

# A Victoria free from violence

## Significant initiatives

- **Ending family violence and sexual assault**  
 \$26.5m in 2023-24 (\$77.1m/4 yrs) to continue delivering support for victim-survivors and perpetrator intervention programs including:

  - Aboriginal frontline family violence services
  - Aboriginal-led sexual assault services
  - Adolescent family violence in the home programs
  - Accommodation-based perpetrator interventions
  - Men's behaviour change programs
  - Financial support and case management for victim-survivors of family violence
  - Specialist support for women with complex needs
  - Safe at Home approaches including the Personal Safety Initiative and culturally-specific flexible support packages for 90 migrant and refugee women on temporary visas who have experienced family violence
  - Support for victim-survivors with complex presentations in appropriate accommodation. Funding is provided to meet increased demand for sexual assault services and sexual abuse treatment services. Funding is also provided to build the first Australian memorial to acknowledge victim-survivors of sexual assault. McAuley Community Services for Women and Good Samaritan Inn will also receive funding to support family violence victim-survivors, including children, to access crisis accommodation.
- **Specialist family violence legal assistance at court**  
 \$7.8m in 2023-24 (\$22.8m/4 yrs) is provided to Victoria Police and Victoria Legal Aid to provide specialist police prosecutors and legal support at Specialist Family Violence Courts. This will ensure that parties involved in family violence matters have legal representation to resolve cases quickly, reducing stress associated with the court process while delivering court efficiencies and improved access to justice.
- **Addressing family violence for older Victorians**  
 \$1.4m in 2023-24 (\$6m/4 yrs) to continue the delivery of Elder Abuse Prevention Networks that provide community-based primary prevention and raise awareness of elder abuse in communities across Victoria.  
 Funding is also provided to continue to deliver the Seniors Rights Victoria support service, including the statewide Elder Abuse Helpline. This service provides free information and referrals, legal advice and casework, advocacy and education on matters specifically related to elder abuse to over 3,600 Victorians aged 60 and above.
- **Providing legal assistance and supporting Victorians with disability**  
 \$7.0m in 2023-24 (\$14m/2 yrs) is provided to continue early intervention programs and meet demand for legal assistance for people experiencing hardship, including through:

  - Community Legal Centre (CLC) initiatives such as the CLC Family Violence Assistance Fund and early intervention health justice partnerships.
- **Improving remote hearing participation**  
 \$1.6m in 2023-24 (\$3.2m/2 yrs) is provided to enable victim-survivors of family violence to appear in court remotely when seeking a family violence intervention order. This includes access to secure non-court locations equipped with remote witness technology and support services.

- Reducing future justice demand and keeping the community safe**  
 \$3.7m in 2023-24 (\$8.7m/4 yrs) to fund a number of initiatives including continuing financial counselling for victim-survivors of family violence, and provision of family violence financial counselling at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Women’s Prison.
- Giving women’s health the focus and funding it deserves**  
 \$23.8m in 2023-24 (\$153.9m/4 yrs) is provided to support the health of Victorian women and girls by improving access to services and promoting best practice management of women’s health issues. This includes establishing 20 new women’s health clinics, a dedicated Aboriginal-led clinic, an additional 10,800 laparoscopies, and nine sexual and reproductive hubs. Funding will also deliver an inquiry into women’s pain management and provide scholarships to increase availability of women’s health specialists.
- Free pads and tampons in public places**  
 \$5.9m in 2023-24 (\$23.0m/4 yrs) to supply free sanitary items across Victoria. The Government will install 1,500 sanitary dispenser machines with free pads and tampons in up to 700 public sites across Victoria, including courts, TAFEs, libraries, train stations, and cultural institutions, such as the State Library and Melbourne Museum.
- Gender responsive budgeting**  
 \$0.5m in 2023-24 (\$1.0m/2 yrs) is provided to continue the work undertaken by the Gender Responsive Budgeting unit within the Department of Treasury and Finance to ensure that outcomes for women are measured and considered as part of the resource allocation and decision-making process.

### What’s good

After record investment in family violence in recent years, and in a tough fiscal environment, VCOSS welcomes new investment of \$117 million. This includes investment of more than \$77 million over four years in a range of supports for victim-survivors of family violence and perpetrator intervention programs, including family violence services, sexual assault services, men’s behaviour change programs, and financial support and culturally specific flexible support packages for 90 migrant and refugee women on temporary visas who have experienced family violence.

In particular, VCOSS welcomes:

- increased investment to specialist sexual assault support services of \$3.95 million over four years, including \$1.1 million ongoing annually
- \$1.9 million to specialist harmful sexual behaviour services over four years, including \$0.5 million ongoing annually, and
- \$5.5 million over four years to Aboriginal-led sexual assault support services, including \$1.6 million ongoing annually.

Alongside this, VCOSS is also pleased to see increased funding to Seniors Rights Victoria, which is

### What’s missing

- While this year’s Budget contains \$30.1m in output initiatives that support primary prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women, the Budget contained no new additional funding for Respect Victoria or new funding for primary prevention initiatives. VCOSS has long advocated for an increase in funding for prevention initiatives, as we believe this will help stop violence before it begins and better support families and communities.
- VCOSS acknowledges the achievements of the Andrews Government in advancing gender equality in Victoria, including the implementation of *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, the introduction of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* and the establishment of a Gender Responsive Budgeting unit in the Department of Treasury and Finance. Whilst the new investment of \$1.0m to support the work of the Gender Responsive Budgeting unit is welcome, we look forward to seeing further investment in gender responsive budgeting in future budgets and support for departments to undertake gender impact assessments across all policy

the only integrated legal and advocacy service specialising in elder abuse that covers the whole state. We highlighted in our recent State Budget Submission that Seniors Rights Victoria was struggling to meet increased demand and we are pleased to see that funding is being provided to support the service, including the statewide Elder Abuse Helpline.

Twelve Specialist Family Violence Courts have been established since 2019, following the Royal Commission recommendation that all family violence matters be heard in specialist courts to improve safety of victim survivors and strengthen accountability mechanisms for people who use family violence through the court process. This Budget provides welcome investment in legal services throughout this court network, to ensure victim-survivors can navigate the legal system and achieve good outcomes in court.

VCOSS also welcomes this Budget's focus and investment in women's health, including funding to establish 20 new women's health clinics and investment in free pads and tampons in public places. This measure is an important contribution to tackling period poverty and will help to advance gender equality.

and program design. Looking ahead, VCOSS would like to see the Victorian Government build on strong foundations and establish an independent Gender Equality Budget Group, modelled on the United Kingdom Women's Budget Group. The Group would comprise experts from across government, academia and the social sector, and undertake an annual gender equality needs assessment of government initiatives. In the meantime, VCOSS looks forward to seeing the release of Victoria's new Gender Equality Strategy later this year.

- We know that many victim-survivors of family violence are stuck in refuges due to a lack of social and affordable housing. VCOSS looks forward to working with the Government to plan the next steps in establishing a long-term pipeline of new social housing, to build the 60,000 new social housing properties we need over the next 10 years.