



"The disadvantaged and marginalised in Victoria will benefit from a range of initiatives in today's Victorian State budget, and from the continued focus on the key human services areas of health, welfare and education". Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Victoria, said today.

"There are some positive steps towards a more just and compassionate society, which the Catholic Church and its welfare agencies advocate." Mr Fitzgerald said.

"The 'Common Ground' initiative to build 120 permanent housing units plus supporting services for chronically homeless is particularly welcome.

"We welcome significant additional disability funding packages, additional respite care, the upgrading of accommodation and the program of community houses for disabled young adults who now live with aged people in nursing homes.

"I am delighted to see funding to provide kindergarten and transition-to-school support for 1000 disabled children.

"\$18 million provided over four years to target health, access to justice and education in refugee communities is also welcomed.

Other initiatives that are welcome are expanded programs to combat family violence, and to strengthen mental health prevention and response services.

"Our preliminary analysis of the Budget has also identified key areas where the Government must do more," Mr Fitzgerald said. "We urge the Premier, the Treasurer, and their colleagues to increase their focus on areas of pressing need."

"Today's initiatives to assist those with disabilities need significant extension in the areas of residential care places, respite care opportunities, and flexibility in the funding of support agencies for disabled Victorians and their families.

"Our member agencies have well developed program proposals to address the long-term needs of the homeless, for which funding is needed. These programs would serve the common good, with increased recognition of the individual importance of these marginalised Victorians. The Government could give more leadership in the area of standards to be applied to rooming houses.

"Gambling revenue continues to increase, but funding for financial counsellors, who are in the front line in treating the problems that arise, has not increased.

"Prison numbers have continued to rise over recent years even as crime rates have fallen, due to longer sentences and fewer suspended sentences. This budget does not do enough to keep people out of prisons nor provide support for families nor assist prisoners with re-entry into society.

"The initiatives that are targeted at those most in need are relatively modest," Mr Fitzgerald said.

"With the State economy forecast to continue growing at 3.0%, there is scope to spend more on those groups that need special assistance in order to share in the overall wealth of our society."

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