

Victorians in work

Significant initiatives

- **On-demand worker support**
\$4.5m in 2023-24 (\$9m/2 yrs) is provided to continue implementation of the Government's response to the Inquiry into the Victorian On-Demand Workforce. This includes the establishment of the Gig Worker Support Service to provide support services for on-demand workers, including information and advice in relation to their entitlements and work status.
- **Jobs Victoria**
\$25.1m in 2023-24 (\$35.1m/2 yrs) to extend the Jobs Victoria Mentors program, which helps reduce barriers to employment for jobseekers in areas experiencing entrenched disadvantage. Funding is also provided to support the not-for-profit organisation Ready Set to provide clothing and coaching services to jobseekers struggling to get into the workforce.
- **Latrobe Valley Authority**
\$7.2m in 2023-24 is provided to continue the Latrobe Valley Authority's operations, supporting the management of economic transition in the region. Funding is also provided for the Ladder Step-Up program to provide employment support for young people in the Latrobe Valley and for delivery of the Inclusive Employment Program by the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council.
- **Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct**
\$2.0m in 2023-24 (\$6.0m/2 yrs) is provided to support the delivery of planning works and build enabling infrastructure in the Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct.
- **Investing early where it matters**
\$10.2m in 2023-24 (\$23.4m/4 yrs) to continue initiatives that support young Victorians at risk of disengagement from the community. These community-led initiatives provide Aboriginal youth mentoring, and provide vulnerable young people from African and Pasifika backgrounds with culturally-specific support and improved education and employment opportunities.
- **Women's economic security program**
\$0.1m in 2023-24 is provided for SisterWorks Richmond to provide skills-based learning programs for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeker women and expand the Employment Pathways program to connect more women to paid employment opportunities.

What's good

Victoria's economy and employment has bounced back following the COVID-19 pandemic, with unemployment at a historic low of 3.9% and youth unemployment at 8.7%. The Government has also achieved its Job Target announced in the 2020-21 Budget – to create 400,000 new jobs by 2025 – two years early.

Victorians living in regional and rural areas have also benefited from strong employment growth, with unemployment at 3.7%. This Budget builds on investment in the regions, with funding provided to

What's missing

VCOSS is pleased to see continued investment in the Jobs Victoria Mentors program, which will help support around 1,500 Victorians to gain employment.

However, we are disappointed that both the Jobs Victoria Advocate and Career Counsellors programs have been defunded.

While unemployment is currently at record lows, we are mindful that there are highly disadvantaged groups that continue to be locked out of opportunity

continue the work of the Latrobe Valley Authority, which helps support coal-fired-power workers and miners retrain, reskill and find new opportunities, along with funding to support the Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct. VCOSS is also pleased to see continued investment to support young Victorians at risk of disengagement from the community, including providing vulnerable young people from African and Pasifika backgrounds with culturally specific support and improved education and employment opportunities. Whilst a small investment, the funding provided to SisterWorks Richmond to deliver skills-based learning programs for migrant, refugee and asylum-seeker women and expand the Employment Pathways program to connect more women to paid employment opportunities is also welcomed.

and would benefit from continued investment in the Jobs Victoria Advocate and Career Counsellor programs.

The Budget papers confirm that around 183,360 Jobs Victoria Services (Advocates, Mentors and Career Counsellors) were delivered to Victorian jobseekers this last year, double the 2022-23 target. This demonstrates the strong engagement with the programs even in this environment.

With the support of Jobs Victoria, nearly 14,000 disadvantaged jobseekers gained employment in 2022-23. Working in both Melbourne and regional Victoria, Advocates helped disadvantaged jobseekers find employment support, training and education through sharing information and tips about getting a job. Alongside this, the Career Counsellors Program helped support disadvantaged jobseekers to identify their career goals and pathways and understand their skills and strengths.

VCOSS notes that a number of flagship government initiatives rely on Jobs Victoria infrastructure, such as social procurement commitments attached to Big Build infrastructure projects, and whole-of-government strategies such as the Victorian Youth Strategy. We are keen to work with Government to ensure momentum can be maintained.

VCOSS agrees that it is appropriate to take another look at the Victorian Government's role in employment services in a changing national economic and policy environment. We encourage the Victorian Government to continue to share insights about the success of Jobs Victoria with the Commonwealth Government and the Senate Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services, to inform redesign of the Commonwealth Government's employment services. However, even in a reformed national environment, VCOSS believes there will still be an important role for the Victorian Government to play at a policy level and a program investment level.

The impact of the reduced service footprint of Jobs Victoria will be compounded by the loss of two programs funded through DFFH. VCOSS is dismayed that the Community Employment Connectors program, which helped support young and culturally diverse Victorians to secure suitable and sustainable employment, and the Carer Employment Support Program have also been defunded. Both of these

programs were making vital contributions to dismantling barriers to work for under-represented groups.