

Strategic assessment of Victoria Police 2022–23

In 2022–23, IBAC conducted a strategic assessment of Victoria Police to identify emerging and enduring misconduct risks impacting the organisation. This work involved extensive consultation with stakeholders and analysis of research, allegations, incidents and cases across Victoria, Australia and internationally.

Victoria Police plays an essential role in keeping our community safe and protected, and personnel are entrusted with significant powers, which must always be used responsibly.

IBAC conducts strategic assessments of Victoria Police every two years. We use the information gathered to produce internal intelligence alerts and briefs. These inform IBAC's decision making, planning and priorities.

This document outlines key findings from the 2022-23 assessment and specific misconduct risks facing Victoria Police based on local and international sources. These issues may not be present within Victoria Police. However, it's IBAC's view that Victoria Police should actively mitigate these risks where possible.

Current police misconduct risks

Understanding the different types of police misconduct that may be occurring is key to recognising and preventing misconduct.

Misconduct risks for Victoria Police, include:



Excessive use of force

Using more force than is needed in dealing with a person or situation.



Predatory behaviour

Police personnel misusing their position to begin, or attempt to begin, an emotional or sexual relationship with a person they meet in the course of their duties.



Police perpetrated family violence

Police personnel engaging in abuse or violence against their own family members or intimate partners.



Sexual harassment

Police personnel engaging in unwelcome or unwanted sexual behaviour that offends, humiliates, intimidates, or undermines a colleague or member of the public.



Improper tactical decision making and response

Failing to act or using poor judgement when managing an incident.



Malicious use of discretion in the charging and management of alleged offenders

Intentionally misusing police powers against an alleged offender.



Racial profiling

Targeting individuals for suspicion of crime based on the person's race rather than on evidence.



Relationships with criminal networks

Helping organised crime groups to further their illegal activities and avoid detection.



Drug trafficking

Aiding the distribution of illicit drugs.



Improper strip searches

Asking a person to move or remove their clothing to search them without a valid reason. It also includes failing to follow procedures or breaching human rights when conducting a search.



Reach back

Former police using their relationships with current police personnel for favours, information or access (to systems, buildings or people).

Others include:

- Inappropriate targeting or profiling of members of LGBTIQ+ communities
- Mistreatment or neglect of vulnerable persons (once in custody)
- Favouritism in recruitment and promotion
- Illicit drug use
- Bullying and harassing colleagues
- Improper human source management
- Non-compliance with body-worn camera policies and procedures
- Seeking out or accepting gifts and benefits
- Concealing police misconduct and corruption complaints
- Perverting or obstructing the administration of justice
- Theft of property, cash or drugs
- Preferential treatment of community members in hope of a reward
- Secondary employment in prohibited industries.



Key police misconduct themes

IBAC examined police misconduct themes identified in our research to assess their level of risk and identify opportunities for prevention. IBAC will continue to monitor these issues.

Predatory behaviour

Predatory behaviour by police personnel against either their colleagues or members of the public remains a problem for Victoria Police.

In July 2023, IBAC published a thematic review that assessed 27 Victoria Police investigations of alleged predatory behaviour by police officers between 2018 and 2022. The review found that evidence of predatory behaviour within Victoria Police persists and that many cases went unreported.

There are opportunities for Victoria Police to improve training materials and increase awareness amongst recruits and leaders to decrease the risk of predatory behaviour occurring.

Predatory behaviour by police is a strategic focus area for IBAC in 2023–24.

Policing of vulnerable youth

The way that police personnel manage young people who are at risk is a concern raised by community legal centres (CLCs). CLCs told IBAC that issues arise due to systemic racism and lack of cultural awareness by police, excessive use of force, and unreasonable exercise of power and discretion.

Victoria Police undertakes several measures to prevent and respond to youth offending and victimisation. This includes an Aboriginal youth cautioning program.

Despite these measures, cultural issues within stations may negatively impact how police respond to youth offenders. For example, senior police who hold negative attitudes towards certain youth offenders may influence less experienced officers to manage them in a way that is not appropriate, fair or in line with their training.

Excessive use of force, including use of force on people at risk, is a strategic focus area for IBAC in 2023–24.

Illicit drug risks

Illicit drug use by police personnel remains a risk for Victoria Police that can lead to further and more serious misconduct.

IBAC and Victoria Police investigations that found illicit drug use by police have substantiated other related improper conduct such as unauthorised access of information, maintaining criminal associations, failing to declare associations and concealing misconduct.

IBAC has conducted many investigations into illicit drug-related activity by Victoria Police personnel. In 2016 IBAC released a special report summarising three of these investigations which led to significant changes to Victoria Police's drug and alcohol testing (DAT) regime in November 2021. Further reforms are still underway.

Reach back

Reach back by former police employees to current police personnel is a misconduct risk for Victoria Police.

Reach back is when a former police employee uses their relationships with current police personnel to acquire favours, information or access (to systems, buildings or people).

The most serious examples of reach back are often by former police officers in the private security and investigations industry or suspended police personnel.

Misuse of social media

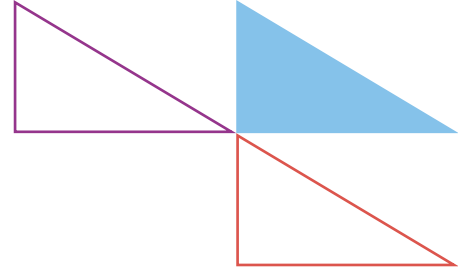
Misuse of social media remains an evolving police misconduct risk for Victoria Police.

A key risk is unauthorised disclosures of police information via social media. This is because it is easy for police personnel to share images or discuss work with their colleagues and friends via social media.

Police personnel being compromised or blackmailed via social media is a growing risk. This is a particular concern for police personnel who may have been videoed or photographed using illicit drugs, or who've had explicit images shared that they could be blackmailed with.

Victoria Police policy and training for social media use is evolving to address new risks and behaviour. In 2021, IBAC published its findings from Operation Turon, which highlighted corruption and police misconduct risks associated with inappropriate social media use and online commentary by a senior police officer. As a result of IBAC's investigation, Victoria Police revised its social media policy. These changes were aimed at ensuring employees are aware of their obligations to use social media appropriately, as well as the consequences of inappropriate social media use.

Victoria Police also requires police and protective services officers to undertake an online cyber security training package. This helps officers understand the policy and expected standards of behaviour. In IBAC's view, Victoria Police should consider this training for all personnel including Victorian Public Service employees who work at Victoria Police.



Emerging drivers of police misconduct

Understanding new or evolving factors that could have negative effects on police conduct can lead to more effective strategies to prevent misconduct. IBAC identified some emerging drivers of police misconduct during our research.

Fear of being filmed

Filming and posting footage of police officers, particularly during instances involving the use of force, has increased in recent years with the widespread use of smart phones and social media.

A fear of being filmed and appearing on social media may lead police officers to stop or withdraw from proactive elements of policing. It may also affect their decision to act.

Work related stress

Worked related stress (which could arise from challenging interactions with community members, repeated exposure to family violence incidents or residual stress from policing during the COVID-19 pandemic) may impact police officers' wellbeing and their ability to make decisions.

During consultations, IBAC heard that officer 'burnout' is negatively affecting how they interact with the public.

Research has linked police officers experiencing stress with the development of unacceptable attitudes and behaviours. This may also increase the chance of them engaging in misconduct.

Police recruitment and retention challenges

Ongoing recruitment and retention challenges at Victoria Police could lead to the acceptance of less suitable applicants and a more inexperienced workforce. This could have flow on effects and increase certain police misconduct risks.

Isolated work positions

A lack of day-to-day supervision and oversight of police personnel who need to work on their own due to their location or the nature of their work, may allow misconduct to go undetected.

Police personnel who work mainly alone may also be at risk of:

- a lack of professional and social support
- isolation from their colleagues
- increased stress from having to respond to incidents without assistance.

Flaws in property management system

Gaps in Victoria Police's property management system may allow misconduct to go undetected.

Victoria Police manages a range of found, seized and surrendered physical property. During consultations, IBAC heard about gaps in the processes for managing this property that could increase the risk of items being stolen or lost from property storage rooms without detection.



Your information helps

Reporting police misconduct can assist IBAC to build intelligence, address systemic risks and issues, and improve the conduct of Victoria Police's internal investigations.

If you experience or suspect police misconduct, report it to IBAC. You can make a complaint or provide information anonymously. Any information that IBAC receives can trigger an investigation or help us find ways to prevent police misconduct or corruption.

Safely report police misconduct to IBAC or provide information anonymously.



Fill out the secure online form at **www.ibac.vic.gov.au**



If you have difficulty accessing the online form, call us on **1300 735 135** for further assistance.



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