



PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

Integrity and Oversight Committee

MEDIA RELEASE

Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare

The Victorian Parliament's Integrity and Oversight Committee has today presented its [report on the Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare](#).

The report reviews the performance of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC), the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC), the Victorian Inspectorate (VI) and the Victorian Ombudsman (VO) during 2020/21, focusing on their management of the welfare of witnesses and others involved in their investigations.

The agencies appeared before the Committee at public hearings in May 2022, provided written submissions and answered questions on notice on their performance and management of witness welfare. The Committee also received submissions and correspondence from interstate and international integrity agencies, non-integrity organisations with expertise and experience in witness welfare, and members of the public.

The Committee was pleased to receive evidence of improvements in how the agencies manage the welfare of witnesses and persons subject to investigation or of interest.

"The report addresses these important witness welfare management issues, assesses the integrity agencies' performance against best practice and recommends how their approaches can be improved for the benefit of everyone", said Committee Chair, Gary Maas MP.

The Committee made 16 key recommendations:

- to enhance IBAC's gathering of information about the welfare of witnesses, as well as the accuracy of its welfare risk assessments (particularly with respect to those coercive investigative processes which impose a greater burden on witnesses)
- strengthen public trust in IBAC's decision-making regarding its power to hold public examinations (hearings) and issue confidentiality notices
- ensure that the VI's witness welfare policies, procedures and practices are fit for purpose; informed by relevant health expertise and experience; and aligned with best practice principles
- improve the VI's capacity to identify, record and respond to welfare risks and ensure that witnesses at greatest risk of serious harm are provided with targeted support
- ensure that the VI continues to make progress with respect to the timeliness of its complaint handling
- ensure that witnesses who are subject to coercive powers that are more likely to have negative impacts on their welfare are given direct access to the VO's Employee Assistance Program, without the need for a referral from the agency
- that the Victorian Government examine the merits of several proposed legislative amendments aimed at strengthening the VO's investigative and alternative dispute resolution functions.

The report is available on the Committee's website at: <https://new.parliament.vic.gov.au/get-involved/inquiries/performance-of-victorian-integrity-agencies-202021/reports> (issued 6 October 2022)