



Victorian Government Response to the Commission for Children and Young People's report

Left Behind: Systemic Inquiry into responses to children and young people who are the subject of multiple reports to Child Protection

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August 2026

The Victorian Government is committed to providing the best outcomes for Victorian children and families and is pleased to provide this response to the Commission for Children and Young People's report.

Since the Commission's inquiry was established in late 2024, key reforms to the child protection and family services system have been introduced. The Commission, in its report, recognises that government has commenced significant work to improve the way the child and family service system operates. The Commission also notes that several government-funded early intervention initiatives are having a positive effect on driving down demand for Child Protection, including:

- Connecting Families', the prevention and early intervention service stream within family services
- 'Early Help Family Services', an early intervention program providing tailored support to families
- Child Protection case conferencing at intake to help existing services involved with a family determine and align appropriate responses to children, young people and their families
- Our Place, a holistic place-based approach to supporting the education, health and development of children and families in communities experiencing disadvantage.

This year the Victorian Government will commence the Supporting Stable and Strong Families scheme. The first of its kind in Australia, the scheme introduces a new model of shared responsibilities across the Victorian Government to improve outcomes for children, young people and families engaged with, or at risk of engaging with, the child protection system.

The Victorian Government is also transforming and modernising Family Services to build on its strong evidence-informed base, ensuring it is both easy to navigate and flexible. These reforms support families to receive the right support when they need, preventing problems from escalating, and to keep families safely together. Family Services are now delivered over three simplified and flexible service streams – Connecting Families (community based supports including supported playgroups), Strengthening Families (integrated support for escalating needs) and Restoring Families (intensive family support services).

The release of the Commission's report closely followed the 2026-27 Victorian State Budget, which delivered \$362 million to help protect and support Victoria's most vulnerable children and young people. This included:

- \$165 million over two years to deliver Restoring Families intensive family support services and Pre-1990 Care Leavers Support Services.
- \$126 million to deliver the first stage of a modern, fit-for-purpose ICT system, replacing outdated client information management and reporting systems, enabling better outcomes for children and families.
- \$71 million to support children and young people in residential care and other initiatives.

This built on investment of \$90.1 million over four years in the 2025-26 State Budget to improve outcomes for children and young people in care and \$167.4 million over 2 years for critical early help, diversion and family preservation and reunification services.

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The 2026-27 Victorian State Budget also delivered \$100 million to continue nation-leading work in preventing family violence. This included:

- \$75 million over two years to deliver refuges and crisis accommodation, family violence case management, expanding the Personal Safety Initiative, flexible support package and crisis brokerage, as well as tailored therapeutic support for children and young people to recover from trauma, disrupting lifelong impacts of family violence
- \$23 million over two years to continue the work of the Central Information Point, which plays a critical role in family violence risk assessment and safety planning by consolidating risk information about people using family violence
- \$1 million over two years to continue funding for peak body Sexual Assault Services Victoria, ensuring statewide leadership, advocacy and capability building for the sexual violence sector.

This built on investment of \$114 million over 4 years in 2024-25 State Budget and \$106.2 million over 4 years in 2025-26 State Budget towards family violence supports and services.

The Victorian Government thanks the current and former Commissioners for their work, and the many people who shared their experiences and insights during the inquiry, including children and young people, carers, educators, child protection practitioners, and service providers across Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Community Service Organisations.

	Recommendation	Statement of Intent from Commission	Victorian Government response	Lead portfolio and dept.	Implementation approach and timing
1	Recommendation 1: Increase age of statutory intervention. That the Victorian Government amend the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> to increase the age at which statutory intervention can occur to protect a child, from under 17 years, to under 18 years, and provide additional resourcing to Child Protection to match any expected increase in demand.	This recommendation seeks to ensure that young people aged (or approaching) 17 years are not excluded from receiving a statutory response when they are in need of protection.	Accept in principle Support the intent of this recommendation noting this would align Victoria with all other Australian jurisdictions except New South Wales. Implementation will be subject to government decision making and funding decisions through future state budget processes.	Portfolio: Children Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	To be considered as part of future state government processes.
2	Recommendation 2: Address uncertainty about engaging with children and young people. That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, in collaboration with child and family services and family violence services: - identify and seek to remove actual and perceived barriers that prevent services from engaging directly with children and young people where age and developmentally appropriate, including: - clarifying the need for consent - supporting practitioners to discuss with parents how to support children and young people, where parents have declined service involvement for themselves	This recommendation seeks to increase direct engagement with children and young people by ensuring workers across the child and family service system understand when and how to do this in ways that are age and developmentally appropriate, including when parental consent is not present.	Accept This recommendation aligns with work currently underway.	Portfolio: Children and Prevention of Family Violence Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has projects underway that will address this recommendation: - A risk assessment specific to a Child or Young Person (MARAM) which ensures that a child or young person's needs and safety are considered individually and independently of their parents, guardians or carers when presenting to The Orange Door - Accompanying Practice Guides to provide guidance to service providers on consent and safe engagement with children and young people about their experience of family violence, and of young people's use of family violence. These resources: - combine a wellbeing and family violence lens - consider age and developmentally appropriate engagement

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- establish a policy and practice response to engaging with and providing services directly to children and young people, where age and developmentally appropriate, when there is no parental consent - strengthen workforce capacity to effectively engage with and directly support children and young people.				- provide professionals with information about capacity and competence to consent to support engagement The resources are expected to be finalised in late 2026. Implementation support will include the development of statewide training and resources for professionals on the Practice Guides. - A practical tool to support assessments by The Orange Door, incorporating the Child and Young Person MARAM wellbeing and family violence risk assessment, and parenting and family functioning assessments. This is due for implementation from mid-2027. - An engagement project that will identify ways that voluntary services can increase engagement and identify levers for change. This work is being undertaken with the sector and includes insights of people with lived experience. Delivery of the first stage of this work is due in early 2027. Key departmental guidance material will also be revised to strengthen expectations and approach to engagement with children and young people, including Family Services guidance, expected to be finalised in August 2026.

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3	Recommendation 3: Strengthen The Orange Door's engagement with children and young people That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, in partnership with children and young people with lived experience, strengthen The Orange Door's Assessment and Planning processes to enable better and direct engagement with children and young people to ensure responses are targeted to their needs.	This recommendation seeks to increase The Orange Door's meaningful engagement with children and young people in its assessment process.	Accept This recommendation aligns with work currently underway.	Portfolio: Prevention of Family Violence Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is currently developing a practical tool to support assessments by The Orange Door, incorporating the Child and Young Person MARAM wellbeing and family violence risk assessment, and parenting and family functioning assessment. This is due for implementation from mid-2027 (as above). This will improve direct engagement with children and young people to ensure responses are targeted to their risk and needs. The insight and expertise of people with lived experience is a critical input to The Orange Door service model and operations. Key guidance, such as the Child and Young Person MARAM Practice Guides, have been designed with input from a Lived Experience Advisory Group of Young People, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, researchers, practitioners, as well as subject matter experts.
4	Recommendation 4: Fund specialised programs and supports for children and young people That the Victorian Government address critical service gaps in age-appropriate and specialised programs for children and young people experiencing vulnerability, especially victim-survivors of family violence. This should include	This recommendation seeks to give more children and young people access to age-appropriate services that focus specifically on their needs rather than those of their parents or guardians and reduce the impact of trauma on their lives.	Accept in principle Support the intent of this recommendation and acknowledge that there are gaps in service delivery for young people experiencing vulnerability. Note that delivery of the recommendation will be subject to funding decisions through future state budget processes.	Portfolio: Prevention of Family Violence Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing acknowledges the importance of providing access to supports and services to children and young people in their own right and currently has a number of tailored initiatives, including: Specialist family violence therapeutic supports for children and young people who are victim survivors of family violence

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establishing, where appropriate, and funding: - increased availability of specialised, accessible therapeutic counselling services for children and young people to reduce high waitlists across the state - increased availability of appropriate family violence crisis accommodation for children and young people who need it, particularly those seeking safety on their own - youth specific family violence case management programs, such as Amplify, state-wide across DFFH regions - state-wide youth specific case management for other priority cohorts, such as Aboriginal children and young people.				- Initiatives to respond to young people as victim survivors of family violence in youth homelessness settings (Amplify, delivered by Melbourne City Mission and Aspire, delivered by Meli) - Design and delivery of a new targeted youth-specific family violence case management service for young people from multicultural communities, including those who are homeless due to family violence, due to commence in 2026. - Flexible funding for family violence refuges to provide targeted supports for children and young people accommodated in refuges. - The Statewide Adolescent Family Violence in the Home Programs, which provides therapeutic, whole-of-family supports where children and young people are using violence in the home, noting many children and young people accessing this program are victim survivors of family violence. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is working closely with the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum to identify system gaps and service improvements. It supports in principle working with Dhelk Dja to design youth-specific case management services for Aboriginal children and young people, but additional investment would be required for implementation. There are currently five ACCOs delivering tailored

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					Adolescent Family Violence in the Home programs. Further investment would be required to increase the availability, geographic reach and breadth of specialised programs for children and young people. The implementation of Child and Young Person MARAM Practice Guides will also support improved responses for children and young people across existing family violence service responses.
5	Recommendation 5: Schools to better support children and young people experiencing vulnerability That the Department of Education provide strengthened guidance, developed with children and young people with lived experience, on how educators and other school staff can support children and young people when they disclose that they have experienced harm.	This recommendation seeks to ensure schools are well-placed to provide ongoing support to children and young people who disclose harm.	Accept This recommendation aligns with work currently underway.	Portfolio: Education Department of Education	In March 2026, the Department of Education released updated PROTECT guidance to support schools to identify and respond to child abuse, and support students and their families to get the right support at the right time. The updated guidance was developed in consultation with stakeholders including DFFH, CCYP and the CCYP Youth Council.
6	Recommendation 6: Create a point of contact for professionals to seek advice. That the Victorian Government fund the establishment of an appropriate point of contact to allow professionals to seek advice about how to support children and young people for whom they hold concerns. This advice function should aim to improve the quality of reports to Child Protection and referrals to services and build capability across service systems.	This recommendation seeks to ensure more children, young people and their families are linked with appropriate supports at the earliest opportunity and to reduce pressure on the child protection system.	Under consideration To be further considered pending outcome of recently introduced changes aimed at supporting responses to children and families and guidance for key referrers.	Portfolio: Children and Prevention of Family Violence Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	A range of initiatives are in progress to assist professionals in supporting and appropriately referring children and young people for support where there are concerns for their safety and/or wellbeing: - The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing recently launched the Professional Reporter and Referrer Hub to provide targeted advice to professionals Professional information hub - The Department of Education has recently undertaken a significant

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					review of the PROTECT guidance to assist education staff to identify child wellbeing concerns and determine appropriate actions and referral pathways. The guidance was released in March 2026 and is currently being implemented. • The Orange Door continues to operate as a primary point of contact for professionals with concerns for a child or young person, providing secondary consultation to assist professionals to determine the seriousness of risk and identify appropriate responses. Secondary consultation operational guidance is expected to be finalised by December 2026. • The <i>Supporting Stable and Strong Families Act 2026</i> establishes shared responsibility across government departments to support children and young people who are in care or at risk of entering care. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing will assess the collective impact of these initiatives before considering an additional 'point of contact'.

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7	Recommendation 7: Enhance assessments of cumulative harm That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing: • evaluate the extent to which SAFER is supporting Child Protection practitioners to effectively assess cumulative harm, with a view to making any necessary changes to strengthen policy and practice • develop an approach to the ongoing monitoring of practice and decision-making in relation to cumulative harm.	This recommendation seeks to ensure structures are in place to enable Child Protection to effectively identify and respond to children and young people's experiences of cumulative harm.	Accept The need to enhance assessments of cumulative harm had already been identified as necessary, and a priority.	Portfolio: Children Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Ahead of Left Behind's publication, the Office of Professional Practice had commenced developing an approach to monitoring practice and decision-making in relation to cumulative harm: • A monitoring and measurement plan (complete) specific to SAFER that aims to: ○ understand the extent to which the five practice activities are occurring in practice ○ use this information to inform continuous improvement ○ monitor and measure the extent to which the framework is progressing towards desired outcomes. • The monitoring and measurement framework relies on three modes of data collection: ○ SAFER Reporting Dashboard (complete by end July 2026) ○ Statewide review of risk assessment (last occurred 2024, next is 2028 data reviewed in 2029) ○ Cohort review of risk assessment (just completed in 2026, next occurring in 2028) • Within the SAFER reporting dashboard and case review tool there is a specified set of quantitative and qualitative metrics that are used to monitor and measure effective consideration of cumulative harm as part of risk assessment.

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8	Recommendation 8: Communicate a clear threshold for statutory intervention That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing communicate the threshold for statutory intervention in a way that ensures a shared understanding of risk, and associated roles and responsibilities, among Child Protection, The Orange Door, child and family services and family violence services.	This recommendation seeks to eliminate discrepancies in the way different parts of the system understand risk to children and young people and their respective roles in responding to that risk.	Accept in part Accept that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing should communicate roles and responsibilities in relation to risk management more effectively, and more effectively communicate existing legislative basis for statutory intervention. Do not accept further communications beyond the legislative basis, as risk assessment is a dynamic process requiring professional judgement.	Portfolio: Children Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Risk assessment and substantiation decisions are dynamic and determined by the unique circumstances within families. Any communication approach would need to recognise that Child Protection practitioners need sufficient flexibility to apply professional judgement on a case-by-case basis, in line with the SAFER Framework. Child Protection fulfils a critical statutory role in investigating reports and intervening where the concern is substantiated, following an investigation. The PROTECT project has recently refreshed publicly available stakeholder guidance regarding Child Protection's role and when to report to Child Protection. The Child and Young Person MARAM Practice Guides provide guidance on direct engagement with children and young people to identify, assess and manage wellbeing needs and family violence risk for all MARAM prescribed workforces. The guidance articulates roles and responsibilities for family violence risk assessment and risk management across the service system. A refresh of the operational requirements between Child Protection, The Orange Door and Family Services is in progress. The requirements articulate the roles and responsibilities for Child Protection, The Orange Door and child and family services. It is anticipated these requirements will be operational by the end of 2026.

9	Recommendation 9: Strengthen referral interface across child and family service system. That the Victorian Government provide resourcing to enable the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to strengthen the referral interface between Child Protection, The Orange Door, child and family services and family violence services by: - conducting a 12-month trial to determine the feasibility and benefits of Child Protection engaging with parents during the intake phase to inform them that a report was made and that a referral will be made for support - requiring that Child Protection referrals contain a rationale for the referral, particularly when previous referrals have not resulted in successful engagement with the family - introducing a formal feedback loop between Child Protection, The Orange Door and services to communicate the outcomes of reports and all referrals, including family engagement with, and participation in, services - providing clear guidance for The Orange Door and services about making a further report to Child Protection when a referral has not resulted in engagement with the family (due to service capacity constraints or a family being uncontactable or declining support) and service involvement is deemed critical for child safety	This recommendation seeks to increase the likelihood that referrals made by Child Protection to other services will lead to engagement, and that Child Protection has timely access to information about the effectiveness of previous referrals to inform risk assessment and decision making.	Accept in part The intent of the recommendation is accepted – to strengthen likelihood of engagement, visibility of families and timely information sharing. The recommendation is accepted in part - some aspects are currently in place or underway. Some aspects will require investment to be realised.	Portfolio: Children Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing will undertake a targeted trial to determine the feasibility and benefits of Child Protection engaging with parents during the intake phase, noting this would require clear identification of the most appropriate cohort. Child Protection currently writes to families about the report and a referral. Child Protection has introduced standard referral information that includes important information from the SAFER assessment. Child Protection and The Orange Door have also strengthened the Enhanced Referral process. Enhanced Referrals are made, for example, when a family has had multiple reports and investigations over time and has had no or limited engagement with voluntary services. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing recently launched the Professional Reporter and Referrer Hub to provide targeted advice to professionals Professional reporter and referrer information hub - DFFH Service Providers Community Based Child Protection Practitioners have particular responsibilities in relation to enhanced referrals that provides strengthened visibility of these families. Formal feedback loops are not accepted as an effective way to strengthen engagement or visibility. The Enhanced Referral process means that families that need to be, are more visible to Child Protection (through the Community Based positions) and the Orange Door. Child Protection intake contact The Orange Door to better understand the
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	In the interim, that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing take steps to progress these elements within existing resources.				engagement profile of previous referrals during information gathering. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is commencing the Communities and Families Transformation Program – providing a better, more modern and fit-for-purpose technology infrastructure to support practitioners, including through having information about families' prior service contact across the system more visible. See more information below. Guidance is clear that The Orange Door and services can consult with Community Based Child Protection Practitioners when warranted because risk has increased but also for support in developing risk assessment, decision making and the ongoing support of children, young people and their families. This will be further improved when updated operational guidance is released (see above) later in 2026.

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10	Recommendation 10: Integrate client information management systems That the Victorian Government provide funding to improve and integrate client information management systems to enhance information sharing and the visibility and monitoring of risk.	This recommendation seeks to allow for a long term and more streamlined approach to sharing information across the child and family service system.	Accept in principle This recommendation aligns with work underway, including delivery of the Communities and Families Transformation Program, the first stage of which was funded through the 2026-27 State Budget. Further funding would be required to deliver on the intent of this recommendation and is subject to government decision-making.	Portfolio: Children Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	The 2026-27 State Budget invests \$126.2 million across four years to commence a transformation across our service system. This funds the first phase of digital transformation that will make it easier for workers to share information and monitor risk to improve data reporting and security and ultimately improve client outcomes. Investment will replace the Integrated Reporting Information System (IRIS) system, and deliver foundational design for broader child protection, family violence, state-funded disability and youth justice programs.
11	Recommendation 11: Strengthen The Orange Door's engagement methods That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing strengthen The Orange Door's approach to attempting engagement with families, to include more flexible and assertive methods.	This recommendation seeks to increase the rate at which The Orange Door effectively contacts families and successfully engages them.	Accept This recommendation aligns with work currently underway.	Portfolio: Prevention of Family Violence Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Work is currently underway to revise the operational requirements of Child Protection and The Orange Door. This encompasses strengthening The Orange Door's proactive engagement strategies, including home visits and community outreach. It is anticipated these requirements will be operational by the end of 2026. An engagement project will identify ways that voluntary services can increase engagement and identify levers for change. This work is being undertaken with the sector and includes insights of people with lived experience. Delivery of the first stage of this work is due in early 2027.

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12	Recommendation 12: Improve guidance for responding to enhanced referrals in The Orange Door. That the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing strengthen the enhanced referral process to include clear guidance for The Orange Door on the process of responding to enhanced referrals, including the importance of making every reasonable effort to allocate them to a service, and the role of Community-based Child Protection in joint work.	This recommendation seeks to encourage greater consistency and effectiveness in responses to enhanced referrals across The Orange Door network by addressing gaps in the existing guidance.	Accept This recommendation aligns with work currently underway.	Portfolio: Prevention of Family Violence Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Enhanced referrals are currently prioritised in accordance with The Orange Door triage ratings. Revised operational requirements for Child Protection and The Orange Door (noted above) include clear guidance on responses to enhanced referrals. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's engagement project (noted above) will also support improved engagement with children and families, including enhanced referrals.
13	Recommendation 13: Increase investment in child and family services and family violence services That the Victorian Government increase the availability of child and family services and family violence services to support timely access, reduce waitlists and work towards meeting demand, including ensuring age-appropriate, flexible service provision for children, young people and families.	This recommendation seeks to increase the capacity of voluntary services to intervene earlier with appropriate levels of support, thereby reducing harm to children and young people and pressure on the child protection system.	Accept in principle Support the intent of this recommendation to increase capacity in child and family services and family violence services, but note that funding decisions are subject to state budget processes	Portfolio: Children and Prevention of Family Violence Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Implementation of this recommendation is subject to government decision-making and further system investment.