



youthaffairs
COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

22 May 2008

The Hon James Merlino MP
Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, Minister Assisting the Premier on
Multicultural Affairs
Level 7
1 Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Minister

Improving youth service responses in Victoria: Final Report from KPMG.

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) welcome the release of the KPMG report *Improving youth service responses in Victoria*. YACVic and VCOSS would again like to congratulate both yourself and the Office for Youth and the (then) Office for Children for initiating this important investigation into the delivery of youth services in Victoria. We are pleased that the report's findings affirm concerns relating to service gaps that YACVic and VCOSS had detailed in our 2006 report, *Who's Carrying the Can? A report into youth service gaps in Victoria*.

YACVic and VCOSS welcome the recommendations of the report. We believe that the recommendations articulate some important opportunities for collaboration between Government and the sector to move forward in improving service responses to young people in Victoria. We wish to share some of our initial responses to the recommendations and content of the report with you.

We believe that the report clearly and effectively describes the nature of generalist youth services¹ and the intervention continuum,² in which generalist youth support services play a critical prevention and early intervention role. We hope that the definition of generalist youth services presented in this report is accepted by Government as a useful foundation upon which to build an improved service response to young people.

¹ See definition of generalist youth services on pg 40 of *Improving youth service responses in Victoria*.

² See both Figure 2: 'The youth service continuum' and Figure 3: 'Life events and intervention continuum' pp38-39 of the report.

We also believe that the recommendations of the report provide a firm basis on which to take important steps to strengthen the capacity of generalist youth support services to meet the needs of Victoria's young people.

In implementing the Report's recommendations, reference should be made to the recent *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*. The Principles for Children (defined as 0 to 18) that are detailed in the Act should drive the implementation of the recommendations in this report and the subsequent development of the strategic framework and further investment in generalist youth services.

Below we provide a more detailed response to each of the three recommendations.

Recommendation 1

This recommendation is in line with the following recommendation made in 'Who's Carrying the Can?': 'That a project be undertaken to develop a framework for a strong youth services system, identify best models of service delivery and where the youth service gaps are in Victoria.'³

YACVic and VCOSS acknowledge the positive steps that have been taken to meet this recommendation through the commissioning of KPMG to undertake a service mapping exercise. The report outlining the mapping exercise could be an important document in informing the development of a State-wide Strategic Framework for youth services. YACVic and VCOSS have, however, raised some concerns around the methodology used to develop the report and some of the content at a draft stage. It is our concern that there may be gaps and inconsistencies in the report. We would be very interested in a progress report on the mapping exercise and would like to reiterate our interest, as previously expressed, in participating in steering mechanisms that exist in order to assist in the development of a comprehensive and representative report. We urge your office to release this report once completed, as an important complementary report to *Improving youth service responses in Victoria*.

Recommendation 2

YACVic and VCOSS strongly support Recommendation 2 of the report, related to the building of a coordinated youth services system through the development of a Statewide Strategic Framework for Youth Services.

Any Framework developed should encompass the service continuum, from universal primary services through to secondary and tertiary services. It is important that any Framework compliment or be integrated with the Framework for Vulnerable Youth that is currently being developed.

In 2006, the then Office for Children in the Department of Human Services developed a Strategic Framework for Family Services. The child and family services sector was actively engaged in the development of this Framework, with a Reference Group of sector representatives being established, and then the draft Framework going through a final consultation process, with additional workshops to support the

³ Victorian Council of Social Service & Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2006). *Who's Carrying the Can? A report into youth services gaps in Victoria*. p.28.

inclusion of culturally competent practice for both Indigenous children, young people and families and culturally and linguistically diverse children, young people and families. We believe that the process for the development of the Strategic Framework for Family Services provides a sound model for the development of a Statewide Strategic Framework for Youth Services.

As acknowledged in the Report, the engagement of the sector in the development of that model is critical to the success of that Framework. YACVic and VCOSS would embrace the opportunity to work in collaboration with the Government to accomplish this. It is also important that this process engage the diversity of organisations working with young people in the sector, and not solely focus on the larger services that may be best placed to participate in this type of collaborative processes. Following the development of the Statewide Strategic Framework for Youth Services, it will be critical to develop an implementation plan, which incorporates clearly defined actions, and an evaluation process. As part of the implementation plan, appropriate guidelines, protocols, strategies, training and other supports will need to be developed. Such an approach was taken around the development and implementation of the Strategic Framework for Family Services, and this has proved valuable in both guiding and driving key reforms and improvements.

Recommendation 3

YACVic and VCOSS are pleased to see the report make the critical recommendation that Government 'consider further investment in the generalist youth services to increase their capacity to meet demand'.⁴ The need for further investment in generalist youth services was a central recommendation in *Who's Carrying the Can?* and is integral if a comprehensive youth services system is to be developed. The investment needs to be in-line with the definition of generalist youth services which is presented in the KPMG report.

Workforce development is a crucial aspect of investing in generalist youth services. As such, we also welcome that this recommendation acknowledges the importance of investment in developing the skills of the workforce, reinforcing the actions outlined in *The Victorian Government's Action Plan: Strengthening Community Organisations*.

YACVic and VCOSS appreciate having received a copy of the KPMG Report. Could you please advise us of the process ahead in terms of the public release of the report and its recommendations, and whether there will be an opportunity for a sector briefing, given the high level of sector engagement in consultations informing the development of this important report? Lastly, we would also appreciate your advice as to what will be the next steps by Government in terms of a formal response to the report.

Both YACVic and VCOSS look forward to working with you and your department to progress the findings of the report. Implementation of the recommendations of the report will provide an exciting opportunity to build a stronger sector and to improve young people's access to essential supports.

⁴ Victorian Council of Social Service & Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2006) *op.cit.* p.102.

We would like to meet with you to discuss the report and the importance of investing in generalist youth services in more detail.

Yours sincerely



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