



**Jesuit  
Social Services**  
Building a Just Society

# Victorian Pre-Budget Submission 2026-27

December 2025

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*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 their love and care of people, community, land and all life.*

For further information, contact:

**Julie Edwards, CEO, Jesuit Social Services**

T: 03 9421 7600

E: [julie.edwards@jss.org.au](mailto:julie.edwards@jss.org.au)

# Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can thrive. For almost 50 years we have accompanied some of the most disadvantaged members of the community, delivering support services and advocating for improved legislation, policy and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities. We are a national organisation with a significant footprint in Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

Jesuit Social Services' service delivery and advocacy focus on:

- **Justice and crime prevention** – working with people involved with the justice system
- **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
- **Education, training and employment** – working with people who face barriers to sustainable employment
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – supporting people with multiple and complex needs including mental illness, trauma, homelessness and bereavement
- **Settlement and community building** – supporting recently arrived immigrants, people seeking asylum and refugees, and communities experiencing disadvantage

- **Climate and ecological justice** – mobilising place-based practices, policies and actions that can be taken by governments, individuals, organisations and the community services sector to build a climate resilient and ecologically just society.

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, as well as 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, business and the community sector 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, as well as articulating and disseminating information on best practice approaches to working with participants and communities across our programs.

# Summary of recommendations

## Recommendation 1

Through the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF), fund early intervention initiatives in the 2026–27 State Budget that will deliver better outcomes for Victorians and generate savings for government, and reinvest the avoided costs derived from successful EIIF initiatives into social services, including those delivered by community sector organisations.

## Recommendation 2

Establish a flexible fund for the Violence Reduction Unit to invest in new and expanded initiatives to prevent and respond to youth offending.

## Recommendation 3

Introduce and properly resource an evidence-informed, child-centred Alternative Service Model to support young people under 14 years to stay out of the justice system, based on four key elements: assessment; intensive and holistic support; therapeutic response; and community connection.

## Recommendation 4

Invest an additional \$12.78 million over four years in the Youth Justice Community Support Service to enable enhanced support to be provided to young people in contact with the criminal justice system, through lower caseloads for workers, embedded family, community and cultural support, and integrated after-hours support.

## Recommendation 5

Invest in an expansion of the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility model to support more adult men exiting prison and/or an adaptation of the model for different cohorts, including young people aged 18–25 and women, to reduce the number of people exiting prison into homelessness.

## Recommendation 6

Invest \$1.57 million in capital funding to support the establishment of a second campus of the Ignatius Learning Centre (ILC) in Melbourne's western suburbs with capacity to enrol 40 students – to expand availability of intensive

engagement and education for boys aged 15–17 in Melbourne's west who are involved in the criminal justice system.

## Recommendation 7

Increase schools' capability to prevent disengagement, conflict and violence among students as a way of intervening earlier to address drivers of crime, including investing \$1 million over four years to establish Re-Engage in ten schools.

## Recommendation 8

Invest in therapeutic and restorative options for children and young people subject to or at risk of intervention orders to divert them from the criminal justice system, support healing and address their underlying needs – including \$3.04 million over four years to re-establish RESTORE.

## Recommendation 9

Continue to strengthen violence prevention efforts by ensuring that school-based programs and initiatives (including Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships education), alongside other youth-focused prevention efforts, reflect adolescents' lived experiences; and that adults are equipped to work with young people to address contemporary issues highlighted in the Adolescent Man Box research.

## Recommendation 10

Invest \$3 million over three years to translate the Adolescent Man Box research into practice through design, implementation and evaluation of a range of interventions to address key areas of concern identified in the Adolescent Man Box report.

## Recommendation 11

Invest \$985,000 in 2026–27 and \$800,000 per annum ongoing to support the proposal from the Women's Health Services Network, Jesuit Social Services (The Men's Project) and Safe + Equal partnership, to build the capability of the prevention and early intervention workforces to integrate knowledge on masculinities and engaging men and boys into their work.

### **Recommendation 12**

Better meet the needs of children and young people who have experienced or been impacted by violence or abuse through a substantial additional investment in targeted, trauma-informed interventions and support services, focused on healing and recovery, as well as capability-building of other service systems (such as child protection, youth justice and homeless services) to better respond to the specific needs of children and young people who have been victims of violence.

### **Recommendation 13**

Scale up early intervention work with at-risk boys and young men to prevent violence by addressing underlying needs, including building the capability of other service systems (such as child, youth and family services, youth justice and homelessness services) to identify opportunities to intervene earlier.

### **Recommendation 14**

Invest \$5.971 million over four years to continue the Change Makers program with boys and young men at greater risk of using violence by decreasing risk factors for violence, including harmful gendered beliefs, and increasing protective factors.

### **Recommendation 15**

Invest \$2 million over 2.5 years to develop, pilot and evaluate a first-of-its-kind national anonymous and free online early intervention service focused on reducing problematic and harmful sexual behaviours among young people, to be called What's ok? Australia.

### **Recommendation 16**

Foster accountability and strengthen service provision by further developing capacity to monitor and report on (unmet) demand for family and sexual violence services (with a focus on children and young people who experience violence or abuse), including committing to and reporting on targets.

### **Recommendation 17**

Make key risk assessment (MARAM) and other risk and needs assessment data available to guide the prioritisation and design of additional research and early intervention efforts.

### **Recommendation 18**

Establish a dedicated evaluation fund to enable community service organisations to participate in high quality evaluations of priority programs, including randomised controlled trials, with evaluation findings shared publicly and used to inform policy and investment and drive evidence-based expansion of programs that demonstrate reductions in violence by men and boys.

### **Recommendation 19**

Provide specific funding allocations to community sector organisations, recognising the significant costs associated with transitioning to new SCHADS award requirements, and make provision for supplemental indexation of funding that reflects actual growth in costs, including rising labour costs and increases in demand and complexity.

### **Recommendation 20**

Expand access to psychosocial disability support to address unmet need in Victoria until an intergovernmental solution is agreed and implemented.

### **Recommendation 21**

Implement reforms to the commissioning of social services, including:

- longer contract terms (minimum five years), enabling stability, workforce retention and innovation;
- greater flexibility in funding, particularly for cohorts with multiple and complex needs;
- a stronger focus on outcomes-based contracting; and
- mechanisms to facilitate better coordination and collaboration between service providers, such as longer application lead-in times.

### **Recommendation 22**

Establish a climate adaptation fund for community service organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to support community-led, place-based climate adaptation, with a focus on communities experiencing the most significant climate impacts.

### **Recommendation 23**

Implement Recommendation 45 from the Yoorrook for Transformation report to enable and support the development of a First Peoples' Climate Justice Strategy (led by First Peoples), with perpetual funding, for Traditional Owner groups to deliver environmental projects on their Country which will assist in mitigating, adapting and/or responding to climate change.

### **Recommendation 24**

As part of any redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers, commit to:

- a 30 per cent uplift in social housing dwellings, including a 10 per cent uplift in public housing dwellings;
- designated social housing places, coupled with practical tenancy support, for populations facing high levels of disadvantage and vulnerability, including young people and those with complex needs such as: people leaving prison; young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; women and children escaping violence; and people with complex needs, including mental ill-health and cognitive disabilities; and
- meeting climate-resilient design standards to protect residents from extreme heat and high energy costs and support safe and healthy living conditions.

### **Recommendation 25**

Offer a financial subsidy to community housing organisations to provide housing for people on the lowest statutory incomes (Jobseeker and Youth Allowance) and people with complex needs, such as those exiting custody, with mental health conditions, and histories of rough sleeping and addiction.

### **Recommendation 26**

Invest in supported housing for people with complex needs who do not have the capacity to live independently, including young people exiting out-of-home care, young people and adults exiting custody (see also recommendation 5), and people with complex mental health issues or developmental disability.

# Intervening early to disrupt disadvantage and break cycles of violence and harm

Jesuit Social Services' vision is to build a just society. We believe everyone should have access to the opportunities and resources they need to thrive.

Yet despite the opportunities to prosper experienced by some Victorians, disadvantage persists for too many in our community. Poverty remains endemic in Victoria, with 13.3 per cent of all Victorians and 17.6 per cent of children living in poverty in 2023 – a rate that has remained steady since 2016.<sup>1</sup>

Disadvantage is also deeply localised. Jesuit Social Services' *Dropping off the Edge* (DOTE) 2021 report found that in Victoria, five per cent of locations accounted for 29 per cent of the most disadvantaged positions across all indicators.<sup>2</sup> This includes a range of intersecting challenges, including housing insecurity, poor mental health and exclusion from education and employment, over-representation in the adult and youth justice systems and disproportionate exposure to the impacts of climate change.

A key theme underpinning this submission is the importance of early intervention to disrupt disadvantage and break cycles of violence and harm. Prevention and early intervention offer a dual benefit for governments, particularly in a tight fiscal environment. They improve outcomes for individuals and communities while reducing demand for tertiary services.<sup>3</sup>

For example, the increase in youth offending in Victoria is a complex problem with deep rooted causes, but the links between disadvantage and involvement in the justice system are clear.<sup>4</sup> While we welcome the establishment of and investment in the Violence Reduction Unit, this limited investment in prevention stands in stark contrast to the trend towards predominantly punitive – and very costly – responses to young people's offending and use of violence.

The children being locked up are, more often than not, victims of family violence or child abuse first and have engaged in criminal activity second. On the one hand, the Victorian Government is committed to ending family and sexual violence and supporting healing and recovery for victim-survivors, including children and young people. Yet its approach to young people is focused on punishment, not healing, nor restorative interventions which hold young people to account for their actions and can interrupt the cycle of violence and offending.

Drawing on the research and practice expertise we have developed over decades of working with people experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage, this submission offers evidence-based recommendations for increased investment in prevention and early intervention where there is significant potential to shift entrenched disadvantage and reduce violence.

Recognising current budget challenges and competing investment priorities, our funding proposals and recommendations seek to build on and scale up existing programs and initiatives that are already demonstrating success. Many of these initiatives would be suitable for funding through the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF).

We call on the government to continue its commitment to the EIIF in the 2026–27 Budget. The avoided costs derived from successful EIIF initiatives should be reinvested into social services, including those delivered by community sector organisations. We also call for greater clarity and transparency about how community sector organisations can engage in the process of developing funding proposals for the EIIF.

<sup>1</sup> VCOSS (2023). *Mapping poverty in Victoria: 2023 VCOSS Insights Report*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> Tanton, R et al (2021), *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and Multilayered Disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne, p. 85. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> The Productivity Commission recently reported that effective prevention can return investment after six years: Productivity Commission (2025). *Delivering quality care more efficiently: Interim report*, pp. 55–56. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025), *Youth justice in Australia 2023–24: Characteristics of young people under supervision – Socioeconomic area*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Our submission also highlights the importance of sustainable funding of social and community services, including increased investment to match increased demand and complexity, reduce wait lists and fund statutory wage rises.

We also call for commissioning reforms to provide greater stability and certainty, together with enhanced flexibility and innovation.

### **Recommendation 1**

Through the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF), fund early intervention initiatives in the 2026–27 State Budget that will deliver better outcomes for Victorians and generate savings for government, and reinvest the avoided costs derived from successful EIIF initiatives into social services, including those delivered by community sector organisations.

# Reducing youth offending by addressing the drivers of crime

Jesuit Social Services shares community concern about crime and particularly high harm offending. We have deep connections to impacted individuals and communities, both victims and those subject to criminal charges. However, community safety is best served by solutions that are informed by data, research and evidence about what works, and grounded in engagement with affected communities.

The reality is that there has been a decrease in the number of individual children committing crimes in recent years, but an increase in repeat offending by a small group of children.<sup>5</sup> Most of these children have complex histories of disadvantage and trauma. More than 60 per cent of children in detention are victims of abuse, neglect or trauma, more than half have had contact with the child protection system and close to half have experienced family violence.<sup>6</sup> Victorians from marginalised groups, including First Nations children and young people, and children and young people from culturally and racially marginalised communities, are significantly over-represented.<sup>7</sup>

We welcome the recent announcement of a Violence Reduction Unit and the investment in peer mentoring and early intervention to reduce school disengagement. However, the government's investment of \$27.5 million in early intervention is grossly inadequate. It is far outweighed by its investment in punitive responses to offending. The \$727 million committed in the 2025–26 Victorian budget to expand adult and youth prisons included an additional 88 beds in youth justice facilities, with an additional 30 beds at the re-opened Malmsbury facility subsequently announced. Further, recent reforms to bail and sentencing laws do not address the underlying drivers of

crime, nor the impacts of untreated trauma for young people who may also be victim-survivors of violence and abuse.

The current approach to youth justice in Victoria is inconsistent with international human rights,<sup>8</sup> out of step with the evidence about what works to reduce youth offending, and is leading to negative outcomes both for young people and the community. We have already seen a 32 per cent increase in episodes of remand in the 12 months to June 2025, and this is limiting access to programs and supports that can reduce reoffending.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than increasing community safety, children and young people who spend time in detention are more likely to reoffend.<sup>10</sup> In 2024, the Productivity Commission reported that 83 per cent of children in Victoria who are sentenced or detained reoffend, compared to just under 50 per cent of those not arrested and receiving diversionary measures.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence shows that prevention and early intervention measures, including support to re-engage in education, decrease the likelihood of offending. It is also clear that diversion and community-based supports can break cycles of offending, and that restorative justice – done well – leads to a decrease in recidivism and high levels of victim satisfaction.

Locking up young people is not only ineffective, it is more expensive than investing in prevention, early intervention, diversion and restoration. In 2023–24, the average cost per day per young person subject to detention-based supervision in Victoria was \$7,775 (the highest of any Australian jurisdiction) or \$933,000 per young person based on an average stay in sentenced detention of 120 days.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, the cost of

5 Crime Statistics Agency, *Unique Alleged Offenders* [Weblink]; Crime Statistics Agency, *Alleged Offender Incidents* [Weblink].

6 Youth Parole Board (2025). Annual Report 2024–25, p 30. [Weblink]

7 Smart Justice for Young People (2023), *Working Together: Action Plan to end the Over-Representation of Particular Groups of Young People in the Criminal Justice System*, pp. 4, 30. [Weblink]

8 According to Article 37 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, detention should only ever be used as a last resort and should be as short as possible.

9 Youth Parole Board (2025). Annual Report 2024–25, pp 11, 34. [Weblink]

10 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025), *Young people returning to sentenced youth justice supervision 2023–24*. [Weblink]; Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). *Help way earlier!: How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing*. Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, p 21–22. [Weblink]

11 Siegel-Brown, N. and Button, S., (2024) Youth justice policy setting back Closing the Gap, Productivity Commission, 17 September 2024. [Weblink]

12 Productivity Commission (2025). *Report on Government Services 2025, Part F: Community Services, Data Table 17A.20: Cost per young person in*

a youth justice group conference can be less than \$10,000.

The *Youth Justice Act 2024* recognises the importance of addressing the underlying drivers of crime in order to reduce offending and improve community safety.<sup>13</sup> This requires investment in prevention and diversion, and sustainable funding for critical systems and services. Organisations working with justice-involved young people, like Jesuit Social Services, have the practice knowledge and expertise to implement the responses needed to keep communities safe – with the government’s collaboration and support.

### Working with community to address the drivers of crime

Having seen the consequences of crime for victims, offenders and communities firsthand, we are deeply committed to addressing its root causes. This requires thoughtful, evidence-informed, and sustained efforts grounded in meaningful partnership between impacted communities, the community service sector and government agencies. In addition, if an affected community is not supported to heal when serious crime occurs, this can result in anger and trauma, potentially increasing the risk factors that can lead to more crime. Through dialogue, we can better understand the drivers of violence and harm and translate this into action.

The government’s \$19.8 million Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) must be more than a branded collection of prevention measures, but a dedicated and coordinated effort at the community level. At the heart of the Scottish model which informed the VRU was a process of engagement and partnership across communities, different service organisations and government. Through such a process, the VRU is likely to identify gaps in existing efforts, new and emerging needs, and challenges requiring new responses. In addition to coordinating existing effort, there will be a need for additional investment. The VRU will need access to flexible funding to utilise in delivering responses.

### Recommendation 2

Establish a flexible fund for the Violence Reduction Unit to invest in new and expanded initiatives to prevent and respond to youth offending.

### Supporting children to stay out of the justice system through an alternative service model

We welcome the increase in the age of criminal responsibility in Victoria from 10 to 12, alongside other positive reforms introduced as part of the *Youth Justice Act 2024*, including expanding options for diversion and restorative justice for children and young people.

We continue to advocate for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised to 14 years, in line with international human rights standards and expert medical evidence. Raising the age from 10 to 14 has been estimated to generate \$315 million in savings over 10 years,<sup>14</sup> which could be invested in services and supports that would keep at-risk children out of custody and give them the help they need to thrive.

Regardless of the age of criminal responsibility, children should be treated as children. A properly resourced, evidence-informed Alternative Service Model is required to support young people under the age of 14 to stay out of the justice system. While the government has provided a modest initial investment, more effort and investment are needed to develop a genuine, child-centred alternative, which is grounded in principles of early intervention and care.

The report of the independent panel appointed by the government to advise on the design and implementation of an Alternative Service Model in 2023 has never been released. We call on the government to release the panel’s report, and to commit adequate resourcing to implement a genuine, child-centred Alternative Service Model, in addition to the range of diversionary and early intervention approaches contained in the *Youth Justice Act 2024*.

detention, 2023–24 dollars [Weblink]; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024), *Youth justice in Australia 2023–24: Characteristics of young people in detention: Data Table S124*. [Weblink]

13 *Youth Justice Act 2024* (Vic), s18(2)(a).

14 Parliamentary Budget Office (Victoria) (2023). *Election policy costing: Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years*. [Weblink]

### Recommendation 3

Introduce and properly resource an evidence-informed, child-centred Alternative Service Model to support young people under 14 years to stay out of the justice system, based on four key elements: assessment; intensive and holistic support; therapeutic response; and community connection.

### Meeting demand for enhanced community support among young people in contact with the justice system

Jesuit Social Services has been delivering the **Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS)** across metropolitan Melbourne since the program's inception in 2008. YJCSS is a longstanding, highly successful program that works with young people aged 10–25 who are involved with the justice system, including those on bail, community-based orders, and pre- and post-release.

In 2024–25, 71 per cent of YJCSS participants did not re-offend or had reduced severity and/or frequency of offending after participating in the program. Program evaluation has also shown YJCSS to be effective in improving education, employment, health and housing outcomes. Because YJCSS addresses the root causes of crime, it represents a genuine step towards supporting young people to live a flourishing life, while also making our communities safer.

Since YJCSS started in 2008, both the complexity of young people participating in the service and demand for the service have increased. Participants are more culturally diverse; more likely to live with family; have a greater level of complex needs; and are more frequently involved in more serious offending. This has meant that family, community and cultural work have become integral to the program – alongside support to navigate multiple services – but these elements are not formally recognised or funded. At the same time, program targets, workload and travel times have increased without corresponding funding increases, leading to growth in caseloads for YJCSS staff and wait lists for after-hours support.

This increase in demand and complexity has not been matched by an increase in funding. While YJCSS is described as providing “intensive” support, current funding is only sufficient to provide an average of two hours of support per participant per week, which is wholly inadequate for this complex cohort.

Through our Budget bid “*Meeting demand for enhanced community support among high-risk young people in Melbourne’s growing suburbs*”, we are calling on the government to invest in enhanced support for young people participating in YJCSS. The enhanced model would:

- Lower caseloads for case workers, enabling them to spend more time supporting participants, including after-hours support; and
- Embed a community of care approach that incorporates family work, cultural work and community-level work.

Investing in more intensive, tailored support through YJCSS – with embedded family, cultural and community support – is expected to deliver further reductions in recidivism, as well as improvements in family function, social connectedness, community safety and community cohesion. At an average unit cost of around \$27,000 per participant for the enhanced model, YJCSS offers a highly cost-effective alternative to detention.

### Recommendation 4

Invest an additional \$12.78 million over four years in the Youth Justice Community Support Service to enable enhanced support to be provided to young people in contact with the criminal justice system, through lower caseloads for workers, embedded family, community and cultural support, and integrated after-hours support.

### Investing in supported housing for young people leaving detention

Limited support is available for young people exiting prison. This means they are at higher risk of reoffending, cycling through the justice system repeatedly. While young people make up

a relatively small percentage of the overall prison population, their rate of recidivism is higher,<sup>15</sup> and the impact of this cycle can be significant for community safety. At the same time, young adults are more amenable to rehabilitation than older adults.<sup>16</sup>

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 51 per cent of young people aged 18–24 exiting prison expect to be homeless once released.<sup>17</sup> Stable and affordable housing with wraparound supports can make a significant difference in the life of a young person leaving prison and mitigate the risk of reoffending.

Through our experience providing residential programs such as Dillon House, we understand the value of residential support for young people intersecting with the criminal justice system. Residential programs offer an opportunity for healing and recovery, and the support and stability young people need to address the issues that contributed to their offending and build a new and flourishing life.

The **Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility (MCRF)** demonstrates the impact of transitional housing and support for adult men exiting prison. Since opening in 2020, more than 300 men have used MCRF – which provides temporary accommodation and support for men exiting prison – to transition into long-term housing and employment.

A 2022 evaluation by the Department of Justice and Community Safety found MCRF residents were 30 per cent less likely to return to prison compared with those leaving prison without similar housing and support. The housing stability provided by the MCRF serves as a solid foundation for residents to support their progress in the other critical domains for reintegration.<sup>18</sup>

However, the current program is strictly limited in the number of people it can support, and has specific eligibility criteria. More adult men, as well as other cohorts such as young adults or

women, could benefit from an expansion and/or adaptation of the MCRF model.

Given both their high risk of recidivism and strong potential for rehabilitation, young people aged 18 to 25 who are under the dual track system or coming out of adult prisons have specific needs that would be best met through a specialised program that does not place them together with older adults.

An adapted version of MCRF – tailored to the specific needs of young people – could offer a suitable step-down option for young people exiting custody to support them to address their health and mental health needs, gain employment or enrol in education or training, re-establish family and social connections, and secure appropriate long-term housing.

As outlined in our Budget bid, “*MCRF expansion/adaptation to reduce recidivism and create safer communities*”, we call on the government to invest in an expansion of the MCRF model to support more adult men exiting prison and/or an adaptation of the model for different cohorts, including young people aged 18–25 and women, to reduce the number of people exiting prison into homelessness.

Intensive transition programs should be one part of a housing system that works for those who are most disadvantaged in our society (see pages 25–27 of this submission for further detail).

## Recommendation 5

Invest in an expansion of the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility model to support more adult men exiting prison and/or an adaptation of the model for different cohorts, including young people aged 18–25 and women, to reduce the number of people exiting prison into homelessness.

15 Sentencing Advisory Council (2016). *Reoffending by Children and Young People in Victoria*, Figure 18. [\[Weblink\]](#)

16 Sentencing Advisory Council (2019). *Rethinking sentencing for young adult offenders*, pp 17–18. [\[Weblink\]](#)

17 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *The health of people in Australia's prisons 2022*. [\[Weblink\]](#). This is national data which excludes Victoria, which did not provide data for this item.

18 The Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway (CVRP) identifies seven critical domains for successful transition: housing, employment, education and training, independent living skills, mental health, alcohol and drugs, and family/community connectedness.

## Re-engaging young people involved in the justice system in education

The link between educational disengagement, poor learning outcomes, and contact with the criminal justice system is well established.<sup>19</sup> A 2017 Victorian Ombudsman report found that approximately 60 per cent of children and young people in the youth justice system had previously been suspended or expelled from school, and over 90 per cent of adults in prison had not completed secondary school.<sup>20</sup>

Education is a critical protective factor against contact with the justice system, and all young people should have access to mainstream schooling. It is unacceptable that young people subject to electronic monitoring as part of enhanced bail, who may have had good engagement in mainstream education, are excluded. We need a culture of inclusion in mainstream schools, supported by investment.

We also recognise that, for some young people and their families, alternative schooling may be an appropriate option. This is particularly the case for young people involved with the youth justice system. To respond to this need, Jesuit Social Services established the **Ignatius Learning Centre (ILC)**. The ILC is a Catholic specialist secondary school providing an intensive engagement and education option for boys aged 15–17 who are involved in the criminal justice system. Established in 2021, the ILC now has over 41 students enrolled with delivery taking place through community outreach and at our campus in Richmond.

The ILC is the only community-based specialist school in Victoria working with young people involved in the criminal justice system. It offers a safe, flexible, holistic and therapeutic learning environment. Students come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds.

The school has demonstrated a strong ability to engage, educate and support boys who have been involved in the criminal justice system. A 2023 evaluation found that participants had made progress in overall attendance/engagement; communication skills (50 per cent);

motivation toward learning goals (75 per cent) and more healthy lifestyle choices (75 per cent).

Growing numbers of young people in custody and on community orders and high levels of educational disengagement among these groups are driving increased need for flexible learning options. However, the ILC is currently unable to meet the demand for this educational option in Melbourne's western suburbs.

As set out in our Budget bid "*Ignatius Learning Centre, Western Suburbs Campus*", Jesuit Social Services is seeking capital funding to support the establishment of a second campus of the ILC in Melbourne's western suburbs in 2026 to provide an intensive engagement and education option for justice-involved young people in this region.

### Recommendation 6

Invest \$1.57 million in capital funding to support the establishment of a second campus of the Ignatius Learning Centre (ILC) in Melbourne's western suburbs with capacity to enrol 40 students – to expand availability of intensive engagement and education for boys aged 15–17 in Melbourne's west who are involved in the criminal justice system.

## Investing in restorative programs to address the harm underlying criminal justice system involvement

Restorative practices can help to establish, maintain, deepen and repair relationships, and to neutralise the conflict associated with negative relationships. The result is less conflict within people, between people, and between groups, and increasing individual and community wellbeing.

Restorative practice is a proven method for curtailing disengagement from school and reducing involvement with the youth justice system. Jesuit Social Services delivers a range of restorative programs, including youth justice

<sup>19</sup> For example, Hayward, G., Stephenson, M. and Blyth M., (2013). "Chapter 6: Exploring effective educational interventions for young people who offend" in Burnett R. and C., eds., *What Works in Probation and Youth Justice: Developing Evidence-Based Practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Willan, pp 88–108.

<sup>20</sup> Ombudsman Victoria (2017). *Investigation into Victorian government school expulsions*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

group conferencing, family group conferencing for adolescent family violence, and capability-building for schools to use restorative practice.

In the school setting, use of restorative practice has been shown to decrease disengagement from school (including reduced suspensions and exclusions) and improve schools' capability to deal with conflict (including reducing the use of intervention orders and the level of violence in schools and the community).<sup>21</sup>

We are currently piloting **Re-Engage** in schools in Merri-Bek, with funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner. Re-Engage seeks to build the capability of staff in schools to use restorative approaches to manage conflict, reducing school disengagement and young people's contact with the justice system.

An earlier pilot in North West Victoria (Engage) was shown to decrease disengagement from school (including reducing suspensions and exclusions) and to improve schools' capability to deal with conflict.<sup>22</sup>

For young people in contact with the justice system, restorative practice has been shown to reduce recidivism,<sup>23</sup> and improve outcomes and satisfaction for participants.<sup>24</sup>

From 2018–2022, Jesuit Social Services piloted **RESTORE** – a Family Group Conferencing program for young people subject to a family violence intervention order – at the Melbourne Children's Court, with funding from philanthropy.

An independent evaluation of the pilot found RESTORE filled a significant gap in the service system, and delivered a range of positive outcomes for the young people and families who participated, including a reduction in the young

person's use of violence, and positive effects on their engagement with school, substance use and mental health issues.<sup>25</sup> Yet despite positive evaluation outcomes and a clear and increasing need, RESTORE has never received government funding.

Adolescent violence is increasingly attracting a legal response. A recent report by Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) found a huge increase in the use of Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIOs) and Personal Safety Intervention Orders (PSIOs) against children in Victoria in the last five years.<sup>26</sup> At least half of FVIOs are made against young people who have experienced family violence themselves,<sup>27</sup> and they are often made against the wishes of the family.<sup>28</sup> PSIOs are increasingly being used to manage disputes between young people within a school setting.<sup>29</sup>

Intervention orders can have serious impacts on young people, including exclusion from their school or home, restricted access to supports and services (e.g. disability support),<sup>30</sup> and escalation into the criminal justice system, since breaches attract criminal penalties.

Given this, we support the recommendations made in VLA's report, *Feeling supported, not stuck: Rethinking intervention orders for children and young people*, including the recommendation to raise the minimum age for respondents to intervention orders to at least 14 years, and to introduce other legislative protections to ensure intervention orders against children are used as a last resort.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to this, these young people and their families would benefit from therapeutic, restorative response that can support healing of all parties, prevent further violence, address

21 Victorian Department of Education & Training (2020). *Evaluation of Engage: Final report*. PhillipsKPA.

22 Victorian Department of Education & Training (2020). *Evaluation of Engage: Final report*. PhillipsKPA.

23 Bonett, R., Lloyd, C., & Oglloff, J. (2022). *Group Conferencing Effects on Youth Recidivism and Elements of Effective Conferences*. Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne Australia. [\[Weblink\]](#)

24 Choi, J., Bazemore, G. & Gilbert, M. (2012) *Review of research on victims' experiences in restorative justice: Implications for youth justice*, Children and Youth Services Review, 34(1), p 35–42. [\[Weblink\]](#); Islam, M. S., Li, B., & Anderson, J. (2023). *An assessment of the potential outcomes in practising restorative justice in criminal settings in Australia and the United States: a systematic review and meta-analysis*. Contemporary Justice Review, 26(3), 262–298. [\[Weblink\]](#)

25 Johns D., and Tambasco C. (2023). *Restorative responses to adolescent family violence: Evaluation of the RESTORE adolescent family violence program – Final report to Jesuit Social Services*. School of Social & Political Sciences, University of Melbourne.

26 Victoria Legal Aid (2025). *Feeling supported, not stuck: Rethinking intervention orders for children and young people*, pp 4, 13. [\[Weblink\]](#)

27 Victoria Legal Aid (2025). *Feeling supported not stuck*, pp 2, 21.

28 In Victoria Legal Aid's review of case files, at least 39 per cent of families were not supportive of the FVIO being made against their child: Victoria Legal Aid (2025). *Feeling supported, not stuck*, p 19.

29 Victoria Legal Aid (2025). *Feeling supported, not stuck*, p 31.

30 Victoria Legal Aid (2025). *Feeling supported, not stuck*, p 21.

31 Victoria Legal Aid (2025). *Feeling supported, not stuck*, p 9.

the root causes of conflict and violent behaviour, and keep young people engaged in school. Yet there is a substantial gap in restorative options for young people against whom an intervention order has been made or is at risk of being made.<sup>32</sup>

Investment is needed in a continuum of restorative options to address conflict and harm involving young people in school settings and the home, and avoid entrenching young people in the justice system. This includes building the capability of school staff to apply restorative approaches, including skills to resolve conflict before it escalates (thus avoiding the need for an intervention order), through programs like **Re-Engage**. It also involves supporting young people and families to heal and reduce the use of violence through restorative justice options like **RESTORE** in cases where an intervention order is made or imminent.

We have submitted two Budget bids to expand the use of restorative practice to prevent young people from coming into contact with the justice system: *“Re-Engage: Restorative Practice in Schools in the Western Region of Melbourne”*, seeking funding to build restorative practice in ten schools; and *“RESTORE: Family Group Conferencing for young people using violence at home and at school”*, seeking funding to re-establish the RESTORE group conferencing program.

Further investment in early intervention programs delivered in schools and community settings, like **Change Makers** (see pages 19–20 of this submission), can further support at-risk young people to build their emotional literacy, non-violent problem-solving skills and empathy for others, and improve their attendance and behaviour at school.

### Recommendation 7

Increase schools’ capability to prevent disengagement, conflict and violence among students as a way of intervening earlier to address drivers of crime, including investing \$1 million over four years to establish Re-Engage in ten schools.

### Recommendation 8

Invest in therapeutic and restorative options for children and young people subject to or at risk of intervention orders to divert them from the criminal justice system, support healing and address their underlying needs – including \$3.04 million over four years to re-establish RESTORE.

32 FVIOs and PSIOs made against adolescents are outside the scope of restorative justice options currently available in Victoria, including: Youth Justice Group Conferencing (only available pre-sentence for young people who plead/are found guilty of certain serious offences); Family Violence Restorative Justice Service (does not work with people aged under 18); and Dispute Settlement Centre Victoria (only mediates between people involved in PSIO applications that do not involve violence and no longer offers face-to-face services).

## Working with men and boys to prevent violence

Despite consistent efforts by governments over the last decade, domestic, family and sexual violence and child abuse remain at unacceptable levels. 2023–24 saw a 35 per cent increase in the number of women killed by intimate partners, following a 31 per cent increase from the previous year.<sup>33</sup> The Australian Child Maltreatment Study, published in 2023, also found high rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children and childhood exposure to domestic violence, including an increase in the rate of sexual abuse of children by other children and young people.<sup>34</sup>

High profile cases of both intimate partner homicide and child sexual abuse within the childcare sector have sharpened the community's focus and expectations for change. At the same time, new challenges are emerging, particularly in online environments – with children and young people increasingly exposed to harmful pornography, and engaged in or experiencing digital surveillance and image-based abuse.

We welcome the release of *Until Every Victorian is Safe: Third Rolling Action Plan to end family and sexual violence 2025–2027 (Third RAP)*, which seeks to respond to these evolving challenges in the Victorian context. In particular, we welcome the Third RAP's recognition of the unique needs of children and young people as victim-survivors of violence, and its focus on working with men and boys to prevent violence from occurring or recurring.

We know that many young people who use violence are victim-survivors first.<sup>35</sup> This underscores the importance both of significantly scaling up therapeutic and restorative responses for victim-survivors of violence, as well as other forms of early intervention, with those at higher risk of using violence. As the 2024 report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches recommended, we must do more to leverage all

prevention touchpoints across early intervention, response and recovery.<sup>36</sup> Addressing the harms of victimisation, and supporting young victim-survivors to recover and heal, is a form of prevention.

Efforts to end men's violence by working with men and boys have increased in recent years and, together, government and the community sector are continuing to build the evidence base about what's needed and what works. But our efforts in prevention and early intervention come nowhere near matching the scale of the problem. Further investment to build the evidence base, translate evidence into practice, and scale up promising initiatives is critical if we are to make meaningful progress in reducing violence against women and children.

Jesuit Social Services established The Men's Project in 2017 to provide leadership and develop new approaches to reducing violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, to keep families and communities safe and to improve the wellbeing of men and boys themselves. Current priorities for The Men's Project include:

- drawing on our Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research and child sexual abuse prevalence study, building a greater understanding of perpetration including opportunities for prevention and early intervention;
- supporting people who work with men and boys every day (e.g. teachers, sports coaches, social workers) to prevent violence and improve the wellbeing of men and boys;
- developing new early intervention approaches with adolescents at-risk of using violence;
- strengthening early intervention responses for adults and young people to prevent child sexual abuse; and

33 Australian Institute of Criminology (2025). *Homicide in Australia 2023–24*. Table A6 [\[Weblink\]](#)

34 Mathews, B. et al (2023). *The Australian Child Maltreatment Study National prevalence and associated health outcomes of child abuse and neglect*. Medical Journal of Australia, 218:6; Mathews, B. et al (2024). *Child sexual abuse by different classes and types of perpetrator: Prevalence and trends from an Australian national survey*, Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 147. [\[Weblink\]](#)

35 Fitz-Gibbon, K., Meyer, S., Maher, J., & Roberts, S. (2022). *Adolescent family violence in Australia: A national study of prevalence, history of childhood victimisation and impacts*. Research report, 15/2022. ANROWS. [\[Weblink\]](#)

36 Rapid Review Expert Panel (2024). *Unlocking the Prevention Potential: accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence*, Recommendation 4. [\[Weblink\]](#)

- drawing on our grounded practice experience, advocating for systemic changes that seek to prevent violence and child sexual abuse.

### Embedding adolescent masculinities research into policy and practice

The Adolescent Man Box study – published by Jesuit Social Services in November 2025 – is the first study in Australia to explore in detail how adolescents of all genders perceive and agree with stereotypical masculine norms, and how supporting or rejecting these norms is associated with a range of behaviours and life outcomes for adolescent boys.

The Adolescent Man Box research highlights a range of contemporary issues that are impacting adolescents' lives and are not sufficiently addressed as part of existing violence prevention and early intervention efforts. Many of the areas of concern identified are tightly linked with rigid adherence to Adolescent Man Box norms.

The research highlights the importance of ensuring that school-based prevention programs respond to young people's concerns and give them the tools and support they need to deal with issues emerging from the research such as coping with rejection, safely navigating digital

environments and mitigating the impacts of harmful pornography.

In partnership with Monash University, Jesuit Social Services has submitted a budget bid "*Unpacking the Adolescent Man Box: Embedding research in policy and practice*" seeking \$3 million over three years to translate the findings of the Adolescent Man Box research into strategies and practical resources that can be deployed in a range of settings.

The project aims to build the capacity of organisations working with young people to incorporate learnings from the research to strengthen efforts to prevent and address harms impacting adolescents, with a focus on six key challenges facing adolescent boys:

- promoting and responding to help-seeking at scale
- supporting boys to handle rejection
- mitigating the harms of pornography and online influences (in line with Action 41 in the *Third RAP*)
- preventing and addressing digital surveillance and coercive control
- preventing and addressing image-based abuse

### The Adolescent Man Box

The Adolescent Man Box research provides the first national evidence linking endorsement of rigid gender norms to poor mental health, violence, harassment, help seeking and online harms among adolescents. This landmark research – based on a survey of 1,400 young people aged 14–18 years – found that around 60 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls think most people in Australia expect teenage boys to be manly, confident and strong at all times.

The research also found an association between personal agreement with the need to be manly and a range of harmful behaviours. Of boys who most strongly agree with the need to conform to rigid masculine norms:

- 39 per cent had engaged in bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month;
- 35 per cent said if someone rejects them, they usually try to get back at them;
- 42 per cent believe that it's normal to continually check who their partner is communicating with;
- 27 per cent said their friends would probably use AI to create fake nude images; and
- a concerning 82 per cent see harmful acts happening to a female when watching pornography.

These boys are also more likely to have experienced violence themselves, have poorer mental health, and are less likely to seek support.

- strengthening the evidence base to understand the intersectional issues that are impacting adolescent lives.

Outputs could include: pilot interventions with specific cohorts of adolescents; online modules targeting young people and adults in their lives; conversation starters for adults working with young people; and community-based campaigns elevating the voices of young people to break down gender norms and share findings from the Adolescent Man Box research.

### Recommendation 9

Continue to strengthen violence prevention efforts by ensuring that school-based programs and initiatives (including Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships education), alongside other youth-focused prevention efforts, reflect adolescents' lived experiences; and that adults are equipped to work with young people to address contemporary issues highlighted in the Adolescent Man Box research.

### Recommendation 10

Invest \$3 million over three years to translate the Adolescent Man Box research into practice through design, implementation and evaluation of a range of interventions to address key areas of concern identified in the Adolescent Man Box report.

## Engaging men and boys in primary prevention

While significant progress has been made, current efforts to engage men and boys in preventing violence are fragmented, and do not always align with the evidence and existing primary prevention frameworks. Without a unified, statewide approach, existing programs are short-term and lack the intensity required to drive significant change.

Together with the Women's Health Services Network and Safe + Equal, we have submitted a budget bid, *"Masculinities and Men in Primary*

*Prevention and Early Intervention"*, seeking funding to build the essential infrastructure for a more coordinated, effective and accountable approach to engaging masculinities and men in prevention and early intervention.

A key element of the project is a pilot program embedding staff from The Men's Project within Women's Health Services across the state as hubs for practice, capability building and evaluation, with Safe + Equal providing expertise in workforce development and monitoring and evaluation. The project will simultaneously build the evidence base for primary prevention and early intervention.

### Recommendation 11

Invest \$985,000 in 2026-27 and \$800,000 per annum ongoing to support the proposal from the Women's Health Services Network, Jesuit Social Services (The Men's Project) and Safe + Equal partnership, to build the capability of the prevention and early intervention workforces to integrate knowledge on masculinities and engaging men and boys into their work.

## Supporting healing and recovery for children and young people

Jesuit Social Services' (adult) Man Box research, completed in partnership with Respect Victoria, shows that a shockingly high percentage of men have perpetrated violence against a partner. 28 per cent of men who responded to the survey reported they had perpetrated at least one form of sexual or physical violence against a current or former partner.<sup>37</sup> The vast majority of these men never have contact with the criminal justice system.

At the same time, we know from our own program data and experience that a high proportion of people involved with the criminal justice system are themselves victims of family violence and/or child abuse. In 2023-24, 74 per cent of participants in our adult justice programs and 53 per cent of participants in our youth justice

37 The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services, p 63. [\[Weblink\]](#)

programs reported being a victim-survivor of family violence at some stage in their lives. The vast majority of the reported experience was exposure to violence in childhood.

Childhood trauma does not inevitably lead to subsequent offending, nor are we excusing the use of violence. Yet failing to acknowledge the links between victimisation and perpetration means we are missing crucial opportunities to intervene earlier with young people to disrupt intergenerational cycles of violence and set them on a path to living safer, more secure lives.

Early intervention starts with supporting healing and recovery for children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse, but there is a gap in child-specific supports for young people who are victim-survivors. We welcome Action 15 in the *Third RAP* to provide targeted funding to expand counselling and therapy for children and young people to support recovery from family violence.

It is also essential that Victoria continues to expand support for adolescents who use family violence – recognising many are themselves victim-survivors of violence. As outlined on pages 13–15 of this submission, many of these young people would benefit from restorative justice to prevent them from becoming entrenched in the criminal justice system, including through re-establishing the **RESTORE** program.

There is also a need to build the capability of other service systems that work with children and young people who are likely to have experienced violence (such as child protection, youth justice and homelessness services) to better respond to the specific needs of child victim-survivors.

## Recommendation 12

Better meet the needs of children and young people who have experienced or been impacted by violence or abuse through a substantial additional investment in targeted, trauma-informed interventions and support services, focused on healing and recovery, as well as capability-building of other service systems (such as child protection, youth justice and homeless services) to better respond to the specific needs of children and young people who have been victims of violence.

### Intervening earlier with young people using or at risk of using violence

Research tells us that boys who use violence are more likely to use family violence as adults.<sup>38</sup> Yet too often we are missing opportunities to disrupt pathways into violence that emerge in adolescence. Our Adolescent Man Box research shows that adolescent boys who strongly agree with rigid masculine norms are far more likely than their peers to cause harm to others. Nearly two in five boys (39 per cent) with the strongest agreement reported that they had used bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month.<sup>39</sup>

In line with Action 43 in the *Third RAP*, there is a critical need to scale up early intervention work with at-risk boys and young men to prevent violence by addressing their underlying needs, in partnership with communities, while also strengthening the evidence base for best practice. As with support for young people impacted by violence and abuse (Recommendation 12), this should include building the capability of other service systems that work with at-risk children and young people (such as child, youth and family services, youth justice and homelessness services) to identify opportunities to intervene earlier.

Jesuit Social Services' **Change Makers** pilot program is working with boys and young men who are showing early signs of violence and misogyny or are exposed to risk factors that

38 Boxall H, Pooley K and Lawler S (2021). *Do violent teens become violent adults? Links between juvenile and adult domestic and family violence*. Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice No. 641, December 2021. Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

39 The Men's Project (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14–18 years*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne, p 19. [\[Weblink\]](#)

make them more likely to perpetrate violence, such as disengagement from education, exposure to family violence, and association with violent peers.

The program partners with mainstream and specialist secondary schools and community organisations to deliver a group-based program with young people, as well as capacity-building with staff to support them to work with young people to prevent violence.

Change Makers complements the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) curriculum with a higher intensity intervention for young men and boys at greater risk of using violence, and those who are disengaged from school.

The Change Makers pilot is generating promising evaluation data which indicates that it is contributing to improvements in participants' emotional literacy, empathy for others, non-violent problem-solving skills and understanding of gender norms and societal pressures related to masculinity, as well as contributing to stronger social connections and behavioural changes for participants, such as improved attendance and behaviour at school and increased help-seeking.

Funding for the pilot is due to end in September 2026. We have submitted a budget bid, "*Change Makers: Early intervention with at-risk young people*", seeking additional funding to embed the program in mainstream secondary schools, further develop the approach with more complex cohorts and settings, and develop a referral-based program which anchors participation in activities of interest to the target cohort. Extending the program will also enable us to continue to build the evidence base for best practice early intervention with at-risk young people, in line with Action 43 in the *Third RAP*.

### Recommendation 13

Scale up early intervention work with at-risk boys and young men to prevent violence by addressing underlying needs, including building the capability of other service systems (such as child, youth and family services, youth justice and homelessness services) to identify opportunities to intervene earlier.

### Recommendation 14

Invest \$5.971 million over four years to continue the Change Makers program with boys and young men at greater risk of using violence by decreasing risk factors for violence, including harmful gendered beliefs, and increasing protective factors.

### Preventing and addressing harmful sexual behaviours among young people and mitigating the risks of online environments

While there has rightly been a recent focus in Victoria and nationally on preventing child abuse in childcare settings due to high profile cases, we are missing opportunities to intervene much earlier.

Contact offending by adults in early childhood settings represents a fraction of overall child abuse. According to the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, in Australia today more children experience sexual abuse from another young person than from an adult perpetrator; an inversion of the historical trend.<sup>40</sup> An increasing body of evidence links early exposure to pornography with harmful sexual behaviour displayed by young people.<sup>41</sup> In addition, research indicates that a high proportion of users of child sexual abuse material first encountered it when they were young people themselves.<sup>42</sup>

While Jesuit Social Services has recently been funded by the Federal Government to establish a child sexual abuse prevention service for adults,

40 Mathews B et al (2024). *Child sexual abuse by different classes and types of perpetrator: Prevalence and trends from an Australian national survey*, Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 147. [Weblink]

41 McKibbin G et al (2022). *Clusters of risk associated with harmful sexual behaviour onset for children and young people: Opportunities for early intervention*. Journal of Sexual Aggression. 30(2). [Weblink]

42 Nurmi J. et al (2024). Investigating child sexual abuse material availability, searches, and users on the anonymous Tor network for a public health intervention strategy. Sci Rep. 14(1). [Weblink]; Salter M et al (2023). Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. [Weblink]

Stop it Now! Australia, there is a service gap for young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours, including pornography use, as well as their parents and carers. Our research with 13 to 18 year olds who have displayed harmful sexual behaviours found many of these young people did not know where to get help for their harmful behaviour or their use of pornography.<sup>43</sup>

Jesuit Social Services has submitted a budget bid, *“What’s ok? Australia: Supporting children and young people to address problematic and harmful sexual thoughts and behaviours and pornography use”*, seeking \$2 million over 2.5 years to pilot an Australian-first anonymous and free online early intervention service for young people worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours, as well as parents, carers and professionals.

The *What’s ok? Australia* service will include an anonymous helpline service and a website with educational content on topics such as: pornography use; addressing sexual thoughts or attraction to younger children; illegal behaviours, including accessing child sexual abuse material; and developmentally appropriate versus problematic or harmful sexual behaviours.

The pilot service would support the government to deliver on Action 41 in the *Third RAP* to scope approaches to challenge the harmful impacts of violent pornography and online misogyny, including by engaging young people through their influencers. This is an opportunity for Victoria to lead the establishment of a pilot service which could later be scaled up and rolled out nationally – funded or co-funded by the Federal Government.

### Recommendation 15

Invest \$2 million over 2.5 years to develop, pilot and evaluate a first-of-its-kind national anonymous and free online early intervention service focused on reducing problematic and harmful sexual behaviours among young people, to be called What’s ok? Australia.

### Enhancing data, evaluation and research to inform policy, practice and investment in work with people who use violence and at-risk young people

Recent statistics show Victoria is responding to men using violence too late, with potentially serious impacts for victim-survivors. Only a very small proportion of men using violence come into contact with the criminal justice system<sup>44</sup> and, in 2023–24, only 10 per cent of men referred to The Orange Door received a response from dedicated specialist family violence services.<sup>45</sup>

We need better data, research and evaluation to enable earlier identification of men and boys using violence, better understand the extent, dynamics and drivers of perpetration, better target interventions, and identify which programs or interventions are effective in preventing or reducing violence.

We welcome the findings and recommendations from the Parliamentary Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators. Recognising the government’s desire to leverage existing programs and investment, there is an opportunity for government agencies to provide the sector with greater visibility of the demand and risk data they already collect.

For example, demand for family and sexual violence services continues to rise, but we do not have a clear picture of the extent to which the service system is meeting demand, including for children and young people who have experienced family violence. We note that the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) has not yet developed the statewide demand management framework recommended by the Victorian Auditor General’s Office to provide a better understanding of service system capacity and demand.<sup>46</sup>

The Victorian Government (including DFFH) also oversees the collection and monitoring of risk

43 Tyler M et al (2025). *What’s OK? Australia Scoping study: Development of a national online early intervention service addressing problematic and harmful sexual behaviour of young people*. Jesuit Social Services. [\[Weblink\]](#)

44 Jesuit Social Services (2024). *Perspectives on prevention of gender-based violence: Identifying and disrupting pathways to violence*, p 11. [\[Weblink\]](#)

45 No to Violence (2025). *Victoria’s community safety story – stop violence at its source: 2026–27 pre-budget submission*, p 6.

46 DFFH committed to this as an action arising from the recommendations in VAGO’s 2020 audit report *Managing Support and Safety Hubs*. This action

and needs assessment data (including MARAM data) from across the specialist family violence and family services systems (including

The Orange Door). This includes assessments of adults using violence and at-risk children and young people, which could be used to build a stronger understanding of both people using violence and at-risk children and young people in Victoria.

Greater sharing of, or access to, this data would provide interested sectors (including community services and research) with a richer picture of the number, characteristics and risk levels of men and adolescents using violence who are presenting to family violence and family services

### Recommendation 16

Foster accountability and strengthen service provision by further developing capacity to monitor and report on (unmet) demand for family and sexual violence services (with a focus on children and young people who experience violence or abuse), including committing to and reporting on targets.

### Recommendation 17

Make key risk assessment (MARAM) and other risk and needs assessment data available to guide the prioritisation and design of additional research and early intervention efforts.

(including The Orange Door), and would help to guide the prioritisation and design of research and additional early intervention efforts.

The standard of evidence underpinning prevention and early intervention programs to reduce men's violence remains uneven. Although several programs show promising results, few have been validated through strong experimental or longitudinal evaluation.

The evidence base should be strengthened by expanding use of rigorous evaluation methods, including experimental designs (such as randomised controlled trials) and longitudinal studies capable of demonstrating causal impact and sustained behavioural change, and identifying effective practice – drawing on

lessons from rigorously evaluated international initiatives, such as *Becoming a Man* and *Coaching Boys into Men*.

We recommend the government invest in rigorous evaluation, share the findings publicly, and use them to inform policy and investment

### Recommendation 18

Establish a dedicated evaluation fund to enable community service organisations to participate in high quality evaluations of priority programs, including randomised controlled trials, with evaluation findings shared publicly and used to inform policy and investment and drive evidence-based expansion of programs that demonstrate reductions in violence by men and boys.

and drive evidence-based expansion of programs that demonstrate reductions in violence by men and boys.

Our current research and practice also indicate specific gaps that would likely benefit from an uplift in data and research, including:

- exploring diverse adolescents' experiences of social pressure and masculinities in different contexts; and
- exploring the development of a standardised, evidence-based risk identification and management framework designed to identify boys/men with an elevated risk of future perpetration to systematically guide prevention and early intervention, informed by research into the different pathways to intimate partner homicide.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> was due to be completed in June 2021.

47 See, for example, <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide/>

# Building strong foundations to support those most in need

## Investing in sustainable support for people with complex needs

Jesuit Social Services works with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our communities, who often experience multiple and complex challenges. Across our programs, we work with adults and young people experiencing multiple, intersecting challenges including family violence (both victim-survivors and perpetrators), homelessness, child protection involvement, criminal justice system contact, histories of trauma, mental ill-health and substance use, and climate change impacts. Many of our participants also experience other forms of disadvantage or marginalisation, such as intellectual, cognitive or psychosocial disability, and discrimination based on cultural, racial and LGBTIQIA+ identity.

Our participants often encounter barriers to accessing support – even from services intended for people with complex needs. We witness people who have multiple diagnoses or are considered too complex being excluded from both the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and state-funded services. Many of our participants are also impacted by declining access rates for NDIS psychosocial disability supports and decreases in funded package sizes.<sup>48</sup>

Through our housing, mental health and complex needs programs, we also offer ongoing support and stability to victim-survivors of family violence. While specialist family violence services are essential, it is often non-specialist services that hold the ongoing relationship with victim-survivors and assist them to navigate the multiple services they need to support their recovery. However, the role of non-specialist services in providing intensive and ongoing support to victim-survivors of family violence is not recognised or resourced.

Jesuit Social Services' programs are specifically designed to support those experiencing the greatest complexity by offering a responsive

and flexible service model, including after-hours support and assertive outreach.<sup>49</sup> Participants can also benefit from the opportunity to access multiple Jesuit Social Services' programs, enabling wraparound support.

However, our capacity to deliver holistic, wraparound services is constrained by funding shortfalls and silos that limit our ability to meet demand for responsive and integrated services. Funding growth has not matched the growth in demand and the increasing complexity of the cohort, and is not meeting the true costs of delivering the level of support required.

To avoid a further funding shortfall and reduction in service delivery, it is essential that government provides an increase in program funding which reflects actual growth in costs, including increases in demand and complexity, and covers the forthcoming increase in the SCHADS Award arising from the Fair Work Commission's gender undervaluation review. An interim solution to address Victoria's unmet need for psychosocial disability support is also needed, until a long-term response is negotiated through the next National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement.

Sustainable funding of social services is not only about adequate investment; it requires funding mechanisms that provide stability and certainty while fostering innovation. Commissioning reforms should also be considered to promote improved service outcomes and support long-term workforce sustainability. Short-term contracts destabilise the workforce and significantly impact service delivery, which is of acute concern given the increase in demand for services and the shortage of workers in the care and social sectors.

There is an opportunity for the Victorian Government to learn from the commissioning reforms for child and family services being introduced by the Federal Government which will integrate funding streams, introduce

48 Threlfall, D et al (2025). *Access Denied: Psychosocial disability and the NDIS*, Australian Psychosocial Alliance (APA). [\[Weblink\]](#)

49 Programs delivered by Jesuit Social Services that are designed for people with multiple and complex needs include: Connexions (dual diagnosis service for young people); Individual Support Program (supporting young people exiting out of home care or with other complex challenges) and ReConnect (supporting adults exiting prison).

five-year contracts, and offer relational contracting focused on outcomes.

### Recommendation 19

Provide specific funding allocations to community sector organisations, recognising the significant costs associated with transitioning to new SCHADS award requirements, and make provision for supplemental indexation of funding that reflects actual growth in costs, including rising labour costs and increases in demand and complexity.

### Recommendation 20

Expand access to psychosocial disability support to address unmet need in Victoria until an intergovernmental solution is agreed and implemented.

### Recommendation 21

Implement reforms to the commissioning of social services, including:

- longer contract terms (minimum five years), enabling stability, workforce retention and innovation;
- greater flexibility in funding, particularly for cohorts with multiple and complex needs;
- a stronger focus on outcomes-based contracting; and
- mechanisms to facilitate better coordination and collaboration between service providers, such as longer application lead-in times.

## Resourcing place-based, community-led climate adaptation

Climate change demands urgent, ambitious, and sustained action to protect Victorian communities and build long-term resilience. Climate risks are not borne equally, with the most severe impacts falling on those already experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation.<sup>50</sup>

Though our work with communities experiencing disadvantage, we see firsthand how climate change disrupts lives, exacerbates existing hardships and deepens cycles of disadvantage. For example, a household experiencing housing instability, unemployment, or chronic illness will have fewer resources to prepare for and recover from climate shocks. We also see how resilient and adaptive some communities can be, given the right enablers and opportunities.

The recent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience highlighted the importance of ensuring that adaptation investment is targeted towards Victorians experiencing the most significant climate impacts to avoid entrenching and perpetuating disadvantage and marginalisation.<sup>51</sup> It also recognised the important but under-resourced role community organisations play in supporting disadvantaged communities to prepare for, and respond and adapt to, climate change.<sup>52</sup>

Strengthening community resilience to address current challenges and prepare for escalating risks and a changed climate must involve not only adaptation of our built environment and infrastructure but also strengthen communities' capacity to prepare for and respond to local risks. For example, Neighbourhood Houses are integral to resilient and adaptable communities, especially those experiencing systemic disadvantage. Yet, to date, they remain unsung heroes in climate change adaptation, with the least funding, and most responsibility, when crises occur.

We welcome the release of *Victoria's Climate Change Strategy 2026-30*, and urge the government to ensure the next round of Adaptation Action Plans include a stronger focus

<sup>50</sup> Lawrence, J et al (2022). 'Australasia.' in: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*.

<sup>51</sup> Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee (2025). *Inquiry into Climate Resilience: Final Report*, Finding 75, Recommendation 59. [\[Weblink\]](#)

<sup>52</sup> Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee (2025). *Inquiry into Climate Resilience: Final Report*, Finding 74. [\[Weblink\]](#)

on investment in transformative adaptation that is place-based, community-led, targeted towards communities experiencing the most significant climate impacts, and address the structural drivers of vulnerability.

Investment in community-led adaptation planning should build on existing initiatives, such as *Mobilising Climate Just and Resilient Communities in the West* and the *Climate Partnerships* project, and must include investment in community service organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations who can support communities to do this work.

We also call on the government to implement **Recommendation 45 from the Yoorrook for Transformation report** to enable and support the development of a First Peoples' Climate Justice Strategy (led by First Peoples), with perpetual funding, for Traditional Owner groups to deliver environmental projects on their Country which will assist in mitigating, adapting and/or responding to climate change. This action is vital to Aboriginal self-determination, and central to an enabling role of government in reconciliation.

### Recommendation 22

Establish a climate adaptation fund for community service organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to support community-led, place-based climate adaptation, with a focus on communities experiencing the most significant climate impacts.

### Recommendation 23

Implement Recommendation 45 from the Yoorrook for Transformation report to enable and support the development of a First Peoples' Climate Justice Strategy (led by First Peoples), with perpetual funding, for Traditional Owner groups to deliver environmental projects on their Country which will assist in mitigating, adapting and/or responding to climate change.

## Expanding safe, secure and affordable housing for those most in need

Housing is a fundamental human right, and access to secure, long-term and climate-resilient housing is a critical foundation for health and wellbeing and social and economic participation. Across our programs working with people with multiple and complex needs, stable and secure housing is the highest priority need. Without housing as a stable platform, it is not possible for other issues like criminal justice involvement, mental ill health or substance use to be addressed, and it is more difficult for people to access employment and training.

The proportion of social housing in Victoria has declined over the last decade to be the lowest in Australia: in 2023 it was 1.1 percentage points lower than the national average, which has in turn been declining (3.0 per cent in Victoria compared with 4.1 per cent nationally).<sup>53</sup> However, the government has committed to only a small increase in social housing dwellings as part of the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers, and there is likely to be a decrease in the number of bedrooms.<sup>54</sup> Compared to other forms of social housing, public housing is more affordable (with rent charged at 25 per cent of income rather than 30 per cent) and has been proven to act as a strong protective factor against homelessness.<sup>55</sup>

As part of any redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing, the government should commit to a 30 per cent increase in social housing dwellings, including a 10 per cent uplift of current public housing dwellings. Any redevelopment should also ensure there is a diversity of housing and support options for people depending on their needs, including designated social housing places for populations facing high levels of disadvantage and vulnerability. This should include young people and those with complex needs such as: people leaving prison; young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; women and children escaping violence; and people with complex needs,

53 Australian Institute for Health & Welfare (2025). *Housing assistance in Australia: Households and waitlists*, updated 24 June 2025. [\[Weblink\]](#)

54 Kelly D and Porter L (2019). *Understanding the assumptions and impacts of the Victorian Public Housing Renewal Program: Final report of a research project with the Cities of Moreland, Darebin and Yarra*, RMIT Centre for Urban Research, p 3. [\[Weblink\]](#)

55 Johnson G. et al (2019). *How Do Housing and Labour Markets Affect Individual Homelessness?*, *Housing Studies* 34:7. [\[Weblink\]](#)

including mental ill-health and cognitive disabilities. Designated housing places should be coupled with high quality, practical tenancy support for tenants who are likely to be managing multiple complex issues to build independent living skills and maintain their tenancies.

Any redevelopment should also meet climate-resilient design standards to protect residents from extreme heat and high energy costs, and to support healthier, safer living conditions.

### Recommendation 24

As part of any redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers, commit to:

- a 30 per cent uplift in social housing dwellings, including a 10 per cent uplift in public housing dwellings;
- designated social housing places, coupled with practical tenancy support, for populations facing high levels of disadvantage and vulnerability, including young people and those with complex needs such as: people leaving prison; young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; women and children escaping violence; and people with complex needs, including mental ill-health and cognitive disabilities; and
- meeting climate-resilient design standards to protect residents from extreme heat and high energy costs and support safe and healthy living conditions.

The Community Housing sector offers valuable social and affordable housing to people who are disadvantaged. However, the financial model favours renters on higher statutory incomes (Aged Care Pension and Disability Support Pension) and those likely to maintain a stable tenancy, pay rent and take care of their property. The means that people on lower incomes (including Jobseeker Allowance and Youth Allowance) and people with complex needs (such as people exiting custody, with mental health conditions, histories of rough sleeping and addiction) are often overlooked when a vacancy arises. The government should respond to this

by offering a financial subsidy to community housing organisations to provide housing to this vulnerable group of Victorians.

### Recommendation 25

Offer a financial subsidy to community housing organisations to provide housing for people on the lowest statutory incomes (Jobseeker and Youth Allowance) and people with complex needs, such as those exiting custody, with mental health conditions, and histories of rough sleeping and addiction.

Supported housing also plays an essential role for people with complex needs who do not have the capacity to live independently, such as young people leaving out-of-home care and people exiting custody and people with complex mental health issues or developmental disability (who are not receiving NDIS home and living support). As highlighted on pages 11-12 of this submission in relation to our residential programs for young people and people exiting prison, access to affordable housing with wraparound supports can give people with complex needs the stability they need to manage their health, engage in education and employment, and build independent living skills as they work towards long-term housing in the community (where possible).

### Recommendation 26

Invest in supported housing for people with complex needs who do not have the capacity to live independently, including young people exiting out-of-home care, young people and adults exiting custody (see also recommendation 5), and people with complex mental health issues or developmental disability.