

OUR PLATFORM · VICTORIAN DIVISION

Public Safety: Preventing the Next Crime

Prevent crime, disrupt repeat offending and fix the system — Safety & Prevention Hubs, enforcement where it counts, and a government held to account for the next crime.



SERIES	DIVISION	PUBLISHED	ONLINE
Policy platform	Victoria	2026	vic.democrats.org.au

Public safety cannot be measured by the number of announcements, arrests, bail refusals or prison beds. It must be measured by whether fewer Victorians become victims.

The Issue

Victorians have a right to feel safe in their homes, workplaces, businesses, neighbourhoods and public spaces. When people experience home invasions, vehicle theft, assault, family violence, retail crime or repeated antisocial behaviour, the government has a responsibility to act.

A credible public-safety policy must recognise two realities:

- **Serious and repeat offending requires a firm response.** Police must have the resources to investigate crime, courts must be able to manage genuine risks, and people who pose an immediate threat to the community must face effective restrictions and consequences.
- **Enforcement alone cannot provide lasting public safety.** Arresting an offender after a crime has occurred does not undo the harm to the victim. Imprisoning someone without addressing addiction, violent behaviour, unstable housing, disengagement from education or untreated health needs can postpone risk rather than reduce it.

Victoria's public-safety system is divided among police, courts, corrections, youth justice, child protection, education, health, housing and community services. Each agency sees part of the problem, but no single body is responsible for ensuring that the entire system prevents the next offence. **1 2 3 4 5**

This fragmentation creates recurring points of failure:

- warning signs are identified but not shared or acted upon
- vulnerable children disengage from education without an effective intervention
- families experiencing violence, addiction or acute disadvantage navigate multiple disconnected agencies
- people accused of offending may be released without stable housing, supervision or treatment
- offenders leave custody without a coordinated transition plan
- courts lack immediate access to verified treatment, accommodation and supervision options
- victims repeatedly provide the same information to different agencies
- frontline police attend crises that could have been prevented through earlier health or social-service intervention
- government measures agency activity rather than whether offending and victimisation have reduced

This policy calls for enforcement, bail reform, early intervention and an understanding of why crime has been allowed to escalate. It also requires policies to be evidence-based, socially fair, economically responsible and practical at the Victorian state level.

The systemic question is not whether disadvantage excuses offending. It does not. The question is whether government should wait until identifiable risks become police matters, court cases and victims of crime, or intervene earlier when there is a reasonable opportunity to prevent harm.

The Australian Democrats Victoria believe government must be tough at every point where the system fails:

- tough on serious and violent offending
- tough on persistent offenders who repeatedly disregard court orders

- tough on organised criminals who recruit or exploit young people
- tough on agencies that fail to act on known risks
- tough on programs that receive public funding without demonstrating results
- tough on prison and rehabilitation systems that release people without reducing their risk of reoffending

Our Plan

Improving Victoria's Public Safety is not simple. No single initiative will solve all the problems at once. Instead, we propose a series of initiatives to address systemic issues while protecting Victorians in the short term.

Safety & Prevention Hubs

The Australian Democrats - Victoria will establish a whole-of-government public-safety framework that connects police, courts, corrections, youth justice, education, housing, health, child protection, and community services.

Safety and Prevention Hubs will coordinate responses to people and families experiencing multiple risks, with one lead agency, a single intervention plan and clear responsibility for action. Support will focus on early signs of escalation, including school disengagement, family violence, homelessness, addiction, exploitation and repeated contact with police.

Information sharing will be lawful, necessary and subject to strong privacy protections. Agencies and funded programs will be measured by whether they reduce victimisation and repeat offending, not simply by how many services they deliver.

Safety & Prevention Hubs will be established in locations identified through Crime Statistics Agency Victoria ^G data as exhibiting sustained concentrations of criminal incidents, serious offending and repeat offending. Priority locations will be assessed against criminal incidents per 100,000 residents, serious offending rates, repeat offending indicators, youth offending concentrations, family violence prevalence and long-term crime trends. Based on current evidence, likely priority locations include:

- **Melbourne CBD**
 - Why here: Highest criminal incident rate in Victoria · Highest recorded offence rate in Victoria · Significant retail theft, transport-related crime and public-order offending · Major concentration of victims, visitors and businesses
 - Focus: Repeat offenders · Retail crime · Community safety · Mental health and homelessness coordination
- **Yarra (Richmond, Collingwood, Fitzroy)**
 - Why here: Second-highest criminal incident rate in Victoria · Significant concentration of property and public-order offences · High demand on police and community services
 - Focus: Repeat offenders · Drug-related offending · Targeted youth intervention
- **Latrobe Valley (Morwell, Moe, Traralgon)**
 - Why here: Among Victoria's highest crime-rate LGAs · Third-highest criminal incident rate · High offence rate and longstanding concerns regarding repeat offending
 - Focus: Recidivism reduction · Youth justice · Housing and addiction interventions

- **Greater Shepparton**

- Why here: Among Victoria's highest offence-rate LGAs · Regional service centre with significant youth and family-related intervention opportunities
- Focus: Early intervention · Family support · Youth diversion

- **Mildura**

- Why here: Fourth-highest criminal incident rate · Regional isolation increases the importance of coordinated government responses
- Focus: Repeat offending · Drug and alcohol issues · Reintegration services

- **Ararat**

- Why here: Among the highest criminal incident rates in Victoria · Small population means crime concentration is particularly significant
- Focus: Repeat offending · Community safety · Regional service coordination

- **Greater Dandenong**

- Why here: Large population centre · Persistent concerns regarding youth offending, organised theft and community safety · Significant opportunity for coordinated intervention
- Focus: Youth disengagement · Criminal exploitation · Family intervention

- **Brimbank (Sunshine, St Albans, Deer Park)**

- Why here: Large population · Elevated justice-system demand · Significant opportunity for early intervention and repeat-offender management
- Focus: Youth crime prevention · Recidivism reduction · Community safety

- **Frankston**

- Why here: Major metropolitan growth corridor · Significant property crime and youth offending concerns · Existing service infrastructure suitable for a multidisciplinary hub
- Focus: Youth intervention · Family violence · Community corrections transition support

- **Loddon Regional Hub (Bendigo)**

- Why here: Historically elevated crime rates · High levels of social vulnerability · Strong opportunity for prevention-oriented interventions
- Focus: Early intervention · Family support · Preventing escalation into persistent offending

Safety and Prevention Hubs will be independently evaluated every three years against measures including victimisation, repeat offending, youth reoffending, family violence reoffending and community perceptions of safety.

Target Serious and Repeat Offending

Victoria Police will direct resources based on independent assessments of crime patterns, response times, investigative workloads and community need, with a particular focus on persistent and repeat offenders responsible for a disproportionate share of serious offending, victimisation and community harm⁷⁸⁹.

Dedicated Serious and Repeat Offending Teams will bring together police, corrections, youth justice, housing and health services to focus on persistent offenders responsible for a disproportionate share of repeat crime and community harm. These teams will:

- investigate and disrupt persistent offending
- enforce bail, parole and community-order conditions
- protect victims and witnesses
- target adults and organised groups that exploit young people
- provide intensive supervision, treatment and rehabilitation
- intervene immediately when the risk of serious harm increases

Systemic prevention does not mean tolerating dangerous behaviour. People who repeatedly cause serious harm must face prompt, proportionate and enforceable consequences.

Make Bail and Sentencing Protect the Community

Bail decisions should be based on demonstrated risk. A person who presents an unacceptable risk of serious violence, intimidation or further serious offending, and whose risk cannot be safely managed, should not be released.

Bail conditions must be specific, practical and enforceable. Courts should have access to verified accommodation, treatment, electronic monitoring and intensive-supervision options. People should not be detained merely because poverty, homelessness or a lack of government services makes compliance impossible.

Sentences must combine accountability with measures that reduce future offending. Custodial and community sentences should address violent behaviour, addiction, mental health, education, employment and housing. Release from custody must include coordinated accommodation, treatment and supervision, particularly for people assessed as presenting a substantial risk of reoffending.

Make Government Accountable for Preventing the Next Crime

An independent Victorian Public Safety Commission will examine why offending is changing, identify failures between agencies and evaluate whether policing, bail, prevention, corrections and rehabilitation programs are working.

The Commission will report publicly on:

- serious and repeat offending
- offending while on bail
- victimisation and community safety
- police, court and corrections capacity
- youth diversion and early intervention
- reoffending after sentence
- failures in agency coordination
- the effectiveness and cost of public-safety programs

A Public Safety Accountability Act will require government to establish measurable safety objectives, respond publicly to the Commission's findings and explain where agencies have failed to meet agreed outcomes.

Central to the Victorian Public Safety Commission is the mandate that all concerned agencies that are part of the Safety & Prevention Hubs — police, courts, corrections, health, education — come together for an Annual Victorian Safety & Prevention Forum. At these annual forums, there must be a focus on statistics, trends and systematic analysis of crime. Existing collective strategies must be scrutinised to check if what was established is working, or if a redirection is needed. This includes setting out coordinated strategies for the year ahead.

Every agency in the Safety and Prevention Hubs must be on the same page, working collectively to address the immediate issues impacting Victorians and implementing strategic initiatives to tackle systemic issues.

Victoria should be tough on dangerous and repeat offending, tough on criminal exploitation, and equally tough on institutional failures that allow foreseeable harm to continue.

The Evidence

Crime Statistics Agency Victoria data shows that crime, victimisation, and offending are highly concentrated in particular locations, offence types, and offender cohorts. A relatively small number of communities account for a disproportionate share of criminal harm and justice-system demand.

Some locations, offence types and offender cohorts account for a disproportionate share of criminal harm, creating opportunities for targeted intervention and prevention. Reporting based on Crime Statistics Agency Victoria data indicates that, in the year ending March 2025, recorded criminal incidents increased by 20.1 per cent and recorded offences increased by 17.1 per cent. However, crime trends differ by offence, location and offender group, and police-recorded data are also influenced by reporting behaviour, enforcement activity, population growth and recording practices. Public-safety policy should therefore be based on offence-specific and local evidence, not a single headline statistic.

- **Crime is not caused by one factor alone.**
- Serious and persistent offending can involve a combination of individual choices, criminal networks, family violence, school disengagement, addiction, unstable housing, untreated health needs and failures in the coordination of government services¹⁰. These circumstances do not excuse offending. They identify opportunities for government to intervene before risks escalate and further victims are harmed.
- **Enforcement remains essential.**
- Police must be able to respond quickly, investigate serious offences, protect victims and disrupt repeat offenders and organised criminal activity. Bail must restrict the liberty of people who present an unacceptable risk of serious harm that cannot be safely managed. At the same time, broad detention policies should not substitute for accurate risk assessment, effective supervision or the provision of services that courts need to manage risk safely¹¹.
- **Early intervention is critical.**
- Evidence supporting early intervention, diversion and integrated services shows why prevention must form part of a credible public-safety response¹². The Australian Democrats' juvenile-justice policy identifies trauma, exclusion, disability and poverty as circumstances in which timely support may prevent deeper

involvement in offending. It also supports diversion and coordinated assistance rather than relying primarily on detaining very young people.

- **Rehabilitation is also a community-safety measure.**
- Imprisonment can incapacitate a dangerous offender for the duration of a sentence, but it does not by itself address violent behaviour, addiction, mental-health needs, housing instability or the circumstances to which a person returns after release¹³. Effective punishment should therefore combine accountability with treatment, education, employment preparation, supervised release and consequences for deliberate non-compliance.

The evidence supports a balanced approach: targeted policing and proportionate restrictions for people who present a serious risk, combined with earlier intervention, coordinated services and rehabilitation to prevent further offending.

Programs and legislative changes should be independently evaluated against clear outcomes, including reduced victimisation, reduced repeat offending, improved victim safety and value for public money.

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