



Submission to Ian Gray AM

City of Port Phillip Community Safety Roundtable

April 2025

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About Windana

Providing connected services for more people in need.

Windana provides services across Victoria for adults and young people experiencing alcohol and other drug harms, family violence, mental health challenges and social disadvantage.

Our Model of Care puts clients at the centre of what we do to create positive change in people's lives. We work with families, communities and other organisations to deliver trauma informed, equitable, culturally safe and integrated services based on evidence and practice wisdom.

By intervening early and creating purposeful partnerships, we help clients achieve improved outcomes while reducing demand on acute services. And we are influencing policy, practice and research to help shape better systems for clients. Together, we influence the broader system for a more positive and connected future.

Windana's interest in the proposed Local Law amendments and community safety

Since 1985, Windana has occupied the historic property at the corner of Alma Road and Chapel Street in St Kilda.

While we now operate 15 sites across Victoria, our St Kilda location serves as the central hub of our organisation. It's where we offer a comprehensive range of alcohol and other drug services to the local community, including our adult residential withdrawal program, counselling, Family Program, harm reduction initiatives, peer support groups and community clinic.

We also use our St Kilda base to collaborate with local partners on the frontlines who share our vision of improving outcomes for marginalised people.

Summary

Windana opposes the proposed amendments to Sections 17(1b), 42 and 43 of the Local Laws, as we believe that making it an offence for vulnerable people to sit, sleep, lay or camp on Council land will create more challenges for people already experiencing complexity. Rather than amend Local Laws, we recommend Council take actions that will help people to connect with services that will improve their circumstances and enhance community safety.

Following the Community Safety Roundtable on 19 March, Windana welcomes the chance to provide recommendations to Ian Clarke AM for the final report to be presented to Council on 21 May 2025.

The following recommendations:

- Identify both short-term and long-term actions to increase public safety and perceptions of safety in Port Phillip.
- Offer evidence-based, person-centred alternatives to the proposed amendments.
- Consider Council's three objectives for the Community Safety Roundtable process.
- Emphasise the power of assertive outreach, lived experience, early intervention and challenging stigma.
- Are aligned with our areas of expertise and focus.
- Put people first and take a human-rights based approach.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (short term): That the City of Port Phillip collaborates with local agencies to enhance the ability of Local Laws Officers to provide support and referrals that address the complex needs of our community's most vulnerable people.

Local Laws Officers are authorised to issue warnings and infringements and impound items. However, Local Laws Officers – in partnership with Victoria Police on Joint Patrols and with access to the Rapid Response Team – also play a critical role in connecting vulnerable people with services. Council can leverage Officers' direct contact with people sleeping rough by enhancing their outreach capacity. This could be achieved by developing a welfare-based patrol model where Local Laws Officers collaborate with agencies (e.g. alcohol and drug services) on joint patrols. Including lived experience, e.g. by a Peer Worker accompanying officers on patrols, would provide culturally safe support and improve outcomes for service users¹.

Recommendation 2 (short term): That the City of Port Phillip supports recommendations from VAADA for funding and structural changes that will improve Victoria's response to alcohol and other drug harms, leading to place-based improvements in community safety.

Victoria's alcohol and other drug system faces growing demand for treatment, increasing complexity (including homelessness, mental health) and service gaps. In their 2025 State Budget Submission 'Fixing the Foundations', VAADA provided 39 recommendations necessary to improve the safety of Victorians. Themes include addressing immediate funding shortfalls, development of a Harm Reduction Framework, urgently funding Aboriginal women's treatment and increasing culturally responsive services for priority CALD communities². Regardless of the upcoming budget outcome, VAADA's recommendations offer structural solutions to reduce substance-related harms, and by advocating for these, Council can address challenges faced on the streets.

Recommendation 3 (long term): That the City of Port Phillip coordinates the implementation of an established, collaborative early intervention program model for vulnerable people to increase safety, manage risks, reduce homelessness and address dynamic criminogenic factors that bring people into contact with the justice system.

Council has an opportunity to be the catalyst for a program that provides direct service delivery to at-risk people (including brief intervention, outreach support and service coordination), enhanced by capacity building and reform. Windana's Living Free Project (2017-2024) offers a model that can be adapted to have positive impact in Port Phillip by adjusting two place-based factors: target cohort and the combination of local agencies that would collaborate to provide specialist support. The Living Free model works – an evaluation found that participants benefited from a range of positive outcomes including reduced involvement in offending behaviour, access to safe long-term accommodation, reduced problematic AOD use and increased engagement with services relevant to needs³.

¹ https://www.qmhc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Promoting-Lived-Experience-Perspective_Discussion-paper.pdf

² https://www.vaada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/SUB_Fixing-the-Foundations_VAADA-25-26-SBS_FINAL.pdf

³ <https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/Living%20Free%20Project%20-%20Evaluation%20Report%202023.pdf>

Council's role in Living Free could involve:

- Coordination – Assembling the appropriate services and organisations to establish a steering committee
- Capacity building – Enhancing skills across police, the justice system and key services that have contact with vulnerable people
- Advocacy – Creating sustainable change by exploring, documenting and responding to systemic gaps that contribute to homelessness and complex social disadvantage in City of Port Phillip.

Recommendation 4 (long term): That the City of Port Phillip leads an anti-stigma campaign in collaboration with alcohol and other drug, homelessness and mental health services to promote inclusion, use of services, outcomes for people facing social disadvantage and perceptions of community safety.

Stigma has negative impacts on community safety – including by delaying treatment-seeking behaviour, exacerbating complex mental health and alcohol and other drug issues, and increasing social isolation and lack of perceived safety⁴. Challenging stigma has been prioritised at different levels of government – including through the Australian Government's Draft National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy. At the local level, an anti-stigma campaign could focus on alcohol and other drugs, mental health and homelessness and be used to:

- Encourage help-seeking behaviours → Preventing exacerbation of social issues by encouraging people to connect with services⁵
- Reducing desire for social distance → Increasing community perceptions of safety (for example, the Time To Change campaign decreased desire for distance from people experiencing severe mental health problems)
- Enhancing knowledge and attitudes⁵ → Positive relationships have been found between anti-stigma campaign awareness and community attitudes, knowledge and beliefs of target groups.

Council's anti-stigma campaign could engage the community through media and education and should leverage anti-stigma work taking place at other levels.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit Windana's recommendations to this important process and are available to speak further on any recommendations covered – including exploration of a collaborative program using the Living Free Project model.

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10220277/>

⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5663972/>