

Summary of Recommendations

Children and Families

1. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support Victorian children and their families by:
 - Investing in early intervention family support services; and
 - Increasing investment in services for level 1 and 2 families to prevent problems from escalating.
2. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support and promote the wellbeing of Indigenous children, young people, families and organisations by:
 - enhancing Indigenous-specific counselling and case work services, family support services and Child FIRST workers;
 - continuing investment in targeted resources and programs for Indigenous kinship care;
 - Funding cultural competence training for all community sector organisations working with Indigenous children and their families (not only those who are DHS-funded);
 - investing in building and sustaining partnerships between Aboriginal-community controlled and mainstream organisations.
3. VCOSS recommends that additional funding be provided within the Child FIRST model by:
 - funding the development and maintenance of Child FIRST networks, similar to the model used for Primary Care Partnerships;
 - providing additional resources for community-based child protection to reduce the number of complex referrals to family support services;
 - increasing funding to allow for lower throughput – providing an increased capacity for longer term support for complex families and subsequently decreasing entry into the child protection services; and
 - training and professional development for universal services staff, such as teachers, childcare workers, community health workers, maternal and child health nurses and kindergarten teachers on Child FIRST and child protection issues.
4. VCOSS recommends that the family support services' funding model reflect the genuine time required and length of intervention required by families within the Child protection and family services system. Such a model should provide for:
 - increases in population demographics;
 - demand growth;
 - level of complexity of families including co-working;
 - weighting to areas of greater socio-economic disadvantage;

- weighting for rurality;
 - inputs for various service components including group work,
 - community engagement and building activities, client expenses;
 - proportional population based access to family services;
 - multi-disciplinary teams; and
 - adequate remuneration for skill level and contemporary entitlements.
5. VCOSS proposes that the Government increase investment and support for children and young people in, and transitioning out of out-of-home care by:
- developing of a community visitors' program for out-of-home care;
 - providing additional resources to increase the capacity of the out-of-home care system to match demand, reducing the need for contingency arrangements;
 - increasing funding to ensure state-wide coverage of therapeutic models of residential and foster care; and
 - extending the support available to young people transitioning from State-care to include increased brokerage funding, active case management and more effective and flexible program responses.
6. VCOSS proposes that the Government provide additional resources and supports to assist Victorian parents by:
- developing a comprehensive Victorian parenting strategy;
 - investing in middle years and adolescent parenting programs and resources;
 - investing in the Raising Children Network website; and
 - providing resources and program development to support young and vulnerable parents
7. VCOSS proposes that the Government increase investment into prevention and early intervention mental health supports for children and young people, particularly at a universal service level.

Young People

8. VCOSS recommends that the Government improve the life chances of young people by:
- developing and investing in generalist youth services;
 - developing and investing in a continuum of integrated youth services;
 - resourcing local planning and collaboration between all organisations providing services and supports to young people; and,
 - developing a State-wide Strategic Framework for Youth Services.

9. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase the availability of prevention and early intervention mental health support services.
10. VCOSS proposes that the Government resource more flexible learning environments to better support the education outcomes of vulnerable young people.
11. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support Indigenous young people by:
 - investing in Indigenous specific services for young people; and,
 - continued investment and targeted resources for Indigenous youth mentoring programs.
12. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support CALD young people by:
 - investing and expanding VicRoads L2P learner driver program to develop targeted driver education supports for newly-arrived, refugee and asylum seeker young people as part of the new Graduated Licensing system; and,
 - providing equipment grants to sporting and cultural groups that support CALD young people, in particular, refugee and asylum-seeker young people.
13. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support young people in contact with the youth justice system by:
 - investing and expanding an after-hours legal advice line for young people;
 - developing and investing in services that prevent high-volume offending and recidivism by young people; and
 - increasing funding to diversionary programs for young people to prevent engagement in the criminal justice system
14. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase investment and support for young people in and transitioning out of State care by:
 - extending the support available to young people transitioning from State care to include increased brokerage funding, active case management and more effective and flexible program responses.

Community Sector Sustainability

15. VCOSS recommends a 4.2% NGO price index for all funding and service agreements with community sector organisations across the State Government.
16. VCOSS recommends an investment of \$1.5 million over three years in the capacity of the community sector workforce. These funds will allow for:
 - project management for the Community Sector Workforce Taskforce;
 - secretariat support to a Community Sector Workforce Taskforce; and
 - project funds to implement strategies.

17. VCOSS recommends an investment of \$750 000 over three years to continue and build on the successful work of the VCOSS Training and Development Clearinghouse.

Climate Change

18. VCOSS recommends that equity be recognised as a fundamental component of policy development in the Victorian Government's response to climate change. This includes:
- prioritising climate change initiatives that support Victoria's most vulnerable people and communities; and
 - ensuring that climate change policies and initiatives are developed in close consultation with communities and affected sectors including the community sector.
19. VCOSS recommends that the Government ensures an affordable essential energy supply for low income households by:
- implementing pricing principals to allow for a minimum supply of affordable household energy;
 - increasing concessions so that at least the real value of existing energy concessions remain in the face of energy price rises; and
 - providing additional assistance to larger low income households to reduce their energy use.
20. VCOSS recommends that the Government ensures consumers have timely and accurate information about the energy markets by:
- funding an independent energy advice service to provide advice to consumers on energy products.
21. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase assistance for low income households to improve the energy and water efficiency of their dwellings and appliances by:
- developing efficiency programs, which utilise direct subsidies and no interest loans and increase the subsidy level for concession holders;
 - expanding the Energy Taskforce program to cover larger energy efficiency measures, similar to the intent and content of the UK Warm Front model, and extending the program outside neighbourhood renewal areas;
 - setting a target to complete energy efficiency retrofitting in 25 per cent of all public housing properties by 2010 and 100 per cent by 1 January 2015; and
 - developing mandatory thermal efficiency requirements for all rental properties to be fully implemented by 1 January 2015.
22. VCOSS recommends that the Government invest in increasing the resilience of communities to the impacts of climate change and the carbon pricing by:

- establishing and supporting regional community-based programs to support communities in climate change mitigation, adaptation and structural adjustment; and
 - increasing targeted investment in emergency services, health and mental health services and community development in climate change vulnerable communities.
23. VCOSS recommends that the Government ensures an affordable essential water supply for low income households by:
- removing the volumetric water concession cap so that it applies fully on a typical household's typical consumption;
 - using water authorities' dividend payments to help offset the impact of price rises on disadvantaged households through direct payment, hardship or efficiency programs; and
 - providing an affordable water supply to low income households not connected to mains water.

Cost of Living

24. In recognition of the cost of living pressures VCOSS recommends that the Victorian Government commit to a package of measures targeted at reducing the impact of cost of living pressures on lower income Victorians. Such a package should include:
- an increase in funding for energy and water concessions to retain the real value of concessions in the face of price increases and the introduction of an emissions trading scheme;
 - the development and funding of programs that provide subsidised access to transport for people in financial difficulty including funding for transport emergency relief; and development of programs to prevent vulnerable groups receiving inappropriate public transport fines;
 - a range of measures to make the Multi-Purpose Taxi Program accessible and equitable (see Transport Section for detailed recommendations);
 - reducing the cost of living pressures on private renters by reforming the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999*. Measures should include: reducing the level of excessive and above market rent increases by banning rental bidding; reducing risk of moving costs through scrapping no reason notices to vacate; and reducing the cost of utilities through introduction of legal minimum standards;
 - the provision of free access to ten hours per week of early childhood education and care for all three year old children whose parents have a Health Care Card;
 - ensure that the full value of the Education Maintenance Allowance is paid directly to families at the start of the school year
 - an increase in the conveyance allowance, indexed to the cost of petrol – DECD; and
 - a commitment of \$1.5 million for a whole-of-sector review of the Victorian financial

counselling sector to facilitate a restructure that will deliver robust preventative programs.

Disability and Accessibility

25. VCOSS recommends that the Government invest in increasing liveability for Victorians with a disability and in the sustainability of disability services by:

- committing at least an additional \$44 million per annum for supported accommodation to account for projected growth in demand of five per cent per annum (above inflation);
- committing resources to a long-term plan for disability support and accommodation, to be developed in partnership with the non-government disability and housing sectors;
- investing in individualised supports and services taking into account:
 - inflation;
 - growth in demand; and
 - the findings of the price review process undertaken by DHS in regard to pricing of disability services;
- committing resources to the staged implementation of universal housing regulations for all new homes and major home renovations;
- resourcing reform of home modifications assistance in line with the KPMG Report, the extent of real demand and best practice in other jurisdictions;
- committing \$7 million (in 2004/05 dollars) of additional resources for home modifications assistance to close the gap between subsidy levels and the real cost of modifications;
- committing sufficient additional recurrent funding to the Victorian Aids and Equipment program to close the gap between subsidy levels and the real cost of aids and equipment and to account for inflation and demand growth;
- committing a minimum additional \$2.3 million per annum to the vehicle modifications scheme;
- allocating resources towards exploring options for increasing the level of available assistance from the vehicle modifications scheme; and
- allocating resources to extend the TAC scheme to create a catastrophic injury insurance scheme in Victoria.

Education and Early Childhood Development

26. VCOSS recommends that the Victorian Government resource and support an integrated

system of service delivery by:

- funding the development of a network of 'social outcomes brokers' to work at the local level to build and facilitate linkages and partnerships between schools, early childhood services, parents and community organisations; and
- providing funding to schools, early childhood services and community agencies to participate in partnerships and integration.

27. VCOSS recommends that the Government better supports the learning and development needs of children with additional developmental needs by:

- streamlining the process of accessing early childhood services and education supports, including the Program for Students with a Disability (PSD) to reduce duplication and improve transitions;
- broadening the eligibility criteria for the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services (KISS) to enable more children to access KISS and participate in kindergarten;
- expanding KISS to 3 year-old kindergarten;
- resourcing the development and implementation of a comprehensive whole-of-government strategy for children and young people with a disability or developmental delay;
- resourcing the development and implementation of the Early Childhood Intervention Service Reform Strategy;
- developing transition supports for children with additional needs that include release time for staff to facilitate successful transitions; and
- investing in and reforming the Program for Students with a Disability to develop a more inclusive approach that provides for portability of funding.

28. VCOSS recommends that Government better support the educational outcomes of young refugee students by:

- developing and adequately resourcing the Multicultural Education Policy; and
- collecting system data annually to track refugee students' progress and to monitor how effectively schools are meeting the particular learning needs of refugee students.

29. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support the educational outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care by providing funding for their education whether they are in Government or non-Government schools to provide appropriate supports, such as case management.

30. VCOSS recommends that the Government strengthen early childhood services and increase access to early childhood services by:

- continuing investment in the Children's Capital program;
- providing funding for governance supports to services participating in integrated children's services, such as Children's Centres or Cluster Management;

- investing in research to explore models of integrated service delivery;
 - resourcing and investing in existing early childhood services to participate in integrated service delivery and partnerships;
 - funding access to ten hours of early childhood education and care for all three year-old children who have access to a health care card;
 - Increasing the four year-old kindergarten subsidy to health care card holders to reflect the true cost of delivery, eliminating gap fees;
 - expanding Best Start across all municipalities with existing neighbourhood and community renewal projects;
 - increasing investment in flexible funding for Maternal Child Health;
 - investing in resources and professional development to support the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework; and
 - funding compliance with the new Children's Services Regulations for not-for-profit services – this could include investing in training, capital, or improved qualifications.
31. VCOSS recommends that the Government strengthen services and supports for children in the middle years by:
- developing transition supports between primary and secondary school; and
 - developing and investing the creation of a new professional role for outside school hours care professionals within schools.
32. VCOSS recommends that the Government support the learning outcomes of students from disadvantaged socio-economic communities by:
- increasing the Education Maintenance Allowance to reflect rising costs;
 - increasing resources to schools to reflect the true cost of delivering the Victorian Essential Learning Standards;
 - implementing all the Auditor-General's Recommendations in the report *Improving our Schools: Monitoring and Support*; and
 - increasing the conveyance allowance and indexing it to the cost of petrol.
33. VCOSS recommends that the Government resource more flexible learning environments to better support the education outcomes of vulnerable young people by:
- evaluating existing flexible learning models and rolling-out successful models across Victoria;
 - providing recurrent funding to current alternative education models;
 - providing adequate funding models for Community VCAL and VET in schools that are appropriate to each community and/or student group; and
 - developing an alternative education strategy.

Health and Wellbeing

34. VCOSS recommends that the Victorian Government address the impacts of health inequalities by:
- developing a *Health and Equity Plan* to coordinate whole-of-government planning and decision making across the health system continuum from health promotion to acute care and across the lifespan.
35. VCOSS recommends that the Government progress its commitments to Indigenous Victorians to 'close the gap' by:
- implementing a staged expansion of Koori Maternity Services from the existing 11 to all 25 Aboriginal-controlled health organisations;
 - resourcing the development of midwife shared care models to all Aboriginal-controlled health organisations and their local hospital based on the shared care model developed in partnership by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and the Royal Women's Hospital;
 - increasing the number of Aboriginal Health Workers in Aboriginal-Controlled Health Services;
 - further strengthening the leadership and partnership capacity of the Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, including resourcing a Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation CEO Network;
 - developing, implementing and resourcing a cultural competency framework to be used as a guide and a training tool for non- Aboriginal organisations, which is linked to quality and funding requirements, to ensure services provide culturally sensitive practice; and
 - developing and implementing a culturally appropriate smoking cessation initiative as part of the *Tobacco Control Strategy*.
36. VCOSS recommends that the Victorian Government shift to a wellness model that reframes chronic disease by:
- investing in population based health promotion initiatives across the lifespan. Specific initiatives are required for disadvantaged and Indigenous communities;
 - extending examples of effective practice at a local level across the state;
 - better integrating prevention and treatment as illustrated in the *Expanded chronic care model*; and
 - extending the Early Intervention in Chronic Disease Program to all Victorian local government areas
37. VCOSS recommends that the Victorian Government better promote the mental health and wellbeing of Victorians by:
- increasing investment in community-based early intervention mental health services;

- addressing the critical shortage of early intervention and mental health support services in rural, regional and growth areas;
- increasing investment in a range of mental health promotion initiatives;
- increasing funding for outreach services, particularly in rural and regional Victoria;
- investing in services and initiatives targeted at children, particularly those in the middle years aged nine to 14; and
- resourcing community organisations to form partnerships to strengthen collaborative practice and achieve improved outcomes.

38. VCOSS recommends that the Government strengthen the primary health platform by:

- resourcing community health services to employ and train more multidisciplinary teams to better prevent and respond to chronic disease, particularly in regional areas;
- increasing investment in culturally appropriate women-specific health services to expand the number of available services; and
- strengthening the capacity of the primary health system to respond to the needs of people who are homeless and who have a mental illness.

39. VCOSS recommends that the Government strengthen the alcohol and drug treatment system to better meet the needs of people who use alcohol and drugs problematically through:

- increasing funding for drug and alcohol services particularly detox services, bed capacity, residential rehabilitation capacity, hospital based-services and follow-up and ancillary services on release;
- increasing the capacity of the alcohol and drug treatment, prevention and education systems to address the needs of young people;
- increasing the capacity of Indigenous-specific services and mainstream services to meet the needs of Indigenous Victorians. This includes cultural training for mainstream services;
- investing in a mix of targeted and population based strategies to reduce harm, such as prevention and education initiatives, exploring volumetric taxation options, limiting alcohol advertising and developing a comprehensive system of data collection on alcohol sales, consumption patterns and resultant social harms; and
- expanding investment in the range of drug treatment options including pharmacotherapy programs and initiatives to support recruitment and retention of GPs and pharmacists.

Housing and Homelessness

40. To address the challenges of housing affordability and homelessness, VCOSS recommends the following initiatives be included in the 2009-10 Budget:

- funding the full cost of implementation, including administration and funding for program delivery, of an *Integrated Housing Strategy*;
- implementing a 'housing guarantee' to ensure that Victorians on the public housing waiting list are guaranteed accommodation support and assistance. That support should be either in terms of transitional housing or top up in rent assistance to ensure that no-one on the public housing waiting list is paying more than 30 per cent of their income in rent;
- maintaining Victoria's leadership position in the growth of public and community housing stock by committing to a minimum investment of at least \$200 million per annum above that required by the National Affordable Housing Agreement, in Forward Estimates;
- committing to the development of a new *Victorian Homelessness State Plan* and through that funding the full cost of development and implementation of the Victorian response to the Commonwealth White Paper on homelessness;
- committing to reducing the cost of living pressures on private renters by reforming the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*. Measures should include:
 - reducing the level of excessive and above market rent increases by banning rental bidding;
 - reducing risk of moving costs through scrapping no reason notices to vacate; and
 - reducing the cost of utilities through introduction of legal minimum standards;
- committing funding, through the Residential Tenancies Fund, to a significant information and education campaign focused on the rights of renters. Such a campaign should include training targeted especially at private landlords; and
- funding VicUrban to increase its delivery of shared equity housing to more Victorians.

Human Rights

41. VCOSS recommends that the government adequately fund an inclusive, open and comprehensive four year review of the Charter in this financial year. Adequate funding must be provided to ensure that Indigenous people and disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and groups are included in this process.

42. VCOSS recommends that implementation of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights be adequately resourced through the following measures:

- committing \$800,000 recurrent funding per annum to the VEOHRC to adequately resource its new human rights functions and powers under the Charter;
- ensuring funding is available to the VEOHRC on an ad hoc basis to facilitate intervention in court proceedings when appropriate, as required under s40 of the Charter;
- guaranteeing indemnifying the VEOHRC against any costs orders arising from being joined as a party to proceedings under s40;
- establishing a recurrent funding pool of \$500,000 per annum to be made available to community sector organisations, to support engagement with the Charter and advocacy for people most likely to be affected;
- resourcing community legal services to provide assistance and advice on human rights issues, particularly in civil matters.
- committing to a strategy for ensuring Indigenous engagement with the Charter, devised in close collaboration with Indigenous agencies; and
- committing to establishing a helpline for potential 'public authorities' providing information and support.

43. VCOSS recommends that the government allocate resources to contribute to the planned national human rights consultation process.

Justice

44. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase investment in Legal Aid and Community Legal Services in 2009-10 to ensure that all Victorians have equal access to justice, particularly in relation to civil law cases.
45. VCOSS recommends that the Government continue working with Indigenous communities to seek, and adequately fund, solutions to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, with priority given to:
- establishing and appropriately funding a Commissioner for Aboriginal Social Justice;
 - providing recurrent funding for the Indigenous Women's Justice Forum after the successful evaluation of the two-year trial;
 - expanding the Koorie Court Program;
 - employing Indigenous Court workers, including Indigenous Community Engagement or Aboriginal Liaison Officers in all Courts;
 - expanding the successful youth mentoring programs funded through Frontline Youth Initiatives within the DOJ;
 - improving access to diversion programs; and
 - providing ongoing funding for an Articled Clerkship specifically for Indigenous lawyers at the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

46. VCOSS recommends that the Government fund an independent human rights audit of women's prisons in Victoria, including conditions and reporting mechanisms.
47. VCOSS recommends funding be directed to improved access to drug and alcohol treatment for prisoners including harm-reduction strategies, programs addressing alcohol and other drug misuse to reduce recidivism, and post-release support.
48. VCOSS recommends that the Government build on the commitment in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 Budgets to sexual assault and family violence services, and provide adequate funding for the implementation of the proposed Family Violence Bill and associated non-legislative reforms.

Skills and Workforce Participation

49. To ensure access to education and training and increase workforce participation by disadvantaged Victorians, VCOSS recommends:
 - committing resources towards increasing the level of investment in VET to at least the national average;
 - committing resources to the equity measures in the skills reform agenda to a level that ensures any Victorian with a health care card is able to participate fully in any VET course;
 - committing at least an additional \$5 million recurrent funding to the New Workforce Partnerships program; and
 - committing resources to the Disability Employment Strategy.

Transport

50. VCOSS recommends that the Government adopt and fund improved minimum service levels for metropolitan and urban regional public transport including:
 - operating hours extended to 6:00am – midnight, 7 days a week
 - minimum half-hourly frequencies on all public transport modes,
 - bus timetables ensure connection to all train services on bus routes.
51. VCOSS recommends that the Government invest in public transport infrastructure and services including:
 - services to suburban and regional industrial areas and employment hubs including Tullamarine, Dandenong South, Altona, Laverton North and Somerton;
 - inter-town bus services in rural Victoria to create links to regional service centres and the wider rural transport network;
 - greater investment in accessible transport infrastructure and vehicles to meet DDA

obligations, especially in rural Victoria;

- investment in extensions to the metropolitan rail network to outer suburban growth areas including Mernda and Cranbourne East, the electrification of the Sunbury and Melton lines; and
- investment in the public transport recommendations outlined in the Eddington report to address peak hour congestion.

52. VCOSS recommends that the Government develop a sustainable and adequately funded model to deliver affordable door-to-door transport services including:

- a comprehensive review of community transport services in Victoria;
- development of a sustainable recurrent funding model for community transport including capital and recurrent costs; and
- the creation of a Mobility Unit within the Department of Transport to coordinate research, governance, policy development and funding of coordinated and affordable transport services for people who require door-to-door transport.

53. VCOSS recommends that the Government develop and fund programs that provide subsidised access to transport for people in financial difficulty including:

- funding for transport emergency relief; and
- development of programs to prevent vulnerable groups receiving inappropriate public transport fines.

54. VCOSS recommends immediate reform to the MPTP including:

- removal of the annual subsidy cap;
- removal of the \$30 trip cap (to create a 50 per cent concession);
- extension of the scheme to cover frail older people and people with temporary impairments;
- simplification of the application process; and
- broadening of the eligibility criteria to include access to public transport as well as ability to use it.

55. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase investment to support community-based transport planning and the implementation of Melbourne 2030 including:

- coordination and allocation of funds to *Melbourne 2030* initiatives and the recommendations of the *Melbourne 2030 audit expert group report*;
- a substantial increase to the *Transport Connections Flexible Fund*; and
- increased funding to ensure the implementation of recommendations from Local Area Bus Reviews.