

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Westjustice

TARGET ZERO's Response to Premier's Announcement on establishment of 'Violence Reduction Unit'

The Premier's recent announcement regarding the establishment of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), which aims to address violent crime through early intervention, is a step in the right direction.

We are concerned, however, about the limited consultation with our sector and community in the design, focus and composition of the unit. Insufficient engagement risks sidelining existing expertise and undermining valuable collaborations already taking place within our community.

Effective solutions require inclusive dialogue, genuine partnership, and a focus on co-design. Most importantly, they require consultation with the young people and their families, who will be impacted by the new Adult Time for Violent Crime Laws. We urge the Government to consult all relevant stakeholders and leverage sector expertise throughout the development and implementation of this initiative.

In establishing the VRU, it is essential that priority is given to the communities most impacted—both geographically and specific groups, such as multicultural communities, First Nations young people, and those in residential out-of-home care. Targeted and timely engagement with these communities will help ensure that the work of the VRU is equitable and responsive to those facing the most significant challenges and overrepresentation in the justice statistics.

It is also essential to recognise that the maintenance of a tough-on-crime narrative, which demonises young people for the failings of systems intended to protect them, runs counter to the stated objectives of the VRU.

The VRU is an opportunity for Government to take the systemic failures that let young people down seriously. Young people should not be held solely responsible for an education system that suspends them at alarming rates, nor for being victims of a growing family violence crisis, or for a youth mental health system that cannot adequately meet their needs. Rather than blaming youth, we must work together to address the systemic issues affecting them in order to ensure meaningful reform.

Aligning Efforts

We agree with the Government that working on the root causes, as opposed to the symptoms of a problem, is the best way to achieve sustainable change. Over-relying on

police intelligence to inform this work has proven ineffective to date and will only give us more of the same.

We must also move away from working in siloes to working together to shift the underlying structures holding the problem of violent crime in place. We believe, therefore, that real and meaningful dialogue between the Government, our sector and the community must start now – not after the settings, priorities and resource allocation decisions of the Violence Reduction Unit have already been made.

The initiatives referenced in the Premier’s announcement are not new; in Brimbank, Melton, and Wyndham, TARGET ZERO is already co-designing crucial responses. We encourage the Government to avoid duplication and to ensure the VRU complements rather than duplicates or disrupts local successes.

TARGET ZERO is focused on addressing the underlying factors contributing to criminalising our young people, including education disengagement, family violence, mental ill-health, poverty, and discrimination. We encourage the government to align its efforts with the work of the more than 30 TARGET ZERO organisations already active across Melbourne’s west.

Direct engagement at this pivotal time will help strengthen and build upon the positive work already underway in our communities. We urge the Government to prioritise immediate dialogue with the TARGET ZERO coalition.

About TARGET ZERO:

TARGET ZERO is a 10-year collective impact project with twin goals to:

- end the criminalisation of young people aged 10-25 in Melton, Wyndham and Brimbank.
- end the over-representation of First Nations young people, multicultural young people and young people in residential care in the criminal justice system.

TARGET ZERO is committed to fostering collaboration and to driving evidence-based strategies to address the root causes that bring young people into contact with the justice system. To achieve this, we have been building a robust coalition across Melbourne’s west with more than 30 organisations partnering and power-sharing with young people and the community.

For further information or to arrange interviews, please contact: Anoushka Jeronimus-anoushka@westjustice.org.au or Peta Fualau- pfualau@cmj.net.au.

Date: 19 November 2025