

Message to the participants in CSV's sexual harassment survey from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria and Chair of Courts Council, Anne Ferguson, on behalf of the Victorian courts and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT).

Wednesday, 19 April 2023

We made a commitment in 2020 to create workplaces that are free from sexual harassment. That commitment is as strong today as it was then.

Sexual harassment is harmful, unlawful and wrong. I reiterate that we will not put up with any form of wrongful conduct in our courts, in VCAT, or in the workforces that support them.

I am grateful to all who participated in the Courts Services Victoria 2022 sexual harassment survey. The experiences shared have provided a deeper understanding of the impact of the work done to implement the recommendations made in 2021, and what we must keep doing, to eliminate sexual harassment from our workplaces.

While it is encouraging to see within the data signs that the work that has been done has had a positive impact in terms of awareness, the responses to the survey confirm that sexual harassment is still experienced in Victoria's courts and tribunal workplaces. People have experienced sexually suggestive comments, intrusive questions, and physical forms of sexual harassment. They have experienced negative short and long-term effects as a result, including detrimental impacts on their psychological, physical, and economic wellbeing. This is a matter of profound concern and reaffirms that we have more work to do.

The survey also confirms that most people did not report incidents they experienced or witnessed. We will continue to focus on measures to address barriers to reporting and build trust in our systems.

The CSV survey was anonymous and not limited to a particular period. I strongly encourage anyone who disclosed that they had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment while working with or for the courts or VCAT to consider reporting it regardless of when the experience occurred. We are particularly concerned about the negative effects that have been reported and want people to know that if they come forward, action will be taken and they will be actively supported.

The survey reinforced that education and prevention measures must continue to be targeted to all, regardless of role or seniority.

Induction and training for judicial officers, VCAT members and CSV executives and staff are helping people to understand what sexual harassment is; to encourage and equip bystanders to take action; and to provide victim-centred policies, clearer complaint processes and stronger support frameworks. We will continue to conduct surveys to track if the measures that were just starting to be rolled out when the survey was conducted, and further measures which are underway are effective and making a difference. A Report Card on what we have done and still must do can be accessed [here](#).

We are focused on doing all we can to directly address the risks that still exist and the measures that we need to have in place to create workplaces that are free from sexual harassment.

Background

A final report from the Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian courts and Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals (VCAT) was released in April 2021. Sixteen recommendations were directed

to Court Services Victoria (CSV), Heads of Jurisdiction, the Judicial College, and Judicial Commission. Of the 16 recommendations, 12 are complete and four are ongoing or in progress.

Recommendation 18 required CSV to conduct an annual anonymous survey of all court and VCAT user groups to track progress on incidents of sexual harassment, reporting of incidents and action by bystanders in the courts and VCAT.

CSV conducted a survey of employees, judicial officers and VCAT members in August 2022. The survey had 686 responses, a 23% response rate.