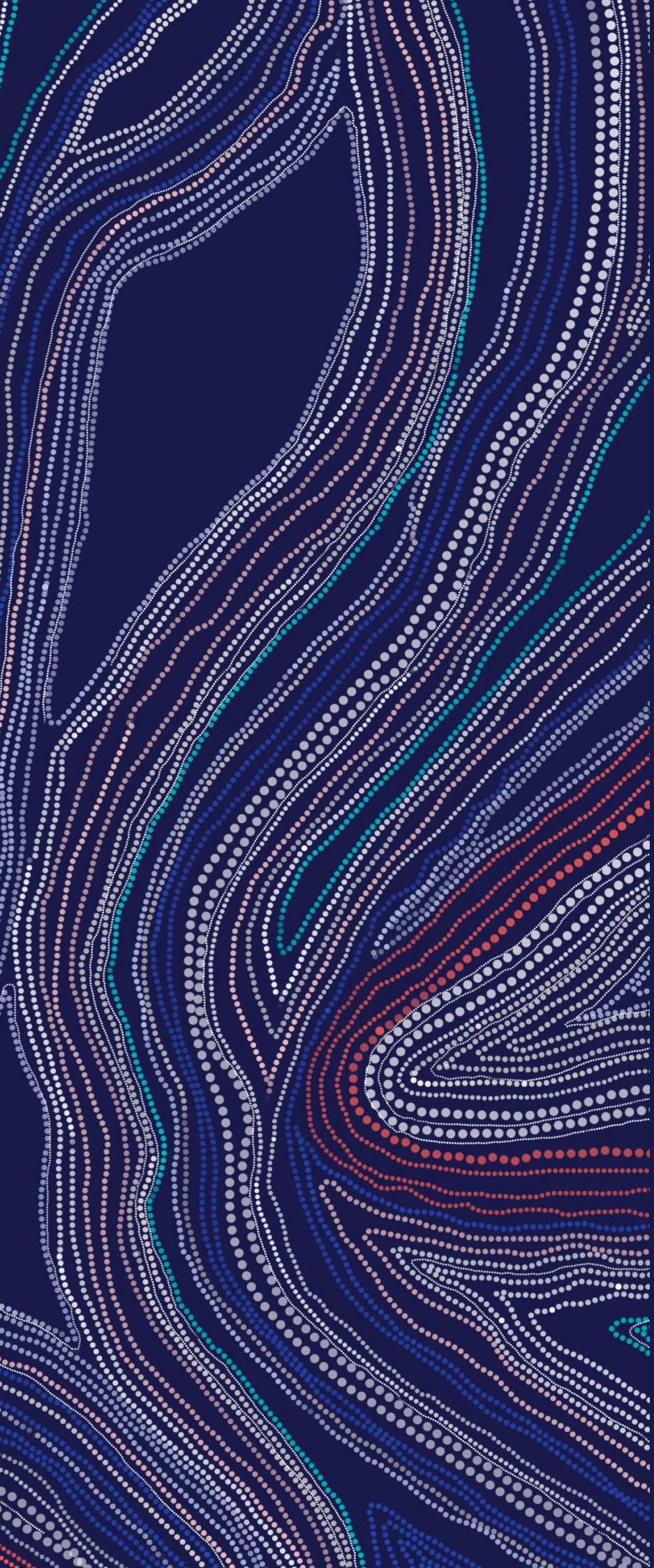


Our approach to engagement

August 2026





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 Cummeragunja and member of the Victorian Ombudsman team.

Accessibility
If you would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, please call 1800 806 314, using the National Relay Service on 133 677 if required, or email vocomms@ombudsman.vic.gov.au.

The Victorian Ombudsman exists to promote fairness, integrity and respect for human rights. We hold the Victorian public sector accountable to the people of Victoria. What this means in practice is that we’re here to ‘level the playing field’ and ensure fairness in people’s dealings with government. This is reflected in our vision, **Victoria is fair**, and in our values of fairness, impact and trust. Our vision and our values guide the way we approach engagement.

Engagement in this context is how we interact with people and groups outside our organisation to communicate, consult and exchange information. Such engagement includes listening as well as talking to government bodies, community advocacy groups, and individual members of the community. It can include one-on-one meetings, conferences, training and education sessions, community information sessions, social media interactions and more.

Our *Strategic plan 2025-29* explains how the Ombudsman will work towards our vision. Our strategic plan outlines our engagement priorities, and is built around four strategic themes: Prevention, Oversight, Communities, and People and Systems. It recognises that fairness requires a flexible approach, using tools such as enquiries and investigations along with proactive education, engagement and collaboration.

Strategic themes

Our approach to engagement sits within the strategic themes of *Our prevention: proactive education and engagement* and *Our communities: Trusted and effective services*.

This explicit focus on prevention is a new approach for the Ombudsman, aiming to help us better target our efforts where they can have the greatest impact, and equipping us to share lessons in ways that drive practical improvements. The publication *Our approach to prevention* includes more information about how we are using a preventative approach to help us to realise our vision.



Why do we engage?

Engagement is the way that we work with public bodies and the community to prevent harm, support better public administration, and achieve our vision that Victoria is fair.

Good engagement helps us do our job more effectively. We talk to and listen to groups in the community and in the public sector, so that they know who we are and what we do, as well as understanding their rights and obligations. It's important that the people who need us most, who are often communities experiencing marginalisation, know their rights and have help in navigating complex systems. This includes directing people to the right agency if it isn't us, or providing information and guidance for specific circumstances such as public interest disclosures.

The Ombudsman engages with public bodies to educate and support them to improve public administration and make good decisions. This prevents complaints and supports better management when they do happen.

Good engagement means that when we conduct an investigation, we consult on our recommendations to make sure that they are workable and will achieve the intended outcome.

Good engagement with the community and public bodies means that we are listening to what people tell us. This could be during our interactions with government at all levels, at a community forum, via a phone call to us, or something we see in the media that points to a system-wide issue.

A rigorous program of engagement helps us to recognise more widespread issues, which complements our formal intelligence channels and guides our work. This in turn means our actions and recommendations have more impact and prevent similar problems in the future.

Our engagement priorities are reflected in our strategic plan. These priorities help us to decide what our engagement activities will be.

Strategic theme	Engagement priority
Our prevention – proactive education and engagement	Strengthen constructive relationships with key stakeholders (such as public bodies and community groups)
	Improve capabilities in administration and complaint handling across public bodies
Our communities – Trusted and effective services	Increase engagement with communities experiencing marginalisation
	Tailor assistance for people who need the most help in seeking a fair outcome from government
	Make it easier to access and navigate the complaint system

Treaty

This is a period of significant reform in the relationship between First Peoples and the State of Victoria.

The establishment of Gellung Warl and the Statewide Treaty framework creates new expectations for how Victorian public sector bodies engage with First Peoples and support self-determination.

The preamble to the Statewide Treaty says that ‘Treaty is an opportunity to listen, to learn, and to affirm the rightful place of First Peoples as decision-makers of their own futures, on their own Country. It recognises the need for meaningful change – enabling self-determination to flourish, for the good of all.’



This highlights the spirit of the Treaty, which creates new obligations and opportunities for the Ombudsman in the way it engages with First Peoples. Implementing the Ombudsman’s Treaty-related obligations presents an opportunity to demonstrate a genuine commitment to culturally safe and responsive practice in our interactions with Gellung Warl and First Peoples in Victoria.

The Ombudsman will work with First Peoples to establish written guidelines and procedures to promote and safeguard cultural safety, and deliver on a commitment to building and maintaining ongoing relationships with First Peoples communities, organisations and governance bodies.

This includes guidelines about the way we will engage with First Peoples during the development of any legislative proposal, statutory rule or policy that is specifically directed to First Peoples.

The introduction of new Treaty Principles in the *Public Administration Act 2004* also provides an impetus for the Ombudsman’s office to continue to invest in the cultural capability of its staff more broadly. This investment will benefit the Ombudsman’s handling of investigations and complaints from First Peoples across all areas of its jurisdiction.

Principles of engagement

In practising the diverse engagement required to deliver on our vision, we adopt the International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) principles of engagement.

What	How	Examples
Inform	Provide the community and stakeholders with balanced information.	— Our education programs for the community and public bodies — Good practice guides and other Ombudsman publications
Consult	Obtain feedback to make workable decisions.	— Engaging with public bodies on our recommendations — Engaging with community organisations on our priorities
Involve	Work with the community and stakeholders to make sure we understand their point of view.	— Complaints clinics and public roadshows — Community surveys
Collaborate	Form partnerships to make sure we identify all the alternatives and get to the right solution.	— Partnerships with non-government organisations such as Victoria Legal Aid — Communities of practice with other agencies
Empower	Provide people with the tools and information to challenge administrative decisions made by Victorian public bodies to achieve better outcomes.	— Training for public bodies to improve decisions and complaint handling — Education and tools about how to make a good complaint and who to complain to

The Ombudsman will adapt this framework if necessary to more effectively meet the needs and experiences of specific communities.

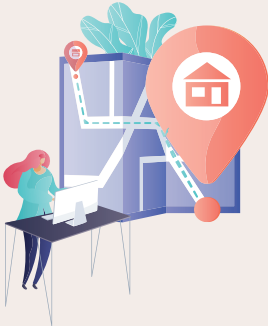
Focus areas

For the first time in 2025–26, we are adopting a new approach to sharpen our focus on key areas where we can make the greatest difference.

We have identified these focus areas by analysing our data and intelligence, and by talking to our stakeholders. We are proactively directing expertise and resources to these areas, recognising their importance to all Victorians.



First Nations



Local government



Housing and cost of living



Climate change and natural disasters



Closed environments

Who do we engage with?

Community

Talking and listening to the community is an important way that we work towards our vision of 'Victoria is fair'. Community insights help us better understand and act upon unfair decisions or behaviour by public bodies. We have an extensive community engagement program that works to bring information and educational programs to the community and provide opportunities for the community to bring information and complaints to us.

Every complaint we receive represents someone trying to navigate government, often in stressful or difficult circumstances. For many, the process can feel daunting or inaccessible, which is why connecting with communities, and making our role clearer, is central to what we do.

When we talk to communities, we help people to understand the role of the Ombudsman, their rights, and how to navigate the complaints system. We also use our community engagements to identify systemic issues in the public sector. This may lead to further investigation and recommendations for broader changes to improve processes and the quality of public administration, and create fairer outcomes.

We engage with the community in many ways, including regional and community events and complaint clinics, public forums (sometimes delivered in partnership with other government agencies) and community legal service clinics, as well as through social media and other digital channels.

We focus our community engagement both geographically and demographically. We prioritise face-to-face communication with communities that are experiencing marginalisation and may struggle to have their voices heard. We know that face-to-face communication is often the best way to build trust and to create stronger relationships with individuals and local community groups, and especially with people who may not have digital access.

We also engage with the community through civil society organisations, which may have more direct communication channels and a better understanding of the issues facing community members. For example, we build relationships with organisations working with people experiencing marginalisation, such as community legal centres and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and its members.

This is an important way for us to understand the issues faced by groups in the community that we are trying to reach, and to better meet their needs. It also helps to increase awareness and confidence in the Ombudsman's work, to encourage people most in need of support to come to us. Expert knowledge within these organisations helps us to target our oversight activities where there is the greatest need.

Public sector

The objective of our engagement with public sector bodies is to support the sector to improve public administration and drive fairer outcomes for the community.

Part of our role involves carrying out investigations into public sector bodies, with resulting recommendations for improvement. We consult with the bodies we are making recommendations to, in order to test whether the recommendations can be implemented, and how best to address the issues we have identified.

When we meet with public sector bodies, we share data and insights to identify problems and trends, and talk to them about complaints we are receiving, to understand what may be occurring and to highlight areas where they might need to improve.

Our engagements with public sector bodies target improvements across diverse entities spanning Victorian government departments, agencies, local councils, hospitals and schools.

We engage with the public sector through:

- high-level engagements with agency heads and senior leadership
- forums, workshops and targeted training
- events including conferences, multi-agency roundtables and regional events such as Law Week
- partnerships and collaborations with other agencies
- publications and guidance materials such as good practice guides.

In the future, we'll develop and deliver a data-led, risk-based program of education, engagement and reviews to assist those public bodies that need it most to improve the quality of their administration and complaint-handling practices.

We also provide resources to support public bodies make better administrative decisions and manage complaints more effectively and fairly. We run a substantial education program to deliver this, including training sessions for public sector bodies and publications to support good administrative practices.



Register for an education workshop



Our education programs broadly cover three topics:

- **Dealing with complex behaviour**
Tools to prevent, respond, manage and limit complex behaviour, including human rights and disability awareness
- **Good complaints handling**
Tools for timely, transparent, flexible and fair complaint handling
- **Good decision making**
Tools for good decision making including considering human rights, fairness and public good.

Strategic activities

We are delivering our engagement priorities through action. Our aim is to make sure that we deliver services in a way that makes the best use of our resources, while supporting the community and stakeholders as effectively as possible.

Strategic theme	Engagement objective	What success looks like	Action
Our prevention	Strengthen constructive relationships with key stakeholders	Regular two-way communication with agencies to highlight areas of concern, need for improvement, share learnings, and early visibility of systemic issues.	— Direct engagement with senior leadership at key government departments and agencies — Facilitate roundtable discussions with targeted sectors to understand key issues and share insights
	Improve capabilities in administration and complaint handling across public bodies	Awareness across public bodies of the role of the Ombudsman, understanding of best practice and where to find out more.	— Education programs to public bodies including local government — Develop and promote new resources such as good practice guides, driven by data and stakeholder feedback — Develop strategic partnerships and networks to build our role as a trusted advisor on good administration

Strategic theme	Engagement objective	What success looks like	Action
Our communities	Increase engagement with communities experiencing marginalisation	Improved awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and rights of the community Improved trust in the Ombudsman Improved perception of fairness in the operations of the Ombudsman	— Targeted engagement to communities experiencing marginalisation — Develop and maintain partnerships with organisations representing communities experiencing marginalisation — Use stakeholder feedback and formal evaluation to improve reach and effectiveness of engagement activities and develop new channels
	Tailor assistance for people who need the most help in seeking a fair outcome from government	Communities experiencing marginalisation understand in what circumstances to contact the Victorian Ombudsman, and can access and understand information from the Ombudsman	— Continue to deliver a community-focused education program — Develop new content and delivery channels based on stakeholder feedback — Develop and deliver plain language resources
	Make it easier to access and navigate the complaint system	Communities have better understanding of how the Ombudsman can help them Communities have support from the Ombudsman to navigate complaints in complex environments	— Increase engagement with communities experiencing marginalisation, to support navigation of a complex system, such as where to go with a complaint, how to escalate — Raise awareness of people's rights, responsibilities and the Ombudsman's role

How do we measure impact?

We use qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure our impact across the four areas of quality, engagement, impact and trust.



Quality



Engagement



Impact



Trust

Currently, we measure the effectiveness and impact of our community engagement through quantitative measures such as attendance rates at our events, satisfaction rates and attendee feedback. For our public sector stakeholders, we measure the number of workshops delivered, number of attendees, and the adoption rate of our recommendations. We also measure the effectiveness of our engagement indirectly through measures such as complaint numbers in the areas we have been focusing on.

To improve our qualitative evaluation, we are introducing a new suite of customer surveys to measure trust in the Ombudsman across its functions (including prevention) and perceptions of fairness.

We continue to research best practice approaches to measuring the reach and impact of our publicly released reports and other publications, using qualitative insights and reporting analytics.

We publish information about our impact in our annual report.



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