



Victorian Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23

April 2022



Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

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Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services has been working for 45 years delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can flourish and reach their full potential.

We are a social change organisation working with some of the most marginalised individuals, families and communities, often experiencing multiple and complex challenges. Jesuit Social Services works where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. Our services span Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on these areas:

- **Justice and crime prevention** – people involved with the justice system
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – people with multiple and complex needs including mental illness, trauma, homelessness and bereavement
- **Settlement and community building** – recently arrived immigrants and refugees, and disadvantaged communities
- **Education, training and employment** – people with barriers to education and sustainable employment
- **Gender Justice** – providing leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, and building new approaches to improve their wellbeing and keep families and communities safe.
- **Ecological justice** – advocating and conducting research around the systemic change needed to achieve a ‘just transition’ towards a sustainable future, and supporting community members to lead more sustainable lives.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, and academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people’s lives and improve approaches to address long-term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with governments, businesses, the community sector, and communities themselves to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

Our Learning and Practice Development Unit builds the capacity of our services through staff development, training and evaluation, and articulating and disseminating information on best practice approaches to working with participants and communities across our programs.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for First Nations people’s love and care of people, community, land and all life.

Executive summary

Many people in Victoria experience significant and persistent disadvantage that manifests in disengagement from school, as well as joblessness, homelessness, substance misuse, family violence, contact with the justice system, mental ill-health, and trauma. These are complex challenges, especially because they intersect, interact, and are often intergenerational.

The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting on those who are already marginalised and magnifying many of these challenges. This is evident in the heightened risk from COVID-19 faced by people in prison and immigration detention, people without safe and secure housing, people with chronic medical conditions, and those unemployed or in insecure employment.

At Jesuit Social Services, we believe everyone is better off in a society where no-one is left behind. The Victorian Government is implementing several important initiatives to tackle disadvantage, including:

- Building more social housing;
- Investing in schools, TAFE and training;
- Establishing gender equality programs and family violence oversight mechanisms;
- Establishing the Truth and Justice Commission, funding Aboriginal community-led responses within the youth justice system, and increasing youth justice staffing; and
- Implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

There is more to be done.

Victoria's growing prison population continues to be of particular concern to Jesuit Social Services, in particular the approach to building more prisons rather than investing in alternatives. In preparing this next Victorian Budget, we urge the Government to ensure Victoria's adult and youth justice systems are centred on prevention, early intervention and restorative justice. Urgent measures are needed to significantly reduce the number of people in prison, promote rehabilitation and to use prison only ever as a last resort.

We call for raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years and investment in programs that divert young people from the justice system. Where detention is the only option, small, home-like and community-based settings which have an overarching emphasis on education and re-socialisation are critical to enabling people to reintegrate into the community. Further, Jesuit Social Services calls on the Government to commit more resources for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system, with self-determination as the core policy approach.

Jesuit Social Services believes that the recovery phase of the pandemic presents a critical opportunity to build a stronger and fairer Victoria. The following recommendations provide a framework for achieving this.

Recommendations

1. *Place-based approaches*

- Continue to support and develop long-term place-based approaches in areas of disadvantage that centre community decision-making and address the range of factors that lead to inequity and disadvantage.
- Fund more research into entrenched and persistent disadvantage to further inform collaborative, long-term and place-based approaches to building thriving communities. This must include the development of place-based indicators that help measure and track the factors that enable equitable and resilient communities.

2. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's overrepresentation in the justice system*

- Fund Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to design, lead and deliver programs aimed at early intervention; train all staff in cultural safety; and employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander case managers.

3. *Youth justice*

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years. Children belong in school, not prison.
- Further invest in programs that divert children and young people from the justice system, specifically focusing on ensuring children remain engaged or are re-engaged with education.
- Identify minority groups that are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and fund community-led and culturally safe approaches to reduce this overrepresentation.
- Extend the age of dual track to 25 so that young offenders can serve their sentence in a youth justice facility rather than an adult prison.
- Ensure the Cherry Creek youth justice facility is a place of small, home-like units and designate it for young adults aged 18 to 25 to support their successful integration back into the community.
- Strengthen the youth justice workforce by investing in training all correctional staff to use therapeutic and restorative approaches when working with children and young people.
- Embed evidence-based, trauma-informed and culturally safe programs for children and young people under youth justice supervision that repair relationships and address underlying trauma.
- Invest in more intensive transitional supported housing programs for justice-involved young people.
- Target more public housing to young people, and expand the [Youth Justice Community Support Service](#) (YJCSS) so all young people exiting custody, and their families, can get the support they need.

4. *Adult justice*

- Focus on reducing prison numbers by:
 - Repealing regressive bail laws which have made it harder to get bail and therefore led to a growing number of people on remand in Victorian prisons.
 - Reintroducing home detention, electronic monitoring and suspended sentences.
 - Developing alternatives to custody for those with a sentence of 18 months or less, and legislating for a presumption against short-term prison sentences.
- Make restorative justice group conferencing available in the adult justice system across the sentencing continuum.

- Address the churn through prisons by funding more intensive transitional supported housing programs for justice-involved adults by:
 - Providing recurrent funding to the [Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility](#) initiative and scaling it up across Victoria so that no one exits prison into homelessness.
 - Establishing a program similar to the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility for women. This will require supports tailored to the needs of women and their children, often including family violence support.

5. *Education, training and employment*

- Expand the [Navigator](#) program, which supports disengaged learners aged 12 to 17 to re-engage with education or training, by lowering the age of eligibility to ten.
- Resource educational programs focusing on young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, such as Jesuit Social Services' [Homework Club](#).
- Help more people facing barriers to employment by expanding programs such as the Jobs Victoria Employment Services and Skills First Reconnect.
- Further invest in employment programs for CALD communities, such as the [Corporate Diversity Partnerships](#) program.

6. *Mental health and wellbeing*

- Provide recurrent funding for assertive outreach and activity-based programs with 'soft entry points' for marginalised young people with mental health and other complex problems.
- Fund the implementation of a state-wide service for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.
- Address the costs of suicide to families and communities by providing funding to postvention bereavement supports, such as [Support After Suicide](#), and increasing access to similar services in rural and regional areas.

7. *Gender justice*

- Scale up the sector working to engage boys and men to prevent violence.
- Prioritise primary and secondary prevention, and early intervention by providing long-term funding to programs and resourcing the piloting of initiatives for at-risk boys and men, including by:
 - Investing in improving women's safety online by engaging young men at risk of perpetrating cyber abuse to further understand how the drivers of violence manifest online.
 - Rolling out training for role models working with men and boys in a range of settings such as schools, youth justice facilities, prisons and community health services to prevent the use of violence.
- Resource research to better understand concerning sexual behaviours among children, and the sexual abuse of children, such as through Jesuit Social Services' pilot project, Worried About Sex and Pornography.
- Commit to recurrent funding for adolescent family violence programs aligned with restorative principles, including Jesuit Social Services' RESTORE and Family Assisted Adolescent Response programs.

1. Place-based approaches

Last year, Jesuit Social Services' latest [Dropping Off the Edge report](#) was released—the fifth edition of research spanning over 20 years, which maps disadvantage by location. This report, made possible with funding from our donors, philanthropy and the Victorian government, once again creates an index of disadvantage across Australia, identifying where entrenched and persistent disadvantage is located and demonstrating the complex web of challenges faced by those communities. For the first time, Dropping Off the Edge 2021 includes environmental indicators alongside social, economic, education and health measurements and includes eight case studies of communities across six states and territories to understand the lived experience of disadvantage.

Jesuit Social Services strongly believes that place-based approaches can address the complex and interconnected web of challenges encountered by vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. While there is no fixed definition of a place-based approach, there is consensus it should involve, “a collaborative, long-term approach to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographic location”. This recognises that everyone’s wellbeing is influenced by the community they live in, and that every community is different.

In January 2021, Jesuit Social Services established the [Centre for Just Places](#) with philanthropy and Victorian government funding. The purpose of the Centre for Just Places is to help governments, other organisations and communities themselves to design place-based policies, programs and services to tackle the root causes of social, economic and environmental inequity and injustice.

To support the broader place-based reform and policy agenda within the Victorian Government, the Centre for Just Places is building a repository of best practice and evidence-based research to inform government decision-making. This research highlights the importance of a whole-of-government approach to better understanding both the factors that support thriving and resilient communities and the role of coordinated and integrated policies to address the drivers of disadvantage across Victoria. This calls for ongoing commitment by the Victorian government to support place-based, community-led initiatives and system-wide responses that prioritise equitable outcomes in social and environmental infrastructure, affordable housing and employment opportunities.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Continue to support and develop long-term, place-based approaches in areas of disadvantage that centre community decision-making and address the range of factors lead to inequity and disadvantage.
- Fund further research into entrenched and persistent disadvantage to inform collaborative, long-term and place-based approaches to building thriving communities. This must include the development of place-based indicators that help measure and track the factors that enable equitable and resilient communities.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander overrepresentation in the justice system

The impacts of colonisation, racism and dispossession continue to be felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in Victoria today.¹ These consequences can be seen in Aboriginal people's overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. On an average day in 2019-20, Aboriginal children were nine times more likely to be in custody than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Aboriginal adults are also overrepresented in the justice system – at March 2021, they were almost 14 times more likely to be imprisoned than adults in the general population.² Jesuit Social Services is concerned that Aboriginal women are the fastest growing prison population in Victoria – the number of Aboriginal women entering prison in Victoria more than tripled between 2012 and 2019.³

We acknowledge the important work of the Victorian Government and First People's Assembly of Victoria in establishing the Truth and Justice Commission. We are also encouraged by the Victorian Government's recent release of the [Wirkara Kulpa Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy](#), which aims to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children under youth justice supervision by 2031.⁴ However, more efforts are urgently needed.

Responding to the long-standing overincarceration of Aboriginal people in the justice system requires a long-term whole-of-government approach built on strong and trusting relationships with Aboriginal organisations. Jesuit Social Services therefore calls on the Victorian Government to commit to reducing the significant over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system by adequately resourcing Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to strengthen their capacity to work with Aboriginal people involved in the criminal justice system.

This should involve a range of initiatives, from capacity building projects in Aboriginal communities, to providing a continuum of supports for Aboriginal people involved with the justice system from pre-release to post-release. These supports must be built on trusted, consistent, culturally safe approaches and incorporate therapeutic, whole-of-family ways of working. There also needs to be an increase in the availability of programs specifically targeted at Aboriginal women involved in the justice system.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Fund ACCOs to design, lead and deliver programs aimed at early intervention; train all staff in cultural safety; and employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander case managers.

¹ Note: Hereafter we use the term 'Aboriginal' to describe the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, clans and Traditional Owner groups of this land.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Government) (2021). Corrective Services March 2021. ([Weblink](#))

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Government) (2021). Corrective Services March 2021. ([Weblink](#))

⁴ Victoria under pressure to raise criminal age as Aboriginal youth justice strategy unveiled. (2022, February 17). *ABC News*. ([Weblink](#))

3. Youth justice

Too often, an encounter with the justice system can lead a young person further into antisocial behaviour instead of out of it. The right leadership and a clear vision, however, can ensure that imprisonment is only ever used as a last resort. This can mean a better, more positive future for people, and therefore a safer community for everyone. Raising the age of criminal responsibility serves as a critical prevention measure by diverting children from contact with the criminal justice system. Where detention is the only option, small, home-like and community-based settings which have an overarching emphasis on education and re-socialisation are critical to supporting young people to reintegrate into the community.

3.1 Education programs that divert children from the justice system

A large number of the young people we work with have been excluded from education; sometimes, for years.⁵ Some of those caught up in the criminal justice system need focused, tailored programs to help them get back on a track and fulfil their potential in a school environment that understands their complex lives and trauma they may have experienced. In early 2021, Jesuit Social Services established the [Ignatius Learning Centre](#) – a small, specialist secondary school for boys aged 15-17 years who are in contact with the justice system and at risk of spending time in prison. Jesuit Social Services would like to see greater investment in, and use of, diversion to educational programs such as the Ignatius Learning Centre. This will allow young people who cause harm to address the drivers behind their offending while still holding them accountable for their actions.

3.2 Working restoratively

In Victoria, Jesuit Social Services has delivered the Youth Justice Group Conferencing program for 20 years, enabling dialogue between children who have offended, their victims and others impacted by harm caused to the wider community. The program is grounded in the foundational principles of restorative justice.⁶ Evidence shows that restorative practices are more effective in reducing re-offending and making our communities safer.⁷ An evaluation by KPMG of group conferencing in 2010 found that over 80 per cent of participants had not reoffended two years later compared to 57 per cent in the comparison group.⁸ We would like to see Youth Justice Group Conferencing made the default response for children who come into contact with the justice system in Victoria.

Additionally, Jesuit Social Services wishes to emphasise the importance of restorative practices such as Youth Justice Group Conferencing in enabling engagement with and support for victims of crime. The 2010 KPMG evaluation of group conferencing found that by participating in a conference, victims were able to resolve unanswered questions, including reasons behind the young person's offending.⁹ Currently, Victoria Police officers are responsible for initiating contact with victims; however, this is not always possible within their busy workloads. Shifting responsibility for this function, along with providing

⁵ Department of Justice and Community Safety. (2020). Youth Parole Board Annual Report. ([Weblink](#))

⁶ Australian Association for Restorative Justice. (n.d.). What is Restorative Justice and what are Restorative Practices? Retrieved February 21, 2022, from ([Weblink](#))

⁷ Jesuit Social Services (2019). #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour. Available from: ([Weblink](#)); and Larsen, J. (2014). Restorative justice in the Australian criminal justice system. AIC Reports: Research and Public Policy Series 127, Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Government. ([Weblink](#))

⁸ KPMG (2010). Review of the youth justice group conferencing program: Final report. Melbourne: State Government of Victoria. ([Weblink](#))

⁹ KPMG (2010). Review of the Youth Justice Group Conferencing Program: Final Report. Melbourne: Department of Human Services, p. 39. ([Weblink](#))

dedicated funding, to the Department of Justice Victims of Crime Agency would support more victims to participate in conferencing. More broadly, we would like to see greater engagement and support for victims of crime across the entire justice system.

3.3 Supported housing for young people with multiple and complex needs

Young people leaving custody often experience homelessness, poor mental health, and high rates of illicit drug use¹⁰. For many years, Jesuit Social Services has provided supported housing for justice system-involved young people through our Perry House and Next Steps programs. Perry House provides a residential-based living skills program for justice system-involved young people with an intellectual disability at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness and require support. Next Steps, which was recognised by the 2017 Victorian Homelessness Achievement Awards, is a supported housing program for 16 to 24 year olds involved with the justice system. With the increased provision of safe and stable housing as a foundation, we can tackle the issues contributing to a person's offending behaviour, develop solid skills that put people on a more positive pathway, and monitor their progress – daily where necessary – to deliver sustainable and lasting change.

3.4 Raising the age of criminal responsibility

Though it is not a Budget measure, we also take this opportunity to call on the government to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14. Our paper, [*Raising The Age of Criminal Responsibility: There is a Better Way*](#), shows this is better for these children and for society as a whole. A more constructive response to children who offend includes restorative justice and therapeutic support.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years. Children belong in school, not prison.
- Further invest in programs that divert children and young people from the justice system, specifically focusing on ensuring children remain engaged or are re-engaged with education.
- Address the overrepresentation of South Sudanese and Pasifika children and young people in youth detention by funding community-led and culturally safe approaches.
- Ensure the Cherry Creek youth justice facility is a place of small, home-like units designed to re-socialise young adults aged 18-25 and support their successful integration back into the community.
- Strengthen the youth justice workforce by investing in training all correctional staff to use therapeutic and restorative approaches when working with children and young people.
- Embed evidence-based, trauma-informed and culturally safe programs for children and young people under youth justice supervision that repair relationships and address underlying trauma.
- Invest in more intensive transitional supported housing programs for justice-involved young people by:
 - Expanding transitional housing programs, such as Perry House and Next Steps, to offer 24/7 supports to young people on their way out of prison that enable them to thrive and remain in the community.
 - Developing a transitional supported housing program similar to Next Steps for young women involved with, or exiting, the justice system.

¹⁰ AIHW (2019). The Health of Prisoners 2018. ([Weblink](#)); Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. ([Weblink](#)); Victorian Ombudsman (2015). Investigation into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prisoners in Victoria. ([Weblink](#)).

- Target more public housing to young people, and expand the [Youth Justice Community Support Service](#) (YJCSS) so all young people exiting custody, and their families, can get the support they need.

4. Adult justice

Victoria's growing prison population continues to be of great concern to Jesuit Social Services, particularly the approach to building more prisons rather than investing in alternatives. In Victoria, rates of incarceration have risen dramatically, with the rate of imprisonment increasing by almost 50 per cent and overall prison numbers doubling in the past 10 years.¹¹

Imprisonment should only ever be a last resort. This is consistent with the *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic). The primary goal of any effective criminal justice system should be rehabilitation, encompassing skilled therapeutic interventions that repair relationships, address underlying trauma and support a person's reintegration into the community. Unfortunately, the system is not delivering these outcomes – currently 44 per cent of adults who exit the prison system return within two years.¹²

4.1 Restorative justice group conferencing in the adult justice system

Restorative programs such as Youth Justice Group Conferencing provide a means of responding to harm with healing by creating opportunities for dialogue between individuals and groups, with benefits for victims, offenders and the wider community. In Victoria, Jesuit Social Services has delivered the [Youth Justice Group Conferencing program](#) since 2003, which is grounded in the principles of restorative justice.¹³

A 2010 KPMG evaluation of Youth Justice Group Conferencing found that over 80 per cent of participants had not reoffended two years later compared to 57 per cent in the comparison group.¹⁴ Additionally, it found that participation in conferences increased the satisfaction of victims by enabling them to resolve unanswered questions. Receiving an apology from the young person and assisting in the development of the young person's outcome plan further increased victim satisfaction.

Despite the success of Youth Justice Group Conferencing, there is no such program available for adult offenders. Jesuit Social Services would like to see restorative justice group conferencing made available in the adult justice system across the sentencing continuum (i.e. at diversion, pre-sentence upon a finding of guilt, and at the post-sentence stage). This approach is responsive to the readiness of offenders and victims to engage in a restorative process and increases options for engagement.

It is critical to ensure that access to dual track is broadened (as outlined above) and that the system is effectively utilised so that young adults who have offended are able to access developmentally appropriate support through Youth Justice Group Conferencing.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019). Prisoners in Australia, 2019 [\(Weblink\)](#)

¹² Productivity Commission. (2020). Report on Government Services 2020. [\(Weblink\)](#)

¹³ Jesuit Social Services (2019). #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour. Available from: [\(Weblink\)](#); and Larsen, J. (2014). Restorative justice in the Australian criminal justice system. AIC Reports: Research and Public Policy Series 127, Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Government. [\(Weblink\)](#)

¹⁴ KPMG (2010). Review of the youth justice group conferencing program: Final report. Melbourne: State Government of Victoria. [\(Weblink\)](#)

4.2 Alternatives to prison

In order to significantly reduce the number of people in prison, promote rehabilitation and reserve prison as a last resort, alternative sentencing options must be considered, including orders such as home detention and suspended sentences. These create a graduated sentencing hierarchy, reserving prison for the most serious, violent offences, and ensuring that legislation matches evidence on what works to prevent reoffending. Certain conditions around these orders provide safeguards to ensure their effectiveness. For instance, certain individuals would be better candidates for non-custodial sentences, such as those with non-violent offending histories who are at low-risk of reoffending.

We also call on the Victorian Government to develop state-wide alternatives to custody for people with short prison sentences (for example, 18 months or less) and to consider legislating for a presumption against short-term prison sentences. Short-term prison sentences, variously defined as being anywhere from less than three months up to two years, have gained more attention as an area for penal reform over the past decade. Most recently, Scotland has acted against sentences of 12 months or less by imposing a presumption against them.¹⁵ Victoria currently does not have a law either banning or limiting prison sentences of any length. However, as previously highlighted, Victoria does have a presumption against imprisonment in general – that is, imprisonment is a penalty of last resort.¹⁶

For many people in prison, short-term sentences do not promote rehabilitation. In fact, the downstream consequences to a person's life can be devastating, and disproportionate to the point of being an unjust sentence.¹⁷ A presumption against short prison sentences combined with robust, viable and state-wide alternatives to custody would prevent people from becoming entrenched in the criminal justice system and reduce the number of people in Victorian prisons. It is essential that any alternatives to custody include wrap-around supports for offenders to address the underlying circumstances influencing their offending.

4.3 Transitional supported housing for people exiting prison

More than half (54 per cent) of people exiting prison expect to be homeless upon release, with 44 per cent planning to stay in short-term or emergency accommodation.¹⁸ People exiting prison are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community, yet the limited support available to them means they often cycle through the justice system again and again. Recently we partnered with the government to launch the new Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility aimed at men exiting prison. Several residents at Maribyrnong have demonstrated that with the right supports in place they can settle into community life, look for work, and plan a better future. The provision of support for people leaving prison is critical to reducing reoffending and building safe communities.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Focus on reducing prison numbers by:
 - Repealing regressive bail laws which have made it harder to get bail and therefore led to a growing number of people on remand in Victorian prisons.
 - Reintroducing home detention, electronic monitoring and suspended sentences.

¹⁵ See: <https://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/scotland-impact-of-presumption-against-short-sentences-pass/>

¹⁶ Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic) s 5(4).

¹⁷ Parliament of Victoria. (2022), Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System Final Report. ([Weblink](#))

¹⁸ AIHW. (2019). The health of Australia's prisoners 2018. Cat. no. PHE 246. Canberra: AIHW. ([Weblink](#))

- Developing alternatives to custody for those with a sentence of 18 months or less, and legislating for a presumption against short-term prison sentences.
- Make restorative justice group conferencing available in the adult justice system across the sentencing continuum.
- Address the churn through prisons by funding more intensive transitional supported housing programs for justice-involved adults by:
 - Providing recurrent funding to the [Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility](#) initiative and scaling it up across Victoria so that no one exits prison into homelessness.
 - Establishing a program similar to the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility for women. This will require supports tailored to the needs of women and their children, often including family violence support.

5. Education, training and employment

Education, training and employment play key and powerful roles in addressing many of the overlapping issues facing people experiencing vulnerability in our community. The promotion of education, lifelong learning and capacity building is fundamental to the work of Jesuit Social Services.

5.1 Maintaining engagement with primary and secondary education

Disengagement from education can often be the first sign that a young person has started on a trajectory into antisocial behaviour. Jesuit Social Services delivers casework and support to disadvantaged young learners as part of the Victorian Government's [Navigator](#) initiative. Navigator works with disengaged learners aged between 12 and 17 to engage with them and their support networks to return them to education or training. This includes the development of individualised learning and cultural plans, and restorative practice including therapeutic and practical support.

Re-engaging vulnerable young people in educational, learning and employment pathways gives them the foundational skills and opportunities they need to flourish. Jesuit Social Services believes that lowering the age of eligibility for Navigator from 12 to ten years would enable the program to intervene earlier in the critical transition period from primary to secondary school.

5.2 Support for CALD students

For almost 20 years, Jesuit Social Services has provided an after-school [Homework Club](#) to students in the Flemington region of inner-city Melbourne. Each week, we support dozens of students from CALD backgrounds and from primary school age through to VCE at the Flemington high-rise public housing estate. Our Homework Club has helped thousands of students, and in 2018, it was the winner of the Outstanding Community-run Out-of-School-Hours Learning Support Program at the Centre for Multicultural Youth's MY Education Awards. We call on the Government to resource educational programs focusing on young people from CALD backgrounds to enable them to continue to connect, learn and flourish.

5.3 Education, training and employment pathways

People facing barriers to employment often need assistance to upgrade their skills and their readiness for work. For example, individuals who have lost work at an older age and been unable to secure new employment; who have left school early or arrived as refugees; who experience poor mental health; or

who have been involved in the justice system, may experience significant barriers to securing employment.

We commend the government's increased funding for the Jobs Victoria employment initiative to support disadvantaged jobseekers and those severely affected by COVID-19, and for the increased funding for TAFE and training. Many of our participants desperately want to work but face several difficulties, such as a lack of experience or education, mental health issues, or struggles with substance misuse or ill-health. None of these factors should sentence someone to a lifetime of unemployment, which is why Jesuit Social Services has been a partner of the Jobs Victoria Employment Services (JVES) since 2016. In that time, we have worked with approximately 340 employers to help 1100 people into jobs. We have seen what intensive support of this kind can achieve.

The Skills First Reconnect initiative represents another critical support for people who have left school early, enabling them to re-enter education and training and improve and enhance their vocational skills. It has enabled many hundreds of people to undertake training. We call on the Victorian Government to continue to provide and expand on initiatives such as JVES and Skills First Reconnect to identify, engage and support people with low levels of educational attainment into education, training and employment pathways.

We also recommend that the Government makes a special effort to assist people from CALD backgrounds who have professional qualifications but are unable to use them to find employment. For example, our Corporate Diversity Partnership includes partnering with major corporations to create a number of new workplace inclusion programs, enabling us to support people from CALD backgrounds with professional skills into their chosen profession for the first time. Our partners have included Melbourne Water, CBUS, SuperConcepts, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), Yarra Valley Water and John Holland.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Expand the [Navigator](#) program, which supports disengaged learners aged 12 to 17 to re-engage with education or training, by lowering the age of eligibility to ten.
- Resource educational programs focusing on young people from CALD backgrounds, such as Jesuit Social Services' [Homework Club](#).
- Help more people facing barriers to employment by expanding programs such as the Jobs Victoria Employment Services and Skills First Reconnect.
- Further invest in employment programs for CALD communities, such as the [Corporate Diversity Partnerships](#) program.

6. Mental health and wellbeing

The Government is to be commended for its significant investment in the transformation of Victoria's mental health system, consistent with the recommendations made by the Royal Commission. At Jesuit Social Services, we know of the suffering of so many Victorians with mental illness and the barriers this creates. We have also seen the positive things that can happen when people with mental ill-health are given the support they need.

6.1 Soft entry-points and assertive outreach

Since 1996, Jesuit Social Services' programs such as [Connexions](#) and the [Artful Dodgers Studios](#) have helped thousands of young people deal with mental illness, substance misuse and associated difficulties. Connexions offers a relationship-based approach to intake and assessment, and uses assertive outreach to engage young people dealing with concurrent issues of mental illness and substance abuse. The Artful Dodgers Studios provide a 'soft entry' via creative projects to engage young people with mental illness who aren't ready for formal participation with social or health workers. Through programs like these, we can help break the cycle, first by creating a space where young people are welcomed, by forming relationships, and by then linking them into other services.

6.2 Dual diagnosis services

We strongly support the development of a new state-wide service for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. As highlighted in [our submission to the Royal Commission](#), it is crucial that the co-occurring issues experienced by some people are not treated in isolation. In particular, specialist expertise and integrated care (often through multi-disciplinary teams) are needed to concurrently address both mental health and alcohol and drug use, in recognition of how the co-occurrence of these issues can impact upon a person's health. We look forward to seeing the state-wide initiative implemented by the end of 2025, as recommended by the Royal Commission.

6.3 Suicide postvention support

Jesuit Social Services also strongly supports the Royal Commission's recommendation for the development of initiatives to support people at risk of experiencing suicidal behaviour. This includes by implementing, in partnership with the Commonwealth Government, state-wide postvention bereavement support, so that every person bereaved by suicide is automatically referred to a postvention bereavement provider.

Jesuit Social Services has delivered [Support After Suicide](#) throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria since 2004. The program provides support to people after a death to suicide, including parents, partners, young people and children. It involves counselling, group work and online engagement, delivered by psychologists and social workers. Currently, Support After Suicide receives funding from the Federal Government. We call on the Victorian government to provide funding for state-wide postvention services for suicide bereavement, including Support After Suicide, and provide increased access to suicide bereavement services for people in regional and rural areas.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Provide recurrent funding for assertive outreach and activity-based programs with 'soft entry points' for marginalised young people with mental health and other complex problems.
- Fund the implementation of a state-wide service for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.
- Address the costs of suicide to families and communities by providing funding to postvention bereavement supports, such as [Support After Suicide](#), and increasing access to similar services in rural and regional areas.

7. Gender justice

Following the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government is well positioned to achieve many elements of its ambition to rebuild the family violence system. However, greater emphasis needs to be placed on engaging with boys and men on issues of masculinities to prevent violence. Through [The Men's Project](#), Jesuit Social Services has taken steps to better understand and respond to male violence and other harmful behaviours, including through our ['Man Box' research](#), which surveys men and boys on their beliefs about sex, gender and violence.

7.1 Preventing violence before it starts

Acknowledging the critical need to prevent violence before it starts, The Men's Project promotes positive and healthy masculinities to reduce violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men. Our [MoRE \(Modelling Respect and Equality\) program](#) helps role models to be agents of change in their schools, clubs and communities. The Men's Project has also invested in the design of a program to decrease the incidence of harmful attitudes and behaviours among at-risk 12 to 18 year olds. Further, in recognition of the significant gap in programs that have sought to engage with men or boys online to prevent cyber abuse, we have developed a proposal to build the evidence-base regarding how the drivers of violence manifest online.

Additionally, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, Jesuit Social Services is engaged in a research project, the [Worried about Sex and Pornography Project](#) (WASAPP), for young people concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviours. This research is seeking to understand the developmental trajectories of children and young people to inform the contents of an effective online help tool. The next stage is to secure funding and build and trial a WASAPP online help tool. We call on the government to prioritise primary and secondary prevention, and early intervention by providing long-term funding to programs and resourcing the piloting of initiatives for at-risk boys and young men.

7.2 Restorative approaches to adolescent family violence

Jesuit Social Services has also drawn on its extensive experience in applying restorative justice principles to develop innovative approaches to responding to adolescent family violence. Since early 2018, Jesuit Social Services has partnered with the Children's Court of Victoria to deliver the RESTORE program. Developed in response to an identified absence of interventions for adolescents who use violence in the home, RESTORE offers a family group conference process for civil cases. It assists the family member victims and adolescent perpetrators to address the harm caused by family violence and prevent further harm being caused. The University of Melbourne is currently evaluating the RESTORE program, which will be completed this year. Anecdotal feedback indicates that RESTORE is meeting an identified gap in service delivery to young people and their families.

In collaboration with Victoria Police, we have also developed the Family Assisted Adolescent Response model. Focussing on improving the crisis and follow-up response to police call-outs to adolescent family violence, the model embeds additional support from social workers working alongside police during call-outs and in the 72 hours post incident. Additional funding is now required to ensure these programs continue.

7.3 Scaling up the sector engaging boys and men

Both the evidence-base and associated practice of addressing the underlying drivers of violence is relatively new, and to deliver on the Victorian Government's priorities in relation to rebuilding the family violence system, the sector engaging men and boys needs to be scaled up. The Men's Project is now a leading voice and actor in the primary prevention of family violence field. We call on the Government to scale up the sector engaging men and boys to prevent violence.

We call on the Victorian Government to:

- Scale up the sector working to engage boys and men to prevent violence.
- Prioritise primary and secondary prevention, and early intervention by providing long-term funding to programs and resourcing the piloting of initiatives for at-risk boys and men, including by:
 - Investing in improving women's safety online by engaging young men at risk of perpetrating cyber abuse to further understand how the drivers of violence manifest online.
 - Rolling out training for role models working with men and boys in a range of settings such as schools, youth justice facilities, prisons and community health services to prevent the use of violence.
- Resource research to better understand concerning sexual behaviours among children, and the sexual abuse of children, such as through Jesuit Social Services' pilot project, Worried About Sex and Pornography.
- Commit to recurrent funding for adolescent family violence programs aligned with restorative principles, including Jesuit Social Services' RESTORE and Family Assisted Adolescent Response programs.