



VICTORIA POLICE

PREVENT DETECT DISRUPT

YOUTH GANG STRATEGY
2023-2026





Message from the Deputy Commissioner



Violent offending by youth gangs significantly impacts community safety and confidence. Violent youth gang behaviour includes inter and intra-gang conflict, and more significantly, gangs victimising the broader community through offences such as aggravated burglary and robberies. This type of offending causes great emotional and physical harm to our community.

The factors that lead to youth gang behaviour and offending are complex, spanning social, economic, and environmental issues. Youth gangs are often the result of social marginalisation, fragmented family structures or economic hardship. Young people involved in gangs place themselves at greater risk of harm and negative life-changing consequences. Individuals who are exposed to crime and the criminal justice system early in life are likely to face longer-term developmental, mental, physical and social problems.

In the past, we approached the issues presented by youth gangs at the local level. However, the landscape has evolved. Youth gangs are more mobile, more connected and influenced by technology, and unfortunately, we have seen an escalation in the harm that they can cause to the community and themselves.

As a result, we need a holistic and integrated response that reflects the complexity of the issue and the importance of collaboration - both with our external stakeholders and within Victoria Police.

The Youth Gang Strategy outlines our approach so that all Victoria Police employees, our partners and the Victorian community understand what we will do to respond to the issue of youth gangs in Victoria. Victoria Police is determined to disrupt groups displaying threatening and violent behaviour to protect the safety of our community. At the same time, Victoria Police recognises the complex risk factors that motivate young people to join youth gangs. We will work alongside our community and our partners to implement evidence-based responses to ensure that these young people can make a successful transition into adulthood. We will pair our enforcement activities with an increased focus on opportunities for individuals to address the factors underlying their offending, re-engage with education and seek employment.

This strategy will orient Victoria Police's response to youth gangs around four key pillars:

- Community
- Partnerships
- Intelligence
- People

The Youth Gang Strategy will direct our efforts to prevent youth gang membership and violent and threatening behaviour from youth gangs, detect their activities through intelligence-led policing and disrupt and dismantle groups causing the greatest community harm.

We are committed to addressing this issue now, before violent behaviours become entrenched in the lives of offenders and the lives of our community.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER RICK NUGENT



The Youth Gangs of Today

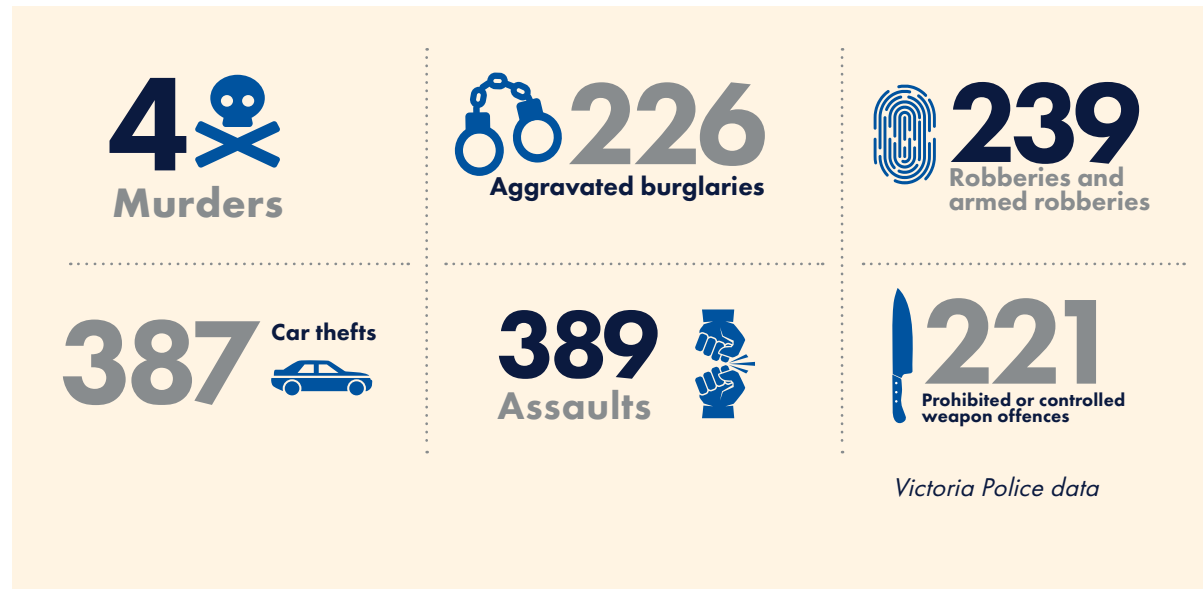
For some young people, a shared identity built around crime and violence results in an escalating pattern of gang-related offending. The rise in aggravated burglaries, home invasions, carjacking and street robberies over recent years by networked youth groups has led to a new era of linked serious crime. This behaviour is often associated with a background in or exposure to substance or alcohol abuse.

Today's youth gangs are mobile, connected and prolific on social media. They seek notoriety and the thrill and excitement of violence and anti-social behaviour. Armed with sharp weapons and firearms, we see rival gang violence in our streets and neighbourhoods.

The issues that lead to the formation of youth gangs cannot be addressed by a single policing response. We must work together to address the factors pushing these youths into this type of offending through engaging with our partners and community. For instance, we are seeing an increase in young girls involved in violent gang behaviour. This will require a different, collaborative response that addresses their serious and violent offending, but can also adapt when offending patterns and methods change.

Youth gang-related offending in Victoria is on the rise

In 2021-2022 crimes linked to youth gangs alone included:

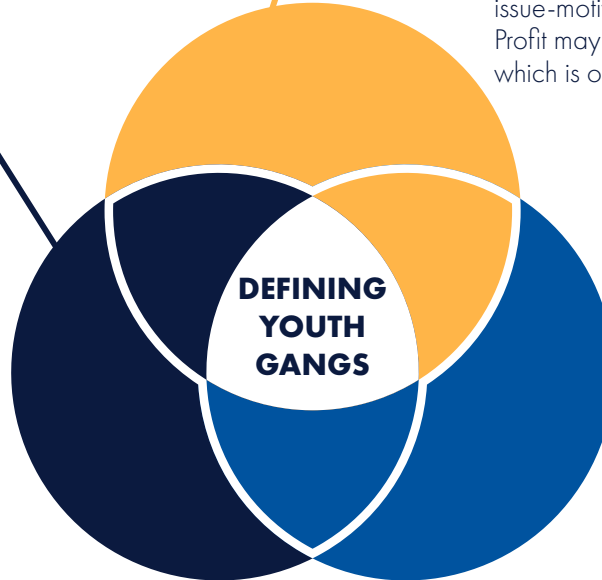


Defining Youth Gangs

In Victoria, groups involved in gang-like behaviour can be separated into three defined groups based on associations, financial motivations, and the extent of their criminal activity. The focus of the Youth Gang Strategy is youth gangs and networked youth offenders. However, Victoria Police recognises that there is often overlap with Serious and Organised Crime. When referring to 'youth' in this strategy, we commonly mean young people ranging from 10-24 years.

YOUTH GANGS

Display broader structure and may have established leaders or influencers operating in a hierarchical framework. They are likely to be identifiable through a gang name or brand, driven by status and will commit violent crimes that will cause community concern. Two core activities for youth gangs are the involvement in crime (robberies/aggravated burglaries) and conflict (affray/assaults).



NETWORKED YOUTH OFFENDERS

Are associated with peer groups and are less structured in hierarchy or membership. They have fluid offending associations that cover a range of 'network' types including youth gangs, but also organised crime groups (OCGs) consisting of youth members, graffiti crews, hacker collectives and issue-motivated groups. Offending may be influenced by peers or status. Profit may not motivate offending; and fear of apprehension may not deter, which is often reflected in their basic methods used to avoid detection.



SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME OFFENDERS

Maintain a clear hierarchy and often function like a legitimate business operation. Criminal offending may be publicly notable, yet well planned and sophisticated. Offending may include murder, shooting, serious assaults, kidnapping, extortion, production and importation of drugs, firearms and other illicit goods. These offenders are highly disciplined, know police methodology and are motivated by profit, commonly accumulating unexplained wealth.



Key Drivers of Youth Gangs

Gang life can present a seemingly glamorous lifestyle for some young people. Despite the violence, the perceived social status of being involved in a gang can be appealing – particularly for marginalised and socially disconnected young people. Joining a youth gang for some young people can often be the outcome of wider social failings in a young person's life.

We know that youth gang members are more likely to have experienced family violence, come from fragmented family structures, live in socio-economically disadvantaged communities and/or are seeking protection from abusive family members or local bullies.¹ As a result, many youth gang members display a lack of social development. This development gap can affect their capacity for empathy and can minimise their ability to understand how their delinquent behaviour impacts others.

A youth gang can also be a form of escapism or association – a break from their everyday routines that provides connections and a sense of purpose not fulfilled elsewhere. Victoria Police understands these risk factors and is determined to work with our partners to create the early interventions that curb youth gangs before they even form.

“Youth gang members thrive on building a reputation for themselves and their gang as being ruthless and feared. This enhances their gang status as well as a means of self-identity with the group and the perceived protection that goes with being associated.”

DETECTIVE SERGEANT, REGIONAL OPERATIONS



HARM

Harm to our Community

Youth gangs cause significant harm to our broader community who are often the victims of youth gang-associated threats, crime, and violence.

The often visible and episodic nature of offending by youth gangs has torn at our community’s feelings of safety. Our community should feel confident to enjoy the public places, events, and amenities of our state, without fear caused by the unlawful behaviour of others.

Youth gang activity, such as engagement in fights, drug use and theft from stores can also have significant economic impacts on local traders and consumers. Harms from youth gang activity can include:

-  **Fear in the community**
-  **Damage to property (vandalism)**
-  **Retail thefts**
-  **Vehicle thefts**
-  **Assaults and affrays**
-  **Robberies and armed robberies**
-  **Burglaries and aggravated burglaries**
-  **The cost of law enforcement and criminal justice, including policing, courts, and prison**

Harm to the Individual

Some of the most serious harms from youth gangs are experienced by members themselves. Exposure to crime and violence at an early age has a socially toxic effect – on families, communities, and the individual, particularly in relation to self-esteem, fear, school performance, building trusting relationships and in some cases, becoming entrenched in the criminal justice system.²

The risk-taking behaviour encouraged by youth gang activities increases the likelihood of members being victims of violence or theft, the target of rival youth gangs, or assaulted whilst under the influence of drugs or alcohol.³

Victoria Police knows that there is rapid escalation into serious and violent offending amongst these groups. We know that gang members are more commonly carrying and are prepared to use knives, particularly in gang conflict.⁴ We are determined to intervene before this type of behaviour becomes endemic to their lives.

“Once indoctrinated into the gang, many youths have unfortunately disengaged from their families and school, whilst totally embracing the gang culture. Their loyalty to the gang transcends everything else.”

DETECTIVE SERGEANT, REGIONAL OPERATIONS

Our Integrated Strategy

The Youth Gang Strategy is an integrated, whole-of-Victoria Police response to the specific problem of youth gangs and networked youth offenders. The strategy forms part of a broader strategic response to youth gang activity and serious criminal activity across Victoria and nationally.

The Youth Gang Strategy sits alongside other similar strategies in Victoria Police including the Victoria Police Drug Strategy, the Victoria Police Cybercrime Strategy and the Victoria Police Illicit Firearms Strategy. Our approach to policing youth gangs will also be complemented by the Victorian Government Youth Strategy and the Victoria Police Youth Strategy.

As the overarching strategic document, the Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) Strategy informs and guides Victoria Police’s response to youth gangs. Youth gang offending occurs on a continuum of harm. While some groups may only participate in low-level crimes such as retail theft, others may suddenly commit serious and violent crimes. The Youth Gang Strategy clarifies Victoria Police’s response across the continuum of offending and integrates national, state and local frameworks and resources.



How We Will Work Together to Respond to Gangs

How we organise ourselves is crucial in responding appropriately to gangs and reducing their harm.

We must take a holistic view in responding to youth gangs – what may appear to be anti-social behaviour or opportunistic offending can sometimes be a precursor to a rapid escalation into serious criminal activity. To successfully intervene, we must proactively identify areas of increasing harm, promote inter and intra-agency cooperation and deploy our resources to where they are most needed. When offending does occur, we will be quick to respond and will work together to identify and hold perpetrators to account. Police interventions will be informed by the young person’s age, their behaviours, legislative options, and the availability of appropriate alternative services from other agencies.

State-wide Response to Gangs

The Victoria Police Crime Command conducts high-level specialist investigations to detect, disrupt and prevent serious and organised crime. Informed by the SOC strategy, Crime Command will maintain primacy over offences committed by youth gangs which are classed as Category 1 criminal matters involving consistent or organised criminal activity. This includes homicide and non-fatal shootings while targeting organised crime groups at a state level.

Local Response to Gangs

Local police resources investigate serious and violent criminal offences committed by youth gangs, classed as Category 2 and 3. These incidents range from aggravated burglaries, robberies, stabbings, carjackings, swarming and vehicle crime. Local police also have primacy of the proactive management and intervention of youth gangs and individual youth gang members. In partnership with community stakeholders, local police provide a coordinated proactive response to divert young people away from gang activity and effectively dismantle criminal networks.

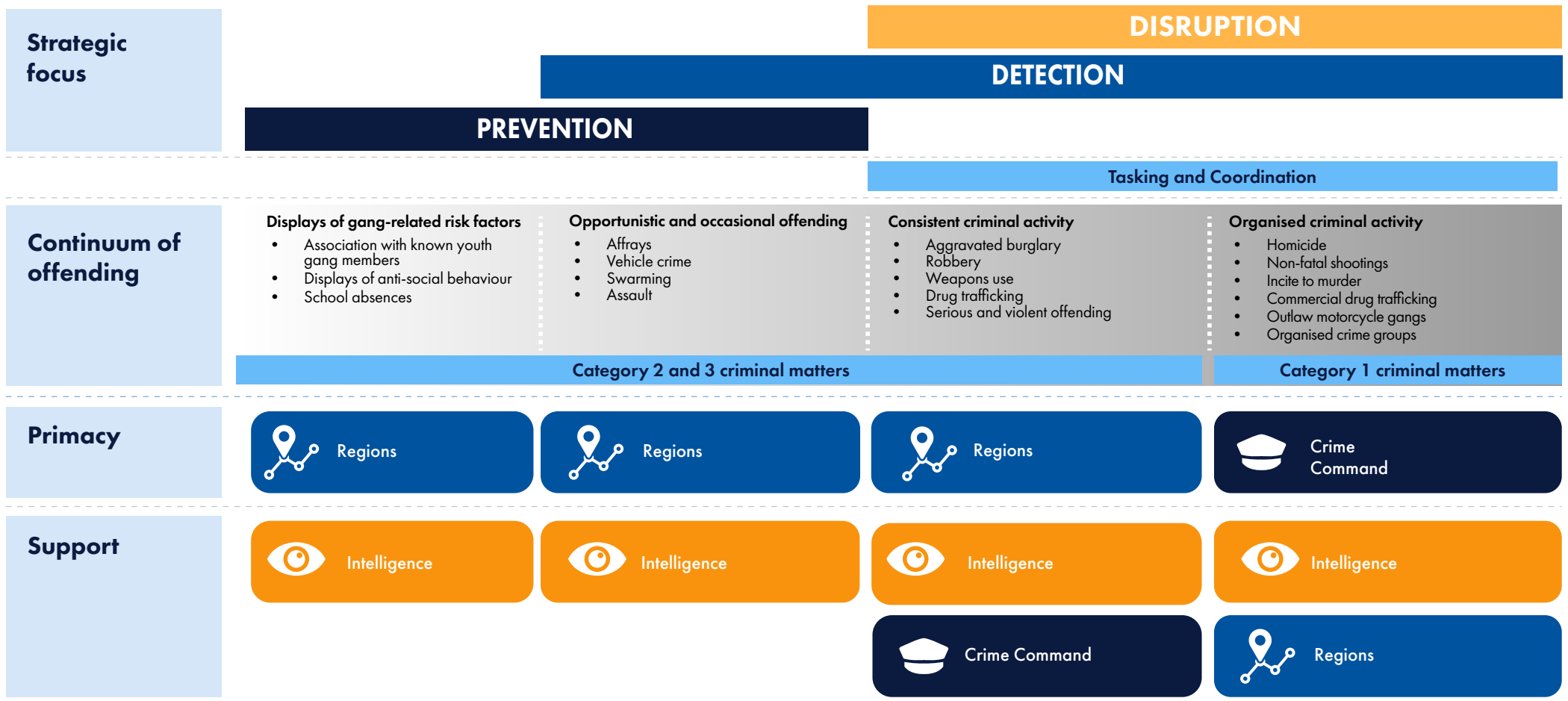
Tasking and Coordination

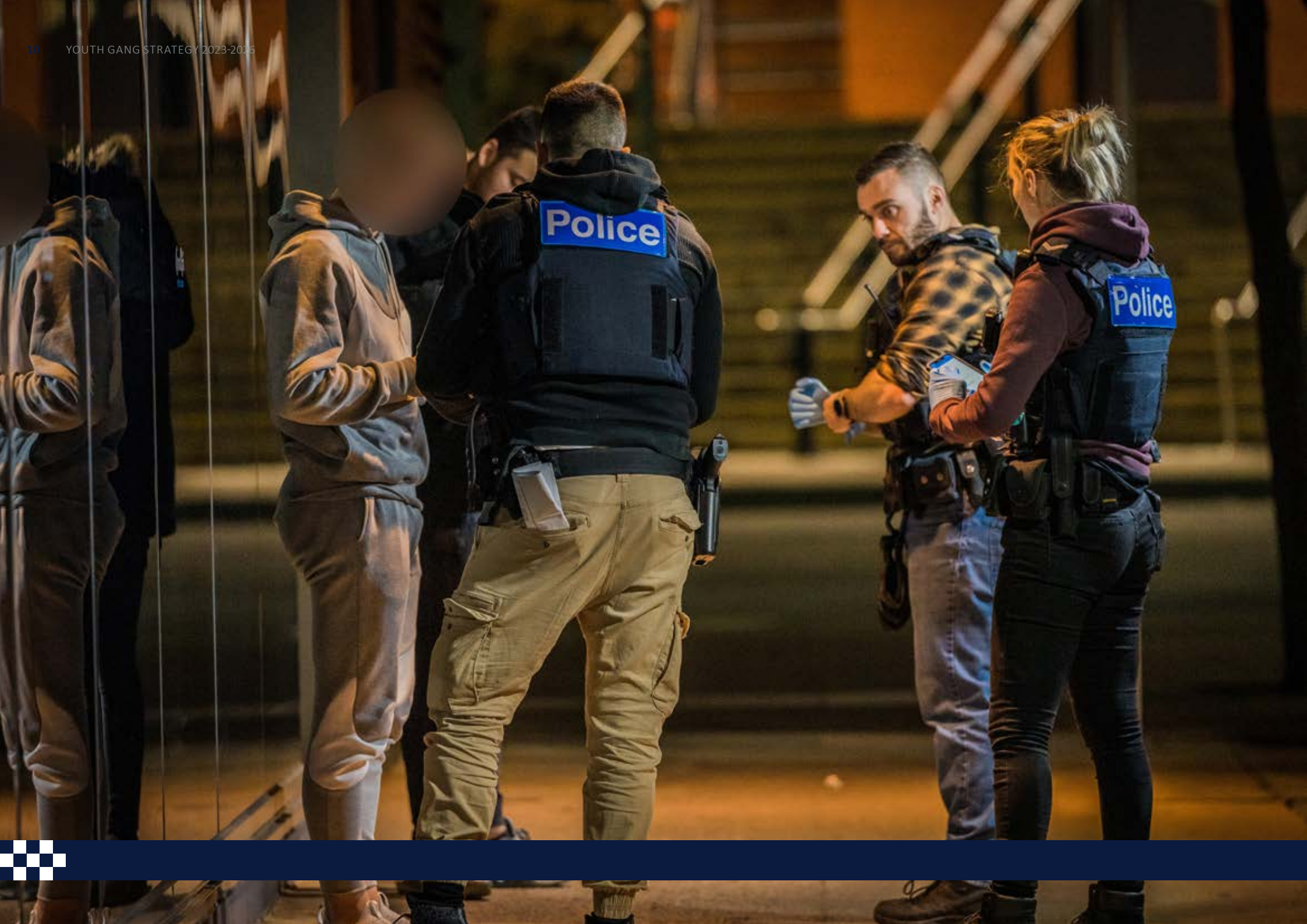
A Tasking and Coordination process brings together local investigative units, Crime Command and Intelligence and Covert Support Command to allocate tasks and coordinate a response to reduce gang crime. The Tasking and Coordination process supports the cohesive and integrated response of local and state-wide resources to share intelligence, determine operational priorities and identify opportunities.

“By actively managing youth gang members, we have the opportunity to disrupt and deter their offending by connecting them with support services, as well as holding them accountable for their crimes.”

DETECTIVE SERGEANT, REGIONAL OPERATIONS

This diagram shows the different stages of youth gang-related offending, the relative harm caused and how Victoria Police will respond.





Our Approach

Our Youth Gang Strategy is based around four key pillars that will direct how we will work within our organisation and with our partners and the community over the next three years.



APPROACH



Early intervention to prevent youth gang formation is the most effective approach to keeping our community safe.

The risk factors for joining a youth gang present themselves early on in a child's life. Frequent school absences, lived experience of family violence or the influence of older siblings, are all aggravating factors to joining a youth gang.⁵ Neighbourhood Policing involves working alongside our community to leverage collective knowledge, ensuring we can detect and divert at-risk young people away from gang life as early as possible. At the same time, we will restore feelings of safety in our community by regularly communicating with community groups and business stakeholders on our efforts in disrupting youth gangs and their networks.

PREVENTION:

We know that the earlier we intervene, the more successful we are in diverting a young person away from joining a youth gang. We will work with the community to engage with young people to build rapport and create a visible and accessible police presence. If young people start exhibiting risky behaviours and show signs of offending, we will have the coordination and resources to intervene before they are embedded into gang life.

DETECTION:

We will further develop our working relationships within the community to share information and intelligence on local safety concerns to inform our policing efforts. These relationships will help us build a thorough understanding of the problem of local youth gangs and their impact, and support the apprehension and arrest of offenders. We will focus on educating our community to know what to look for, what to do and who to notify if they become aware of youth gang activity in their community.

DISRUPTION:

Engaging with our community will help us disrupt youth gangs by increasing our understanding of local nuances and emerging trends. This enhanced understanding will inform the development of targeted disruption approaches to those who cause the most harm, enabling greater youth gang disruption activities in areas identified as high-risk.

Case study: Schools Engagement Model

The Schools Engagement Model involves specialist and frontline police officers delivering crime prevention and safety messages to primary and secondary students across the state. The program aims to identify opportunities to partner with educators and other services to address determinants of harm and prevent harm before it occurs.

OUR ROLE

- Creating a highly visible policing presence in high-risk locations for youth gang-related offending
- Proactively engaging with young people to build rapport and detect early risk indicators of youth gang membership
- Connecting with our community through local policing and obtaining intelligence about emerging youth gang issues
- Diverting and reconnecting youth with family and community
- Leveraging the Neighbourhood Policing Framework. The framework includes the establishment of Local Safety Committees with community groups, government and business stakeholders which will inform the early prevention, detection and disruption of youth gangs

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?



- Police actively engaged in the community with young people, especially in high-risk locations for youth-gang related offending
- Victoria Police has encouraged and increased the provision of intelligence from the community that prevents and disrupts harm caused by youth gangs
- Victoria Police has increased the use of cautioning and diversion for eligible young people and reduced unnecessary exposure to the criminal justice system
- Victoria Police has strong relationships with schools and community organisations to identify at-risk young people and direct them towards appropriate interventions





Partnerships

Partnerships are essential to preventing harm, disrupting youth gang activity, and connecting youth gang members with appropriate support services.

Engaging at-risk young people with support services is proven to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.⁶ We will work with our partners to quickly identify those at risk of becoming entrenched in gang lifestyles and identify referral pathways to enable their integration into the community. We will work with our partners to identify those youth gang members causing the most harm to our community and develop coordinated disruption activities to dismantle their networks. Ultimately, addressing the issue of youth gangs is a shared responsibility that requires a Whole-of-Government and Whole-of-Community approach.

“Those youth who are open to engaging in prosocial programs, offered through our government and non-government partners, with the proactive policing support have had great success. These actions, such as sporting and mentoring programs provide at-risk youth with alternatives to committing crimes”

DETECTIVE SERGEANT, REGIONAL OPERATIONS

PREVENTION:

We will strengthen our partnerships with other key agencies, government, and the private sector to intervene early and share skills and resources before violent behaviour and offending escalates. This shared intelligence, especially contributions from health agencies and schools, will allow Victoria Police to better identify at-risk youth early on and have greater oversight on the most up-to-date and appropriate support services for effective intervention.

DETECTION:

Victoria Police will work proactively with partner agencies to share information, intelligence, and strategies to identify youth gang members and their activities. This will be achieved through strengthening and further developing data-sharing arrangements with partner agencies and maintaining expectations and obligations around the timeliness of information provision.

DISRUPTION:

Utilising a coordinated holistic approach, police will work in partnership across agencies to disrupt and dismantle youth gangs. Enhanced information sharing and multidisciplinary engagement will make it difficult and increasingly undesirable for youth gang members to conduct harmful activities in the community.

Case study: Blue EDGE

Blue EDGE is a holistic program run by Blue Light in partnership with Victoria Police that combines physical training, mentoring and life skills for at-risk young people. Blue EDGE aims to foster positive relationships between young people, their peers, and police to reduce crime through prevention. Blue EDGE focuses on engaging participants socially, creating wider support networks and linking participants with local services and opportunities to promote positive behaviours and instil a positive mindset.

Case study: Girl in Charge program

The Girl in Charge program is designed for Year 9 and 10 girls to provide them tools to better themselves through fostering a positive self-image and achieve healthy goals. The program is run by Victoria Police on the Surf Coast. The program involves supporting participants to study and become Foundation Netball Umpires. Participants also attended sessions related to nutrition, public speaking, and goal setting.

Case study: Embedded Youth Outreach Program

The Embedded Youth Outreach Program (EYOP) is a collaborative initiative that pairs a police officer with a youth worker to provide an after-hours secondary response to young people coming into contact with police. Together, the pair respond to police interactions with young people, engaging with young people in the field or at a police station to assess their needs and provide initial support, assessment and referral to youth-specific supports.

OUR ROLE

- Working to deepen connections and develop partnership models with government departments, NGOs, schools and health services to leverage capabilities, share intelligence and provide referrals to relevant support services to at-risk children and young people
- Collaborating with national law enforcement and intelligence agencies to inform the development of effective operational responses to identify and act on opportunities to dismantle youth gangs
- Working with and educating our partners on their role in identifying at-risk young people and reporting these cases to Victoria Police when they see it

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?



- Rapid referrals to partner agencies and appropriate support services for at-risk young people which result in positive engagement with education, employment, and family and break the cycle of offending
- Knowledge and data sharing between all agencies that improve Victoria Police's understanding of youth gangs and inform effective responses to dismantling their networks
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities of Victoria Police and partner agencies to ensure an effective policing response to youth gang activity and offending
- Victoria Police is a trusted partner in a multi-agency approach involving schools, community organisations, police and government agencies to holistically address the drivers of youth gang offending



Intelligence

We will identify and proactively target youth gangs who cause harm to our community using real time intelligence.

Intelligence is critical to our understanding, decisions, and actions to respond to the harms of youth gangs. Victoria Police will invest and build upon our intelligence resourcing and technological capabilities to track the formation, movement, and activities of youth gangs. We will create comprehensive intelligence holdings, so our organisation has accurate, timely and useable information filtered through the organisation to support resource allocation activities and rapid responses when incidents occur.

OUR ROLE

- Delivering timely, thorough, and robust investigations: detecting offences, identifying offenders, detaining them and dismantling their networks
- Proactive intelligence scanning to identify new enforceable actions or management opportunities
- Utilising intelligence to identify areas of greatest harm and risk and ensuring investigations are targeted to those areas of harm/risk
- Working with partner agencies to share data sources to build an in-depth understanding of identified youth gang members and affiliates

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?



- Refined and streamlined multi-agency intelligence sharing allowing Victoria Police to identify emerging threats and target those involved in serious and violent youth gang-related crime
- Increase in intelligence capability within Victoria Police to supplement proactive investigations of youth gangs
- Streamlined intelligence sharing procedures within Victoria Police

PREVENTION:

Intelligence will help us prevent youth gangs and youth gang membership by providing us with greater insights into the motivations behind joining a youth gang and the potential risk factors. Building our intelligence resourcing and capability will allow us to embed early detection tools to identify at-risk youth and undertake proactive intelligence scanning to detect youth gang members and reduce the harm they cause.

DETECTION:

Detecting youth gangs and their activities is contingent on the implementation of sophisticated intelligence approaches. We will focus on deepening our intelligence and analysis capability and on developing intelligence sharing procedures that are timely, reduce duplication of effort and enable targeting of inter-regional and inter-divisional offending by youth gangs. These sophisticated intelligence approaches will strengthen Victoria Police's capability to apprehend and arrest offenders and hold them to account.

DISRUPTION:

Building our intelligence holdings and sharing processes will enable the appropriate tasking and coordination discussions that build relationships across centralised commands and regions, and across regional boundaries. Increasing our intelligence capability will support better connected and coordinated approaches to our disruption of youth gangs. We will ensure that intelligence is shared readily to inform resource allocation of local and specialist resources as appropriate.

Case study:

In July 2022 a series of aggravated burglaries occurred involving the theft of motor vehicles from across the southern and eastern Melbourne metropolitan suburbs. This series saw multiple offences occurring on the same nights, which placed unsuspecting residents at risk of a violent confrontation with any disturbed/detected offenders. Intelligence holdings identified that local youth gang members were involved in different gangs across a broad geographical area. The gangs were offending together to steal multiple luxury vehicles, primarily for social status amongst their peers.

This response required a coordinated effort of police across multiple regions supported by specialist resources to locate the offenders and stop the offending.

After working together to track and find the offenders, investigators moved in and apprehended 6 youth offenders in a stolen car. These offenders had been involved earlier in a police ramming to avoid apprehension. 3 offenders were remanded in custody, 2 were bailed and 1 was released pending further enquiries.

By actively working together to integrate intelligence, Victoria Police can create a multi-faceted response that disrupts youth gang-related activity.





People

The capacity and capability of our people are crucial to our success in responding to youth gang-related activity and crime in Victoria.

Our people are our greatest asset in combatting youth gangs. Victoria Police will continue to invest in developing new skills across people, systems and processes, technology, infrastructure, and intelligence to remain adaptive to the youth gang environment and build our capabilities and capacity to police youth gangs effectively.

We recognise the need for greater organisational alignment for youth gang policing. To do this, we will develop agreed ways of working and establish role clarity in responding to the harm of youth gangs in our community.

Case study:

Operation Alliance

Operation Alliance is Victoria Police’s dedicated response to detect, disrupt and dismantle youth gangs involved in serious and violent offending. Operation Alliance prioritises offending causing the greatest harm with proportionate responses. Operation Alliance is informed by proactive intelligence scanning that identifies spikes in youth gang activity. The effectiveness of Operation Alliance has been proven with multiple arrests, seizures of dangerous items, such as firearms and other weapons, and more than 200 young people diverted away from youth gang affiliation and offending since its inception.

VIPER Taskforce and Gang Crime Squad

The VIPER Taskforce is a state-wide capability that provides a tactical and investigative response to serious and organised crime, including youth gangs and their networks. It delivers a multi-faceted intelligence-led response that supports Regional and Specialist Commands. The Gang Crime Squad is a dedicated unit in Crime Command with a purpose to systematically dismantle the networks, capability and capacity of street gangs. It provides specialist support to Regions in responding to gang crime and identifying emerging gang crime issues. This integrated response enhances Victoria Police’s ability to target the offenders, facilitators, and enablers of youth gang-related crime.

We will be successful in effectively disrupting and dismantling youth gangs when we invest in our people and work collaboratively to leverage the full expertise, intelligence, and knowledge of our organisation.

Operation Alliance 12-month results*

Over the past 12 months, there were **1,395**  separate arrests of **youth gang members** by Victoria Police,  resulting in almost **3,000** charges being laid.

1 in 3  known youth gang members **(32%)** who were arrested **in the last 12 months** have not re-offended post-arrest.

*Between December 2021 and December 2022

PREVENTION:

We will prevent youth gangs by continuing to develop our capability to identify at-risk youth and proactively monitoring youth gang members’ activity. We will conduct regular checks with identified and suspected youth gang members to ensure that early signs of reoffending are detected and provide connections to appropriate support services. Investing in our people to continually develop their skills in understanding and monitoring the young people at highest risk of causing the most harm to the community is crucial to minimising the harmful impact of youth gangs.

DETECTION:

We will support our staff’s capability to detect youth gang activity through improving tasking and coordination processes across Crime Command, the Regions and Intelligence and Covert Support. These processes will identify who leads, who supports and when specialist central resources need to be deployed. A commitment to collaboration will reduce siloed activity and support accurate and timely intelligence provision. We will increase our internal intelligence capability so that there is additional support where and when it is needed to successfully apprehend and arrest offenders and ensure that they are held accountable.

DISRUPTION:

We will support our people to disrupt youth gangs through openly sharing intelligence and learnings from within our organisation and from partnership agencies. We will implement training and development that focuses on evidence-based responses to engaging at-risk youth and disrupting youth gangs. Alongside this focus on learning and development, we will undertake structured evaluations of youth gang disruption activities to review response effectiveness, share learning outcomes and inform future operations.

OUR ROLE

- Investing in learning and development opportunities for staff to take a holistic approach when interacting with young people to identify the early risk indicators of youth gang involvement
- Continuing to focus on the influencers and individuals driving youth gang-related offending, and develop approaches to dismantle their influence within the youth gang
- Leveraging our enforcement networks to focus on those high-risk youth gang members and identify opportunities to prevent and suppress youth gang networks, targeting illegal and harmful activities
- Undertaking targeted operations to apprehend serious and violent youth gang-affiliated criminals

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?



- Victoria Police is better able to identify the early indicators of involvement in youth gangs and predict escalating serious and violent offending
- A deployment model that proactively detects and prevents criminal youth gang activity, particularly at major events, in public spaces and increases community reassurance
- Clear articulation of roles and responsibilities within Victoria Police in addressing youth gang issues and offending
- Victoria Police has built the capacity to understand, identify and respond to youth gangs
- Enhanced tasking and coordination to strengthen relationships between the Regions, Crime Command and Intelligence and Covert Support Command
- Victoria Police has structured, and formal resources deployed where they are needed to prevent and disrupt threatening and violent gang behaviour

“The ultimate aim of disrupting and dismantling gang and gang-related activity is to break the cycle of re-offending encourage positive behavioural change. The ultimate measure of that success will always be the absence of crime.”

DETECTIVE SERGEANT,
REGIONAL OPERATIONS

Police
VIPER



Key Enablers for Successful Delivery



Coordination in Responding to Youth Gangs

Youth gang offending is complex – it is often visible to the community, opportunistic and spans a continuum of harm, making it difficult to address the issues of youth gangs through a single policing response. To effectively tackle this complexity, we must adopt a coordinated approach within our organisation and with national law enforcement agencies and external partners.

We need to prioritise openly sharing information, ensure intelligence holdings are accessible, debrief on intervention outcomes and incorporate diverse perspectives. Strong working relationships will allow us to effectively prevent, detect and disrupt youth gangs and support early identification to promote positive behaviour change.



Evidence-based and Responsive Approaches

Our approach to curtailing the problem of youth crime must continually mature in response to the evolving nature of youth gang-related activity and the local problems that develop in different regions. To succeed, we must continue to build our understanding of youth gang offending patterns and the associated harm so we can identify the areas of greatest need across the State and deploy our resources appropriately.

We must establish partnerships with universities, academics, and other agencies to produce research on the drivers of youth gangs, particularly amongst the younger cohort, and their offending patterns to inform the design of evidence-based intervention models.

“The ultimate aim of disrupting and dismantling gang and gang-related activity is to break the cycle of re-offending and encourage positive behavioural change. The ultimate measure of that success will always be the absence of crime.”

DETECTIVE SUPERINTENDENT, CRIME COMMAND

Case study:

Police in the Southern Metro Region responded to a stabbing incident in the south-eastern suburbs involving rival youth gangs. Because of the nature of the incident and the Region’s strong relationships with Crime Command, specialist resources were contacted and deployed to support the investigation.

Through the intelligence holdings of specialist resources, police were able to identify several youth gang members who lived in the northern suburbs of Melbourne and instigated conversations to corroborate intelligence with the North West Metro Region. The offenders were then located, charged and remanded.

Strengthening our working relationships and adopting a coordinated approach are key to an effective policing response to youth gangs.

Endnotes

- 1 White, Rob. Youth Gangs, violence, and social respect: Exploring the nature of provocations and punch-ups. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- 2 https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/170/filename/Youth_Gangs,_Violence_and_Anti-social_Behaviour.pdf White, Rob, Youth Gangs, Violence and Anti-Social Behaviour, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, 2007. https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/170/filename/Youth_Gangs,_Violence_and_Anti-social_Behaviour.pdf
- 3 Wu, Jun and Pyrooz, David.C., (2016). "Uncovering the Pathway Between Gang Membership and Violent Victimization," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 32, no.4 (2016): 531-5., <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-015-9266-5>
- 4 Stakeholder consultation, 14/06/2022
- 5 Stakeholder consultation, 12/05/2022
- 6 Shirley, Kimberley. *The Cautious Approach – Police cautions and the impact on youth offending*. Melbourne: Crime Statistics Agency (Victoria), 2017 <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/research-and-evaluation/publications/youth-crime/the-cautious-approach-police-cautions-and-the>





VICTORIA POLICE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Victoria Police pays our respect to the traditional owners of lands on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who continue to care for their country, culture and people.

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