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Victoria Inquiry Probes Coercive Cult Practices

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Victoria has launched a landmark public inquiry into the recruitment tactics and internal practices of cults and fringe groups, aiming to assess the effectiveness of existing laws in preventing coercive control. The inquiry, run by the Legal and Social Issues Committee of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, is the first of its kind in Australia and will run until September 2026.

The investigation seeks to understand how some organisations use manipulation to isolate members and prevent them from leaving. It also aims to identify gaps in legal protections for

those who suffer long-term emotional and psychological harm after leaving such groups.

Public hearings began last month, with several survivors giving evidence. One former member of the Geelong Revival Centre described growing up in fear, isolated from the outside world and denied access to healthcare. Others spoke of abuse, strict control over relationships, and enduring trauma that extended into adulthood.

The inquiry comes after criticism that the 2013 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse failed to cover harm caused by cults and fringe groups. Witnesses who felt excluded from that process have welcomed the opportunity to share their stories now.

While the focus remains on coercive behaviour, some political submissions have attempted to expand the inquiry's scope by drawing comparisons with unrelated topics such as gender identity and COVID–19 restrictions. These comparisons have been rejected by the committee, which has clarified that the inquiry is not about personal beliefs but about behaviour that results in measurable harm.

The committee is expected to provide recommendations for reform once the inquiry concludes. These may include improved legal definitions of coercive control and more robust oversight of high-risk organisations.

This inquiry represents a critical move toward acknowledging psychological abuse and coercive tactics used in fringe communities across Victoria. It also highlights the growing demand for stronger safeguards against organised manipulation that may not currently fall within the scope of criminal law.