

**2025-26**

Youth Affairs Council Victoria

# **Victorian Budget Submission on behalf of the Youth Sector**

**October 2024**



## Acknowledgement of Country



Our work takes place across Victoria. YACVic's head office is on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation in Naarm (Melbourne). We also have offices on the lands of the Gunditjmara Nation in Warrnambool, and on the lands of the Wemba Wemba and Wadi Wadi Nations in Swan Hill.

YACVic pays our respects to Elders past and present for their wisdom, strength, support and leadership. Bunjil's lore states that those who walk on this land must care for Country and the waterways as well as care for the children and young people.

We stand in solidarity to pay respect to the ongoing culture and continued history of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. Sovereignty was never ceded.

*This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.*

## About YACVic

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading advocate for young people aged 12–25, and the youth sector that supports them. Our vision is that the rights of young people in Victoria are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

We promote youth participation and make policy recommendations on issues that affect young people's lives, build the capacity of the youth sector and nurture connections for collaboration and support, and identify and advance thinking on emerging issues for young people. As changemakers we have a particular focus on young people who face marginalisation and disadvantage.

## About YACVic Rural

YACVic Rural provides additional targeted advocacy for young people and services in rural and regional Victoria.

We connect with young people, youth practitioners and the youth work sector to identify the unique needs and priorities of rural and regional young people. We respond through purpose driven place-based projects, programs and trainings, collective impact, sector support and policy input to accelerate positive change for young people.





*“The youth sector is vitally important for our entire society. Young people are quite literally the future, and if we don’t provide them with the services they deserve, then we are not only doing them an injustice, we are setting ourselves up for failure as a society.” - Youth Worker*

## Executive Summary

**Victoria is at a critical juncture, facing rising cost-of-living, the impacts of climate change and a housing crisis, with young people on the front line.**

Young people are experiencing rising educational disengagement, still navigating the after-effects of the COVID years, discrimination, homelessness, mental health challenges, and alarming rates of suicide. It is critical we strengthen the systems designed to support young people. The more we invest in young people now, the better Victoria’s community and future will be.

The Victorian youth sector plays a pivotal role in supporting young Victorians. A Social Return On Investment (SROI) report undertaken by Deloitte found that **every \$1 invested in young people via youth sector programs directly returns at least \$2.62 in benefits** through improved economic, social and health outcomes for young people, along with reduced need for crisis interventions and acute care.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the youth sector is facing significant workforce challenges – including increasing operational costs, stagnant or reduced funding in real teams, high volumes of complex cases, and staff burn-out. **Our sector must be adequately resourced to deliver safe, inclusive and effective services to support young people to reach their full potential and thrive.**

**The 2025-26 Victorian State Budget must commit to sustainable, long-term solutions.** To achieve success, Victoria must prioritise youth engagement through meaningful co-design processes. Young people want a say in the decisions that affect them. They have a right to be involved in, and central to, discussions about policies and services that shape their futures.

This submission outlines 53 recommendations for priority investments across 12 focus areas, including:

1. **Strengthening Victoria’s youth sector** through longer contracts and place-based youth services.
2. **Ending youth homelessness and housing insecurity** by developing a co-designed Victorian specific Youth Housing and Homelessness Strategy.
3. **Addressing rural transport disadvantage** for young people and youth sector workers.
4. **Supporting youth mental health** through tailored early intervention programs and youth-led education.



Our recommendations are based on extensive consultations, including:

- YACVic's 2024 Listening Tour with 155 youth sector stakeholders and 83 young people.
- YACVic's 2024 Youth Sector Survey with over 200 Victorian youth workers and their employers.

We are aware of the government's focus on debt recovery and are committed to addressing critical needs that align and deliver current initiatives and reform agendas, including:

- [\*Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027\*](#)
- [\*Mental Health and Wellbeing Reform\*](#)
- [\*Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQA+ strategy 2022-32\*](#)
- [\*Our equal state: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023-2027\*](#)
- [\*Inclusive Victoria: state disability plan \(2022-2026\)\*](#)

We also include measures to support the upcoming [\*Statewide Action Plan to reduce drug harms\*](#), and *Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy*.

Importantly, our recommendations aim to alleviate long-term costs for government via an early intervention approach under the [\*Early Intervention Investment Framework\*](#).

YACVic, alongside our members and the broader youth sector, stands ready to support the Victorian Government in creating a progressive and equitable state for all young people.



Sincerely,

**Mary Nega**

YACVic CEO



## Contents

Summary of recommendations .....	6
1. A Strong and Sustainable Youth Sector .....	13
2. Support young people early, where and when they need it .....	17
3. End youth homelessness and housing insecurity .....	20
4. Support all young people to be healthy and well .....	23
5. Invest in a safe future for young people free from family violence .....	27
6. Safe, inclusive and supportive schools .....	29
7. Youth Justice .....	31
8. Intergenerational fairness, disasters and climate change .....	33
9. Address rural transport disadvantage .....	36
10. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Self Determination .....	37
11. Disabled young people .....	38
12. Anti-racism and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds .....	39
References .....	41



# Summary of recommendations

YACVic recommends the Victorian Government makes the following additional investments in the 2025-26 State Budget...

## 1. A Strong and Sustainable Youth Sector

- 1.1 Increase default contract terms to seven years for government funded community service organisations**, including both service agreements and common funding agreements, as recommended by the Productivity Commission.
- 1.2 Fund an independent review into the Victorian Government's contracting and procurement arrangements** to investigate how they could better incentivise collaboration, promote sustainability and enable innovation in community service delivery.
- 1.3 Boost base funding to the community sector to meet the real cost of delivering essential services**, including accounting for indexation.
- 1.4 Address student placement poverty** by working with the Commonwealth to **introduce support payments for youth work students undertaking unpaid placements**.
- 1.5 Increase support to youth sector organisations so they can deliver high quality youthwork placements**, including through:
  - Dedicated funding to youth sector organisations to ensure they have the **resources and capacity to provide high quality student learning experiences and coordination**.
  - **Specific funding for peak bodies (including YACVic) to support placement capacity building** for placements across the youth sector.

## 2. Support young people early, where and when they need it

- 2.1 Allocate funding over the next four years to fully implement the 74 initiatives in 'Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-27.'**
- 2.2 Increase investment in youth services and generalist youth workers embedded in high-need schools and community.** This will support place-based capacity building and respond to young people's co-occurring issues – such as mental health, AOD and educational disengagement.
- 2.3 Ensure all youth workers in schools are covered by and renumrated under the Social Community, Home Care and Disability Services**



**(SCHADS) award level**, to increase job attractiveness, retention and workforce capacity.

**2.4 Invest in repurposing more community spaces into youth hubs**, to expand the availability of safe, accessible and inclusive spaces where young people can engage in activities, events and programs outside of school.

**2.5 Allocate funding to peak bodies to support the ‘Youth Hub Network.’** This would support youth hubs to develop and share relevant resources, training, information and advocacy for best practice with young people.

### 3. End youth homelessness and housing insecurity

**3.1 Develop a co-designed Victorian specific Youth Housing and Homelessness Strategy**, focused on ending youth homelessness by coordinating services, supports, and interventions tailored to young people. To include:

- Dedicated youth housing model: **The design, development and implementation of a dedicated and fit-for-purpose youth housing model** for young people (15-24) in the Victorian homelessness system – to empower young people with the skills and resilience to transition to housing independence.
- Social Housing: **5000 social housing tenancies for young people** to improve access to affordable, safe and youth-appropriate housing and to meet rising demand.
- Aboriginal youth housing stock: **10 per cent of all youth housing stock allocated to Aboriginal young people.**
- Investment in social housing: **Dedicate 15 per cent of the combined Social Housing Accelerator Fund and Regional Housing Fund to social housing for young people**, better supporting a data driven approach to housing stock that is proportionate to youth homelessness.
- Subsidy modelling: **Fund the modelling of sufficient subsidy levels** so young people can meet market rents until they can support the rent unassisted, including across all tenancy types.
- Prevention and early intervention services: **Increase investment in dedicated funding for prevention and early intervention services** to address the needs of young people before they experience homelessness. This should prioritise populations overrepresented in homelessness and marginal housing, focusing on holistic support and tenancy maintenance.

**3.2 Fund the 500 supported housing places for young people experiencing homelessness and mental ill health**, as promised through the mental health royal commission (Rec 25) and now overdue.



## 4. Support young people to be healthy and well

- 4.1 Increase investment in tailored youth mental health supports and services beyond the headspace model, both in community and schools** (see also [recommendation 2.2](#) regarding investment in generalist youth workers to better support mental health prevention and early intervention).
- 4.2 Invest in youth-led suicide prevention and mental health education that is place-based and supports capacity building, such as [Live4Life](#).**
- 4.3 Fund the establishment of a non-government agency led by people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress, as promised through the mental health royal commission (Rec 29) and now overdue.**
- 4.4 Invest in increasing the capacity of the youth AOD sector, by:**
  - **Funding youth AOD practice leads, programs and services to address barriers to access and lengthy appointment wait-times.** To focus on critical place-based and cohort-specific need, including for rural and regional Victoria, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, and refugee and migrant communities.
  - **Implementing 20 additional youth residential detoxification beds across Victoria.**
- 4.5 To support the rollout of the Victorian Government's new pill testing trial, invest in a co-designed information and social education campaign targeting young people 18-25 who use illicit substances.**
- 4.6 Scale-up the *Victorian Trans and Gender Diverse Health Initiative* to increase access to vital healthcare support, including specialised mental health and peer support.**
- 4.7 Invest in training and education for community and health sector professionals on best practice inclusive support for trans, gender diverse and non-binary young people, particularly in rural and regional areas, to increase accessibility to safe healthcare.**
- 4.8 Invest in place-based mental health and wellbeing programs to support LGBTIQ+ young people from multicultural, multifaith, and Aboriginal communities – including through the [Healthy Equal Youth \(HEY\) project](#).**

## 5 Invest in a safe future for young people free from family violence

- 5.1 Fund youth-specific family violence service responses, co-designed with children and young people, within the Orange Door Network, family violence services, child protection and other family services.** This would ensure young people are supported as victim survivors in their own right, with unique needs distinct from children and adults.
- 5.2 Invest in developing youth specific information and resources so young people understand family violence and where to access support specific**



**to their needs.** This must be designed and developed for young people, by young people.

## 6 Safe, inclusive and supportive schools

**6.1 Increase funding to mainstream flexible in-school and remote learning options to support students with diverse learning needs** to remain supported and engaged in school. Flexible learning options to be individualised, student-centred and student-led to ensure they are appropriate and accessible for all young people.

**6.2 Increase funding and expand eligibility criteria for programs such as Navigator,** to support disengaged students much earlier.

**6.3 Invest in place-based collaboration to support trauma-informed and culturally safe, early intervention and prevention initiatives for young people in schools,** rather than reactive punitive responses (*see also [recommendation 2.2](#) regarding investment in generalist youth workers to better support mental health prevention and early intervention*).

**6.4 Provide regular and ongoing trauma-informed professional development for teachers and other school staff** to better understand:

- The impacts of trauma on child brain development and its effect on behaviour; and
- how to identify and respond to students impacted by trauma, such as adjusting their learning, having conversations about mental health and suicide, and linking them in with relevant services and supports.

**6.5 Agree to and fund recommendations 29, 30 and 50 of the Legal and Social Issues Committee [Final Report](#)** from the inquiry into the state education system:

- The Victorian Government **investigate the need for additional appropriate supports for culturally and linguistically diverse students, with a view to establishing a program of Multicultural Support Officers** (Rec 29).
- That the Department of Education commit to funding that ensures the **long-term stability of Out-of-School Hours Learning Support Programs** (Rec 30).
- That the Victorian Government **review English as an Additional Language reference funding** with a view to ensuring that every student requiring support is reached (Rec 50).

**6.6 Establish a student mental health taskforce to consult with students about their experiences and report back to government.**



## 7 Youth justice

- 7.1 Provide secure funding for youth crime prevention programs** which keep high-need communities and young people safe and supported – including reinstating funding for the Youth Support Service run by the [Youth Support and Advocacy Service \(YSAS\)](#).
- 7.2 Increase investment in youth workers in high-need schools and community settings**, recognising their central role in early intervention and prevention to divert young people from youth justice system (*See [recommendations 2.2 and 6.2](#)*).
- 7.3 Fund concerted evidence-based approaches to youth justice reform, research and policy** – including the [Smart Justice for Young People Coalition](#).
- 7.4 Fund the implementation of *[Working Together: An Action Plan to End the Over-representation of Particular Groups of Young People in the Criminal Justice System](#)***.

## 8 Intergenerational fairness, disasters and climate change

- 8.1 Invest in the establishment of a Victorian Commissioner for Future Generations.**
- 8.2 Establish a Victorian child and youth advisory council on climate.**  
Crucially, ensure accountability measures are established to track the implementation of youth council advice by government.
- 8.3 Pilot the development of a framework co-designed with young people to address navigating conversations around climate anxiety** and the rise of disasters and extreme weather events, in partnership with the youth mental health sector.
- 8.4 Fund the development of a state-wide Disaster Resilience Coalition of young people to provide advice and expertise on the State Emergency Management Plan and the Municipal Emergency Management Plans**, ensuring young people's voices are included in disaster resilience at all levels of government.
- 8.5 Scale-up place-based youth participation projects that build local skills and enhance qualification pathways for young people to respond to disasters and extreme weather events.**



## 9 Address rural transport disadvantage

**9.1 Fund the development of a rural and regional transport fund to remove significant access barriers for young people and youth workers.** To support the attendance of professional development, events, education, work and support services.

**9.2 Develop a comprehensive and place-based analysis of the public transport needs of young people,** through engagement and co-design with young people and the youth sector.

## 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Self Determination

**10.1 Provide ongoing investment to meaningfully implement current and upcoming recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission.**

**10.2 Appropriately fund and resource Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations delivering essential programs for Aboriginal people** across housing, health, mental health, and youth justice.

**10.3 Expand dedicated funding for youth specific Aboriginal supports –** such as through the [Koorie Youth Council](#) and [Marram Nganyin Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program](#).

**10.4 Fund training and development to strengthen cultural competency of mainstream organisations to enable best practice engagement and allyship.**

*(See also: [recommendations 3.1](#) (Aboriginal youth housing stock), [4.4](#) (cohort specific AOD support), [4.8](#) (LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal young people), [7.1](#) and [7.4](#) (youth justice addressing overrepresentation) and [12.1](#) (Anti-racism)).*

## 11 Disabled young people

**11.1 Invest in policy, research and capacity building with disabled young people to ensure their voices are heard when implementing reforms** from Victoria's [Youth Strategy](#) and [Inclusive Victoria](#).


**11.2 Embed delivery of disability-led disability inclusion and awareness training across community, health, education and allied sectors to combat ableism and improve inclusive and accessible service delivery for this cohort.** Training should be co-designed, led and delivered by and with disabled young people, such as [Together Training](#).

**11.3 Dedicate funding to implement minimum accessibility standards across all generalist service providers in mental health, health, and housing services,** co-designed with disabled people and the disability sector.



- 11.4 Provide targeted funding to disability advocacy bodies working with disabled young people and the community sector so they can support young people to understand the changes to the NDIS and address system gaps within services.** This includes ensuring organisations are supported to meet new compliance standards and supporting disabled young people to realise their rights.
- 11.5 Dedicate funding to promote the Disability Liaison Officer program and fully fund the implementation of the Disability Identifier Project.**
- 11.6 Provide disability-specific career guidance for disabled young people transitioning from education to employment, provided by disability-led organisations and counsellors with lived experience of disability.**

## 12 Anti-racism and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

- 12.1 Invest in youth focused initiatives in *Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy*.**
  - 12.2 Invest and expand whole-of-school approaches to combat racism,** including tailored approaches for primary and secondary schools – such as [Schools Standing up to Racism](#).
  - 12.3 Ensure ongoing funding and scale-up support programs for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, focusing on regional and rural areas.**
  - 12.4 Increase funding for youth- and community-led programs which strengthen multicultural youth participation and integrate youth-led solutions into decision-making processes, such as [Culture Spring](#).**
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# 1. A Strong and Sustainable Youth Sector

## Goal:

A strong and sustainable Victorian youth sector means youth professionals have the resources, capacity, and training needed to improve young peoples lives. When Victoria's youth sector is strong, young people are better supported to reach their full potential, and thrive as active members of the community.

## Provide multi-year funding.

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**1.1 Increase default contract terms to seven years for government funded community service organisations**, including both service agreements and common funding agreements, as recommended by the Productivity Commission.

**1.2 Fund an independent review into the Victorian Government's contracting and procurement arrangements** to investigate how they could better incentivise collaboration, promote sustainability and enable innovation in community service delivery.

**Rationale:** Short-term funding means insecure employment. This significantly impacts everything – the youth sector workforce, the young people we support, and the impacts the sector can make

YACVic's listening tour highlighted critical youth sector challenges – including a fatigued workforce experiencing high levels of stress, burnout, and staffing instability. These issues are exacerbated by short-term contracts, and rising cost-of-living pressures.

YACVic's Youth Sector Survey highlighted key findings:

- 46 per cent of employer participants are funded only through the short-term, typically 1-2 years.
- 57 per cent of employers and 47 per cent of youth workers identified short-term or cyclical funding as the biggest barrier to fully effective youth programs, projects and/or services.
- 48 per cent of employers reported difficulty finding and retaining staff due to contract uncertainty and short-term funding cycles.

Short term funding prevents youth sector organisations from engaging in long-term planning, jobs are insecure for the last six months of every funding cycle, employees are anxious about their future prospects and disincentivised to work for long-term impact and rapidly move on from the sector, to areas where there is a better prospect stable employment. In turn, the sector faces several challenges:



- Ongoing and avoidable recruitment costs.
- Loss of key specialist knowledge and strong trusted relationships between workers, young people and communities.
- Difficulty in scaling-up evidence-based programs, leading to program insecurity and limited opportunities for growth or innovation.

While the Community Sector Fair Jobs Code focuses on, among other key asks, “promoting secure employment and job security,” this is largely untenable if short-term funding cycles are maintained.

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*“Often we don’t receive notice our programs have been refunded until the funding is about to expire so staff look elsewhere for work as we don’t know whether the program will be refunded or not” – Youth organisation*

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**Job security will boost staff retention and enable youth services sector to invest in medium-term planning**, thereby supporting the Victorian government’s reforms and activities more effectively. This shift would ultimately lead to better outcomes for young people, allowing them to develop secure and trusted relationships with their workers and support programs.


The Productivity Commission has previously recommended increasing default contract terms for community services to seven years.<sup>2</sup> **This recommendation should apply to all service agreements, including both grants and common funding agreements.**

### **Ensure sector funding reflects the full cost of delivery services.**

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should...**

**1.3 Boost base funding to the community sector to meet the real cost of delivering essential services**, including accounting for indexation.

**Rationale:** In the context of a cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation, community services are facing escalating operational costs. Other factors contributing to increased costs include:

- Fair Work Commission minimum Award rate increases which have not been matched by funding increases
  - Mandatory portable long service leave contributions since 2019 (the scheme has had a disproportionate cost impact on sectors with predominantly young workers)
- 

- Increased superannuation contributions
- The abolition of the minimum threshold for super payments for casual workers in 2022
- The 42% increase in the Victorian WorkCover premiums in 2023
- Rising costs of compliance with new Social Service Regulations and Community Sector Fair Jobs Code.

In YACVic's Youth Sector Survey, 65 per cent of employers don't believe they have adequate funding to meet the basic delivery costs for their programs, projects and or/services. This financial strain is compounded by increasing workloads: over 60 per cent of youth workers and over 75 per cent of youth worker employers told us caseloads and/or the number of young people engaging with their service has increased over the last two years. Also, that the complexity and risk of cases has increased.

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*"We must adequately fund programs. Especially the overheads component. There's such little recognition of the growing cost of investment required in tech and systems space. Resulting in widespread use of basic record management tools and limited funding for innovation." – Youth Organisation*

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**The Victorian government should work with peak bodies to establish a sustainable and equitable funding model that takes into account rising costs.**

This approach would ensure community services can continue to provide the essential support young people need.

**Support youth worker students to complete quality placements.**

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**1.4 Address student placement poverty by working with the Commonwealth to introduce support payments for youth work students undertaking unpaid placements.**

**1.5 Increase support to youth sector organisations so they can deliver high quality youthwork placements, including through:**

- Dedicated funding to youth sector organisations to ensure they have the **resources and capacity to provide high quality student learning experiences and coordination.**
- **Specific funding for peak bodies (including YACVic) to support placement capacity for placements building across the youth sector.**



**Rationale:** High-quality student placements are essential for enhancing community sector capability and workforce development. They help students build workplace skills, and facilitate their transition to paid employment by applying theoretical knowledge to real world situations. YACVic's youth sector survey indicated 47 per cent of employers rely on unpaid positions, such as student placements, interns and volunteers, to support service delivery.

YACVic commends the Federal government's 2024 commitment to providing support payments for nursing, social work and teaching students doing unpaid placement. But, **despite also being a priority industry, youth work students are missing out**, including, but not limited to:

- Bachelor or Master of Youth Work
- Diploma of Youth Work
- Certificate IV in Youth Work

**Placement poverty is well established.** Many students are required to juggle study and paid work while completing their placement, and often incur out-of-pocket expenses – including transport, accommodation, clothing, childcare, and compliance checks (e.g. police check and NDIS worker screening check). **Without better support for youth work students, we risk burnout before they even begin, and Victoria will struggle to meet rising demand for social services.**

At the same time, the supply of high quality youth work placements is limited. Students face challenges finding placements, while organisations don't have the funding or resources to support students and coordinate with education institutions. **Lack of high quality placement opportunities is compounded by high workloads and existing workforce shortages, further reducing organisational capacity.**

To effectively support youth sector organisation in delivering high quality placements, funding initiative such as the 'Working for Victoria' program, which YACVic delivered in partnership with the Centre for Multi-cultural Youth (CMY), have proven pivotal. Key outcomes of this project included:

- 99 student placements developed over 13 months in 2021 and 2022.
- 80 additional student placements in the planning stage as of February 2022 when the project ended.
- Resources created to assist youth sector organisations in developing placement opportunities.

By increasing support for youth worker students and the organisations that host them, we can ensure a well-prepared workforce capable of meeting the growing needs of our communities.





## 2. Support young people early, where and when they need it

### Goal:

Every young person deserves the support and opportunities necessary to develop their skills and achieve their goals in life. To do this, all young people should have access to capacity building, and tailored support services where and when they need them. The more we invest in supporting young people now, the better Victoria's community and future will be.

### Fully fund the implementation of the Youth Strategy.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should...

**2.1 Allocate funding over the next four years to fully implement all 74 initiatives in 'Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-27.'**

**Rationale:** Through the Victorian Youth Strategy, the Victorian government made a commitment to implement meaningful and sustained actions to improve outcomes for young people and the youth sector. Developed in collaboration with thousands of young people in 2022, the strategy sets out a five year plan including 74 initiatives across six priority areas – health; safety and security, education and employment; youth participation; identity and culture; and access to services.

However, despite being over two years into the strategy, **there has been limited funding to meaningfully implement the Youth Strategy to date.** Stakeholders in the youth sector and young people themselves have expressed some confusion regarding the status of the Strategy – particularly its implementation, government reporting requirements, and funding allocations.

As a priority, the Victorian government should prioritise the allocation of funding to fully implement the 74 key actions outlined in the strategy. This funding could also provide additional resourcing for the Office for Youth to better disseminate timely and relevant information regarding the implementation of these actions.

### Invest in place-based youth services in schools and community.

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should...

**2.2 Increase investment in youth services and generalist youth workers embedded in high-need schools and community.** This will support place-based capacity building and respond to young people's co-occurring issues – such as mental health, AOD and educational disengagement.



**2.3 Ensure all youth workers in schools are covered by and renumerated under the Social Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) award level, to increase job attractiveness, retention and workforce capacity.**

**Rationale:** Investing in prevention and early intervention supports for young people promotes positive mental health and capacity building, equipping them to better cope with life's stresses and engage meaningfully in their communities.<sup>3</sup> Also, directly reduces the risk of escalation into acute or crisis interventions.

A key finding from YACVic Listening Tour, particularly among rural and regional stakeholders, highlighted an **overreliance on outreach services, which are ineffective compared with place-based supports**. Some challenges with the outreach model include:

- Travel time leads to reduced or inconsistent direct service and case management delivery in communities, undermining service effectiveness.
- A lack of local knowledge and relationships means outreach service aren't tailored to respond to local needs.

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*“Youth work means meeting the specific needs of the community you work within, consulting them and encouraging their own advocacy and voice as the driving force behind the work being completed.” – Youth Worker*

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**Strengthening place-based youth services and generalist youth workers in community and schools offers a critical opportunity to build capacity and provide supports early, including:**

- Understanding and addressing the unique local needs of young people, providing tailored supports, facilitating trusted referrals, and helping navigate services.<sup>4</sup>
- Leveraging local community knowledge and capacity to drive action, and develop sustainable solutions.
- Building trusted relationships with local sector services and young people.

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*“Youth Work means meeting a young person where they are at and accepting them for who they are in a non judgmental way, listening to their wants, needs and goals, and working with them in a way that works for both of you. It's relational based, built on trust, flexibility and reliability.” – Youth Worker*

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Youth workers are essential for supporting young people who face barriers in accessing specialist services – such as limited availability, high costs, privacy, marginalisation, system complexity, lack of transport options, and stigma – especially in rural and regional communities.<sup>5</sup>

In schools, place-based youth workers can bridge the gap between school staff and wellbeing teams, enhancing teachers capacity through shared knowledge and skills, including trauma-informed practice. See the [Empower Youth Program in Swan Hill](#) as a strong example of a successful place-based embedded approach, which lost program funding this year.

The Social Return On Investment report commissioned by Deloitte found that **every \$1 invested in young people via youth work programs directly returns at least \$2.62 in benefits** through improved economic, social and health outcomes for young people, along with reduced need for crisis interventions and acute care.<sup>6</sup> This aligns closely with the goals of the Victorian Government’s Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIF).

## Provide safe and inclusive spaces for young people.

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should...**

**2.4 Invest in repurposing more community spaces into youth hubs**, to expand the availability of safe, accessible and inclusive spaces where young people can engage in activities, events and programs outside of school.

**2.5 Allocate funding to peak bodies to support the ‘Youth Hub Network.’** This would support youth hubs to develop and share relevant resources, training, information and advocacy for best practice with young people.

**Rationale:** Safe and inclusive spaces outside school and home are essential for young people to feel connected, included, and secure in their communities. Youth Hubs serve as drop-in centres offering programs, activities and events, providing vital entry points for information and referrals to various supports, and are a space for young people to make social connections.

Feedback from both YACVic’s listening tour and Youth Sector Survey highlighted that young people are increasingly feeling a lack of inclusive and safe places to socialise outside of school, especially in rural and regional areas and among marginalised groups. Many have expressed the need for a 'third' space:

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*“It’s important for me to be able to go to spaces where my identity is validated and accepted as a queer young person because growing up in a small town i’ve had to hide or lessen my identity so much of the time. It’s important these events go ahead to me because sometimes they are*



*the only spaces available where I can be myself and express myself in a safer space” – Young Person*

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**There is a need to repurpose funding of community spaces for more youth hubs, particularly in rural and regional areas.**

Existing youth hubs also require more support to ensure their effectiveness and impact, particularly through the ‘Youth Hub Network’. Currently, the Nillumbik Youth Hub is informally managing this coordination, but lacks distinct resources to do this work.

**To ensure sustainability, maximise efficiency and enable best-practice, Youth Hubs must be supported through a resourced network. This would provide relevant resources, training and information that advocates for best practice with young people.** It’s crucial to understand what makes a safe and accessible space for young people, including adhering to the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector, the National Principles of Child Safety, and the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

### **3. End youth homelessness and housing insecurity**

#### **Goal:**

Homelessness among young people in Victoria should be rare, brief and non-recurring. But when young people do experience homelessness or housing insecurity, our service system must be equipped with the necessary resources and programs to support them effectively, addressing their unique needs and experiences. This includes access to stable housing, tailored support services, and pathways to long-term solutions.

#### **Develop a co-designed Victorian Youth Housing and homelessness strategy.**

The following recommendations have been developed through careful and ongoing consultation with the youth housing and homelessness sector and relevant peaks through the Youth Housing Alliance, a coordinated voice of leading youth housing and homelessness experts and specialist organisations. This alliance is convened by YACVic and brings together the housing and homelessness sector with the common goal of ending youth homelessness. Numbers are based on Council for Homeless Persons (CHP) modelling.





**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**3.1 Develop a co-designed Victorian specific Youth Housing and Homelessness Strategy**, focused on ending youth homelessness by coordinating services, supports, and interventions tailored to young people. To include:

- Dedicated youth housing model: **The design, development and implementation of a dedicated and fit-for-purpose [youth housing model](#)** for young people (15-24) in the Victorian homelessness system – to empower young people with the skills and resilience to transition to housing independence.
- Social housing: **5000 social housing tenancies for young people** to improve access to affordable, safe and youth-appropriate housing and to meet rising demand.
- Aboriginal youth housing stock: **10 per cent of all youth housing stock allocated to Aboriginal young people.**
- Investment in social housing: **Dedicate 15 per cent of the combined Social Housing Accelerator Fund and Regional Housing Fund to social housing for young people**, better supporting a data driven approach to housing stock that is proportionate to youth homelessness.
- Subsidy modelling: **Fund the modelling of sufficient subsidy levels** so young people can meet market rents until they can support the rent unassisted, including across all tenancy types.
- Prevention and early intervention services: **Increase investment in dedicated funding for prevention and early intervention services** to address the needs of young people before they experience homelessness. This should prioritise populations overrepresented in homelessness and marginal housing, focusing on holistic support and tenancy maintenance.

**Rationale:** Victoria requires a targeted strategic framework and [model for youth housing](#) that addresses the unique challenges young people face. This response would empower and equip young people with the skills and resilience needed to transition to housing independence. There are three focus areas:

- **Provision of housing:** There is an urgent need for additional subsidised housing that aligns with the specific needs of young people, including tenancy duration and location near public transport, access to work and essential services.
- **Services and support:** Housing allocation must be paired with comprehensive support services for the duration of tenancy and for the spectrum of needs.



- **Subsidies for viability:** Addressing the rental gap is crucial. Current subsidies are inadequate, requiring up-to-date modelling to determine sufficient subsidy levels that allow young people to meet market rents.

Victoria's youth homelessness rates are critical, with demand severely outweighing supply of adequate housing.

*With 7,628 young people aged 12-24 experiencing homelessness in Victoria on census night, they make up 25% of all people experiencing homelessness.<sup>7</sup> And, in the context of our worsening housing crisis, cost-of-living crisis, and increasing demand for services, this number continues to grow.*

Despite this urgent need, Victoria's current housing system is not effective for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.<sup>8</sup> Victoria has no youth specific housing strategic framework to coordinate services, supports and interventions, as well as other barriers to achieving better outcomes for young people:

- **A lack of adequate housing options.** Current investment in housing falls short of addressing the scale of young people experiencing homelessness.
- **Inadequate support systems.** Current responses are built around legal and developmental assumptions of personal and financial independence of young people, who often require extra support to transition to adulthood and housing independence.
- **Intersectional needs.** The current system fails to adequately support the unique needs, experiences, and intersectional requirements of young people who are overrepresented in homelessness populations – including Aboriginal young peoples, disabled young people, young people from refugee, asylum seeker and multicultural backgrounds, and young people who identify as LGBTIQ+. 77% of young Victorians experiencing homelessness or marginal housing are first- or second-generation Australians.
- **Rural and regional are missing out.** Many current initiatives targeting youth homelessness are not rolled out state-wide, leaving young people living in outer metro, rural and regional areas missing out on vital support.

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*“We need stable accommodation options that are designed considering the unique needs of young people, and programs that provide young people with the opportunity to build positive connections in a way that is flexible and adaptable.” – Youth Worker*

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Investing in youth specific responses provides a crucial opportunity for early intervention and prevention, ensuring young people don't experience a lifetime of episodic homelessness.

We welcome the considerable Victorian government work underway to reform the Victorian housing system, providing a unique opportunity to work in partnership with the housing and homelessness sector to create an overarching strategy to end youth homelessness in Victoria.

## Keep the promise to fund 500 supported housing places

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**3.2 Fund the 500 supported housing places for young people experiencing homelessness and mental ill health**, as promised through the mental health royal commission (Rec 25) and now overdue.

**Rationale:** The Victorian government has already committed to fund 500 supported social housing properties for young people, as part of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.<sup>9</sup> Despite this commitment, funding is yet to be allocated, and the government has provided limited information on any action. Stable housing is a crucial protective factor for mental health. This must be a priority for 2025.

## 4. Support all young people to be healthy and well

### Goal:

All young people should have early access to critical health, mental health, alcohol and other drug (AOD), and other specialist services, where and when they need it. And, young people should feel empowered to make informed choices about their health, by knowing where and how to access trusted, evidence-based health information and services.

## Ensure young people can access tailored mental health support

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**4.1 Increase investment in tailored youth mental health supports and services beyond the headspace model, both in community and schools** (see also [recommendation 2.2](#) regarding investment in generalist youth workers to better support mental health prevention and early intervention).



**4.2 Invest in youth-led suicide prevention and mental health education that is place-based and supports capacity building, such as [Live4Life](#).**

**4.3 Fund the establishment of a non-government agency led by people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress, as promised through the mental health royal commission (Rec 29) and now overdue.**

**Rationale:** In the face of an alarming increase in youth mental ill health and youth suicide, alongside a slow down on implementing the remaining Royal Commission recommendations, this budget must re-commit to supporting youth mental health.

In our Youth Worker Survey, 84 per cent of youth workers told us mental health is the most pressing issue for the young people they work with. The Mission Australia Survey (2023) also highlighted 24 per cent of young Victorians aged 15-19 consider mental health their biggest challenge, including experiences of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

There is a clear and critical gap in care for young people with complex mental health needs who don't require hospital services, but also don't receive adequate support from primary mental health services. While headspace centres play a vital role, they are facing overwhelming demand and lack of resources to address rising number of presentations.

Current access barriers across the system – particularly in rural and regional communities – mean many young people are accessing support way too late, at the point of acute or crisis intervention. headspace cannot meet the needs of young people on its own, and was never set up to respond to complex and serious mental health challenges.

Both our Youth Sector Survey and Listening Tour highlighted the **critical need for greater investment in youth specific mental health early intervention, treatment, and support for young people**. This includes investment in the youth workforce beyond health care workers and mental health clinicians, particularly for rural areas where access to specialist services is limited.

Prevention and early intervention also requires strengthening mental health literacy and capacity building, including investment in place-based and youth-led suicide prevention and mental health education. See the [Live4Life](#) model as a key example, empowering rural communities to improve youth mental health and reduce suicide.





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*“Youth participation and community development frameworks are key to our service delivery. Incorporating these frameworks in the planning, development, implementation, delivery and evaluation. Young people are at the centre of any type of project or initiative, and are the drivers of our programs.” – Youth Worker*

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The government has already promised to fund the mental health lived experience agency as part of Recommendation 29 of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. Despite this commitment, there has been no action. This recommendation is critical to Victoria’s mental health reform pathway to drive systems change.

## Strengthen youth AOD support, treatment and service access

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**4.4** Invest in increasing the capacity of the youth AOD sector, by:

- **Funding youth AOD practice leads, programs and services to address barriers to access and lengthy appointment wait-times.** To focus on critical place-based and cohort-specific need, including for rural and regional Victoria, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, and refugee and migrant communities.
- **Implementing 20 additional youth residential detoxification beds across Victoria.**

**4.5** To support the rollout of the Victorian Governments new pill testing trial, invest in a co-designed information and social education campaign targeting young people 18-25 who use illicit substances.

**Rationale:** Our work in rural and regional Victoria highlights the **critical need for significant increase to alcohol and other drug (AOD) early intervention, prevention and treatment supports** for young people and their families.

We commend the Victorian Government for introducing an 18-month drug checking trial including both mobile and fixed site services. Pill testing is evidenced based, and aligns with the Coroners Court recommendations to reduce preventable deaths and non-fatal harms associated with drug use.

To ensure effective roll-out of this trial, **young people need information about how to access the pill testing sites, where they will be located, where to access additional support and what their legal rights and responsibilities are.** To do this, the government must invest in a co-designed information and social education campaign targeting young people aged 18-25 who use illicit substances.



In [YACVic's 2024 Submission in the Inquiry into Vaping](#), young people told us **AOD information needs to be co-designed with young people, support them to make informed decisions, and be delivered by young people**. Peers often serve as more trusted sources of information for young people,<sup>10</sup> making peer-delivered information an important harm reduction tool that is relevant and relatable.

The [Crushed But Okay](#) campaign serves as a strong example of meaningful youth co-design for public health initiatives, providing a solid foundation and framework for future campaigns.

## Strengthen support for LGBTIQIA+ young people

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**4.6 Scale-up the *Victorian Trans and Gender Diverse Health Initiative*** to increase access to vital healthcare support, including specialised mental health and peer support.

**4.7 Invest in training and education for community and health sector professionals on best practice inclusive support for trans, gender diverse and non-binary young people**, particularly in rural and regional areas, to increase accessibility to safe healthcare.

**4.8 Invest in place-based mental health and wellbeing programs to support LGBTIQIA+ young people from multicultural, multifaith, and Aboriginal communities** – including through the [Healthy Equal Youth \(HEY\) project](#).

**Rationale:** LGBTIQIA+ young people, especially those who identify as trans, gender diverse, or non-binary (TGDNB), face rising discrimination and vilification in mainstream media, online, and in-person. Anti-LGBTIQIA+ sentiment directly impacts their mental health, feelings of belonging, and ability to seek support. Compounding these issues are long waitlists for services, a shortage of affirming and inclusive care, and insufficient understanding among healthcare professionals regarding the unique needs of TGDNB young people.

Harmful discriminatory rhetoric has resulted in unsafe environments online and the spread of misinformation about accessing gender affirming care. To address this, the government must invest in **training for mainstream community and health sector professionals on LGBTIQIA+ specific health and wellbeing needs, co-designed with LGBTIQIA+ young people**.

Scaling up programs like the *Victorian Trans and Gender Diverse Health Initiative*, including the Transgender Victoria's Peer Support Program, will ensure timely and inclusive access to mental health support for LGBTIQIA+ young people. Peer support programs empower LGBTIQIA+ young people to develop leadership skills and safely share their lived experiences.



The Healthy Equal Youth (HEY) Project is the only government funding specifically dedicated to youth LGBTIQ+ mental health and wellbeing, and suicide prevention. By providing training, safe spaces and community visibility, the project strengthens and supports young people in their communities. According to Deloitte's 2024 evaluation Report, there is a rising number of young Victorians identifying as LGBTIQ+, coupled with an unmet demand for safe, inclusive mental health and wellbeing services, especially in rural and regional areas.

The Report also identified **gaps in services for LGBTIQ+ young people from multicultural and First Nations communities**. Investing in multicultural and Aboriginal Community-Controlled organisations to deliver inclusive mental health and wellbeing services will improve access and engagement with LGBTIQ+ young people in their communities.

## 5. Invest in a safe future for young people free from family violence

### Goal:

All children and young people live in a safe home, free from family violence. To achieve this, we need a service system that young people understand, can easily access, and will meet their needs. And, will do this regardless of whether they are accompanied by an adult, navigating the service system on their own, or are under statutory care.

### Young people are supported as victim survivors in their own right

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...

**5.1 Fund youth-specific family violence service responses, co-designed with children and young people, within the Orange Door Network, family violence services, child protection and other family services.** This would ensure young people are supported as victim survivors in their own right, with unique needs distinct from children and adults.

**Rationale:** The needs of young people must be recognised as distinct from their parents, carers and younger children. Currently, **there is a significant gap in targeted crisis responses and case management for unaccompanied young people experiencing family violence.**

This is due to a lack of clarity on the rights of young people to exercise agency, and the ways in which family violence, family services, youth services and child protection systems intersect. Most family services and child protection systems are not designed or resourced to support young people over 15.<sup>11</sup> So, the only

support services available are homelessness or youth services, neither of which are designed or resourced to manage complex family violence risk and/or cases.

In practice, **there are no specialised family violence crisis response or case management programs designed with young people's needs in mind.** This gap is evident in the Orange Door Network and family violence services. And, there are limited supports for young men who identify as victim survivors.

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*“Children and young people should have a dedicated, stand-alone family violence service response. The government should fund a meaningful co-design/production project to engage children and young people in designing a service offering that will meet our unique needs.”*  
– Conor Pall, Deputy Chair, Victim Survivor’s Advisory Council

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The Orange Door must be resourced to support young people as victim survivors in their own right – regardless of parental engagement or consent. Youth specialisation includes expertise in the developmental, legal and other unique needs of young people, and applying tailored responses – such as assertive outreach, and communication strategies. **Youth services and specialisation must be embedded in holistic service integration with the Orange Door, family violence services, child protection, and other services.**

## **Young people understand family violence, including where and how to access support**

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**5.2 Invest in developing youth specific information and resources so young people understand family violence and where to access support specific to their needs.** This must be designed and developed for young people, by young people.

**Rationale:** Creating generational change to break the cycle of family violence requires a strong commitment to primary prevention, including challenging the attitudes and behaviours that underpin violence. This includes **strengthening access to education programs and awareness raising campaigns designed by, and tailored for, young people.**

There are already a number of resources that have been developed to provide young people with information to understand family violence, including where to access support. However, research shows that this information is designed for them, not by them.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, this information makes an assumption that young people know what family violence is, and where to find information but,



young people may not know that what they are experiencing is family violence, and often don't identify with current information materials.

There must be investment in resources developed by young people in places they will find them incidentally and are already engaged with. For example, schools (including through Respectful Relationships and sex education), public transport, services, online and social media. This information should be delivered in formats that young people identify and engage with, such as TikTok videos.

We continue to endorse the governments implementation of the Respectful Relationships program, but **awareness campaigns must extend beyond formal education settings**. Evidence tells us young people at risk of using or experiencing family violence often experience disrupted schooling, including avoidance and early school leaving.

## 6. Safe, inclusive and supportive schools

### Goal:

Students must feel safe and supported at school, and have their voice heard. This means schools prioritise safety, inclusivity and accessibility for all young people over punitive responses, and teachers and staff are empowered and supported with the knowledge, information and training to do this.

### Invest in flexible and supportive learning environments

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**6.1 Increase funding to mainstream flexible in-school and remote learning options to support students with diverse learning needs** to remain supported and engaged in school. Flexible learning options to be individualised, student-centred and student-led to ensure they are appropriate and accessible for all young people.

**6.2 Increase funding and expand eligibility criteria for programs such as Navigator**, to support disengaged students much earlier.

**6.3 Invest in place-based collaboration to support trauma-informed and culturally safe, early intervention and prevention initiatives for young people in schools**, rather than reactive punitive responses (*see also [recommendation 2.2](#) regarding investment in generalist youth workers to better support mental health prevention and early intervention*).

**6.4 Provide regular and ongoing trauma-informed professional development for teachers and other school staff** to better understand:

- The impacts of trauma on child brain development and its effect on behaviour; and





- how to identify and respond to students impacted by trauma, such as adjusting their learning, having conversations about mental health and suicide, and linking them in with relevant services and supports.

**6.5** Agree to and fund recommendations 29, 30 and 50 of the Legal and Social Issues Committee [Final Report](#) from the inquiry into the state education system:

- The Victorian Government **investigate the need for additional appropriate supports for culturally and linguistically diverse students, with a view to establishing a program of Multicultural Support Officers** (Rec 29).
- That the Department of Education commit to funding that ensures the **longterm stability of Out of School Hours Learning Support Programs** (Rec 30).
- That the Victorian Government **review English as an Additional Language reference funding** with a view to ensuring that every student requiring support is reached (Rec 50).

**Rationale: The rising disengagement of young people from school due to mental health challenges and safety concerns highlights a critical issue in our education system.** Up to 10,000 young people from Years 9 – 12 are disengaging each year.<sup>13</sup> Disabled young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, Aboriginal young people, rural and regional young people, young people in out-of-home care, and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are overrepresented.<sup>14</sup>

We have seen a rise in violence, bullying, discrimination and racism at school. During periods of COVID-19 remote learning, students' emotional and behavioural scaffolding by schools was limited, and further compounded by challenges at home – such as a rise in family violence.<sup>15</sup> Experiences of emotional dysregulation and trauma impacts mental ill-health, substance abuse, and other health issues.<sup>16</sup> Also, trauma negative impacts learning ability, sense of belonging to the school community and educational engagement.<sup>17</sup>

Stakeholders in [YACVic's recent Submission into the Inquiry into the State Education System in Victoria](#) told us many mainstream schools focus on attendance without considering inclusivity, safety and student wellbeing. There is an **urgent need to adopt student-centred education approaches, flexible learning options, and increased student support programs**. Importantly, this requires early support interventions, well before students show signs of school-can't.

Schools and teaching staff feel under-supported and overwhelmed to 'solve' student wellbeing and mental health.<sup>18</sup> Many teachers have limited understanding of the impacts of trauma on behaviour, leading to exclusionary responses that further marginalise students with diverse needs.<sup>19</sup> This is concerning given the



distinct correlation between expulsion and overrepresentation within the criminal justice system.<sup>20</sup>

**Schools and teachers must be empowered and supported with the knowledge, information and training to facilitate safe and inclusive learning environments.** At the same time, supporting student wellbeing is not and should not be the primary role of teachers, and they must be supported by the expertise of the community sector.

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*“There is a crucial need for generalist youth case management... this could decrease the risk of disengagement, anti social behaviour and higher rates of mental health.” – Youth Worker*

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**Implementing innovative, trauma-informed, and non-punitive responses that focus on the underlying causes of behaviour** requires place-based collaboration. See [TARGET ZERO](#) as an innovative service model.

## Youth voice in schools

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**6.6 Establish a student mental health taskforce to consult with students about their experiences and report back to government.**

**Rationale:** Children and young people are the experts in their own lives and are best placed to understand their wellbeing and learning needs. Schools and government don’t always provide an opportunity for students to give feedback or be involved in the decision making about mental health or broader programs in schools.<sup>21</sup>

A student mental health taskforce would strengthen timely and relevant feedback from students with lived experience to the government about how mental health programs and initiatives are working in schools. Successful co-design with young people requires a commitment to sharing responsibility and decision-making roles.

## 7. Youth Justice

### Goal:

Young people receive early support to learn from their mistakes, stay engaged with education, and connected to their families, communities and culture, before they have any contact with the criminal legal system.



## Invest in evidence-based early intervention approaches that work

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**7.1 Provide secure funding for youth crime prevention programs** which keep high-need communities and young people safe and supported – including reinstating funding for the Youth Support Service run by the [Youth Support and Advocacy Service \(YSAS\)](#).

**7.2 Increase investment in youth workers in high-need schools and community settings**, recognising their central role in early intervention and prevention to divert young people from youth justice system (*See [recommendations 2.2](#) and [6.2](#)*).

**7.3 Fund concerted evidence-based approaches to youth justice reform, research and policy** – including the [Smart Justice for Young People Coalition](#).

**Rationale:** Victoria’s criminal justice system isn’t working and continues to set young people up to fail.<sup>22</sup> The earlier a child enters the justice system, the more likely they will reoffend in the future and become further entrenched in a cycle of disadvantage.<sup>23</sup> Many young people who are involved in the justice system do so as a result of significant trauma or disadvantage.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, we continue to rely on punitive justice measures, instead of providing **trauma-informed, community-led interventions that are proven to have better outcomes for young people and their communities.**

Smart Justice for Young people (SJ4YP) is a coalition of over 40 community organisations working together to create positive systems change for children and young people interacting with the criminal legal system. The coalition collaborates to shift political and public attitudes, advise government on evidence-based approaches, and challenge harmful practices, policies, and laws.

A recent evaluation highlighted a key barrier to achieving SJ4YP shared goals is the lack of dedicated resources to drive coordinated advocacy. Also, gaps in digital infrastructure, content creation and communications capacity means stories highlighting effective community-based aren’t being heard. Proper resourcing of SJ4YP is essential to drive effective, evidence-based youth justice reform in Victoria.



## End the over-representation of particular groups of young people in the criminal justice system

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...

**7.4 Fund the implementation of *Working Together: An Action Plan to End the Over-representation of Particular Groups of Young People in the Criminal Justice System*.**

**Rationale:** While Victoria's overall youth incarceration rate is falling, certain groups of young people still come into contact with the justice system at disproportionately high rates. They are overrepresented in police contacts and youth detention, and they are under-served by government and community services.<sup>25</sup> The five most frequent over-represented groups in Victoria are:

- First Nations children and young people;
- Multicultural children and young people
- Children who live in out-of-home care;
- 18-25 year olds; and
- Girls and young women with complex needs.

To end over-representation, the Victorian government should **fully fund the 49 asks contained in *Working Together: An Action Plan to End the Over-representation of Particular Groups of Young People in the Criminal Justice System***. This comprehensive, evidence-informed framework provides guidance for systemic reform across various sectors, including criminal and civil justice, corrections, policing, education, health, housing and material needs, and family wellbeing.

## 8. Intergenerational fairness, disasters and climate change

### Goal:

Promote intergenerational fairness by ensuring young people are actively involved in decision-making processes related to disaster preparedness and climate change. This requires implementing policies that prioritise long-term sustainability, resilience, and meaningful youth participation – ensuring that young people remain hopeful and empowered about their future.



## Parliamentary decision making underpinned by intergenerational fairness and youth participation

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...

**8.1 Invest in the establishment of a Victorian Commissioner for Future Generations.**

**8.2 Establish a Victorian child and youth advisory council on climate.**

Crucially, ensure accountability measures are established to track the implementation of youth council advice by government.

**Rationale:** The climate crisis poses a significant threat to current and future generations, with young people bearing the brunt of its impacts.<sup>26</sup> According to Mission Australia's Youth Survey, 51 per cent of Victorians aged 14-21 identified environmental issues as their top concern.<sup>27</sup> **Young people have the strongest stake in the future, yet their calls to consider their future health and wellbeing continue to be ignored and excluded from government decision making.**<sup>28</sup>

Intergenerational equity recognises the duty of current generations to ensure that decisions made today – especially regarding pollution and climate risk management – do not harm future generations. Establishing a Victorian Commissioner of Future Generations would hold decision-makers accountable, ensuring policies provide a sustainable and secure future for all Australians.

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*"I've been born with a sense of urgency. I don't want to live in a future that is desolate, dry, volatile. I want to live in a lush, abundant, fair, ecologically sound future." – Young Person*

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Insights from '[A Fair Go for All](#)', an intergenerational policy survey, reveal:

- 97% agree that current policies should consider the interests of future generations.
- 81% agree that Australian politicians generally think too short-term when making decisions.
- 78% support the establishment of a Commissioner for Future Generations.

## Understanding and responding to youth climate anxiety

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...

**8.3 Pilot the development of a framework co-designed with young people to address navigating conversations around climate anxiety and the rise of**





disasters and extreme weather events, in partnership with the youth mental health sector.

**Rationale:** Exposure to climate change is disproportionately impacting young people's mental health and wellbeing.<sup>29</sup> [Orygen and Mission Australia research on the impact of extreme weather events on young people](#) indicates **six in 10 young people are worried about climate change**.<sup>30</sup> And, one in 10 have been impacted by extreme weather events.

Mental health impacts arise from direct experience of disasters, and from indirect exposure, such as observing, perceiving and thinking about climate change.<sup>31</sup> Marginalised groups, including young people in lower socioeconomic areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, disabled young people, and gender-diverse young people, face increased risks as they are often more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather on their households and/or communities.<sup>32</sup>

The uncertainty surrounding climate change negatively impacts mental health and is a significant barrier for young people to feel hopeful and secure about their future.<sup>33</sup>

The Government should work with Youth Mental health specialist services to pilot a framework focused on navigating conversations about climate anxiety and extreme weather events. The framework must be co-designed with young people to understand their feelings of despair and identify actions that could ease their anxiety. Emphasising positive conversations of hope and community level action for parents and schools will be essential.

## Young people and disaster resilience

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**8.4 Fund the development of a state-wide Disaster Resilience Coalition of young people to provide advice and expertise on the State Emergency Management Plan and the Municipal Emergency Management Plans,** ensuring young people's voices are included in disaster resilience at all levels of government.

**8.5 Scale-up place-based youth participation projects that build local skills and enhance qualification pathways for young people to respond to disasters and extreme weather events.**

**Rationale:** The Sendai Framework (UNDRR 2015) recognises children and young people as 'agents of change' within disaster risk reduction.<sup>15</sup> Young people are essential in combatting climate change, consistently demonstrating adaptive capacities to disasters, especially when provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute.<sup>16</sup>



It is essential to include and harness **young people's knowledge, skills, and capabilities at all levels of decision making in emergency and disaster management**.<sup>17</sup> By genuinely involving young people in these processes, we can prioritise intergenerational thinking, and help reduce feelings of climate anxiety and hopelessness.<sup>17</sup> Orygen and Mission Australia emphasise the importance of engaging young people in disaster recovery strategies, planning and implementation.<sup>34</sup>

See [Future Proof: Young People, Disaster Recovery and \(Re\)building Communities](#) as a best-practice example of a collective-impact project responding to the 2019-20 Victorian bushfires. The program supported youth-led activities, established local youth advisory groups, and created pathways for young people to gain qualifications, empowering them to take leadership roles in their communities to respond to disasters.

## 9 Address rural transport disadvantage

### Goal:

Young people and youth sector workers have access to affordable and reliable transport options, enabling them to access education, professional development, work and support services when they need to.

### Rural and regional transport fund

In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...

**9.1 Fund the development of a rural and regional transport fund to remove significant access barriers for young people and youth workers.** To support the attendance of professional development, events, education, work and support services.

**9.2 Develop a comprehensive and place-based analysis of the public transport needs of young people,** through engagement and co-design with young people and the youth sector.

**Rationale:** Transport disadvantage in rural and regional areas is a key outcome from YACVic's listening tour. There is a **pressing need for investment in transport subsidies specifically for rural and regional young people and youth sector workers to enable them to access education, work, professional development, events and support services.**

Feedback from young people and youth sector workers indicated that public transport in these areas is often too expensive, infrequent, inconsistent or non-existent. Many young people may not have their drivers license, access to a car, or the financial means to cover car-related costs.



In the Mallee and Wimmera South West, only 47.8 per cent and 45.9 per cent of children, respectively, were living close to affordable public transport in 2023, compared with 84.6 per cent in metropolitan areas.<sup>35</sup>

Lack of access to transport impacts all aspects of life, leaving young people isolated and disengaged from vital services, school, employment, social life and other opportunities. It also impacts the ability to engage in professional development, events, and training, especially when these opportunities are located in another town or metro Melbourne.

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*“Because of a lack of public transport, I’ve missed out on all social and extracurricular activities. Unless I get driven, I cannot even get to the school bus and home again, so I miss out on everything, netball, social events, absolutely everything. Without mum to drive me around I can’t do anything but stay at home on the farm.” – Young Person*

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Both sector workers and young people have strongly urged YACVic to advocate for improved transport options to ensure equitable access to essential services and opportunities.

## 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Self Determination

### Goal:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their families and communities have access to high-quality, culturally appropriate services and supports. This requires platforming and prioritising Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing, self-determination, and Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations.

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

- 10.1** Provide ongoing investment to meaningfully implement current and upcoming recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission.
- 10.2** Appropriately fund and resource Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations delivering essential programs for Aboriginal people across housing, health, mental health, and youth justice.
- 10.3** Expand dedicated funding for youth specific Aboriginal supports – such as through the [Koorie Youth Council](#) and [Marram Nganyin Aboriginal Youth Mentoring Program](#).



#### **10.4 Fund training and development to strengthen cultural competency of mainstream organisations to enable best practice engagement and allyship.**

*(See also: [recommendations 3.1](#) (Aboriginal youth housing stock), [4.4](#) (cohort specific AOD support), [4.8](#) (LGBTIQA+ Aboriginal young people), [7.1](#) and [7.4](#) (youth justice addressing overrepresentation) and [12.1](#) (Anti-racism)).*

**Rationale:** In the wake of the failed referendum for a Federal Voice to Parliament, now more than ever the Victorian Government must actively listen to and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. YACVic commends the government for its ongoing investment to support the critical work of the Yoorook Justice Commission and Victoria's Treaty process.

The Commission delivered its Yoorook for Justice report last year, and continues to make critical recommendations for healing, system reform and practical changes to laws, policy and education. **As the Commission prepares to release its Final Reform Report in June 2025, the Victorian Government must be ready to meaningfully implement these recommendations.**

Self-determination must be at the heart of Victoria's reform pathway. But, there's also a critical need to strengthen the role of allyship of mainstream organisations – we all play a role and shared responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice and cultural competency.

## **11 Disabled young people**

### **Goal:**

Disabled young people are empowered to be active contributors and leaders in their communities. This requires co-designing policies, resources and trainings with disabled young people to identify solutions to systemic barriers with a human rights approach.

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**11.1 Invest in policy, research and capacity building with disabled young people to ensure their voices are heard when implementing reforms from Victoria's [Youth Strategy](#) and [Inclusive Victoria](#).**

**11.2 Embed delivery of disability-led disability inclusion and awareness training across community, health, education and allied sectors to combat ableism and improve inclusive and accessible service delivery for this cohort.** Training should be co-designed, led and delivered by and with disabled young people, such as [Together Training](#).



- 11.3 Dedicate funding to implement minimum accessibility standards across all generalist service providers in mental health, health, and housing services, co-designed with disabled people and the disability sector.**
- 11.4 Provide targeted funding to disability advocacy bodies working with disabled young people and the community sector so they can support young people to understand the changes to the NDIS and address system gaps within services.** This includes ensuring organisations are supported to meet new compliance standards and supporting disabled young people to realise their rights.
- 11.5 Dedicate funding to promote the Disability Liaison Officer program and fully fund the implementation of the Disability Identifier Project.**
- 11.6 Provide disability-specific career guidance for disabled young people transitioning from education to employment, provided by disability-led organisations and counsellors with lived experience of disability.**

**Rationale:** In Victoria, 12% of young people aged 18-24 identify as having a disability, yet only 10% of all disabled Victorians qualify for NDIS plans, leaving many without crucial support.

Investment in advocacy support *for and with* disabled young people and workers supports this cohort to navigate complex systems and fully utilise the resources and programs available – such as changes to NDIS.

It is essential disabled young people have their lived experiences inform the rollout of inclusive policies and reforms, including from Victoria's *Youth Strategy* and *Inclusive Victoria*. Training and resources which have been co-designed with disabled young people, such as [Youth Disability Advocacy Service's](#) (YDAS) *Together Training*, improve outcomes for disabled young people by addressing stigma and equipping mainstream health and educational workers with the skills they need to provide the right inclusive supports.

## **12 Anti-racism and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds**

### **Goal:**

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds feel connected to their communities, empowered, supported to participate in opportunities and included in decision-making.





## Anti-racism

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**12.1 Invest in youth focused initiatives in *Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy*.**

**12.2 Invest and expand whole-of-school approaches to combat racism, including tailored approaches for primary and secondary schools – such as [Schools Standing up to Racism](#).**

**Rationale:** Although Victoria has a strong history of multiculturalism, racism is still an everyday experience in the lives of many young people. It permeates the spaces young people encounter on a daily basis and has real and lasting, harmful effects.

Investing in anti-racism at school is essential. [Schools Standing up to Racism](#) is a capability building program that builds anti-racism for school staff, and supports the development of tailored policies and procedures relevant to each school.<sup>36</sup>

## Young people from migrant and refugee communities

**In the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian government should ...**

**12.3 Ensure ongoing funding and scale-up support programs for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, focusing on regional and rural areas.**

**12.4 Increase funding for youth- and community-led programs which strengthen multicultural youth participation and integrate youth-led solutions into decision-making processes, such as [Culture Spring](#).**

**Rationale:** The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) regional and rural offices in Ballarat and Inner Gippsland ensure that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are supported to access appropriate services and to have their voices heard.

CMY also works with a wide range of services and service networks in Ballarat and Gippsland to build their capacity to work more effectively with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. With the rise in population and the increase in service demand, CMY's Regional Presence Project will need to be maintained and boosted.

CMY also faces risk to funding for its [Le Mana Pasifika program](#) and [Community Support Groups](#) – providing essential support, a sense of belonging and connection to culture and communities for young people. Funding for these programs must be maintained.



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