Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

Priorities for the 2026 Victorian State Election

August 2026

Contents

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do 3
Introduction 4
Summary of priorities 5
Priority 1: An evidence-based approach to criminal justice 8
Priority 2: Working with men and boys to prevent violence 14
Priority 3: Supporting young people with complex needs 18
Priority 4: Place-based climate adaptation 21

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.

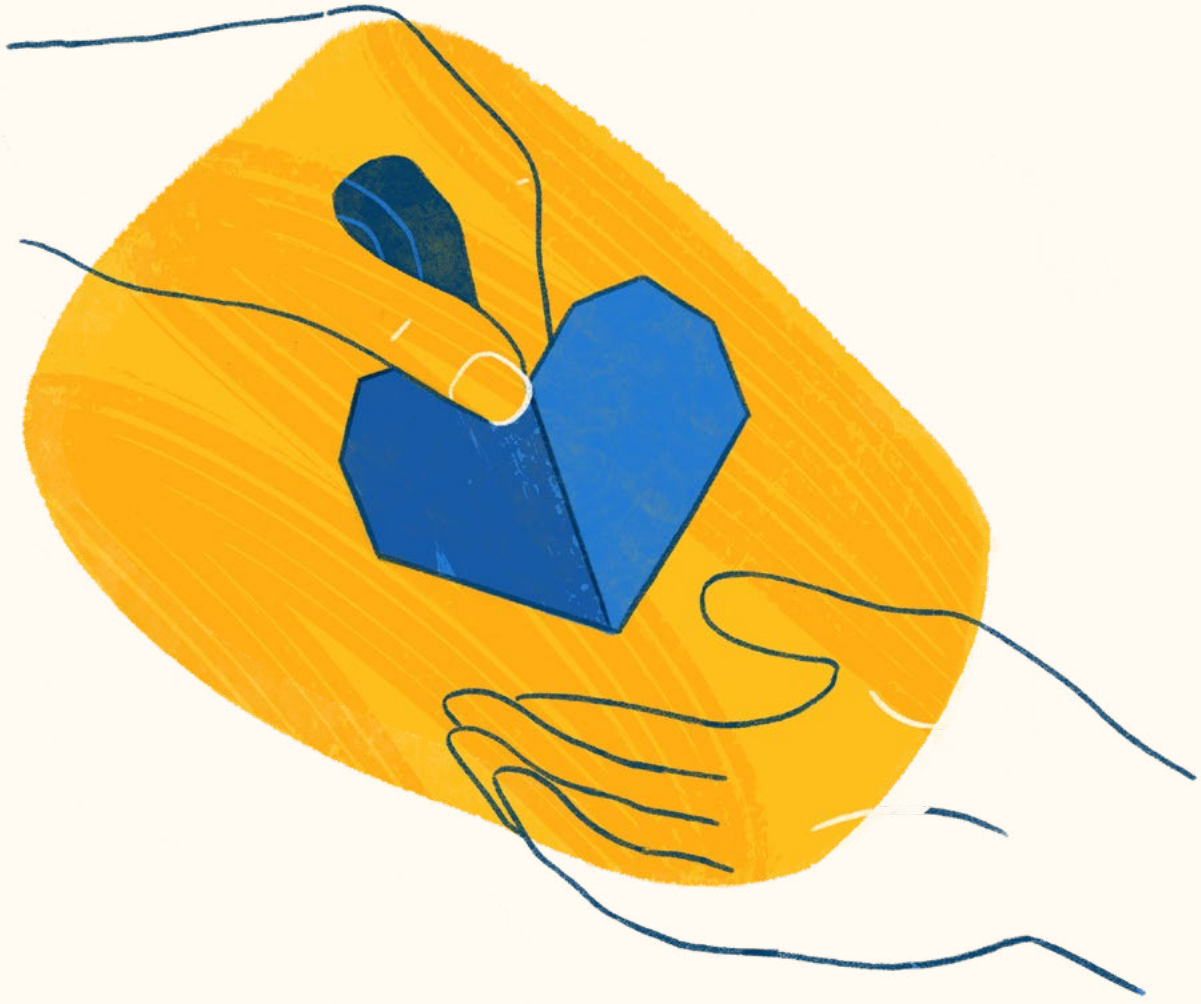
For further information, contact:
Julie Edwards, CEO, Jesuit Social Services
T: 03 9421 7600
E: julie.edwards@jss.org.au

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 live to their full potential.

We began in 1977 supporting people in contact with the criminal justice system, and this continues to be a core focus. Over time, we have expanded our services to include delivery of programs in other areas including prevention of men's violence, mental health and wellbeing, settlement and community building, housing, education, employment and training, and climate and ecological justice.

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 work where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference.



Introduction

Jesuit Social Services' vision is to build a just society where everyone has access to the opportunities and resources they need to thrive. We have worked closely with governments in Victoria over many decades to progress important social reforms across a range of priority areas – including housing, family violence, mental health and youth justice – that have worked towards increasing equity, reducing disadvantage and enabling Victorians to reach their full potential.

Yet disadvantage persists for too many Victorians. We work with some of the most marginalised members of our community, many of whom experience multiple forms of disadvantage, including housing insecurity, family violence, mental ill-health and substance use, exclusion from education and employment, over-representation in the justice system and increased exposure to the changing climate. These are complex challenges, especially because they intersect and compound, and are often intergenerational.

Jesuit Social Services advocates for a Victoria that prioritises support for people most at risk, builds community resilience, and advances social, gender and ecological justice. We support Treaty because First Peoples are the experts in their communities, cultures and lands and, while we can't change the harm inflicted on First Peoples since colonisation, we can create a better future together.

The priorities we have identified for the 2026 Victorian election are informed by our decades of practice expertise, the lived experience of participants in our programs, and our own and others' research and evidence.

A key theme underpinning our priorities for the 2026 election is the importance of early intervention – especially with children and young people – to disrupt disadvantage and break cycles of violence and harm. Evidence shows that prevention and early intervention improve outcomes for individuals and communities, while reducing long-term demand for costly crisis and tertiary services.

Elections are times for reflecting on the kind of society we want to live in. As we approach the 2026 Victorian election, our society finds itself at a crossroads. Do we want Victoria to be a place where disadvantage is entrenched, those doing it tough are punished or cast adrift, and policy is driven by media hype and disinformation? Or do we want Victoria to be a place where equity and inclusion are paramount, where those doing it tough are given the opportunities and support they need to flourish, and where we value evidence and expertise, including lived experience?

There has never been a more important time for political leadership. Now is the time to progress the gains we have made so far and reassess and change course where we may have taken the wrong path. We call on our political leaders to commit to policies and investments that create inclusion and opportunity for all Victorians.

Summary of priorities

Priority 1. An evidence-based approach to criminal justice

Foundational reforms necessary to protect human rights

1.1 Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14.

1.2 Raise the minimum age of incarceration to 16.

1.3 Repeal the "adult time for violent crime" laws and re-invest implementation funding into prevention, early intervention and diversion.

1.4 Repeal the 2025 bail reforms, which unreasonably restrict access to bail, and implement Poccum's Law to make remand a measure of last resort.

1.5 Designate and resource an independent inspection body for detention facilities to ensure compliance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

Prioritising crime prevention and early intervention

1.6 Invest in building the capacity of local community groups to partner with government to develop and implement place-based crime prevention and early intervention initiatives.

1.7 Build schools' capability to use restorative approaches to manage conflict in order to reduce disengagement from school among at-risk young people.

1.8 Increase and sustain funding for the Youth Crime Prevention Program.

1.9 Increase investment in the Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS) to enhance support for young people in contact with the criminal justice system.

Expanding access to restorative justice

1.10 Expand access to restorative group conferencing in youth justice so it is the default option for young people at every stage from pre-charge to pre-parole.

1.11 Invest in restorative group conferencing 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.

Ensuring safe and humane custody

1.12 Adopt a rehabilitation-focused approach to the detention of young people, with an emphasis on education and access to therapeutic supports.

1.13 Transfer provision of all primary healthcare in prisons to public and/or not-for-profit providers, in partnership with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations, and transfer responsibility for healthcare in custodial settings to the Department of Health.

Supporting the transition to community

1.14 Expand the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility (MCRF) model to support more adult men exiting prison.

1.15 Building on the success of MCRF, develop and implement supported housing models for young people aged 18-25, including young people with disabilities, and women involved with the criminal justice system.

1.16 Adapt the mentoring and support model of the African Visitation and Mentoring Program (AVAMP) program for young people of African background and people from other communities overrepresented in the justice system, who are in or exiting prison.

Priority 2. Working with men and boys to prevent violence

Strengthening and scaling up prevention

2.1 Strengthen and scale up prevention efforts, including respectful relationships education and healthy masculinities work, across a range of settings where children and young people can be reached, including by:

a. Starting respectful relationships education earlier, in early childhood settings (building on training currently being rolled out for early childhood educators);

b. Rolling out and/or scaling up prevention programs that promote respectful relationships and healthy masculinities in non-school settings, such as sports clubs and youth programs;

c. Ensuring respectful relationships education and related programs continue to evolve to address contemporary challenges facing young people, including online harms such as harmful pornography, digital surveillance and image-based abuse;

d. Reinforcing institutional efforts and countering harmful online influences through:

i. online resources to continue to build young people's knowledge and skills at scale; and

ii. practical support for parents and carers to navigate challenging conversations with young people;

e. Building the capability of workforces in universal settings who can influence boys and men, such as teachers and sports coaches, to challenge harmful gender norms, including through professional development programs like Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE).

Investing in early intervention with boys and men

2.2 Strengthen service system capacity to identify, assess and respond to children and young people who have experienced family violence and child abuse, and invest in holistic, child- and young person-centred, trauma-informed interventions and services to support their healing and recovery.

2.3 Invest in targeted early intervention programs for boys and young men who are using or at higher risk of using violence.

Expanding responses for men who use violence

2.4 Expand options for responding to men who use violence beyond traditional men's behaviour change programs to include, for example, fathering programs, justice reintegration programs and restorative approaches.

Coordination and workforce development

2.5 Promote consistent, evidence-based prevention and early intervention work with men and boys through more effective coordination and workforce capability-building.

Priority 3. Supporting young people with complex needs

3.1 Invest in a diversity of supported housing models for different cohorts of young people with complex needs, including young people exiting out-of-home care, with complex mental health issues or developmental disability.

3.2 Renew and increase funding for Connexions and the Artful Dodgers Studio which support young people facing mental health and substance use challenges.

3.3 Explore and invest in new ways of working to engage young people with multiple and complex needs who present a risk to the community.

3.4 Embed and appropriately resource after-hours outreach support as a core element of programs working with young people with multiple and complex needs, including Connexions and the Complex Needs Youth Response Program.

3.5 Increase the number of people who can access Skills First training delivered through community-based Registered Training Organisations.

Priority 4. Place-based climate adaptation

4.1 Commit to implementing and resourcing the recommendations from the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience.

4.2 Effective implementation of Victoria's Adaptation Action Plans 2027-31 must recognise the role of community service organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations as partners in climate adaptation efforts across all systems and be underpinned by funding for community organisations to:

a. build their own adaptive capacity, including organisational climate risk assessments and adaptation plans, to keep doors open to community members and

b. resource their role as a delivery mechanism for transformative adaptation, supporting collaborative place-based planning and coordination within communities.

Priority 1:
An evidence-based approach to criminal justice

Jesuit Social Services shares the Victorian community's concern about crime, particularly high harm offending. Through our work with both victims and young people in the justice system, we see that community safety is best served by responses informed by data, research and evidence about what works, and grounded in engagement with affected communities.

While fewer children are committing crimes overall, there has been an increase in repeat offending by a small group of young people. These children often have complex histories of trauma and disadvantage, and are disproportionately from marginalised communities. They have often been under-served in the provision of essential support services, such as housing, healthcare and education, as well as therapeutic supports.

While we welcome the establishment of the Victorian Violence Reduction Unit and its adoption of a public health approach, current investment in criminal justice remains heavily weighted towards punitive responses, including tougher bail and sentencing laws which are incompatible with Victoria's human rights obligations, and significant expansion of youth and adult custodial capacity. Custodial responses do not address the underlying drivers of offending, are more likely to lead to reoffending, and are significantly more costly than prevention, early intervention and community-based responses.

We call on the next Victorian Government to recommit to the vision, principles and reform directions set out in the *Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030* and the new *Youth Justice Act 2024*, which are backed by evidence and deep engagement with the sector and community. We also call on the next Government to implement the criminal justice recommendations in the Yoorrook for Justice report.

If we want to reduce crime and keep the community safe, we need to address the root causes of offending and disrupt pathways to the justice system, including by strengthening families and communities, re-engaging young people in education, and disrupting the networks of adults who exploit vulnerable young people.

We also need to invest in the range of evidence-based alternatives available to hold people to account and reduce reoffending, including diversion and restorative justice. Where young people and adults do spend time in custody, we need to provide intensive support for reintegration into the community, with a strong focus on supporting people to secure housing, education and employment to give them the stable foundation they need to build a new life.

Our priorities for an evidence-based approach to criminal justice

Foundational reforms necessary to protect human rights

To ensure Victoria's criminal justice legislation and policy is effective in reducing crime, addresses the root causes of offending and is compliant with Australia's international human rights obligations and the Victorian Charter of Rights and Responsibilities, the Victorian Government must:

1.1 Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14.

Victoria should raise the age of criminal responsibility from 12 to 14 years, and reinvest the savings in services and supports to keep at-risk children out of custody and give them the help they need to flourish.[1]

Raising the age of criminal responsibility reflects international human rights standards, expert medical evidence and the report of the Commission for Children and Young People's recent inquiry into the experiences of children who entered the criminal justice system before the age of 14.

1.2 Raise the minimum age of incarceration to 16.

Children and young people who spend time in detention are more likely to reoffend. Evidence consistently shows that prevention and early intervention, diversion, restorative justice and community-based supports are more effective in reducing offending and improving community safety. They are also significantly more cost effective than detention.

1.3 Repeal the "adult time for violent crime" laws and re-invest implementation funding into prevention, early intervention and diversion.

Victoria's "adult time for violent crime" sentencing laws are inconsistent with Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that arrest, detention and imprisonment of a child should be used as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period. These laws should be repealed and the funds invested to expand capacity across prisons and youth justice centres to respond to increased demand arising from these laws reinvested in prevention, early intervention and diversion.

1.4 Repeal the 2025 bail reforms, which unreasonably restrict access to bail, and implement Poccum's Law to make remand a measure of last resort.

Victoria's 2023 bail reforms successfully reduced unnecessary remand for low-risk offenders. However, the number of unsentenced people on remand has risen to record highs since regressive bail laws were introduced in 2025 – with young people, First Peoples and people with disabilities disproportionately affected. These laws are inconsistent with international human rights standards, are putting pressure on courts and prisons and destabilising the prison population, as well as severely disrupting people's lives and increasing the risk of reoffending.

1 In 2023, the Parliamentary Budget Office estimated that raising the age from 10 to 14 would generate $315 million in savings over 10 years, based on decreased operating expenses due to a reduced number of children held on remand, and custodial and non-custodial sentences for convicted children.

1.5 Designate and resource an independent inspection body for detention facilities to ensure compliance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

We remain concerned about the excessive use of isolation in Victoria's adult prisons and youth detention facilities. Isolation for extended and/or cumulative periods of time is inconsistent with international human rights standards and can cause health, psychological and other harms. It must be subject to legislative protection, stringent oversight and record-keeping to ensure it is not misused.

Stronger legislative provisions prohibiting solitary confinement and limiting the use of isolation in youth detention are due to commence in September, and work to ensure the appropriate use of seclusion in adult prisons is under way as part of the Separation Reform Project. Yet the current Government has amended the *Corrections Act 1986* to effectively remove the right to an hour in the open air daily for every prisoner, breaching the minimum standard set under the Mandela Rules. Victoria also remains non-compliant with its obligation under OPCAT to establish a National Preventive Mechanism to ensure preventive oversight of all settings in which people could be deprived of liberty, including in relation to use of isolation.

Prioritising crime prevention and early intervention

1.6 Invest in building the capacity of local community groups to partner with government to develop and implement place-based crime prevention and early intervention initiatives.

Addressing the root causes of offending and identifying effective solutions requires meaningful engagement, dialogue and partnership among impacted communities, the community service sector and government agencies. In keeping with the right of First Peoples to self-determination, we support Aboriginal-led solutions to reduce the overrepresentation of First Peoples in the criminal justice system. Some smaller grassroots organisations led by First Peoples, African and Pasifika communities need resourcing and support to partner effectively with government and may benefit from partnering with established organisations to strengthen their capacity to design, lead, deliver and govern services and programs that meet the needs of their communities.

1.7 Build schools' capability to use restorative approaches to manage conflict in order to reduce disengagement from school among at-risk young people.

Educational disengagement and poor learning outcomes are known risk factors for anti-social behaviour and involvement in the justice system. Use of restorative approaches in schools – for example, through Jesuit Social Services' Engage program pilot – has been shown to decrease disengagement from education and improve schools' capability to deal with conflict.

1.8 Increase and sustain funding for the Youth Crime Prevention Program.

A 2022 evaluation of the Youth Crime Prevention Program showed a 29 per cent reduction in offending and a 24 per cent reduction in severity of offending. Yet, despite its success, investment in this program is meagre and short-term ($5.12 million in the 2026-27 State Budget), limiting its effectiveness.

1.9 Increase investment in the Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS) to enhance support for young people in contact with the criminal justice system.

YJCSS is a highly cost-effective program that has been shown to reduce reoffending and improve education, employment, health and housing outcomes for young people involved with the criminal justice system. Additional funding is needed to respond to increased demand and complexity, including embedding family, community and cultural work, and lowering caseloads for staff to enable them to offer the intensive level of support needed.

Expanding access to restorative justice

1.10 Expand access to restorative group conferencing in youth justice so it is the default option for young people at every stage from pre-charge to pre-parole.

Restorative group conferencing processes have been shown to promote accountability and reduce recidivism among young people who have caused harm and to promote healing for victim-survivors. The Youth Justice Act 2024 expands options for restorative conferencing to include pre-charge diversion, but no funding has been committed to implementation. As in New Zealand, restorative conferencing should be available as a default option ("opt out") for all young people not diverted from the criminal justice system – from pre-charge to pre-parole.

1.11 Invest in restorative group conferencing 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.

Children and young people who use violence at home or at school are increasingly subject to intervention orders, which can lead to criminalisation of young people if they are breached. Restorative justice programs for young people facing intervention orders – such as Jesuit Social Services' Restore program – can support healing for all parties, prevent further violence, address the root causes of conflict and violent behaviour, and keep young people engaged in school.

Ensuring safe and humane custody

1.12 Adopt a rehabilitation-focused approach to the detention of young people, with an emphasis on education and access to therapeutic supports.

Evidence shows that a focus on resocialisation and reintegration into the community reduces recidivism rates among young people subject to detention. Youth detention facilities in places like Missouri and Norway are small and home-like, with a strong focus on education, including vocational and practical living skills. In Spain, Germany and New York, each young person receives a comprehensive assessment, with a tailored support plan developed to meet their educational, health and social needs.

1.13 Transfer provision of all primary healthcare in prisons to public and/or not-for-profit providers, in partnership with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations, and transfer responsibility for healthcare in custodial settings to the Department of Health.

In 2022, the Cultural Review of the Adult Custodial Corrections System recommended moving toward a public health model to improve the quality and clinical oversight of health services provided to people in custody and enable continuity of care. The Yoorrook Justice Commission recommended all prisoners have access to publicly delivered healthcare, in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. The Victorian Government partially implemented these recommendations by bringing women's prison healthcare back into the public sector in 2023, but men's prison healthcare continues to be delivered by private, for-profit providers.

Supporting the transition to community

1.14 Expand the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility (MCRF) model to support more adult men exiting prison.

MCRF demonstrates the benefits of providing transitional housing and support to people leaving prison, with an evaluation finding that MCRF residents were 30 per cent less likely to return to prison compared with those leaving prison without similar housing and support. MCRF supports residents to find long-term housing (which is very challenging for this cohort), engage in education and work, connect with support services, enhance their independent living skills and self-efficacy. However, the current program is strictly capped. The MCRF model should be expanded to support more men exiting prison and create safer communities.

1.15 Building on the success of MCRF, develop and implement supported housing models for young people aged 18-25, including young people with disabilities, and women involved with the criminal justice system.

A range of supported housing models is needed for young people and women on bail, serving community-based sentences or exiting prison. This will mitigate the risk of re-offending by providing safe and stable accommodation as a foundation to build a new life and supporting people exiting prison 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. It may not be safe for some young people and women to return to or remain in the family home due to family violence, and this model would also address this need.

The models should be tailored to the specific needs of different cohorts, and cater for people with complex needs. In particular, there is a significant gap in appropriate supported accommodation for young people with complex disabilities leaving prison, for whom Transitional Housing Management (THM) is not suitable, but who are not eligible for or unable to access NDIS-funded Supported Independent Living (SIL).

1.16 Adapt the mentoring and support model of the African Visitation and Mentoring Program (AVAMP) program for young people of African background and people from other communities overrepresented in the justice system, who are in or exiting prison.

AVAMP has successfully supported adults of African background in or exiting prison, on parole and community orders with mentoring and practical assistance to support their transition to community since 2010. The majority of AVAMP participants report improved connections with family and community – an important protective factor in preventing re-offending. We are seeing an increase in demand from young people of African background aged under 25 on remand. In addition, other communities overrepresented in the justice system would also benefit from co-designing a similar model to support reintegration and reduce recidivism.

Priority 2: Working with men and boys to prevent violence

For more than a decade, Victoria has played a leading role – nationally and internationally – in implementing critical reforms to end violence against women, girls and LGBTIQA+ communities. However, while significant progress has been made, domestic, family and sexual violence and child abuse remain at unacceptable levels.

Data show that the vast majority of people who use domestic, family and sexual violence are male. At the same time, some men who use violence have also experienced violence themselves, especially in childhood. Our research also shows that men's use of violence is connected to adherence to restrictive ideas about masculinity, and that men and boys' health and wellbeing is shaped by these same ideas.

To end men's violence and support men and boys to reach their full potential, Victoria must strengthen and scale up work with men and boys that challenges harmful gender norms and builds the attitudes, behaviours and relationships that support safety, equality and wellbeing. This work is needed across settings where men and boys can be reached, including settings where there are boys and men at higher risk of using violence.

There is also a need to continue to refine our violence prevention practice, including ensuring it is responsive to contemporary challenges, such as online harms, and engages boys and men in a safe and effective way that avoids collusion. This means holding care for men and boys together with accountability for harm: recognising their dignity and potential for change while staying clear about responsibility, safety and the impacts of violence.

Our priorities for working with men and boys to prevent violence

Strengthening and scaling up prevention

2.1 Strengthen and scale up prevention efforts, including respectful relationships education and healthy masculinities work, across a range of settings where children and young people can be reached, including by:

- **a. Starting respectful relationships education earlier, in early childhood settings (building on training currently being rolled out for early childhood educators);**
- **b. Rolling out and/or scaling up prevention programs that promote respectful relationships and healthy masculinities in non-school settings, such as sports clubs and youth programs;**
- **c. Ensuring respectful relationships education and related programs continue to evolve to address contemporary challenges facing young people, including online harms such as harmful pornography, digital surveillance and image-based abuse;**
- **d. Reinforcing institutional efforts and countering harmful online influences through:**
  - **i. online resources to continue to build young people's knowledge and skills at scale; and**
  - **ii. practical support for parents and carers to navigate challenging conversations with young people;**
- **e. Building the capability of workforces in universal settings who can influence boys and men, such as teachers and sports coaches, to challenge harmful gender norms, including through professional development programs like Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE).**

Victoria's approach to the primary prevention of gender-based violence, including the statewide roll-out of Respectful Relationships Education, is world-leading and showing results, but effort and investment remain insufficient to match the scale of the problem. Strengthening and scaling up prevention includes starting earlier – investing in age-appropriate respectful relationships education in early childhood, recognising that children's attitudes and behaviours are shaped before they start school – and rolling out or scaling up prevention programs in other settings where there's scope to influence young people, such as sports clubs and youth programs.

Our Adolescent Man Box research suggests that adolescent boys need greater support to navigate a range of contemporary challenges, including mitigating the harms of pornography and online influences, coping with rejection, and preventing and addressing digital surveillance, image-based abuse and coercive control. Content addressing these issues should be integrated into existing prevention programs and reinforced through online resources. Our research also shows parents play an important role in shaping young men's attitudes and behaviours, but need practical resources (including digital tools) to support them to navigate conversations on these sensitive topics.

The findings from our Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research underscore the importance of assisting boys and young men to detach from rigid masculine norms, which are associated with a range of harmful behaviours towards themselves and others, and connect with their own strengths and values. To scale up these efforts, it critical to build the capability of workforces in universal settings such as schools and sports clubs to support the promotion of healthy masculinities.

Investing in early intervention with boys and men

2.2 Strengthen service system capacity to identify, assess and respond to children and young people who have experienced family violence and child abuse, and invest in holistic, child- and young person-centred, trauma-informed interventions and services to support their healing and recovery.

Many young people who use violence are themselves victim-survivors. The impacts of experiencing violence in childhood can be long-term and profound, and include an increased risk of future victimisation and perpetration of violence. Supporting young victim-survivors to heal and recover is therefore an essential early intervention strategy. Yet children and young people who have experienced violence often do not receive a system response unless and until they cause harm themselves, and existing system responses are not designed to meet their help-seeking, recovery and healing needs.

2.3 Invest in targeted early intervention programs for boys and young men who are using or at higher risk of using violence.

Most prevention work struggles to reach and engage the highest risk cohorts, while very few men who use violence come to the attention of police or specialist response services. There is a critical need for greater investment in early intervention with boys and young men who are showing early signs of violence or are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence (including childhood victimisation).

Jesuit Social Services' Change Makers program is a group-based program that aims to empower boys and young men who are using or at risk of using violence or other harmful behaviours with the knowledge, skills and confidence to live safer, healthier lives by increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors for use of violence. Programs like Change Makers (currently delivered in a small number of secondary schools) should be expanded to settings such as flexible learning schools and residential out-of-home care. Young fathers at higher risk of using violence would also benefit from a tailored group-based program similar to Change Makers.

Expanding responses for men who use violence

2.4 Expand options for responding to men who use violence beyond traditional men's behaviour change programs to include, for example, fathering programs, justice reintegration programs and restorative approaches.

Current options for responding to men who use violence are largely limited to Men's Behaviour Change Programs, which only reach a small number of men and vary in their effectiveness. There is a need to expand responses to men who use violence to reach more men with evidence-based programs and approaches. This includes investing in effective programs that work with fathers who have used violence, and leveraging residential programs for men and boys leaving prison and youth justice rehabilitation programs to explicitly address the risk and protective factors for use of gendered violence. Restorative approaches – such as the RESTORE program – can also support men and boys to be accountable for and change their behaviour and help them reset relationships with their families in a safe way.

Coordination and workforce development

2.5 Promote consistent, evidence-based prevention and early intervention work with men and boys through more effective coordination and workforce capability-building.

While there are examples of promising practice with men and boys across the state, these efforts are fragmented and the evidence for what works is still emerging. To strengthen and scale up prevention and early intervention work with men and boys, stronger alignment and coordination is needed. This includes: creation of coordination mechanisms at state and local levels; identification of practice techniques linked to measurable outcomes ("common practice elements") to inform development of shared practice standards; more rigorous program evaluation; translation of research into practical tools and resources; and forging of stronger links between prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.

It also requires workforces across a range of settings to have the knowledge and skills to contribute to violence prevention and healthy masculinities in a safe, non-collusive way with the men and boys they are influencing. In addition to workforces in universal settings (see recommendation 2.1(e)), those who work with men and boys who have already used or are at higher risk of using violence (such as mental health, justice and child and family services) need practical skills in how to challenge harmful gender norms, build protective factors against violence, model care and accountability, and respond safely when concerns emerge. All these workforces also receive training in identifying and responding to family violence and child abuse, and would benefit from better coordination and sequencing of training.

Priority 3:
Supporting young people with complex needs

Jesuit Social Services works with young people experiencing some of the most complex challenges. These young people experience multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage, including histories of trauma, homelessness, mental ill-health and substance use, as well as other forms of marginalisation, such as disability and racial discrimination.

Many of these young people have experienced family violence and are also involved with – or at high risk of being involved with – the criminal justice system. They share many similarities with the young people we work with in our criminal justice and violence prevention programs. Working "upstream" to reduce risks to the young person and the community and supporting them to build safe, healthy and flourishing lives is a critical form of early intervention. However, the compounding challenges these young people face often create significant barriers to accessing support, even within systems designed to respond to people with complex needs.

Access to safe, secure and affordable housing is a critical foundation for stability, recovery and participation, but the supply of supported housing for people with complex needs continues to fall short of need. Young people experiencing high levels of complexity also need services that are responsive and flexible to meet their fluctuating needs, and that include after-hours support. These services must be adequately funded to meet demand and the true cost of service delivery. Young people who face barriers to education and employment and are not ready for mainstream vocational education also need greater access to community-based, entry-level training pathways.

Our priorities for supporting young people with complex needs

3.1 Invest in a diversity of supported housing models for different cohorts of young people with complex needs, including young people exiting out-of-home care, with complex mental health issues or developmental disability.

A range of supported housing options is needed for young people with complex needs (including but not limited to those involved with the criminal justice system, as outlined in recommendation 1.15). This should include housing options with wraparound 24 hour support similar to Jesuit Social Services' newly established Blackwood housing model. Without housing as a stable foundation, it is not possible to address other complex needs. Action is also required to fully implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System to deliver 500 dedicated social housing places for young people living with mental illness.

3.2 Renew and increase funding for Connexions and the Artful Dodgers Studio which support young people facing mental health and substance use challenges.

Jesuit Social Services has been delivering Connexions – the first dual diagnosis program for young people with co-occurring mental health and substance use issues in Victoria – for nearly 30 years. Connexions provides assertive outreach, counselling, casework and advocacy to participants, and is tailored to meet the needs of young people with a dual diagnosis who are unlikely to engage in office- or appointment-based counselling services.

The Artful Dodgers Studio is a therapeutic arts program offering a creative and flexible way to engage young people facing mental health and substance use challenges. Through a drop-in service which offers opportunities to engage in a range of artistic media, young people build their confidence, gain skills, and make social connections. The Artful Dodgers Studio also acts as a soft entry point for access to support services.

Funding for these important programs is due to lapse in June 2027 and should be renewed and increased to meet demand and offer after-hours support where appropriate.

3.3 Explore and invest in new ways of working to engage young people with multiple and complex needs who present a risk to the community.

The Complex Needs Youth Response pilot, funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing until June 2027, is showing promise as a service delivery model for engaging young people with multiple and complex needs with whom other services have struggled to connect. Resourcing must be sufficient to support a flexible and responsive service delivery model that includes after-hours and weekend support, and enables recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced staff, including adequate resources for support from a second practitioner in high risk situations.

3.4 Embed and appropriately resource after-hours outreach support as a core element of programs working with young people with multiple and complex needs, including Connexions and the Complex Needs Youth Response Program.

Across our programs that work with young people, we see strong demand for flexible and tailored outreach support after-hours and on weekends, which are often high risk times for young people. Most services are funded to operate during business hours and usually deliver an appointment-based model, which is unsuitable for engaging young people with complex lives who experience frequent crises. After-hours support should be a core component of programs working with young people with multiple and complex needs and must be adequately funded to meet the true costs of service delivery.

3.5 Increase the number of people who can access Skills First training delivered through community-based Registered Training Organisations.

Community-based Registered Training Organisations such as Jesuit Community College fill a critical gap supporting people who face barriers to education and employment. The imposition of caps on subsidised places through the Skills First initiative is reducing the ability of these providers to offer accredited training to learners who are not ready for mainstream vocational education and training, but are without other access to supported, entry-level pathways. The imposition of caps has reduced the numbers of funded Skills First participants at Jesuit Community College from 1,600 in 2020 to 300 from 2022 onwards. We are seeking an increase in the number of funded Skills First places, with a focus on vocational courses in areas of skills shortage including aged care, community services and hospitality.

Priority 4: Place-based climate adaptation

Climate change is a social justice issue. It disproportionately impacts communities facing disadvantage and entrenches inequalities in health outcomes, housing, and energy and water security.

Victoria has demonstrated strong national leadership in climate action and emissions reduction, including setting and meeting ambitious targets for renewable energy generation, phasing out coal, and transitioning households off gas. Continuing to advance Victoria's transition to renewable energy is essential to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change and ensure energy remains affordable for Victorians.

As climate impacts intensify, mitigation efforts must also be matched by sustained and significant investment in adaptation, resilience and preparedness. This includes targeted support for people and places facing the greatest climate risks and existing disadvantage. The crucial role played by the community services sector in supporting place-based and community-led adaptation must be recognised and funded.

Our priorities for place-based climate adaptation

4.1 Commit to implementing and resourcing the recommendations from the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience.

The scale and acceleration of climate impacts require a significant upscaling of investment in adaptation and a systemic integration of climate equity concerns into planning, infrastructure, housing, biodiversity, health and budgeting decisions. However, the Victorian Government's response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Resilience stops short of committing resourcing to implement the recommendations, including those related to resourcing local governments and community service organisations to support communities most at risk.

4.2 Effective implementation of Victoria's Adaptation Action Plans 2027-31 must recognise the role of community service organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations as partners in climate adaptation efforts across all systems and be underpinned by funding for community organisations to:

- **a. build their own adaptive capacity, including organisational climate risk assessments and adaptation plans, to keep doors open to community members and**
- **b. resource their role as a delivery mechanism for transformative adaptation, supporting collaborative place-based planning and coordination within communities.**

Community service organisations play a critical role in supporting place-based and community-led approaches to adaptation. We work directly with local communities and can support information sharing, action planning and adaptation-focused service delivery. Place-based initiatives like *Resilience In-House,* led by Wyndham Park Community Centre in partnership with Jesuit Social Services, build local resilience to climate risks and ensure that climate resilience is not abstract or technical, but grounded in lived experience, local knowledge and everyday realities.

The next round of Adaptation Action Plans is expected to be finalised before the Victorian election. We have advocated for the Plans to include a stronger focus on transformative adaptation that is place-based, community-led, and which addresses the structural drivers of vulnerability and exposure to climate risks. Dedicated investment is needed to enable community organisations to strengthen resilience, preparedness and adaptive capacity in communities experiencing the greatest climate risks and disadvantage, and to embed First Nations leadership.

Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society