



TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

VCAT STRATEGIC
DIRECTION:
2024 – 2027

VCAT Victorian Civil &
Administrative Tribunal

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

From the President

Like all the people who serve the Victorian community at VCAT, I am proud and respectful of our purpose, work and history as one of the world's first 'super tribunals'.

But much has changed in the world over the last 25 years, perhaps most profoundly with the COVID-19 pandemic and the global leap to a new normal. To continue to achieve its purpose, VCAT needs to keep changing too.

The Victorian population is growing. This is increasing the demand for VCAT's services, and we need to match that demand as it emerges in communities across the state.

Public expectations are becoming more rigorous. Victorians come to VCAT with problems they need help solving, fairly, quickly, inexpensively, in ways they can trust, using tools that feel familiar and accessible.

The public we serve is increasingly complex and diverse. VCAT needs to be a safe and inclusive place that meets the needs of all Victorians, particularly at a time of Treaty.

Helping solve problems for Victorians is also how VCAT creates economic and social value, and it's how we safeguard public trust in independent and impartial decision-making and the rule of law.

Global megatrends are transforming our daily lives. We must ready VCAT to ride the waves of the digital economy, artificial intelligence, and cleaner, greener, and leaner ways of living and doing business.

At the same time, public resources are constrained. VCAT must fulfill its purpose by achieving more with our existing resources, by ensuring that continuous improvement becomes part of our day-to-day work.

To meet the challenges of our changing world, and to realise our aspirations, VCAT has commenced a multi-year process of strategic change.

This means we have begun comprehensively re-making VCAT – our work systems and workforce, our digital systems and built environment.

Towards Excellence sets out the strategic direction for VCAT – a roadmap for VCAT's next three years. It tells the story of our purpose and our strategic change. It sets out how we will play to the strengths of our people, our work, and our organisation to fulfill VCAT's purpose, to realise its potential for tribunal excellence, and to maximise the contribution we make to Victoria.

Towards Excellence has a three-year horizon and this document will guide our decision-making, planning, and activity through to 2027.

I and the other stewards of VCAT are committed to this strategic direction and we will do our utmost to lead our people, our work, and our organisation towards excellence.

Justice Ted Woodward
President of VCAT

June 2024

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

An overview



Tribunals are an essential resource for dispute resolution and decision-making in Australia.

VCAT was established in 1998 to bring together several existing tribunals and introduce new procedures and approaches aimed at improving the quality, accessibility, timeliness, and cost of Victoria's broader civil justice system. From the outset, innovative use of technology and alternative dispute resolution were seen as integral to realising those aims.

VCAT immediately became the largest tribunal in Australia and one of the largest super tribunals in the world. Since 1998, VCAT has resolved nearly 2.1 million cases. We presently manage more than 75,000 new cases each year at venues across Victoria and in online and telephone hearings.

VCAT is part of Courts Group, a structure that constitutes the judicial branch of Victoria's system of democratic government and includes Victoria's five courts, VCAT, the Judicial College, the Judicial Commission, and Court Services Victoria.

Some of VCAT's most important attributes are shared with the courts. We value independence, impartiality, and the rule of law. We maintain procedural fairness and our decision-making is rigorous and expert. But in accordance with our founding purpose, our procedures are less formal and more accessible. Most of our members are not judges and many are not lawyers.

In this way, VCAT's legal subject matter experts aim to help Victorians reach just outcomes as swiftly and inexpensively as possible, by working with our users to solve problems and offer practical and sustainable solutions while being as informal as fairness permits.

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

An overview



OUR SERVICE USERS

Victorians who need independent and expert help to solve problems quickly, at low cost, and in ways they can trust.

Of everyone who comes to VCAT, most people need help with rental issues or small civil claims involving household goods and services. Thousands more come for help with problems that concern property, planning, human rights, decisions by government or disciplinary bodies, and many other areas.

Our processes are set up so that people can come to VCAT without engaging a lawyer and most of our users don't have a lawyer to help them. We will permit a lawyer to represent a party in appropriate cases.

Our users live and work throughout Victoria and we seek to meet their needs in places that are close to them and by using technology that's accessible and familiar to them.

People come to VCAT with different physical, psychological and cultural needs, and we do our best to support people with the help of our dedicated support workers and service partners.

OUR PEOPLE

Over 500 members and professionals working together.

We have just over 200 members, who are independent, expert decision-makers.

Our members have diverse professional expertise and include lawyers, planners, nurses, dentists, physiotherapists, environmental scientists, and fire engineers.

We have just over 300 professionals to help Victorians with their matter, support members in their work, and run the business of VCAT.

The knowledge, skills, and abilities of our people and their individual and cultural differences are the greatest strength of our organisation.

OUR WORK

Work that's essential to Victoria's people, economy and democracy.

We resolve over 75,000 cases each year by supporting people to explore and find their own solutions to their concerns or disputes and, where necessary, by making fair and expert decisions.

Our work promotes and safeguards public trust in the rules of society, business and government.

The issues we are called upon to manage and adjudicate arise under over 150 pieces of legislation.

We work closely with our users and other parts of Victoria's justice system to create value for Victorians and to connect people with other assistance.

OUR ORGANISATION

Services for Victorians delivered in places and ways that are accessible and that represent value for money.

We operate from locations throughout Victoria.

Roughly 70% of our hearings are held online or over the telephone.

We represent a \$65 million annual investment by government and our work is crucial to many people's lives and to many millions in economic activity each year.

Demand for the work we do is increasing by between five and ten percent every year.

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Our strategic direction



***Towards Excellence* sets out the strategic direction for VCAT. It tells the story of the strategic change we will be making over the next three years.**

VCAT's foundational characteristics were set at its establishment as accessibility, informality, inexpensiveness, speed, and efficiency. *Towards Excellence* represents a renewal of our purpose and these characteristics in a contemporary Victoria.

There is no standard recipe for excellence. Superior performance is always relative to the environment and excellence itself is not so much a destination as a way of doing things.

Towards Excellence is VCAT's own recipe and it represents the pursuit of tribunal excellence. It re-states VCAT's purpose and it sets out our strategic intent, which encompasses our values, aspirations and long-term direction.

The strategy described in this document is framed by three areas for excellence, which comprise our most important resources and capabilities. These areas are ***Our People, Our Work, and Our Organisation.***

These areas provided structure for explaining who we are in the previous section. They are also what we will concentrate on, invest in, and enhance as we move VCAT towards excellence.

Towards Excellence gives substance to our aspirations by identifying the concrete changes we will make with these three areas and why these changes matter. This document also sets out our approach to implementing our strategic direction; we will manage the detail of implementation with dedicated governance and biennial planning processes.

Our users are central to VCAT's purpose, to the value we create for Victoria and to the future we seek to realise. For that reason, in its final section *Towards Excellence* includes a simple statement of our commitment to our users.

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Our strategic intent

Our ambition is for VCAT to be a leader of tribunal excellence that is trusted by Victorians.

This means our services are highly efficient and readily accessible to Victorians, that we continuously improve the way VCAT works, and that VCAT is a great place to work.

Our buildings, locations and technology enable excellence in those areas. And we use our connections with other parts of Victoria's justice system to help Victorians.

We are proud of the expertise and commitment of our people, our culture of respect, professionalism, and performance, and we share a keen focus on doing better.

We value our service to Victorians and our contribution to Victoria. Fulfilling our purpose means that we are helping solve people's problems and in doing so contributing to the proper functioning of Victoria's communities, economy and democracy.



TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Our areas for excellence



Our People, Our Work, and Our Organisation are crucial to what VCAT does each day, creating value for Victoria, fulfilling our purpose and moving VCAT towards excellence.

VCAT's strategic change will renew our purpose and foundational characteristics. But at the same time it will bring changes to VCAT's workforce, the way we do things, our geographic footprint and digital capability. Major aspects of the strategic change have existing funding support from the Victorian government.

We will pursue our areas for excellence in ways that establish a solid foundation for superior performance into the future. Our approach to doing the work set out here will be shaped by clear performance expectations, which will focus on the productivity of individuals, the efficiency and quality of our work systems and the continuous improvement of VCAT as a whole.

	OUR PEOPLE <i>are our most important resource</i>	OUR WORK <i>is how we create value</i>	OUR ORGANISATION <i>is the place that enables tribunal excellence</i>
Our long-term direction	Our people are high-value decision makers and professionals and excellent problem solvers who are committed to VCAT's purpose.	Our work systems and processes are highly efficient, outcome focussed, and we continuously improve the ways we work.	Our organisation's service infrastructure, digital capability, and design enable our work and align with VCAT's purpose.
Why it matters	Our people are the principal determinant of VCAT's performance. Enhancing the knowledge, skills, abilities of our entire workforce is the very best investment we can make in VCAT. Making sure that VCAT is a great place to work ensures that we can expect the best from our people each day. Moving VCAT towards excellence means that we must maximise the value of our workforce by creating new roles and structures as the ways we do our work changes, by further leveraging the capabilities of every person through continuous learning, and by building our culture based on respect, professionalism and performance.	Our work and the ways we do it are defined by VCAT's purpose and its foundational characteristics. Our systems and processes must be highly efficient, our services must be accessible, affordable, and straightforward for Victorians, and the work we do must be challenging and meaningful for our people. Moving VCAT towards excellence means that we must embed continuous improvement practices in the way we do things, that our service model matches our capabilities to Victoria's demand, and that our people are empowered to solve problems and share our focus on performance.	Our organisation provides a workplace for our people and the supporting arrangements for our work to be done. This encompasses our locations throughout Victoria, our technology for engaging with Victorians, managing cases, and conducting hearings, as well as the way we organise ourselves to fulfill our purpose. Our organisation sets the parameters for our performance in important ways. Moving VCAT towards excellence means that we must modernise our technologies, optimise the use of our service infrastructure, and redesign our organising structures.
What we will do	<p>Workforce redesign: we will redesign our professional workforce to enable our new ways of working, expand our capabilities, and enable greater case resolution at a lower cost, while also establishing clear career paths.</p> <p>Performance leadership: we will equip our senior leaders and people managers with the skills, tools, and authorities to lead our people, lead change, and continuously improve performance.</p> <p>Productivity and wellbeing: we will invest in the productivity and wellbeing of our people to ensure they have the learning, materials, and support needed to do and be at their best.</p> <p>Performance culture: we will build a purpose-led performance culture to embed our values of respect, professionalism, and tribunal excellence in harmony with judicial values.</p>	<p>New service model: we will introduce a new service model for VCAT to deliver high-quality justice at a sustainable cost by making greater use of earlier, less-formalised, lower-cost approaches to resolution.</p> <p>Work system redesign: we will redesign our work systems and processes from the ground up by empowering and equipping our leaders, members, and professionals to continuously improve VCAT's performance.</p> <p>Reviewing service fees: we will work with the Victorian government to review the fees charged to our users, to optimise the accessibility and economy of Victoria's courts and VCAT.</p> <p>Eliminate case backlogs: we will eliminate structural case backlogs in VCAT so that users can trust our work and all Victorians can have confidence in the swiftness of justice at VCAT.</p> <p>Measuring excellence: we will introduce a performance framework for tribunal excellence and we will hold ourselves to account for VCAT's performance.</p>	<p>Optimising service infrastructure: we will align our use of service locations and remote hearing channels with our new service model to increase efficiency, safeguard quality, and expand accessibility for Victorians.</p> <p>New jurisdictional framework: we will redesign our governance and organising structures to promote internal integration and efficiency so that these arrangements benefit our work, our people, and our purpose.</p> <p>Digital change: we will fully digitise our case management and listing systems to support our new work systems and processes.</p> <p>Digital future: we will determine VCAT's way forward with emerging technologies, including machine learning and artificial intelligence.</p> <p>Corporate consolidation: we will optimise VCAT's corporate services arrangements in partnership with Court Services Victoria to create a more sustainable model for Courts Group and to enable us to fully focus on the business of VCAT.</p>

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Implementing the strategic direction



Delivery of the aims set out in *Towards Excellence* will be the responsibility of the Service Improvement Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will prepare a tribunal improvement plan, to map-out in detail the practical steps we will take to implementing this strategic direction. The tribunal improvement plan will be refreshed on a biennial basis to ensure that VCAT's aims, resources, and environment are well-aligned.

Implementation of the strategic direction will be guided by the following broad principles:

- Our commitment to VCAT users is at the heart of everything we do.
- Our purpose and foundational characteristics are clear, and they guide every aspect of our strategic improvement work.
- We respect VCAT's history, but we are not tied to it.

This means that:

- If VCAT's existing division and list structures no longer represent the optimal way to manage VCAT's work for the benefit of our users, they must be recast. The Steering Committee will examine how VCAT can better organise its work by looking beyond the boundaries of subject matter and existing division and list structures to different approaches that enable the earlier resolution of cases at lower cost.
- If existing structures, practices, or processes act as barriers to achieving our strategic direction, they must be remade to better enable VCAT's purpose and our aims. The Steering Committee will seek to eliminate inefficiencies, wasted effort, and failure demand in the way we operate and ways we do our work. As a rule, every interaction with a case file should be treated as an opportunity for resolution.
- If the ways we use our workforce are inefficient for VCAT and unfulfilling for our people, then we must change the model. Having members work across multiple lists is but one possible solution.
- If we are able to operate with consistent practices and processes across divisions and lists, then we must do so to improve efficiency, speed, workforce mobility, and

the simplicity of services for our users. The Steering Committee will advance consistency and standardisation throughout VCAT.

- If we are achieving great results in one part of VCAT, then we should translate those lessons to other parts of the organisation. For example, the Backlog Recovery Program is an exemplar of what is achievable and it should be a springboard for future reforms.
- If we have done things well in the past, then we should revisit those lessons. The Steering Committee will consider reinstating certain practices and processes that worked well in previous years, before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We have a number of important projects underway at VCAT, notably the digitisation of case management and listing systems and the move to a new CBD venue. Our tribunal improvement plan must realise the full value of existing projects and bring that value to bear on achieving our other aims.
- We operate under significant financial constraints. The Steering Committee will explore every available opportunity for creating efficiencies that reduce cost and any recommendations for change must be cost neutral.

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE

Our commitment to VCAT service users

VCAT operates with a commitment to our users for several important reasons.

Foremost among these is VCAT was created to make justice more accessible to Victorians.

In Victoria's democracy, it is Victorians who determine what is valuable for their government to do. VCAT creates that value for Victoria and Victorians by fulfilling its unique purpose.

For VCAT to fulfill its purpose we must work with Victorians to reach fair and trusted outcomes.

Our commitment to service users sets out what people's experience of VCAT will be.

Our purpose is to provide equal access to high-quality justice for Victorians.

Our aim is to help people reach a fair outcome at low cost and as quickly as possible.

As a user:

You will be treated with respect and professionalism.

We will listen to you, and we will explain what to expect from our handling of your case.

You have the right to independent and impartial treatment of your case.

You are entitled to clear and accurate information about your case and how we handle it.

Your case will be handled by professional staff and members, who are expert decision-makers.

You can expect that we will work with you with as much speed and as little formality and technicality as fairness permits.

You can expect that we will demonstrate integrity, confidentiality, and openness in how we handle your case.

We expect that you will treat us with respect, provide us with accurate information, and communicate with honesty and speed.



The logo for the Victorian Civil & Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) is displayed in white text on a dark blue background. The acronym 'VCAT' is in a large, bold, serif font. To its right, the full name 'Victorian Civil & Administrative Tribunal' is written in a smaller, sans-serif font, stacked in two lines.

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www.vcat.vic.gov.au