



Government response to Review to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the delivery of support to victims

Background

The *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009* (VOCAA) commenced on 1 December 2009.

The VOCAA provides a scheme to provide financial assistance to certain victims of acts of violence.

VOCAA is administered by Victim Assist Queensland (VAQ) within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG).

VAQ also coordinates and delivers the Victims of Crime Community Response (VOCCR) program which is intended to meet the immediate needs of victims of violent crimes through the provision of 24 hour a day, seven days a week referral and brokerage support in three pilot locations (Townsville, Cairns and Logan).

Review to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the delivery of support to victims

A review was undertaken to identify options to improve the efficiency and timeliness of the delivery of financial support to victims, including the use of community recovery approaches.

KPMG Australia was engaged to review the Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS).

Community consultations undertaken by the Interim Victims' Commissioner have also informed this Government response.

Financial Assistance Scheme

KPMG's review of the FAS considered:

- whether the original intent and objectives of the scheme are being met, as defined in the VOCAA;
- the effectiveness of the current FAS for victims of crime; and
- recommendations 14 to 17 of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee (LASC) *Inquiry into Support of Victims of Crime*.

As part of the review, KPMG consulted with stakeholders from the victim support sector and domestic and family violence advocates. The review used quantitative assessments, analysed data and compared financial assistance in other jurisdictions.

Review findings

KPMG's review found "the objectives and intent of the legislation are being broadly achieved". Stakeholders noted that assistance provided under the scheme "positively impact outcomes and recovery for victims".

The review also found community awareness and expectations and increasing demand for services are changing the profile of the scheme, and identified opportunities to improve accessibility and increase support and recognition for victims.

KPMG made 10 recommendations, which broadly aim to simplify the FAS and enhance accessibility and outcomes for victims (including victim-survivors of domestic and family violence).

Department of Justice and Attorney-General

Of the 10 recommendations, the Queensland Government:

- has accepted three recommendations (recommendations 1, 3 and 5);
- accepts-in-principle six recommendations (recommendations 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9); and
- will further consider one recommendation (recommendation 10).

The table below provides a line-by-line response to the specific recommendations.

| No. | KPMG recommendation | Queensland Government position | Queensland Government response |
|-----|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <p>That an immediate payment of \$3,000 is paid to all eligible primary victims under the Financial Assistance Scheme (on the delivery of reduced evidentiary requirements, see Recommendation 3).</p> <p>This will support more rapid provision of payments to, and reduce the burden on, victims of crime.</p> | Accepted | <p>The Queensland Government accepts the recommendation and notes that the Department of Justice and Attorney-General has implemented an immediate triage, assessment and payment process to address this recommendation. These changes will support victims to receive financial assistance in a timely manner.</p> <p>It is noted that where evidence is sufficient to prove eligibility for a special assistance payment, the full amount of the special assistance payment will be provided to victims.</p> |
| 2 | <p>To reduce the time associated with processing applications and increase access to the timely provision of support, it is recommended that all eligible victims be deemed automatically able to access counselling support, without the need to evidence a provisional diagnosis of psychological injury or adverse impacts.</p> | Accepted in-principle | <p>The Queensland Government accepts in principle the recommendation and, in consultation with stakeholders, will implement changes to improve access to counselling support in a timely and effective manner for all eligible victims under the scheme.</p> <p>It is noted that counselling support is currently available under the financial assistance scheme to treat psychological injuries or adverse impacts caused by violence.</p> |
| 3 | <p>That the information requirements in relation to the \$3,000 immediate payment and the automatic access to counselling be simplified and reduced.</p> | Accepted | <p>The Queensland Government accepts the recommendation and notes that the Department of Justice and Attorney-General has implemented enhancements to the financial assistance scheme to reduce the burden on victims, including changes to streamline the assessment process to support eligible victims to access immediate payments, financial assistance and counselling in a timely manner.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will implement changes to improve access to counselling support in a timely and effective manner and has expanded counselling support available to eligible victims of property crime.</p> |



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| 4 | <p>To reduce wait-times and improve the experience of victims, it is recommended that a victim's eligibility for support through WorkCover and/or other Queensland Government mechanisms does not preclude the victim from receiving financial assistance through the Financial Assistance Scheme. This does not extend to Compulsory Third Party arrangements where the existing process should still apply.</p> | Accepted in-principle | <p>The Queensland Government accepts in principle this recommendation to remove the current requirement for workers' compensation applications to be finally dealt with before assessing an application for financial assistance and will progress legislative amendments to the <i>Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009</i> to implement the recommendation.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Attorney-General will work closely with other key Government agencies and statutory bodies to support streamlined assessments for financial assistance and limit the risk of duplicate payments being made to victims.</p> |
| 5 | <p>That the eligibility criteria underpinning Other Expenses Exceptional Circumstances (OEEC) payments be better defined to improve consistency and certainty for victims of crime, improve payment timeframes, and reduce confusion for stakeholders.</p> <p>In consideration of recommendations 2 and 6, the scope of OEEC payments can be reduced to focus on recovery expenses that are not otherwise covered by the proposed recommendations relating to funeral expenses and counselling.</p> | Accepted | <p>The Queensland Government accepts the recommendation.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Attorney-General will, in consultation with stakeholders, continue to implement enhancements to the financial assistance scheme to reduce the burden on victims, including simplifying the types of expenses claimable, including as OEEC under the Financial Assistance Scheme.</p> |
| 6 | <p>To better meet the needs of victims and the broader community, it is recommended that claimable funeral expenses under financial assistance payments be expanded.</p> <p>Funeral payments should encompass all reasonable funeral-related expenses (including travel) within the maximum cap, in order to simplify the process.</p> | Accepted in-principle | <p>The Queensland Government accepts in principle the recommendation.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Attorney-General will, in consultation with stakeholders, review the types of expenses that may be claimed as reasonable funeral expenses under the Financial Assistance Scheme.</p> |
| 7 | <p>To provide a greater sense of control, flexibility and empowerment for victims, it is recommended that claimable counselling expenses be expanded to include alternative therapies.</p> | Accepted in-principle | <p>The Queensland Government accepts in principle the recommendation.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Attorney-General will, in consultation with stakeholders, review counselling expenses claimable under the Financial Assistance Scheme to ensure that reasonable alternative therapies are</p> |



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| | | | claimable under the Financial Assistance Scheme. |
| 8 | That an approved providers list be introduced and utilised by Victim Assist Queensland when organising the reimbursement of expenses under the Other Expenses Exceptional Circumstances category of financial assistance, as well as for counselling, in order to support the more timely provision of support for victims. | Accepted in-principle | <p>The Queensland Government accepts in principle the recommendation.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Attorney-General will, in consultation with stakeholders, explore options to expedite payments to victims, including the establishment of an approved panel or panels of providers for certain payments under the Financial Assistance Scheme.</p> |
| 9 | That statutory timeframes underpinning the application for financial assistance for child victims of domestic and family violence or child abuse be extended so that these victims can apply for support within 10 years of turning 18. This will support the Financial Assistance Scheme in meeting the needs of victims through the provision of a more trauma-informed approach. | Accepted in-principle | <p>The Queensland Government supports the proposal to extend the statutory timeframes for child victims of domestic and family violence or child abuse to apply for financial assistance and will progress legislative amendments to the <i>Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009</i> to implement this recommendation.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will also consult with stakeholders as part of progression of this recommendation.</p> |
| 10 | In light of the low rate of recovery, it is recommended that the offender debt recovery function currently being undertaken by VAQ cease. It is suggested that through the removal of this function the Scheme may promote the recovery and safety of victims. | Noted | This recommendation will be further considered, in consultation with key stakeholders, including victim advocates and domestic and family violence stakeholders. |

Next steps

KPMG’s review also identified possible future state options for VAQ’s operating model across three key domains of the FAS (simplified eligibility, expanded assistance and navigation support pathways for victims).

The Government will consider progressing legislative amendments to the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009* to implement recommendations of KPMG’s review and possible future state options for VAQ’s operating model, following stakeholder consultation.

The Queensland Government will review existing supports available for victims of crime and consider how best to support victims to navigate each stage of the criminal justice process. This work will be informed by KPMG’s review findings.

The Government has already taken steps to simplify the financial assistance process, including implementing an immediate assessment, triage and payment process to support victims to receive financial assistance in a timely manner.

The Government has also committed funding to continue to address demand across the financial assistance scheme.

Legislation has been passed by the Queensland Parliament establishing the crucial role of the Victims’ Commissioner, as an independent advocate to champion the rights and needs of victims of crime. The Government and VAQ will seek feedback and advice from the Victims’ Commissioner as part of ongoing enhancements.



Community and Victim Response models

The VOCCR program, delivered in partnership with Victim Connect, currently provides immediate 24/7 support to victims of crime in Townsville, Cairns and Logan. A community response may be activated to respond to a crisis or an incident with significant community impacts.

Under the program, individuals may be referred by the Queensland Police Service, first responders or hospitals. A triage assessment is then used to determine the individual's immediate needs. Following the assessment, face to face or telephone support is provided to the victim, along with referrals to specialist services such as counselling or housing, and support to meet their immediate needs – food, safe shelter, clothing, immediate care needs (such as mental health first aid) and necessary transport.

Government has reviewed research and analysis of existing interjurisdictional models that provide victim of crime specific support and community-level critical incident responses, and analysed stakeholder insights and data relating to the delivery of the program to inform ongoing support for victims in Queensland.

Early findings from the VOCCR pilot to date indicate that:

- the VOCCR program is meeting the objectives of supporting the immediate needs of victims impacted following a violence crime and is readily accessible 24/7
- victims with unique and complex circumstances are accessing support under the VOCCR program, including trauma-informed support and assistance to navigate the service system through referrals for ongoing support
- the VOCCR program has been providing timely immediate and practical support to victims that were at risk of falling through the cracks due to complexities or vulnerabilities.

Stakeholders consulted have expressed positive sentiment towards the program and initial feedback reported positive outcomes across the three locations where the program is in operation.

Next steps

Under the Community Safety Plan for Queensland, released by the Queensland Government in April 2024, the Government committed an additional \$16 million to continue and expand the pilot in two additional locations, enabling ongoing support for victims across Queensland in the immediate aftermath of an act of violence.

As part of this continuation and expansion, Victim Assist Queensland will refine and enhance service delivery through stakeholder feedback and pilot findings.

Supporting victims of property crime

On 21 February 2023, the Government announced an additional \$3 million over four years to address service gaps of non-government organisations to help victims of property crime involving violence or a threat of violence.

\$1 million of this funding has been allocated to non-government organisations funded under the Victims Support Funding Program (VSFP) providing additional capacity to support victims of crime with violence.

Consultation with stakeholders during the review of the financial assistance scheme identified the need for other property crime victims to be able to access counselling.

The Government has listened to this feedback. The remaining \$2 million of this funding has been allocated to UnitingCare to provide a counselling and case management service for any victims of property crime filling this identified service delivery gap. The service commenced on 1 July 2024. VAQ will monitor the demand for this support.

