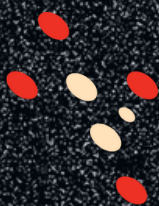


Catholic Social Services Victoria

2022 Victorian Election Statement

PRIORITISING VULNERABLE VICTORIANS

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Catholic Social
Services Victoria

*Let's build a more just and
compassionate society*



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Catholic Social Services Victoria Members

Organisational Members

- Aboriginal Catholic Ministry
- Assisi Centre
- Australian Catholics Against Trafficking of Humans (ACRATH)
- Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
- Cabrini Outreach
- CatholicCare Victoria
- Catholic Women's League Victoria and Wagga Wagga
- Corazon
- Corpus Christi Community
- Don Bosco Youth Centre & Hostel
- Edmund Rice Camps Victoria
- Edmund Rice Refugee & Community Services
- Edmund Rice Services-Mt Atkinson
- Good Samaritan Inn
- Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
- House of Welcome Ballarat
- Jesuit Social Services
- JoCare
- John Pierce Centre for Deaf Ministry

- Joseph's Corner Inc.
- Kewn Kreestha
- Keysborough Learning Centre
- Links and Consolidation Network (LinCoN)
- MacKillop Family Services
- Mary Aikenhead Ministries
- Missionary Sisters of Service – Highways and Byways
- Nazareth House—Sisters of Nazareth
- Order of Malta Hospice Home Care Vic
- Pregnancy Assistance, Frankston
- Rosies Oblate Youth Mission
- Sacred Heart Mission, St Kilda
- St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria
- St John of God ACCORD
- St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
- St Joseph's Home for the Aged, Little Sisters of the Poor
- St Mary's House of Welcome
- Vietnamese Catholic Family Mutual Assistance Network
- VincentCare Victoria
- VMCH
- Wellsprings for Women

Bishop Members

- Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli
- Bishop Paul Bird CSsR
- Bishop Shane Mackinlay
- Bishop Greg Bennet

Introduction and Ethos



Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) is the peak body for 40 Catholic social and community member organisations, who work across the state, supported in various ways by many of the 300 parishes and religious congregations which inhabit the four Catholic dioceses of Victoria (Sale, Ballarat, Sandhurst and Melbourne). Inspired by the message of Jesus and underpinned by Catholic social teaching, we believe that all Victorians matter and we work alongside our members and many others of good will towards a more just and compassionate society and a hope-filled future for all. These foundations particularly direct us to stand with and serve the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised.

This Victorian State election is set within a period of growing inequality so it is particularly important that we hold the most vulnerable—those barely surviving in our current cascade of crises—close to all our considerations. CSSV has focused on the theme 'Regions Matter' in the lead up to this election and has gone on location to listen to and magnify the less heard, but urgent regional voices through public forums: in Gippsland and Central Victoria. These forums involved current Members of Parliament, as well as candidates, social service representatives and volunteers, parishioners, local government and general community members.

While not particular only to regional/rural Victoria, certain challenges that are exacerbated by the tyrannies of distance, a growing digital divide and other elements include:

- **a changing climate in which bushfires and flood emergencies are prevalent and compounding already existing issues of poverty and inequality**
- **affordable housing shortages and rents have ‘gone up astronomically’ creating a secure and affordable housing crisis**
- **gender injustice and the severity in domestic violence**
- **under- and unemployment, simultaneously accompanied by workforce shortages in areas of social service and care, and**
- **continued COVID-19 impacts and mental health-related issues.**

We believe that positive local and state-wide change emerges from good collaboration between community services, governments of all levels, businesses, alongside religious and wider communities, each contributing their strengths. The newly elected Victorian Government should look carefully to the nexus of collaboration to meet the needs of our times. Shared resourcing and cooperation will be key to a future in which all Victorians can flourish.

Good policy and well targeted resource allocation, alongside good social practice, is universally needed if we are to see a Victoria where equality and justice is prized. However this is not enough; CSSV also calls for localised, responsive and dynamic social service responses. This work is timely, intensive, more holistic, and place-based in response to social issues and contextualised for building up more just and compassionate communities and societies.



Our member organisation, Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places' Dropping off the Edge (DOTE) research (most recently updated in November 2021) is important in identifying local challenges, and where the strengths of those communities can be drawn upon to meet those challenges. This is important to consider when prioritising areas of government-backed work. This mapping and approach to 'disadvantaged' communities can help set regional and urban priorities for investment and care. When governments genuinely engage faith communities, social service and community organisations and broader disadvantaged communities in resourced collaborations—as well as in briefings and consultations—better outcomes will be achieved.

A hope-filled future will be underpinned by ecological justice and access to secure work, alongside a broad suite of social programs and substantial interventions that appreciate the 'whole' needs of a person. A focus on these foundational approaches will ensure continued work by the newly elected Victorian Government in many ways, including:

- mitigation of the contradictions of a housing market that continues to divorce the notion of housing as primarily concerned with creating safe, secure, and affordable homes in favor of treating housing as just another commodity in which investment does or does not take place
- continued emphasis on the complex work of reconciliation and truth telling, leading to treaties with First Nations Peoples
- continued investment in domestic and family violence responses, prevention and recovery
- actively fostering and resourcing partnerships and coordination of charitable and social work, and
- facilitating a reduction in the number of Victorians involved with the justice system, and appropriate care given to the incarcerated.

CSSV asks that all members of the newly elected parliament, alongside the public service, to commit to deep thinking and listening, moving to the co-creation and resourcing of projects and programs that enhance and enliven the strengths of communities; that address drivers of inequality and create opportunities to consider the spiritual, material, social and health needs of communities.



Areas of Priority

CSSV works particularly on three core areas of interconnected priorities: housing and homelessness; domestic and family violence; and justice and equity. Some specific elements which the newly formed government and all parliamentarians should consider are detailed below:

Priority Area 1: Housing and Homelessness

The most vulnerable are worst affected in extreme temperature variations adding to the poor health and safety of the homeless, and those living in substandard accommodation—including for its fastest rising cohort, middle-aged and older women. Government must work at this intersection. Further, increased job mobility and subsequent tree- or sea-changers across Victoria, especially since COVID-19, along with increased short-term and other rental options has unintentionally and indirectly exacerbated regional rental pressures and homelessness. Changing climate and associated crises like homelessness from bushfire or flood means we need to mitigate immediately while working at longer-term goals. CSSV holds an equitable, inclusive platform for a just, inclusive Victoria grounded in Catholic Social Teaching. Pope Francis connects ‘the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’ (*Laudato Si*, [Section 49](#)) as two sides of a coin — this is relevant for helping communities prevent and adapt to a changing climate in ways that do not further penalise the poor.

In light of these broad challenges, CSSV:

1. Commends the current State Government’s \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build investment now at half-way stage. We also affirm the importance of state and federal governments working together to address shortfalls in affordable, secure housing. But there are no new house starts till late 2023. We have previously called for Victorian and Federal Government matching agreements to enable long-term outcomes, however present housing needs are urgent.
2. Supports Housing First approaches to homelessness as key to individual persons, family and community stability. Homes are foundational for flow-on benefits in education, work, care, and health in all stages of life; with genuine community support and professional care, homes can be a springboard to a flourishing life. The current Government is commended for adopting this successful approach by supporting our member Sacred Heart Mission and also for implementing this approach during COVID-19. CSSV urges that this continue and be upscaled as this approach is highly beneficial to both people experiencing homelessness and taxpayers alike.
3. Supports Council to Homeless Persons’ proposal of 6000 social houses per annum for 10 years as rapidly rising homelessness exacerbated by COVID-19 threatens the basic equality of the ‘Australian dream’.
4. Notes that the large-scale building and reconfiguring of public and social housing also requires community and social services infrastructure and consultation for maintaining and enhancing our social fabric. This requires resources, but also has positive equitable economic by-products.
5. Calls for, in all cases, proportionate shares of benefits for reconfiguring public or social housing to go to the poorest parts of the public.



6. Recommends immediate housing crisis action in regional Victoria. Temporary solutions need to be found while longer-term affordable options are worked out. Partnership with local organisations is crucial for the success of shorter-term solutions. Dialogue and resources need to be allocated immediately by any newly formed government. [CSSV's Regional Matters Forums](#) showed us that people in regional areas such as Bairnsdale (missing out on recent promised regional housing investment), suffer severe homelessness issues. 36.2% of Lakes Entrance renters pay rent over 30% of household income, thus facing rental stress. Local Member of Parliament, Tim Bull said, 'Availability and affordability are intimately connected. Council is struggling to get through subdivision and planning approvals. The State Government could assist with a fast-track process to assist in supply...East Gippsland has had the perfect storm—long drought, bushfires [destroying 400 houses] and COVID.' So many local residents are occupying rentals, and during COVID-19, Melbourne residents bought homes or took rentals to avoid city lockdowns. Some bushfire recovery projects are winding up as funding ends, but homelessness continues due to compounding issues. Coordinated continuity of funding and communication at all levels of government is needed. Recent floods also demonstrate the urgency of action in other areas, so that issues of homelessness are not further compounded.
7. Calls for more dialogue and support for smaller-scale developments with intimate community involvement. Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH), CatholicCare Victoria and the Society of St Vincent de Paul are all investing substantially in building affordable housing. Parishes and religious congregations have made land available to allow our members to operate a wide array of services, including residential services, with some State Government help and collaboration. CSSV's 2018 analysis of parish properties within the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne found 1 in 5 parishes already utilising property for those most in need. Parishioner and neighbour concerns were serious about mixed land use, but a broad commitment remained to meeting the needs of our times. CatholicCare Tasmania [train and employ young people while building social and affordable housing](#), and do much community engagement when building social housing, including running Yes in my Backyard campaigns to garner community support. This can be replicated here in Victoria with adequate dialogue with faith communities, social service organisations and collaborative resourcing by Government. As Sunday's Age stated on Oct. 9, 2022, p.28 'Housing the vulnerable benefits all of us'.

Priority Area 2: Domestic Violence

The prevention, response and recovery of those impacted by domestic and family violence remains of core concern to the wellbeing of Victorians:

1. CSSV commends the current State Government's substantial ongoing commitment to, and spending on, responses to and prevention of domestic violence with the Orange Door providing access to support services across the state. However, CSSV members report referrals to further support remain extremely challenging. We must have the resources to respond to the assessed needs and assist where possible with the ongoing recovery of those impacted by domestic and family violence.
2. CSSV asks for commitment to consistent collaborative prevention programs both in cities and lesser resourced regions and dioceses. This can make a real difference as shown by CSSV's successful [pilot program](#) which engaged with 127 people in leadership within the Gippsland region, made possible by collaboration with the Catholic Diocese of Sale and support from the Victorian Multicultural Commission. More grassroots efforts like these could contribute to long-term change.
3. CSSV's Domestic Violence Working Group sees as core the State Government's Respectful Relationships program to promote healthy, happy relationships for young people. This program needs resourcing to support and equip teachers to deal with disclosure of domestic and family violence as students become more aware of such violence. This hopefully results in increasingly healthy, respectful relationships.
4. Commend recent Government focus on funding for supporting families with adolescent family violence issues as a priority need. Although the recommendations of the Royal Commission are seen to be implemented, this is still a gap in an important area of work.
5. Encourage cooperation between the Victorian and Federal Governments in relation to the recently released National Plan but with more specific goals in addition to aspirations.

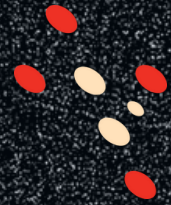


Priority Area 3: Justice and Equity

Matters of justice and equity affect all Victorians. Some areas in need of particular attention include:

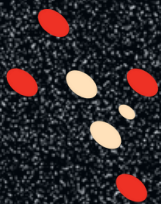
1. Destitution is desperately obvious for people seeking asylum who are trapped in a never-ending limbo of visa queues, and clogged Administrative Appeals Tribunal and circuit court applications. While understanding the important role of the Federal Government in dealing with these issues, Victorian charities and healthcare systems are assisting to keep people afloat. There is unfortunately continued need for the State Government to continue to step in, where recently the Federal Governments should have. The refurbished Mickleham accommodation for COVID-19 isolation is now rightly being used for needy flood victims. Asylum seekers are equally needy and deserving of such ample transitional accommodation to get back on their feet while their claims are being assessed.
2. Day-to-day care for aged prisoners is important and CSSV research found not adequately resourced. CSSV asks for the full implementation of the recommendations from Dr Ruth Webber and Dr Alicia Evans' report on Prisoner Care-Giving Programs in our prison system, and in so doing, build upon the State 2022-23 budget allocation of \$2.5m for provision of services to support ageing people in the prison system, ensuring assistance, such as personal care and daily living needs, and specialist transition and reintegration assistance.
3. CSSV remains deeply disappointed that there has not been a commitment to raising of the age of criminal responsibility and detention in Victoria and asks the newly formed Government to take seriously criminal justice and child welfare. The call for a bare minimum age standard of 14 years as recommended by legal (Law Council), medical (AMA) and indigenous experts is necessary and urgent. The ACT alone has taken substantial action following expert advice, committing to raising the age to 14. Raising the age requires system reform, but there are effective interventions for children of this age that can give them the best chance of a bright future, and which also makes economic sense and keeps communities safe in the present and longer term.
4. Victorian investment in large-scale prison facilities needs to be re-engineered. There is a strong evidence base that informs how youth justice facilities should be designed to improve outcomes for justice-involved young people in custody, improves the working conditions for Youth Justice staff, and improves public safety through reducing the risk of reoffending. The physical environment of a facility greatly impacts procedures in a youth justice environment, relationships between staff and young people, and ultimately a young person's prospects of rehabilitation and community safety. These facilities should be immediately piloted and then implemented at scale according to the Key Principles outlined in the Design guidelines for evidence-based, best-practice Youth Justice facilities in Victoria which include:
 - **Small Scale:** Approximately 8-beds in size, allowing staff to develop meaningful relationships with young people, to understand the individual motivations, risks, needs, skills and strengths of each young person, and to modify their role and behaviour based on this knowledge.
 - **Differentiated and Relational Security:** Promoting approaches that encourage a therapeutic relationship between staff and young people, with measures that are adaptable to individual dynamic risks and needs, and goals, with a preference for semi-open settings.
 - **Local:** Close proximity to the young person's community to support accessibility and allow the strengthening of protective factors, including school, family, and pro-social connections.
 - **Therapeutic:** A healthy and home-like environment, designed to reduce stress, aggressive and harmful behaviours, and promote overall wellbeing and mental health.

Conclusion



CSSV urges a commitment to ongoing dialogue alongside a spirit of creativity and partnership to address the issues in this statement. To summarise a selection of important priorities:

1. Committing to build 6,000 ecologically sound social housing dwellings each year over the next 10 years. And through the building process include the training up of disadvantaged and unemployed individuals.
2. Respond to the homelessness crisis in regional Victoria with immediate, temporary solutions while appropriate longer-term housing stock is arranged.
3. Continue emphasis on the complex work of reconciliation and truth telling, leading to treaty.
4. Maintain a diversity of investment in domestic and family violence responses, prevention and recovery - including place-based agencies and faith community partnerships.
5. Actively foster and resource partnerships that include coordination of place based charitable and social services work in areas of most disadvantage.
6. Reduce involvement with the justice system by Victorians and provide appropriate care to those incarcerated, including: raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14; development of small-scale facilities for young people; and fully implementing recommendations from the Supporting Older Prisoners report, (which includes dedicated funding for personal carers for older prisoner care, alongside well governed and detailed prisoner care-giving programs for aged prisoners).



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