
STRATEGIC PLAN

VCAT for the future

2018–2022



Our vision

To serve the community by resolving disputes in a timely, cost-effective and efficient way

Our values

Fairness, professionalism, integrity, independence, efficiency, approachability, accessibility

Our goal

To be a tribunal that meets the needs of all Victorians

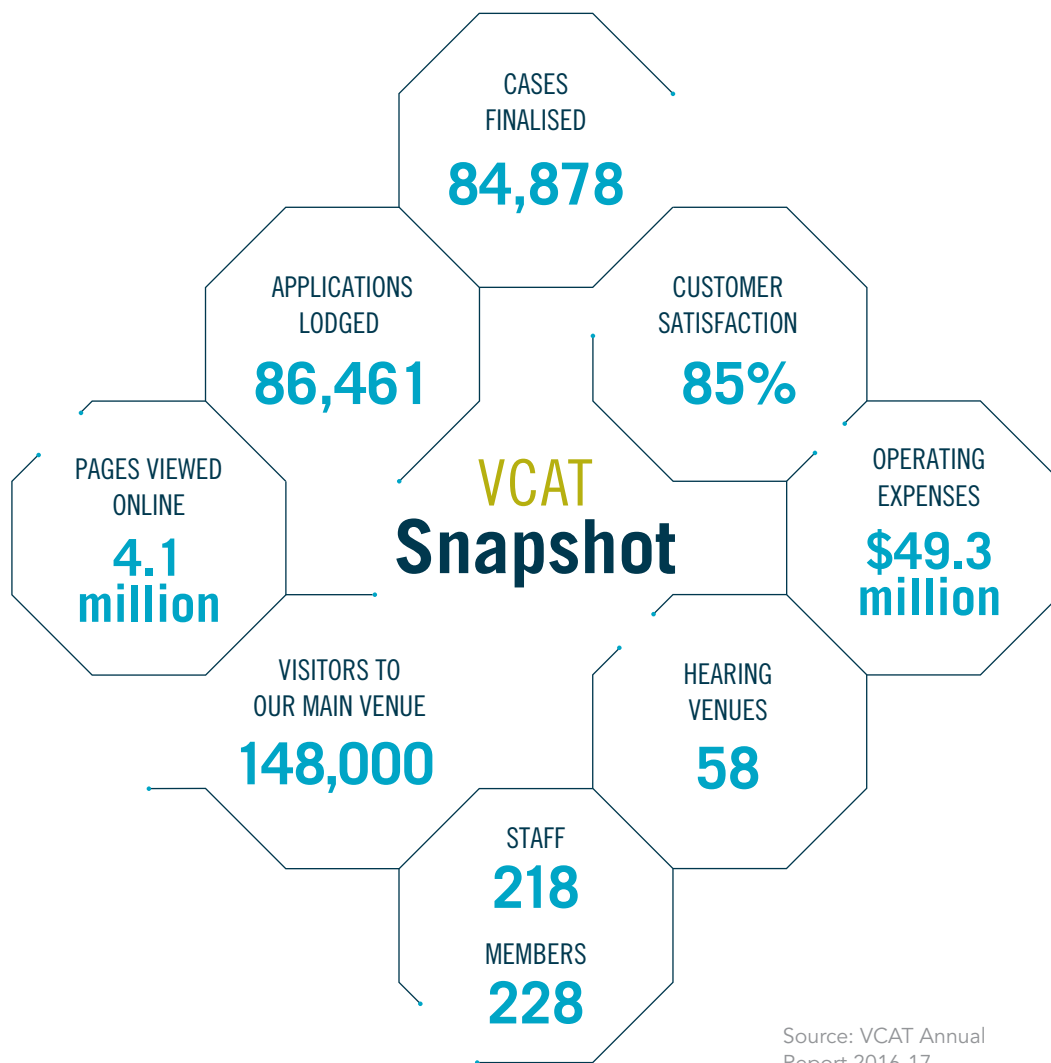
Introduction

We want VCAT to be an outstanding tribunal, known for our accessibility, fairness and willingness to innovate as a justice service.

Tens of thousands of Victorians come to us each year to resolve their disputes. Their service expectations are changing, and we are also changing to meet these expectations.

VCAT has embarked on a transformation agenda focused on enhanced digital service, easier access, stronger stakeholder relationships and an organisational culture empowered and ready for change.

We want to substantially improve the experience at VCAT for the long term. To succeed, our strategy and priorities outline what we want to achieve and how we will get there.



Who we are and what we do

Working in more than 50 locations across Victoria, VCAT serves the community by resolving many different types of civil disputes and making decisions in human rights cases.

We are less formal than court and in most cases people represent themselves in mediations and hearings. Except for the right to appeal to the Supreme Court of Victoria, VCAT decisions are final and legally binding on the parties to the proceeding.

Our workforce has a diversity of skills ranging from legal and professional expertise, customer service, registry, information technology, communications, finance and reporting, and people and facilities management. Together, we work to deliver a justice service guided by standards established by the *International Framework for Court Excellence* and the *Australia and New Zealand Tribunal Excellence Framework*.

VCAT's jurisdiction is governed by Victorian legislation. To support VCAT to operate

independently of the executive branch of government, Court Services Victoria provides our administrative services and facilities.

We collaborate and share our expertise with a range of legal and community sector organisations. We work with the Department of Justice and Regulation to provide insights on our practices, legal professionals, peak bodies and a range of agencies and support services. Working closely with others enables us to fulfil our role for the community.

President's message

VCAT has a proud history of providing fair, accessible and efficient justice for Victorians.



Justice Greg Garde
AO RFD

The tribunal resolves on average 85,000 cases per year and, as we look to the future, we anticipate changes to our jurisdiction and demand for our services. To continue to be effective for Victorians, we need to innovate.

The next four years will see a transformation of our services. At the heart of this ambitious agenda is the drive to be a contemporary, forward-thinking tribunal. This means being responsive to the dynamic social, technological and legislative environment in which we operate.

Our strategic plan, *VCAT for the Future 2018-22*, is shaped by the standards of *International Framework for Court Excellence* and builds on the successes of the last four years. Developed through extensive consultations across VCAT and with external stakeholders, our priorities reflect the feedback we have received.

The community expects easily accessible, tailored services using the latest digital technology and communication.

To meet these expectations, we are reinventing our digital services for fast, seamless access to VCAT any time and anywhere across Victoria. We will drive operational improvements to deliver more services and resolve disputes more quickly.

Expanding access to justice is a core VCAT commitment. We intend to make it easier for all Victorians to participate and get the assistance they need. Enhanced leadership capability and performance approaches will help drive performance and transformation. We will support and invest in our people, and build stronger connections with external stakeholders and the community to achieve our agenda.

I am excited to share our ambitious plans over the next four years. We are committed to striving for service excellence, and delivering on our priorities for a successful and sustainable future.



OUR PRIORITIES

How we will
achieve fair,
fast and cost-
effective justice

**STRATEGIC
PRIORITY** **01**

Contemporary and customer-centric services

Embrace innovation
and digital technologies
to meet contemporary
service expectations

The community expects simple and convenient access to services. To meet these expectations, we will offer a contemporary, digitally enabled VCAT that makes it easier to do business with us.

We will achieve this by putting the community at the centre of our service design.

We are enhancing our digital platforms for greater self-service and 24/7 access. Our digital channels will be the primary point of entry, supported by easy-to-understand information and self-assist tools. Where further help is needed, we will offer an improved face-to-face and telephone experience – personalised, targeted and based on principles of customer service excellence.

Over time we intend to increase digital uptake, enabling more people to access VCAT at a time and place that suits them.

Improving the experience at VCAT means delivering simpler interactions from end-to-end. We are streamlining our processes, replacing paper-based systems for greater automation and transitioning to a single case management system. This will help us meet community needs for efficient, tailored services.

Online dispute resolution (ODR) will play a greater role in the future of dispute resolution. We will support the exploration of ODR as a fast, accessible option for people and prepare for its introduction to meet the anticipated increase in disputes.

Our hearing and mediation rooms will be equipped with far greater digital capability. Video and teleconferencing, electronic files and other technology will improve how hearings are conducted, how people participate in hearings, and break down geographic barriers to access.

**STRATEGIC
PRIORITY** **02**

Inclusive and accessible

Make it easier for all Victorians to participate and access us

We aspire to providing fair, affordable and accessible justice for everyone who comes to VCAT, including people who represent themselves, legal professionals and a wide range of organisations.

While we will improve our services for everyone, our priority is people most in need.

Thousands of people represent themselves in a range of disputes at VCAT each year. We will create a holistic system of support for self-represented people – reducing effort and responding to gaps in our support services.

Partnering with other agencies ensures clear support pathways. We will explore the feasibility of a dedicated self-represented service centre and build capabilities of staff and members to better support self-represented litigants.

We will strengthen dedicated family violence support, working closely with courts and tribunals and other agencies.

To empower people to use our services, we will provide tailored information and online decision-making tools. We will communicate in everyday language – in hearings and in the information we provide.

We acknowledge that our digital-first service model will not suit everyone's needs. Face-to-face contact and improved telephone assistance provides alternative pathways to us.

To better cater to people from diverse backgrounds, we will implement our Koori Inclusion Action Plan. This will build stronger connections with the Koori community to empower greater use of our services. We will better support linguistic diversity and our Accessibility Action Plan will help us better meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Compulsory conferences and mediation are the preferred options for dispute resolution.

We will work to improve and expand these alternative dispute resolution services for people across Victoria in partnership with Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria and other agencies.

We want to expand access for people living in regional areas. We will enhance our regional and suburban coverage with venues conveniently located in areas where our services are needed most. We are focussed on providing welcoming, fit-for-purpose venues that respond to local needs within local communities.

**STRATEGIC
PRIORITY** **03**

Responsive and collaborative relationships

Strengthen relationships
with stakeholders and
the community we serve

Our success relies on building responsive relationships with stakeholders and the community. Understanding their perspectives – and communicating our own – creates better outcomes for community in the long term.

Our stakeholders represent broad and diverse sectors of the community, including the legal profession. Through their knowledge and experience, they help us to identify need and develop innovative service responses.

We are focused on strengthening how we consult and collaborate. We will be open to different viewpoints and feedback on our services. This means engaging stakeholders at the right time and in the right ways. By collaborating and promoting the work we do, we will build a positive perception of VCAT's role.

Delivering access to justice is a collaborative effort. Referral and support systems must be connected and easy to navigate.

Working closely with stakeholders, we will integrate referral pathways to VCAT and co-design support services.

Connecting effectively with the community builds confidence and trust in VCAT. We will capitalise on the strengths of digital communications channels to build a better understanding of our role, and incorporate feedback and user research into our service design. Stronger community connections place people at the heart of our services and helps shape our priorities for the future.

VCAT is governed by legislation. To the extent that it is appropriate for VCAT, we will assist government in providing insights about how our services are used to ensure the community is well served in the future.

We share similar opportunities and challenges to other Victorian courts and tribunals. We will work collaboratively with courts to build capability, identify opportunities to pool resources, and innovate for shared success.

**STRATEGIC
PRIORITY** 04

United leadership and culture

Embed the leadership capability and culture needed to drive change

Delivering for the community requires a strong, united leadership and culture.

A new leadership model defines the leadership capabilities required for change (see page 13). Everyone at VCAT has a leadership role to play in embracing change and adopting new ways of working. In particular, Deputy Presidents, Heads of Division, Heads of List and the senior executive team need to adopt our leadership attributes.

Our leaders will foster VCAT's vision, drive cultural change and strive for outstanding results. They will lead the organisation in forward-thinking approaches to services.

Our success depends on working as one-VCAT, with a common purpose. We will help our people focus on VCAT's priorities and work together to meet community and stakeholder needs. This means connecting effectively across the organisation and adopting new ways to collaborate and communicate.

Our leaders will be enablers, engaging and empowering the workforce for change.

This involves giving staff greater responsibility and autonomy in decision-making. It also means addressing barriers that impede ability to deliver service improvements.

The pace of change requires strong accountability, performance and risk management. We are enhancing our governance mechanisms, to help us manage resources sustainably and deliver the highest value to the organisation and community.

Fostering the right capability, culture and governance ensures we manage challenges and capitalise on opportunities for the future.

Our leadership attributes



- 01 Strategic
- 02 Collaborative
- 03 Innovative
- 04 Caring

**STRATEGIC
PRIORITY** **05**

Skilled for the future

Develop a modern and dynamic workforce for the future

To deliver on our goals for the future, we will help members and staff develop the skills and expertise they need to succeed.

We expect the future will look very different to today. This requires the right skills, in the right place, at the right time. We will identify current and future capability needs for VCAT and start preparing for that change.

Transforming our work from paper-based to digital services will change the nature of our workforce over time. We will support our people to make the shift through targeted development, focused on building digital competence and service excellence across the organisation.

We are implementing stronger performance management approaches that focus on effectiveness. Our people will be given opportunities for development aligned to our needs. Leadership programs will help identify and grow future leaders.

We will provide an environment where members and staff feel supported and valued. This is based on two-way feedback and a system of recognition, reward and career development.

We want to be an employer of choice for people from diverse backgrounds. To succeed, we are implementing a Koori Inclusion Action Plan and an Accessibility Action Plan. They will ensure we have the culture, recruitment and employment practices in place to attract greater diversity in our workforce.

As demands on our services change we will need greater flexibility in managing our resources. We will use sophisticated data tools to inform decision-making, predict future workload and allocate our resources. This means faster decisions, shorter waiting times and better outcomes for the community.

LEADING FOR THE FUTURE

We have defined leadership attributes needed to lead VCAT successfully for the future. We will build the capability of our leaders and promote these leadership attributes at all levels of the organisation.



Four leadership attributes will support the delivery of our strategic priorities. They are:

- 01 Strategic
- 02 Collaborative
- 03 Innovative
- 04 Caring



Strategic	Collaborative	Innovative	Caring
ASPIRATIONS			
<p>We take a future-focused and whole-of-VCAT perspective to position VCAT for the future. We anticipate and respond effectively to changes in our external environment to support delivery of VCAT’s strategic priorities.</p>	<p>We work together across VCAT to create ‘one VCAT’ that works together to meet the needs of customers. We collaborate with the community and external stakeholders to deliver exceptional outcomes.</p>	<p>We challenge established ways of thinking and take bold actions to position VCAT as the leader in courts and tribunals. We embed a culture of continuous improvement to enhance VCAT.</p>	<p>We understand and respond to the needs of VCAT members, staff, the community and external stakeholders. We create a caring and supportive environment that responds to the diverse needs of our members, staff and the community.</p>
BEHAVIOURS			
<p>Our leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » recognise the need and value of thinking strategically about VCAT’s future direction » promote VCAT externally and are cognisant of how their actions affect its reputation » effectively communicate VCAT’s strategic agenda to members, staff, the community and external stakeholders to excite and inspire » anticipate, influence and respond to external factors, such as changes in policy, community needs or markets » translate ideas into action to support delivery of strategic priorities. 	<p>Our leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » think and act as one VCAT by actively bringing together VCAT members, and all staff » facilitate the exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills within and between teams » work with the community, external stakeholders and across VCAT to co-design solutions » develop trusting and influential relationships with key external stakeholders » recognise the need and power of collaboration to enable change 	<p>Our leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » approach and support change with energy and enthusiasm » encourage diverse views and robust discussions to develop the best solution for VCAT » proactively identify opportunities for improvement and work across VCAT to implement changes » apply courageous and evidence-based decision making » challenge themselves and their teams to consider better ways of doing things 	<p>Our leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » ensure VCAT is accessible to all Victorians » build a caring, empathetic and respectful working environment » ensure the needs of the community, external stakeholders and VCAT members and staff are considered in the development of processes, procedures and systems » communicate openly and transparently to prevent any ‘surprises’ » provide support, guidance and development to the personal needs of every member and employee » give and receive feedback in a positive and constructive manner

Measuring success

We have defined success measures designed to drive performance and demonstrate how we are delivering impact for VCAT and community.

Our measures are outcome-focused and align with global standards established by the *International Framework for Court Excellence* and the *Australia and New Zealand Tribunal Excellence Framework*.













The outcomes they align with include:

- ▶ Becoming a contemporary tribunal;
- ▶ delivering faster and cost-effective services;
- ▶ fairness;
- ▶ ease of access for all Victorians.

We will report on performance against these measures in VCAT's Annual Report and in biannual Strategic Plan progress reports.



Key measures

-  Overall customer satisfaction
-  People surveyed agree that VCAT is fair
-  People surveyed agree that VCAT's services are easy to access
-  Number of complaints about our customer service
-  Number of visitors to our website relative to the number of phone enquiries
-  Number of online transactions (online lodgement, payment of fees and other)
-  Average time from application to hearing
-  Number of cases resolved compared to number of cases initiated
-  Proportion of disputes resolved through alternative dispute resolution
-  Number of customers assisted by VCAT's support services
-  Overall staff satisfaction
-  VCAT staff and members feel supported and valued



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Our priorities



01	02	03	04	05
<p>Contemporary and customer-centric services</p> <p>Embrace innovation and digital technologies to meet contemporary service expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Reinvent our digital services to make it easier to do business with us any time, anywhere » Provide simpler, guided interactions across the customer journey » Streamline and modernise our customer service operations » Explore online dispute resolution as a fast and affordable way for people to resolve disputes » Enhance digital capability of our hearing rooms to support hearings 	<p>Inclusive and accessible</p> <p>Make it easier for all Victorians to participate and access justice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strengthen our support services for people representing themselves » Deliver services responsive to the community's diverse needs » Increase community awareness of VCAT's role and services » Provide easy-to-understand information and communication » Expand compulsory conferences and mediation as the preferred options for resolving disputes » Provide accessible, welcoming and fit-for-purpose venues across Victoria for greater access in regional areas 	<p>Responsive and collaborative relationships</p> <p>Strengthen relationships with stakeholders and the community we serve</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strengthen our responsiveness to stakeholders for greater service impact » Build positive perceptions of VCAT » Connect with the community in meaningful ways » Support strategic partnerships for service innovation across courts and tribunals » Provide insights to government to enable innovative service responses 	<p>United leadership and culture</p> <p>Embed the leadership capability and culture needed to drive change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Strengthen VCAT's leadership capability to lead and manage effectively » Build a united culture to deliver our priorities for the future » Empower the workforce to drive continuous improvement of our services » Strengthen opportunities for greater collaboration and communication across the organisation » Enhance our governance structures for sustainability and success 	<p>Skilled for the future</p> <p>Develop a modern and dynamic workforce for the future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Deliver targeted skills development for staff and members to meet VCAT's needs » Ensure our workforce structure enables VCAT to meet our service delivery aspirations » Strengthen recognition and rewards for exemplary performance » Enhance performance management approaches to drive a high achieving workforce » Strengthen workforce diversity to reflect the Victorian community » Use data to optimise and predict resourcing needs

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