CARSAFE

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Accountability and prevention are not competing ideas. A serious response protects victims now and reduces the conditions that produce the next offence.

Inside

What the 15-person study can tell us
What current data can tell us
Intervention points
Measures that matter

PREVENTION BRIEF

Vehicle offending is a public-safety problem with a prevention window

What a small qualitative study, current official data and frontline practice suggest about earlier, safer intervention.

15

young people in the original 2020 Victorian qualitative study

The interviews provide depth, not prevalence. They illuminate trajectories and service gaps among a highly specific custodial sample; they cannot describe every young person who offends.

The prevention rule

Intervene before exclusion becomes a pathway.

CURRENT CONTEXT

The scale is real, but the datasets answer different questions

National offender data, Victoria Police processing and youth-justice supervision are distinct measures. Read each on its own terms.

44,583

youth offenders

People aged 10-17 proceeded against by police nationally in 2024-25, down 5% on the previous year.

25,275

Victorian incidents

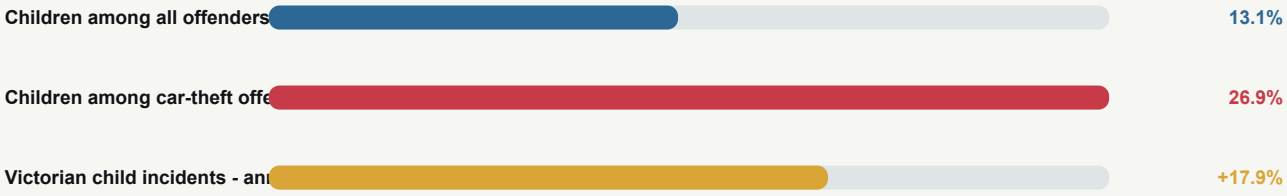
Alleged offender incidents involving children aged 10-17 in the year to March 2025, up 17.9%.

4,147

under supervision

Average number of young people under youth-justice supervision on a day in 2024-25 nationally.

Victoria, year to March 2025: share of processing



The policy implication is targeted intensity, not indiscriminate labelling

- A smaller group can account for a disproportionate share of a particular offence without representing young people generally.
- Public safety requires a rapid response to dangerous driving, burglary and violence as well as credible exits from repeated offending.
- Current statistics describe system contact. They do not, by themselves, explain motivation or identify which intervention caused change.

Sources: ABS Recorded Crime - Offenders 2024-25; Victoria Police statement for year to March 2025; AIHW Youth Justice 2024-25.

STUDY INSIGHT

What the original interviews brought into view

The themes below came from 15 young people serving custodial sentences for violent motor vehicle offences. They are hypotheses for action and further testing, not population rates.

01 Early adversity

Participants described family violence, child-protection contact, substance use around them, intergenerational offending and homelessness.

02 School disconnection

All reported suspension and expulsion. Problems commonly began in primary school and were linked in their accounts to boredom and offending peers.

03 Changing motivation

Early theft was described in terms of transport, recreation, boredom and sometimes accommodation; later offending was often tied to substance dependence.

04 Violence as escalation

Participants did not describe an original intention to harm. They reported violence when seeking rapid access to a car, avoiding detection or overcoming resistance.

05 Peer context

Offending commonly occurred with peers. Residential care and school exclusion could intensify contact with peers further along an offending trajectory.

06 Car interest as strength

Participants described strong attachment to cars and mechanical knowledge, suggesting a credible engagement route through supervised training and employment.

These accounts do not excuse harm. They help locate earlier points where education, housing, health, family and justice systems can reduce the risk of more serious harm.

Source: archived 2020 qualitative report. Sample: 15 Victorian young people in custody for violent motor vehicle offences.

INTERVENTION PATHWAY

A continuum from universal security to intensive support

The response should match the risk and the young person, while keeping victims and community safety visible at every stage.

1	**Reduce easy opportunity**	Support households to secure keys, garages and vehicles. Use vehicle and place-based measures informed by local patterns.
2	**Respond to early warning**	Treat repeated school exclusion, homelessness, substance use and low-level offending as a coordinated support trigger, not separate referrals.
3	**Use assertive outreach**	Engage young people where they are, including after police contact, with rapid access to housing, health, education and family support.
4	**Interrupt escalation**	For repeated or dangerous offending, combine supervision and swift accountability with intensive therapeutic and practical intervention.
5	**Build a credible alternative**	Offer full-time education, training and employment pathways, including well-supervised automotive interest where suitable.
6	**Plan the return**	Start accommodation, health, education, work and mentoring arrangements before release, then maintain continuity in the community.

A referral is not an outcome. Track whether the young person was contacted, engaged, retained and connected to a stable place, activity and adult relationship.

Sources: archived 2020 study; Victoria Police youth prevention and embedded outreach programs; AIHW youth-justice reporting.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Five systems, one safety plan

Fragmentation is predictable when each service sees only its own event. Shared goals and consent-aware information practice are essential.

SYSTEM	PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION	MEASURE OF PROGRESS
Education	Keep the young person engaged or move quickly to a viable alternative pathway.	Attendance, participation, attainment.
Housing	Provide safe accommodation that does not intensify exposure to offending peers.	Nights safely housed; placement stability.
Health	Address trauma, mental health, substance use and emotional regulation.	Access, retention and clinical goals.
Police and justice	Protect the public, enforce conditions and connect early with support.	Harm, breach and recontact patterns.
Family and carers	Strengthen safe adult relationships and practical capacity.	Contact quality and crisis reduction.
Training and employers	Create a structured route to skill, income and pro-social identity.	Completion, placement and job retention.
Victim services	Provide information, safety planning and trauma support.	Timeliness, uptake and unmet need.

Use multidisciplinary case review for the small group at highest risk. Keep responsibilities named, time-bound and visible to the young person and family where lawful and safe.

CARSAFE program framework synthesising the archived study and current official prevention programs.

SAFEGUARDS

Prevention must be both effective and legitimate

Programs lose trust when they overstate evidence, ignore victim harm, share data loosely or treat a whole age group as a risk category.

EVIDENCE

Be honest about inference

- [ ] Separate qualitative insight from prevalence claims.
- [ ] Compare like datasets and consistent time periods.
- [ ] Pre-register outcomes and publish null results.
- [ ] Include lived experience without turning it into spectacle.

PRACTICE

Protect people

- [ ] Keep victim safety and support in the program model.
- [ ] Use trauma-informed practice without removing accountability.
- [ ] Apply consent, privacy and information-sharing law.
- [ ] Avoid placements that cluster and amplify risk.

GOVERNANCE

Watch for harm

- [ ] Monitor racial, gender, disability and regional impacts.
- [ ] Provide complaint, review and correction pathways.
- [ ] Use qualified staff with supervision and debriefing.
- [ ] Stop or change interventions that cause net harm.

CARSAFE safeguards for ethical prevention and evaluation.

MEASUREMENT

Count safety, stability and opportunity - not attendance alone

A useful dashboard combines public-safety outcomes with the conditions that make desistance more plausible.

1 Immediate safety

Track violent events, dangerous driving, crashes, victimisation and police contacts using consistent definitions.

2 Stable place

Measure safe nights housed, placement disruption and whether accommodation avoids harmful peer concentration.

3 Meaningful day

Track education, training or work participation, completion and persistence beyond program exit.

4 Health engagement

Measure timely access, continued engagement and agreed clinical or harm-reduction goals, not diagnostic labels.

5 Trusted relationships

Capture continuity with a safe adult, mentor or worker and the young person's assessment of support quality.

6 Longer-term recontact

Report severity, frequency and time to recontact, with appropriate comparison and enough follow-up to avoid easy claims.

Success is not a single clean number. Report whether serious harm fell, whether life became more stable and which groups benefited or were missed.

CARSAFE evaluation framework informed by ABS, AIHW and current Victorian program descriptions.

SOURCES AND USE

Sources, limits and language

Avoid causal claims that the evidence cannot carry. The original study is valuable because it adds detail to administrative statistics, not because it replaces them.

[1] **Australian Bureau of Statistics, Recorded Crime - Offenders, 2024-25**

www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-offenders/2024-25

[2] **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Youth justice in Australia 2024-25**

www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-justice-in-australia-2024-25/contents/summary

[3] **Victoria Police, Crime Statistics Agency response for year to March 2025**

www.police.vic.gov.au/victoria-police-statement-relation-crime-statistics-agency-data-release-12-months-e

[4] **Victoria Police, Youth Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Program**

www.police.vic.gov.au/youth-crime-prevention-and-early-intervention-program

[5] **Victoria Police, Embedded Youth Outreach Program**

www.police.vic.gov.au/embedded-youth-outreach-project

[6] **Archived 2020 qualitative study, used as the core topic reference**

web.archive.org/web/20250000000000id_/carsafe.com.au/assets/200917_FINAL_Insights_into_Contemporary_Young

Use and limitations

- The 2020 study involved 15 young people in a Victorian custodial setting. Its themes are not prevalence estimates.
- This publication discusses serious offending and disadvantage without excusing harm or labelling young people generally.
- Administrative datasets count different units, including people, incidents and average daily supervision. They are not additive.
- This publication provides general policy information, not legal, clinical, child-protection or case-management advice.