

VIFM Strategic Plan

2022 -2025



Acknowledgement of country

The Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which our building stands, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which we live and work. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.



Wurundjeri
Woi-wurrung

Cultural Heritage
Aboriginal Corporation

Foreword Council Chair



I am delighted to present this new strategic plan for the VIFM on behalf of the Council.

The plan is based around five newly articulated 'strategic pillars' that give clarity to the areas of focus for the Institute in achieving our priority goals in this next three years: service excellence; valued people; partnerships and connections; leading edge technology and facilities; and innovation, research and teaching.

The development of this plan has included

- » Consultation across the VIFM with the Council
- » Feedback from our customers, partners and stakeholders
- » Reference to external sources including the findings of the Victorian Law Reform Commission Report: Improving the responses of the justice system to sexual offences, Nov 2021
- » Incorporation of work done to produce our Gender Equality Action Plan (2022), the main strategies of which are represented in this plan.

Council fully endorses the goals and strategies set out in this new plan and stands in support of the VIFM Director and the Executive and all the staff in making the goals a reality.

The Hon. John Coldrey AM QC

Foreword Director & Chief Operating Officer



Our new strategic plan builds from our last one, in particular what we were able to achieve with to our goal 'to secure funding to enable us to deliver all elements of the VIFM's purpose'. State budget funding in 2021 for targeted outcomes at the VIFM support key strategies for this next plan period that are designed to bring us 'up to speed' with leading edge technology and facilities. This includes redeveloping the mortuary and CAE spaces, procuring an MRI machine and embedding its use into our practices for investigating death and offences involving neck compression. We have also been funded for major ICT upgrades to achieve digital transformation and increased cyber security which enhances our leading edge technology. Our ICT upgrades also contribute to the mechanics of achieving our goal to have a contemporary approach to how we create, access, manage, share, use and learn from our information; our main aspirations in this space being to share, use and learn from our information with research and innovation that enhances the evidence base so we can improve our processes, the reports we write, our court appearances and our contribution to community safety locally and international.

In what will be a post-pandemic tightened fiscal environment in these next three years, we have reflected on how to improve what we do without assuming that we will receive increased operational funding. So, another focus for this plan is on 'working smarter together'. This includes partnering with the agencies within our networks to support shared goals. The 'network map' on page 10 shows VIFM within its complex web of partners and stakeholders, and representation of who and how we serve. Our priority goals for partnerships and connection speak to the need for us to work in a networked way - in close partnership with the Coroners Court of Victoria to achieve our service excellence goal of transforming our death investigation system. Similarly, to create and deliver a new model for our clinical forensic medical services that ensure they are accessible and responsive we need to be working collaboratively with our network of stakeholders, starting with Victoria Police.

Another way of 'working smarter together' is to better utilise the knowledge skills and experience of our staff. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how our staff can adapt and 'pivot' and be motivated to find more effective ways of working as circumstances change. The strategies for us to achieve a diverse and engaged workforce that is continuously learning and developing to create the VIFM of the future are directed towards engaging our staff in ways that enhance their learning and growth at the same time as helping the organisation meet the challenges it faces.

We look forward to working with you over the next three years.

Noel Woodford, Director
Mari-Ann Scott , Chief Operating Officer



Our plan is directed at meeting:

Our aim

We will embrace innovation to strengthen and enhance our position as a trusted leader in forensic medicine and science

Our purpose

At the VIFM we

- » provide independent, quality forensic medical and scientific services to support families, the community and the justice system; and
- » undertake research and teaching to expand and share our knowledge

and we do these things by valuing our people and engaging with our partners.

We are guided by our values:

Respect

We respect all people, our history, our calling and the law.

Openness

We are open minded, open to each other, and open to knowledge and learning.

Service

We provide services for the community which are responsive and client-focused.

Integrity

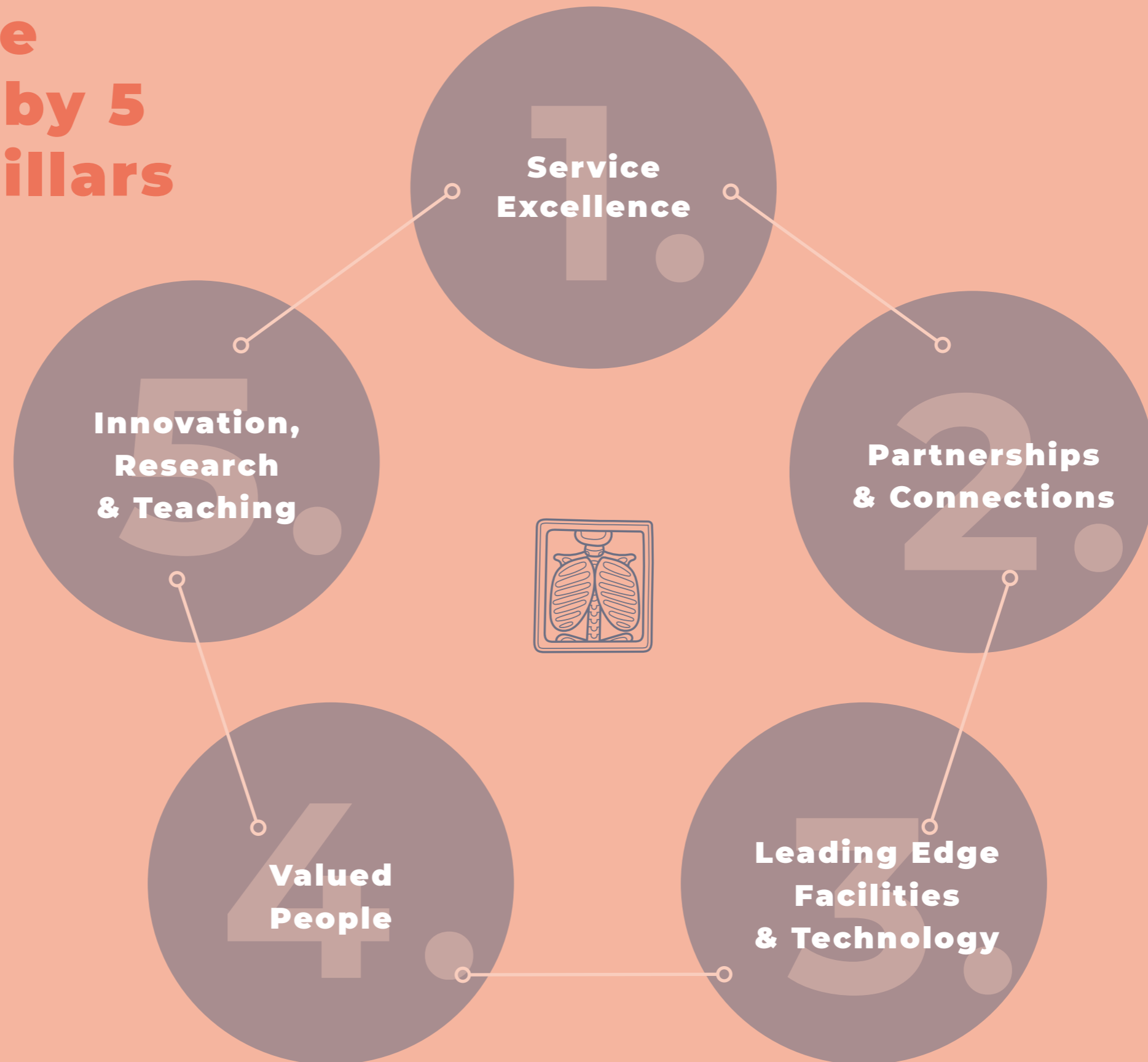
We will be beyond reproach. We commit to truth, confidentiality, impartiality and accountability. We commit to systems that are secure, reliable, accurate, valid and safe.

Innovation

We are creative and curious. We have a desire for knowledge, and we are not afraid to do things differently.



Our aim & purpose are supported by 5 strategic pillars



Who we are & what we do:

Statutory functions delivered through our services

Medico-legal death investigation

Our forensic pathologists, nurses, executive assistants, technicians, radiologists, photographers, anthropologists, toxicologists, and scientists assist the coroner to investigate the causes of reportable deaths and to identify remains. Our experts provide reports and give evidence in the Coroners' and criminal courts.

Clinical forensic medicine

Our CFM examiners provide clinical examinations and forensic assessments on patients; provide objective forensic medical evidence and opinions to support investigating agencies and the courts in determining matters of interpersonal violence and other crimes. In addition, they provide expert consultancy relating to fitness to drive.

*The VIFM also runs the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria, which has its own strategic plan available at xxxxxxxxxx

Expert consultancy

Our forensic medical and scientific specialists provide expert opinions and reports covering a wide range of forensic medical and scientific issues to support the justice system. Our expert consultancy work and International Program also supports judicial, humanitarian, medical and social services in Victoria and around the world.

Family health referral

Our forensic nurses act as clinical liaison when previously unknown medical conditions are identified during a medico-legal death investigation. They support the referral of families to genetic health services and other medical specialists.

Corporate services

All our statutory functions and facilities are supported by a dedicated team of corporate services professionals including: legal and governance, finance and business services, human resources, information communications and technology, and risk management, quality and improvement.

Teaching and research

Our academic practitioners educate and inspire the next generation of forensic medical and scientific practitioners through under- and post-graduate, and short courses delivered in our capacity as Monash University's Department of Forensic Medicine.

Our research is focussed on: enhancing forensic medical and scientific practice, improving the forensic medical and scientific evidence base for courts, public health issues to make our communities safer, better application of existing and creation of new data sets, and global issues to which forensic medicine can make a meaningful contribution.



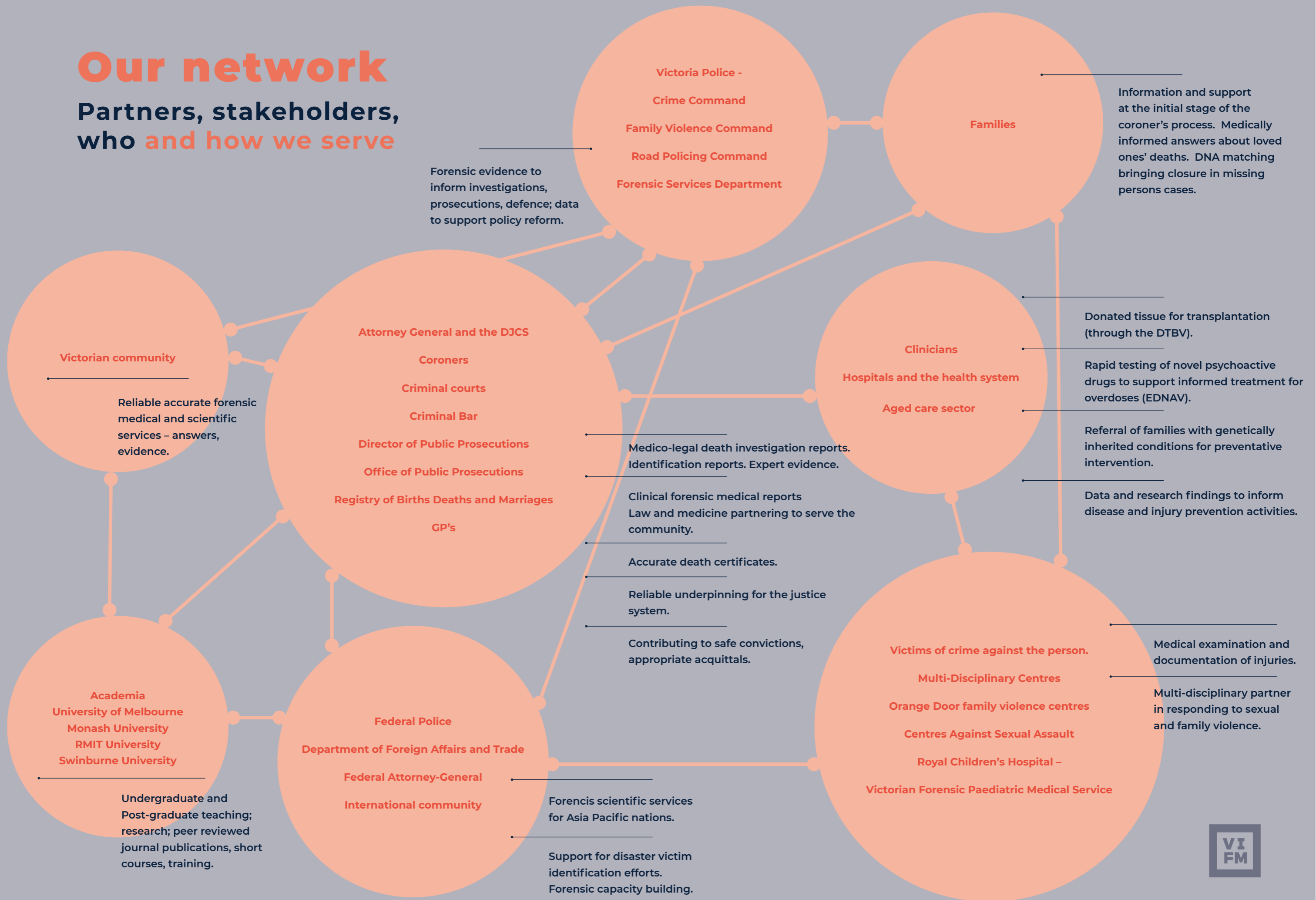
Forensic scientific services

Our toxicology, histology and molecular biology scientists support the forensic pathologists in medico-legal death investigations. Our toxicologists also conduct analyses for Victoria Police on specimens from drug facilitated assaults and injured drivers and those suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Specialist drug testing services are also undertaken for individuals, hospitals and other organisations. Our molecular biology laboratory works with Victoria Police to solve missing persons cases.



Our network

Partners, stakeholders,
who and how we serve



Priority Goals 2022-25



Valued people

- » A diverse and engaged workforce that is continuously learning and developing to create the VIFM of the future.



Service Excellence

- » A transformed death investigation system, that maximises the public value of our expertise and focusses on the needs of families.
- » A CFM service that provides a reliable, high quality and timely service that is accessible and responsive to stakeholder needs.



Leading edge facilities & technology

- » A safe and welcoming service and education hub.



Partnerships & connections

- » Closer partnership with the Coroners Court to drive system reform.
- » Collaborative relationships established with all our clinical forensic medicine stakeholders.



Innovation, research & teaching

- » A contemporary approach to how we create, access, manage, share, use and learn from our information.

Service Excellence



Our Goal

A transformed death investigation system, that maximises the public value of our expertise and focusses on the needs of families

Strategies:

We will

- » Work with DJCS and the Attorney General to achieve needed legislative amendments to underpin meaningful system reform including authority for VIFM's forensic pathologists to complete Medical Certificate Cause of Death (MCCDs).
- » Undertake research and development to create evidence-based service innovation for improved investigation outcomes, whilst preserving case reviewability.
- » Collaborate with the Coroners Court and the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages to develop and embed new processes aligned with the legislative changes to ensure the desired system improvements are achieved on the ground.
- » Engage with GPs to generate a better understanding of reportability of deaths.
- » Extend the MLDI protocol for reviewing medical records of hospital based deaths following FNOF to other well-documented low risk cases.
- » Review our protocols for ordering internal testing (e.g. toxicology) to ensure best use of our resources.

Measures:

- » Faster turnaround of natural cause deaths that do not require extensive investigation.
- » Reduction in complaints from families.
- » Improved stakeholder and customer feedback, in particular those from minority backgrounds.
- » More targeted use of toxicology testing resources.

Service Excellence



Our Goal

A CFM service that provides a reliable, high quality and timely service that is accessible and responsive to stakeholder needs.

Strategies:

We will

- » Recruit, train, and develop a highly specialised team of doctors and nurses to provide CFM services in metropolitan Melbourne to deliver victim-centred CFM services including 'just in case' examinations for alleged sexual assaults.
- » Review and optimise the utilisation of clinical forensic medicine expertise in Victoria through collaboration with Victoria Police, Custodial Health, VFPMS, and the hospitals.
- » Commence the search for innovative and cost-effective IT solutions that service the needs for CFM work processes and can assist with data management, research, work force planning, billing and moving to a more productive mobile organisation, able to work safely, securely and efficiently where most needed.
- » Work to ensure, as far as is practicable, sexual assault victims have a choice in relation to the gender of their forensic examiner.
- » Address government policy requirements for improved access to CFM services by establishing onsite working arrangements for VIFM practitioners at emergency medicine (Crisis Care Units) and/or other designated facilities across Victoria.

- » Contribute to training medical, legal, and allied health staff to ensure a high level of knowledge and competency in the management of response to sexual offences in Victoria and other Australian jurisdictions (through an extended contract between the Department of Social Services and Monash University to provide training in recognising and responding to sexual violence for frontline workers).

Measures:

- » A 24/7 roster of trained forensic personnel to respond to requests for forensic assessment and management of victims of physical and sexual assault and alleged perpetrators in place across Victoria.
- » KPI for 2 hour response time to attend victims of sexual assault in place and consistently met.
- » Locations for CFM service delivery attended and operational.
- » Improved feedback about choice of gender of forensic examiners.
- » Academic and competency-based internal training program for forensic practitioners and allied health staff established.

Partnerships & Connections



Our Goal

A closer partnership with the Coroners Court to drive system reform

Strategies:

We will

- » Establish cross functional working groups between CCOV and the VIFM to review processes to inform system reform.
- » Hold regular case review sessions for CCOV and VIFM personnel to enhance understanding of outcomes from both legal and medical perspectives.
- » Increase engagement between forensic practitioners and coroners for enhanced understanding and respect for the respective roles through a workshop series and presentations on forensic topics of direct relevance to coronial decision-making.
- » Provide opportunities for CCOV staff to tour the VIFM facility and understand more about the medical and scientific operations that go into creating reports for the coroner and create reciprocal opportunities for our staff to understand more about the coronial processes.

Measures:

- » Cross functional working groups established, and processes reviewed.
- » System reform efforts are based on collaborative thinking and action.

Partnerships & Connections



Our Goal

Collaborative relationships established with all our clinical forensic medicine stakeholders

Strategies:

- » Reinvigorate and enhance our working relationships with stakeholders involved in responding to sexual assault including Centres Against Sexual Assault, and Victoria Police SOCITs by having sufficient staff to provide timely and high-quality responses.
- » Engagement of Victorian Health Services in CFM service provision within hospitals by establishing MOUs with hospital services and other facilities where we provide CFM services to ensure a collaborative approach to service provision.
- » Reinvigorate and enhance our working relationships with stakeholders involved in responding to sexual assault including Centres Against Sexual Assault, and Victoria Police SOCITs.
- » Work towards a Victorian Interagency Agreement between key stakeholders (Police, Health, CASA, VIFM (CFM), OPP, Ambulance Victoria) that outlines the roles and expectations of each stakeholder organisation to ensure a more collaborative and consistent approach to responding to reports of interpersonal violence.

Measures:

- » Improved feedback on CFM services through client service meetings with Victoria Police.
- » Hospital MOUs in place.
- » Interagency agreement on responding to reports of interpersonal violence.

Valued People



Our Goal

A diverse and engaged workforce that is continuously learning and developing to create the VIFM of the future

Strategies:

We will

- » Create and implement a clear research and education plan for each of our operational areas and identify dedicated work time to enable the realisation of this.
- » Undertake an internal audit of backgrounds and skills in our workforce to understand and utilise untapped potential.
- » Engage our staff in continuous improvement projects based on 'Lean' and 'Action learning' principles.
- » Implement our Gender Equality Action Plan focussing on:
 - Improving our data on gender and intersectionality in our workforce
 - Building capability and capacity related to equality
 - Equitable pathways to career development and leadership
 - Creating a safer, empowering, and inclusive culture.
- » Create stronger staff engagement with professional bodies locally and internationally e.g. RCPA, ICRC and TIAFT.
- » Undertake an executive project to develop clearer organisational structure, reporting and accountability to facilitate greater staff engagement in projects and innovation.

- » Develop our workforce succession planning including needs relating to our academic roles with Monash University.

Measures:

- » Process improvement projects completed.
- » Increased staff membership in professional bodies and supporting committees, involvement in projects and activities.
- » Gender equality data improvement plan developed and implemented.
- » Internal governance structures for implementation of the VIFM Gender Equality Action Plan (Executive Steering Committee and Working Group established and delivering on planned actions for communication and consultation, training and professional development for staff).
- » Improved outcomes in the People Matters Survey relating to diversity and inclusion, work culture, management and leadership.
- » Research program aligned to operational needs.
- » Workforce succession plan developed and in use.

Leading Edge Facilities & Technology



Our Goal

A safe and welcoming service and education hub

Strategies:

We will

- » Focus on our OHS management and measures to ensure safety for our workforce and visitors including taking account of new regulatory requirements for psychological safety in the workplace.
- » Redevelop the mortuary and CAE to achieve safe and functional environments for our staff and families visiting our site.
- » Procure, install and embed the use of MRI technology into our MLDI practice and for investigation of crimes involving strangulation/neck compression.
- » Transition to the new era of hybrid onsite and working from home arrangements with a focus on achieving a vibrant work hub and well-connected teams.
- » Work with Monash University to develop a renewed MOU to clarify the relationship with the VIFM and support the growth of the Department of Forensic Medicine/ VIFM Academic Programs.

- » Undertake a review of our environmental impact with a focus on waste management
- » Scope the future needs of the VIFM and the next generation facilities and technology.

Measures:

- » High levels of staff satisfaction regarding psychological safety, flexible work arrangements and team cohesiveness, as measured by the People Matters Survey.
- » Redevelopment project implemented.
- » Increased number of visitors to the VIFM facility.
- » MRI machine installed and use embedded in pathology and CFM practice.
- » MOU with Monash University in place.
- » Improved OHS audit data.
- » Improved measures of environmental impact.
- » Future planning documentation developed.

Innovation, Research & Teaching



Our Goal

A contemporary approach to how we create, access, manage, share, use and learn from our information

Strategies:

We will

- » Enhance the evidence base for forensic medical and scientific issues of importance to the criminal justice system.
- » Use our information for research and development aimed at improving forensic medical workflows and practices.
- » Create resources for educating
 - the next generation of forensic medical and scientific practitioners.
 - legal personnel about the relevance, reliability and limitations of forensic medical evidence.
- » Implement a digital transformation project, involving operational staff in design of new systems for creating, managing and using our information.
- » Increase our cyber security in line with the requirements of the Victorian Protective Data Security Standards (VPDSS).
- » Develop and implement detailed data sharing protocols with government and other agencies to allow the information we hold to inform policy and research for the public good.

- » Complete our transition to our electronic records management system (ELO) and embed processes for improved storage and access protocols.
- » Continue to develop our research partnerships and grant writing capacity to grow our research program and communicate important findings.

Measures:

- » Research papers produced on forensic medical and scientific issues of importance to the criminal justice system.
- » Forensic medical workflows and practices updated.
- » Educational resources produced.
- » Digital transformation completed.
- » Improved compliance with VPDSS.
- » Increased data sharing with key agencies.
- » Improved storage and accessibility of VIFM information internally.
- » Increased research activity supported by external funding.



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