



About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body for Victoria’s social and community sector and the state’s premier social advocacy body.

VCOSS exists to end poverty and disadvantage in Victoria. We do this by supporting organisations and activities, through research and advocacy, and by connecting, convening, and working with others.

VCOSS’s strength comes from our members and the people at the heart of their work. Our members include frontline service organisations, peak bodies and advocacy groups, working across a wide range of areas including health and wellbeing, children and family services, family violence, early childhood, housing, food systems, economic and civic participation, justice, disability and disaster response.

VCOSS’s work is enriched by people with lived and living experience who share with us their personal stories, experiences and insights. Thank you for your courage and generosity.

We also gratefully acknowledge our funders and sponsors, including the Victorian Government.

VCOSS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country, and pays respect to Elders and ancestors. Our office is located on the sovereign, unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation.



President and CEO's report

In a time of growing division, VCOSS's power to bring together government, community organisations and the people they serve has never been more important.

The 2024–25 year saw many significant achievements on the path to improving the lives and opportunities of Victorians experiencing poverty and disadvantage, thanks to the tireless efforts of workers and advocates right across our sector.

But, in its darkest moments, it was also a year marked by an increase in social unrest and a shift towards splintering ideologies, extremism and violence.

This shift may be driven in part by global issues, but it is underpinned and exacerbated by an even bigger rift – between the 'haves' and 'have nots' – that continues to grow, worsening intergenerational disadvantage.

The cornerstone of social cohesion, and of a strong economy, is all Victorians having the opportunity to thrive by being able to access housing, healthcare, education, childcare and the ability to gain good employment and participate in their communities.

Ensuring Victorians have a roof over their heads is the most foundational of these needs.

The Growing Social Housing campaign was a major tranche of work towards this end in 2024–25. With the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance, we developed a set of data and critical insights calling on the Victorian Government to build 80,000 new social homes over the coming decade, to meet demand, bring our state up to the national average and ensure that Victorians on low and very low incomes aren't left out in the cold.

Our systemic advocacy on rental fairness was another important line of work. Steered by engagement with frontline services, this work fed into a number of improvements for the almost one third of Victorians who rent their home, including bans on rental bidding and no-fault evictions, and extended notice periods for evictions and rent increases.

Sector advocacy also saw enhanced minimum standards for energy efficiency in rental homes. Through the Victorian Utilities Network – convened by VCOSS and including representation from across our membership and Energy Consumers Australia – we were able to directly influence energy regulation and consumer protections.

And on the heels of collaborative sector advocacy a massive \$2.3 billion in cost-of-living relief was allocated in the 2025 Victorian Budget.

Collaboration has always been the life-blood of VCOSS. This year we enshrined that principle as a key pillar of our new strategy – which was itself informed by consultation and collaboration with more than 100 stakeholders during 2024–25.

Collectively, Victoria's social and community sector is a force to be reckoned with, generating approximately \$18 billion a year, employing over 200,000 people and engaging more than 427,000 volunteers. When our sector stands together, we are an influential force for change.

In this report we are proud to present some of the collective outputs we achieved in 2024–25. We look forward to working with you in the year to come, and to continuing the fight for a Victoria free from poverty and disadvantage.

Juanita Pope
CEO, VCOSS



Sue White
President, VCOSS



Thank you and farewell to Damian Ferrie

In 2025 we farewelled Damian Ferrie as President of VCOSS.

Damian served as President since November 2021, and on the VCOSS Board since 2018. He helped to lead VCOSS through significant changes including COVID-19, the appointment of Juanita Pope as the new VCOSS CEO, and the updating of the VCOSS Constitution.

Damian said: “Being part of the VCOSS Board has been an extraordinary privilege, and an opportunity to see firsthand the incredible work of our sector as it strives to eliminate poverty within the state of Victoria. I have valued the contribution of each hardworking Director and thank the CEOs and the VCOSS team for their amazing dedication.”

We’ll all miss Damian’s kind, dedicated and forward-looking leadership.

In the second half of 2025 we warmly welcomed Sue White as the new President of the Board. Sue is CEO of the Queen Elizabeth Centre, Victoria’s largest provider of early parenting services, and a former Director of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.



2024-2025 outcomes



Shift the system

In numbers



84

Advocacy meetings with government decision-makers and influencers

38

Submissions and reports published



160+

Media stories

\$2.3 billion

Allocated in 2025 Victorian Budget for cost-of-living relief



In the community sector, we understand the importance of tackling issues systemically. This means shifting the underlying structures that lead to negative outcomes for people and entrench intergenerational disadvantage.

But systems are vast, complex and interconnected.

It is impossible to address the inequities of, for instance, the justice system without fixing a housing system that locks people out of the safety and security of being able to afford a home. We cannot improve health outcomes without addressing social determinants including education, employment, climate equity and social inclusion.

VCOSS's membership is made up of organisations doing vital work to improve the wellbeing of their clients and communities, often in high-pressure and resource-constrained environments.

But individually, with all the will and determination in the world, each of these organisations cannot span cross-systemic divides to join the dots.

That's where VCOSS's work can help to shift the system. VCOSS aims to turbocharge the impact of our members and our sector by:



strengthening relationships and building coalitions both within and across systemic frameworks



producing targeted policy and advocacy outputs that 'join the dots' and compel decision-makers to act



encouraging public participation in positive social change

Shift the system

Some of the system-shifting work we're most proud of from 2024–25 includes:

- Convening and collaborating with **seven housing-related peaks** to produce a major tranche of work on [Growing Social Housing](#). Using data commissioned from SGS Economics and Planning, we developed a set of social housing targets and critical insights, quantifying the quantum and type of social housing required over the next 10 years and the next 35 years for low- and very-low-income Victorians.
- VCOSS's 2025 [Renting in Victoria](#) report drew on extensive engagement with sector workers on the front line of the rental crisis to shed light on the conditions that – despite nation-leading legislation to protect renters – are still leading to renters experiencing insecurity, housing stress and discrimination in the market.
- Recommendations that emerged from both the Renting in Victoria report and from VCOSS's other work in the housing space – including the rental fairness and family violence paper [Hidden Hurdles](#) – contributed to the Government taking further meaningful steps to improve renters' rights.
- Through six [Renters' Rights Rundown](#) events, VCOSS supported 676 workers across the community sector to understand the changes to Victoria's rental rules, so they can support renters to realise their rights.
- VCOSS and our members' advocacy fed into government action to establish new [energy efficiency minimum standards](#) for Victorian rental properties, and a [long-term shift](#) away from the use of fossil fuels in Victorian homes.
- Our advocacy also fed into reforms to the [Energy Retail Code of Practice](#), which will benefit up to 75,000 electricity and 60,000 gas customers experiencing payment difficulty.

'VCOSS provides broad leadership in ensuring Governments remain focussed on making a fairer Victoria. VCOSS also brings together the various peaks and statewide organisations to ensure everyone is across each other's work and delivering a joint agenda.'

VCOSS member

- VCOSS's project to [tackle the energy/health hardship nexus](#) raised awareness and created new pathways between the health and energy systems, to better identify and support people experiencing the energy-and-health hardship. A [health care digital resource pack](#) was produced and disseminated through the [Winter Warm campaign](#) to all Victorian Primary Health Networks.
- In another great win, long-term sector advocacy originating from a WEstjustice pilot Travel Assistance Program resulted in the Victorian Government's move to [make public transport free](#) for all children across the state.
- As part of our work with the [Smart Justice for Young People](#) coalition to create change for children and young people who come into contact with the criminal legal system, we hosted a workshop on the [Working Together Action Plan](#) at the VCOSS Community Sector Education Forum. We also co-chaired a deep dive roundtable with Department of Education and Smart Justice for Young People representatives on education system reform.

Shift the system

- VCOSS advocacy also resulted in a \$91 million investment in the [Victorian Early Leaver Connection Initiative](#), to help the almost one-in-five students who are early school leavers to stay engaged in education and training.
- VCOSS's submission on [Climate Resilience in the Built Environment](#) identified recommendations that can contribute to both climate resilience and mitigation. The submission was quoted heavily in the final report of the inquiry.
- In the disability advocacy space, the [Disability Advocacy Resource Unit](#) (DARU):
 - continued to expand its library of disability inclusion online training offerings for sector partners, colleagues and government.
 - convened the Victorian Disability Advocacy Leadership Group, to increase the capacity of disability advocacy organisations to engage with systemic reform
 - expanded the reach of Advance your Advocacy Practice sessions and Advocacy Toolkit sessions, to continue to build the capacity of Victorian Disability advocates, with a particular focus on intersectionality and upskilling engagement with media and submission writing.

'Useful to have a peak drawing connections between multiple community service orgs. Feel that the whole community service sector benefits from the advocacy, and individual member organisations. By extrapolation, the people each org works with benefit indirectly.'
VCOSS member

2024–2025 outcomes



Communities in control

In numbers



28

Sector capacity-building activities

57

Taskforces, ministerial advisory committees, reference and advisory group meetings



84

Sector coalition activities convened or attended

4500+

Organisations benefiting from VCOSS advocacy



When decision-making that impacts communities *starts in communities* – drawing on lived experience and local knowledge – the policy initiatives and solutions that can emerge are fit-for-purpose, durable and empowering.

Community members know better than anyone else what they need to thrive. The challenge is conveying that knowledge to the decision-makers who need to hear it, at all levels of government.

Community organisations, which have deep ties and trusted positions in their local communities, can be a vital link in this chain of knowledge transfer and empowerment.

That’s why elevating the voices of our member organisations, and the communities they serve, is a central pillar of VCOSS’s work. We do this through:



convening spaces of collaboration and discussion between government, business, sector and community voices



direct advocacy for the fair funding and conditions that our sector needs



respecting and supporting the self-determined work of the ACCO sector

Communities in control

Ways that VCOSS has enabled and empowered the sector and our communities in 2024–25 include:

- VCOSS reaffirmed our commitment to walking alongside ACCOs in the journey to self-determination and justice for First Nations peoples through our [Friends of Treaty Pledge](#).
- As part of our Pledge work to *collaborate, build, educate, advocate, embed and ensure*, VCOSS co-hosted an information session with the Victorian Government to keep the sector informed and engaged about the Treaty process, and made a [public submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission](#).
- VCOSS established a continuous and productive dialogue with government through the creation of the **service agreement reference group**, to advocate for better and more secure funding, and fair and sensible regulation for the sector.
- Through the **Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee** (HSHPIC) – which VCOSS co-chairs with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health – we led a series of deep dives on workforce, skills development and funding, with high-level sector and government representatives.
- VCOSS established the [Compliance and Operations Network](#). The Network is a space for members to come together, share experience and gain new insight and expertise on issues affecting the sector including workforce, funding and financial sustainability, IT and data, regulation and more. Fifty-four VCOSS member organisations have participated.
- In collaboration with the COSS network, VCOSS worked with the Fair Work Commission on its review of gender undervaluation in the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry (SCHADS) Award. In several [joint submissions](#), VCOSS advocated for improvements in the review to ensure maximum benefit and no negative outcomes for the sector.

‘One of the benefits of VCOSS is its strong relationship with the Government and the public service. This helps to ensure that they are kept in the loop and involved in helping to formulate positive changes for community orgs and the people we support.’

VCOSS member

- Working with DFFH in partnership with other cross-sector community services peaks, VCOSS supported the pilot of a new graduate program for community and social services to build and develop the future skilled workforce. [The Community and Social Services Graduate Program](#) invests in early-career professionals across community services, to build their job readiness and skills. The program has so far led to 217 graduates taking up roles in community service organisations.
- VCOSS convened the [Climate Network for Community Organisations](#), a space where community organisations can connect, share knowledge, and learn from experts about adaptation, climate mitigation and climate justice. The network now includes over 200 members from over 130 organisations.
- VCOSS supported community control of disaster preparedness and resilience through the [Collaboration for Disaster Resilience](#) report – launched through a webinar and a number of presentations in other forums – and the **VCOSS Disaster Resilience Network**, which focuses on collaboration between communities, emergency management services and government. Following the devastating fires in Wimmera and the Grampians, VCOSS also convened a workshop in Halls Gap that brought together Neighbourhood Houses, CFA and local councils from five LGAs, to discuss opportunities to work together and build community resilience.

‘VCOSS provides a strong strategic link between government, NGOs and community.’

VCOSS member

2024–2025 outcomes

An impactful VCOSS



In numbers

68

1:1 interviews with CEOs and other executives to develop VCOSS strategy



10

major VCOSS events

71

Responses to member strategy survey



8

Collaborative activities supporting staff wellbeing, development and culture



In 2024–25 we greatly extended the reach of our member services and engagement, to support, empower and connect our diverse member organisations in new ways.

Much of this engagement was built around – and fed into the development of – the new VCOSS Strategy.

Between August and October 2024, member organisations were offered an opportunity to meet with the VCOSS CEO one-on-one or in small groups.

What we heard was that most members see VCOSS’s access to and relationships with government as highly valuable.

We heard that VCOSS has an important role in working as a conduit between government and people with lived and living experience, and that members want VCOSS to focus on ‘big picture’ systemic issues such as poverty, intergenerational equity, housing, and the future of the community sector including funding, regulation and workforce issues.

All the member feedback we received fed into the [VCOSS Strategy 2025–28](#), which articulates a theory of change from our focus areas to their strategic outcomes: ‘shift the system’, ‘communities in control’ and ‘an impactful VCOSS’.

The strategic outcome to create and consolidate ‘an impactful VCOSS’ acknowledges that VCOSS’s power is in building the capacity, capability and impact of our member organisations, and in supporting our members, staff, and the whole sector to thrive.

We do this through:



expanding VCOSS member services and engagement



strengthening financial and operational sustainability



enhancing VCOSS’s continuous learning framework

An impactful VCOSS

Our deep member engagement and strategy work was a foundational part of consolidating our impact in 2024–25. We also strengthened our organisational impact through internal and external mechanisms including:

- As part of our internal culture work, VCOSS continued to hold staff ‘collaboration days’ every quarter. These are an opportunity for individual and group learning, professional development and team-building.
- As part of our work to support Aboriginal self-determination and the Victorian Treaty process, learning and upskilling about First Nations history, culture and contemporary issues was a particular focus of staff and organisational development. This included a full day all-staff training with Koorie Heritage Trust, convening and attending multiple Treaty information sessions, and learning on Country with VCOSS Deputy President Dr Jill Gallagher AO.
- Disability Inclusion remains a strong focus for VCOSS, with the Inclusion committee refining a practical, immersive suite of training offered to all staff and as an established element of new staff induction. Disability inclusive practice is now firmly embedded across all meetings and events both internally and externally. The Inclusion committee was also involved in developing a theory of change, and assessing processes to ensure inclusion for all VCOSS staff, members and guests.

‘VCOSS provides a collective voice for the community services sector, advocating for both our workforce and the communities we serve.’
VCOSS member

- Through the steady stewardship of the Board and the VCOSS Finance and Risk Committee, our financial and operational position remained strong. The 2024–25 financial statement [are available here](#).

‘A sector voice with bipartisan respect in Spring St.’
VCOSS member

Flagship events

Treasurer’s Lunch

Treasurer Jaclyn Symes addressed the community sector at the 2025 **VCOSS Treasurer’s Lunch**, which also featured a panel discussion moderated by Jon Faine AM, with Dr Jill Gallagher AO, Professor David Hayward and VCOSS CEO Juanita Pope discussing what this year’s Budget means for our sector.



Education Forum

VCOSS’s annual **Community Sector Education Forum** was held at The Wheeler Centre. The Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll MP launched the Government’s refreshed Education State agenda at the Forum, which explored the theme *Recommitting to the Education State: Driving another decade of excellence and equity in education in Victoria*.

Electrify Victoria

VCOSS joined with **Victorian Trades Hall Council** and **Environment Victoria** for an event at Parliament in support of reforms to replace gas with electric appliances. Speakers included community sector workers, homeowners, unionists and Minister Lily D’Ambrosio. VCOSS also produced an [explainer](#) and [key messages](#) about the case for electrification, an [opinion piece](#) about Victoria’s electric future, and a [submission](#) to the Building Electrification Regulatory Impact Statement, as well as a messaging guide for members wanting to make their own submissions.

Other events



Above: VCOSS staff at the 2024 Walk Against Family Violence



Above: VCOSS staff at the 2025 Midsumma Pride March

Below: The VCOSS Energy-Health Hardship Nexus Forum



Below: VCOSS Pride puppy, Juice



Below: The 2024 VCOSS AGM featured a panel discussion on the cost of living with Sharon Goldfeld AM, Iskhandar Razak and Kos Samaras in conversation with CEO Juanita Pope



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