Community Safety

City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

Safety and security are important determinants of peoples' health and wellbeing. Overall, Port Phillip residents have a sense of safety and security that is comparable with the Victorian average. However, criminal incidents are persistently more common in Port Phillip than Victoria overall. No one organisation can solve complex safety issues in isolation.

What is community safety?

"A safe community is one in which all sectors of the community work together in a coordinated and collaborative way, forming partnerships to promote safety, manage risk, increase the overall safety of its members and reduce the fear of harm."

- Australian Safe Communities Foundation, 2013.

How do community safety issues affect the Port Phillip community?

1. Views on safety within Port Phillip

Council's annual community survey indicates that residents have an overall sense of safety and security however public safety improvement is required (City of Port Phillip, 2020).

A Victoria-wide survey undertaken in 2015 indicated that the proportion of Port Phillip residents who felt safe walking alone during the day was consistent with the state average and that a higher proportion felt safe walking alone in their local area after dark.

To inform priorities and actions to be contained within the current City of Port Phillip Community Safety Plan, consultation took place in 2019 with over 140 local organisations to identify their community safety concerns. Council was advised that:

- *The "look and feel" of the community contributes to safety:* Appropriate lighting, and passive surveillance (having other people around) helps residents to feel safe when walking at night and while at transport hubs.

- *Theft is a concern for residents:* Residents feared property, bike, and car theft.

- *Unsafe driver behaviour is contributing to road safety concerns:* Traffic speeds and illegal behaviour, in local streets can put pedestrian and bike rider safety at risk.

- *Connected communities feel safer:* Residents feel safer when they know their neighbours and want opportunities to connect with others.

- *Diversity is celebrated:* Residents are proud of the diversity in Port Phillip and see it as a major community strength that should be celebrated.

- ***Access to housing and support increases safety.*** Residents want those who are sleeping rough to be supported to access housing.

- ***Support for vulnerable groups is important to creating safer communities.*** Residents believe that support needs to be provided to street-based sex workers, homeless people, those in insecure housing and older citizens identified at risk of elder abuse.

- ***Responsible pet ownership is important to residents and visitors.*** Residents feel unsafe around dogs off leash behaving aggressively.

- ***People are concerned about impacts of alcohol and drug use.*** Residents see the impact of drug and alcohol misuse on the community.

2. Crime within the City of Port Phillip

Victoria Police data shows that:

- The rates of criminal incidents in Port Phillip have been consistently higher than the Victorian average over the past ten years.

- For the year ending September 2020, there was a substantial increase in criminal incidences compared to the previous year. This increase is largely due to the introduction of new COVID-related offences. 10,395 criminal incidents were recorded from January to September 2020, however 968 were public health and safety offences[1].

- There has been an increase in criminal incidents occurring on streets, lanes, and footpaths and in car parks, multi dwellings and apartments.

- Approximately one third of the total criminal incidents occurred in St Kilda.

- The top offences included theft from motor vehicle, other theft, public health and safety offences, criminal damage and obtaining benefit by deception.

- Alleged offender incidents increased by 9.7 per cent between June 2019 and June 2020. The most prevalent alleged offender age group was 45+ and males were almost four times more likely to offend.

- The total number of victims of crime reports for the year ending September 2020 has remained stable compared to the previous year, however victimisation rates per 100,000 persons have been consistently higher than the Victorian average since 2011 (Crime Statistics Agency, 2020).

In relation to family violence:

- While Port Phillip's incidence of family violence is below the Victorian average, rates have been increasing since 2016.

---

[1] Six new Covid-19 related offences codes were added in 2020 to the overall public health and safety offences category. These offences codes were introduced to support the Victorian Government public health response to COVID-19 which involved restrictions on people's movements, new hygiene sanitation practices and the introduction of mask wearing in public.

- In 2019/20 there were 1,354 incidents of family violence attended by police in Port Phillip, representing a 6 per cent increase on the previous year and a 22 per cent increase on incidents in 2015/16. It is estimated that only 25 per cent of family violence incidents are reported to the police. Consequently, the above data is unlikely to capture the full scale of the issue in our municipality.

- Incidents most frequently take place at residential locations and occur between current and former partners.

- A fifth of family violence incidents attended by police recorded a child or children as present (Hutcheson, 2017).

How are some groups in our community particularly affected by safety concerns?

- In Victoria, males account for 45 per cent of victim reports and almost 80 per cent of offenders. The most prevalent alleged offender age group was 45+ (Crime Statistics Agency, 2020).

- Australia-wide, men are most likely to be physically assaulted in public by a male stranger, whereas the majority of violence against women occurs in the woman's own home and is perpetrated by a man they know (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

- Women report a lower sense of safety and security than men (City of Port Phillip, 2020). In fact, women's perceptions of safety in Australia are among the lowest among developed countries, with over half of Australian women feeling unsafe when walking alone at night (GIWPS, 2019).

- People residing in Port Phillip who have a disability are less likely to feel safe walking alone during the day or night compared to people without a disability (VicHealth, 2015). Men with a disability experience higher levels of physical violence than men without a disability, while women with a disability experience higher levels of partner abuse than women without a disability (Krnjacki, et al., 2015).

- While there are no significant differences in perceptions of safety walking alone during the day or night between non-heterosexual and heterosexual Victorians, LGB Victorians reported lower general wellbeing, resilience and life satisfaction, which is "intimately connected to their sense of safety in their community" (VicHealth, 2015).

- Consultation with 900 young people highlighted that safety was one of the top three aspects young people did not like about Port Phillip (City of Port Phillip, 2020). However, a resilience survey undertaken with eleven schools showed that one of the key strengths for young people was safety at home, at school, and in the community (Resilient Youth Australia, 2019).

How has COVID-19 affected community safety?

It is difficult to establish a causal relationship between Covid-19 restrictions and crime rates. However, it is evident that lockdown restrictions significantly alter the environment in which criminal activity can take place. Less people out in public may reduce crime rates on the streets.

Victorian family violence practitioners reported that the pandemic has led to:

- An increase in the frequency and severity of violence against women and an increase in first-time reporting by women

- An increase in the complexity of women's needs

- New forms of violence, including enhanced tactics to achieve social isolation and forms of violence specifically relating to the threat and risk of COVID-19 infection

- For many women experiencing violence during the lockdown period, it was more difficult to seek help (Pfitzner, et al., 2020).

While Port Phillip's incidence of family violence is below the Victorian average, rates have been increasing since 2016. It is expected that this trend will continue to accelerate in 2020/21 due to the on-going effects of COVID-19.

Why is managing community safety important?

- When individuals feel safe within their communities, they are more likely to connect with friends, engage with other community members and experience greater levels of trust and social connection.

- Community safety also influences our physical health and wellbeing by altering how people use, and interact with, the built environment, local amenities, parks and community facilities and their ability to travel to opportunities in the wider community.

- How people perceive safety can influence behaviour and community wellbeing. The positive 'look and feel' of our streets and spaces can contribute to reducing crime and increase feelings of safety. Perceptions of safety are often driven by how people feel about an area or place.

How are the Commonwealth and State Governments managing community safety?

Federal and State governments are responsible for law and order, public health, social housing, public transport, and emergency management. Victoria Police, in conjunction with the Department for Justice and Community Safety, set the priorities for crime prevention and community safety, and lead on responses to these issues in Port Phillip.

What is the role of the Port Phillip City Council in creating a safe community?

Increasing community safety requires a focus on the natural and built environment as well as on cultural, social and economic factors that impact on community safety, crime, health and wellbeing. The City of Port Phillip contributes to the safety of the community in a number of ways.

In the first instance, the City of Port Phillip is responsible for using its regulatory functions to promote and maintain safety in our community. This includes:

- Managing waste, graffiti removal, street lighting, footpaths, bike lanes, parks, traffic speeds and road design, parking, and recreational spaces in public areas. Use planning controls to ensure the safety of buildings and infrastructure and regulate their use. For example, licencing and monitoring noise impact in venues.

- Management and permitting of public events and public art.

- Promoting responsible pet ownership.

- Establishing outdoor alcohol restrictions in partnership with Victoria Police who are responsible for enforcing.

In addition to our regulatory responsibilities, the City of Port Phillip develops policies and programs that strengthen the community to prevent crime, injury and ill-health, and to foster positive social change. Our priority areas include:

- **Creating Safe Spaces** that are vibrant and welcoming environments that can be enjoyed by all, both day and night. In particular, we work with our partners to increase actual and perceived safety in public places through design and management of our streets, network of walking paths and bike corridors, entertainment precincts, the foreshore, parks and outdoor spaces, lighting, graffiti and waste removal and sensitive CCTV.

- **Building Resilience:** We work with local businesses, organisations, and community members to create a welcoming, inclusive, resilient community that supports the most vulnerable to feel and be safe.

- **Healthy Living:** We support our community to realise their health potential through promoting social connectedness without a focus on alcohol. We also contribute to the effort to reduce alcohol and drug-related harm.

In addition to this, Port Phillip has a role to play in:

- Tracking crime trends and community perceptions of safety to identify priorities and emerging risks

- Evaluating CCTV, undertaking safety audits and implementing crime prevention measures such as environmental design

- Working collaboratively with government agencies, community service organisations, community members and traders to identify and respond to priority issues

- Encouraging residents, visitors, and local traders to take shared responsibility maintaining a safe community by respecting public spaces, disposing of waste appropriately, managing pets responsibly, being courteous toward fellow community members and reporting crime.

Who are our partners?

Community safety is the responsibility of all levels of government, community service organisations, business owners and community members. Safety is determined by a range of complex environmental, social and economic factors. No one organisation can solve complex safety issues in isolation. The City of Port Phillip works collaboratively to continually improve safety in our community.

- Star Health

- Victoria Police

- Transport Accident Commission

- Department of Health and Human Services

- Department of Justice and Community Safety

- Community Organisations

- Community Members

What may change over the next five years?

As a consequence of COVID-19 it is likely that we will experience a declining economy, increased levels of poverty, social marginalisation and inequality. This may result in escalating levels of crime, including family violence.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017. *Personal Safety Survey 2012: 4906.0,* Canberra: ABS.

Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012. *Violence, Harassment and Bullying and Homelessness.* [Online]
Available at: https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/commission-general/violence-harassment-and-bullying-and-homelessness#fn15
[Accessed 01 01 2020].

Australian Safe Communities Foundation, 2013. *Becoming a Safe Community.* [Online]
Available at: http://www.safecommunities.net.au/index.php/becoming-a-safe-community
[Accessed 1 1 2021].

City of Port Phillip, 2020. *2019 Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey,* s.l.: City of Port Phillip.

GIWPS, 2019. *Australia's Performance on the Women, Peace, and Security Index.* [Online]
Available at: https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/australia/
[Accessed 01 01 2021].

Hutcheson, E., 2017. *Family Violence in the Southern Metropolitan Region.* [Online]
Available at: https://southsafe.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Family-Violence-in-the-SMR-Summary-Document-v3.pdf
[Accessed 26 12 2020].

Krnjacki, L., Emerson, E., Llewellyn, G. & Kavanagh, A. M., 2015. Prevalence and risk of violence against people with and without disabilities: findings from an Australian population-based study. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health,* 40(1).

Pfitzner, N., Fitz-Gibbon, K. & True, J., 2020. *Responding to the 'shadow pandemic': practioner views on the nature of and responses to violence against women in Victoria, Australia during the COVID-19 restrictions.,* s.l.: Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, Monash University.

Resilient Youth Australia, 2019. *City of Port Phillip Youth Resilience Survey.* s.l.:s.n.

VicHealth, 2015. *VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015 Results: Port Phillip - LGA Profile,* Carlton South: Vichealth.

VicHealth, 2015. *VicHealth Indicators Survey 2015: Supplementary report - sexuality,* Carlton South: VicHealth.