

DVCONNECT

Be heard. Be safe.



SUBMISSION

Office of the Victims' Commissioner
Review of the Charter of Victims' Rights
DVConnect Submission

October 2025



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DVConnect receives funding from the Queensland Government

DVConnect respectfully acknowledges and celebrates the Traditional Owners/Custodians throughout Australia and pays its respects to Elders, children and young people of past, current and future generations. We are committed to helping anyone experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence. This includes the LGBTIQ+ community, people of all ethnicities, religions, ages, abilities and pets.



Contents

About DVConnect	3
Opening Statement	5
Safety, Dignity and Participation as Foundational Rights	6
Suggested Charter Reform: Formal Right to Consultation	7
Suggested Charter Reform: Right to Protection Through Process.....	7
Suggested Support Reform: Timeframes for consultation and input	7
Equity and Inclusion	8
Suggested Charter Reform: Non-Discrimination and Equal Access.....	8
Suggested Charter Reform: Accessible and Specialist-Guided Communication Standards.....	9
Suggested Charter Reform: Dedicated Charter for Children and Young People	9
Suggested Support Reform: Accessible Communication Tools	10
Suggested Support Reform: Intersectional Training Framework.....	10
Accountability and Implementation.....	11
Suggested Support Reform: Victims’ Rights Implementation Framework	11
Suggested Support Reform: Lived Experience in Design and Review	11
Suggested Support Reform: Opt-Out Safety and Information Systems	11
Consistency across systems	12
Suggested Charter Reform: Designation of Responsible Entities	12
Suggested Support Reform: Consistency Across Systems.....	13
Suggested Support Reform: Privacy, Data and Digital Accessibility	13
Summary of Suggested Charter Reform	14
Summary of Suggested Support Reform.....	15
Conclusion	16



About DVConnect

DVConnect is Queensland's state-wide crisis response service for domestic, family and sexual violence and state-wide general support for victims of violent crime. We support people impacted by violence through immediate intervention, specialist counselling, case management and connection to safety – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Each year, DVConnect responds to over 100,000 contacts across our telephone and online services. Our programs include:

- **VictimConnect** – 24/7 helpline, counselling and case management for people affected by violent and personal crime under Queensland's *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009*
- **Victims of Crime Community Response After Hours Service** – responsive, community-based support following incidents of violence
- **DVConnect Womensline** – 24/7 crisis support, accommodation and safety planning for women and children
- **DVConnect Mensline** – counselling and referral support for men who use violence or are affected by violence
- **Sexual Assault Helpline** – counselling and support for people impacted by sexual violence
- **Forensic Support Line** – information counselling and referral for people impacted by the Qld Commission of Inquiry into Forensic DNA management
- **START** trial – six-week behaviour change intervention for men using violence
- **Pets in Crisis** – temporary foster care for pets of families escaping violence
- **Bella's Sanctuary** – medium-term housing for women and children rebuilding their lives after crisis

DVConnect is also active in building evidence to inform practice and outcomes through research and partnerships. DVConnect is a partner in The Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEVAW) and is part of numerous collaborations including She Is Not Your Rehab and Griffith University Disrupting Violence Beacon.

We apply an **intersectional feminist** framework, recognising domestic, family, and sexual violence as gender-based violence, predominantly perpetrated by men against women. We acknowledge the influence of patriarchal and colonial systems on experiences of safety, violence, and justice across cultural groups, while holding perpetrators fully responsible and recognising the systemic factors that enable such violence.



Our services are trauma-informed, culturally safe and inclusive. We are guided by the voices of survivors and the strengths of the people we work with. We actively centre the expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, support culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and respect the rights and choices of people with disability and LGBTQ+ people.

While most of our work is funded by the Queensland Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety and Department of Youth Justice and Victim Support, we utilise philanthropic funds and donations for distinct projects. The establishment and running of our transition accommodation Bella's Sanctuary is solely through donations and corporate investment

DVConnect's unique insight into Queensland's violence response systems, gives us a comprehensive, frontline-informed understanding of the realities facing victim-survivors and the services that support them. We bring this perspective to our submission.



Opening Statement

DVConnect welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Review of the Charter of Victims' Rights.

The current Charter of Victims' Rights (Charter) sets important expectations for how victims should be treated within the justice system. However, too often these rights are experienced as procedural rather than personal, limited to being informed about what is happening, rather than being empowered and involved in shaping it.

Our submission identifies that the Charter must shift from a passive model of communication to an active model of participation, recognising that victims are not bystanders to crime. The injustice was done to them, and their voices must therefore form part of the justice response.

Feedback from our clients also highlights that the Charter is only powerful when enlivened by the agencies responsible for its implementation. Exploration of the obligations, accountability and oversight required to ensure the Charter is realised in practice is therefore a key theme of this submission.

We recognise the relative newness of the Victims' Commissioner role and the important function of the Office of the Victims' Commissioner in ensuring victims are aware of their rights, have clear pathways to exercise them, and that agencies are held accountable for doing so.



Safety, Dignity and Participation as Foundational Rights

Victims must be treated with respect, compassion, understanding and agency.

The Charter should move beyond a “right to be told” toward a right to have a voice in decisions that affect their safety, recovery, and sense of justice.

Rather than just being informed, Victims should be **actively consulted** about:

- the name of the person charged and the offences laid
- whether police decide to charge the person, and why or why not, or if there are substantial changes to charges
- if the prosecution changes or reduces the charges, or accepts a plea to lesser charges
- upcoming court hearings, including when victims may attend and what support is available
- bail applications and decisions, including any conditions that may affect the victim’s safety
- participation in diversionary programs
- the outcome of court proceedings.

These should not be just administrative updates but instead genuine consultation. They are moments of direct consequence for victims’ safety, wellbeing and sense of fairness.

Being part of the process means victims must have structured opportunities to be heard, to express concerns, and to contribute information relevant to their safety and justice. Participation must be voluntary, trauma-informed and supported.

There are existing elements in the Charter where victims have formal input pathways, such as the Victim Impact Statement and submissions to the Parole Board. While victims identify that these opportunities are important, many victims report finding these participation points confusing, emotional, time-consuming, or administratively inaccessible and burdensome. There are only a few structured opportunities victims have to express their voice within the system, yet the language, complexity, and lack of tailored guidance often make the process overwhelming or exclusionary.

Accessible communication must therefore go beyond simple information-sharing. It should equip victims to meaningfully engage at these critical points through clear, trauma-informed materials, supported options for assistance, and the ability to receive information in the format and language most suitable to their circumstances.

A core theme in feedback from victims and practitioners is that safety must remain central to justice participation. While existing provisions focus on confidentiality and the non-disclosure of personal information, victims consistently describe the need for broader, more active protection throughout the justice process, particularly in cases involving interpersonal or domestic violence. Safety can be compromised at multiple points, such as the timing or method of serving papers, court listing and



adjournments, transport arrangements, or the scheduling of hearings where both parties may be present. These practical elements can inadvertently expose victims to risk, particularly in interpersonal matters.

A trauma-informed system must therefore consider safety both passively and actively. Passively, by ensuring all procedural decisions take into account potential safety impacts; and actively, by communicating with victims about these steps, offering protective measures, and ensuring they can participate without fear of harm or re-traumatisation.

Suggested Charter Reform: Formal Right to Consultation

Introduce a ***Right to Consultation***, ensuring victims have safe opportunities to provide input on key justice decisions that affect them.

At a minimum, this should involve the right to question, understand, and unpack with the relevant agency why a decision (such as a change to charges or parole) has been made.

Ideally, victims should be contacted before such decisions are finalised, with their input formally considered and documented, somewhat mirroring the intent of the written submissions to the Parole Board.

This can be an overarching right that must be considered in all rights or explicitly stated within certain rights. We see it of most importance when considering, charges, bail processes, sentencing, parole and involvement of any diversionary programs as it is these stages clients report having the most amount of impact on their wellbeing and safety.

Suggested Charter Reform: Right to Protection Through Process

Establish a ***Right to Protection Through Process*** that obliges agencies to take proactive steps to maintain victims' safety throughout the criminal justice process.

This right extends beyond confidentiality to include consideration of timing, logistics, and communication methods that may affect safety, ensuring victims are informed, consulted, and protected at every stage.

This also includes appropriate responses from police or other agencies to promote safety.

Suggested Support Reform: Timeframes for consultation and input

Regardless of whether the Charter integrates a more victim-inclusive approach, a framework outlining timeframes and mechanisms for contact and consultation with victims should be established to ensure engagement is accessible, supported, and allows sufficient time for informed responses.

This will be of high importance if a formal Right to Consultation is adopted.



Equity and Inclusion

The Charter must recognise that victims' experiences are shaped by intersecting forms of inequality, including gender, race, disability, sexuality, culture, and socio-economic status.

Systems have historically privileged some voices while silencing others. First Nations peoples, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ communities, migrants and refugees, children and young people, and those in regional or remote areas often face the greatest barriers to having their rights upheld.

Our client experience reflects this: people with multiple and intersecting identities frequently encounter additional barriers in realising their rights. While many of these are systemic, explicitly naming them within the Charter and its supporting legislative environment will strengthen the mandate for agencies to respond.

True equality requires embedding cultural safety, accessibility and intersectional practice across every agency responsible for implementing the Charter.

To uphold equity in practice, the Charter must also make explicit that no victim should be treated differently or have their human rights limited on the basis of personal characteristics or circumstances. This includes protection from discrimination based on race, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, source of income or payment, sex, gender identity, or gender expression. A modern Charter should reinforce that every victim, regardless of who they are or where they live, is entitled to the same standard of care, respect, and protection under the law.

The Charter should also affirm that immigration status or national origin must never affect a person's access to support or justice. Victims should be able to safely seek help and participate in justice processes regardless of citizenship or visa status and be provided with interpreter services or culturally appropriate communication when language or understanding is a barrier.

In addition, the Charter should acknowledge that children and young people hold specific rights to make certain decisions independently and must be supported to participate in processes in a developmentally appropriate way, without unnecessary parental or guardian interference where the law allows.

Although some of these protections exist under other legislation, embedding them in the Charter gives specific recognition and prominence to victims' needs at the point when they are most vulnerable after experiencing a serious crime.

Suggested Charter Reform: Non-Discrimination and Equal Access

The Charter should enshrine a right to non-discrimination and equal access for all victims, ensuring that personal characteristics or circumstances never limit their ability to receive support, protection, or justice.



This includes explicit protection from discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, source of income, sex, gender identity, or gender expression, and affirmation that immigration status must not restrict access to emergency care, safety, or legal processes.

The Charter should also require that interpreter and accessibility supports are available when language, hearing, cognitive, or cultural barriers exist. Notwithstanding *Suggested Charter Reform - Dedicated Charter for Children and Young People* it should be recognised that children and young people have defined rights to make certain decisions independently, supported by age-appropriate communication and participation mechanisms.

Suggested Charter Reform: Accessible and Specialist-Guided Communication Standards

The Charter should include a specific legislative provision requiring that all communications about a victim's rights be accessible, inclusive, and responsive to their individual and intersectional circumstances.

This means that information provided to victims, including updates, rights notices, and invitations to participate, *must* be delivered in ways that take account of:

- language, literacy, disability, and cultural background
- digital access and location (particularly for people in regional, remote, or digitally disadvantaged areas)
- the emotional and cognitive impacts of trauma

To ensure consistency and quality, the Charter (or at minimum, other relevant supporting legislation or policy) should require all government and statutory agencies to:

- use or adapt specialist-developed resources that are designed in consultation with lived experience experts and accredited by the Office of the Victims' Commissioner
- demonstrate compliance with these standards through regular reporting and quality review processes

This legislative direction would establish a clear and enforceable expectation that victim communication is not only accurate and timely, but also understandable, respectful, and safe for every person, regardless of background or circumstance.

Suggested Charter Reform: Dedicated Charter for Children and Young People

Develop a *Charter for Children and Young People*, recognising their distinct experiences and participation rights.

Children often experience violence differently. As witnesses, direct victims, or through the harm caused to family members. Children may also move from childhood to adulthood during lengthy criminal justice proceedings. The Charter should evolve with them.



While statements about specific considerations for children and young people could be woven into the overarching Charter, the complexity of need, impact of childhood development, and that children and young people can be both primary and secondary victims calls for a stand-alone Charter that can truly map and outline their unique Rights.

Clients tell us this is particularly impactful when seeking information about services for children, court and witness processes, and sentencing or parole outcomes (including eligible-person provisions). It is especially important when the offender is a family member or parent.

If specific provisions for children and young people are introduced, the related complaints processes must also be accessible and responsive to their needs and capacities.

Suggested Support Reform: Accessible Communication Tools

The Charter review should also prioritise the creation of accessible, culturally tailored, and age-appropriate communication tools that clearly explain victims' rights and justice processes. These tools should be co-designed by the Office of the Victims' Commissioner in partnership with community representatives and relevant agencies to ensure they are accurate, inclusive, and responsive to diverse needs

A key component of these resources should be increasing public awareness of the Charter itself, ensuring victims, support services, and professionals understand what rights exist and how to exercise them

Suggested Support Reform: Intersectional Training Framework

Support the requirements for all agencies to undertake intersectional, trauma-informed, and cultural safety training. This should form part of a dedicated, accredited framework overseen by the Office of the Victims' Commissioner, with government and other agencies required to submit annual compliance reports.



Accountability and Implementation

Rights that cannot be easily understood, accessed, or enforced are not meaningful. To be effective, the Charter must be supported by strong mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement, including:

- clear complaint and review processes when Charter rights are not upheld
- independent monitoring and public reporting through the Office of the Victims' Commissioner
- consistent training, guidance and resources to support implementation
- structured feedback loops for victims to influence policy and practice

We acknowledge the Office of the Victims' Commissioner's emerging leadership and encourage a legislative and operational framework that reinforces the Commissioner's authority in oversight and implementation. This leadership should continue throughout the implementation of the new Charter and any related updates.

Suggested Support Reform: Victims' Rights Implementation Framework

Establish a Victims' Rights Implementation Framework outlining agency obligations, accountability measures and annual public reporting, led by the Office of the Victims' Commissioner.

This should include communication pathways and feedback loops to ensure the Commission's work is achieving the outcomes it is striving for in implementation. That is; while working on helping the system be accountable to victims, the Victims' Commissioner and the Office of the Victims' Commissioner need to be similarly transparent and accountable. This would also include published data on numbers of complaints, time to reach complaint resolution, and complaint themes to allow continuous improvement across relevant agencies that have obligations to uphold victims rights.

Suggested Support Reform: Lived Experience in Design and Review

Strengthen lived-experience engagement at all stages of system design, delivery and review. Victims should not only be consulted but engaged as co-design partners in shaping reform.

Suggested Support Reform: Opt-Out Safety and Information Systems

Adopt an opt-out (not opt-in) approach for victim notification systems such as the Victims Register.

This ensures victims are automatically kept informed about parole, sentencing or release decisions unless they choose otherwise.



Consistency across systems

Feedback from both victims and frontline services highlights a persistent frustration that the Charter does not interact coherently with other legislative and procedural frameworks that victims must also navigate.

While DVConnect has not received extensive or direct feedback specific to the legislative intersections, our practice intelligence indicates that confusion and fragmentation are common experiences for victims trying to understand how their rights under the Charter align with other systems. The result is duplication, inconsistency, and additional effort required from victims at times when their capacity is already stretched.

The Charter also lacks clarity on ownership and accountability for ensuring victims' rights are upheld. Although it may be assumed that responsibility sits with government agencies and justice departments, the absence of explicit ownership weakens enforcement and accountability. This has the practical effect of placing the onus on victims to pursue their own rights. Agencies must instead be proactive, ensuring that rights are recognised, explained, and enacted as part of standard practice.

The revised Charter should:

- Clearly articulate how it interacts with related legislative frameworks, including but not limited to the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009, Youth Justice Act 1992, and Human Rights Act 2019, to ensure coherence and prevent duplication or confusion for victims and agencies.
- Specify which government entities and justice partners, including police, prosecution, courts, corrective services, and victim support agencies, have defined obligations to uphold victims' rights.
- Embed cross-system consistency through shared accountability measures and joint oversight by the Victims' Commissioner.

Suggested Charter Reform: Designation of Responsible Entities

The Charter should explicitly identify or formally reference through a prescribed regulatory or administrative instrument, the entities responsible for upholding each right.

This could be achieved by embedding direct references within the Charter or by linking to a recognised subordinate instrument (such as a regulation, directive, or statutory guideline) that clearly outlines the agencies and roles accountable for implementation.

Such an approach would ensure clarity and accessibility for victims while maintaining flexibility to adapt as government structures and processes evolve over time.



Suggested Support Reform: Consistency Across Systems

Develop a cross-system implementation and accountability framework that defines how the Charter interacts with other key legislation and agency responsibilities.

This framework should map intersections, eliminate duplication, and assign clear obligations to each entity involved in the justice response, ensuring that victims' rights are consistently recognised and enforced across all systems.

Suggested Support Reform: Privacy, Data and Digital Accessibility

Undertake a targeted review of how victims' rights intersect with data privacy, information-sharing, and digital accessibility frameworks to ensure the Charter remains contemporary and responsive to technological change.

This review should examine privacy protections, digital communication standards, and accessibility for victims engaging online, ensuring safety and confidentiality are not compromised in digital service environments.



Summary of Suggested Charter Reform

Formal Right to Consultation – Embed a legislated right for victims to provide input on key justice decisions that affect their safety and wellbeing.

Right to Protection Through Process – Require agencies to take proactive measures to maintain victims' safety throughout the justice process, ensuring protective actions and communication at every stage.

Non-Discrimination and Equal Access – Enshrine a right to equal treatment and access to justice regardless of identity, background, or status, with protections for language, disability, and children and young people's participation rights.

Accessible and Specialist-Guided Communication Standards – Victims must be engaged in a manner that is responsive and inclusive ensuring that the victim receives information in a way that is understandable, respectful, and safe.

Dedicated Charter for Children and Young People – Establish a stand-alone Charter that recognises children's distinct rights and participation needs.

Designation of Responsible Entities – Clearly identify or reference, through a prescribed instrument, the agencies responsible for upholding each Charter right to ensure accountability and flexibility over time.



Summary of Suggested Support Reform

Timeframes for Consultation and Input – Define clear, supported timeframes and mechanisms for engaging victims in decision-making.

Accessible Communication Tools – Develop co-designed, plain-language resources that explain rights and processes across diverse communities.

Intersectional Training Framework – Mandate accredited, trauma-informed and cultural-safety training for all agencies with Charter obligations.

Victims' Rights Implementation Framework – Create a monitoring and reporting framework to ensure agencies uphold Charter responsibilities.

Lived Experience in Design and Review – Embed victim and survivor voices in all stages of system design, implementation and evaluation.

Opt-Out Safety and Information Systems – Shift to automatic victim notification, preserving choice to opt out.

Consistency Across Systems – Develop a cross-system framework that defines how the Charter interacts with other legislation and agency responsibilities to ensure victims' rights are applied consistently.

Privacy, Data and Digital Accessibility – Review how victims' rights intersect with privacy, information-sharing and digital accessibility to keep the Charter responsive to technology and safety needs.



Conclusion

The Review of the Charter of Victims' Rights provides an important opportunity to re-imagine how Queensland's justice system listens to, supports, and protects victims.

The revised Charter must do more than describe principles, it must embed them into the daily practice of every agency, court, and professional who interacts with victims with clear responsibility for action and accountability for outcomes.

A modern Charter should:

- Centre safety, dignity, and participation as fundamental rights, ensuring victims are not passive observers but active contributors to justice processes.
- Guarantee equal treatment and accessibility, protecting every victim regardless of identity, background, or circumstance.
- Establish clear mechanisms for consultation, protection, and communication, ensuring victims are informed, heard, and safeguarded at each stage.
- Designate responsibility and ensure accountability across agencies, embedding transparent reporting, review, and feedback mechanisms that make rights enforceable in practice.
- Promote consistency and interoperability across systems, so that victims experience their rights seamlessly regardless of which agency or jurisdiction they engage with.
- Remain responsive to change, adapting to new technologies, privacy expectations, and contemporary understandings of trauma, intersectionality, and cultural safety.

DVConnect believes that when rights are practical, accessible, and enforceable, they restore trust, safety, and fairness to victims' experiences of justice.

We are willing to work in partnership with the Victims' Commissioner, government, and sector colleagues to shape a Charter that is cohesive across systems, grounded in lived experience, and unwavering in its commitment to safety and dignity for all victims. We are also willing to actively participate in its implementation ensuring our practice is aligned with new directions.