Public perceptions of police and crime are driven not only by actual experiences, but are influenced by media representations and community contexts. Exaggerated perceptions of crime skew perceptions of risk and fear. Local governments and other agencies find it difficult to implement effective strategies that can mitigate fear and worry for issues that are beyond the scope of their mandate.

Commissioned in early 2018 by the Community Crime Prevention Unit (CCPU) within the Department of Justice and Regulation, Monash University is undertaking an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Community Safety Networks Project to provide evidence and recommendations for improving police engagement with local communities. It will assess the effectiveness of the community engagement interventions, contribute to an understanding of enablers and barriers to effective police engagement with local communities, and identify improvements to police practice in relation to future community engagement activities. The recommendations from the evaluation will be incorporated into Victoria Police future strategic planning for improving community engagement.

As part of the Victorian Government's Community Safety Statement, the Community Safety Networks (CSN) Project has been established to improve police engagement with local communities and enhance understanding of policing priorities and community safety for residents across 12 local government areas in Victoria.

There are significant barriers to police/community engagement in different community contexts, despite recent developments in community policing strategies.