

18 October 2017

**Submission to the Victorian Law Reform Commission:
Review of the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 1996**

1. What is your experience or understanding of people's experience in accessing VOCAT?

A lot of Victims of crime don't know or not told by the police about VOCAT. Needs a lot of work to make it user friendly.

2. How do victims learn about the availability of VOCAT? What is the best way to inform victims of their potential eligibility under the Act?

Maybe in an information pack and police who are the first contact in most cases to make sure that the victim of crime is given the information, as I have been told by clients that they were not told by the police.

3. Should the definition of 'act of violence' in the Act be amended?

Yes it needs to be amended, for example mental abuse in family violence, work places, schools.

4. Should the definition of 'injury' in the Act be amended to include other forms of harm including non-physical and/or psychological injuries? Are the maximum amounts of financial assistance available under the Act adequate to meet the needs of victims?

The psychological effects of post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by victims of crime is never ending, as some people can be in courts for years, have retrials, suppression orders, cold cases, domestic violence, sexual abuse and PTSD. VOCAT does not look at the years ahead. School children who were victims of crime, for example who have been bashed by other students, some don't go back to school, and some don't go back to their jobs, some lose their homes, marriages break up, families are never the same. The psychological effect lasts a lifetime for many and if you are a victim of youth offenders you cannot claim compensation from them as they are under age. So no, the maximum amounts for financial assistance available for victims mentioned above is inadequate and does not meet the needs of victims.

5. How could the time frames and procedures for the making of awards be changed to better meet victims' needs?

Have more staff working on them to get it processed quicker.

6. Should the six year time period for variation of an award be extended to account for victims of crime with long-term needs? If yes, how long should the time limit be extended and should this be for specific crimes or specific types of awards only?

Should be no time limit as for reasons stated in answer to Q4, as it is a long going process.

7. To what extent is VOCAT a therapeutic process for victims? Having regard to the impacts of crime on victims, what are victims' needs and how should they be met through a state-funded financial assistance scheme?

Needs some independent people on the board who are victims of crime not all public servants. To make it more therapeutic, victims should be allowed to access psychologists or counsellors, medication, sleeping pills and medication for anxiety and illness caused by the trauma like for example I had a Heart Attack second day after my mothers murder ended up in a public ward where I arranged her funeral my Heart Specialists said it is called' Broken Heart Syndrome" I damaged a heart valve I cannot have an operation for a new valve as the Heart Specialist says I may not survive it, the hospital stays for angina , the medications the costs , I never had a heart condition before. Also, those who suffer from anxiety and cannot use public transport, or drive so therefore their quality of life has been taken from them.

8. Are there other models that would more effectively deliver assistance?

Look at the US model.

Kind regards,

Janine Greening and Kathleen Fisher-White

Forgetmenot Foundation. Inc

