

MEDIA RELEASE

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Maintaining a holistic appreciation of social issues is key to the 2021/22 Victorian budget

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) welcomes the focus of the 2021/22 Victorian Budget: 'Creating Jobs, Caring for Victorians'. The sentiment, as stated by Minister for Regional Development, Mary-Anne Thomas, in her address at the budget lock up, that 'Good, secure and meaningful jobs must be at the heart of our recovery' is a solid foundation.

'The \$3.8 billion that has been committed in this budget to implementing various recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health system is a landmark investment and is to be commended,' says executive director of CSSV Joshua Lourens.

'This investment puts us on a path to drawing closer to those who we, as a society, have systemically disregarded for years.'

An important change to the Victorian Government revenue is the new mental health levy, which will be implemented from 1st January 2022.

'While this levy is an important initiative to ensure sustained investment, improved mental health for all Victorians will not be achieved through reforms to the mental health system alone. They must continue to include caring and daring social policy reforms addressing inequality and impoverishment,' says Lourens.

The Government "will legislate that revenue from this levy will only fund mental health services" and the scope of this legislation and funding should appreciate the important accompaniment and programs that actively include protective factors for positive mental health that Catholic social service organisations deliver every day,' Lourens says.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, in their [Social Justice Statement 2020-21](#) on Mental Health in Australia, say that "Some instances of mental illness may be explained and addressed by a purely medical approach. However, a more holistic approach is often needed because human beings are a unity of body, mind and spirit, and we are persons-in-community.'

'As CSSV stated in our [Budget Priorities Discussion Paper](#), poverty leads to poor mental and physical health as does unemployment and homelessness. As such, mental health services need to be seen not only as clinical, but also as social in nature.' says Lourens.

'This will assist in ensuring that mental health care is not just about assisting adaptation to fundamental injustice, but rather as one important aspect of Victoria as a caring State.'

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'CSSV stands ready to assist to ensure that the implementation of these incredible investments will hold true to a holistic approach. Appreciation of the interconnection of care needs was evident in each of the budget lock up presentations, which also included Acting Premier James Merlino and Assistant Treasurer Danny Pearson.'

The Victorian Government claims that this budget will deliver 38,000 jobs each year, over the next four years. This is significant and welcomed. With 305,247 Victorians in March 2021 receiving an unemployment-related Government payment, a focus on secure, meaningful jobs and care is very welcome.'

'Given the inadequacy of JobSeeker and Youth Allowance payments, sustained work from across the social services and community sector, and ongoing support from the State Government, is really necessary and appreciated,' says Lourensz.

CSSV has been concerned about care for ageing prisoners, and released a substantial piece of [research into prisoner-carer programs](#) within the Victorian Justice system in late 2020. There doesn't seem to be particular budget consideration of the aged care needs of prisoners in this budget, but CSSV will continue to promote and advocate for the adequate care of those who are especially vulnerable in our state,' says Lourensz.

The ongoing implementation of the 'big build' will be very important over the coming years, along with these substantial mental health system reforms. There is much to be grateful for, and a lot to work with going forward, but implementation and the maintaining of a holistic appreciation of social issues will be key to these investments translating into real outcomes for the people who need it most.

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