

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND THE
VICTORIAN COMMUNITY SECTOR

2018–2022



Education
and Training

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Authorised by the Department of Education and Training,
2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne, Victoria, 3002

PREAMBLE

The Victorian Department of Education and Training (the Department) and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), on behalf of the Victorian community sector, recommit to a Partnership Agreement (the Agreement) that reflects a shared commitment to working together to ensure every Victorian is provided with support, services and resources for learning and development.

This Agreement renews the Partnership Agreement signed by the Department and VCOSS, on behalf of the Victorian community sector, in July 2014.

The Department recognises that the community sector helps to improve the lives of many children, young people, adults and families through direct service delivery, social support and advocacy on behalf of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians. The Department respects the practice, diversity, knowledge and autonomy of the community sector and acknowledges its right to advocate on behalf of those they work with.

The Victorian community sector acknowledges the role and responsibility of the Department in delivering learning and development support, services and resources for all Victorian children and families, young people and adults.

This Agreement acknowledges the important work of both partners, and constitutes a commitment by them to increase collaboration and communication, respect the other's mandate, and to achieve the best possible learning and development outcomes for all Victorians.

VISION

The Department and the Victorian community sector will work together to improve the learning, development, health and wellbeing outcomes of all Victorians, particularly those who are vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage.

Signed on the 14th day of September 2018, by:



Gill Callister

Secretary

on behalf of the Department of Education and Training



Emma King

Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Council of Social Service

on behalf of the Victorian community sector

POLICY CONTEXT

The Victorian Government has committed to building an education system that produces excellence and reduces the impact of disadvantage. Education is more important than ever: skills, knowledge, creativity and adaptability will be central in our future economy and community.

The Department is working to give every Victorian the best learning and development experience, making our state a smarter, fairer, more prosperous place.

Through the *Early Childhood Reform Plan*, it is delivering a higher quality, more equitable and inclusive early childhood system to support Victorian families and their children to be ready for kinder, ready for school and ready for life.

Victoria's recent reform and investment in school education has laid the foundations for a world-class education system that gives all learners the best chance to succeed in work and in life. The Department is seeing positive results in improved student outcomes and achievements that indicates they are better prepared to face the challenges of life and work in the 21st century.

And in tertiary education, *Skills First* is delivering results to industry, employers and students. Skills are the greatest link to job opportunities for Victorians. The Department is revitalising the state's TAFE and training system along with its TAFEs so every Victorian can access high-quality training that will lead to real jobs, meet industry needs and grow economic productivity.

Partnership with communities, employers and families is fundamental to the success of this agenda. As Victoria's population grows and changes, high-quality learning, from early childhood through schooling and into adulthood, is pivotal to future prosperity and wellbeing.

Growing up in poverty, in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or with complex social problems like mental health or disability, should not mean that a person's chances of succeeding in education are reduced. The Department is committed to breaking the link between disadvantage and educational achievement.

The community sector is active across education, health and social wellbeing, and plays a significant role in the lives of many Victorians in the communities in which they live, and in many of the services and supports they access. It is a major provider of early years services, a provider of services for vulnerable children and young people, an involved and informed advocate in improving the life chances of disadvantaged and vulnerable Victorians, including through the provision of education services, and is also a key partner in the development of good policy and research.

The Department recognises that its agenda for improving the learning and development outcomes for all Victorians can only be delivered successfully in partnership with the community sector. Governments in other jurisdictions have reached similar conclusions, and recognise the importance of forging stronger relationships with the community sector. This renewed Agreement will continue to guide relationships, agreements and activities undertaken between the Department and the community sector.

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Discussion about a stronger model of engagement between the Department and the community sector led to the development of a Partnership Agreement in 2010, which built upon existing mutual support and collaboration in order to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families, young people and adults.

This Agreement renews the 2014-2018 Partnership Agreement to consolidate the collaborative relationship between the Department and the Victorian community sector.

THE PARTNERS

The Department of Education and Training

The Department leads the delivery of education and development services to children and families, young people and adults, both directly through government schools, and indirectly through the regulation and funding of early childhood services, non-government schools and training programs.

The Department support Victorians to reach their potential, regardless of their background, postcode or circumstance, and to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to participate and thrive in a complex economy and society.

The Department's objectives in achieving this are:

- ensure Victorians have equitable access to quality education and training
- work with providers and partners to build an integrated birth to adulthood education and development system
- support children, young people and adults with well-coordinated universal and targeted services close to where they live
- activate excellence, innovation and economic growth.

The Department recognises that supporting the needs of vulnerable children, young people, adults and families is the responsibility of a number of government departments, and is committed to whole-of-government approaches to respond to these needs. It also recognises the necessity of the community sector in the delivery of its mandate and in pursuit of our reform agenda.

The Victorian community sector

The Victorian community sector provides a diverse range of services and supports to both promote the health, development, and wellbeing of children, young people, adults and their families and to support improved community health and wellbeing. The majority of community sector organisations are independent bodies that are accountable, in accordance with their constitutions, to clients, the wider community, donors and funding bodies and to other sector organisations.

Community sector organisations work within the requirements of legislation, regulation, program parameters and professional standards. Organisations also contribute substantial funds through non-government funding sources to deliver services for children, young people and adults to help support safe and healthy communities and build stronger families.

In Victoria, community sector organisations comprise an extremely diverse group, ranging from the large employers with hundreds of staff to very small organisations that employ only one staff member and are largely run by volunteers.

As the peak body for the state's social and community sector, the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) works towards the elimination of poverty and disadvantage in all its forms, and the creation of a society where all people are supported to thrive.

VCOSS does this through policy development, public and private advocacy and increasing the capabilities of the state's social service bodies. It also gives people experiencing poverty a voice in policy formulation and public debates, fostering a greater understanding of the true causes and effects of disadvantage.

VCOSS's members include charities, peak bodies, frontline service groups, advocacy organisations and individuals passionate about the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

SHARED PRINCIPLES

This Agreement is based upon a model of engagement emphasising cooperation and commitment to the following principles:

- a **shared vision** to achieve the best possible learning and development outcomes for all Victorians, particularly the vulnerable or disadvantaged
- **mutual respect** for each partner's autonomy and responsibilities, while recognising that true partnership may require change, innovation and risk
- **collaboration** and the fostering of opportunities to work together on issues of mutual benefit or concern
- **communication, consultation and engagement** on decisions by one partner that will impact upon the other
- **transparency** of financial relations between the Department, VCOSS and the sector, subject to relevant legislation and policies
- a **relationship** that celebrates success, addresses challenges and acknowledges contributions to outcomes that are achieved
- **joint leadership** of the partnership, including joint agenda setting.

INTENT OF THE PARTNERS

The Department intends to:

- recognise the importance of working with the community sector to achieve positive learning and development outcomes for all Victorians
- build strong relationships with the community sector at a central, regional and local level in a consistent and positive manner
- engage in cooperative and meaningful consultation around policy, issues or opportunities of mutual concern
- ensure that specific contracts, arrangements, policies and plans entered into or carried out by the partners are consistent with the Agreement
- explore joint work and resource sharing in areas of mutual interest, where possible, with a view to improving learning and development outcomes for all Victorians
- display open and informed decision-making and share evidence-based policy decisions, where possible
- participate in forums and events around key issues and themes as opportunity presents.

The community sector intends to:

- recognise the importance of working with the Department to achieve positive outcomes for Victorians
- build strong partnerships between the Department and the social and community services sector at a central, regional and local level
- engage in cooperative and meaningful consultation around policy, issues or opportunities of mutual concern

- ensure that specific contracts, arrangements, policies and plans entered into or carried out by the partners are consistent with the Agreement
- explore joint work and resource sharing in areas of mutual interest, with a view to improving outcomes for children, young people, adults and their families
- collaborate on forums and events around key issues and themes as opportunity presents
- seek to understand and respect the roles and responsibilities of government, and communicate openly and constructively with the Department
- participate in decision-making processes and support evidence-based policy decisions, where possible
- commit to working constructively and collaboratively with the Department in policy development and program planning, review, research, innovation and evaluation.

ACTION PLANS

The partners commit to the shared development of an annual Action Plan, agreed by the Governance Group, to outline joint work for the Department and VCOSS. The partners commit to implementing, resourcing and evaluating these Action Plans to the fullest extent possible, given resourcing and other considerations.

RELATIONSHIP OF THIS AGREEMENT TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

This Agreement is not intended to supersede or alter any existing contractual or other Agreements between the Department, VCOSS, VCOSS members, or any other community sector organisation.

DET and VCOSS will work together to support the implementation of this Agreement and the annual Action Plan. Any funding provided to VCOSS for this purpose, including agreed deliverables, accountabilities and reporting requirements, will be set out in a Service Agreement to sit underneath this Agreement.

MANAGING DIFFERENCE

The partners agree that they have legitimate differences in governance, roles and responsibilities.

Though the partners intend to give effect to this Agreement and to work constructively to honour the terms of the Agreement, they acknowledge that it does not create, and must not be construed as creating, a legally binding and enforceable contract.

The partners agree that in the event of a partner stating that one or more undertakings in the Agreement are not being fulfilled, the partners will endeavour to ensure that the undertaking is satisfied or that an alternative solution is agreed.

EVALUATION AND REVIEW

The partners agree to monitor the implementation of the Agreement and evaluate its effectiveness as considered jointly necessary.

TERM OF THE AGREEMENT

The Agreement will have a four-year term, commencing from the date of signing.



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