



# Annual Report

2022-23










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 respects to Elders past and present, and to emerging leaders. We conduct our business on sovereign, unceded Aboriginal land. This document was prepared on the lands of the Kulin Nation.





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# President and CEO report



**Damian Ferrie**  
President, VCOSS



**Juanita Pope**  
CEO, VCOSS

**The 2022–23 year saw VCOSS continue its prolific and impactful advocacy, uniting across members and partners to influence government policy and drive meaningful social change.**

We are pleased to present the VCOSS Annual Report for 2022–23 detailing the significant achievements of VCOSS in this pivotal time – a year marked by resilience, determination and fearless advocacy under the outstanding leadership of former VCOSS CEO Emma King AOM.

The lead-up to the State Election in November 2022 was a period of intense campaigning by VCOSS, with a focus on ensuring election commitments advanced social equity and wellbeing for every Victorian. In a heated political climate, VCOSS remained true to our mission to amplify the voices of members and of Victorians experiencing poverty and disadvantage. The comprehensive VCOSS Election Platform advocated for a powerful, evidence-based, targeted set of social and economic policy priorities.

Throughout 2022–23, VCOSS has been closely involved in various sector reform projects at different stages of development. VCOSS advocated for the sector regarding new social service regulations, contributed to social service workforce development initiatives and actively engaged with Government in deliberations about the Community Services Sector Fair Jobs Code.

With the approach of the 2023 Budget and holding grave concerns about funding and program cuts, VCOSS again played a significant and delicate role as the main conduit between the Government and our sector.

At all times, the extraordinary VCOSS team has worked hard towards the organisation’s vision and purpose.

At a governance level, this year the VCOSS Board has embedded new constitutional arrangements that ensure diversity and a more balanced array of skills on the Board. These measures pave the way for thoughtful planning and strategic decision-making as the Board stewards the organisation to new leadership and a refreshed strategy over the next year.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to Emma King, whose leadership was instrumental in VCOSS’s achievements in 2022–23 as throughout her 10-year tenure as CEO. Working with Emma was a pleasure and a privilege. It was a fitting final act – as well as a tribute to the ongoing efforts of the whole VCOSS team – that our long-running campaign for security and clarity on funding indexation was resolved in Emma’s last week.

As always, VCOSS’s achievements are a testament to the strength of our members, whose resilience and hard work is the driving force behind all our advocacy.

There are complex and even daunting times ahead. People are struggling to afford the basics, housing is out of reach for many, inequality endures and disasters are increasingly prevalent. Yet our commitment to the wellbeing of Victorians is unwavering, and our desire for impact is strong. With your support, we look forward to an emboldened year of collaborative effort and meaningful action ahead.





**Emma King OAM**  
VCOSS CEO,  
July 8 2013 –  
September 15 2023

## Farewell from Emma King

**Emma King was VCOSS CEO during the 2022–23 year.**

What an extraordinary privilege it has been.

I've been so fortunate to work alongside colleagues and collaborators across the social sector and our broader community as we strived together to make Victoria stronger, fairer and more just.

It has also been my pleasure to engage with so many members of parliament, political staff and departmental leaders who have shared VCOSS's vision for change, and have worked incredibly hard towards making this a reality.

Thank you for the absolute privilege of working with you.

I look forward to cheering on the work of VCOSS and the community sector as a friend and ally.

*This is an extract of Emma King's formal farewell message to VCOSS members in September 2023.*



# The big issues

**Social challenges don't exist in a vacuum. They intersect with and compound each other in complicated ways.**

For example, engagement with the justice system might lead to housing challenges, while energy poverty can make people sick. Different population groups also experience these challenges in different ways. Appropriate responses must therefore be comprehensive, tailored and responsive to community needs.

To navigate these complexities VCOSS is guided by a series of cross-cutting themes and philosophies.

## Wellbeing

Wellbeing is at the centre of everything VCOSS does. Focusing on wellbeing means working to ensure all Victorians have access to the support and resources they need to thrive. It means enabling resilient, inclusive and cohesive communities.

We face deep systemic challenges including increasing inequality, skyrocketing cost of living, and escalating impacts of climate change. To address these challenges, VCOSS advocates putting people's needs at the forefront of economic decision-making by embracing wellbeing economy approaches.

Rather than focusing on conventional measures like GDP, wellbeing approaches call for the driving purpose of our economy to be the holistic wellbeing of people and the planet.

## Thriving communities

Thriving communities are connected, inclusive and resilient. The community sector has a fundamental role in supporting community members' wellbeing and facilitating connections between people and services.

VCOSS empowers the community sector by actively listening, fostering partnerships, and co-designing holistic solutions. VCOSS membership structures such as the Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee (see p.14) and Peaks and Statewide Network Forum enable sector networking, collaboration and learning.

In 2022–23, VCOSS's Voices of Victoria Listening Tour (see p.18) provided an opportunity for lesser-heard Victorians to talk about what their communities need to thrive. These insights have fed into VCOSS's policy and advocacy work in areas including just transition, disaster resilience, social connection and food security.

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## First Nations

Taking our lead from First Nations Victorians and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, VCOSS came out hard and early in support of an Indigenous Voice to Federal Parliament. We supported the campaign through public advocacy, and the production of a series of videos platforming First Nations leaders campaigning for 'Yes'.

VCOSS remains committed to being a good ally to First Nations people and a forceful advocate for Treaty and truth-telling in Victoria. We will keep exploring new ways to support, celebrate and empower First Nations people. We honour their unbroken and unbreakable culture and connection to the lands and waters.





# Key projects and achievements





**VCOSS is the peak body for Victoria's social and community sector, and the state's premier social advocacy body. We strive to be a fearless and constructive voice for change.**

To achieve this, we endeavour to lead debates about the true causes and effects of poverty, and propose positive, innovative and workable approaches that will create real improvements in people's lives.

## **Climate change**

VCOSS has continued to ensure the voices of the community sector are included in decision-making processes around climate change.

In May 2023, the Victorian Government confirmed its 2035 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 75–80 per cent below 2005 levels, and brought forward its net zero emissions target to 2045 (previously 2050). VCOSS provided advice to the Government on ensuring its targets are fair and equitable for Victorians experiencing disadvantage.

VCOSS also spotlighted our efforts on combating heat stress through a webinar and panel discussion addressing resilient cooling strategies for climate-proof buildings and communities.

Additionally, VCOSS convened and chaired meetings of the **One Million Homes Alliance**, a coalition of Victorian community and consumer groups advocating for energy efficiency and climate resilience in vulnerable households.

We also participated in the **Resilience Community of Practice** and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's **Greater Melbourne's Regional Adaptation Strategy Stakeholder Committee**.

Engaging in multiple project advisory groups on resilient households and communities, VCOSS ensured the inclusion of the community sector and individuals facing disadvantage in climate change research initiatives.

We continue to work closely with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate to deliver a research report on the opportunities and barriers to climate change mitigation and adaptation for community sector organisations, and on a series of Listening Tour-style sessions to hear and amplify the perspectives of Victorian communities on climate change.

## **Fair and affordable energy**

In 2022–23, as energy affordability played a big part in the cost-of-living crisis, VCOSS partnered with members and frontline workers to continue our work addressing energy hardship.

This work included a number of submissions to state and federal departments and regulators (detailed in Formal Policy Outputs, pp.13), including to the Essential Services Commission on the Victorian Default Offer price. It also included release of the flagship research paper *The Missing 14%: Why so many Victorians are missing out on energy concessions*.

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Throughout 2022–23, VCOSS convened the **Vic Utilities energy consumer advocacy group**. This informal policy and advocacy peer network meets every two months to share information and coordinate systemic efforts on social equity and related issues in energy, water, and other household essential services.



## Renters' rights

Victorian renters are facing some of the toughest market conditions we have seen in our lifetime, with the twin challenges of low vacancy rates and months of interest rate rises sending rents skyrocketing.

While changes introduced in 2021 to Victoria's renting laws have helped to make renting fairer and safer, the regulatory environment has been tested by these unforeseen economic conditions.

Frontline community sector workers have a key role to play in supporting renters to navigate these conditions, and hold a wealth of insights into how renters are faring and what needs to happen to ease the pressure facing renters.

As part of our Department of Government Services funded Rental Fairness Project, VCOSS continues to raise awareness of renters' rights and of the supports available to frontline workers.

In 2022–23, VCOSS has hosted four Renters' Rights Rundown events – free, one-hour online sessions where workers hear from a community lawyer on renters'

rights under the Act and on supports available to renters, and have the opportunity to ask questions to learn more about matters important to their work.

These events have been attended by close to 1,000 frontline community sector workers, with resources related to the events – including slidepacks, summary articles, quick links and transcripts – sent to nearly 2,000 workers.

Insights gathered from frontline community sector workers as part of this project have formed the basis of our advocacy and engagement with the Department and Consumer Affairs Victoria, as well as our ongoing political engagement to continue to make renting fairer and safer.

## Housing and homelessness

With a new Federal Government focused on addressing the housing crisis, VCOSS engaged with the Victorian Housing Minister and Homes Victoria to support the Victorian Government to get the best possible outcomes for Victoria from the Commonwealth's prospective new social housing investments.

VCOSS continued to advocate for the Victorian Government to build a minimum of 60,000 new social housing dwellings over the next decade.

We have also advocated to:

- improve minimum standards in rooming houses
- introduce a short-stay levy in the City of Melbourne to increase rental housing supply
- switch to a broad-based land tax to make the upfront costs of housing more affordable, make it less expensive to move as needs change over time, and stabilise the revenue stream for the Victorian Government
- ensure public housing renters have adequate supports and strong tenancy rights to prevent unnecessary evictions into homelessness for neighbourhood issues.



## Disability advocacy

In 2022–23, VCOSS continued the important work of advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in areas including housing, education, justice, and emergency planning.

VCOSS delivered three important submissions over the last year.

- *Building a Stronger Foundation* – our submission to the National Disability Advocacy Framework 2022–2025
- *Left behind* – our submission to the Review of the impact of COVID-19 on school students with disability.
- Our submission to the 2022 Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.

VCOSS's State Budget

Submission included important priorities such as creating a supported decision-making service and increased long-term funding for Victoria's disability advocacy sector.

VCOSS also supported our member organisations in the community sector to engage with the NDIS review by hosting a member forum. This forum presented an opportunity for VCOSS members to hear directly from senior personnel from the NDIS Review Secretariat as well as collaborate with each other around how the NDIS can be made to work for all Victorians. Insights and reflections from this forum were used to shape up our written submission to the NDIS Review in August 2023.

VCOSS continues to work closely with the **ECCV State Disability Network**, which aims to identify key advocacy issues and support COVID-19 recovery for people with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We are also a member of the **All Aboard Network**, which advocates for better, more independently accessible public transport across Victoria.

Through these groups, VCOSS continues to collaborate with the sector to identify key advocacy issues and collaborate on systemic advocacy.

## Gender equality

Gender inequality touches all parts of our community and is a driver of violence against women.

In 2022–23, VCOSS continued to advocate for a society where all people live free from family and gender-based violence. We supported the specialist family violence sector and the Victorian Government with the implementation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence recommendations through representation on the **Family Violence Reform Advisory Group**. We were also part of **Safe & Equal's 16 Days of Activism Project Advisory Group**.

Victoria has continued to advance gender equality, which is reflected in its commitment to embedding gender responsive budgeting. This is resulting in higher quality gender impact assessments in the State Budget and ensuring that government investment better meets women's needs and aspirations.

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Through our membership of the **Equal Workplace Advisory Council**, we have advocated for redressing gender pay inequity in the female-dominated community services sector. We also engaged in the national policy process to help develop the next National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality, advocating for more accessible and affordable childcare, a fairer paid parental leave scheme, more funding towards prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women, and better investment in women's economic security.

## Emergency management, resilience and recovery

In late 2022 Victoria experienced one of the worst flooding events in the state's post-colonial history, inundating homes, communities, businesses and farmland.

VCOSS has been visiting and consulting with community sector organisations affected by the floods and/or delivering flood relief and recovery. Their insights have shaped VCOSS's ongoing advocacy to emergency management agencies and our submission to Parliament's 'Inquiry into preparedness and response to Victoria's major flooding event of October 2022'. Among VCOSS's recommendations is the need for long-term funding before and after disasters for the sector to build disaster resilience and help people recover.

VCOSS has been supporting projects aimed at building the disaster resilience of people most at risk during emergencies. For example, the CFA's 'Clearing the path to disability inclusive emergency planning' project is training CFA and Red Cross volunteers to deliver the Emergency Planning Advice Service. The volunteers will visit people with disability in their home and help them develop an emergency plan together.

And VCOSS has been working with multicultural organisations and communities in flood-affected areas as part of the **Multicultural Resilience Project**. The project will co-design flood recovery and disaster resilience resources with multicultural communities in Mildura, Shepparton, Wodonga and Wangaratta and will also produce an insights paper to capture key learnings.

VCOSS has also been working with community sector workers, government representatives and academics to help the sector plan for the **increasing dangers of extreme heat**. In the lead-up to the 2022–23 summer, VCOSS hosted the '**Adapting to the scorching summers ahead**' forum, at which presenters shared ideas about how community services can prepare for heatwaves and brainstormed advocacy asks for helping people experiencing disadvantage to keep cool on hot days. The event was supplemented with resources for the sector to use each summer to plan for extreme heat.

## Education equity

Education is the foundation for social and economic inclusion, and a key determinant of health and wellbeing. But not all children, young people and adults have equitable access to education.

In 2022–23 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 our formal partnership with the Department of Education, **Senior Secondary Reform Advisory Group** and **Best Start Best Life Taskforce Advisory Group**, 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 2022 Community Sector Education Forum was held in September 2022, focussing on the theme of education equity in a wellbeing economy.

VCOSS also ran webinars on the Department's new School Community Safety Order scheme and the Disability Inclusion Package in schools, convened a policy Roundtable on school education costs and their impacts on learning and wellbeing for single mother headed families, and facilitated a community sector workshop to inform the detailed design of the Best Start Best Life early childhood reforms. Additionally, VCOSS assisted the sector to engage with education reforms by providing three free online workshops on how to effectively engage policy-makers and other systemic advocacy skills.

## Sector planning

VCOSS has supported the sector to plan for upcoming changes including the new social services regulatory scheme and The Victorian Fair Jobs Code for the Community Services sector.

Forums such as **HSHPIC** and the **VCOSS Peaks and Statewide Network** have continued to bring sector leaders together to collaborate and share knowledge.

VCOSS welcomed the Victorian Government's Jobs Guarantee, which commenced in September 2022. This initiative will provide graduates from the Diploma of Community Services with a 12-month position in the sector, as well as support to assist their transition from study to employment.





VCOSS has also strongly advocated for supported student placement and recognition of community sector workers as ‘key workers’ to enable access to government-backed affordable housing.

## Mapping poverty in Victoria

In 2018, VCOSS released the report *Every suburb, every town: poverty in Victoria*. Using complex modelling techniques based on 2016 census data, this report mapped estimated poverty rates for different groups in different areas, providing a detailed picture of poverty across the state for the first time. In 2022–23 VCOSS worked with the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) to produce the second iteration of this series, containing updated modelling of poverty rates in Victoria based on 2021 census data.

The intent of this analysis is to shed light on the extent and dynamics of economic disadvantage in Victoria and to inform policy and government

intervention that reduces poverty and improves the lives of all Victorians. The *NATSEM Mapping Economic Disadvantage Report 2023* and the accompanying [interactive maps](#) were released in August 2023, sparking conversations about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recent cost-of-living pressures on Victorians experiencing disadvantage.

## Good jobs for a strong workforce

Addressing workforce shortages is a key challenge for the Victorian social and community services sector. To meet community demand over the coming decade, the sector needs a reliable pipeline of graduates and effective strategies to attract and retain new workers.

Throughout 2022–23, VCOSS helped lead the Victorian Government’s Social Services Jobs Guarantee – an innovative pilot connecting Diploma of Community Services graduates to vacant community sector jobs.

The scheme aims to drive up completion rates of community service qualifications, attract new workers to the sector, and increase the proportion of graduates taking up job opportunities in community services.

The pilot has been embraced by members, with 60 employers having participated in its initial phase.

The pilot’s next phase will focus on supporting employers to implement best practice community service graduate programs, in recognition that appropriate graduate support can improve staff retention and safety outcomes. VCOSS is excited to support members to engage in the pilot throughout 2023–24.

# Learning from communities

## Listening Tour

VCOSS's second Voices of Victoria Listening Tour, following on from the successful 2021–22 tour, was run in the first half of 2023.

As we emerge from the worst years of COVID-19, the Tour is about listening to Victorians who don't often get a seat at the table. It is about meeting them in the spaces where they feel comfortable and empowered to tell their stories, and finding out what they need in order to live a good life.

To this end, VCOSS partnered with Victorian community organisations to visit 15 communities across the state. Most of these sessions were held in person – in Neighbourhood Houses and other community organisations in metropolitan and regional locations – with a few supplementary 'deep-dive' online sessions with specific cohorts.

VCOSS heard about the specific struggles different communities are facing and the different service needs they have, as well as the positive and generative connections that sustain Victorians through the pandemic recovery and through challenges including the housing and cost-of-living crises.

The [2023 Listening Tour Report](#) was launched at Parliament House and delivered to Government in late 2023.

The Tour will continue to link back to the communities we visited to give them updates, individualised briefings and reports.

## Multicultural Resilience Project

Jointly funded by the Australian and Victorian Governments under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, the Multicultural Emergency Management and Resilience Project aims to:

- Support multicultural communities to continue to recover from the October 2022 Victorian floods.
- Enhance the disaster recovery capacity and resilience of multicultural communities.
- Continue to strengthen partnerships between multicultural communities, government and emergency management agencies and organisations.

In early 2023, VCOSS consulted with multicultural communities and emergency services in flood affected areas in regional Victoria to understand their experiences of the floods and identify opportunities to support the community to continue to recover.

Informed by these findings, VCOSS is now partnering with local multicultural organisations in four areas to deliver a series of workshops with community members and codesign resources that can help people prepare for, respond to and recover from the floods and other potential disasters.

In early 2023, VCOSS consulted with multicultural communities and emergency services in flood affected areas in regional Victoria to understand their experiences of the floods and identify opportunities to support the community to continue to recover.

The partner organisations are Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council (Wodonga), North Eastern Multicultural Association (Wangaratta and surrounds), Point of Difference Studio (Shepparton and surrounds) and Sunraysia-Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (Mildura and Swan Hill).





# Our leadership and advocacy

## Formal policy outputs

As well as the VCOSS 2022 Election Platform and 2023 Victorian Budget Submission, VCOSS produced other flagship reports including:

### Value strength, build resilience

A blueprint to improve emergency management outcomes for Victoria's multicultural communities. *September 2022*

### The Missing 14%

Too many Victorians are missing out on energy concessions they're entitled to. *May 2023*

### Flooded with demand

The community sector's relief and recovery efforts for the 2022 Victorian floods. *June 2023*

VCOSS develops formal submissions and provides informal feedback to dozens of policymaking processes each year, including parliamentary inquiries, government consultation exercises, regulatory reviews, Royal Commissions and more.

### July – December 2022

#### *Department of Social Services (Federal)*

National Disability Advocacy Framework

#### *Senate Select Committee on Work and Care (Federal)*

Work and Care

#### *Australian Energy Regulator*

Victorian gas distribution network businesses – 5yr regulated revenue arrangements (initial proposals)

#### *The Treasury (Federal)*

Building a more prosperous Australia (Submission to the Employment White Paper)

#### *Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action*

Protecting consumers of distributed energy resources

### January – June 2023

#### *Department of Families, Fairness and Housing*

Updated minimum standards for rooming houses

#### *Essential Services Commission*

Victorian Default Offer price review 2023–24

#### *The Treasury (Federal)*

Measuring What Matters (wellbeing economy)

#### *Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council*

Proposed changes to incorporate emissions reduction into NEO

#### *Australian Energy Regulator*

Submission on gas networks' draft proposals

#### *Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet*

Submission to the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

#### *Industrial Relations Victoria*

Review of the Long Service Benefits Portability Act submission

#### *Department of Education (Federal)*

Review of the impact of COVID-19 on school students with disability

#### *Essential Services Commission*

VDO 2023–24 draft decision

#### *Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry*

Victorian inquiry into stamp duty

#### *Infrastructure Victoria*

Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy

#### *Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry*

Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria

#### *City of Melbourne*

Submission to City of Melbourne 2023–24 Draft Budget

#### *Department of Infrastructure and Transport (Federal)*

Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002





## Coalitions for change

The strength of VCOSS comes from our members and the partnerships we create and foster. Over the past year, VCOSS has played a prominent role in several formal partnerships and coalitions.

### Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance

The **Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance** is a group of leading peak bodies dealing with housing and homelessness matters in Victoria. Members are independent organisations that come together on issues of shared interest and great importance.

In addition to VCOSS, the Alliance comprises: Aboriginal Housing Victoria, the Community Housing Industry Association (Victoria), the Council to Homeless Persons, Safe + Equal, Justice Connect, Tenants Victoria and the Victorian Public Tenants Association.

Collectively, The Alliance represents people seeking a home, housing providers, renters, renters' rights groups and housing support bodies.

In 2022, ahead of the Victorian Election, the Alliance produced 'Leave a legacy for good', calling on the Victorian Government to leave a positive housing legacy as part of the delivery of the 2026 Commonwealth Games in regional Victoria. The paper included six measures to achieve this, including building more public and community housing, investing in housing and supports for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and measures to protect renters from rent increases and evictions.

Although the 2026 Commonwealth Games were subsequently cancelled, a housing legacy has been secured with the announcement of a \$1b Regional Housing Fund, which will build 1,300 new social housing properties in regional Victoria.

### Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee

The Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee, also known as HSHPIC, is a longstanding partnership between VCOSS, the housing and community sectors, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and the Department of Health.

HSHPIC continued to meet every six weeks in 2022–23, with a strong focus on social services regulation reforms, the Victorian Government's Social Services Jobs Code and indexation.

The partnership also continued the work of implementing key priorities of the Community Services Industry Plan, including building a thriving and sustainable workforce and supporting the community sector's ongoing recovery from COVID-19.



### DET Partnership

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

This partnership also supported the delivery of VCOSS's flagship 2022 Community Sector Education Forum, which was held in September 2022 and focused on the theme of wellbeing.

### VCOSS Education Equity Coalition

This is a long-standing group of organisations convened by VCOSS, focused on driving equity in the state education system. During the year, VCOSS ran information forums to provide members with updates (and the opportunity to provide feedback on implementation) regarding two major Department of Education reforms: the introduction of School Community Safety Orders and the rollout of the Disability Inclusion Package in schools.

This group was also a key consultative forum supporting the development of VCOSS's State Election advocacy priorities. A sub-group of members also participated in a **Senior Secondary Reform Policy Advisory Group** convened by VCOSS. This Policy Advisory Group created a forum for members to share insights on the implementation of changes to Victoria's senior secondary certificates and to jointly advocate to government for refinements to the detailed design and implementation of these reforms.

### COSS network

VCOSS is a proud and active member of the national Council of Social Service network.

Each state and territory has a peak body (called a Council of Social Service) representing that jurisdiction's community sector organisations. This is in addition to the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) which operates at the Commonwealth level.

While each Council of Social Service operates independently, we collaborate on matters of joint concern and coordinate where appropriate to boost our individual and collective impact. Our combined national network has almost 4,000 organisational and individual members.

The COSS network is committed to working together constructively into the future to end poverty, inequality and disadvantage, and to create a fairer, more equal and inclusive Australia.

## Disability Advocacy Resource Unit

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

DARU has had a successful 2022–23 year, with many initiatives to strengthen the disability advocacy sector.

Highlights include:

- the introduction of the **Frontline Disability Advocates Community of Practice**, and **Victorian Disability Advocacy Leadership Group** meetings which focus on strategic outcomes for the sector
- the launch of Advance your Advocacy Practice sessions and continuation of Advocacy toolkit sessions, to continue to build the capacity and increase the knowledge and skills of Victorian disability advocates
- continuing to resource a project officer to build the capacity of the sector to do collaborative systemic work.

In addition, DARU also continued the expansion of its online training library offerings; disability inclusion trainings for sector partners, colleagues and government; and multiple well attended online advocacy sector conversations.

### Other coalitions

In alphabetical order

- Best Start Best Life Taskforce
- COSS Directors' Network Vic.
- DELWP Energy Consumer Insights Forum
- Department of Health Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Expert Advisory Committee
- The Disability Act Review Advisory Group

- Early Childhood Education Reform Stakeholder Group
- Equal Workplaces Advisory Committee
- Essential Services Commission Community Sector Roundtable
- EWOV Community Consultation Group
- Family Violence Reform Advisory Group
- Justice Partnership Committee
- Mental Health Policy Network
- National Consumer Roundtable on Energy
- Peaks and Statewide Network
- Premier's Mentally Healthy Workplaces Advisory Group
- RIMAG Implementation Steering Group
- Roadmap to Reform Ministerial Advisory Group
- Senior Secondary Reform Advisory Committee
- Service Agreement Working Group
- Sick Pay Guarantee Ministerial Advisory Committee
- Smart Justice for Women
- Smart Justice for Young People
- State Relief and Recovery Team
- Switch to Social Work Advisory Panel
- Victorian Food Relief Taskforce
- Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance
- Victorian Peak Bodies Climate Roundtable
- Victorian Primary and Community Health Network
- Victorian Utilities Policy Network

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## Communicating the issues

The communications approaches used by VCOSS changed dramatically during COVID, as events moved online and people recalibrated their expectations regarding the frequency and style of certain communications. 2022–23 has been a year of reflection and consolidation of these approaches. Some events returned to exclusively in-person (including the flagship *2023 VCOSS Treasurer's Lunch*) while others (including our large program of topic-specific member briefings) have mostly remained online.

VCOSS has maintained a strong presence in the traditional media, with appearances across 2022–23 in all major newspapers (*Herald*

*Sun*, *The Age*), radio stations (*ABC*, *3AW* and regional broadcasters) and mainstream TV news programs. The largest proactive media engagement of the reporting period was the release of the *VCOSS Poverty Maps*, a project charting the different rates and types of poverty by region (see p.11). The most common topics for VCOSS media comment were: the 2022 Victorian election, housing/homelessness and renters' rights, and the cost of living, including energy prices.

VCOSS will update its communications strategy in 2023–24, in response to emerging methods of delivery, evolving expectations and changes to the user experience and popularity of various social media platforms, including Twitter (now X).

The largest proactive media engagement of the reporting period was the release of the *VCOSS Poverty Maps*, a project charting the different rates and types of poverty by region (see p.11).





VCOSS staff  
in May 2023

# A strong VCOSS

## Disability inclusion

Disability inclusion remains a strong focus for VCOSS.

In 2022–23 the Inclusion Committee focused on providing disability inclusion as a part of the induction of new staff, and creating and delivering online training, as well as practical, immersive training for all staff.

Disability inclusive practice is now firmly embedded across all VCOSS meetings and events, both internally and externally.

The Inclusion Committee has also turned its attention to VCOSS online resources: ensuring that all images have alt text, our communications are written in plain English where possible, and all videos are captioned to make our communications inclusive to all.

## Workplace health and safety

Throughout 2022–23, VCOSS's Occupational Health and Safety Committee continued to meet regularly to oversee the health and safety of VCOSS staff in compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (Vic) 2004*.

Staff continued to work in a hybrid format and to complete working-from-home safety checklists every six months, to ensure best safety and ergonomic practices. Two staff members undertook first aid training.

Staff mental health was supported through an increased focus on culture-building and collaboration days.

## LGBTIQ+ inclusion

The VCOSS Rainbow Committee was inaugurated in 2022–23, with a mission to ensure that all VCOSS's work is LGBTIQ+ inclusive and affirming.

The Committee established a project plan that included:

- auditing VCOSS's internal policies, procedures, website and public policy work for LGBTIQ+ inclusion;
- ensuring that all VCOSS staff have cultural awareness of and training in issues that affect LGBTIQ+ communities; and
- engaging with members to help make connections and foster an inclusive, safe and welcoming sector.

Jac Tomlins was commissioned to provide LGBTIQ+ training.

The Committee meets every six weeks to progress opportunities for VCOSS to make a positive difference for LGBTIQ+ Victorians.

# Financial report

## Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2023

	Note	2023 \$	2022 \$
Revenue	2	4,222,075	4,994,415
Employee benefits expense		(1,707,512)	(1,671,381)
Occupancy expenses		(154,545)	(22,406)
Publication expenses		(30,357)	(25,756)
Investment expenses		(41,106)	(44,510)
Other operating and administration expenses		(524,930)	(517,933)
Project expenses		(1,598,725)	(2,331,122)
Finance costs		(1,024)	(9,245)
<b>Surplus from operating activities</b>		<b>163,876</b>	<b>372,062</b>
Interest – investment	2	9,528	1,273
<b>Surplus for the year</b>		<b>173,404</b>	<b>373,335</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>			
<b>Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss</b>			
Net fair value movements for financial assets		501,105	(719,373)
Realised gains/(losses) on disposal of financial assets		(25,999)	(47,811)
Other comprehensive income for the year		475,106	(767,184)
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>648,510</b>	<b>(393,849)</b>

Full Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2023 are available on the VCOSS website.



## Thank you

As always, partnerships and collaborations were the cornerstone of VCOSS's work throughout 2022–23. Thank you to the organisations who worked with us this year to help advance the goal of wellbeing for all Victorians.





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