



Catholic Social Services
Victoria

*...building a more just
and compassionate society*

Victorian Budget Submission

MARCH 2023

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Ethos and Introduction

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) is the peak body for 42 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). Our work is inspired by the message of Jesus and underpinned by Catholic social teaching. We believe that all Victorians matter, and that the test of a good society — one of solidarity and of commitment to the common good — is the care we have for the people who are most disadvantaged. We work alongside our members — community and social service organisations and the Bishops of Victoria, along with many others of good, who work towards a more just and compassionate society and a hope-filled future for all. Our foundations particularly direct us to stand with and serve the disadvantaged, poor and marginalised — not only for reasons of charity, but also because of justice. No one can truly live well in Victoria while poverty, inequality and harm are so widespread.

We recognise that the 2023/24 Victorian State Budget is set within a period of significant fiscal challenge. It has been a difficult few years for people in Victoria. We understand that this reality may impose tighter rules around recurrent spending and have heard language being used of a 'budget reset'. In difficult times, it is important that values and focus are brought to the fore. Those who are poorest and most disadvantaged must not bear the brunt of these challenges, rather a focus on them, and the programs, organisations and work that supports them, must be maintained as we navigate difficult times together.

This is particularly important as there are significant increases in the cost of living – particularly in necessary basics such as accommodation costs — a median rental increase of 11% across the state in 2022¹, far outstripping the long-term average annual increase over the past ten years (2.1%), and with certain LGAs navigating 20% increases in average rental increases. This alongside a rise in costs related to food and energy have compounded pre-existing disadvantages. These costs affect those on fixed incomes (pensions and unemployment related payments), and no income, the most. Indexation of funding by the federal Government was welcome, but in real terms still leaves people substantially worse off. In Victoria, 13% of the

¹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. 2022. *Rental Report December Quarter*. [https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report#:~:text=In%20the%20twelve%20months%20to%20December%202022%2C%20the%20RRI%20increase,d,past%20ten%20years%20\(4.1%25\)](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report#:~:text=In%20the%20twelve%20months%20to%20December%202022%2C%20the%20RRI%20increase,d,past%20ten%20years%20(4.1%25).).

population live in poverty—almost eight hundred-thousand people². These realities concerningly contribute to growing inequalities in our state.

It is particularly important that we hold those disadvantaged and those made vulnerable — those just managing to survive our current cascade of crises — close to all budgetary considerations.

Budget Considerations

1. General Approach

This submission is made after consultation with our members on areas of need, backed with existing research and work within, and external to, the social and community services sector.

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 good work and economic stewardship by the Government in many ways, including:

- 1.1 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 favour of treating housing as just another commodity in which investment does or does not take place
- 1.2 continued emphasis on the complex work of reconciliation and truth telling, leading to treaty
- 1.3 continued investment in domestic and family violence response, prevention and recovery
- 1.4 continued investment in the mitigation of climate related impacts, including increased temperature variability³ and consideration of ensuring low income households, community spaces and community and public housing are able to comfortably accommodate persons while at the same time able to operate with excellent energy efficiency and are affordable to maintain

² Victorian Council of Social Service. 2018. *Every Suburb, Every Town. Poverty in Victoria*.
<https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Every-suburb-Every-town-Poverty-in-Victoria-VCOSS.pdf>

³ Bureau of Meteorology. 2022. *Australian Climate Variability and Change*.
http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/change/#tabs=Tracker&tracker=timeseries&tQ=graph%3Dtmean%26area%3Dvic%26season%3D0112%26ave_vr%3D0

- 1.5 actively fostering and resourcing partnerships and coordination of charitable and social work that consider and respond to the whole needs of each person alongside systemic justice, and
- 1.6 facilitating a reduction in the number of Victorians involved with the justice system, and appropriate care given to the incarcerated.

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 Victorian Government should look carefully to allocate resources at 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.

It is worth highlighting that in our pluralistic and multicultural state, 57% of Victorians have a religious affiliation⁴. Spiritual needs alongside physical and cultural requirements of living a meaning-filled and authentic life should be considered as core to the work of social and community services as they work to situate and address the whole needs of communities and persons in difficult and crisis-fuelled contexts.

Good policy and well targeted resource allocation, alongside good social practice, is needed if we are to see a Victoria where equality and justice are prized. However, this is not enough; CSSV also calls for resourcing of localised, responsive and dynamic social service responses. This way of working holds flexibility and can be timely, intensive, or long-sighted, but will always be more holistic in approach and place-based in response to social issues and contextualised for building up more just and compassionate communities and societies. In the long run, spending money in this way, in these areas, will pay dividends in many different and positive ways – for the benefit of individuals, our dynamic Victorian cultural and social contexts and the economy.

2. Social Services Operations: Workforce, Indexation, Contract Arrangements and Funding

As Victoria Council of Social Services (VCOSS) has noted, the funding provided to community services organisations does not reflect the true cost of delivering services. Catholic social service organisations often utilise their connections to parish communities, Catholic schools and congregations to assist with governance capacity, voluntary assistance, accommodation and facility, and donations. Government funding is vital, but often does not allow for the many and

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2022. *Snapshot of Victoria*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/snapshot-vic-2021#:~:text=In%202021%2C%2013.1%25%20of%20people,%2C%20and%207.3%25%20in%201971.>

varied costs associated in works of charity and justice, particularly in strictly regulated organisational environment.

Even with multiple streams of support, underfunding services simply means that people who need assistance are sometimes turned away, or they are only given short term relief, when much more comprehensive support is required.

We join with VCOSS in asking for some key changes in the 23/24 budget⁵:

- 2.1 Increase base funding to reflect rising demand, increased case complexity and the true cost of delivering services. The quantum of increase should be determined in partnership with sector peak bodies. It must be equitable across the sub-sectors and different Government departments.
- 2.2 Index funding properly. The rates of inflation are affecting services and staff. In early 2022, Victoria committed to a 4.6 per cent funding boost to services funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Department of Health for 2022–23. This was welcomed. However, this rate of indexation was for one year only, and did not apply to organisations funded by other departments. Victoria needs a consistent, whole-of-Government and whole-of-sector solution for the long term, which adheres to a clear and transparent formula and process.
- 2.3 The sector's impact is constrained by short funding contracts. It is impossible to deliver services and retain hard accumulated skills, experience and knowledge of what works to assist people on short term funding. Short contracts also lead to inefficiencies, with higher contracting and recruitment costs, uneconomical use of infrastructure and limited capacity for long-term planning. This is part of the reason our sector struggles to attract and retain workers — short-term government funding creates insecure jobs.
- 2.4 By default, government funding contracts for the community sector should span seven years. This is the recommendation of the Productivity Commission⁶. It should be an immediate priority.

⁵ Victorian Council of Social Service. 2023. *Victorian Budget Submission*. <https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/VCOSS-2023-Victorian-Budget-Submission.pdf>

⁶ Productivity Commission. *Commissioning Family and Community Services*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/human-services/reforms/report/03-human-services-reforms-family.docx>

3. Regional/Rural Victorian Challenges

CSSV has done extensive consultation and authored a number of reports and submissions relating to regional Victoria over the past few years. Consistently, certain general challenges that are exacerbated by the tyrannies of distance and a growing digital divide include:

- 3.1 a changing climate in which bushfires and flood emergencies, and more recurrent prolonged and one-off instances of extreme temperatures are prevalent and compounding already existing issues of poverty, inequality which are substantially relating to homelessness
- 3.2 [housing shortages](#) and rents have '[gone up astronomically](#)' creating a secure and affordable housing crisis
- 3.3 gender injustice and the severity in family and domestic violence
- 3.4 under- and unemployment, simultaneously accompanied by workforce shortages in areas of social service and care, and
- 3.5 continued detrimental [COVID-19 impacts](#) and mental health-related issues.

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 locating 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 should, in conjunction with input from local organisations, community groups and faith communities, help set regional and urban priorities for investment and care in this budget. 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. Place-based approaches work. CSSV asks that all members of parliament, in tandem with the public service, 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.

CSSV Priority Areas of Focus

CSSV currently works particularly on three core areas of member-consulted interconnected priorities: housing and homelessness; domestic and family violence; and justice and equity. Some specific elements which should be considered in the context of the Victorian budget are:

Priority Area 1: Housing and Homelessness

The most vulnerable are worst affected in extreme temperature variations, adding to the poor health and safety of homeless persons, and those living in substandard accommodation—including for its fastest rising cohort, middle-aged and [older women](#). Government must focus 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. These pressures are outlined in the Productivity Commission's 'Report on Government Services 2023', which found that even among Victorian households that received Commonwealth Rent Assistance, 44.3% still experienced rental stress and spent more than 30% of their gross income on rent. Changing climate and associated crises like homelessness from bushfire or floods means we need to both mitigate immediate issues while also working at longer-term goals. Pope Francis connects 'the cry of the earth and cry of the poor' as two sides of the same coin — always we must consider the issues of both together. This approach will frame good work with communities to address complex and immediate issues, and adapt to a changing climate in ways that do not further penalise the poor – but rather addresses actively inequality in our communities and simultaneously brings further opportunity for flourishing.

In light of these broad challenges, CSSV:

- P1.1 Recommends that the Government in 2023/24, in this time of rising interest rates and therefore relative stability in the housing market average price, allocates significant funds to purchase properties immediately, ensuring that there are enough houses for rent at an affordable rate for those on low and fixed incomes. This should be in addition to longer term planning commitments.
- P1.2 Commends the current State Government's \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build investment now past its half-way stage. We also continue to affirm the importance of State and Federal Governments working together to address shortfalls in affordable, secure housing and are encouraged by developments in this area.

- P1.3 Is concerned with the slow growth of housing stock as we have had only a growth of 74 homes over the past four years.⁷ Our members report intense housing stress amongst not just clients but also staff, and we note with concern that the social housing waitlist has grown by about 45% – from about 44,000 applications in June 2018⁸ to 64,168 in June 2022⁹. State and Federal Government matching agreements we earlier called for are a big potential long-term positive, but present housing needs are urgent. The Victorian budget must continue to resource this area of ongoing work to address this significant material and social challenge. We understand there are a number of reasons due to demolition involved in development works etc. that may account for the low number of overall increase – but this still stands as a real issue for people in the present. For instance, according to the 2021 census, Victoria has the highest proportion of people living in boarding houses (28%)¹⁰, the conditions of which have been outlined as very poor in a number of reports and settings, including in evidence given to the disability royal commission¹¹.
- P1.4 Supports Tenants Victoria's suggestion of greater funding for legal and financial counselling support services as an early intervention measure for the expected increase in the termination of rental agreements, providing immediate, short-term relief and support for tenants.
- P1.5 Asks that the budget allocate sufficient resource to delivering on the promise of 10-Year Strategy for Social and Affordable Housing, which was due to be released in 2021 but has received no updates since its February - April 2021 consultation phase. As noted in the paper's introduction, there is an urgent need to ensure access to safe, accessible housing for all Victorians, particularly in the context of Victoria's current housing crisis.
- P1.6 Is concerned that in Victoria, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness grew by over 40% between the 2016 and 2021 census, and

⁷ The Guardian. 2023. *Victoria's social housing stock grows by just 74 dwellings in four years despite huge waiting list*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/mar/17/victorias-social-housing-stock-grows-by-just-74-dwellings-in-four-years-despite-huge-waiting-list>

⁸ The Guardian. 2018. *Almost 25,000 children waiting for social housing in Victoria*. [Almost 25,000 children waiting for social housing in Victoria | Housing | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/feb/22/almost-25000-children-waiting-for-social-housing-in-victoria)

⁹ Homes Victoria. 2022. *Applications on the Victorian Housing Register*. [Applications on the Victorian Housing Register \(VHR\) | Homes Victoria](https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/vhr)

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023. *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021>

¹¹ SBS News. 2022. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/i-was-hit-and-raped-i-had-no-control-boarding-house-was-like-prison-inquiry-hears/09qydhprj>

homelessness overall is up some 24%¹². While we applaud the work towards treaty and truth-telling, it is crucial that this budget addresses this disproportionate increase by resourcing both general and specific housing solutions that can work, in consultation with connections and networks developed through the deeply thought through processes of the Yoorook Justice Commission.

- P1.7 Calls for the expansion of '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 successful¹³ approach by supporting our member Sacred Heart Mission and also for implementing this approach during COVID-19. CSSV urges that this continue and be scaled in urban settings but also across into regional and rural areas, as this approach is highly beneficial to both people experiencing homelessness and taxpayers alike¹⁴.
- P1.8 Supports Council to Homeless Persons' ask of 6000 new social houses per annum for 10 years. Rapidly rising homelessness exacerbated by COVID-19 threatens the basic equality promised within ideas of the 'Australian dream'.
- P1.9 Notes that the large-scale building and reconfiguring of public and social housing also requires community and social services infrastructure and recurrent funding for brief interventions, case management as well as other pro-social programs and community development work, including consultation which all work towards maintaining and enhancing the social fabric.
- P1.10 Believes that creativity is called for in dealing with this housing and homeless crisis — such creative reimagining of existing infrastructure greatly enhance social outcomes, as well as equitable economic by-products¹⁵.

¹² SBSnews. 2023. *Homelessness is surging in Australia. There are fears it could get worse.* <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/homelessness-is-surging-in-australia-there-are-fears-it-could-get-worse/7pbeo2oht>

¹³ Sacred Heart Mission Australia. 2022. *Journey to Social Inclusion Program Outperforms Its Targets for the Third Year in a Row.* <https://www.sacredheartmission.org/media-release/j2si-program-outperforms-targets-third-year-in-a-row/>

¹⁴ Sacred Heart Mission Australia. 2022. *Our J2SI Participants are Kicking Goals.* <https://www.sacredheartmission.org/news/our-j2si-participants-are-kicking-goals/>

¹⁵ The Guardian. 2022. *Refurbishing not demolishing Port Melbourne public housing estate could save Victoria \$88m, study finds.* [Refurbishing not demolishing Port Melbourne public housing estate could save Victoria \\$88m, study finds | Housing | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/housing/article/2022-08-10/refurbishing-not-demolishing-port-melbourne-public-housing-estate-could-save-victoria-88m-study-finds)

- P1.11 Calls for, in all cases, proportionate shares of benefits for reconfiguring public or social housing to go to the poorest parts of the public. We must use public housing and public land to overwhelmingly increase social housing stock that can create secure and permanent homes for individuals and families in need.
- P1.12 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.
- P1.13 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, and parishes and religious congregations have often put up some land 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 much good action and good will with 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/St Joseph Affordable Homes train and employ young disadvantaged 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'. This is a matter of justice and requires community participation in solutions.

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:

- P2.1 CSSV commends the current State Government's substantial ongoing commitment to and spending on response 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.
- P2.2 CSSV asks for continued resourcing for grassroots, collaborative domestic violence prevention programs both in cities and lesser resourced regions and dioceses. This can make a real difference as shown by CSSV's successful pilot program¹⁶ which engaged with 127 people in leadership within the Gippsland region, made possible by collaboration with the Catholic Diocese of Sale and a grant from the Victorian Multicultural Commission. More grassroots efforts like these could contribute to long-term change, but need adaptable and accessible funding for community groups grappling with real social change in this area.
- P2.3 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, which hopefully results in increasingly healthy, respectful relationships.
- P2.4 CSSV commends the 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 this important area of work.

¹⁶ Catholic Social Services Victoria. 2022. *Empowered to respond to domestic violence*. [Empowered to respond to domestic violence - Catholic Social Services Victoria \(css.org.au\)](https://www.css.org.au)

P2.5 CSSV encourages 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:

- P3.1 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 step in where consecutive Federal Governments should have. Current levels of funding for the Federal Government's Status Resolution Support System (SRSS) are inadequate in meeting the needs of the over 70,000 people currently seeking refugee status in Australia. Furthermore, access to these services has been locked behind overly stringent and burdensome eligibility requirements, barring access to this important social net for all but 1,580 people¹⁷. Victoria is home to a substantial number of unsupported individuals and therefore it is critical that they be supported by State Government to stem destitution while the Federal Government response remains lacking. Refurbished Mickleham accommodation for COVID-19 isolation was used for needy flood victims during the northern Victoria floods. Asylum seekers are equally needy and deserving of transitional accommodation to get back on their feet while their claims are being assessed. They are also in need of emergency relief. We ask that the budget allocates some allowance for this particular cohort.
- P3.2 Day-to-day care for aged prisoners is important and CSSV research found it to be inadequately resourced. CSSV asks for the resourcing so that the recommendations from Dr Ruth Webber and Dr Alicia Evans' report on [Prisoner Care-Giving Programs](#) in our prison system can be put into place, and in so doing, build upon the State 2022-23 budget allocation of \$2.5 million for provision of services to support ageing people in the prison

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Refugee Council of Australia. 2022. <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/thousands-of-people-seeking-asylum-living-in-poverty/>

system, ensuring assistance, such as personal care and daily living needs, and specialist transition and reintegration assistance.

P3.3 CSSV is hopeful regarding recent discussion of raising the age of criminal responsibility and detention in Victoria. The task of providing adequate alternatives to detention and positive interventions (including restorative justice as a mode of approaching issues of justice and child welfare) is the responsibility of the state, but government should make good use of the expertise of the social and education sectors. 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. Raising the age requires system reform, but there are effective interventions¹⁸ 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.

P3.4 Non-profit Community Registered Training Organisations are key to a positive community response to education needs, skills development, and support. Whilst we commend the recent \$250 million dollar investment into fee-free TAFE training, and recognise the Victorian Government's commitment to ensuring opportunities are available to all interested students¹⁹, these non-profit RTOs, registered with the ACNC, should be considered as a part of the fee-free TAFE infrastructure to deliver improved outcomes for students. We call for these RTOs to be funded in the same way as TAFE training so that the people these groups hold relationships with and tailor programs for, are able to get the same benefit as the TAFE system. This will increase the overall scope of the intention of state-funded education in areas of skills shortages.

P3.5 Victorian investment in large-scale youth 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

¹⁸ Jesuit Social Services. 2019. *Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: There is a better way.*

https://cdn.jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/06055821/JSS0102_Raising_the_Age_There_is_a_better_way_v.5.1.pdf

¹⁹ The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP Minister for Skills and Training and The Hon Gayle Tierney MLC Victorian Minister for Higher Education, Training and Skills JOINT MEDIA RELEASE. 2022. *Fee-Free TAFE and VET places for Victorians in 2023.* <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-12/221214%20-%20Fee-Free%20TAFE%20and%20VET%20places%20for%20Victorians%20in%202023.pdf>

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:

- a. **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.
- b. **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.
- c. **Local:** Close proximity to the young person's community to support accessibility and allow the strengthening of protective factors, including school, family, and prosocial connections.
- d. **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 that the 2023/24 Victorian budget creatively resource, in a spirit of partnership and innovation, organisations and social infrastructure that will work to address the priority issues in this submission. We urge the Victorian Government to ensure that any considerations of addressing the fiscal challenges of our time also ensure that those who are most disadvantaged are well supported. In summary, the below are a selection of priorities touched on by this submission:

- **Mitigate the contradictions of a housing market** by committing to build 6,000 ecologically sound social housing dwellings, and through the building process include the training up of disadvantaged and unemployed individuals, each year over the next 10 years.
- **Respond to the homelessness crisis** in regional Victoria with immediate, temporary solutions while appropriate housing stock is arranged.
- **Continue emphasis on the complex work of reconciliation and truth telling**, leading to treaty.
- **Continue investment** in domestic and family violence response, prevention and recovery.
- **Take an active role of fostering and resourcing partnerships** that include coordination of place-based charitable and social services work in areas of most disadvantage, that consider the whole person – their locational and cultural context, material and spiritual needs.
- **Reduce Victorians' involvement with the justice system** and provide appropriate care to those who are incarcerated, including: raising the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14; developing, at the very least, a pilot 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.