

PRESS RELEASE



Victorian Aboriginal
Children & Young
People's Alliance

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Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance rejects Allan Government Youth Justice Backflip

The Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance (VACYPA) strongly rejects the Allan Government's decision to abandon its promise to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age.

Chairperson Karen Heap said, 'Failing to raise the age of criminal responsibility is an uncaring and punitive backflip that threatens the trust we have worked hard to establish with this government.'

After years of advocacy and negotiation, we reached agreement with the government that children under the age of 14 years of age should not be prosecuted as criminals if they break the law. Children need support – not to be dragged into the criminal justice system, where they are more likely to offend.

The Allan Government appears set on a dangerous path, bending to conservative pressure that opens it to accusations of policy on the run.

This decision adds fuel to the spreading fire that there is a youth crime epidemic. There is no youth crime wave. Youth crime is at historic lows, despite a post-COVID rebound. According to ABS data, there were 8,175 Victorian youth offenders in 2022-23, compared to 11,537 ten years ago in 2012-13. (ABS 2024, Recorded Crime Offenders 2022-23, table 20.)

Police data, called upon to justify regressive policy change, can be misleading as it includes charges that are often subsequently dropped or downgraded.

VACYPA warns against capitulating to hyped-up media coverage about a tiny handful of young people. The Allan Government's knee-jerk response demonises all young people. Our young people are not demons.

VACYPA CEO Jason Kanoa said, 'Prevention, early intervention and holistic support are what children and young people need. Electronic ankle bracelets and more youth prisons are not the answer.'

Aboriginal leaders were not consulted about laying aside the commitment to raise the age of criminal responsibility. The Yoorrook Justice Commission, Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal Justice Agreement all support raising the age.

The Allan Government now only proposes to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12. That signals head on conflict with Aboriginal leaders, not to mention the Greens and Victorian cross-bench.

VACYPA hopes to see a positive campaign over the next two years before the 2026 election. But this policy does not bode well.

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