



Annual Report





2021-22



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 Victorians experiencing poverty and disadvantage, 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 respect to past and present Elders, and emerging leaders. This document was prepared on the lands of the Kulin Nation.





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Chair's report



In 2021–22, COVID continued to have a heavy impact on all aspects of life in Victoria. And our sector continued to respond with extraordinary flexibility, creativity, and generosity.

Demand has been particularly pressing on community healthcare services, emergency relief providers, and other hubs of community assistance such as Neighbourhood Houses.

The pandemic continues to highlight and exacerbate pre-existing structural inequities in our society. For many Victorians – such as recently arrived refugees, people on low incomes and with insecure work, those with pre-existing health concerns and other forms of disadvantage and marginalisation – the pressures associated with rising costs and shrinking public safety nets are hitting hard.

For these Victorians, the community sector is a lifeline.

VCOSS continues to work with government, with our partners and with industry to advocate for and support the organisations that our communities depend on.

Just as structural inequities weaken and undermine the communities our sector serves, similar structural issues are an ongoing struggle *within* the sector.

Community organisations strive to be employers of choice, to model and represent workplace conditions that can lift Victorians out of poverty and provide a good life.

But – while funding indexation and other government commitments to the sector have been welcomed in 2021–22 – the way our organisations are funded remains an ongoing concern. Community organisations are often unable to provide the job security, good pay and conditions they wish for their staff – and the continuity and long-term planning they wish for programs and communities – because of insecure and short-term funding.

VCOSS will continue to work with government on this issue, to advocate for the needs of our sector and of all Victorians.

We were heartened by announcements from the Federal Treasurer about measuring the national economy in a way that goes beyond fiscal results. There is a burgeoning recognition that budgeting needs to take account of more than GDP and headline employment numbers: to consider the real-world impacts of government decisions and policies.

VCOSS continues to work with the State Government to progress the goal of a wellbeing economy for Victoria: one in which freedom from poverty, adequate housing, healthcare, and other vital community connections are the ultimate indices of our society's success.

As always, in the ongoing conduct of this work, the strength, resilience and capability of our members sustains us; as does the commitment of the whole VCOSS team, headed tirelessly by CEO Emma King.

I look forward to continuing this work in the year to come.

Damian Ferrie
Chair, VCOSS
CEO, Star Health

CEO's reflections



During the year 2021–22, we became familiar with the refrain 'living with COVID'.

At a societal level this meant the phasing out of broad-based lockdowns and other public health directives.

For some it has been an uncomplicated relief.

But for many people in our sector, and for the communities our sector serves, it's not so simple.

As our tireless members know all too well, these communities are struggling. For people living with pre-existing health conditions, people experiencing poverty or social exclusion, people on the wrong side of the digital divide – for these and many others, 'living with COVID' presents new challenges and complicates old ones.

To really hear and understand what Victorians are going through, VCOSS undertook a 'listening tour' in 2022, in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.

In 12 locations across the state, as well as three online forums, we asked people simple and vital questions:

- How were you before COVID?
- How are you now?
- What are your hopes and fears for the future?

For all the many differences between communities, the commonalities we heard were striking – and we were able to verify our findings with extensive phone polling.

We heard that people are struggling with basic needs like keeping a roof over their head, paying for food, keeping the lights and the heating on and accessing health and social services.

People across the state also told us that they're struggling with loneliness and isolation, and that they feel anxious about an uncertain future.

For many, many Victorians, basic human needs that shouldn't be too much to ask have become acute challenges.

This is a great illustration of why VCOSS is pursuing a wellbeing agenda.

Most of the issues facing Victorians don't fit neatly into any one government portfolio. Rather, the over-arching question for every part of government should be how to achieve wellbeing for *all* Victorians and their communities.

The vision of a Victoria free from poverty and disadvantage – a Victoria where everyone's wellbeing is prioritised – underpins all our work.

We were privileged in 2021–22 to be able to partner with, learn from and advocate for our wonderful member organisations, whose vital work at the coalface of social issues drives and informs our advocacy.

I can't thank our phenomenal Board members enough for their energy, integrity and commitment throughout 2021–22. Irrespective of the increased demands on their time as they were all navigating a complex COVID environment, they continued to show their dedication to VCOSS, including contributing significant time and expertise on a voluntary basis. This work is vital to the health and strength of our organisation.

My particular thanks go to our Board President Damian Ferrie, Deputy President Sue Woodward, and Treasurer Simon Trivett, who is stepping down after nine years. I'm so grateful to Simon for his time at VCOSS, for his wisdom and generosity. Through his role as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and his overall stewardship of VCOSS's finances, he has left the organisation financially healthy and in a strong position going forward.

Thank you also to the terrific VCOSS staff, who continue to work towards VCOSS's vision and purpose, supporting the organisation, our members and each other with resilience, flexibility and good humour.

The VCOSS Board, our team, our members and our partners work together in the knowledge that our collective voice is what makes us strong and effective.

Thanks to the strength of this collective advocacy, we've had some really big wins in amongst the challenges of 2021–22. For example, the Victorian Government's announcement of 4.6 per cent funding indexation for the 2022–23 financial year for community sector organisations funded by the departments of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and Health. This is just the beginning, but it's an acknowledgement of the sector's vital work.

Supporting, representing and advocating for this amazing sector – for you – is a great privilege for me and for everyone on the VCOSS team.

I look forward to working with you all in the year to come.



Emma King
Chief Executive Officer



Crosscutting themes

Wellbeing

Working towards a Victoria that's free from poverty and disadvantage means finding innovative ways to promote individual and community wellbeing. In this way a focus on wellbeing is at the centre of everything VCOSS does.

This means looking to the strengths that individuals and communities have and promoting programs and policies that are already working.

It means thinking in intergenerational terms, with an eye to long-term goals as well as acute challenges.

It means advocating for government to measure what matters, breaking down siloed thinking and looking for holistic ways to solve problems and improve people's lives.

There are structural and systemic challenges to Victorians' wellbeing around issues such as safe and affordable housing, loneliness and isolation, equitable responses to climate change, effective emergency management and recovery for all Victorians, to name just a few.

These issues are not discrete challenges that individuals should have to struggle with alone; they are our collective responsibility.

By its nature, a wellbeing economy needs to be codesigned and informed by the communities it serves. This ethos informs all VCOSS's policy and advocacy work – exemplified in 2021–22 by the Listening Tour (see p.18).

A wellbeing approach means listening to people and communities and forming policy and programs around their needs. It means putting people first.

COVID recovery

We'd all like to believe the narrative that we're 'done with COVID', but our sector is seeing on a daily basis that we're still in the midst of a pandemic.

Many of the Victorians who depend on VCOSS's member organisations are not just living with COVID, they're being battered by it.

They might be coping with Long COVID and struggling to find medical and social supports for a condition that's still not widely recognised or understood.

They might be dealing with the long tail of family violence problems that sharply increased during lockdowns, or with the mental ill-health, drug and alcohol addiction or social isolation that accompanied the overlapping health and economic crises of the last two years.

They might have a complex and compounding intersection of these issues.

Research has shown that children and young people were hit hard by the mental health impacts of lockdowns, with remote learning proving particularly challenging for already vulnerable families: parents of children with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse

families, those who couldn't stay home to supervise remote learning or couldn't access devices or reliable internet.

The effects of all these experiences are still rippling through our communities, with many people needing intensive support to get back to some kind of equanimity and normality.

Community sector organisations are often the only available source of that support.

The community sector is full of incredibly hard-working, resourceful and committed individuals. But it's an industry that was already beset by funding shortfalls, workforce shortages and retention issues *before* the pandemic.

Now, with many workers experiencing mental and physical ill-health as a result of the last two years, conditions in the industry are really challenging.

VCOSS continues to be a strong voice for the sector through our policy and advocacy work: advocating for investments in the health and wellbeing of the community sector workforce; advocating for an increase in pay and for stable, ongoing funding for programs that support the community.

Because our sector is the engine that can drive a real and fair recovery, in which no one is left behind.



Thriving communities

Thriving communities are strong, resilient and inclusive.

Our sector is a vital source of support in establishing and maintaining thriving communities.

Thus, a big part of the way VCOSS supports and promotes thriving communities is by fostering a strong community sector: by developing the workforce, representing and advocating to government for the sector's needs, and building its capacity.

Some of the mechanisms for this support work in 2021–22 include the Community Services Industry Plan (see p.22), the Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee (see p.20), and two targeted traineeship programs (see p.19).

VCOSS promotes sector and community resilience through policy and advocacy in areas including equitable responses to climate change, building food resilience, and emergency management planning and recovery.

We campaign for a wellbeing economics approach that puts people's needs at the centre of government and policy planning, promoting inclusive growth across Victoria so that people living in poverty or experiencing disadvantage are not left behind.

VCOSS has also continued to support the sector by providing timely information about the changing medical, social and economic environment around COVID-19, and advocating to government about what communities need to deal with the crisis.

Aboriginal reconciliation

Just as Aboriginal Victorians experience disproportionate impacts of disadvantage due to colonisation and intergenerational trauma, many have been hit particularly hard by the impacts of the health, economic and social crises of the pandemic.

VCOSS is committed to supporting the processes by which Aboriginal Victorians can achieve full self-determination and empowerment, making decisions about all the policies and decisions that affect their lives.

In 2021–22 the VCOSS Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee was reconstituted, with a focus on supporting the work of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

We continued to use the lens of Aboriginal rights and empowerment in all our policy and advocacy work.

Amid debate about Treaty, truth and self-determination (including whether there should be a Constitutionally enshrined Aboriginal 'Voice' to the Federal Parliament), VCOSS sought to amplify the views of Aboriginal people and leaders.

Advocacy and leadership



Disability advocacy

In 2021–22, VCOSS continued the important work of advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in areas including housing, education, justice and emergency planning.

VCOSS was pleased to sit on the Victorian Government's Disability Act Review Advisory Group. Through the group, VCOSS has advocated for and had a voice in the development of a new Disability Inclusion Bill (currently an exposure draft), as well as reforms to the existing *Disability Act*.

This work was reinforced by a written submission into the Review of the *Disability Act*, which reflected the insights and experience of VCOSS members in calling for:

- improved accountability and residential rights
- elimination of restraint, seclusion and other restrictive practices in government-funded services
- the implementation of a human rights approach to disability.

VCOSS's [State Budget Submission](#) included important priorities such as closing service gaps for people with disability, boosting core funding to help disability advocacy organisations meet demand, and building more public changing facilities.

VCOSS continues to advocate for the needs of people with disability across all our priority areas, as reflected in an array of our policy submissions (see pp.14–15).

And collaboration continues to be vital to our systemic advocacy efforts. In 2021–22, VCOSS was a member of the Advisory Group for the [DFFH Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Victoria Project](#) – a cross-sector project aiming to increase emergency preparedness and resilience for people with disability – as well as a member of the Reference Group for the [CFA Preparing Vulnerable People Project](#), which aims to improve fire preparedness plans for people at greatest risk.

VCOSS also convened a member group to explore issues in early childhood education and care and children with disability and/or developmental delay, with a view to delivering a joint advocacy project in late 2022.

A fair response to climate change

Supporting the community sector to adapt to the challenges of climate change was an important VCOSS priority in 2021–22, as we continued to advocate to government for a fast and fair transition to a sustainable future.

VCOSS's research report [Feeling the Heat](#) generated significant media coverage in summer as a heatwave swept across Victoria. VCOSS CEO Emma King was quoted in *The Age*, *Pro Bono* and *The Guardian* and interviewed on ABC's *The Drum* and 3AW's *Drive* about the health impacts of heat on Victorians experiencing disadvantage.

The Victorian Government released a series of action plans for helping all sectors and regions adapt to climate change, including Health and Human Services. VCOSS worked closely with policymakers to make sure the plans were fair and equitable and incorporated the community sector.

VCOSS supported community service organisations to deliver climate projects such as scoping the resilience of the Darebin Neighbourhood House Network and developing a children's book about keeping safe on hot days. VCOSS is also involved in developing a Community of Practice focused on building the climate resilience of the community sector.

VCOSS continues to work closely with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, with upcoming projects including a research report on the challenges and opportunities for adapting the community sector to climate change, and recommendations for Victoria's 2035 emissions reduction target.

Strong and effective emergency management

Many of VCOSS's members play crucial roles during emergencies and disasters – including Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and VCCEM, as well as a range of local community organisations who are at the coalface before, during and after emergencies and disasters. These organisations are vital in supporting the long-term recovery of people and communities.

Throughout 2021–22 VCOSS:

- Led two major emergency management projects – the **VCOSS Bushfire Recovery Project** and the **VCOSS-ECCV Multicultural Resilience program** (details p.17).
- Provided two submissions to the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's *Review of Victoria's preparedness for major public health emergencies, including pandemics*.
- Supported the **Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Victoria Project**, which makes sure the needs and voices of people with disability are included in emergency planning and disaster risk management.
- Introduced a new newsletter that provides a summary of news and resources relating to resilience: **Resilience Review**. The newsletter aims to increase the capacity of all sectors involved in building resilience, share and promote good resilience policy and practice across Victoria, and ensure that resilience efforts prioritise people who may be vulnerable or disadvantaged.

VCOSS is a member of the State Relief and Recovery Team, one of the five key emergency governance teams operating at a state level.

VCOSS is also a member of the Victorian Food Relief Taskforce, which provides strategic advice to Government on strengthening and enhancing food relief activity in Victoria.

Renters' rights

Long-awaited changes to Victoria's renting laws were introduced in March 2021, to make renting fairer and safer.

Through a project funded by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, VCOSS engaged with community sector workers on the changes, so that sector workers could better support renters to understand and exercise their rights.

In the final stage of this project, VCOSS gained insights into how renters are experiencing the changes in the market by surveying over 300 frontline community sector workers and interviewing representatives from 20 organisations.

These insights were drawn together in a report to the Victorian Government, highlighting issues facing renters and opportunities to improve the real-world effectiveness of the new laws.

The long-tail effects of the pandemic on the rental market and affordability for renters are significant. VCOSS will continue to advocate for the provision of ongoing information, education and advice, so that renters and their supporters can be empowered consumers in the rental market.

Many of VCOSS's members play crucial roles during emergencies and disasters... they are at the coalface before, during and after emergencies and disasters. These organisations are vital in supporting the long-term recovery of people and communities.



Strengthening social housing regulation

As part of the Victorian Government's Big Housing Build agenda, an independent panel undertook a review of social housing regulation, to better support the long-term interests of social housing renters and communities.

VCOSS made three submissions to this review, based on robust policy development in consultation with colleagues from the tenancy advocacy, homelessness, family violence and community housing sectors, and advocacy organisations representing the unique needs of key groups including:

- public housing renters
- people with disability
- young people
- older people
- CALD groups.

Our advocacy focused on strengthening social housing renters' rights and their voice in decision-making, improving avenues for dispute resolution, better integrating housing with support services, and establishing an independent regulator with a strong mandate for continuous sector development.

VCOSS will continue to advocate strongly for the rights and interests of all Victorians in social and community housing.

Gender equality

VCOSS advocates for a society where all people live free from family and gender-based violence and are treated with respect and dignity.

In 2021–22, VCOSS continued to support the specialist family violence sector and the Victorian Government with the implementation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations, including representation on the Family Violence Reform Advisory Group. VCOSS also supported the work of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor.

We also engaged in the national policy process to help develop the next National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, running member consultations to inform written submissions.

The Victorian Government has made significant steps towards gender equality in Victoria, and the recent PAEC *Inquiry into gender responsive budgeting* establishes a plan to build on these strong foundations.

Through our membership of the Equal Workplace Advisory Council and submission to the *Inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women*, we have advocated for a greater focus on tackling insecure work and redressing gender pay inequity in the female-dominated community services sector.

Education equity

Education is the foundation for social and economic inclusion, but not all children, young people and adults have equitable access to it.

In 2021–22 VCOSS continued our focus on education equity and on providing a representative voice for the sector through advocacy on key issues such as inclusion, wellbeing and the costs of education. We did this through membership of the Department of Education and Training's (DET) Education State in Schools Guiding Coalition, Senior Secondary Reform Advisory Group and Kindergarten Expansion Consultative Committee, as well as making written submissions to consultation processes.

To ensure that we brought the most up-to-date informed evidence to the Department, VCOSS convened two stakeholder groups – the Education Equity Coalition and Senior Secondary Pathways Policy Advisory Group.

VCOSS's flagship 2021 Community Sector Education Forum was held in October 2021. Focused on the theme of *creating a sense of belonging*, it provided a host of perspectives on how learners can be supported in connecting to places of education.

Good jobs and a sustainable workforce

Having a job is about being able to afford the basics for a good life, but it's also about much more than that.

Participation in *fair* employment – a job that offers fair pay and conditions – has huge social and psychological as well as economic benefits, lifting people out of poverty, helping people stay connected to community and giving life a sense of meaning and purpose.

VCOSS's employment advocacy focuses on two areas, the first being our own industry as an engine room for jobs creation.

In 2021–22 we continued to advocate for solutions to some of the key constraints on community sector jobs growth – particularly low and unequal pay and insecure work.

Addressing these structural and systemic issues will enable the community sector to be a pipeline not just of new jobs, but of good careers.

VCOSS also continued to work with the Victorian Government to raise awareness and excitement about the many possibilities for careers in the community sector, to make our sector an industry of choice for jobseekers.

The other pillar of VCOSS's employment policy and advocacy work is about ensuring an *inclusive* Victorian labour market, so no one is locked out of the opportunity to get and maintain a job.

We advocate for tailored and targeted support for disadvantaged jobseekers, including young people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disability, people who

experience racism or postcode stigma, people with caring responsibilities – or, most often, people who face an intersecting and compounding combination of these barriers in applying for work.

As part of our responsive advocacy around these issues, VCOSS has made numerous submissions to government, including the *Inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women*.

As part of our proactive work we have advocated for a Youth Guarantee, which would ensure that every young Victorian has an offer of employment, education or training pathway within four months of leaving school.

We also established a new policy advisory group in the area of employment, for VCOSS members to share information, build connections and networks, and workshop new ideas and policy solutions for a fair and inclusive labour market.

Adequate and affordable energy for all

In a year when the [national energy crisis](#) attracted significant attention, VCOSS's longstanding work in energy affordability has never been more relevant.

Our energy policy work in 2021–22 was, as always, heavily informed by members' and frontline workers' feedback about Victorians' experiences and needs.

A sector-wide survey we conducted generated over 220 responses, providing frontline insights into the who, why and how of Victorians missing out on eligible energy concessions, and what the sector and government can do to ease pressure on households.

Our ongoing sector engagement also fed into a number of public and formal submissions (detailed in Formal Policy Outputs, pp.14–15), including to the Victorian Government’s [Gas Substitution Roadmap](#), the Essential Services Commission’s [Energy Payment Difficulty Framework](#) [implementation review](#), and on the annual price-setting process for the [Victorian Default Offer](#).

VCOSS will continue to work in this difficult and important space in the coming year, because no Victorian household should have to decide whether to ‘heat or eat’.

Communicating the issues

Strong and clear communication is central to VCOSS. Without it, we can’t properly advocate for change, engage in public debates, or educate people about the true causes and effects of poverty.

Communication is also critical to supporting VCOSS members and the broader sector, through information sharing, capacity building and the provision of expert analysis, in addition to amplifying members’ voices and perspectives.

In 2021–22, we again faced a constrained media environment. Physical events were rare and a significant amount of media engagement (notably interviews with TV stations) still done online.

VCOSS issued 11 official (public) media releases in 2021–22. This is in addition to private ‘pitching’ to journalists, which isn’t visible to the public.

We achieved more than 2,100 traditional media ‘mentions’, which incorporates being interviewed, directly quoted or referenced in some way. VCOSS was featured across a diverse range of media outlets, including newspapers, commercial TV, online and public broadcasters. According to media monitoring company Isentia, over the course of 2021–22 our combined potential reach across these media channels was over 20 million people.

VCOSS email communications have been ‘separated out’ into distinct offerings (instead of the all-encompassing ‘VCOSS eNews’). We now have:

1. Amplify (fortnightly sector newsletter)
2. VCOSS Issues Alerts (as needed)
3. COVID Sector Alerts (temporary)
4. Resilience Review (new)

Audience members can now opt in, or out, of individual products. The overall email subscriber base has grown about 20 per cent.

Our presence and impact on social media continued to grow, with the launch of a VCOSS Instagram account. Our most important platform for advocacy remains Twitter, which is beloved by politicians and journalists. On Twitter in 2021–22, our 401 tweets were seen an estimated 2.4 million times (impressions). VCOSS was mentioned by other users 2,475 times and gained 691 new follows.

Throughout the pandemic, VCOSS has worked with the Victorian Government to develop and convey powerful messaging about the continued importance of vaccine take-up and other public health measures, including through paid social media, FM radio advertising and traditional media engagement.

VCOSS’s vital work of amplifying and platforming the voices of Victorians with diverse lived experience was given extra momentum in 2021–22 through the VCOSS Listening Tour (see p.18).

Strong and clear communication is central to VCOSS. Without it, we can’t properly advocate for change, engage in public debates, or educate people about the true causes and effects of poverty.

Formal policy releases

In 2021–22, VCOSS produced flagship publications including:

- *The Way Forward*
Victorian Budget
Submission 2022
- *Who's who and what do they do? Recovering from emergencies and disasters*
A stakeholder guide for
community organisations

Over the reporting period, the VCOSS policy team also produced 30 formal submissions and responses to various inquiries and public policy development processes. These are detailed below.

July – December 2021

1. *Build on the Big Housing Build*
Submission to Consultation Paper on the 10-Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing

2. *Gas Substitution Roadmap consultation*

Submission to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning on the Victorian Government's potential actions to equitably achieve the substantial carbon emissions necessary in Victoria's gas sector to meet the state's climate change targets

3. *Quality Initial Teacher Education Review*

Submission to the Federal Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

4. *Consultation for Senior Secondary Reform*

Submission to the Victorian Government's Consultation for Senior Secondary Reform to introduce a new vocational specialisation stream within the VCE to replace the Intermediate and Senior VCAL, and a new Victorian Pathways Certificate to replace Foundation VCAL

5. *Embedded Networks Review*
Submission on the Expert Panel's Draft Recommendations on implementing a proposed ban of embedded networks in new apartment buildings (with appropriate exemptions for certain shared-benefit renewable energy arrangements)

6. *Adapting the community sector*
Submission to the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing on the Health and Human Services Adaptation Action Plan

7. *Every risk needs addressing*
Submission to the Department of Education and Training on the Education and Training Adaptation Action Plan

8. *Supporting the community services sector post COVID-19*
Submission to the Victorian Government's Inquiry into economic equity for Victorian women

9. *Ensuring safe worksites and healthy Victorians and communities*
Submission to the Victorian Government's Secure Work Pilot

10. *An Australia free from all forms of violence*
Submission to inform the Federal Government's development of the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

11. *Approach to the Energy Payment Difficulty Framework implementation review*
Feedback to the Essential Services Commission on its proposed approach

12. *Strong communities are safe communities*
Submission to the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

13. *A contemporary social housing regulatory framework for Victoria*
Submission to the Social Housing Regulation Review – Consultation Papers 2 & 3

14. *A fairer, equal and more inclusive Victoria*
Submission to the Victorian Government's Review of the Disability Act 2006

15. *Victorian Default Offer 2022 – draft decision*
Submission to the Essential Services Commission on the proposed tariffs for the independent reasonable price for retail electricity

16. *Zero Emission Vehicles*
Expert Advisory Panel policy consultation

17. *Compliance and Performance Reporting Guideline*
Submission to the Essential Services Commission on potential additional retail market performance indicators

18. *Sustainability Victoria's next decade of action*
Submission to the development of SV2030: A Decade of Action – Accelerating Victoria's transition to a circular, climate resilient clean economy

19. *Energy Payment Difficulty Framework implementation review*
Submission to the Essential Services Commission on the key questions for this review, including the need for monitoring and measuring retailers' operational implementation, continuous improvement, capability-building and cultural change



January – June 2022

20. Inquiry into the Victorian On-Demand workforce

Submission on the Fair Conduct and Accountability Standards

21. School Community Safety Order – Ministerial Guidelines Issues Paper

Feedback to the School Community Safety Order – Ministerial Guidelines Issues Paper

22. Submission to the EPA's new draft guideline on managing greenhouse gas emissions

Submission to the Environment Protection Authority on their new guidelines for how organisations should manage their carbon emissions

23. Strengthening coordination and collaboration

Submission to the Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery's *Legislation for a strong and effective Victorian TAFE network* consultation paper

24. Feedback on adding home energy rating assessments to the Victorian Energy Upgrades program

Submission to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning on their proposal to add home assessments to the Victorian Energy Upgrades program

25. Victorian Default Offer 2022–23 – draft determination

Submission to the Essential Services Commission on the proposed tariffs for the independently-set reasonable price for retail electricity

26. Keep an eye on the kids

Submission to the Inquiry into children affected by parental incarceration

27. Fair and fast action for a safer climate

Submission to the Victorian Government's Independent Expert Panel on the 2035 emissions reduction target

28. Response to Victorian Default Offer Order-in-Council Review

Submission to the Review of the Victorian Default Offer Order in Council

29. Ending all forms of gender-based violence

Submission to the Federal Government in response to their draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

30. Fair Conduct and Accountability Standards

Submission to provide feedback on the draft Fair Conduct and Accountability Standards

Key projects



Multicultural Emergency Management

Funded by the Department of Health, in 2021–22 VCOSS oversaw a multi-stakeholder program to support community-led resilience in multicultural communities and help prepare for COVID outbreaks. The project delivered:

- a Needs Analysis
- capacity building for community leaders
- a Policy Paper
- new partnership between multicultural communities and the emergency management sector.

The project delivered four Masterclasses to 92 multicultural community leaders, to build capacity in:

- *Community leadership and COVID-19*
- *Emergency Preparedness in Victoria*
- *Communicating with your community*
- *Introduction to Psychological First Aid*

A cross-sector Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership was established to:

- increase mutual understanding and trust, and strengthen partnerships between multicultural communities, government and emergency management organisations
- provide greater cultural safety for all who work in and with emergency management organisations
- strengthen community resilience and reduce the disruptive impacts of emergencies.

Membership of the Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership includes 11 community leaders from a range of multicultural communities, and representatives of:

- Ambulance Victoria
- Australian Red Cross
- Emergency Management Victoria
- CFA
- Fire Rescue Victoria
- Life Saving Victoria
- State Emergency Service
- Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministry
- Victoria Police

The Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership is ongoing and has the strong support of Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp.

“At last I feel invited to the table, with people who understand what I’m going through.” Masterclass attendee, Multicultural Emergency Preparedness Project Evaluation Report, March 2022

“I’ve never seen it before – 35 community leaders in front of those agencies. There’s a fervour and a passion in the community about this. They’re mixing with a completely different group.” Emergency services representative, Multicultural Emergency Preparedness Project Evaluation Report, March 2022



Listening Tour

In 2021–22 VCOSS conducted a listening tour in partnership with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.

We travelled to 12 different locations across the state – a mix of regional and suburban locations – as well as running online forums.

We conducted deep dives with particular cohorts, such as Aboriginal Victorians, carers and people with disability.

The tour was about listening to and understanding people's experiences of the pandemic, and learning what their hopes and aspirations are for the future.

The events were held in community facilities where people felt comfortable and safe to share their stories, and the forums were intentionally structured in an open-ended way so that participants could direct the conversations.

VCOSS also corroborated what we heard in the forums through broad phone polling, which captured the perspectives of a further 550 people from across Victoria. Combining small face-to-face consultations with broad public polling ensured both depth and breadth, and the public polling included a focus on the particular challenges encountered by young people, who were less likely to attend the forums.

What we heard over the course of the Listening Tour was that people are still struggling with the realities of the pandemic.

Coming out of the last two years, communities are still experiencing high amounts of anxiety, stress, and uncertainty about the future.

People spoke about their immediate needs, such as relief from cost-of-living pressures, but they also pointed to the foundational needs for a good life.

Broadly, these needs are access to safe and secure housing, a secure job and income support, and connection with community.

Voices of Victoria, the report that captures what we heard on the listening tour and makes VCOSS recommendations, has been published and can be read [here](#).

Good jobs for a strong workforce

The importance of a strong community sector has never been clearer than during the pandemic and the difficult recovery period. One of the nation's largest and fastest growing employment areas, social care and assistance needs a secure and ongoing pipeline of well-trained workers to support Victoria's communities into the future. Working directly with employers and training institutes in 2021–22, VCOSS continued to help build this pipeline through two targeted and successful traineeship programs.

Community Traineeship Pilot Program

This pilot project supported young people facing barriers to employment to secure a 12-month traineeship with a community service organisation, while completing a Certificate IV in Community Services.

Coordinated by VCOSS, funded by Jobs Victoria and delivered in partnership with TaskForce Community Agency and Youth Projects, the program has seen 84 young people supported into a traineeship since it commenced in 2018.

The final group of trainees formally graduated in May 2022.

Over the life of the program, six cohorts of trainees completed their traineeships, with an overall completion rate of almost 70 per cent (as compared to a national average of around 50 per cent).

Wraparound support was vital to the success of the trainees and the program. To help them stay engaged, trainees had the support of a youth worker, workplace supervisor and TAFE teachers. They also had access to a flexible wraparound support fund, which helped overcome barriers to engagement such as homelessness, mental illness and cost-of-living stress.

After taking part in the program, many employers took on subsequent trainees, which is a testament both to the power of traineeships as an employer pathway model, and the level of support provided by the Community Traineeship Pilot Program.

Innovative Traineeship Program

Using a supported traineeship model, this program helped trainees gain employment in a community service organisation while simultaneously completing a Certificate III in Individual Support (Disability).

Trainees graduated with 12 months of relevant work experience in the sector as well as a qualification to boost their employment opportunities and open up career pathways.

The program was coordinated by VCOSS, funded by the Department of Education and Training and delivered in partnership with Wellways in Gippsland and Uniting in Western Melbourne.

Trainees formally graduated in December 2021, and 90 per cent of the graduating cohort gained ongoing employment with their workplace or other employment in the disability sector.

This high rate of post-traineeship employment is a testament to how well the program integrated course content and workplace learning, setting trainees up for successful sector careers.

Corroborating this, data from the program evaluation indicates that the supported traineeship model improved trainees' skill capabilities, competence, and preparedness for employment in the community services sector.

Working directly with employers and training institutes in 2021–22, VCOSS continued to help build this pipeline through two targeted and successful traineeship programs.

Coalitions for change

Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee

The Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee, or HSHPIC, is a longstanding partnership between VCOSS, the housing and community sectors and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (previously the Department of Health and Human Services).

HSHPIC continued its important focus on the ongoing COVID-19 response and ensuring a fair recovery for vulnerable Victorians in 2021–22, meeting every six weeks.

The partnership has also taken a strong focus on social services regulation reforms, and on implementing key priorities of the Community Services Industry Plan, including addressing workforce challenges and supporting community resilience.

DET Partnership

Continuing our longstanding partnership with the Department of Education and Training (DET), VCOSS supported the coordination and delivery of quarterly DET – Community Sector Organisation Governance Group meetings, to discuss areas of mutual interest including transitions, inclusive education for students with disabilities and student engagement.

This partnership also supported the delivery of VCOSS's flagship 2021 Community Sector Education Forum, which was held in October 2021 and focused on the theme *creating a sense of belonging*, reflecting on the impact of the pandemic and learners' connection to places of education.

COSS network

VCOSS is a proud and active member of the national Councils of Social Service network. We have collaborated with our state colleagues – and the national body ACOSS – on campaigns of shared importance. These include campaigns to 'Raise the Rate' of JobSeeker and related payments, oppose robodebt, increase sector funding, and introduce better management of the NDIS and other national systems.

During the pandemic, the COSS Network worked together on issues relating to federal support for people who are isolating, as well as other disaster-type payments.

With the new Federal Government signalling an embrace of wellbeing economics, we anticipate further collaboration to progress the national wellbeing agenda.

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2021 Victoria Summit

VCOSS was a prominent and active player in the 2021 Victoria Summit, hosted by the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The Summit brought together business representatives, government officials, unions, education institutions and the community sector to “create a shared, bold, compelling and aspirational vision” for a post-COVID Victoria.

VCOSS was pleased to play a key role on the Reference Group and co-chair the Community, Health and Wellbeing group, bringing the voices and needs of people in poverty and experiencing hardship into debates and workshops. An embrace of a wellbeing-focused approach and the proposal for a Victorian Youth Guarantee were both included in the Summit’s final communique.

Other coalitions

In alphabetical order

- Community Services and Health Industry Advisory Group
- COSS Directors
- DELWP Energy Consumer Insights Forum
- DHHS Psychosocial Reference Group
- The Disability Act Review Advisory Group
- Early Childhood Education Reform Stakeholder Group
- Early Childhood Education Stakeholder COVID-19 group
- Education State Guiding Coalition
- Equal Workplaces Advisory Committee
- Essential Services Commission Community Sector Roundtable
- EWOV Community Consultation Group
- Family Violence Steering Committee
- HSHPIC COVID-19 Response Group
- Justice Partnership Committee
- 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
- RIMAG Implementation Steering Group
- Roadmap to Reform Ministerial Advisory Group
- Senior Secondary Reform Advisory Committee
- Service Agreement Working Group
- Smart Justice for Women
- Smart Justice for Young People
- State Relief and Recovery Team
- Victorian Food Relief Taskforce
- Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance
- Victorian Peak Bodies Climate Roundtable
- Victorian Primary and Community Health Network
- Vic. Utilities policy network

A thriving sector

Disability Advocacy Resource Unit

VCOSS hosts and supports Victoria's Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU).

DARU has expanded their team to four staff, enjoying a busy and very successful 2021–22 with many initiatives to strengthen the disability advocacy sector.

Highlights include:

- the launch of a new 2021–2024 Strategic Plan with a strong focus on upskilling and strengthening the capacity and cohesiveness of the advocacy sector in Victoria to encourage collaboration, partnerships and sharing of knowledge
- the launch of advocacy toolkit sessions, interactive workshop style training sessions that focus on advocates teaching other advocates the tools of the trade
- building the capacity of the sector to do collaborative systemic work, with the resourcing of a project officer
- commencing work supporting the Office for Disability to deliver an Outcomes Framework to measure the effectiveness of the Victorian Disability Advocacy Program.

In addition, DARU also:

- delivered three well-attended online Advocacy Sector Conversations forums
- delivered monthly peer support meetings for both frontline advocates and CEOs/managers of disability advocacy organisations
- continued to work on expanding the bank of online training offerings for the sector.

10-year Community Services Industry Plan

Launched in 2018, the *10-Year Community Services Industry Plan* (CSIP) outlined a unified vision for the Victorian community services sector.

COVID-19 provided an opportunity for the sector and government to come together to reassess, refine and adapt directions in the plan, and make sure sector and government strategic priorities are aligned. The *CSIP COVID-19 2021–22 Update* adjusts the existing CSIP vision, themes and priorities.

This update has been crucial in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging recovery efforts. Prioritising actions that address pandemic-related issues, the update focuses on:

- greater impacts in people's lives through person-centred services and stronger outcomes
- developing the capacity of the sector and the effectiveness of the wider service system
- rebuilding communities, including their resilience, social capital, and access to quality services.

While recognising that there are still pandemic-related challenges remaining – including a sharp increase in demand for social services and ongoing impacts on the mental and physical wellbeing of many Victorians – this update upholds the original intention and values of the CSIP.



Victorian Housing Peaks

Safe and affordable housing is a foundation stone of a good life.

In 2021–22, the long-tail health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to make people more vulnerable than ever to housing stress and homelessness.

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance, which brings together sector peak bodies that have a strategic focus on and expertise in housing policy, systems and lived experience, continued to work together to advance systemic, evidence-based solutions to the housing crisis.

The continued rollout of the Big Housing Build was a central focus, as was the Social Housing Regulation Review, with the Alliance collaborating to establish shared messaging on priority issues relating to social housing regulations.

In addition to VCROSS, the Alliance comprised Aboriginal Housing Victoria, the Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, the Council to Homeless Persons, Safe and Equal, Justice Connect, Tenants Victoria, and the Victorian Public Tenants Association.

The Alliance continued to meet every six weeks, to share information and to coordinate effective policy and advocacy.

Supporting bushfire recovery

With funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, VCROSS continued to 'support the supporters' of bushfire recovery, building the capacity of community organisations so they can help their communities recover and develop long-term resilience. In 2021–22, VCROSS published:

- a series of monthly Disaster Recovery Bulletins
- a series of case studies highlighting the central role of community organisations in bushfire recovery
- a stakeholder guide for community organisations: *Who's who and what do they do?*

VCROSS also convened a series of monthly online Disaster Recovery Conversations, providing expert, in-depth information and advice on a range of recovery themes. There were more than 1,500 registrations for these conversations.

Ongoing work includes:

- Co-designing a sector-wide Disaster Recovery Outcomes Framework to help community organisations identify shared outcomes and indicators.
- Jointly establishing a new collaboration to mobilise community connection, collaboration and leadership. The collaboration will support strong cooperation between community members, emergency services, governments, community organisations, researchers and the private sector in working towards community-led resilience.

A strong VCOSS

Inclusion

The VCOSS Inclusion Committee has started implementing inclusive practice and actively embedding disability inclusion across the organisation, through initiatives including:

- orientation and induction processes for new staff, who need to complete a *How to be Disability Inclusive* online learning module, as well as an in-person induction session with a member of the Inclusion Committee
- twice-yearly internal Disability Inclusion training
- trialling and assessing different methods and strategies for hybrid meetings, to ensure that inclusion at VCOSS is always front of mind.

The Committee has started an internal inclusion audit, working with all departments to implement processes that address inclusion issues and encourage a culture across the whole of VCOSS in which inclusion is everyone's responsibility.

Workplace health and safety

Throughout 2021–22, the Occupational Health and Safety Committee continued to focus on ensuring that VCOSS maintains a COVID-safe workplace, with regular reviews of VCOSS's COVID-safe work plans and OH&S policies to ensure the organisation remains safe for all employees, contractors and visitors.

Staff have continued to work from home when necessary to comply with Victorian Government directives and have been provided with the appropriate ergonomic equipment.

As always, the wellbeing of staff is vitally important to the organisation. Many staff engagement and social activities were facilitated throughout the year, and the senior leadership team and other staff members undertook Mental Health First Aid accreditation.

Acknowledgment of funders and supporters

Thank you to the following organisations. We're deeply appreciative of your support this year, which helped advance the goal of wellbeing for all Victorians.





Corporate governance



Treasurer's report

I'm pleased to report that for the year ended 30 June 2022, VCOSS has achieved an operating surplus of \$373,335 (2021: \$178,914). Overall this is a good result from our core operations. While we didn't have as many lockdown disruptions during the year, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are still affecting us, as they are every organisation.

As you will see from our statutory financial statements, the overall comprehensive loss of VCOSS for the 2022 year was \$393,849 (2021 gain: \$916,051). This takes into account the net market value movements for the year of the investment portfolio established when the Collingwood property was sold in 2018. Although the investment portfolio declined in value in the last weeks of the 2022 financial year (following the general share market), on an overall basis it grew. I also note that the share market rallied after year end and regained much of the declines of June 2022. VCOSS has an Investment Policy that balances the need for returns to help fund activities, with preservation of the capital value of the portfolio. This helps us focus on good sustainable investments, and not be overly distracted by the movements in value of the investment portfolio.

As I've noted in prior years, research and advocacy focused on those experiencing disadvantage doesn't always attract external funding. The earnings from our investment portfolio help VCOSS fund advocacy and projects that would not otherwise happen.

Over the 2021–22 year, VCOSS continued to focus on member engagement and support, and communications. Throughout the pandemic we've seen that the community sector was crucial

to the wellbeing of so many Victorians. We're proud that VCOSS could represent the sector during this time and influence many outcomes to assist our member organisations to look after those who needed it most.

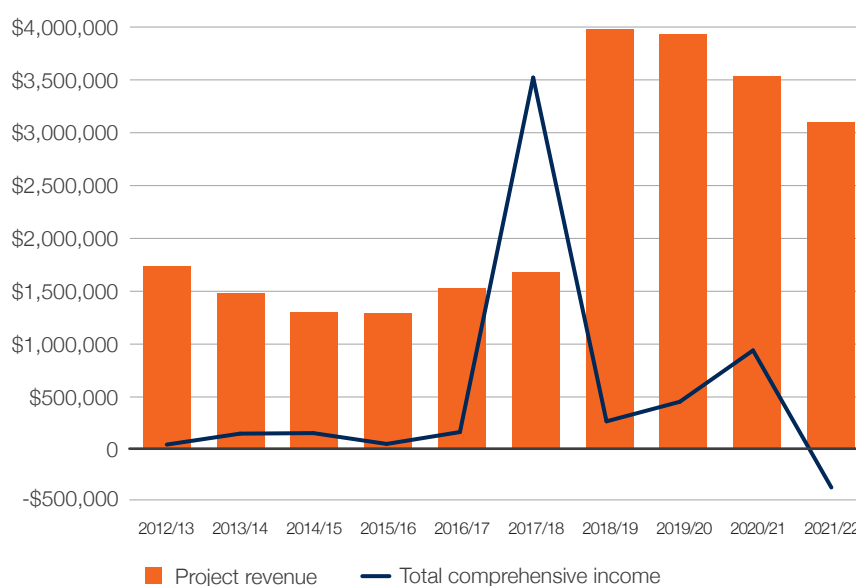
This is now the tenth year that VCOSS has delivered an operating surplus. Our net asset position is \$5,668,719 (2021: \$6,062,568). I'm again very pleased to confirm that the VCOSS Board agreed to continue to hold each membership category subscription fee at 2016 levels. However, as in all organisations, the inflationary pressures are being felt and I think this will be the last year we'll be able to keep fees suspended at 2016 levels.

VCOSS's sustainability relies on continuing to identify and develop diversified and recurring revenue sources, and on tight management of our expenses. Each year the annual budget is approved by the Board, helping steer the finances. As you would know from your own organisations, it is critical to be financially healthy in order to deliver quality member services. Financial health is just as critical for VCOSS when it comes to being able to research and advocate on issues that matter.

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FARC) continued to oversee the integrity of the organisation's financial reporting, investment management, internal controls and risk framework. It was important that we maintained regular meetings and regular reporting to achieve this. I thank the FARC members for their flexibility and willingness to adapt to all the challenges we have faced over the past couple of years. I also want to thank the VCOSS Board, who worked so well together to navigate the complex environment.

The sustainable results achieved by VCOSS are the outcome of the continued hard work of the entire VCOSS team. I'm aware of all sorts of challenges and curve balls that have been managed – work related, and also personal. As Barack Obama says, "The only thing that's the end of the world is the end of the world." The VCOSS team's professionalism and passion for the sector is evident from all they achieved during the year.

And finally, 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 2022

	Note	2022 \$	2021 \$
Revenue – operating activities	2	4,994,415	5,392,461
Employee benefits expense		(1,671,381)	(1,589,908)
Occupancy expenses		(22,406)	(29,083)
Publication expenses		(25,756)	(3,219)
Investment expenses		(44,510)	(34,601)
Other operating and administration expenses		(517,933)	(531,105)
Project expenses		(2,331,122)	(3,010,205)
Finance costs		(9,245)	(18,260)
Surplus from operating activities		372,062	176,080
Interest income	2	1,273	2,834
Surplus for the year		373,335	178,914
Other comprehensive income			
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss			
Net fair value movements for financial assets		(719,373)	787,535
Realised gains/(losses) on disposal of financial assets		(47,811)	(50,398)
Other comprehensive income for the year		(767,184)	737,137
Total comprehensive income for the year		(393,849)	916,051

Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2022

	Note	2022 \$	2021 \$
Assets			
Current assets			
Cash and cash equivalents	4	2,801,352	4,183,520
Trade and other receivables	5	122,367	195,553
Total current assets		2,923,719	4,379,073
Non-current assets			
Right-of-use assets	9	110,623	331,870
Financial assets	6	4,372,472	5,080,168
Property, plant and equipment	7	47,528	51,354
Total non-current assets		4,530,623	5,463,392
Total assets		7,454,342	9,842,465
Liabilities			
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	10	379,081	646,355
Short-term provisions	11	87,520	-
Employee benefits	13	392,069	308,957
Other liabilities	12	785,838	2,336,222
Lease liabilities	9	121,386	234,829
Total current liabilities		1,765,894	3,526,363
Non-current liabilities			
Employee benefits	13	19,729	48,875
Long-term provisions	11	-	83,273
Lease liabilities	9	-	121,386
Total non-current liabilities		19,729	253,534
Total liabilities		1,785,623	3,779,897
Net assets		5,668,719	6,062,568
Equity			
Reserves	14	416,989	1,135,089
Retained earnings		5,251,730	4,927,479
Total equity		5,668,719	6,062,568



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