

Annual Report  
2019-20





The Victorian Council of Social Service is the peak body of Victoria's social and community sector.

Our 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.

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VCOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country and pays our respects to Elders past and present.

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CHAIR'S REPORT	02
FROM THE CEO	03
OVERARCHING THEMES	04
POLICY AND ADVOCACY	06
FORUMS FOR INFLUENCE	12
STRENGTHENING THE COMMUNITY SECTOR	14
SUPPORTING A WORKFORCE BOOM	18
WORKING WITH PARTNERS	20
KEEPING VCOSS HEALTHY AND STRONG	22
THE VCOSS BOARD	24
TREASURER'S REPORT	26
FINANCIAL REPORT	27
OUR MEMBERS	29



# Chair's Report

Between the bushfires, the COVID pandemic and the lockdowns, 2019-20 has been a year like no other. The hardships and challenges have been traumatising for us as a society, and also in many respects as a sector.

They have also been catalysing.

These difficult times, and VCOSS's response to them, have brought our sector to the fore and shed light on its critical role. Our role will be just as important moving forward, into a rebuilding phase that must be respectful and responsive to community needs.

COVID – its devastating speed and impact – has taught us things about ourselves. We are responsive and agile. We can move quickly, be courageous and bold in investments in our sector, and in supporting the essential work our sector does for vulnerable communities.

Against this backdrop we developed our new Strategic Plan, designed in consultation with members and with these insights in mind. It will chart a course for VCOSS over the coming years, for a thriving sector that supports the wellbeing of people and communities.

I'm incredibly grateful to my fellow Board members for their time and commitment in a year when their 'day jobs' have been particularly busy.

I want to acknowledge the phenomenal work of our CEO Emma King and the whole VCOSS team, who have represented and advocated for the sector with commitment, integrity and agility.

The partnerships and collaborations that are VCOSS's lifeblood have been particularly important during this time: partnerships with government – ministers who have really 'come to the table' with an unprecedented amount of time, attention and will to get things done; partnerships with sector and industry leaders who have come together to co-design responses for Victoria's recovery.

VCOSS has felt the weight of its responsibility during 2019-20 – to represent and advocate for a sector that has never been more vital, and for communities whose needs have never been greater.



**Stella Avramopoulos**  
VCOSS President

The achievements outlined in this Annual Report are a testament not just to VCOSS as an organisation but to the strength of our sector, and the amazing commitment of our members to ensuring all Victorians can live a good life. I could not be prouder, and I look forward to working with our members, partners and allies through the difficult, vitally important recovery period to come.

**Stella Avramopoulos**  
President

# From the CEO



**Emma King**  
VCOSS Chief Executive Officer

Like any defining moment in human history, the past year can be split neatly into two distinct halves: in this instance it's before COVID and during COVID.

When COVID struck, it sent a shockwave across the community and turbocharged demand for the services VCOSS members deliver. It also exposed the fragilities and failings of our broader social security and government support systems.

Governments were forced to respond quickly and boldly. Community organisations stepped up, as they always do, and VCOSS was active informing, scrutinising and, where appropriate, supporting this broad community response.

But despite the upheaval, in some regards COVID didn't change anything.

For over 70 years, VCOSS has fought for equality, fairness, economic justice and the right of every person to lead a good life, regardless of their individual circumstances. Global events may have raised the stakes and changed the operating environment, but this goal remains unchanged and VCOSS's commitment to it unshaken.

In that context, it's worth acknowledging the many achievements of the past year separate from the pandemic response: from advances in workforce development (p. 18) to advocacy on climate change (p. 7) and the development of an innovative new traineeships model (p. 18), just to name a few.

This Annual Report seeks to detail some of these key successes and milestones. But by necessity it is an incomplete list, and no document can truly capture the pride and awe with which I regard the achievements of both VCOSS and the wider community sector over the past year.

I would like to thank all who have worked with and supported VCOSS over the last year, including our members, partners, funders and those in our community who have trusted us to share their personal experiences of poverty and disadvantage.

I'd like to thank the VCOSS board for their commitment, generosity and stewardship in what has been an extraordinary year. I'd also like to acknowledge their work in 2019-20 towards developing a new Strategic Plan. In particular I would like to thank Stella Avramopoulos for her exceptional guidance and support to the governance and strategic direction of VCOSS. This was particularly vital during the pandemic and the leadership she has shown has truly gone above and beyond.

To the VCOSS staff: thank you! For your effort, resilience and general brilliance. For your ability to adapt in an ever-changing environment, for your commitment to VCOSS and everything VCOSS stands for, and for looking out and caring for one another. It is my absolute privilege to work with you.

The coming years will be challenging but I'm confident that working together towards achieving wellbeing for every Victorian and Victorian community, we can meet these challenges head on.

**Emma King**  
Chief Executive Officer





## Overarching themes in 2020

### Gender

VCOSS is committed to gender equity and to ensuring that all Victorians regardless of their gender identity have access to equal power, resources and opportunities, and are treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

In 2019-20 we have pursued the elimination of all forms of violence against women and children, through participation in implementing the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations, and partnerships with organisations across the family violence and family services sectors.

Women are disproportionately on the frontline of the COVID pandemic—the majority of health care workers, social assistance workers and teachers are women, as are the majority of unpaid carers. Data shows an intensification of violence, and particularly domestic violence, against women and girls since the outbreak of COVID. VCOSS has ensured that gender equity underpins and informs our policy and advocacy work in response to COVID.

### A fair and just Victoria

#### First Nations

VCOSS recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples. We are committed to an ongoing journey to support meaningful self-determination and reconciliation. During 2019-20 we have seen the Black Lives Matter movement gather momentum and support for change. We are committed to doing our part to dismantle systemic racism and improve outcomes for First Nations people.

VCOSS has begun work with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector and the community services industry to develop a Compact, articulating a shared vision for Aboriginal self-determination, and the responsibility of mainstream community service organisations in progressing self-determination. In July 2019 VCOSS and the wider COSS network released a joint statement welcoming the Federal Government commitment to move forward with Constitutional recognition for First Nations people, as part of a broader push towards genuine, meaningful and lasting reconciliation.

We have worked closely with Aboriginal partners including Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victorian Aboriginal Executive Council, Change the Record and the Coalition of Peaks.

Through our policy and advocacy work we have sought to address the disturbingly high rates of incarceration and deaths in custody and lower health, social and economic outcomes experienced by Aboriginal Victorians.

The key document governing VCOSS's commitment is the VCOSS Reconciliation Action Plan. Throughout 2019-20 VCOSS commenced planning for our next Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan.

Recognition must be more than words. Words alone cannot soothe our nation. Our commitments must be written in our actions.

#### COVID-19

The social and economic fallout from COVID is a common thread through much of VCOSS's work in late 2019-20. Its impacts are significant and far reaching, as noted extensively elsewhere. The long tail of the COVID recession will be with us for many years, shaping and influencing community need, demand for services and how organisations deliver support. COVID and its numerous implications are referenced extensively throughout this Annual Report.



# Policy and Advocacy towards a fairer Victoria

## Major reports/workstreams/projects

### Disability advocacy

As an advocate and an ally for a better, fairer and more just Victoria, VCOSS works alongside people with disability, advocacy organisations and support services to advocate for systemic change. As part of this, VCOSS provides backbone support for 'Empowered Lives', a network of over 40 Victorian disability advocacy organisations to undertake coordinated systemic advocacy.

VCOSS and 'Empowered Lives' members share a vision for an inclusive Victoria where people with disability have the same opportunities as other Victorians. Since the launch of the Empowered Lives platform in September 2018, Empowered Lives members have worked together on a range of collaborative policy submissions, and on advocacy to decision makers on key issues such as transport accessibility and COVID responses.

### Building knowledge, resilience and sustainability

The roll-out of the NDIS continues to transform disability services and supports for Victorians. Through projects, submissions and research, VCOSS continues to advocate for a fair transition and ongoing, high quality support for people with disability, their families and carers.

We are exploring the impact of the NDIS on Victorian disability advocacy and self-advocacy organisations through a collaborative research project. VCOSS and key project partners, including the Future Social Service Institute, the Disability Advocacy Resource Unit and the Self Advocacy Resource Unit, are working together to examine the increased demand and pressures on disability advocacy organisations, and to develop tools and resources informed by the insights of this research.

The Strengthening Sector Resilience (SSR) Project supported Victorian disability organisations to be user-led and well-positioned for the future. Through the project, VCOSS worked with disability information organisations and advocacy services to prepare for and access NDIS Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grants. The project provided a suite of training workshops and targeted assistance to participating organisations. A review of the collective learnings of this project was completed and will inform further opportunities for capacity building and transition support.

## A fair and just Victoria

### Responding to climate change

VCOSS is not an environmental policy organisation, but believes it has a critical role to play in debates around global warming, economic transformation and the development of fair, equitable and sustainable responses to climate change.

The flagship VCOSS report 'A Climate of Fairness' (launched in October 2019) explores climate equity in Victoria and VCOSS's concerns that people experiencing disadvantage are already being affected by climate impacts like prolonged heatwaves, escalating bushfire risk, and growing food insecurity. Key recommendations include energy efficiency standards for rental properties and support for the community sector to build resilience to natural disasters.

VCOSS engaged in joint public advocacy with the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, Victorian Trades Hall Council, Environment Victoria and others, to encourage the Victorian Government to act boldly on climate change, and provided advice to all seven of the Victorian Government's Adaptation Action Plans, to ensure that sectors like transport, primary production and the built environment consider the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable communities. Meantime, VCOSS members have been linked with the place-based Regional Adaptation Strategies so the community sector's voice is represented.

Although the COVID pandemic has delayed climate action overall, the need for economic stimulus has created opportunities for green proposals that also advance social justice.

### Improving emergency management

Throughout 2019-20, VCOSS continued to advocate for the needs of people who may be vulnerable and disadvantaged in emergencies, and to highlight the role of community and social service organisations before, during and after emergency events. The devastating 2019-20 bushfires and the COVID pandemic highlighted the crucial role that the community and social service sector plays during emergencies and disasters.

VCOSS's ongoing work in emergency management was brought to the fore in March 2020 as the COVID pandemic took hold. VCOSS worked closely with the Victorian Government, peak bodies and community organisations to support the sector throughout the evolving emergency response and relief measures, and in dealing with governance changes and increasing demand across the community sector.

To ensure that the community sector was supported and the needs of Victorians facing vulnerability and disadvantage were addressed, VCOSS and the Victorian Government established new partnerships and protocols, and expanded on existing ones, to share advice and information and manage issues relating to COVID. This included HSHPIC and the VCOSS CEOs Forum, and Peaks and Statewide Networks. VCOSS was also invited to become a member of the State Relief and Recovery Team, one of six key teams operating at state level that support coordination of emergency relief and recovery.

VCOSS will continue to partner with the community sector and the Victorian Government to ensure the needs of community organisations and vulnerable people continue to be met during and after the pandemic.





Helping renters

In 2020, to make renting fairer, the Victorian Government commenced the final stages of the biggest residential tenancy law reform in Victoria's history. VCOSS has been actively engaged with the Victorian Government since the reform process commenced in 2017. Our advocacy is reflected in the new laws, which protect renters against discrimination, mandate minimum standards for amenity, and allow renters to make modifications for safety, accessibility and comfort.

Effects of the COVID pandemic have been widely felt in our community, including housing insecurity, which particularly affects Victorians renters. VCOSS, alongside many of our member organisations, has been working with the Victorian Government to develop a number of emergency legislative changes to support Victorian renters to stay in their homes, as well as implementing additional programs to manage housing costs during the pandemic and into the future.

**Addressing housing and homelessness challenges**

*Make Social Housing Work* is a ten-year framework for Victoria's public and community housing, developed by the Housing Peaks Alliance. It was first published in 2014 and updated in 2019 to reflect the critical need for increased supply of social housing: based on population growth, data from Victoria's social housing waiting list and indicators of housing stress, we need 6,000 homes every year for the next ten years. The framework was publicly launched in April 2020, just as the effects of the pandemic were exposing the fragilities of the Victorian housing system.

In 2019-20 the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria was another key focus for community sector advocacy. Many VCOSS members engaged with the Inquiry through hearings and written submissions, and VCOSS's own engagement provided more opportunity to advocate for social housing growth as a key solution in ending homelessness.

As part of its pandemic recovery program, the Victorian Government announced new social housing builds and upgrades to existing stock.

**Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System**

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform a system in crisis. VCOSS provided evidence, both as a witness and through a formal submission, to the Royal Commission.

We highlighted the close links between mental health and disadvantage. Poverty is a major driver of mental ill-health, as both a cause and consequence. To prevent mental illness and build healthy communities we need to target the risk factors of poverty, homelessness and social isolation.

We now look to the Royal Commission to set out an ambitious long-term plan that builds on the strengths of the current system, considers the mental distress Victorians are experiencing with the impacts of the COVID pandemic, and provides a blueprint for a system that delivers real and meaningful change for people living with mental illness in Victoria.

**Formal budget advocacy**

In December 2019, VCOSS launched its submission to the 2020-21 State Budget, *A State of Wellbeing*.

*A State of Wellbeing* makes the case for a shift to a wellbeing economy, and lists dozens of positive policies that would help Victorians live a better life. Making the leap to a wellbeing economy would require traditional budget processes and the machinery of government itself to evolve to put pursuit of wellbeing at the centre of all decisions.

Adopting this wellbeing lens would create a framework for departments and ministers to make funding bids for programs that achieve this greater goal. Most importantly, becoming a wellbeing economy would provide the framework for Victoria to measure the success of policies, and make changes where necessary.

With the COVID pandemic and consequent delay in delivery of the Victorian Budget until November 2020, VCOSS is planning a supplementary submission that will highlight the critical funding needs emerging as a result of the pandemic.



Official policy submissions in 2019-20

SUBMISSION	FLAGSHIP REPORT
Fairer energy contracts and discounts for all Victorians Response to Essential Services Commission Issues Paper Ensuring energy contracts are fair and clear	July 2019
The path to a stronger mental health system Submission to Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System	July 2019
Equitable transition to a zero net emissions Victoria Response to Independent Expert Panel Final Report: Interim Emissions Reduction Targets for Victoria (2021-2030)	August 2019
Tackling climate change in Victorian communities Submission to the Legislative Assembly Inquiry	August 2019
Sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers Submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee Inquiry	August 2019
Adequacy of Newstart and related payments Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry	September 2019
10 years of emergency management reform Submission to the Inspector General of Emergency Management Review	September 2019
Draft Accessibility Strategy of the Royal Commission VCOSS feedback to the Draft Accessibility Strategy of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability	September 2019
Early childhood engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse communities VCOSS submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry	October 2019
Long Service Leave Benefits Portability Regulations Response to the Long Service Benefits Portability Interim Regulations 2019	October 2019
Delivering on the promise: a better and fairer NDIS Submission to the review of the NDIS Act and the new NDIS Participant Service Guarantee	October 2019
A climate of fairness Making Victoria's climate change transition fair and equitable	October 2019
A state of wellbeing Victorian budget submission 2020-21	December 2019
Pathways to a positive future Submission to the Education Council's review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training	December 2019
Managing school infrastructure Response to the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry	December 2019

SUBMISSION	FLAGSHIP REPORT
Ensuring energy contracts are clear and fair Submission to the ESC draft decision on ensuring energy contracts are clear and fair	January 2020
Energy upgrades targets Submission to the Victorian Energy Upgrades Targets Consultation	February 2020
Supporting a strong, safe and sustainable sector Submission to the Victorian Disability Worker Regulation Scheme proposed regulations and standards	February 2020
Meaningful, principles and inclusive engagement Submission to the Victorian Public Engagement Framework Consultation Draft	February 2020
Review on Raising the age of criminal responsibility Joint COSS Network statement to the Council of Attorneys-General	February 2020
Safety, dignity and choice Submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety	February 2020
Safeguard kids from the justice system Submission to the Council of Attorneys-General Review of the Age of Criminal Responsibility	February 2020
Fair energy prices for embedded networks Submission to the ESC's proposed framework for setting maximum prices in embedded networks	March 2020
Home; the foundation for a good life Submission to the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria	March 2020
Growing a skilled, valued and supported disability workforce Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS Workforce Inquiry	April 2020
An aspirational vocational and applied learning system Submission to the review of vocational and applied learning in senior secondary schooling	April 2020
Supporting communities in recovery Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements	May 2020
Portable long service leave draft regulations Submission to the Portable Long Service Scheme draft regulations	June 2020
Lessons from remote and flexible learning Submission to the Education State: Lessons from remote and flexible learning	June 2020
Supplementary feedback on early childhood engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse communities Supplementary submission to the Parliament of Victoria's Legal and Social Issues Committee Inquiry	June 2020



# Forums for influence

## Partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services

The Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee, or HSHPIC, is a longstanding partnership between the Department of Health and Human Services and the health, housing and community sectors. Its aims are to:

- **STRENGTHEN DHHS** and community sector partnering to achieve effective and respectful relationships
- **SUPPORT** projects that improve business processes to reduce the regulatory burden on the community sector, and
- **ADDRESS** strategic challenges facing the human services industry through joint planning and shared action.

This strong pre-existing partnership between DHHS and the community services sector enabled a fast and focused response to COVID, improving outcomes for vulnerable Victorians.

As the pandemic hit in early 2020, the group moved quickly to fortnightly meetings of an expanded membership (HSHPIC COVID Response Group), bringing together community sector peak bodies and government to strengthen engagement and planning around the COVID response and recovery.

## Partnership with Department of Education and Training

Education can disrupt and prevent socio-economic disadvantage. Many VCOSS members play an important role in connecting and reconnecting Victorians to early childhood education, school education, vocational education and training, and higher education. This is complemented by a longstanding formal partnership between VCOSS and the Department of Education and Training.

In 2019-20:

- VCOSS and DET continued to co-chair a quarterly DET-Community Sector Organisation Governance Group meeting. This meeting is a forum for strategic conversations between the Victorian Government and our sector. It provides a vehicle to identify and progress joint action on pressing policy and systems issues at the interface of education and community services. VCOSS members and partners amplifying the community sector voice on the Governance Group are Community Child Care Association, Early Learning Association Australia, Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network, The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.
- VCOSS continued to participate in the Education State Guiding Coalition, which is convened by DET to support collaboration on Education State policy goals. As part of its participation in this coalition, VCOSS is a member of two working groups (Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion and The Future of Secondary Schooling).
- Planning commenced for the annual community sector/education forum. Normally convened by VCOSS in partnership with DET in June, the 2020 forum will take place in October to enable a focus on insights from COVID and the 2019-20 bushfires.

This work was complemented by the policy and advocacy work that VCOSS undertakes in partnership with its members and partners, including members of the VCOSS Education Equity Coalition.

## Media and Communications

VCOSS executed a robust communications strategy in late 2019, with different approaches for reaching the organisation's diverse audiences: MPs and government officials, staffers, policymakers, bureaucrats, our members, the broader social sector and the general public.

Traditional media and social media were again key tools, with a focus on reaching people who might be unaware of the issues at the centre of our advocacy, or do not yet agree with our recommendations for positive change. In 2019-20 VCOSS was present and active on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube, as well as growing our web and email-based audience.

Throughout December 2019, VCOSS ran a '12 Days of Christmas' advocacy campaign, in support of our formal 2020 State Budget Submission. Staff were conscripted into the VCOSS choir and sung a reimagined version of the classic carol, with each day representing a priority recommendation from the submission. We filmed this performance on the steps of the Victorian Parliament and paired each 'ask' with a short video of a relevant VCOSS representative briefly explaining the issue. Each day, we shared the videos and channelled viewers to an in-depth analysis piece on the VCOSS website.

When COVID struck everything changed, and VCOSS developed a series of new communications products. We launched a new email newsletter, the COVID Sector Bulletin, with brief and targeted news and resources to guide social organisations with their response to the pandemic. The monthly COVID Sector Forum event series was launched, first in-person and later online, with between 300 and 600 people tuning in monthly to hear from public health experts and government officials, and ask questions about the state's unfolding COVID response. We also began producing a COVID Issues Alerts web series, applying an equity and fairness lens to the numerous policy decisions the Victorian Government was making at some speed in response to the pandemic.

This coincided with a significant uptick in media engagement. VCOSS played an active and leading role in discussions around topics including, but not limited to: engagement and support for vulnerable communities, lockdowns, home schooling, public housing, mental health challenges, police enforcement of COVID rules, changes to JobSeeker and Victoria's post-COVID recovery.

## Amplifying lived experience

Magnifying voices of lived experience is an important part of VCOSS's mission, never more so than during the COVID crisis. Victorians found themselves under unprecedented physical and mental health and financial strain, and at risk of isolation and invisibility while they were stuck at home.

One forum through which VCOSS has given a platform to Victorians with lived experience is the 'My Corona' series—comprising first person accounts of the specific challenges the crisis has presented.

The series has highlighted the experiences of people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, older Victorians and people facing socio-economic vulnerability, including during the public housing 'hard lockdowns'.

## Other

- Collaborative Panel on Ageing, Disability and Mental Health
- COSS Directors
- DET-CSO Governance Group
- DHHS Psychosocial Reference Group
- Early Childhood Education Stakeholder COVID-19 group
- Education State Guiding Coalition
- Equal Workplaces Advisory Committee
- Essential Services Commission Energy Consumers Roundtable
- HSHPIC
- HSHPIC COVID-19 Response Group
- Joint Housing Peaks
- Kindergarten Expansion Consultative Committee
- Mental Health Policy Network
- National Consumer Roundtable on Energy
- NDIS Implementation Taskforce
- NDIS Workforce Expert Advisory Group
- Peaks and Statewides Network
- Roadmap to Reform Ministerial Advisory Group
- Service Agreement Working Group
- State Crisis and Resilience Council - Relief and Recovery Subcommittee
- Victorian Peak Bodies Climate Roundtable



# Strengthening the Community Sector

## Disability Advocacy Resource Unit

2019-20 has seen DARU go increasingly digital in the way it delivers its programs, and not just due to the impact of COVID. For instance, DARU developed a suite of online courses such as Best Practice in Disability Advocacy, and Advocacy at the Intersections which looks at advocacy for people with disability who identify as LGBTIQ+.

DARU explored the accessibility of online meetings using platforms such as Zoom and created a suite of resources to assist the sector in making their online interactions accessible for people with disability.

DARU also continued with a successful program of Advocacy Sector Conversations Forums, with an engaging and detailed professional development program for disability advocates, and a big focus on projects looking at the demand on the disability advocacy sector.

Our Strengthening Disability Advocacy Conference in September 2019 went national, in partnership with Disability Advocacy Network Australia, and explored Disability Advocacy as a Sector at Capacity and ways to ease the pressure on advocacy Australia-wide.

## 10-year Community Services Industry Plan

The 10-year Community Services Industry Plan Rolling Implementation Plan 2019-20 was written to set the priorities for the community services sector at a key time of service delivery change and growth. Produced in partnership with sector leaders and endorsed by government, it set the first two-year action priorities of the 10-Year Community Services Industry Plan.

VCOSS has continued its key role in updating the sector on progress of the Implementation Plan. A critical part of this is capturing and acknowledging existing work done in the sector and by government.

Many of the actions in the Implementation Plan remain unfunded. VCOSS continues to advocate strongly for funding for priority actions.

## Strengthening Sector Resilience

*Information, Linkages and Capacity Building* (ILC) is a core component of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The ILC program, like other aspects of the NDIS, has transformed the service system for participants and service providers. Through the SSR project, VCOSS has been supporting Victorian disability information and advocacy organisations to build their capacity to transition to the ILC environment.

During the year, participating organisations had access to networking and peer learning, professional development and other capacity building resources, practical information and one-on-one support. The project has had a strong focus on assisting the sector to be user-led, and VCOSS modelled this by establishing a Project Ideas Group comprising project participants, including self-advocates.

A Collective Learnings report has been produced to document participant insights on the ILC transition, to inform ongoing advocacy to the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, which now has responsibility for the implementation of the ILC program.

The project was funded by an ILC grant administered by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

## Regional engagement

VCOSS members working in regional, rural and remote areas face distinct challenges in relation to workforce, fair funding, and access to resources for their communities. At the same time, their deep connection to place is driving some of the most innovative collective impact work in Australia.

During the year, VCOSS continued its longstanding involvement with place-based work led by Go Goldfields, G21 and others.

We continued to proactively seek feedback from regional members on issues of concern, amplify the voices of regional communities in our advocacy, and provide support to advocacy campaigns led by regional organisations.

## A thriving sector

VCOSS engaged regional members in an array of projects designed to support workforce growth and development, such as the VCOSS traineeships programs and the Enhanced Pathways to Family Violence Work project. Other sections of this report describe our work with regional, rural and remote communities on emergency preparedness and response, and social and economic recovery, in the context of events such as bushfires and pandemic.

## Service Agreement consultations

After extensive negotiations between the community sector and the Victorian Government, a revised Service Agreement was finalised in December 2019. The agreement took effect from 1 January 2020 and will expire on 30 June 2024.

The Service Agreement Working Group met throughout the negotiations to consult and review the Service Agreement terms and conditions as well as discuss the effective operation of the Service Agreement and assist funded organisations to understand the Service Agreement.

VCOSS worked closely with members of the Service Agreement Working Group and with Justice Connect Not-for-Profit Law, which provided invaluable pro bono legal advice and support.

With the sector's input and assistance, VCOSS was able to secure:

1. Formal acknowledgment of the independence of funded organisations.
2. Support for embedding Aboriginal self-determination in our work.
3. Clearer guidelines on what we must do if a data breach occurs within our organisation.
4. Limiting the circumstances under which the government can recoup unspent funds.
5. More notice when policies are being changed, or new policies are being introduced.
6. Some limits on what records the government can access.



### Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance

Housing is at the heart of almost every social policy issue VCOSS works on. The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance brings together community sector peak bodies that have a strategic focus on, and expertise in, housing policy, systems and lived experience. We work together in a joined-up, evidence-informed way to identify shared concerns and advance systemic solutions.

This year we were pleased to welcome Aboriginal Housing Victoria to the Alliance. Other, longstanding members of the Alliance, convened by VCOSS, are the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP), the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic), Domestic Violence Victoria, Justice Connect, Tenants Victoria and the Victorian Public Tenants Association.

Our flagship piece of work this year was the development and launch of 'Make Social Housing Work – A Framework for Victoria's Public and Community Housing 2020 – 2030'. This Framework calls for the construction of 6,000 new social housing properties a year for 10 years, including at least 300 Aboriginal housing properties a year. This would raise the proportion of social housing stock in Victoria to the national average of 4.5 per cent.

Make Social Housing Work also advocates for extra support for people to gain and sustain tenancies, and for inclusionary zoning to be mandated in Victoria.

### Ageing, Disability and Mental Health Collaborative Panel

Over the past five years, the Ageing, Disability and Mental Health Collaborative Panel—funded by the State Trustees Foundation Australia—has played a key role in supporting the ageing, disability and mental health sectors to:

- Prepare for the transformational changes associated with government reforms, including the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the introduction of the Aged Care Gateway and related funding reforms
- Develop good practice in relation to consumer-led service delivery.

The Panel comprises representatives from VCOSS and Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Australian Multicultural Community Services, Carers Australia Victoria, Council On The Ageing Victoria, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, Mental Health Victoria, National Disability Services, State Trustees Australia Foundation, and Victorian Aboriginal Controlled Health Organisation Inc.

During the year, the Panel delivered the following sector capacity building projects:

- Communities of Practice to Support Service System Development
- Good Practice Case Study and Sustainability Analysis
- HACC Consumer Perspectives Project
- Community Services Learning Hub Feasibility Study
- Promoting the Exercise of Consumer Choice and Control.

### Bushfires response

The 2019-20 Australian bushfires were unprecedented in intensity and devastation. In Victoria, around 1.2 million hectares were burnt, a State of Emergency was declared, and the military was called in to support firefighting and rescue efforts. In addition, three people died as a result of the fires and more than 300 homes were confirmed destroyed.

With climate change threatening more bushfires, it is imperative that community sector organisations are supported to build their resilience to cope with emergencies so they can continue to provide critical services to people and communities in need.

In March 2020, VCOSS received funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation for a new bushfire project that aims to:

- Build the capacity of community and social sector organisations to support their communities' resilience and recovery from the 2019-20 bushfires
- Advocate for the recovery needs of community organisations and vulnerable people impacted by bushfires
- Contribute to effective current and future emergency and disaster recovery planning.

Work on this project continues.

## A thriving sector

### FV Workforce Census

The Royal Commission into Family Violence identified industry planning and workforce development as critical to reform. As part of this work, Family Safety Victoria undertook its first ever Family Violence Workforce Census in 2017, receiving more than 11,000 responses.

On the 18th of November 2019 the 2nd Census of Workforces that Intersect with Family Violence was formally launched, conducted on behalf of Family Safety Victoria by ORIMA Research.

VCOSS worked closely with other sector peak bodies to support the delivery of the biennial census, which aimed to build the evidence base on specialist family violence, primary prevention and related workforces, to help track the effectiveness of Building from Strength: 10-year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response and other reforms. It was an opportunity to better understand diversity in the workforce, and the different needs and concerns within different subsections of the workforce.

The 2019 Census officially closed at the end of February 2020. The findings will be disseminated once they are finalised and approved. In consultation with the peaks involved, VCOSS is currently reviewing lessons learnt from the Census process, which will not only inform our report back to Family Safety Victoria but also future data collection and dissemination.





# Supporting a Workforce Boom

Social care and assistance is one of the nation’s largest and fastest growing employment areas. As the social and economic fallout from COVID demonstrated, it’s also one of the most critical for the health and wellbeing of all Australians. VCOSS is committed to supporting this workforce, including working directly with employers to facilitate and deliver smart and targeted traineeship programs.

## The ‘Unlimited Potential’ Community Traineeship Pilot Program

The Community Traineeship Pilot Program, supported by Jobs Victoria, links young people with community services organisations. The young person undertakes a 12-month traineeship, during which they are employed by the organisation while completing a Certificate IV in Community Services.

The program aims to support young people who are experiencing barriers to employment, reflected in the consistently high levels of youth unemployment across Victoria.

Since its launch in May 2019, the pilot program has successfully secured 49 traineeships for young people in the community services sector.

To date, the program has an 80 per cent completion rate, as compared to a national average of just over 50 per cent for traineeships, which is an incredible achievement, especially given the significant challenges posed by COVID over the last few months.

By linking young jobseekers with employment in the growing community services sector and supporting organisations to build their workforce needs, the program hopes to help young people and the community services sector towards a successful future.

## The ‘Discover Opportunity’ Innovative Traineeship Program

The DET-funded Innovative Traineeships Program has built on the success of The Jobs Victoria Community Traineeship Pilot Program and expanded the reach of community services traineeships to western Melbourne and Gippsland.

After an extensive EOI process, VCOSS selected two Partner Organisations, Uniting in western Melbourne and Wellways in Gippsland, to deliver The Program.

VCOSS is also partnering with Victoria University Polytechnic and TAFE Gippsland to deliver the formal training component, which will occur online due to COVID restrictions.

To date, the Program has recruited over 40 trainees to undertake a traineeship while studying a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability).

A thriving sector

Former Victorian Jobs Minister Martin Pakula meets trainees (below). Tamara Eldridge (top) was later nominated for the Victorian Trainee of the Year.





# Working with Partners

“If you want to go fast, go alone.  
If you want to go far, go together.”

VCOSS is a strong believer in the power of community, collaboration and partnership. We are extremely thankful to all the organisations who share our vision for a fairer and more just Victoria, and have worked alongside us to pursue this goal.



## A healthy VCOSS

### National COSS Network

Every state and territory has an independent and non-partisan Council of Social Service, in addition to the national body ACOSS. Our combined national network has almost 4,000 organisational and individual members working with them: that's the foundation of who we are, that is our power to influence. One purpose, one message, one goal, thousands of voices.

That's why our network is engaged with government in negotiating policies that will meet our goals – and theirs. Only by staying engaged can we achieve change. It's also why organisations from across the community sector and other sectors want to form alliances with us. Those alliances make our network even more formidable.

To achieve the goal of ending inequality and poverty we, and our allies, build resilience within communities by enabling and amplifying their voice to challenge policies, systems, behaviours and attitudes.

We equip them, and our strategic partners, with the compelling evidence – the big picture on the social, economic and political need for change, and the dramatic, moving human experiences that are the motivator for what we do.

We listen to people in communities through consultation and grassroots engagement, we mobilise the skills and experience in communities, so their voice grows in power, endurance and eloquence now and through the generations.

We speak not only of the challenges faced by communities and individuals but, most critically, the successes. The COSS network is committed to working together constructively into the future to end poverty, inequality and disadvantage, and create of a fairer, more equal and inclusive Australia.





# Keeping VCOSS healthy and strong

## Building a more inclusive workplace

Inclusive practice has been a big focus at VCOSS in the last 12 months. VCOSS has taken the initiative to set up an Inclusion Committee, which looks at disability inclusion right across the organisation to ensure that we are inclusive in everything we do.

The Inclusion Committee has implemented measures across the organisation that change the way we induct new staff members and conduct meetings, as well as shifting our considerations when we implement new programs, purchase new software and equipment, and generally do our work.

Right down to after-work social events, VCOSS strives to lead to be inclusive in all that we do, and will continue to embed this work across the organisation in the coming year.

## Keeping everybody safe and well

VCOSS's Occupational Health and Safety Committee meets regularly and is engaged in the ongoing review of OH&S policies according to best practice.

With the rapid transition to working from home due to COVID, the Committee has implemented a range of processes to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff whilst working remotely. This includes the development of an 'Emergency Management - COVID 19 Policy' and supporting procedures, together with the provision of IT and ergonomic equipment.

A healthy VCOSS





# The VCOSS Board

**President**  
**Stella Avramopoulos**  
Good Shepherd Australia  
New Zealand  
Elected 2011

**Deputy President**  
**Kim Sykes**  
Australian Nursing  
& Midwifery Federation  
Elected 2012

**Treasurer**  
**Simon Trivett**  
Grant Thornton Australia  
Co-opted 2013

**Damian Ferrie**  
Star Health  
Elected 2018

**David Brant**  
Disability and  
community advocate  
Elected 2006

**Sue Woodward**  
Justice Connect  
Elected 2018

**Vicki Sutton**  
Melbourne City Mission  
Elected 2017

**Stefan Gruenert**  
Odyssey House Victoria  
Elected 2019

**Departing members**  
**Caroline Mulcahy**  
Independent member  
(departed September 2019)

**Paul Linossier**  
(departed February 2020)

**Sheena Watt**  
Independent member  
(departed October 2020)



A healthy VCOSS



# Treasurer's Report

For the year ended 30 June 2020, VCOSS has reported a surplus of \$426,842 (2019: \$243,859). This is a very healthy result from core operations in a year impacted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020, there was significant uncertainty around the breadth and duration of the impacts. It's hard to believe the social, health and economic disruption that has since occurred throughout Australia, but in particular in Victoria. And especially to those in our community affected by poverty and inequality.

During the 2020 year, the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee continued to oversee the integrity of the organisation's financial reporting and internal controls. The VCOSS Risk Framework was amended early on for COVID-19 considerations and continues to be embedded in the culture of the organisation.

Over the 2020 year, there continued to be focus on member engagement and support, and communications. We know that 2020, more than any other year, was when our sector and our member organisations were crucial to the wellbeing of so many people.

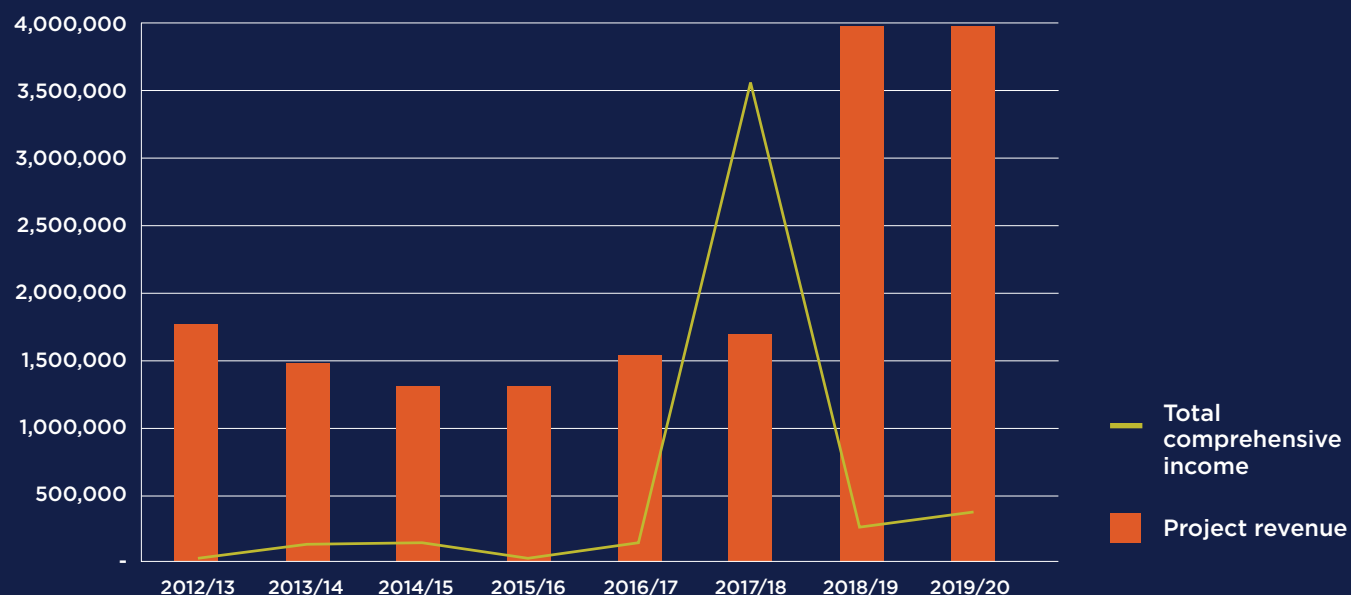
VCOSS has now achieved operating surpluses for eight consecutive years. The net asset position has increased to \$5,146,517 (2019: \$4,719,352). As noted in previous years, the sustainability of VCOSS continues to depend on diversified and recurring revenue sources, and prudent expense management. VCOSS needs to be financially healthy in order to deliver

quality member services and advocate on issues that matter. It is due to this tight financial management that the VCOSS Board is able to continue to hold each membership category subscription fee, for a further year, at 2016 levels.

Whilst the spread of COVID-19 caused significant volatility in Australian and International markets, it has not had a material impact on VCOSS's operations. We are fortunate that overall the VCOSS investment portfolio has weathered the uncertain environment well, with only \$26,494 being recognised as the loss when valuing the portfolio to market value at the end of the financial year. It has subsequently recovered in value. VCOSS's financial position enables us to provide research and advocacy in areas needed by those experiencing disadvantage in Victoria. These important areas don't always attract external funding. This is important, as it is the earnings from our portfolio that helps VCOSS be sustainable and fund advocacy and projects that would otherwise not happen.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, and the VCOSS Board, for working together to achieve another positive result for the year ending 30 June 2020, enabling a financially stable organisation. I am very proud of the hard work VCOSS management has done to achieve a financially sustainable organisation. This will enable VCOSS to operate as the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria, now and into the future.

The table below shows the trend of project income and the financial sustainability of the organisation through continued surpluses.



# Financial Report

## Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income For the Year Ended 30 June 2020

	Note	2020 \$	2019 \$
Revenue – operating activities	2	5,783,942	5,682,632
Employee benefits expense		(1,455,842)	(1,501,750)
Occupancy expenses		(31,437)	(240,438)
Publication expenses		(7,582)	(14,387)
Investment expenses		(31,579)	(2,774)
Other operating and administration expenses		(643,141)	(473,489)
Project expenses		(3,167,336)	(3,214,918)
Finance costs		(26,605)	-
<b>Surplus from operating activities</b>		<b>420,420</b>	234,876
Interest - investment	2	6,422	8,983
<b>Surplus for the year</b>		<b>426,842</b>	243,859
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>			
Net fair value movements for financial assets		(26,494)	-
Realised gains/(losses) on disposal of financial assets		26,817	-
Other comprehensive income for the year		323	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>427,165</b>	243,859



# Financial Report

## Statement of Financial Position For the Year Ended 30 June 2020

	Note	2020 \$	2019 \$
<b>Assets</b>			
<b>Current assets</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	4	5,799,899	9,432,856
Trade and other receivables	5	216,512	48,064
<b>Total current assets</b>		<b>6,016,411</b>	9,480,920
<b>Non current assets</b>			
Right-of-use assets	9	553,117	-
Financial assets	6	3,049,126	-
Property, plant and equipment	7	79,815	39,265
<b>Total non current assets</b>		<b>3,682,058</b>	39,265
<b>Total assets</b>		<b>9,698,469</b>	9,520,185
<b>Liabilities</b>			
<b>Current liabilities</b>			
Trade and other payables	10	530,082	1,138,881
Employee benefits	13	275,254	207,905
Other liabilities	12	3,059,028	3,336,464
Lease liabilities	9	217,560	-
<b>Total current liabilities</b>		<b>4,081,924</b>	4,683,250
<b>Non current liabilities</b>			
Employee benefits	13	31,446	36,192
Long term provisions	11	82,367	81,391
Lease liabilities	9	356,215	-
<b>Total non current liabilities</b>		<b>470,028</b>	117,583
<b>Total liabilities</b>		<b>4,551,952</b>	4,800,833
<b>Net assets</b>		<b>5,146,517</b>	4,719,352
<b>Equity</b>			
Reserves	14	344,720	364,792
Retained earnings		4,801,797	4,354,560
<b>Total equity</b>		<b>5,146,517</b>	4,719,352

A healthy VCOSS

# Our members

Action for More Independence and Dignity in Accommodation | Alamein Neighbourhood & Learning Centre | Amaze (Autism Victoria) | Anchor Inc | Anglicare Victoria | ARC Justice | Ardoch | Association for Children with a Disability | Australian Association of Social Workers | Australian Red Cross | Autism Family Support Association | Balancing of Life | Ballarat & Grampians Community Legal Service Inc. | Ballarat Foundation United Way Inc. | Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council | Banksia Gardens Community Services | Baptcare | Barwon Adolescent Task Force Inc. | Barwon Community Legal Service | Bendigo Community Health Services | Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre | Berry Street | Beyond Housing | Borderlands Co-operative | BrainLink Services Limited | Braybrook Maidstone Neighbourhood House | breakthru People Solutions | Brimbank City Council - Community Planning Unit | Broadmeadows Progress Association | Brotherhood of St Laurence | Care Direct Home and Community Care Services | Carers Victoria | CASA Forum - c/- Mallee Sexual Assault Unit | Casey North CISS | Catholic Social Services Victoria | CatholicCare Victoria Tasmania | Central Goldfields Shire Council | Central Ranges LLEN | Centre Against Violence Inc. | Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare | Cerebral Palsy Support Network Inc. | Child and Family Services Inc (CAFS) | Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) | Chronic Illness Alliance | Cobaw Community Health Service | Cohealth | Community Child Care Association Inc. | Community Houses Association of the Outer Eastern Suburbs | Community Housing Industry Association Victoria | Community Hub Inc. | Community Information and Support Victoria Inc | Community Southwest Incorporated | Community Support Frankston | Concern Australia Welfare Inc. | Consumer Action Law Centre | Consumer Policy Research Centre | Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc. | Council On The Ageing (VIC) Inc. | Council to Homeless Persons | Cranbourne Information and Support Service Inc. | Cystic Fibrosis Community Care (CFCC) | Deaf Victoria | DES Action Australia | Disability Advocacy Victoria Inc. | Disability Discrimination Legal Service | DJIRRA | Domestic Violence Resource Centre | Domestic Violence Victoria | Doncare Community Services | Drummond Street Services Inc | Early Childhood Australia (Victoria) | Early Childhood Intervention Australia | Early Learning Association Australia | Eastern Community Legal Centre | Eastern Domestic Violence Service | Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Family Violence Partnership | Eastern Suburbs Rental Housing Co-operative | Eating Disorders Foundation of Victoria | Emerge Women and Children's Support Network | Emma House Domestic Violence Services Inc. | Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria | Family Access Network Inc. | Family Life Limited | FamilyCare | Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre | Federation of Community Legal Centres Vic | Financial Counselling Victoria (FCVic) | Fitzroy Legal Service | Flat Out Inc. | Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre | Foster Care Association of Victoria | Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning & Employment Network (FMPLEN) | Friends for Good Inc | Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) | Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault | Gippsland Disability Advocacy | Gippsland Women's Health Inc. | Give Where You Live Foundation | Good Shepherd Australia & New Zealand {Merged} | Grampians Disability Advocacy Association | Grampians Pyrenees Primary Care Partnership | Hamilton Community House | Hands Up Mallee | Healesville Interchurch Community Care Inc. | Highlands Local Learning & Employment Network | Holden Street Neighbourhood House | Hope Street Youth and Family Services | Humanist Society of Victoria | Hume City Council - City Communications | Hume Whittlesea Local Learning and Employment Network | Inclusion Melbourne | Inner East Primary Care Partnership, | Inner Eastern Local Learning & Employment Network (IELLEN) | Inner Melbourne Community Legal | IPAA Victoria | Ithaca CERC | Jesuit Social Services | Justice Connect | Kevin Heinze Garden Centre | Kids First | Kids Under Cover | Kidsafe Victoria | Knox Infolink | Koobor Care Australia | Launch Housing | Leadership Plus | Leadership Victoria | Leongatha Community House Inc | Les Twentyman Foundation | Lifestyle in Supported Accommodation Inc. | Link Community Transport Inc. | Lively | Living Positive Victoria | Loddon Mallee Homelessness Network | MacKillop Family Services | Make a Difference Dingley Village Inc | Mallee Accommodation and Support Program | Mallee Family Care | McAuley Community Services for Women | Melbourne City Mission | Mental Health Victoria Ltd | Mentone Community Assistance and Information Bureau Inc | Merri Community Health Services | Millennium Disability Care | Mission Australia | Morwell Neighbourhood House & Learning Centre | Multicultural Centre for Women's Health | Neighbourhood Houses Victoria | Network of Inner Eastern Community Houses | Nillumbik Community Health | No To Violence incorporating the Men's Referral Service | Non Profit Training | North East Local Learning & Employment Network (NELLEN) | North East Neighbourhood House Network | North Richmond Community Health Limited | North Western Melbourne PHN | Northern Community Legal Centre | Odyssey House Victoria | Office of the Public Advocate | Operation Newstart Inc. | Playgroup Victoria | Port Phillip Community Group | Prahran Malvern Community Housing | Primary Care Connect | Quantum Support Services Inc. | Queen Elizabeth Centre | Reconciliation Victoria | Reinforce | Relationships Australia Victoria | Sacred Heart Mission | Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre | Samarinda Ashburton Aged Services | Save The Children | Settlement Services International | Slavery Links Australia Inc. | Social Change Projects | Social Traders Ltd | Social Ventures Australia | South East Community Links | South East Volunteers | Southern Grampians Glenelg Primary Care Partnership | Southern Peninsula Community Support | Springvale Monash Legal Service Inc. | Star Health | Syndromes Without A Name Australia | Tandem | Taskforce Community Agency Inc. | Tenants Victoria | The Centre Connecting Community in the North | The Gianna Centre Inc. | The Salvation Army | The Workshop Pty Ltd | The Youth Junction Inc. | Thorne Harbour Health | Tweddle Child and Family Health Service | Unison Housing | Uniting (Victoria & Tasmania) Ltd | Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership | UrCommunity Ltd | VICTAS Community Transport Association | Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) | Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd | Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability Inc | Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association | Victorian Clinical Genetics Services | Victorian Health Promotion Foundation | Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council | Victorian Primary Care Partnerships | Victorian Public Tenants Association | Victorian Student Representative Council | Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service Inc. | Volunteer West | Volunteering Geelong | Volunteering Victoria | Wellsprings for Women Inc. | West Footscray Neighbourhood House Inc. | Western Community Legal Centre Limited (trading as Westjustice) | Whittlesea City Council | Windermere Child & Family Services Inc | WIRE | WISHIN Inc. | Women & Mentoring - WAM Limited | Women with Disabilities Victoria | Women's Health East Inc. | Women's Health Goulburn North East | Women's Health Grampians Inc. | Women's Health Loddon Mallee | Women's Health Victoria | Women's Health West | Women's Liberation Halfway House | Women's Property Initiatives | WRISC Family Violence Support | Wyndham City Council | Yarraville Community Centre | Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service Ltd | Youth Affairs Council of Victoria | Youth Now Inc | Youth Projects Ltd | Youth Support and Advocacy Service | YouthLaw





Victorian Council  
of Social Service

Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

e [vcoss@vcoss.org.au](mailto:vcoss@vcoss.org.au)  
t 03 9235 1000

[www.vcoss.org.au](http://www.vcoss.org.au)