

The Hon. John Lenders MP
Treasurer
1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, 3002.

Friday 18 December, 2009.

Dear Treasurer,

Re: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria's priorities for the 2010-11 State Budget

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. YACVic welcomes this opportunity to provide advice to the Government in regard to the development of the key policies and strategic direction of the 2010-11 State Budget.

As a member of the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), YACVic endorses the 2010-11 State Budget submission developed by VCOSS. YACVic **strongly supports** the recommendations made in VCOSS's submission in relation to young people, in particular VCOSS's recommendations that the Victorian Government better support vulnerable young Victorians by:

- a) Accompanying the Vulnerable Youth Framework with an implementation plan supported by substantial new investment,
- b) Investing in generalist youth services,
- c) Funding a rural youth sector project, with a specific policy, advocacy and sector development focus on rural and regional young people,
- d) Strengthening the program of same-sex attracted and transgender youth support services,
- e) Increasing targeted legal support for young people through Community Legal Centres, particularly in rural and regional areas,
- f) Committing on-going funding for the Youth Referral and Independent Persons Program,
- g) Adopting the recommendations of the *Inquiry into Strategies to Prevent High Volume Offending and Recidivism by Young People*,
- h) Improving access to Vocational Education and Training (VET) for young people by developing information for young people about the changes to VET, maintaining VET concession fees at January 2009 rates, and expanding the eligibility criteria for government-subsidised places to include students up to the age of 25.¹

Below YACVic will expand on the recommendations made by VCOSS relating to:

- Investment in the Vulnerable Youth Framework and in youth support services, and
 - Funding of a rural youth sector project, with a specific policy, advocacy and sector development focus on rural and regional young people.
- The importance of investing to improve support to young people with a disability will also be discussed.

¹ Victorian Council of Social Service (2009). *VCOSS State Budget Submission 2010-11*. p.77. Available for download from www.vcooss.org.au

Investment in the Vulnerable Youth Framework and youth support

YACVic strongly supports the proposed *Vulnerable Youth Framework* (VYF), released in 2008 by the Department of Human Services, Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The VYF provides a significant opportunity to improve the way youth services are planned, resourced and delivered in Victoria, ensuring young people have better access to locally based supports in a timely way.

Key to the success of the proposed Framework will be investment in youth support services. For the Victorian Government to fulfil its stated commitment to early intervention and to ensuring that young people have the chance to reach their full potential, increased investment is needed to ensure that youth support services are available across Victoria.

Investment in the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* would build upon the investment Government has already made into supporting children in their early years through the *Best Start* initiative. *Best Start* acknowledges that 'to achieve better outcomes for children and families, we need an integrated system of services that can respond to the emerging needs of children and families in local community settings.'² This is equally as important in achieving positive outcomes for adolescents and young adults. Adoption of, and investment in, the Vulnerable Youth Framework would ensure that the positive outcomes cemented by *Best Start* in childhood, are built upon as Victoria's young people continue to develop through these critical years.

Rural disadvantage and the need for a specific focus on strengthening youth advocacy and support

That young people in rural Victoria face specific disadvantage in relation to a broad range of wellbeing indicators and in terms of accessing important opportunities in education, employment and support is well documented.³

In recent years the Victorian Government has invested in advocacy and support for young people facing specific disadvantage and with unique needs. This significant investment has seen funding provided to establish the Youth Disability Advocacy Service, the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council, and strengthen the work of the Centre for Multicultural Youth. The same investment has not been made to resource the needs of rural and regional young people and the sector that supports them.

The disadvantage faced by rural young people and the challenges in delivering services and support to young people in rural areas warrants a specific advocacy and sector development focus. It will improve outcomes for Victorian rural young people by providing important advocacy to Government around policy and program development and will strengthen youth support in rural areas by providing specific rural youth sector development initiatives.

² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 'What is Best Start?' Downloaded from www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmangement/beststart/what.htm 14/01/09.

³ Research shows that young people in rural areas have higher rates of suicide and accidental death than metropolitan young people, are more likely to experience alcohol related harms, more likely to become young parents and have greater difficulty in accessing rental housing. There are also specific difficulties in accessing alternative and higher education opportunities, employment and services for young people in rural Victoria. See the Australian Clearinghouse of Youth Studies, Rural and Isolated Youth: http://www.acys.info/youth_facts_and_stats/design_extras/focus/rural_and_isolated_youth See also the findings of the Victorian Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee (2006) *Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities Final Report* and the Victorian Education and Training Committee (2009) *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education Final Report*.

Rural and regional workers in the youth sector consistently tell us that they feel isolated and under-supported in their roles. These workers often work in isolation or as the only worker with a youth focus in a larger social support agency. Opportunities for professional development and networking are few and far between.

For these reasons, the *Victorian Rural Youth Services* (VRYS) steering committee, comprising representatives from YACVic and rural youth services is seeking funding support from State Government to provide advocacy and sector support on rural youth sector issues.

The proposed model would involve State Government funding a 'Rural Youth Sector Advocacy and Sector Support' role to be auspiced by YACVic. This role would bring a specific policy and advocacy focus to issues impacting on young people and youth services in rural Victoria. The initiative would work closely with, but would not replicate the role of, the Regional Youth Affairs Networks (RYANs). Where the RYANs provide advice to government on issues impacting on young people at a regional level across the state, this initiative would be a resourced, rural-specific advocacy and sector development/capacity building project. It would provide a dedicated rural youth sector development focus and assist Government to better understand and respond to the specific needs of rural/regional young people in Victoria and of the services in those areas.

Government investment in such an initiative could support the objectives of the Ministerial Taskforce on Regional Planning in their task to develop a Regional Strategic Planning initiative. It could assist to ensure the relevance of the strategy to young people and its effectiveness in harnessing the capacity and contributions of young people in those communities.

Increased investment to support young people with a disability

YACVic recommends that the State Government better support young people with a disability by:

- Supporting the creation of a National Disability Insurance Scheme as will be examined by the Australian Government Productivity Commission's forthcoming inquiry into a long-term care and support scheme for people with a disability in Australia. The scheme should support all people with a disability regardless of the cause of their disability.
- Investing to ensure a reduction in the long waiting lists for Individualised Support.
- Increase support available to children and young people with a disability in schools, in recognition of the key importance of positive educational outcomes to the futures of young people with a disability.

Other key areas of relevance for young people

Several other policy areas discussed in VCOSS's submission include recommendations that would improve outcomes for young people in Victoria. YACVic would like to draw your attention to VCOSS's recommendations in relation to:

- Investing in a comprehensive family services system.⁴
- Supporting families early, not earlier.⁵
- Culturally competent services for Indigenous children, young people and families.⁶
- Continuing to invest in out-of-home care and in support for young people leaving care.⁷
- Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in children and young people.⁸

⁴ Victorian Council of Social Service (2009). *op.cit.* pp.5-6.

⁵ Victorian Council of Social Service (2009). *op.cit.* pp. 6-7.

⁶ Victorian Council of Social Service (2009). *op.cit.* p.7.

⁷ Victorian Council of Social Service (2009). *op.cit.* p.8.

⁸ Victorian Council of Social Service (2009). *op.cit.* pp. 45-46.

We are happy to provide further information on any of these areas of priority for the 2010-11 State Budget. Please contact Jen Rose, Manager of Policy and Projects on 9267 3722 should this be required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Ferrari', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Georgie Ferrari
Chief Executive Officer
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria