

Progress against past inquiries

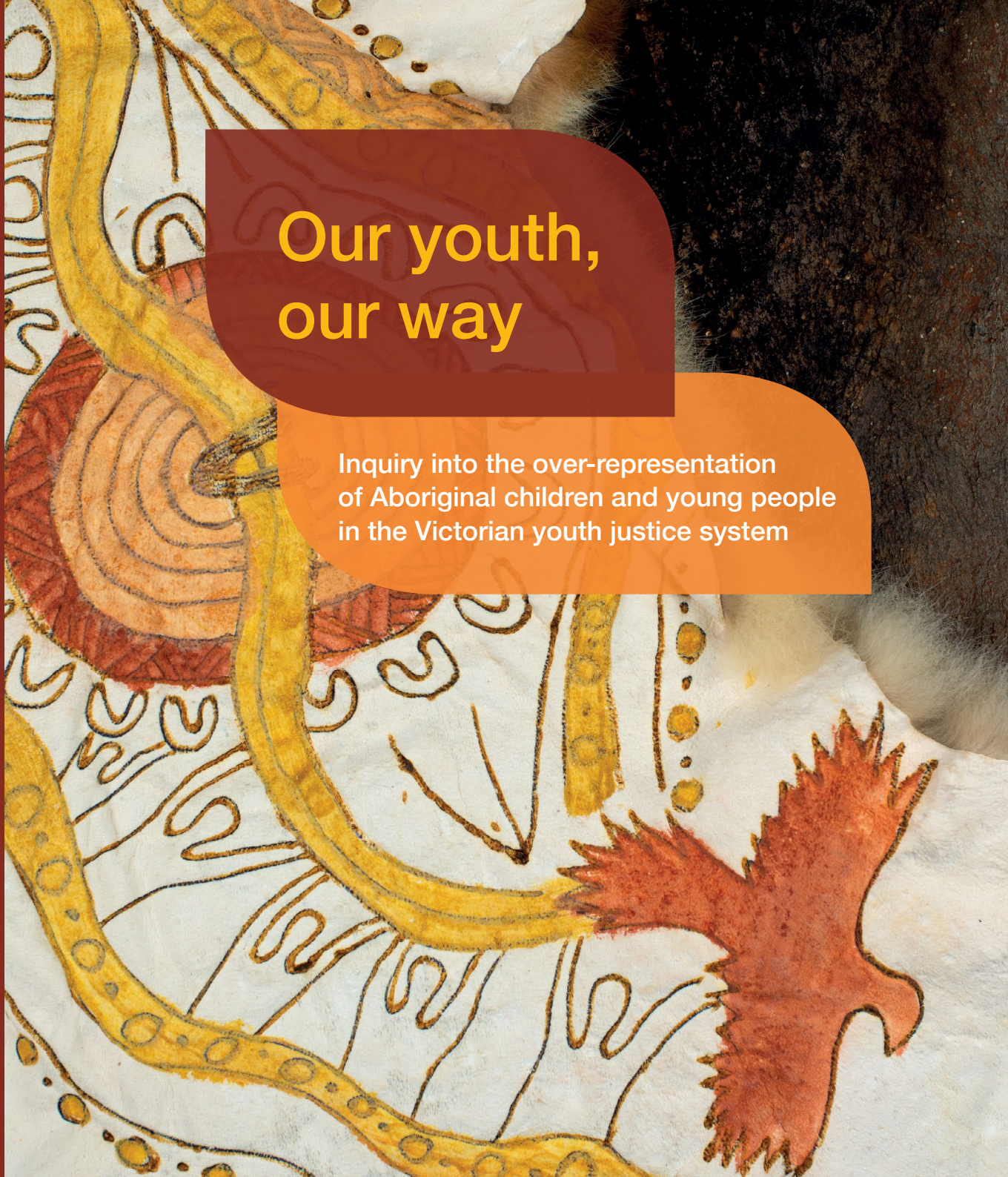
This document provides an update on the Department of Justice and Community Safety's responses to our recommendations from *Our youth, our way: Inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the Victorian youth justice system* (2019) and the Commission's assessment of progress made in 2024–25.

The Commission will continue to assess and report on progress made against these recommendations annually.

For actions to address recommendations in previous years, please see the 2023–24 progress report at <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/inquiries/systemic-inquiries/our-youth-our-way/>.

Our youth, our way

Inquiry into the over-representation
of Aboriginal children and young people
in the Victorian youth justice system



Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1	That the new <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i>: a) enable the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) Secretary to authorise Aboriginal communities to design, administer and supervise elements of the youth justice system, including: – delivering cautions and alternatives to proceedings, including diversionary options – delivering family group conferencing and restorative justice group conferencing – determining the location and delivery of hearings (including Koori Court hearings) – determining the conditions of community-based Youth Justice orders – designing and administering community-based Youth Justice options, including alternatives to custody b) place a positive duty on the DJCS Secretary to develop strategic partnerships with Aboriginal communities, and report regularly on measures taken to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.	Support in principle	DJCS Victoria Police	This action has been completed. The 2025–26 State Budget provides support for the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> implementation via the <i>Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system budget initiative</i>.	Completed	The Commission welcomes the 2025–26 State Budget support for the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> implementation via the <i>Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system budget initiative</i>. The Commission will continue to monitor the impact of the legislation on Aboriginal children and young people through our legislated monitoring and oversight role, and as a regulator of Child Safe Standards (Standards) and the Reportable Conduct Scheme (Scheme) in youth detention centres.

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2	That the Victorian Government resource and develop the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to design, coordinate and deliver youth supports, including through a peak body or bodies for Aboriginal youth sector workers and organisations.	Support	DJCS	The Aboriginal Youth Justice Annual Gathering was held in May 2025 and provided professional development and networking opportunities for Aboriginal Youth Justice staff, in line with Goal 3.2 of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, to develop the Aboriginal Youth Justice workforce. The Annual Gathering brings together frontline workers from the DJCS and funded Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and agencies, who deliver Aboriginal Youth Justice Programs (AYJP). The workforce from the Community Based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program, Aboriginal Early School Leavers and Aboriginal Youth Support Service, are provided the opportunity to connect with and hear from other workers who directly engage with children at risk of or in contact with the justice system. Attendees also participated in focus groups facilitated by DJCS in relation to the review and recommissioning of Youth Justice community funded programs. The review will help ensure programs respond effectively to the evolving needs of young people involved with Youth Justice.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased to note that DJCS is undertaking activities to develop the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to deliver youth justice services. As part of DJCS's review, the Commission encourages the adequate resourcing and capacity building of ACCOs to meet ongoing demand. There is further systemic work to be undertaken to address the intent of this recommendation, including regional ACCO sector roundtables with a final state-wide ACCO sector roundtable for the establishment of a peak body. We look forward to the continuation of this initiative.

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3	That the Victorian Government ensure that relevant agencies record data on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and young people at each point in their journey through the youth justice system, using indicators developed and approved in partnership with the Aboriginal community.	Support	DJCS	A <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> Performance Framework (the Framework) has been completed in collaboration with a project control group involving Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC) members and Youth Justice staff. On 28 October 2024, the Framework was endorsed out-of-session by the Youth Collaborative Working Group (YCWG) and endorsed by AJC in December 2024. The Framework will set justice-related targets and accountability measures to improve Aboriginal children and young people's outcomes and provide a centralised accessible mechanism for relevant agencies to report data on justice involved Aboriginal children and young people at each point of their journey. The implementation of the Framework has commenced, with future implementation and review to be guided by the YCWG. Additionally, as part of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i>, DJCS is implementing an initiative to share data and information with Aboriginal organisations to help provide a full picture of the child and community trends to enable Aboriginal led responses (Domain 4, Goal). Comprehensive Youth Justice data and comparative analysis is provided three times a year at each Aboriginal Justice Forum (AJF). The Youth Justice Data Report has been shaped by input from members of the AJC. Higher level regional-specific data snapshots are provided to each Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee biannually.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased that Stage 1 of the implementation of the Framework has commenced, setting justice-related targets and accountability measures to improve Aboriginal children and young people's outcomes. The Commission looks forward to further progress against this recommendation with the development of the Framework and continued collaboration with the AJC. We reiterate the importance of centering the voices of young people in this process and mapping client journeys through the youth justice system.

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4	That DJCS, in partnership with the Aboriginal community, establish a centralised mechanism for the regular publishing of accurate, cross-agency, linked data to provide a single, authoritative source of information on Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system and their outcomes.	Support	DJCS	See response to recommendation 3.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes that this recommendation is a priority in Tranche 2 of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> , though we would like to see further movement on the establishment of a centralised mechanism that is accessible to the Aboriginal community and community organisations. We note that the actions do contribute to better sharing of information about Aboriginal children and young people engaged in the youth justice system.
5	That DJCS partner with an Aboriginal organisation to pilot Kapiti Youth Support's Outcomes Measurement Model used in New Zealand.	Support in principle	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission notes that the development of the <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> Performance Framework (the Framework), used the Kapiti Youth Support Outcomes Measurement Model as reference material to guide the design of indicators and measures across <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> 's 22 outcomes.
6	That the Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy prioritise early intervention and prevention strategies and justice reinvestment programs led by the Aboriginal community.	Support	DJCS Children's Court	This action has been completed.	Completed	<i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> is the Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, the first for Victoria. It is a ten-year strategy centred around five domains which focus on empowering families, protecting cultural connection, diverting young people from the youth justice system to reduce over-representation, and working towards Aboriginal-led responses, creating a system that's fair for Aboriginal children and young people. The Commission looks forward to greater investment in <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.

Progress against past inquiries: *Our youth, our way*

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Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
7	That the Victorian Government resource the establishment of a culturally-based, multi-service, accessible youth hub in each region to coordinate and provide holistic supports for Aboriginal children and young people. Youth hubs should be designed and developed in partnership with, and managed by, Aboriginal communities and organisations.	Support in principle	DJCS	The Co-design phase (stage 1) of the Aboriginal Youth Justice Hubs initiative was completed in early March 2025. Sixteen Aboriginal organisations were funded to engage and co-design with young people. The project is now in the Exploration phase (stage 2). In this phase, five of the 16 organisations will receive additional funding over nine months to further develop their work. The Exploration phase and funding will focus on designing and developing the services, programs and experiences that respond to the needs and desires that young people identified during the Co-design phase. A review panel, comprising of AJC and Youth Justice representatives, assessed and ranked the organisations in relation to the greatest state of readiness based on their submitted Insight Reports, as well as the needs of their respective geographic areas. Announcement of the five organisations will be made mid-year.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased that Aboriginal Youth Justice has led significant collaborative design work for the Aboriginal Youth Justice Hubs with input from ACCOs and members of the Aboriginal Justice Youth Collaborative Group. The Commission looks forward to further funding of ACCOs to implement this recommendation.

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8	That the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> (CYFA) be amended to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) in Victoria to 14 years. This should not be subject to any exceptions.	Under review	DJCS	DJCS and partner agencies, including Victoria Police, Court Services Victoria, Victoria Legal Aid and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) are working to implement the MACR elements of the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i>, which will come into effect from 30 September 2025. DJCS acknowledges the Commission's intention to monitor the use of additional police powers as part of its oversight role. The Victorian Government provided \$5 million to support 10 to 11 year-old children in 2023–24 to deliver early intervention, diversion and family support programs for children aged 10 to 11 who are in contact, or at risk of contact, with the justice system (2023–24 BP3, pp. 40, 43). DFFH is planning to implement a new service model to support this cohort. The model will be informed by the Independent Review Panel report. Any response will aim to deliver culturally safe and inclusive services to Aboriginal children and families and, over time, embed community-led responses and contribute to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in youth justice. See recommendation 1 for summary of <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> Implementation funding in last year's update.	Limited progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is deeply disappointed in the Victorian Government's decision to abandon its commitment to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 by 2027, despite compelling evidence for its support. The Commission will monitor the use of additional police powers now available under the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> for 10 and 11 year olds, noting the Commission's oversight role of these powers whilst legislated has not been funded.

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9	That the Victorian Government, in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, develop and provide a range of culturally responsive and gender-specific programs and services that are tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal children under the age of 14 years who are engaging in anti-social behaviour, and to address the factors contributing to the behaviour.	Support	DJCS	Under <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i>, the Victorian Government is committed to providing a range of culturally responsive and gender-specific programs and services. For information regarding culturally responsive program details, please see the response to recommendation 17. For information on program development specific to 10 to 13 year olds, please see the response to recommendation 6 in last year's update. For information regarding service development specific to anti-social behaviour, please see the response to recommendation 72.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased to see funding for culturally safe programs for Aboriginal children and young people. It is important that this funding is provided on an ongoing basis.
10	That the CYFA, the <i>Sentencing Act 1991</i> and the <i>Bail Act 1977</i> be amended to prohibit: a) children under the age of 16 years being sentenced to, or remanded in, youth justice custody b) children under the age of 18 years being sentenced to adult imprisonment c) the transfer of children under the age of 18 years from Youth Justice custody to an adult prison.	Under review	DJCS	The government is committed to ensuring that bail legislation strikes the right balance between supporting vulnerable children and ensuring that the community feels safe and has confidence in the bail system. The <i>Bail Amendment Act 2025</i> clarified that community safety is the overarching principle for bail decision-making (for offenders of all ages), through an amendment to the guiding principles of the <i>Bail Act 1977</i>. The Act also amended section 3B of the <i>Bail Act 1977</i> to remove the principle of 'remand as last resort' for children. The government announced that these changes are about reducing the risk of re-offending, but they will also ensure the justice system meets the expectations of the broader community. <i>continued next page</i>	No progress in the past year	The Commission is deeply concerned about the passage of the <i>Bail Amendment Act 2025</i> and its impact on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. We reaffirm our concern for those under 16 who are placed in custody and remain dedicated to ensuring that no child under 18 is sentenced to adult imprisonment or transferred from youth justice custody to the adult system. The Commission will also continue to monitor the impact of detention on Aboriginal children and young people as part of its legislated monitoring and oversight role, as well as through the Standards and the Scheme.

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10				<i>continued from previous page</i> The <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i>: • codifies the common law presumption of <i>doli incapax</i> (that a child under 14 lacks the mental capacity to form criminal intent) • introduces a new presumption against custodial sentences for children under 14 (unless they have committed certain serious or violent offences and pose a serious risk to community safety) • maintains the age threshold of 16 at which young people may be transferred to adult custody for violent or disruptive behaviour – with additional safeguards for those aged under 18 – recognising the harm that this type of behaviour can have on the health and safety of others in custody and that a safe, secure and stable custodial environment is necessary for rehabilitative work to occur. The codification of the common law presumption of <i>doli incapax</i> will come into effect from 30 September 2025, as part of the minimum age of criminal responsibility reforms. All other reforms have a default commencement date of 30 September 2026. Youth Justice will closely monitor the effectiveness of the new sentencing framework and transfer mechanisms under the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> when they come into effect in September 2026.		

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11	That the new <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> require youth justice system decision-makers: a) to prioritise early intervention and diversionary processes at all points on the youth justice system continuum b) to ensure that children and young people are subject to the least intrusive intervention that is necessary in the circumstances, including a decision not to take any formal action against the child or young person c) not to commence a criminal proceeding against a child or young person if there is another appropriate means of dealing with the matter.	Support in principle	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission welcomes the passage of the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i>. The Commission has had opportunities during 2023–24 to engage with DJCS on aspects of the Act and is satisfied that many aspects prioritise early intervention and diversion.
12	That the Victorian Government pilot in at least two regions an integrated case management program for Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system, based on <i>A place to go</i> .	Support in principle	DJCS	The additional Aboriginal Youth Justice funding for an Aboriginal Intensive Case Management model delivered by Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative has been extended until 31 December 2025.	Completed	The Commission commends the DJCS for implementing the Aboriginal Intensive Case Management model in one region. We look forward to the expansion of this program under Tranche 2 of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> .
13	That Youth Justice ensure that the proposed Aboriginal Case Management Review Panels (the Panels) are chaired by a senior Aboriginal person, include senior representatives of relevant departments and service providers, adopt a strengths-based approach, give due weight to the views of the child or young person and place culture at their centre. The panels should be monitored at Secretary level by all relevant departments to ensure collaboration and accountability in relation to nominated actions, and to identify and address any systemic issues that arise. The panels should be established in consultation with the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.	Support	DJCS	On 28 January 2025, the Panels were convened in Morwell to facilitate culturally safe and collaborative case planning for Aboriginal children and young people involved in the youth justice system. The session reviewed the cases of Aboriginal young people, each at distinctly different stages of their youth justice journey – ranging from early engagement and diversion to active supervision, and post-custodial transition.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	Two Panels were conducted in Shepparton in February 2023. After lengthy delay, the Commission was pleased that the Panels resumed in 2025, convening in Morwell. We look forward to the resumption of this initiative and the implementation of learnings from previous panels.

Progress against past inquiries: *Our youth, our way*

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14	That Youth Justice establish regular regional Koori youth justice forums with local justice partners and social services.	Support	DJCS	Youth Justice will soon commence regular regional Aboriginal youth justice forums aimed at hearing the voices of community members and promoting collaboration, coordination and integration between funded organisations and justice agencies. Areas and regions with high levels of youth offending will be prioritised.	Limited progress made – action required	The Commission looks forward to the proposed action on this recommendation.
15	That Youth Justice ensure that its staff are adequately resourced and trained to comply with practice guidelines focused on building trusting, stable and therapeutic relationships with Aboriginal children and young people. In particular, Youth Justice staff should be equipped to understand and respond to different behaviours in Aboriginal children and young people, and to apply a culturally safe and trauma-informed approach.	Support	DJCS	A new Trauma Informed Practice training program, designed in collaboration with the Australian Childhood Foundation, has commenced delivery to Youth Justice custodial staff in 2025. Intergenerational trauma is also covered in both Youth Justice community and custodial Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training, which is a mandatory learning session delivered during induction.	Completed	The Commission is pleased to see the inclusion of training to support culturally safe and trauma-informed relationship building with Aboriginal children and young people and look forward to the impact of this training.

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16	That Youth Justice review its policies, guidelines and training to ensure that they do not promote 'deficit discourse' with respect to Aboriginal children and young people and consider the adoption of a strengths-based framework for case management of Aboriginal children and young people.	Support	DJCS	Youth Justice is committed to reviewing policies, guidelines, and training to ensure cultural responsiveness with respect to Aboriginal children and young people. As part of an ongoing review of the Youth Justice Community Practice Manual, collaboration is occurring with the Youth Justice Principal Aboriginal Support Practitioner to shape strengths-based culturally responsive practice. Further, the Youth Justice Principal Aboriginal Support Practitioner has contributed to an Aboriginal strengths-based approach for the development of: • Youth Justice Practice Guidelines • the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) training package • the Enhanced Bail Supervision and Support operating model. For information regarding induction training, please see recommendation 15.	Progress made	The Commission has seen a positive shift towards a strengths-based framework for case management of Aboriginal children and young people. We look forward to seeing further progress on this recommendation, specifically addressing concerns about 'deficit discourse' under Tranche 2 of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i>.
17	That the Victorian Government, in implementing the expansion of the Community-based Koori Youth Justice Program announced in March 2021, ensure that the program has sufficient capacity to provide holistic support for Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system, including through increased brokerage funding and an appropriate gender distribution among Koori Youth Justice workers (see recommendation 21).	Support	DJCS	The Community-based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program is delivered through 15 funded agencies. Fourteen of these agencies are ACCOs and one is a Community Service Organisation (CSO) (Anglicare). The program provides preventative, early intervention and case management services for Aboriginal children and young people at risk of Youth Justice involvement, or subject to a Youth Justice Order or Children's Court Youth Diversion Order (CCYD). Funding for the Community-based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program has been extended until December 2026 to allow for the review and recommissioning of youth justice community funded programs.	Complete	The expansion of the Community-based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program has been an important step towards better supporting Aboriginal children and young people. The Commission is pleased that funding has been extended until December 2026 and looks forward to the implementation of this recommendation through <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i>.

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18	That Youth Justice develop a framework to identify an Aboriginal child or young person's most trusted worker and give them a central role in planning and decision making concerning the child or young person's care. DFFH should commit to the same framework for Aboriginal children and young people for whom DFFH has joint responsibility with Youth Justice. This should be reflected in the revised protocol between Child Protection and Youth Justice (see recommendation 40).	Support	DJCS	As part of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> , DJCS continues to progress work to deliver a 'trusted worker' approach for every Aboriginal young person in Youth Justice. Including through exploring ways to embed this approach into key program models. DFFH remains committed to working with DJCS on the implementation of this recommendation, as part of the commencement of Tranche 2 of the <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> Implementation Plan. DFFH and DJCS continue to progress work to finalise the Memorandum of Understanding and Shared Practice Guide (see recommendation 40 for an update on those items).	Limited progress made	The Commission is disappointed to see limited progress towards developing this framework. We look forward to seeing further collaboration between DFFH and DJCS to streamline planning and case management processes in Tranche 2 of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> .
19	That Youth Justice ensure that Aboriginal children and young people have meaningful input into, and influence on, the decisions that affect them in the youth justice system. This should include working with the Koorie Youth Council or another Aboriginal youth organisation to develop Youth Justice youth participation principles and implementing regular and ongoing training for staff on effective youth participation.	Support	DJCS	The Department of Premier and Cabinet funds the Koorie Youth Council to support its operations and deliver activities that engage with, and advance the rights and representation of, Aboriginal young people, including the annual Koorie Youth Summit.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission commends DJCS and the Koorie Youth Council in their development of a youth voice model. We look forward to funding of this model to see the impact in amplifying the voices of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.
20	That the Victorian Government fund and partner with the Koorie Youth Council to design, implement and lead a whole-of-government Aboriginal youth engagement strategy.	Support in principle	DJCS	Please see the response to recommendation 14 for an update on the development of Koorie Youth Council's Youth Voice Model. DJCS will explore opportunities to build upon the current initiative with Koorie Youth Council to inform a whole-of-government Aboriginal youth engagement strategy.	No progress in the past year	While the Commission is pleased to see that progress has been made on a Youth Voice Model in partnership with the Koorie Youth Council, we look forward to seeing this work inform a whole-of-government youth engagement strategy and the further involvement and resourcing of the Koorie Youth Council in its development.

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21	That DJCS ensure that the youth justice system is responsive to the specific needs of all Aboriginal children and young people, including young women, young people with disability and LGBTQI+ young people. This should include: a) resourcing more Aboriginal-led, designed and delivered programs for Aboriginal girls and young women b) employing more female Koori Youth Justice workers c) ensuring that all children and young people entering Youth Justice supervision or Youth Justice custody are screened for disability, referred for a further assessment if the result indicates the likelihood of a disability, and assisted to access appropriate supports d) ensuring that disability screening and assessment tools and processes are culturally appropriate e) implementing specific training for all youth justice staff in relation to working with LGBTQI+ children and young people f) reviewing policies, procedures and accommodation options to ensure that the needs of transgender and gender-diverse children and young people are met, including by amending databases so that they can accurately record gender descriptors.	Support	DJCS Children's Court	Youth Justice introduced practice guidance for staff on working with LGBTIQ+ young people, with a focus on trans and gender diverse young people, in March 2025. The practice guidance was developed in consultation with organisations who attend Youth Justice's LGBTIQ+ Expert Advisory Group. To support implementation, a range of workforce readiness training activities have commenced and will be integrated into Youth Justice training on an ongoing basis.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes many aspects of this recommendation were incorporated into <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i>. We look forward to further work to implement this recommendation to appropriately support Aboriginal girls and young women. We note the need for funding to ensure this recommendation is implemented to meet the needs of all Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.

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22	That DJCS work with DFFH, DET and other agencies, and in partnership with the Aboriginal community, to implement mandatory pre-charge family group conferencing, based on the New Zealand model, for all children and young people whom police are considering charging, and for whom a warning, caution or other less intensive diversionary process is not appropriate. Without limiting the purposes of the pre-charge family group conference, its primary purpose should be to provide: a) integrated and coordinated welfare responses to address the holistic needs of children and young people and the underlying causes of their offending behaviour b) a formal mechanism for family involvement in planning and decision-making regarding appropriate interventions and supports for the child and their family.	Support in principle	DJCS	DJCS will work with DFFH, DET and other agencies, and in partnership with the Aboriginal community to design early diversion group conferences, to progress the pre-charge family group conferencing recommendation as part of the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> reforms.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased that family group conferencing and restorative approaches were included in <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> as well as the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> .
23	That DJCS convene a working group of Aboriginal organisations to design Aboriginal-led family group conferences for Aboriginal children and young people, informed by Iwi-led conferences in New Zealand.	Support	DJCS	Please see the response to recommendation 22 for update on work related to Aboriginal-led family group conferences.	Significant progress made	The Commission is pleased that family group conferencing and restorative approaches were included in <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> as well as the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> .

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24	That Youth Justice strengthen family and community connection for Aboriginal children and young people in custody by: a) expanding the definition of ‘family’ for Aboriginal children and young people in all practice guidelines, instructions and procedures to include extended family, kin and Aboriginal community members b) implementing a generous visits program to increase the frequency and flexibility of visits, leave, and phone and virtual contact c) providing adequate information to children and young people and their families about visits and other contact opportunities, and proactively planning regular visits and communication with family d) amending practice guidelines and procedures to ensure that contact (including through phone calls) is not linked to, or limited by, children and young people’s behaviour or ranking in behaviour management systems e) continuing the availability of video visits post COVID-19 to enable more frequent contact, or to facilitate contact when physical visits are not possible.	Support	DJCS	Youth Justice is continuing to provide custodial staff with clear guidance on approved visitors, contacts for telephone communication, and coordination of planned leaves to strengthen family connection. In April 2025, Youth Justice released the updated <i>What I Need To Know</i> booklet. This booklet is provided to all young people entering custody and provides information on a range of topics including accessing visits, phone contact, complaints, safety, and cultural rights.	Significant progress made	The Commission is pleased to see many elements of this recommendation incorporated into updated operating procedures, including strengthened advice about phone calls not being limited by children and young people’s behaviour.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
25	That the Victorian Government fund holistic family support programs, including through services delivering multi-systemic therapies, to address disadvantage experienced by the families of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system. These programs should be available in every region and designed and led by Aboriginal organisations. They should be available through Youth Justice family group conferencing, in addition to other avenues.	Support	DJCS	The government has worked with the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and Youth Collaborative Working Group to develop a program model to keep Aboriginal children aged 10 to 14 years old out of the justice system. The Aboriginal Justice Caucus approved program design and implementation within the Gippsland, Loddon Mallee, and North Metro regions. Following a competitive Request for Application process, the three successful ACCOs selected to deliver the service are: • North Metro: Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service • Gippsland: Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency • Loddon Mallee: Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative Youth Justice is also exploring options for available Multi-Systemic Therapy and alternative programs for Aboriginal children and young people in contact with youth justice, in consultation with the Youth Collaborative Working Group.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission was pleased to see significant investment in the Putting Families First trial in 2021–22. We look forward to seeing the continued expansion and adequate funding of this interdisciplinary service model in every region in Victoria.

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26	That Youth Justice improve its support for Aboriginal children and young people and their families by: a) updating its practice guidelines to ensure that they clearly address the impact of family disadvantage on Aboriginal children and young people's ability to comply with Youth Justice obligations, and direct Youth Justice staff to facilitate or provide necessary family supports b) ensuring that its practice guideline on working with families addresses the situation of young people with their own caring responsibilities.	Support	DJCS	How Youth Justice works with families is outlined in the case management evidence base and framework. These overarching policy positions are included throughout the guidance in the Custodial Operating Manual and Community Practice Manual. The Youth Justice manuals team is currently reviewing the case management evidence base and framework policy documents and will include updates about working with families, including young people with their own caring responsibilities. These documents are due for release in late 2025. The manuals team has now been appointed on an ongoing basis.	Significant progress made	The Commission commends the commitment of DJCS to updating operational policies and procedures to improve the support provided to Aboriginal children and young people, and we await the outcomes of this work.
27	That Youth Justice family group conferencing include consideration of Aboriginal children and young people's family circumstances, home environment and caring responsibilities, with a view to identifying and facilitating all necessary family supports.	Support	DJCS	Please see response to recommendation 22.	Progress made	The Commission is pleased that family group conferencing and restorative approaches have been included in <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> and looks forward to seeing the development of a more holistic approach in family group conferencing.
28	That the new <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> require youth justice system decision-makers at all points on the youth justice continuum, including police, judicial officers and youth justice staff, to: a) recognise that strong connections with culture, family and community are essential for Aboriginal children and young people to thrive b) have regard to the need to strengthen connection to culture, family and community in decision-making affecting Aboriginal children and young people.	Support in principle	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission is pleased to note that the 2025–26 State Budget provides support for the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> implementation via the <i>Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system</i> budget initiative.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
29	That the new <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> require the DJCS Secretary to ensure that every Aboriginal child and young person under Youth Justice supervision has a cultural support plan.	Support in principle	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission welcomes the 2025–26 State Budget support for the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> implementation via the <i>Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system budget</i> initiative. The Commission will continue to monitor the impact of the legislation on Aboriginal children and young people through our legislated monitoring and oversight role, and as a regulator of the Standards and the Scheme in youth detention centres.
30	That Youth Justice review and update its approach to cultural support planning, with a view to improving practice and accountability in complying with practice guidelines and strengthening the role of families. The review should consider the need for additional resourcing for Aboriginal organisations to develop and implement high-quality cultural support plans for children and young people in the youth justice system.	Support	DJCS	The recently passed <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> requires the DJCS Secretary to offer every Aboriginal young person subject to a community-based or custodial sentence the opportunity to develop a cultural support plan, and to give the young person the support they need to develop their plan. An Aboriginal young person being held in custody on remand, or on bail, may also develop a plan. The Secretary's obligation to assist a young person includes supporting them to engage with Aboriginal family members, Elders, and Aboriginal organisations, and assisting the young person to request information from other entities that might be relevant to the development of their plan. A young person controls who or what organisations have access to their plan and how it is used. The default commencement date for these provisions is 30 September 2026. Funding for cultural support planning has been allocated to DJCS from the 2025–26 State Budget as part of the <i>Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system budget</i> initiative.	Completed	The Commission is pleased to see progress against this recommendation and the DJCS commitment to ongoing improvement. We look forward to further progress on this recommendation in partnership with the Cultural Support Plan sub-working group of the Youth Collaborative Working Group.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
31	That DJCS ensure that the families of Aboriginal children and young people are meaningfully involved in the Youth Justice cultural support planning process, whether by means of family group conferencing or through the strengthening of existing processes.	Support	DJCS	See response to recommendation 30 for information regarding cultural support plans, and response to recommendation 22 for information regarding family group conferencing.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased to see progress against this recommendation and the DJCS commitment to ongoing improvement. We look forward to further progress on this recommendation in partnership with the Cultural Support Plan sub-working group of the Youth Collaborative Working Group.
32	That DJCS, DFFH and DET work together and with Aboriginal organisations to develop protocols for the sharing of cultural support plans with the young person's consent. An Aboriginal child or young person should only have one cultural support plan across all agencies.	Support	DJCS	DJCS, DFFH and Department of Education (DE) are working together with ACCOs on Cultural Support Plans (CSPs) for Aboriginal children and young people through the Youth Justice Collaborative Working Group and the Cultural Support Plan sub-working group. The Aboriginal Children's Forum and Aboriginal Justice Forum have both been continuing consideration of this important matter recently and will be part of this work as it progresses. DFFH is currently supporting the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) to undertake a project to review cultural support planning, which will be discussed with the Aboriginal Children's Forum and other forums as appropriate. The departments note this recommendation was reiterated in the Commission's <i>Let us learn</i> inquiry final report. A separate update has been provided on the recommendation (31) about sharing information from cultural planning with education settings, and both pieces of work will remain connected where necessary. DJCS, DFFH and DE are committed to ongoing collaboration to improve support for Aboriginal children and young people.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the provision under the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> to ask an Aboriginal child or young person for a cultural plan. We are pleased to see commitment to ongoing collaboration between DJCS, DFFH and DE, however, we are yet to see specific work towards an agreed approach for how this will work for Aboriginal children and young people engaged with Youth Justice and Child Protection. Given the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in both systems, this is an important issue that needs to be led across departments.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
33	That the Victorian Government implement systems to ensure that there is appropriate monitoring of the quality and implementation of cultural support plans, and the involvement of the young person and their family in the development of plans.	Support	DJCS	Decisions regarding cultural support plan processes and protocols, including the engagement of families and young people, will be decided in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders within the Cultural Support Plan sub-working group of the Youth Collaborative Working Group, and the Aboriginal Justice Caucus.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission remains concerned about the quality and implementation of cultural support plans. We look forward to further progress in integrating the involvement of young people and their families into the development of these plans.
34	That the Victorian Government monitor and publicly report on the implementation of the Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care, including a focus on its effectiveness at reducing the criminalisation of Aboriginal children and young people.	Support	DFFH	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission is satisfied that previous responses provided by DFFH adequately address the recommendation. It is critical that the Victorian Government publicly report on the implementation of the Framework. We also note recommendation 23 of the <i>Yoorrook for Justice</i> report of September 2023 which highlighted the importance of implementation and monitoring of the Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care.
35	That DJCS support the development, including via adequate resourcing, of a crossover list between the Family Division and the Criminal Division of the Children's Court, beginning with regional headquarter courts, to strengthen the court's ability to identify and meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people, and holistically address the underlying causes of their offending behaviour.	Support in principle	Children's Court of Victoria	No longer relevant as per the Commission's assessment.	Not completed – no longer relevant	The Commission is of the view that this recommendation should be assessed as 'not completed – no longer relevant'. The recommendation relates to Finding 17 and 'crossover children' (children with both Child Protection and Youth Justice involvement). This recommendation involves sharing of information prior to the determination of court proceedings which could unfairly prejudice decision makers and judicial officers. Also, the intended outcome (courts and decision makers better meeting the needs of Aboriginal children and young people) can be better met through the implementation of other recommendations, and through <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> .

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
36	That the Victorian Government ensure that sentencing legislation requires judicial officers to consider the impact of various factors on a child or young person's behaviour, including: a) the systemic racism, increased disadvantage and postcolonial and intergenerational trauma experienced by Aboriginal children and young people, including any culturally inappropriate responses that may have worsened the effects of trauma b) any experience of trauma, including the effect of that trauma on the child or young person's development and capacity to avoid problematic behaviour, and the relationship between trauma and any mental illness, neurological difficulties or developmental issues c) removal from family, home, community and school, or other disruption to the child or young person's living situation or education d) any experience of out-of-home care, particularly foster care and residential care, including the number of placements and carers, and the need for the child or young person to have safe, stable and secure living arrangements e) the child or young person's age, including developmental age, when they first offended and at their current offence and sentence.	Support in principle	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Complete	The Commission is pleased to see new sentencing principles enshrined in the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> , including Aboriginal-specific sentencing principles.
37	That the Victorian Government continue to build on its commitment to improve early intervention and family preservation services, with new investment over time informed by monitoring of recently funded and other existing programs.	Support in principle	DFFH	This action has been completed.	Complete	The Commission welcomes the increased investment in early intervention and family preservation services. We look forward to monitoring the impact and continued investment in these initiatives as we continue to advocate for further resourcing for early intervention and prevention.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
38	That the Victorian Government, in implementing the recommendations from the Commission's <i>In our own words</i> inquiry, particularly recommendation 16, work with Aboriginal organisations to identify and develop alternatives to residential care that meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people with complex trauma and challenging behaviours.	Support in principle	DFFH	Round 9 of the Innovation and Learning fund provided \$2.3 million to ACCOs to develop and test new initiatives and ways of working. Through this, the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) and the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance were successful in securing funding to scope an Aboriginal residential care model to inform further work. This work will build on learning from the current delivery of residential care through ACCOs, including two and three-bed therapeutic care and the Keep Embracing Your Success residential care model.	Not completed – retired and monitored through another inquiry	We welcome the Victorian Government's announcement in August 2025 of funding through the Innovation and Learning Fund for the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance to scope an Aboriginal designed residential care model. The Commission continues to monitor the broader work around therapeutic options for children and young people in care through recommendation 16 of our <i>In our own words</i> inquiry.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
39	That DFFH work in partnership with the Aboriginal Children's Forum, the Aboriginal Justice Forum and relevant departments to develop a strategy to divert Aboriginal children in out-of-home care from entering or progressing in the youth justice system.	Support in principle	DFFH	For young people in residential care, the department continues to implement the Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in care and its 18-month action plan, in place until September 2024. The action plan sets out 35 actions, including for DJCS and Victoria Police to support all young people in residential care. It has oversight through a statewide implementation group that includes the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance. The government is planning how best to support 10 and 11 year olds and their families following the increase of the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 years which will come into effect in September 2025. Considerations include service responses which reduce over-representation, embed community-led responses, and provide culturally safe and inclusive services for Aboriginal children and families. DFFH has supported recent discussions at both the Aboriginal Children's Forum and the Aboriginal Justice Forum where minimising Aboriginal children and young people's contact with the justice system was raised. DFFH is supporting the planning for a joint Aboriginal Justice Forum and Aboriginal Children's Forum in 2025 which include this topic being considered for the agenda. <i>continued next page</i>	Limited progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes DFFH's commitment to embed the Framework to reduce criminalisation of young people in residential care into practice. We emphasise the importance of ensuring that all children in out-of-home care are supported to minimise their contact with the youth justice system.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
39				<i>continued from previous page</i> Findings and recommendations from the new systemic inquiry the Commission initiated in December 2024 into experiences of young children in contact with the criminal justice system will be incorporated into these initiatives at the earliest opportunity.		
40	That: a) DJCS and DFFH urgently review and update the Protocol between Child Protection and Youth Justice b) DFFH provide clear guidance to Child Protection workers in both the <i>Child Protection Manual</i> and the Protocol between Child Protection and Youth Justice to clarify their obligations to perform their statutory duty to the children and young people they work with throughout any contact with the youth justice system. Similar guidance should be provided to contracted agencies.	Support in principle	DJCS DFFH	DJCS and DFFH are continuing to progress this recommendation. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Youth Justice, Child Protection and authorised ACCOs has undergone extensive consultation and is currently undergoing final review prior to publication and signing. The accompanying Shared Practice Guidance (SPG) is currently being drafted. DJCS and DFFH anticipate this will be finalised in 2025.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the strengthening of Child Protection/Youth Justice protocols. The Commission looks forward to the Shared Practice Guidance (SPG) currently being drafted and the implementation of the protocols to ensure children and young people in the child protection system have appropriate wrap around supports when navigating the youth justice system.
41	That DFFH ensure that Child Protection is properly supporting children and young people involved in both the youth justice and child protection systems, preferably by establishing a senior ‘crossover’ role in each division or by another mechanism that achieves the same outcome.	Support in principle	DFFH	DFFH and DJCS are continuing to progress the intent of this recommendation via a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and accompanying SPG. An update regarding progress of the MoU and SPG is at recommendation 40. DFFH has considered but does not support the creation of a senior crossover role, as the proposed approach will deliver on the intent of the recommendation in a less resource-intensive manner.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the strengthening of Child Protection/Youth Justice protocols. We look forward to closely monitoring the implementation of the MOU and SPG to achieve strengthened support for Aboriginal children involved with both child protection and youth justice.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
42	That the Victorian Government require and resource Child Protection to provide an appropriate level of support to children and young people throughout their contact with the youth justice system, including by: a) rostering Child Protection staff to the Children's Court b) empowering the Criminal Division of the Children's Court to compel Child Protection workers and/or contracted agency staff to attend hearings and to provide the court with reports concerning children and young people under Child Protection's care c) ensuring that Child Protection workers and/or contracted agency staff visit and support children and young people in custody, actively engage with youth justice staff and attend hearings, appointments, assessments and meetings as advocates for children involved with both Youth Justice and Child Protection.	Partially Support in principle a) Do not support b) Support in principle c) Support	DFFH DJCS	The 2025–26 State Budget provides support for the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> via the 'Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system' initiative. From September 2026, the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> will give the Court discretion to order the DFFH Secretary or ACCO authorised under section 18 in respect of a child: • to attend any criminal proceeding in relation to the child and give any information and assistance required • to provide a report to the Court and to other parties to the proceeding, with any information the court requires • to provide information the Court requires to DJCS, for inclusion in court report or provision to court by DJCS. This recommendation will also be partially addressed by the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and accompanying Shared Practice Guidance (SPG). An update regarding progress of the MoU and SPG is at recommendation 40.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the recent 2025–26 State Budget allocation towards the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i>, specifically the strengthening of Child Protection workers and contracted agency staff roles in supporting children and young people attending the Criminal Division of the Children's Court. We encourage continued support by Child Protection and/or contracted agencies for children and young people in custody, as noted in subsection c of this recommendation. We look forward to the implementation of strengthened Child Protection/Youth Justice protocols.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
43	That the Victorian Government establish Aboriginal community-controlled crisis accommodation for Aboriginal children and young people in every region, informed by the model provided by Nungurra Youth Accommodation Services.	Under review	Homes Victoria	Homes Victoria continues to be guided by the Blueprint Steering Committee in implementing the Blueprint in which self-determination remains at the centre and decisions are community driven. The Big Housing Build has committed \$50 million for ten new supported housing sites for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, with 60 per cent of this investment in regional locations. This will accommodate a further 130 young people across Victoria to address youth homelessness and make sure more young Victorians have access to the support they need. The \$50 million investment includes capital funds to develop two more Aboriginal-specific youth accommodation and support facilities, building on the one already in operation. The Village 21 model in Frankston has commenced operation and the models in Gippsland and Shepparton are under development and scheduled to go live in 2026. The Commonwealth Government's National Housing Infrastructure Fund-Crisis and Transitional (NHIF-CT) funding is currently seeking proposals for crisis and transitional accommodation capital projects for young people and for women and children experiencing family violence. This provides an opportunity for ACCOs to seek funding for more crisis and transitional housing to build a self-determined Aboriginal-specific homelessness system. Homes Victoria is actively providing support to a range of ACCOs to submit proposals into the funding round to meet their local community's needs.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission acknowledges the current work underway to deliver transitional and longer-term support housing, as well as crisis and transitional housing. The Commission is pleased to hear that Homes Victoria is supporting Aboriginal organisations to build a self-determined Aboriginal-specific homelessness system. We encourage continued partnership with Aboriginal organisations to deliver accommodation for Aboriginal children and young people in every region.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
44	That the Victorian Government establish at least four Aboriginal community-controlled youth foyers across the state, with consideration given to three regional locations and one metropolitan location.	Support in principle	Homes Victoria	Youth foyers remain a key deliverable in the blueprint for a specific Aboriginal homelessness system across Victoria supported by the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum. As part of the \$50 million Big Housing Build investment, ten new supported housing sites for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness have been funded, new Education First Youth Foyers are being developed with the first to open in Wodonga in May 2025. The new foyer is in addition to the 13 youth foyers, including three Education First Youth Foyers, already operating across metropolitan and regional Victoria. The new foyer in Wodonga will accommodate 40 young people. The Commonwealth Government's Housing Australia–National Housing Infrastructure Fund–Crisis and Transitional (NHIF-CT) funding is currently seeking proposals for crisis and transitional accommodation capital projects for young people and for women and children leaving family violence. This provides an opportunity for ACCOs to seek funding for more Aboriginal-specific youth foyers through the NHIF-CT funding. Homes Victoria is actively providing support to a range of ACCOs to submit proposals into the funding round to meet their local community's needs.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission commends the Victorian Government for its commitment to establish Aboriginal-specific youth accommodation facilities. We encourage continued partnership with Aboriginal organisations to deliver accommodation for Aboriginal children and young people in every region.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
45	That DJCS fast-track plans to introduce mandatory, ongoing mental health training for Youth Justice community staff to enable them to identify, understand and respond to trauma and mental health concerns experienced by Aboriginal children and young people.	Support	DJCS	Work is underway to implement the Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy. A key priority area of the Strategy is helping to ensure that culturally appropriate responses are available to support the health, mental health, AOD, education, disability and other social and emotional wellbeing needs of Aboriginal children and young people in contact with the youth justice system For information regarding trauma-informed training, please see response to recommendation 15.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission commends the work of DJCS and members of the AJC Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing sub-working group on their establishment of a Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy. The response demonstrates a strong commitment to trauma-informed, culturally responsive and ongoing mental health training for youth justice staff. The Commission looks forward to the implementation of the Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy over the next five years.
46	That the Victorian Government resource Aboriginal organisations to provide in-reach mental health support for Aboriginal children and young people in Youth Justice custody and facilitate transitional and post-release mental health treatment for Aboriginal children and young people.	Support in principle	DJCS	Work is underway to implement the Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy). Supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to work with Youth Justice involved Aboriginal children and young people with complex needs is a key action under the Strategy. This includes development of an Aboriginal-led model of social and emotional wellbeing care in Youth Justice custodial precincts. Implementation of all Strategy actions is intended to occur over its five-year lifespan. Recruitment is also underway by the Custodial Forensic Youth Mental Health Service to fill the Aboriginal Mental Health Worker role that will support mental health interventions for Aboriginal children and young people in custody and during transition into the community. <i>continued next page</i>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission commends the work of DJCS and members of the AJC Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing sub-working group on their establishment of a Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy and notes the establishment of a Custodial Forensic Youth Mental Health Service. The Commission looks forward to the outcome of this work.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
46				<i>continued from previous page</i> Primary health services, including primary mental health, in custody are delivered by cohealth at Parkville and Barwon Health at Cherry Creek. Both services include resourcing for Aboriginal health workers to support Aboriginal children and young people in custody, including access to primary health and mental health services and transitional support. Cohealth's Aboriginal health worker is supported by cohealth's Yakeen Tharn Aboriginal Health Unit. Wathaurong, through their agreement with Barwon Health, resource the Aboriginal health roles at Cherry Creek. Demand for Aboriginal health workers more broadly across the state has limited availability of Aboriginal health workers for this role and therefore the role currently includes a youth social and emotional wellbeing worker, with onboarding of an Aboriginal nurse also underway.		

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
47	That the Victorian Government work with the Aboriginal community to design and establish at least two healing centres for Aboriginal children and young people, in addition to Bunjilwarra and Baroona. Consideration should be given to establishing a dedicated healing centre for Aboriginal girls and young women, and another for Aboriginal children and young people under the age of 16 years.	Support in principle	DJCS	Following the 2021–22 State Budget, a total of \$5.85 million was allocated to support the construction of a new Baroona Youth Healing Centre in Echuca. The project has been delayed as a result of COVID restrictions, floods, and Njernda's organisational challenges. Over the course of 2024 and early 2025, Njernda completed a series of community meetings to engage the Echuca community which informed a revised proposal to complete the project. The Aboriginal Justice Caucus (AJC) endorsed the revised proposal in March 2025. As a result, governance structures have been revised and established to oversee the project. The design of the Model of Care is progressing, and infrastructure works are set to be completed by early 2027. It is expected that service delivery will commence by mid-2027.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes recent progress of a revised plan to implement the Baroona Youth Healing Centre. We look forward to further progression and adequate funding for two additional healing centres to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
48	That the Victorian Government: a) resource additional strengths-based cultural mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and young people across the state, designed in partnership with local Aboriginal communities and in accordance with youth participation principles b) in expanding the Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program under the Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy, establish dedicated programs for Aboriginal girls and young women, and for Aboriginal children and young people in custody.	Support	DJCS	DJCS is committed to providing strengths-based cultural mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and young people. Included within the suite of culturally responsive programs and services offered within the Community-based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program are gender-specific programs and activities such as the Lil Lubblies program provided by the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BDAC), the Deadly Daughters program provided by Anglicare Victoria, and the Koori Women's Football Carnival hosted by BDAC. For more information regarding the Community Based Aboriginal Youth Justice Program, please see the response to recommendation 17. For information regarding the Youth Through Care program, please see the response to recommendation 75. Work is also occurring to provide in-reach Elder support for Aboriginal children and young people in Youth Justice custodial centres, as part of implementation for action 18–46 of Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja – Aboriginal Justice Agreement 4. <i>continued next page</i>	Progress made	The Commission notes the current mentoring programs currently provided to Aboriginal children and young people in Parkville and Cherry Creek. Strengths-based cultural mentoring programs must be further resourced and expanded to meet demand.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
48				<i>continued from previous page</i> There are several initiatives under <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> that support mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and young people in custody and community. DJCS will: • provide more strengths-based mentoring programs for young people in custody and community through Aboriginal organisations and Elders (Domain 1, Goal 2) • engage Aboriginal leaders, Aboriginal community organisations and businesses to deliver leadership development opportunities for Aboriginal young people in community and in custody (Domain 1, Goal 2). Both initiatives are scheduled to begin in Tranche 2 of the <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> Implementation Plan, which commenced in July 2024.		

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
49	That the Victorian Government improve Aboriginal children and young people's engagement in education by: a) expanding the Navigator program to include children aged 10 years and above b) ensuring targeted educational support for Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system, whether through the expansion of the LOOKOUT program, the Youth Justice education pathway coordinator role, the Education Justice Initiative program or the role of Parkville College c) resourcing the expansion of the Out Teach program to another region, with consideration given to it being led by an Aboriginal organisation d) expanding the Aboriginal Early School Leavers program to enable more Aboriginal organisations to provide material support to Aboriginal children and young people in contact with the youth justice system e) considering the expansion of referral pathways to the Aboriginal Youth Support Service from education providers f) regularly publishing data on the suspension of Aboriginal children and young people from Victorian government schools g) implementing mandatory reporting of informal expulsions and requiring parents or guardians to provide information regarding the student's departure from school, in line with the Victorian Ombudsman's 2017 recommendations h) strengthening efforts to tackle and eliminate racism in schools.	Support in principle a–e) Support in principle f) Support in principle g–h) Support	DE	Reporting no longer relevant, captured in subsequent inquiry.	Not completed – retired and monitored through another inquiry	This recommendation will be monitored through the Commission's 2023 <i>Let us learn</i> inquiry.

Progress against past inquiries: *Our youth, our way*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
50	That DET consult Aboriginal children and young people and work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to design and deliver additional schooling options embedded in culture for Aboriginal students, taking into consideration the example of Worawa College.	Support in principle	DE	This action has been completed.	Complete	The response to this recommendation has demonstrated a proactive approach to consulting Aboriginal communities and involving young people in the reform process. The Campfire Conversations and the Koorie Young People Advisory Group are significant steps toward designing culturally appropriate educational options. The Commission looks forward to the implementation of recommendations stemming from the Campfire Conversations final report.
51	That DET review the supports provided to Aboriginal children and young people, including the Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) role, with a view to increasing direct support for Aboriginal children and young people in schools, and prioritising access to educational support for Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system.	Support in principle	DE	Reporting no longer relevant, captured in subsequent inquiry.	Not completed – retired and monitored through another inquiry	This recommendation will be monitored through the Commission's 2023 <i>Let us learn</i> inquiry. However, the Commission is disappointed that DE is yet to address the recommendation to review the role of KESOs.
52	That DE develop and fund an ongoing identified Aboriginal education support role for Parkville College at each youth justice centre. The role should have a particular focus on directly assisting Aboriginal students in the classroom and with planning transition into education or employment pathways in the community.	Support	DE	This action has been completed.	Complete	The response provided by DE in the previous reporting year adequately addresses this recommendation.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
53	That the Victorian Government expand partnerships with community organisations and implement a strategy to create more employment opportunities in a variety of fields for Aboriginal children and young people in contact with the youth justice system, with priority for those leaving custody.	Support in principle	DE DJCS	As part of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> , DJCS will work to improve vocational learning support and living skills to Aboriginal young people to increase their employment prospects, including through introducing on-Country work arrangements in partnership with Traditional Owners. (Domain 1, Goal 2) This initiative is scheduled to begin in Tranche 2 of the <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> Implementation Plan, which commenced in July 2024.	Limited progress made – action required	The Commission notes that it is a priority under Tranche 2 of <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> to improve vocational learning support and living skills for Aboriginal young people to increase their employment prospects. We look forward to further action from DJCS and DE to address this recommendation. The Commission will also continue to monitor the experiences of Aboriginal children and young people in accessing these employment opportunities, particularly through Vocational Education and Training programs through our Independent Visitor Program.
54	That the Victorian Government commission an independent and properly mandated body with specialist knowledge and expertise in relation to children and young people to undertake an urgent review of the experiences of Aboriginal children and young people with Victoria Police. This review should: a) include an examination of police powers and the exercise of discretion in the investigation and processing of Aboriginal children and young people suspected of offending, including cautioning, diversion, arrest, summons, custody and complaints processes b) be empowered to make recommendations for improved police practice and policy in relation to Aboriginal children and young people.	Under review	DJCS	Government is considering reforms to Victoria's police oversight system which are informed by all the evidence and feedback from the systemic review of police oversight, and from the Yoorrook Justice Commission. Government recognises the importance of an improved police oversight system that is responsive to complainants and the victims of police misconduct, and culturally safe for Aboriginal people, their families and community. Reforming Victoria's police oversight system is complex. The DJCS is consulting with IBAC, Victoria Police, the Aboriginal Justice Caucus and other key stakeholders. Timing on police oversight reforms is to be determined following decisions of government.	Limited progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased to hear that DJCS is consulting with IBAC, Victoria Police, and the Aboriginal Justice Caucus about improving police oversight. We reaffirm that police powers should be independently examined in relation to treatment of Aboriginal children and young people. We will closely monitor the outcome of this work. The Commission also notes new transport powers that will come into effect with the raising of the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 later in 2025, and the Commission having a corresponding legislated oversight role of these powers, without any additional funding being provided through the state budget process.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
55	That the Victorian Government prioritise investment in Aboriginal-led diversionary programs across Victoria that meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people, drawing on relevant interstate and New Zealand examples.	Support	DJCS Victoria Police	For information regarding Aboriginal-led diversionary programs, see response to recommendations 17 and 48. For information regarding pre-charge diversion within the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> , see response to recommendations 1 and 22.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the inclusion of pre-charge diversion and cautioning opportunities in the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> . We also note the current review and recommissioning of Aboriginal Youth Justice Programs and reinforce that Aboriginal-led diversionary programs must be adequately resourced and funded to meet demand.
56	That the Victorian statutory Children's Court diversion scheme be amended to maximise opportunities for children and young people to obtain diversion. This should include introducing a presumption in favour of diversion, removing the requirement for prosecutorial consent to diversion, and reviewing current exclusions under section 356B of the CYFA for certain road safety offences.	Support in principle	DJCS	The <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> partially acquits this recommendation by changing the requirement for diversion in the Children's Court that a young person acknowledge the offending so that they may access diversion if they do not deny the offending. The Act does not remove the current exclusions for certain road safety offences or the requirement for prosecutorial consent to diversion. Instead, the Act aims to maximise opportunities for diversion through the introduction of comprehensive pre-charge diversionary mechanisms that will increase transparency of decision-making in the diversion space and divert more children before they enter the court system. Pre-charge diversionary mechanisms are: - legislated warnings and cautions and a new Early Diversion Group Conferencing scheme including an Aboriginal-led model for Aboriginal children and young persons - establishing a hierarchy of options for alleged offending behaviour, requiring a police officer to prioritise taking no action or taking diversionary action unless clearly inappropriate in the circumstances. The 2025–26 State Budget provides support for the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> implementation via the <i>Supporting a safe and effective Youth Justice system</i> budget initiative.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission was pleased to note the emphasis on early intervention and diversion in the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> . However, the provisions relating to prosecutorial consent for diversion and <i>Road Safety Act 1986</i> offences have been incorporated into the new <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> unchanged.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
57	That the <i>Bail Act 1977</i> be amended to exclude children and young people from the operation of the 2017 and 2018 amendments, including the requirement to show exceptional circumstances or compelling reasons.	Under review	DJCS	On 21 March 2025, the government passed the <i>Bail Amendment Act 2025</i> to strengthen Victoria's bail laws. These reforms removed the consideration of remand being an option of last resort for young people and amended the guiding principles of the <i>Bail Act 1977</i> to clarify the overarching importance of maximising safety of the community and persons affected by crime to the greatest extent possible. The amendments also introduced new offences for committing an indictable offence while on bail and contravening bail conditions and strengthened bail tests for serious offences. Bail decision makers will still be required to consider specific vulnerabilities for young people in making bail decisions, including when a reverse onus test is being applied. The government has announced it will introduce a second bail Bill to Parliament in the middle of the year. This second set of bail reforms will create a new, stricter bail test for people charged with serious and repeat offences. This new test will apply to both young people and adults. Additionally, changes are being developed to Victoria's uplift settings which will impose a reverse-onus bail test on people charged with 'committing an indictable offence on bail'. Safeguards are being developed so this 'uplift' is proportionate.	No progress in the past year	The Commission is deeply concerned and disappointed that the recent <i>Bail Amendment Act 2025</i> has removed the consideration of remand as a last resort for children and young people. Further, the Commission strongly warns against plans to establish a new 'second-strike' rule within tranche two of bail reforms, whereby more children will experience prison if they commit even minor further offences. It is clear that these laws will capture vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people in numbers well beyond the small group of repeat, serious offenders, as already seen in Victoria's marked rise of children in custody. Further, the Commission remains deeply concerned about the trial of electronic monitoring bracelets in certain circumstances and its impact on children and young people who are on bail. The Commission has previously commented on the lack of evidence for the effectiveness of these measures, and the potential to stigmatise children or young people involved with the justice system. It is the Commission's view that government should invest in strengthened assessments, interventions, and supports that tackle the drivers of each child's offending and effectively support prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation, instead of further entrenching Aboriginal children and young people within the youth justice system.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
58	That the <i>Bail Act 1977</i> be amended to expand sections 3A and 3B to require decision-makers, in making determinations under the <i>Bail Act 1977</i>, to take into account: a) the systemic racism, increased disadvantage and postcolonial and intergenerational trauma experienced by Aboriginal children and young people, including any culturally inappropriate responses that may have worsened the effects of trauma b) any experience of trauma, including the effect of that trauma on the child or young person's development and capacity to avoid problematic behaviour, and the relationship between trauma and any mental illness, neurological difficulties or developmental issues c) removal from family, home, community or school, or other disruption to the child or young person's living situation or education d) any experience of out-of-home care, particularly foster care and residential care, including the number of placements and carers, and the need for the child or young person to have safe, stable and secure living arrangements e) the child or young person's age, including developmental age, at the time of the alleged offence.	Under review	DJCS	This action is complete.	Completed	The reforms to the <i>Bail Act 1977</i> in March 2024 included amendments to section 3A and 3B and were welcomed by the Commission.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
59	That the Victorian Government fully resource a 24-hour bail system for children and young people across Victoria, whether this is a Children's Court bail and remand service, or otherwise involves access to specialised and trained decision-makers who have expertise in working with children and young people, and Aboriginal children and young people. The 24-hour bail system should also include access to corresponding support services.	Under review	DJCS	The Children's Court Weekend Online Remand Court remains active, hearing after-hours bail and remand applications to reduce unnecessary after-hours remands of young people, including Aboriginal young people, wherever possible and appropriate.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission is pleased that the Children's Court Weekend Online Remand Court remains active. We will closely monitor the impact of the recent <i>Bail Amendment Act 2025</i> upon the effectiveness and ability of the Children's Court Weekend Online Remand Court to reduce unnecessary after-hours remands of young people.
60	To reduce the likelihood of remand and increase compliance with bail orders, that the Victorian Government: a) increase the number of roles in the Koori Intensive Support Program to enable statewide access b) resource and, in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, establish therapeutic, home-like supported bail accommodation options across Victoria.	Support in principle	DJCS	DJCS continues to deliver the Koori Intensive Support Program (KISP). These roles service the Hume, North Metro, Gippsland, South Metro, and Barwon South West regions. <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> prioritises delivery of culturally responsive residential bail support via action to expand the Baroona Redevelopment Project to provide more residential bail support and healing programs for Aboriginal girls and young women. For more information, please see the response to recommendation 47. Under <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> , DJCS will explore on-Country alternatives to remand to keep Aboriginal children and young people close to their families and communities. This initiative scheduled to begin in Tranche 2 of the <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> Implementation Plan, which commenced in July 2024.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the continued provision of the KISP and the DJCS plans to provide residential bail support as well as on-Country alternatives to remand. We urge the government to implement, adequately resource, and support these measures to reduce remand rates and improve compliance with bail orders.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
61	That the Victorian Government work towards having no Aboriginal child or young person on remand. As a step towards this, the Victorian Government should provide community-based alternatives to custody for Aboriginal young people on remand. In particular, DJCS should invest in establishing a minimum of two small, home-like facilities that provide therapeutic and culturally appropriate care for Aboriginal children and young people on remand.	Support in principle	DJCS	Under <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> , DJCS is exploring on-Country alternatives to remand and custody to keep Aboriginal children and young people close to their families and communities.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the inclusion of this recommendation in <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> and urges the Victorian Government to take immediate steps to provide community-based alternatives to custody. We urge DJCS to prioritise this critical initiative to reduce unnecessary detention.
62	That the Victorian Government resource the expansion of the fully specialised Children's Court, commencing with rural and regional headquarter courts, to support the court's work with Aboriginal children and young people. Specialisation for all magistrates undertaking Children's Court work should include training in child and adolescent development, trauma, adolescent mental health, cognitive and communication deficits, and Aboriginal cultural safety.	Under review	Children's Court of Victoria	This recommendation continues to be actively considered by government alongside recommendations 18 and 19 of the <i>Yoorrook for Justice</i> Commission which address the need for specialist children's court statewide and the expansion of Marram-Ngala Ganbu subject to resourcing.	No progress in the past year	The Commission is disappointed that the Victorian Government has not addressed the recommendation to expand the fully specialised Children's Court, noting this has been echoed in recommendation 18 and 19 of the <i>Yoorrook for Justice Report</i> . We urge the government to prioritise this recommendation to better support Aboriginal children and young people in the court system.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
63	That the Children's Koori Court be expanded to sit at more locations and with greater frequency at existing locations.	Support in principle	Children's Court of Victoria	In January 2025 the President of the Children's Court made changes to the listing practices for the criminal division of the Children's Court of Victoria (ChCV) in metropolitan Melbourne so that all matters would be heard at one of the four specialist Children's Court venues (Melbourne, Dandenong, Broadmeadows, and Moorabbin). As part of these changes there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Aboriginal young people who have access to on-site support from Children's Court Koori Services and Programs staff (Melbourne, Broadmeadows, Dandenong), and a Children's Koori Court at their proper venue (Melbourne and Dandenong). The ChCV is committed to further expansion of the Children's Koori Court to all of its specialist venues and received funding in the 2025–26 State Budget to commence both Children's Koori Court and Marram-Ngala Ganbu at the new Wyndham Law Courts commencing in the second half of 2026.	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes recent changes to practice whereby all criminal division matters will be heard at one of the four specialist Children's Court venues, which offers access to on-site culturally responsive supports. Further expansion and ongoing systemic efforts are required to ensure every Aboriginal child has appropriate access to specialised, culturally responsive, court supports.
64	That the Victorian Government review the role of Elders in the Children's Koori Court process with a view to strengthening Elder participation and self-determination. This should include consideration of the role of Elders in New Zealand's Rangatahi Courts and Queensland's Youth Murri Courts, and the ability to conduct hearings in more culturally appropriate spaces.	Support in principle	Children's Court of Victoria	The Government acknowledges the crucial role that Elders play in the Children's Koori Court in ensuring the cultural safety of the justice system for Aboriginal children. This recommendation will be given further consideration subject to resourcing, noting the significant reform underway as a result of the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> .	No progress in the past year	The Commission reiterates our recommendation that this position must be reviewed and strengthened to enable greater self-determination.
65	That the Victorian Government ensure that Balit Ngulu is resourced to provide specialist legal services statewide for Aboriginal children and young people on an ongoing basis.	Support in principle	DJCS	Ongoing funding for Balit Ngulu was provided in the 2024–25 Victorian State Budget.	Completed	The Commission welcomes the allocation of ongoing funding for Balit Ngulu, and the important legal services it provides for Aboriginal children and young people.

Progress against past inquiries: *Our youth, our way*

continued

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
66	That the Victorian Government develop and implement measures to increase the capacity of mainstream legal assistance providers to ensure culturally and age-appropriate services are delivered to Aboriginal children and young people.	Support	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission commends the work led by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, with support from Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian Legal Services Board, for the development of the First Nations Cultural Capability Framework which will support legal practitioners to provide culturally appropriate legal services to Aboriginal children and young people.
67	That the CYFA be amended to include a presumption against the use of restrictive conditions in supervised community orders, except where necessary and achievable in the individual circumstances of the child or young person.	Support in principle	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission welcomes the passage of the <i>Youth Justice Act 2024</i> and the sentencing principles that will limit the use of restrictive conditions in supervised community orders for children and young people.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
68	That DJCS: a) work with Aboriginal communities in Victoria to establish a community steering committee to guide and monitor the design and implementation of cultural services and programs in youth justice centres b) validate its risk assessment tools for use with Aboriginal children and young people c) ensure that all Aboriginal children and young people have access to culturally safe youth offending programs in custody, preferably delivered by Aboriginal organisations d) establish a dedicated, permanent indoor cultural space at the Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre secure site e) evaluate the recent improvements to cultural spaces in youth justice centres and continue to improve these spaces to provide access to culturally enriching environments f) ensure that custodial placement decisions prioritise, where possible, placing Aboriginal children and young people with at least one other Aboriginal child or young person g) give every Aboriginal child or young person remanded or sentenced to custody a cultural connection package, preferably tailored to their needs and cultural connection. This care package should not be connected with behaviour management and incentive programs.	Partially support a) support b) support c) support d) under review e) support f) support g) support	DJCS	a) Under the Aboriginal Justice Forum framework, the Youth Collaborative Working Group is comprised of Aboriginal Justice Caucus members, Aboriginal organisation representatives, government staff, and relevant independent statutory bodies/agencies. The Youth Collaborative Working Group supports the development and implementation of initiatives that meet the particular needs of Aboriginal children and young people at risk of, or in contact with the justice system, including cultural services and programs in Youth Justice centres. b) Validation of the risk assessment tools for Aboriginal young people is planned as part of ensuring that the LS/YLS assessment tools are calibrated appropriately. Youth Justice is committed to validating this tool for use with Aboriginal young people. c) Aboriginal children and young people have access to culturally responsive youth offending programs in custody through the Youth Through Care program and programs in community through the Aboriginal Youth Justice Program. For more information on these programs, please see the response to recommendation 75 and recommendation 17 respectively.	Progress made – ongoing systemic efforts required	The Commission notes that several actions to address this recommendation are in progress. We look forward to seeing the outcomes from this work, particularly the development and implementation of the <i>Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy</i>.

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Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
68				<i>continued from previous page</i> d) While Malmesbury has been decommissioned, the new Cherry Creek Youth Justice Precinct has a Multi-faith and Cultural Centre. This centre offers a variety of spaces for culturally specific programs and activities for Aboriginal young people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and faiths. The cultural spaces include a dedicated building for cultural and multi-faith staff and visitors, gardens with a yarnning circle and picnic style seating, and a foot washing room next to the multi-faith space. e) An evaluation of cultural spaces in Youth Justice Centres will be undertaken in the first half of 2025. This will inform future improvements to these spaces. f) Custodial placement decisions always strive to place Aboriginal children and young people with at least one other Aboriginal child or young person where compatibility exists. g) All Aboriginal children and young people admitted to custody are provided with cultural connection packages including possum skins and have access to art therapy packs which strengthens cultural identity. Provision of these items is not linked to behaviour management or incentive programs such as ACE, however items may be limited where suicide and self-harm or other safety risks exist.		

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
69	That DJCS review the Aboriginal Liaison Officer program to assess how it can meet the competing needs and demands placed on the program, with a view to strengthening it. The review should include an assessment of the training needs of, and remuneration for, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) role.	Support	DJCS	Changes have been made to the training and key accountabilities of the ALO role, with this work led by the Manager, Aboriginal Operations. A review of remuneration has also occurred in 2025, with the outcome that ALO roles are fairly remunerated in alignment with comparative roles in Corrections Victoria (CV). Additional total FTE have been added to the ALO team to ensure caseloads are kept low and on-call functions spread across a larger team.	Completed	The Commission commends the recent review of remuneration for ALO roles and the addition of FTE to meet competing needs, demands, and cultural load placed on the team. We encourage continued support and appropriate resourcing of the ALO program.
70	That DJCS: - urgently progress the implementation of the Youth Justice custodial workforce plan, and monitor the extent to which it is reducing the use of isolation and lockdown - ensure that culturally supportive therapeutic spaces as an alternative to separation, isolation or seclusion rooms are established in Youth Justice centres - immediately introduce care packages for all children and young people experiencing isolation or lockdown to relieve stress, boredom and psychological damage.	Support	DJCS	Under <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i>, DJCS will work to reduce the use of isolation in Youth Justice custodial facilities, as part of the Custodial Services operating philosophy, and continue to report to the Aboriginal Youth Justice Forum on the extent of use and publish data on a quarterly basis (Domain 5, Goal 2). The Youth Justice Custodial Workforce Plan is being implemented and progress monitored through a Custodial Workforce Working Group, with the majority of items already actioned. Parkville Youth Justice Precinct transitioned to a new workforce model in October 2023, which is also in place at Cherry Creek. Under the new model, the roles, responsibilities and classifications of Youth Justice workers and unit supervisors have been elevated and additional training provided, incorporating new job requirements focused on improving the rehabilitation of young people in custody. This new approach aims to support improved outcomes for young people, with flow on benefits for staff remuneration and precinct safety and stability. <i>continued next page</i>	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	With the opening of Cherry Creek in September 2023, the Commission has welcomed the efforts of the Victorian Government to ensure custodial staff have the appropriate training and staffing numbers. We continue to monitor the use of isolation and lockdowns as part of our monitoring and oversight role. We also note the inclusion of sensory rooms at Cherry Creek as a way of de-escalating children and young people's behaviours in youth justice custodial settings. The Commission will continue to monitor the use and impact of lockdowns through the Commission's oversight and monitoring of youth justice.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
70				<i>continued from previous page</i> Implementation of the uplifted workforce model has resulted in a significant improvement in attraction and recruitment activities, increasing workforce numbers and capacity across both precincts. There has been a 36 per cent reduction in security-based and behaviour-based isolations between quarter one of 2023–24 (July to September) and quarter two of 2023–24 (October to December) – this follows the introduction of the new workforce model at both Cherry Creek and Parkville. b) Utilisation of culturally supportive spaces as an alternative to isolation remains a work in progress. Access to the Indigenous Garden at Parkville has been hindered due to infrastructure upgrades to accommodation spaces due for completion by the end of 2024. The way the cultural and therapeutic spaces are utilised in Cherry Creek continues to evolve during the early stages of site operations. c) Aboriginal children and young people have access to cultural support during periods of isolation or lockdown. This support will be strengthened as more ALO positions are filled in 2024–25.		

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
71	That the Victorian Government ensure that the body designated as the National Preventive Mechanism for youth justice facilities is a body with specialist expertise in children and young people including child development, working with vulnerable children and young people, and Aboriginal children and young people.	Support in principle	DJCS	The Victorian Government supports the principles of Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). Victoria is seeking a commitment from the Commonwealth to provide sufficient and ongoing funding to establish a National Preventive Mechanism in Victoria. Implementation of this recommendation into action is contingent on the outcomes of funding negotiations with the Commonwealth. The Victorian Government strives to protect all people deprived of liberty, including children and young people, from torture and other cruel inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. If funding negotiations are successful, National Preventive Mechanisms established in Victoria will be designed to meet the needs of children and young people in places of detention.	Not yet progressed	The Commission notes that the Victorian Government is seeking commitment from the Commonwealth for the establishment of a National Preventative Mechanism in Victoria. We reiterate our recommendation that this body must have specialist expertise in children and young people, including Aboriginal children and young people.
72	That DJCS urgently develop a strategy to provide improved, consistent and therapeutic responses to children and young people at risk of suicide or self-harm in youth justice centres. The strategy should include specific elements to ensure a culturally safe and improved response to Aboriginal children and young people.	Support	DJCS	Addressing the unique needs of Aboriginal children and young people in the Youth Justice system at risk of suicide or self-harm is a key priority area of the <i>Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy</i>. Work is underway to implement the <i>Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy</i>.	Completed	The Commission commends the work of DJCS and members of the AJC Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing sub-working group on their development of a <i>Youth Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy</i>. We note that strategy development occurred over a two year period in close partnership with Aboriginal Justice Caucus members and input from Aboriginal children and young people. The Commission looks forward to the strategies implementation.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
73	That DJCS fast-track plans to equip custodial staff with the training and skills they need to undertake trauma-informed, evidence-based and person-centred interventions. This should include support to understand the trauma often experienced by, and complex needs of, children and young people in custody, and to anticipate, de-escalate and respond effectively to challenging behaviours without resorting to the use of force. Training should also include a specific focus on intergenerational trauma.	Support	DJCS	This action has been completed.	Completed	The Commission acknowledges that DJCS has training initiatives in place to equip custodial staff with the necessary skills for trauma-informed, evidence-based and person-centered interventions.
74	That the Victorian Government work towards having no Aboriginal child or young person in custody. As a step towards this, the Victorian Government should work with Aboriginal communities to establish three small, home-like facilities for Aboriginal children and young people serving custodial sentences. These facilities should have no more than six beds. Although these facilities would be secure, they must allow for Aboriginal children and young people to connect with their culture and community.	Support in principle	DJCS	<i>Wirkara Kulpa's</i> vision is to see no Aboriginal children or young people under Youth Justice supervision because they are strong in their culture, communities, and families, living safe, happy, thriving and resilient lives. DJCS has made concerted efforts to reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people under Youth Justice supervision. As the 2022–23, AJA4 milestone has been surpassed, based on current results, Youth Justice is also on track to meet the target of reducing the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent (i.e., a target of 12.3 per 10,000 in the population), by 2031. In 2020–21, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention was 9.6 per 10,000 in the population, a 37.3 per cent reduction compared to the rate of 15.3 per 10,000 in 2019–20. In 2023–24, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention was 7.3 per 10,000 in the population, a 59 per cent reduction in comparison to 2018–19.	No progress in the past year	The Commission notes the significant reforms aimed at reducing the number of children in custody and ensuring culturally safe interventions. However, this response does not describe efforts to establish secure, home-like facilities for Aboriginal children and young people serving custodial sentences.

Rec #	Recommendation	Department status	Lead department or agency	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
75	That the Victorian Government work with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that all Aboriginal children and young people who leave youth justice custody have access to culturally appropriate and reliable community-based support for as long as required. This may include intensive case management, housing, employment and training, and mental health, drug and alcohol and cultural support services.	Support	DJCS	The Youth Through Care program continues to operate and work in collaboration with Aboriginal Liaison Officers in custody to provide culturally responsive holistic support for Aboriginal children and young people transitioning out of Youth Justice supervision. Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative also continues to operate the Aboriginal Intensive Case Management program, which includes referral support for substance use. For further information regarding mental health, please see the response to recommendation 72. Several initiatives under <i>Wirkara Kulpa</i> will also support young people who leave youth custody, these include to: • improve vocational learning support and living skills to Aboriginal children and young people to increase their employment prospects, including through introducing on-Country work arrangements in partnership with Traditional Owners (Domain 1, Goal 2) • provide more housing options for Aboriginal children and young people that keep them connected to their family and community (Domain 2, Goal 2).	Progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission notes the success of the Youth Through Care program, currently funded for three years. We reinforce the importance of recurrent funding and assisting young people to find stable housing post-release, as well as employment and training opportunities available to young people leaving custody.