Prisons and without a home education and engagement plan

Victorian Electoral Commission

2025–27

Harris, Ashlee.
“One Tree, Many Leaves”

To me it is about no matter who you are, where you come from, or even the past that everyone can make their mark and become something extraordinary. The tree shows that we are all connected yet we are all our own person.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation, as the traditional custodians of the lands on which the VEC works and where we conduct our business. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present, and emerging. The VEC is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

Electoral Commissioner's introduction

I am proud to present the *Prisons and without a home education and engagement plan 2025–27*. The plan continues our work to help Victorians without a home, or in prison, take part as active citizens.

People in these groups often face barriers when trying to vote. Their situations can change quickly, making it hard to follow the rules and processes for voting. The plan explains how we will work with communities to address barriers.

Each of our education and engagement plans is based on years of working closely with Victorian communities. We developed the plan with people with lived experience in these environments. We are grateful for their help and will keep working with them on the plan's actions and goals.

I look forward to seeing the results of the plan. I truly hope that our focus on inclusion will help make Victoria's democracy stronger.

Sven Bluemmel
Electoral Commissioner

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About us

The VEC is an independent authority set up under Victoria's *Electoral Act 2002*. Our vision is that all Victorians actively participate in their democracy, and our purpose is to provide high-quality, accessible electoral services with innovation, honesty and independence.

> Our vision is that all Victorians actively participate in their democracy.

Our responsibilities include:

- running state, local council, and statutory elections
- maintaining the register of Victorian electors
- conducting electoral boundary reviews
- administering political funding and donation disclosure laws
- conducting research in the public interest
- promoting public awareness and understanding of electoral issues
- regulating obligations under the Electoral Act 2002.

Our values are:

- independence – acting with impartiality and integrity
- accountability – transparent reporting and effective stewardship of resources
- innovation – shaping our future through creativity and leadership
- respect – consideration of self, others and the environment
- collaboration – working as a team with partners and communities.

Our advisory groups

We have 5 active community advisory groups. These are the:

- Young People Advisory Group (YPAG)
- Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG)
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Advisory Group
- Prisons and Without a Home (PAWAH) Advisory Group
- Electoral Access Advisory Group (EAAG).

Prisons and Without a Home Advisory Group

PAWAH Advisory Group members include:

- Gippsland Homeless Network
- St Mary's House of Welcome
- Fair Collective
- Corrections Victoria
- VACRO
- Sacred Heart Mission
- The Salvation Army
- Council to Homeless Persons
- people with lived experience of homelessness or incarceration.

The PAWAH Advisory Group provides us with advice, feedback and ideas to improve electoral engagement for people in prison or without a home.

Figure 1: Electoral Commissioner and Prison and Without a Home Advisory Group member.

Developing the PAWAHEEP

Our work on the PAWAHEEP is shaped by the 2 governing documents outlined below.

Strategy 2027

Strategy 2027 sets VEC objectives until 2027. It reflects the dynamic and complex environment we work in and responds to new challenges including:

- changes to the law
- changes to the way people expect elections to run, including using technology
- misinformation and disinformation across the media landscape and their impact on political views
- decreasing trust in democratic systems
- increasing threats to our systems and applications and a need for better cybersecurity.

The strategy has 4 thematic areas that guide our work and help address these challenges:

- Trust – we are trusted to deliver electoral services with integrity and high quality.
- Voters – we deliver a great voter experience.
- Processes and systems – our processes and systems respond to a complex environment.
- Wellbeing – our people are capable, engaged and satisfied.

These themes inform the goals and actions of our education and engagement plans.

The VEC Strategy 2027 has 4 thematic areas:

- trust
- voters
- processes and systems
- wellbeing.

Inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) framework

We are committed to providing inclusive and accessible services to Victorians and creating a workplace that reflects the diverse communities we serve. We aim to foster respect and prevent all forms of discrimination, harassment, and violence.

We are developing an IDEA framework which will explain how we will work with people of all ages, genders, sexualities, abilities, ethnicities, cultures, religions and socio-economic backgrounds. Our IDEA framework will build on our previous diversity and inclusion framework to increase trust in the VEC through recognising and celebrating diversity.

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The VEC has a history of championing inclusion through initiatives such as our democracy ambassador program. The IDEA framework will support the goals of our education and engagement plans to help our staff and communities thrive.

Figure 2: Democracy Ambassadors at Melbourne Assessment Prison for outreach session.

Goals of the PAWAHEEP

The new PAWAHEEP replaces our *Out of home action plan 2021–23*, which was the first of its kind. The PAWAHEEP builds on the successes and learnings from the previous plan. It outlines how we will support the electoral needs of people in prison and without a home so they can be equal at the ballot box and active in our democracy.

The complex social needs of people experiencing homelessness or who are in prison can mean other people do not recognise the issues that exclude them from participating in elections. While these communities and sectors are separate, some people have lived experiences in both. With lower participation rates for enrolling and voting, the PAWAHEEP will help us make sure people in prison and without a home:

- have more trust in, understanding of, and access to electoral processes
- are considered in election planning and delivery
- increase their enrolment, voting, and engagement to maximise their participation in democracy.

> PAWAHEEP outlines how we will support the electoral needs of people in prison and without a home so they can be equal at the ballot box and active in our democracy.

The PAWAHEEP has 3 focus areas:

- access
- knowledge and confidence
- relationships, visibility and representation.

The actions we will take to achieve these goals are outlined under the headings below.

Access

To improve access for people without a home or in prison, we will:

› provide accessible and inclusive voting options to prisons and homelessness services

› create an Easy English enrolling and voting guide for people in prison

› review barriers to enrolling and voting for people in prison.

Knowledge and confidence

To increase electoral knowledge and confidence for people in prison or without a home we will:

› deliver ongoing electoral education in prisons

› provide year-round outreach to the prison and homelessness sectors

› identify gaps in electoral resources for these sectors

› offer outreach education in homelessness services for young people.

Relationships, visibility, and representation

To build relationships with and improve representation of people experiencing homelessness or in prison we will:

› build and maintain relationships with, and seek advice from, the PAWAH Advisory Group

› collaborate with Corrections Victoria and homelessness services to improve electoral engagement

› expand our support and partnerships in the homelessness sector

› employ people with lived experience of homelessness and/or incarceration to lead peer electoral education programs

› track the changing nature of homelessness and its impact on electoral participation

› attend prison and homelessness sector events, conferences, and forums across Victoria

› establish relationships in youth justice settings.

PAWAHEEP outcomes

At the end of this PAWAHEEP, some of the outcomes we hope to see include:

- easier enrolling and voting for people in prison, on remand, or without a home
- more people who are without a home or in prison knowing how to enrol and vote
- more people who are without a home or in prison enrolling and voting
- stronger engagement with, and visibility and representation of, homelessness and prison stakeholders at the VEC
- more awareness and understanding among homelessness, youth justice, and prison groups about our work and the importance of voting
- homelessness, youth justice, and prison sector stakeholders better support their clients to participate in elections.

Measuring the success of the PAWAHEEP

The Electoral Commissioner, VEC Executive Management Group and staff are responsible for making sure we achieve the actions in the PAWAHEEP.

We will maintain a progress report for the PAWAHEEP and invite feedback twice a year from the PAWAH Advisory Group. We will also publish a yearly progress summary in our VEC annual reports.

This education and engagement plan is guided by its own program logic. The monitoring and evaluation plan includes measures and targets, using data from various sources that we report quarterly, annually and for elections.

For a copy of the program logic, or monitoring and evaluation plan, please contact education@vec.vic.gov.au

Figure 3: Mobile voting at a prison site.

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