

# Inclusive communities

## Aboriginal Self determination

### Significant initiatives

- **Dandenong and Districts Aborigines Co-operative accommodation**  
\$10.4m in 2025-26 (\$12.5m/4 years) to fit-out and lease accommodation for the Dandenong and Districts Aborigines Co-operative Limited (DDACL) to deliver clinical, social and emotional wellbeing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Melbourne's south-east.
- **Delivering First Nations community infrastructure**  
\$5.3m in 2025-26 (\$5.4m/2 years) to invest in infrastructure for First Nations organisations, including funding to extend the Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program.
- **Supporting Aboriginal women on their journey into motherhood**  
\$3.8m in 2025-25 (\$15.8m/4 yrs) to provide Aboriginal women with culturally safe care and support in their journey into motherhood.
- **Advancing First Peoples' interests and delivering on Victoria's commitment to Closing the Gap** \$6.7m in 2025-26 (\$13.4m/2 years) to meet Victoria's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including supporting Victoria's formal Closing the Gap implementation partner.
- **Advancing Self-determination for Aboriginal children and families**  
\$5.6m in 2025-26 (\$24.8m/4 years) to increase capacity for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to undertake child protection investigations and lead case planning and case management; continue the Aboriginal Children's Forum to develop and monitor the Wungurilwil Gapgapduir action activities; and support the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance to work with and represent its member ACCOs.
- **Closing the Gap for First Nations Victorians in VET**  
\$6.8m in 2025-26 (\$17.6m/4 years) to support the Aboriginal Community Controlled and First Nations-owned training sector to design training models to support VET completion rates of First Nations Victorians. This initiative is funded from the National Skills Agreement Commonwealth Revenue.

- **Continuing support for First Nations organisations and events**  
 \$2.2m in 2025-26 (\$3.8m/2 years) to provide continued investment in First Nations organisations and continue delivering First Nations cultural events and awards programs. This includes support for the Koorie Youth Council and Koorie Heritage Trust to continue critical service delivery for First Nations young people and members of the Stolen Generations.
- **Maintaining investment in Aboriginal community-based justice solutions**  
 \$6.9m in 2025-26 (\$14m/2 years) to enable Aboriginal organisations to continue programs that improve Aboriginal justice outcomes, including regional legal service hubs operated by VALS and Koori men’s and women’s diversion programs delivered by Aboriginal organisations.
- **Koorie literacy and numeracy program**  
 \$4.1m in 2025-26 (\$18.5m/4 yrs) to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Victorian government schools.
- **Self-determination for Aboriginal early childhood education**  
 \$0.7m in 2025-26 (\$5.4m/4 yrs) is provided for kindergartens and other early years services run by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to support self-determination through implementing culturally sensitive and flexible approaches to kindergarten curriculum and service delivery.
- Analysis of further significant initiatives related to Aboriginal Self Determination can be found in other sections, including:

  - **Community Safety Package**  
Refer to our Justice budget analysis
  - **Supporting a safe and effective corrections system**  
Refer to our Justice budget analysis
  - **Continuing early intervention and resolution legal services**  
Refer to our Justice budget analysis
  - **Justice system costs associated with court programs**  
Refer to our Justice budget analysis
  - **Housing Support Program – Priority Works**  
Refer to our Housing budget analysis

## What’s good

- VCOSS welcomes the Victorian Government’s investment in infrastructure for Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-Operative, which VACCHO has recommended for a number of

years and VCOSS supported in our pre-budget submission. As noted by VACCHO, this investment is long-overdue and will allow the DDAACL to reopen its services in a new location, following one of its buildings being forced to close in August 2024 after it was condemned due to asbestos. This is a much needed investment in a vital hub for Aboriginal health and wellbeing services.

- The *Closing the Gap for First Nations Victorians in VET* initiative, which will provide funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACC-RTOs) under the National Skills Agreement, is welcome and has been [described by VACCHO](#) as “a fundamental milestone in recognising the role of ACC-RTOs in delivering community-based education and developing the pathways of critically needed Aboriginal workforces.”

## What’s missing

- Although funding of \$13.4m/2 years is provided to meet Victoria’s commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, this Budget does not allocate resources to address the recommendations of the historic Yoorrook Justice Commission, due to conclude in June 2025. Fully investing in the Treaty process and implementing all recommendations of the Yoorrook Justice Commission is foundational to closing the gap and advancing self-determination, addressing systemic racism and discrimination, and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria.
- VCOSS is disappointed to see no direct funding in the Budget allocated to deliver an [Aboriginal-led model of care in custody](#). An Aboriginal-led model of care has been a recommendation to Government since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and numerous other reports, investigations and reviews in the almost 40 years since then. For more, see our Justice budget analysis.
- Although support has been provided for several significant initiatives, as described above and throughout this analysis, more needs to be done overall to adequately invest in supporting Aboriginal self-determination across the social services system, including for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and for preventative and early intervention initiatives run by First Peoples organisations across justice, health, education, child and family services, and housing. For example, as outlined by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the [Budget invests \\$43.4m into youth custodial programs, compared to \\$1.9m for a youth outreach program](#). For more, see our Justice, Education, Health and Housing analyses.
- According to VACCHO, the \$5.4m allocated to infrastructure needs across the Aboriginal sector, outside of the funding allocated to DDAACL, falls well short of what is required. Infrastructure Victoria has recommended that an investment of \$100–150m is needed.

- The Budget fails to provide funding to implement key recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, including no commitment to fund urgent mental health services for Aboriginal children and their families, and two on-Country Healing Centres, as recommended by VACCHO and supported by VCOSS in our pre-budget submission.

## Victorians with disabilities

### Significant initiatives

Refer also to our Education, Justice and Health budget analyses.

#### Advocacy, Capacity Building and Support Services

- **Continuing support for Victorians with Disability**  
\$24.1m in 2025-26 to maintain critical supports for people with disability including:
  - The Victorian Disability Advocacy Program.
  - Supporting Victorians with disability who are ineligible to receive services from the NDIS.
  - Autism assessment grants.
  - Delivery of an integrated child and family services response for the most vulnerable children with disability.
  - Building the capacity of mainstream services to support people with complex disability needs.
- **Supports for people with disability outside of the NDIS**  
\$22m in 2025-26 to maintain delivery of the Home and Community Care Program for Younger People, which enables independent living in the home and community for people with disability outside of the NDIS. Funding is also provided to assess people with disability seeking to have allied health supports included within their NDIS plans.
- **Early Childhood Sector Supports and Regulation**  
\$3.1m in 2025-26 towards early childhood intervention services, such as inclusive education and therapy supports, to children with disability or developmental delay who are not eligible for the NDIS due to their residency.
- **Additional Supports for Students with Disabilities: Transport assistance**  
\$33.4m in 2025-26 to continue transport assistance for eligible students to travel to their government specialist school. New services will also be introduced from the 2026 school year to meet growth in demand.

- **Additional Supports for Students with Disabilities: Accessible Buildings Program**  
\$9.3m in 2025-26 (\$18.6m over 2 yrs) to improve access to school facilities for students with disability and additional needs. Facility modifications may include ramps and handrails, alterations to toilet and shower facilities, and adjustments for students with vision or hearing impairments.
- **Community mental health supports**  
\$12.8m in 2025-26 (\$27.2m/4 yrs) to continue delivery of statewide community mental health programs that provide specialist support to cohorts experiencing mental ill-health and prevention initiatives that reduce mental distress and promote wellbeing. This includes funding to support Forensicare’s community forensic disability mental health service.

#### Regulation and oversight

- **Maintaining regulation of disability and social services**  
\$13.6m in 2025-26 (\$27.5m/2 yrs) to support the operation of the Disability Worker Regulation Scheme through the Victorian Disability Worker Commission and the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria.
- **Maintain identity and worker screening services**  
\$23.5m to continue worker screening checks, including working with children and NDIS screening checks.

#### **What’s good**

- VCOSS is pleased to see continued funding for the Victorian Disability Advocacy Program, and the provision of a further 12 months of demand funding (on top of core funding). Both the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS review highlighted the important role that state funded disability advocacy organisations have in the prevention of violence, abuse and neglect towards people with disabilities and the vital role they play in identifying and reporting systemic issues. While this is a welcome addition, we note that sustainable and ongoing funded is needed for this program to reflect the level of demand, quantum of unmet need, complexity of cases and the true cost of service delivery, especially given the current complex reform environment disability advocacy organisations are operating in.
- We are pleased to see continued funding to support people with disabilities who are ineligible to receive services from the NDIS. Given the current complex reform environment where it is yet to be determined how foundational supports will be funded and rolled out, it is vital to ensure those who are at risk of falling through the cracks are able to receive the critical supports they need. The allocation of funding towards Autism assessment grants is

also a welcome addition to this Budget; however, this needs to be complemented with ongoing funding for any therapies that may be required after a diagnosis for non-NDIS participants.

- VCOSS is pleased to see a continuation of funding for the Family Service Specialist Disability Practitioners and Children with Complex Disability Support Needs Program. This funding ensures families raising children with disabilities can access the strengths-based supports they need. These high value programs together play a critical role in supporting around 1,075 Victorian families (a total of 2,150 children) to navigate complex service systems, access the NDIS, and promote the sustainability of care that prevents families from breaking down.

## What's missing

- The recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review have presented us with a blueprint for clear, positive change. While negotiations continue at the Commonwealth level, we continue to be concerned about the lack of investment into laying the groundwork to prepare the mainstream and community sector for the reform that is to come. While we welcome this Budget's investment into building the capacity for mainstream services to support people with complex disability needs, VCOSS calls for:
  - The release of the Victorian response to the NDIS review.
  - Investment into building up the capacity of mainstream, community and the Victorian Public Sector services in readiness to engage with substantial work that lies ahead with implementing the recommendations of Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review.
  - Investment in sector readiness initiatives focusing on disability co-design, sector capacity building and other change management/transition activities.
  - Re-establishing the Disability leadership Program for emerging leaders and providing grants for self-advocacy groups and peer support networks to coordinate under-represented and lesser-known voices.
- Community Visitors undertake unannounced visits to specialist disability accommodation settings to monitor residents' wellbeing, safety and rights, acting as a vital safeguard. No additional funding has been allocated in this Budget towards the Community Visitors Program, despite strong recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission and calls from the Community Visitors Disability Services board for more funding.

## Multicultural communities

### Significant initiatives

- **Supporting our multicultural and multifaith communities**

\$3.1m in 2025/26 (\$5.6m/2 yrs) to support multicultural and multifaith communities to build or upgrade facilities, connect with culture and traditions, and foster positive community engagement.

- **Migrant Workers' Centre**

\$1.9m in 2025/26 (\$7.6m/4 yrs) to support the continued operation of the Migrant Workers' Centre which promotes safe and secure employment and raises awareness about workplace rights for migrant workers.

- **Supporting settlement outcomes in Victoria**

\$1.8 in 2025/26 (3.6m/2 yrs) to support newly arrived migrant communities, particularly in regional Victoria.

- **Support for Victoria's multicultural seniors**

\$2.1m in 2025/26 to support multicultural seniors' groups in Victoria and reduce isolation by strengthening connections with the community.

### What's good

- VCOSS is pleased to see the support for multicultural communities in regional Victoria in this Budget. This includes funding for regional ethnic communities' councils and community organisations supporting migrants to settle in the regions. These organisations not only provide critical support to individuals and families, but also engage in important systemic advocacy to improve outcomes for the communities they serve.
- It is pleasing to see continued investment to support multicultural seniors' clubs. This program improves wellbeing outcomes for senior citizens from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by promoting social and community connections, which are protective factors for both physical and mental health.
- VCOSS welcomes funding to deliver family violence prevention and early intervention work within multicultural and faith communities. This will help to ensure that victim-survivors can access culturally appropriate support. See the Family Violence section for more detail.
- The investment in physical infrastructure for multicultural communities in this Budget is welcome, as it shows the Victorian Government's commitment to ensuring more people

have access to purpose-built spaces to connect to faith, culture and community. This includes continued funding for the Multicultural Multifaith Infrastructure Fund and a specific allocation of funds to complete Australia's first Vietnamese Museum. VCOSS also welcomes continued investment to improve access to healthcare, education and training for asylum seekers and newly arrived refugees.

## What's missing

- It is disappointing that the Budget does not include funding to implement Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024–2029. The strategy promises to tackle racism and discrimination and create a more equitable state, but implementation will be fettered without government investment and meaningful collaboration with multicultural organisations who are embedded in and trusted by their communities.
- While it is pleasing to see an investment in embedding multicultural organisations within the family violence sector, it is also crucial that mainstream service providers are supported to build capacity to provide high-quality care to clients from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This should include funding to employ bicultural and bilingual workers and provide their staff with cultural competency training to ensure the whole service system is truly accessible and inclusive.
- It has become increasingly difficult for multicultural Victorians to access interpreters and translators, particularly in healthcare and justice settings. While this Budget includes welcome funding for English as an Additional Language programs, qualified translators and interpreters are needed in the immediate term, and it is disappointing that there is no investment to increase access to these services. This reinforces inequities experienced by people who do not speak English.

## LGBTIQA+ Victorians

### Significant initiatives

- **Supporting Victoria's LGBTIQA+ communities**

\$1.5m in 2025-26 (\$1.5m/1 year) to continue the QHub program, which supports the mental health and wellbeing of young people and their families in western Victoria's LGBTIQA+ communities. Funding for the Trans and Gender Diverse Peer Support Program is also continued to support the health and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse Victorians.

- **Mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people**

\$16.6m in 2025-26 (\$28.3m/4 years) for continued delivery of the Youth Outreach Recovery Support, Youth Live4Life, and Healthy Equal Youth programs, which promote mental health and wellbeing in young people, including in regional communities and LGBTIQA+ young people. Funding will also support the continuation of group-based parenting sessions and the community-based Youth Justice Mental Health Initiative.

- **Supporting groups disproportionately impacted by suicide**

\$6.1m in 2025-26 (\$7.5m/2 years) to prevent and respond to suicide among groups disproportionately impacted, including young people, LGBTIQA+ people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- **Life-saving supports for trans and gender diverse young people**

\$3.6m in 2025-26 (\$15.3m/4 years) to support trans and gender diverse young people in Victoria to continue to access care through specialist services at the Royal Children's Hospital and community-based mental health, peer and family support services.

### What's good

- VCOSS is pleased to see continued investment in mental health support for the LGBTIQA+ community, including nearly doubled investment in suicide prevention initiatives compared to last year's Budget, investment for mental health support for LGBTIQA+ communities in western Victoria and LGBTIQA+ young people, and investment in specialist care and community-based supports for trans and gender-diverse young people. For further analysis of the Budget's mental health initiatives, please see Health, Children and Young People and Climate.

### What's missing

- As in our pre-budget submission, VCOSS continues to call for funding to establish an LGBTIQA+ Community-controlled Social Delivery Fund to support programs and services delivered by LGBTIQA+ led organisations. This fund would provide organisations that are

governed and operated by and for the LGBTIQ+ communities with dedicated funding to deliver programs and services that address the evolving needs of their communities. It would ensure equitable funding access for smaller and medium sized organisations and enable the development of a stable, skilled workforce through multi-year contracts.

## Senior Victorians

### Significant initiatives

- **Support for Victoria’s multicultural seniors**  
\$2.1m in 2025-26 funding is provided to support multicultural seniors’ groups in Victoria to reduce isolation by strengthening connections with the community through regular social outings, cultural events and activities, promoting health and wellbeing.
- **Free weekend public transport for seniors**  
\$400,000 in 2025-26 (\$2.2m/4 yrs) to make all weekend public transport travel in Victoria free for Victorian Seniors Card holders.
- **Strengthening public sector residential aged care services**  
\$34.6m in 2025-26 for public sector residential aged care services to continue delivering high-quality care and assist in meeting nurse-to-resident ratios. Funding will also support additional public sector residential aged care places at the redeveloped Kingston Centre and Hesse Rural Health.
- **Victorian Aids and Equipment program**  
\$2.7m in 2025-26 to support the aids and equipment needs of Victorians, including older people and people with permanent or long-term disability under 65 years of age who may be ineligible for the NDIS.

### What’s good

- VCOSS is pleased to see free weekend public transport for all Victorian Seniors Card holders, helping increase older Victorians connection to community, social and essential mainstream services.
- VCOSS welcomes continued investment into strengthening public sector residential aged care services. This investment is essential to help them continue to provide high quality care and service delivery for senior Victorians.
- This Budget also includes continued funding for multicultural seniors groups in Victoria for regular social outings, cultural events and activities and promoting health and wellbeing,

which will help strengthen connection with community and reduce isolation for senior Victorians.

- We noted in our recent pre-budget submission that the NDIS review highlighted service gaps and inequities for older Victorians with a disability who are not eligible for the NDIS and are reliant on the aged care system and mainstream services. Some of these gaps related to the provision of aids and equipment. It is good to see some funding allocated to the Victorian Aids and Equipment program, which will support the needs of older people and people with permanent or long-term disability under 65 years of age who sit outside the NDIS. As noted in our pre-budget submission, VCOSS would like to see some funding in future budgets allocated to the exploration of strategies to close service gaps for older Victorians with a disability.

### **What's missing**

- VCOSS is disappointed that there was no new investment in Seniors Rights Victoria, which is the only integrated legal and advocacy service specialising in elder abuse that covers the whole state. We highlighted in our pre-budget submission that Seniors Rights Victoria was struggling to meet increased demand, and we would like to have seen more investment in this Budget in elder abuse prevention, awareness and tailored response services.

## Community Transport

### What's good

- VCOSS is pleased to see continued funding for the delivery of the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program which provides for improved availability of crucial wheelchair accessible vehicles. This is a crucial service for people with mobility needs.

### What's missing

- VCOSS is disappointed to see no new funding for Community Transport. This will compound challenges the sector is facing with demand soaring and providers struggling to keep services running. Community transport fills an important gap by connecting people with disabilities, older Victorians and people living in geographically remote areas to community, local shops, health services, libraries or social services and more. Without adequate and sustainable funding, some of the state's most marginalised and excluded community members are at risk of experiencing social isolation.