

# Media Backgrounder



Federation of  
Community Legal Centres  
VICTORIA

## Preventing avoidable police shootings in Victoria

### The statistics show that Victoria has a high rate of police shootings

Over the past three decades, Victoria has had more fatal police shootings than any other state or territory in Australia.

- Between 1984 and 1995 there were 35 fatal shootings in Victoria- just over twice as many as in *all* other police services in Australia. (Jude McCulloch, '[Policing the Mentally Ill](#)', *Alt Law Rev*, Vol 24, No 5, 2000, 241). (For Victorian statistics for 1980-2005, refer to OPI [Review of Fatal shootings by Victoria Police](#), 2005, Appendix 4, 63).
- There were 29 police shooting deaths in Victoria between 1990 and 2004, followed by New South Wales (18), Queensland (11) and South Australia (5). (OPI [Review of Fatal shootings by Victoria Police](#), 2005, 63).
- More than half of Victoria Police fatal shootings since 1982 have involved people with mental illness and the proportion of shooting victims with mental illness has increased over time. (Kestic, Thomas, Ogloff, [Mental illness among police fatalities in Victoria](#) 1982-2007, *Aust NZ J Psychiatry* 2010, 44:463-468).
- Since Tyler Cassidy's fatal shooting in 2008, there has been one fatal police shooting and 9 reported non-fatal shootings in Victoria. (Federation of Community Legal Centres, [Table 1: Fatal and non fatal Victoria Police shootings since Tyler Cassidy](#)). There has been no independent review of these non fatal police shootings as the coroner only has jurisdiction where someone has died. Victoria police has not released any information about internal reviews into these shootings.

### Why is the rate so high and what can be done to reduce police shootings?

- We saw reductions in shootings after 1994 when Victoria Police initiated Project Beacon to address the increase in shootings in the late 80's and early 90's. It demonstrated that good training, culture and tactics reduce police shootings. (See the reduction in deaths in subsequent years in the annual police shooting statistics in OPI [Review of Fatal shootings by Victoria Police](#), 2005, Appendix 4, 63).
- The emphasis on training, tactics and cultural change must be on-going. In 2005 the OPI attributed the increase in police shootings at that time to a gradual decrease in training and the re-emergence of a culture overly reliant on guns. (preface to OPI [Review of Fatal shootings by Victoria Police](#), 2005). 'Some of the lessons learnt during Project Beacon about ensuring that Operational Safety Tactics (OST) training is current, relevant and well-accepted by officers have been overlooked in recent times'. OPI [Review of Fatal shootings by Victoria Police](#), 2005, 41.
- In 2009 the OPI reported that by 2009 Victoria police continued to lose strategic focus on safety and avoiding the use of force and that there was little evidence to suggest Operational Safety Tactics (OST) training is informed by ongoing analysis, monitoring or research into the skills required by operational police to avoid or minimise the use of force. (OPI [Review of the use of force by and against Victoria police](#), 2009, 11, 24).
- An internal police review into police shootings between 2005-2008 only released to the Federation of Community Legal Centres under a FOI legal process found that 'there is a tendency to revert to the 'must resolve quickly' style accompanied with a communication style that may inflame the situation, particularly involving vulnerable people. Training with an emphasis on recognising potential critical incidents, indentifying symptoms of vulnerable persons, tactical communications skills [...] and techniques for creating time, are all considered to be essential

skills for police attending potential critical incidents. ([Victoria Police 'Examination of police shooting critical incidents'](#), 2009, 7.

- While Victoria Police has acknowledged that it needs to improve its tactics and trainings, there are a number of concerns: the roll out of the new police semi-automatic guns and the recruitment of 940 armed protective services officers who will not have the same on the job training and supervision afforded to police officer recruits. (Opinion: [Poor training and bad tactics to blame for police shootings](#): The Age, 23 March 2011).
- On going independent reviews of all fatal and non-fatal police shootings by the proposed Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) to make sure that police training is responsive, appropriate and continuous. ([Federation letter to Ministers regarding police shootings on 1 May 2011 and 2 May 2011](#)).

**Further information:**

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