



# COURT SERVICES VICTORIA STRATEGIC PLAN

Delivering excellence  
in Court and Tribunal  
Administration  
2020 – 2025

# MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND CEO

Victorian courts and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) have a clear and important responsibility to administer justice fairly, transparently, impartially and with integrity.

In doing so, they play a key role in promoting the safety and security of Victorian communities and contribute to our social cohesiveness and economic prosperity by resolving disputes and deciding cases within a framework of excellence, timeliness and accessibility.

The courts and VCAT have an opportunity to lead Victoria's justice system to be innovative, forward-thinking and world leading. This vision is best achieved by working collectively and collaboratively.

Court Services Victoria provides the means to achieve this collective ambition by providing high-quality, responsive administrative services and is accountable to Courts Council for doing so.

The courts, VCAT and Court Services Victoria continued delivery of justice during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic reflects the ability of the justice system to work collaboratively and to adapt. As challenging as these circumstances have been, they have also demonstrated the ability of courts and VCAT to innovate and to look at different and better ways of working.

This strategic plan sets out how courts, VCAT and Court Services Victoria will continue to deliver justice effectively and efficiently; and pursue innovative approaches to justice into the future supported by collaborative leadership and excellence in court administration.

The plan connects the courts, VCAT and Court Services Victoria, while recognising, and continuing to maintain the independence of each.

This strategy introduces key principles to guide this collective effort:

- ▶ **The central role justice plays in the community** through the delivery of justice services that are people-centric.

- ▶ **Justice systems that respond to users' needs** through accessible, inclusive, and where appropriate, therapeutic and restorative, processes.
- ▶ **Excellence in operations** through a highly capable workforce and effective, efficient and accessible processes enabled by technology.

This is an ambitious but achievable strategy that will require effective partnerships and advocacy to attract the necessary support for its delivery.

The strategy has been developed cognisant that we are facing several real challenges in our operating environment, including:

- ▶ a growth in backlog of cases due to the 2020 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic,
- ▶ ageing physical and technological infrastructure, and
- ▶ a tightening fiscal environment, and an imperative to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery and redirect resources to maintain and improve frontline services.

Within this context Court Services Victoria commits to delivering on this strategy and working toward the Council's vision for world class administration of justice in Victoria.

## **The Honourable Anne Ferguson**

Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria  
Chair of the Courts Council

## **Louise Anderson**

Chief Executive Officer  
Court Services Victoria



# ABOUT COURT SERVICES VICTORIA

**Court Services Victoria was established in 2014 to support the performance of the judicial, quasi-judicial and administrative functions of Victorian courts, VCAT, Judicial College of Victoria and Judicial Commission of Victoria (collectively referred to as the 'Courts Group'). We do this by providing the administrative services and facilities necessary for the Victorian courts, VCAT and other entities to operate independently of direction by executive government.**

Court Services Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waterways upon which our lives depend. Court Services Victoria acknowledges and pays respect to ancestors of this country, Elders, knowledge holders and leaders – past and present. Court Services Victoria extends that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As an organisation, Court Services Victoria comprises more than 2,200 people within the Courts Group and the administrative and corporate centre, who together support the Victorian courts and VCAT to deliver justice to the Victorian community.

Courts Council is our governing body and provides leadership to Court Services Victoria. The Council is chaired by the Chief Justice of Victoria, and is made up of the judicial heads of the courts and VCAT as well as independent non-judicial members.

The Courts Executive is our key management leadership group, which focuses on delivery of strategy and collaboration across jurisdictions.

We employ the non-judicial staff who work in the courts, VCAT, the Judicial College and the Judicial Commission. These people include senior executives, lawyers, registrars, judges' associates, and a range of other administrators, who are critical to the effective delivery of justice in Victoria.

We also employ a core team to provide essential shared administrative and corporate services. This team supports and drives:

- ▶ an engaged and productive workforce,
- ▶ an ethical, healthy and safe workplace,
- ▶ good governance following the requirements of the Victorian Public Sector,
- ▶ sound financial management and future sustainability,
- ▶ user focussed and innovative information technology systems, and
- ▶ provision of key infrastructure for the delivery of justice.

Our staff – whether in the Courts Group or the administrative and corporate centre – enable the Courts Group to deliver on their own strategic priorities while also pursuing strategic opportunities that are interconnected and deliver benefits more broadly. They also aspire to several key principles that underpin our workplace culture to enable delivery of an independent and people-centred Victorian court system, including:

- ▶ always keeping the people who use and work in the court's environment front of mind,
- ▶ meaningful community engagement and striving to deliver the best possible experience for court users and the community,
- ▶ collaborating where appropriate with Government and justice sector bodies, and
- ▶ continually improving the services we deliver.

# OUR OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

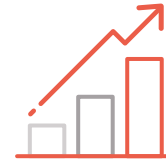
Victoria is experiencing significant demographic, social, and economic change. A well-functioning civil society needs a strong and enduring system of justice to sustain and support community safety, social stability, economic growth, innovation, and financial sustainability.

Court Services Victoria has identified a range of factors currently influencing, or likely to impact on the environment it operates in within the next five years.

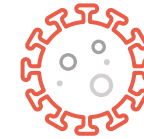
## A CHANGING VICTORIA



Victoria's population is growing, becoming more diverse and focusing as a state on strengthening social inclusion. Victoria is committed to self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians, and these priorities will impact on communities and change the way services are accessed and delivered.



The impact of bushfires and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the state's economy, and place increasing pressure on public institutions to become more efficient and improve financial sustainability.



The health, social and economic impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is significant, and the Courts Group have rapidly adapted the way they provide and deliver services. The impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) will be lasting, and the Courts Group will be required to continue to adapt.

## COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS



The community expects that public institutions are financially sustainable and responsible, open, transparent and accountable.



The community will continue to demand more digitally enabled services that are timely, transparent and accessible.



The community expects that government and institutions provide integrated and effective solutions to complex social issues such as family violence, mental health and drug abuse.

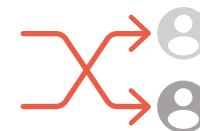
## EVOLVING COURT SYSTEM



The courts and VCAT continue to experience increasing demand. Growing caseloads and the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) will put extraordinary pressure on the courts and VCAT to meet demand.



Problems that come before the courts and VCAT often have broad and complex social causes, and there is a growing demand for therapeutic and problem-solving approaches to address issues such as family violence, mental health and drug abuse.



Government's strong focus on the justice system, with an increasing emphasis on access to integrated services, requires the courts and VCAT to anticipate and respond to the changing needs of court users and the environment in which they operate.

# OUR PRIORITIES

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**Courts Council has identified five priorities that will guide Court Services Victoria's actions over the next five years.**

In delivering these priorities, Court Services Victoria strives to deliver integrated services for the community that respond to the needs of users, through excellence in our processes, technology and people.

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## **EXCELLENCE IN COURT AND TRIBUNAL ADMINISTRATION**

We will deliver operational excellence through increasingly effective, efficient, integrated and responsive service delivery that will ensure high quality judicial support, facilitate case management and support innovation to enable the courts and VCAT to achieve their purpose.

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## **CONTEMPORARY, SAFE AND INTEGRATED VENUES**

We will invest in our court facilities to provide safer, fit for purpose and people-centred venues.

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## **RELIABLE, INTEGRATED AND INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL CAPABILITIES**

We will make use of the opportunities presented by technology to rethink and improve processes, enable appropriate matters to be dealt with remotely, and simplify access to justice through integrated, people-centric solutions.

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## **BUILDING UNDERSTANDING, CONFIDENCE AND TRUST**

We will enhance confidence and trust in the justice system by engaging meaningfully with both our internal, external and community stakeholders, demonstrating ethical behaviour and delivering effective and efficient court operations and services.

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## **DIVERSE, COLLABORATIVE, ETHICAL AND CAPABLE PEOPLE**

We will invest in our people to ensure we are a sought-after and safe place to work, comprising a diverse, highly capable and flexible workforce.

## PRIORITY 1

# EXCELLENCE IN COURT AND TRIBUNAL ADMINISTRATION

Court Services Victoria is committed to excellence in the delivery of services to its users, the community and government. Technology, workforce and data are critical enablers of excellence in service delivery.

To achieve this, we will support courts and VCAT in their delivery of justice, and pursue opportunities to streamline service delivery, reduce duplication and implement service improvements to become more effective, efficient and improve financial sustainability.

We will demonstrate our effective and efficient use of available resources, and advocate for funding to support delivery of our strategic priorities through data analysis and sound evaluation.

We will base our operations on a deep understanding of the court system, and will seek continually to enhance our support of court processes.

We will routinely conduct robust examination of our performance to recognise progress and resolve any shortcomings in our pursuit of world class justice and court administration.

### OUR ACTIONS

Beginning immediately, and to be completed progressively over the next five years, we will:

- ▶ Implement more effective and efficient ways of working to improve the delivery of shared services and remove duplication.

- ▶ Work toward long term financial sustainability by improving the efficiency of service delivery and redirecting resources to maintain and improve frontline services.
- ▶ Engage with our justice sector partners and stakeholders to work in more connected ways that improve information sharing and service outcomes.
- ▶ Facilitate the continuous improvement of court processes to ensure they are easy to understand, inclusive, accessible, culturally appropriate and designed from the user perspective.
- ▶ Support the courts and VCAT to expand therapeutic/ problem solving approaches with evidence-based interventions to address the underlying causes of offending behaviour and in doing so, to intervene more effectively to enhance community safety.
- ▶ Leverage lessons learned from our response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to improve business continuity and resilience.
- ▶ Continue to embed and refine our risk and emergency management approach, processes and culture.
- ▶ Recognise the importance of the public record and improve systems to ensure appropriate records management.



## PRIORITY 2

# RELIABLE, INTEGRATED AND INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL CAPABILITIES

The unfolding digital revolution presents ongoing opportunities for the Courts Group to improve services, innovate, and engage with people who come to the courts and VCAT, and the community.

Digital transformation has been a key enabler of change to improve the experience of people coming to court, reduce the dependency on physical locations, automate processes and increase efficiency.

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Courts Group changed the way they operated by moving from in-person to telephone and video hearings, and digital document management. This enabled courts and VCAT to remain operational during the pandemic. There remains much more to do as the response to coronavirus (COVID-19) demonstrates the criticality and power of technology to enable innovation and improve service delivery.

Our use of data and technology will drive opportunity creation, inform decision making, and simplify access to justice through integrated, people-centric solutions. We must continue to invest in technology and digital transformation as a key enabler of change, ensuring the people who use and work in the courts are at the centre of the design and delivery of services.

### OUR ACTIONS

Beginning immediately, and to be completed progressively over the next five years, we will:

- ▶ Engage with court users to understand how technology can improve their accessibility and experience.

- ▶ Develop an overarching Information Technology and Digital Strategy to guide our future directions and investments to enable simpler and faster user-centric services.
- ▶ Continue the digitisation of court and tribunal processes, taking a 'digital first' approach.
- ▶ Uplift the capacity and functionality of in-court technology to support online hearings from judicial officers' chambers or remotely.
- ▶ Pilot temporary courts for jury trials.
- ▶ Deliver a new case management system at the Magistrates' and Children's Courts, and explore leveraging its use by other jurisdictions.
- ▶ Invest in data and analytics systems and capabilities to improve data governance and support improved data-driven decision making.
- ▶ Facilitate the use of integrated systems and data to support a differentiated approach to listing and scheduling practices that respond to user needs, identified risks, demand and capacity.
- ▶ Provide technology solutions to enable remote and flexible working arrangements for staff.
- ▶ Implement cybersecurity measures and education to protect our data and systems from external threats.

## PRIORITY 3

# DIVERSE, COLLABORATIVE, ETHICAL AND CAPABLE PEOPLE

Foundational to effective service delivery is our dedicated, professional and passionate workforce.

We believe it is important that every person working at Court Services Victoria feels connected to and understands our purpose, and strives for the highest ethical standards in everything they do.

We value building an inclusive and diverse workforce that reflects the community we serve.

We aim to be an organisation where Aboriginal employees and communities have a say in policy, and are supported to lead self-determination.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic highlights the importance of supporting wellbeing. We take the wellbeing of our people seriously, and will continue to support wellbeing and resilience and provide a safe and supportive workplace.

We are committed to continuing to build a diverse, high-performing and cohesive team, who are confident and empowered to drive change.

### OUR ACTIONS

Beginning immediately, and to be completed progressively over the next five years, we will:

- ▶ Develop an overarching People Strategy to establish future directions and to guide investments that support and develop our people.
- ▶ Work in partnership with Victorian Aboriginal communities to advance Aboriginal self-determination, provide cultural

and practical support to Aboriginal people, and build greater organisational cultural awareness.

- ▶ Implement our 'Self-determination Action Plan' to build a more Koori inclusive courts environment for Koori staff, agencies and communities in Victoria.
- ▶ Review our values and embed these in our work.
- ▶ Support mobility of the workforce across jurisdictions to enhance learning, develop capability and contribute to a unified culture.
- ▶ Build the capability of staff and workplace culture to innovate and continuously improve our services.
- ▶ Monitor workplace culture through regular surveys and respond to emerging issues.
- ▶ Establish a dedicated People and Culture support service for judicial officers.
- ▶ Continue to provide and expand our leadership, integrity and inclusiveness programs across both the administration and the judiciary.
- ▶ Continue to provide and expand our support and wellbeing programs to strengthen health, safety and wellbeing.
- ▶ Leverage lessons learned from our response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to further enable and normalise remote and flexible work arrangements.



## PRIORITY 4

# CONTEMPORARY, SAFE AND INTEGRATED VENUES

Delivering people-centric and accessible services requires a built environment that is safe, fit-for-purpose and enables modern, integrated service delivery.

The courts are important public spaces. They are where justice is delivered; workplaces for judicial officers, staff and people attending court; and they have a symbolic role in embodying community values about the rule of law and access to justice.

In 2020, Court Services Victoria operates seventy-five separate buildings in sixty-six locations across Victoria. Forty-one per cent of the buildings are over fifty years old and fifty per cent are single court rooms. Two thirds of the buildings are not fit-for-purpose and do not meet the requirements for a contemporary, integrated, people-centred venue for the delivery of justice.

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Courts Group rapidly transitioned to new ways of working, including the transition to remote operations facilitated through technology. These changes highlight the importance of the interaction of technology and the built environment for courts of the future.

We will continue to invest in our court facilities to provide safer, fit-for-purpose venues, and establish exemplar models of 'courts of the future' that will be community-focussed, people orientated, safe and enable operational excellence.

### OUR ACTIONS

Beginning immediately, and to be completed progressively over the next five years, we will:

- ▶ Deliver the Bendigo Law Courts Development as an integrated and excellent 'court of the future'.
- ▶ Commence implementation of our Strategic Asset Plan to transform our built environment.
- ▶ Explore alternative and innovative ways to fund future venue development and support the implementation of our Strategic Asset Plan.
- ▶ Continue to maintain and improve our built environment to improve safety and security.
- ▶ Integrate digital court hearing experiences with the built environment to reduce dependency on physical spaces.
- ▶ Support and improve the accessibility of the Koori Court to deliver, fair, accessible and understandable justice.
- ▶ Explore ways to build the civic presence of our court buildings and increase community use and access.
- ▶ Ensure our operations continue to meet our occupational health and safety obligations to promote the safety, wellbeing and welfare of our staff and all court users.
- ▶ Ensure sound project governance and excellent project delivery by embedding the Asset Management Accountability Framework.

## PRIORITY 5

# BUILDING UNDERSTANDING, CONFIDENCE AND TRUST

The Victorian courts and VCAT contribute to social cohesiveness and economic prosperity by resolving disputes and deciding cases according to law, in a timely, fair and accessible manner.

Building confidence and trust across our stakeholders and the Victorian community is fundamental to the operation of courts and the justice system.

Fair, impartial, accessible, effective and efficient courts contribute to trust and confidence in the justice system.

The majority of Victorians have little direct contact with the courts, and limited knowledge of the justice system beyond the media coverage of the criminal justice system.

We will continue to enhance trust and confidence by building an understanding of the role and value of courts, demonstrating our commitment to meeting stakeholder needs through improved service delivery across the Courts Group, and performing in a manner consistent with our values of fairness, integrity, inclusiveness and independence.

### OUR ACTIONS

Beginning immediately, and to be completed progressively over the next five years, we will:

- ▶ Engage with court users to understand what accessibility and contemporary service looks like to them to guide how we can improve.
- ▶ Make it easier for people to access clear and accurate information in ways that are meaningful to them and builds their confidence in the justice system.
- ▶ Develop and implement a strategic and integrated approach to media and communications.
- ▶ Expand both internal and community engagement and education programs.
- ▶ Develop and implement optimal performance measurement frameworks to measure and report on courts, VCAT and administrative performance.



# DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES

To ensure delivery of our priorities we will take a strategic governance approach that will:

- ▶ focus the work and discussions of Council, committees and our leadership on the Strategic Plan,
- ▶ engage with stakeholders and staff and thoroughly and creatively communicate the strategy,
- ▶ develop clear annual action plans detailing specific initiatives, accountabilities, resources and timelines,
- ▶ integrate our planning and delivery with our risk management approach,
- ▶ define, monitor and report on measures of success,
- ▶ periodically review and update our Strategic Plan.

## PLANNING

### COURTS COUNCIL DIRECTIONS

#### STRATEGIC PLAN

High level priorities and actions

#### ACTION PLAN

Detailed initiatives and resources

## EXECUTION

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

DELIVER INITIATIVES

MEASURE AND REPORT PROGRESS



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