



Catholic Social Services Victoria

...building a more just and compassionate society

Submission to the 2018-19 Victorian State Budget

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Contact:

Denis Fitzgerald

dfitzgerald@css.org.au, 0418 136 372

Summary and Recommendations

Victoria's strong economy provides an opportunity to invest in services that help to build a community that is safe, equitable and compassionate; where all Victorians share in the State's prosperity. This would include measures that:

- address the issues that cause disadvantage such as the lack of affordable and secure housing, access to education, health services and employment opportunities
- meet the diverse infrastructure needs of Victoria's future, particularly where there can be a positive impact on the wellbeing of vulnerable Victorians
- ensure a just social and economic structure, which includes addressing cost of living pressures for Victorian families
- ensure that services, service structures and funding meet the needs of those who are disadvantaged or marginalised and adequately protects their rights.

Within this framework, the following are among the priority areas have been identified by Catholic Social Services Victoria, for further investment in the 2018-19 Victorian Budget:

Recent investment to address family violence in the community was welcomed. The Budget is an opportunity to build on that, through a holistic approach for the provision of support to families and children; where housing stability and safety, economic participation, justice issues and support services for families are addressed collaboratively.

Many areas of reform are impacting on agencies' capacity and capability to deliver services which are already stretched. Over the past few years, indexation on State Government funded programs has not kept up with wage and CPI increases. It is critical that funding for the sustainability of community service organisations is maintained and strengthened.

The future resourcing of community mental health services should be assured and strengthened to ensure the implementation of NDIS operates collaboratively with the broader health system and other service sectors that support people with mental illness.

Aboriginal Victorians continue to experience a greater level of disadvantage compared with non-indigenous Australians. Sustained and focused effort is needed to reduce the level of disadvantage and strengthen Aboriginal families and communities.

The loss of some traditional industries in regional and rural communities has impacted the availability and security of jobs. Greater planning and investment is needed to ensure sufficient affordable housing options are available, access to support services is improved, educational opportunities and pathways to further training exist and employment opportunities are created.

We continue to urge the Government to implement a justice reinvestment approach with an emphasis on alternatives to prison, increased resources for rehabilitation and reintegration into society, and developing services addressing social issues that help reduce offending behaviour. For young people, this requires additional expenditure on prevention and early intervention approaches as well as rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

Many refugee and asylum seeker families and individuals, as well as recently arrived communities generally, face challenges in relation to housing, education, health services and opportunities for employment. We urge the Government to invest further to support these communities.

The full list of our recommendations is as follows:

Aboriginal Victorians:

- increase funding of Aboriginal owned and controlled homes in Victoria
- increase support for Aboriginal Victorians involved in the justice system
- invest in strategies to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in the Child Protection and OOHC systems.

Child and family welfare:

- provide sufficient funding of prevention, early intervention and support services for families facing relationship difficulties in the development of the Support and Safety Hubs
- provide funding of reforms to improve the experience of children and young people in out of home care.

Criminal and youth justice:

- expand transitional and post release support
- improve strategies that meet the particular needs of women offenders
- address the support needs of children to reduce the intergenerational risk of offending
- expand and increase early intervention programs and strategies for young people
- increase funding of Youth Justice Group Conferencing programs
- increase wrap-around services for young people and their families
- introduce targets to reducing recidivism.

Disability and mental health support:

- fund disability services to assist clients with NDIS transition
- ensure funding for state disability and mental health services outside the scope of NDIS.

Family violence:

- guarantee ongoing funding to support children and families affected by family violence
- fund financial resilience for women suffering economic abuse
- investment in restorative justice approaches to address adolescent violence in the home.

Financial sustainability of community service organisations:

- ensure the funding for community service organisations is sustainable and is adequately indexed for costs and demand growth.

Social housing and homelessness:

- develop a long term plan to fund a substantial increase in the level of public and community housing stock
- reduce the cost of energy and create a fairer energy market environment.

Palliative care:

- Increase the funding for the adequate provision of palliative care.

Recently arrived communities and people seeking asylum:

- invest in further support for asylum seekers and refugees
- invest in the development of services for women facing forced marriage
- invest in adequate interpreter services within the courts
- further investment in men's behavioural change programs for specific cultural groups
- further invest in activity based programs for newly arrived children and young people.

Rural and regional issues:

- Increase the level of secure and affordable social housing options in regional and rural Victoria
- Greater planning to address entrenched disadvantage is needed in regional and rural areas
- Improve access to services in rural and regional areas.

Budget submission for 2018-19

Introduction

[Catholic Social Services Victoria](#) (CSSV) is the peak body for Catholic social service agencies in Victoria. A list of [member organisations](#) is provided at the end of this submission.

Catholic social service agencies in Victoria reach more than 300,000 clients a year, utilising 7,000 staff and more than 17,000 volunteers. Our member organisations work with disadvantaged groups; supporting people with a disability, providing quality aged care, delivering specialist services to people who experience homelessness, mental illness or addiction and providing a range of services for children and families.

We work with member agencies, as part of the Catholic Church in Victoria, to fulfil the gospel imperatives to stand with and serve those who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable and compassionate society.

This submission builds on the experience and expertise of our member agencies who continue this tradition in applying these principles to contemporary issues.¹

Catholic Social Services Victoria recognises the challenges that governments face in balancing the allocation of resources across economic and social priorities. There has been significant investment in recent years in developing all-of-government approaches and strategies to address significant social issues in the areas of family violence and the need for affordable and social housing.

However, there continues to be areas of persistent disadvantage across Victoria². Further ongoing investment is required in the provision of universal, prevention and early intervention services that are holistic and culturally appropriate. This will strengthen local communities' ability to support vulnerable people and families, particularly in rural areas where distance affects access quality education, training and employment.

The 2018-19 State Budget is an important opportunity for the government to include measures that:

- address the issues that cause disadvantage such as the lack of affordable and secure housing, access to education, health services and employment opportunities
- meet the diverse infrastructure needs of Victoria's future, particularly where there can be a positive impact on the wellbeing of vulnerable Victorians
- ensure a just social and economic structure, which includes addressing cost of living pressures for Victorian families
- ensure that services, service structures and funding meet the needs of those who are disadvantaged or marginalised and adequately protects their rights.

¹ The member agencies that have contributed to this submission include:

Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
CatholicCare Victoria and Tasmania
Centacare Ballarat
Catholic Sandhurst
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
Jesuit Social Services
MacKillop Family Services

McAuley Community Services for Women
Sacred Heart Mission, St Kilda
St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria
St John of God Accord
Villa Maria Catholic Homes
VincentCare Victoria.

² [Dropping off the Edge Report 2015 – Victorian Fact Sheet](#) Nearly half the state's 40 most disadvantaged postcodes in the report were found to be the most disadvantaged in the 2007 study.

Within this framework, we bring to your attention the following priority areas, which are addressed in more detail in the body of this submission:

- Family violence
- Social housing and homelessness
- Child and family welfare
- Financial sustainability of community service organisations
- Aboriginal Victorians
- Rural and regional issues
- Criminal and youth justice
- Disability and mental health support
- Recently arrived communities and people seeking asylum
- Palliative care.

1. Aboriginal Victorians

Governments and the community face large challenges in the short and long term closing the gap of disadvantage between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The most recent [Closing the Gap](#) report (released February 2017) shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience a greater level of disadvantage compared with non-indigenous Australians. The 2017-18 State Budget invested \$57 million into family violence programs and services that target the particular needs of Aboriginal people. Sustained and focused effort is needed at all levels to reduce the level of disadvantage and strengthen Aboriginal people, families and communities.

Increase funding of Aboriginal owned and controlled homes in Victoria – There is a pressing need for additional social and affordable Aboriginal housing to address over-crowding and the over-representation of Aboriginal people who are homeless. Responses should be developed in consultation with each community to address specific housing needs³.

Increase support for Aboriginal Victorians involved in the justice system – Increased effort is needed to address the continuing overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. Accessing legal assistance and support is more difficult, making custodial sentences more likely. Additional resources are needed to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in prison and to reduce the number of Aboriginal people involved across the Justice system. We urge Government to increase support for aboriginal Victorians involved in the justice system through budgetary provision of the following:

- increased and improved access to legal assistance and support to help reduce the number of custodial sentences
- addition and the expansion of targeted, culturally specific early intervention and diversion programs such as Barreng Moorop that support vulnerable Aboriginal young people and their families to address disadvantage and reduce offending
- the introduction of targets within the justice system to reduce recidivism and to reduce the the number of people in detention
- improved support for Aboriginal people in prison, which enables them to develop a positive connection to culture and re-establish community and family ties.

Invest in strategies to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in the Child Protection and OOHC systems - Victoria currently has the highest rate in Australia of Aboriginal children involved in the child protection system (80.2 per 1000 children, compared to 57.2 in NSW and

³ [Parity](#) August 2017 Volume 30- issue 6 – page 8

21.8 in Qld).⁴ TaskForce 1000 revealed system failures for Aboriginal children in OOHC. [Always Was, Always will be Koorie Children](#) (October 2016) made 77 recommendations, some of which have been addressed through the Roadmap for Reform: Safe Children, Strong Families. The family violence initiatives will strengthen Aboriginal families and help reduce the number of children involved with child protection. Recognition of the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination and decision-making in relation to the care and support of Aboriginal children under [Section 18 of the Victorian Children, Youth and Families Act 2005](#) is also an important step to ensure Aboriginal children receive care and support that is culturally appropriate and safe. In addition, we recommend Government considers, in consultation with local Aboriginal communities, the following strategies:

- introducing targets within Child Protection and OOHC to reduce the number of Aboriginal children being placed in care to help sustain focus on this issue
- investment in building the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to become accredited child care agencies that enable ACCOs to provide case management, care and support for children and families in their community
- developing partnerships between community service organisations and ACCOs to transition placements over time to ensure support the child and family is sustained.

2. Child and family welfare

CSSV welcomed the Government's continuing investment in early childhood programs and support services in last year's budget. Investing in early intervention services that strengthening families' ability to care for their children, is a key element in breaking the cycle of disadvantage for vulnerable families. The Early Childhood Reform Plan and the Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children require ongoing budgetary commitments in the areas of prevention and early intervention programs and in the reform of out of home care.

Provide sufficient funding of prevention, early intervention and support services for families facing relationship difficulties - The establishment of the Support and Safety Hubs will provide an important integrated place based approach to providing services for families dealing with family violence issues. Adequate consultation and resourcing in the development of the Hubs will be critical to ensure the demand generated does not create blockages in other service systems, such as housing and family services. The positive impact of family services was acknowledged in the Royal Commission into Family Violence report and was translated into additional resources in the 2017-18 State Budget. The Support and Safety Hub model recognises that the early intervention and support services should not cease if or when child protection becomes involved with a family, but should be provided to support parents as well as children and carers throughout their engagement with the service system. To ensure this continuum of support for families, it is critical for Government to sufficiently fund the early intervention services and family services to meet the expected demand.

Provide funding of reforms to improve the experience of children and young people in out of home care - A process is underway to reform how out-of-home care (OOHC) is provided. Consideration should be given to the increasing number of cases coming before the Children's Court and the flow-on demand this places on family services and OOHC. To improve the experience of children and young people live in OOHC, we urge Government to make budgetary provision for:

⁴ [AIFS Child Protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children CFCA Resource sheet August 2017](#)

- adequate financial support for carers that addresses current carer allowances concerns and inconsistencies, particularly for elderly kinship carers as the fastest growing form of OOHC
- development and funding of a coherent state-wide framework to provide respite care
- funding to continue supporting parents and families while children are in OOHC
- extending funding to enable young people to remain supported until 21 years old
- extending funding to support young people leaving care, particularly in relation to providing secure and supported housing and pathways to further education and work
- appropriate models and sufficient funding and to ensure no children under 12 years are placed in residential care.

As the largest parent of all, we are seeking all state and territory governments to provide an option, whereby the can be extended to, much like what is happening in any other family setting in Australia. We believe that giving young people the extended care option will provide them with the platform to make the right start in life and enjoy a better long term life outcome.

Please also refer to the Aboriginal Victorian section for reference to investing in strategies to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in the Child Protection and OOHC systems.

3. Criminal justice

Substantial initiatives over the past year by the Andrews' Government have addressed entrenched disadvantage and vulnerability in the community, including in child and family services, family violence and social housing and homelessness. Some very helpful initiatives notwithstanding, this budget did not seize the opportunity to take further this focus on disadvantage and need. Nor did it venture as boldly in addressing the underlying causes of crime as it did in funding high profile increases in police numbers and capability. The 2018 pre-election budget will be the next major opportunity to redress this.

We urge the government implement a justice reinvestment approach with an emphasis on alternatives to prison, increased resources for rehabilitation and reintegration into society, and developing services addressing social issues that help reduce offending behaviour.

The increase over recent years in prisoner numbers in Victoria requires additional expenditure on rehabilitation and reintegration programs. With any increase in prison numbers there needs to be a proportionate increase in services within prisons – including mental health, disability and other health care services, chaplaincy, and provision of meaningful occupation. This includes addressing the needs of particularly vulnerable cohorts including young people, Aboriginal Victorians, people with disabilities and women to ensure the development of positive life skills that enable prisoners to reintegrate into the community when they leave prison. It is essential that the government meet its duty of care toward prisoners. These services are necessary to ensure that imprisonment contributes to the rehabilitation of prisoners. In light of this we urge the Government to:

Expand transitional and post release support - Expand the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre and establish a separate centre for women to enable more prisoners to address transitional issues critical to their successful reintegration into the community including employment, accommodation, life-skills and family reintegration. In addition, increasing resources for post release support services would further assist ex-prisoners to reintegrate well and increase community safety.

Improve strategies that meet the particular needs of women offenders - Invest in diversion, early intervention and family preservation programs for women to address the complex challenges

that many face in addition to their offending behaviour, such as safety for themselves and their children, debt, and homelessness. In addition offenders should have access to family violence services.

Address the intergenerational risk of offending - Invest in the provision of support for children with parents serving custodial sentences to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and reduce the risk of offending.

4. Youth justice

The Youth Justice Review and Strategy: Meeting Needs and Reducing Offending Report (July 2017) reveals a system in crisis. It recommends the need for separate Youth Justice legislation, a greater focus on prevention and intervention strategies and the need to provide effective rehabilitation programs within community and custodial services to reduce recidivism and offending behaviours. The Report states that the current system ‘focuses too heavily on the tertiary end, neglecting early intervention and step-down and transition support.’ (page 18). Despite this, the Government investment in Youth Justice in the 2017-18 Budget is largely focused on custodial services: \$361m is being spent on a new youth justice facility and strengthening the Parkville and Malmsbury Youth Justice Precincts. This significant investment should include increased services that address the underlying causes of offending behaviour to ensure the young people develop of positive life skills that move them away from the justice system.

The 2018-19 Budget provides Government an opportunity to address these issues and invest in evidence based approaches to divert young people from the justice system and support them to develop positive life skills. Research shows that restorative practices are more effective in reducing re-offending and making our communities safer and is critical to ensuring that young people do not become entrenched in the criminal justice system. We urge the government to:

Expand and increase early intervention programs and strategies - initiatives such as the Victorian Government’s Navigator work to re-engage 12 and 17 year olds in education or training. Expansion of this program would provide opportunities for more young people to re-engage in educational, learning and employment pathways, giving them the foundational skills and opportunities they need to flourish. The Youth Diversion Pilot Program, now being delivered by the Department of Health and Human Services in all Children’s Courts across Victoria had strong local support and demonstrated positive results in diverting young people with little or no history of offending, from further progress into the criminal justice system.

Increase funding of Youth Justice Group Conferencing programs - The Victorian Government has invested in preventative services that divert young people from the justice system and support them to address their offending behaviour. Research demonstrates that restorative justice approaches to reduce the frequency and seriousness of re-offending.⁵ CSSV calls for further investment in restorative justice group conferencing across community and custodial youth justice services.

Increase wrap-around services for young people and their families – additional support for young people sentenced to youth justice orders that includes wrap-around services to strengthen the whole family. This should include intensive case management for the small group of young people committing a high number of offences, family group conferencing and a focus on engaging the young person in education, training and employment pathways.

⁵ [JSS State budget submission 2017-18](#) - Page 20

Introduce targets to reducing recidivism - It is important that Government takes proactive steps to ensure the positive impact of services. The Youth Justice Review and Strategy Report reports a gap in the transparency of performance measures articulated for the Youth Justice Community Based services output. We recommend that Government determines performance measures and targets to reduce recidivism to ensure rehabilitation programs within the community are effective and focused on positive outcomes for young people.

5. Disability and mental health support

The NDIS is designed to provide Australians with a permanent and significant disability with the reasonable and necessary supports they need to live an ordinary life. However there are some people who do not meet NDIS eligibility who are not receiving services, particularly people with mental illness. In addition, NDIS funding does not cover service provision costs for case planning, training, planning and follow-up work. The cost is currently absorbed by agencies and reduces the capacity of workers to work flexibly with clients. We urge the Government to:

Fund disability services to assist clients with NDIS transition - Fund the additional advocacy work that disability services are undertaking in the NDIS transition process to assist clients negotiate a new case plans. Many clients need this support and rely on the established relationships they have with workers they trust.

Ensure funding for state disability and mental health services outside the scope of NDIS - These include services for group and centre based support, respite care, carer support, and services and support for those who do not meet the NDIS eligibility requirement of having a severe and permanent impairment.

Advocate with the Commonwealth Government to ensure adequate funding of psychosocial rehabilitation services in Victoria - Notwithstanding the Victorian Government Budget 2017-18 announcements of 75,000 hours of community care and a further investment of \$20 million for community mental health services in June 2017, there remains uncertainty about the future funding of current services in Victoria which provide essential support. Since July 2016 the Victorian Government has progressively transferred state funding for mental health into the NDIS to fund disability supports. There is now almost no state-funded community based services available for people with functional impairment associated with severe mental illness. This has implication for the broader health system and other service sectors that support people with mental illness. Community mental health services need adequate resourcing for the continuity of services and to ensure that people who are disengaged or hard to reach receive the help they need.

6. Family violence

Catholic Social Services welcomed the significant investment made in the 2017-18 budget which committed \$1.9 billion in family violence initiatives to implement the recommendations of the 2016 Royal Commission into family violence. These measures will lead to positive outcomes for victims in terms of improved court processes, an increase in safe housing options and a greater focus on prevention and early intervention and support for children.

Further consideration of other broader economic factors including access and participation in the workforce, education and training, and access to affordable housing, child care and the affordability of utilities also need to form part of the family violence response.

Guarantee ongoing funding to support children and families - The 2017-18 budget provided for \$130m for child protection and related services for children affected by family violence; but there is no provision for future years. Provision should be made in the 2018-19 to ensure that the support for children and families does not come to an abrupt end.

Fund financial resilience for women suffering economic abuse - We are concerned about the impacts of economic abuse for women experiencing family violence. Many women face ongoing challenges with financial support, debt management, savings, budgeting and barriers to employment. Research conducted by Good Shepherd⁶ recommends service responses that include financial support and economic capacity building as a way of supporting women and children to remain safe from domestic and family violence. Good Shepherd's Firmer Foundation financial coaching program for women provides this approach⁷. We recommend the funding of programs that help women to increase their financial capability, security and resilience so that they have sufficient economic resources to meet their material needs so they and their children can live with dignity.

Investment in restorative justice for adolescent violence in the home – CSSV recommends investment in restorative justice approaches for families dealing with young people who use violence at home. Restorative justice helps to support positive reconciliation and the development of victim empathy. It also recognises the important roles families and the broader community have in supporting young people to recognise the impact of their offending and to develop positive relationships.

7. Financial sustainability of community service organisations

Over the past few years, indexation on Government funded programs has not kept up with wage and CPI increases. Despite agencies best efforts to find efficiencies, deficits are growing each year. Agencies are reluctant to reduce front line staff but efficiencies gained from cost cutting measures are becoming increasingly difficult. The impact of not dealing with this issue will be staff cuts and a reduction in service provision.

In the prioritisation of budgetary funding for new programs and initiatives, it is critical that all base funding for the sustainability of community service organisations is maintained and strengthened. At a minimum, community service organisations should receive adequate indexation for costs and demand growth.

8. Social housing and homelessness

Shelter is a basic human need. The provision of secure and affordable housing is critical element in addressing disadvantage and vulnerability. Poor access to housing is linked to poor health, education and justice outcomes. Strengthening tenancy protections through the reform of the Residential Tenancies Act in 2018 will help some of the issues regarding property conditions.

The existing supply of public and community housing stock has fallen far below demand. CSSV encourages Government to take an investment approach that focuses on providing an adequate level of services over time in relation to public housing in the same way that Government planning addresses transport, energy and other physical infrastructure issues.

⁶ [Economic Security for Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence: understanding and measuring the impact \(2016\)](#)

⁷ Good Shepherd's [Quietly changing lives: Summary Report of the Firm Foundations Evaluation](#).

Develop a long term plan to fund a substantial increase in the level of public and community housing stock - Announcements in the 2017-18 budget of the Social Housing Fund and Social Housing Loan Guarantee to increase the level of social housing are a major injection of necessary resources as is the increase to homelessness support services (\$109 million) and the renewal and expansion of public housing stock (\$341 million). CSSV notes that the [Council to Homeless Persons](#) report that over 20,000 Victorians experience homelessness on any given night and the number is growing. [Victoria's 30 Year Infrastructure Strategy](#) notes that that between 75,000 and 100,000 vulnerable low income households require better access to affordable housing and estimates that 30,000 additional social housing dwellings in Victoria are needed. It is critical that in future annual budgets the government reinforces and builds on recent investment in social housing.

The Victorian's Government's [Homes for Victorians](#) strategy aims to remove the barriers to affordable housing and increase the level of social housing. Other measures that should be considered include:

- ongoing planning to determine and respond to emerging housing needs, particularly for Aboriginal people who are over-represented in homelessness services
- adequate funding for housing agencies that provide support services within social housing
- the introduction of a vacancy tax to ensure high occupancy levels of properties and minimise the number of properties bought for investment that remain unoccupied
- the introduction of a 15% social housing zoning for all new developments.

Reduce the cost of energy and create a fairer energy market environment - In addition to housing costs, affordable energy is another impact on household budgets. Since privatisation of the energy market in 2002, gas and electricity prices have almost tripled. The Essential Services Commission's [Victorian Energy Market Report](#) (January to March 2017 update) states that 'Energy is an essential service that underpins our health, wellbeing, and social and economic participation.' (page viii). The [Independent Review of the Electricity and Gas Retail Markets in Victoria](#) report, commissioned by the Victorian Government and release on 13 August 2017, found that Victorian households pay too much for gas and electricity. The Review report provides Government an opportunity to invest in creating a fairer market environment that includes measures to reduce the cost of living for low income and disadvantaged households.

We urge Government to implement recommendations of the report, particularly in relation to:

- improving pricing transparency by retails for consumers
- producing targeted concessions and complementary measures to supports low income and vulnerable households transition to the new energy future and make associated budgetary provision
- greater regulation to ensure the market benefits and protects consumers.

9. Palliative care

The 2016 Victorian Parliamentary Report on End of Life Choices recommended that the Victorian Government should provide additional funding for greater availability and access to quality palliative care.

Increase the funding for the adequate provision of palliative care - In the paper [Estimated Need and Unmet Need for Palliative Care in Victoria](#) (October 2017) Palliative Care Victoria outlines the shortfall (66.54%) of palliative care people who died in hospitals, aged care facilities and in the community in 2016. The paper states that there was a large unmet need for palliative care in 2016 and estimates that approximately 30,000 Victorians who died would have benefitted from

palliative care. Only 12% of residents who die in residential aged care facilities receive palliative care. We urge government to provide for this vast unmet need so that everyone receives timely access to high quality palliative and end of life care. Action is also urged to ensuring access for those living in regional and rural Victoria and should include the ability to move home from hospital with real and practical support.

10. Recently arrived families and communities and people seeking asylum

Newly arrived communities have specific needs as they settle and adapt to life in Australia. Settlement services are funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services to ensure support is provided to help newly arrived refugees to settle well in Australia. Many families and individuals have left their home as a result of conflict and come to Australia with experiences of trauma, physical and mental health issues. In Australia they face challenges with income, housing, and access to education, health services and opportunities for employment.

The Victorian Government has a responsibility to support these communities by funding services that promote diversity and protect people from racism. CSSV welcomes the Victorian Government's [Victorian. And proud of it - Multicultural Policy Statement](#) (February 2017) and the investments made to support multicultural communities across Victoria. We call on Government to:

Invest in further support for asylum seekers and refugees - the recent State Government commitment of \$600,000 financial support for asylum seekers to counter the withdrawal of support by the Commonwealth Government is helping to ensure the basic needs of these vulnerable people are catered for in the short term. A recent survey commissioned by Jesuit Social Services and the Refugee Council of Australia showed that the majority of the Australian public are supportive of refugee families receiving the opportunity to be reunited with their families⁸. Catholic agencies and parishes, together with many others, are already providing substantial accommodation, material aid, mental and physical health, legal and other support – to this group, and to many other asylum seekers and refugees in similar circumstances. We urge the Government to invest further to support asylum seekers and refugees to ensure these people are treated humanely and with compassion.

Invest in the development of services for women facing forced marriage - the current criminal justice response does not address the safety of women who are forced to marry. Many of these young women are isolated, prevented from accessing education and can experience various forms of violence. Most victims are reluctant to engage with the police for fear of violence, concerns about their children and a limited understanding about their options. We urge the Government to establish services specifically designed for victims of forced marriage that includes a dedicated forced marriage hotline and the inclusion of forced marriage in respectful relationships education in schools.

Invest in adequate interpreter services within the courts - The Royal Commission into Family Violence Report made specific recommendations regarding interpreter practices and standards at court⁹. Access to interpreters for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds involved in family violence matters at court is critical to ensuring their future safety. The Womens Legal [Creating meaningful access to Justice for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse](#)

⁸ Jesuit Social Services – [Major party voters support family reunion for refugees new poll shows](#) - media release 2 October 2017.

⁹ State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parl Paper No 132 (2014–16)

[\(CALD\) women](#): preliminary investigation into the use of interpreters in family violence matters report, found that at present there are delays in accessing interpreter services and inadequate resourcing within Court Services Victoria, resulting in adjournments which increase family violence risks for women and children. We urge Government to allocate dedicated funding to address this issue within the court system.

Further investment in men's behavioural change programs for specific cultural groups – Our members report long waits for access to men's behavioural change programs. Further investment is needed in this area, particularly for programs and education for specific cultural groups within the community. Monash University's longitudinal study into the [effectiveness of men's behavioural change programs](#) (May 2017) shows that men showed a sharp reduction in the nature and severity of violence that is maintained over time and that most men become violence free or almost violence free two years after their program.

Further invest in activity based programs for newly arrived children and young people – Children and young people new to Australia face language barriers and often have gaps in their education, making integrating into Australian life more challenging. Activity based programs (i.e. sports and interest based) help children and young people develop skills and confidence that help to reduce social isolation. We urge the Government to further invest in programs that promote inclusion and pro-social behaviours for children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to reduce the risk of young people becoming involved in gangs or being radicalised.

11. Rural and regional issues

With the loss of some traditional industries in rural communities, employment has become more competitive, impacting on the availability of jobs and job security; in Maryborough the two supermarkets are the largest employers in the town. More job creation and opportunities in rural areas are needed. In this market, access to stable housing, education and training becomes increasingly important for the long term future of families and their children. Distance also affects opportunities to access quality education, training and employment.

Jesuit Social Services' Dropping of the Edge (DOTE) report, identifies areas of disadvantage across Victoria using statistics collected from a number of government agencies that reflect factors that may limit life opportunities in the broad areas of social wellbeing, health, community safety, access to housing, education and employment. The reports from 2007 and 2015 consistently show pockets of entrenched disadvantage in rural and regional areas of Victoria¹⁰.

Increase the level of secure and affordable social housing options in regional and rural Victoria – our member organisations report that secure and affordable housing options are critical to maintaining viable rural communities, where people can remain connected to their community and maintain stability for families in for employment opportunities and children's education. Housing instability has led to an increase in rough sleepers and people living in transient arrangements, placing increased pressure on regional housing services and in suburban Melbourne where people move to access services.

Greater planning to address entrenched disadvantage is needed in regional and rural areas - the 2015 DOTE report shows that rural centres such as Mildura, Shepparton and Morwell have remained depressed for long periods demonstrating the persistent, entrenched nature of the

¹⁰ [DOTE Victorian Fact Sheet 2015](#)

disadvantage experienced by these communities. A greater level of regional planning is needed to address the issues of:

- safe, secure and affordable housing options
- educational opportunities and pathways into further training
- access to employment opportunities.

Improve access to services in rural and regional areas - while regional towns are centres for services and expertise, they are stretched; often providing additional services to those living in smaller rural communities where there are minimal or no services. The long distances and cost of transport create additional barriers for people in rural areas to access the services they need. Access to regular public transport (particularly bus services) is critical to improving the accessibility of services. Additional bus services and assistance with transport costs should be considered in the development and provision of services for rural areas.

In addition, greater effort is needed to improve the availability of services. Patients in regional areas wait longer to see medical specialists than those in suburban areas and there are insufficient drug and alcohol, mental health, disability and legal support services to meet demand. Where services are cut or reduced, other similar services are either non-existent or too far away to be a viable alternative.

Catholic Social Service Victoria members:

Aboriginal Catholic Ministry
Assisi Centre
ACRATH
Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project
Cabrini Health
CatholicCare Victoria Tasmania
CatholicCare Melbourne
CatholicCare Sandhurst
Catholic Chaplains' Association for Health
Care
Solo Catholics
Centacare Ballarat
CatholicCare Sandhurst
Catholic Womens League Victoria and
Wagga Wagga
Centacare, Diocese of Ballarat
Corazon
Corpus Christi Community
Don Bosco Youth Centre & Hostel Inc
Edmund Rice Camps (Amberley)
Edmund Rice Refugee and Community
Services
Good Samaritan Inn
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand
Griefline
Jesuit Social Services
John Pierce Centre for Deaf Ministry
Kewn Kreestha (Family Care Sisters)
Keysborough Learning Centre
Little Sisters of the Poor : St Joseph's Home
for the Aged
MacKillop Family Services
Marist180
Mary Aikenhead Ministries
Mary MacKillop Aged Care
McAuley Community Services for Women
Missionary Sisters of Service
Nazareth Care
Office for Justice and Peace, Archdiocese of
Melbourne
Order of Malta Hospice Home Care (Vic) Inc
Pregnancy Assistance Frankston
Rosie's Oblate Youth Ministry
Sacred Heart Mission St Kilda Inc
Mary MacKillop Aged Care
Society of St Vincent de Paul
Southern Cross Care (Vic)
St John of God ACCORD
St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
St Mary's House of Welcome Ltd
The Way Community
Villa Maria
Vietnamese Catholic Family Mutual
Assistance Network
VincentCare Victoria
Wellsprings for Women