

Tackling Problems Early

The Department of Justice aims to maintain and enhance the confidence of Victorians in their personal safety.

The Department is working to prevent crime and violence, be responsive to emerging issues and continue to explore new solutions to long-standing challenges.



Students at Laverton Secondary College mentor Altona Green Primary School students in performing a variety of styles ranging from classical through to rap. The Department, through Crime Prevention Victoria, undertakes early intervention strategies which are designed to improve crime and violence prevention outcomes for young people.

Preventing crime

The Department of Justice aims to improve the safety and confidence of Victorians wherever they live or work.

With a crime rate 23.6 per cent below the national average, Victoria is the safest state in Australia to live. Nonetheless, the cost of crime to the Victorian community is estimated at between \$4 and \$6 billion a year due to the costs associated with rising insurance premiums, hospital bills, costs of policing and other emergency services, and the maintenance of courts and prisons.

The consequences of crime are not just financial – physical injury, psychological trauma and intangible social costs all impact on Victorians.

Launched in 2002, *Safer Streets and Homes* – the Government's Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy for Victoria – provides a whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach to crime and violence based on three key themes:

- Improving Safety in Streets and Neighbourhoods;
- Reducing Offending and Violence by Young People; and
- Preventing Family Violence – Safety in the Home.

Handgun Buyback

The tragic shooting at Monash University in October 2002 was the catalyst for sweeping changes to Victoria's firearms laws. In June 2003, a handgun buyback scheme was introduced to facilitate the withdrawal of handguns from the community and to enable their owners to surrender weapons and, where eligible, receive compensation.

At the end of the program in December 2003, a total of 18,814 handguns had been surrendered and \$3.1 million paid in compensation. The guns surrendered included a range of handguns now prohibited as a result of changes to the *Firearms Act 1996*. Changes to this legislation have enhanced the powers of police to conduct a search for a weapon or firearm in a public place without a search warrant, justified on the basis of reasonable belief.



The State Government's handgun buyback campaign was a tremendous success with more than 18,000 weapons surrendered to Victoria Police during 2003.

In 2003–2004, the Department funded more than \$3 million of new and ongoing initiatives under the *Safer Streets and Homes* strategy. These involved key partnerships with agencies including Victoria Police, the Departments of Human Services, Education and Training, Infrastructure, Sustainability and Environment, and the Department for Victorian Communities, together with local government, community agencies, community legal centres, advisory committees and advocacy groups.

Improving safety

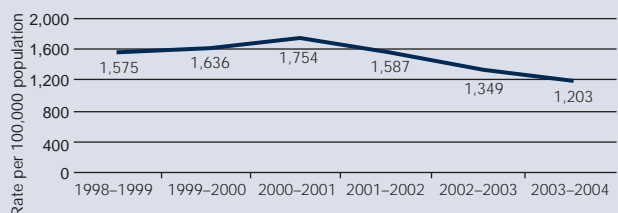
The Department provides support and advice to local communities and other agencies on crime trends, issues and best practice in crime prevention.

Victorian Burglary Reduction Council

Through Crime Prevention Victoria, the Department leads the Victorian Burglary Reduction Council which, in partnership with Victoria Police and agencies such as Neighbourhood Watch and RACV, aims to develop strategies to reduce high-volume crimes.

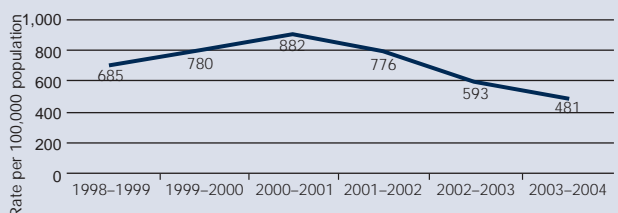
During 2003–2004, the Council developed preventative strategies for residential burglary, commercial burglary, thefts from building sites and the disposal of stolen goods. Key initiatives, such as the *Is Your Home 'Savy'?* (Security, Access, Visibility and You) burglary-reduction campaign, are thought to have had a positive impact, with burglaries currently at an historic low.

Recorded burglary* offences per 100,000 Victorian population



* Burglary offences include aggravated, residential and other burglary.
Source: Victorian Police Crime Statistics.

Recorded theft of motor vehicle offences per 100,000 Victorian population



Source: Victorian Police Crime Statistics.

Preventing crime continued

Other initiatives undertaken in 2003–2004 include:

- activities of the Victorian Motor Vehicle Crime Reduction Council;
- launch of a major community education campaign aimed at reducing the demand for and supply of weapons;
- development of new Safer Design Guidelines to facilitate the planning and design of safer urban environments;
- staging Community Safety Month, with more than 560 organisations participating in activities such as Livestock Theft Prevention Week;
- a leading department role in the implementation of the Darebin Community Building Initiative;
- providing crime prevention and community safety expertise to the Department of Human Services *Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy*; and
- establishing the Inner-City Entertainment Precincts Taskforce to examine how best to manage competing demands between entertainment and residential land uses in inner city entertainment areas; and
- provision of crime prevention policy advice through the Ministerial Crime Prevention Council.

Reconnecting young people to supportive learning environments

While young people comprise 20 per cent of the total population, they are consistently over represented as both victims of crime (23 per cent) and as offenders. More than 50 per cent of all offenders recorded by Victoria Police are aged between 10 and 24 years. The Department works closely with a number of Government and non-Government agencies on youth issues, including Victoria Police, local government, and the Departments of Human Services, Education and Training, the Department for Victorian Communities and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.

In 2003–2004, Crime Prevention Victoria continued to work in partnership with a range of stakeholders to implement a \$1.02 million package of initiatives designed to improve crime and violence prevention outcomes for young people. Initiatives have involved improving their connectedness to educational and employment pathways, a truancy reduction program, an early school leavers program and vocational training programs.

Other key initiatives undertaken in 2003–2004 include:

- The Youth Referral and Independent Persons Program, which seeks to divert young people under 17 – primarily refugees and newly arrived young people – from progression to higher levels of the criminal justice system, based on culturally appropriate, early intervention and diversion support at the point of police interview.

- The Arrest Referral Program, which aims to provide early intervention to young offenders – especially those presenting with drug related offences – and enhance their capacity to meet court conditions by linking them to housing, health, income and welfare support services at the time of arrest.

Youth Gang Forum

The *Exploring and Responding to 'Youth Gang' Formations* forum was held on 10 June 2004. The forum brought together 100 youth, senior representatives and practitioners from across government, the academic community and the service and corporate sectors to examine emerging issues surrounding young people's participation in gang-like activity in Victoria.

A key aim of the forum was to move beyond theoretical discussion to achieve an agreed position on the extent and nature of the youth gang issue in Victoria and develop a set of recommendations for anti-gang intervention strategies in 2004–2005.

A number of issues were identified through the forum, including the need to:

- manage youth violence, with a focus on changing male behaviours and attitudes towards the use of violence;
- provide training and professional development around conflict resolution and interpersonal skills for professionals who engage with young people; and
- engage young people through consultation, particularly those who are involved in gang-like activities.



Julia Griffiths, Department of Justice (standing) introduces the panel discussing cross-jurisdictional perspectives on 'Youth Gangs'. Members of the panel are (from left to right): Pat Boyle, Victoria Police, Peter Fleming, Crown Casino, Lucas Gosling, City of Monash, Richard Tregear, Open Family Australia, Stan Small, Anglicare Youth Services New South Wales, John Pech, Hampton Park Secondary College and Van Nguyen, Department of Human Services.

Preventing family violence

Family violence includes all forms of violence within families, including children being harmed by family members or guardians, and women being harmed by their partners or children. While anyone can be affected by family violence, the majority of victims are women and children – almost half of recorded assaults against women occur in the home.

In 2003–2004, family violence prevention pilot programs in Shepparton and Brimbank took a locally based approach by building the capacity of a range of service providers to undertake prevention through early intervention. It is anticipated that the pilot projects will be completed and evaluated in 2005.

In 2003–2004, the Health Professionals Project developed resource materials to increase the capacity of general practitioners and mental health professionals to identify and respond to family violence involving their patients. Information has been distributed to GPs in northern and western metropolitan areas as well as the Hume and Grampians regions.

A continuing professional development training package has been developed and approved by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. A similar resource is being developed for professionals in the mental health sector for distribution in 2004–2005.

Family violence prevention through the workplace

In a state-first, the Department initiated the *Family Violence Prevention Through the Workplace* project. The project is consulting widely with stakeholder groups to raise awareness of family violence and its impact in the workplace and to develop resources for the workplace prevention of family violence.

On 30 October 2003, the Department hosted the *Family Violence IS a Workplace Issue* forum, with around 80 representatives attending from private industry, family violence services and other community support agencies, unions, Victoria Police and Government departments. The forum has provided a basis for a number of workplace strategies currently being developed across Victoria.

Encouraging drug- and offence-free lifestyles

Recent data shows that approximately two-thirds of new prisoners report their offences were related to drug use. This figure increases with second or subsequent sentences, with approximately 80 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women reporting such issues. Intervention programs are crucial in assisting first-time offenders to not re-offend and to work towards a drug-free lifestyle.

The Court Referral and Evaluation for Drug Intervention and Treatment program (CREDIT) operates in 11 Victorian magistrates' courts. The program aims to provide offenders who have substance abuse issues with an opportunity to engage in early treatment while they are on bail. A total of 1,593 offenders were referred to the program in 2003–2004, compared to 963 in 2002–2003.

Criminal Justice Diversion Program

Established in 1998, the Criminal Justice Diversion Program operates in 12 magistrates' courts across Victoria. The program mainly provides first-time offenders with the opportunity to avoid a criminal record by undertaking diversion programs such as community service. In 2003–2004, 5,454 offenders entered into diversion plans, an increase of 881 from 2002–2003.

Drug Court of Victoria

The Drug Court of Victoria commenced in May 2002 and imposes drug treatment orders on offenders. The Drug Court is a new approach to dealing with offenders and is an attempt to reduce drug and alcohol-related crime by addressing its underlying causes.

The Drug Court magistrate heads a team including a clinical adviser, case manager, legal aid solicitor, police prosecutor and housing and support workers. The team develops a case management plan for each offender, which is tailored to the needs of the individual and is aimed at breaking the offender's drug or alcohol dependency.

The Drug Court supervises offenders on intensive treatment programs and is able to imprison offenders who fail to comply with conditions.

The pilot continued throughout 2003–2004, and 97 drug treatment orders have been imposed since 2002.



Members of the Drug Court team at the Dandenong Magistrates Court develop individual plans to help break offenders' dependency on drugs and/or alcohol.

Responsible gambling

In 2003–2004, the Department worked to ensure the regulation of an honest, crime-free and responsible gambling industry.

The *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* was passed in December 2003. The Act creates a streamlined framework for gambling regulation in Victoria and consolidates eight of the ten existing Acts governing gambling into one simple, streamlined Act. Further information on the Act is available under page 45 of this report.

The Commercial Gambling Licences Review Project Team was established during 2003–2004 to develop the approach to the review of future licensing arrangements for lotteries, wagering and gaming machines in Victoria.

The Gambling Research Secretariat has been expanded to provide improved support for the Victorian Gambling Research Panel (VGRP) and to commence secretariat support for the National Gambling Research Program of the Ministerial Council on Gambling.

Problem gambling

For most people, gambling is not a problem. However, gambling can create financial, social and personal problems for some people, their families, and their communities. The Department of Justice works closely with the Department of Human Services to encourage responsible gambling in Victoria. The Department of Justice is responsible for gambling policy, industry monitoring and regulation and the Department of Human Services is responsible for problem gambling interventions and services.

Advocate for Responsible Gambling

The Advocate for Responsible Gambling was appointed in August 2003. The role of the office includes:

- encouraging, facilitating and promoting responsible gambling;
- being an information conduit between Government and gambling stakeholders; and
- participating in the development of community education programs and training initiatives.

In 2003–2004, the Advocate held regular meetings with industry leaders, Gamblers' Help services, the financial services sector, the academic community and community groups. The Advocate has met with every Gambler's Help service and attended community meetings and meetings with local government chief executive officers, mayors and councillors across Victoria. The Advocate has a program of meetings with local government areas which have high ratios of electronic gaming machines.

A key component of the Advocate's role is chairing the Problem Gambling Roundtable. The Roundtable, which met four times in 2003–2004, provides an open forum for discussion among all stakeholders on approaches to problem gambling. Both the Minister for Gaming, John Pandazopoulos and the Minister for Community Services, Sherryl Garbutt are active participants.

The office also put forward a strong case for considering problem gambling in the context of other public health

issues such as tobacco, alcohol and obesity. The Advocate highlighted the need for responsible gambling education programs in schools to tackle the emerging issue of youth gambling.

In 2003–2004 the Minister for Gaming, John Pandazopoulos, with information provided by the Advocate, gained the support of his colleagues in other states to propose reforms to the *Federal Bankruptcy Act* that will assist rehabilitation of problem gamblers and assist their families.



From left to right: Minister John Pandazopoulos, Advocate for Responsible Gambling Kerrie Cross, Secretary Penny Armytage and Margaret Kearney of Clubs Victoria, with guest speakers Michael O'Neil from the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies and Professor Robert Ladouceur from Quebec University, Canada at the Problem Gambling Roundtable.

Gambling research

The Department's gambling research program helps to ensure that Victoria has relevant and timely research information on the social and economic impacts of gambling and problem gambling available to inform policy and decision making.

In 2003–2004, the Department extended its research capacity by providing additional secretariat support to the VGRP that commissions and publishes research into gambling and problem gambling. It also commenced a review of the current arrangement for research procurement. In 2003–2004 five reports were completed and released.

- *Evaluation of the Victorian Gambling Screen*, June 2003.
- *Best Practice in Problem Gambling Services*, June 2003.
- *2003 Victorian Longitudinal Community Attitudes Survey*, April 2004.
- *Validation of the Victorian Gambling Screen*, April 2004.
- *Study of Clients of Problem Gambling Services – Stage 2, Round 1 Report*, April 2004.

The Department further extended its gambling research effort by providing gambling research secretariat support for the National Gambling Research Working Party, which reports to the Ministerial Council on Gambling. The role of the working party is to commission research on problem gambling issues in Australia and measures likely to reduce its incidence. The secretariat also assisted the working party to scope 16 research projects. Six of these were endorsed for further development. In 2003–2004, one project – the National Definitions of Problem Gambling and Harm – was put out to tender.