



# Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Programs





VICTORIA

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Victorian  
Auditor-General

# Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Programs

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The Hon. Bruce Atkinson MLC  
President  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

The Hon. Ken Smith MP  
Speaker  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my performance report on the *Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Programs*.

Yours faithfully



D D R PEARSON  
*Auditor-General*

9 February 2011



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# Audit summary

## Background

Victoria Police classifies crimes against the person as homicide, rape, assault, sexual assault, robbery and kidnapping/abduction. Between 2000–01 and 2009–10, the annual number of reported crimes against the person increased from 34 092 to 45 385 (33.1 per cent). Over the same period, all recorded offences fell by 19.3 per cent. In 2009–10, police recorded 39 032 people as victims of crime against the person, 2.3 per cent higher than the previous year. This is lower than the number of reported crimes because one person may be the victim of more than one crime.

Not all victims report these crimes to the police. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that, depending on the nature of the crime, between 57.5 and 78.2 per cent of victims do not report the crime.

Being a victim of crime can affect a person's health, relationships and quality of life. While some people may have the existing networks and support, others need extra assistance. The Department of Justice's (DOJ) 2004 *Justice Statement* obliges the justice system to assist the victim of an offence to recover from its effects. Evidence shows that giving support to victims can help bring an offender to justice, as victims are more likely to act as witnesses if they are supported. The *Victims' Charter Act 2006* was introduced to recognise the impact of crime on victims, and to establish principles to improve, among other things, the treatment of victims of crime by all investigatory agencies, prosecuting agencies and victims' services agencies.

The Victims Support Agency (VSA) was established in 2004 specifically to support victims of crime. VSA administers a range of services to victims, including the Victims of Crime Helpline (the Helpline), the Victims Register, and the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP). It is also responsible for implementing the Victims' Charter. In 2009–10, VSA's budget was \$9.98 million. Over half of this, \$5.40 million, was used to fund nine not-for-profit community agencies to deliver VACP in eight DOJ regions covering 31 locations across Victoria.

The audit examined whether victim support services managed by VSA help victims recover from the effects of crime, and whether VSA and the VACP providers have treated victims in accordance with the Victims' Charter.

## Conclusions

VSA has designed its services on soundly-based principles of early intervention, streamlined service delivery, assistance in navigating the criminal justice system and flexibility in addressing victims' needs. Services are being delivered consistent with these principles and victims are being treated in accordance with the Victims' Charter. However, there are areas that need to improve, including complaints management, data security, and guidance to VACP providers on victim management processes.

Due to the inherent difficulties in measuring outcomes for victims of crime, VSA is not able to demonstrate that its services are helping victims recover from a crime. This is influenced by several factors: the difficulty of defining recovery in a measurable way; the variation between each individual's ability to manage their own recovery; and concerns that seeking feedback from victims on the effectiveness of services could retraumatise them.

Because VSA lacks information about outcomes, greater reliance is placed on gaining assurance over the quality of services delivered to victims. However, there are no clear objectives or performance indicators at the agency level, and VSA does not audit its service delivery. Consequently, it is unable to provide assurance that the services are delivered as intended.

## Findings

### Service design and management

While the research available on victims of crime is less developed than other areas of criminology, an evidence base has accumulated from evaluations of existing services in Victoria and other jurisdictions, academic research, surveys about victims and reviews of related areas of victims' support. VSA has effectively used this evidence as the basis for designing programs to meet the needs of victims of crime.

VSA is generally delivering services as planned. People on the Victims Register receive timely, appropriate information about the status of the relevant offender. VSA has also implemented a number of prudent initiatives, such as changes to the Helpline, which have improved timeliness of service delivery and engagement with victims.

Generally, victims are receiving timely services tailored to their individual needs from VACP providers. However, deficiencies in record keeping by case workers, particularly at two of the four VACP providers visited, means there is less assurance available regarding service quality. Further, a lack of sufficiently detailed instructions on how to document key processes, including assessing the needs of a victim, has contributed to this.

All four VACP providers visited by VAGO had a waiting list of some kind. Three of these providers managed demand by prioritising victims and meeting immediate needs before placing individuals on waiting lists. However, the fourth provider, where demand was well over target, had several cases where victims had long waiting times and their immediate needs were not met. As the management of waiting lists between VACP providers varies, victims received different standards of service depending on which provider they were assigned to.

Although VSA manages complaints in accordance with the Victims' Charter guidelines, there is no data on the time it takes to resolve complaints.

For all other types of complaints managed by VSA, there are insufficient documented processes. VSA does not systematically record non-Charter complaints and, as such, VAGO could not verify whether any complaints of this type have been received.

Maintaining the privacy of victims' personal information is an important focus of VSA and the VACP providers. Policies and procedures provide appropriate coverage of information privacy matters, however, delays in providing VACP staff access to the database is leading them to circumvent security procedures.

## Evaluation, monitoring and reporting

VSA has been evaluating the implementation of the Victims' Charter since shortly after it was legislated in 2006. VSA produced an evaluation report in 2010. This evaluation found that the Charter is improving victims' experiences of the justice system although the lack of sufficient existing data means this evaluation will largely be used as a baseline for future evaluations.

Other reviews and evaluations of VSA have focused on processes and do not provide information on outcomes for victims of crime. In particular, there is neither sufficient nor reliable information on whether victims' services are helping victims recover from, or more effectively manage, the effects of crime.

VSA's monitoring and reporting activities do not provide assurance over the quality of services provided to victims of crime. There are no objectives or key performance indicators (KPI) for VSA and the only agency-level performance measure it uses is the number of services delivered. This does not adequately address VSA's performance nor reflect the different levels of complexity of the services provided. While VSA prepares quarterly reports about its own performance, these are not consistently completed and do not provide sufficient information on performance or quality of service delivery.

There are no indicators to measure the performance of the Helpline or the Victims Register. The KPIs and performance measures for the VACP are well developed but have not been benchmarked and some performance measures are currently not being measured or reported. The main measure for each VACP provider is the number of new clients. However, the targets set do not reflect the demands of the existing case load, nor do they consider differences in client complexity between regions. This complexity could include, for example, a high proportion of clients from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Provision for quality reviews of VACP providers is included in funding and service agreements. However, VSA does not conduct sufficient quality assurance to determine the extent to which services are meeting appropriate standards. VSA largely relies on external accreditation by the Quality Improvement Council, a not-for-profit body, but this accreditation cannot provide assurance on whether VACP guidelines are being followed.

## Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
	The Department of Justice should:	
1.	Provide more guidance to Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers on what constitutes good practice in terms of needs assessment and the management of waiting lists.	12
2.	Improve the complaints management process by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• applying the process for handling Charter-related complaints to non-Charter complaints</li> <li>• reporting on subsequent performance against timeliness targets.</li> </ul>	14
3.	Develop objectives supported by key performance indicators for the Victims Support Agency that are consistent with guidelines established by the Department of Treasury and Finance.	20
4.	Refine the current performance measure on the number of services delivered to differentiate between the various types of services provided, namely the Victims of Crime Helpline, the Victims Register and the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program.	20
5.	Improve performance reporting on the services provided by developing key performance indicators for the Victims of Crime Helpline and the Victims Register.	21
6.	Improve performance reporting on the services provided by refining its performance monitoring and reporting framework for the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program to clearly distinguish between objectives, indicators and measures.	23
7.	Refine its target for the number of new clients to reflect the extent of services delivered and the resources and time required.	23

Number	Recommendation	Page
8.	Increase the coverage of quarterly data reporting and the client surveys to include the more critical key performance indicators in the funding and service agreement.	28
9.	Improve the methodology used to survey victims of crime about the quality of service delivery by Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing the sample size to obtain a representative sample</li> <li>• selecting the sample independently of the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers</li> <li>• identifying potential participants using existing lists of victims who have agreed to be surveyed.</li> </ul>	28
10.	Conduct quality assurance activities such as audits of the standard of the provision of services to victims by Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers.	28

## Submissions and comments received

In addition to progressive engagement during the course of the audit, in accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report, or relevant extracts from the report, was provided to the Department of Justice with a request for submissions or comments.

Agency views have been considered in reaching our audit conclusions and are represented to the extent relevant and warranted in preparing this report. Their full section 16(3) submissions and comments, however, are included in Appendix A.



# 1 Background

## 1.1 Victims of crime against the person

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Victoria Police classifies crimes against the person as homicide, rape, assault, sexual assault, robbery and kidnapping/abduction. These crimes are also referred to as violent crime. Between 2000–01 and 2009–10, the number of reported crimes against the person increased from 34 092 to 45 385 (33.1 per cent). Over the same period, all recorded offences fell by 19.3 per cent.

In 2009–10, police recorded 39 032 people as victims of crime against the person, which was 2.3 per cent higher than the previous year. This is lower than the total number of crimes because one person may be the victim of more than one crime.

Of the victims of reported crime in 2009–10:

- 53.9 per cent were male, with 84.6 per cent victims of assault and 3.5 per cent victims of sex offences
- 46.1 per cent were female, with 73.9 per cent victims of assaults and 20.9 per cent victims of sex offences
- 18.9 per cent (7 382) were under 18 years old.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that in 2008–09, 142 500 Victorians were physically assaulted, 184 200 were threatened with assault, 24 100 were robbed and 11 000 were sexually assaulted. This estimate is based on surveys and includes unreported as well as reported crime.

While there is insufficient information available on the extent or significance of unreported crime, the ABS reports that the proportion of victims in Victoria who reported a crime to the police in 2008–09 ranged from 21.8 per cent of victims of sexual assault to 42.5 per cent of victims of physical assault.

## 1.2 Policy response

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The Department of Justice's (DOJ) 2004 *Justice Statement* recognised that, as well as dealing with the offender, there is also an obligation for the justice system to assist the victim of an offence to recover from its effects. To do this, victims should be:

- kept informed of the justice process and the progress of their case
- given the opportunity to have their views heard
- in some cases, compensated and given material, medical, psychological and social assistance.

According to *Justice Statement 2*, which was released in 2008, giving support to victims can also help bring an offender to justice, as victims are more likely to be willing and able to be witnesses if they are supported. A victims' support project in the United Kingdom resulted in a 19 per cent increase in witness attendance rates at court and a 27 per cent reduction in trials adjourned due to witness issues.

## 1.3 Legislation

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The main act relating to victims of crime is the *Victims' Charter Act 2006*. Other relevant acts are the:

- *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996*, which provides financial assistance to victims of violent crime.
- *Victims of Crime Assistance and Other Matters Act 2001*, which covers Victim Impact Statements.
- *Corrections Act 1986*, which provides the mandate for the operation of a Victims Register.

### 1.3.1 *Victims' Charter Act 2006*

The 2004 *Justice Statement* committed to investigate the need for a victims' charter that would clearly state the rights of victims of crime. The Victims' Charter was legislated in the *Victims' Charter Act 2006*. Its objectives are to:

- recognise the impact of crime on the victims, their families, witnesses to the crime and in some cases the broader community
- recognise that all persons adversely affected by crime, regardless of whether they report the offence, should be treated with respect by all investigatory agencies, prosecuting agencies and victims' services agencies and should be offered information to enable them to access appropriate services to help with the recovery process
- reduce the likelihood of secondary victimisation by the criminal justice system.

The principles of the Victims' Charter, shown in Figure 1A, apply to any person adversely affected by crime, whether or not it is reported.



**Figure 1A**  
**The Victims' Charter principles**

<p><b>If you are the victim of crime, you have the right to:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be treated with courtesy, respect and dignity by all criminal justice and victim support services.</li> <li>2. Be given clear, timely and consistent information about your rights and entitlements and, if appropriate, be referred to victims and legal support services.</li> <li>3. Be told about the police investigation at key stages.</li> <li>4. Be told about the prosecution.</li> <li>5. Be told about the outcome of any bail applications.</li> <li>6. Have the court process explained to you, including your role as a witness.</li> <li>7. As far as practicable, be protected from unnecessary contact with, and intimidation by, the accused and their family and supporters, as well as defence witnesses while you are at court.</li> <li>8. Prepare a Victim Impact Statement (VIS) which may be considered by the court in sentencing the offender, and have access to the assistance you require to prepare a VIS.</li> <li>9. Have your personal information not disclosed except in accordance with the <i>Information Privacy Act 2000</i>.</li> <li>10. Have your property that is held for investigation or evidence stored and handled in a lawful, respectful and secure manner and returned as soon as practicable.</li> <li>11. If you are the victim of a violent crime, request that the court order the offender to pay you compensation; and apply for financial assistance from the government for harm resulting from the crime.</li> <li>12. Apply to be included on the Victims Register (if eligible).</li> </ol>
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Source: Department of Justice.

## 1.4 Victims Support Agency

The Victims Support Agency (VSA), within DOJ, was established in 2004 to implement the government's policy on victims of crime. VSA replaced the Victims Referral and Assistance Service, which was established in 1997 to coordinate services to victims.

VSA is responsible for:

- conducting research and developing policy relating to victims of crime
- engaging stakeholders and conducting community education
- ongoing implementation of the Victims' Charter
- administering victims' services.

In 2009–10, VSA's budget was \$9.98 million. VSA used over half of this, \$5.40 million, to purchase services from not-for-profit community agencies.

### 1.4.1 Services for victims

VSA administers a range of services for victims, including the Victims of Crime Helpline (the Helpline), the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program, and the Victims Register. According to the DOJ Annual Report, in 2009–10, VSA provided services to 9 662 victims of crime, which represents 24.8 per cent of the number of victims of crime recorded by Victoria Police. This is an increase of 2 766 (40.1 per cent) from 2007–08.

#### Victims of Crime Helpline

The Helpline is a telephone service for victims of crime to call to discuss needs arising from being the victim of a crime and to access further services. It has operated since 1997 and is centrally administered and operated by the VSA. Helpline officers give information and advice about the criminal justice system and processes. Helpline officers also assess callers' needs and refer eligible victims to other services, in particular, counselling and assistance services. By making the referral, the victim is not left to themselves to make initial contact with the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP) provider.

Between 2007–08 and 2009–10, the number of VACP clients who were referred by the Helpline increased from 206 to 1 319 (540 per cent). There were nearly 12 000 calls to the Helpline in 2009.

#### Victims Assistance and Counselling Program services

VACP provides practical support and a range of therapeutic interventions including counselling via a case management framework to eligible victims of crime. People who are primary and secondary victims of crimes against the person or related victims of crime where the primary victim is deceased are eligible for the VACP.

VSA contracts and funds nine not-for-profit organisations to deliver the program in eight DOJ regions covering 31 locations across Victoria. Between 2007–08 and 2009–10, the number of new people using VACP services has increased by 145 per cent, from 2 378 to 5 822.

#### Victims Register

Victims of crime who meet eligibility criteria can apply to be included on the Victims Register. A person is eligible to be included on the register if the relevant prisoner is under sentence or subject to an extended supervision order, supervision or detention order, and if the applicant is one of the following:

- the victim or primary care giver of the victim of violent crime committed by the prisoner
- a family member of a victim who died as a direct result of the criminal act committed by the prisoner

- a person who has been the spouse or domestic partner of a prisoner who has a current family violence intervention order against the prisoner
- a person who has a history of family violence against the prisoner, at the discretion of the Secretary of the Department of Justice
- a person who has a substantial connection to the relevant offence for which the prisoner has been sentenced or placed on an extended supervision order, supervision or detention order, at the discretion of the Secretary of the Department of Justice.

If a person is on the register they can receive information at key points while the relevant offender is under sentence or extended supervision. Victims on the register also have the right to make a written submission to the Adult Parole Board when the prisoner is being considered for parole, and additionally to make a written submission to the court and the Adult Parole Board when the prisoner is being considered for a supervision or detention order. VSA administers the register and at 31 January 2010, there were 413 victims on the register.

## 1.5 Audit objective and scope

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The audit objective was to determine the extent to which:

- victims support services help victims recover from the effects of crime
- victims have been treated by the Victims Support Agency and service providers in a manner that is consistent with the principles of the Victims' Charter.

## 1.6 Structure of report

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The rest of this report is structured as follows:

- Part 2 examines the design and management of victims' services.
- Part 3 examines the evaluation, monitoring and reporting of provision of victims' services.

## 1.7 Audit method and cost

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The audit was performed in accordance with the Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards. The total cost of the audit was \$250 000.

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# 2 Service design and management

## At a glance

### Background

The Victims Support Agency (VSA), within the Department of Justice, is responsible for implementing the government's policy response to victims of crime. Current services comprise the Victims of Crime Helpline and the Victims Register, which are managed directly by VSA, and the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP), which is delivered by community agencies across the state.

### Conclusion

Services for victims are soundly-based and generally implemented as intended. Improvements to areas including complaints handling and case management would further enhance service delivery as well as provide greater transparency and assurance that quality standards are met.

### Findings

- VSA has designed services for victims of crime based on sound evidence and research, and is generally delivering these services in line with this design.
- There is insufficient guidance to VACP providers on what constitutes good practice, particularly relating to needs assessment and wait list management.
- While complaints about the Victims' Charter are managed according to appropriate guidelines, insufficient data is recorded on timeliness of resolution.
- There are insufficient documented guidelines for managing non-Charter complaints, and the details of these complaints are not recorded. Consequently, it is not possible to assure the effective management of these complaints.
- Security of victims' personal information is generally sound, though a significant compromise was noted at one of the four providers visited.

### Recommendations

The Department of Justice should:

- provide more guidance on what constitutes good practice to VACP providers in terms of needs assessment and the management of waiting lists
- improve the complaints management process by:
  - applying the process for Charter complaints to non-Charter complaints
  - reporting on performance against timeliness targets.

## 2.1 Introduction

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The Victims Support Agency (VSA) replaced the Victims Referral and Assistance Service in 2004, and management of victims' services was returned to the Department of Justice (DOJ) from the Department of Human Services (DHS) in 2007. In 2009–10, DOJ made changes to the service delivery model to better meet victims' needs.

The services currently managed by VSA are the:

- Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP), delivered at 31 sites across Victoria by nine not-for-profit community agencies.
- Victims of Crime Helpline (the Helpline), which operates Monday to Friday 8am to 11pm.
- Victims Register.

This chapter examines whether VSA has designed services based on a sound evidence base, and whether it is implementing these services effectively. VAGO examined practices at VSA and at four of the nine VACP providers.

## 2.2 Conclusion

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Services for victims are soundly-based and generally implemented as intended. Improvements to areas including complaints handling and case management would further enhance service delivery as well as provide greater transparency and assurance that quality standards are met.

## 2.3 Evidence supporting design of service

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Soundly-based evidence and research necessarily inform the design and provision of services, however, when compared with other areas of criminology, the research base dedicated to the study of victims is less developed. The collection of information about victims is difficult because:

- Victims may not want to access services or participate in the evaluation of services and are free not to. This reduces the ability to collect a sufficient sample size for research.
- Victims may be retraumatised by participation in surveys and evaluations and evaluators make efforts to avoid this. As such, the methodologies used tend to result in low participation rates which compromise the validity of research results.
- Victims accessing services are not necessarily representative of the total population of all victims. However, these victims are easier to recruit for research, and can bias the results.
- Victims of unreported crime are unidentified and less likely to have made contact with government agencies about their experiences as a victim.

Nonetheless, an evidence base has accumulated about the needs of victims, based on:

- evaluations of existing services in Victoria and other jurisdictions, containing surveys of victims and non-victims and consultations with service providers and other parties
- academic research projects, such as comparisons of the effectiveness of treatment approaches
- surveys dedicated to collection of data about victims of crime
- reviews of other aspects of victims' services, such as police referral practices.

### 2.3.1 Design based on evidence

The design of services by VSA is in line with the accumulated evidence about victims' needs. The evidence emphasises that:

- The duration and intensity of the effects of crime can be significantly reduced by immediate support and information following a crime. The VSA's current service delivery model reflects this by emphasising the need for quick response, and by aiming to minimise delays and streamline service provision.
- Victims should not unnecessarily have to repeat their story. The current design is intended to reduce this, by coordinating government services and actively referring victims to services so that victims do not have to tell their story to the Helpline and then again to a VACP provider.
- Some victims need help navigating the justice system, and some have been retraumatised by their experience of the system. VSA has addressed this need by providing practical assistance as well as support in dealing with the justice system through VACP. The transfer of all functions relating to victims' services from DHS to DOJ in 2007 means that staff engaging with victims should have better access to information about the criminal justice system and stronger networks with other justice agencies. This should help them to better support victims in the justice system.
- Victims have varied needs and the more flexibility that service providers are allowed, the more effectively they can meet these needs. VSA redesigned their service delivery model in 2009 to address this.

### 2.3.2 Practice in other jurisdictions

Victoria is largely consistent with practices in other jurisdictions. These vary depending on historical factors, such as whether victims' services are run by the government or the community, and what type of victim is eligible for services.

Services available to victims typically include a helpline, and more intensive engagement providing assessment, case planning, practical assistance and justice advocacy. This is consistent with Victoria's victims support services.

## 2.4 Management of service delivery

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VAGO examined VSA's management of service delivery through the Helpline, VACP and the Victims Register. This included aspects of implementing the Victims' Charter, such as complaints management and security of victims' personal information.

VSA is generally delivering services well. VSA has made ongoing changes to the Helpline that have significantly improved its delivery of services. One objective of the Helpline is to provide information to victims of crime about the services available to them and the criminal justice system. The extension of the hours of the Helpline to 8am–11pm, Monday to Friday, means there is more opportunity for victims to access this information. Previously, contact with VACP providers was initiated by the victim. Now, the Helpline staff organise this contact on behalf of the victim and this has contributed to an increase in the number of victims accessing the VACP. An electronic referral system currently being implemented should further improve the efficiency of these active referrals and engage victims in services faster.

Under the *Corrections Act 1986*, victims of violent crime can be included on the Victims Register. Registered victims can receive information about the relevant offender including the length of sentence, earliest possible release date, and whether an offender has been granted parole. VSA processed applications to be included on the register in a timely manner, and information provided to registered victims was generally clear and timely.

Victims Register staff must find a balance between providing information to victims and the possibility that receiving this information may retraumatise the victim. Staff use discretion in providing information and VAGO found the principles they base this on, and the use of this discretion, appropriate. For example, where a victim has already been informed of the prisoner's earliest possible release date, Victims Register staff are unlikely to provide information to a victim about a prisoner's parole hearing until and unless the prisoner is granted parole. However, if a victim specifically requests this information, VSA provides it even if the prisoner does not receive parole.

Aspects of VSA's management, with areas for improvement, are discussed below. These relate to record keeping, waiting lists, complaints management and securing information.



### 2.4.1 Record keeping at Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers

Case workers should keep up-to-date records about clients to allow an ongoing and seamless client management, particularly where another case worker takes over. A victim may be retraumatised if they have to explain their situation again to another case worker. Adequate record keeping is also necessary so that the appropriateness of actions can be demonstrated and reviewed for accountability and quality assurance purposes.

VACP providers are required to comply with the VACP guidelines, which include directions about case management. VAGO reviewed a random sample of 70 case files and found that generally, from the information available, VACP providers delivered services in a timely and appropriate manner, in line with the guidelines. However, there was variation in the level of relevant information recorded in the files regarding the management of clients, and the services provided were not always documented. This reduced the degree of assurance over the quality of service delivery.

The lack of appropriate and sufficient information was due to insufficient record keeping at two of the four VACP providers visited. For example, financial records indicated services had been provided but this was not clearly evident in the case management files. Consequently, it was difficult to form an opinion about the extent or quality of information and services provided at these locations. At VACP providers where the importance of record keeping was emphasised, case workers kept better records.

A lack of sufficiently detailed instructions on how to implement the VACP guidelines also contributed to the lack of information. For example, the guidelines state that case workers must identify and address needs. However, in the majority of cases, the identification and management of needs was not clearly recorded. VSA should provide more detailed instructions on identifying and addressing victims' needs. Two VACP providers visited by the audit team had developed a document to record needs and associated actions, although this was not always used.

### 2.4.2 Waiting lists for the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program

Research highlights the importance of immediate practical support following a crime and the VSA service model emphasises a quick response. The four VACP providers visited by VAGO had a waiting or pending list of some kind. Furthermore, a quarter of the 52 VACP clients surveyed by VSA in 2010 reported they were put on a waiting list, seven of whom reported waiting for more than one month.

At three of the providers visited, clients' immediate needs were met as necessary, then some were placed on the waiting list until a case worker was available to help them with less urgent needs.

However, at the fourth VACP provider visited, which in 2009–10 had an unexpected increase in demand that was 134 per cent of the target for new clients, immediate needs were not always met. In eight of the twenty cases reviewed by VAGO at this provider, clients waited for extended periods and experienced gaps in service provision of between six weeks and five months.

VSA has developed Wait List Demand Management Guidelines that provide high level guidance but not detailed advice on how to implement a demand management system. While this allows VACP providers flexibility in implementing a system, variations in how VACP providers manage demand means that victims receive different standards of service depending on which VACP provider they receive services from. For example, one VACP provider sends letters to victims placed on the waiting list, informing them of how long they are likely to have to wait to access services. This gives victims clear expectations on when they will receive services.

The differences in how the VACP providers manage their waiting lists are also observed through their differing approaches to supporting victims of crime. For example, one of the VACP providers visited by VAGO regularly makes contact with victims on the waiting list to maintain engagement and to identify any changes in individuals' needs. However, another VACP provider believes this is unnecessary, and that if a victim wanted to call again, they would. This argues a need for more guidance from VSA to highlight what good practice should entail.

## Recommendation

1. The Department of Justice should provide more guidance to Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers on what constitutes good practice in terms of needs assessment and the management of waiting lists.

### 2.4.3 Managing complaints

There are separate ways for handling different types of complaints about the provision of victims' services and the treatment of victims:

- The Victims' Charter complaints process, for handling complaints made against the principles of the Charter. For example, a complaint could be about a victim not being provided the information they are entitled to under the Charter.
- Complaints against the VSA business unit, excluding Charter complaints. An example of a non-Charter complaint could be about the behaviour of an individual VSA staff member.
- The VACP Client Complaints Management Protocol, for complaints made to individual VACP providers.
- Letters of complaint to the Attorney-General or DOJ relating to victims' services may in some circumstances be managed directly by VSA depending on the nature of the complaint. For example, complaints received from members of the public regarding VSA's direct area of accountability such as funding or service delivery would typically be responded to by VSA.

## Charter complaints

VSA has developed procedures and guidelines for managing complaints against the Victims' Charter. VAGO assessed these against the requirements identified by Ombudsman Victoria for a good complaints handling system. We found that it is generally in line with better practice, providing clear direction on how to manage complaints. Between January and September 2010, VSA received 29 Charter-related complaints, which were managed in accordance with the procedures and guidelines.

However, there is insufficient data recorded about the timeliness of complaint handling. For Charter complaints, the only information recorded is the date the complaint was received and the date that it was entered in the database. Without information on how long it takes to resolve complaints, the timeliness of complaint management cannot be reliably assessed.

In August 2010, there were no timeliness targets for the resolution of complaints. Subsequent to this audit, VSA has developed timeliness requirements for all complaints it receives. VSA should also include these targets in its complaints reporting.

## Non-Charter complaints

VSA does not systematically record non-Charter complaints. It is therefore not possible for VAGO to verify whether any complaints of this type have been received.

The guidelines for handling non-Charter complaints are insufficiently detailed. The only documentation for managing non-Charter complaints is the:

- Helpline Practice Manual, which guides Helpline staff in referring complaints to relevant other parties, such as the police, but which does not contain a process for managing complaints.
- Complaints Management System, which is not a detailed process for managing complaints. It contains some minimum requirements, such as all complaints should be entered on the Resolve database. However, it does not outline the key steps in complaints management for non-Charter complaints, such as contacting both parties involved in the complaint.

Without a clear and sufficiently detailed process, it is not possible to assure the effective management of non-Charter complaints. However, given the apparently small number of non-Charter complaints, the procedures for Charter complaints could be appropriately adopted for non-Charter complaints.

## Complaints to Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers

All VACP providers visited by VAGO had complaint handling policies and procedures that fulfilled the requirements of the VACP Client Complaints Management Protocol. This protocol satisfied the Ombudsman's requirements and complaints were well managed. VSA has specified time requirements, such as the requirement that a VACP provider must respond to complaints within 30 days of initial receipt and inform the complainant of the outcome of the investigation.

### Recommendation

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2. The Department of Justice should improve the complaints management process by:
  - applying the process for handling Charter-related complaints to non-Charter complaints
  - reporting on subsequent performance against timeliness targets.

## 2.4.4 Securing victims' personal information

Security of victims' personal information is a principle of the *Victims' Charter Act 2006*. Data security is an important area of the VSA's responsibilities, given the sensitive nature of the information that the VSA and VACP providers use and maintain on a daily basis.

Data security over victims' personal information is in most respects implemented in accordance with published policy and procedures. These policies and procedures ranged from Information Security Policies to Case Notes Policies and Procedures and provide appropriate coverage of information privacy matters. Maintaining the privacy of victims' personal information is an important focus of VSA and the VACP providers and the level of staff awareness of requirements is high.

However, the process of setting up a new VACP staff member with access to the Resolve database can take between two and four weeks. As a result, VAGO observed that staff at one VACP location were circumventing policy and procedure by sharing access information to allow new staff access to the Resolve database. As a result, control over improper use of systems is compromised.

# 3 Measuring performance

## At a glance

### Background

The Department of Justice evaluates services to victims and collects performance information on the delivery of services managed by the Victims Support Agency (VSA).

### Conclusion

There are inherent difficulties in determining and measuring outcomes for victims of crime, namely, the extent to which victims recover from the effects of crime. Because of this, greater reliance on effective performance monitoring is required if VSA is to obtain adequate assurance over the quality of services to victims. However, VSA's performance monitoring and reporting arrangements lack key elements. As such, VSA does not provide sufficient assurance that services are delivered as intended.

### Findings

- VSA has conducted evaluations to collect performance information, but these have not determined whether services have improved outcomes for victims.
- VSA has evaluated the Victims' Charter and findings suggest that the Charter is improving victims' experiences of the justice system.
- There are no objectives or key performance indicators (KPI) for VSA. While there are objectives, KPIs and performance measures for the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP), VSA is currently not collecting information for all measures contained in the funding and service agreement.
- VSA does not quality assure service delivery by VACP providers.

### Recommendations

The Department of Justice should:

- develop objectives and KPIs for the VSA
- refine the current performance measure on the number of services delivered to differentiate the types of services provided
- improve performance reporting on the services provided by developing KPIs for the Victims of Crime Helpline and the Victims Register, and refining its performance monitoring and reporting framework for the VACP
- improve the methodology used to survey victims of crime
- conduct quality assurance activities over VACP providers.

## 3.1 Introduction

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As discussed in Part 2, the Victims Support Agency (VSA) designed its services using sound evidence from appropriate sources including evaluation, research projects, and surveys. To inform itself about whether services to victims are in line with this design and how effectively they are supporting victims, VSA should have a range of mechanisms for evaluation, performance monitoring and reporting, and quality assurance.

This chapter examines whether VSA conducts appropriate activities to provide itself assurance about the effectiveness of its services.

## 3.2 Conclusion

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There are inherent difficulties in determining and measuring outcomes for victims of crime, namely, the extent to which victims recover from the effects of crime. Because of this, greater reliance on effective performance monitoring is required if VSA is to obtain adequate assurance over the quality of services to victims. However, VSA's performance monitoring and reporting arrangements lack key elements. As such, VSA does not provide sufficient assurance that services are delivered as intended

## 3.3 Evaluating outcomes for victims

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Effective evaluation can identify outcomes, the impact of policy and service delivery, and the extent to which objectives have been met. Information from evaluations can inform decision making and continuous improvement activities.

There are difficulties in collecting information about outcomes for victims:

- Evaluations of victims often rely on feedback from victims themselves, but it is difficult to engage with a sufficient number of victims to have a statistically valid sample size, because victims may not wish to be involved.
- It is difficult to define what an outcome for a victim is, particularly in developing quantifiable objectives and outcomes, as there is no clear definition of what 'recovery from' or 'management of' the effects of crime may be from a case management perspective.
- Achieving outcomes for victims can vary between individuals, irrespective of the services provided. This will be influenced by each individual's social and family networks, their history of prior victimisation, their experiences with police and the court system, the sentences handed down to offenders, the crime type perpetrated against them, and other factors.
- Some victims may never recover from the effects of crime despite the best efforts of service providers. In these instances, the optimum outcome may be, for example, a positive experience with the justice system.

Nevertheless, VSA has conducted several activities to try to collect this information.

## Evaluation of the Victims' Charter

The *Victims' Charter Act 2006* included a commitment to monitor and review the Charter. Shortly after this legislation was introduced, the VSA commenced evaluating the effectiveness of the Charter's implementation in achieving its stated purposes and objectives. An evaluation report was produced in 2010.

This report recognised that there is a lack of data available on victims and their experiences through the criminal justice system. To address this, the evaluation framework identified existing data sources as well as a range of supplementary processes from which to collect relevant data. Because of the limitations of the data, the report did not purport to be representative of all victims of crime.

The evaluation has provided information on the effectiveness of implementation of each of the Charter principles. It found that victims' willingness to report crime to police may be increasing since the Charter was introduced. It also suggests that victims' experiences of the criminal justice system are now less likely to result in retraumatisation or reduced confidence in the system.

However, given the lack of comprehensive data prior to the evaluation, the Department of Justice (DOJ) considers the evaluation provides benchmark data for future comparisons. Therefore, because of the limitations of the data, the report's conclusions on the impact of the Charter's implementation are properly qualified.

## Other evaluations

In addition to the evaluation of the Victims' Charter, VSA has conducted other evaluations:

- **Evaluation of the Victim Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP), 2007**—This aimed to assess the effectiveness of the previous service delivery model. The evaluation was unable to identify information with which to measure service quality, effectiveness of services or client outcomes. It relied on a client survey which suggested the VACP service was contributing to positive client outcomes. However, the sample size of 95 was too small to be representative of the total population of victims receiving services. This was noted by the survey consultant engaged by VSA who commented that *'the small sample size of the client survey means that the results presented throughout this report cannot be regarded as representing the opinions of the total population and should be viewed as indicative only'*.
- **Evaluation of the Victims of Crime Helpline (the Helpline), 2010**—This collected information on the effectiveness of processes, which can provide some assurance over the quality of service delivery. However, it did not measure the experience of victims with the service system or the impact of services.

- **VSA process review, 2010**—The review focused on the effectiveness of the services being provided by the VSA, in terms of whether VSA had established an adequate internal control framework for delivery of services to victims, and whether this framework had been consistently applied. It did not make conclusions on outcomes or the quality of service delivery to victims.
- **VACP client survey, 2010**—VSA conducted the first VACP client survey in 2010 under the new service delivery model. However, the sample size was too small to represent the total population. Furthermore, the questions asked in the survey cannot provide information on outcomes for victims. The only aspect of quality examined is the overall satisfaction of the quality of service. These surveys are an opportunity to collect information about the impact VACP services have on victims. For example, it could ask victims about the degree to which they think they have returned to the way they lived their lives prior to the crime, and the extent to which the VACP services contributed to this.

The difficulties in collecting information from victims have limited the ability to make conclusions about the effectiveness of service delivery. Given these difficulties, as an additional source of information, DOJ could consider surveying health professionals such as counsellors and other service providers such as solicitors to whom VSA and VACP providers refer victims. These surveys could identify whether the respondents believe that services provided have helped victims recover from, or manage the effects of, the crime. This would also be an opportunity for these providers to identify alternative treatment strategies.

## 3.4 Monitoring and reporting on performance

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The previous chapter identified that the services delivered by VSA were based on sound evidence. Given the inherent difficulties of conducting large-scale evaluations of outcomes, we expected that VSA would have in place a range of mechanisms to inform itself about whether it was providing services as intended. This would include a robust performance monitoring and reporting framework, as well as quality assurance activities to verify and independently assess whether performance is in line with expectations.

### 3.4.1 Performance of the Victims Support Agency

#### Objectives

Objectives are statements of what a program, agency or department intends to achieve through its activities. Good objectives:

- provide a clear focus for the development and implementation of initiatives and activities
- provide clear boundaries in which to conduct these activities
- are used to measure performance, in terms of the extent to which objectives have been achieved.



Guidelines by the Department of Treasury and Finance describe how objectives should:

- state what the agency's outputs can be reasonably expected to achieve
- have an explicit relationship with government priorities
- be measurable.

VSA does not have any objectives against which its performance as an agency can be monitored and measured over time.

Without agency-level objectives, it is not possible to clearly demonstrate alignment of government, departmental, agency and program objectives, and therefore clearly demonstrate the contribution of activities at the operational level to higher level government objectives.

### Performance indicators and measures

Performance indicators are used to provide information to measure the extent of achievement of objectives. As discussed above, VSA has no agency-level objectives. There are also no agency-level performance indicators to demonstrate the effectiveness or efficiency of VSA's performance.

Performance measures are used to quantify outputs. VSA has one agency-level performance measure: the number of victims receiving a service. This is reported in the annual budget papers and the annual report and is the only performance information available externally that is regularly reported.

This measure is limited in its usefulness for performance information because the number of people accessing services largely depends upon crime rates, the ability of individuals to cope without assistance and whether or not an individual victim wants assistance. These factors are beyond VSA's control.

The current measure is further limited by the way in which VSA is recording a 'service'. The measure is an aggregation of several types of services and does not differentiate between them. The measure includes:

- unique VACP clients
- unique Victims Register clients
- calls to the Victims of Crime Helpline, excluding those that become VACP referrals.

Consequently, the measure gives equal weight to a short call received by the Helpline and intensive service provided through VACP.

While it is important to report the number of people receiving services, differentiation between types of services, as well as additional measures such as appropriateness of referral and timeliness of response would provide a more meaningful assessment of VSA's activities.

### Agency-level reporting

VSA prepares a quarterly report to the Executive Director, Community Operations and Strategy. This is the only regular, documented report on the work undertaken by the VSA. The report covers a range of areas including Victims' Services.

The reports are not always produced. VSA supplied reports from January 2009 but these reports were not mandatory. No reports were produced in July 2009 or July 2010. This is offset to some extent by the Director, VSA and the Executive Director meeting every three weeks. These meetings, however, are not minuted. As such, records of VSA's performance are not consistently maintained.

### Recommendations

3. The Department of Justice should develop objectives supported by key performance indicators for the Victims Support Agency that are consistent with guidelines established by the Department of Treasury and Finance.
4. The Department of Justice should refine the current performance measure on the number of services delivered to differentiate between the various types of services provided, namely the Victims of Crime Helpline, the Victims Register and the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program.

### 3.4.2 Performance of the Victims of Crime Helpline and Victims Register

VSA has identified clear objectives for the Helpline, which can be measured and would provide information to decision makers. The Victims Register is established under the *Corrections Act 1986* and has a purpose, which can be considered to be an objective.

However, there are no KPIs to demonstrate achievement of objectives for the Victims of Crime Helpline or the Victims Register. While there are oversight mechanisms such as the Victims Register Steering Committee, there is no specific performance framework for either the Helpline or the Victims Register. Monitoring mechanisms used for each are the agency-level performance indicator, monthly statistical reports and the quarterly whole-of-VSA reports.

The reports for both the Helpline and the Victims Register contain useful input and output information. However, these reports do not provide information on the level of performance achieved. Performance measures and indicators should provide information about the quality of service delivery. For example, DOJ could measure the appropriateness and timeliness of referrals made by the Helpline.

The coordinator of the Victims Register advised that she conducts audits every month of the files of the previous month's applications, as well as examining between five and 15 existing cases. No record of these audits is kept. The audit results could be used to report on the quality of service delivery.

## Recommendation

5. The Department of Justice should improve performance reporting on the services provided by developing key performance indicators for the Victims of Crime Helpline and the Victims Register.

### 3.4.3 Performance of the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program

VSA included a performance monitoring and reporting framework in its funding and service agreements with VACP providers. The framework is intended to monitor performance using a number of measurement techniques.

#### Objectives and key performance indicators

VSA has clearly identified objectives and performance indicators for the VACP. The objectives are appropriate and relevant. However, there is confusion in the application of the performance monitoring and reporting framework, where VACP objectives are incorrectly referred to as performance indicators. There should be a clear distinction between the objectives (what is intended to be achieved) and the performance indicators (the extent to which objectives have been achieved).

#### Performance measures and targets

VSA have developed a sound suite of measures on the quality and quantity of services delivered. However, the effectiveness of these measures has been limited due to delays in establishing targets. According to the funding and service agreements, targets for performance measures were to be set 12 months after the commencement of the contract. These would be based on data collected through client surveys and by the Resolve database, which is the case management database into which VACP providers are required to enter information about each client.

Delays to the required Resolve software modifications meant that Resolve did not start collecting the relevant data until March 2010 and adequate data to set targets for performance measures will not be captured until March 2011, almost two years into the three-year agreements. For those measures determined by the client surveys, the limited response to the first survey conducted in 2010 could not be used to set targets as it was unrepresentative.

One of the key measures that VSA reported it uses in monitoring the performance of VACP providers is the number of new clients. Each VACP provider has an annual target for the number of new clients. This target is contained in the funding and service agreements between the VSA and the VACP providers, and is based on crime rates and populations statistics. In 2009–10, the total target for the VACP statewide was 6 073. According to the Resolve database, the actual number of new clients was 5 822, which is 96 per cent of the target. While most providers came close to the target, one provider achieved 76 per cent of its target, and another 134 per cent. The achievement of the target for each VACP provider is shown in Figure 3A.

**Figure 3A**  
**Target number of new Victims Assistance and Counselling Program clients and the actual number of new clients by region, 2009–10**



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, based on Department of Justice data.

The targets do not reflect a realistic assessment of the resources and time needed for different types of clients, as they do not take into account regional differences in client needs and complexity. For example, by comparison with other regions, one region has higher rates of disadvantage and diversity, as measured by the high proportion of people for whom English is not their first language. The clients accessing the VACP in this region have more complex needs and require more resource-intensive engagement.

The current target is for new clients only. It does not take into account the number of existing clients. Clients may engage with the VACP long term, in particular, clients with ongoing needs or who need help with compensation claims and court processes. VSA reported that the VACP was 26 per cent over statewide target, when accounting for the services delivered to existing clients.

The VACP targets should reflect the extent of services delivered taking into account the differences of client bases and the demands of longer-term clients.

## Recommendations

6. The Department of Justice should improve performance reporting on the services provided by refining its performance monitoring and reporting framework for the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program to clearly distinguish between objectives, indicators and measures.
7. The Department of Justice should refine its target for the number of new clients to reflect the extent of services delivered and the resources and time required.

## Performance measurement tools

VSA uses several performance tools to monitor the VACP providers, including quarterly data reports, client surveys, and half yearly VACP reports. Meetings between the VACP providers and the program and services advisors are also conducted each quarter.

### *Quarterly data reports*

DOJ maintains the Resolve database to record data about each client. Reports from the database are produced each quarter and these are VSA's most regular and detailed tool for monitoring the performance of the VACP providers.

However, there are concerns about the:

- integrity of the data
- consistency of reporting
- consistency of data entry
- reports not containing information on important performance measures
- reports not providing sufficient information to assess the standard of service delivery.

VSA does not independently verify the data in the reports. Minutes from meetings between VSA and VACP providers show that the providers do not think the data reports accurately reflect service provision. In some cases, VSA agreed that data was inaccurate, due to data entry by VACP providers. During the conduct of the audit, DOJ upgraded its software so that providers could also run reports. This will allow VACP providers to verify the accuracy of information and monitor their own performance more closely.

The information contained in the data reports is not consistent across the state. For example, in the last quarter of 2009–10, the reports of seven VACP providers contained 'new client response time' while three did not. VSA is therefore not measuring performance of VACP providers consistently against critical performance measures.

Additionally, data entry is not consistent. For example, two of the VACP providers visited by the audit team did not use the waiting list function on Resolve, despite having a waiting list, while the remaining two did. To address this, VSA introduced business rules in June 2010, and the requirement that all new staff complete the Resolve database training before being given access.

The Resolve database is the measurement tool for 11 of the 20 performance measures for the VACP. However, the data reports do not cover all the measures for which Resolve is the data collection tool, including critical measures such as the 'number and percentage of clients who attended an intake and assessment appointment within five business days of contacting the VACP'. The reporting of performance measures is shown in Figure 3B.

**Figure 3B**  
**Performance measures contained in quarterly Resolve data reports**

Performance measure	Measurement tool	Reported
Number of new clients	Resolve reports and VACP half yearly reports	✓
Number of hours of practical support per client	Resolve reports and VACP half yearly reports	✓
Number and percentage of victims responded to within one business day	Resolve reports and VACP half yearly reports	7 out of 10 VACP reports
Number and percentage of clients who attended an intake and assessment appointment within five business days of contacting VACP	Resolve reports	✗
Number and percentage of clients on VACP waiting lists	Resolve reports	✓
Number and percentage of clients referred by VACP for counselling	Resolve reports	✗
Number and percentage of VACP clients who received counselling and for whom a treatment plan was developed	Resolve reports	✗
Number and type of client referrals made to other Court Support Services	Resolve reports and VACP half yearly reports	To some extent
Number of shared activities undertaken with key stakeholders	Resolve reports and VACP half yearly reports	✓
Number and percentage of eligible clients referred to VACP and referred by VACP.	Resolve reports and VACP half yearly reports	✓
Number and percentage of VACP victims from the following backgrounds (e.g., Indigenous)	Resolve reports and VACP half yearly reports	✓

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

The functionality of the Resolve database dictates VSA's ability to collect information. An upgrade in March 2010 allowed VSA to start collecting important performance information that it previously could not collect, including the number of clients receiving intake within five days, and waiting lists. However, it still cannot collect all information in line with VSA's monitoring requirements.

The reporting format for key areas of performance does not provide sufficient information to assess the standard of service delivery. For example, for the measure of 'new client response time', this only reports whether the response time was between one to eight days or more than eight days. It does not reflect how much more than eight days. Five of these six agencies had large numbers of cases where response time was over eight days; however, the full extent of this delay was not reflected as part of performance reporting.

### *Client surveys*

The funding and service agreement with VACP providers states that client surveys will be conducted to determine the extent to which providers helped victims deal with the effects of crime and improved their experience of the justice system. This is currently VSA's only instrument to measure the effectiveness of services provided by VACP providers.

Two of the nine measures that are intended to be measured by the client surveys are not included in the survey questionnaire. These are the number and percentage of clients who report that:

- VACP services assisted in their management of the effects of crime
- they received practical support from the VACP provider in their contact with the criminal justice system.

The measures not included in the survey are critical for outcomes information and should be included. Most of the questions in the client survey currently do not provide information on quality. Instead they focus on data such as the number of clients who experienced a certain type of crime, or demographic information.

In 2010, VSA conducted the first client survey under the agreement. VSA asked the VACP providers to select a random sample using the Resolve database and in accordance with business rules developed by VSA. While VAGO received some assurance that the sample was selected in a random manner at the VACP providers visited, there are concerns that the sample could be biased as it was not selected independently of the agency.

VSA has outsourced the conduct of the next survey to a social research group. To avoid the possibility of bias, the contractor could be responsible for identifying the sample group. Under the funding and service agreement, this information can be accessed by third parties, such as contractors, at DOJ's discretion. The random selection of survey participants by contractors can occur while maintaining victims' confidentiality. Aspects of survey administration where victims' surnames would be required, such as obtaining victims' consent, could continue to be managed by VACP providers.

Response rates to surveys of victims of crime are typically low. In these circumstances, it is prudent to maximise the response rate. However actions taken by VSA have inadvertently reduced the response rate:

- VSA limited the number of clients surveyed from each VACP provider to 50 to provide a consistent response rate across the state. This not only limited the extent of responses but would not have enabled VSA to make valid comparisons due to the variation between the regions and the client population within the regions. 413 possible survey participants were identified and 52 participated in the survey. This response rate is too low to have reliable findings and to be able to draw conclusions.
- VACP providers obtained approval from clients to participate in the survey at their initial assessment. However, these approvals were not used by VSA to establish the survey population. Instead, a postal invitation was used to obtain client approval. Given that clients were required to respond in writing to the postal invitation before they were included in the survey population, this may have reduced the pool of participants.

In relation to the last point above, it is acknowledged that the use of a victim's prior approval to establish the survey population needs to be managed in a careful and sensitive manner to avoid the potential for retraumatisation. As an illustration, victims could be reminded in writing of their prior approval to participate before the survey process commences. At this point, they would be provided with clear guidance on how to withdraw their consent should they not wish to participate.

In their report of the results of the client survey, VSA recognised that this sample size was limited and that meaningful conclusions about the whole population could not be drawn based on this sample size. Furthermore, VSA identified the need for strategies to increase response rate.

### *Other Victims Assistance and Counselling Program reporting*

As well as the data reports, each VACP provider submits a half yearly report and participates in a quarterly meeting with its program and services advisor located in DOJ regions. Performance information is provided to VSA. These are opportunities for VSA to collect information that is either not included in the Resolve data reports or which requires further explanation.

However, the half-yearly report is very general and could be strengthened with inclusion of quantitative as well as qualitative information. For example, it included a section on complaints received by the VACP provider, but the template did not require providers to report the number of complaints or any other information on timeliness or client satisfaction. Since the completion of our examination, VSA has advised that the half-yearly report was reviewed in November 2010 and now includes more detailed complaints management key performance indicators.



Two of the four VACP providers visited did not use a function introduced in the upgrade of the Resolve database in March 2010 to enable the recording of a waiting list. For example, one provider informed VAGO that they do not record a waiting list on Resolve because any immediate needs are met. However, the VACP Manager informed VAGO that at any one time there is a waiting list of 20–40 non-urgent cases with a wait time of up to two months. Furthermore, VAGO randomly selected 20 case files at this VACP provider and found that 13 victims had experienced delays of an average of two months on a waiting list or gaps in service. The half-yearly reports could be used to provide this information to VSA, if it has not been recorded on Resolve. However, for the two VACP providers identified, this had not been reflected in any reporting: either via Resolve or in half yearly reports.

#### *Monthly reports by the senior program and services advisor*

In response to an internal audit in 2010, VSA started preparing monthly reports. While these reports do not contain any performance information about the VACP providers, they are used to highlight emerging issues, initiatives, reports received, meetings conducted, staffing and accommodation updates.

## 3.5 Quality assurance over the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers

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Given the lack of performance information available about the VACP providers, we would expect that VSA would conduct sufficient quality assurance activities to collect its own information.

### 3.5.1 Accreditation of Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers

VSA requires all VACP providers to be accredited by the Quality Improvement Council, a not-for-profit body that reviews agencies against its own standards for Community and Primary Health Care Services. However, this accreditation does not guarantee that an agency is complying with VACP guidelines nor does it determine whether providers are effectively meeting their obligations under the funding agreement with the VSA. Furthermore, VSA does not see the accreditation report which may contain qualifications or outstanding issues.

### 3.5.2 Quality assurance by the Victims Support Agency

There is a need for VSA as the accountable agency for providing victim support services to conduct quality assurance activities, such as audits, to determine the extent to which the quality of service delivery by VACP providers is in accordance with funding and service agreement. Although evaluations and reviews, including the client surveys, have provided information about the quality of VACP providers' services, this has been limited and generally a by-product of process reviews. Furthermore, although the client survey asks about client satisfaction with service delivery, a positive response does not necessarily mean that they received a quality service. Research has also consistently demonstrated that surveys of satisfaction overstate the quality of services delivered.

The current funding and service agreement allows VSA to audit the VACP providers. Such audits could be undertaken by the program and service advisors, who are responsible for determining providers' compliance with agreements. Audits could examine, for example, timeliness, the thoroughness of needs identification, and the quality of case and file management.

### 3.5.3 Quality assurance by Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers

There was no consistent, systematic quality assurance conducted by VACP providers. Three of the four VACP providers visited did not conduct any quality assurance activities while one VACP provider conducted ad hoc activities without making any formal record of these.

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## Recommendations

8. The Department of Justice should increase the coverage of quarterly data reporting and the client surveys to include the more critical key performance indicators in the funding and service agreement.
  9. The Department of Justice should improve the methodology used to survey victims of crime about the quality of service delivery by Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers by:
    - increasing the sample size to obtain a representative sample
    - selecting the sample independently of the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers
    - identifying potential participants using existing lists of victims who have agreed to be surveyed.
  10. The Department of Justice should conduct quality assurance activities such as audits of the standard of the provision of services to victims by Victims Assistance and Counselling Program providers.
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# Appendix A.

## *Audit Act 1994* section 16— submissions and comments

### Introduction

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In accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report was provided to the Department of Justice with a request for submissions or comments.

The submissions and comments provided are not subject to audit nor the evidentiary standards required to reach an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

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## Submissions and comments received

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### **RESPONSE provided by the Acting Secretary, Department of Justice**



Department of Justice

Secretary

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Our ref: CD/11/26210

28 JAN 2

Mr Pearson  
Auditor-General  
Victorian Auditor-General's Office  
Level 24, 25 Collins St  
Melbourne Victoria 3000

Dear Mr Pearson,

I acknowledge receipt of the VAGO Proposed Audit Report on the *Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Programs*.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional comments to assist with the finalisation of the proposed report to Parliament, before it is tabled in February 2011. I note that the Victims Support Agency provided written feedback on previous iterations of the report, and the issues raised have since been resolved and incorporated in the Proposed Audit Report.

The Audit process represented an opportunity to improve the outcomes delivered to victims of crime in Victoria, and the department commits to implementing the Audit Recommendations through its Victims Support Agency to continually improve the effectiveness of its victim services.

The Director of the Victims Support Agency, [REDACTED] can be contacted [REDACTED] should you require further information.

Yours sincerely

**TONY LEECH**  
Acting Secretary



# Auditor-General's reports

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## Reports tabled during 2010–11

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Date tabled</b>
Portfolio Departments: Interim Results of the 2009–10 Audits (2010–11:1)	July 2010
Taking Action on Problem Gambling (2010–11:2)	July 2010
Local Government: Interim Results of the 2009–10 Audits (2010–11:3)	August 2010
Water Entities: Interim Results of the 2009–10 Audits (2010–11:4)	August 2010
Public Hospitals: Interim Results of the 2009–10 Audits (2010–11:5)	September 2010
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