

Hearings

Most applications are finalised without a hearing, but you have a choice – you can ask VOCAT to make a decision with or without a hearing. In some cases, even if you prefer not to attend, the Tribunal may decide it needs to talk to you about your application.

VOCAT hearings are less formal than court hearings, and do not have rigid rules about what evidence is allowed or how evidence should be given.

Hearings allow victims to talk about their experience, and to receive acknowledgement and validation that they have been the victim of a crime.

Victims can ask for hearings to be 'closed' (kept private) and can bring their lawyer or any support people they wish.



Where to get further advice

The following services can help you with your VOCAT application:

Victims of Crime Helpline

1800 819 817 (Free call, except from mobile phones)

8am – 11pm weekdays except public holidays

Helpline staff provide information and advice, and can refer you to your local Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP) who can guide you through the process of seeking assistance from VOCAT.

Law Institute of Victoria

Phone 9603 9311, Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm or visit www.liv.asn.au

Most VOCAT applicants have lawyers, and VOCAT will usually pay for reasonable legal fees. The VACP or Law Institute of Victoria can help you find a lawyer.

Contact VOCAT

VOCAT is located within the Magistrates' Court of Victoria and has 54 venues across the state. Visit www.vocat.vic.gov.au or phone VOCAT at the following Magistrates' Court venues:

Ballarat	5336 6200
Bendigo	5440 4140
Broadmeadows	9221 8900
Dandenong	9767 1300
Frankston	9784 5777
Geelong	5225 3333
Heidelberg	8458 2000
Latrobe Valley	5116 5222
Melbourne	1800 882 752
Moorabbin	9090 8000
Neighbourhood Justice Centre, Collingwood	9948 8777
Ringwood	9871 4444
Shepparton	5821 4633
Sunshine	9300 6200

If you need language assistance in order to communicate with VOCAT, you can use the Translating and Interpreter Service on telephone number 131 450.

If you have a hearing, sight or speech impairment, you can use the Speech to Speech Relay through the National Relay Service on telephone number 133 677.

Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal
www.vocat.vic.gov.au

DOT7663/0713



Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal

Financial assistance for victims of violent crime



Are you or your child the victim of a violent crime? Has a close relative died as a result of a crime? If so, you may be eligible for financial assistance from the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT).

VOCAT provides financial assistance to eligible victims of violent crime committed in Victoria to help them recover from the effects of the crime. VOCAT may also pay for some costs incurred as a result of the crime, and can award payments in recognition of a crime's impact on victims and family members.

VOCAT can also provide victims of crime with a forum to express how they feel about what has happened to them.

There is more information about VOCAT on our website – www.vocat.vic.gov.au

Who may apply

You may be eligible for VOCAT assistance if you are a:

- **Primary Victim** – you have been injured by an act of violence, including while trying to assist a victim or prevent a violent crime from occurring
- **Secondary Victim** – you were injured through witnessing an act of violence, or you are a parent or guardian injured as a result of learning about an act of violence committed against your child
- **Related Victim** – you were a close family member, dependant or a person who had an intimate relationship with a person who died as a result of an act of violence.

An **injury** can be physical or psychological, including the worsening of an existing psychological illness. It does not include injury from property loss or damage.

To qualify for assistance you must also:

- report the crime to the police within a reasonable time and cooperate with their investigations; and
- within two years of the crime, complete and lodge an application for assistance form with VOCAT .

In some circumstances VOCAT can accept applications outside these time limits. You should seek legal advice if this applies to you.

VOCAT can help to validate victims' experiences and restore a sense of dignity, while providing financial help to assist in their recovery.

Financial assistance available

If you are eligible for financial assistance, VOCAT may pay your reasonable past or future expenses for:

- counselling
- medical and dental services
- safety and security
- funeral costs
- loss of earnings
- other expenses to assist recovery, in exceptional circumstances

The amount of assistance VOCAT awards will depend on the circumstances of the crime, your injury, and whether you are a primary, secondary or related victim.

VOCAT can award up to \$60,000 to a primary victim, and \$50,000 to a secondary or related victim. Where there is more than one related victim, the maximum shared between all victims is \$100,000.

In some cases VOCAT can also award a primary victim 'special financial assistance' of up to \$10,000 to recognise the significant harm often suffered by victims.

You can ask a lawyer to make an application for you. VOCAT will usually pay for the reasonable legal costs associated with making an application for assistance.

VOCAT's website has further information about awards for financial assistance.

How to apply

It is free to apply to VOCAT. You can find application forms on VOCAT's website or at any Magistrates' Court venue in Victoria. Once completed, forms can be lodged at the court venue closest to where you live. However they must be lodged at the Melbourne Magistrates Court if:

- they relate to the death of a person;
- the applicant lives outside Victoria; or
- the applicant identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (for inclusion in the Koori VOCAT List)

If your child has been the victim of a violent crime, you can apply on their behalf.

VOCAT can award financial assistance even if no one has been charged with or found guilty of the act of violence.

Urgent financial assistance

Before an application is finalised, VOCAT can pay 'interim financial assistance' for things like urgent medical, counselling, safety and security or funeral expenses.

If you need urgent financial help you must complete and lodge an application for assistance form, together with an application for interim assistance setting out the assistance required and enclosing receipts, invoices and other documents to support your claim.

Determining an application

VOCAT considers applications and decides if applicants are eligible for financial assistance and the amounts to award. VOCAT asks the police for information about the crime and any criminal history of the alleged offender or the victim.

VOCAT will ask you or your lawyer to provide receipts, invoices and documents, such as medical reports, to support your application. VOCAT may also ask you or your lawyer to attend a 'directions hearing' to clarify issues or obtain information needed to help make a decision.

VOCAT will write to you about its decision. It can take up to six weeks for payment to be made after a matter is determined.