

Our speakers



Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP

Minister for Education
Minister for Women

Minister Hutchins is the Member for Sydenham and was elected to the Victorian Parliament as the Member for Keilor in 2010. She has been Minister for Education and Minister for Women since June 2022.

Minister Hutchins previously served as Minister for Local Government from December 2014 to September 2017, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Industrial Relations from December 2014 to December 2018, Minister for Women and Minister for Prevention of Family Violence from September 2017 to December 2018, and Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support from June 2020 to June 2022.

The Minister for Education oversees Victoria's Education State reforms and is responsible for providing education to more than a million Victorian students. This portfolio includes government investment in school infrastructure and programs.



Hon. Gayle Tierney MP

Minister for Training and Skills and
Minister for Higher Education
Minister for Agriculture

Gayle Tierney was appointed as Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Corrections in November 2016. In 2018, she was appointed as Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Higher Education. In 2020 Gayle was appointed Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and in 2022 she was appointed as Minister for Agriculture.

Minister Tierney has implemented significant reforms to create a world class Skills, Training and Higher Education System throughout Victoria. Key programs and policies which have driven this reform are the introduction of Free TAFE in 2019 and the establishment of Apprenticeships Victoria, The Victorian Skills Authority and the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery in 2021.

Minister Tierney understands the importance of communities and has dedicated her professional life to enhancing opportunities for the people she represents and works with. She is passionate about equality and creating opportunities for all members of society, with a keen focus on building opportunities for women and culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians.



Hon. Ingrid Stitt MP

**Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep
Minister for Workplace Safety**

Ingrid Stitt was elected to the Victorian Legislative Council at the 2018 state election representing the Western Metropolitan Region. She is the Minister for Workplace Safety and the Minister for Early Childhood in the Andrews Labor Government.

Ingrid is committed to making all Victorian workplaces safer and ensuring that every worker makes it home to their loved ones at the end of each day in her role as Minister for Workplace Safety.

As Minister for Early Childhood, she is passionate about education as the great leveler and is proud to continue the Government's rollout of three-year-old kinder across Victoria.

Prior to entering Parliament, Ingrid devoted her working life to fighting for low paid workers across the private and community sectors. As Secretary of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Services Union between 2004 -2018, Ingrid advocated for secure and safe work for her members in some of Australia's largest private sector companies. Ingrid has lived in the West for over 20 years.



Jenny Atta

Secretary, Department of Education and Training

Ms Jenny Atta PSM has been Secretary of the Department of Education and Training since March 2019. Prior to this, Jenny was Acting Secretary from November 2018. Jenny is directly responsible for the management of the Department and for supporting the early childhood and pre-prep, education, higher education and training and skills Ministers in the management and administration of their portfolios. Jenny joined the Department in December 2015 as Deputy Secretary, Infrastructure and Finance Services Group. In this role, Jenny was responsible for the management and oversight of the Department's financial, procurement and information technology services, along with strategic advice and planning for State Budget processes, and infrastructure policy and delivery.

This followed a range of senior roles in the Victorian Public Service (VPS), including with the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) and the Department of Human Services.

Jenny holds a Bachelor of Applied Science and a Master of Public Policy and was awarded a Public Service Medal in June 2021 for outstanding public service to strategic social policy reform and delivery in Victoria. In 2019, Jenny was inducted as an IPAA Victorian Fellow.



Emma King

CEO, Victorian Council of Social Service

Emma King joined the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) as Chief Executive Officer in 2013, providing a strong voice of leadership and advocacy on social justice issues for the community sector.

Emma was previously Chief Executive Officer of the Early Learning Association Australia (formerly Kindergarten Parents Victoria), the peak organisation representing parents and providers of early learning services in Victoria.

Emma also has an extensive background in the public sector and in workforce and education issues, having worked as a Victorian policy adviser, a teacher, and in a range of industrial and training roles at the Victorian Independent Education Union and the Finance Sector Union. Emma's qualifications include a Masters in Industrial and Employee Relations, a Graduate Diploma of Education and a Bachelor of Arts.

Emma represents VCOSS on a range of ministerial advisory groups and committees, serves on numerous boards including the Victorian Skills Authority and Portable Long Service Authority, and is the Chair of Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Emma is a regular commentator on social affairs.



Dr Katherine Trebeck

Co-founder of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) and advocate for economic system change

Katherine is an advocate for economic change with roles including writer-in-residence at the University of Edinburgh and a Strategic Advisor for the Centre for Policy Development. She co-founded the Wellbeing Economy Alliance and WEAll Scotland. She sits on advisory groups for The Democracy Collaborative, the C40 Centre for Urban Climate Policy and Economy, and the Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity. She is a Senior Fellow at the ZOE Institute and Distinguished Fellow of the Schumacher Institute.

Katherine instigated the group of Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo) and spent over eight years with Oxfam GB. Her most recent book *The Economics of Arrival: Ideas for a Grown Up Economy* (co-authored with Jeremy Williams) was published in January 2019 and her major report *Being Bold: Budgeting for Children's Wellbeing* was launched in March 2021.



Madhuri Prashar

Early Childhood Educator, Kids First Australia

Madhuri Prashar has worked as an early childhood educator since 2020, currently at Kids First. Her focus is on providing a safe and healthy environment where children can learn and grow.

Madhuri is studying a Bachelor of Early Childhood Teaching, and her educational background includes a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care and a Master of Business Administration. She has also completed 200 hours of yoga teacher training, which has informed her ability to support the wellbeing of children and teammates. In a world filled with stimulation, confusion and noise, yoga promotes a focus on personal truths and synthesis between mind and body, which has helped Madhuri attain strength and calmness.

Apart from yoga, in her personal time Madhuri likes to spend time with family, and to read inspirational books. Her favourite author is Swami Vivekananda. She is also inspired by Mother Teresa, and believes "Peace begins with a smile", which is the reason you'll usually find her with a smile on her face.



Nahzi

Student, Wellsprings for Women

Nahzi was Born in Afghanistan in 1992 and is the youngest child in her family. She has 7 siblings. Her parents migrated to Iran and then moved to Dubai in mid 1990s.

She finished her high school education before she got married 6 years ago.

She was living with her parents in Dubai when she got engaged and then went to Pakistan to get married.

Her husband came back to Australia and Nahzi went to Afghanistan with her in laws. But during the 6 years of her marriage, she kept traveling to Afghanistan and Dubai.

Nahzi wanted to continue her education but due to financial hardship and high fees she could not continue her education in Dubai.

Nahzi reunited with her husband in Australia 4 months ago.

She attends English, computer, sewing and self-care programs at Wellsprings for Women.

She is happy to come to Wellsprings as it is an organisation where opportunities are provided for women of different ages and backgrounds.

Nahzi hopes to study fashion design and art in one of the universities in Melbourne as it is her dream to work in this industry and also to support her family.



Professor Sharon Goldfeld

Director, The Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital & Murdoch Children's Research Institute

Professor Sharon Goldfeld is a paediatrician and Director of the Royal Children's Hospital's Centre for Community Child Health and Theme Director for Population Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. She has a decade of experience in state government as a senior policymaker in health and education, including holding the role of Principal Medical Advisor in the Victorian Department of Education and Training. Her unique career has seamlessly straddled research, policy and practice with her cross-sectoral approach focusing on investigating, testing and translating sustainable policy relevant solutions that eliminate inequities for Australia's children. Over the COVID-19 pandemic, Prof Goldfeld has led the public advocacy effort at MCRI leveraging existing and new studies to provide a unique understanding on the experiences of children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring we can inform its aftermath. Sharon was recently awarded the inaugural [Marles Medal](#) for excellence in original research that led to outstanding achievements in research impact.



Abe Ropitini

Executive Director, Population Health, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Abe Ropitini is a Māori man of Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Maniapoto iwi, with ancestral links to Palawa Country, Tasmania. He has a background in medical anthropology and international development, and has managed projects across health, disability, aged care, reconciliation, and digital transformation. Abe is the Executive Director of Population Health at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).



Dr Claire Tobin

A/Executive Director Wellbeing Health and Engagement, Department of Education and Training

Claire is a public service executive with over a decade of experience contributing to improved child health and wellbeing outcomes, bridging research, policy and practice.

Claire is a paediatric nurse by trade, Doctor of Public Health and passionate about prevention and promoting health.



Professor Kitty te Riele

Deputy Director (Research), Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, University of Tasmania

Professor Kitty te Riele leads the research portfolio in the Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment, at the University of Tasmania. Her main research focus is on how education can support marginalised young people to improve their life chances. In particular, she collaborates with alternative and flexible education programs that offer a second chance for young people for whom – for whatever reason – mainstream schooling has not worked well. A key report is *“Putting the jigsaw together: Flexible learning programs in Australia. Final report”* (2014), available through: <http://ecite.utas.edu.au/113856>. Also relevant for this forum is an article with colleagues on *“Outcomes from Flexible Learning Options for disenfranchised youth: What counts?”*, available through: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1168878>. She is inaugural co-chair of the Board of the Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education (aafie.org.au).



Murray Geddes

Principal – LOOKOUT Centre, South East Victoria Region, Department of Education and Training

Murray has worked in education for more than 35 years and has seen the positive impact connection with education and all that it involves can have on a young person. As the South East Victoria Region LOOKOUT Centre principal, Murray has had the privilege of working with an incredible team to improve the educational outcomes and life choices available to young people in statutory care. Along the way, he has had the opportunity to meet and work with some exceptional young people, carers and other professionals working in this space. Murray believes that every kid deserves to be given the support they need to thrive. He is committed to creating opportunities for young people to have their voices heard and challenging decisions not made in their best interests.



Cathy Connop

Centre Manager, Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre

Cathy Connop has been the Manager at Farnham Street Neighbourhood Learning Centre since 1992, having started in a .5 Further Education Worker position in 1989.

Cathy has a background in Psychiatric Nursing, Aged Care, Youth Work and Fitness Instructing. She was very attracted to the Learn Local sector and could see opportunities for people from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to engage and participate in programs that would support and nurture their learning. A warm, friendly and welcoming environment, with a focus on individual needs and goals, would be the vehicle to break down barriers and provide the necessary encouragement that this particular cohort needed to move into further education and employment.

In her capacity as Centre Manager, she has overseen the Farnham Street pre-accredited program where more than 20,000 Student Contact Hours have been delivered annually, supported the nomination of the 2021 Learn Local Pre-accredited Student winner, been involved in two CAIF Projects, been a member of the Steering Committee for the Farnham Street WTIF Project 'The Little Things' (which had a budget of \$500K), been the Chairperson of the Inner North Cluster Co-operative, and been a member of the ACFE Regional Council. She also nominated a Refugee Youth Mentoring Project that won the 2020 Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Community Development Award.

Cathy has lived in the Flemington area for 40 years and been a passionate advocate for improving the lives of disadvantaged local residents. She was a founding member of the Flemington/Kensington Community Legal Service and the Flemington Community Bank.