



# ELECTION PLATFORM 2026





Every Victorian should have the essentials for a life lived with dignity, hope and opportunity.





## 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' strength comes from our members and the people at the heart of their work. VCOSS 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, justice, disability, and disaster response.

Across this diversity in size and services, VCOSS members share our ultimate goal to eliminate all forms of social and economic disadvantage in Victoria. The social and community services sector is part of the largest employing and fastest growing industry in Victoria, which is expected to deliver more than 335,000 new jobs over the next decade.\*

\* 'Health care and social assistance' sector forecast in *State of the Victorian Labour Market Report*

## Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

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 Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.





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# CEO INTRODUCTION



**Every Victorian should have the essentials for a life lived with dignity, hope and opportunity.**

Victorians broadly agree on the basics we all require for a dignified life – housing, healthcare, food, education, decent work, and belonging. For too many people, these foundations are out of reach.<sup>1</sup>

In Victoria, more than 800,000 people were living in poverty at the time of the last census<sup>2</sup> – and conditions have worsened since.

On any given night, more than 30,000 Victorians have no safe place to sleep, including many older Victorians, LGBTIQ+ people, family violence victim survivors, and children.<sup>3</sup>

Loneliness and social isolation are quietly compounding Victorians' material problems, especially for older people, those with disability, people from multicultural communities, and carers.<sup>4</sup>

And one in three Victorian households experience food insecurity. For families with kids, this undermines healthy childhood development and impacts the educational outcomes of young Victorians. Combined with other risk factors, it presents an alarming outlook for the future of our children: for the first time in history, projections suggest that the current generation of children will not live longer than the one before.<sup>5</sup>

**What connects these disparate challenges is a system that has not kept pace with need – and a community sector holding much of it together, often without the resources to do so sustainably.**

VCOSS' 2026 Election Platform presents a set of concrete, coherent policy recommendations for how all Victorian political parties can confront and answer these challenges.

It does this through six priority areas that encapsulate basic conditions which should be attainable for everyone in our communities and must be targeted to those most in need.

**We ask that all political parties commit to a Victoria where:**

Every Victorian is supported through a strong community sector

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Every Victorian has a home and can afford the cost of living

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Every Victorian child has a bright future

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Every Victorian community is ready for, and protected from, climate impacts

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Every Victorian gets the care they need, before (and after) crisis hits

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Every Victorian belongs.

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In the face of chaos and negativity on a global scale, Victorians are seeking something different in their home state. People in our communities are calling for a bold, forward-looking vision, championing the kind of society that will benefit all Victorians.

Everyone should have access to the essentials of a life lived well. This vision is both good policy and good politics.

We look forward to working with our elected leaders in the next parliamentary term to realise it.

**Juanita Pope**  
CEO, VCOSS





# EVERY VICTORIAN IS SUPPORTED THROUGH A STRONG COMMUNITY SECTOR



Victoria's community sector is the backbone of the state's social infrastructure. It supports people through crisis, delivers essential services, prevents harm, and builds and sustains community wellbeing.

It is also a vital part of the connective tissue that holds other reform priorities together. An effective housing system depends on the community organisations that provide social housing and homelessness support, tenancy and legal assistance, family violence services and other supports for people in housing stress. Cost-of-living relief reaches people through the community sector workers who can provide and connect financial counselling, emergency relief and practical supports. Generational equity, disaster resilience and community cohesion are built and maintained by a sector with the capacity and expertise to show up for those who need it most.

When that sector is undervalued, underfunded and under-resourced, every other reform is harder to achieve.

**Effective social policy rests, in no small measure, on this part of our platform.**

Yet the sector operates under conditions that regularly undermine its capacity: short-term contracts, chronic underfunding, persistent pay inequity, workforce burnout, and a digital capability gap that threatens to compound with the passing of time.





Our election priorities are grounded in a cornerstone truth: if the community sector is relied on to deliver essential services across sensitive and complex areas of social policy, then government must fund and support the sector in a way that makes that possible.

This means:

- providing fair funding on longer terms to enable the community sector to plan for impact and close the gender pay gap
- investing in the workforce pipeline and practice excellence of a sector employing 595,000 Victorians and growing faster than any other<sup>6</sup>
- equipping organisations with the digital capability to remain sustainable and responsive
- reforming the funding and contracting settings that currently value short-term outputs over long-term impact.

**A thriving, well-resourced community sector underpins effective public policy – it should never be an afterthought. When it is, services fall short, more people fall through the cracks, costs shift to crisis-end services like emergency rooms, and the system ends up more expensive for everyone.**

The priorities outlined below provide a practical agenda for positive, critical change.

## ELECTION PRIORITIES

- ✓ Pay what it takes to get communities through
- ✓ Value the community sector workforce
- ✓ Support community services to move beyond compliance to excellence
- ✓ Equip organisations with digital capability to remain sustainable and responsive
- ✓ Reform funding and contracting settings to value long-term impact

**ELECTION PRIORITY**

# Pay what it takes to get communities through

## What we propose

Commit to funding community services at a level that reflects their true cost and value, and recognise closing the gender pay gap as core government business.

## Key features

**Cover the cost of community sector wage increases** arising from the Fair Work Commission's gender undervaluation review of the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Industry Award and other priority awards.

**Provide funding certainty by committing to minimum five-year funding terms** (see also [Election priority: Reform funding and contracting settings to value long-term impact](#) .

**Create transparent, fair and consistent policy settings for how community services are funded** by government departments. This includes indexation equity for community health services and boost funding to redress successive unfunded superannuation rate rises and other exceptional cost increases impacting service delivery.

## Case for change

When Victorians are facing the most difficult of issues – family violence, mental health crisis, child protection, legal need, early childhood disadvantage – they need well-resourced services built on trusted relationships. The community organisations that provide those services are routinely asked to deliver complex, sustained outcomes on funding that does not cover their actual cost. When the gap between funding and the real cost of service delivery is unsustainable, organisations are forced to choose between cutting programs, reducing staff, or absorbing costs they were never resourced to carry. Communities bear the consequence.

Women make up 78 per cent of the healthcare and social assistance workforce.<sup>7</sup> For decades, their work has been systemically undervalued<sup>8</sup> – treated as less skilled and less worthy of remuneration than equivalent work in other sectors. The Fair Work Commission's Gender-based Undervaluation Review, and the resulting SCHADS Award changes, represent hard-won recognition of that injustice. The Victorian Government, as the primary funder of community services, must meet the full cost of new award arrangements – including wage increases – or the burden falls on organisations that are already stretched, and ultimately on the workers and communities they serve. This is a matter of economic justice for an overwhelmingly female workforce that has subsidised essential services through decades of undervaluation.

The settings through which government funds community services have a direct and material impact on whether organisations can plan and operate sustainably. Currently, these settings are not providing the conditions that organisations need to serve their communities effectively. Despite the welcome introduction of a floating indexation formula for most community service agreements in 2024, the application of the formula is inconsistent across portfolios and contract types, successive one-year funding terms impede its proper application, and there is no government policy or accountability regarding the use of the Victorian Common Funding Agreement which has no indexation certainty.

Funding security is a precondition for effective, efficient service delivery. Issues like family violence, homelessness, child poverty, and mental health are not going to be addressed in a one-year funded period. Short-term funding periods drive wasteful staff churn, increase administrative burden, undermine workforce stability, and ultimately cost more – both to government and to communities that lose continuity of care every time a funding period ends. Proven pilots that demonstrate impact should have a clear pathway to recurrent program funding, rather than cycling through short-term renewals that create uncertainty for workers, organisations, and communities.



# Value the community sector workforce

## What we propose

Establish a funded community services workforce strategy to attract, develop and retain a skilled, diverse workforce – paid and volunteer – that meets growing community demand and has the capacity to deliver quality human services and life-changing care.

## Key features

**Introduce a paid student placements model** covering both students and hosting community services organisations, based on a ‘per-placement-day’ fee.

**Introduce financial incentives such as sign-on and retention bonuses for community sector workers and traineeship wage subsidies**, consistent with other industries where services are provided on behalf of the state, including nursing, midwifery<sup>9</sup> and corrections.<sup>10</sup>

**Recognise and strengthen the contribution of volunteers**, including by funding dedicated volunteer management and coordination to recruit, train and support the hundreds of thousands of volunteers that keep the sector running.

**Commit to funding community services at a level that reflects their true cost and value**, and recognise closing the gender pay gap as core government business (see [Election Priority: Pay what it takes to get communities through](#) .

**Invest in the infrastructure of the community sector** to build leadership capability, promote continuous improvement, and ensure safe, efficient, high-quality social services (see [Election Priority: Support community services to move beyond compliance to excellence](#) .

## Case for change

The community service sector is part of Victoria’s largest and fastest-growing workforce,<sup>11</sup> spanning home care and support workers, caseworkers, allied health practitioners, counsellors, legal professionals, early educators, finance and administrative/intake staff, and a significant volunteer base.

**Despite its scale and complexity, the community services sector receives substantially less structural investment than other industries delivering essential services of public benefit or on behalf of government.**

Workforce shortages are constraining the delivery of critical services such as family violence, disability support, community health and child and family services. The challenges are particularly acute in regional areas. Without targeted investment in workforce pipelines, training pathways, governance capability, worker wellbeing and volunteer engagement, these shortages will deepen, and the sector’s capacity to meet intensifying community demand will further erode.

## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Support community services to move beyond compliance to excellence

### What we propose

Invest in the community services sector as a priority, build leadership capability, promote continuous improvement, and ensure safe, efficient, high-quality social services.

### Key features

**Support capacity building, leadership development, and practice excellence**, including by funding VCOSS to scope a cross-sector Academy (based on the successful Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership) to drive community service excellence and continuous quality improvement across the sector.

**Invest in a supported quality assurance framework** that addresses the current gap in the social services regulatory ecosystem – where organisations are left to self-assess with no external audit function, no pool of qualified assessors, and no investment in quality improvement beyond minimum thresholds. This should be linked to the cross-sector Academy.

**Provide governance support and capability grants** to strengthen board and leadership capacity – including, where appropriate, providing financial support for volunteer board members to attend training, particularly for smaller organisations navigating complex regulatory environments.

**Create the conditions for people with lived and living expertise to flourish** in the community sector workforce and in positions of influence and leadership, recognising that better outcomes are possible when solutions are designed by and with the people they are for.

### Case for change

Investing in community sector capability, quality assurance and governance is not a luxury – it is the foundation on which every other investment in social services depends.

Victoria's community service organisations are on the frontline of some of the state's most complex social challenges. Demand is rising, case complexity is increasing, and the regulatory expectations placed on organisations are higher than ever.

Yet the sector lacks the foundational infrastructure that other professions take for granted. Unlike teaching, nursing, or the law, the community services sector has no cross-sector institution dedicated to leadership development, continuous improvement and practice excellence. Many organisations are left to build capability in isolation, with limited resources and no shared framework for what 'best practice' looks like.

Governance is a growing pressure point. Volunteer boards and organisational leaders are navigating increasingly complex regulatory, financial and risk environments with little dedicated support. And the current regulatory model for social services – which expects organisations to self-assess compliance without any quality improvement support – is a long-term risk for government-funded services and the communities that depend on them.

Other sectors have answered this challenge. Victoria's own Academy of Teaching and Leadership has demonstrated what is possible when government invests in a shared infrastructure for professional excellence. It is time to extend that commitment to community services.





Victoria's community service organisations are on the frontline of some of the state's most complex social challenges.



ELECTION PRIORITY

# Equip organisations with digital capability to remain sustainable and responsive

**What we propose**

Develop and fund a digital capability strategy that lifts the community sector’s capacity to use technology effectively, sustainably and responsibly – including through the careful adoption of artificial intelligence (AI).

**Key features**

**Establish a \$20 million Community Sector Digital Capability Fund** to help community service organisations update technology, modernise digital tools, and strengthen cybersecurity.

**Subsidise an ‘AI for good’ grant program** to enable community organisations to trial AI applications that support impact and innovation in service delivery.

**Develop a digital skills and leadership program**, similar to the Digital Jobs Program for construction and manufacturing, with a Regional Digital Inclusion and Access Fund to ensure digitally disadvantaged regional and rural communities are not left behind.

**Support shared digital infrastructure and operations platforms** to reduce costs and improve efficiency across the community sector.

**Case for change**

The community sector is being asked to do more with less. Demand is rising, funding is constrained, workforce shortages are growing, and reporting requirements are increasing.

Without digital investment, these pressures compound – and the cost ultimately falls on government and the communities it is trying to support. Investing now in digital tools, AI capability, workforce skills, and shared infrastructure will improve economic productivity and future-proof essential service delivery.

**A sector that can use technology effectively can reduce inefficiencies, redirecting time and money from administration towards the people who need it.**

Done right, this also positions Victoria as a national leader in responsible AI and digital innovation. Ultimately, a more digitally capable community sector means a stronger state economy.<sup>12,13</sup>

# Reform funding and contracting settings to value long-term impact

## What we propose

Move from short-term, output-driven government contracts for community services towards long-term, outcomes-focused investment that enables the sector to plan, build capacity, invest and deliver sustained impact.

## Key features

**Commit to minimum five-year funding terms for community services**<sup>14</sup> (see also [Election Priority: Pay what it takes to get communities through](#) ) and create a mechanism for proven pilots to transition automatically to core service funding.

**Shift to outcomes-focused, relational contracting** to enable genuine cross-sector collaboration, shared accountability and joint delivery.

**Reduce reporting burden and invest in genuine accountability frameworks** to reduce duplication and redirect resources from excessive reporting requirements towards frontline services.

## Case for change

Current funding and contractual settings for the community sector are structurally misaligned with the outcomes that government seeks to achieve.

Short-term, output-driven funding agreements incentivise volume over impact, entrench silos, and leave organisations unable to plan, retain staff, or build the capability they need.

KPIs in government contracts can create ineffective incentives, there are few guardrails around what type of contract is used when, and the standard Service Agreement used by key government departments has unresolved problems including in relation to records ownership, Aboriginal data sovereignty, and proportionality of requirements to risk.

Evidence shows that long-term, innovation-enabling, trust-based contracting approaches deliver better outcomes, reduce duplication, and unlock real value through more integrated services and lower administrative costs.<sup>15</sup> In practical terms, this means a commitment to five-year funding terms (see [Election Priority: Pay what it takes to get communities through](#) ) , outcomes-based reporting, funding for ‘the glue’ (i.e. peak bodies, partnership building, collaborative practice development, collective impact measurement) to deliver integrated person-centred services, and proportionate, risk-based accountability frameworks.

It also means a commitment to contracting organisations to deliver services that prevent harm and intervene earlier. Prevention remains underfunded because budget cycles favour short-term outputs over long-term value, but an early intervention approach will deliver significantly higher social and economic returns than crisis responses, reducing long-term demand on health, justice, and care systems.<sup>16</sup>

When funding instability erodes organisational capacity, communities bear the cost. Without structural reform, government will continue to pay more for fragmented, reactive services while missing the opportunity to achieve measurable, long-term impacts.





# EVERY VICTORIAN HAS A HOME AND CAN AFFORD THE COST OF LIVING



Too many Victorians are struggling to make ends meet. Rents are increasingly unaffordable, while social housing supply falls well short of demand for those who cannot compete in the private market. At the same time, rising costs across energy, food and fuel are compounding pressure on household budgets, leaving many people at risk of deepening financial stress, housing insecurity, and homelessness.

At the time of the last census, one in six Victorian children was already living in poverty. For many families, things have worsened since. Those living in poverty or acute financial stress are routinely skipping meals, going cold in winter and sweltering in summer, and making impossible choices such as whether to pay rent or keep the lights on.

Housing is the foundation for everything else in life. It is a basic human right, essential to health, safety and opportunity. Everyone should have access to a home that is secure, affordable and appropriate to their needs, in a neighbourhood that supports connection, participation, and a sense of belonging.

For victim survivors of family violence, including children and young people, that home must also be safe. Family violence is a key driver of homelessness and housing



insecurity, forcing too many people to choose between remaining in an unsafe home or leaving without a secure place to go. Safe, stable and affordable housing is essential to safety, recovery, healing and long-term wellbeing.

Beyond housing, the rising cost of essential goods and services is placing increasing strain on Victorians doing it toughest. Energy, food and safety are not luxuries; they are foundations for survival and a dignified life. When they become unaffordable or inaccessible, the consequences are worst for those with the least.

These challenges are connected. They compound disadvantage, deepen insecurity and make it harder for people to plan for the future. Meeting them requires a response that matches the scale of the problem: not temporary relief measures alone, but sustained investment and structural reform to lift people out of poverty and tackle wealth inequity.

Ensuring that everyone can afford the basics is not only a matter of fairness; it is essential to building strong, functioning communities and a thriving, inclusive state for current and future generations.

## ELECTION PRIORITIES

- ✓ Turbocharge social housing growth
- ✓ Build a stronger, fairer rental system
- ✓ Make energy affordable and accessible for every Victorian
- ✓ Ensure every Victorian can access the food they need

## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Turbocharge social housing growth

### What we propose

Launch a 25-year social housing blitz that delivers 377,000 new social homes by 2051 for Victorians on low and very low incomes, including 80,000 in the first 10 years.

### Key features

**Commit to building 80,000 new social homes over the next decade through dedicated growth in both public and community housing stock.**

**Establish a long-term investment strategy to achieve the social housing growth targets over the next 10 and 25 year periods.** At a minimum, this should include:

- A sustained and predictable level of direct government investment in new public housing and grant funding to community housing organisations.
- The introduction of a mandatory inclusionary zoning scheme for private developers to contribute to the social housing growth pipeline.

**Properly implement the full suite of reforms from the Social Housing Regulation Review**, which are key to strengthening and growing the system.

**Re-set the Urban Renewal Initiative to deliver a much more substantial uplift of social housing** on the impacted high-rise estates, beyond the current commitment of a 10 per cent increase. The process to identify the revised target and the pathway to achieve that should elevate the rights and aspirations of residents on the impacted sites. All public land should be retained in public ownership.

**Commit to delivering a minimum of 10 per cent of all social housing and 10 per cent of all affordable housing through the renewal process as Aboriginal housing.**

**Meanwhile, expand the service system** to reduce the frequency and impacts of homelessness, family violence and other systemic costs of a lack of affordable, safe and inclusive housing for Victorians in need.



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## Case for change

Decades of underinvestment have left Victoria with the lowest level of social housing nationally, and average wait times of more than 18 months. Even with the Government's recent budget commitment of 7,000 new community homes over 10 years, the thousands in housing stress – or facing homelessness – need much more.

Social housing is essential infrastructure. Turbocharging social housing growth is key to fixing the state's housing crisis. It is the highest priority in Infrastructure Victoria's recommendations for housing and planning.<sup>17</sup>

Setting – and achieving – a target-driven social housing agenda will enable Victoria to catch up to the national average of 4.5 per cent social housing stock in 10 years, as part of a pathway to meet total future demand by 2051. This will alleviate housing stress in the private rental market and help end homelessness.

It will also generate other social and economic benefits. A national cost-benefit analysis has projected budget savings of \$7.8 billion over 30 years if Victoria and other Australian jurisdictions address the under-supply of social housing. Benefits include improved health outcomes, reduced crime and reduced family violence.<sup>18</sup>

Building homes is vital, but it takes time. While new stock is being built, Victorians need strong and well-funded service responses to lessen the catastrophic impacts of housing insecurity and experiences of homelessness. This requires strong investment in models that work – with support for specialist homelessness services and intersecting service areas including family violence, community health and community legal assistance.



## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Build a stronger, fairer rental system

### What we propose

Strengthen rental fairness through sensible market controls and preserving changes made to the Residential Tenancies Act since 2021.

### Key features

#### Limit rental stress by:

- Continuing to cap the frequency of rent increases.
- Establishing a Rent Increase Fairness Formula for private rental housing – with the Essential Services Commission charged with its development.<sup>19</sup>

#### Maintain existing minimum standards for private rentals, and commit to completing the full rollout of the new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards

in private rentals, public housing and community housing – with an unchanged start date of 1 March 2027 for the first wave of reform.

**Build on existing family violence provisions in the Residential Tenancies Act** by working with survivor advocates and community lawyers to introduce additional legal protections against discrimination, financial loss, and risk of eviction.<sup>20</sup>

**Strengthen oversight of NDIS registered and non-registered Specialist Disability Accommodation dwellings** by improving coordination and information sharing across key Victorian Government regulators and agencies.

### Case for change

One in three Victorians rent; many of them will be renters for life. The private rental market they are navigating is in crisis. In 2025, there were no properties in Victoria that met the affordability criteria for singles on JobSeeker – and just one property in the entire state was affordable for a single parent with one child over 14 relying on Centrelink as their source of income.<sup>21</sup>

The mechanism for renters to challenge rent increases is failing those who need it most. There is a critical need for a fair and fixed rent increase formula – rather than the current system of comparative market analysis, which consistently disadvantages low-income renters.

These conditions put Victoria's rental reform agenda under severe pressure. A lack of affordable housing, a highly squeezed rental market, and limited regulatory enforcement of rental rights are stacking the deck against renters – perpetuating a power imbalance in which renters are unable to assert their rights out of fear of rocking the boat.<sup>22</sup> Rent increases are a persistent driver of this stress: 68 per cent of practitioners surveyed for VCOSS' 2026 *Renting in Victoria* report told us that these increases are happening all the time or most of the time, with 80 per cent of rental providers raising rent in the past two years, averaging 17 per cent. Victoria's rental reform agenda since 2021 has been nation-leading. Key protections include limitations on evictions and rent increase frequency in some circumstances, specific protections for family violence victim survivors, higher standards for thermal comfort and energy efficiency, and provisions for renters living in particular forms of disability accommodation.

But strong laws only make a difference if they can work in practice. Workers report that enforcement remains a critical gap, with renters facing significant barriers to reporting non-compliance.<sup>23</sup>

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The rental market remains a site of disproportionate harm for victim survivors of family violence, which is a major driver of homelessness. Family violence victim survivors are the largest renter cohort that community sector workers are supporting, and victim survivors continue to face stigma and barriers – including discrimination from real estate agents, rental offers being withdrawn when renters disclose using a DFFH bond loan, and inadequate responses to safety requests such as new locks or security cameras.

Renters with disability also face compounding barriers. Notices to vacate are considerably more common for these renters, and have risen five-fold since 2021 as renters struggle with rising costs. An overwhelming majority of workers supporting renters with disability report issues with Specialist Disability Accommodation.<sup>24</sup>

**The people most affected by rental market failure are those with the least power to withstand it. Victoria's rental reform agenda has made meaningful progress across five years – but momentum must be maintained, laws must be enforced, and the remaining gaps must be closed.**





## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Make energy affordable and accessible for every Victorian

### What we propose

Reduce the cost of energy for Victorians in hardship, empower households to cut their energy costs for good, use the revived State Electricity Commission to give people a genuine socially responsible energy alternative, and reform the regulatory settings that leave people vulnerable to debt and disconnection.

### Key features

**Introduce a social tariff** (an affordable rate for energy) for customers who experience payment difficulty and are unable to pay for ongoing energy costs.

**Institute a ban on energy disconnections** and progress embedded networks reform.

**Utilise the revived State Electricity Commission** to purchase existing and build new energy infrastructure and enter the electricity retail market as a socially responsible public option.

**Empower low income households to reduce energy usage and emissions** by:

- Fully funding electrification, energy efficiency retrofits, and installation of solar PV and batteries on social housing properties
- Providing subsidies, rebates and no interest loans for low-income private renters and owner-occupiers to bridge the affordability gap for retrofits with the Victorian Energy Upgrades and Solar Homes programs.

### Case for change

Energy is not optional, it is essential. For many Victorians, it is increasingly out of reach – and the systems meant to protect people have not kept pace with the problem.

Despite the minimum debt-disconnection threshold being raised, the scope for retailers to cut households off from essential electricity remains. While that scope is limited, banning disconnections altogether is the important next step in the evolution of Victoria's energy market – ultimately, neither retailers nor consumers benefit from circumstances where people stop paying their bills. For those on gas – households that can't afford the upfront cost of switching to cleaner, cheaper alternatives – declining customer numbers mean rising per-customer cost, effectively penalising people for a market transition they can't afford to make.

Too many Victorians are going into energy debt: at the end of 2025, approximately 38,000 households who could not pay ongoing usage were receiving tailored assistance for electricity bills.<sup>25</sup> With existing consumer protections not addressing the underlying affordability gap, people will continue to accumulate more debt and live with energy precarity.

A social tariff addresses this gap directly. It offers a guaranteed affordable rate for those who need it most, rather than a patchwork of concessions and short-term supports that can be difficult to access and easy to fall off.

This affordability measure would address the symptoms of energy hardship. Addressing the underlying causes of it requires targeted investment to break the cycle of fossil energy dependency.

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**People experiencing poverty and other disadvantages are often stuck in poorly performing rental properties they don't own and can't upgrade, and are locked out of the savings that come with electrification and other modifications.**

This is a compounding inequity: the households paying the most for energy are those least able to adapt to use less of it – through things like insulation, efficient appliances, solar, batteries, and electric heating. Targeted investment through the Victorian Energy Upgrades and Solar Homes programs – subsidies, rebates and no interest loans – can break that cycle for renters and owner-occupiers alike. And this is especially important for social housing, where fully funding electrification, solar and batteries will make a lasting positive impact for households, and for the state's emissions.

The revived State Electricity Commission can help drive this renewables transition faster and more equitably still, by offering a publicly owned presence in the retail market that is accountable to Victorians rather than to profit.

Together, these reforms move Victoria from a system where energy affordability depends on navigating a complex and unforgiving market, towards one where the basics are genuinely within reach, and where the path to lower bills and lower emissions is open to everyone.



**ELECTION PRIORITY**

# Ensure every Victorian can access the food they need

## What we propose

Realise every Victorian's right to adequate and nutritious food.

## Key features

### Fund recommendations of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Food Security.

Initial investment should include:

- Developing a Victorian Food Security Strategy to address the underlying drivers of food insecurity and build a resilient, sustainable food system for the long term.
- Commissioning a comprehensive audit of food relief services to identify gaps in coverage, and using that data to build and maintain a real-time Food Relief Services Map accessible to providers and the public.
- Shifting the funding model for the food relief sector from short-term grants to recurrent funding, giving organisations the certainty they need to plan, staff and deliver consistently.

**Create a decentralised, place-based healthy school lunch program.** Start by facilitating and resourcing state schools in priority (low SES) areas to buy lunches from local businesses, or to prepare them in-house, involving participation of students where possible. Utilising locally supplied, culturally sensitive food is essential.

**In rural and regional areas, invest in local production and distribution** to make supply chains more resilient to external shocks.

## Case for change

Food is the most basic of essentials – yet for too many Victorians, reliable access to adequate and nutritious food is not something they can take for granted. Cost-of-living pressures have made food insecurity a mainstream issue, increasingly affecting not just those in long-term poverty but working families, renters in the private housing market, and people on fixed incomes who have to choose between food and other essentials.<sup>26</sup>

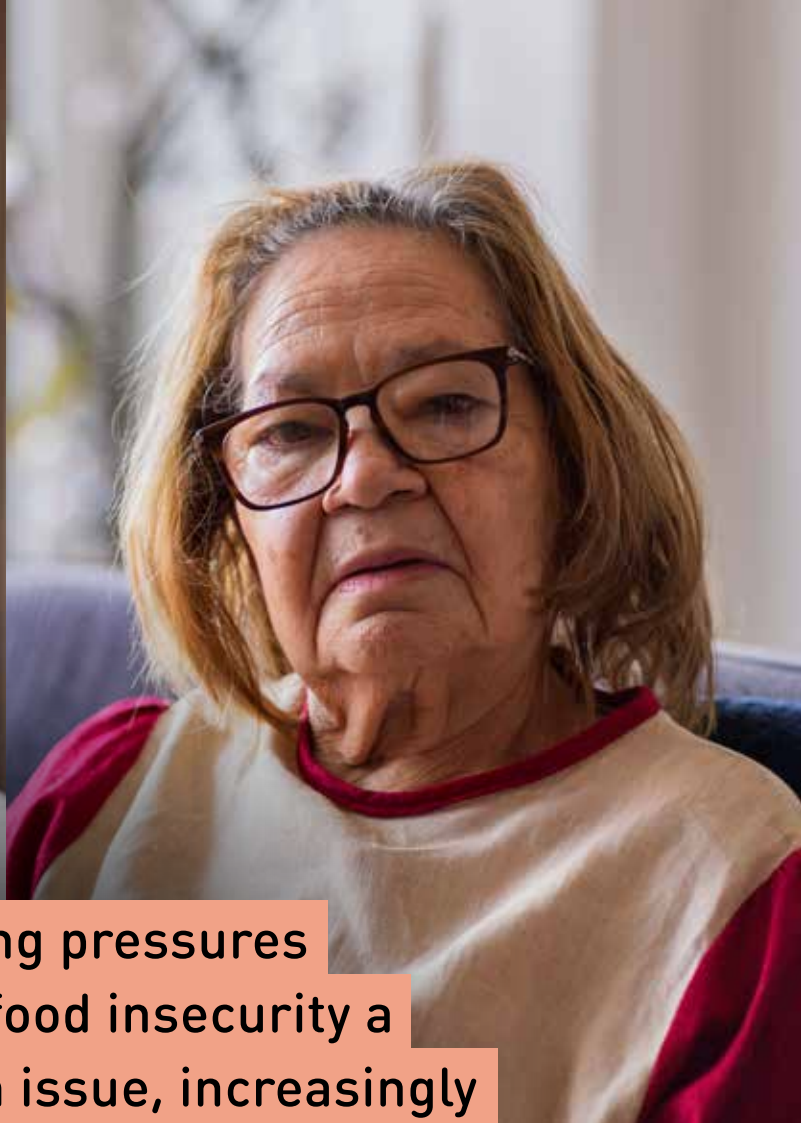
While the recent fuel supply crisis has led to welcome investments in the state's food relief services, Victoria needs to build on this by investing more in systems and architecture for a long-term response. Funding the recommendations of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Food Security is the most direct way government can meet this need: through a Food Security Strategy that addresses the underlying drivers of food insecurity, a real-time map of where services exist and where the gaps are, and a shift from short-term grants to recurrent funding that treats food relief organisations as essential services, rather than recurrent supplicants.

Food insecurity among children is a significant and growing concern.<sup>27</sup> A decentralised, place-based healthy school lunch program would improve resilience and local supply chains. A holistic model of such a program is being piloted in Ballarat by Health Futures Australia, which focuses on supporting child mental health and wellbeing, leveraging the circular economy, and providing jobs for struggling parents.<sup>28</sup>

As a structural solution to fuel-price vulnerability, Victoria also needs to invest specifically in regional food security resilience infrastructure. This includes food warehousing and transport, community food hubs, Neighbourhood Houses and social supermarkets, prioritising place-based and community-led initiatives and direct farm-to-charity relationships. As well as providing access to affordable food, hubs such as social supermarkets that are tailored to local needs improve access to services and opportunities for connection, and bridge the gap between emergency food relief and general food retail.<sup>29</sup>

These measures represent the solid foundation of coordination and capacity for a food system that works for all Victorians.





Cost-of-living pressures have made food insecurity a mainstream issue, increasingly affecting not just those in long-term poverty.





## EVERY VICTORIAN CHILD HAS A BRIGHT FUTURE



Every child in Victoria should have the opportunity to grow up safe and healthy and to thrive. This requires access to the foundations for a strong start in life: stable housing, adequate family income, nutritious food, safe communities, social connection, and quality education and childhood care. Early investment is critical. When children can access high quality early learning and a well-resourced education system that centres equity and inclusion, they are far more likely to learn well, stay engaged, and develop the skills needed to thrive.

Not every child is the same – and so our education, early childhood and service systems need to be intentionally designed to be holistic and responsive to the diverse needs of children and their families, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities, and in communities where economic disadvantage is prevalent.





As children move into adolescence, sustained and targeted supports are essential – particularly for those at risk of school disengagement or contact with the justice system. Too often, young people experiencing poverty and exclusion are drawn into punitive systems that fail to address underlying drivers of their behaviour. Victoria must prioritise non-punitive, early intervention responses that invest in community-based supports, inclusive education pathways, and equitable access to training and employment.

## ELECTION PRIORITIES

- ✓ Fund and strengthen every Victorian child's right to an inclusive, safe, equitable and quality education
- ✓ Get the Thriving Kids rollout right to deliver genuine disability reform
- ✓ Work together to restore opportunity and hope for young people at risk of justice system involvement



**ELECTION PRIORITY**

# Fund and strengthen every Victorian child's right to an inclusive, safe, equitable and quality education

## What we propose

Fully fund Victoria's public schools and strengthen the early childhood education and care system and school settings – ensuring every child has access to the high-quality, safe and inclusive education they need.

## Key features

### **Lift Victorian government school funding to meet 100 per cent of the School Resourcing Standard (SRS) by 2028.**

The Victorian and Commonwealth Government should urgently sign a long-term Bilateral Agreement under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, with Victoria increasing its contribution to government schools from 70.43 per cent to 75 per cent to ensure the Commonwealth Government will lift its share from 20 per cent to 25 per cent.

**Recognise the value of and invest to expand access to alternative education pathways** including flexible learning options and Special Assistance Schools, so every student can access a school that meets their needs. Additionally, ensure these settings are included in wider reform initiatives to support equity and inclusion across the system.

**Stay the course on Best Start, Best Life** and continue to deliver the progressive rollout of funded Four-Year-Old Kindergarten and the early learning infrastructure investment that underpins it.

**Continue to expand and strengthen the Disability Inclusion program** through sustained investment in initiatives that build inclusive education capability so all students with disability can thrive. This should include dedicated funding to fully implement recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review to ensure students with disabilities are safe, supported and set up for success in education.

**Implement key recommendations of the 2025 Rapid Child Safety Review**, including by continuing to work with Commonwealth, state and territory governments to drive meaningful improvements to quality and safety in the early childhood education and care sector. Additionally, resource the sector to lift standards by investing in workforce and leadership development (see [Election Priority: Support community services to move beyond compliance to excellence](#) .

**Ensure continued investment in place-based supports across all areas of Victoria** so students are supported from school into training or work transitions. This includes targeted support for at-risk cohorts, facilitated work experience opportunities, vocational training, and broader initiatives to prevent disengagement.

**Address the impacts of food insecurity on kids' education and wellbeing** through a place-based, healthy school lunches program in public schools (see [Election Priority: Ensure every Victorian can access the food they need](#) .

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## Case for change

A child's start in life shouldn't be determined by their postcode or family income. But in Victoria, almost half of all children are not on track across the five key development domains when they start school, and the funding gap that disadvantages them only widens as they progress through their education. While Best Start, Best Life reforms are a strong, nation-leading step to shift the early part of this picture, they must be sustained to ensure quality early childhood education and care for every child. This must be paired with targeted investment for priority cohorts – including students with a disability – and expanded access, alongside implementation of the Rapid Child Safety Review recommendations and proper resourcing for sector implementation.

At the school level, there is a stark and consequential funding gap. Nearly one-third of students enrolled in Victorian government schools come from low-income households,<sup>30</sup> yet these schools remain the lowest funded in Australia.<sup>31</sup> This persistent funding gap is not just a budget

issue – it's an equity issue. It reduces the number of specialist staff that students rely on, undermines schools' capacity to strengthen learning and wellbeing, and limits their capacity to respond to complex student needs, driving wider achievement gaps for those already facing disadvantage.

Urgent action is also needed to support students with additional needs, through sustained investment, building inclusive education capability and broader inclusive education initiatives. Expanding access to alternative education settings is also important, ensuring that every student can learn in an environment that supports their engagement, wellbeing and success. Sustained investment in place-based supports across Victoria would also strengthen pathways from school to training or employment.

If Victoria is serious about inclusion, equity and educational excellence – and about community safety – it must fully resource its public schools and early childhood system, so that every child, regardless of background, postcode or ability, has the support they need to thrive.



## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Get the Thriving Kids rollout right to deliver genuine disability reform

### What we propose

Commit to a staged, properly funded and independently evaluated rollout of *Thriving Kids* in Victoria, grounded in genuine community and sector engagement.

### Key features

**Legislate a staged implementation plan** aligned to the recommendations of the *Thriving Kids Advisory Group Final Report*, with mandatory public reporting on access, wait times and outcomes to ensure government is accountable for delivering equitable reform.

**Build and fund workforce uplift and capacity** across health, allied health, education and community sectors before transitioning children from the NDIS, so mainstream systems are ready to meet need, not set up to fail.

**Embed local navigation and system integration as essential infrastructure**, ensuring families and carers can receive coordinated, person-centred care across services.<sup>32</sup>

**Direct investment in proven programs and community and social services organisation**, that have already demonstrated impact through place-based, culturally embedded models such as community hubs, to support those facing the greatest barriers.<sup>33</sup>

**Increase long-term funding for the Victorian Disability advocacy sector.**

**Ensure all mainstream and specialist services implementing Thriving Kids deliver culturally responsive, trauma-informed, inclusive and accessible support** for all Victorian children and young people, including for First Nations, LGBTQIA+, CALD children and those living in regional and remote areas.<sup>34</sup>

**Strengthen and maintain the role of the Victorian Committee for Families of Children with Disability** and other disability-focused advisory bodies to ensure lived experience continues to shape implementation, oversight and reform.



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## Case for change

The Victorian Government has a decisive role in ensuring Thriving Kids succeeds. Success or failure of Thriving Kids will be determined by the strength of Victoria's mainstream systems. The risk of poor implementation sits squarely with state government, and so does the responsibility to get it right.

For too long, too many children have been pushed towards the NDIS not because it was the best approach for them, but because mainstream services have been inaccessible, under-resourced,<sup>35</sup> and unwilling to adapt. This has entrenched exclusion, and in many cases caused harm.<sup>36</sup>

Exiting children from the NDIS does not reduce need, it simply puts pressure back into already strained state systems. Without strengthened state-led health, education and community supports, unmet need will re-emerge in Victoria's public paediatric, child mental health and school systems. Long-term and sustainable funding for disability advocacy is critical to the rollout, as demand for advocacy will continue to grow.

## **For children with a disability at risk of falling through the gaps as they transition out of the NDIS, disability advocacy remains essential, supporting children and families to assert their rights and access supports.**

The evidence is clear – early intervention works, but only when it is timely, intensive and well-coordinated.<sup>37,38</sup> Yet workforce shortages, particularly in regional and rural Victoria, already limit access to essential support.<sup>39</sup> Without deliberate state investment and planning, Thriving Kids will increase pressure on systems rather than relieve them.

This reform is a critical opportunity to reset how Victoria supports children with disability, but only if it is done well. Government must ensure Thriving Kids strengthens systems, invests in community-led solutions and improves outcomes rather than shifting risk onto children and families.



## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Work together to restore opportunity and hope for young people at risk of justice system involvement

## What we propose

Safeguard community safety and the futures of young people at risk of justice system involvement by investing in what the evidence has shown to work for Victorians – early intervention approaches that prevent harm before it occurs and long-term poverty reduction that tackles root causes.

## Key features

**Retain and strengthen the effectiveness of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) through:**

- Embedding a genuine public health approach that prioritises prevention and early support and addresses the underlying causes of harm and violence.
- Partnering with communities who are most impacted by the justice system, and working closely with community organisations supporting and representing young people experiencing systemic marginalisation and over-policing.
- Transparency on data, decision-making and outcomes to improve accountability and oversight of implementation.

**End the over-reliance on police as first responders to young people in crisis.** Invest instead in community-based, trauma-informed rapid response teams – without police at first instance – to provide health, housing and welfare support to young people experiencing mental health crises, homelessness or family breakdown.

**Leverage *Working Together: An Action Plan to End Overrepresentation of Particular Groups of Young People in the Criminal Legal System*,<sup>40</sup>** developed by the Smart Justice for Young People coalition, to design new whole-of-systems approaches to prevention and early intervention.

**Bring to life Victoria's Supporting Stable and Strong Families legislation through an ambitious cross-portfolio implementation framework that drives better outcomes for children in out of home care and other priority cohorts** – so that all children grow up loved, safe, respected, and nurtured to realise their full potential.

**Commit to broader institutional reforms needed to make a justice system that communities can trust** – including implementation of Yoorrook Justice Commission recommendations, independent police oversight, and healthcare in custody (see [Election Priority: Create a justice system that communities can trust](#) .

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## Case for change

Some groups of children and young people are consistently under-served by the universal systems – including health, education, and early childhood support – which should reach them first: First Nations children and young people; multicultural children and young people; children and young people in out-of-home and residential care; and young women with complex needs, including experiences of family violence and sexual violence.

When those systems fail to intervene early and provide critical support, young people who miss out on adequate health care and education don't just fall through the cracks; they are often channeled into the justice system. This system is, at best, ill-equipped for prevention and rehabilitation. At worst it pulls young people into a cycle of long-term reoffending and continued system involvement.<sup>41</sup> Research consistently shows that even short periods of justice system contact – including police contact or brief periods in detention – can derail young people's education, family and community connections, and increase the likelihood of further contact with the criminal justice system.

Over-representation in the justice system is a clear signal that systems designed to provide early support and prevention have failed children and young people.

**Past approaches to youth offending have failed because they responded to that signal by doubling down on justice responses, moving us in a direction not supported by the evidence.**

Between 2004 and 2024, Victoria's prison population grew by 62 per cent – far exceeding the state's overall population growth rate of 39 per cent.<sup>42</sup> The introduction of adult time for serious crime legislation, tightening bail laws, and heavy investment in police and prison budgets without equivalent investment in prevention are policy responses to political pressure, not evidence. There is minimal evidence that tougher sentencing reduces reoffending.

Restorative justice programs, by contrast, reduce reoffending rates for young people from 80 per cent to 20 per cent two years after participation.<sup>43</sup> This is a result no punitive approach comes close to matching.

**What is needed is coordinated, cross-sector investment in the conditions that allow young people to thrive, before crisis hits.**

Where young people do come into contact with crisis services – often when experiencing mental health crises, homelessness or family breakdown – the evidence is clear that police are not the right first response.<sup>44</sup> Instead, trauma-informed rapid response teams can de-escalate situations without criminalising young people, connect people to health and welfare supports, and reduce the likelihood of justice system contact that can become a driver of long-term disadvantage and reoffending.

The establishment of the new Violence Reduction Unit, which takes a public health approach, can be a game changer. The *Working Together* framework is ready-made to help set direction and drive coordinated investment in actions across government, statutory agencies and government-funded organisations. This is the kind of whole-of-systems response that prevention requires.





# EVERY VICTORIAN COMMUNITY IS READY FOR, AND PROTECTED FROM, CLIMATE IMPACTS



The climate crisis is actually a set of compounding crises: bushfires, floods, heatwaves and droughts are becoming more frequent and severe, homes are becoming uninsurable, and the people hit hardest are those with the least capacity to adapt and recover. This includes communities in rural and regional areas, First Peoples, renters, people on low incomes, and others already facing disadvantage.

The most effective disaster investment happens before emergencies strike, not after – and supports the vital role of community leadership. Victoria must invest in community-led resilience measures. Social capital, trusted community relationships and well-resourced local community organisations are vital assets that determine how well people can weather disasters. Yet they are chronically underfunded and generally mobilised only in recovery.



Victoria needs a different approach: permanent, place-based investment in community resilience, particularly in rural and regional areas. We must:

- close Victoria's growing adaptation gap for those most exposed to climate risk
- ensure Victoria's homes are fit for a changing climate and emergency relief arrangements reflect contemporary realities around renting, underinsurance and compounding disasters
- recognise community organisations as genuine partners in emergency management – not auxiliary services to be activated during crises and defunded between them.

All resilience-building measures must be underpinned by meaningful action to reduce emissions, addressing the root cause of escalating climate disasters.

## ELECTION PRIORITIES

- ✓ Build community resilience and empower communities to adapt to climate change
- ✓ Ensure Victoria's homes are fit for a changing climate
- ✓ Support people hardest hit by disasters
- ✓ Reduce emissions

## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Build community resilience and empower communities to adapt to climate change

### What we propose

A permanent investment in building community resilience before disasters strike by funding community-led climate adaptation and a permanent community sector resilience workforce.

### Key features

**Establish community-led and place-based adaptation planning**, particularly for First Peoples. This should be facilitated in areas deemed at the greatest risk from climate impacts. A pool of funding should be provided to implement adaptation plans developed by communities.

**Fund trials of community-led adaptation processes** and provide clear pathways to scale up what works.

**Establish a permanent disaster resilience workforce** including place-based, specialist, statewide and cohort-specific services for people at higher risk from emergencies.

**Alongside this investment, update Victoria's emergency management legislation and arrangements to formally recognise the role of community services** in building resilience and embed community-led approaches.

**This should be in parallel with full implementation of recommendations 45 and 46 of the Yoorrook Justice Commission**, including development of a self-determined Aboriginal Climate Justice Strategy and embedding self-determination for First Peoples in Victoria's emergency management arrangements.

### Case for change

Rural and regional areas are facing more severe and frequent emergencies, longer periods of drought, and compounding and cascading disasters.

We know that investing in preparedness and resilience *before* disasters strike is critical in reducing the harm they cause, and improving recovery.

**Community organisations are uniquely placed to build resilience amongst Victorians who are at the highest risk from emergencies, because these organisations already hold trusted relationships in their local communities.**

But current emergency recovery funding arrangements are inefficient and ineffective, requiring community organisations to scramble to respond with short-term contracts during the recovery phase. Without the resources to invest in long-term community resilience initiatives, organisations lose skilled recovery workforce between emergencies due to lapsing funding – sometimes just weeks before needing to mobilise for the next disaster.



# Ensure Victoria's homes are fit for a changing climate

## What we propose

Ensure all Victorian homes – particularly those occupied by people on low incomes – are fit for a changing climate, by improving disaster resilience, closing the adaptation gap between wealthy and less wealthy communities, and expanding support for heat resilient home upgrades.

## Key features

**Co-develop a resilient homes program** to protect homes and communities from future disasters – ensuring support reaches households experiencing the greatest climate risk and the highest levels of disadvantage.

**Reduce upfront costs for heat-resilient home upgrades** through the Victorian Energy Upgrades program, enabling households on low incomes to participate and ensuring that wealthier communities are not the only ones able to invest in climate resilience (see [Election Priority: Make energy affordable and accessible for every Victorian](#) .

**Ensure rental homes comply with minimum energy efficiency standards** so renters, who can't make changes to their homes, can access life-saving thermal upgrades to protect them from heatwaves (see [Election Priority: Build a stronger, fairer rental system](#) .

## Case for change

Victoria's housing stock leaves many people exposed to extreme heat, storms and increasing disasters. As more homes are affected, housing supply is further stretched and insecurity deepens – with the worst consequences falling on those with the least capacity to respond.

The gap between those who can afford to adapt and those who can't is widening. Wealthier communities are already investing in resilience measures to protect their homes and households. Less wealthy communities – those hit first and hardest by climate change – deserve the same protections and the same right to live without fear that their communities are unliveable and their homes uninsurable.

In the absence of investment to ensure these protections, Victoria risks a society divided between those with the capacity to adapt to climate change and a growing number of people and communities without the means to do so. Without adaptation for all, inequality deepens – and becomes self-reinforcing.

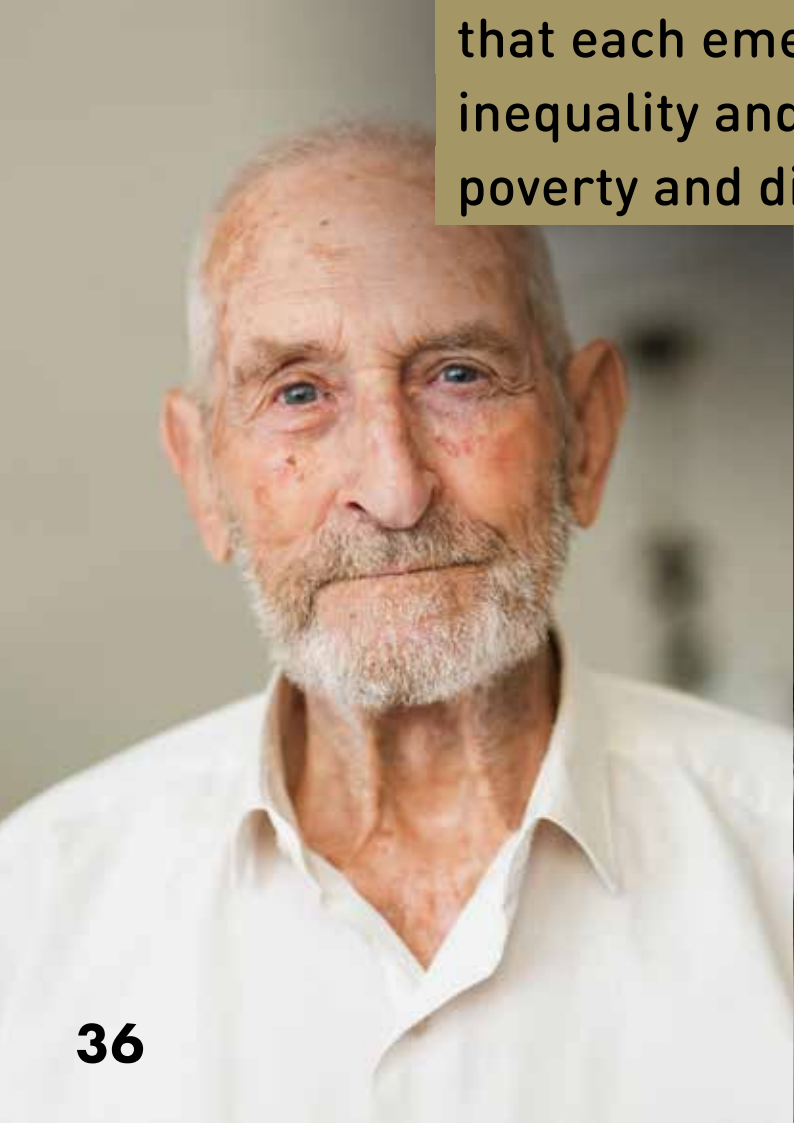
Addressing the adaptation gap is both a human rights imperative and an economic necessity. The economic benefits of investing in adaptation are transformative – the Insurance Council of Australia estimates that for every \$1 invested pursuing climate resilience in Australia, \$10 is returned to the Australian economy.<sup>45</sup> Deloitte Access Economics notes the profound 'resilience dividend' that comes from avoiding the perennial costs of disaster response and recovery.<sup>46</sup>

Community organisations, which have trusted relationships in their communities, are uniquely positioned to build community resilience and support Victorians at the highest risk from emergencies. The next iteration of *Victoria's Adaptation Action Plans* presents an opportunity to place community at the centre of adaptation planning.

*Victoria's Climate Change Strategy 2026–2031* speaks to the goal of 'protecting kids, families and communities' and addressing households' increasing cost-of-living concerns. Fulfilling this promise requires government commitment to invest at scale in the adaptation needs of all Victorians.<sup>47</sup>



Disasters impact everyone, but not equally. Without the right supports in place, there is a risk that each emergency widens inequality and entrenches poverty and disadvantage.



# Support people hardest hit by disasters

## What we propose

Update Victoria's emergency relief and recovery programs to reflect the realities of a changing climate, housing crisis, and insurance crisis.

## Key features

**Increase the Emergency Relief Assistance** payment to match VCOSS' recommended level of the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment, to \$3,000 per person and \$1,200 per child.

**Expand eligibility** for emergency relief payments so that renters who stay to defend their homes, and are not displaced but face financial or psychosocial impacts, can easily access them.

**Review and expand programs for renters** to enable more renters to remain in their communities, access a full range of recovery supports, and uphold their rights in the wake of emergencies.

**Increase accessibility of emergency relief and recovery programs** by reducing reliance on digital forms and centralised phone hotlines – instead support access through local, trusted services.

**Increase transparency of eligibility criteria** and ensure information is clear and publicly available to individuals and services. Criteria regarding underinsurance is particularly important to clarify given extremely high levels of underinsurance.

**Review and update Victoria's emergency management arrangements** to embed community-led recovery and recognise community sector roles and responsibilities in recovery.

## Case for change

Disasters impact everyone, but not equally. Without the right supports in place, there is a risk that each emergency widens inequality and entrenches poverty and disadvantage.

Victoria's emergency relief and recovery supports for individuals and households are no longer fit for purpose in the context of more intense and severe emergencies that are often compounding and cascading.

More Victorians are renting, and underinsurance and non-insurance are extremely prevalent and growing in high-risk areas. Emergency relief supports need to reflect this new reality.

People most impacted by disasters often struggle to access supports, even when they are eligible, for a range of reasons including a lack of digital literacy, lack of clear public communication regarding eligibility, and complex and bureaucratic recovery systems.

Financial impacts following disasters in Victoria are severe and long-lasting – following the 2022 floods, for instance, people in flood-affected areas had persistent higher unemployment and households had over \$22,000 less disposable income than those in unaffected areas.<sup>48</sup> This finding is consistent with Recommendation 62 of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria for the Victorian Government to evaluate the criteria and funding arrangements for financial assistance post-disaster with a view to better aligning support with costs of recovery.

Even with the right programs in place, the complexity of recovery from emergencies can be overwhelming for community members. Greater coordination between government and the community sector can reduce bureaucratic overwhelm, but this coordination remains challenging while the work of community organisations is largely invisible within Victoria's emergency management arrangements. Recognising the critical work of community organisations as part of formal emergency management arrangements can help ensure that relief and recovery support reaches those who need it most as quickly as possible.



**ELECTION PRIORITY**

# Reduce emissions

## What we propose

Victoria must increase its ambition for the speed of transition to net zero emissions. This requires a coordinated strategy to achieve a more ambitious net zero target – including a plan to get off fossil fuels – that is matched by the urgency the science demands. Equity must be centred in this transition, ensuring poverty and disadvantage are addressed and no household is left behind.

## Key features

**Bring forward Victoria's net zero emissions target date to 2035**, in line with what the science requires to limit warming to liveable levels and achieve Victoria's share of global emissions reduction.

**Facilitate an orderly phase-out of fossil fuels** by requiring the Plan for Victoria's Energy Future to include exit dates for coal and gas – recognising that Victoria cannot achieve its emission reduction commitments with continued reliance on fossil fuels.

**Require all data centres to invest in new renewables to cover their energy use**, addressing a growing threat to Victoria's decarbonisation progress as data centres are being approved rapidly without yet being required to fund or underwrite their own power supply. Standards introduced by the Australian Government will address this, but are not expected to require operations to be fully powered by renewable energy sources.

**Enable households to fully electrify**, ensuring people experiencing poverty and disadvantage are not left behind in the transition (see [Election priority: Make energy affordable and accessible for every Victorian](#) )

## Case for change

Victoria's net zero target of 2045 is more ambitious than most other states and the national target, but not ambitious enough: reaching net zero by 2045 is not consistent with limiting warming to liveable levels or with Victoria achieving its fair share of global emissions reduction. The science points to 2035 as the necessary date.<sup>49</sup> A more urgent net zero target will help ensure we avoid the worst impacts of climate change: increasing heat, storms, drought and disasters, which compound cost-of-living pressures. All of these disproportionately affect people experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

Achieving a more ambitious target requires a coordinated approach to getting the state off fossil fuels. Victoria is transitioning to renewables, but a recent audit found that meeting future renewable energy targets is not guaranteed on the current trajectory.<sup>50</sup> The transition is not orderly or fast enough, and we cannot achieve our emissions reduction commitments with continued reliance on fossil fuels. Exit dates for coal and gas must be built into the Plan for Victoria's Energy Future, and households experiencing poverty and disadvantage must be placed at the centre of decarbonisation efforts.

A further threat to our decarbonisation progress comes from data centres. The state's attempts to attract AI-related investment have seen data centres approved rapidly.<sup>51</sup> While a Sustainable Data Centre Action Plan is in development, operators are not yet required to cover their energy use with investment in new renewable energy – and cannot be expected to do so voluntarily. Left unaddressed, this risks entrenching Victoria's reliance on fossil fuels and negatively impacting energy system access for people experiencing poverty.

For Victorians experiencing poverty and disadvantage, cost-of-living pressures are acute – and addressing energy costs is one direct way to ease them. Steps taken so far to electrify households – including the expansion of minimum energy efficiency standards for rentals, and the introduction of building electrification regulations – are welcome foundations that must now be built upon. Further expanding minimum energy efficiency standards to include cooktops and disconnecting rental homes from gas will help renters avoid daily supply charges and potential outsized costs as more households exit from the gas network. Setting a date for the phase-out of gas appliances will provide certainty to the market and further support households to get off gas.<sup>52</sup>







## EVERY VICTORIAN GETS THE CARE THEY NEED, BEFORE (AND AFTER) CRISIS HITS



The case for prevention is not new, but it remains chronically underfunded. Across health, mental health, family violence, youth justice and early childhood, evidence consistently points in the same direction: intervening early – before crises set in – leads to better outcomes for people and communities, and reduces long-term pressure on systems that are already stretched.

Yet budget cycles continue to reward acute response over upstream investment. The result is the perennial ‘ambulance at the bottom of the cliff’ scenario: a system that, at best, helps people when they fall – rather than stopping them from falling in the first place.

The priorities below make the case for changing that ineffective status quo. Victoria has laid some important groundwork – in mental health reform, family violence system response, and the rollout of universal early childhood education. These commitments need to be honoured and sustained.

And staying the course is not enough. There are persistent gaps in how prevention is coordinated and funded, and particular communities – including First Nations Victorians, young people, children in out-of-home care, and people experiencing poverty or housing insecurity – remain underserved by the universal systems that should reach them first.





The justice system, which is too often the end-point for Victorians who are failed by those other systems, must be reformed to recognise that prevention does not end at the prison gate. Systemic accountability, access to good healthcare, and rehabilitation and therapeutic support in custody are vital to keeping communities safe and preventing cycles of disadvantage.

Creating the conditions under which all Victorian communities can thrive requires a realignment of planning horizons and funding enablers, which are currently set to perpetuate wealth concentration. One in six Victorian children are living in poverty.<sup>53</sup> Inequality that is baked into people's lives early compounds over a lifetime.

Victoria is at a hinge point. The largest intergenerational transfer of wealth in history is already underway, and without course correction it will entrench and exacerbate inequality. For the first time, this generation may not outlive the one before it.

Responding to this moment requires more than discrete funding decisions, it calls for brave systemic thinking: about time horizons, how holistic social goals can be met, and what a fair society actually requires. A Victoria that is serious about evening the scales between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' – and about the gains in governmental trust and social cohesion that this realignment can achieve – must get serious about the economic structures that make disadvantage the default for too many people from the start.

Investment in prevention and early intervention is not a soft alternative to system reform; it is effective system reform. It can reduce the demand on health, justice and welfare systems, and build the community capacity and individual wellbeing that a strong society depends on.

## ELECTION PRIORITIES

- ✓ Invest in the social and economic foundations of health and wellbeing
- ✓ Stay the course on nation-leading social policy reform agendas
- ✓ Create a justice system that communities can trust
- ✓ Safeguard investment in prevention and early intervention

## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Invest in the social and economic foundations of health and wellbeing

### What we propose

Invest in the social and economic drivers of health and wellbeing to create healthier, safer and more equitable communities. This includes strengthening prevention, supporting early intervention, and addressing the root causes of disadvantage.

### Key features

**Invest in equitable access to high-quality, culturally safe care.** Resource healthcare services to reduce health inequities, align services with demand, and ensure that evidence-based, high-quality care is available to everyone.

**Invest in prevention and early intervention initiatives that address key social and economic drivers of poor health and wellbeing** including through the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF).

**Sustain and strengthen prevention leadership,** including reversing the decision to dismantle VicHealth's independent structure, which will undermine critical long-term prevention.

**Strengthen integration and navigation across the healthcare and social services landscape,** informed by learnings from cross-sector initiatives (such as tackling the energy-health hardship nexus<sup>54</sup>).

**Support and fund Aboriginal models of care,** including community-controlled approaches developed and led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

### Case for change

People's health and wellbeing are shaped by the broad conditions of their lives, including housing, income, access to services, and connection to community. When these foundations are strong, people are healthier and communities thrive.

We know that investment in prevention and early intervention improves outcomes and reduces long-term costs across systems, including health, justice and child protection. It also helps build stronger, more resilient communities.

Victoria has made progress through reforms in family violence, mental health, and early childhood education. It is critical to continue this work and ensure it is fully implemented. And it is vital to protect the prevention infrastructure of VicHealth, which has a 40-year record of delivering campaigns and programs that improve health across the state. VicHealth's independence is what has made that record possible – existing beyond four-year political terms, it can build impactful partnerships and pursue long-term strategy. It should be retained as a strong, independent and fully funded agency.

**There is also a clear need to strengthen community-led and community-controlled responses, including Aboriginal-led and controlled responses for First Nations communities. These approaches address the broader determinants of health, deliver culturally safe care, and are essential to reducing entrenched health inequities.**

A stronger focus on the social and economic drivers of health will support better outcomes across the whole system, improving wellbeing, reducing inequality, and building communities that are healthier, safer, and more able to thrive.

# Stay the course on nation-leading social policy reform agendas

## What we propose

Commit to continuing to implement Victoria's nation-leading social policy reform agendas including reforms to the mental health system, family violence reform action plans, statewide rollout of early childhood education, and outcomes for kids in out-of-home care.

## Key features

**Continue and strengthen Victoria's long-term social policy reform priorities** including:

- systemic reforms to the mental health system, including measures to prevent mental ill-health and improve Victorians' wellbeing
- family violence system reform, including prevention initiatives and coordinated responses and behaviour change programs
- equitable rollout of universal access to early childhood education.

**Bring to life Victoria's Supporting Stable and Strong Families legislation** – addressed in full under [Work together to restore opportunity and hope for young people at risk of justice system involvement](#) .

**Sustain Victoria's Treaty process** – addressed in full under [Close the Gap and back Victoria's Treaty](#) .

## Case for change

Victoria has laid important foundations through a series of ambitious, nation-leading social policy reforms – including in the areas of family violence, mental health and wellbeing, and early childhood education. These reforms represent years of sustained effort to improve service system performance and redirect effort to earlier intervention and prevention, to deliver more inclusive and equitable outcomes for Victorians.

As the state approaches the next election, the task is not to retreat from this progress, but to see it through. Slowing momentum, scaling back ambition, or stalling implementation would risk undoing hard-won gains and leave communities without the support that Royal Commissions and systemic review processes have demonstrated are needed.

Instead, the next term of government must lock in these commitments, double down on sustained investment, and complete these reform agendas so that their full benefits are realised across the Victorian community – right now and for future generations.

Victoria's Treaty process is a vital commitment that also requires follow-through from government, although its foundations are distinct. Built across more than a decade and now in delivery phase, Treaty rests not on sustaining the momentum of an established program but on supporting the self-determination of First Peoples and the structural change identified by the Yoorrook Justice Commission. We make the full case for backing this nation-leading reform under [Close the Gap and back Victoria's Treaty](#) .



## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Create a justice system that communities can trust

### A note about this priority

Systemic drivers of over-representation in Victoria's justice system – including the failures of housing, mental health and education systems to reach those who need them most – are addressed in the election priorities [Work together to restore opportunity and hope for young people](#), [Close the Gap and back Victoria's Treaty](#), [Stay the course on nation-leading social policy reform agendas](#), [Turbocharge social housing growth](#), and [Fund and strengthen every Victorian child's right to an inclusive, safe, equitable and quality education](#). The upstream investments needed in young people's wellbeing and in community safety are also addressed there.

This priority focuses on the institutional reforms needed to make the justice system itself more accountable, and on the duty of care the state owes to those already within it.

### What we propose

Build a more effective, fairer justice system by establishing genuinely independent police oversight and investing in a public health model for people in custody – moving away from solely punitive responses that entrench disadvantage and towards systems that strengthen community safety, uphold human rights and earn public trust.

### Key features

**Establish a new independent police oversight body** to investigate complaints against police, including racial discrimination, unjustified use of police power, and excessive force – replacing existing mechanisms that have failed to deliver accountability or change police behaviour.

**Invest in a public health model for people in custody**, co-designed by lived experience advocates, to deliver and provide oversight of health services in prison – including mental health, alcohol and other drug support, and continuity of care after release. Build the capacity of community health organisations, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, to anchor this model.

**Invest in rehabilitation, family violence counselling and targeted programs for people who use violence**, to meet demand and help prevent violent re-offending post-release.

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## Case for change

Public trust in institutions is declining. Rebuilding confidence requires evidence-led policy, transparency, and strong independent oversight. A justice system that produces outcomes to meet the public good and win trust is one that doesn't over-police some communities while under-serving them in every other respect, that treats everyone with dignity, and that invests in the conditions – housing, mental health, education, family support – which make contact with the criminal justice system less likely in the first place.

As noted [elsewhere in this platform](#) , Victoria's policy direction has moved away from what the evidence supports. Prison population growth has far outpaced overall population growth, and legislative changes have emphasised punitive responses where prevention and early intervention would be more effective. Proposed workplace protection orders – a response to workplace safety problems – are another example of over-reliance on criminal justice responses.

The evidence is consistent that tougher sentencing does not reduce offending or keep communities safer, and the weight of that misdirection falls most heavily on people who are already marginalised.

Prison should be a genuinely last resort. But for Victorians already in custody, prevention does not end at the prison gate. The state has a duty of care that the current system frequently fails to meet. Access to good healthcare, rehabilitation and therapeutic support in custody are matters of dignity – and also forms of prevention, reducing the likelihood of reoffending and the long-term community harms and costs that flow from it. Investment in rehabilitation, family violence counselling and targeted programs for people who use violence – scaled to meet demand – is the most direct way to reduce violent reoffending after release.<sup>55</sup>

Community health organisations, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, are best placed to anchor a public health model: they bring trusted relationships, cultural safety, and continuity of care that a purely custodial system can't provide.



## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Safeguard investment in prevention and early intervention

### What we propose

Establish government architecture and budget mechanisms to drive greater investments in prevention and early intervention, with a stronger focus on cross-portfolio service integration, evidence-based investment and measurable outcomes for people and communities.

### Key features

**Support cross-sector innovation and evaluation to identify programs** that deliver strong social and economic returns.

**Scale proven early intervention programs** that improve service integration and produce better outcomes for children, families and communities.

**Strengthen whole-of-government coordination** to embed prevention and early intervention across major policy areas.

**Formalise the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF)** as a standalone unit within the Department of Treasury and Finance. Require EIIF projects to be co-designed with communities. Define 'early intervention' for the EIIF and ensure that all EIIF-funded projects meet that definition.

**Establish a Future Fund** dedicated to funding programs for intergenerational equity. As a starting point, this Fund could support long-term (10 to 20 year) community development in disadvantaged communities and seed funding for community wealth building projects (see also [Election priority: Build the conditions for every local community to prosper](#) .

### Case for change

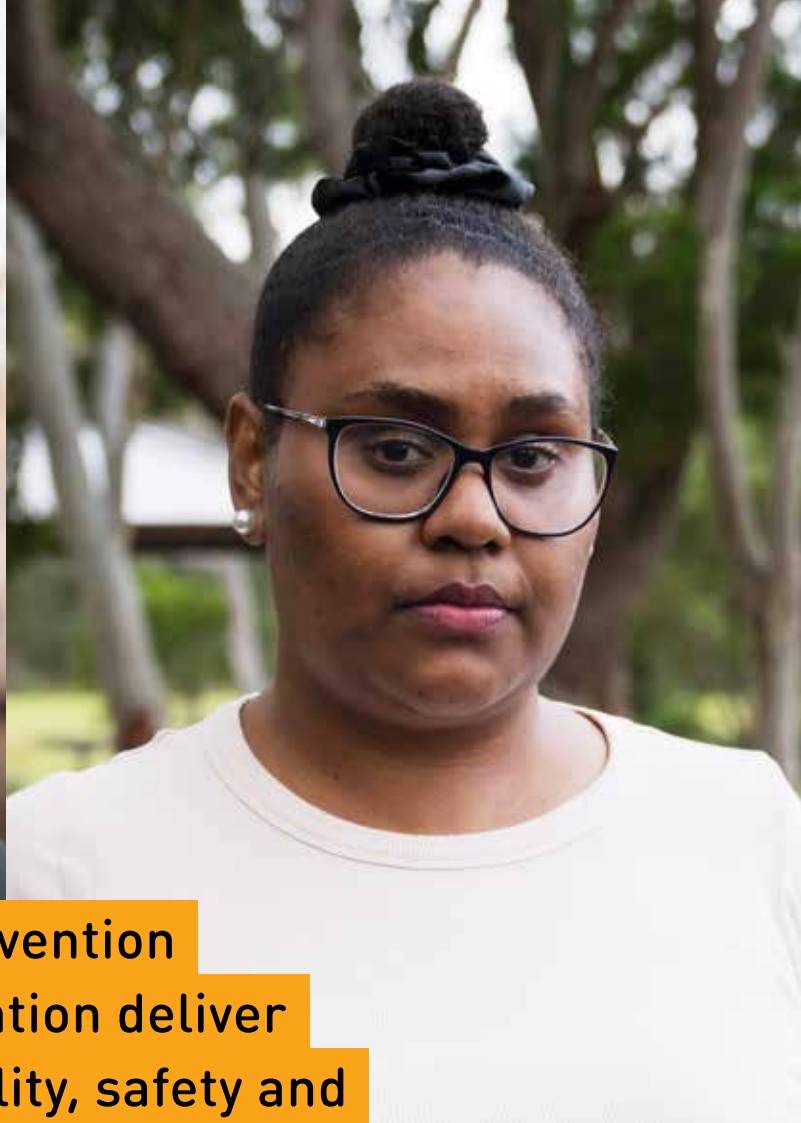
Evidence consistently shows that early intervention and prevention deliver better quality, safety and long-term outcomes than crisis responses, reducing pressure on health, justice and welfare systems.

Despite this evidence, prevention initiatives are often underfunded because government budget cycles prioritise short-term outputs over long-term value.

The Victorian Government already uses the EIIF to support initiatives such as family violence and homelessness prevention, demonstrating that early investment can be targeted, measurable and scaled where it works. Formalising the EIIF would strengthen this by prioritising co-designed solutions informed by lived experience alongside evidence-based approaches.

Early intervention investment shouldn't start and stop with the EIIF. Most early intervention and prevention programs are simply 'good policy' and should continue to be funded outside the EIIF by line departments. And where long-term investments don't lend themselves to demonstrating avoided costs over a 10 year period, there should be another option – such as a Future Fund – with governance structures to protect investment in prevention from political cycles, support evidenced-based scaling, and ensure sustained commitment to long-term system reform. This will ensure that Victorians have every confidence that decisions about the Future Fund are driven by the genuine objective of safeguarding equity and wellbeing for future generations.



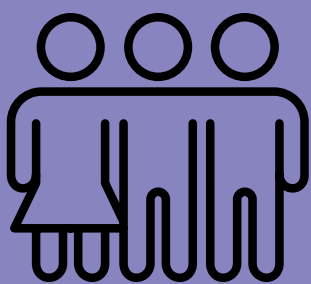


Early intervention  
and prevention deliver  
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## EVERY VICTORIAN BELONGS



Victoria stands at a critical moment. Around the world – and increasingly at home – we are seeing the consequences of fractured and disenfranchised societies, where division is deepening, trust is eroding, and extreme views are gaining ground. The forces of exclusion, racism and division are not abstract risks – they are present and growing, and they threaten the social fabric that underpins a fair and stable society.

In this context, the work that Victoria has begun matters more than ever. Through truth-telling and treaty-making with First Peoples, renewed commitments to multiculturalism, and a stronger focus on confronting racism and hate in all their forms, Victoria has laid the foundations for a more just and inclusive future. But these foundations must now be strengthened, not weakened. Resolute and compassionate political leadership is required.





Building a cohesive society requires sustained investment in the social and economic infrastructure that connects people – community organisations, local spaces, and trusted institutions – alongside a deliberate shift towards community wealth building that ensures prosperity is shared and rooted locally. Ultimately, the path forward is clear: to resist division by fostering belonging, to stand firm against hate with a commitment to justice and inclusion, and to ensure that no one is left behind.

## ELECTION PRIORITIES

- ✓ Close the Gap and back Victoria's Treaty
- ✓ Create a Victoria free from hate
- ✓ Invest in social infrastructure
- ✓ Build the conditions for every local community to prosper



## ELECTION PRIORITY

# Close the Gap and back Victoria's Treaty

## What we propose

Back Victoria's Treaty – a self-determined process built over more than a decade, with broad community support – and resource it fully. Gellung Warl is now getting to work, and this is the way Victoria can Close the Gap: through the self-determined framework that puts Aboriginal decision-making in the hands of Aboriginal people to deliver practical solutions for their communities, culture and Country. All elected decision-makers are invited to be part of this new way of doing things. VCOSS calls on all parties to honour that invitation.

## Key features

**Honour and sustain Victoria's landmark Treaty legislation** across the term of the next Parliament, ensuring Traditional Owners hold genuine authority and autonomy over matters affecting their communities, culture and Country.

**Fully resource and empower Gellung Warl** to exercise genuine decision-making authority over matters affecting First Peoples, negotiate future Treaties, and hold government accountable for outcomes impacting Victoria's First Peoples.

**Significantly increase and sustain investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations** to strengthen self-determined infrastructure, workforce and service delivery.

**Address and dismantle racism, discrimination and stigma embedded across mainstream and statutory systems** through system-wide reforms identified in the *Yoorrook Justice Commission Final Report*. Commit to the full and timely implementation of the Yoorrook Justice Commission's recommendations – including those from the Final Report on child protection and criminal justice – alongside other key inquiries, to deliver structural change, truth telling and justice.

## Case for change

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians are significantly over-represented in the justice system, including policing, courts and prisons. They are also likely to experience poorer health outcomes and shorter life expectancy than the rest of the population.<sup>56</sup> These inequities are the direct and enduring consequences of colonisation, which has entrenched dispossession, exclusion and systemic discrimination across generations.

Victoria's formal truth-telling inquiry, the Yoorrook Justice Commission, has made clear that police and child protection systems are acute sites of harm for First Nations communities, and that incomplete implementation of its recommendations will only entrench mistrust.

**The Victorian Government has so far committed to roughly half of the Yoorrook recommendations on child protection and criminal justice. This is not enough. Meaningful change requires full implementation, embedded within Treaty, backed by independent oversight.**

Self-determination is not optional – it is essential to justice and to closing equity gaps. It sits at the core of First Peoples' aspirations in Victoria.<sup>57</sup> In the words of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, "only fully self-determined systems can dismantle the colonial structures that perpetuate injustice".<sup>58</sup>

Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, all Australian governments – including Victoria – have committed to measurable socioeconomic targets and to tangible actions giving effect to four Priority Reforms. Nationally, progress on these targets and Reforms is falling well short.<sup>59</sup> In Victoria, some of the sharpest failures can be read in the significant over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care – which the Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People and the Yoorrook Commission have compared to the Stolen Generations.<sup>60</sup>

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The Productivity Commission's 2024 report on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is unequivocal about the underlying cause of these failures: "There will be no change unless governments share power with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to design and implement their own solutions. The first action we call on governments to commit to here, is to amend the National Agreement to make it clear that self-determination is the purpose of the first Priority Reform."<sup>61</sup>

In Victoria, this essential self-determination is the structural change that Treaty is designed to deliver. In this, Victoria is leading the way – the Treaty process has been identified by the Productivity Commission as a nation-leading pathway to achieve structural reform and close the gap.

This leadership has been built across more than a decade of tireless advocacy by First Peoples, and has the support of Victorians broadly. As the Productivity Commission has noted, Treaty also removes reliance on Government, cuts bureaucratic red tape and promotes economic independence.<sup>62</sup> To reverse course on this process would be a retrograde step, undermining the economic prospects and rights of Victorian First Peoples.

Gellung Warl will allow First Peoples to use their local knowledge to deliver practical solutions. This case is already proven: where Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations lead – across health, child protection and family support – they achieve better outcomes than mainstream systems, because they are led by and accountable to community.<sup>63</sup>

This transformational change now requires follow-through: the transfer of decision-making power, authority and resources – including control over system design, revenue raising, resource allocation, and the governance and oversight of institutions.<sup>64</sup>

These systems must be led by First Peoples, accountable to their communities, and supported through sustained investment and structural reform.



ELECTION PRIORITY

# Create a Victoria free from hate

**What we propose**

Fund and deliver coordinated, whole-of-government action to eliminate racism, remove barriers to inclusion and support multicultural communities.

**Key features**

**Take decisive action to eliminate racism, antisemitism, islamophobia and all forms of discrimination and hate.** Funding should be increased to deliver *Victoria’s anti-racism strategy 2024–2029*, which offers a solid foundation for systemic change.

**Deliver a new and strengthened whole-of-government multicultural policy framework** and governance structure backed by funding, accountability, transparency and best practice data and reporting, as detailed in the 2025 Multicultural Review *Final Report*.

**Commit to sustained, long-term investment in community capacity building and collaboration,** multicultural infrastructure, accessible language services and community-led grants programs.

**Case for change**

Victoria’s diversity is a defining strength, but it is under growing strain.

There has been an increase in antisemitic,<sup>65</sup> islamophobic,<sup>66</sup> and racist incidents<sup>67</sup> in Victoria and nationally. Extremists are spreading anti-immigration and racialised rhetoric online, leading to displays of hatred, violence and intimidation in our streets.<sup>68</sup>

Rising inequality, economic insecurity and the spread of disinformation are eroding trust and fueling division, while global conflicts are intensifying local tensions. Migrant, refugee and multicultural communities continue to experience systemic discrimination, exclusion and unequal access to services and opportunities. These inequities are not incidental, but rather embedded in policy settings and institutional structures that have failed to deliver fair outcomes.

This moment demands strong, principled political leadership. Migrants and diverse communities must not be scapegoated for the complex economic and social challenges Victoria faces. Divisive and hateful messaging and actions must be unequivocally condemned, and racism addressed at its core.

A genuine commitment to anti-racism and multiculturalism is needed to ensure all Victorians feel safe, respected and included. Without coordinated, whole-of-government reform, systems will continue to reproduce inequality and undermine outcomes across health, education, employment and justice.

Developing strong multicultural leadership and governance that restores trust in institutions, focused and adequately resourced initiatives that address systemic racism, and support for community organisations and community-led programs are foundations for this transformation.



# Invest in social infrastructure

## What we propose

Invest in the social infrastructure that makes neighbourhoods liveable – community hubs, Neighbourhood Houses, libraries, green spaces, and the community services that animate them – and fund those services at a level that allows them to meet demand.

## Key features

**Map Victoria's social infrastructure** to identify 'service deserts' and work towards population-centric equitable distribution of community spaces and services across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria.

**Fund the State's Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2035** and implement a coordinated approach that brings communities, service providers and government together to strengthen the focus on prevention, promotion and healing at every stage of life.

**Back trusted, local community assets and services** – like Neighbourhood Houses and community information centres as well as third sector-led service hub models like Our Place schools – with the funding uplift and certainty they need to support people to access the basics, lessen the digital divide, and drive long-term community building and economic benefit (see also [Election priority: Build the conditions for every local community to prosper](#) .

**Invest in and maintain local parks, community gardens and green spaces** – especially in urban growth areas and social housing sites – ensuring every Victorian has access to safe gathering places and connective public outdoor spaces.

**Recognise and resource the volunteer and community leader networks** that animate and sustain social infrastructure (see also [Election Priority: Value the Community Sector Workforce](#) .

## Case for change

Thriving communities need more than just houses, shops, and roads. The places where people gather, stay healthy, and get help – including local service hubs, Neighbourhood Houses, multicultural clubs, green spaces, youth spaces, health centres and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations – are the lifeblood of Victorian communities.

But in some parts of Victoria – particularly in regional and outer suburban areas – there is almost none of this social infrastructure.

**Victorians who most need connection and support are often those with the least access to it. This fuels social isolation, fragmented and distrustful communities, and too many people falling through the cracks.**

The organisations that operate in these spaces are working at capacity or beyond. Short-term and insecure funding cycles prevent them from building staff capability, planning ahead or meeting growing demand. As a result, vital community assets are underutilised – or struggling to keep the lights on.

Social infrastructure sits alongside other essentials like housing and health as a determinant of whether people can live a dignified life. Victoria must treat it as vital public investment – mapping where it's missing, funding it sustainably, and ensuring every community can access it.

ELECTION PRIORITY

# Build the conditions for every local community to prosper

**What we propose**

Introduce a Community Wealth Building Act to build stronger local economies where wealth is created, retained and reinvested in communities.

**Key features**

**Introduce a Victorian Community Wealth Building Act, creating a strategic foundation for a new economic development model** that enables the generation, circulation and retention of wealth at a local level.

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**Model the approach on Scotland’s new world-first legislation,<sup>69</sup> adapted for a Victorian context.**

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**Design legislative levers to:**

- Develop local labour markets and drive growth in good jobs.
- Support growth in local enterprises that generate community wealth, including social enterprises, employee-owned firms, and cooperatives.
- Enable local communities to unlock greater social, ecological, financial, and economic value from land and property assets.

**Case for change**

Despite strong economic growth, many Victorians cannot afford basic necessities like housing, food and access to essential services. Poverty remains stubbornly high across Victoria, concentrated in pockets of severe place-based disadvantage. We face the deepening challenges of inequality, intergenerational disadvantage and climate change.

These interconnected issues are symptoms of an economic system that is not serving the majority of people, but instead extracting value for the lucky few by design.<sup>70</sup>

People are looking for new solutions.

Community Wealth Building aims to ensure that the benefits of economic activity and growth are owned by and shared amongst local communities. Its key pillars centre around progressive employment, just labour markets and land use, harnessing financial power, and plural ownership models.<sup>71</sup>

The approach is showing promise in promoting economic development and alleviating poverty in communities globally, including here in Victoria.<sup>72</sup> There are also foundational elements that can be leveraged and built on such as Victoria’s social procurement<sup>73</sup> and place-based approaches<sup>74</sup> frameworks.

But there remain policy, legislative, regulatory and resource barriers that stand in the way of broader adoption so more communities can benefit.<sup>75</sup> Legislation like the Scottish Community Wealth Building Act could enable this transformational approach to move from the margins to the mainstream.

This would be a key step towards Victoria becoming a wellbeing economy – in which the settings shaping economic activity are designed to deliver the flourishing of people and planet.<sup>76</sup>



Community Wealth Building aims to ensure the benefits of economic activity and growth are owned by and shared amongst local communities.





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