Commission, South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group and Framework to Reduce the Criminalisation of Children in Residential Care.<sup>8</sup>

Based on available evidence, best practice and our experience, we have identified common and overlapping system issues (root causes) that are perpetuating the over-representation of all the five youth cohorts in the criminal justice system including:

- the application of certain criminal and civil justice and correctional laws, policies and practices;
- over-policing;
- the way decision-makers exercise their discretion;
- the way crime prevention and community reintegration are currently dealt with;
- over-reliance on police by community-based institutions to deal with challenging behaviour by young people;
- the way families are supported; and
- government funding to, and service decisions by, community organisations.<sup>9</sup>

Our Action Plan highlights how simultaneously fixing these issues will deepen the impact of key government work underway.

**This Action Plan is an unprecedented and collective effort to focus attention on the systemic and cross-sectoral factors underpinning the over-representation (and under-representation) of some children and young people.**

This Action Plan is for **all decision-makers involved with children and young people**: government and the government funded community sector. Ending over-representation requires our immediate and sustained collective and coordinated attention.

**SJ4YP** is a coalition of over fifty leading Victorian social services, health, legal and youth advocacy organisations, calling for evidence-based and effective responses to children and young people involved in the criminal legal system. It is co-convened by Youthlaw and Westjustice. The coalition provides a coordinated and expert voice on



youth justice initiatives and reforms so that children and young people will have the best chance to succeed in life, supported by their families and their communities. Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (VEOHRC) and Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) participate as observers. This Action Plan was created by one of SJ4YP's working groups. Working Group members include: Youthlaw, WestJustice, Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council, Koorie Youth Council, Police Accountability Project, Inner Melbourne Community Legal Centre, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Centre for Multicultural Youth, Centre for Innovative Justice, Federation on Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, Human Rights Law Centre, Youth Support and Advocacy Service, Youth Affairs Council Victoria, Jesuit Social Services, Justice Reform Initiative, Dr Tamar Hopkins, Victorian Council of Social Services, Dr Nesam McMillan, Associate Professor Diana Johns, and Associate Professor Anne-Marree Fenech. A special thanks to Professor John Tobin from the University of Melbourne as well for his time and expertise as we developed this Action Plan; Eva Lazzaro of SJ4YP; and the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne, for research assistance support.

This Action Plan supports the implementation of remaining recommendations contained in the following reports and is designed to work with them:

- CCYP's [Keep Caring, Out of Sight, Our Youth, Our Way](#)<sup>10</sup>
- [Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System](#)
- Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody
- Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System
- Koorie Youth Council's Ngaga-Dji Report
- Finding into the passing of Veronica Nelson
- Finding into the passing of Tanya Day
- Yoorrook Justice Interim Report.

*We acknowledge and pay our respects to the custodians of the lands on which we work and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded.*

## Where do we begin?

Based on recent reforms, strategies, policy platforms and public statements, this Action Plan assumes those working in government, statutory organisations and community organisations, whose work engages with 10–25 year olds and families affected by young people's over-representation in the criminal justice system, share a commitment to:

- Equality and non-discrimination
- Addressing over-representation of First Nations children and young people; multicultural children and young people; children living in residential care homes; 18–25 year olds; and girls and young women with complex needs
- Detention as a last resort
- Minimising re-offending
- Enabling the wellbeing and social integration of children and young people who offend
- The use of evidence to inform policy and practice
- Collaborating with all relevant actors including young people
- Self-determination for First Nations children and young people
- Having a criminal justice system that maintains public safety and uses State resources efficiently.



# Action plan: Ending over-representation in the criminal justice system

## Whole of Government Asks

### ASK ONE:

The Victorian Government develop and implement a cross-ministerial portfolio and cross-departmental Framework to end the over-representation of the five youth cohorts in the criminal justice system.

This Framework would set and coordinate all actions across government, statutory agencies and government-funded organisations and address criminalising processes and systemic over-representation across the following domains:

- Criminal and civil justice systems – understand the systemic drivers of over-representation and prioritise outcomes that work
- Policing – ending policing practices that lead to over-representation
- Children, families and their communities – Enabling families, carers and communities to get the help they need when they need it to support young people
- Housing and material needs – Ensure all children, young people and their families have access to safe, stable, affordable housing
- Health and wellbeing – ending practices which criminalise health and wellbeing issues and recognise and end systemic barriers to accessing meaningful support
- Education – ending education practices that lead to criminalisation and increase school inclusion.

This Framework would coordinate decisions and investments that affect the life course of young people and their families over-represented in the criminal justice system from prevention through to reintegration across these domains.

Responsibility would be spread across the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), Department of Education (DE), Department of Health (DH), Department of Families, Fairness, Housing (DFFH) and Department of Jobs, Skills, Precincts and Regions (DJSPR). DFFH should lead this response, as it has the expertise coordinating and commissioning social services to support families with complex needs.

The Framework, and action to implement the Framework, should be centred on the following principles:

- Prohibition against all forms of discrimination
- Best interests of the child
- Right to life, survival and development
- Young peoples' right to participate in decisions that affect them
- Aboriginal self-determination.

This Framework would build on reform already underway, based on shared commitment and responsibility across government and service providers under *Wirkara Kulpa 2021–2031* and the *Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care*.

The Framework would also incorporate and align with other key government policies, including:

- [Our promise, Your future: Victoria's youth strategy 2022–2027](#) | Victorian Government
- [Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030](#) | Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria
- [Corporate Plan 2022-26](#) | Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria
- [Crime Prevention Strategy](#) | Community Crime Prevention Victoria
- [DJPR-Strategic-Plan-2021-25](#)
- [Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children](#) | Department of Families Fairness and Housing Victoria

### ASK TWO:

Government develops and adopts outcomes measures to monitor and report on progress towards achieving the proposed Framework in Ask One. These outcomes measures should be linked to the existing Youth Strategy Outcomes Framework and:

- Relate clearly to the decision making principles outlined in Ask One
- Comply with Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance principles
- Legislation should be introduced to mandate regular data collection, analysis and public reporting by the responsible departments and statutory agencies<sup>11</sup>
- The data collection and reporting process should begin with the establishment of baselines
- Include cost expenditure and avoidance.

### ASK THREE:

Regularly assess the impact of proposed law reform, policies, and practices on groups affected by over-representation including genuine consultation and feedback as to the outcomes of those consultations as part of the Framework and adopted outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

### ASK FOUR:

Ensure services are adequately funded, over time, to enable deep collaboration and collective impact under the Framework by:

- Including the framework as a key criterion across all government funding and programming in time for the 2024-25 Victorian Budget for new and renewed funding opportunities including but not limited to crime prevention funding, youth justice funding, education and health
- Long-term contracts for government-funded community service organisations. The Productivity Commission recommends 7 years.
- Introducing funding models that support systems change.

### ASK FIVE:

Mandate all government and government-funded community delivered services across justice, policing, education, health, housing, child and family services to regularly undertake foundational and booster training on cultural safety, anti-racism, gender inequity, and trauma-informed practice as part of the Framework.<sup>13</sup>

### ASK SIX:

Progress implementation of '[Our promise, Your future: Victoria's youth strategy 2022-27](#)' by strengthening the Office for Youth's coordination role and investing in the youth and adjacent sectors to implement the strategy.

### ASK SEVEN:

Commit to genuine First Nations self-determination and community control. This means prioritising the actions that First Nations people say will enable self-determination and end over-representation and under-representation, including power, money and resource transfer and sharing.<sup>14</sup>

### ASK EIGHT:

Develop a whole-of-government Multicultural Youth Justice Strategy, that sits alongside the existing Framework to End the Criminalisation of Young People in Residential Care and *Wirkara Kulpa*.

### ASK NINE:

Bring Community Crime Prevention and Community Reintegration Support into the DFFH portfolio for 10-25 year olds. Shared responsibility between DJCS and DFFH will enable the creation of collaborative responses e.g. Youth Justice Community Support Service and Putting Families First.<sup>15</sup>



# Spotlight: Ask Two

Government develops and adopts outcomes measures to monitor and report on progress towards achieving the proposed Framework in Ask One. *Outcomes measures should include:*

## **Criminal and civil justice systems<sup>16</sup>**

Access to diversionary options, access to therapeutic and community-based sentencing options, civil and criminal summary and indictable prosecution outcomes, fine issuance and enforcement outcomes, victims of crime applications and outcomes, family violence and personal safety outcomes, and legal assistance outcomes.

## **Children, families and their community**

Child removal and placement in residential care data; involvement with the community and statutory care and protection system and any intersecting cross-over into the criminal justice system including level of police contact; and, education, health, employment and exit from care outcomes.

## **Health and wellbeing**

Service access and outcome data throughout the health, mental health, alcohol and other drug support systems, self-harm and suicide data.

## **Housing and material needs**

Service access and outcome data relating to homelessness and material needs support.

## **Policing**

Pedestrian and vehicle stops, searches, requests to move-on, arrests, detention in police custody, use of force, family violence call outs, action on family violence breaches, cautions, recommendations for diversion, action on missing person reports, complaints along with perceived racial appearance, First Nations status, gender appearance and child protection status.

## **Education**

Number of, and grounds for, student absenteeism, formal and informal suspensions, and expulsions, to monitor patterns of student groups disengaging, detaching or being removed from school, Parkville College outcomes, TAFE and University course completion.

# The problem of over-representation, over-criminalisation and under-representation

The problem of over-representation is urgent and complex. A group of young people is over-represented if they come into contact with the justice system at a rate disproportionate to the general population. They can be over-represented in police contacts, criminal charging and convictions, remand and youth detention. Our Action Plan focuses specifically on the shared systemic and structural drivers that lead to the over-representation of First Nations young people, multicultural children and young people, young people living in out-of-home residential care, 18–25 year olds, and girls and young women with complex needs, five of the most over-represented youth cohorts in the criminal justice system.

**Over-criminalisation** is one driver of over-representation. A person or group is over or unfairly criminalised if they experience inappropriate, unnecessary or unjustified police or legal system contact (including stop, question, search, arrest, prosecution, detention). They are also over-criminalised if they do not receive an alternative, non-criminalising response (such as a police caution, health, education or welfare response) where one could or should have been made available. Over-criminalisation is underpinned or maintained by assumptions that support the over-policing of certain communities in relation to others. Over-criminalisation is an active and systemic process, and over-representation is a result.<sup>17</sup>

## ● Case study 1: Ahmed<sup>54</sup>

Ahmed was approached by police at the bottom of the high-rise estate he lived in. He had been locked out of his flat by his uncle who was experiencing a mental health crisis. Police asked Ahmed what he was doing and to empty his pockets. He swore at them and resisted their attempt to search him. He was arrested and charged with offensive language and resist police.

*What Ahmed needed was assistance managing his uncle's crisis and with finding alternative accommodation.*

*Racial profiling is a key example of unfair and over-criminalisation experienced by First Nations people and other racialised communities. We know racialised groups are more likely to be stopped, questioned and searched on the streets and in vehicles in circumstances where the police have not observed an offence, while 'white' people are more likely to be left to go about their business. When police investigate some racial (or otherwise criminalised) groups more than others, this 'over-sampling' means these groups become over-represented amongst those who are fined, and those who enter the criminal justice system.*

**Under-representation** describes the practice by which children and young people who are over-represented in the criminal justice system are under served when it comes to accessing basic social and governmental services. For example, they are under-represented in measures of Year 12 attainment and/or meaningful education,<sup>18</sup> access to physical and mental health services, stable housing, stable employment and access to diversion, cautions and proceedings by way of summons once in the criminal justice system.<sup>19</sup> These children and young people are also less likely to be responded to appropriately when they are the victims of crime.<sup>20</sup>

Racial profiling is a key example of unfair criminalisation experienced by First Nations people and other racialised communities. We know racialised groups are more likely to be stopped, questioned and searched on the streets and in vehicles in circumstances where the police have not observed an offence, in comparison to white people.<sup>21</sup> When police investigate some racial groups more than others, this 'over-sampling' means these groups become over-represented amongst those who are fined, and those who enter the criminal justice system.<sup>22</sup>

### **Over-representation and over-criminalisation cause significant harm**

The watershed report, *Our Youth, Our Way*, showed that justice system contact can dramatically alter the life trajectory of First Nations children, and adversely affect the social and emotional wellbeing of their families and communities.<sup>23</sup>

Any police contact, including being questioned or searched, sends powerful negative messages to young people about their belonging, trustworthiness and their status.<sup>24</sup> It can cause them to withdraw and disengage from public life.<sup>25</sup> Detention can have long term developmental impacts on children and cause significant trauma.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the particular stage of a young person's development may make it even harder to manage their impulses and emotions in prison, not to mention the added complexities of mental health issues and cognitive, linguistic and neurological challenges that they may be further navigating.

**We know that even short periods of justice system contact (like police contact or time in detention) can result in disengagement from school, family and community, and an increased likelihood of further contact with the criminal justice system.**



Our criminal justice system is not responsive to the needs of young people from the over-represented cohorts. For example, girls and young women are a 'minority' within the current youth justice system which is primarily designed to respond to young men.<sup>27</sup> Many of these young people also have experiences of family violence, trauma, out-of-home care, sexual abuse, disadvantage or displacement from war or conflict – and custodial staff lack the training (including cultural safety training) to respond to their needs.<sup>28</sup>

In relation to 18-25 year olds, they are legal adults who are not yet developmentally mature. Other areas of government, notably the health system, recognise and account for the particular needs of people aged 18-25, but the justice and correctional systems lack a real differential response for this age group.<sup>29</sup>

There is minimal evidence tougher sentencing policy improves community safety.<sup>30</sup> In fact, several studies have found that imprisonment increases the likelihood of offending behaviour and has the potential to negatively affect people in prison, particularly younger, lower-risk offenders.<sup>31</sup> In addition to having little impact on community safety or rehabilitation, detaining young people is highly expensive. The current cost per day, per young person subject to detention-based supervision in Victoria is \$5050.<sup>32</sup> **This equates to \$1.84 million per year, per young person.**<sup>33</sup>

Conversely, there is evidence that restorative justice programs reduce the re-offending rate for young people from 80 percent to 20 percent two years after the program.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, diversion offers genuine potential to curb over-representation in the criminal justice system.

### Isolation

In addition, we know the use of isolation and restraint in Victorian youth justice facilities continues as a way of addressing operational issues arising from staff shortages as well as occupational violence.<sup>35</sup> **We are yet to fully understand the extent of the harm caused to the over-represented cohorts who have experienced isolation including further contact with the criminal justice system.** The Victorian Ombudsman noted with concern in its 2019 investigation into the solitary confinement of children and young people, that unlike in the adult system, there is no requirement to be given to a person's medical and psychiatric conditions before authorising isolation.<sup>36</sup> The Ombudsman also found that Port Phillip Prison (one of the three facilities inspected) was particularly ill-equipped to deal with the challenging behaviour of young people. While young people accounted for 18 percent of the prison population, they were disproportionately subject to isolation practices.<sup>37</sup>

### ● Case study 2: Julie<sup>55</sup>

14-year-old Julie is removed from her family due to family violence and placed into residential care of the State. She acts out in out-of-home care by throwing a plate at a wall. The police are called and Julie is charged with criminal damage. If this act had occurred in a family home context it is unlikely the police would be called. There might have been a conversation about how to safely express feelings next time instead.<sup>56</sup>





**Who are the children and young people affected?**

**First Nations children and young people** belong to the longest surviving continuous culture on this planet. First Nations young people 'desire to connect with culture, to be heard, to feel safe and protected, and to move forward'.<sup>38</sup> Connection to culture is also a strong preventative factor for contact with the criminal justice system. We celebrate the leadership role of young First Nations people and welcome and support the work of the First People's Assembly of Victoria in Treaty negotiations. However, as *Our Youth, Our Way* describes and Victorian Government Ministers conceded at the Yoorrook Justice Commission, First Nations children and young people continue to be systematically over-represented in all aspects of the youth justice system.<sup>39</sup> First Nations children and young people endure the unique and destructive results of dispossession from their ancestral land, colonisation and intergenerational trauma connected to successive policies of child removal. We note government action to address this over-representation, and that its response to the recommendations in *Our Youth, Our Way* is driven through *Wirkara Kulpa*.<sup>40</sup>

**Children and young people living in residential home care** are members of our Victorian community with enormous strengths, in spite of the harm and structural barriers they face, that if enabled, and supported to heal, can realise their goals and aspirations. Children and young people in the child protection system, in particular those living in out-of-home residential care, are also over-represented in the criminal justice system.<sup>41</sup> A 2019 Sentencing Advisory Council (SAC) analysis found that 94 percent of children known to child protection engaged in their first sentenced or diverted offence after a child protection report about them had been lodged.<sup>42</sup> Young people in out-of-home residential care are also more likely to have unnecessary police contact or their behaviour criminalised than other young people. The Victorian Government has acknowledged the shared responsibility to address their over-representation and over-criminalisation through the creation and implementation of the *Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care* in early 2020. While this framework is a critical starting point, statistics continue to show that young people with out-of-home care experience are over-represented in the criminal justice system.<sup>43</sup>

● Case study 3: Mia<sup>57</sup>

Mia (not her real name) grew up living with her mother after her parents separated. She loved her Mum, but her Mum had mental health issues and sometimes tried to harm herself in front of Mia. After those incidents, Mia went to live with her father, who was also looking after four of Mia's siblings. Mia found it hard to settle at her Dad's place. She was diagnosed with an intellectual disability and complex post-traumatic stress disorder. After a few months, her Dad decided that he was not able to care for her anymore, so Mia was moved to residential care. [At the time], Mia [said] residential care doesn't provide the support and care she craves. 'It's bad because you don't get love there. People just come to work to get the money and go home. There's not many carers that like you and stuff gets locked away, so you can't even get metal forks or glass cups,' she said.

When Mia first moved, a lot of her workers weren't told about her background, disabilities and mental health issues and weren't provided with training on how to manage and support these conditions. She said workers often called police for minor things. 'I was going through a lot of stuff and I got in trouble for stupid things like breaking a plate. Mia often [left] residential care to see friends and because 'I've had enough there and I feel more free and welcomed in the community,' she said. She [was] often then placed in secure welfare, a higher security facility.

*Continued page 57*

**Multicultural children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds** are important and valued members of the Victorian community, recognised for the 'knowledge, skills and culture' they individually and collectively possess and disperse across all of its facets.<sup>44</sup> Multicultural children and young people, in particular, those from African, Māori and Pasifika backgrounds are severely over-represented at all levels of the criminal justice system, from police contact to supervision in youth justice system.<sup>45</sup> The United Nations' preliminary findings into the treatment of African people in Australia paints a grim picture of discrimination at every single point across education, health, employment and housing.<sup>46</sup> Until recently, Māori and Pasifika youth have faced exclusion from higher education and Centrelink benefits.<sup>47</sup> We also know that multicultural young people are less likely to get Children's Court Diversion.<sup>48</sup>

**2.1: Who is in youth justice custody? (Youth parole board data)**







**Girls and young women with complex needs** are also over-represented in the criminal justice system.<sup>49</sup> This is particularly the case for girls and young women who are survivors of sexual and family violence, have histories of untreated mental health and alcohol and other drug ('AOD') use, and have out-of-home residential care experience. Girls and young women in custody are overwhelmingly survivors of trauma whose safety, health, and care needs have not been met from a very early age.<sup>50</sup> They are more likely to be known to the child protection system than their male counterparts.<sup>51</sup> First Nations women and mothers are the fastest growing group in the prison system.<sup>52</sup>

We acknowledge other youth cohorts significantly affected by over-representation, criminalisation and under-representation, for example: Victorian young people who identify as LGBTIQ+; Victorian males of the Muslim faith; those living with a disability; those living in low metropolitan and rural socio-economic index for areas (SEIFA). We note the intersections with the cohorts focused on in this Action Plan and welcome and encourage further detailed data collection, analysis and commentary.<sup>53</sup>

**18-25 year olds.** Discussion regarding this cohort is integrated into the other categories in this guide. This is due in large part to a lack of data about the experiences of this specific age group.



Diagram 1: Why some young people are more likely to be over-represented in the criminal justice system<sup>63</sup>

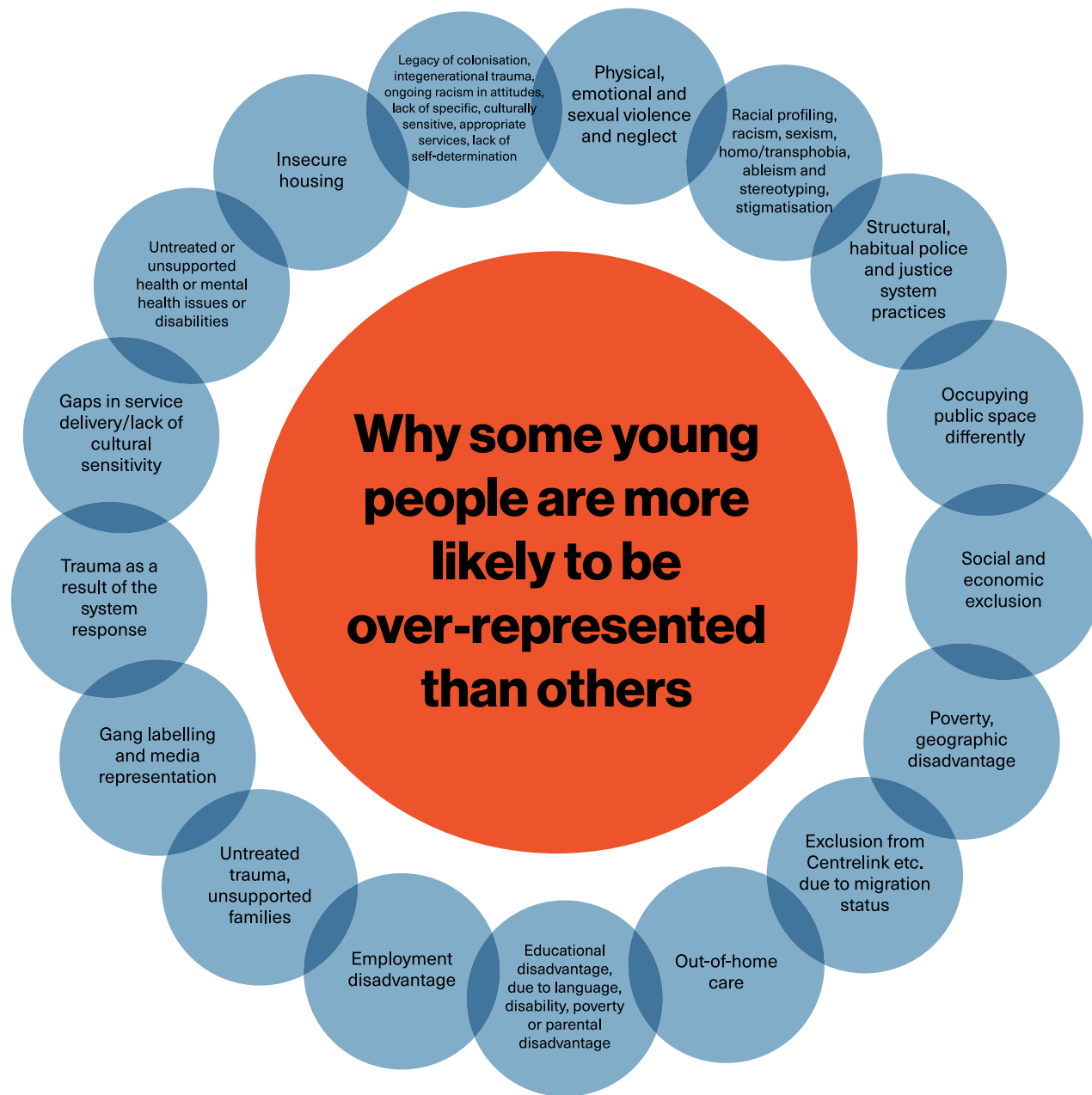


Diagram 2: Why multicultural children and young people are over-represented in the criminal justice system<sup>64</sup>

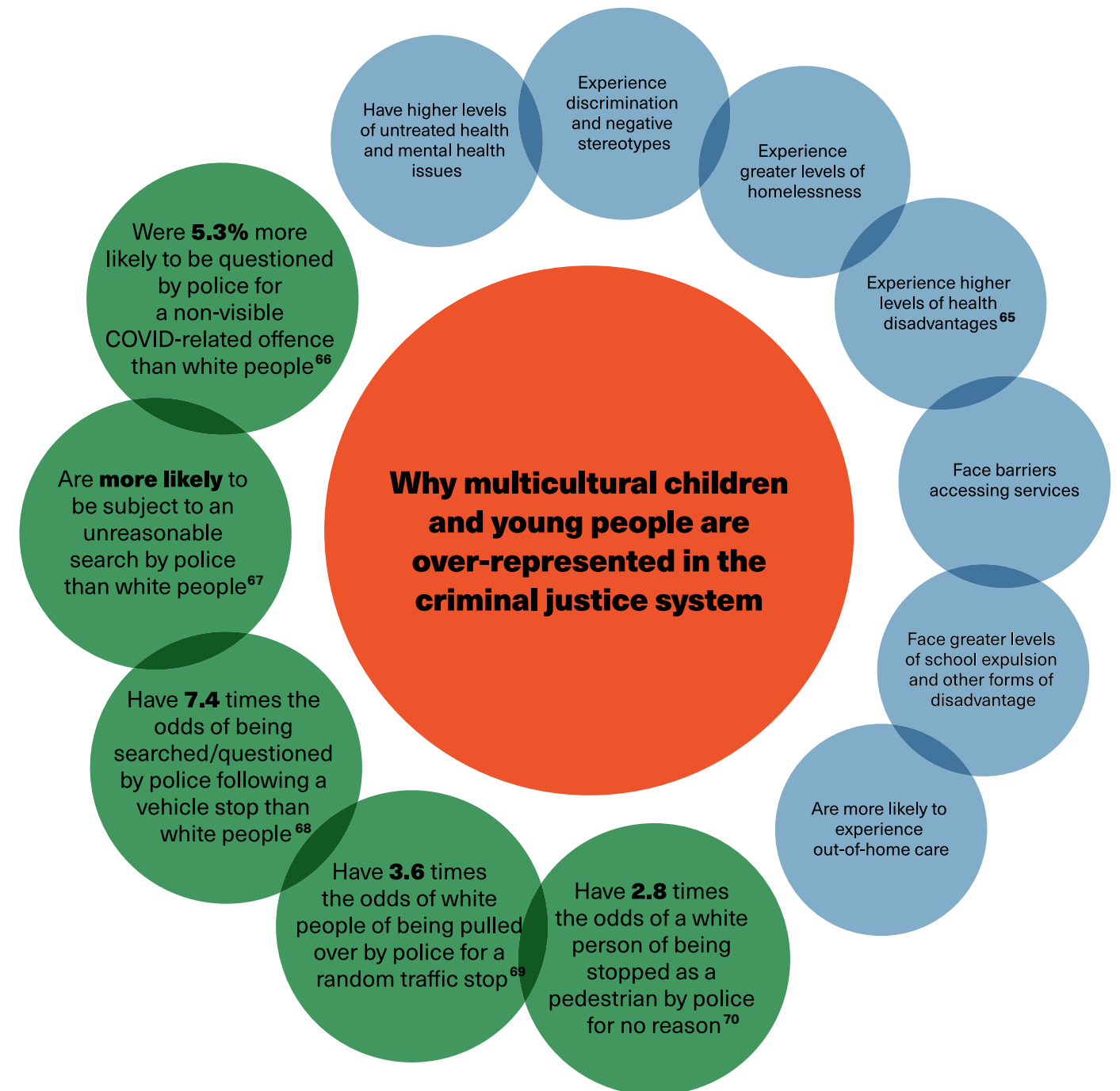


Diagram 3: Why First Nations children and young people are over-represented in the criminal justice system



Diagram 4: Why children and young people in out-of-home residential care are over-represented in the criminal justice system<sup>77</sup>



# What do we need to do? A whole of government approach based on collaboration and rights to end over-representation

SJY4P has identified nine (9) whole of government system asks, and forty (40) systems asks within six (6) individual government portfolio areas required to end the over-representation of First Nations children and young people; multicultural children and young people; children living in residential care; 18-25 year olds; and girls and young women with complex needs.

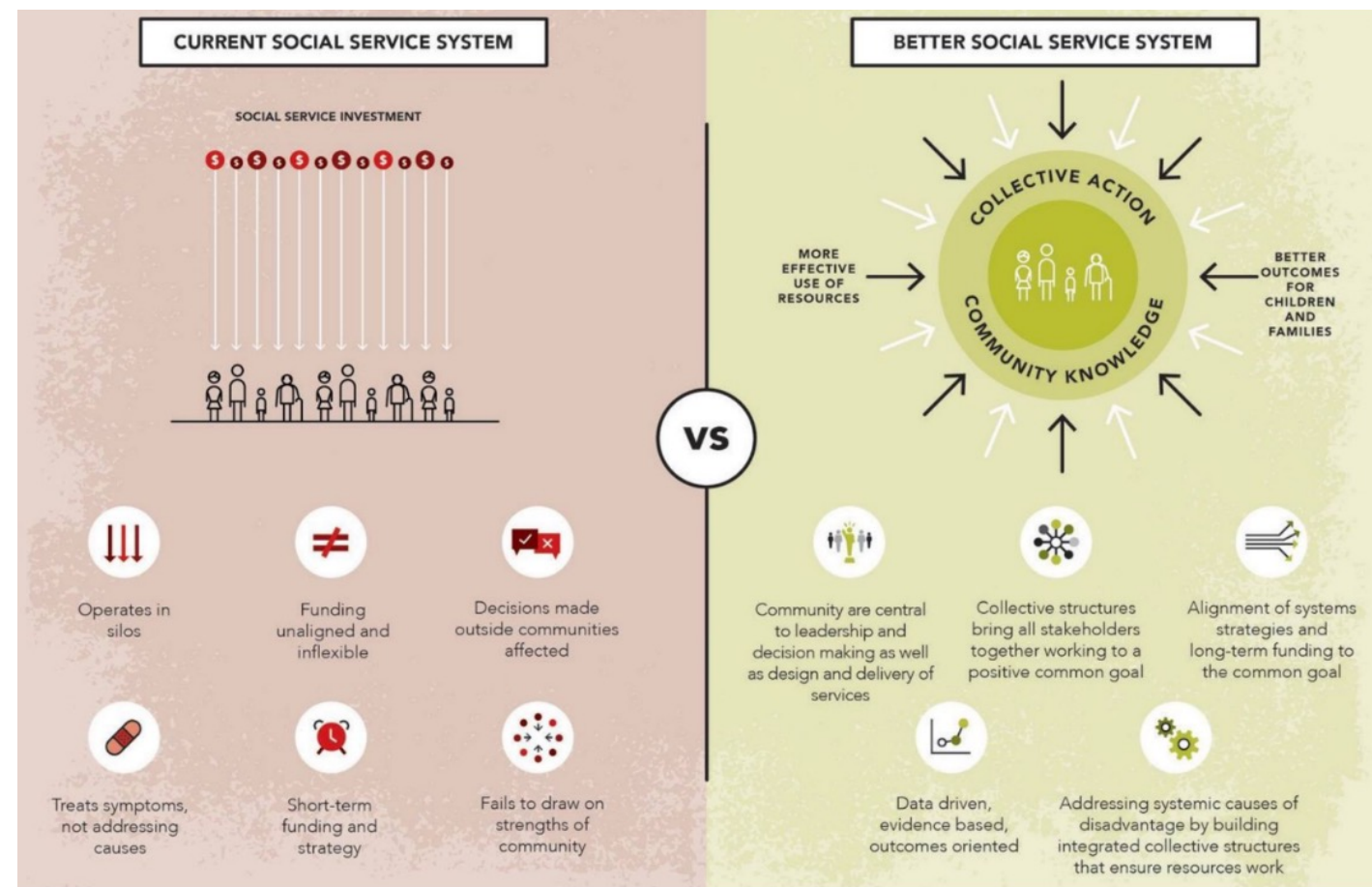
Our asks are based on expert reports and recommendations, research, and our collective practice and practical experience working with young people, their families and their communities. The common problems we have identified across a range of domains include:

- Attitudes and biases (conscious and unconscious) held by decision-makers that affect the use of their discretion;
- Competitive, short-term grant cycles and funding insecurity for programs and services (which stifle long-term initiatives);
- Lack of a shared focus on ending over-representation and measuring the impact of programs and services targeting the five cohorts and consistent data collection; and,
- The bulk of the resource allocation tied up at the acute end of the service systems and not prevention e.g., law enforcement, emergency department hospital admissions, statutory child protection intervention and child removal and incarceration.

Policy and law reform decisions made in response to a single incident and/or intense media attention (as opposed to a clear evidence-base) also exacerbate the problem.

Our **criminal justice system and intersecting systems** require coordination, collaboration, trust and common understanding of cultural, gender and trauma-informed practice. Community-led and collective structures and strategies are key, so too are shared goals about what best practice looks like. This transformation requires services to work differently and collectively, collaborating as a first step, rather than as an afterthought. It also involves funders providing the

Figure 6: Example of a thriving social service system<sup>84</sup>



structures and support for services to work in this different way. This requires an acknowledgement upfront that the status quo is perpetuating over-representation, not addressing it.

**Data collection and reporting are also key.** Outcome data for these over-represented cohorts is not consistently collected nor readily available. It's an obvious challenge when trying to assess the impact of statutory decisions and measures either directly or indirectly targeting them. It also means we miss opportunities to see common overlapping factors affecting them.

The changes we are asking for are not exhaustive. Rather, they are the system level actions that based on the evidence and our expertise, if done today, would transform outcomes for the five cohorts currently over-represented in the criminal justice system. Further, the avoided cost and justice reinvestment dividend would be high. To demonstrate, **Figure 3 shows what a thriving social service system could look like if our Asks are adopted.**

**Our whole of government approach to ending over-representation** sees responsibility spread across education, health, housing, family and community services, policing and justice systems. It is a response that involves government, statutory agencies and government funded community organisations.





The approach must be **rights-based**: whenever decisions relating to a child or young person are being made, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) imposes a positive obligation to respect, protect and fulfil these key rights/principles including:

- A prohibition against all forms of discrimination
- The best interests of the child as a paramount consideration for all decisions affecting them
- A child's right to life, survival and development
- A child's right to participate in all decisions that affect them<sup>81</sup>

A rights-based approach prioritises **First Nations self-determination**: whenever decisions relating to a First Nations young person, their family and their community are being made.<sup>82</sup> While the meaning of First Nations self-determination remains unsettled in Victoria, the Government must continue to work with First Nations community leaders and the First People's Assembly to develop a shared understanding of the right to self-determination and reform the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* to reflect this agreement.

Our collaborative and rights based Action Plan is an effective way to ensure sound, evidence based public policy and law making and investment decisions and to sustain the necessary shifts to end over-representation.<sup>83</sup>

It will ensure that when the criminal justice and intersecting systems interact with young people aged 10-25 years old, we will always be able to realise our commitment to:

- Equality and non-discrimination
- Addressing the over-representation of First Nations children and young people; multicultural children and young people; children living in residential care homes; 18-25 year olds; and girls and young women with complex needs
- Detention as a last resort
- Minimising re-offending
- Enabling the wellbeing and social integration of children and young people who offend
- The use of evidence to inform policy and practice
- Collaborating with all relevant actors including young people themselves
- Self-determination for First Nations children and young people
- Having a criminal justice system that maintains public safety and uses State resources efficiently.



## Domain 1: Criminal and civil justice systems

### ASK TEN:

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age with no exceptions within this term of government.
- Raise the minimum age of detention to at least 16 years, in line with UN recommendations.
- Amend the *Bail Act 1977* (Vic) to implement *Pocum's Law*<sup>85</sup> beginning with children and young people aged 10-25.<sup>86</sup>
- Raise the jurisdiction of youth justice to 25 years old in line with Victoria's Youth Strategy: *Our Promise, Your Future*.
- Resource proper consultation with affected groups.
- Stage implementation starting with supervised bail and start using Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre for both remand and sentenced young people over 18 years old.
- Remove the need for police consent for diversion for 10-25-year olds.<sup>87</sup>
- Require police to provide reasons where they have not proceeded by way of summons per s 345 of the Children, Youth and Families Act (CYFA) in the forthcoming Youth Justice Act Bill.
- Repeal the mandatory and presumptive uplift provisions for category A (non homicide offences) and category B offences contained in the CYFA in the forthcoming Youth Justice Act Bill as per recommendation 13 of the May 2022 Youth Justice Statutory Review.
- The forthcoming Youth Justice Bill Act, *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* (Vic), *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic), and *Bail Act 1977* (Vic) should include formal acknowledgement of the unique systemic factors which lead to the over-representation of particular youth cohorts in the

justice system, and the need for decision makers under these Acts to take active steps wherever possible to redress and reduce this over-representation.

### ASK ELEVEN:

- Improve the way youth victims are currently identified and supported to recover (including where they have also offended) and ensure that the system is child-centred, gender, culture and trauma informed and meeting their needs, in particular those who are over-represented in the criminal justice system.
- The CCYP and Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in conjunction with other key statutory organisations including the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), Victoria Police, Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) and Victims of Crime Commission engage with media outlets on issues of youth crime and the serious harms that can be caused through incomplete and/or inaccurate reporting to Victorians impacted and affected by over-representation in consultation with community organisations.
- Increase the mandate of the Youth Referral and Independent Person Program (YRIPP) to 25 and require that the option of an Independent Person is provided to any young person under 18 years even when a parent/guardian is available. Mandate pre-interview legal assistance and post interview legal and non-legal referrals, considering information sharing and privacy considerations.
- Victorian Government fully implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) in relation to treatment and conditions in police custody, prison and other places of detention, including

the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism whose operations, policies, frameworks and governance are culturally appropriate and safe for First Nations people and other criminalised racial groups.

- Youth Justice and Corrections Victoria end solitary confinement for people aged 25 years and under.
- Ensure all children and young people 25 years and under are eligible to apply for parole and able to be represented. The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) and rules of natural justice should apply and allow for applicants to be legally represented.
- The Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) introduce a new Director's Policy regarding the best practice treatment of child and youth victims, witnesses and those who are accused, where they are the prosecuting agency.
- Mandate full physical, mental, language, neurological and cognitive health checks to all young people under 25 entering into custody to ensure proper throughcare (whilst in the criminal justice system) and post care (once they formally depart the criminal justice system).

### ASK TWELVE:

Prohibit the imposition of Personal Safety Intervention (PSIO) and Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIO) and infringement notices against children under 14 years old.

### ASK THIRTEEN:

Legislate to implement binding enforcement reviews as advised under Recommendation 17 of the *Fine Reform Advisory Board's* (FRAB) Report.

### ASK FOURTEEN:

Victorian Government legislate to expand CAYPINS for 18-25 year olds.

### ASK FIFTEEN:

DJCS implement Recommendation 9 of the FRAB report to increase the accessibility and sustainability of the Work and Development Permit (WDP) scheme and resource WDP sponsors, so more financially disadvantaged young people can deal with fines.

### ASK SIXTEEN:

DJCS promote and expand the COVID-19 fines concession scheme to all fines to enable financially disadvantaged young people to pay a reduced amount and exit the system.

### ASK SEVENTEEN:

The Victorian Government undertake a broad ranging review of the effectiveness (including cost recovery) of the Infringement and Demerit Point System in discouraging anti-social behaviour of 10-25 year olds and promoting safety, fairness and community welfare.<sup>88</sup>

### ASK EIGHTEEN:

Implement the recommendations of the PIPA Report<sup>89</sup> relating to improving where a victim has been incorrectly identified as a perpetrator of family violence and Smart Justice For Women (SJFW) recommendations, particularly its policing recommendations.<sup>90</sup>

### ASK NINETEEN:

DFFH, DH and DE develop a whole of school and family approach to addressing underlying safety and wellbeing needs and end the over-reliance on PSIO's in school settings, particularly against children over-represented in the criminal justice system.



In Victoria, criminal justice and correctional law and policy decisions have directly or indirectly contributed to the over-representation of the five groups of young people. The criminal justice system extends from the first contact with police, appearance in court right through to parole and/or transfer to adult prison.



● Case study 4: Mahmud<sup>156</sup>

Mahmud (not his real name) is 17, he goes to high school and lives with his family in outer Melbourne.

He was charged with intentionally cause injury in circumstances of gross violence, on a complicity basis for filming a fight that broke out. The circumstances of the incident were serious, but there was no evidence of any agreement, plan or understanding between Mahmud and his co-accuseds, the footage does not depict him intentionally assisting, encouraging or directing the commission of the offence and other people are shown to be filming as well who were not charged. Despite not being alleged to have committed or encouraged any violence, Mahmud was initially refused bail because of the seriousness of the charge. As a result, Mahmud spent 136 days in remand.

Because of the uplift presumption the matter was adjourned to a committal and a summary jurisdiction application was listed. This created delay for time to prepare evidence and disclosure materials, and a complainant examination.

Ultimately a discontinuance was accepted and all the charges were withdrawn. While this is a just outcome for Mahmud, because of the Category A charge influence on the bail decision-maker in the first instance, Mahmud spent 136 days in remand at a young age; because of the uplift process the matter took almost a year to resolve.

We have also seen policy and legislation enacted based on a 'tough on youth crime' rhetoric rather than evidence of what works. Reforms and practices we are most concerned about include:

- The introduction of serious youth offender legislation and new category A and B offences in 2018<sup>91</sup>
- Relentless, sensational and at times inaccurate media reporting
- Harsh criminogenic conditions in youth custody (as opposed to rehabilitative) including rolling lockdowns due to staff shortages
- Transfer of children to adult custody
- Lack of awareness/consistency in police bail decision-making discretion at station level
- Non-adherence to the presumption in favour of summons contained in s345 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) (CYFA)
- Need for prosecution consent to diversion and police consent for cautions
- Lack of respect for the presumption of doli incapax<sup>92</sup>
- Criminalisation of under 14 year olds
- The introduction of strict bails laws in 2013, 2017 and 2018.
- Erosion of the "dual track" system which enables a young person aged 18-21 at the time of their sentence to be detained in a Youth Justice custodial centre, as opposed to adult prison, if assessed as suitable.

The changes to the *Bail Act 1977* (Vic) introduced in 2018 have made it harder for young people to get bail and have disproportionately impacted women, particularly Victorian First Nations women. Young people have borne the burden of a defective bail system, which was still dealing with the compound effect of the 2013 bail changes and then the 2016 reforms which had little time to take effect.<sup>93</sup>

The problem of the 2018 changes has been well articulated through the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Criminal Justice System, Coronial Inquiry into the death of Veronica Nelson and the Yoorrook Justice Commission.<sup>94</sup> We welcome the announcement of bail changes by the Victorian Government earlier this year and introduction of the Bail Act Reform Bill.<sup>95</sup> We also acknowledge the tireless and generous advocacy of Uncle Percy Lovett and Aunty Donna Nelson and the rest of Veronica Nelson's family without whom change in the Bail space may not have occurred.<sup>96</sup> Often young women are charged with minor crimes, but still are remanded. Minor crimes leading to remand include drug offences, theft and property offences, public nuisance and unlawful assembly. The period of remand can lead to homelessness, separation from children and other vital protective factors. It can also force people into unsupported drug withdrawal leading to their death (e.g. Veronica Nelson). The risks that young women present with during applications



for bail are more likely to be indicators of disadvantage and marginalisation, in particular, housing instability, impoverishment and drug use, rather than risks to community safety.

### 18-25 year-olds

In recent years, youth crime prevention has been focused on 10-17 year olds. However, young adult offenders (18-25 years-olds) are over-represented in Victoria's criminal justice system. Young adults make up 15 percent of Victoria's adult population but 22 percent of offenders in the Magistrates Court and 25 percent of offenders in the higher courts.<sup>97</sup> More than half (53 percent) of young adults return to prison within two years. This recidivism rate is more than 8 percent higher than the general population,<sup>98</sup> suggesting that the current criminal justice system is not adequately responding to the unique developmental needs of young adults. It is well established that brain development continues until at least a person's mid-20s, often up to 30. Young adults are statistically greater risk takers and are more likely to be influenced by peers and less future-oriented than older groups — this has an impact on behaviours and attitudes.<sup>99</sup>

**To reduce the over-representation of 18-25 year olds it is essential we take a developmental approach and the most logical and accessible solution is to extend the jurisdiction of Youth Justice to 25 years old. The infrastructure is there and a precedent has been set with Victoria's Youth Strategy covering 12-25 year olds.**

With the exception of youth imprisonment to aged 20, most youth justice policy is directed to people under 18.<sup>100</sup> This means young people over the age of 18 miss out on the Youth Justice Group Conferencing and Diversion Programs and other critical programs designed to support young people whose brain development has not reached maturity (25-30 years old).<sup>101</sup>





There are two areas of concern in the civil justice system that are contributing to the over-representation of these youth cohorts: (1) the fines infringement system; and, (2) misidentification of victim survivors in family violence and personal safety matters as perpetrators.

### Fines

In terms of current infringement policies in Victoria, there exists a fine to crime pipeline that disproportionately impacts young people who are experiencing disadvantage.<sup>102</sup> There are three core aspects to consider when evaluating the efficacy and fairness of the Victorian fines system: (1) whether fines are the best way to deter children and young people; (2) the amount of the fine issued in response; (3) the method of prosecuting unpaid fines. In the Children's Court there is the CAYPINS system<sup>103</sup> which adequately deals with (3) however this system does not exist for 18-25 year olds.

Some infringement offences such as begging and having an open container of liquor explicitly criminalise poverty and homelessness. The one-size-fits-all fines system means most young adults experiencing vulnerability who receive fines are unable to pay them. These young people are then subject to enforcement measures, prosecutions and the risk of imprisonment if their fines remain unpaid. This has generational flow-on impacts. For example, we often see children and young people commit shoplifting offences for food and clothes their family can't afford because their families are trying to pay off fines. By reducing the impact of fines on youth experiencing vulnerability and financial hardship, consequential offending can be prevented. The independent Fines Reform Advisory Board (FRAB) inquiry in 2020 recommended consideration be given to concession-based fines, which would legislate that people, including under 25 year olds on Centrelink and others in significant financial hardship would be fined a smaller amount.<sup>104</sup> The legal assistance sector has recommended between 5 and 20 percent of the full fine amount. This reform would enable people experiencing financial hardship to address their infringements and avoid criminalisation. Keeping people out of the courts will

prevent them entering the recidivist cycle of exposure to the criminal justice system, which sees hardship compounded and reoffending become more likely. This reform was introduced in relation to COVID fines and should be extended to all 10-25 year olds.<sup>105</sup>

The FRAB similarly found that improving the accessibility of the *Work and Development Permit* (WDP) Scheme would assist more recipients experiencing vulnerability and made three key recommendations focused on enabling those who shouldn't or can't pay their fines to access a therapeutic, non-financial alternative to payment.<sup>106</sup>

Another FRAB recommendation that would reduce reoffending and prosecution is the direction to make enforcement review decisions final and binding. Currently, after Fines Victoria reviews an enforcement agency's decision to issue a fine, the enforcement agency has the power to issue a charge and summons for the underlying offence where the infringement is cancelled by Fines Victoria. Making Fines Victoria's decisions final and binding would again prevent vulnerable Victorians being funnelled into the court system.<sup>107</sup>





Anecdotally, we know that police misidentification in Family Violence and Personal Safety matters is a phenomenon disproportionately affecting over-represented children and young people. The challenge is that insufficient data is available, hence our ask for the collection of data as a starting point.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) raised concerns about the misidentification of the predominant aggressor in family violence situations and its associated impact on women.<sup>108</sup> It also recommended programs to prevent the criminalisation of children and young people.<sup>109</sup>

A small study conducted by Women's Legal Service Victoria in 2018 revealed that of the 55 female clients named by police as respondents to intervention orders, 32 were incorrectly identified.<sup>110</sup> The misidentification of women as the predominant aggressor in family violence situations leads to the criminalisation of family violence victim-survivors, compounding their distress and trauma.<sup>111</sup> The Centre for Innovative Justice's Positive Intervention for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home (PIPA) Report also found case examples where young victim-survivors had been misidentified during its research and that the Victorian legal response system carries a strong risk of criminalisation of young people.<sup>112</sup> The PIPA report demonstrates that the current legal response to family violence is not reducing risk to families and makes young people vulnerable to criminalisation.<sup>113</sup>



## Domain 2: Policing

### ASK TWENTY:

As Part of Ask 2, the Victorian Government establish a culturally safe independent Police Ombudsman to investigate all police complaints including racial discrimination, the unjustified use of police power, excessive force and duty failure in family and sexual violence cases. All young people making complaints should be assisted and supported in making their complaint in a gender, culturally and trauma sensitive way. The Police Ombudsman must be independent, effective, prompt, transparent and prioritise and support the interests of complainants.

### ASK TWENTY-ONE:

Victoria Police prohibit police operations that either by design or outcome proactively target young people from diverse backgrounds or are based on predictive risk databases. Where concerns are raised about crime in particular youth communities, support community, youth services and schools in those areas to proactively engage and support young people to address the drivers.

### ASK TWENTY-TWO:

The Victorian Government legislate to prohibit police 'targeted interactions' (interactions where police ask questions such as 'where are you going', 'what are you doing', 'what is in your bag', 'what is your name' etc) unless the police have reasonable grounds to suspect that a particular individual is involved with a particularised crime.

### ASK TWENTY-THREE:

Victoria Police embed in its Youth Strategy the understanding that: Crime is a community issue, not a police issue and formally commit to actively contributing to an ending of the over-representation of First Nations children and young

people; multicultural youth, girls and young women with complex needs and children in residential care including policies and practices that criminalise them.

### ASK TWENTY-FOUR:

In furtherance of Ask One, Victoria Police rethink and review how young people are policed starting with consolidating all guidance relating to welfare checks, child witnesses, victims and those who have been accused of a crime, including investigation and media interaction into a single Victoria Police Manual (VPM) chapter.

### ASK TWENTY-FIVE:

Victoria Police, DFFH, DH and DE, in consultation with relevant community-based peak bodies, mainstream and culturally specific grassroots organisations, commit to minimising police as first respondents, especially where there is no specific or immediate safety risk to another person. Instead, health, education and community services respond to young people to provide therapeutic, practical and social supports to ensure all young people can engage in civic life pro-socially.

### ASK TWENTY-SIX:

DJCS, DH, DFFH, Office of Youth and Family Safety Victoria create local, community-based safety, 24/7 homelessness and mental health rapid response teams without police involvement at first instance. Teams to be trauma informed and trained in de-escalation. (See e.g. Youth Projects – Foot Patrol, New York City Be-Heard and Community Night Patrols).<sup>157</sup>

We welcome the recent acknowledgement of the connection between systemic racism within Victoria Police and the over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice system by Chief Commissioner Patton to the Yoorrook Justice Commission.<sup>158</sup>

The impact of police practices – including discriminatory policing and over-policing – on over-representation cannot be overstated. Police are the gate-keepers of the criminal justice system: they are invariably the first point of contact with the system, and of potential criminalisation. Their decisions, and their use of discretion or diversion, can directly affect which young people enter the system.

**Police have also repeatedly stated, “we can’t enforce or arrest our way out of [this] problem.” Harmful conduct indicates an unsupported young person in need of care. Recognition of this reality requires a shift across police, media, government and community services.<sup>160</sup>**

The systemic policing issues we are most concerned with include over-policing and racialised policing, predictive policing, and the lack of independent police oversight.

### Over-policing and racialised policing

Systemic practices of over-policing and racialised policing lead to racialised young people being criminalised for behaviours that other young people are not.

Victoria Police does not publish extensive data regarding when the five over-represented cohorts are policed, why, how and frequency. Data that has been obtained and analysed reveals individual and systemic racism within Victoria Police, whereby certain young people are stopped, searched and questioned without substantiated cause.<sup>114</sup>



A 2018-2019 survey of 981 Victorian's stop and search experiences by Victoria Police found that Aboriginal, African, Middle-Eastern/Muslim and Pasifika drivers have:<sup>115</sup>

- 3.6 times the odds of being stopped by police for random rather than a traffic safety stop reasons compared with white drivers.
- 7.4 times the odds of being subject to unjustified post-stop police conduct than white drivers.

It further found that Aboriginal, African, Middle-Eastern, Muslim and Pasifika pedestrians and cyclists have:

- 2.8 times the odds of white people of being stopped by the police for no reason compared with after an offence has been committed.
- 3.3 times the odds of white people of being subject to unjustified post-stop police conduct, including being asked to move on, being searched or being asked for contact details without an offence being alleged.<sup>116</sup>

There is other evidence that African, Middle Eastern and Asian Victorians and First Nations people are more likely to be searched unreasonably than white people. It shows that police searches of people from these groups had lower 'hit rates', in the sense that the police did not locate a prohibited item during the search.<sup>117</sup> Victoria Police is more likely to arrest and detain, and less likely to caution, Aboriginal children and young people than their non-Aboriginal peers.<sup>118</sup>

The policing of racialised young people remains a highly politicised flashpoint. Concerns about African and Pasifika 'gangs', starting from around 2016, have been associated with intense media coverage and the promotion of tough on crime policies.<sup>119</sup> Such controversies have been related to the creation of particular proactive police taskforces that effectively focus on racialised youth and exacerbate problems of racialised outcomes and over-policing.<sup>120</sup>

Recent data shows Sudanese and South Sudanese born people were **35.6 times** more likely than their proportion in the population would predict of being issued with a COVID fine in the first half of 2020.<sup>121</sup> Data from Victoria Police shows that African and Middle Eastern people were 5.4 percent more likely to be questioned for non-visible compared with visible COVID offences than white people.<sup>122</sup>

Some taskforces were grossly disproportionate in their issuing of COVID fines to African/Middle-Eastern people despite COVID offending occurring across the community. For example, the Embona Task Force Altona North issued 87.5 percent (7/8) of their fines to African/Middle-Eastern appearing people, while the Embona Taskforce Melbourne issued 50 percent (16/32) of their fines to these groups.<sup>123</sup>

● Case study 5: Dave<sup>159</sup>

**Aboriginal man – 2018  
Melbourne CBD**

**Reason for the stop?** They wanted to search my car, they said it was a random search.

**What did they do?** They pulled me out of the car, searched my car and checked my license then asked me about what I was up to and whose car it was.

**What happened in the end?** Free to go.

**Felt that the police were:** unjustified, unprofessional, racially motivated.

**He feels:** devalued, stereotyped, like he has no rights and that he's under constant police scrutiny.

**Why did you answer the police questions?** Because they said if I didn't answer the questions, I could be arrested.

**Why didn't you make a complaint?** I didn't think anyone would listen or take me seriously.

**Excessive stop, search and question practices impact young people the hardest. As one of the groups most visible on the streets, young people are easy targets for over-policing and racialised policing practices.**

Police often have a higher presence in and around places like public housing towers, suburban train stations and places where young racialised youth gather. This leads to more police contact, and a higher likelihood of being charged with an offence.

Current responses also fail to recognise that many children and young people are victims of crime, neglect and abuse themselves, and this context may impact how these young people respond when treated as suspects and/or offenders.





We appreciate the accountability shown by Commissioner Patton in recognising and apologising for past and present systemic racism in Victoria Police.<sup>124</sup> However, we also note the incongruence of these remarks with Victoria Police's recent emphatic denial of racial profiling in response to the publishing of COVID data.<sup>125</sup>

### **Predictive policing**

Police are increasingly using computer mediated strategies to predict who is more likely to commit crime.<sup>126</sup> The databases used by Victoria Police include the Youth-Networked Offender database,<sup>127</sup> the Australian National Target Risk Assessment Matrix and the Victoria Police Priority Target Management Plan. These databases operate to focus police attention on individuals considered to be 'high risk'. 'Risk' criteria for inclusion on databases can include prior offending, family histories of offending, associations, unemployment, and poor health.

**Predictive databases are problematic. These risk assessment tools are not neutral or objective, but are embedded with skewed historical data, and certain assumptions, beliefs and expectations about what the risk of offending looks like.<sup>175</sup>**

Discriminatory policing occurs when data gathering and predictive tools embed historical bias, resulting in discriminatory outcomes.<sup>128</sup> For example, police may declare a suburban train station a designated area. This operation may result in more people being stopped and searched, higher rates of people being charged, and more data being gathered. This data will then feed into these predictive policing tools which will result in more designated areas being declared, because they contain information about the crime rates in the areas they have already targeted.

The second concern with these databases is they result in police focusing on who is at 'risk' of committing crime, rather than who is reasonably believed to have committed a crime. This undercuts the legal safeguards for police contact defined in legislation.

### **Lack of police oversight**

Despite systemic problems with policing, there is no effective system of police oversight to hear and determine complaints about the police. The failure of Victoria's police complaint system means there is no effective mechanism to hold police to account for racism, over or under policing or other forms of unlawful or harmful conduct.<sup>129</sup>

Victoria does have an independent police complaint body – the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC). In 2020/2021 only 0.4 percent of all investigations into allegations against the police were independently investigated by IBAC.<sup>130</sup> A 2022 IBAC report found that 22 percent of police investigations into complaints by Aboriginal people were biased.<sup>131</sup> These findings were similar to those contained in the previous Koori Complaints Report in 2008.<sup>132</sup> Existing accountability mechanisms in Victoria consistently fail to maintain accountability, ensure human rights compliance, change police behaviour or improve practices.

### **The Police Association**

There is concern amongst the SJ4YP coalition regarding the Police Association's engagement with, and influence on, government policy and law reform in relation to the five over-represented cohorts.

As highlighted through the Yoorook Justice Commission, there is a significant legacy of systemic racism, racist attitudes and discriminatory policing policies and practices towards First Nations peoples. Other systemic reviews have shone a spotlight on discriminatory policing practices that have led to the over-representation of other cohorts identified in this Action Plan.

**The promise of this Action Plan can only be achieved with significant cultural and practice shifts in policing, including positive engagement by the Police Association.**

As the Chair of the Yoorook Justice Commission, Professor Eleanor Bourke AM told Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Shane Patton: "Your apology must bring real change."

The Victorian Government should also consider appropriate regulation of the Police Association along with other lobby groups as part of Ask One and Two.



## Domain 3: Health and wellbeing

### ASK TWENTY-SEVEN:

DH, in conjunction with health service providers, implement the promise of the Victorian Government to involve youth with diverse lived experience in the roll out of the implementation of the Royal Commission into Mental Health Services.<sup>161</sup>

### ASK TWENTY-EIGHT:

DH, in conjunction with health service providers, prioritise investment in culturally safe and responsive youth alcohol and other drug (AOD) and mental health services to address critical need in Melbourne growth corridors and regional Victoria, with an emphasis on overcoming barriers to access and lengthy appointment wait-times, especially for the over-represented groups of young people in the CJS.

### ASK TWENTY-NINE:

Victorian Government decriminalise cannabis and within 36 months the Victorian Government act to decriminalise all drug use learning from the decriminalisation of public drunkenness and establishment of safe injecting rooms.

### ASK THIRTY:

Recognise young people as victim-survivors of family violence in their own right and ensure that services are funded to deliver age-appropriate and tailored support.

### ASK THIRTY-ONE:

Support system transformation by fully funding actions in Victoria's whole-of-government Sexual Violence Strategy.

### ASK THIRTY-TWO:

Better equip the specialist sexual assault sector to lead efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence, by providing increased, reliable and ongoing funding.

A child's opportunities in life should not be damaged because they cannot access treatment and support for health and wellbeing issues — nor should they be criminalised — but this is the Victorian reality.

As the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System notes, accessing appropriate health and wellbeing support is disproportionately difficult for the five groups we have identified are over-represented in youth justice.<sup>133</sup>

Children and young people with justice system involvement often experience multiple and intersecting health issues. A recent survey of young people in Victorian youth justice showed that almost 90 percent have a history of substance use, 62 percent were using mental health support and 28 percent had a history of self-harm or suicidal ideation, and 29 percent had active cognitive impairment.<sup>134</sup> 63 percent had offended while under the influence of drugs and alcohol.<sup>135</sup>

The harmful use of alcohol and other drugs by young people is frequently a form of self-medication and a consequence of untreated mental health or unresolved trauma issues including discrimination and homelessness. We know 55 percent of people with an alcohol or other drug (AOD) disorder have a mental health issues, with young people and First Nations people at even higher risk.<sup>136</sup>

The over-representation in the criminal justice system of young people who have neurodevelopmental disabilities, mental health concerns, experiences of potential trauma and traumatic brain injury is reflective of broader health inequalities in the community.<sup>137</sup>

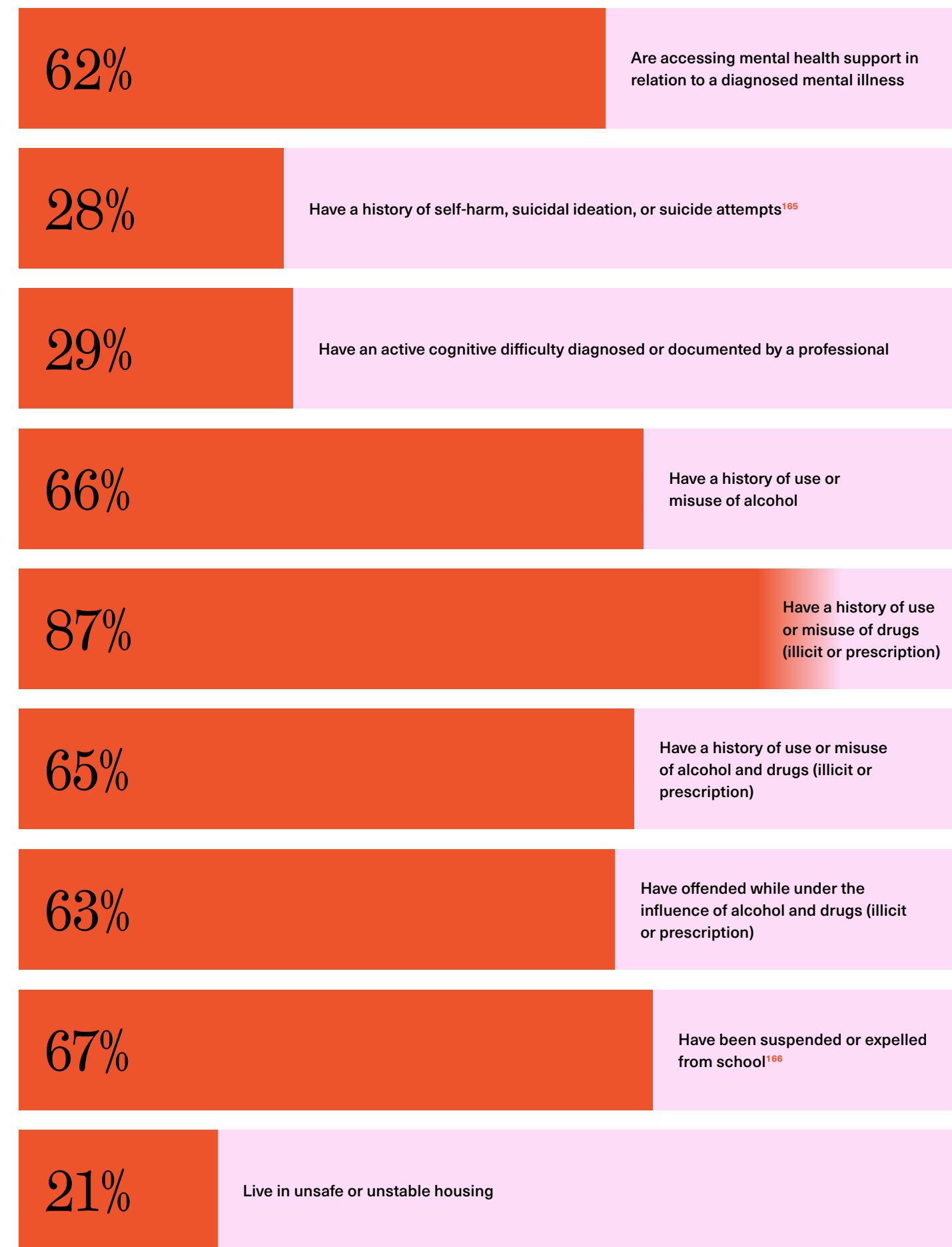
There is a documented connection between access to health services and social discrimination and inequality, such as racism.<sup>138</sup> It is reflected in the lower access to health services and unmet health needs of First Nations children and children from migrant and refugee sub-communities.<sup>139</sup>



These experiences of discrimination and inequity are intersectional – for example, First Nations young people with disability or from LGBTIQ communities can experience greater health inequalities<sup>163</sup> and mental illness compounded by housing instability.<sup>164</sup>

Victoria’s mainstream early childhood and primary and secondary education systems along with our out-of-home care and youth justice systems are not equipped and currently fail to identify, understand and appropriately respond to the impact of trauma on First Nations children and young people, as well as multicultural youth from refugee backgrounds. As the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System points out, ‘the mental health system does not currently deliver safe, responsive or inclusive care for many people from diverse communities and social groups’.<sup>140</sup> In the present system, trauma goes unseen, and the system itself can cause trauma.<sup>141</sup> The Royal Commission further notes the interface between the criminal justice system and mental health system lacks coordination.<sup>142</sup> These failures impact disproportionately on young people from First Nations, African and Pasifika backgrounds as well as care-experienced young people and young women who have experienced trauma.

**Table 2: Characteristics of young people in youth justice custody<sup>162</sup>**





## Domain 4: Housing and material needs

### ASK THIRTY-THREE:

Expand transitional housing programs to offer 24/7 wrap-around supports to young people (up to and including 25 year olds) exiting prison to enable them to thrive and remain in the community.

### ASK THIRTY-FOUR:

DFFH, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, DE, Department of Transport and Planning, VicPol and DH, in conjunction with community service providers, establish a justice intervention and child protection reinvestment framework (building on the Early Investment Framework, Partnerships in Disadvantage, Empowering Communities and Better Connected Care) that authorises investment in, and support for, affected communities to identify local need, design common agendas and deliver solutions addressing localised youth under-representation and criminalisation.

### ASK THIRTY-FIVE:

Fund the development of a Youth Homelessness Strategy, co-designed with young people. This would incorporate supports best suited to young people, and encourage better coordination between youth homelessness services and other support systems.

### ASK THIRTY-SIX:

Deliver 5,000 new social housing properties for young people over four years.

Young people make up 21 percent of single people accessing homelessness services in Victoria.<sup>167</sup> Every night 7,600 young people in Victoria are homeless.<sup>168</sup> According to a 2020 Youth Affairs Council of Victoria report, the reasons behind this homelessness include in order of prevalence: family violence and abuse; mental ill-health; relationship breakdown; alcohol and other drug dependence; exiting youth justice and out-of-home care; and unsafe accommodation.<sup>169</sup>

Young people from refugee backgrounds were disproportionately represented at the Couch Surfing Clinic, run by WestJustice in 2016-2017. Of the 62 couch surfers presenting to the clinic, 10 had refugee backgrounds (16 percent).<sup>148</sup> Some of these young people were also unaccompanied and had spent time in detention before being resettled. The lack of support for these young people and lack of family networks meant they were often left with no choice but to couch surf. Lack of housing is a key factor behind refusal to provide bail<sup>149</sup> or release people over 18 years on parole.<sup>150</sup>

## Prisons have become the default housing alternative to ensuring secure housing in the community.

Homelessness is explicitly prohibited in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) as a reason to refuse bail; however the practical reality of finding immediate and safe housing options means that homeless children may spend time in custody for this reason. Our collective sector experience is that homelessness is more likely to be experienced by the five groups of young people we have identified as being over-represented in the criminal justice system. Consequently addressing homelessness is a critical strategy to reduce their over-representation.



## Domain 5: Children, families and their community

### ASK THIRTY-SEVEN:

Led by DFFH, the development, adoption and resourcing of a Child Wellbeing Strategy (to complement Victoria's new Youth Strategy) underpinned by a whole of government Child & Youth Wellbeing Outcomes Framework that refers to and works alongside the Ending Over-representation whole of government Framework.

A Child & Youth Wellbeing Outcomes Framework will outline what children and their families need and want to be well and thrive in life, what government needs to do to enable this, and how the community sector can contribute to this vision.<sup>170</sup>

### ASK THIRTY-EIGHT:

Extend portfolio responsibility of DFFH to include coordinating the implementation of the Child Wellbeing Strategy and Outcomes Framework, and consider dividing DFFH into early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence and young adulthood to support effective implementation of both this strategy as well as the Youth Strategy.

### ASK THIRTY-NINE:

DFFH fully implement and evaluate the *Framework to Reduce Criminalisation of Young People in Residential Care 2020* to improve outcomes for and reduce the criminalisation of children in residential care.

### ASK FORTY:

Amend the CYFA to acknowledge the systemic and intersectional drivers of the over-representation of particular youth cohorts in the criminal justice system, including children in out-of-home residential care, and require decision-makers to take active steps to redress and reduce this over-representation when exercising their powers in relation to procedural and substantive matters.

### ASK FORTY-ONE:

DFFH resource:

- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to support cultural plan development and implementation.
- Aboriginal specific family support programs and voluntary programs providing families with flexible and practical supports, respite, and brokerage to opt into prior to child protection referrals or mandates.

### ASK FORTY-TWO:

DFFH ensure fully resourced exit planning exists for all children and young people exiting care at any point in time.

### ASK FORTY-THREE:

Strengthen the child and family services system by:

- Providing adequate and secure funding to providers so they can meet demand and provide the highest levels of therapeutic, cultural and gender identity informed care.
- Delivering a substantial increase in resources for the sector to provide early intervention, and family preservation and reunification support.
- Strengthening investment, testing and evaluation of programs (such as Putting Families First) to develop a whole of family model of care to support children, young people and their families when they need it, breaking the cycle of disadvantage and helping to prevent children and young people entering and re-entering the criminal justice system.
- Supporting self-determination, with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations empowered with more funding to work proactively with Aboriginal children and their families to prevent them from becoming system-involved.<sup>171</sup>

### ASK FORTY-FOUR:

Invest in training and funding youth workers in community settings to take a strengths-based, relational and holistic approach to supporting young people to deal with issues in their lives, and re-engage with their families, school and community. They can also forge trusted referral pathways to other services as needed. Deloitte analysis shows a return on investment of at least \$2.62 for every \$1 invested in youth work programs, which are proven successful in diverting young people from youth justice.<sup>172</sup>

Unsupported people living with untreated complex trauma can struggle to maintain a safe home for children and people needing their care. Children in these households absorb the impacts of parental and intergenerational distress. Complex trauma and toxic stress are associated with emotional and behavioural dysregulation, attachment disruption, lack of impulse control, difficulty with attention and problem solving, and high-risk and challenging behaviours.

### ● Case study 3: Mia (continued)

*Continued from page 22*

Mia [said] young people in out of home care need more understanding. 'Kids in resi want love and to feel welcomed. Not like you're in the gutter just because you're in resi because your family has issues. It shouldn't be like this. Kids are going through hard stuff and if they act badly, they're doing it for a reason.'

Mia said while some police treated her with kindness, others were not sympathetic. 'All they think about is, when the police come, charge charge, charge. The police can be mean. They say "calm the \*\*\*\* down" and when kids are upset and crying they say, "stop crying, you're just being a sook."'

Mia is now going to court over multiple charges of property damage. But she believes there are other ways to deal with misbehaviour.

*Continued on next page*

Rather than supporting care givers to address their own trauma needs and to support their children, our current system removes children from these complex situations and places them in out-of-home care.

Once in out-of-home care, children are met with punishment instead of the support they need. This was first evidenced by Victoria Legal Aid's *Care not Custody* report.

Home should be a place of understanding and support, however in residential care in particular, carers do not always respond to behaviour in the way that a parent would, and too often police are unnecessarily involved.<sup>143</sup> The 2020 *Framework to Reduce the Criminalisation of Young People in Residential Care*<sup>144</sup> is a great starting point to address these issues. More work needs to be done to prevent people entering out-of-home residential care, and to work with them from a trauma informed perspective once they are part of it.

Of the children in youth custody, 54 percent have been subject to a child protection order or have a currently open child protection case. According to the CCYP, current responses to children who are absent or missing from residential care play a critical role in contributing to the criminalisation of children.<sup>145</sup> Children are 'arrested' by police for feeling unsafe and running away and are treated as criminal rather than as traumatised children needing a caring rather than punitive and aggressive response. Another contribution to criminalisation is stigma and negative perceptions of children in care. Additionally, there is often an absence of coordination and good working relationships between the various professionals involved in the lives of children in care, resulting in piecemeal and ineffective responses that fail to prevent criminalisation.



For children and young people who arrive with their families as refugees, there are unique factors which appear to contribute to the rate at which youth are criminalised. These include post settlement conflict and family relationship breakdown.<sup>146</sup>

WEstjustice has been running a Settlement Justice Partnership with settlement service providers in Melbourne's West. In its recent report *Don't Settle for Less*, it found that a significant majority of its clients had children in their care, and would benefit from early legal interventions in terms of their health, stability and wellbeing. In addition, the broad spread of years in which its clients had arrived in Australia indicated that the need for targeted support for positive settlement outcomes consistently extends beyond one's first five years in Australia.

Further barriers to successful settlement identified in the report include:

- Low English-language and literacy levels
- Unfamiliarity with Australian law and legal systems
- Distrust of authorities (including perceptions of law services and lawyers)
- Limited financial resources
- Cultural isolation
- Digital divide.<sup>147</sup>

#### ● Case study 3: Mia (continued)

*Continued from page 57*

'In three years, I've had two good workers. One of them treats me like her own daughter, she understands and she listens. If you get upset or angry the good ones don't get mad or threaten to call the police on you. They give you a hug, then you get better.'

'The good workers actually really care and they think about you when they're outside of work, like they call you and check in,' said Mia.

When Mia was in care, a much-loved family member stopped contacting her out of the blue and she didn't know why. A year later, she accidentally saw a document that detailed how that person had died from suicide. Mia hadn't been told that the family member had died and how. On discovering the document, Mia got upset and ripped up the piece of paper. She then went into the office to try and find more information about what had happened to her family member. The police were called and Mia was charged with criminal damage for ripping up the paper and burglary for entering the office without permission. Mia's lawyer is trying to have the charges relating to this dropped.





## Domain 6: Education

### ASK FORTY-FIVE:

Develop a whole of government plan to engage over-represented cohorts in meaningful education and training opportunities through to completion by recognising and facilitating the provision of timely and tailored support to all primary and secondary students (along with their families) when needed and across transitions. The plan should take into account the intersectional needs of students and teachers and allied staff wellbeing.

### ASK FORTY-SIX:

DE introduce culturally safe and inclusive restorative practice in school settings with a presumption against suspension/expulsion.

### ASK FORTY-SEVEN:

DE should embed foundational and booster training in emotional regulation and awareness, cultural competency, colonisation, trauma and gendered violence into existing mental health and respectful relationships reform initiatives across government, Catholic and independent schools.

### ASK FORTY-EIGHT:

DE introduce mandatory anti-racism learning into the curriculum for teachers and students; and introduce mental health literacy including but not limited to the harms associated with racism.<sup>173</sup>

### ASK FORTY-NINE:

DE and DFFH together with DH and other statutory and community experts to minimise police interactions in Victorian Schools and shift reliance on police as first responders to other statutory and community supports.

Children facing educational barriers and exclusion are more likely to enter the criminal justice system. For example, in 2019, 68 percent of children in custody were recorded as having been suspended or expelled from school.<sup>174</sup>

Once in the criminal justice system, children then face additional education barriers through disruption and incarceration. In relation to incarceration, inadequate staffing, resulting in children spending increased time in isolation and lockdown, severely limits access to education. While the commitment is there, the operational reality of custody means children's educational needs cannot remain at the forefront of a custody facility's planning and staff considerations.<sup>151</sup>

We are also concerned about the criminalisation of young people through the presence of police officers at schools in areas where police allege crime reports are high.<sup>152</sup> These are frequently areas with low socio-economic status, and which are racially diverse. Victoria Police have a few initiatives that work intensively in these spaces — Youth Specialist and Youth Resource Officers (Proactive Policing Units) and officers working under the School Engagement Model.<sup>153</sup>

The School Engagement Model (SEM) aims to build trust and confidence in the police along with partnering with educators and other services to address the causes of crime.<sup>154</sup> Youth Support Officers (YSOs) and Youth Resource Officers (YROs) in combination with the SEM have led to school leaders having a direct line to the police when a child acts out. But other, less funded, service providers with expertise and skills in addressing the genuine issues that lead children and young people to act out — issues that include homelessness, mental health, AOD use and family violence — are often overlooked in a school's effort to resolve any issues they are experiencing with their student populations. The presence of police at schools encourages student behaviour to be viewed through a criminal justice lens, and the lack of engagement with support services misses the opportunity to deal with the complex and underlying issues relating a young person's



cry for support. Criminal justice responses are stigmatising and harmful to young people and their families and do not resolve the underlying issues.<sup>155</sup>

### Children exhibiting problematic behaviour are likely to need complex, wrap around support for themselves and their family to resolve the underlying issues.

From the recorded data, expulsions appear to have reduced. We note that suspension data is not collected however. Anecdotally we understand reliance remains high. Teacher shortages and increased burnout post COVID-19 are likely compounding the situation. Early, primary and secondary schools need to be sufficiently resourced to provide wrap around support to children and their families to keep them engaged and assist in managing their underlying issues without harming other children. This necessarily involves a big increase in support for teachers. Racism, sexism and homophobia continue to be prevalent in schools. A 2017 survey in Victoria and NSW found that 60 percent of students reported witnessing an act of racism at school. To further illustrate the point, in 2022, the SA Commissioner for Children and Young people found that sexism had remained unchanged in schools for 40 years.

Rigid attitudes towards traditional gender norms lead to poorer mental health, sexual harassment, violence and bullying. Sexism and racism are critical factors behind the discrimination and disadvantage that leads particular groups to be over-represented in the criminal justice system. Given the direct link between these attitudes and the creation of harm, it is critical the Department of Education ensures ending racism and patriarchal attitudes are a central focus in the education of children.





# Conclusion

The five groups of young people that we have focused on in this Action Plan are entitled to equitable outcomes and procedural fairness not just in the criminal justice system but also in the intersecting systems of health, education and child protection.

Ending their under-representation means addressing broader social inequities and determinants of health and wellbeing, including poverty, systemic racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, sexism, classism and any other types of discrimination. It means Truth, Voice and Treaty. It means access to education, safety, housing, health and justice not just for them but their families as well. Some of the specific action that this change requires is outside the scope of our Action Plan. However, we hope that our Action Plan takes us a further step closer to ensuring that the children and young people discussed in this document who are over-represented in the criminal justice system are not just free from criminalisation, but have an opportunity to thrive in life, along with all children and young people in Victoria.





## References

- 1 Maïam nayri Wingara, 'Maïam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty,' (Web page, accessed on 16 August 2023) <<https://www.maïamnayriwingara.org/definitions>>.
- 2 Maggie Walter et al, 'Indigenous Data Sovereignty in the Era of Big Data and Open Data' (2020) 56(2) *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 143.
- 3 See Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), 'Diversion: keeping young people out of youth justice to lead successful lives' (Report, April 2022) p 11; See also Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Youth justice in Australian 2021-22, Victoria' Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Report, online at 31 March 2023) This report states that over the 5 years to 2021-22, on an average day, in Victoria, the number of all young people under supervision fell by 30 percent (from 1,036 in 2017-18 to 727 in 2021-22) (Table S129a), while the rate fell from 11 to 5.8 per 10,000 young people aged 10-17 (Table S12a); In community-based supervision, the number fell by 27 percent (Table S129b), while the rate fell from 8.7 to 4.6 per 10,000 young people aged 10-17 (Table S45a); In detention, the number fell by 41 percent (Table S129c), while the rate fell from 2.0 to 1.3 per 10,000 young people aged 10-17 (Table S83a); The rate of Indigenous young people aged 10-17 under supervision fell from 111 to 53 per 10,000 (Table S12a). Note though most recent Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) data which says that alleged offender incident data up for 10-17 year olds; Lachlan Abbott, 'Youth crime Victoria: Offences by children aged 10 to 14 increase by more than a third' *The Age* (Online at 15 March 2023) <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/youth-crime-surge-as-offences-by-children-aged-10-to-14-increase-by-more-than-a-third-20230316-p5c5skw.html>>.
- 4 As recognised in The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, 'Wirkara Kulpa - Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy 2022-2032' (Report, 17 February 2023) (Wirkara Kulpa); DJCS, 'Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030' 'Youth Justice Strategy' (Report, 2 December 2022), p 32; DJCS, 'Crime Prevention Strategy' (Report, 2022) 'Crime Prevention Strategy'; DJCS, 'Review of the Children and Justice Legislation Amendment (Youth Justice Reform) Act 2017' (Report, May 2022) and Sentencing Advisory Council (SAC), 'Rethinking Sentencing for Young Adult Offenders' (Report, December 2019) ('SAC's Rethinking Sentencing for Young Adults Report').
- 5 Each organisation has a vast catalogue of relevant position statements, policy paper, research reports and law reform submissions. This Action Plan builds in particular on SJ4YP's Investing in communities not prisons Report (Report, 2017) accessed online 30.09.23 <<http://youthlaw.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/18579-MIS-YouthLaw-Advocacy-Report-2017-WEB.pdf>>.
- 6 See John Kania, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge, 'The Water of Systems Change,' (Report, June 2018), p 3-5 for introduction to the framework and six conditions of change concept.
- 7 Commission for Children and Young People, 'Our Youth, Our Way: Inquiry into the over-Representation of Aboriginal Children and Young People in the Victorian Youth Justice System' (2021 Our Youth, Our Way Report); Felicity Stewart, 'Crossover Kids: Vulnerable Children in the Youth Justice System: Report 1' Sentencing Advisory Council (Report, August 2019); Charis Mentoring, 'Village Response Plan, a Grassroots Response to Reducing Recidivism amongst Pasifika Youth' (Report, 2020); State Government of Victoria, 'Targeted support for at risk South-Sudanese Youth' (Media Release, 12 May 2022); Shepherd, Stephane, Bailey, Aisling and Masuka, Godwin, 'The Experiences and Perspectives of African-Australian Community Service Providers Who Work with At-Risk and Justice-Involved Youth', *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* (Article, 2022), in particular 1438-1443 (Shepherd, Bailey and Masuka 2022); Shepherd, Stephane and Masuka, Godwin, 'Working With At-Risk Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People in Australia: Risk Factors, Programming, and Service Delivery', *Criminal Justice Policy Review* (Article, 2021) (Shepherd and Masuka 2021).
- 8 For example Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), 'A Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care' (Report, January 2020) (*Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care*); Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, 'Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safer Children' (Report, 2021); State Government of Victoria, 'Transforming the System for Our Most Vulnerable Kids' (Media Release, May 2021); Victoria, Royal Commission into Victorian Mental Health System 'Final Report: Summary and Recommendations' (Report, February 2021); DJCS, 'Crime Prevention Strategy' (Report, 2022); Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement 'Wirkara Kulpa: Aboriginal Youth Justice Australia 2022-2032' (Report, 17 February 2023); Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement 'Burra Lotjpa - The Aboriginal Justice Agreement Phase 4' (Agreement, 2018); State Government of Victoria 'The Victorian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2021-2023' (Report DJCS, 'Youth Justice Strategy 2020-2030', (Report, May 2020); notably the establishment of the South Sudanese Australian Youth Justice Expert Working Group; ; State Government of Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet 'Victorian African Communities Action Plan' (Report, 2018); Department of Families, Fairness and Housing 'Our Equal State: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023-2027' (Report, 2023); State Government of Victoria, 'Safe and strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy' (Report, 2016) and the Victorian Government's establishment of the Anti-Racism Task Force. Note this is not meant to be an exhaustive list.
- 9 See DJCS, 'Review of the Children and Justice Legislation Amendment (Youth Justice Reform) Act 2017' (YJ Statutory Review Report), May 2022, p 40 which confirmed: 'There has been a 287 percent growth in the number of South Sudanese and Sudanese young people under Youth Justice supervision (other than CCYD, including community supervision, remand, and custodial supervision) between 2014-15 and 2020-21. However, this increase has not been matched by an increase in the proportion of this cohort being referred to CCYD;' Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, '*Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care*' (Report, February 2020) was released in 2020 and signed by DFFH, DJCS, VicPol, CFECW and VACCA. On page 26 it is noted that the release coincides with the commencement of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Framework included an 18-month review which was delayed due to Pandemic response. According to the 2021-22 Youth Parole Board Report, 31 percent of the young people in custody were previously subject to a previous child protection order but not an open case, 5 percent had an open child protection case with no previous history and 18 percent were subject to a previous child protection and had an open case. DJCS, 'Youth Parole Annual Board Report 2021-2022' (Report, September 2022), p 26 <<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au>>
- 10 2021 Our Youth, Our Way Report, above, n [7].
- 11 See for example Ontario's Race-Based Data Collection Standards <<https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/introduction>>
- 12 We can learn from Victoria's Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2027 including the *Gender Equality Act 2022* (Vic) when designing and implementing the Framework and setting and adopting related Outcomes. Design and implementation can learn from the process introduced as part of Victoria's gender equity reforms and provisions in the Gender Equality Act 2020.
- 13 In many cases this will formalise work already underway, see for example: Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, 'Anti-Racism Taskforce'; Victoria Legal Aid, 'Cultural Diversity Anti-Racism Action Plan' (Report, March 2022).
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- 15 We note the machinery of government change in 2017 which saw the youth justice system transferred from the Department of Health and Human Services (predecessor to DFFH) to the Department of Justice and Regulation (DOJR).
- 16 Crime Prevention, Victim Services, Support and Reform, Youth Justice, Adult and Youth Parole Boards, Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria, Judicial College of Victoria, Children's Court of Victoria, Magistrates Court of Victoria, Coroners Court, Office of Public Prosecutions, Victoria Legal Aid, Fines Victoria.
- 17 See Victoria Legal Aid, 'Care not Custody: A new approach to keep in kids residential care out of the criminal justice system' (Report, 2016) (VLA's Care Not Custody Report).
- 18 See for example, Community Crime Prevention Program, 'Crime Prevention Strategy' (Report, June 2021), p 7 which noted that only 4 percent of Victorian prisoners have completed secondary school, while 68 percent of young people in custody had been suspended or expelled from school; DJCS, 'Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2018-19' (Report, September 2019) p.29; Corrections Victoria, 'Annual Prisoner Statistical Profile 2006-07 to 2018-19,' (Report, August 2019), Table 1.13, 'All prisoners by sex and highest level of education'; We note as well the NAPLAN results released last Wed 23 August 2023, which showed more than 30 percent of the state's students were below proficiency. Further analysis and potentially data may be required to understand the nature and extent of the intersection with the cohorts over-represented in the criminal justice system.
- 19 See YJ Statutory Review Report above n[9] p 40-42.
- 20 To demonstrate, in their broad ranging review of Victoria's Youth Justice System, Armytage and Ogloff highlighted the factors underlying youth justice involvement, i.e.. mental health, disability, fragmented and problematic contact with education services, unstable accommodation, family dysfunction, poverty/ socioeconomic disadvantage, parents who offend, child protection involvement and exposure to family



- violence. Armytage and Ogloff, 'Meeting Needs and Reducing Offending' (Report, 2017), p8-9 (Armytage and Ogloff 2017 Report).
- 21 Tamar Hopkins, 'Understanding Racial Profiling in Australia' (PhD, UNSW, May 2022).
- 22 Bernard E Harcourt, *Against Prediction, Profiling, Policing and Punishing in an Actuarial Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). Note: We welcome Chief Commissioner Patton's acknowledgement at Yoorrook recently (Day 7 Hearing, Block 5, page 496-497) "As a result of systemic racism, racist attitudes and discriminatory actions of police have gone undetected, unchecked, unpunished or without appropriate sanctions, and have caused significant harm across generations of Aboriginal families. For all this, I genuinely and formally apologise as Chief Commissioner and on behalf of Victoria Police. I am sincerely sorry that this has occurred to Aboriginal people. It should not have happened. I cannot undo past actions and decisions of Victoria Police. What I can, and will do, is ensure that we proactively review our policies and processes with community to address systemic racism, unconscious bias or unequal use of discretionary power in outcomes."
- 23 2021 Our Youth, Our Way Report, above, n [7], p 19-21.
- 24 Leanne Weber, *You're Going to Be in the System Forever: Policing, Risk and Belonging in Greater Dandenong* (Monash University, April 2020); Charles R Epp, Steven Maynard-Moody and Donald Haider-Markel, *Pulled over: How Police Stops Define Race and Citizenship* (University of Chicago Press, 2014).
- 25 Above.
- 26 Armytage and Ogloff above n 24 (Part 2) at 81 affirmed the disruptive impact of time in custody for adolescents is undisputed, particularly the detrimental impact of time away from family, social networks, education, employment, recreation and community programs. See also for example online opinion by Baldry and Cunneen *OPINION Locking up kids damages their mental health and leads to more disadvantage. Is this what we want?*, 21 June 2019 <Locking up kids damages their mental health and leads to more disadvantage. Is this what we want? | UNSW Newsroom>.
- 27 Youth Justice Strategy, above n [2] p 32-33, this cuts across all aspects of the system — from prevention, remand, incarceration and programs designed to prevent re-offending.
- 28 Jesuit Social Services, 'All alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system' (Report, 2018).
- 29 Sentencing Advisory Council (SAC), 'Rethinking sentencing for young adult offenders', at 6.1, December 2019, and footnote 579. We note as well s 32 of the *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic) .
- 30 See Sentencing Advisory Council, Long-Term Sentencing Trends in Victoria, 2022; See further Justice Reform Initiative, State of Incarceration: Insights into Imprisonment in Victoria, March 2023, 1-2; IPSOS, Issues Monitor June 2023: The top issues facing Victoria, June 2023 <[https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2023-07/IM\\_States\\_Jun23.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2023-07/IM_States_Jun23.pdf)>
- 31 D. S. Nagin, F. T. Cullen and C. L. Jonson 'Imprisonment and reoffending' (2009) 38(1) *Crime and justice*, 115-200; P. Gendreau, F. T. Cullen, and C. Goggin 'The effects of prison sentences on recidivism' (Ottawa, Ontario: Solicitor General Canada, 1999) p. 4-5
- 32 Productivity Commission, 'Report on Government Services 2023,' (Report, 2023) Chapter 17, 'Youth Justice Services.'
- 33 \$5050 x 365 days.
- 34 Jesuit Social Services, Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Criminal Justice System, September 2021, p24-25 citing the findings of an independent evaluation conducted by KPMG in 2010.
- 35 Jesuit Social Services, above n [28]
- 36 Victorian Ombudsman, OPCAT in Victoria: A thematic investigation of practices related to solitary confinement of children and young people, September 2019, para 956.
- 37 Above, p8. See further Jesuit Social Services, *All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system*, 2018
- 38 'Our Youth, Our Way', above n [7], p 19.
- 39 Above, p 21.
- 40 The first Aboriginal youth justice strategy launched in February 2022 and is the primary vehicle through which to respond to the Our Youth, Our Way recommendations. We note further the budgetary commitments to resource priority actions in the 20-21, 21-22 and 22-23 budgets, notably in the DJCS, 'Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2021-22' (Report, September 2022), p 28.
- 41 Felicity Stewart, 'Crossover Kids: Vulnerable Children in the Youth Justice System Report 1' Sentencing Advisory Council (SAC) (Report, 27 June 2019) (SAC's Cross-over Kids Report 1); Susan Baidawi and Rubini Ball, 'Multi-system factors impacting youth justice involvement of children in residential out of home care,' (2022) 28(1) *Child and Family Social Work* 53.
- 42 SAC's Cross-over Kids Report 1, above.
- 43 2021-2022 Youth Parole Board Report, above n[9], p 28.; Rachel Eddie, *Charged with throwing a sponge: Residential Care criminalising kids*, data shows, The Age online, September 8, 2023- 5am <Victorian residential care is criminalising children, Victoria Legal Aid data shows (theage.com.au)>

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- 46 United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of and African Descent, above n [44].
- 47 See Westjustice, *Systemic Impact Report*, January to June 2023, p11 <https://www.westjustice.org.au/media-and-events/systemic-impact-report-january-to-june-2023>; and Prime Minister, Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Media Release: Direct Pathway to Citizenship for New Zealanders, April 2023 < <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/direct-pathway-australian-citizenship-new-zealanders>>
- 48 DJCS, 'Diversion: Keeping young people out of youth justice to lead successful lives' (Report, April 2022); See above YJ Stat Review caution and diversion data n[9] p 40-42.
- 49 Ogloff and Amytage, above n[19] (Part 2) p 159-160, detailed the needs of young women in custodial settings including higher rates of abuse, substance misuse and mental illness that youth male counterparts and the rates of all forms of disadvantage higher overall.
- 50 Emma Russell, Hui Zhou and Gabriela Franich, 'Gendered Injustice, The Policing and Criminalisation of Victim-Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence' (Fitzroy Legal Service, 2022).
- 51 SAC's Cross-over Kids Report 1 above n[41], p xvii p xviii: 'Of children first sentenced or diverted aged 14 or over, 46 percent of girls and 34 percent of boys were known to child protection.' See also Baidawi and Ball above n[41] at 1.3.
- 52 See Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency ('VACCA'), 'Response to the Inquiry into Children of Imprisoned Parents' (Report, April 2022) p 2-3.
- 53 See Smart Justice for Women, 'Smart Justice for Women: Policy Platform 2022-2024' (Report, Version 1:January 2023) p 2 (SJFW Policy Platform 2022-2024), [SJFW\\_Final\\_Policy\\_Platform\\_2022-2024.pdf](https://www.nationbuilder.com) (nationbuilder.com). Indeed 20 percent of young people in youth detention in 2021-2022 according to the Youth Parole Board identified as having an active cognitive disability in the criminal justice system. See also Law Council of Australia, 'The Justice Project: Final Report; Introduction and Overview'(Report, August 2018), p 20-22. In terms of poverty, according to VCOSS, women comprise a majority
- of people aged 15 and over who are experiencing poverty- <https://victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au/reports%2Ffactsheets%2FSocioeconomics%2F-Statewide%2FVWHAAtlas%20Fact%20Sheet%20Socioeconomics%20Statewide.pdf>
- 54 Case study drawn from a member of SJ4YP.
- 55 Case study drawn from SJ4YP member.
- 56 VLA's Care Not Custody Report above, n[17].
- 57 From VLA's Care note Custody Report above n[17].
- 58 NB this figure is from the 2019-2020 Annual report as it is not in the 2021-2022 report.
- 59 Victorian Youth Parole Board Annual Report n[9] p 26.
- 60 NB This figure from the 2017 Youth Parole Board Annual Report as these figures are no longer provided in most current report.
- 61 NB This figure from the 2017 Youth Parole Board Annual Report as these figures are no longer provided in most current report.
- 62 2021-2022 Victorian Youth Parole Board Annual Report n[9] p 26.
- 63 Source: SJ4YP 2022 Sector Survey Responses. Conducted December 2022. Responses from 26 members out of 230 SJ4YP members in total.
- 64 The blue circles reflect our sector knowledge. See also Shepherd, Bailey and Masuka 2022 above n7, 1437-1439 regarding African-Australians and Shepherd and Masuka 2021, above n[7] 471-472.
- 65 Baidawi Susan Dr; Avery, Scott Dr and Kembhavi-Tam, Gayatri Dr et al, 'Research Report- Care criminalisation of children with disability in child protection systems' (May 2023), p 215-234.
- 66 Multicultural young people, particularly targeted racialized young people were at significantly higher risk of being issued with a Covid fine following questioning than their Caucasian counterparts. Statistics demonstrate that people of African/Middle Eastern appearance and people of Māori/Pasifika appearance had a 5.4% 2.8% greater risk of being issued with a fine respectively. (Inner Melbourne Community Legal Centre, 'Policing Covid-19 in Victoria: Exploring the Impact of Perceived Race in the Issuing of Covid-19 Fines During 2020' (Report, June 2023), 32)
- 67 Hopkins, Popovic, Sanchez-Urribarri, Sentas, 'Identifying Racial Profiling in Victoria Police Search without Warrant' forthcoming.
- 68 Above
- 69 Above n [67], 192.
- 70 Targeted multicultural groups 2.8 times higher odds of being stopped before an offence is detected with white people. (pedestrian and bicycle), above n[x], 192.



- 71 Productivity Commission, 'Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2020' (Report, 2020), 11.19. At State level, from January 20217 to December 2020, the diversion referral rate for First Nations children remained between 12-14 percent of all Children's Court Youth Diversion (CCYD) participants - YJ Statutory Review, above n[9], above, at 5.2.3 (a). This according to the Review reflects the number of First Nations children across the youth justice system for the same period.
- 72 State Government of Victoria, 'Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2021' (Report, 2021). 'Victoria has the lowest rate for all children in OOHC [out of home care] (6.4/1000 compared to the national rate of 8.1/1000), but the highest rate for Aboriginal children in out of home care ('OOHC') (103.0/1000, compared to a national rate for Aboriginal children of 57.6/1000) (VACCA, 2022).
- 73 Australian Law Reform Commission, 'Pathways to Justice-Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' (ALRC Report 133, 2018) cited by Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), April 2022, p 9.
- 74 See above n [67].
- 75 See above n [67].
- 76 See above n [67].
- 77 Details from Baidawi et al, above n 40, 1.3
- 78 In 2021-22 there were 8953 young people in out-of-home residential care. 4418 were female and 2,554 (28.5 %) were First Nations young people- Crime Statistics Agency, Family Violence Dashboards: Victorian Child Protection (Web page, Reviewed 11 April 2023) <<https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/family-violence-data-dashboard/victorian-child-protection>>
- 79 For example, between 2019 and 2022, 15.5 percent of VLA's child client's living in out-of-home residential care identified as living with disability (intellectual disability and mental health issues the most prevalent). In addition 27.5 percent were aged 14 or younger. VLA, Care not Custody- keeping kids in residential care out of the courts, (Web page, Reviewed August 2023) <<https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/care-not-custody-keeping-kids-residential-care-out-courts>>. Taskforce 1000, a systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC in Victoria, also revealed 14 percent of Aboriginal children were identified as having a known disability, cited in VACCA, Response to the Systemic Inquiry into the Educational Experiences of Children and Young People Living in Out-of-Home-Care (Submission, July 2022), p 18.
- 80 Between 2019 and 2022 42 percent of VLA's child client's living in out-of-home residential care accrue criminal charges within 12 months of placement and 51.3 percent accrued criminal charges within 24 months of placement. VLA, Care not Custody- keeping kids in residential care out of the courts, (Web page, Reviewed August 2023) <<https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/care-not-custody-keeping-kids-residential-care-out-courts>>
- 81 Young people are also protected by the other six major human rights treaties Australia is a party to: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Articles (2), (3), (6) and (12). The Committee of the Rights of the Child has stressed states must 'take all necessary measures to ensure that children in conflict with the law are treated equally. This requires the state to prohibit both direct and indirect discrimination and take positive measures to address the needs of especially vulnerable groups of children repeatedly in conflict with the law. Domestically, the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) protects the rights of families and children section 17(1) and (2) and specifically children in the criminal process while the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Vic) also protects children and young people from discrimination due to any protected attribute including, age, race and disability.
- 82 Article 3, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- 83 Kania, Kramer and Senge above n[6].
- 84 ARACY referred to by Collaboration For Impact - 2022
- 85 Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, 'Pocum's Law: The Blueprint for Bail Reform' (Media Release, 22 March 2023).
- 86 We acknowledge at the time of final production the introduction of the Bail Amendment Bill 2023 (Vic) into Parliament on 15 August 2023.
- 87 YJ Statutory Review Report above n[9], p 7.
- 88 See Fines Reform Advisory Board, 'FRAB Summary Report on the Delivery of Fines Reform', (Report, April 2020), p. 14 which recommends 'Improved access and outcomes for vulnerable people through a reformulated nexus test' (Recommendation 7) and 'A better balance between fairness to fine recipients and road safety' (Recommendation 8).

- 89 Elena Campbell et al. 'The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent violence in the home (AVITH)' (Report Issue 4, March 2020), p 163-164; SJFW: Policy Platform 2022-2024' above n[53], in particular Recommendation 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.
- 90 SJFW Policy Platform 2022-2024 above n[53], p 10.
- 91 *Children and Justice Legislation Amendment (Youth Justice Reform) Act 2017* (Vic) (YJ Reform Act).
- 92 The legal principle that children aged 10-13 are incapable of crime, unless proven otherwise. If applied correctly, *doli incapax* could avoid the unnecessary incarceration of children- Australian Human Rights Commission, 'The Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility, 2021.
- 93 To highlight, DJCS, 'Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2021-22' (Report, September 2022) p. 33-34, reported that for the year to 30 June 2022, for 10 to 17-year-olds, 1 individual Youth Justice Residential Centre (YRC) Order was made, and 105 Youth Justice Centre (YJC) Orders were made, whereas 52 YRC remand orders were made and 311 YJC remand orders.
- 94 Change this to SJFW Policy Platform 2022-2024 above n[53], p 14.
- 95 Bail Amendment Bill 2023 (Vic).
- 96 Uncle Percy Lovett and Nerita Waight, Statements: Uncle Percy Lovett and Nerita Waight on bail reform in Victoria, July 31 2023 (online) < <https://www.vals.org.au/statements-uncle-percy-lovett-and-nerita-waight-on-bail-reform-in-victoria/>>
- 97 See 'Rethinking Sentencing for Young Adult Offenders', above n [4], p xi.
- 98 Above at xii.
- 99 Above.
- 100 *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic) s 32.
- 101 DJCS, 'Children's Court Youth Diversion Service' (Web page, online at 19 July 2023) <<https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/justice-system/childrens-court-youth-diversion-service>>.
- 102 'FRAB Summary Report', above n [87], p 6 The Fines Reform Advisory Board draws on the typology of fine recipients developed by the Sentencing Advisory Council in a report prepared in 2014 on the imposition and enforcement of court fines and infringement penalties to show how the payment, management and enforcement of fines require different approaches based on the type of fine recipient involved. These five types are: fine recipients who will or might pay their fines and require incentives or behavioural nudges to do so; those who won't pay their fines and require strong enforcement mechanisms; those who shouldn't pay their fines but rather should be diverted from the criminal justice system as early as possible; and those who can't pay their fines and should have a wider range of options to expiate their fines. Our concern is with the latter two categories.
- 103 The CAYPINS system is more appropriate for young people who incur fines, as CAYPINS enforcement orders and any other related warrants expire after 3 years. While CAYPINS fines do carry a Court risk, you cannot get a criminal record for a finding of guilt relating to a CAYPINS offence. Further, in practice, CAYPINS fines are rarely enforced by the Sheriff.
- 104 See FRAB Summary Report above n[87], Recommendation 15, p 9.
- 105 We note that for children's fines that are unenforceable, they should be removed from the system altogether as opposed to remaining on their record for 3 years.
- 106 FRAB Summary Report, above n [87], p. 14-15. Recommendations 9-11 focus on the further resourcing and expansion of the Work and Development Permit scheme, a key social justice initiative introduced by the 2014 Fines Reform.
- 107 This is especially important given the abolition of the Special Circumstances List in 2019, which means that fines that have been deregistered as a result of a person's special circumstances are referred to the court closest to where the offending occurred. As a result, there are frequently multiple hearings for related matters across different courts, which are difficult to consolidate. Furthermore, exposure to the court system increases the risk of reoffending. Working with young people, we have witnessed the disastrous impact of non-binding enforcement reviews firsthand, particularly in circumstances where clients experiencing homelessness, family violence, addiction or mental illness are being referred to court by Victoria Police. For these young people, going to court is a profoundly stressful experience, and one that can lead to serious declines in mental health presentation and even relapses in substance use.
- 108 Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and Recommendations (Report, March 2016) vol 3, p 37; Our colleagues at Smart Justice for Women echo these concerns in their SJFW Policy Platform 2022-2024 above n[53], p 32.
- 109 'The PIPA project' above n [88], p 58.
- 110 Women's Legal Service Victoria, 'Snapshot of police family violence intervention order applications,' (Report, January – May 2018), p 1.
- 111 See SJFW Policy Platform n [53], p. 32 citing C. Caruana, E. Campbell, T. Bissett and K. Ogilvie, 'Leaving custody behind: Foundations for safer



- communities and a gender-informed criminal justice systems' (Centre for Innovative Justice, RMIT University, July 2021) p 21.
- 112 The PIPA Project, above n [88], Chapter 10.
- 113 Above, p 17.
- 114 Tamar Hopkins, above n [67].
- 115 Above. Note the research controlled for age, gender, LGBTIQ+ and disability status.
- 116 Above.
- 117 Above n[66].
- 118 Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, 'Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Nuther-Mooyoop to the Yoorrook Justice Commission: Criminal Legal System' (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, November 2022) 31.
- 119 John Budarick, 'Why the media are to blame for racialising Melbourne's 'African gang' problem' The Conversation (online at 1 August 2018).
- 120 For more information on the link to media coverage of youth gang violence with the establishment of proactive policing taskforces, please see Adelle Ulbrick, 'Predictive Policing and Young People: Discriminatory impacts of pre-emptive and racialised policing in Victoria' Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre (Report, 2021).
- 121 Tamar Hopkins and Gordana Popovic, 'Policing COVID-19 in Victoria: Exploring the impact of perceived race in the issuing of COVID-19 fines during 2020' (Inner Melbourne Legal Service, 2023), 18.
- 122 Above, 11.
- 123 Above.
- 124 See Yoorrook Justice Commission Transcript, Hearing Block 5 Day 7, p 496-497: "A a result of systemic racism, racist attitudes and discriminatory actions of police have gone undetected, unchecked, unpunished or without appropriate sanctions, and have caused significant harm across generations of Aboriginal families."
- 125 See for example Allanah Sciberras, 'Victoria Police deny accusation of 'racial profiling' over COVID-19 fines' Nine News (online) (online at 27 June 2023) <<https://www.9news.com.au/national/victoria-police-accused-of-racial-profiling-when-handing-out-covid19-fines/a6c8bb28-85d1-4f80-85a5-30be61f67e92>>.
- 126 See Victoria Police, 'Victoria Police Corporate Plan 2022-2023' (Report, 2022) p 9, which references 'Taskforce VIPER.'
- 127 Weber, above n [23].
- 128 Matthew Browning and Bruce Arrigo, 'Stop and Risk: Policing, Data, and the Digital Age of Discrimination' (2021) 46(2) American Journal of Criminal Justice 298, 299-300.
- 129 See Tammy Mills, 'Man bashed in police anti-terror raid gets \$400,000' The Age Online (online at 27 August 2019) <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/court-awards-400-000-for-assault-of-indigenous-teen-in-police-raids-20190827-p52159.html>>; Nick McKenzie, 'Police and IBAC accused of failings while investigating a cop who abused his wife' The Age Online (online at 11 October 2022) <<https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/police-and-ibac-accused-of-failings-while-investigating-a-cop-who-abused-his-wife-20221010-p5boht.html>>
- 130 (5 in total); (source: IBAC's annual report, p 26.); [https://www.ibac.vic.gov.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ibac-annual-report-2020-21.pdf?sfvrsn=9e4ec2f0\\_0](https://www.ibac.vic.gov.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ibac-annual-report-2020-21.pdf?sfvrsn=9e4ec2f0_0).
- 131 Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC), 'Victoria Police Handling of Complaints Made by Aboriginal People' (Report, May 2022).
- 132 Victorian Aboriginal Justice Commission, 'Koori Complaints Project' (Final Report, 2008). IBAC, Victoria Police Handling of Complaints Made by Aboriginal People, Audit Report (Independent Broad Based Anti-Corruption Commission, May 2022). Ethical Standards Department Victoria Police and Department of Justice Indigenous Issue Unit, Koori Complaints Project 2006-2008 (2008).
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- 134 2021-2022 Youth Parole Board Report, above n[9], p 31.
- 135 Above.
- 136 Alcohol and Drug Foundation, 'Alcohol and Other Drugs and Mental Health' (Mini bulletin, February 2022), p 1.
- 137 N Hughes, M Ungar, A Fagan, J Murray, O Atilola, Nichols, K, Garcia, J and Kinner, S 2020, 'Health determinants of adolescent criminalisation' (2021) 4(2) Lancet: Child & Adolescent Health, 151-157; see also (in relation to experiences of Aboriginal people with disability) VACCA, VACCA's Response to 'Issues Paper: The Experiences of First Nations Peoples with Disability in Australia' (Report, October 2020) p 12. (VACCA's Response)
- 138 Priest, et al., 'Racism, Racial Discrimination and Child and Youth Health: A Rapid Evidence Synthesis,' VicHealth (Report, 2021) p 1-3; Department of Health and Human Services, 'Balit Murrup: Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework 2017-2027' (Report, October 2017) p 17; CJ Bond et al., "Now we

- say Black Lives Matter but... the fact of the matter is, we just Black matter to them'" (2020) 213(6) Medical Journal of Australia, p. 248-250.
- 139 Priest et al, above p 9.
- 140 Above.
- 141 Above, p 12.
- 142 Above, p 16.
- 143 VLA's Care Not Custody Report above n [16], p 10.
- 144 'Framework to reduce Criminalisation of young people in residential care', above n [8].
- 145 Commission for Children and Young People, 'Out of sight: systemic inquiry into children and young people who are absent or missing from residential care' (Report, 2021) p 3.
- 146 See Shepherd, Bailey and Masuka 2022 above n[7], 1437-1439 and Shepherd and Masuka 2021, p 470-472.
- 147 See Matthews, Tess and Nunweek, Joseph, 'Dont Settle For Less: The Settlement Justice Partnership and Fairer Outcomes for Refugees in Melbourne's West' (Report, July 2023), Parts 1, 10 and 11.
- 148 Shorna Moore (WEstjustice) 'Couch Surfing Limbo' (Report, 2017).
- 149 'Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2021-22', above n [9]; SAC's Crossover Kids Report 1 above n [41].
- 150 Adult Parole Board Victoria, 'Adult Parole Board Victoria 2021-2022' (Report, 2022) p 28.
- 151 'Our Youth, Our Way', above n [7], p 32.
- 152 Police records are not always made in response to actual crimes, but for example 'fear of crime' such as responses to reports of 'youth congregating'. Furthermore, crime reports tell us about who is being processed by the system and who has been labelled as an offender. These are discretionary figures that tell us more about who the police are focussed on than the true level of victimisation, as indicated in Ben Bowling and Coretta Phillips, Racism, Crime and Justice (Longman, 2002) 84-91.
- 153 Victoria Police, 'Youth, Programs and Initiatives, Schools Engagement Model' (Web page, online at 10 December 2021) <<https://www.police.vic.gov.au/youth>>.
- 154 Above.
- 155 Ward, Krohn and Gibson, above n [44]; Victor M Rios, 'The Hyper-Criminalization of Black and Latino Male Youth in the Era of Mass Incarceration' (2006) 8(2) Souls 40; Stephanie A Wiley and Finn-Aage Esbensen, 'The Effect of Police Contact' (2013) 62(3) Crime & Delinquency 283.
- 156 VLA, 'Youth Justice Reform Act Statutory Review' (Submission, April 2022).
- 157 Refer to *Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care*, above n[8], p 20; relates as well to Alternative Service Model discussions currently being held as part of the Raise the Age reform; Please note too Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, 'Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System' (Melbourne, 21 September 2021) p 21, comments made by Sergeant Wayne Gatt in the context of mental health, "Effectively it is about getting upstream with mental health intervention. We agree with and support the royal commission's findings into mental health reform that is required. But if you want to look at the police intervention and the freeing up of those resources, then it simply is trying to minimise those handover processes that exist in hospitals, enable police to quickly and expediently deliver people to places where they can receive care, but to invest and solidly invest in in-community and peer care in terms of mental health, to ensure that police are not the people being called to help people in a health crisis, but clinicians are being called—and I will say not to people in crisis but in-community care and support is provided to people with mental health conditions, to help them manage it before they are in crisis. The only reason police are called is because we have let it go too long or because the system has failed them and they are falling into crisis..."
- 158 See Yoorrook Justice Commission Transcript, Hearing Block 5 Day 7 at p 496-497.
- 159 Case study from Hopkins n[21].
- 160 Marta Pascual Juanola and Chris Vedalago, 'We cannot arrest our way out of this: A new plan to prevent youth crime' The Age (online) (online at 5 May 2023) <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/we-cannot-arrest-our-way-out-of-this-a-new-plan-to-prevent-youth-crime-20230313-p5crrq.html>>.
- 161 Victoria, Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, Final Report (2021), In particular we highlight the importance of implementing recommendations 17, 18, 19, 20,23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 44, 45, 46 & 47.
- 162 2021-2022 Youth Parole Board Report above n [9], p 26.
- 163 'VACCA's Response', above n [136], p 10-12; 'Balit Murrup', above n [137], p 20.
- 164 'Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System', above n [158], p 13.
- 165 The year-to-date data to May 2023 for Victoria show that between January and April 2023, there was an increase in suspected suicide deaths among young people aged under 18 years, with 17 deaths recorded to 30 April (CCOV 2023c). This is notably



higher than the number of suspected or confirmed suicide deaths recorded during this period for this age group in previous years (2 in 2022, 7 in 2021, 9 in 2020 and 2 in 2019) (CCOV 2023c). The number of suspected suicides reported for young people aged under 18 years in Victoria remained unchanged at 17 in May 2023 (CCOV 2023e). The increase in young people under 18 years between January and April 2023 was seen in both males and females (CCOV 2023c): For males in this age group, there were 10 suspected deaths by suicide in the first 4 months of 2023, compared with none during the same period in 2022, 3 in 2021, 7 in 2020 and 1 in 2019. For females in this age group, there were 7 suspected suicides between January and April 2023, compared with 2 in this period in 2022, 4 in 2021, 2 in 2020 and 1 in 2019 from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Suicide and Self-Harm Monitoring Data (Data Download)p 31 <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/fe61104-dbe5-4f91-bdb2-fc50f7c55177/Suicide-self-harm-monitoring-Data.pdf.aspx?inline=true>>

- 166 'Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2021-22', above n [9], p 26.
- 167 YACVIC, 'Youth sector welcomes \$50 million investment for youth housing in the Big Housing Build' (Media Release, Advocacy, 8 December 2021) <<https://www.yacvic.org.au/advocacy/youth-big-housing-build/>>.
- 168 YACVIC, 'Ending Youth Homelessness: Solutions from Young People,' (Report, March 2020) p 4.
- 169 Above, p 10.
- 170 See Recommendation 4, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee Parliament of Victoria, 'Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System' (Report, 2022).
- 171 This involves harmonisation and integration with other relevant key reforms underway eg. Mental Health and Family Violence. See also compatible recommendations from SJFW's Policy Platform above n[53], at 11 regarding the Support System for women at risk of criminalisation.
- 172 'Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2021-22', above n [9], p 26.
- 173 We should learn from the collaboration work being done by VEOHRC and VicHealth for example 'Bigger than This' project as part of VicHealth's Future Healthy initiative <<https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/education/reducing-racism-hub/bigger-than-this/>>
- 174 DJCS, 'Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2018-2019' (Report, September 2019) p 5.

- 175 As explored in detail in Ellen Broad, *Made by Humans: The AI Condition* (Melbourne University Press, 2018); See also Kristina K. Childs, Jennifer H. Peck, Caitlin M. Brady 'Predictive Bias in Juvenile Risk Assessment: Considering Race/Ethnicity and Sex' (2022) *Crime and Delinquency*, which examines the way algorithmic bias systemically disadvantages young people of colour.

### Working Together

Action Plan to end the Over-Representation of Particular Groups of Young People in the Criminal Justice System

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