



Youth Affairs
Council Victoria

A 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy for Victoria

**A response to Infrastructure Victoria's draft strategy,
by Youth Affairs Council Victoria**

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The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc.
Level 3, 180 Flinders Street Melbourne VIC 3000
Phone 9267 3799

www.yacvic.org.au | info@yacvic.org.au

About YACVic

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. YACVic's vision is that young Victorians have their rights upheld and are valued as active participants in their communities.

YACVic is an independent, not-for-profit, member driven organisation that represents young people (aged 12-25 years) and the sector that works with them. Through our research, advocacy and services, we:

- lead policy responses on issues affecting young people
- represent the youth sector and elevate young people's voices to government
- resource high-quality youth work practice.

We are driven by our members and prioritise their needs and concerns.

Youth Affairs Council Victoria
Level 3, 180 Flinders St
Melbourne, VIC 3000

T: (03) 9267 3722

E: policy@yacvic.org.au

Author: Dr Jessie Mitchell, Policy Manger, Youth Affairs Council Victoria



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Background

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) welcomes the release of Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year strategy.

YACVic is the state peak body for young people aged 12-25 and the services that support them. We have 255 members – approximately half of them young people, the others comprising local governments, community and health services and research bodies. Our vision is that young Victorians have their rights upheld and are valued as active participants in their communities.

We welcome the draft strategy's objective of fostering healthy, safety and inclusive communities, and applaud its emphasis on strengthening housing affordability, public transport and quality public education.

Infrastructure Victoria's initial consultations with young people set a positive precedent, and we stress the importance of meaningful youth engagement throughout the life of the strategy.

Unfortunately, we do not have capacity to respond to the draft strategy's 134 recommendations in the time available. However, in this submission we will respond to the 'top three' areas for action cited by Infrastructure Victoria:

- Investing in social and affordable housing for vulnerable Victorians to significantly increase supply.
- Increasing densities in established areas to make better use of existing infrastructure.
- Introducing a comprehensive transport pricing regime to manage demands on the network.

We also offer preliminary comments in response to several key reforms proposed by Infrastructure Victoria in the areas of housing, transport, schools and community service delivery.

Engaging with young people over the life of the strategy

Infrastructure Victoria has undertaken very considerable community consultations to inform the draft 30 year strategy, and we especially welcomed the moves to consult with young people. However, it is important to ensure ongoing community engagement in the planning process.

At present, none of the draft strategy's recommendations explicitly commit to ongoing community engagement (representing the diversity of Victoria's community) over the life of the strategy. We argue such a commitment is necessary, and would align well with the Victorian Government's commitment to a co-design approach across multiple, related strategies, including *Roadmap for Reform*, the *10 Year Mental Health Plan* (and the subsequent *Suicide Prevention Framework* and *Mental Health Workforce Strategy*), the response to the findings of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and the 2016 *Youth Strategy*.

It is important that meaningful engagement with young people continues, especially given the generational impacts of a 30-year strategy. Some of the measures proposed in the draft strategy – such as new mechanisms to foster ride hailing, car pooling and on-demand community transport – are still to some extent in the conceptual stage. They will doubtless evolve with changing technology over the next few years, and young people may be one of the first cohorts expected to take up these new options. As such, ongoing youth engagement by planners will be needed.

A mandate for youth engagement has been provided by the Victorian Government in their 2016 *Youth Engagement Charter*. The Charter, intended for use across different departments, determines that the Victorian Government will (amongst other things):

- Value young people as experts in their own experiences, recognising them as equal partners in identifying and implementing solutions.
- Recognise that young people must be at the centre of decision making about issues that are important to them.
- Value young people as genuine partners in decision-making processes.

The departments involved in planning Victoria's future infrastructure should be guided by the principles and undertakings of the *Youth Engagement Charter*.

The 30-Year Strategy should also be guided by relevant findings from the consultations with young people which informed the Victorian Government's 2016 *Youth Policy*. The *Youth Policy* identifies priority areas for policy and program development including affordable housing, public transport and education, as well as supporting young people with disabilities to achieve their full potential and control their own lives, and benefitting young people in rural and regional Victoria.

The *Youth Policy* undertakes to support further consultations with diverse young people about these issues.

Given the obvious synchronicities, we urge that Infrastructure Victoria liaise further on these topics with the Victorian Government Office for Youth, youth services, and YACVic.

Investing in affordable housing

We strongly support the inclusion of affordable housing in Infrastructure Victoria's list of 'top three' priorities. We welcome the document's recommendation of a state-wide plan for the provision of dedicated affordable housing, as well as the recommendations for a significant increase in crisis and transitional housing and social housing investment, and increased investment in initiatives to promote affordability in private rental housing.

Housing affordability is a major concern for young people, especially those facing disadvantage. For example:

- In June 2016, the median rent for a two-bedroom unit in Melbourne's inner suburbs was higher than the entire combined Youth Allowance of two young people. Even in Melbourne's more affordable outer suburbs, the median rent on a two-bedroom unit would have consumed 73% of two Youth Allowance payments. The median rent on a two-bedroom unit in regional Victoria was more affordable

(consuming ‘only’ 55% of two Youth Allowance payments), but would be offset by higher travel costs and limited local access to education, training and services.¹

- In *Building the Scaffolding*, a 2013 survey of 213 Victorian youth service providers, YACVic and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) found that crisis accommodation and transitional housing were by the far the most common areas of unmet need cited by Victoria’s youth services.²
- Between 1994-95 and 2013-14, the rates of home ownership amongst Australians aged under 35 fell from 48% to 34%.³
- The metropolitan local government areas with the lowest median costs for mortgages and rent are mostly located in the ‘growth’ or ‘outer’ suburbs of Melbourne, where infrastructure and job opportunities are relatively scarce. As these communities also tend to have higher than average birth rates, they will be expected to meet the needs of large cohorts of young people in the future.⁴
- Several cohorts of young people face particular barriers to accessing adequate housing. For example, young people with disabilities are at high risk of being dependent on their families or living in group homes, as they face combined barriers of accessibility and affordability. While the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will increase the support available to live independently, the affordable, accessible housing stock does not always exist. Wiesel et al (2015) estimated that the NDIS will create unmet need for affordable, accessible housing for 83,000-122,000 Australians.⁵

We have some concerns about the definition of affordable housing adopted by Infrastructure Victoria in the draft 30-year plan:

‘[A]ffordable housing is that which reduces or eliminates housing stress for low-income and disadvantaged families and individuals to assist them with meeting other essential basic needs on a sustainable basis, while balancing the need for housing to be of a minimum appropriate standard and accessible to employment and services.

This definition has been taken from the Commonwealth Council on Federal Financial Relations Affordable Housing Working Group: Issues paper January 2016. Under this definition, affordable rental housing is provided at a subsidised rent to households through access and affordability requirements set by government. The broader issue of

the affordability of housing for home owners and renters is not covered under the strategy as it does not relate to the ‘most vulnerable’ and applies to privately owned assets.’ (p.91)

We submit that this definition is not adequate to the purpose of state-wide community planning. For example:

- ‘Reducing’ housing stress or ‘assisting’ people to meet their other basic needs does not guarantee that people will be able to meet their housing costs and other essential needs. Therefore, it does not guarantee affordability.
- People in receipt of state housing assistance may still experience significant stress in meeting their housing costs and other essential costs.
- Not everyone experiencing housing stress is receiving state housing assistance.
- The affordability of private rental properties and home ownership must figure in a state-wide housing plan. Most people on low incomes are not living in public housing. Moreover, the high costs of private rental housing and the fact that young people are being ‘shut out’ of property ownership contribute to the shortage of rental housing that is both affordable and available to people on low incomes.

We urge that Infrastructure Victoria work with leading community stakeholders including the Victorian Council of Social Service, Council to Homeless Persons and Tenants Union of Victoria to develop a more comprehensive and workable definition of housing affordability.

Housing is generally considered to be affordable if the household members are not in financial stress after they have paid for their housing – but there are a range of measures used to determine affordability. One of the most widely used models states that a household in the bottom 40% of incomes should not spend more than 30% of their gross income on housing. (This applies regardless of whether the housing is rented or purchased, or whether it is in the private, public or community housing sectors.) However, this definition may not be adequate for households where the sole income is a government pension or benefit; these households may experience significant financial stress even when housing costs are set at 30% of income. Alternative affordability measures might include requiring the percentage of income

earmarked for housing (e.g. 30%) to include the costs of utilities; or adopting a ‘residual income method’ which calculates how much is left over for housing costs once the household’s essential expenditure items have been taken into account.⁶

An affordable housing strategy should coordinate change across government, sectors and agencies, and join up disparate reform levers. We support calls by the Victorian Council of Social Service, Community Housing Federation of Victoria, Council to Homeless Persons, Victorian Public Tenants Association, Tenants Union of Victoria, Domestic Violence Victoria and Justice Connect Homeless Law, for a strategy to expand the supply, security and quality of low-cost social and private housing in Victoria. Such a strategy should include mechanisms to finance the expansion of social housing, leverage affordable housing through the planning system, and expand supported options for low-income home ownership. For example, VCOSS has called for a dedicated growth fund to expand social housing – new investment of \$200 million per year would enable the growth of at least 800 homes each year.⁷

We also refer Infrastructure Victoria to ‘An Affordable Housing Reform Agenda’ (2015) by the Australian Council of Social Service, Community Housing Federation of Australia, Homelessness Australia, National Shelter, and National Association for Tenants’ Organisations. These expert stakeholders have provided a detailed model for reform to enable the growth of affordable housing stock, through mechanisms in areas including tax reform, investment in new housing stock, provision of land for social and affordable housing, development of innovative finance models, reducing barriers to investment in affordable housing, reviewing and increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance, and strengthening tenants’ rights to adequate housing and advocacy services.⁸

In addition, specific interventions are needed to redress young people’s exclusion from adequate, independent housing. In particular, an affordable housing strategy should include a ‘housing guarantee’ for young people leaving out-of-home care, who are exceptionally vulnerable to homelessness. A housing guarantee for young care-leavers is supported by VCOSS, the Council to Homeless Persons, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Berry Street. This model should make support available to all care leavers up to the age of 25 who are seeking to access the private rental market. Here, relevant supports might include a

rent guarantee to encourage more landlords to rent to young people, and a rent supplement to assist the young person if they are studying and/or unable to work. Young people leaving care should also be enabled to access transitional housing and Foyer-style programs if they are not ready to live independently yet.⁹

Other interventions are also needed to ensure adequate housing for all young people. YACVic has called for greater support for innovative, cross-sector initiatives like the Geelong Project, which bring together services, schools and local government to identify young people at high risk of homelessness and intervene early to prevent this, while also addressing school disengagement and mental health problems. Meanwhile, VCOSS has proposed investment in youth-specific models of affordable housing, such as subsidized, supported share house programs in social housing, and rental brokerage programs for shared student housing arrangements.¹⁰

Housing made available through these mechanisms must be not only affordable but also 'adequate'. The Victorian Government is currently consulting on the Better Apartments Draft Design Standards, in recognition that thin guidance for this sector has led to some Victorians living in properties which do not meet basic needs, such as natural light, fresh air and storage. This issue affects many vulnerable young people – for example, the high-rise apartments blocks proliferating in the City of Melbourne (which provide housing of varied quality) are home to high proportions of low income residents, many of whom are students and other young adults. (In 2011 there were 10,000 students living in the City of Melbourne.)¹¹

Any affordable housing strategy must align with adequacy standards as regards health and safety, room depth, accessibility, waste and water, energy efficiency, storage, open space and noise minimisation. Here, we note the advocacy of VCOSS and the Tenants Union of Victoria for reasonable minimum standards of rental housing, and we urge that their recommendations inform any affordable housing strategy.¹²

Increasing housing density in established areas

We would sound a note of caution in response to Infrastructure Victoria's proposal to prioritise increasing housing density in 'established' areas. The recent intensification

of housing stock in the inner suburbs of Melbourne has not noticeably improved the affordability of these areas. In fact, arguably its main impact (outside of the CBD itself) has been to increase access to gentrified suburbs for higher income buyers.¹³

While we support making the inner suburbs more accessible to young people, especially on lower incomes, this will not eventuate from increased stock alone. Any such moves must form part of a comprehensive affordable housing strategy, with strong and well evaluated mechanisms to grow affordable housing in areas with good local amenity. The housing stock must match the circumstances of people in that community who are at risk of disadvantage – who may range from large families to single young people.

Moreover, we would also urge that any 30-year plan identify established Victorian communities where young people and their families are *currently* living without adequate access to essential infrastructure, and prioritise improving development to meet their needs. This will require new investment in infrastructure in growth corridors, regional centres and rural communities.

A 30-year strategy might also include steps to promote higher density housing, along with employment, community and recreational opportunities, around regional or suburban ‘hubs’ in areas where there are large and growing populations of young people. (Such an approach is referenced by Infrastructure Victoria in their recommendation 1.1.2.) Any such initiatives must include strong affordability measures and must be responsive and appropriate to local needs.

Transport pricing

In response to Infrastructure Victoria’s proposed transport pricing initiative, we urge that further consultation be undertaken with the Victorian Council of Social Service and its members, to ensure such a scheme does not increase hardship and isolation for households experiencing poverty.

Many outer suburban and regional areas with high rates of car dependence – for example Hume, Melton, Wyndham, Geelong, Mildura and Latrobe – also have higher

than average rates of youth unemployment, as well as populations that are younger than the state average and growing rapidly.¹⁴ As of 2014, only around a quarter of Melbourne's low-cost private rental dwellings had good access to public transport.¹⁵ It is vital any initiatives to better leverage resourcing from Victoria's roads do not have the effect of worsening the marginalisation of disadvantaged young people.

To further guard against this, any transport pricing developments should occur following the strengthening of Victoria's public and community transport systems.

High quality education infrastructure

Infrastructure Victoria suggests transforming state schools into community facilities, especially in areas experiencing rapid growth and regional and rural communities – for example, by integrating kindergartens and long day care into schools, and sharing sports, arts and library facilities.

We would see merit in such an approach if the intent was to strengthen the connection of students and their families (particularly those facing disadvantage) to services and opportunities which they would otherwise struggle to access, and to make schools into more nurturing, welcoming and culturally safe spaces that recognise physical, social and familial wellbeing as important to a student's educational engagement and success.

However, we would not support any approach which limited young people's access to wellbeing, sporting or cultural facilities by only making these things available within schools. This would be especially unsuitable for young people no longer attending school or young people who have been excluded from their local school.

Nor would we (usually) support any approach which sought to restrict a community's access to basic amenities by only providing these within the local school. (We appreciate there may be some exceptions in the case of highly built-up new suburbs where space is paramount. We refer the planners to the work currently being done to design the new 'vertical' primary school on Ferrars Street in Fishermans Bend as a dual

purpose space for the best-practice delivery of educational and community services. Findings from this initiative should be used to guide any future work in this space.)

If Infrastructure Victoria wishes to support the integrated delivery of schools with community services, we suggest that more work be undertaken to evaluate and (where appropriate) extend the ‘schools as community hubs’ approach. This approach – sometimes called Extended Service Schools, Extended School Hubs and Full Service Schools – supports schools to work in partnership with a range of other organisations to deliver education along with other community services. These can include Maternal and Child Health services, kindergarten, early childhood services, onsite health services, recreational activities, and education support for parents. ‘Hub’ style schools may also increase community access to libraries, sporting facilities, gardens and community spaces.

These integrated schools focus on engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged families who might otherwise struggle to access the support services and community connections they need. ‘Hub’ schools aim to connect students and their families to supports that improve their educational engagement and attainment along with their health, wellbeing and social connections, in the universal and non-stigmatising environment of a school. (Note: the aim of ‘schools as community hubs’ is *not* to reduce the community’s access to services outside the school setting.)

This integrated model of education and community service delivery can have many benefits. Research conducted through the Royal Children’s Hospital Centre for Community Child Health and the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute recommended that if the ‘hub’ model is to be successful it must include:

- Genuine multi-sector collaboration
- Consultation with all stakeholders at all points in the model’s development
- A passionate, committed, multi-level leadership team
- Adaptability to the changing needs of school communities
- Regular monitoring and review processes; and
- Adequate resourcing, including professional development for stakeholders.¹⁶

Challenges will include dual-purpose or multi-purpose building and grounds design, complexities over safety and procedures, and the cultural challenges of delivering community services in an educational institution.

Most Victorian schools which have adopted a ‘hub’ model have been primary schools and preschool settings, for example in Campbellfield, Broadmeadows, Coolaroo and Dallas. The model has been extended to include older age groups at the Doveton Learning Centre and Yuille Park Community College, but its implementation in secondary school settings has been relatively rare. At this point, limited evidence exists as to how to deliver this model effectively for older students and their families.

Any moves to extend a ‘schools as community hubs’ model into secondary schools would need to be informed by close consultation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including the School Focused Youth Service, the Navigator program, and the Victorian Student Representative Council, the peak body representing school aged students in Victoria.

Meanwhile, any model which sought to deliver community services to secondary-aged young people in the physical context of a primary school would need to work closely with local youth services and young people (as well as the abovementioned bodies) to ensure the environment and service delivery are age-appropriate and youth-friendly.

Alignment with Victorian Child Safe standards would, of course, also be essential.

In addition, we note with some concern that Infrastructure Victoria’s draft 30-year strategy includes very few recommendations for strengthening access to quality education outside of mainstream schools, apart from promoting shared community use of TAFE facilities, and resolving ‘regulatory or workforce barriers’ that prevent vocational training being offered in school settings.

We strongly support strengthening young people’s access to quality vocational learning options. However, it is important to note that Victorian secondary students are already meant to have access to VET in Schools and VCAL – in-school vocational education already exists as a model. That these pathways are not taken up more often reflects the

costs attached and the assumption by some school communities that vocational education is less valuable and prestigious than academic pathways.

In response, YACVic has recommended that schools be adequately funded to provide students with a range of high quality VET in Schools options which are well embedded within the wider curriculum and which provide students with necessary career planning and workplace experience, without passing costs onto families experiencing disadvantage. (We appreciate that Infrastructure Victoria's recommendation 9.4.1 may have intended to extend vocational training in school settings to older members of the community. However, we argue it is critical to first address shortages of quality, affordable in-school VET for secondary-aged young people themselves.)

In view of the estimated 10,000 young Victorians who leave school each year within a Year 12 qualification, we also urge that any future community planning takes into account the need for adequate, case-managed support for vulnerable school-aged young people to re-engage with education and employment, and the funding of flexible re-engagement models in line with the best practice identified by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and Associate Professor Kitty te Riele, including through the Framework of Quality Flexible Learning Programs. Some of these models will operate within mainstream schools; others will require their own physical spaces or operate within community services.

Strengthening public transport

Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year strategy makes a number of proposals concerning Victoria's public transport system which YACVic welcomes. These include:

- Expanding the local bus network coverage in growth areas and providing service enhancements to support local trips and connection with other trunk services,.
- Providing new and expanded coach services between regional towns and cities, to improve connections with neighbouring centres and rail stations.
- Providing new and expanded local bus routes within regional Victorian cities.
- Providing targeted additional rail services on long-distance lines, especially to Warrnambool, Bairnsdale, Albury-Wodonga, Echuca, Swan Hill and Shepparton.

- Expanding the SmartBus network and providing service enhancements to support cross-town travel.

A strong, accessible public transport system is especially important to young people aged 12-17 (who cannot drive independently) and to those young people aged 18 and over who are not licensed drivers. This cohort is increasing; since 2001 there has been a pattern of licensing decline amongst young Victorians, and in 2014, over one-third of Victorians aged 18–24 were not licensed to drive.¹⁷ For some young people, this is a personal preference; for others, it can be the result of disability, mental health problems, low income, or lack of access to a family vehicle and adult driver to help them learn. For these young people especially, their independence, wellbeing and access to jobs, training and education can depend on accessible, affordable public transport and suburbs which are designed for easy use by pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair/scooter users.

It is particularly important to prioritise strengthening public transport in growth suburbs and rural and regional areas, and we welcome the draft 30-year strategy's attention to this issue. For example, in 2013 the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) found that the growth areas of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mitchell, Whittlesea and Wyndham were inadequately serviced by public transport. VAGO found that people living in growth areas had, on average, less than half as many public transport routes as inner metropolitan residents, that bus services were less direct in growth areas (making for longer journeys), and that access to public transport stops was worse in growth areas. For example, approximately 45% of households in Cardinia were further than 400 metres from a public transport stop, as were almost 60% of houses in Mitchell shire.¹⁸

Meanwhile, in rural and regional areas public transport remains a frequent struggle. The 2011 Victorian Government report *The State of Victoria's Children* found that young people aged 12-17 in rural Victoria were much less likely than their metropolitan peers to report having access to public transport – 56% compared to 81%. 51% of young people aged under 18 in rural areas reported that lack of transport made it hard for them to work, study, socialise, and/or see a doctor, as did 41% of young people living in Melbourne.¹⁹

To achieve a public transport system which works to promote equality and community wellbeing, it is vital to achieve full physical accessibility, including stops, stations, carriages and customer service. At present, Victoria remains behind Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT) targets, and appears unlikely to meet 2017 targets, which require the public transport system to reach 90% compliance for most services and infrastructure by December 2017.²⁰

Affordability can pose another barrier to public transport access for Victoria's most marginalised people. VCOSS has noted that emergency relief organisations spend significant resources assisting vulnerable people with problems relating to public transport, including fares, fines and complicated ticketing and concessions systems.²¹ A recent report by the WEstjustice Sunshine Youth Office, funded by the Victoria Law Foundation, found that there was an overrepresentation of young people from Melbourne's western suburbs in the infringement notice system, and that the fines system was presenting significant problems for families on low incomes and keeping some young people away from education, training and employment.²²

As such, we welcomed the Victorian Government's recent commitment to allow for greater discretion and lenience in relation to 'one-off' or accidental breaches, reducing the time it takes to top-up Myki, and improving training for Authorised Officers.

However, travel costs remain an issue, even for young people on a student discount. For example, a yearly Myki student pass costs \$546. The WEstjustice Fare Go report noted that young people aged 11-16 (and older teens who are studying full-time) travel for free on buses and trams in London, and that eligible secondary students can access free or subsidised public transport in NSW and Canberra. The report made a number of recommendations, which YACVic sees merit in. These included:

- Making public transport free to all passengers up to 18 years of age, or at least for secondary students whose parent or carer is in receipt of Centrelink income or a healthcare card.
- Accepting identification issued by any authorised educational institution as evidence of age or student status for the purposes of free travel.

- Authorise schools to issue Myki travel cards to students free of charge.
- Abolish the public transport fines system for all young people under 18 years of age, or replace fines with innovative, non-fiscal responses to criminal behaviours.²³

Flexible community service delivery to meet diverse local needs

Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year strategy proposes increasing the provision of temporary or 'pop-up' community infrastructure, such as relocatable buildings, to respond to rapidly changing community needs. The document suggests this could be of particular use in areas experiencing high population growth.

We have no essential objection to the use of temporary infrastructure to house services while permanent places are being built or identified for them. However, genuine, sustained investment in growth areas and rural areas is essential. Appropriately qualified staff and adequate governance and partnership arrangements must be resourced and put in place, whatever physical infrastructure is used. And while the physical infrastructure which houses a service may change over time, the community's access to that service should be adequate and continuous.

Moreover, any initiatives to address a perceived lack of physical facilities for service delivery to young people must engage closely with young people and local community services. The needs and solutions they will identify are likely to vary considerably between communities. For example, the City of Port Phillip recently committed to creating physical infrastructure and facilities for 'youth places' where young people can connect socially, get involved in their community and access services. The commitment was made in response to local research which identified that young people wanted youth-specific places which they could feel 'ownership' over. In contrast, in rural shires young people may live in communities scattered over large geographical areas with poor transport access. Some of these communities have identified that a single service space is not a good solution to local shortages. For example, the shire of Gannawarra recently initiated a 'roving youth centre' model, which will take the activities and supports offered by a youth centre around to different community spaces. This was in response to a concern raised by young people that a physical

‘centre’ might consume resources without necessarily reaching all the young people who might benefit from it.²⁴

We would be delighted to discuss any of these issues further with you. Please contact Jessie Mitchell, Policy Manager, on policy@yacvic.org.au or 9267 3722.

Recommendations

1. Commit to ongoing, meaningful community engagement (involving diverse cohorts and age groups) over the life of the strategy, in line with the Victorian Government's commitment to a co-design approach across multiple, related areas of reform.
2. Ensure the departments engaged in planning Victoria's future infrastructure are being guided by the youth engagement principles and commitments set down in the *Youth Engagement Charter*, which was designed for use across government.
3. Ensure the 30-year strategy is informed by the findings of the youth consultations undertaken to inform the Victorian Government's 2016 *Youth Policy* – especially on the topics of housing, transport and education – and by ongoing engagement with the Victorian Government Office for Youth, YACVic and the youth services sector.
4. Ensure that key priorities of the 30-year infrastructure strategy include development of a state-wide affordable housing plan (with adequate resourcing attached) to expand the supply, security and quality of affordable social and private housing in Victoria, sufficient to meet community needs. A diversity of housing stock will be required to meet the needs of different households, including single young people and young families.
5. Work with leading community stakeholders including the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) and Tenants Union of Victoria to develop a more comprehensive and workable definition of housing affordability, to inform this plan.
6. Ensure that the affordable housing strategy is informed by the joint community-based advocacy already undertaken by VCOSS, Community Housing Federation of Victoria, Council to Homeless Persons, Victorian Public Tenants Association, Tenants Union of Victoria, Domestic Violence Victoria and Justice Connect Homeless Law. It should also be informed by the recommendations of the

‘Affordable Housing Reform Agenda’ by the Australian Council of Social Service, Community Housing Federation of Australia, Homelessness Australia, National Shelter, and National Association for Tenants’ Organisations.

7. Ensure that the affordable housing strategy aligns with reasonable standards of adequacy for housing, for example in relation to room depth, waste and water, energy efficiency, storage, open space, noise minimisation, utility and physical safety. The new design standards being compiled for Victorian apartments will presumably influence this. We also support the recommendations of VCOSS and Tenants Union of Victoria as regards minimum standards for rental housing.²⁵
8. Work with the Victorian Government, the youth services sector and young people to develop targeted responses to young people's exclusion from adequate, affordable housing. In particular, support the adoption of a housing guarantee for young people leaving out-of-home care up to the age of 25, as recommended by VCOSS, CHP, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Berry Street.
9. Identify existing Victorian communities where young people and their families are currently living without adequate access to essential infrastructure, and prioritise improving development to meet their needs. Many of these communities (which are already ‘established’) are in growth corridors and regional and rural areas.
10. Ensure that any moves to increase housing density in inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne occur as part of a comprehensive affordable housing strategy with strong mechanisms to increase access for young people to affordable housing stock in areas with strong access to employment, public transport and community services. (Increased density alone seems unlikely to deliver significantly improved housing for young people.)
11. Investigate the viability of promoting higher density housing (where it is affordable and responsive to local needs) around regional and suburban ‘hubs’, where employment, education and community facilities are developing.

12. Undertake further consultation with the Victorian Council of Social Service and their members concerning a possible transport pricing regime, to ensure any such approach does not increase hardship and isolation for low-income households, including young people facing disadvantage.
13. Investigate the existing 'schools as community hubs' approach (also known as extended service schools, extended school hubs, and full service schools). Support the expansion of this model into communities which have identified that this approach would strengthen the health, wellbeing and educational engagement and attainment of students and families who are experiencing disadvantage, particularly those who are not currently accessing relevant support services. This work should be guided by:
 - The critical requirement to comply with Child Safe standards.
 - Existing research into schools as community hubs, notably that conducted through the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.
 - The findings of primary schools and P-9 / P-8 schools which already offer an integrated model, such as Doveton College and Yuille Park Community College.
 - Evaluation of the work currently being done to develop the Ferrars Street primary school in Fishermans Bend into a dual purpose space for delivery of education and community services.
 - Strong consultation with students, especially via the Victorian Student Representative Council, the peak body representing school aged students in Victoria, who empower student voices to be valued in all aspects of education.
 - Strong consultation with community and education stakeholders, including the School Focused Youth Service, Navigator program, local government youth services, and Parents Victoria.

As the 'hub' model has traditionally been aimed at younger students and their families, particular consultation and planning would be needed to develop any model designed to operate in a secondary school setting, or to meet the health/community needs of secondary-aged students in a primary school setting. Young people must be able to access essential health and community

supports in environments which are welcoming, culturally safe, age-appropriate and youth-friendly.

We would not support any reforms which restricted young people's access to health, community and recreational services to school settings alone. This would be especially inappropriate for young people who have left school, and young people who have been excluded from school.

14. Ensure schools are adequately funded and supported to provide students with a range of high quality VET in Schools (VETiS) options, without passing costs onto families experiencing disadvantage.
15. Support schools to align VETiS better with other school subjects, increase students' access to workplace training, and promote VETiS as a foundational pathway for higher VET qualifications and apprenticeships.
16. Ensure that community planning takes into account the need for services which can support vulnerable and disengaged young people to re-engage with education, training and employment. This should include funding flexible re-engagement models in line with the best practice identified by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and Associate Professor Kitty te Riele, including through the Framework of Quality Flexible Learning Programs. Some of these models will operate within mainstream schools; others will require their own physical spaces, either independently or within community services.
17. Adopt universal design principles for the planning and design of Victoria's public transport system, and focus on meeting the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport, 2017. While the draft 30-year plan proposes prioritising 'low cost and high-benefit upgrades', we suggest the first steps should be to identify and address points in the transport system where people with disabilities have identified especially high unmet demand for accessibility, with particularly negative impacts on members of the community who are excluded.

18. Prioritise the strengthening of public transport access to communities with strong identified gaps, notably in growth corridors and rural and regional areas. YACVic sees merit in the proposals for an improved and extended public transport system outlined by Infrastructure Victoria in the draft 30-year strategy, which involve expanding and enhancing local bus networks in growth areas, providing new and expanded bus services in regional cities and between regional towns and cities, providing additional rail services on distance lines, and expanding the SmartBus network and opportunities for cross-town travel. We would be happy to support further consultations with young people about how best to target and develop such initiatives.
19. Support other, non-structural approaches to increasing access to public transport for young people facing disadvantage. In particular, we recommend that the Victorian Government pursue the recommendations of the *Fare Go* report, funded by the Victoria Law Foundation, which included:
- Making public transport free to all passengers up to 18 years of age, or at least for secondary students whose parent or carer is in receipt of Centrelink income or a healthcare card.
 - Accepting identification issued by any authorised educational institution as evidence of age or student status for the purposes of free travel.
 - Authorising schools to issue Myki travel cards to students free of charge.
 - Abolishing the public transport fines system for all young people under 18 years of age, or replacing fines with innovative, non-fiscal responses to criminal behaviours.
20. In communities with identified gaps or shortages in youth service provision, work with local governments and other key stakeholders to develop places where young people can connect socially, access services and get involved in their communities. These places should be physically accessible (both in building design and proximity to transport), youth-friendly and culturally safe. In some areas, there may be an identified need for new physical facilities - here, the community may possibly find that temporary infrastructure provides an acceptable option while permanent spaces are being created. In other

communities, the solutions offered may focus instead on outreach, 'pop-ups' or moveable youth spaces, notably to address rural isolation. The aim should be to ensure that young people's access to a necessary service is adequate, appropriate and secure.

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- ² Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic), *Building the Scaffolding: Strengthening support for young people in Victoria*, Melbourne, 2013, p.53
- ³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 4130.0 - Housing Occupancy and Costs, 2013-14, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4130.0Main+Features100052013-14?OpenDocument>
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- ⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 'Glossary', https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/glossary?result_1751_result_page=H; Terry Burke, Michael Stone and Liss Ralston, 'The residual income method: a new lens on housing affordability and market behaviour,' the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Swinburne-Monash Research Centre October 2011, AHURI Final Report No. 176; Council to Homeless Persons, 'Submission to ALP Discussion paper on Housing Affordability', April 2015; Gethin Davison, Nicole Gurrán, Ryan van den Nouweland, Simon Pinnegar and Bill Randolph, with Glen Bramley, 'Affordable housing, urban renewal and planning: emerging practice in Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales,' Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute UNSW-AHURI Research Centre, November 2012, AHURI Final Report No. 195 ; National Shelter and Shelter NSW, *Housing terms factsheet: A quick guide to housing jargon*, 2012; Steven Rowley, Amity James, Catherine Gilbert, Nicole Gurrán, Rachel Ong, Peter Phibbs, David Rosen and Christine Whitehead, 'Subsidised affordable rental housing: lessons from Australia and overseas', Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute at Curtin University at The University of Sydney, August 2016, AHURI Final Report No. 267; Gavin Wood, Rachel Ong and Melek Cigdem, 'Housing affordability dynamics: new insights from the last decade,' Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute at RMIT University at Curtin University, November 2014, AHURI Final Report No. 233
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