

Priority investments for the 2024/25 Victorian State Budget

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential.

We ‘do’ and we ‘influence’. We accompany people and communities to foster and regenerate the web of relationships that sustain us all – across people, place and planet; and we work to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion.

We recognise the 2024/25 Victorian Budget will be delivered within a tight fiscal environment. With this context in mind, we encourage the Victorian Government to prioritise funding toward projects and services that will have the greatest impact and deliver meaningful outcomes across the state.

While we continue to advocate for a comprehensive set of changes to policies, practices, services and infrastructure, we present here a priority list of investments we believe are critical and achievable to deliver real change for Victorians currently facing disadvantage. These investments will serve all those across the state by contributing to safe and thriving communities where people are supported to flourish.

Specifically, these investments will shore up the foundations necessary for living a safe and healthy life – including appropriate housing and resilience to climate change – while also investing in services that intervene early to address complex needs.

With that in mind, we call on the Victorian Government to:

Shore up the foundations:

- Build at least 60,000 safe, sustainable and supported public and community homes by 2032, with a particular focus on increasing the supply of public housing as a percentage of social housing overall.
- Provide incentives to community housing providers to provide housing to people with histories of homelessness and people who have complex needs or are on lower incomes (such as Jobseeker or Youth Allowance).
- Invest in supported housing options including outreach and wrap around supports for people with a range of needs, including:
 - young people exiting out-of-home care and custodial settings
 - victim-survivors of family violence
 - people with mental health, substance use issues and experiences of trauma
 - people with disabilities
 - people seeking asylum and refugees.
- Provide long-term funding to the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility and scale it up across Victoria so that no one exits prison into homelessness.

- Resource the establishment and coordination of place-based, cross-sector, resilience coalitions to work in partnership with local governments and the health and community sector to strengthen climate adaptation planning and policies.
- Resource initiatives and interventions to address long-term, place-based and systemic disadvantage. Ensure these approaches centre community decision-making and address factors that lead to inequity and disadvantage.

Invest in early interventions:

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to 14 years old as soon as possible in conjunction with investment in a comprehensive alternative model to support children under 14 to understand the impact of their actions and be supported to address their behaviour and flourish.
- Divert children and young people from the justice system by further investing in diversionary programs focused on ensuring children remain engaged or are re-engaged with education. In particular:
 - Statewide expansion of the Navigator pilot program to support children as young as 10 years old to address challenges and re-engage with education in a sustainable way.
- Enable better transitions from youth detention to the community by:
 - Expanding transitional and supportive housing programs, such as Perry House and Dillon House, to offer 24/7 supports to young people in the criminal justice system who do not have access to safe and secure housing. This includes young people exiting custody, on parole or on a community justice order.
 - Further resource Youth Justice Community Support Services (YJCSS) so the service can provide support to every young person exiting youth detention.
- Significantly invest in the expansion of diversion options for early offending, complemented by therapeutic and wrap-around supports to decrease the likelihood of reoffending.
- Implement, in full, all recommendations from the *Yoorrook for Justice* report to address systemic injustice in the child protection and criminal justice systems for Aboriginal people in Victoria.
- Ensure healthcare in custody meets the same standards as those of community healthcare, including:
 - Work with the Commonwealth Government to provide ongoing access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Medicare Benefits Schedule, and to reduce the waiting period for the Disability Support Pension for people exiting prison;
 - Work with Commonwealth Government to support access to NDIS upon transition out of prison back into the community.

- Provide long-term, secure funding for Support After Suicide, to reduce the risk of further deaths by suicide and ensure that all Victorians have access to vital support following the loss of a loved one to suicide.
- Fund early intervention, culturally safe education re engagement programs tailored to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) learners such as Jesuit Social Services' Homework Club.
- Invest in skills training and services that support people who experience disadvantage, barriers to employment and/or multiple or intersecting needs to gain meaningful and stable employment including the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment program which supports the Victorian Police to grow a skilled workforce that better represents the community it serves.
- Expand funding for the Reconnect program to ensure Victorians aged 17-64 who are unemployed and not engaged in education or training are supported to re-engage and be on a pathway to a job.
- Invest in foundational skills for more Victorians by removing caps on numbers who can access Skills First accredited training delivered through private and not-for-profit registered training organisations. This program delivers a practical pathway to further education, training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers.
- Continue funding The Jobs Victoria Mentors Service for the most vulnerable Victorians who are not serviced well by the Commonwealth employment service.
- Provide long-term funding to programs that prioritise violence prevention and early intervention, including by:
 - Drawing on our Modelling Respect and Equality program and Unpacking the Man Box workshops, scale up workforce capacity building 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.
 - Continuing to invest in and rigorously evaluate pilot programs to engage at-risk young people with the view to developing scalable early intervention programs.
- Commit to recurrent funding for adolescent family violence programs aligned with restorative principles, in collaboration with the Children's Court and Police, including Jesuit Social Services Restore and Family Assisted Adolescent Response program.