



Annual plan

2026-27

The Ombudsman acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Victoria and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise the enduring connection of First Peoples to land, water and culture, over which sovereignty was never ceded.

As the human rights complaint handler and investigator, we often see the imbalance of power between individuals and the State. We acknowledge the profound injustices and systemic discrimination experienced by First Peoples, often amplified by this power imbalance.

Through our commitment to fairness and human rights, we strive to listen, learn and advance outcomes that contribute to justice in pursuit of a Victoria that is fair for everyone.

Artwork by Maddison Laws, a proud Yorta Yorta woman from Cumeragunja and member of the Victorian Ombudsman team.

Accessibility

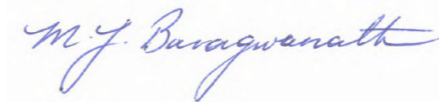
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To
The Honourable the President of the Legislative Council
and
The Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Dear Presiding Officers

In accordance with the provisions of the *Ombudsman Act 1973*, I am pleased to transmit the Victorian Ombudsman's *Annual plan 2026-27* to Parliament.

Yours sincerely



Marlo Baragwanath
Victorian Ombudsman
29 June 2026

About the Victorian Ombudsman

We help protect the rights of Victorians by bringing fairness to the inherently unequal relationship between the government and citizens. As a constitutionally independent officer reporting directly to Parliament, the Ombudsman has – since 1973 – investigated administrative actions under the *Ombudsman Act 1973*, while actively working to resolve complaints and improve public administration to prevent future issues.

Our vision and intent

The future we strive to create is simply captured in our vision:

Victoria is fair

That means that:

- human rights are protected and promoted
- people are kept at the centre of decision making
- public bodies are open and accountable.

In practice, through our work we:

- **protect human rights** by acting as an independent investigator and improving access to complaints for disadvantaged groups
- **strengthen integrity** by exposing maladministration and improper conduct, and investigating serious systemic issues
- **deliver fairness** through impartial complaint resolution and the promotion of reasonable decision making
- **drive improvement** by helping public bodies to learn from complaints and investigations and working constructively to identify solutions.

Our values

Our values serve as the foundation of our identity and guide our decision making, behaviour and strategic direction:



Fairness

We pursue fairness in our work. We keep people at the centre of decision making and seek to address inequity. We treat each other and everyone with dignity, respect and compassion.



Impact

We make intentional choices to bring about meaningful and enduring change. We work with those we oversight to develop innovative solutions to improve the lives of Victorians. We bring creativity and curiosity to our work.



Trust

We build trust with the community by listening and acting with independence and integrity. We are a valued voice in improving public administration. We work in a spirit of openness and collaboration to support a constructive workplace culture.

Our work will also continue to be guided by the public sector values – responsiveness, integrity, impartiality, accountability, respect, leadership and human rights.

Welcoming Victoria's Treaty with First Peoples

Victoria's Treaty with First Peoples came into effect in December 2025, marking an important milestone in relations between First Peoples and the State of Victoria. The Victorian Ombudsman welcomes this vital step towards upholding the rights of First Nations communities, embedding self-determination in the delivery of public services and strengthening Victoria's integrity system.

Following the establishment of Gellung Warl, in 2026-27 we will continue strengthening our approach to engaging with First Nations communities throughout the development and implementation of a dedicated First Nations complaint handling strategy, capability framework and broader organisational reforms focused on cultural safety, accessibility and trust.

We have progressed initiatives to strengthen First Nations engagement and oversight capability, including improved data collection and data sovereignty practices, culturally informed complaint pathways, staff capability uplift and engagement with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and other First Nations stakeholders to inform service design and continuous improvement.

This work supports the Ombudsman's broader commitment to accessible, fair and culturally safe oversight services for all Victorians, particularly in the context of Victoria's evolving Treaty and self-determination landscape.

Our work

In performing our functions under the Ombudsman Act, we oversee the actions and decisions of more than 1,000 public bodies.

These bodies include:

- state government departments and administrative offices
- bodies established by legislation, such as the Transport Accident Commission
- local councils
- prisons, both public and private
- some private or community-run organisations that are publicly funded.

Our decisions are evidence-based and aligned with the Ombudsman Act. We act independently, which means we do not advocate for the public or the government and its agencies.

While our work is generally conducted in private in accordance with our legislation, the Ombudsman retains the authority to make it public in specific circumstances.

Human rights

Human rights principles have always been foundational to our work. Enacted in 2006, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (the Charter) established 20 fundamental rights and freedoms in Victoria, affirming that all individuals are equal in dignity and rights, with limitations allowed only as permitted by the Act.

The Charter also amended the Ombudsman Act and empowered us to make explicit what had always been implicit in our work. We are Victoria's independent human rights investigator and complaint handler.

Viewing public administration through a human rights lens places people at the heart of decision making.

In our day-to-day work we use a wide range of tools and approaches based on our discretion and consideration of the situation.



Facilitating complaints

We speak with tens of thousands of people every year and help where we can. Sometimes this means taking on their complaint ourselves or, where we can't help, pointing them in the right direction.



Making enquiries

Either on a complaint or our own motion, we can make enquiries to decide whether an issue may be informally resolved or should be investigated further. Our enquiries are informal and can involve speaking to the parties, undertaking research, obtaining records or inspecting files.



Conciliating complaints

We can conciliate complaints at any stage of an enquiry or investigation by bringing the parties together in a facilitated and structured setting to find sustainable solutions to problems.



Complaint System Review

We proactively review public bodies' complaint-handling practices and processes to help them improve and, ultimately, reduce the number of complaints to the Ombudsman about others' complaint handling.



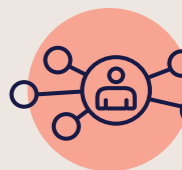
Investigations

Using Royal Commission-style powers, we formally investigate public bodies' actions and decisions and make remedial recommendations for improvement. We investigate complaints (including public interest (whistleblower) complaints), on our own motion, or any matter referred by the Victorian Parliament.



Education

We provide education and training to empower public bodies to improve the quality of their administration and complaint-handling practices.



Engagement

We seek to engage with public bodies to disseminate lessons and integrity insights and inform potential recommendations for improvement. We also engage with diverse communities to help navigate a complicated landscape and make effective complaints that will ultimately be easier for public bodies to deal with.

Our Strategic plan 2025-29

Our strategic plan defines our vision, our strategic focus and priorities, and the impact we want to see from our work.



Focus areas

In 2025-26, we adopted a new approach to sharpen our focus on key areas where we can make the greatest difference to improve public administration and protect human rights in pursuit of our vision that Victoria is fair.

Drawing on our data and other intelligence including stakeholder consultation, we identified five thematic focus areas to proactively direct extra attention, resources and expertise. These areas reflect important and emerging spheres of public life and administration where our strategic oversight, guidance, engagement and understanding can have the most meaningful impact.



First Nations



Local government



Housing and cost of living



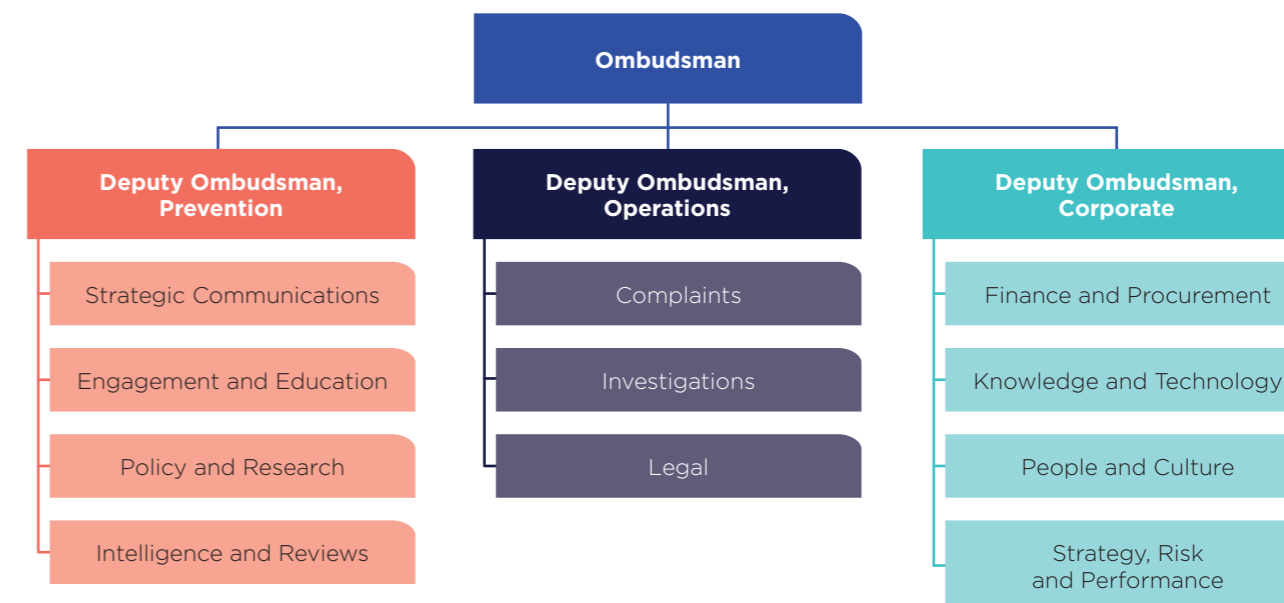
Climate change and natural disasters



Closed environments

Our structure

Our organisation is made up of three divisions. We coordinate and collaborate across these divisions to achieve our outcomes.



The **Prevention division** draws together our policy, strategic communications, engagement and education, and intelligence and reviews functions. Our work seeks to proactively improve public sector administration by identifying, exposing and preventing maladministration and improper conduct. This means promoting what works, supporting public bodies to learn from complaints, and helping them to navigate complex challenges before they escalate. It also means being visible in the community, accessible to those who need us most and engaged with the issues that matter.

The **Operations division** leads our complaint handling, investigation and legal functions to deliver our principal functions under the Ombudsman Act. The Complaints team works to assess, prioritise and resolve matters quickly and informally. More complex complaints can involve further enquiries and analysis, or meeting with the parties involved. Our Investigations team formally investigates

authorities' actions and decisions either on a complaint or, where we identify systemic issues of public interest, on our 'own motion' (without a complaint). We also enquire into and investigate public interest (or whistleblower) complaints. Our Legal team supports the whole organisation on a variety of operational and corporate matters.

The **Corporate Services division** leads our strategic planning and manages our finance, procurement, governance, risk and compliance, people and culture, and knowledge and technology services. The division focuses on ensuring our organisation plans for and manages the resources, capabilities and infrastructure we require to deliver on our legislative obligations and strategic plan. This includes advocating for sustainable resourcing, championing a constructive culture, building our people capabilities, managing effective technology systems and fostering continuous improvement.

Key initiatives for 2026–27

Our *Annual plan 2026–27* activates our long-term strategy by defining key initiatives for the year. These initiatives, organised under our four strategic themes, build upon our daily operations to ensure we meet our future goals.

Our prevention

We believe the best way to handle unfairness is to stop it before it starts. We assist public bodies in improving their operations by demonstrating what good administration looks like. Engaging and educating stakeholders is at the heart of our mission to deliver better outcomes for the community.

Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Establish a complaint handling network	30 June 2027
Embed the Victorian Ombudsman’s <i>Approach to prevention</i> ▲	30 June 2027
Develop a guideline articulating the meaning of fairness in the delivery of public services	30 June 2027

▲ *Actions anticipated to be delivered over multiple years.*

Our oversight

Independent oversight is essential to democratic accountability. We ensure public bodies serve the community honestly, highlight failures and rights breaches, and provide pathways to resolution.

Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Embed the prioritisation framework and triage and allocation model	30 June 2027
Develop a complaints channel strategy, to guide the way people contact and communicate with us	30 June 2027
Produce publications including a casebook on complaints, a human rights investigation report, and two Parliamentary referral investigation reports	30 June 2027

Key initiatives for 2026–27

Our communities

Placing people at the heart of our decisions is essential. To maximise our impact, we must target the right audience and ensure our services are accessible, meaningful and valuable. Because needs differ, we are committed to providing tailored, intensive support to those who require it most.

Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Implement our Treaty obligations and First Nations complaints and engagement strategy ▲	30 June 2027
Undertake targeted community engagement, awareness raising and enablement ▲	30 June 2027

▲ Actions anticipated to be delivered over multiple years.

Our people and systems

Our success depends on our people. To help them thrive and grow, we are committed to providing the right tools, skills, and support. We cultivate a constructive environment – both within our organisation and across the sector – and ensure our people have seamless, reliable technology to succeed.

Key initiatives

Actions	Due
Implement year two of our <i>People strategy</i> , including developing our first workforce plan	30 June 2027
Implement year one of the <i>Technology, digital and data strategy</i>	30 June 2027
Develop an operating model for the Victorian Ombudsman	30 June 2027

Performance measures

As part of our accountability to the Victorian Parliament, we are expected to achieve performance targets set out in the State Budget Paper No. 3 (BP3).

In 2025-26 we refreshed our suite of BP3 measures, aligned them to our legislative objectives and introduced new measures focused on:

- the fairness of our complaints handling
- how quickly we prioritise complaints based on their potential impact in improving public administration, fairness and equity for the Victorian community
- better demonstrating our prevention engagement and reach across Victoria.

Performance measure	Type	Unit	2026-27 target
Objective 1: To provide a timely, efficient, effective, flexible and independent means of resolving complaints about administrative action of authorities			
Complaints closed versus received	Quantity	Per cent	99
Jurisdictional cases selected for enquiry/investigation	Quantity	Per cent	27
Complainants who felt they were treated with respect and given the opportunity to explain their complaint	Quality	Per cent	70
Triage and allocation of high priority complaints made within five business days of receipt	Timeliness	Per cent	80
Objective 2: To provide for, or assist in, the identification, investigation, exposure and prevention of maladministration and improper conduct			
Public Interest Complaints closed versus received	Quantity	Per cent	99
Investigation recommendations made that were accepted	Quality	Per cent	75
Standard investigations closed within 12 months	Timeliness	Per cent	75
Complex investigations closed within 18 months	Timeliness	Per cent	70

Performance measure	Type	Unit	2026-27 target
Objective 3: To assist in improving the quality of administration and complaint handling practices and procedures of authorities			
Objective 4: To facilitate the education of the public sector and community about matters relating to the functions of the Ombudsman			
Participants in public sector prevention initiatives, including formal training workshops, presentations and speeches and other education programs	Quantity	Number	1,250
Public sector education program satisfaction rate	Quality	Per cent	90
Service delivery cost across all objectives			
Total output cost	Cost	\$m	24.44

Limitations

Our achievement of BP3 target levels may be affected by various factors influencing performance, including:

- volume of complaints and notifications received
- number of enquiries and investigations ongoing
- public sector funding impacting the number of training participants
- resource constraints due to funding affecting service levels
- community sentiment towards the Victorian public sector
- receipt of Parliamentary referrals.

Strategic challenges

Our complex operating environment poses various risks to our strategic goals and operations.

Committed to robust risk management, the Victorian Ombudsman complies with the Victorian Government Risk Management Framework. We have implemented an Enterprise Risk Management Framework based on the Australian Standard, ensuring clear, systematic risk management across all operations. Our current strategic risks are summarised in the table below.

Challenge	Analysis			Link to annual plan actions
	Likelihood	Impact	Rating	
Securing financial resources Inadequate sustainable funding to deliver on our legislative mandate and key strategic initiatives	Possible ●●●○○	Major ●●●○○	High ●●●○○	While we received some additional funding in the 2026-27 budget, it is insufficient to cover our projected deficit. We will continue to advocate for government to undertake a base review to ensure we have sufficient future funding to fulfil our mandate.
Upholding public confidence Inability to maintain credibility and trust as an integrity agency and effectively manage strategic stakeholder relationships	Possible ●●●○○	Major ●●●○○	High ●●●○○	Embedding our <i>Approach to prevention</i> , establishing a complaint-handling network, targeted community engagement, and implementing our Treaty obligations and First Nations complaints and engagement strategy.
Maintaining contemporary information systems Ineffective cyber, information security and information management resulting in a significant security breach, or disruption of operations	Possible ●●●○○	Major ●●●○○	High ●●●○○	Implementing year one of our <i>Technology, digital and data strategy</i> and roadmap; implementation of ongoing improvements to security and information management.
Supporting strong capability and culture Inability to attract, support, retain and develop staff and build and maintain a constructive workplace culture	Possible ●●●○○	Moderate ●●●○○	Medium ●●●○○	Implementing year two of our <i>People strategy</i> , including workforce planning.
Maintaining a safe workplace and service Failure to adequately manage safety and wellbeing of staff and the people we engage with	Possible ●●●○○	Minor ●●○○○	Low ●○○○○	Implementing year two of our <i>People strategy</i> , including safety and wellbeing initiatives.
Ensuring compliance with legislative obligations Non-conformance with legislative obligations including the Ombudsman Act, Public Interest Disclosure scheme and relevant financial and compliance legislation	Possible ●●●○○	Moderate ●●●○○	Low ●○○○○	We remain committed to assurance and legal compliance as part of our core business.

Funding

The below table summarises our funding provisions for the next four years.

Funding component	Budget (\$m)			
	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Total funding	24.44	24.7	25.35	25.95

Operating budget

The confirmed funding for FY2026-27 is \$24.4m which includes non-recurrent funding of \$0.33m which we received for the recent bail reforms.

Consistent with recent years, additional funding was sought through budget processes, but, consistent with previous years, this funding request was largely rejected with no explanation. While we welcome this year's funding uplift of \$0.9m which has been included in forward estimates, the fact remains that this increase does not keep pace with our increasing costs (due to wage increases and CPI cost increases on other goods and services).

The lack of ongoing sustainable base funding over the last five years has meant we have had to absorb unfunded CPI increases of 4-5 per cent each year. To date, we have done this through internal offsets such as delaying recruitment, postponing prioritised initiatives and capping staff numbers. However, we are no longer financially sustainable and, from

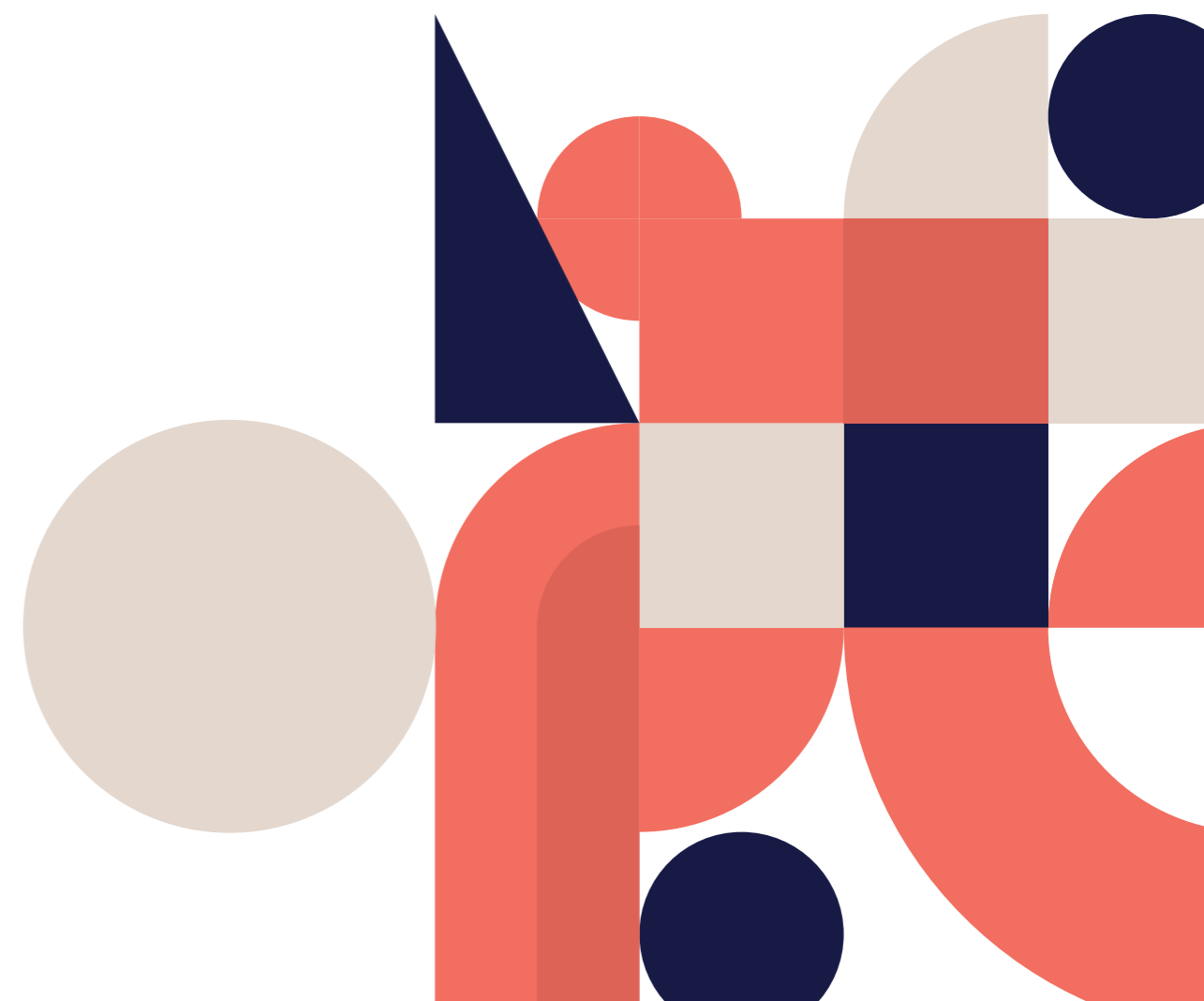
2026-27, our budgeted deficit is greater than our accumulated reserves. As the Integrity and Oversight Committee recently recommended, a base funding review is now a necessity.

Without a step change in our funding, we will not be able to provide the oversight that is the foundation of the Ombudsman's purpose.

Without a change in the process by which we are funded to ensure more independence and transparency, no one can have confidence that we are adequately funded.

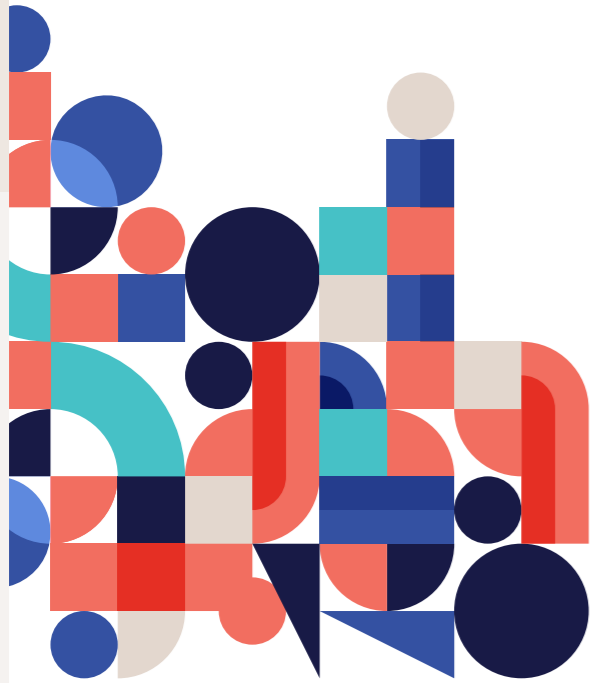
Capital expenditure

Capital expenditure of \$0.300m for FY2026-27 will support asset replacement and minor capital works. Additional request for capital funding will be made for supporting VO's ageing and new assets program of works.



Strategic plan

2025-29



Informed by engagement with our people and stakeholders, our *Strategic plan 2025-29* sets out our ambitions for the years ahead, and our priorities for realising them.

Find out more at
ombudsman.vic.gov.au



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