

Delivering Fairness

Victorian Budget
Submission 2019-20



Delivering Fairness

The Victorian Council of Social Service is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS members reflect the diversity of the sector and include large charities, peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals interested in social policy.

In addition to supporting the sector, VCOSS represents the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in policy debates and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

Authorised by VCOSS CEO Emma King

© Copyright 2019

Victorian Council of Social Service

Policy enquiries

Llewellyn Reynders

llewellyn.reynders@vcoss.org.au

Media Enquiries

Ryan Sheales

ryan.sheales@vcoss.org.au


0418 127 153

Original illustrations in the publication by Jacob Komesaroff (on Instagram at @jkomments). Design by Louisa Roubin. Printed at Indigi-Print (indigi-print.com.au).

 /VCOSS

 @vcoss

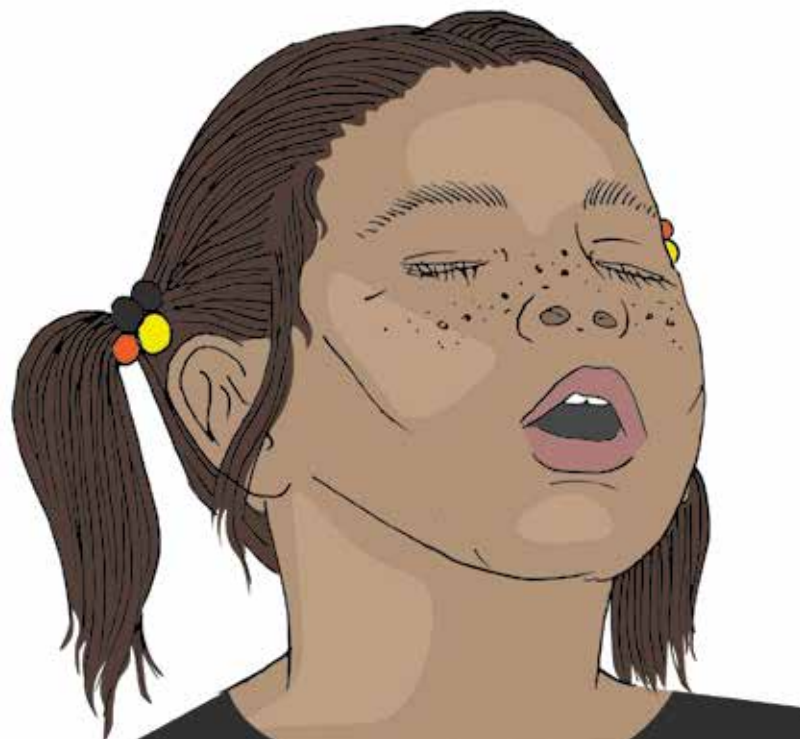
 ChannelVCOSS

 vcoss.org.au

VCOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country and pays our respects to Elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded.

The Andrews Government proudly describes itself as one of the most progressive governments in Australia, with a focus on not only 'getting things done' but also 'making things fair'.

A suite of socially progressive policies were embraced in the last term of government, from overdue rental reforms to important education equity initiatives and the smooth completion of the world's first Royal Commission into Family Violence.



A large number of smart social policies were also promised during the 2018 Victorian election campaign. VCOSS publicly welcomed these pledges at the time.

Victorians overwhelmingly embraced this positive vision, and voted for our state to continue on a path towards fairness and greater equality.

The re-election of the Andrews Government provides a significant opportunity to bed down the social policy advances of the 58th Parliament, while also delivering a further suite of bold and innovative policies to ensure every Victorian can lead a good life.

Now is also the moment to embrace and capitalise on opportunities presented by significant change in the state's workforce, especially the exciting growth in social care and assistance jobs. Victoria only has one chance to catch this wave of opportunity.

This document serves two purposes.

Firstly, it details the initiatives and funding requirements VCOSS and our members believe are required to deliver on the positive plans the Victorian Government presented at the last election.

But it also lists the smart and effective new policies required to take Victoria to the next level, and deliver fairness, prosperity and opportunity to future generations.



Emma King
VCOSS CEO



Contents

Priority budget investments	4
Overarching themes	6
■ A safe place to call home	9
Supercharge social housing construction	10
Build on vacant land and compel developers to include social housing	10
Stop homelessness before it starts	11
Help homeless people access private rental	12
Deliver renting fairness	12
Establish a Housing Ombudsman	13
Further strategies	14
■ Affordable living	16
Upgrade homes to cut bills and boost wellbeing	18
Support fair clean energy access for renters	18
Deliver on energy fairness changes	19
Help Victorians overcome financial distress	20
Introduce an 'Energy for Health' concession	21
Prevent destitution for people seeking asylum	22
Fix the public transport concessions mess	22
Ramp up transport options for rural and regional Victorians	23
Further strategies	24
■ Victorians in work	26
Create a Youth Jobs Plan	28
Meet demand for community service workers	28
Complement free TAFE to help struggling learners	29
Use government purchasing to secure jobs for struggling workers	30
Boost community education funding to build skills success	30
Remove barriers to selecting the best training option	31
Keep successful employment assistance	32
Further strategies	33
■ Transformative justice	35
Replace child prisons with better alternatives	36
Better support people leaving prison	36
Keep toll debts out of courts	37
Fund community justice partnerships	37
Further strategies	38

■ Champion community sector potential	40
Deliver the 10-year Community Services Industry Plan	42
Boost quality and innovation with indexation certainty	42
Augment funding for rural services	43
Simplify community sector service agreements	43
Guarantee long-term funding for more effective services	44
Fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and grow the Aboriginal workforce	45
Back community organisations to face climate change and emergencies	45
Further strategies	46
■ Stronger early childhood education and schools	48
Give children bright futures with early learning	50
Make education affordable	51
Provide free school travel for struggling students	52
Help children join their friends in local sport and recreation	53
Stop students dropping out of school	54
Support the learning needs of children with disability	55
Invest in schools as community hubs	56
Further strategies	57
■ Ensure women and children can thrive, and live free from violence	60
Continue implementing the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations	62
Fund foster and kinship carers fairly	62
Prevent family violence and violence against women	63
Foster strong, nurturing families	63
Empower parents with disability to care for their children	64
Help young people leaving care to thrive	65
Ensure Aboriginal Children in out-of-home care are strong in culture	65
Further strategies	66
■ Healthy Victorians	69
Deliver a successful Royal Commission into Mental Health	70
Give every Victorian a healthy smile	70
Ensure that people experiencing mental illness continue to get the support they need	71
Expand alcohol and other drug treatment services	72
Further strategies	73
■ Inclusive communities for people with disability, older people and carers	75
Amplify the voices of people with disability	76
Stop disability service gaps emerging	76
Launch a super-stop and station access building blitz	77
Champion and sustain carers	77
Produce a blueprint for ageing in Victoria	78
Combat elder abuse	78
Further strategies	79

Priority budget investments



Make education affordable

Fund public schools better, and help families cover costs by refunding the Camps, Schools and Excursions Fund and State Schools Relief (see page 51), provide free school travel (see page 52) and provide a sports and recreation subsidy (see page 53).

Supercharge social housing construction

Accelerate social housing construction by pumping up public investment. See page 10.

Stop homelessness before it starts

Fund more homelessness prevention services and join up our fragmented system. See page 11.

Upgrade homes and expand concessions to cut bills and boost wellbeing

Invest in energy efficiency (see page 18), and introduce an 'Energy for Health' concession (see page 21), to create affordable-to-run, healthy homes for people on low incomes.

Meet demand for community service workers

Promote community careers, plan for the regional workforce, conduct a workforce census, and increase training pathway visibility. See page 28.

Complement free TAFE to help struggling learners

Deliver bursaries and skills mentors to help battling students get qualified. See page 29.

Replace child prisons with better alternatives

Re-direct resources to diversionary services and prevention programs for young people. See page 36.

Better support people leaving prison

Provide access to housing and services to people leaving prison to stop re-offending. See page 36.

Boost community services quality and innovation with indexation certainty

Make community service funding keep pace with wage increases and cost pressures. See page 42.

Foster strong, nurturing families

Invest in prevention and early intervention services for families. See page 63.

Ensure that people experiencing mental illness continue to get the support they need

Provide emergency funding to the community mental health sector. See page 71.

Stop disability service gaps emerging

Maintain state-funded services through the NDIS transition. See page 76.



Overarching themes



Deliver a Treaty and Aboriginal self-determination

Transforming government means confronting our shared past: to plan for the future of all Victorians we must find a pathway forward to reconciliation with Victoria's first peoples. Aboriginal Australians have long called for a Treaty, or treaties, between community and government as a pathway to entrenching self-determination. Aboriginal Victorians should decide the scope of a Treaty, potentially including sovereignty, rights, government relationships, service delivery and decision-making. It could also include education, Aboriginal guardianship, housing, economic empowerment and business development.

Outline Victoria's overarching social goals

Under a flagship strategy for Victorian social justice, different areas of government can develop leadership, oversight and coordination to work together in achieving social change. Victoria needs a clear future vision setting high aspirations through targets, timeframes and accountabilities. This will bring together different plans and ensure resources are working in the right places, reaching the right people, and rolled out in the right sequence.

Achieve gender equality

Victoria can pursue cultural, structural and attitudinal change to achieve gender equality. This will require sustained effort and investment to erode gender stereotypes and develop public consciousness of the equal capabilities and value of women and men. By encouraging women's participation in all levels of government,

and supporting business and the community to dismantle barriers to equality, we can facilitate equal representation and life achievement, and change perceptions of women's capabilities and leadership potential.

Put people at the centre of services

People with lived experience, including of poverty, disability, family violence or homelessness, have knowledge and insight essential for governance systems, place-based approaches, and service design and delivery. Co-design "involves coming alongside people who experience vulnerabilities, to work with them in creating interventions, services and programs which will work in the context of their lives, and will reflect their own values and goals".¹ Local co-design can use collaborative problem-solving to produce tailored service design and delivery suited to local needs.

Focus on places, precincts and regions

Social and community services are most potent when they work as part of broader, collaborative action in local communities. Place-based approaches facilitate government, nongovernment, private sector and community collaboration to tackle local issues. By developing existing collaborations, and launching new ones, ideally in partnership with the Federal Government, Victoria can move toward to 'one place, one plan' structures, reflecting unique local community composition, enabling local networks to identify opportunities and linkages not visible to more distant and centralised agencies.

Prevent harm before it occurs

The key to enhancing the lives of Victorians is to prevent health and social problems, rather than waiting for predictable problems to arise before acting. Across the Victorian Government, resources need to be directed to prevention and promotion activities. Prevention is cheaper and more effective and leads to people living happier, healthier and more productive lives.

Intervene early to stop problems escalating

Identifying and acting on early warning signs of risk means crises can be avoided, and people can be supported to sustain stable, healthy lives. Early intervention helps stop problems escalating and minimises harm, providing a safer, less damaging and more cost effective outcome.

Take an equitable approach to climate change

Climate equity is an approach that recognises the inequities created by climate change. It looks at the inequities between places and people across the world. Climate change is a bigger threat to the people who are the least responsible for it. They are people who are already vulnerable to poverty, ill-health and other disadvantages. Conversely, the people who have contributed the most to climate change – typically wealthier, or in areas less at risk from climate change – are often better able to protect themselves from its impacts.²

Plan to match services with population growth and change

Victoria has an opportunity to forecast and budget for local social and community services and infrastructure needs, as local communities grow and change differently in different places. Every local community needs a mix of local services that fit with its current size and need. This includes the right suite of community services, including childcare, neighbourhood houses, community health services, mental health services, disability services, children's services and family violence services, among others.

Pursue Inclusive economic growth

To reduce economic inequality, Victoria can pursue inclusive growth, which ensures that the dividends of economic growth flow to those with the lowest incomes through stronger income support, more jobs and higher wages. This is fairer than the current economic growth trajectory, where most of the extra income generated by economic growth flows to people who already have high incomes and wealth.

1 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Walk alongside: Co-designing social initiatives with people experiencing vulnerabilities*, VCOSS, July 2015.

2 World Resources Institute, *Climate Equity*.





A safe place to call home

Amidst Victoria's prosperity, many people struggle to pay the rent, or worse, have nowhere to live. Victoria continues to face the most basic challenge of government – making sure everybody has a safe place to call home.

Having a safe place to call home is a basic human need. A home is more than a roof over someone's head; it is a place to spend time with family and friends, a place to stay safe, warm, clean and healthy. Having a home allows people comfort, personal expression, and a sense of refuge.

Every person has a right to a home. Delivering affordable social housing, tackling homelessness and making renting fair gives every Victorian a chance at living a good life.



Supercharge social housing construction

Accelerate social housing construction by pumping up public investment

Social housing is Victoria's best tool to reduce poverty. The Andrews Government can rise to the challenge of providing people's most basic need: shelter.

Over 82,000 people are currently on the public housing waiting list, many forced to sacrifice essentials like food and energy to keep their homes.

Social housing gives struggling Victorians a secure base for a decent life – from which to find work, get educated, stay well, raise healthy children, and retire with dignity. Without it, people risk spiralling into poverty, homelessness, sickness and entrenched unemployment. As an extra bonus, accelerating social housing construction creates new jobs for Victorians, and support our state's economic growth.

Victoria currently languishes behind all other states when it comes to social housing, comprising just 3.5% of homes.³ New social housing placements have slowed to a trickle, and people are left struggling on lengthening waiting lists,⁴ impoverished by an unaffordable rental market.⁵ We need an extra 30,000 new homes over the next decade, just to meet demand.⁶

The Victorian Government can meet this challenge. Currently the Government is committed to building 1,000 new public homes in three years,⁷ supporting 2,200 community housing dwellings through the Social Housing Growth Fund,⁸ and delivering extra homes with the Public Housing Renewal Program. This pipeline will need to be supercharged to deliver what's needed.

Build on vacant land and compel developers to include social housing

Build social housing on vacant government land and mandate inclusionary zoning

For some Victorians, a safe and secure home isn't available. Growing competition for rental properties has caused rents to increase, with most private rental properties unaffordable to people who are living on low incomes.⁹

Melbourne has nearly 200 hectares of vacant government-owned land that can accommodate 30,000 homes.¹⁰ Using this for social housing will reduce development costs and help keep people in their local communities, close to jobs, services and social connections.¹¹

We can also leverage private construction. 'Inclusionary zoning' requires developers to deliver a proportion of social housing among new apartments. Private developers build around 30,000 apartments in Victoria every year.¹² Requiring a percentage for social housing would generate thousands of new homes, helping rapidly achieve our targets.

Building new social housing means we can optimise it for the future. It can provide more options for single people, including single parents with children, and be fully accessible for people with disability. Social housing must also be energy efficient and include insulation and air-conditioning so people aren't forced to live in properties that don't protect them from extreme weather.

Stop homelessness before it starts

Fund more homelessness prevention services and join up our fragmented system

The best way to stop homelessness is to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place. Victoria can better prevent people becoming homeless by funding more homelessness prevention services and improving the alignment and integration of the existing services.

A better service system could assess a person's needs, and combine legal assistance, financial counselling and emergency financial relief, flexible funding packages, negotiation with landlords and real estate agents to save tenancies, and links to other social supports, regardless of whether they were in public, community or private housing.

As things stand, there is a hodgepodge of under-funded, narrow and disconnected homelessness prevention programs. The help people get depends strongly on where they turn. For instance, Tenancy Plus helps save public and social housing tenants from eviction, whereas the Tenant Assistance and Advocacy Program helps in the private sector. Other services respond where they can: community legal centres may fight evictions, financial counsellors or emergency relief services might deal with rent arrears, or people might access Private Rental Assistance.

Flexible support means combining legal, social and financial responses, wherever people live. The Victorian Government can fight homelessness with a clear, integrated, multi-disciplinary and properly funded homelessness prevention program.



Having a safe place to call home
is a basic human need.

A home is more than a roof over someone's head;
it is a place to spend time with family and friends,
a place to stay safe, warm,
clean and healthy.



Help homeless people access private rental

Keep funding the Private Rental Assistance Program to help people access the rental market

Every night, over 24,000 Victorians are homeless, with many sleeping in their cars, couch surfing or staying in temporary accommodation. More women¹³ and older people are experiencing homelessness than ever before.¹⁴ In regional areas, housing and crisis accommodation can be difficult to secure for people experiencing homelessness, especially in competition with influxes of tourists or seasonal workers.

The Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) is a lifeline to many Victorians experiencing homelessness. With so few social housing properties available, the program helps people to find, secure and sustain private rental housing, and steps in if the tenancy is at risk. The program has supported more than 4,500 people to access and sustain private rental housing.¹⁵

This program is a good-news story, but funding for PRAP is due to end on 30 June 2019. Although private rental is not suitable for everyone experiencing homelessness, PRAP provides one effective tool to rapidly rehome thousands of Victorians who would otherwise get caught in the expensive and ineffective scramble for short-term and crisis accommodation. Without it, specialist homelessness services will have diminished ability to find secure homes for people, and social housing lists will balloon.

The Victorian Government can extend PRAP funding to keep every available tool working to end homelessness, and make sure all Victorians have a secure, affordable home.

Deliver renting fairness

Draft strong rules to make rental law changes work for tenants

The Victorian Parliament passed historic rental law changes last year. The timely reforms respond to an unaffordable housing market in which more people rent for longer, including more families and older people. They especially help Victorians facing disadvantage, who are more likely than other Victorians to live in rental housing, and to be unnecessarily evicted, disempowered in disputes, exposed to exorbitant costs, and vulnerable to poor housing conditions.

But now the detailed work begins to write the specific rules so the new laws can work properly. They will set out crucial details on exactly how the law will operate. For example, what kind of modifications can be made to a rental home without having to ask for permission? What information about a dwelling must be disclosed to prospective tenants before they sign a lease?

Badly written regulations, loop-holes and carve-outs could undermine the intended protection of renters' rights. Deep, constructive consultation with tenant representatives and community organisations can deliver strong rules helping level the playing field, so renters can create safe, stable and livable homes.

A fair and equitable system incorporates strong minimum standards for health, safety and energy efficiency, clarifies tenants' rights around modifications and repairs, regulates a reasonable bond cap threshold, allows people to keep pets, and requires evidence for eviction. Vulnerable people, including those experiencing family violence, must also have their rights protected.

Establish a Housing Ombudsman

Create a simple, streamlined system for resolving housing disputes

Introducing an independent Housing Ombudsman creates a fairer, faster and more affordable way to deal with housing problems, helping overcome people's fear and bewilderment.

Victoria already has an Ombudsman for Energy and Water, and for Public Transport. Victoria has also appointed Australia's first Residential Tenancies Commissioner, providing independent advice to government on our renting system. A Housing Ombudsman goes beyond this role, being able to directly help renters, investigate dodgy landlords, and solve disputes.

Current dispute resolution processes do not work for tenants. Just 11 per cent of around 53,000 VCAT residential tenancy cases were initiated by renters.¹⁶ The adversarial VCAT process is intimidating, complex and convoluted, which works against renters. On the rare occasion cases are challenged, they are often overturned in the renter's favour,¹⁷ but most renters don't get this chance.¹⁸

VCOSS believes a Housing Ombudsman must have jurisdiction to investigate all housing tenures, including for older people, those with disability and people facing homelessness. For instance, some retirees are swindled by retirement villages with unfair charges; the NDIS will bring new issues through Specialist Disability Accommodation; and there are ongoing issues for people living in rooming houses and Supported Residential Services.

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Address high Aboriginal homelessness rates

One in five Aboriginal Victorians sought help from a specialist homeless service last year.¹⁹ Aboriginal Victorians disproportionately experience worse health outcomes, over-incarceration, and family violence.²⁰ Homelessness compounds this disadvantage. The Victorian Government can build upon self-determination principles to deliver the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework currently being developed.

■ Champion accessible housing standards

Just 5 per cent of Australian homes are accessible.²¹ The Victorian Government can support incorporating minimum accessibility standards in the National Construction Code. These standards can deliver appropriate homes for Australia's ageing population, and reduce the costs of injuries, preventable deaths, loneliness, social isolation, future home modifications, and forced relocation.

■ Make public housing energy efficient, comfortable and healthy

To ensure some of Victoria's most vulnerable people can afford to be comfortable in summer and winter, Victoria needs energy-efficient public housing buildings with efficient appliances. Victoria could create healthier homes by expanding the EnergySmart Public Housing Project beyond the current upgrades to 1,500 homes.

■ Permanent supportive housing

Permanent supportive housing addresses chronic homelessness by providing housing and support for as long as it takes for people to live independently. The Victorian Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan includes key elements such as outreach, intensive case management and multidisciplinary supports. It needs dedicated housing access to succeed.

■ Education-linked housing for young people experiencing homelessness

Children experiencing homelessness are more likely to struggle with housing as adults.²² Education improves future job prospects and housing stability.²³ Support for young people experiencing homelessness must include wrap-around education support. Extending education-focused accommodation options across Victoria helps young people find future success pathways without leaving their community.

■ Cut home purchase costs with a broad-based land tax

Victoria's reliance on stamp duties adds cost to home purchase, and risks sudden revenue falls, threatening service funding. We can develop a more stable, efficient and fair tax system by progressively replacing stamp duties with a broad-based land tax. A good land tax system needs appropriate concessions, exemptions and deferrals.

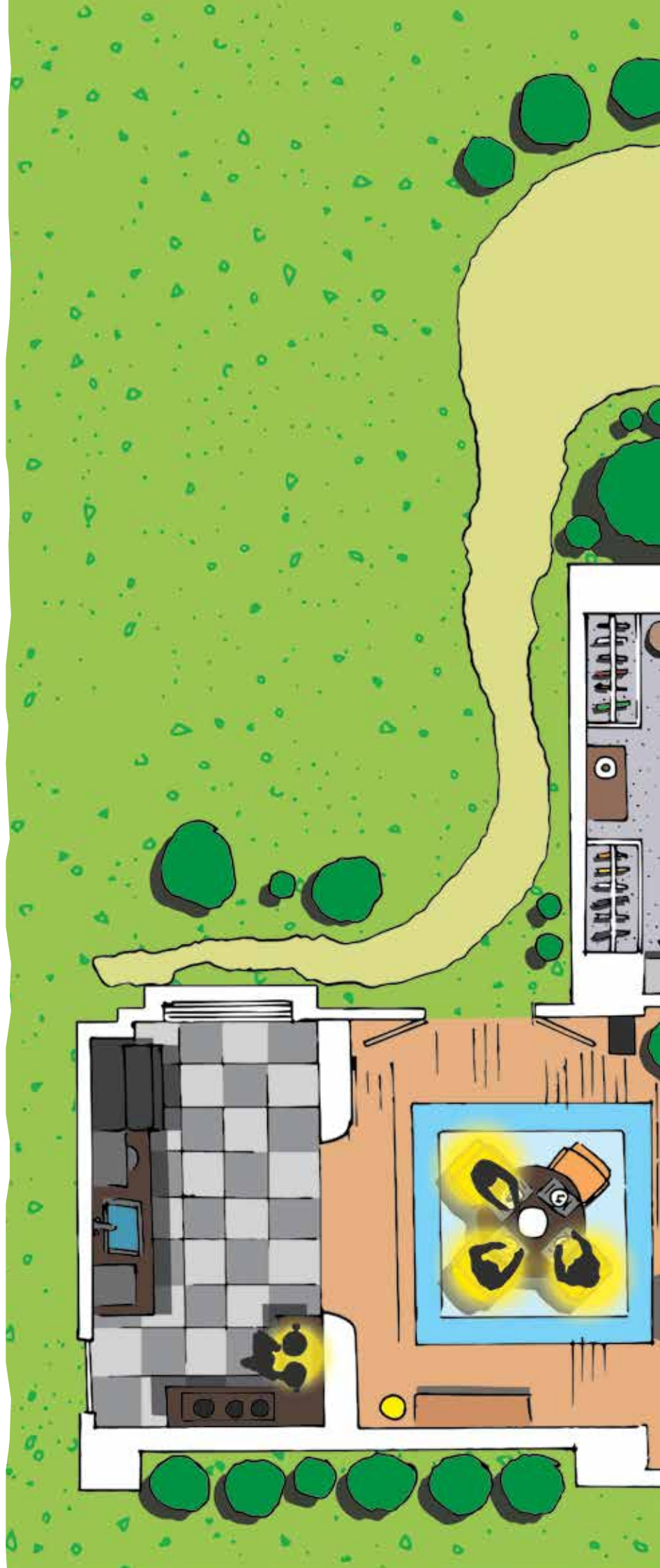
-
- 3 Yates, J, *Victoria's social housing supply requirements to 2036*, 2017, p. 2.
 - 4 Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program*, 2018.
 - 5 K Raynor, I Dosen and C Otter, *Housing affordability in Victoria*, 2017, p. 7.
 - 6 Community Housing Federation of Victoria, *Quantifying the shortfall of Social and Affordable Housing*, 2016, p. 3.
 - 7 Premier of Victoria, *Building New Homes To Fight Homelessness*, Media Release, 17 October 2018.
 - 8 Victorian Minister for Housing, *Social Housing Growth Fund Open For Business*, Media Release, 6 August 2018.
 - 9 Department of Health and Human Services, *Rental Report – September Quarter* 2018.
 - 10 M Palm, K Raynor, and C Whitzman, *Project 30,000: Producing social and affordable housing on government land*, 2018, p. 3.
 - 11 Ibid. p. 20.
 - 12 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Building Activity, Australia, Spreadsheets table 34*, September 2018.
 - 13 Mercy Foundation, *Retiring into Poverty*, September 2018, p. 6.
 - 14 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, 2016, 2018.
 - 15 Department of Health and Human Service, *Annual Report 2017–18*, p. 42.
 - 16 Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, *Annual report 2017–18*, p. 57.
 - 17 Justice Connect Homeless Law, *There's no place like home: submission to the Residential Tenancies Act review*, 2015, p. 25.
 - 18 I Ross, *Transforming VCAT (Discussion Paper, VCAT 2010)*, p. 9.
 - 19 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2017–18: Indigenous Clients*, 2018.
 - 20 State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, *Korin Korin Balit-Djak; Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–2027*, 2017.
 - 21 Liveable Housing Australia, cited in Australian Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, *Delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities Inquiry Report*, 2017.
 - 22 G Johnson and C Chamberlain, *From Youth to Adult Homelessness*, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 2008, p. 576.
 - 23 G Johnson, H Gronda and S Coutts, *On the Outside; Pathways in and out of homelessness*, 2008.

Affordable living

Victoria enjoys solid economic and jobs growth,²⁴ but this hides the 13 per cent of Victorians living in poverty,²⁵ who can't afford basics like housing, food and power. One in six people have difficulty meeting basic living costs.²⁶

The Victorian Government is taking strides towards easing the cost of living, by cleaning up a confusing and over-priced energy market, investing in public transport and rolling out dental services for public school students. But there is more to do to help people afford the basics.

Victoria can make large-scale investments in energy efficiency for people on low incomes, and make energy market reforms work for the most vulnerable. Investment in early intervention financial counselling is also valuable at a time of high household debt levels, paltry income support and low wage growth.





Upgrade homes to cut bills and boost wellbeing

Invest in energy efficiency to create affordable-to-run, climate-safe homes for people on low incomes

Around 180,000 Victorian households repeatedly struggle to pay their energy bills, while 45,000 have repeated trouble heating their homes.²⁷ Energy inefficient housing contributes to sky-high bills, including for those on low incomes, with health conditions and disabilities. This can lead to disconnection, or sacrificing essentials to keep the lights on.²⁸

Everyone benefits from energy efficiency; 'efficiency first' should be Victoria's mantra

The Victorian Government could achieve more energy efficiency and bigger bill savings by making existing home subsidies more flexible, for both renters and homeowners. For example, allowing people the option to spend their 'Solar Homes' subsidy on other home upgrades, such as insulation, affordable heating or cooling, window coverings, draught sealing, and repairs to broken windows, walls and floors.

At present, Solar Homes has solar hot water system subsidies worth up to \$1,000.²⁹ But this positive step targets only one of the 'big three' home energy spends – hot water – while doing nothing to help with heating or whitegoods.³⁰

Subsidies for home upgrades can be targeted at people on low incomes, who suffer most from high energy and housing prices, and have least capacity to adapt to climate change.³¹ Low-income households are the biggest beneficiaries of energy efficiency upgrades, with a \$2,000 subsidy producing average savings of \$328 each year.³²

And where household solar is installed, energy efficiency allows more solar to be pumped into the grid. This makes the clean energy transition cheaper by reducing network costs and putting pressure on wholesale prices.³³

Support fair clean energy access for renters

Abolish the renter co-payment for Solar Homes

Under Victoria's nation-leading 'Solar Homes' program, 650,000 homeowners and 50,000 renters will get a solar panel subsidy. But to be eligible, renters will need to strike an agreement with their landlord to share solar panel costs. Renters will cover 25 per cent of costs, via a four-year rent levy, with government and the landlord paying the rest. This could mean renters have to pay an extra \$1000 – or more – to their landlord.

The deal assumes renters enjoy a net benefit – they help cover solar panel costs, but energy bill savings make it worth it. Even if this occurs, the deal isn't fair on renters. It forces them to pay for an upgrade to a house they don't own. Renters may see the benefit of lower bills, but it's the landlord who'll scoop up the improved capital value, and potentially higher rents from future tenants.

The co-payment is particularly challenging for low-income renters. An extra rent levy means greater risk of financial stress and eviction if energy bill savings don't measure up.

And the renter co-payment raises tricky implementation issues, such as cost recovery. Most tenancies only last 12 months, making it likely future tenants will have to make co-payments, or the existing renter will face a large lump sum payment when they leave. Both options are difficult, especially for people on low incomes.

The better approach is for the Victorian Government to co-fund solar panels with landlords, half and half. This is a great deal for landlords that should increase solar installation on rental homes.

Solar Homes for renters can work, by waiving the renter co-payment, delivering a good deal to landlords, and ensuring renters receive bill savings from solar installation.

Deliver on energy fairness changes

Ban all predatory energy marketing, add low-cost concession deals, stop rapid price changes, and enforce consumer protections

The Victorian Government's energy reforms are a blueprint for lower prices and fairer treatment. They will outlaw energy door-to-door sales and telemarketing, ensure concession holders get the best deal, stop retailers rapidly jacking up prices, and introduce stronger consumer protections for people struggling to pay bills.

There are further steps the Government could take to manage high electricity prices. The ban on predatory energy marketing should include solar panel sales. Unsolicited solar sales can pressure vulnerable people into shoddy, overpriced deals,³⁴ with risks of more 'cowboys' increasing during the Solar Homes roll-out.

Victoria can also swiftly deliver on its promise to ensure concession holders get a good energy deal.³⁵ This can be with a low-cost deal, set below the 'Victorian Default Offer', delivered by one or several Victorian energy retailers, similar to South Australia's concession deal.³⁶

Victoria can also speed up reforms to fix energy prices for 12 months. People are getting burned by dodgy retailers who hike prices moments after customers switch to affordable deals.³⁷ Victoria can also cap costs when people can't comply with pay-on-time discounts. The average 'bill shock' for late payments is \$314. In some cases, people have paid \$652 more than expected.³⁸

Around 50,000 Victorians are disconnected each year for not paying their bills.³⁹ Under the new payment difficulty framework, disconnection is a last resort, people can get affordable payment plans, and retailers must support people in greatest need. But the framework has no teeth unless the regulator cracks down on belligerent retailers. Successful reform needs a properly funded regulator.

HENRY AND JUNE'S SOLAR RIP-OFF

Henry and June live in regional Victoria and rely on the Disability Support Pension. A salesman came to their home selling solar panels. Henry and June felt they could not afford solar, but the salesman said they would no longer receive energy bills if they installed solar, and they could get finance. Henry agreed to apply for finance. Copies of the signed paperwork were not left with Henry and June, and they later learned the salesperson had completed the contracts himself (without their knowledge), and falsely state one of them was employed. Henry and June were also not told about the cooling-off period on unsolicited sales.

Henry and June were rejected for finance, but the panels were already installed and they could not pay for them. Debt collectors sought to recover the \$15,000 panel costs.

Community lawyers helped Henry and June resolve the matter, and showed the solar panels should have cost \$6,000 to \$7,000, rather than the \$15,000 charged.⁴⁰ ■

Help Victorians overcome financial distress

Boost financial crisis responses with an extra 90 financial counsellors

Many people struggle with financial problems in their lives, particularly when they have children, grapple with bills and debts, and face health problems. A strong financial counselling network helps get Victorians back on their feet and stops small financial problems snowballing into expensive catastrophes.

Victoria needs an extra 90 financial counsellors as a minimum to meet demand.⁴¹ Household debt is at record highs, with wages barely growing and over 270,000 Victorians underemployed. Meanwhile, income support payments like Newstart and Youth Allowance are set below the poverty line.⁴²

Financial counsellors help people avoid financial predators, and address rental and mortgage stress, energy hardship, debt problems, and the financial effects of family violence, health issues and job loss. Without financial counselling, people are vulnerable to unscrupulous payday lenders and 'debt help' services.

In particular, specialist financial counselling can help in priority areas and cases. These might include drought-affected rural and regional communities suffering financial stress, and child-abuse survivors needing financial and investment advice if eligible for the National Redress Scheme. People struggling to pay rent and avoid eviction are another priority, including those who can now be referred by VCAT under rental law changes. Specialist financial counsellors should ideally be embedded in drug and alcohol services, community legal centres, asylum seeker agencies, and other organisations enabling this vital counselling to be delivered alongside related services.

TAMARA'S DEBT NIGHTMARE

Tamara and her husband were married for 10 years and had two children. Tamara's husband was extremely violent, abusive and controlling.

After the loss of their daughter, Tamara's husband refused to pay funeral expenses and continued to use Tamara's Centrelink benefits. With the little money she could access, Tamara paid for her daughter's funeral and the family's rent, school fees and her husband's fines.

Tamara had more than \$25,000 in debts for unpaid utility bills, credit cards, a Centrelink debt and a personal loan she used to pay for her daughter's tombstone. Tamara came to the McAuley/WEstjustice legal and financial counselling program soon after she separated from her husband. She had to leave her son with a close friend so he could continue his studies. Tamara was skipping meals while living in a safe house to make ends meet.

In just five hours, WEstjustice obtained a full waiver of Tamara's \$10,000 personal loan, and in just one week secured full waivers of Tamara's telephone, utility, other banking and debt collection debts. By clearing these debts, Tamara could afford to return to a private rental and live with her son again.⁴³ ■

Introduce an 'Energy for Health' concession

Introduce an 'Energy for Health' concession for people with health or disability related energy needs

Health problems and disability can blow out energy bills; for instance, due to daily wheelchair charging or heater use spikes by people with chronic respiratory illness. This can result in long-term energy hardship. Sixty per cent of households persistently unable to heat their homes include someone with a long-term health condition or disability. Over 70 per cent of people with poor mental health struggle to pay energy bills.⁴⁴

Victoria currently provides a Medical Cooling Concession to people who can't maintain a normal body temperature,⁴⁵ and a Life Support Concession. But other people with health or disability related energy needs are left out. With a comprehensive 'Energy for Health' concession, Victoria can reduce energy costs for people with conditions that:

- are exacerbated by temperature changes
- affect body temperature maintenance
- create intensive washing, cleaning or personal care needs
- require charging or using communication, medical and mobile devices
- require lengthy periods of time at home.

PETER'S POWER STRUGGLES

Peter is a 75-year-old man with heart problems, arthritis, asthma and bowel cancer. He carefully manages his Age Pension, but health issues mean he struggles to afford enough energy for comfort and wellbeing. Peter "can't take the humidity" that exacerbates his arthritis pain, but never uses air-conditioning in summer because of the cost.⁴⁶ He is ineligible for the narrowly defined Medical Cooling Concession. An Energy for Health concession would help people such as Peter stay cool and comfortable, with less pain. ■

Prevent destitution for people seeking asylum

Fund a crisis response to prevent destitution among people seeking asylum in Victoria

About 11,000 people seeking asylum live in Victoria. They learn in schools and TAFEs, contribute to local communities, and work when allowed. Six thousand members of this community will have no means to live and face extreme deprivation, as a result of Federal Government changes to the Status Resolution Support Services program. These changes remove the paltry \$250 a week financial allowance they receive, and block access to services including accommodation and mental health care.

Victoria can protect people by immediately funding a crisis response package, delivered by specialist asylum seeker services and mainstream organisations such as emergency relief providers. This will allow people to stay housed, fed and educated, and access legal and psychological support.

Victoria can fund the development of training, resources, communication materials and programs so mainstream organisations can provide appropriate and accessible services, and people seeking asylum can navigate them. Meeting people's basic needs will build social cohesion, create stronger communities and prevent further trauma and hardship among an extremely vulnerable group of people.

Victoria can make it easier to access essential services by making asylum seekers eligible for the mainstream safety net. This includes allowing people to use the Public Transport Victoria Asylum Seeker ID to receive energy and water concessions. Victoria can make all state-funded services available to people seeking asylum, regardless of visa status, residency, Health Care Card, or Medicare eligibility.

Fix the public transport concessions mess

Overhaul the concessions system to make it easier to use

Victoria's public transport concessions are messy and confusing, hindering access to affordable travel. There are 17 types of concessions and six types of free travel passes, bewildering many eligible people, who give up and don't bother applying. Victoria can make this system simpler, more efficient and equitable.

Affordable public transport is especially important for people on low incomes, who may otherwise be unable to reach workplaces, education, healthcare and family and friends. It brings freedom to young people, older people who cannot drive, and people with disability who need options other than expensive point-to-point transport, such as taxis.

Affordable public transport gets people out of cars and off roads, helping to fight congestion and reduce carbon emissions.

Victoria has already taken a solid step by allowing students to use school ID cards for concession travel, overcoming one of the main roadblocks to affordable student travel.⁴⁷ It's now time for a comprehensive overhaul of the concession system as a whole, to improve everyone's access to affordable travel.

Ramp up transport options for rural and regional Victorians

Expand the Flexible Local Transport Solutions program in rural communities and regional towns

Rural and regional communities have a dire need for accessible, affordable public transport. People in these communities typically travel longer distances and have fewer transport options, an older population and poorer socio-economic outcomes than people in urban areas. Infrequent bus services with sparse coverage make it difficult to access jobs, services and train stations.⁴⁸

Victoria can ramp up investment in the Flexible Local Transport Solutions program, which funds small innovative local transport projects.⁴⁹ This type of funding helps ensure people can move around their local communities and access basic services like shopping, medical appointments, education, jobs and community services.

Government funding for rural and regional services should recognise that transport can be a major barrier to service access. A proper community transport industry, in touch with local people's needs, would help people get where they need to be. This means subsidising transport for people who cannot afford to travel to or around regional centres, and funding organisations to provide outreach or permanent local transport services in areas with entrenched transport disadvantage.

ON THE MOVE WITH WOODEND FLEXIRIDE

Woodend Flexiride is an on-demand weekday bus service. The 18-seater bus departs from the local shopping centre seven times a day, and connects with the sports centre, medical centre and train station. For the cost of a local transport fare, people can be picked up at the 28 local stops by calling to request a pickup, or catch the bus from the shopping centre to be dropped near home.

Flexiride is an example of providing flexible public transport to meet the needs of small communities, where demand may be low and a traditional fixed bus route may not be feasible. ■

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Enable more Victorians to access cheaper energy deals

The existing 'Your Energy Broker' service helps people, face-to-face, to find a better energy deal, answers their questions and helps them switch. This service can be expanded to directly assist more Victorians to quickly lower their energy costs by switching retailers.

■ Index the Utility Relief Grant

Victoria has boosted the Utility Relief Grant to \$650, to help financially stressed households with energy and water bills. This protection can be defended from eroding in value by properly indexing it to reflect changing energy and water costs.

■ Boost emergency relief services

Victoria can boost underfunded emergency relief services, which cannot keep up with demand. They provide emergency assistance to people in crisis, including with rental and utilities stress, high education costs, and food insecurity. Victoria is one of the few states and territories that does not directly fund emergency relief services.

■ Improve food security

Many Victorians cannot afford a healthy diet and experience food insecurity, including people on low incomes, without work, single parents and Aboriginal people.⁵⁰ Victoria can support communities to develop long-term food security strategies, and support people to grow, buy, and prepare affordable nutritious food close to home.

■ Develop a digital inclusion strategy

Digital access is an essential service, needed for everything from getting a job to finding a home, managing money, doing homework or accessing services. Victoria can develop a digital inclusion strategy including expanding public access Wi-Fi and internet, and connecting low-income households through low-cost internet plans and affordable devices.

■ Promote access to general insurance

Adequate home and contents insurance protects Victorians against financial crisis and allows them to more quickly recover from natural disasters. Community organisations can be supported to partner with insurers to develop better products, and Victoria can run ongoing campaigns to raise awareness of the value of insurance.

- 24 Victoria State Government, Department of Treasury and Finance, Economic Update, December 2018.
- 25 Tanton, op. cit.
- 26 Centre for Social Impact and National Australia Bank, *Financial Security and the Influence of Economic Resources – Financial Resilience in Australia 2018*, December 2018, p. 21.
- 27 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Battling On: Persistent Energy Hardship*, November 2018.
- 28 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Power Struggles: Everyday Battles to Stay Connected*, August 2017.
- 29 Victoria State Government, 'Solar Homes Package'.
- 30 Sustainability Victoria, *Victorian Households Energy Report*, May 2014, p. 2.
- 31 Australian Council of Social Service and Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Energy Stressed in Australia*, October 2018; K Mallon, E Hamilton, M Black, B Beem and J Abs, *Adapting the Community Sector for Climate Extremes*, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, 2013, p. 286.
- 32 Australian Council of Social Service and Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Affordable, Clean Energy for People on Low Incomes*, January 2019, p. 16–18.
- 33 CSIRO and Energy Networks Australia, *Electricity Network Transformation Roadmap: Final Report*, April 2017.
- 34 Consumer Action Law Centre, Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and WEstjustice, *Knock it off! Door-to-door Sales and Consumer Harm in Victoria*, November 2017.
- 35 Victorian Labor, *Fact sheet: Cracking down on dodgy energy retailers – Labor's Energy Fairness plan*.
- 36 South Australia Government, Energy concession discount offer.
- 37 D Cuthbertson, 'Sumo admits luring customers with cheap deals then upping power prices', *The Age*, 28 December 2018.
- 38 Essential Services Commission, *Victorian Energy Market Report, 2016–17*, 2017.
- 39 Essential Services Commission, *Victorian Energy Market Snapshot, 2017–18*, 2018.
- 40 Consumer Action Law Centre, Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre and WEstjustice, *Knock it off! Door-to-door Sales and Consumer Harm in Victoria*, November 2017.
- 41 Consumer Action Law Centre, *Access to justice matters: Make it fair and affordable*.
- 42 Reserve Bank of Australia, *The Australian Economy and Financial Markets – Chart Pack*, January 2019; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Average weekly earnings, Australia*, May 2018, cat. no. 6302.0; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labor force, Australia*, October 2018, cat. no. 6202.0; Councils of Social Service, *Payment adequacy: A view from those relying on social security payments*, 2015.
- 43 S Tonkin, *Restoring Financial Safety: Collaborating on Responses to Economic Abuse*, WEstjustice, July 2018.
- 44 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Battling On: Persistent Energy Hardship*, November 2018, p. 22–25.
- 45 The Medical Cooling Concession is available to concession card holders and provides a 17.5 per cent electricity discount between 1 November and 30 April, in addition to the yearly electricity concession of 17.5 per cent.
- 46 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Power Struggles: Everyday Battles to Stay Connected*, August 2017, pp. 26–27.
- 47 Public Transport Ombudsman Limited, *Public Transport Ombudsman Youth and Industry Roundtable Report*, November 2015.
- 48 Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, December 2016.
- 49 Transport for Victoria, *Local Transport Update*, August 2018.
- 50 Department of Health and Human Services, *Challenges to Healthy Eating – Food Insecurity in Victoria: Findings from the 2014 Victorian Population Health Survey*, State of Victoria, 2018.

Victorians in work

A good job can change someone's life. Stable incomes mean people can meet their living expenses, put a roof over their heads and plan for the future. A job can also provide purpose, new social connections and the opportunity to give back to society.

Victoria has had recent rapid jobs growth, providing a unique opportunity to break the cycle of long-term unemployment and intergenerational poverty. The community sector is supplying the fastest jobs growth, fuelled by the NDIS roll-out, family violence reforms and aged care changes.

By investing in supported training and job pathways, providing extra help for disadvantaged learners, and creating job placements with trusted employers, the Victorian Government can help people left behind by the jobs boom, and secure prosperity for people otherwise sidelined by the economy.





Create a Youth Jobs Plan

Develop an overarching plan to help young Victorians into work, enabled by a re-funded LLEN network

Youth unemployment remains stubbornly high at 11.9 per cent,⁵¹ above the Australian average. Young people's jobs are becoming increasingly precarious, meaning many can barely cover living costs.

For tens of thousands of young Australians, their first 'real' job is likely to be a survival job – and a part-time one at that.⁵²

The Victorian Government can create a Victorian Youth Jobs Plan. Co-designed with young people and their communities, this plan can bring together government, educators, jobseeker supports and employers to reduce Victoria's high youth unemployment rate. It can leverage Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to provide brokerage and innovation to help young people successfully navigate into a career. For instance, LLENs bring together employers, schools, training providers and community services to strengthen young people's education, training and employment outcomes. The LLENs are funded until the end of 2019. An extended funding program can re-energise the LLENs, forming a central plank of Victoria's action on youth unemployment.

Also drawing on the innovative programs in the Jobs Victoria Employment Network, the Plan can map out better connections supporting young people to complete education and training and to transition into the workforce.

Meet demand for community service workers

Promote community careers, plan for the regional workforce, conduct a workforce census, and increase training pathway visibility

The social assistance and health industry is already Victoria's biggest employer, projected to grow faster than any other and generate one in four new Victorian jobs over the next five years.⁵³ In this time, Australia will need nearly 70,000 extra aged and disability carers alone.⁵⁴

The 10-year Community Services Industry Plan prioritises actions to help community services compete with other skilled industries to attract and retain talent in an increasingly competitive labour market.

As demand for more quality services grows, workers increasingly need demonstrated skills and qualifications, especially for new entrants. Greater alignment between the capacity and focus of educational institutions and the industry can help provide this skilled worker pipeline.⁵⁵ Promoting and supporting community sector careers helps create an industry of choice for qualified, committed and motivated people, and secure the workforce required.

The Victorian Government can develop a regional workforce strategy to address significant workforce shortfalls in targeted areas, and fund a community services industry workforce census to better understand and address workforce shortages and skills gaps across the sector, and in particular locations.

Disparate and confusing information prevents future community service workers from finding the right training to get them job-ready and develop their expertise. The Victorian Government can commit to funding a Community Services Learning Hub for future workers to easily find quality learning opportunities.

Complement free TAFE to help struggling learners

Deliver bursaries and skills mentors to help battling students get qualified

Victoria's landmark free TAFE program for priority courses starts this year,⁵⁶ helping close Victoria's skill gaps, especially in booming community service careers. But some Victorians face extra hurdles to finding a job, including mental and physical health problems, and limited educational opportunities and work experience, leading to a lack of employable skills, financial pressures and insecure housing.

Barely half of young people finish their first full-time vocational education course.⁵⁷ Students facing disadvantage do better with financial aid and personalised support while studying.⁵⁸ The Victorian Government can provide bursaries and scholarships to cover costs of childcare, textbooks, public transport and digital devices so these students can successfully complete courses.

TAFEs can also be funded to target resources and support disadvantaged learners overcome participation barriers. This includes dedicated mentoring and pathways support staff, literacy and numeracy support, study skills assistance, assessment adjustments, counselling, and employer partnership development to facilitate workplace training.⁵⁹

Victoria can maximise completion rates by working with the Federal Government to design a world-class system, develop fit-for-purpose national training packages, integrate training programs, eliminate perverse incentives, and simplify funding arrangements.⁶⁰ The sector is still hampered by mediocre training providers, including those with low-quality teaching, inadequate facilities, and lacking industry connections.⁶¹ Raising quality standards and rebuilding the reputation of vocational education will create a more successful training system.



Social assistance and health is already
Victoria's biggest employer,
projected to generate one in four new
Victorian jobs over the next five years.



Use government purchasing to secure jobs for struggling workers

Extend requirements on public contracts to employ disadvantaged workers in secure jobs

The Victorian Government spends about \$16 billion to support service delivery and operations.⁶² By putting conditions on this massive spending power, the Government can generate extra social benefits, like providing pathways to secure jobs for vulnerable workers.

Victoria's current Social Procurement Framework is leading the nation by supporting procurement from social enterprises and Aboriginal businesses; creating opportunities for disadvantaged communities, women and people with disability; and considering workplace conditions around family violence leave, fairness and safety, environmental sustainability and climate change.⁶³

But more can be done. The Victorian Government can help Victorians facing disadvantage by setting more prescriptive targets to give them jobs, and extending this requirement to smaller contracts (it is currently only mandated for contracts over \$50 million). The existing regime requires companies to comply with industrial relations laws, but the Government could set a higher standard to encourage the creation of more secure jobs. For example, a minimum proportion of workers employed permanently, reducing sub-contracting, casual employment, and labour hire.

Boost community education funding to build skills success

Increase the hourly funding rate for Foundation Skills courses

Many Victorians need more than one pathway to education and work. For example, Victoria has 650,000 adults with low literacy.⁶⁴ Many adults experiencing disadvantage have a better chance to get qualified by starting with the basics.

Adult and Community Education (ACE) provides community-based learning, meeting individual needs with flexible, tailored support. ACE helps high-needs learners develop foundational language, literacy and numeracy skills, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence for further training and finding work.⁶⁵

ACE successfully re-engages adults with learning, builds bridges to further, formal tertiary education and paid work, and delivers accredited VET programs in their own right.⁶⁶ People transitioning from ACE complete TAFE courses at a higher rate than others.⁶⁷ This is remarkable given they often face multiple complex barriers to learning.

But Victoria's hourly funding rate for Foundation Skills courses is just \$7 per contract hour, below the national average of \$9.10. This hinders providers from covering the extra costs and workload to intensively support struggling learners.⁶⁸

The Victorian Government can fund ACE providers to reflect the extra costs of delivering training to learners who require extra support.⁶⁹

Remove barriers to selecting the best training option

Reform the 'two-course' rule limiting learners' training options

To best address barriers to learners' progress, the Victorian Government can reform the 'two course' rule that often blocks people, including high-needs learners, from selecting the best training option for them. Under this rule, students are restricted to:

- commencing a maximum of two government-funded courses in a calendar year
- undertaking a maximum of two government-funded courses at any one time, and
- commencing a maximum of two government-funded courses at the same level in their lifetime.⁷⁰

Currently this rule reduces participation and impedes seamless transitions into further training. It can also block people from re-training in a new career; for example, to enter the rapidly growing community services sector by re-training as an aged or disability worker. Reforming the two course rule would better support disadvantaged learners' momentum in building their learning and skills development, and help meet skills shortages in Victoria's rapidly growing economy.

Keep successful employment assistance

Build on the successful Jobs Victoria Employment Network

Delivered by employment specialists, the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) is the Victorian Government's centrepiece policy to provide place-based support to Victorians facing barriers to employment.⁷¹

Employment experts work closely with employers to identify job opportunities and prepare jobseekers for work. This can include identifying career and training goals, updating resumes, conducting mock interviews and facilitating work experience.

The Victorian Government can provide long-term funding certainty to continue the success of JVEN and maintain support to find people jobs.

ANAB'S JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT

Anab came to Australia seven years ago from Somalia. She arrived with no English and prioritised enrolling in English classes. Whilst studying, Anab had a series of short-term warehousing jobs. Before enrolling in the #WorkNOW program, she had been out of work for 18 months.

As a result of enrolling in the #WorkNOW program, Anab secured a one day a week job as a dry cleaner at an aged care service, whilst studying a Certificate III in Childcare. Anab really values the support that she gets from her consultant. "If I have a problem at work I know she will help me," says Anab. "She calls me to see how I'm going." Without the support of the program, Anab doesn't think she would have a job.

The JVEN #WorkNOW program is delivered by Wingate Avenue Community Centre in partnership with Kensington Neighbourhood House and the Maribyrnong & Moonee Valley LLEN. ■

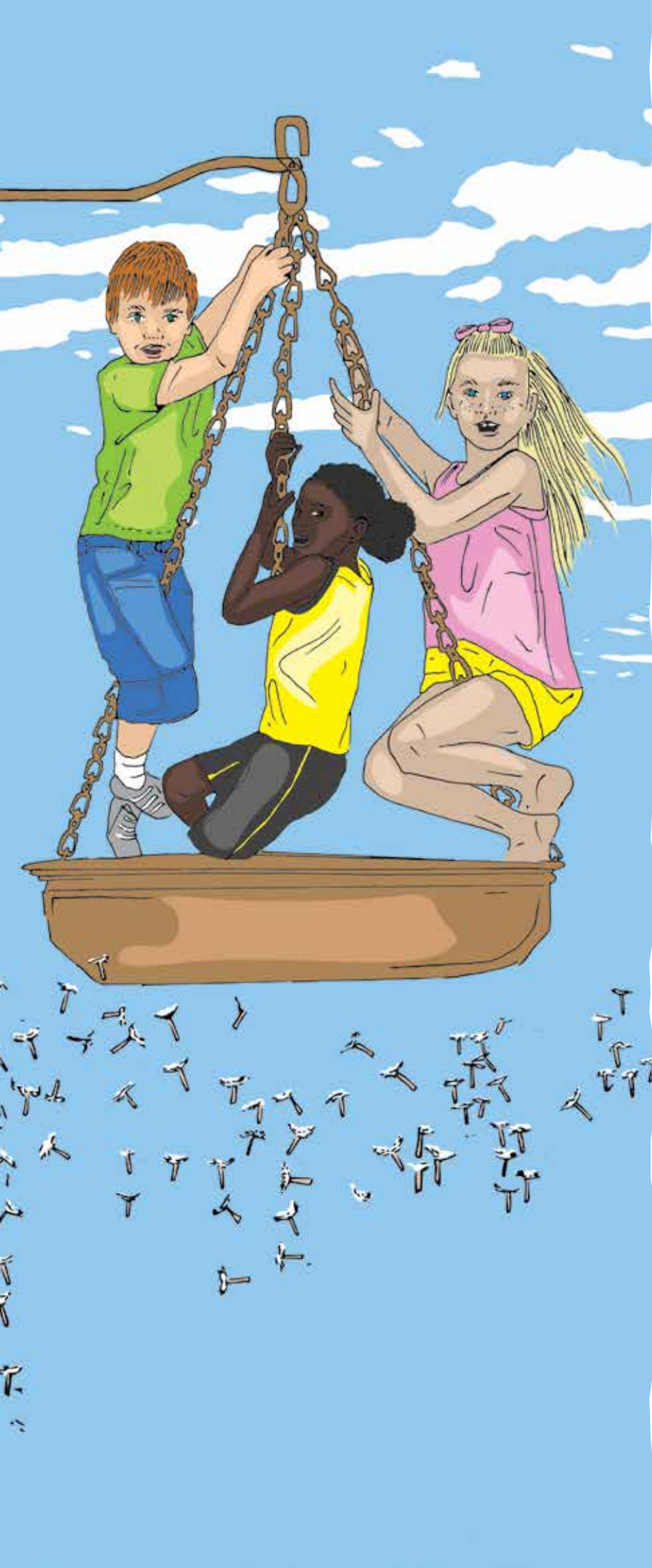
FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Target more government jobs to people locked out of work

The Victorian Government can build on existing targets⁷² for a more diverse public sector workforce by including other cohorts such as refugees, new migrants and single parents. This includes extending the existing targets for people with disability⁷³ and Aboriginal people⁷⁴ from the relatively small central public service to the whole public sector.

-
- 51 David Martine, Secretary, Department of Treasury and Finance, *Economic Update*, December 2018.
- 52 Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Part-time purgatory: Young and underemployment in Australia*, December 2018.
- 53 Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business, *Employment Projections: Regional Projections – five years to May 2023*.
- 54 Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business, *Employment Projections: Occupation Projections – five year to May 2023*.
- 55 Deloitte Access Economics, *Forecasting the future Community Services in Queensland 2025*, 2016.
- 56 TAFE Victoria, *Free TAFE for lots of jobs*.
- 57 Estimated completion rate is 51.6 per cent for those aged under 25 years in full-time study with no prior post-school qualification, in G Myconos, K Clarke, K te Riele, NCVER, *Shedding light: private 'for profit' training providers and young early school leavers*, 2016.
- 58 Future Social Services Institute, *Submission to Joint Standing Committee on National Disability Insurance Scheme – Market Readiness*, 8 March 2018.
- 59 Youth Action – Uniting – Mission Australia, *Vocational Education and Training in NSW: Report into access and outcomes for young people experiencing disadvantage – Joint report*, February 2018.
- 60 Future Social Services Institute, op. cit.
- 61 Future Social Services Institute, op. cit.
- 62 Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victoria's social procurement framework: Building a fair, inclusive and sustainable Victoria through procurement*, 2018.
- 63 Social Traders Australia, *'Victoria continues to lead the way with Social Procurement Framework'*, 2018.
- 64 Department of Education and Training, *Future opportunities for adult learners in Victoria: Pathways to participation and jobs*, 2018, p. 6.
- 65 S Lamb, Q Maire, A Walstab, G Newman, E Doecke and M Davies, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*, Victoria University, 2018, p. 13.
- 66 K Bowman, *The Value of ACE Providers*, Adult Learning Australia, 2006.
- 67 Department of Education and Training, op. cit., p. 19.
- 68 Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, *Adult Community Education State Budget Submission 2019*, forthcoming.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Department of Education and Training, *Future opportunities for adult learners in Victoria: Pathways to Participation and Jobs discussion paper*, 2018, p.29.
- 71 Victorian Government, *Jobs Victoria*.
- 72 For example, the 6 per cent by 2020 Victorian public sector disability employment target. Victorian Public Sector Commission, *Getting to work: Victorian public sector disability employment action plan 2018–2025*, 2018, p. 1.
- 73 There is a 6 per cent Victorian disability employment target by 2020 in government departments and Victoria Police, increasing to 12 per cent by 2025. Victorian Government, *Every Opportunity: Victorian economic participation plan for people with disability 2018–2020*, p.16.
- 74 Barring Djinang has adopted an Aboriginal employment target of 2 per cent for the Victorian Public Service. No target has been set for the broader public sector. Victorian Public Sector Commission, Barring Djinang, 2017.





Transformative justice

A fair society is founded on an impartial justice system that targets the causes of crime, provides equal access and protects everyone's rights.

We can re-orient our justice system to prevent crime and stop it re-occurring. Strategic, community-driven investment in early intervention, prevention and diversion reduces crime and strengthens local communities.

If there's less crime, there's less imprisonment. It costs \$110,000 per year to lock someone up in prison. Helping someone reform in the community makes them less likely to re-offend,⁷⁵ and prevents them getting trapped in the quicksand of the criminal justice system.

Spending billions of dollars on prisons won't reduce crime or deliver safer communities. Victoria can adopt evidence-based approaches to legal need and offending behaviour, and embrace strategies that work.

Replace child prisons with better alternatives

Re-direct resources to diversionary services and prevention programs for young people

The Victorian Government can build a world-class youth justice system that diverts young people from prison into education and jobs. By supporting young people with intensive, therapeutic community interventions, we can return Victoria to a nation-leading youth justice approach.

Young people who come into contact with the justice system have often experienced significant disadvantage. Most come from poverty and have experienced trauma and neglect. Many are known to the child protection system long before they are known to police.

Building more prisons for these children, and criminalising their behaviour with unfair policies and legislation, pushes them to become career criminals. Our child prisons don't rehabilitate people, with no improvement in future offending after young people leave.⁷⁶

Diverting young people from entering the justice system in the first place, and investing in community-based drug and alcohol, mental health and education support, is the most effective solution to make communities safer.⁷⁷ Funding for innovative approaches can expand diversion and prevention activities, and establish effectiveness of successful programs.

If the Victorian Government insists on detaining children and young people, their needs must be individually assessed, and matching education and trauma-informed rehabilitation delivered. This gives young people the opportunity to leave the criminal justice system and succeed in the community.

Better support people leaving prison

Provide access to housing and services to people leaving prison to stop re-offending

Almost every prisoner will return to community life. To lead successful, productive lives in the community, people leaving prison need support before and long after they leave. In particular, this support can focus on finding and maintaining housing, sustaining their mental health, and treating problem drug and alcohol use.

A third of people leaving prison expect to be homeless,⁷⁸ making them more likely to re-offend.⁷⁹ Prisoners are four times more likely to die in the first six months of release than after a year.⁸⁰ Effective post-release support gives people the best chance to stay alive and transition towards a productive, law-abiding life.

The Victorian Government can ensure community and health services engage with prisoners long before they leave. They can plan a successful reintegration with a continuous, stable network of supports protecting against future re-offending. Aboriginal prisoners, especially women, need extra support to maintain a connection to country and culture while in prison.

Currently, transition programs are under-resourced, only target the highest-risk prisoners, and only support people for a couple of months. Post-release support services can be expanded to more people, and assist for up to a year after release.

Keep toll debts out of courts

Change the road toll system to stop gouging the public

Toll road fines are clogging up Victoria's courts. They are the most common charges heard in the Magistrates Court. The Royal Commission into Family Violence found valuable court time is wasted with toll fine charges, taking time from priority matters like family violence.⁸¹

Victorians have clocked up almost \$700 million in outstanding fines, because excessive fees can magnify the original toll by 83,000 per cent.⁸² Owing thousands of dollars for not paying tolls worth a few dollars is ridiculously disproportionate, and causes people real anxiety and financial hardship. It fuels community disrespect for tolling systems⁸³ and drags out fine disputes.

Victoria can take a new, more sensible approach to toll fines. Courts can be unclogged by reconciling unpaid debts through civil proceedings, rather than using courts to enforce excessive fines. Paying tolls can be made easier.

Fund community justice partnerships

Embed community lawyers in local services to improve access to justice

People most vulnerable to legal problems often have fewer skills and resources to deal with them without assistance. This means that help is often delayed and only sought at crisis-point.⁸⁴ The Victorian Government can ease justice system pressure and help people experiencing vulnerability get legal advice.

Community justice partnerships put lawyers into places where people can access them easily during their everyday lives, such as community health services, family violence services or schools. People experiencing legal problems are more likely to confide in a GP, a social worker or their teacher than go to a lawyer.

Embedding lawyers in community settings gives people a chance to address their legal needs before they spiral out of control. It means non-legal professionals receiving information from someone can work with lawyers to jointly address that person's needs.

*Women found it empowering and helpful to access information and legal advice in healthcare settings.*⁸⁵

Victoria has been a trailblazer for community justice partnerships, particularly in health settings like hospitals. While health justice partnerships are now more common, early intervention partnerships between legal assistance and other social services yield similar positive outcomes, including with housing and homelessness services and specialist family violence services.⁸⁶

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Create more specialist problem-solving and diversionary courts

The Victorian Government can invest in more specialist problem-solving and diversionary courts to reduce crime and prisoner numbers. Where traditional approaches fail, problem-solving courts tackle behaviours causing offending, and they work: Drug Court recidivism rates are 34 per cent lower,⁸⁷ and the Neighbourhood Justice Centre has significantly improved community order compliance and reduced recidivism.⁸⁸

■ Raise the age of criminal culpability to 14

In Victoria, primary school age children as young as 10 can be sentenced to jail time. Sending children to prison doesn't work to keep communities safe, and it causes harm and trauma. The Victorian Government can raise the age of criminal culpability to 14, and introduce more effective age-appropriate interventions for children who come into contact with the justice system.

■ Expand community-based treatment services

Community-based mental health and drug and alcohol treatment is the cornerstone of preventing crime and keeping people out of prison. Funding treatment services for people on parole or community-based orders helps prevent them re-offending. Extra services can adopt place-based approaches to deal with geographically specific problems and build community resilience.

■ Set a recidivism reduction target

Victoria's recidivism rate has increased every year for five years. Prisons can be recalibrated to effectively rehabilitate people serving sentences. The Victorian Government can set a target to reduce reoffending by 15 per cent. Setting a target helps maintain momentum and encourages collaboration across government.

■ Strengthen economic and social rights

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights can be strengthened to protect vulnerable Victorians' economic and social rights. Access to healthcare, housing and education can be formalised in the Charter as inalienable human rights. The Charter can have better real-world impact if people can take legal action when their rights are breached.

■ Reduce Aboriginal prisoner numbers

Aboriginal people are imprisoned at 12 times the rate of other Victorians⁸⁹ – 19 times for Aboriginal women.⁹⁰ The Victorian Government can fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and specialist services, such as the Balit Ngulu Aboriginal youth legal service, to help reduce growing numbers of Aboriginal people being incarcerated.

■ Improve support for people with a disability in the justice system

People with disability are over-represented across the criminal justice system, particularly in detention. There is not enough specialist disability support. Early identification of a person's disability after justice system contact can ensure appropriate, timely treatment and support. Enhanced diversion and community-based options can also prevent unnecessary imprisonment.

■ Accelerate the Work and Development Permit Scheme roll-out

The Work and Development Permit Scheme allows people facing hardship to pay off debts with community service. The Victorian Government can roll out this program statewide.

-
- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>75 Productivity Commission for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, <i>Report on Government Services, Volume C: Justice</i>, 2017, pp. 13–14.</p> <p>76 P Armytage and J Ogloff, <i>Youth Justice Review and Strategy</i>, 2017, p. 8.</p> <p>77 Sentencing Advisory Council, <i>Reoffending by Children and Young People in Victoria</i>, 2016, p. 53.</p> <p>78 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, <i>Health of Australia's prisoners 2015</i>, November 2015, p. 29.</p> <p>79 I Brunton-Smith and K Hopkins, <i>The factors associated with proven re-offending following release from prison</i>, 2013, p. 19.</p> <p>80 M Hobbs, K Krazlan, S Ridout, Q Mai, M Knuiman and R Chapman, <i>Mortality and morbidity in prisoners after release from prison in Western Australia 1995–2003</i>, 2018, p. 2.</p> <p>81 Royal Commission into Family Violence, <i>Final Report</i>, 2016, p. 148.</p> <p>82 WestJustice, <i>Our plan for a fair and effective toll enforcement system for Victoria</i>, 2017, p. 4.</p> <p>83 V Braithwaite, <i>Closing the gap between regulation and the community</i>, 2017, p. 33.</p> | <p>84 C Coumarelos, D Macourt, J People, HM McDonald, Z Wei, R Iriana and S Ramsey, <i>Legal Australia Wide Survey; legal need in Australia</i>, 2012, p. 30.</p> <p>85 Women's Health Victoria, <i>Great Expectations: How gendered expectations shape early mothering experiences</i>, November 2018, p. 15.</p> <p>86 WestJustice, <i>Restoring Financial Safety; collaborating on responses to economic abuse</i>, 2018.</p> <p>87 KPMG, Magistrates' Court of Victoria, <i>Evaluation of the Drug Court of Victoria</i>, 2014, p. 4.</p> <p>88 S Ross, <i>Evaluating neighbourhood justice: Measuring and attributing outcomes for a community justice program</i>, 2015, p. 5.</p> <p>89 Australian Bureau of Statistics, <i>Prisoners in Australia</i>, 2018.</p> <p>90 Australian Bureau of Statistics, <i>Corrective Services Australia: Tables 5 & 12</i>, 2018.</p> |
|--|--|

Champion community sector potential

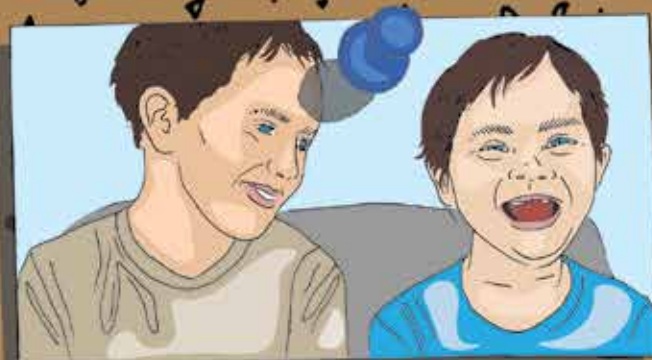
At its heart, Victoria's community services industry is motivated by social outcomes: forging strong, cohesive and inclusive communities, where everyone is supported to live good lives and fulfil their potential.

But this social good also creates economic opportunities. The community services industry is experiencing phenomenal growth and can fuel an expanding Victorian economy. The social assistance and health industry is already the biggest employer in Victoria, and is projected to grow faster than any other, generating one in four new Victorian jobs over the next five years.⁹¹ In this time, the nation will need nearly 70,000 extra aged and disability carers alone.⁹²

In delivering the 10-year Community Services Industry Plan, the Victorian Government can begin realising the potential of the community services industry, generating abundant new secure, well-paid jobs, and building a strong, modern sector to amplify the social and economic benefits for Victoria.



m u n i t y



Deliver the 10-year Community Services Industry Plan

Develop community services by funding full implementation of the first and second year actions

Victoria's community services industry is strong, vibrant and mature, with a proud history of supporting people facing poverty and disadvantage. It is undergoing rapid change caused by a growing and ageing population and reforms such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and the roll out of universal three-year kindergarten. The repercussions of the Royal Commission into Mental Health and the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety will likely intensify this pressure.

The Victorian Government can support the rapid expansion of the community services industry by fully funding implementation of the first two years of the Community Services Industry Plan.

The Plan was jointly developed by the Victorian Government and the community services industry, and presents a unified industry vision and actions to achieve it. Early plan actions include developing the workforce, building the evidence base, and investing in sector transitions. Peak bodies will need resources to support the industry as it builds capacity to expand, change and reinvigorate.

Boost quality and innovation with indexation certainty

Make community service funding keep pace with wage increases and cost pressures

When community service organisations are financially healthy they can attract skilled staff, invest in innovation and build stronger partnerships to maximise their impact. But funding that does not grow to match costs saps organisations of their dynamism and threatens the viability of high-quality services.

When wages outpace funding, organisations are forced to contemplate shedding staff and restraining wages. The community services industry needs a responsive funding indexation formula, to match funding increases with minimum wage decisions and inflation, so service quality is not eroded.

Premier Daniel Andrews announced the Victorian Government would link community services funding to the Minimum Wage Case, and provided \$13.8 million towards wage shortfalls for the 2018–19 financial year. He also promised to continue to fund rising wage costs over the current term of government.⁹³

A sound indexation formula accounts for the real costs of wage increases, including those determined by the minimum wage decisions of the Fair Work Commission. It also includes provision for rising administrative expenses, like rents, electricity and fuel, and costs imposed by legislative and policy changes, including portable long service leave, incident management and investigations. Other cost increases include WorkCover premiums and the unfunded increases in the Superannuation Guarantee Levy.

Augment funding for rural services

Provide a rural funding loading for services delivered in rural Victoria

The Victorian Government can boost rural service funding with a ‘rural loading’, giving organisations the resources to properly service rural communities.

People living in rural areas benefit from high community connectedness and high rates of volunteering. But they share many problems and need access to the same diversity of services as other Victorians. Community organisations are often funded to provide services across regions that might be hundreds of kilometres wide, with no additional funding to cover the added difficulty and expense of rural service delivery.

VCOSS regional members report many challenges in serving rural communities. Not everyone in rural Victoria can simply drive to a regional city to seek assistance, and it may take hours out of a worker’s day to drive to someone’s home or community. Small and variable numbers of clients can make it challenging and expensive to find space for service delivery in rural areas. It can also impede recruiting and retaining qualified staff. These challenges impose extra costs.⁹⁴

Rural Victorians require the same recognition and respect as people living in Melbourne, and they should not be denied access because they live far from the corridors of power.

Simplify community sector service agreements

Revise and improve the standard service agreement for community organisations to reduce complexity

The Victorian Government can enable more effective, better quality community services by reducing red tape and duplicative reporting.

Streamlined reporting and compliance requirements will free up community services to do what they do best – provide services to people in need. The role of government in the community services industry is evolving, moving away from service provision to system stewardship, enabling new arrangements.⁹⁵ The standard Service Agreement is a central tool in managing the relationship between government and community organisations.

In 2018, the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office made numerous recommendations to improve service agreements, and stated that they should “contain clearly defined performance standards, deliverables and review mechanisms”, and “impose requirements on funded organisations that are proportionate to their risk profiles”.⁹⁶

Negotiations in 2019 are an opportunity to create a more balanced agreement, reflecting a mutual respect between organisations and the Government. In particular, the Victorian Government can introduce tiered agreements that reduce reporting and regulatory burden and better reflect the varied size and different complexity of services delivered.

Guarantee long-term funding for more effective services

Ensure long-term funding of community organisations

An enduring funding base means community organisations can keep and develop stable, skilled workforces, and deliver continuously improving quality services. Core service funding is usually secured by a three or four year service agreement, providing reasonable funding certainty for organisations. Indeed, the Productivity Commission has recommended they be extended to seven years. But presently, there is a plethora of short-term grants, time-limited project funds and last-minute funding extensions, often for only a year or two.

For instance, the Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence released a welcome funding boost to meet demand; but much of it was short-term contract funds. VCOSS members observe this trend in many different community service programs.

Short-term funding impedes sustainable future planning. Workers can find themselves on a short-term contract 'merry-go-round,' moving from one contract to another, trying to secure sustainable work. This undermines both organisational capacity and worker morale. It can also disturb trusting therapeutic relationships built with vulnerable people – the foundation of quality, person-centred services.

SHORT-TERM FAMILY VIOLENCE FUNDING

A family violence organisation in Melbourne had 78 per cent of funding revenue secured in long-term contracts during the 2015–16 financial year. Two years later, only 44 per cent was long-term. This funding insecurity has accelerated staff turnover and increased recruitment, training and development costs. It also means an organisation dedicated to gender equality cannot provide secure jobs for the women it employs. ■

Fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and grow the Aboriginal workforce

Fund and support strong ACCOs and resource the implementation and roll-out of an Aboriginal Workforce Strategy

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are independent, not-for-profit organisations that are initiated, controlled and operated by Aboriginal people, acknowledging the right of Aboriginal peoples to self-determination. They are governed by an elected Aboriginal Board, which is directly accountable to the Aboriginal communities served.⁹⁷

ACCOs build strength and empowerment in Aboriginal communities and people, creating enduring relationships free from unintentional racism. This includes empowering Aboriginal people to participate directly in the design and delivery of services within their communities, and defining priorities, outcomes and approaches from an Aboriginal community perspective. Collectively, they can reach and engage Aboriginal people, unmatched by the mainstream sector.⁹⁸

ACCOs require sustainable long-term funding for the total cost of providing holistic, comprehensive and culturally appropriate services in community. For example, this includes building up Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to accept transfer of guardianship of Aboriginal children (see page 65). They can also be resourced to reach out to Aboriginal people to participate in Treaty negotiations.

Investing in ACCOs grows the Aboriginal workforce, and supports Aboriginal leadership in governance and management. Victoria can help build the Aboriginal community services workforce by working with both the Aboriginal community controlled sector and the mainstream community services industry to fully fund and implement the sector-wide Aboriginal Workforce Strategy.

Back community organisations to face climate change and emergencies

Fund capacity building for community organisations on the frontline

The effects of climate change – including extreme weather and natural disasters – are profoundly discriminatory. Climate change can exacerbate problems related to health, mental health, safety, financial and general wellbeing for people facing disadvantage, particularly those living on low incomes.

Community sector organisations are frequently among the first responders to an emergency, and are often on the frontline, providing resources, support and triage services to people in the immediate aftermath. They also support long-term community development, cohesion, rebuilding and resilience, and environmental recovery.

The Victorian Government can develop a community services framework for emergencies and climate change. It can outline the roles and responsibilities of organisations, identify the skills and competencies required, and document the activities for developing and maintaining these capabilities. Flowing from this, the Government can fund a capacity building program for organisations to engage in emergency and climate change planning, assist people facing vulnerability, and continue operating during emergency events.

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Develop a multi-lingual community services workforce

Having staff able to communicate in community languages is one important way of improving access for people from diverse language backgrounds. For instance, traineeships and scholarships can encourage people with English as a second language to work in community services.

■ Embed culturally appropriate practice and strengthen language services

People from culturally diverse communities are more likely to access services if staff have been trained in cultural safety and trauma-focused responses. The Victorian Government can fund affordable training opportunities, improve assistance to organisations to provide materials in community languages (including Auslan), and expand access to interpreter and translation services, to improve service access.

■ Embed co-design and participatory approaches

Involving service users in program design and delivery is critical to developing person-centred services. Consumer participation needs to be resourced and fully integrated into services, not something that is ad-hoc or added-on. It should include participation at all levels, including service design, organisational governance and the integration of peer and other practical supports.

■ Match services to local population and need

Victoria can better plan for local services and infrastructure, responding to divergent community growth and change in different places. Tools like the VCOSs Poverty Maps⁹⁹ provide a sophisticated picture of who experiences poverty and where they live, which can inform planning to deliver targeted services to areas in need.

■ Roll out disability worker accreditation as a model for a qualified, professional community service workforce

VCOSs encourages a gradual, resourced and supported transition to the new disability worker accreditation scheme. The scheme should avoid stifling workforce growth,¹⁰⁰ incur minimal costs to workers, and be supplemented with free training, and recognition of prior experience. The scheme can be enhanced in future to strengthen minimum qualification requirements, and can provide a model for the future professional enhancement of the community service workforce, in consultation with community sector peak bodies.

-
- 91 Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business, *Employment Projections: Regional Projections – five years to May 2023*.
- 92 Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business, *Employment Projections: Occupation Projections – five year to May 2023*.
- 93 Victorian Council of Social Service, *'Big political announcements at the Good Life Summit'*, 2018.
- 94 Victorian Council of Social Service, *The Voices of Regional Victoria: VCOSS Regional Roundtables Report November 2018*.
- 95 Deloitte Access Economics, *Forecasting the future Community Services in Queensland 2025*, 2016.
- 96 Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Contract Management Capability in DHHS: Service Agreements*, September 2018.
- 97 NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation, *Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)*, Policy Brief.
- 98 NACCHO submission, *Productivity Commission Inquiry into Human Services: Identifying sectors for reform*, 2016.
- 99 R Tanton, D Peel and Y Vidyattama, *Every Suburb, Every Town: Poverty in Victoria*, Victorian Council of Social Service, November 2018.
- 100 Victorian Council of Social Service, *A high quality disability workforce: VCOSS submission to registration and accreditation consultation paper*, October 2017.

Stronger early childhood education and schools

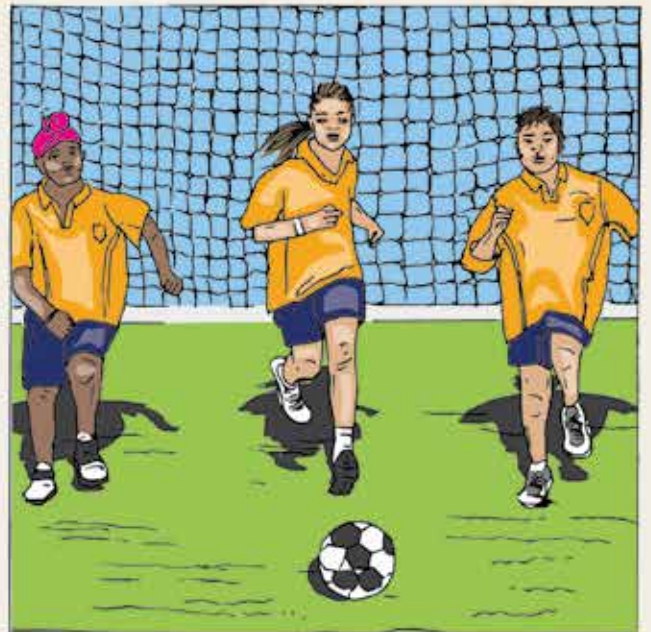
A good start in life begins with a great education. High quality, affordable education from the early years through to adulthood means every Victorian can be creative, informed and primed for success.

Long before children begin school, inequities in their health, development, wellbeing and economic circumstances exist. Participating in high quality early years education helps overcome these barriers so children are ready for school.

To transform lives, schools need enough resources, funding and facilities for a world-class education. Without them, children miss out on school, sport and extra-curricular activities.

Investing in programs for young people facing disadvantage helps participation so everyone leaves school with the skills, knowledge and resilience to thrive.





Give children bright futures with early learning

Invest in high quality early childhood education for all three- and four-year-olds

Up to 90 per cent of children's brain development occurs in their first five years.¹⁰¹ Participating in high quality early childhood education strengthens children's cognitive, social and emotional development, laying foundations for success in education, work and life. Children who attend at least two years of preschool perform better than their peers at age 15.¹⁰²

The Victorian Government has made life-changing commitments to roll out universal three-year-old preschool for 15 hours per week,¹⁰³ build 785 new kindergartens, expand 170 existing ones,¹⁰⁴ and co-locate kindergartens at new primary schools.¹⁰⁵ The Victorian Government's commitment to make early childhood TAFE courses free and provide university scholarships for kindergarten teachers will help create a pipeline of skilled early childhood educators.¹⁰⁶

In planning for this momentous reform, the Victorian Government will need to consider both infrastructure and workforce implications. On average, local councils' early childhood facilities were built 70 years ago, with over \$500 million needed for upgrade and replacements.¹⁰⁷ Successful delivery will require collaborative planning to expand and modernise facilities and ensure centres can find qualified staff, taking into account local differences between growth and established suburbs.

There are other measures the Government could take to make the reforms a success. By collaborating with key stakeholders, the Government can develop strategies to increase the engagement and participation of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, remote communities, Aboriginal backgrounds, non-English speaking backgrounds, and those with a disability who are less likely to use early childhood services.¹⁰⁸

Current Federal funding for four-year-old kindergarten ends in 2019, creating uncertainty and making service planning difficult. Victoria should continue advocating for long-term Federal four-year-old kindergarten funding, and to reinstate National Quality Framework funding.



In planning for this momentous reform,
the Victorian Government will need
to consider both infrastructure and
workforce implications.

Make education affordable

Fund public schools better, and help families cover costs

Every child should be able to access and participate fully in a high quality education, regardless of how much their family can pay. Families' average annual out-of-pocket costs in Melbourne are \$3,841 for a primary school child, and \$5,368 for secondary school.¹⁰⁹ Free education is enshrined in Victorian law,¹¹⁰ but this only covers the 'standard education curriculum.' Schools can charge families for digital devices, school uniforms, textbooks, camps, excursions, elective subjects and speech or occupational therapy.¹¹¹ Some schools also impose 'voluntary' fees.

When families cannot afford essential items, children and young people risk being excluded from the standard school curriculum and activities, increasing their risk of disengagement, behavioural issues, bullying, and poorer learning outcomes.¹¹²

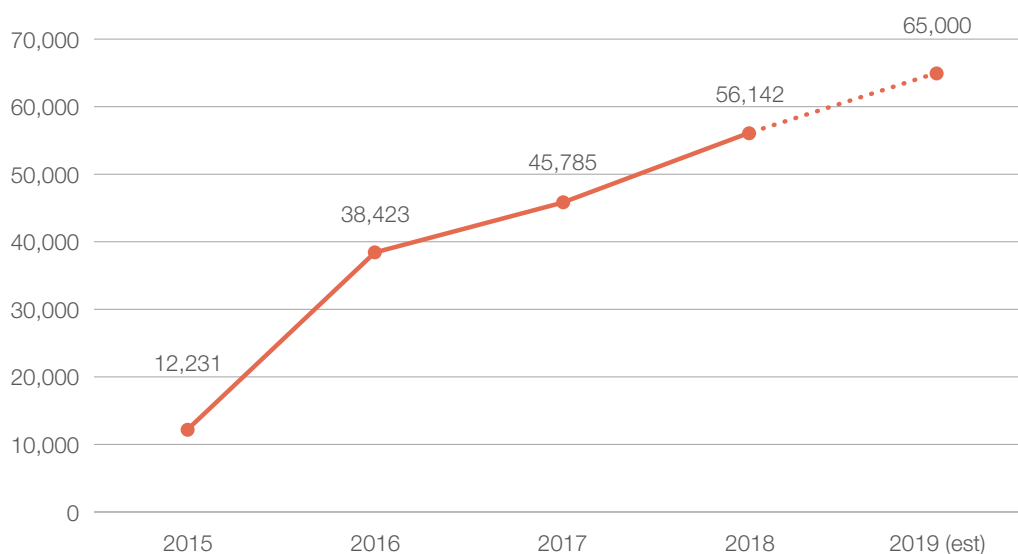
The Victorian Government can prevent this by fully funding schools to deliver the standard curriculum. Victoria's real (in-school) expenditure per student in government schools is the lowest across the nation and substantially below the Australian average, by around \$1,500.¹¹³

The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and State Schools' Relief provide partial support for disadvantaged families. These programs can't do everything but they do help: the Fund supports students from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend educational activities, and State Schools' Relief helps families pay for school uniforms, shoes, stationary and books, supporting over 56,000 students in the last year.¹¹⁴ It recorded a 23 per cent increase in applications this financial year.¹¹⁵

Community sector organisations continue to be overwhelmed by requests for assistance with families' educational and living costs, particularly at the start of the school year.¹¹⁶ Funding for the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and State Schools' Relief is due to end in 2019. It should be permanently extended.

The Department of Education and Training should also continue to monitor schools' implementation of the Parent Payment Policy guidelines so they are consistently applied, and families and students are not excluded from full participation.

Students assisted by State Schools' Relief



Source: State Schools' Relief, 2018 Annual Report.

Provide free school travel for struggling students

Provide free school transport passes for students from families facing disadvantage

A good education starts with getting to school. Some families cannot afford a myki,¹¹⁷ let alone a lump-sum payment of \$607 for a full-year student pass, which is currently the cheapest option.¹¹⁸

To rectify this, the Victorian Government can directly provide a free school transport pass to every school-aged child if their parent or guardian has a health care card.

Some students stay home and miss school because they cannot afford transport, while others travel without paying and get fined.¹¹⁹ Fines cause children to worry about paying off debts. Students in this position have been thrown out of home, or ended up sleeping on friends' couches to avoid trouble with their parents.¹²⁰

In NSW, Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT, the government already provides free or substantially discounted school travel for students experiencing disadvantage.¹²¹ A successful pilot Myki project in western Melbourne provides free public transport passes for disadvantaged students.¹²² It has now been extended to 15 schools.¹²³

Free travel passes could save low-income families over \$600 for each child.¹²⁴ It would help support school attendance, reduce drop-outs and promote participation in after-school or social activities. Strong educational attachment promotes young people's mental health, supports their emotional and social development and sense of belonging.¹²⁵

JAKE'S IMPROVEMENT IN SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

I was removed from my mum's care and taken to my nan's in Altona Meadows. My nan wasn't able to afford to pay for a Myki or to get me to school. I asked the school and they were able to give me a Myki. In 2016, I didn't go to school much because I couldn't get there. Since I got a Myki my attendance has skyrocketed and I'm really thankful for that.

Jake is Year 9 student at Wyndham Central College ■

Help children join their friends in local sport and recreation

Introduce a sport and recreation subsidy scheme to help families experiencing disadvantage

Playing organised sport improves children's physical activity, mental health and social skills.¹²⁶ Participation in music programs improves school attendance, academic achievement and social and emotional wellbeing,¹²⁷ with students facing disadvantage benefiting most.¹²⁸ But more than 40 per cent of children from disadvantaged backgrounds miss out on sport,¹²⁹ and are also left out of activities like drama, art and music, often due to high costs.¹³⁰

Victoria is the only Australian state without a subsidy scheme to help. Every other state has one,¹³¹ providing up to \$200 each year for students experiencing disadvantage. The NSW scheme started last year, with families using nearly half a million vouchers,¹³² including strong participation of Aboriginal students, those with disability, from CALD backgrounds,¹³³ and living in regional and remote communities.¹³⁴

The Victorian Government can cut costs for vulnerable families, and deliver better education, health and social benefits for children by investing in a new sport and recreation subsidy scheme, reducing the barriers to participating in extracurricular activities.

MIRANDA'S ESCALATING COSTS FOR UNDER-9S FOOTBALL

Being a sole parent to two primary school boys, extracurricular sports and activities are important for our family. Apart from being beneficial for children's development, physically, socially and emotionally in areas they are interested in, it also links us to other families within our community with children of the same ages and interests providing much needed social connections.

Unfortunately there are always costs involved, and being a sole parent family, money is already tight. These costs increase when a child goes from training in a sport to competition as I found when my child went from Auskick, costing approximately \$95 a year, to play his first season in football competition for under 9s.

I now have to cover the costs of uniform, mouth guard, membership, club group photos, rewards and trophy night and, as I found at the end of the season, buying the coaches thank you gifts and putting in extra for your child to receive an extra reward. All up for my child to play football for under 9s for the season everything cost just under a \$1,000.

A subsidy scheme would make a big difference to my family as it would help reduce the costs and ensure that my kids do not miss out. ■

Stop students dropping out of school

Scale up effective programs to keep children engaged in education and extend support to those at risk of disengaging

Around 10,000 Victorian students disengage from education each year, and around 10 per cent of young Victorians are not in education, training or employment.¹³⁵ Year 12 completion rates have barely budged in the last decade.¹³⁶ Leaving school early is often a precursor to poor life outcomes and long-term unemployment.¹³⁷

Helping young people stay engaged helps them improve their educational outcomes and job prospects. But this requires a suite of evidence-informed programs focussing on early intervention and re-engagement. By facilitating greater coordination and referrals between schools, education and training providers, the Victorian Government can ensure children and young people get support in time and don't fall through the cracks.

The Government can instigate robust evaluations and scale up effective programs and initiatives including LOOKOUT,¹³⁸ Springboard,¹³⁹ Navigator,¹⁴⁰ Local Learning and Employment Networks,¹⁴¹ School Focused Youth Services,¹⁴² the Education Justice Initiative,¹⁴³ and Hands on Learning.¹⁴⁴

While the Victorian Government expanded the Navigator program in the 2018 Budget to reach every community, existing services still have unmet demand. Service providers report long waiting lists and restrictive eligibility rules¹⁴⁵ mean many miss out.



To transform lives, schools need enough
resources, funding and facilities
for a world-class education.

Support the learning needs of children with disability

Fully roll out a new Program for Students with Disability based on strengths-based functional needs assessment

The Victorian Government can give children with disability the best start in life by matching their learning needs with tailored funding.

Currently about 15 per cent of Victorian students require reasonable adjustments at school to participate on the same basis as their peers.¹⁴⁶ However, under the current guidelines for the Program for Students with Disability (PSD), only four per cent of students qualify for specialist funding support.¹⁴⁷ This means about 60,000 students are missing out on targeted funding that could maximise their learning.

Targeted funding means students with disability can access extra teaching supports, more tailored learning programs and specialised therapists and integration aides to support their learning and development.

A comprehensive 2016 review of the PSD recommended developing a new funding model based on a strengths-based functional needs assessment.¹⁴⁸ In response, the Victorian Government announced a six-month pilot to develop a new strengths-based functional needs assessment to better understand the educational support needs of students with disability.¹⁴⁹

The Victorian Department of Education and Training has been trialling the new assessment in 100 primary, secondary, combined and specialist schools since June 2018. Based on these results, the Victorian Government can develop a new funding model to be rolled out to every school.

Invest in schools as community hubs

Support schools to be central community hubs by becoming service delivery sites and expanding community access

Schools and preschools can be more accessible, available and embedded in communities by becoming community hubs. This enhances children and young people's education and wellbeing and better meets the needs of their families and communities.

The Victorian Government has already committed to build a preschool in all new primary schools and is partnering to establish 10 'Our Place' sites across Victoria.¹⁵⁰ The Government can build on this by expanding community engagement and partnerships across the school system to make schools central hubs for communities.

Partnering with community organisations and local government to deliver services on school sites can help schools engage more holistically with children and their families. Many families have difficulty negotiating the service system, being unaware of available support or lacking the confidence to seek help. Schools as community hubs can provide easier service access pathways, a non-stigmatising environment, and extra support for vulnerable families.

Fostering an inclusive space where everyone in the community is welcome helps create pride in school and reduce vandalism. Use of community facilities outside school hours¹⁵¹ can include developing agreements with local sporting, music or cultural clubs to provide local opportunities for children and young people. Schools can also leave grounds available on weekends to encourage families to use playgrounds, basketball courts and school ovals.

Making schools into community hubs helps promote a sense of belonging, greater connections within families, increased safety, and stronger relationships with staff.

OUR PLACE

Our Place is a network of 10 schools that are open to the whole community, with each school providing:

- high quality early years learning, health and development
- high quality schooling
- out-of-school-hours enrichment activities for children and families
- wrap-around health and wellbeing services
- adult engagement, volunteering, education and employment support.

Building on the successful Doveton College model, Our Place seeks to create places for children, families and communities to flourish. It is an initiative of the Colman Foundation, in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training.¹⁵² ■

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Give secondary students access to life skills

Many students feel underprepared for 'real' life after school, and want help with basic living skills,¹⁵³ including understanding finances, taxes, voting, citizenship, undertaking self-care, maintaining mental health, healthy lifestyles and knowing their rights at work.¹⁵⁴ The Victorian Government can work with students, teachers and schools to create more 'life skills' learning opportunities.¹⁵⁵

■ Strengthen 'middle years' engagement

Policy, service provision and support often misses students in the 'middle years' from Grades Five to Eight.¹⁵⁶ The Victorian Government can develop a strong middle years transition framework, outlining strategies to engage families, improve primary to secondary transitions, respond to early school disengagement, and support students with extra learning needs.

■ Support quality flexible learning options

Flexible learning options can help address the root causes of young people's educational disengagement in complex cases by providing flexible, person-centred and practical approaches to teaching and learning.¹⁵⁷ Funding high quality flexible learning options can help more young people remain in school and re-engage early school leavers, particularly in rural Victoria.

■ Support lawyers in schools program

Secondary school students are increasingly facing legal problems, such as accumulated transport fines, fair pay, and family violence. By building on WEstJustice's innovative school lawyer program,¹⁵⁸ the Victorian Government can embed a community lawyer in schools' wellbeing teams to better support at-risk or vulnerable young people.

■ Improve students' mental health and wellbeing

One in seven school-aged children experience a mental health condition,¹⁵⁹ but they are less likely than adults to seek professional help.¹⁶⁰ Embedding 190 mental health professionals in secondary schools helps ensure young people can access support.¹⁶¹ Given half of all mental health conditions begin before age 14, the Victorian Government can expand this initiative to primary schools, focussing on children who have experienced trauma.¹⁶²

■ Reform careers education

Understanding different career options and navigating post-school pathways can be challenging for many young people. While community services careers are booming, career counsellors are often unaware of the opportunities and training pathways. Ensuring that all career counsellors have up-to-date information about this sector helps promote this option to young people.¹⁶³

Stronger early childhood education and schools

- 101 S Pascoe and D Brennan, *Lifting our game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions*, 2017, p. 15.
- 102 OECD, *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*, p. 261.
- 103 Premier Daniel Andrews Media Release, Ready for school: kinder for every three-year-old, 4 October 2018.
- 104 Premier Daniel Andrews Media Release, Huge new kinder build ahead of 3 year old kinder rollout, 9 October 2018.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 Jenny Mikakos, Free TAFE for early childhood educators, 22 November 2018.
- 107 Municipal Association of Victoria, Early Years infrastructure planning and funding, 2018.
- 108 Carly Molloy et al, Restacking the odds, Early Childhood Education and Care: An evidence-based review of the measures to assess quality, quantity and participation (unpublished), Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Social Ventures Australia, Bain & Company; The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), *Child and Family Welfare Services in Multicultural Victoria*, ECCV Policy Position Paper, June 2018.
- 109 ASG, ASG's Education Costs Estimates – Metropolitan Victoria: Estimated schooling costs in 2019.
- 110 Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic).
- 111 Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, Schools Policy: Parent Payments.
- 112 The Smith Family, Education costs 'unaffordable' for Australians new survey, 15 January 2019.
- 113 Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools, July 2018.
- 114 States Schools' Relief, 2018 Annual Report.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 CISVic, Children suffer as families unable to pay school costs, Media Release, 12 February 2019.
- 117 S Robertson, *Fair Go: Myki, Transport Poverty and Access to Education in Melbourne's West*, WEstJustice, March 2016.
- 118 Public Transport Victoria, Metropolitan myki fares, 2019.
- 119 Robertson, op. cit.
- 120 Ibid.
- 121 Transport for NSW, About the School Student Transport Scheme; Queensland Government, School Transport Assistance Scheme, 2019; Tasmanian Government Department of State Growth, Free Bus Travel Pass; ACT Government Access Canberra, Student Transport Program: Who is eligible?
- 122 WEstjustice, *School-myki Pilot Project Report: Key Findings and Recommendations*, 2018.
- 123 Treasurer of Victorian, Helping Kids in Melbourne's West get to school, Media Release, 29 October 2018.
- 124 Ibid.
- 125 Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, Promote mental health.
- 126 RM Eime, JA Young, JT Harvey, MJ Charity and WR Payne, 'A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport', *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, Vol. 10, 2013, p. 98.
- 127 The Song Room, *Bridging the gap in school achievement through the arts: summary report*, 2011; ABC, *Don't Stop the Music*, 2018.
- 128 A Collins and M Adoniou, 'Learning music early can make your child a better reader', *The Conversation*, 8 November 2018.
- 129 Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission, *AusPlay Focus – Children's Participation in Organised Physical Activity Outside of School Hours*, April 2018.
- 130 Parliament of Victoria, Education and Training Committee, *Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools*, November 2013, p. 67.

- 131 Queensland Government, Get Started sport and recreation vouchers for children; Government of Western Australia, Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, KidSport; Tasmania Liberals, Ticket to Play; NSW Government, Office of Sport, Active Kids; Government of South Australia, Sports Voucher.
- 132 NSW Government, Active Kids, Office of Sport – Update 15 October 2018.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 Victorian Government, *Education State: Schools*, September 2015, p. 10.
- 136 Victorian Government, Department of Education and Training, Summary Statistics for Victorian Schools, July 2018.
- 137 KJ Hancock and SR Zubrick, *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*, University of Western Australia, June 2015 (Updated October 2015), p. 5.
- 138 Victorian Government, Lookout Education Support Centres.
- 139 Victorian Government, Springboard.
- 140 Victorian Government, Navigator Pilot – Evaluation Snapshot, June 2018.
- 141 Victorian Government, Local Learning and Employment Networks.
- 142 Victorian Government, School Focused Youth Service.
- 143 K te Riele and K Rosauer, *Education at the Heart of the Children's Court: Evaluation of the Education Justice Initiative Final Report*, The Victoria Institute, December 2015.
- 144 Hands on Learning; Deloitte Access Economics, *The socio-economic benefits of investing in the prevention of early school leaving*, September 2012.
- 145 Navigator is available to young people who are aged between 12 and 17 years of age and have attended less than 30% of the previous school term (if enrolled in a school).
- 146 Victorian Government, Education State, *Review of the program for students with disabilities*, p. 30.
- 147 Ibid., p. 61.
- 148 Ibid.
- 149 Victorian Minister for Education Media Release, World-Leading pilot for students with disabilities, 4 August 2018.
- 150 Our Place.
- 151 S Sanjeevan, M McDonald and T Moore, *Primary schools as community hubs: A review of the literature*, The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, 2012.
- 152 Our Place.
- 153 Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC), VicSRC response to proposed VCE review.
- 154 Young Workers Centre, *Annual Report 2017/2018*.
- 155 J Douglas, 'Disengaged students learn life skills as they navigate through school', *ABC News*, December 2017.
- 156 Hume Whittlesea LLEN, Middle Years Matter in Hume, August 2018.
- 157 Mission Australia, Flexible learning options program holds key to brighter futures for disengaged SA students, April 2018.
- 158 WEstjustice, School Lawyer Program.
- 159 D Lawrence, S Johnson, J Hafekost, K Boterhoven De Haan, M Sawyer, J Ainley and SR Zubrick, *The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Canberra: Department of Health, 2015.
- 160 T Slade, A Johnston, M Teesson, H Whiteford, P Burgess, J Pirkis and S Saw, *The Mental Health of Australians 2: Report on the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Canberra: Department of Health and Ageing, 2009.
- 161 Victorian Minister for Education, Media Release, Expanding Mental Health Support to Victorian Students, 25 October 2018.
- 162 Lawrence, op. cit.
- 163 Parliament of Victoria, Economic, Education, Jobs and Skills Committee, Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools, August 2018, p. 80.

Ensure women and children can thrive, and live free from violence

Women and children deserve dignity, respect, safety and equal opportunity. Anything less fails them, and leads to an unfair society for everybody.

Victoria has lead the world with the Royal Commission into Family Violence providing a blueprint for preventing and responding to family violence. Victoria is also leading in enhancing child protection strategies through its responses to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Abuse, and to the subsequent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

However, we need to continue implementing the recommendations of the inquiries to ensure women and children are supported to succeed.





Ensure women
and children
can thrive, and
live free from
violence

Continue implementing the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations

Continue collaboration and funding to sustain momentum to end family violence

The Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence has generated an evolving system-wide family violence reform. Having already delivered 90 of the 227 Royal Commission recommendations, focus now turns to longer-term objectives, following the 10-year blueprint to combat family violence.^{164, 165}

Family violence continues to take its toll. By the end of 2018, 69 women were killed, including 20 in Victoria.¹⁶⁶ The Victorian Government needs to sustain momentum for system re-design and evolution, and focus on strengthening collaborative governance, sensible sequencing and building sustainable capacity in its delivery partners.

The Government can heed advice of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor,¹⁶⁷ especially to strengthen coordination in the current reform architecture, and improve implementation and risk management processes. Long-term funding certainty will be key to successfully sustaining the reforms.

Fund foster and kinship carers fairly

Increase the basic carer allowance and index it to prices

Over 10,000 children in Victoria are living in out-of-home care.¹⁶⁸ Foster and kinship carers provide temporary care to children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents. Currently, more than a third of foster and kinship carers in Victoria struggle to cover basic costs,¹⁶⁹ such as housing, food, clothing, utilities, furniture, transport, leisure and personal care.

The Victorian Government should immediately increase the level one and level two basic carer allowance by \$70 per week and peg it to inflation.¹⁷⁰ This will help Victorian carers cover children's basic living costs and build a safe, supportive and sustainable home environment.

DAISY'S FOSTER CARE FUNDING STRUGGLES

I have a child who has high psychological and educational needs but is only on the basic level one care allowance. Despite my requests DHHS have not assessed her as needing higher funding. The criteria for determining higher levels of funding are both vague and opaque and no one can give me an adequate explanation of why I have not qualified.

The base care allowance in Victoria is one of the lowest in Australia and does not cover day-to-day living costs. At present I am paying for all allied health care services such as occupational therapy and counselling without any guarantee of reimbursement. ■

Prevent family violence and violence against women

Provide enduring, coordinated resources for family violence prevention

Victoria now has a blueprint to combat the problem of family violence and violence against women: *Free From Violence*.¹⁷¹ The Victorian Government can provide leadership and enduring resources for a successful, holistic prevention strategy. This will require recurrent funds, both to extend existing family violence prevention work, like *Partners in Prevention*,¹⁷² and ensure the Office of Women and Respect Victoria can successfully implement the strategy. Gender Equity Victoria has called for 10 per cent of family violence funding to go towards prevention.¹⁷³

Victoria has a history of successful public campaigns that have reduced deaths and injuries. Smoking rates more than halved between 1987 and 2012.¹⁷⁴ This was achieved through cultural, legislative and organisational changes, public awareness campaigns and research. Victoria's next successful public campaign should be to reduce family violence deaths and injuries.

Foster strong, nurturing families

Invest in prevention and early intervention services for families

Investing in prevention and early intervention services helps promote the health and wellbeing of children and families. Supporting positive parent-child interactions helps strengthen families and improves children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive development.

VCOSS welcomes the commitment by the Victorian Government to invest in seven new Early Parenting Centres, baby bundles, first aid training for new parents, a revamped 24-hour phone line, new payroll tax exemption for all parents who access paid parental leave, and expanding first time parent groups.¹⁷⁵


The Victorian Government can also consider expanding programs that support access to intensive therapeutic support early in life, such as right@home nurse home visits, Aboriginal and mainstream Cradle to Kinder¹⁷⁶ and Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies.¹⁷⁷ Investing in outreach perinatal support services and best practice programs for new and expectant parents who may be experiencing or at risk of perinatal depression should also be a priority.¹⁷⁸

RIGHT@HOME NURSE HOME VISITING PROGRAM

right@home delivers sustained nurse home visits for families at risk of poorer maternal and child health and development. Beginning during pregnancy and continuing until the child reaches two, parents receive 25 home visits by a specially trained nurse, who builds parents' ability to create a safe, responsive care and a home environment. All nurse teams are supported by a social worker.¹⁷⁹

An extensive randomly-controlled trial showed right@home improved parenting and the home learning environment for families experiencing adversity compared with existing services. It found the program could be scaled up and integrated into well-child health care in Australia.¹⁸⁰ ■

Ensure women
and children
can thrive, and
live free from
violence



Empower parents with disability to care for their children

Fund dedicated supports for parents with disability

Many people with disability face discriminatory attitudes and beliefs about their parenting capacity,^{181,182} creating barriers to starting a family and affecting the parenting support they receive.¹⁸³

Like all parents, parents with disability need some important basic supports – including stable housing, adequate income, and a social support network – and may also need specialised supports.¹⁸⁴

Timely access to appropriate information and services is important, but standard parenting programs are rarely inclusive and providers often lack the experience or resources to adapt their programs. Existing programs like the Strengthening Parenting Support Program,¹⁸⁵ or the federally funded MyTime,¹⁸⁶ are designed for parents of children with disability, but there are no specific programs for parents with disability, whose children may not have disabilities.

The Victorian Government should establish an evidence-based program for parents with disability to help support their parenting across their child's life – from pregnancy into their child's adulthood. The program should take into account the needs and wellbeing of individuals and the family as a whole, provide opportunities for parents to connect, and be available for families long-term.¹⁸⁷

KRISTEN, FOSTER MOTHER WITH DISABILITY

It turns out actually that everybody needs support to parent... It turns out that maybe the problem is not with women with disabilities wanting to have children. Maybe the problem is... with the society that we live in. People seem to think that it is okay for everybody else to need support to parent, but it is not okay for us to need that support.¹⁸⁸ ■

Help young people leaving care to thrive

Ensure every young care leaver is supported until they are 21

The Victorian Government has invested \$11.6 million over five years to roll out Home Stretch, to allow 250 more young people the chance to stay in care until the age of 21.¹⁸⁹

VCOSS believes the same opportunity should be extended to the approximately 500 young people leaving out-of-home care each year.¹⁹⁰ Extending the support available to all young care-leavers until they are 21 will help ensure they have the skills and educational opportunities to succeed in life.

In the modern world, young people usually continue to get family support well after their 18th birthday, often living at home for extended periods and getting parents' help to continue study, find a home and secure a job.

Every child in out-of-home care is supposed to commence transition planning from the age of 15, guided by the Victorian Government's Looking After Children framework. This framework states transition plans should focus on health, emotional and behavioural development, education, family and social relationships, identity, social presentation, and self-care skills.¹⁹¹

But most young people leaving care don't have a transition plan, and stretched caseloads mean case workers often focus on urgent needs like housing, rather than more holistic planning.¹⁹² Young care leavers are less likely to finish Year 12,¹⁹³ but only 19 per cent report having an Individual Education Plan.¹⁹⁴ If all young people leave care with a transition plan, completed long before they leave, they will be more likely to thrive after leaving.

Ensure Aboriginal Children in out-of-home care are strong in culture

Continue supporting the transfer of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care to Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations

Despite making up only 1 per cent of the population, 22 per cent of Aboriginal children live in out-of-home care.¹⁹⁵ The Victorian Government has committed to resource and support Aboriginal organisations to care for Aboriginal children, families and communities in its landmark agreement with the Aboriginal community and community organisations: Wungurilwil Gapgapduir.¹⁹⁶ Targets have been established to transfer 100 per cent of Aboriginal children to Aboriginal care by 2021.¹⁹⁷

Wungurilwil Gapgapduir, meaning 'strong families' in Latji Latji, outlines strategic directions to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by building their connection to culture, country and community. It was developed in consultation with the Aboriginal community, as well as with Aboriginal services and key mainstream child service organisations. It is supplemented by a Strategic Action Plan detailing steps to address Aboriginal children and young people's over-representation in the child protection and out-of-home care systems.

The Victorian Government can continue to transfer guardianship of Aboriginal children to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, with the necessary resources, to better promote connection to family, culture, community and self-determination.

Ensure women
and children
can thrive, and
live free from
violence

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Ensure every young person in residential care has access to high quality, therapeutic programs

Therapeutic care recognises the trauma children have experienced, and uses professionally supported, skilled staff to help children manage their own behaviour. The Victorian Government should make sure every young person in a residential care setting has access to therapeutic programs catering for their specific needs.¹⁹⁸

■ Prioritise playgroups

Playgroups bring young children, parents, families and communities together through providing informal play activities and social interaction. They help parents and caregivers build important social and support networks and link families into local community, health and support services. The Victorian Government can support children's early development and health and wellbeing by increasing investment in parent-led community playgroups and supported playgroups for families experiencing disadvantage.

164 Victorian Government, The 227 Recommendations.

165 Victorian Government, Plan for Change.

166 Destroy the Joint. Counting Dead Women Australia.

167 Family Violence Implementation Monitor, Report of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor, 2017.

168 Australian Institute of Family Studies, Children in care, CFCA Resource Sheet – September 2018.

169 J Fergeus, C Humphreys, C Harvey, and H Herrman, 'Is the concept of a hierarchy of needs applicable to foster and kinship carers?' *Adoption & Fostering*, forthcoming 2019.

170 Foster Care Association of Victoria, *Increase the Carer Allowance*, 2018.

171 Victorian Government, Free from Violence – Victoria's prevention strategy.

172 Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, Partners in Prevention.

173 Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC), Media Release, Priorities for Victorian Government Action 2018–2021, 15 August 2018.

174 H Keleher, *Prevention and Public Health Strategies to Inform the Primary Prevention of Family Violence and Violence Against Women*, Commissioned to VicHealth by Department of Premier and Cabinet, March 2017.

175 Jenny Mikakos, Young Families Package, 19 November 2018.

176 Victorian Government, Department of Health and Human Services, Families & children, Cradle to Kinder and Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder.

177 Victorian Government, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies.

178 Victorian Parliament. Family and Community Development Committee, Parliamentary Inquiry into perinatal services, 2018, p. 156; Commission for Children and Young People, *Annual report 2017–18*, p. 18.

179 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, right@home.

- 180 Goldfeld S, Price A, Smith C, *et al.* Nurse Home Visiting for Families Experiencing Adversity: A Randomized Trial. *Pediatrics*. 2019;143(1):e20181206
- 181 Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Involuntary or coerced sterilisation of people with disabilities in Australia*, July 2013.
- 182 ABC Radio National, 'We've Got This' series, 2018.
- 183 Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Involuntary or coerced sterilisation of people with disabilities in Australia, final report*, July 2013.
- 184 New Zealand Families Commission, *Disabled Parents: Diversity, Experiences and Support Needs*, 2012.
- 185 Victorian Department of Education and Training, *Strengthening Parent Support Program: Policy and Funding Guidelines*, July 2017.
- 186 Australian Government Department of Social Services, *MyTime: supporting parents of children with disabilities*.
- 187 *Ibid.*
- 188 Quote from Kristen, a foster mother with disability, in the Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee's *report into the involuntary or coerced sterilisation of people with disabilities in Australia*, 2013, p. 25.
- 189 Victorian Premier, Media Release, *Helping Vulnerable Young People on the Home Stretch*, 25 September 2018.
- 190 Victorian Government, Department of Health and Human Services, *Leaving care*.
- 191 *Ibid.*
- 192 Australian Government, Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Beyond 18: The Longitudinal Study on Leaving Care: Wave 1 Research Report: Transition planning and preparation*, May 2018.
- 193 *Ibid.*
- 194 *Ibid.*
- 195 Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into the financial support provided to kinship carers*, December 2017, p. 5.
- 196 Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement*, April 2018.
- 197 Commission for Children and Young People, *Annual Report 2017–18*, p. 32.
- 198 Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, *Putting children at the centre: 2018 State Election*.





Healthy Victorians

Being healthy in body and mind is a key part of leading a good life. Victorians must be supported to stay strong and avoid sickness, recover quickly if they are injured or ill, and have a full life if they do have longer-lasting conditions.

Poor health is unfortunately more common among people who experience poverty, discrimination and a lack of education or employment. This leads to higher rates of preventable hospitalisation, chronic disease and premature death.

People experiencing hardship or marginalisation are also less able to get help when ill or injured, and find it harder to recover from health challenges. Health inequity is more pronounced in regional Victoria.

Victoria can build a comprehensive, easy-to-access and low-cost health system, focusing on preventive and primary health services. We can dismantle barriers and recognise community health clinics and social services as critical entry points to the broader health system.

Deliver a successful Royal Commission into Mental Health

Ensure the Royal Commission has the resources for a broad-ranging inquiry, which prominently features people with lived experience

The Royal Commission into Mental Health presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to promote a mentally healthy Victoria, and change the way that people experiencing mental ill-health are supported. Victoria's mental health system was once the envy of Australia. The Royal Commission provides an opportunity to build on this legacy, and again place Victoria at the forefront of mental health in the nation.

VCOSS members desire the Royal Commission to have a broad scope to determine the most effective means of improving the mental health of Victorians, observing that many useful changes may lie beyond the mental health system. They desire a future-focused inquiry identifying best practice.¹⁹⁹

The Royal Commission must prominently feature the voices of people with lived experience, their families and carers. Many people with lived experience of mental illness want to tell their stories, including the trauma they experienced in the mental health system. The Commissioners can adopt a human rights and trauma-informed approach to gathering evidence and framing the inquiry.

The Royal Commission can examine diversity and difference in mental wellbeing, using an intersectional approach, incorporating examination of identity, life-course, geography and socio-economic status.

The Victorian Government can provide appropriate resources for a successful Royal Commission into Mental Health to produce an ambitious but achievable plan for a new approach to mental wellbeing.

Give every Victorian a healthy smile

Use school dental vans as a prevention platform, and boost funds for emergency and ongoing dental care

The Victorian Government has introduced a major reform in bringing back school dental vans for every public school, producing a marked improvement to dental services for children.

Prevention, early intervention and improved access to dental services are crucial to boosting oral health. The Victorian Government can embed evidence-based education into the school dental program, using their presence at schools to provide prevention and early intervention service, in addition to treatment.

The Victorian Government can expand on the work of its dental vans by building a system that provides equitable access to timely and affordable dental care for every Victorians. More than half of Victorian children aged three to five have signs of tooth decay.²⁰⁰ The average waiting time for a Victorian adult to receive general dental care in the public system is more than 20 months, and the longest waiting time is 42 months.^{201,202}

The Victorian Government can increased funding for public dental services across Victoria's community health sector, going a long way to providing easily accessible dental care, improving prevention, early detection and treatment.

Ensure that people experiencing mental illness continue to get the support they need

Provide emergency funding to the community mental health sector

The Victorian Government has taken a bold step in calling a Royal Commission into Mental Health, which can examine the pressures at every point of the mental health system. We hope that the Royal Commission will give us a roadmap for the future. But the Victorian Government must also act now, to address immediate issues.

Community mental health services, and the Victorians who most rely on them, have been significantly affected by the NDIS transition. Victoria redirected community mental health services funding to the NDIS, unlike other states, which increased funding. As a result, experienced community mental health workers are leaving the sector and being replaced with less qualified staff, or not at all.

An estimated \$200 million each year is needed to provide adequate community mental health support to 35,900 Victorians.²⁰³ The Government's commitment to \$70 million over two years for community mental health will help, but will not reach everyone.

An extra funding boost will attract experienced mental health workers back into the workforce to support people who no longer receive community mental health services. This will help ensure that people experiencing mental ill-health continue to get the support they need during the Royal Commission's investigations.

MICK IS LOSING ACCESS TO COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mick Cairns is a 68-year-old client of Merri Health's mental health support services. He has been going to Merri Health for many years and has been attending the arts and crafts sessions in the Day to Day Living program. The program provides an array of social activities to support mental wellbeing, but is not funded beyond 30 June 2019.

"Three or four days a week, I am in my element painting in the art studio. Julie and David run the programs and their support has been invaluable to me. Julie's wise suggestions have made me a better artist. David's friendly support is enriching socially. These programs are what get me up in the morning."

"It would leave a huge gap in my life if the funding for these programs ceased. Please do your best to make sure that I can look forward to the future confidently." ■

Expand alcohol and other drug treatment services

Build more AOD rehabilitation places, including in regional Victoria

The Victorian Government can help people overcome addiction and problem drug and alcohol use by boosting the number of residential rehabilitation beds available. These offer live-in treatment for people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction. Seeking treatment can be difficult, and a responsive system with sufficient capacity means people can find a bed soon after deciding to get help.

But these state-funded programs have long wait-lists that impede timely treatment – Victoria has the second-lowest ratio of residential rehabilitation beds per capita in Australia.²⁰⁴ Private residential rehabilitation is prohibitively expensive for many people, and poorly regulated, with some providers of questionable quality.

Rural and regional Victoria has particularly urgent needs. Regional Victoria has higher rates of drug overdose deaths than Melbourne, and they are rising faster.²⁰⁵ People living in regional and rural areas face difficulties accessing services, and must travel to Melbourne to get treatment.²⁰⁶

Rural and regional Victorians need rehabilitation services close to home. Given the lengthy nature of rehabilitation programs, a locally-based program enables people to stay connected with their family and community.

Treatment beds per 1,000 people



Source: Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Take pressure off hospitals by implementing the recommendations of the Victorian Community Health Taskforce

Victorian community health services are incredibly efficient,²⁰⁷ and target their services to people experiencing disadvantage with high health needs. The Community Health Taskforce is investigating strategies to build an even stronger, more effective system. The Victorian Government can commit to implementing its recommendations to help keep struggling Victorians well and out of hospital.

■ Tackle eating disorders

Eating disorders are serious psychiatric disorders affecting 234,000 Victorians.²⁰⁸ Help for people with eating disorders crosses both health and mental health systems, but there is limited co-ordination, policy framework or dedicated funding. The Victorian Government can develop and fund a coordinated response to eating disorders.

■ Invest in assertive outreach suicide prevention programs

VCOSS applauds the Victorian Government's recent announcement of an expansion of the Hospital Outreach Post-suicidal Engagement Program (HOPE) to six more hospitals.²⁰⁹ The Victorian Government can continue investing in and expanding assertive suicide prevention responses.

199 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Towards a successful Mental Health Royal Commission*, VCOSS submission to the Royal Commission into Mental Health Terms of Reference Consultation, January 2019.

200 Dental Health Services Victoria, Victorian-first study helping children fight tooth decay.

201 Victorian Agency for Health Information, Statewide – Average time to treatment for general dental care – Quarterly Data.

202 Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch, Public Dental Waiting Times 2018.

203 Mental Health Victoria, *Saving money. Saving lives. The case for better investment in Victorian mental health*, June 2018.

204 Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, *Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform*, March 2018.

205 Pennington Institute, *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2018*, p.38.

206 Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, *Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform*, March 2018.

207 Victorian Auditor General Office, *Community Health Program*, June 2018.

208 Eating Disorders Victoria, Eating Disorders Carer Workshop.

209 Minister for Mental Health, *Suicide Prevention Program Expands To Six More Hospitals*, Media Release, 14 August 2018.





Inclusive communities for people with disability, older people and carers

Genuinely including everybody in our community means people can develop relationships, be independent, and lead active lives.²¹⁰

By improving access to buildings and transport; delivering accessible, up-to-date information and services; and challenging stereotypes and discrimination, the Victorian Government can help break down the barriers holding people back, leaving them out, or leading to abuse and neglect.

As state-funded disability and aged care systems are dismantled and transferred, the Victorian Government must ensure they remain accessible and available. Safeguards must be maintained and strengthened.

The Victorian Government has made decisive commitments in releasing the Victorian Carer Strategy²¹¹ and the Disability Advocacy Futures Plan.²¹² These can be backed up with deeper commitments and secure funding so everyone can participate in Victoria's rich community life.

Inclusive
communities
for people
with disability,
older people
and carers

Amplify the voices of people with disability

Lock in disability advocacy funding permanently

Disability advocacy empowers people with disability and their families and carers to understand their rights, communicate and meet their needs.²¹³ The NDIS and other changes to disability services are increasing the volume and complexity of advocacy cases, putting advocacy organisations under stress.²¹⁴

The Victorian Disability Advocacy Futures Plan increases core advocacy funding and provides advocacy grants in the short term.²¹⁵ But disability advocacy organisations face dramatic funding drops after June 2020, when the Advocacy Plan funding boost and Federal commitments expire. Advocacy organisations cannot protect the rights of people with disability if they are constantly trapped in short-term funding cycles.

Recurrent, expanded advocacy funding helps organisations plan for the future and reach more people with disability, including those in marginalised communities and those who have previously missed out on advocacy. Expanding advocacy also makes economic sense – for every \$1 invested, governments save \$3.50.²¹⁶

Stop disability service gaps emerging

Maintain state-funded services through the NDIS transition

About 105,000 Victorians will be NDIS participants at full roll-out.²¹⁷ But one million Victorians with disability will be ineligible,²¹⁸ and need services outside the NDIS. Many program funds are being reallocated to the NDIS, leaving little else. Addressing service gaps is especially urgent for people experiencing mental illness, older Victorians, and carers.

Simultaneously, the NDIS and other service systems are handballing responsibility for funding services, including in health, justice, housing, transport and child protection. Both NDIS and mainstream services claim the other has responsibility to provide services, leaving people stuck in the middle without the help they need.²¹⁹

People with disability and their families and carers need access to quality services, regardless of their NDIS eligibility. Being left without support risks people's physical and mental health, and increases pressure on other, more expensive services, including hospitals, crisis services and the justice system. It also increases reliance on family and carers.

All governments remain responsible for inclusive, decently funded, mainstream services for people with disability and their carers – including those ineligible for the NDIS. The Victorian Government must ensure systems work seamlessly before de-funding services as the Victorian NDIS roll-out concludes in 2019.

Launch a super-stop and station access building blitz

Launch a dedicated accessible transport fund to accelerate upgrades

Everyone needs to be able to get to work, school or appointments, but outdated public transport infrastructure can stymie people's attempts. Too often, whether people can use public transport depends on things like where they live, when they're travelling, their income, or whether they have a disability.

Many rural and regional areas have limited public transport,²²⁰ and even less accessible public transport.²²¹ Even Melbourne is failing to meet its accessibility targets, with less than a quarter of tram stops²²² currently meeting the Accessible Transport Standards.²²³ A recent investigation found more than two thirds of people with disability said transport inaccessibility meant they missed out on valuable activities.²²⁴

While progress is being made, it is painfully slow. The Victorian Government needs to accelerate public transport accessibility improvements, including by rapidly rolling out accessible tram super-stops and fully accessible train station retrofits. Establishing a dedicated, long-term government investment fund would allow systematic planning and sequencing of legacy infrastructure upgrades to maximise access for all Victorians.²²⁵

Champion and sustain carers

Deliver respite care, sustain peer support, and bolster carers beyond the NDIS roll-out

More than 770,000 Victorians care for those they love, without being paid.²²⁶ Family and friends provide deep interpersonal relationships and continuous support not easily replaced by paid carers.

The Victorian Carer Strategy 2018–22 recognises carers' rights and begins to strategically address the unique and specific needs of people in care relationships.²²⁷ The strategy reflects different care experiences, including both young and older carers, on issues like employment, health, education and financial disadvantage.

In the lead-up to the Victorian Election, the Government committed to nearly \$50 million in funding for an extra 100,000 hours of respite care each year, and \$4 million in grants for carer support groups.²²⁸ The next step is to begin implementing the carer strategy, so adequate support is available for Victorian carers as the NDIS rollout finishes this year, and beyond.

Inclusive
communities
for people
with disability,
older people
and carers

Produce a blueprint for ageing in Victoria

Develop and implement a future-focussed state-wide ageing strategy

By 2031, almost one in four Victorians will be over 60.²²⁹ The challenges this creates and the opportunities it brings can be best met if we thoughtfully plan now, through collaboration across generations, to meet our community's changing needs.

*An ageing population brings new economic and social opportunities – if we embrace what modern ageing can bring.*²³⁰

Older Victorians want to remain active in communities comprising people of all ages, including by sharing their wisdom and skills with others through work and volunteering. They want secure, affordable and accessible homes as they age, connected to services and opportunities with good access to transport. They want to be included in community life through a variety of communication methods, and not forced to use digital services.²³¹

A Victorian ageing strategy can strategically identify the challenges and opportunities an ageing population brings, and whole-of-government actions to support better access and inclusion. It can reflect our diverse community, including the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, older people with disability, and the LGBTIQ community.²³²

Combat elder abuse

Deliver an integrated strategy to address elder abuse

Around one in six older people experience elder abuse.²³³ Elder abuse is any action that harms or distresses an older person, carried out by someone they know, including physical violence, psychological or emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.²³⁴

The Victorian Government can make a strong commitment to improving safety and inclusion for older Victorians, by creating a Victorian elder abuse strategy. A collaboratively developed platform, co-designed with older people, community organisations and business, can promote the dignity, agency and autonomy of older people,²³⁵ and recognise discrimination's multi-layered impact. It can provide a solid foundation for co-ordination and co-producing services across government and the community.²³⁶

An overarching strategy should include enduring support for local elder abuse prevention networks, resourcing frontline staff training to detect and respond to abuse, and investing in specialist services to help meet growing demand for information, advocacy and support.²³⁷

FURTHER STRATEGIES

■ Guarantee safeguards to protect people with disability

Despite numerous reviews and inquiries, people with disability face high levels of violence, abuse and neglect. The NDIS helps in some ways, but also brings new safety and quality challenges. The Victorian Government has a continuing role to create and maintain strong safeguards outside the NDIS, especially for mainstream services.

■ Expand disability and inclusion training

Workers, especially in the public sector, provide many critical services. But people with disability report that workers are missing basic information on providing appropriate support to people with disability.²³⁸ The Victorian Government can expand its capacity to train workers, using a human rights approach and emphasising participation and inclusion.²³⁹

■ Increase access to public spaces

Victoria can build more inclusive public places by ensuring new developments are accessible, and investing in initiatives such as Changing Places facilities (fully accessible toilets and changing rooms) to increase the accessibility of existing spaces.²⁴⁰

Inclusive communities for people with disability, older people and carers

- 210 A Mathers, *The four jewels of inclusive communities*, Good Things Foundation, 2018.
- 211 Victorian Government, *Recognising and supporting Victoria's carers: Victorian carer strategy 2018–22*.
- 212 Victorian Government, *Disability Advocacy Futures Plan 2018–20*, 2018.
- 213 Disability Advocacy Resource Unit, *What is disability advocacy?* 2016.
- 214 Disability Advocacy Resource Unit, *Disability Advocacy by the Numbers: Statistics from July 2012 to June 2016 from the Victorian Office for Disability Advocacy Program Quarterly Data Collection*, 2017.
- 215 Victorian Government, *Disability Advocacy Futures Plan 2018–20*, 2018.
- 216 A Daly, G Barrett and R Williams, *A Cost Benefit Analysis of Australian independent disability advocacy agencies*, for the Disability Advocacy Network Australia, 2017. The government savings figure is based on the estimated cost savings that could be made in education, health, justice and other government services.
- 217 NDIA, *NDIS Victoria roll out: Participant Information Pack*, 2015.
- 218 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4430.0 – Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia*, data for Victoria, 2015.
- 219 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Empowered Lives: Securing Change for Victorians with Disability*, 2018.
- 220 K Rosier and M McDonald, *The relationship between transport and disadvantage in Australia*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2011.
- 221 B Nielsen, 'V/Line pays thousands for taxis due to trains being wheelchair inaccessible,' *ABC News*, 28 February 2018.
- 222 T Jacks, 'Trapped on a 96 tram: No accessible stops added an hour to James' journey,' *The Age*, 9 May 2018.
- 223 Australian Government, *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*.
- 224 Disability Resources Centre, *Transport for All: Report from the Accessible Public Transport Project*, November 2018.
- 225 Victorian Council of Social Service, *Creating Accessible Journeys*, 2011.
- 226 Carers Victoria, *Take Action for Victorian Carers: Pre-Budget Submission 2016–17*, 2017.
- 227 Victorian Government, *Recognising and supporting Victoria's carers: Victorian carer strategy 2018–22*.
- 228 Victorian Government, *Caring For Our Carers With More Respite And Support*, 13 September 2018.
- 229 COTA Victoria, *An Agenda for Ageing in Victoria*, The Alliance for An Agenda for Ageing, 2018.
- 230 Ibid., p. 3.
- 231 COTA Victoria, *State Election Platform*, 2018.
- 232 COTA Victoria, *An Agenda for Ageing in Victoria*, The Alliance for An Agenda for Ageing, 2018.
- 233 COTA Victoria, *State Election Platform*, 2018, p. 12.
- 234 Seniors Rights Victoria, *FAQs about Elder Abuse*, 2013.
- 235 Australian Law Reform Commission, *Elder Abuse: A National Legal Response*, Final report, 2017.
- 236 COTA Victoria, *State Election Platform*, 2018, p. 12.
- 237 COTA Victoria, *State Election Platform*, 2018, p. 12; Australian Law Reform Commission, *Elder Abuse: A National Legal Response*, Final report, 2017.
- 238 Victorian Council for Social Service, *Empowered Lives: Securing Change for Victorians with Disability*, 2018.
- 239 VEOHRC, *From Principle to Practice: Implementing the human rights based approach in community organisations*, September 2008.
- 240 Association for Children with a Disability and Victorian Government, *Changing Places: Transforming Lives. Information Guide & Technical Standards*, 2017.

Victorian Council of Social Service

Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street,
Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

e vcoss@vcoss.org.au

t 03 9235 1000

www.vcoss.org.au

