

A Fairer Victoria

Progress and Next Steps
June 2006



Published by the State Government of Victoria
1 Treasury Place, Melbourne VIC 3002

Also published on www.vic.gov.au

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ISBN 0 9775335 1 4

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***A Fairer Victoria* Case Studies**

The stories in *A Fairer Victoria* are all real stories of Victorians from many different locations, backgrounds and cultures.

We would like to thank them for agreeing to share their stories and experiences.

Some names have been changed or adjusted at their request for privacy reasons.

Cover photograph:

Like all Victorian families, Angela Casasanta and her husband, Mark (not pictured) of Bundoora, want their young children Alessandra and Luca given the best start in life.



Message from the Premier

A Fairer Victoria is about giving more Victorians a fair go to build a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

We are a Government that cares about all Victorians. We recognise the challenges that Victoria faces over the coming decades: skilling our kids for the jobs of the future; providing for our ageing population; maintaining harmony in our diverse community; and improving disadvantaged communities so that all Victorians have access to opportunity.

We will uphold our core values of decency and a fair go – offering help to those who need it, whether they be families, children, older Victorians, Indigenous Victorians, people with a disability or people with a mental illness.

And we know that by doing this we are not just giving vital support to people in need, but we are strengthening our whole community. By making Victoria a place that gives everyone a fair go, we can better harness all of the potential amongst us.

We have worked hard to ensure that the prosperity Victoria has enjoyed over the past seven years is not just sustainable, but more attainable to more Victorians. And we have made progress.

A Fairer Victoria is a five to ten year plan to reduce disadvantage in our State and we know there is more to do.

One year on, I am proud to announce these next steps in delivering *A Fairer Victoria*.

Steve Bracks MP
Premier of Victoria



Message from the Deputy Premier

A Fairer Victoria is a long term task that our Government is working hard to deliver. Since launching *A Fairer Victoria* in 2005, strong progress has been made.

In this report, I am pleased to detail progress to date and announce the next steps in our actions to achieve *A Fairer Victoria*.

Our next steps maintain the focus on early intervention, place-based actions and targeted support to groups and areas.

A major focus this year is Victoria's outer suburbs and growth corridor areas. Families in our new suburbs need better access to services to ensure their children get a good start in life.

In addition we are taking extra action to strengthen our multicultural communities and to boost support for people who are homeless.

We will continue our new ways of working together and giving families and communities a greater say in the delivery of services.

These new actions build on our progress and a substantial next step towards a fair, thriving Victoria.

John Thwaites MP
Deputy Premier of Victoria
Minister for Victorian Communities

The story so far

A Fairer Victoria is a long-term action plan by the Government to tackle disadvantage and increase opportunities for all Victorians. Through *A Fairer Victoria* we are helping people help themselves and each other.

A Fairer Victoria is a groundbreaking approach based on the latest research and proven government trials. By combining traditional service provision with new methods of strengthening communities, we are reforming the way government works.

One of the most important reforms is to give people more say in decisions that affect their lives.

A Fairer Victoria also focuses on the places where people live and work. It recognises different places have different issues. It highlights the need for locally appropriate policy responses and flexible ways of delivering services.

There are places in Victoria where disadvantage is more acutely felt and has been entrenched for a long time. By working in partnership with local stakeholders and focusing on increasing people's participation *A Fairer Victoria* is addressing the problems of these areas in a sustainable way.

Since 1999 the Victorian Government has worked hard to make Victoria the best place to live and raise a family by:

- diversifying the economy and investing in infrastructure;
- tackling environmental issues such as climate change and water; and
- restoring services in health, education and public safety.

We have worked hard to ensure Victoria's way of life is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

In 2005, the Government recognised that despite substantial progress in rebuilding services in health, education and community safety, some people still experienced disadvantage. *A Fairer Victoria* is creating opportunities for all Victorians to benefit from the State's growing economy.

CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING DISADVANTAGE

Challenges in addressing disadvantage in Victoria, released in March 2005, identified the nature, extent and distribution of disadvantage, as well as the circumstances preventing individuals from fully taking part in social and economic life. It showed how disadvantage can be experienced both by individuals and whole communities.

A Fairer Victoria framework

***A Fairer Victoria*, launched in April 2005, committed the Government to five objectives.**

1. Access to Universal Services

As we continue to rebuild essential public services, we will make sure these services meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, individuals and communities, with a particular focus on the critical transition points in life.

2. Reducing Barriers to Opportunity

We will act to reduce the barriers that prevent people gaining opportunities for a better life. These barriers include individual and structural difficulties that prevent people from fully participating in community life, such as poor health, a lack of skills, poor mobility and restricted access to services and facilities. Action will also be taken to strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities in order to increase their choices and control over life's opportunities.

During the past 12 months, new challenges have emerged. Petrol and food prices have risen; access to tertiary education has become more costly and significant changes have been made to national industrial relations and social welfare laws. These changes affect all Victorians, as well as having a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. This is especially true for single parents, people with a disability and people in casual and unskilled jobs.

Parts of regional Victoria continue to face challenges such as drought, rising fuel prices and population change. The Government has delivered a strong response to these issues through its \$502 million provincial statement, *Moving Forward*.

One of our key challenges is the rapid growth in our outer suburbs and ensuring that services keep up with the pace of growth

We are well placed to meet these challenges. Victoria continues to have low unemployment, sustainable economic growth and ongoing investment in infrastructure and new industries.

However, the new challenges reinforce the need for additional effort to ensure all Victorians are provided with support so they can overcome disadvantage and make the most of opportunities.

The continuing implementation of *A Fairer Victoria* will ensure we maintain a strong economic base, and strong and cohesive communities into the future.

Introduction

3. Support for Disadvantaged Groups

We will introduce innovative approaches to help disadvantaged groups access the services and opportunities available to other members of the Victorian community.

4. Support for Disadvantaged Places

We will direct effort and resources towards addressing disadvantage where it is concentrated in particular locations. We will support a coordinated approach in these areas, involving all levels of government, non-government agencies and local communities.

5. Making It Easier To Work With Government

We will implement new ways of working directly with communities, giving groups and communities a greater say in determining their futures. We will also streamline the delivery of services across different levels and functions of government, and work together with the business and community sectors to improve local outcomes.

Next steps

Last year the Government invested \$788.2 million to fund 85 specific actions grouped under 14 strategy areas as the first steps in achieving these objectives.

A further \$851.6 million will now be invested to continue the progress, with 82 new initiatives.

Our priority continues to be providing universal services, targeting areas of greatest need and assisting people who face extra disadvantage.

We will also continue to improve the way we deliver services, further strengthen partnerships with local government, the community sector and business, and work in a more coordinated and collaborative way.

Within this framework, the Government's major focus for this year's initiatives include:

- investing in services for our growth areas and regions and regions;
- more early intervention and prevention services for children and families;
- increasing services for homelessness;
- improving community transport; and
- supporting our multicultural community

We will join up services to respond to the different needs and circumstances of families when they need help, and continue our work with vulnerable families to prevent critical problems and behaviours taking hold.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR GROWTH AREAS AND DISADVANTAGED PLACES

We will use our experience implementing *A Fairer Victoria* reforms in local communities to provide more proactive and planned assistance to our growth suburbs in Melbourne, and our growing regional centres. At the same time, we will continue to use these new ways of working in disadvantaged localities.

We are targeting our growth suburbs because they have particular needs. They are experiencing a rapid growth in numbers of young families and have a higher proportion of young children than more established suburbs.

They are spread across larger geographic areas. Services have difficulty coping with demand and have further distances to cover.

Agencies providing services are more likely to be located in older suburbs and many are yet to set up permanent offices in newer areas.

These factors are contributing to social impacts in these areas including babies with lower than average birth weights who are less likely to be breast fed, and mothers experiencing higher rates of post natal depression than elsewhere in Victoria.

Major priorities are early intervention and investing in services for our growth areas.

In consultation with local councils in these areas, we will boost funding for services and facilities to help meet the growing demand and avoid later problems.

We also know that in established places, pockets of disadvantage persist. These can be single neighbourhoods or clusters of neighbourhoods within an otherwise prosperous area. As shown by *Neighbourhood Renewal*, these places can be turned around through investment, better cooperation and linking of effort.

Over \$200 million has already been invested in housing and community building activities for *Neighbourhood Renewal*. This year we will commence *Community Renewal Projects* modelled on *Neighbourhood Renewal* but which are not based on Office of Housing estates.

We will ensure that in both growth areas and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, government departments work together and in cooperation with local councils, businesses and community organisations to set priorities and initiatives that reflect their needs.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION TO GIVE CHILDREN THE BEST START IN LIFE

Early intervention prevents problems from taking hold, which are harder to change later on. New parents face a critical transition in their lives as they cope with both the excitement and the challenges of dealing with a new baby. The way families deal with this transition has a major influence on how these children grow and develop. Linking services like Maternal and Child Health, parenting support, childcare and pre-school makes life easier for parents and better for children.

Our experience with *A Fairer Victoria* shows early intervention and a focus on prevention works for both our universal and our targeted services. This is why our *Best Start* projects across Victoria are so exciting and so successful. They link services for families in a very locally-responsive and accessible way.

This year we will expand *Best Start* projects in our growing suburbs. We will focus on children between birth and eight years, as research shows this is the time when government support can make the biggest difference.

HOMELESSNESS

We will make responding to homelessness a priority for *A Fairer Victoria*. While we have one of the lowest rates of homelessness in Australia and assist more homeless people than any other state through a diverse range of services, any level of homelessness is unacceptable. We are committed to ensuring the best possible responses to reduce the disadvantage caused by homelessness.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) special report *Counting the Homeless*, 20,305 people were recorded as being homeless in Victoria on Census night in 2001. Victoria had significantly lower proportions of people sleeping rough than the national average (9 per cent of the homeless population in Victoria compared to 14 per cent nationally).

Victoria was also able to provide temporary accommodation for a quarter of the homeless population compared with the national average of only 14 per cent. It is, however, concerning that nearly half of those recorded as homeless in both Victoria and Australia were under the age of 24.

The Government currently allocates about \$120 million for homelessness assistance services each year and in 2005-06 these services assisted more than 80,000 people. Since the election of the Bracks Government, Victoria's contribution toward the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, as the major component of our homelessness response has increased by 83 per cent. However we are looking to do more. Accordingly the Government has developed new initiatives designed to deal with homelessness as a priority in *A Fairer Victoria* this year.

We will continue to link homelessness assistance to specialised responses such as health services and supports from the justice system to provide the help that individuals need. In addition we will fund a range of new initiatives to address issues associated with homelessness. Recognising the disproportionate level of youth homelessness we will strengthen services for young people and those for people with a mental illness.

In addition we will increase the wellbeing and social engagement of homeless people by encouraging them to actively participate in community activities.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

Distance and geographic isolation act as a barrier to local participation in community life. Locally-provided community transport is often the only way some people are able to be involved in their communities. This includes older people staying involved in social and community activities and younger and financially-disadvantaged people having access to education, training and employment.

Community transport is a mix of taxis, route buses, school and community buses and volunteer driver schemes. These are provided by local councils, some government departments and some community organisations.

Coordinating different transport services, in addition to running services, is a difficulty faced by communities in providing improved transport options for local residents.

We will help communities plan and develop tailored community transport services such as community buses and better coordinate the transport options available to people in their local areas.

The Government's Transport Statement, *Meeting Our Transport Challenges*, released in May 2006, provides specific local support to ensure communities can coordinate and deliver more flexible and responsive local community transport options.

Community transport is often the only way some isolated people are able to be involved in their communities.

SUPPORTING OUR MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

Victoria has a proud history of supporting and accepting new migrants from around the world, and our cultural diversity is a strength which enriches our society.

However, our culturally and linguistically diverse communities often face high levels of disadvantage due to a range of factors, including language skills, low health status, different cultural experiences and expectations, and isolation. We have always provided special services to meet the particular needs of different groups, especially as they settle within the community.

Recent events in Australia and overseas have placed some strains on different communities. The Government is committed to ensuring Victorians continue to live harmoniously together, with the right to practice different faiths, speak freely, celebrate our cultural diversity and live without discrimination or vilification.

We will increase our efforts to improve access to services for our multicultural communities, especially language services, education and health services. At the same time we will continue to promote multicultural harmony.

An important part of *Growing Victoria Together*

Growing Victoria Together 2000-2010 is the Government's vision for making Victoria a stronger, more caring and innovative state. As part of 10 goals that the Government is striving toward, *A Fairer Victoria* is directly relevant to:

- High quality, accessible health and community services;
- High quality education and training for lifelong learning;
- Building friendly, confident and safe communities; and
- A fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity.

During the past six months, the Government has released a number of key policy statements setting out actions to improve Victoria's future. These complement *A Fairer Victoria's* focus on creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage. Seen in this context, *A Fairer Victoria* is part of a broader government vision that is tackling the fundamental challenges faced by Victoria and focusing on maintaining our economic strength, social stability and prosperity.

- ***Moving Forward – Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest*** was released in November 2005. This includes initiatives designed to strengthen regional communities and unlock their potential for future growth. Managing the impact of population growth, building additional infrastructure, supporting industries and the survival of small towns are amongst the challenges for regional communities identified in the statement. This plan contains a \$502 million investment in specific measures that were developed after extensive consultation with regional communities.
- ***Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians*** was released in February 2006 and sets out the Government's plan to ensure Victoria's education and training system continues to deliver a highly skilled, adaptable and innovative workforce into the future. The plan includes a \$241 million investment to boost the skills of the workforce including funding for four new Technical Education Centres for senior secondary

students, 13 new skills stores to provide advice about further education and training options and upgraded teaching equipment for TAFE institutes. It provides a guaranteed place in TAFE or other public providers to support all young Victorians to complete Year 12 or an equivalent training qualification. It promotes earlier completion of apprenticeships, including additional pre-apprenticeship programs. It also includes measures designed to assist adults increase their skills and remain in the workforce longer, for their personal benefit and the benefit of the community.

- ***Meeting Our Transport Challenges*** is the Government's policy statement on transport and liveability released in May 2006. It sets out an action blueprint and a funding commitment of \$10.5 billion over ten years to help Victoria's transport system meet the needs of Victorian communities both now and into the future. Improved bus services for people in middle and outer suburbs will make it easier to travel across town by public transport without having to

go through the CBD. It will boost train network capacity to improve peak hour services and reduce overcrowding. Road congestion from bottlenecks will be addressed, and new road projects will be funded across the outer suburbs as well as arterial upgrades. Transport services will also be improved for people with restricted mobility.

- ***Plan For Melbourne's Growth Areas*** – In November 2005 the Government announced the establishment of a new Growth Areas Authority to improve planning for the environmentally sustainable growth of Melbourne. The Growth Areas Authority will promote safe and healthy new neighbourhoods and coordinate the delivery of the infrastructure and services that communities need in a more timely way.



Actions in detail

Strategy 1

Giving children the best start in life

Children are the key to Victoria's future.

The Victorian Government has given a high priority to Victorian children and their families. Evidence shows government intervention in the early years of life can make a real difference to the life chances of adults. The reforms in *A Fairer Victoria* have provided a strong foundation for future progress.

We will provide more concrete help to struggling families by getting in early, working together and offering different types of support to meet each family's particular needs.

We will work to improve how our early years services contribute to the healthy development of all children by delivering high quality services in a more coordinated and responsive way for all parents – making services easier to access initially and to move between when necessary.

We will focus on helping children in their vital transition into school. And we will continue to provide increased support to parents as they balance work and family commitments.

What We Have Done

We have revitalised our political commitment and administrative support for young children with a separate Minister for Children and a new Office for Children within the Department of Human Services, supported by an expert Victorian Children's Council. These arrangements are creating a new coordinated approach to early years services including the development of a comprehensive Action Plan for Victorian Children.

We are encouraging more children into kindergarten programs by making them easier for parents to access. We are funding kindergarten programs in childcare centres. This means working parents do not have to try to find different services in different locations when their children turn four years old.

We have made kindergarten programs more affordable for low income families by increasing the kindergarten fee subsidy – making 17,000 four year olds eligible for \$320 subsidy. We have encouraged the building of new services where parents need them by boosting capital grants for kindergartens.

We have improved the quality of kindergarten programs by improving the career structure and remuneration of kindergarten teachers and enhancing their status.

We have provided additional assistance to families of children with a disability and for Indigenous children including the establishment of the State's first *Aboriginal Family Restoration* program in Echuca.

We have radically refocused our efforts to improve the safety and security of our most vulnerable children through the new *Children, Youth and Families Act* that puts the wellbeing of the child at the centre of all policy and legal responses. This is the first major review of the State's child protection laws in a generation and will transform practices and policies for protecting children.

We have appointed Victoria's first Child Safety Commissioner who is overseeing our *Working With Children Check* and developing a new *ChildSafe Organisations* policy to encourage a safer community for our children.

We have implemented *Family Support Innovation Projects* that are providing early intervention and individual support for vulnerable families. These are proving remarkably successful with child abuse notifications being reduced by 4.1 per cent in project areas. The number of substantiated cases is down 12.3 per cent across Victoria. This is in contrast to the rest of Australia where child abuse notifications are increasing.

Childcare + kindergarten = happier parents and kids

Flynn Gilder-Smith likes to plan his day.

And so, every morning before he sets off for the Annie Dennis Child Care Centre, he and mum, Sally Gilder, discuss his movements for the day.

Will today involve dress-ups, easel painting or puzzles, and importantly what's for lunch?

Flynn, 5, and 162 other children aged between six months and school age, attend Annie Dennis – a combined kindergarten and child care centre.

The Northcote centre is one of 376 childcare centres across Victoria offering a state-funded kindergarten program.

In 2005 a quarter of all kindergarten programs in Victoria were provided in a childcare setting – allowing 8000 children to attend kinder while in long daycare.

This year the State Government increased the kindergarten long daycare per child grant from \$857 to \$1325 a year.

This makes it easier for the many families who are unable to access kindergarten in traditional centres because of work commitments.

For Sally the choice of a combined centre had obvious benefits for both her and Flynn.


Flynn attends morning and afternoon sessions at the kindergarten, with a specialised teacher. When they finish, he spends time in the child care centre.

Sally said this arrangement meant Flynn had a consistent and regular routine in familiar surroundings.

It was easier for fee payment and importantly for Sally (who works two days a week) it meant she was not travelling between two centres.

Annie Dennis Director Lara Dibenedetto said the centre's attraction was families could access both childcare and kindergarten, which reduced the stress on children and families to make arrangements to attend two programs.

"Parents think it's fantastic and are relieved because they do not have to worry about the pick up and drop off and children in childcare have access to a kindergarten program," she said.



Case Study

What We Will Do

We will give a major boost to children's services in the outer suburban growth areas. We will strengthen our protection for children and create new teams to help school aged children improve their literacy. Overall, we will provide \$283.2 million over five years to improve child and family support services, improve school readiness, better protect children and promote their safety across the whole community.

1.1 Reforming Child Protection and Supporting Families

The Government will invest \$225.9 million over five years to continue supporting families in need and reforming our child protection system through the new *Children Youth and Families Act 2005*. We will expand our successful *Family Support Innovation Projects* to cover the whole State. We will continue to improve child protection services and out of home care to provide greater stability for children. We will provide wider access to culturally appropriate Indigenous initiatives. This includes \$75.2 million for the *Safety of Children in Care* initiative announced in late 2005.

1.2 Growing Communities, Thriving Children

We will invest \$25 million over four years to assist councils in Melbourne's outer suburbs increase services for children and their families. We will provide six new Children's Centres for Wyndham, Melton, Hume, Whittlesea, Casey and Cardinia and funding for nine *Best Start* projects and nine *Multipurpose Facilities* in each of these areas plus Nillumbik, Yarra Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula. This funding will also boost services such as parent support groups, in-home parenting services, responses to post natal depression and specialist child health teams.

1.3 Improving Care for Children

The Government will invest \$17.4 million over four years statewide as part of the *Intervening Early to Maximise Outcomes for Children* initiative to:

- provide an extra 200 places for children with a disability or developmental delay;
- develop new regulations for *Outside School Hours Care* and *Family Day Care*; and
- maintain kindergarten affordability by ensuring increased wages are not passed on to parents.

1.4 Literacy Improvement Teams

We will provide \$11.7 million over three years (two school years) to employ 45 literacy specialists to work with teachers to improve student literacy in Years 3 to 8. The program will provide advice for all schools and work closely with schools in need. It will also provide cultural awareness training for teaching staff in schools with high concentrations of Koori students.

1.5 Expanding Outside School Hours Care Programs

We will encourage more schools to provide *Outside School Hours Care* programs so that more families have access to this form of care for their children.

These programs are an enormous benefit for working parents, assisting them to balance their work and family responsibilities. They can provide real benefits to students as well.

We have identified how schools can benefit from providing *Outside School Hours Care* and how successful programs operate. We will provide this information to all school communities to increase awareness, generate interest and identify the support mechanisms available to them.

Access to universal services

Giving children the best start in life

We will provide \$283 million over five years to give children the best start in life.

We will invest a further \$500,000 as part of *Growing Communities, Thriving Children* initiative to enable 100 schools to receive a Service Planning grant of up to \$5,000 to develop their proposal for a new *Outside School Hours* program. This follows a successful round of such grants in 2004–05 and provision of \$1.2 million in capital grants for *Outside School Hours* Care programs.

1.6 Reporting on Children's Health and Development

We will provide a clear and comprehensive picture of how Victorian children are progressing by publishing an annual report on the safety, health, development, learning and well being of children and youth from 0 to 18 years.

This will be the groundbreaking *Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System* which will for the first time bring together data collected across all Government departments and other relevant agencies dealing with children.

1.7 Improving Children's Safety

The Victorian Government is working to reduce the number of preventable injuries related to infant and nursery furniture. Every year approximately 400 Victorian infants and babies require hospital treatment for injuries related to infant and nursery furniture.

We will implement a new *Infant and Nursery Products Safety Campaign* to make parents and carers more aware of potential hazards from using banned and damaged second-hand products, modifying new and second-hand products or misusing products. The campaign will encourage parents and carers to use free Consumer Affairs tools and information to check the safety of products before they acquire them and to adopt safe habits when using them.

We will pilot this campaign in the Cities of Casey and Latrobe. These local government areas have higher than Victorian State average populations under four year of age and higher than average indicators of disadvantage. We will also work with local groups through this campaign to reduce the number of preventable injuries to infants and babies.

Giving children the best start in life

A Fairer Victoria – Progress and Next Steps continues the Government's commitment to making children and their families a priority to ensure every Victorian child has the best possible start in life.

International experts such as Dr Jack Shonkoff¹ and Victoria's own internationally recognised specialists in children's development such as Professor Frank Oberklaid² support the approach to early childhood reflected in *A Fairer Victoria*. Dr Shonkoff's groundbreaking research shows that when and how children develop from the moment of birth is critical to later behaviour. Early childhood experience determines whether as adults we can learn, adapt and contribute to our communities. Genetic and environmental factors work together in a dynamic way, affecting children's development.

There is now a strong consensus that early environments and early relationships play a crucial role in determining whether children develop their social, emotional and cognitive skills in a way that gives them a solid foundation for further development. Children need at least one strong, dependable and nurturing relationship for healthy development.

Governments can intervene to support parents and children in a way that makes a difference. This is not just a moral and social imperative, it makes economic sense.

Chicago University's Professor James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in economics in 2000, has shown that investment in the early years – between birth and eight years of age – gives much higher returns for government than expenditure on trying to fix problems after they have developed.

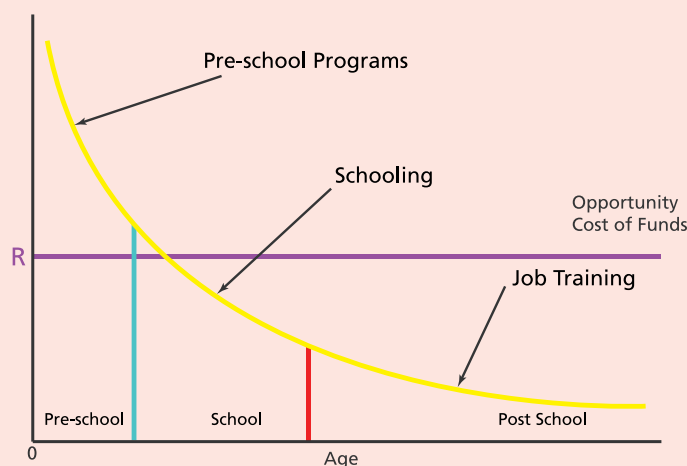
We will continue our emphasis on early intervention, from birth to eight years, with existing and new programs to make children's services more integrated and more locally-responsive. This will give parents more easily accessible support, when and where they need it most. We will continue our focus on giving the most vulnerable families intensive support earlier in order to prevent bigger problems occurring later on.

¹Dr Shonkoff is Professor of Human Development and Social Policy at Brandeis University, USA, recognised for his expertise in early childhood experience and brain development, as well as research into the intersection of science, policy, and practice in advancing the healthy development of young children and their families.

²Professor Frank Oberklaid is Director of the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital and Deputy Chair of the Victorian Children's Advisory Council. He is also previously a member of the Premier's Children's Advisory Committee. The Centre for Community Child Health hosted a visit by Dr. Shonkoff in March 2006.

Rates of Return to Human Development Investment Across all Ages

Pedro Carneiro, James Heckman,
Human Capital Policy, 2003





Focus

Strategy 2

Getting young people back on track

A *Fairer Victoria* recognises that young people are vital to Victoria's economic and social prosperity and that they will play an increasingly important role in this prosperity as our population ages.

Young people are already active in Victorian communities, in particular through sports, the arts and volunteering. More young people are also performing well in school, with Victoria having the best school completion rate of any Australian state for Year 12 or its equivalent.

Young Victorians are telling us they want more information and more involvement in decisions affecting them. We also know that young people come from different backgrounds and circumstances and do not share equally in opportunities and achievements. Young people who are disengaged from employment or education and training experience poorer health, lower paying jobs and higher unemployment.

A *Fairer Victoria*, along with reforms in health and education and our investment in early childhood, have given us a good foundation for further work to prevent young people from becoming disengaged from their communities. We know that individual support at the right time can have a real impact on the lives of young people. The Office for Youth delivers dedicated programs and provides a solid basis for understanding the needs of and working with young people in Victoria. We will continue to build on

this effort so more young people are supported to reach their full potential.

In the coming months, the Victorian Government will release a *Youth Action Agenda*, outlining principles and outcomes backed by specific actions to further support young Victorians.

What We Have Done

We have expanded services targeting young people who have left school early. More than 18,000 young people were assisted to re-enter school, training or jobs with support from *Local Learning and Employment Networks* (LLEN) around Victoria. We have boosted youth mentoring (providing positive role models and advisers for young people) in Shepparton and Gippsland in regional Victoria and in culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Melbourne. We have developed new programs aimed at providing new skills for young people who have a disability.

We are diverting young people out of our prisons with some 86 per cent of participants in the Department of Justice *Reconnecting Early School Leavers* program back in school, training or jobs. We are encouraging all government school communities to take new improved measures to increase school attendance in both primary and secondary schools through the *It's Not OK to be Away* campaign.

We have increased the jurisdiction of the criminal division of the Children's Court so young people who commit a crime up to and including the age of 17 now have a chance to get their lives back on track rather than go to adult prison. We have implemented a new *Children and Young Persons Infringement Notice System* to divert young people in trouble with the law away from our prison system.

We have enhanced *Managed Individual Pathways*. This program provides individual assistance to all government school students aged 15 and above in preparing for the transition from school to work or further education or training. All young people leaving school are assisted by school staff who have had professional training. These staff are better able to manage the transition of students especially those at risk of disengaging. Once they have left school, young people are followed up to see if they need help getting jobs or accessing further training.

Sharing experiences helps boost Vanessa's confidence

Shelley Hermens no longer wonders what "cu@10 4chocOK?" means.

As a new volunteer in a youth mentoring program for students at Trafalgar High School, she wanted to change the perceptions that young people have of adults.

What she didn't expect was to become an expert in mobile phone text messaging.

"I had to learn a new language and now we are texting all the time."

At the other end of the phone is 15 year old Year 10 student, Vanessa Steen.

When the invitation went out at school for students interested in having a mentor, she seized the chance to gain a new experience and "do something for myself".

Their hour-long weekly meetings are a chance for two quite different people to talk and share their ideas and experiences.

Shelley became involved in the mentoring after a friend showed her an ad in the local paper.

She trained in mentoring skills and, despite some initial misgivings, found "it actually validated a lot of what I already knew."

Research shows that successful mentoring contributes to higher school retention rates, better relationships with peers and family, higher levels of participation in community activities and lower

levels of drug and alcohol use.

For Vanessa, having a mentor has given her new skills and someone to talk to, other than teachers and parents.

"One of my goals was to be a lot more confident going into exams and Shelley has helped me a lot with that."

But behind those individual stories is another success story – success in linking together different groups, training activities and resources in ways that help create more mentoring opportunities.

Part of that success is due to the work of the Gippsland Mentoring Alliance, funded through *A Fairer Victoria*.

The success of the Alliance can be seen in mentoring programs running in Trafalgar, Traralgon, Moe and Warragul.

Back at the café, Vanessa and Shelley have finished their hot chocolate and Vanessa is preparing to go back to class.

As she's leaving she observes that at the beginning kids wanted to join the mentoring program just to get out of class.

"But now they look forward to it. I know I do."

Case Study



What We Will Do

We will continue to assist young people to develop their skills and make a successful transition from school to further education, training and employment through an active program of individual support. This will include additional support for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools, school-based apprenticeships and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

We will provide further investment of \$21.6 million over four years to turn around the lives of young people who are disconnected from education and training, giving them the best possible opportunity to make the most of their potential.

2.1 Transition Support for Disengaged Youth

The Government will provide \$10 million over four years to appoint 22 Youth Transition Workers to assist young people aged 15 to 19 years who have disengaged from education, training or employment to navigate existing government services and education and training opportunities. These workers will be employed in 11 regions where there are high numbers of disengaged youth, including in the outer suburbs and regions.

2.2 Youth Foundations

The Government will provide \$4.5 million over four years from the Community Support Fund to establish 15 local Youth Foundations in disadvantaged areas in partnership with the Bendigo Bank. Each Youth Foundation will involve young people from different backgrounds managing funds and making grants. Youth Foundations will bring adult mentors, community agencies and business supporters together with diverse young people to select and implement development activities within their communities.

2.3 Keeping Young People Informed

The Government will provide \$1.6 million over 3 years to further develop the *youthcentral* website which provides young people with a single access point for information regarding health, education, vocational, recreational and other government services.

The web based youth initiative provides young people with the opportunity to build skills while delivering interactive content.

2.4 Protecting Victorian Youth

We will provide \$2.6 million over three years to divert more young people from further criminal behaviour. The *Youth Referral and Independent Persons Program* pilot will be expanded from 14 to 101 police stations throughout the State. The program recruits and trains independent persons to attend police interviews of young people if that person's parent or guardian is unable to attend. The independent person witnesses the interview to ensure it is carried out fairly, and also acts as a support and referral point for the young person. The independent person is trained to assess the young person's issues and refer them to a relevant agency or informal network for support, for reasons such as health, legal, housing, education, employment or general counselling.

2.5 Youth Justice Group Conferencing

We will expand the successful *Youth Justice Group Conferencing* program across Victoria from 1 October 2006. This program diverts young offenders from more intensive supervisory court outcomes. Group conferences facilitate meetings between child offenders and if they wish to participate, the victim and members of the child's family. A pilot program in three regional areas from 2003 has shown this to be a successful deferral option for the Children's Court.

Access to universal services:

Getting young people back on track

We are working to make sure young people have the best possible opportunities as they move into adult life.

Focus on

Making education a success for students with disabilities

We recognise the diversity of students attending Victorian government schools and cater for every student to allow them to achieve their full potential. We are delivering an inclusive education system to ensure all students have access to a quality education that meets their diverse needs.

In Victoria, we have developed an enviable international reputation for the way in which the needs of students with a disability are met. Parents and guardians of students with disabilities are able to choose the most appropriate education setting and are supported by the Government in making this choice.

The number of students with an additional learning need has been increasing at a substantial rate over the past decade as a result of medical advances, improved diagnosis and increased community and parental awareness. With this growth comes the challenge of ensuring educational responses keep pace.

Since the \$119.5 million in initiatives for people with a disability announced in *A Fairer Victoria* in 2005, the Government has allocated an additional \$216 million over five years to the *Program for Students with Disabilities* to ensure this program continues to meet the needs of all students with special needs. The Victorian Government has boosted funding for students with special education needs by 72 per cent since 1999.

This massive funding increase is supported by reforms in how the program is delivered so that we get better outcomes for students with special needs. The new *Language Disorder Program* means better results for all students with a language disorder or delayed language development because it provides explicit and systematic language support in the classroom every day of every week. The evidence shows that earlier intervention, supported by appropriate professional support, leads to substantially improved education outcomes for these students.

Focus

Responding to family violence more effectively

The Government committed in *A Fairer Victoria* to a profound change in the way all of us respond to family violence because family violence has serious social and economic consequences for families, communities and society.

The Government recognised that to effectively address family violence our service systems need to be more responsive and coordinated, and that community awareness and understanding needs to be raised. We also need to give priority to reducing the risk of family violence for future generations.

Our experience with *A Fairer Victoria* has shown us we cannot solve family violence overnight. But we can take steps towards reforming the service system to better protect women and children, reduce the level of family violence and over time improve the lives of many families. As community awareness has risen we have seen a growing willingness to confront and report family violence and as a consequence the need for more services. We are responding by funding new and innovative responses.

The new approach we are taking to break the cycle of family violence involves greater coordination across police, the courts and community services. We are also promoting improved and increased responsiveness from all services to the people involved.

What We Have Done

We have increased after hours support for those experiencing family violence across Victoria. We have enabled the Statewide Women's Domestic Violence Service to take more calls from women in direct need of assistance. A new dedicated line will operate from July 2006 providing a direct link between Victoria Police and the services women and children need. In addition we have given police additional power to detain a person until an intervention order is obtained so that victims of family violence can stay safely in their home without fearing further violence until an intervention order is put in place.

We are providing a stronger and more consistent response by police to family violence incidents. A new *Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* requires police to select one or more of three actions – referral, criminal action or civil protective action. At a minimum, police must make a referral to support services. The Code also places a strong focus on police taking action – such as obtaining intervention orders including orders that exclude the person using violence from the home, and investigating crimes committed during family violence incidents. There are now 10 Police Family Violence Advisors in place across Victoria who are assisting to implement the Code.

Recent police data shows us this new approach is working. The number of intervention orders applied for by Victoria Police increased by 81 per cent in 2004-05. Over the same period the number of charges laid in relation to family violence matters increased by 73 per cent.

One of the key objectives of the new approach is supporting women and children to remain safely in their home. Traditionally the removal of women and children from the family home and placement in high or medium security refuges has been the norm. This has created enormous difficulties for some women and children as they are relocated away from established support networks of schools, work, family and friends.

Sometimes men return home even when an exclusion order has been granted as they feel they have nowhere else to go. New crisis accommodation and referral responses for men will ensure that more women and children can remain safely in the home.

Where it is not possible for women and children to stay in their home we are helping them get into private rental with outreach support as a new accommodation option.

Getting help when it's needed most

The relationship began on the Internet two years ago. Tony and Kim chatted daily, then Tony visited Kim in the Philippines and they decided to move to Melbourne.

"When I arrived, we stayed with Tony's parents and his adult son, but I wasn't comfortable there."

"I found a job and started a nurse's bridging course. We continued our relationship and Tony found us a unit in Melbourne's south east."

The south east was far from work, school and the few people she knew.

The relationship changed once they were living together. Tony's aggressive behaviour began to surface in many arguments about money as Kim was paying all the bills.

Over several months this behaviour became more frequent. He threatened to have her visa revoked. At Easter his aggression turned violent.

He started yelling and throwing her belongings on the roof. Kim climbed a ladder to retrieve them and Tony shook the ladder until Kim fell about 10 metres to the ground.

Knowing that she was now in a violent relationship, Kim feared Tony. She called her friend Sue and travelled more than two hours by train to meet her. Together they went to the police.

"I wondered, is this the right thing to do? What will people say? I was embarrassed that this was happening and felt very alone."

The police could see Kim was frightened and contacted the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service (WDVCS) on the spot, and assured her that they would go and see Tony.

The WDVCS arranged accommodation and for Kim to see a doctor. Kim stayed at a safe house for four days, where she received clothes, food, and advice – and then moved into a refuge.

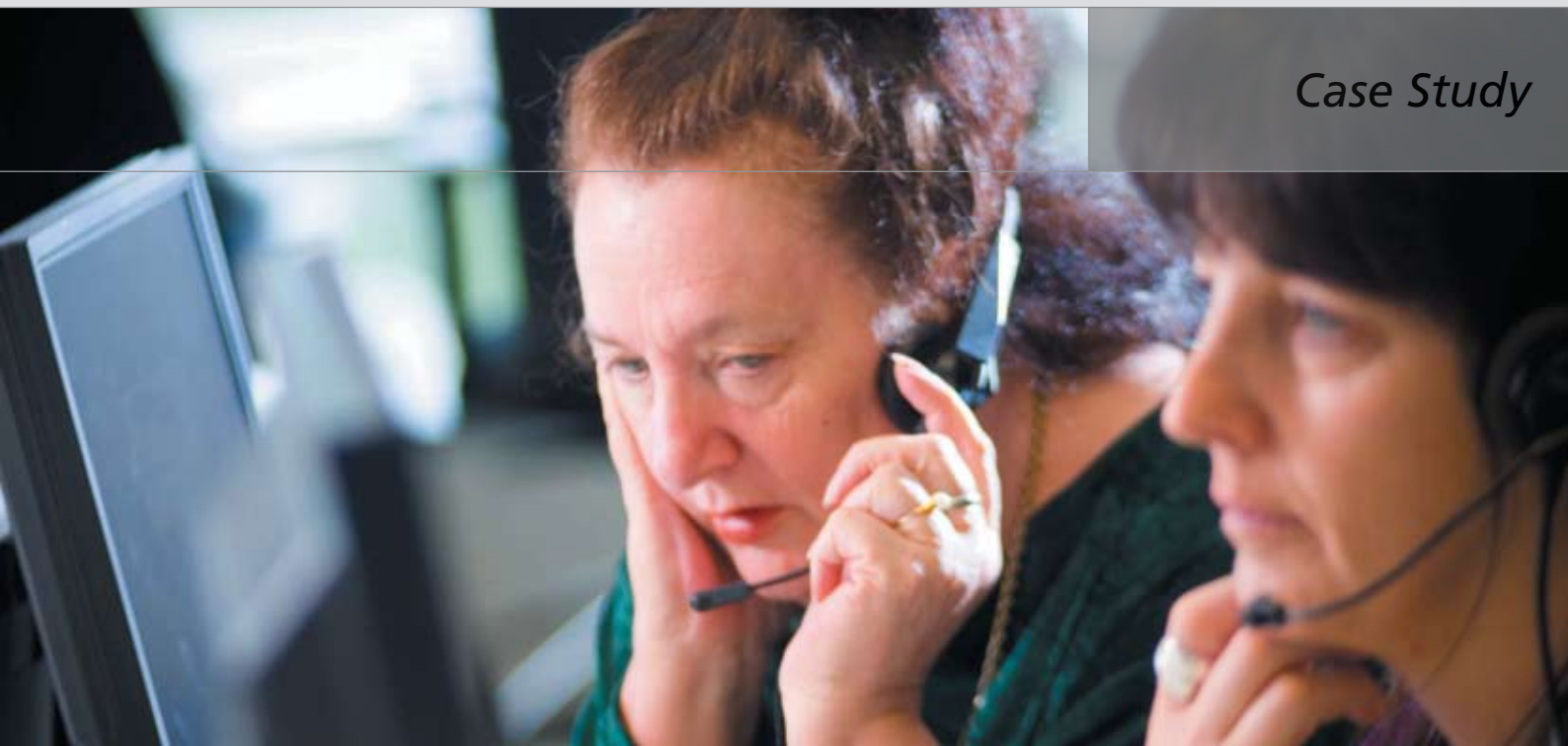
The police interviewed Tony and although no charges were laid, he was required to leave the unit.

The Victorian Government's new approach to family violence funded under *A Fairer Victoria* is bringing police, support services and courts together to more effectively respond to incidents of family violence. The new approach aims to support women and children while increasing the accountability of those who perpetrate violence.

Kim has moved back into her unit and is slowly re-establishing her life.

"I can't believe the level of support that I received from all those involved. I could not have done this on my own".

Case Study



We have established a new specialist service model for those women and children identified as most at risk of continuing cycles of family violence. Intensive case management will ensure skilled professionals work with women and children with complex needs to get access to the services they need (including appropriate cultural support). This includes coordinating access to a number of different services, and engaging informal support networks.

We have extended and enhanced counselling, recovery and group programs for women and children experiencing family violence.

We have increased the number of men's behaviour change programs to assist men to take responsibility for their behaviour.

We are providing additional *Indigenous Healing* and *Time Out Services*. These will complement the first three healing services established in north and west metropolitan, southern Loddon Mallee and East Gippsland regions. These services are developing new ways of preventing and responding to family violence in Indigenous communities, including running Healing Circle groups; cross-generational cultural activities that include Elders, men women and young people; and narrative therapy programs, which have a strong emphasis on oral communication and acknowledge the importance of cultural identity.

We have established two new *Family Violence Courts* at Heidelberg and Ballarat and these have been operating since June 2005. These hear family violence matters including intervention order applications, criminal matters, some family law matters and Victims of Crime applications. We are establishing new *Family Violence Specialist Services* at three Courts – Melbourne, Frankston and Sunshine.

These new courts and services are making the process of applying for an intervention order easier and less intimidating. They are also reducing the additional trauma for all involved, especially children, having support services available. New specialist magistrates, police prosecutors, court staff and support services are working together to ensure better outcomes for all those involved in court proceedings.

The new courts have the power to order men to attend counselling programs to support behaviour change and stop the use of violence. In the Heidelberg Court between June 2005 and February 2006, 66 defendants were ordered to attend counselling. At Ballarat over the same period 97 defendants were ordered to attend counselling. At both courts a family violence support program for men's partners is provided.

We are developing ways of measuring how these changes impact on families affected by family violence and how effectively services are working together. All of these changes are only the start of a major change in our response to family violence. This new approach will take time to fully develop and for its full consequences to become evident. The Government is committed to continuing these important reforms.

Access to universal services::

Responding to family violence more effectively

*These are the first steps towards
a more integrated, effective response
to family violence in Victoria.*

What We Will Do

We will press ahead with the major reforms, which were launched and funded last year.

Key elements of the reform package will be developed and rolled out as part of the integrated approach necessary to reduce family violence in Victoria. The Government will:

- work with Victoria's 70 agencies to ensure the new integrated community service response to family violence, which comes into effect on 1 July 2006, delivers new levels of support for women and children;
- establish a common risk assessment tool for use by all family violence services in Victoria;
- implement new referral pathways between Victoria Police and family violence service providers to ensure that victims of family violence are quickly referred to appropriate support;
- implement family violence specialist court services at Sunshine and Frankston following on from the specialist service already established at the Melbourne Magistrates Court;
- pilot innovative early intervention programs for adolescent males at risk of using violence in future relationships;
- undertake further work across government agencies and with community organisations to develop prevention strategies to reduce family violence;
- take further steps to strengthen the justice system having regard to the Law Reform Commission's March 2006 report on family violence laws. This will include taking action to modernise the intervention order system, improving court processes, and providing victims of family violence with effective remedies and protection; and
- develop new family violence legislation and release an exposure draft bill in 2006 to allow consultation with the community.

Access to universal services

New courts – making a difference

Noreen Toohey, Lead Magistrate at the new Family Violence Division of the Magistrates Court in Ballarat is pleased with how the new Court is operating. She says: "After seven months I am seeing where the integration of services is helping many families work together to resolve the violence and stay together when they choose to.

I have been delighted at the high level of willingness of men whom I order to undertake the mandated men's behaviour change program, with only one man out of 97 ordered to take the program querying the Court on whether it is for him. Clearly there is an acceptance and willingness by these men that their behaviour needs to change."

Strategy 4

Helping older Victorians stay independent

Victorians are well aware of the significance of our ageing population and the impact this will have on Victoria in future years. We now live longer and healthier lives than previous generations. There are real opportunities and challenges to maximise the quality of life and contributions of current and future older Victorians. Seniors play many vital roles in Victoria, as family members, carers, volunteers, investors, workers and consumers.

The Government recognised in *A Fairer Victoria* that older Victorians want to live active, independent lives for longer and have opportunities to participate in community life. Achieving these objectives both improves the quality of life for individuals and contributes social and economic benefits for the State. The Government is committed to services and programs that support older Victorians and to making services more responsive to their needs and wishes.

In 2006, the same challenges confront us. To make our workforce more productive for longer to deliver economic benefits; to encourage age-friendly communities; to ensure senior Victorians have information to make well informed decisions; and, to improve the quality and responsiveness of services.

It is particularly important older workers have the opportunity and encouragement to stay in the workforce. Many employers

recognise that attracting, retaining and training older workers helps their competitiveness. These employers offer older workers more options about how and when they retire, especially encouraging a step down approach to work.

Local governments are important in ensuring their communities are age-friendly and inclusive. Many are developing and implementing positive ageing plans.

All of us want to make well-informed decisions about the most important issues in our lives. We will continue to support initiatives providing better information for seniors. We will continue to support our older citizens to remain healthy so they can be active and contributing members of their families and communities. We will also work to make our community safer for older Victorians.

What We Have Done

We have helped employers to develop new and flexible options for keeping older workers in the workforce, especially small and medium-sized employers, in partnership with the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

We supported the Municipal Association of Victoria to encourage local councils to develop positive ageing plans, information technology training and to revitalise infrastructure used by seniors. We supported the

expansion of Universities of the Third Age and delivered a financial literacy initiative for older women in partnership with the Council on the Ageing.

We have assisted older Victorians to remain independent for longer by providing services such as personal alert alarms, spectacles and dentures. We have funded 1900 personal alert systems to individuals, bringing the total number available for older Victorians to 18,255.

The Government has expanded the range of services available to keep older people in their own homes by negotiating a new and improved Home And Community Care (HACC) agreement with the Commonwealth Government. This will result in more than 400,000 additional hours of service in 2005–06, including new services for culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous communities. We have allocated additional funding to about 500 agencies to improve service delivery. We are proactively involved with the Commonwealth and other States and territories to negotiate an improved HACC agreement.

We have started new services aimed at a more personalised approach to providing in-home services in Yarra Ranges, Moreland, Alpine Shire and Baw Baw Shire. We have completed planning for improved residential aged care services.

When help is just the push of a button away

Joyce Castles' mailbox is probably full of bills and junk mail.

But when she goes to check it, she is full of confidence.

Part of that confidence comes from having a Personal Alert pendant around her neck.

About the size and weight of a small matchbox, the pendant has a red button on it which, if pushed, automatically calls a 24 hour a day Response Centre at the Peninsula Health Service.

That call triggers phone calls from the Response Centre to nominated family or friends, and if those calls go unanswered then an ambulance can be sent for.

Joyce is one of more than 18,000 Victorians who have a Personal Alert pendant funded by the Victorian Government.

Last year, through *A Fairer Victoria* an extra 1900 Personal Alert pendants were funded. All will have been distributed by 30 June 2006.

Prior to getting the pendant, Joyce had had a number of falls: at the shops, getting on and off public transport and even through an open cellar door.

Falling in public can be embarrassing and painful, but at least there are other people around to help you up.

Falling at home can be even more dangerous and can make people feel less confident about living independently in their own home.

Studies have shown that experiencing a fall is one of the greatest fears of the elderly. If the fear of falling prevents older Victorians from being physically active and socialising, that fear can increase the risk of further falls.

But the security Joyce has got from having her own Personal Alert pendant has made her feel "happy in my home" and has given extra peace of mind to her family.

Joyce's enthusiasm is matched by Sylvia Simons, one of the ten operators who work at the other end of the Personal Alert Victoria phone line.

Each month she deals with some of the 48,000 events requiring a response; events that range from missed daily check-up calls and flat batteries in pendants to damaged phone lines and true medical emergencies.

"It's the most satisfying job I have had" she says.

"Short of getting a degree in nursing, this is one of the best ways of helping people".

Case Study



What We Will Do

We will provide further investment of \$59.5 million over four years to prevent elder abuse, provide more personal alerts and increase services for older Victorians.

4.1 Protecting Older Victorians

We will protect older Victorians from abuse through a new community based unit to raise awareness of elder abuse and assistance through community legal centres. We will also help older Victorians feel safer at home by issuing 1200 more personal alerts.

4.2 Supporting Life Long Learning

We will encourage older Victorians to continue to learn by expanding the University of the Third Age (U3A), establishing 32 new U3As in disadvantaged and growth areas.

4.3 Helping Older Victorians Stay in Their Homes

We will support older Victorians to maintain independent living in their homes and communities. Victoria's funding under the HACC program will be matched by the Commonwealth, with contributions from local government to provide additional services including a range of community based nursing, allied health and other in-home support services to enable these older Victorians to maintain their independence for as long as possible.

4.4 Aged Care Land Bank Pilot

We will provide \$4.8 million to encourage the provision of additional high care residential aged care beds in metropolitan areas by providing not for profit aged care providers with access to surplus government land in a pilot program.

4.5 Travel Savings for Seniors

As recently announced in *Meeting Our Transport Challenges*, we will invest \$30 million over ten years to introduce major public transport travel savings for Victorian Seniors, including free travel on Sundays within metropolitan Melbourne and regional cities, 2 free travel vouchers each year and extending the concession rate for Seniors on V/Line services to include peak period and weekend travel.

4.6 Recognising the Contribution of Veterans to Victoria

The Government will provide \$1.2 million over four years to recognise the contribution of veterans to Victoria. It will also fund a range of initiatives to raise community awareness about the service and sacrifice of Australian servicemen and women including an ongoing provision for the Victorian 'Spirit of ANZAC' Prize and Schools Competition and additional grants for upgrading memorials and commemorative and educational activities. We will also fund the replacement of the Kokoda gymnasium and build a new hydrotherapy pool for veterans at the Community Rehabilitation Centre at the Heidelberg Repatriation site. (see Initiative 11.4)

Access to universal services:

Helping older Victorians stay independent

We will continue to support older Victorians to remain healthy and active members of our community.

4.7 Community-based Rehabilitation Services

We will develop an integrated service framework to enable people to have their rehabilitation needs met in their own homes where possible. And if it is not, we will ensure their rehabilitation in the closest and most appropriate rehabilitation centre. We will achieve this by getting more flexibility and coordination among services by developing an integrated service framework. People requiring rehabilitation services have improved health outcomes when their care is delivered in the most appropriate setting, whether in their own home or at a rehabilitation centre. The capacity to achieve this has often been limited by a lack of flexibility within the service system. We will also develop new, clear guidelines for service providers to show them how to deliver services that best meet a person's care needs. These guidelines will particularly help people with dementia, continence problems, falls and mobility and pain issues to maximise their independence and return to, or remain in their homes.

4.8 Older Driver Safety Program

We will help older Victorians stay independent for as long as possible by distributing a further 50,000 copies of the *Victorian Older Drivers Handbook* this year and by continuing *SafeDrive* seminars, which provide information to help older drivers to continue to drive safely.

Five local councils will be provided with dollar for dollar funding in 2006–07 as part of the *Keeping Older Drivers Safe and Mobile* Local Government resource. We will also help older drivers plan for when they can no longer drive by providing information about mobility options and alternative modes of transport.

Fairer access to universal services

A Fairer Victoria recognises the importance of all Victorians having access to quality universal services.

Not all Victorians have equal ability to access to the services we use to meet fundamental needs. Some people face barriers preventing them from taking part fully in community life. These include poor health, a lack of skills, poor mobility and restricted access to services and facilities. *A Fairer Victoria* aims to reduce those barriers, ensuring access to government-funded services, reducing the costs of living for disadvantaged households and improving access to services for low income and other disadvantaged groups.

This is why we are rebuilding our universal services in critical areas. In addition to the measures outlined in *A Fairer Victoria* the Government is rebuilding Victoria's universal services in:

Education

In education over 6000 additional teachers and staff have been employed and 57 new and replacement schools have been built. The *Blueprint for Government Schools* announced in November 2003 is focusing on ensuring that all schools provide the best possible education outcomes for all children regardless of their background or economic circumstances.

In February 2006 the Government committed to the biggest single investment in school building projects in Victoria's history, funded through the sale of Victoria's share of the Snowy Hydro Electricity Generation Company. \$600 million has been committed to transform up to 100 schools mostly in disadvantaged areas and deliver a \$50 million boost to school maintenance across Victoria.

Health

In the health system we are making sure that all Victorians have access to the best possible hospitals and medical service. To ensure this the Victorian Government has increased its recurrent spending on health by a massive \$2.9 billion since 1999. In addition we have rebuilt or are rebuilding 29 hospitals. This includes opening the largest medical precinct in Australia – comprising the new Austin Hospital and the new Mercy Hospital for Women, commencing the construction of the new Royal Women's Hospital and the new \$850 million Royal Children's Hospital, and opening Casey Hospital in Berwick – the first totally new hospital in Victoria for more than 20 years. We have employed over 6,400 extra nurses to ensure patients get the support they need and in 2005–06 we will admit almost 250,000 more patients than were admitted in 1999.

Police

We have increased the number of police serving the Victorian community by more than 1478 and we are building 145 new and replacement police stations throughout Victoria – the largest police station construction program in the State's history. In the 2006 State Budget the Government has committed a further \$20.7 million to continue this building program. Our investment in community safety is paying off. Since 2000–01 the crime rate has declined 21.5 per cent – including a massive 38 per cent decline in burglaries and a 52 per cent decline in car thefts.

Transport

Since 1999 we have made significant improvements to transport around Victoria, re-opening country rail lines, introducing fast rail links, upgrading major roads and providing community buses. On top of this, we recently released a \$10.5 billion plan for future improvements to meet Victoria's growing transport needs. (see page 44)



Focus

Strategy 5

Providing fairer access to services

The Government made a commitment in *A Fairer Victoria* to give as many Victorians as possible equal access to the services we all need. We promised to tackle systemic discrimination, recognising that some people face difficulties in accessing services because of personal attributes such as language and learning difficulties or personal circumstances.

We recognised that as a community we can do more to reduce systemic discrimination and promote fairer access to services. In particular the Government is committed to exploring new ways of dealing with a lack of access to services.

What We Have Done

We tackled systemic discrimination through major antidiscrimination campaigns such as *Employment 4 All* targeting disability and employment, and campaigns including *Just Like You* and *A Seat Beside You* campaigns targeting racism promoting tolerance and understanding.

We have repealed the *Vagrancy Act* to remove outdated language and offences and modernised the law in the *Summary Offences Act*. While begging remains an offence, the impact of the offence on people in genuine hardship will be monitored.

We are helping newly arrived refugees access services by providing specialist nurses in Kensington, Werribee, Northcote, Broadmeadows, Footscray, Dandenong, Warrnambool and Shepparton.

We have refocused Victoria's employment programs so that they provide maximum benefit to those who need them most. The new *Workforce Participation Partnerships* program is run through local partnerships to create jobs and training opportunities for job seekers facing barriers to employment.

We have improved access to the arts through our *STAR6* program that has assisted 6,633 mostly rural and regional students visit Scienceworks since July 2005. Our *VRAP 9* program has seen 35,000 rural and regional students attend the Arts Centre.

We are providing additional services to Victorian Veterans through the *Victorian Veterans Fund*.

Through the *Peer Education and Support Program* we are using the experience of people who have used our services to improve the responsiveness of homelessness services. We will continue to recruit, train and engage people who have been homeless to work with homeless people to make sure our services meet the needs of people who use them.

Creating community on the other side of the world

There is almost half a world between Warrnambool and Sudan. But Otha Akoch sees the similarities.

In Sudan, bringing up a child is the responsibility of the whole community, he says, and in Warrnambool there is a similar level of community involvement.

Otha came to Victoria with his wife Charity on a humanitarian visa six years ago and spent his first few years working in Dandenong.

But after meeting the Warrnambool City Council's Liaison Officer at the South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, his family decided to become part of a new community in Warrnambool.

It is a move he is delighted to have made.

He is deeply involved in his community and is a regular speaker at public meetings, social clubs and churches about his cultural background.

At a ceremony in 2002, Otha became an Australian citizen; a moment he says made him feel "proud to be part of Australia."

He is studying a Community Welfare course at South Western TAFE and on his lapel he wears his Warrnambool Rotary Club membership badge.

Otha hopes that for his children's generation Warrnambool will become a melting pot of multiculturalism. His work is helping to establish the important local connections that new communities need.

But there is also a need for longer-term community building to develop a new community's capacity to support themselves, now and in the future.

With funding from *A Fairer Victoria*, Warrnambool City Council has employed Andrina Mitchell - a refugee support worker - to help build the capacity of the area's refugee community.

"That means we're doing very practical things - leadership training and mentoring for community members, developing new community enterprises, such as food stalls or cross-cultural services, and helping start a new language program on the local community radio station" she says.

Otha is a keen supporter of this approach.

"I like working with people, helping them with finding housing, and enrolling in TAFE courses."

"But this is a strategy for bringing up a whole community."

Case Study



What We Will Do

We will provide further investment of \$43.1 million over four years to ensure fairer access to services for all Victorians. This will include more services for our culturally diverse communities who have special needs, increased community health services in areas of high demand and more flexible community transport services. This funding will also support increased access to the arts.

5.1 Victorian Multicultural Community Grants

The Government will provide \$3.5 million over four years to enable the Victorian Multicultural Commission to expand its highly successful community grants program. The funding categories for grants include organisational support, seniors groups, community strengthening, and building and facilities improvements.

5.2 Language Interpreter Services

We will provide \$3.1 million over four years to continue the language services strategy to improve interpreting and translating services. This includes increasing the supply of interpreters and more interpreter training, testing and accreditation.

Priorities are increasing interpreter and bilingual service capacity for newly arrived refugees, assisting ageing migrant communities to access aged care services and supporting professional development in the mental health sector to ensure our different communities receive the services they need.

5.3 English Language Support in Schools

The Government will provide \$1.2 million over four years for specialist English as a Second Language services built around a vocational curriculum for the many recently arrived young people, including those 16 years and older who arrive in Victoria with little or no formal education.

5.4 Promoting Multicultural Harmony

We will provide \$2.1 million over four years to fund a range of initiatives to bring different faith and community groups together to promote multi-faith and multicultural harmony and events that celebrate our shared values and increase our understanding of, and respect for, our differences.

5.5 Improving Community Health

The Government will provide \$2.1 million over four years to improve community health services in areas of high demand as part of the *Local Access to Primary Care Services* initiative. A further \$25.6 million investment will enable the redevelopment of two centres, Monashlink Clayton and the North Richmond Community Health Centre, to improve current service delivery and meet future growth.

Funding for child health teams and mental health services, under Strategies 1 and 11, will also be delivered through Community Health Services.

5.6 More Nursing Services For Refugees

We will provide \$2.1 million over four years as part of the *Local Access to Primary Care Services* initiative to extend the community based refugee health nurses program by extending the hours and availability of nurses in areas with high refugee populations and joining up clinicians and resources to support this high needs group.

5.7 Flexible Transport Solutions

As recently announced in *Meeting Our Transport Challenges*, we will invest \$18.3 million over four years to improve local transport for those who have restricted mobility such as young people, seniors, and people with a disability as well as people in

Reducing barriers to opportunity:

Providing fairer access to services

regional and rural Victoria. We will support up to 30 projects in regional and outer suburban areas make better use of existing transport resources. These projects tailor transport services to meet local needs by improving coordination of existing services such as school, local and community buses, taxis and volunteer drivers as well as other improvements and new services where required.

5.8 Drugs Blueprint

We will address the disadvantage experienced by those with alcohol or drug problems and build on the achievements of the *Victorian Government Drug Initiative* by developing a new Blueprint for the drug service system during the next four years. The Blueprint will aim to improve linkages between prevention, early intervention and treatment, promote partnership and collaboration and focus on delivering quality, seamless services to clients and their families. The focus of the Blueprint will be to promote the health and wellbeing of young people to delay the uptake of alcohol; prevent the uptake of tobacco and illicit drugs; intervene earlier for those at risk; ensure access to effective, quality treatment services for those with alcohol and drug problems; and reduce the harms caused by drugs.

5.9 Mature Aged Workers

As announced in *Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians* we will harness the productive capacity of our mature aged workers, which will become increasingly necessary as our population ages. We will specifically target an additional 1,800 vocational education and training places for Victorians aged 35 to 64 years without year 12 or its equivalent.

This training will be in industry sectors with skill shortages now or predicted in the future, and existing workers in these industries will be given the first opportunity to take part. The training will recognise the prior learning of these mature-aged workers.

5.10 Increased Access to the Arts

Arts and cultural activities strengthen and inspire, build social connection, and instil a sense of community health and wellbeing.

We will increase community access to the arts in two new outer metropolitan facilities; a new performance space at Burrinja Community Cultural Centre in the Dandenong Ranges (\$3 million over 2 years) and the redevelopment of the Museum of Lillydale into a regional Civic and Cultural Facility (\$0.4 million).

This is in addition to the \$28 million already announced in the Provincial Statement to support regional arts and cultural infrastructure across Victoria. The Government is also continuing the highly successful *Access All Areas* which gives regional and rural students the opportunity to participate in events at major cultural venues in Melbourne.

The Government will also work with SBS radio and nine regional councils to assist in the preparation of broadcast license applications. Expansion of the radio network into regional Victoria will bring multilingual programs to areas with large numbers of refugees and migrants.

Strengthening our multicultural communities

Victorians come from more than 230 nations; we speak 180 languages and dialects; we follow more than 116 religions. One in four Victorians were born overseas.

Victoria remains the most successful multicultural state in Australia. We take great pride in our humanitarian migration record. Victoria is now the home for more than one-third of Australia's annual humanitarian or refugee intake. We are also proud of our successful record of attracting skilled migrants to Victoria. Our share of skilled migration has increased from 18 per cent to 26 per cent of the Australian intake. Many of our new Victorians settle in towns in regional Victoria providing much needed workers for local industries and new families to participate in schools and sporting clubs.

Cultural diversity contributes directly to Victoria's economic strength. States and cities that are diverse, tolerant and open to other cultures are leaders in attracting new investment. Victoria possesses an enormous advantage in the competition to provide locations for new manufacturing, research, design and marketing operations for global companies as they seek new markets for their products and skilled people for the jobs they bring.

Our multicultural diversity also directly contributes to the richness and vibrancy of our cultural life. We have also benefited from diversity in our hospitality sector and our tourism industry.

However people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can face high levels of disadvantage. These include poor language skills, low health status, different cultural experiences and expectations of services and difficulties making new networks of friends in isolation from extended families.

Language and education are critical to successful settlement. The next wave of migration may lead to people from up to 150 new language groups coming to Victoria. This will strain on our capacity to provide both language services and education programs. Many of our new migrants have experienced war and famine. Sometimes children have never attended school. Some have no experience of hospitals and doctors. They may need extra help to make a successful transition to life in our cities and country towns. We will provide resources and programs to assist those making a new life in Victoria.

Another issue affecting our diverse communities is ageing. Those who came to Victoria as part of the first wave of post war immigration are now ageing in greater numbers than other Victorians. We need to ensure home-based services and aged care facilities are equipped to help these older Victorians and their families.

The threat of terrorism has placed many of our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities under greater pressure. Victoria has an excellent record of interfaith co-operation. Working in partnership with faith and community leaders and promoting community events is a powerful way to increase understanding between communities – celebrating our similarities rather than our differences.

The landmark *Multicultural Victoria Act* 2004 enshrines the principles of multiculturalism for future generations, and makes the strengthening of multiculturalism a core goal for every state government department. All departments and agencies are required to report annually on initiatives taken to value diversity, reduce inequality, improve access, encourage participation and promote the social and economic benefits of cultural diversity to all Victorians. Cultural awareness training is making our public servants more aware of the additional help some groups may need. The Government will require departments to compile cultural diversity plans which address provision for culturally sensitive service delivery to Victoria's communities. Departments will be required to:

- incorporate culturally appropriate training for their staff into the delivery of services to our CALD communities;
- ensure that information on services is readily accessible to CALD communities; and
- include assessment of the effectiveness of service delivery to CALD communities as an integral part of program evaluation.

Departments will be required to implement these actions and to report annually on progress through their Ministers to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.



Focus

Strategy 6

Making services more affordable

The Government recognises many families often struggle to meet basic living costs. While most income support is provided by the Australian Government, there are mechanisms available for the State Government to provide assistance to these families.

Financial hardship can prevent disadvantaged families from accessing services and this can have a major impact on children. The Government has addressed some of these cost barriers, especially through allowances and concessions in education, public transport and in respect to water and council rates. The Government has also moved to assist people understand their rights as consumers and tenants.

A Fairer Victoria has focused on increasing the access of Victorians to new services like the internet as well as support in meeting energy costs and obtaining loans.

What We Have Done

We have increased access to the internet by funding 88 community organisations to upgrade internet services. These organisations were in both metropolitan and regional Victoria and more will be funded in 2006. More than 12,000 hours of internet access has been provided in community settings since November 2005.

Energy hardship has been the subject of a Committee of Inquiry, which recently reported to the Minister for Energy Industries. We are helping cut the energy bills of 1000 homes occupied by pensioners who will receive energy audits and retrofits through an Energy Taskforce focused on the new *Neighbourhood Renewal* areas of West Heidelberg, East Reservoir, Delacombe and Hastings.

We provided uniforms and footwear to more than 3800 primary and secondary school students through the *State Schools Relief Committee*. There has also been a review into access to affordable credit and ways to help ensure credit options do not worsen the financial position of people on low incomes.

We helped low-income people save for their children's education through the innovative and extremely successful *Saver Plus* initiative with the ANZ Bank and Brotherhood of St Laurence. *Saver Plus* helps low-income parents save towards their children's education by providing training in personal financial skills; personal support to implement a savings plan; and matching every dollar saved up to \$1000.

We provided \$1.35 million to extend this savings plan, allowing a total of 3000 families in Victoria to benefit from the program.

Support to save opens doors

Azhar Almousawy has a new focus. After being in the financial wilderness for several years, a new savings program has set her on the track to financial freedom.

When Azhar joined *Saver Plus*, her aim was to save enough money to buy a computer for her son Saif Saadi.

She achieved her goal in just eight months – giving her the incentive for a new savings pattern.

And now she has a new goal – saving for a house.

Developed by the ANZ Bank and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Saver Plus* is a financial literacy and matched savings program to help families on low incomes improve their financial knowledge, build a long-term savings habit, and save for their children's education.

The ANZ Bank matches savings up to \$1000 made over an extended period.

Since 2003, Berry Street Victoria has delivered the program to about 190 Shepparton families.

Azhar, her husband Selman Saadi and their children Saif, 14, Zahraa, 13, Ali, 10, Nour, 3, and Alaa, 2, are originally from Iraq. They have lived in Shepparton for 12 months.

They settled into the community, but were unaware of the program until the Victorian Government-funded interpreter Fatima Al-Qarakchy introduced them to the benefits.

Fatima was employed by Berry Street Victoria, using funding from the Department for Victorian Communities, to deliver the *Saver Plus* program to the emerging Arabic community in Shepparton.

Fatima said there are 2000 people in the community. Initially they were sceptical of the program and were reluctant to participate, but after seeing the benefits they began applying.

And the program has not just helped the families involved. Tracy Pell, financial inclusion program manager for Berry Street Victoria, said the whole community had benefited, particularly businesses and schools.

For Azhar the program has made a real difference to her life.

Previously she had never even had a bank account and had purchased items that were not always necessary.

"I have learnt to buy just what you need and not what you want," she said.

Case Study



What We Will Do

We will provide further investment of \$11.3 million over four years to increase access to no-interest loans, increase the rebate for high efficiency hot water and to increase support for people struggling to pay their energy bills who have entered financial hardship payment plans.

6.1 Fair and Affordable Credit

We will invest \$5.7 million over four years to reduce the impact of credit debt and financial hardship on vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians and by expanding the *No Interest Loans Scheme* (NILS) program to 77 locations providing up to 4000 extra loans per year, in partnership with National Australia Bank and Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services. We will also require credit providers to provide alternative dispute resolution schemes for customers.

6.2 Addressing Financial Hardship of Energy Consumers

The Government will provide \$4.6 million over two years as part of its response to the Committee of Inquiry into Financial Hardship of Energy Consumer Report. The funding includes a \$4 million boost to the existing *Utility Grants Program*, bringing the total Government commitment to \$11 million. Eligibility for the program will be extended allowing more families to apply

for grants to help pay their energy bills when in financial difficulty. The Government is also committing \$600,000 over two years to provide additional training for financial counsellors at Consumer Affairs Victoria to provide specialist energy related advice to consumers in hardship.

We will require gas and electricity retailers to develop and implement hardship policies and programs to ensure that people in financial hardship do not have their energy supplies cut off. Minimum standards will include a requirement on retailers to offer flexible payment plans and that they not disconnect consumers participating in a hardship program. All hardship policies and programs will have to be approved by the Essential Services Commission.

6.3 Reducing Energy Bills Through Gas Efficiency

We will provide \$1 million to provide a one year extension to the rebate to assist with the cost of installing high efficiency gas heaters in households with reticulated natural gas connections. We will also provide an additional 100 per cent rebate to concession card holders to convert from unflued to flued LPG heaters.

6.4 Increasing Concessions

The Government will increase support for low income people by increasing concessions on basic services. This indexation was introduced in 2004 after many years of the concession being capped. In 2006–07 the concession for water and sewerage will increase by \$4 to \$154 and the concession for municipal rates will increase by \$5 to \$168. The Government is also bringing concessions related to non-mains energy into line with mains energy to ensure that low income households in rural areas are not disadvantaged. This involves a change from a flat \$85 concession to a three tiered approach taking into account household expenditure on non-mains energy.

Overall, the Victorian Government concessions budget in 2006–07 will increase by \$32 million to \$1009 million.

We will help households in rural areas and people living in caravan parks by restructuring the concession available for low income households reliant on Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and alternative fuels.

We will increase the assistance available to low-income pensioners and beneficiaries. Those in drought-affected rural areas will benefit by increasing the rebate for large purchasers of carted water.

Reducing barriers to opportunity:

Making services more affordable



Improving transport for everyone

Accessible transport options help people make the most of the opportunities that are available to them throughout their lives - from accessing children's health and aged services, through to schooling and entertainment for young people, maximising employment opportunities and enabling community participation. Access to transport plays a critical role in the quality of life of every one of us.

We know that to provide these transport options requires planning and investment. Transport options need to grow and change as the communities they serve grow and change. To enable everyone to participate in the community we need services that run at times when people need them, more services at peak time, and more services later during week days and more frequently on weekends.

We recognise that some areas of Melbourne are more transport disadvantaged than other areas and that these suburbs need more assistance in meeting the transport needs of their residents. And we need improved transport for rural and regional Victorians. That is why the government recently launched *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* a \$10.5 billion plan to transform Victoria's transport system over the next ten years.

WHAT WE WILL DO

In direct support to the objectives of *A Fairer Victoria* to improve access to services and meet the needs of disadvantaged Victorians, *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* includes:

Improved Bus Services

We will invest \$1.4 billion over 10 years to improve metropolitan bus services. This will fund a 22 per cent increase in local bus services and introduce four new SmartBus routes that link with the rail network to create a grid of public transport routes within and between suburbs so that people in Melbourne's middle and outer suburbs will be able to travel more conveniently across town by public transport, rather than going through the CBD.

An additional investment of \$90 million in new regional bus services will create new links to Regional Fast Rail services, new connections to small towns and new services in growing regional centres.

Improved Rail Services

We will invest \$2.1 billion over 10 years to revitalise our rail transport system. This consists of a rail network capacity program targeting key bottlenecks such as the Dandenong and Sunshine rail corridors, new stations to be built on existing rail lines at Point Cook, Cardinia Road and Lynbrook, and adjusted timetables to allow extra morning and afternoon peak and shoulder services on weekdays and extended train and tram services to 1.00am on Friday and Saturday nights.

Improved Access to Public Transport

We will invest \$695 million over 10 years to increase access to services for people with restricted mobility such as older people, those with a disability and people with young children. We will provide new low floor platform stops, better access to rail stations and improvements to V/Line passenger services. We will improve access, transfer facilities and amenity at key metropolitan public transport interchanges and build on the success of Park & Ride facilities by providing more spaces (See Initiative 10.6 for details on \$250 million of these funds directed to the Disability Discrimination Act Compliance Retrofit Program).

Flexible Transport Solutions

We will invest \$18.3 million over four years to improve transport and mobility services for young people, seniors, disabled people and other Victorians who are transport disadvantaged in regional and rural Victoria. Through expansion of the successful *Transport Connections Program* (TCP), Government will provide funding to extend program coordinators on a state-wide basis to assist up to 30 local communities improve the planning and coordination of local community and public transport services.

Travel Savings For Seniors

We will invest \$30 million over ten years to improve mobility for senior Victorians by encouraging greater use of public transport. Free travel will be provided to Victorian Seniors on Sundays within metropolitan Melbourne and major regional centres. In addition, concessions for Seniors on V/Line services will be aligned with entitlements for pensioners and health care card holders, and two free travel vouchers will be provided to all Victorian Seniors for off peak V/Line and Metcard travel. Broader fare reform including incentives for more off peak travel will be considered following the implementation of the *New Ticketing Solution*.



Strategy 7

Boosting access to affordable housing

Every family deserves a decent place to live. Secure, affordable and accessible housing located near jobs and transport is vital to a better future. This is especially the case for families and individuals on low incomes. The Victorian Government investment in affordable housing means Victoria now has more social housing than ever before. This is despite a steadily reducing commitment from the Commonwealth Government.

The Government has built or acquired more than 10,000 public and community housing units since 1999. This includes over 830 new social housing units delivered through partnership and joint venture arrangements with other agencies. We have upgraded public housing estates through *Neighbourhood Renewal* and developments such as the Kensington redevelopment, now considered a model around Australia. Significant environmental features have enhanced smart design in our housing, for example, more than 10,000 public tenants are now using solar-powered hot water.

The Government has forged partnerships with five new not-for-profit community Housing Associations to provide additional social housing for rental below the market rate around Victoria. Underpinned by \$74.5 million from the Government, the new Housing Associations will deliver \$100 million worth of good quality housing units in our suburbs and regions.

A Fairer Victoria is building on this investment and further addressing the need for affordable homes for a range of groups including young families and single people on low incomes. There is a clear link between the affordability of housing in the private sector and the pressures placed on social housing.

We recognise the need for a coordinated and integrated approach to housing policy in Victoria engaging a wide range of public and private sector organisations. We recognise the need to focus on homelessness, which is integrally related to housing availability. Homelessness can be temporary or ongoing. People experience homelessness following family breakdown, illness, financial stress or abuse. Transient living means that people often have difficulty accessing the opportunities and services that would help them achieve a more stable lifestyle.

Victoria leads Australia in services for homeless people and has fewer people sleeping rough than the national average according to 2001 Census data. The *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* is the most comprehensive government response to homelessness in this country. We will continue to make improvements, especially where early intervention and integrated responses can help homeless people overcome the range of interrelated problems they face.

What We Have Done

We are increasing the availability of housing that families on low incomes can afford. We are well on our way to meeting our commitment in *A Fairer Victoria* of building 100 new homes across regional and metropolitan Victoria by 2007.

VicUrban has started its contribution to the Government's strategy by running a design competition for a low cost home. One of the winning designs is being built at Aurora as a demonstration home. It has also begun work with a builder and with financiers to develop a pilot scheme to provide one in 10 affordable new homes to means-tested buyers at below-market price.

A secure roof over their heads

It's a picture of contentment.

Patricia is roasting a chicken for dinner, and daughters Angela and Laura are in their room and watching television. Nicholas won't be home until later – he's got uni and then is going out with friends. Anthony is staying with his dad.

It is a far cry from late last year when Patricia and her family were living with her sister after fleeing from a domestic violence situation.

Patricia was desperate. She had no accommodation, no job and four children to look after, including a son with cerebral palsy.

"We were living with my sister, her husband and their four kids and my four kids in a four-bedroom house," she said.

Every day Patricia would drop her son at the train to go to uni and would then hit the streets looking for a place to live. Application after application was turned down.

"I was a single mum with no income, four children and I had a dog," she said.

She turned to Wayss – a non-government agency providing housing and family violence support services, including to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the outer south-east of Melbourne.

"I went there for some counselling – I needed someone to talk to. The counsellor was fantastic and suggested I apply for public housing," Patricia said.

She had an interview with the Victorian Government's Office of Housing and shortly after was offered a three-bedroom house in Melbourne's south-east.

Patricia's newly-built house is not only within her budget, it is wheelchair accessible – meaning Nicholas can easily negotiate himself around without assistance.

For Patricia it has brought stability and a secure home for her and her children. It has also changed the course of her life.

It has given her a chance to "take a few deep breaths" and consider her future.

"At the moment I need to be home to be able to take Nicholas to uni, and the girls like me being home, but hopefully I can get back into working in aged care soon," she said.

Case Study



We have implemented affordable housing actions contained in *Melbourne 2030* including working with local councils to develop *Regional Housing Statements*. We are also working to incorporate affordable housing objectives into the state planning policy framework.

The Victorian Government has pursued the development of a *National Affordable Housing Agreement*. This has resulted in all State and Territory Ministers and the Commonwealth agreeing to examine relevant whole-of-government issues, including financial and taxation levers and new ways of developing and expanding the social housing sector.

In addition to *A Fairer Victoria*, the Government has ensured that as part of our Commonwealth Games legacy, housing constructed for the Athletes Village will provide social housing for 200 young people and other Victorians in need. Of the 20 transportable units from the Village to be used for social housing, eight will be used for *Neighbourhood Renewal* programs in Shepparton, Moe, Braybrook, Delacombe and Norlane. Another six will be available for low income families to rent in Robinvale, Colac and Horsham. A further six will be used to house Indigenous people in Gippsland. The remaining 95 transportable units will be sold to community organisations, members of the public and the private sector.

The Government is providing around \$40 million for homelessness assistance including around \$17 million above our contribution to the *Commonwealth State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Agreement*. Innovative new pilots under the *Youth Homeless Action Plan* will help the 11,000 young people who approach youth homelessness services in Victoria each year to move from crisis accommodation to independent living in the community.

What We Will Do

We will provide further investment of \$86.1 million over five years to boost the supply of social housing across the state and to provide more support to people experiencing homelessness. This support will help young homeless people make the transition to independent living and access private rental, assist people with mental illnesses and provide homeless people with opportunities to engage in team sport and community activities.

7.1 Boosting Access to Affordable Homes

The Government will provide \$50.5 million to increase access to affordable housing for Victorian families across suburban Melbourne and regional Victoria. This includes further assistance to not-for-profit housing associations, that are creating partnerships with the private sector, local government and others to increase the supply of affordable housing in Victoria and will have new homes ready for families on low incomes to rent from 2007. These funds will also be used for maintenance and upgrade works on ageing public housing infrastructure to enable tenants to be safe and comfortable in their homes.

7.2 Conveyancing Duty Concessions

The Government is making housing more affordable by raising the thresholds for the pensioner and concession cardholder conveyancing duty concession. From 30 May 2006, a full stamp duty concession will be available to eligible pensioners or concession cardholders purchasing property valued up to \$300,000, with a partial concession available up to \$400,000.

Reducing barriers to opportunity:

Boosting access to affordable housing

The Government is also providing first homebuyers with families the option of a full stamp duty concession in lieu of the First Home Bonus when they purchase property valued up to \$150,000, with a partial concession available up to \$200,000.

7.3 Targeted Assistance for Crisis Accommodation

We will provide an extra \$13.8 million under the new SAAP V agreement to support homeless people across three strategic priority areas: increased involvement in early intervention and prevention strategies; better assistance to people who have a number of support needs; and providing ongoing assistance to ensure stability for clients post-crisis.

7.4 Youth Homelessness

We will provide \$10.8 million over five years as part of the *Increasing Support to Homeless People* initiative for new projects to assist young homeless people, including:

- \$4.2 million over four years for *Youth Futures*, a new service to assist young homeless people including young mothers move to independent living. This will fund outreach workers and accommodation for 200 young people each year;
- \$2.5 million capital funding for purpose-built facilities incorporating a mix of 14 self-contained one and two bedroom homes, which can be used to assist an estimated 28 households per year;
- we will provide a further \$4.2 million over four years to provide private rental brokerage. This will assist approximately 350 young people to access private rental accommodation each year.

7.5 Homelessness Innovation and Investment Fund

The *Homelessness Innovation and Investment Fund Action* will pilot innovative investments to assist people out of homelessness. Victoria has proposed three new projects under the Fund within the new *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Agreement*:

- to expand *Youth Futures* to support vulnerable young people move from crisis accommodation to independent living. This will assist around 900 young people over four years. This project would cost \$4.4 million;
- to develop and distribute a best practice toolkit showing how to help women experiencing family violence access the private rental market. This project would cost \$200,000; and
- to develop a new intensive case management response to assist at least 320 SAAP clients with very complex needs related to drug and alcohol dependency and mental illness. It will focus on improved links to health and support services, in order to support a stable move out of the homelessness service system. This project would cost approximately \$6.6 million over four years.

7.6 Housing Support From the Victorian Property Fund

Housing projects for low income or disadvantaged Victorians are being funded by the Victorian Property Fund as provided for under the *Estate Agents Act*. New projects include:

- \$2.7 million over three years to the *Home Renovations Service* of the Office of Housing expanding access to private renters as well as home owners;
- \$1.8 million over three years for the *Group Self Build* program that will help 216 families who cannot afford deposits for home loans build their own home; and
- \$5.9 million over three years for the *VicUrban Affordable and Responsive Housing Projects* towards the construction of 37 well designed rental homes on VicUrban estates to be managed by not-for-profit Housing Associations.

7.7 Reducing Discrimination Against Homeless People

We will consult and work with homeless organisations and industry groups to develop guidelines and training tools to ensure business does not discriminate against or refuse service to people on the grounds they homeless.

The guidelines will outline to service providers, from caravan parks to cafes, the Government's expectations in their dealings with homeless people, and suggest strategies to deal with issues that may arise. The Government will maintain dialogue with stakeholders to monitor the ongoing effectiveness of the program.

7.8 Homeless World Cup – Street Soccer for Social Change

We will provide \$0.5 million from the *Community Support Fund* to increase the wellbeing and social engagement of homeless people by bidding to host the 2008 *Homeless World Cup – Street Soccer for Social Change* along with hosting the National Street Soccer League Tournament, and funding a statewide *Street Socceroo Program*.

These events will give homeless people opportunities to engage in regular activity and build self-esteem through achievement. Initial soccer programs run by *The Big Issue Australia* have shown that this leads directly to practical social outcomes for homeless people, such as improved health and skill levels, mentoring opportunities and connection to support networks and employment and accommodation opportunities. It will also contribute to improving mainstream understanding of and engagement with homeless people.

7.9 Affordable Homes for Victorian Families

Across Government a range of projects are under way or in development that aim to alleviate housing stress, promote better operation of the housing market and generate greater opportunities for more Victorian families to obtain secure and affordable housing with good access to employment, transport and other amenities. In addition to interagency partnerships on individual projects, senior officers of the Departments of Human Services, Sustainability and Environment, Premier and Cabinet, and Treasury and Finance are now working closely together on a regular basis to coordinate and integrate housing policy developments and a framework for a whole of government approach will be announced in the near future.

Victoria will also support the Council of Australian Governments' consideration of the package of reforms being developed to support a *National Affordable Housing Agreement*.

Reducing barriers to opportunity:

Boosting access to affordable housing

Renewing a community to change lives

Kim Ling Chua speaks passionately and enthusiastically about Collingwood Neighbourhood Renewal. The project, she says, has changed her life.

It has also changed the lives of hundreds of public housing tenants at the estate.

Neighbourhood Renewal is an initiative of the Department of Human Services and works by building partnerships between the residents, State Government, local governments, service providers and local businesses to upgrade the physical and social infrastructure of public housing estates.

The project relies on the initiative and drive of the residents – who are central to making the decisions and ensuring its success.

The renewal is a never-ending project, continually setting new goals, changing the landscape of the housing estate and boosting morale for the 1200 households who live on site.

The Collingwood project kicked off in November 2002.

And, according to Kim, it has a long list of achievements. From simple ideas such as upgrading the lifts and extending gym opening hours, to long-term life-changing ideas including boosting employment opportunities for residents.

The project continues to connect the community through

neighbourhood lunches and the introduction of a welcome program for new tenants, has improved safety by launching *Neighbourhood Watch* and aims to increase childcare opportunities.

For Kim, a resident of the estate for five years, it has been a chance to develop her skills and encourage a real sense of community.

Previously, she said, people did not feel like they belonged, and it was difficult to encourage residents to take part in the scheme and its activities.

But with real results now evident, residents are jumping on board.

As well as being the secretary of the *Neighbourhood Renewal* advisory team, Kim now works part-time in the estate gym, cooks at a monthly welcome lunch for new residents and is a lead member of a health and wellbeing working group.

Kim said a key to the program's success was partnerships.

"With the *Neighbourhood Renewal* program we have the bridges between governments – we know where we have to go and how to get things done," she said.

And she can see a bright future for the project.

"I think there are heaps of things to do. It has changed my whole life, and I could talk about it for hours," she laughed.

Case Study



Ensuring access to drug rehabilitation services

People with drug or alcohol problems often experience multiple disadvantages, including marginalisation and poorer access to health, housing and other services. Their physical and mental health is often worse than that of other people. The social, emotional and economic disruption caused by their drug use or excessive use of alcohol has a ripple effect that affects their children, other family members, workmates, friends and communities.

People with alcohol problems can experience a range of health and social harms, including injury, mental health problems and economic disadvantage. They can also encounter social dislocation, such as difficulty maintaining their relationships at home, their employment and participation in their community.

There are close associations between alcohol-related violence and high costs to the community. Alcohol is involved in up to 30 per cent of family violence incidents reported to police and a high proportion of serious assaults. Alcohol is also a significant factor in many road accidents and injuries.

The significant health and social harm for individuals and the community arising from excessive alcohol consumption requires a joint approach between the Government and the community. We have established a research program in conjunction

with the University of Melbourne, the Australian Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, to identify the most effective ways of addressing alcohol misuse and harm, including the emerging binge-drinking culture.

During the next 12 months, the Government will work to develop initiatives to improve responses to alcohol problems for individuals and communities, covering prevention, education, treatment and rehabilitation. As part of this work the Government has included in *A Fairer Victoria* new initiatives aimed at improving services for people experiencing drug and alcohol problems.

What We Will Do

Drugs Blueprint (see Initiative 5.5)

Government will address the disadvantage experienced by those with alcohol or drug problems and build on the achievements of the Victorian Government *Drug Initiative* by developing a new Blueprint for the drug service system during the next four years. The Blueprint will aim to improve linkages between prevention, early intervention and treatment, promote partnership and collaboration and focus on delivering quality, seamless services to clients and their families.

Dual Diagnosis Initiative (see Initiative 11.8)

We will lead the further development of service responses to improve outcomes for people experiencing both mental health and drug and alcohol problems. With advice from the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Mental Health and other stakeholders, we are providing clear service development directions for both the mental health and drug and alcohol sectors so people with dual diagnosis have timely access to appropriate and integrated treatment. There will be no 'wrong door'.

Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service \$3.7 million (see Initiative 9.5)

We will provide \$3.7 million to build a new residential facility for Koori youth with substance abuse issues including assistance to reintegrate into community living.

New Intensive case Management for Complex Needs Clients (see Initiative 7.4)

Subject to Commonwealth support, the Homeless Innovation and Investment Fund will assist at least 320 SAAP clients with complex needs related to drug and alcohol dependency and mental illness. It will focus on linking health and support services to achieve a stable move out of homelessness. The project would cost approximately \$6.6 million over four years.

*For many years John has had a dream – to live in the country in a house on a hill with a long driveway.
Now that dream is a possibility.*

*Intensive support through the Victorian Government Family Support Innovations Project
– Maribyrnong run by MacKillop Family Services has helped John of Footscray
get on the path to recovery after 30 years as a drug user.*

*John is raising his two sons, Arend and Reggie on his own, and believes the help of his case worker,
Hazel and her team has made all the difference.*

*The MacKillop programs have assisted John to get involved in detox programs,
apply for a disability pension, home help, school holiday programs and after school care.*



Focus

Strategy 8

Improving access to justice

A *Fairer Victoria* recognises that access to justice is important in addressing disadvantage as is protecting human rights and support for victims of crime.

Ensuring vulnerable Victorians have access to court services and legal advice is critical to ensuring they can exercise their legal rights. If people are unaware of their rights or unfamiliar with legal processes and terminology they inevitably feel alienated from the legal system and at risk of continuing cycles of disadvantage.

The Government is committed to responding to the needs of ordinary Victorians. We are making justice work at a local level in every community, bringing meaning and relevance to legal processes so that all Victorians have access to the law. We are creating greater flexibility and simplicity in legal processes, providing more options outside the criminal justice cycle and more access to affordable mediation in civil disputes.

This commitment to a fair, affordable and effective justice system that meets the changing needs and expectations of the community is reflected in the priorities set out in the Attorney-General's *Justice Statement* released in May 2004 as well as in *A Fairer Victoria*. A road map for justice reform over a 10 year period, the *Justice Statement* flags 25 major initiatives and many more minor projects that are putting a "fair go" back on the agenda. Four strategic areas needing further reform were identified:

- Protecting human rights;
- Addressing the causes of overrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in the criminal justice system;
- Improving responses to victims of crime; and
- Improving access to legal information, advice and assistance.

What We Have Done

We have responded to the overrepresentation of our Indigenous communities in the criminal justice system by expanding Koori Courts to Mildura and Moe and establishing the first stand-alone Koori Children's Court in Australia. We have committed further funding for the Drug Court, building on a pilot project that was highly successful in addressing repeat offending caused by drug dependency.

We have also focused on the needs of victims, consulting widely on the development of a *Victims' Charter* supported by Victoria's new Victims Support Agency. We have also commenced the first major reform of sexual assault law and process in Victoria for decades.

The *Justice Statement* also highlighted the importance of human rights in promoting tolerance and respect in our community and protecting the rights of all members of society. Extensive community consultation led to the introduction of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Bill* in early May 2006.

We have also begun work on Australia's first *Neighbourhood Justice Centre*, located in Collingwood. The local community is centrally involved in all aspects of the Centre, through a Community Liaison Committee. The Centre will explore a restorative approach to justice and the underlying causes of offending by providing offenders with treatment and counselling. Where a community-based sentence is made, the work component will be done locally as visible repayment to the community. In another Australian first, community representatives are participating in the selection of the first Neighbourhood Justice Court Magistrate.

We have provided more resources for Community Legal Centres so they can provide more advice to more people, as well as community legal education. This includes new community legal centres in Cranbourne, Melton, Boronia and Bendigo.

We have recruited staff for the *Court Integrated Services Program*, which is designed to break the cycle of re-offending for offenders with complex needs and multiple forms of disadvantage. We have also employed a Vietnamese Liaison Officer at the Dame Phyllis Frost Women's Prison to help reduce women's re-offending.

Free legal help gets Sofie back on the road

Sofie was having a bad year.

Her close friend had recently died and she had just attended her mother's funeral.

Sofie had also found a lump on her neck and was so sick she spent most of the day in bed.

"I was unemployed at the time and was having to pay for specialists to find out what was wrong with me," Sofie said.

Then her car registration expired.

"I was waiting for a payment to be cleared at the bank before I could pay it," she said.

The same day her doctor called about her test results.

"I just jumped in the car. All I could think was 'I hope it's not cancer'."

As Sofie arrived at the doctor's surgery, she was pulled over by a police officer for a random breath check. He discovered the car required new tyres and was unregistered.

She had to replace all four tyres and pay a \$511 fine within 28 days for driving an unregistered vehicle.

"When I walked into my doctor's office, I was very upset and teary. My doctor actually wrote a letter for me to explain the situation," she said.

Sofie was under immense stress as she struggled to pay for the tyres, registration and the fine. It was at this time when she saw an advertisement in her local newspaper for the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre – a free legal service funded through the Victorian Government Department of Justice.

"The people at the Legal Centre were very understanding and helpful. They helped me understand the legal process," she said.

The case went to court where the Magistrate allowed the appeal and approved a Diversion - a penalty that takes a case outside the regular legal system. Sofie replaced the tyres, re-registered her vehicle and instead of the fine was required to make a donation to the Bendigo Hospital.

"I was thrilled with the outcome and actually gave more than the required amount," she said.

"I couldn't believe it because I had come to expect the worst. I asked the Legal Centre 'what do I owe you?' and they said 'nothing'."

"I still visit the legal centre office occasionally to drop off a lovely vase of my flowers from home," Sofie said.



Case Study

What We Will Do

We will provide further investment of \$41.3 million over four years to improve access to justice for targeted disadvantaged groups and protect the rights of all Victorians. These actions will aim to reduce offending and re-offending and improve outcomes for both individuals and the community.

8.1 Protecting Victorians' Human Rights

We will provide \$6.7 million over four years to support the implementation and ongoing operation of the new Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities that comes into operation on 1 January 2007. We will establish a new Human Rights Unit in the Department of Justice to assist implementation of the Charter.

This funding will also:

- enable the Equal Opportunity Commission to undertake a community education program;
- provide special training for Victoria Police, Corrections Victoria and the Department of Human Services; and
- assist the Human Rights Law Resource Centre to support human rights advice and advocacy for disadvantaged communities.

8.2 Protecting Child Witnesses

We will provide \$3.2 million to establish Victoria's first child witness service to help care for and assist children before, during and after court appearances. The specialist team of support workers will help reduce distress associated with legal processes, improve the quality of evidence and minimise the long term impact of court proceedings on children.

8.3 Reforming Sexual Assault Responses

We will provide \$31 million over four years to reform the criminal justice system's response to sexual assault. This includes extra court resources to create specialist sexual offences lists in the Magistrates' and County Courts, a dedicated prosecution team in the Office of Public Prosecutions, new forensic nurses and two dedicated centres bringing together police and victims' support under one roof. We will also provide new crisis care services for victims in rural locations, a major expansion of sexual assault counselling services and establish voluntary treatment programs for 15 to 18 year olds to reduce juvenile offending. In addition, we will strengthen offender supervision and rehabilitation measures for adult sex offenders.

8.4 Department of Justice Cultural Diversity Plan 2006-2008

We value the diversity of our community and want to ensure all Victorians are able to understand and access our justice system. One way to do this is to increase the number of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities employed in justice related jobs. We will facilitate a long-term increase in the number of qualified staff from these backgrounds employed in our system of justice – both in the public and private sectors – by awarding three scholarships for a justice-related course to members of newly arrived communities.

Reducing barriers to opportunity:

Improving access to justice



Strategy 9

Building a new partnership with Indigenous Victorians

Since it was first elected in 1999, the Bracks Government has focused considerable effort on addressing the impacts of Indigenous dispossession, as well as the cycle of disadvantage that has beset Indigenous communities since the settlement of Victoria. Indigenous disadvantage in Victoria is highlighted by low rates of school achievement and high rates of unemployment, imprisonment and ill health.

We have recognised Indigenous Victorians in the State Constitution and have increased investment in areas such as health, education, children's services, justice, economic development, family violence and responding to the Stolen Generations. At the same time the Government has acknowledged the importance of proper recognition of the State's Indigenous history and culture and the importance of the ongoing links between Victorian Indigenous communities and their traditional lands.

What We Have Done

The Government is working in partnership with Indigenous communities. Together we are improving outcomes through new models of Indigenous community representation, new approaches to funding Indigenous organisations and new projects encouraging economic development and increased community capacity to plan for and deliver services.

A Fairer Victoria contained more than \$45.7 million to build skills and capacity within Indigenous communities, promote reconciliation and reach out to Indigenous children and families at key stages in life.

The *Stolen Generations Organisation of Victoria Board* has been established and a Chief Executive Officer appointed, with work starting on governance training for Board members and a Communications Framework.

We established the *Secretaries Group for Aboriginal Affairs* to provide leadership and direction across government. The group has met to develop strategies to improve policy coordination and service delivery.

The multi-department integrated approach at the *Lake Tyers Community Renewal Project* has been a tremendous success. Examples of progress include the school children's breakfast program, which has led to improved education outcomes; increased engagement and community participation in activities such as the Night Patrol and school holiday programs; increased community cohesion across the family groups; a significant increase in community safety and a reduction in police call outs.

We invested in better Indigenous housing and community facilities, with additional staff recruited and trained for tenancy management at the *Aboriginal Housing Board Victoria (AHBV)*. A business plan and financial model are currently being developed by the AHBV and Office of Housing to expand the independence and capacity of the AHBV as a housing organisation.

The capital review of Indigenous community infrastructure, funded by the State Government, has been completed. This will ensure services for Indigenous Victorians are carried out from safe and appropriate facilities.

Breakfast gets the day started right

"What'll be for you this morning – toast, spaghetti, cereal?"

Breakfast is only just on the table and already a growing number of Lake Tyers children aged three to 12 are enthusiastically tucking into their cereal and toast.

In the kitchen, Mathew Peacock, Pam Hood, Tiffany Tregonning and Gina Wilkinson are busy making sandwiches and cordial to pack nearly 25 school lunches on an average weekday morning.

"We feed them, look after them for an hour or so, and get them safely on the bus to school," says Gina, who has managed the program since it started in November last year.

Breakfast is served from 7am until the last school bus arrives at 8.30am to take students to the nearby Nowa Nowa Primary School, Toorlo Arm Primary School and Lakes Entrance Secondary College. The organised program aims to connect children more closely to kindergarten and school and it's proving a success.

"It's made a 100 per cent difference to the kids having breakfast – they are going to school and there are less absence days, which is important," says Gina.

Gina's four grandchildren and Pam's two daughters are among the regulars who always come to breakfast and only miss school if they are sick or need a doctor's appointment.

The program also provides these four Lake Tyers residents with a job five mornings a week and they've all had to study for their Food Handling Certificate to take it on.

Despite the early starts all say it's a good opportunity to work in the community and help the children get to school.

There's a flurry of activity as Mathew calls out, 'Bus'. The children wolf down their last bites of breakfast, grab their lunchboxes and all run out to jump on the school bus.

The breakfast program is one part of the Lake Tyers Community Renewal Project, a partnership between the Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government. In *A Fairer Victoria*, the Government allocated \$3.2 million to a range of new services and programs driven by local residents.

The Renewal Project is tackling a number of issues identified by the community, including improvements to housing and roads, the opening of new facilities like the recently opened training and health centres and a community bus to provide transport into town.

Case Study



The Victorian Government also invested to improve health and wellbeing for Aboriginal Victorians. We established the *Aboriginal Health Promotion and Chronic Care* (AHPACC) Partnership. The *Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation* (VACCHO), in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS), developed a new model of primary health care for Aboriginal people with, or at risk, of chronic disease.

Under the AHPACC Partnership, local partnerships between Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and Community Health Services have been established to improve access to health promotion and chronic disease prevention and management services for Aboriginal Victorians. There are nine funded local partnerships across Victoria.

We introduced new legislation to preserve and protect Aboriginal heritage for future generations. Following extensive consultation, the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* provides effective protection and management of places, objects and human remains.

The Act broadens the involvement of Aboriginal people in decision-making processes and recognises the role of traditional owners in managing their heritage. The legislation promotes Aboriginal heritage partnerships to improve the understanding and respect for Aboriginal heritage and promote reconciliation between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous Victorians.

We also launched the *Aboriginal Tourism Development Plan 2006-2009* so that Victoria's Aboriginal cultural attractions play a more prominent role within the tourism industry. The Plan is supported by the *Aboriginal Land and Economic Development Program*, a three-year program to develop land for use by Aboriginal people to meet cultural, economic and environmental interests.

Sustainable tourism ventures and new business opportunities for Aboriginal people in south west Victoria are being supported by the \$2.65 million allocated in 2005-06. The Great Ocean Road, the 12 Apostles and the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, provide excellent opportunities to showcase Victoria's unique Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Victoria's Indigenous communities were consulted extensively to develop a new approach for Indigenous representation. At the core of our efforts to build a new partnership with Indigenous Victorians is the establishment of local place-based Indigenous networks. There are strong links between effective networks and positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

We also met with Indigenous community organisations to identify ways to streamline administrative arrangements. This work is leading to the development of consistent, streamlined funding agreements with Indigenous organisations receive funding from multiple government agencies.

These measures are ensuring local Indigenous communities are better resourced to take a more strategic, long-term and sustainable approach to addressing disadvantage and increasing opportunities.

Support for disadvantaged groups:

Building a new partnership with Indigenous Victorians

What We Will Do

We will invest an additional \$61.7 million over four years to implement further practical steps to build stronger communities, support healthy families, respect cultural heritage and deliver jobs and justice for Indigenous Victorians.

9.1 Extending the Aboriginal Justice Agreement

We will invest \$26.1 million over four years to extend the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which aims to reduce Indigenous over-representation in the criminal justice system by addressing recidivism risks and strengthening diversion strategies. The funding includes Koori Courts expansion, extension of mentoring, liaison and support programs and capital works to support the Indigenous Residential Diversion program, which will enable Indigenous people to complete their community based orders while learning life skills.

9.2 Refurbishing Indigenous Community Facilities

We will provide \$5.7 million over three years to undertake essential capital works on Indigenous community facilities identified in the review of Indigenous community infrastructure announced in *A Fairer Victoria* in 2005. The funding will ensure that approximately 70 State-funded Indigenous community facilities are refurbished.

9.3 Indigenous Community Engagement and Representation

We will provide \$10.8 million over four years to introduce new community engagement arrangements which will, build capacity at a local and regional Indigenous community level. At a local level, this will provide an opportunity for each Indigenous community to identify its priorities and develop plans geared to strengthening their community. At the regional level, the arrangement provides a structure through which Government can engage with the Victorian Indigenous community directly and allow a broader range of Indigenous citizens to have input into the existing service forums. These changes follow on from the withdrawal of ATSIC arrangements and will help inform the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council.

9.4 Protecting Victoria's Indigenous Cultural Heritage

We will provide \$12.6 million to support the implementation of the new *Victorian Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2006*, which transfers responsibility for management and protection of Indigenous cultural heritage from the Commonwealth to the State. The legislation establishes an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council and require new heritage assessment, compliance and enforcement functions to be undertaken by the Victorian Government.

9.5 Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service

We will provide \$3.7 million to build a new residential facility for Koori youth with substance abuse issues, including assistance to reintegrate into community living.

9.6 Academy of Sport, Health and Education

We will provide \$2.7 million over four years to broaden the vocational pathways for Koories in Northern Victoria administered by the Academy of Sport, Health and Education in partnership with Rumbalara Football and Netball Club and the University of Melbourne. This will be achieved by offering Certificate IV in Community Recreation, Certificates II and III in Aboriginal Health Work, a series of short course options and a range of specialist sports programs.

Strategy 10

Creating new opportunities for people with a disability

A Fairer Victoria recognises that many Victorians with a disability want the chance to be fully active in community life. We strengthened the options available to improve the daily lives of people with a disability. We increased support for families and carers and improved the built environment to improve accessibility for people with a disability.

The Victorian Government, in collaboration with local government, is developing strategies to upgrade neighbourhoods, so buildings, footpaths and public transport stops are more accessible.

The Victorian Government is leading by example by building housing that can be easily accessed by people with a disability. More accessible dwellings will mean people with a disability will have a better chance of remaining independent within their homes.

What We Have Done

We have actively encouraged more individually-focused support to ensure Victorians with a disability have more control over their own lives. To support this, new disability legislation has been developed. We provided additional resources for the Public Advocate to reduce disadvantage experienced by Victorians with a disability.

The Victorian Government is strengthening individual rights and reducing discrimination against people with a disability. Under the *Victorian State Disability Plan 2002-2012*, all government departments must develop *Disability Action Plans* to increase employment opportunities in the Victorian Public Service for people with a disability. The plans also aim to reduce barriers for people accessing goods and services and encourage the participation of people with a disability in positions of leadership across the community.

We are providing more resources for people with disabilities to increase their independence through more flexible support in the home and more hands-on help with budgeting, shopping and access to community activities. The Victorian Government is helping families caring for children with a disability whose behaviours are difficult to manage through the creation of the *Signposts to Better Behaviour* program.

This includes additional resources for families as well as funds for *Intensive Transition Support Packages* to support people whose care arrangements are at risk of breaking down. We are helping families with equipment, such as wheelchairs and shower rails.

The Victorian Government recognises the role carers and families play in supporting people with a disability, and is increasing the number and flexibility of respite services. Respite support ranges from in home supports to out of home options, facilities and overnight camps.

We are refurbishing residential facilities so that accommodation for people with disabilities is modernised to meet the needs of all residents, including those who are ageing and wish to retire from full-time day programs. We also established a new *Disability Housing Trust* to leverage greater investment in housing options for people with disabilities.

The Victorian Government is listening to the views of people with a disability when developing policies and programs through the Disability Advisory Council of Victoria.

Six additional Advocates/Guardians have been appointed to the Office of the Public Advocate to meet the demands of our ageing population and increased numbers of adults with an acquired brain injury.

The support and choice to live independently

Seven years ago Matthew, 36, lost not only his father but his carer.

His death changed the course of Matthew's life, and when he was unable to live with family, the Department of Human Services stepped in to help.

Matthew was placed in Shared Supported Accommodation (SSA). But it was only a short-term plan.

"When Dad died I didn't really know what was going on and I ended up in residential care," Matthew said.

"I always wanted to live in my own place and when the staff at the SSA began helping me, it all started to really happen."

Matthew moved into his own private rental unit in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs, through *Support and Choice*.

Support and Choice, a statewide initiative launched in 2003 and boosted by *A Fairer Victoria*, has helped more than 1500 people with a disability and their families.

It provides individually-tailored support, giving people with a disability more choices and control over their lives.

Through *Support and Choice*, people with a disability, and their families and friends, have a chance to consider support needed to make a difference.

A planner or facilitator assists the person with a disability to develop a plan.

"It's wonderful, I've made friends with my neighbours, and people at work," Matthew said.

He has also become involved in community activities.

The SSA staff supported Matthew living more independently and helped develop his living skills.

"I know I don't eat very well all the time and I'll have to do better... but my outreach worker will help me with that," he said.

Matthew found that while he was at the SSA he seemed to become involved in mostly disability-related activities.

"I used to do swimming with Special Olympics and go out with work groups when they arranged weekends away," he said.

Matthew now enjoys the chance to mix with a wide variety of people and shares a flat with a work colleague from Waverley Industries.

"Everyone should have the same chance as me to have a go. Everything is happening for me, having my own flat and joining new groups."

Case Study



What We Will Do

Building on these actions we will invest a further \$67.3 million over four years to increase services and accessibility for people with a disability.

10.1 Increasing Disability Services

We will provide \$41.5 million over four years to implement the *Disability Services Strategy*, which continues the Government's commitment to improve services for people with a disability. This will fund new and innovative models of in home care and new services for people with a disability that improve their choices and options in life. We will build on existing programs such as behaviour intervention services, individual planning and support packages, aids and equipment and respite. We will continue to provide support for people with severe and profound disability through the *Futures For Young Adults* program.

We will broaden the implementation of Individualised Planning and Support so that people with a disability have greater independence, choice, control and flexibility over the supports and services they need. Individual funds can be directed to a service provider, broker or financial intermediary. From June 2006, we will trial the use of direct payments for people with a disability, family members, guardians or administrators.

10.2 Young People in Nursing Homes

We will provide \$20.8 million over four years as our contribution to the national agreement to provide more appropriate support for young people requiring residential care. As a first step, 281 people aged less than 50 who currently live in nursing homes will be assessed to identify the most appropriate care and support for their needs.

10.3 Community Facility Redevelopment

The Government will provide \$5 million to redevelop community facilities that provide day programs for people with disabilities.

10.4 Implementing the New Disability Act

We will continue reforms to our disability services following the new *Disability Act* 2006. In particular we will establish a new Disability Services Commissioner to help people with complaints about disability services, and create an Office of the Senior Practitioner to provide additional protection for the rights of people with a disability with complex behavioural needs.

10.5 Office for Disability

To ensure all Victorians with a disability fully take part in the life of the community, the Victorian Government will establish an Office for Disability within the Department for Victorian Communities.

The Office for Disability will put issues affecting people with a disability on the agenda across the whole of government.

People with disabilities want to use the same services, attend the same schools, get the same sorts of jobs, and be involved in the same recreation and leisure activities as all Victorians. The Office for Disability will help make this possible for all Victorians with a disability, including those who are currently using specialist disability services.

The Office will also support the implementation of *Disability Action Plans* in all government departments, agencies and local governments. *Disability Action Plans* provide practical strategies to increase the employment of people with a disability in the public sector and improve the accessibility of government services and community infrastructure.

Support for disadvantaged groups:

Creating new opportunities for people with a disability

The Office, guided by the *Disability Advisory Council of Victoria*, will also provide expert advice to government departments about how to include people with a disability in policy development.

10.6 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Compliance Retrofit Program

We will increase mobility for people with a disability by making current pedestrian facilities safer and easier to use. This will be through initiatives such as more platform tram stops and wheelchair-friendly ramps, as well as more tactile pavement tiles and audio tactile pedestrian push buttons. We will invest \$129 million over four years to make public transport more accessible to seniors and people with a disability. Announced under the *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* strategy in May 2006, this includes new and upgraded platform tram stops, regional and city bus stops being made wheelchair and scooter accessible, V/Line stations being made more accessible and metropolitan train stations being upgraded.

10.7 Disability Action Plans

We will make public services easier for people with a disability to access. The *Disability Action Plans* of all government departments will include innovative ways of improving employment opportunities, physical access and communication about services, consultation about policies and services and improved staff understanding and awareness of disability issues. Key initiatives from departmental plans include:

- the representation of people with a disability on departmental boards, committees and advisory groups;
- greater inclusion of people with disabilities in the community through the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) grants programs – grant applicants will need to consider access and inclusion in preparing funding submissions. DVC will also make information about grants more readily available to disability organisations;
- three two-year scholarships awarded by the Department of Justice (DOJ) to young people with a disability to increase in the number of qualified staff with a disability employed by the department;
- the expansion of a mentoring program in the Department of Education and Training (DET), to improve the career prospects and development opportunities of employees with a disability;

- the development of a Communications Access Policy (CAP) to improve electronic and print communications for people with a disability; and,
- work with key disability and employment organisations, such as *Disability WORKS Australia* to attract, recruit and retain more people with disabilities into the Victorian Public Service.

10.8 Improving Accessibility in Housing

The Government supports housing that caters for the broadest range of people and can be cost-effectively adapted to meet changing life situations. It is currently considering the report of the Accessible Housing Taskforce. We will improve accessibility of housing for people with a disability by working with housing industry organisations to develop:

- a best practice industry guideline for developers and builders on how to incorporate accessible and adaptable features into dwellings; and,
- practice notes that contain technical specifications on accessibility and adaptability.

We will also develop a web-based directory to provide a one-stop resource of information on housing accessibility and adaptability for the community and housing industry. We will also educate consumers about the benefits of accessible and adaptable housing.

Strategy 11

Increasing support for mental health services

A *Fairer Victoria* gave an unprecedented funding boost to improve programs for Victorians experiencing mental health problems. The Government recognised the direct link between mental health problems and a wide range of other factors contributing to social disadvantage, such as family breakdown, unemployment, homelessness and criminal behaviour.

A *Fairer Victoria* continues to expand this effort. We are investing in new approaches to ensure people get the support they need. We will continue to integrate and improve mental health services for all ages in the community and in hospitals. We will build new facilities and redevelop ageing ones.

Victoria is showing strong national leadership by sustaining service growth and developing a strong community-based support sector.

We welcome the additional resources through the *Council of Australian Governments* (COAG) work on mental health and will continue to work collaboratively on national reform initiatives.

Through the COAG *National Mental Health Action Plan* (to be finalised in July 2006) we will pursue a better deal for Victorians with mental illness and their carers into the future. A *Fairer Victoria* is delivering a further major boost to the Victorian Government's investment in improving mental health outcomes.

What We Have Done

We are expanding mental health services in the community by distributing funds for the *Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Service* and intensive community-based services, such as mobile mental health workers.

We are linking treatment for people suffering mental health and drug or alcohol problems and we are implementing the *Homelessness Outreach Psychiatric Service* with the Alfred/Sacred Heart, St Vincent Hospital and Werribee/Mercy Hospital for homeless people with complex mental health needs.

We are improving access to services for primary school children with severe behavioural problems through the *Conduct Disorders Programs* operating out of the Wodonga Regional Health Service and the Royal Children's Hospital. We are increasing access to early psychosis programs for young people aged 16 to 25 years who present with emerging mental health problems through Orygen, Outer East Area Mental Health Service and Latrobe Regional Hospital.

We are helping mothers with a mental illness who care for young infants in the critical six months after childbirth. This is through an innovative program to address the immediate needs of these mothers and their children through Southern Health, Austin Health and Werribee Mercy Hospital.

We are improving access to services by providing better information to carers of people with a mental illness from six ethnic communities - Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Italian Turkish and Vietnamese.

We have increased the mental health response in emergency departments of the Western, Werribee, Royal Melbourne, Northern, St Vincent's, Monash and Dandenong hospitals. We opened new inpatient beds at Casey and Werribee Hospitals. We are creating more step down services in Gippsland for people who, while not requiring an acute bed, are not well enough to go home.

We are expanding a graduate nursing program and providing statewide training relating to dual diagnoses. We are encouraging more graduate nurses to enter the mental health field, retaining more mental health workers and nurses, especially in rural Victoria, and providing more specially-trained staff in major hospital emergency departments.

We are also building new facilities and redeveloping old ones, including redesigning several hospital emergency departments.

Learning the value of an invisibility cloak

Eight year old Sam is not having a happy time at school.

He doesn't have many friends, he is not doing well in class, he is often the last one picked in lunchtime team games and he can be hostile and rough with other children.

Sam's parents find him hard to handle and reports of his behaviour at school have made them not want to be involved in school activities.

Sitting with a small group of other children in his school library, Sam is learning about the Anger Volcano and how not to "explode".

The group is learning how to stop, take a deep breath, put on their "Invisibility Cloak" and walk away.

It is a big change for children with social skill deficits who are often simply labelled as being wilful and naughty.

Sam is a puppet, but his behaviour is based on the real life experiences of young school children in Prep through to Grade 2.

Sam plays a big role in the *Kool Kids Positive Parents* program, helping young children understand their feelings and modify their conduct.

The program helps with significant changes in behaviour, in children's perceptions of themselves and in teachers' and parents' perception of their children. Its approach is that children like Sam have a skill deficit.

Kool Kids Positive Parents is an early intervention program, reflecting both the distress that Sam's behaviour causes and that his conduct can be a precursor to more serious problems later in life.

With extra funding, provided through *A Fairer Victoria*, the free program has been able to work with new schools and provide more follow up support to previously visited schools.

The program works at schools with small groups of children, usually identified by teachers, in weekly one hour sessions over 12 weeks. Parents attend a separate eight week program.

Although Sam comes to the sessions with an external trainer, the program also skills up a school staff member so that future groups of children can also be helped.

Kool Kids Positive Parents started in 2004 and the team of psychologists, speech pathologists and nurses behind the program has now worked with more than 20 schools.

Case Study



What We Will Do

Over the next five years we will provide an additional \$170 million (\$136 million over four years) for new mental health services, with an emphasis on early intervention, effective emergency treatment and appropriate community-based services as part of the Mental Health Strategy and other related initiatives.

This will provide a more comprehensive, innovative and better integrated service system. The focus is on improving step down services and care in the community.

11.1 Strengthen Prevention and Early Intervention Services

\$16.9 million over four years will be committed to services targeted at those with emerging disorders to effectively prevent or reduce the severity of mental illness. We will:

- establish three new Early Psychosis Services for young people experiencing behavioural disturbance and two new programs for early conduct disorders in the first years of school;
- extend the *Children of Parents with a Mental Illness* support program to seven areas across the State;

- increase postnatal depression services to provide additional treatment and training to help workers increase their expertise in identifying and responding to women with this condition;
- support the establishment of the Centre for Women's Mental Health at the Royal Women's Hospital; and,
- improve access to counselling services in Community Health Centres for people with a range of mental health problems.

11.2 Expand Specialist Community-based Mental Health Services

Continued growth and development of treatment, rehabilitation and support in local community-based services is a core plank in the Government's strategy. A total of \$28.3 million will be spent over four years to:

- expand adult, aged and child and adolescent community mental health services to support up to 460 extra clients;
- further grow the Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services program supporting up to 1500 clients with a psychiatric disability and their carers;
- expand community care unit capacity for people who need extended clinical care; and,

- support the Butterfly Foundation program at Southern Health to provide specialist care to young people suffering from serious eating disorders.

11.3 Improve Hospital-based Care and Expand Alternative Services

Improving care provided in acute hospitals and providing new forms of short to medium-term residential care is vital to good recovery and avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions. The 18 interim beds for forensic mental health services will shortly be opened at Thomas Embling Hospital.

Government will invest a further \$36.8 million over four years in:

- additional step up/step down (Prevention and Recovery Centre) services for people who need short term sub-acute care;
- expanding mental health teams in emergency departments in seven hospitals to enable 24-hour, seven day a week coverage;
- new support for the transition of long-stay residents from bed-based clinical care services to the community; and,
- greater capacity to address the complex mental health problems of the prison population.

Support for disadvantaged groups:

Increasing support for mental health services

Focus on

Addressing post natal depression

A particular priority in *A Fairer Victoria* is post natal depression – a condition experienced by approximately 14 per cent of new mothers. Recent research shows that maternal depression can also impact on the development of the child.

Often mothers are reluctant to discuss or seek help for post natal depression. It is important to raise awareness of post natal depression and ensure

nurses and medical practitioners who work with new mothers are adequately trained to help them.

The Government is funding community Maternal and Child Health Services to provide more mothers' groups and more in-home support for mothers as part of the \$4.7 million to outer suburban councils as part of the children's services package in Strategy 1.

A further \$2.1 million is being provided through the Mental Health Strategy in Strategy 11 to fund experienced trainers to work with the Maternal and Child Health Services and build skills in addressing post natal depression. It will also improve existing services within Mother-Baby Units at Monash Medical Centre and the Werribee Mercy and Austin Hospitals.

11.4 Build Better Mental Health Facilities

We will fund the construction, redevelopment and planning of three mental health facilities in metropolitan and regional Victoria at an initial cost of \$20.5 million. The projects are:

- planning and early works on an extended clinical care facility on the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital site, including extended care beds, patient treatment areas and therapeutic recreation facilities;
- redevelopment of the former Ambergmere psychiatric hospital in Shepparton to provide recovery and rehabilitation for 20 patients in a 10 place PARC Unit for people who need short-term sub acute care, as well as a 10 place Community Care Unit for people who need extended care; and,
- relocation of the Bouverie Centre to a new purpose-designed building, co-located with the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture in Brunswick. The move will provide an accessible location for mentally ill children and their families, students and health care professionals.

11.5 Supported Accommodation and Housing Options

We will expand the availability of suitable supported accommodation options for people with a psychiatric disability, including both transitional and secure long term arrangements. A total of \$33.6 million will be spent to:

- secure the viability of pension level Supported Residential Services, through the *Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians* initiative which provide a critical source of suitable long term accommodation for people with mental illness and related complex care needs; and,
- extend and expand the *Mental Health Pathways* project to provide support to people after discharge from hospital, to reduce the risk of recurring homelessness and secure long-term housing in conjunction with appropriate support.

11.6 Invest in Research, Innovation and Promotion

We will continue cutting edge research and community-based prevention by:

- supporting beyondblue, including the Victorian Centre for Excellence in Depression, to undertake research, community awareness and early intervention in community settings such as workplaces;

- strengthening Victoria's medical research into the causes and treatment of mental illness through the new Australian Centre for Neuroscience and Mental Health; and,
- prioritising new community projects and research through VicHealth, focusing on promotion of positive mental health and minimisation of social factors that increase the risk of mental health problems.

11.7 Victoria's Suicide Prevention Forward Action Plan

We will support initiatives to reduce suicide. The aim is to prevent suicide and self-harm in at-risk groups, including young people, Indigenous people and people with domestic and family violence problems. The *Forward Action Plan* provides a framework for further developing community-based suicide prevention activities and providing a coordinated state approach to ensure suicide prevention programs are integrated and embedded in all relevant parts of the service system.

11.8 Dual Diagnosis Initiative

We will help services improve outcomes for people experiencing both mental health and drug and alcohol problems. People with dual diagnosis need timely access to appropriate and integrated treatment responses accessible through either service sector. There will be no 'wrong door'.

Support for
disadvantaged groups

In addition the Government will contribute \$0.8 million to the new Centre for Women's Mental Health for it to become a core centre for excellence in mental health issues of particular importance to women, including post natal depression.

This centre will be established at the Royal Women's Hospital as a result of a generous \$2.5 million donation by the Pratt family. The Victorian Government is pleased to be working closely with the philanthropic sector to deliver specialised facilities.

Building stronger communities

Evidence shows strong communities provide a network of support for individuals to take part in activities, including volunteering, learning new skills, helping each other in times of crisis and having a real say on issues affecting them. Communities with these features often have higher school retention rates and lower rates of unemployment and crime.

A Fairer Victoria recognises that strong communities can reduce the effects of disadvantage and provide pathways for people to change their life circumstances.

Government investment in community facilities, local leadership, social networks and improved participation in community life can result in more active, confident and resilient communities.

We have demonstrated that this works in our successful *Neighbourhood Renewal* program, which revitalises communities in public housing estates by involving them in the upgrade and maintenance of buildings and creating skills, leadership, safer communities and community pride.

We will build on this approach and expand the Government's place-based, community strengthening investment into areas that do not have high levels of public housing infrastructure, with a focus on outer suburbs and regional areas.

Local community facilities and public spaces play a central role in building the social fabric of communities. Keeping such facilities available for public use retains their public value, particularly for those people who can least afford to pay to use facilities.

We are making these investments because we know they result in improvements including: improved feelings of safety; better facilities; better employment and educational opportunities and improved community participation in recreational and cultural pursuits. These are all well documented indicators of community strength and vitality.

What We have Done

A Fairer Victoria boosted programs to build stronger communities in towns and neighbourhoods around Victoria.

Four new Neighbourhood Renewal sites have started in West Heidelberg, East Reservoir, Hastings and Delacombe (Ballarat) in addition to the 15 already successfully on track and extended as part of *A Fairer Victoria* in 2005. Nineteen Community Building Initiatives, encompassing 102, towns have been chosen, including communities in the Kinglake and Latrobe regions affected by bushfires.

Growth areas of Melbourne and regions that lack significant public and private transport options have been provided with new bus services, including Yarra Ranges, Point Cook, Wyndham, Sydenham, Melton, Frankston and Mornington. Regional areas funded in the first round of the Community Bus program include Southern Village Network, Pearcedale, Bendoc Progress Association, Melton Shire Council, Yinnar and District Community Association, Sea Lake and District Health Services and the Pyrenees Shire Council.

All aboard in Bendoc

"If you live in Bendoc, then it is pretty much two hours drive to anywhere else" says local resident Derek Manning cheerfully.

He's not joking.

Bendoc is a small East Gippsland community 112 kilometres on the north road out of Orbost, nestled up against the NSW border.

There are roughly 150 people living in and around Bendoc and although small communities might be closely knit, getting people out and active in their community can be a challenge.

Over a year ago the gearbox on the small community bus died after 250,000 kilometres of active service on roads, which in winter are almost impassable.

Working with the local community, the Bendoc Progress Association put together a carefully prepared business plan to support an application for one of the new community buses funded in *A Fairer Victoria*.

"We knew a service like this could work and the demand was high, but we wanted to make sure it met everyone's needs" says Derek Manning.

The search for the new bus took Bendoc Progress Association as far a field as it needed to provide access for elderly citizens and those with a disability.

Like the 'new' 10 year old bus, their business plan is a finely tuned machine. A volunteer driver scheme combined with a \$10 charge covers the cost of fuel and helps to generate a small surplus to fund longer trips.

A trip to the National War Memorial in Canberra is planned for May, but for many passengers the trips closer to home are just as important.

"The bus means residents can go the markets in Cooma, visit the beach or go to a meal and the movies together," says Derek.

Local resident Ute Gallagher came to Bendoc to care for a sick parent.

Ute doesn't drive and says the bus is her link to the outside world giving her an opportunity to visit shops and exhibitions in larger towns.

Go anywhere in Bendoc, Derek says, and you will hear the same story. "We're all passionate about our bus!"

As the kilometres click over the new bus will play in a big role in connecting one of Victoria's most isolated communities.



Case Study

We are encouraging more volunteers through the *Volunteer Support Grant* program. The Government has so far given 613 Volunteer Small Grants totalling more than \$1.9 million in direct assistance to community groups.

New Neighbourhood Houses are being funded in areas of high population growth and high need. Existing Neighbourhood Houses are upgrading or establishing computer facilities and improving public access to the Internet. Others are being redeveloped to fix occupational health and safety issues or to increase the space available for programs.

We are encouraging the use of schools as community facilities. Examples include:

- Yarra Primary School in Richmond – Finbar Neighbourhood House in Richmond is operating from the old caretaker's cottage on the school grounds;
- Swan Hill College – the Performing Arts Centre has been co-funded by the local council and Arts Victoria and is used by the local community as well as the school;

- Anderson's Creek Primary School in Warrandyte – a partnership with the local council to build a basketball stadium on the school grounds means it is available for use by both the school and local community;
- Moe Primary School – a community adventure playground located on the school grounds is open to the general community out of school hours; and,
- Port Phillip Specialist School – a Performing Arts centre on school grounds is available to both the school and the broader community. The centre has a fully equipped gymnasium, a rehearsal and performance drama room, music room and art room.

We are encouraging communities to be more active by distributing *Go For Your Life* Street Party Kits, which provide councils with mobile catering facilities to support small scale community events that help neighbours get to know each other.

What We Will Do

Building on these initiatives we will invest a further \$39.6 million over four years to develop local networks, improve public facilities and create more opportunities for participation in disadvantaged areas and growth areas of Victoria.

12.1 Neighbourhood Houses In Action

We will provide a significant boost to funding to Neighbourhood Houses. An extra \$27.8 million over four years will give a 25 per cent increase in the hourly rate paid for Coordination, as well as provide an extra 2046 hours every week allowing Neighbourhood Houses to offer more courses and activities. This is an increase of 34 per cent on the current hours. We will also increase funding to the peak body and the 16 networks that support the 338 Houses across Victoria.

12.2 Queen Victoria Women's Centre

We will provide \$1.9 million over four years to support the long-term financial viability for the Queen Victoria Women's Centre to continue the provision of services such as health information services, leadership programs, rest and meeting rooms.

Support for disadvantaged places:

Building stronger communities

12.3 Access to Millions of Books and Library Items

Millions of book titles and other resources in Victorian libraries will become available to Victorians when *LibraryLink Victoria* is fully operational in late 2006. More than 50 per cent of Victorians are regular library users. They will be able to directly search a catalogue of all member libraries. The book or item will be sent to a library nearest to the user's home for collection. An allocation of over \$320,000 will fund this service.

The Victorian Government believes all Victorians deserve free access to library services. *LibraryLink Victoria* will provide important access for CALD communities, young families, people in remote areas, older Victorians and other Victorians who would not have had access to these vital resources.

The portal will initially be available to members of 10 country public library services in the north and west of Victoria and three metropolitan services, before becoming available across the State.

12.4 Place-Based Investment: Community Renewal

We will provide \$6.1 million over four years* from the *Community Support Fund* to support communities in targeted areas to give people a say in their own futures. Building on the success of *Neighbourhood Renewal* we will extend our support to other towns and suburbs that are newly established, growing or experiencing high socio-economic disadvantage. We will work together to improve access to community activities and infrastructure. Starting in Laverton, Frankston North and Whittington we will provide locally-based workers to assist communities to identify local priorities and act on them. We will help bring together Victorian Government, local government and other partners to address these priorities. The new funding includes \$2 million to make visible improvements to open spaces in these communities, such as parks, playgrounds, streetscapes and shopping strips. Working together we will develop vibrant, active and diverse neighbourhoods from the ground up – where people can enjoy a sense of identity and belonging, and influence their futures.

**(Note; This initiative has a five year total of \$7.5 million)*

12.5 Upgrading RSL and CFA Community Assets

In partnership with the Returned and Services League (RSL) and the Country Fire Authority (CFA), we will provide \$2.9 million over four years from the *Community Support Fund* to help local communities redevelop RSL clubrooms and CFA buildings into flexible, multipurpose community facilities.

12.6 Maintaining Volunteering After the Games

We will support the more than 7000 Victorian Commonwealth Games volunteers who said they want to keep volunteering. We will provide additional support to Councils and local organisations to harness this energy and commitment for the benefit of local communities.

The *Staying Involved Call Centre* will make personal contact with the 7000 volunteers. They will be offered tailored advice, support and encouragement.

A publicly advertised hotline will also provide advice to all Victorians who want to know how they can volunteer in their local community.

Developing new ways of working together

Communities work best when they are directly involved in the planning and priority setting for services and facilities in their communities. Through *A Fairer Victoria* the Government is demonstrating its commitment to finding new and innovative ways of working together to address disadvantage and create opportunities.

Since its election in 1999, the Bracks Government has progressively trialled and developed place-based approaches to addressing disadvantage through fostering local community networks and partnerships. Programs such as *Neighbourhood Renewal*, the *Community Building Initiative*, *Best Start* and the Department for Victorian Communities community enterprise and volunteer funding, exemplify new ways of working between government, local councils, the community sector and business.

These and other successful place-based approaches in education, health, justice and the environment have common features:

- the development of strong working relationships between people delivering services, instead of organisations working alone with little exchange of information and no common understanding of the problems that need to be addressed;
- single consultation processes to identify problems, instead of a plethora of disconnected documents and plans and multiple consultations, (often with the same people) causing overload, frustration and scepticism about government commitment to change;
- collective commitment to work together on problems identified, instead of separate initiatives with different goals and directions, different outcomes and different reporting requirements; and,
- more knowledge and ownership of the actions taken to resolve problems and joint commitment to make them work in a sustainable way.

The Government's new approach to working with people and communities is already demonstrating how a high level of collaboration and planning can result in joint activities benefiting both individuals and the communities they live and work in. In 2006, the Government will further develop this approach giving priority to developing the social infrastructure of Melbourne's growth areas and areas in urban and regional Victoria that have pockets of high disadvantage. The early provision of local community services and facilities creates opportunities for people to come together and have a say in the way their communities develop.

Training opportunity gives Jess a bright future

Jess Aiello is efficient, confident and self-assured.

She also knows the value of a great coffee.

Jess is duty manager at the Pelican Pantry in Hastings, a training cafe that provides training and employment opportunities to locals.

She's at the cafe when the doors open and is responsible for leading the team to be ready for business. She supervises staff, helps customers and, of course, froths up a good cappuccino – the foundation of all good cafes.

The cafe is a community building initiative of the Mornington Peninsula Shire, supported by the Victorian Government, the Frankston Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network, 18 secondary colleges and 19 local education, employment and training organisations.

Jess was the cafe's first trainee when it opened in 2003. Employed on a 12-month indigenous traineeship under the *Jobs for Young People* program she was keen to develop her skills and seek full-time employment.

Twelve months later she was appointed to the staff, and is now jointly responsible for the running of the cafe's front of house.

Pelican Pantry sources its trainees from 16 programs including *Workforce Participation*

Partnerships, funded through the Department for Victorian Communities. The program aims to increase sustainable employment opportunities for Victorians facing barriers to work, addressing areas of emerging labour and skill shortages.

Today Jess manages and mentors such trainees – and is an inspirational example of hard work and persistence.

Cafe coordinator Andrew Dolphin said Jess had stood out at her interview for her enthusiasm. After 12 months she was invaluable.

Andrew said more than 290 people had trained at the cafe – about 70 per cent of whom had received employment.

He said Pelican Pantry graduates were sought after by local employers for their confidence, skills and excellence in customer service.

Andrew said the shire was supportive of Pelican Pantry and worked hard to build industry links and partnerships to create sustainable employment for participants. He said the support of the community was imperative to success.

But, the cafe, he said, had exceeded all his expectations.

"I didn't envisage it would be this big. My expectations were that it would be a success, but not such a success."

Case Study



Strategy 13

Changing the way we work with communities

A Fairer Victoria recognises that tackling disadvantage requires significant reforms in the way government works. We need to make it easier for people to work with government and to build the capacity of individuals, families and communities to create new opportunities by and for themselves.

Government can help in building the capacity of individuals, strengthening local community organisations, nurturing local leaders and supporting innovation. Changing our practices can reduce the administrative burden on community groups and help them focus on delivering more effective local services.

A Fairer Victoria recognises the special role of local government in encouraging better local planning, as well as the opportunities for new types of responses to disadvantage that involve the business community working in partnership with the community sector to create jobs.

What We Have Done

We are working with local councils across Victoria finding ways to increase community input into the priorities and plans of local areas.

The *Local Area Planning Support Program* is supporting local councils to develop new skills and planning processes. The emphasis is on creating partnerships between local governments and ensuring benefits are maximised across the local government sector. Discussions and negotiations are happening at a regional level with councils on projects to address common planning issues. Community stakeholder involvement and projects to better coordinate state and local government processes are also being explored. This approach is leading directly to improved quality and coordination of services and more timely investments by both levels of government in new social and physical infrastructure.

The Victorian Government is supporting greater involvement of business in responding to social issues. New partnerships have formed to foster community enterprises in disadvantaged communities. For example *Cleanable* developed by Social Firms Australia, is employing people with a mental illness on cleaning contracts in Melbourne's Western suburbs.

Community Enterprise projects are a way of using business skills and strategies to address disadvantage and create opportunities for skill development and work experience in disadvantaged areas. Other examples include funding provided to the Brotherhood of St Laurence to develop community enterprises in neighbourhood renewal sites and funding provided to the Adult Multicultural Education Services to develop social enterprises with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The Victorian Government has provided a grant of \$40,000 to Melbourne City Mission, in collaboration with the Helen McPherson Smith Trust and Ernst & Young to bring together business, the community and government sectors in the Agora think-tank to explore new, joint solutions to disadvantage.

More than just a delicious enterprise

The tables are laden with baked goods. There's date and cardamom biscuits, sesame seed biscuits, ambasha and basbosa.

The Sorghum Sisters are hard at work on their latest catering gig – today it's afternoon tea for a function at VicHealth.

The three are meticulous in their work.

The biscuits are rolled out just so, the cuts precise, the kitchen is spotless.

It is obvious these women love what they do and take great pride in their work.

Their lentil sambosa, meat koftas and basbosa are in high demand.

Nuria Khalil, Siti Ibrahim and Rahma Ibrahim make up the Sorghum Sisters – a catering enterprise supported by Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) and the Department for Victorian Communities.

Nuria and Siti are originally from Ethiopia, and Rahma is from Eritrea, with the women producing traditional cuisine from the countries in the Horn of Africa.

The women work four days from a kitchen at Carlton Primary School, from 9.30am to 3pm preparing morning and afternoon teas and lunches.

When they started about a year ago they had a handful of their

own recipes and an enthusiasm to get out into the workforce.

Today they are trained in food and safety skills, business practices and English language skills.

They have about 40 items on their menu.

Today it is catering for 65. Often it is catering for 300 to 400 people.

But the women are unflappable, as they calmly go about cutting basbosa into slices.

"I love my job," Siti says, "coming in with friends, leaving the house."

And soon the women will be training others and helping them get out into the workforce.

The community enterprise offers vocational training and job readiness support for refugees, predominantly from the Horn of Africa.

Six women will spend two days a week with the Sorghum Sisters, for up to 13 weeks, gaining on-the-job training.

And Kate Jackson, AMES Community Training Coordinator, says the Sorghum Sisters will provide great motivation and inspiration for their trainees.

"They really are fabulous women and such great role models for their communities."

Case Study



Agora will focus on work increasing economic participation of socially disadvantaged young people and their families through workforce participation. Four working groups with members from all sectors have been established to progress:

- understanding and promoting preventative projects focusing on crime and substance misuse;
- understanding and promoting asset based approaches to economic participation;
- understanding and promoting education and training programs for disadvantaged young people; and,
- understanding and promoting community facilities.

Agora will also co-host, with The Smith Family and Mission Australia, a *Social Policy in the City* seminar series in Melbourne. Issues of significance to community, business and government will be discussed in this public forum.

The *Frankston Partnership* between the Victorian Government, Frankston City Council and the Brotherhood of St Laurence is focusing on new ways to address youth issues in the Frankston area. The Partnership consulted, identified gaps in local services and proposed new initiatives to help young people achieve better outcomes. The Partnership will expand to include a number of locally-based services.

What We Will Do

We will continue to support capacity building and the skill needs of our partners and further develop the Victorian Government's focus on community engagement and place-based partnerships. To do this we will consult extensively with community organisations who play such an important role in tackling disadvantage in the community.

13.1 Stronger Community Organisations

We will provide \$250,000 to work with Victorian Council of Social Services and other community sector, philanthropic and business leaders to develop a strategic approach to improving the capacity of the community sector and plan for the key challenges for not-for-profit sector sustainability and growth over the next 10 years. Learning from innovative community sector projects, including those funded from the *Community Sector Investment Fund*, we will focus on social innovation, strong governance, local collaboration and workforce development.

13.2 Enhancing Community Engagement in the Planning and Delivery of Health Services

We are encouraging health service providers to put consumers, carers and community members at the heart of how health services are delivered. The *Doing it With Us Not For Us* policy framework will encourage health services to build on their existing activities to better share information, improve communication and use the experience of consumers and carers to improve the quality of services.

We are also helping health services in rural and regional Victoria be more responsive by providing them with guidelines on how best to consult and engage people in decisions about planning and delivery of services.

13.3 Community Engagement in Education

We will encourage greater links between schools and their communities by funding the Education Foundation to assist in two exciting projects. The *West Heidelberg Education Provision Project* is an innovative project initiated by the principals of five local schools and explores future schooling options for the Heidelberg area. The *Barwon South West Education Project* aims to improve student outcomes through increasing the involvement of the local community in schooling in the area.

13.4 Community Sector Leaders Scholarship Program

We will provide opportunities for professional development in the community sector to help build stronger leadership and management skills. We will also increase the sector's capacity to plan for and deliver efficient and effective services. The Victorian Government will fund three scholarships per year for current and future leaders within the Victorian community sector to finish post-graduate leadership qualifications, at the Australian New Zealand School of Government.

Strategy 14

Developing better ways of working together at a regional and local level

The Victorian Government has maintained a clear focus on strengthening Victoria's economy. We recognise that sustained long-term economic growth is the key to creating greater opportunities, more jobs and higher living standards for all Victorians. However, some Victorians are not getting a chance to share in the benefits of the state's strong economic performance.

Some groups of people and some places in Victoria still experience disadvantage, hardship and barriers to accessing the opportunities they need to secure a better future. And as life becomes increasingly complex, so does the way government operates.

One of the Victorian Government's most important steps in *A Fairer Victoria* was reforming the ways departments are organised and operate within their regions. This was to ensure they work more closely with local groups to identify issues and deliver appropriate responses.

A Fairer Victoria laid the foundation for these new ways of working and created stronger links between local and state government and the communities they serve. The reforms included:

- aligning the State Government's administrative boundaries with local government boundaries and establishing eight standard departmental regions. This creates a more sensible and straightforward set of responsibilities and relationships between levels of government and government agencies;
- establishing a high-level administrative network in each region to bring regional government departments and regional local governments together; and,
- bringing together groups of departments, local government representatives and the community sector to develop and implement local innovations in service design and delivery.

These reforms were designed to underpin a broader change in the way government works with communities – one where government places greater focus on consultation with local communities, the delivery of more flexible and locally-accessible services and the provision of area-based data and resources for planning.

What We Have Done

Government at all levels has moved quickly to implement these reforms. The alignment of the state's administrative boundaries was announced by the Premier in May 2005 based on the existing eight region structure used by the Department of Human Services.

This was followed by the establishment of Regional Management Forums (RMF) in each of Victoria's eight new administrative regions. As promised in *A Fairer Victoria*, each includes a State Departmental Secretary assigned as regional champion, representation of Local Government Chief Executive Officers and the Regional Managers of State Departments and the Victoria Police.

Overseen by the Minister for Local Government, the Forums are developing local views on opportunities and projects where by working together outcomes can be improved. Within their first 12 months of operation, all Forums have produced work plans to initiate regionally identified and developed projects. Two examples are:

- The *Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Management Forum* has initiated a *Regional Opportunities in Volunteering and Civic Participation* project to develop and implement a strategic plan to strengthen volunteering and civic participation in Eastern Metropolitan Region. The

Loud and clear – a single community voice

The world of census statistics and demographics turns into reality in Whittlesea.

About 25,000 people have moved into the area in the last 10 years,

By 2030, the population is expected to increase from 127,000 to 250,000, with particular growth in the number of young families.

Whittlesea resident Karlie Stanton and her family see the impact of that growth in Doreen, one of the many new estates in the area.

Karlie grew up in the area and remembers when the cows were almost as loud as the traffic.

One of her reasons for moving back to Doreen was so her three young children could experience some of what she remembered as a child.

She is delighted to be back and, although the roads are much busier, there is a new café and a health centre where there used to be paddocks.

Growth creates new demands for existing services often provided by already overstretched agencies.

It also risks creating service “black holes” – pockets of concentrated disadvantage, particularly among the most vulnerable in any community: children, young people and families.

Helped by financial support from *A Fairer Victoria* and new Statewide Regional Management

Forums, which bring together different state government departments and local councils, the Whittlesea Partnership is a way of meeting those challenges.

The Partnership grew out of collaboration between the Whittlesea Council and 18 local service agencies, and produced the first single plan for the delivery of social services in Whittlesea.

The aim of the Partnership is to attract new resources and extra community services and facilities into the Whittlesea area with a coordinated “single voice”.

The plan recognises two specific areas of need: disadvantaged areas in the Thomastown and Lalor areas and new communities in the growth areas of Epping North and Mernda.

The Partnership is now working on the practical actions that will meet those different challenges – creating new facilities, such as Neighbourhood Houses, getting better use of existing facilities, such as schools, and developing new and improved community services.

The change in Whittlesea in the past 20 years has been dramatic and shows no sign of slowing.

The new Whittlesea Partnership will mean that more local residents, like Karlie and her family will benefit from that change now and in the future.

Case Study



project partners include Department for Victorian Communities, the City of Knox, Community Houses Association of Outer Eastern Suburbs (CHAOS), Eastern Volunteer Resource Centre Inc, Knox Community Volunteers and Shire of Yarra Ranges; and,

- The *Hume Region Regional Management Forum's Integrated Strategic Planning* project considers land use development and planning on a local/sub-regional basis in areas experiencing rapid growth. The planning includes VicRoads, Regional Development Victoria, Catchment Management Authorities, local councils, Country Fire Authority, Victoria Police and State Emergency Services as partners. Led by the Department of Sustainability and Environment it includes the departments of Human Services, Victorian Communities, Education and Training.

The completed work plans illustrate that across all RMFs distinctive themes have emerged for all regions' priorities. These include:

- place-based projects combining community activity and facilities developments in neighbourhoods, suburbs and towns;
- strategic planning or integrated planning emphasising collaborative or region-wide approaches;
- population groups with particular needs, many focusing on disadvantage or families and young people;
- economic and environmental issues, particularly in rural regions;
- collaborative efforts between State and local governments to build capacity, strengthen networks and contribute to joint outcomes;
- community building projects or programs;
- innovative use of community facilities and public land;
- transport provision and access, including community transport; and;
- local data and information management, especially access to and use of common data.

In addition to the work of the Forums, the Victorian Government has taken further steps to ensure the successful development of Melbourne's growth areas. Due to the sheer scale and complexity of planning for and overseeing the sustainable development of Melbourne's outer areas over the next 25 years, the Government has announced the establishment of the Growth Areas Authority to coordinate investment in infrastructure and services in Melbourne's newest communities. The Growth Areas Authority will work with councils, the development industry and a range of government agencies to achieve its objectives of good planning, timely infrastructure and service provision and the development of sustainable communities in growth areas.

Making it easier to work with Government:

Developing better ways of working together at a regional and local level

What We Will Do

Building on the changes announced in *A Fairer Victoria*, we will undertake further work to support the development of collaborative work between and across levels of government.

14.1 Inter-governmental Agreement With Local Government and the Commonwealth

We will support the implementation of the *Inter-Governmental Agreement Establishing Principles Guiding Inter-Governmental Relations on Local Government Matters* signed in April 2006 by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers for Local Government and the Australian Local Government Association. The Agreement signals improved cooperation between Commonwealth, State and Local Government to deliver better outcomes for local communities in Victoria and across Australia. Local governments will be consulted when required to provide extra services by either the State or Commonwealth Government.

14.2 Regional Management Forums Linking Across Victoria

We will promote linkages across the membership of Regional Management Forums by establishing a shared on-line workspace for Victorian Government and Local Government senior managers and Chief Executives. The Government will host the Intranet as a jointly accessible forum for sharing information, generating ideas and collaborating on new approaches to planning and service delivery that engage communities and produce effective outcomes. The Intranet will connect the 179 members of the Forums and provide a platform for future developments to improve the collection and delivery of information to support place-based decision making between and across levels of government.

14.3 Electronic Democracy

The Government will actively encourage and support community participation and broader representation in civic activity and establish a best practice public consultation framework. This includes the use of web-based forms of community consultation and engagement, for use as a whole of government resource. We are also working to reduce the remaining barriers to Internet uptake in the Victorian community through the Connecting Communities: the 2nd wave program, will increase accessibility to digital records through the Public Records Office of Victoria Digital Archive project and will continue to support My Connected Community to enable small community groups and organisations to participate in the online environment.

A Fairer Victoria: new initiatives for regional for Victoria

Many of the A Fairer Victoria initiatives have local application. These include:

Loddon Mallee

Local initiatives in the Loddon Mallee Region:

- Employment of new Youth Transition workers
- SBS Radio application support in Bendigo, Mildura and Swan Hill
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons Program
- Establishment of Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions to improve community transport

Hume

Local initiatives in the Hume Region:

- Redevelopment of the former Ambermere psychiatric hospital in Shepparton
- Expanded support for Indigenous young people through the Academy of Sport, Health & Education in partnership with Rumbalara Football and Netball Club
- SBS Radio application support in Shepparton and Wangaratta
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons Program
- Establishment of Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions to improve community transport

Grampians

Local initiatives in the Grampians Region:

- Employment of a new Youth Transition worker in Ballarat
- SBS Radio application support in Ballarat and Horsham
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons Program
- Establishment of Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions to improve community transport

Barwon South West

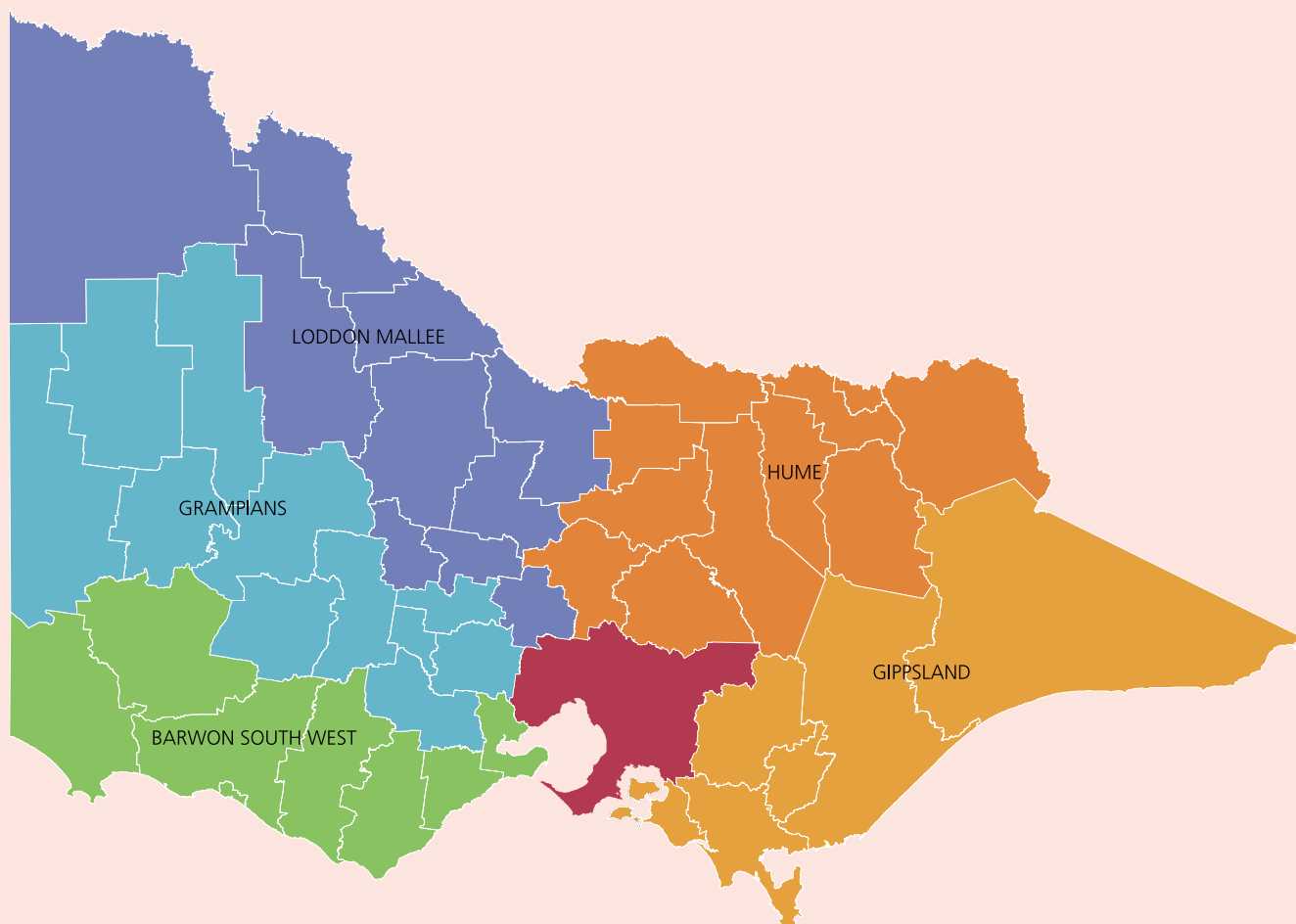
Local initiatives in the Barwon South West Region:

- Employment of new Youth Transition workers in Geelong
- A SBS Radio application support in Warrnambool
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons Program
- Establishment of Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions to improve community transport

Gippsland

Local initiatives in the Gippsland Region:

- Employment of new Youth Transition workers
- A SBS Radio application support in Latrobe City
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons Program
- Establishment of Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions to improve community transport



New initiatives for
regional Victoria

A Fairer Victoria: new initiatives for metropolitan Melbourne

Many of the A Fairer Victoria initiatives have local application. These include:

North and West Metropolitan Region

Local initiatives in the North and West Metropolitan Region:

- Establish new Children's Centres for Wyndham, Melton, Hume, Whittlesea
- Employment of new Youth Transition workers
- New Best Start projects and Multipurpose Facilities to better deliver new children's services in Wyndham, Melton, Hume, Whittlesea and Nillumbik
- A Laverton Community Renewal project
- Establishment of the Centre for Women's Mental Health at the Royal Women's Hospital
- North Richmond Community Health Centre redevelopment

- Planning for an extended clinical care facility on the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital site
- The Kokoda gymnasium and hydrotherapy pool for veterans at the Community Rehabilitation Centre at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital site
- Relocation of the Bouverie Centre to a new purpose designed building, co-located with the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST)
- Additional support for the Queen Victoria Women's Centre in Melbourne
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons Program
- Establishment of Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions programs to improve community transport

Eastern Metropolitan Region

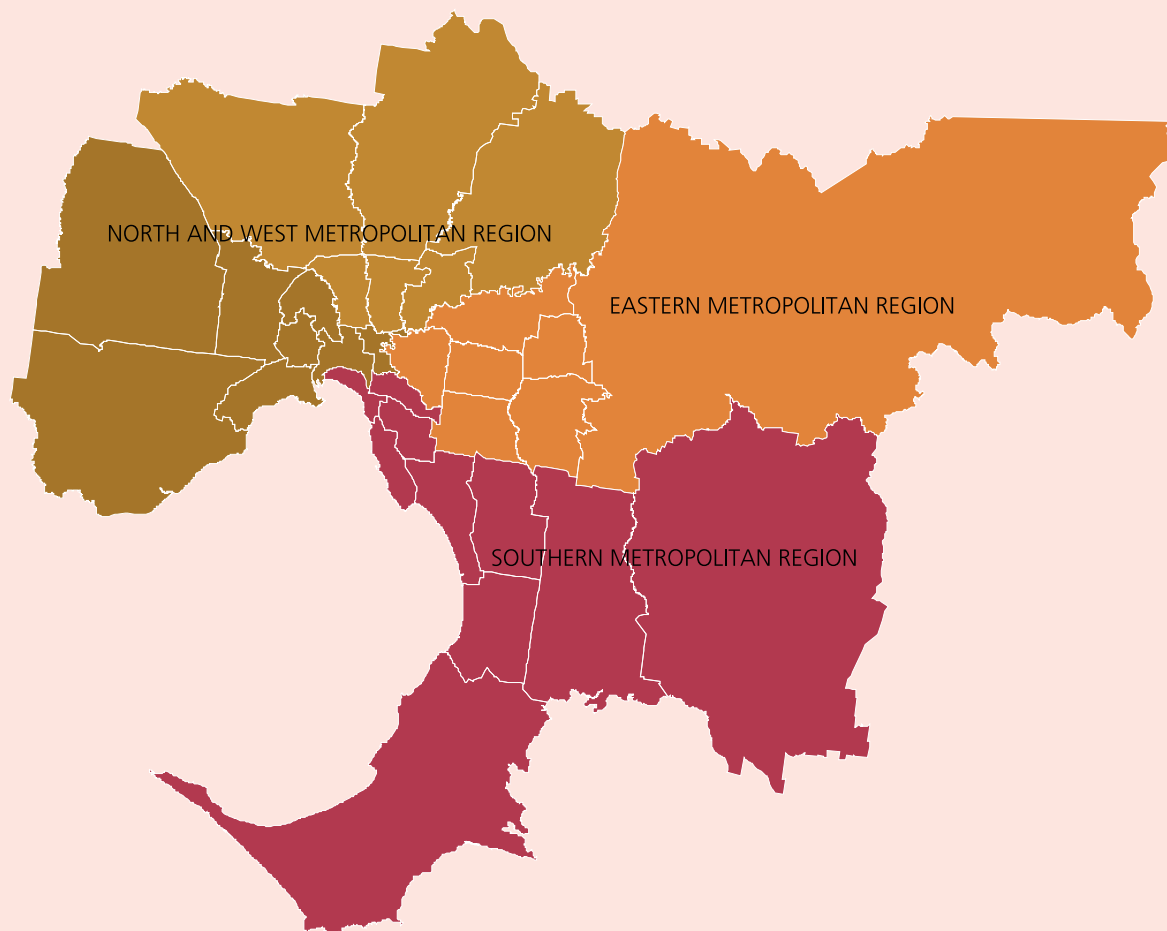
Local initiatives in the Eastern Metropolitan Region:

- 20 interim beds for forensic mental health services at Thomas Embling Hospital
- Employment of new Youth Transition workers
- New Best Start projects and Multipurpose Facilities to better deliver new children's services in Yarra Ranges
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons Program
- Establishment of Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions programs to improve community transport

Southern Metropolitan Region

Local initiatives in the Southern Metropolitan Region:

- Establish new Children's Centres for Casey and Cardinia
- Employment of new Youth Transition workers
- New Best Start projects and Multipurpose Facilities to better deliver new children's services in Cardinia, Casey and the Mornington Peninsula
- A Frankston North Community Renewal project
- Support for the Butterfly Foundation program at Southern Health to provide specialist care to young people suffering from serious eating disorders
- Establishment of Flexible Transport Solutions programs to improve community transport
- Volunteer training to extend the Youth Referral Independent Persons
- Establishment of the Youth Justice Group Conferencing



New initiatives in
metropolitan regions

Increasing services in our outer suburbs

Melbourne's nine outer suburban councils of Wyndham, Melton, Hume, Whittlesea, Nillumbik, Yarra Ranges, Cardinia, Casey and the Mornington Peninsula are growing at a rate almost twice that of the rest of Victoria.

This growth is characterised by higher than average proportions of young families with pre-school and school age children, higher rates of households servicing mortgages and more geographically dispersed populations than for the rest of Melbourne. Research undertaken by the Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT (2003), has highlighted trends showing that in these areas key indicators of community wellbeing such as low birth weight, rates of post natal depression, rates of child protection notifications, early school leaving and youth unemployment are higher than the metropolitan average.

This growth is occurring across new housing developments at the city's fringe as well as in the transformation of country towns located close to Melbourne, which are increasingly being seen as affordable and attractive locations for people who work in the metropolitan area. Population growth is expanding local economies and bringing a range of benefits to these areas, but it is not without social costs.

Growth places pressures on a wide range of health, education, transport and community services that are often under-prepared for the demand that comes from rapid population growth.

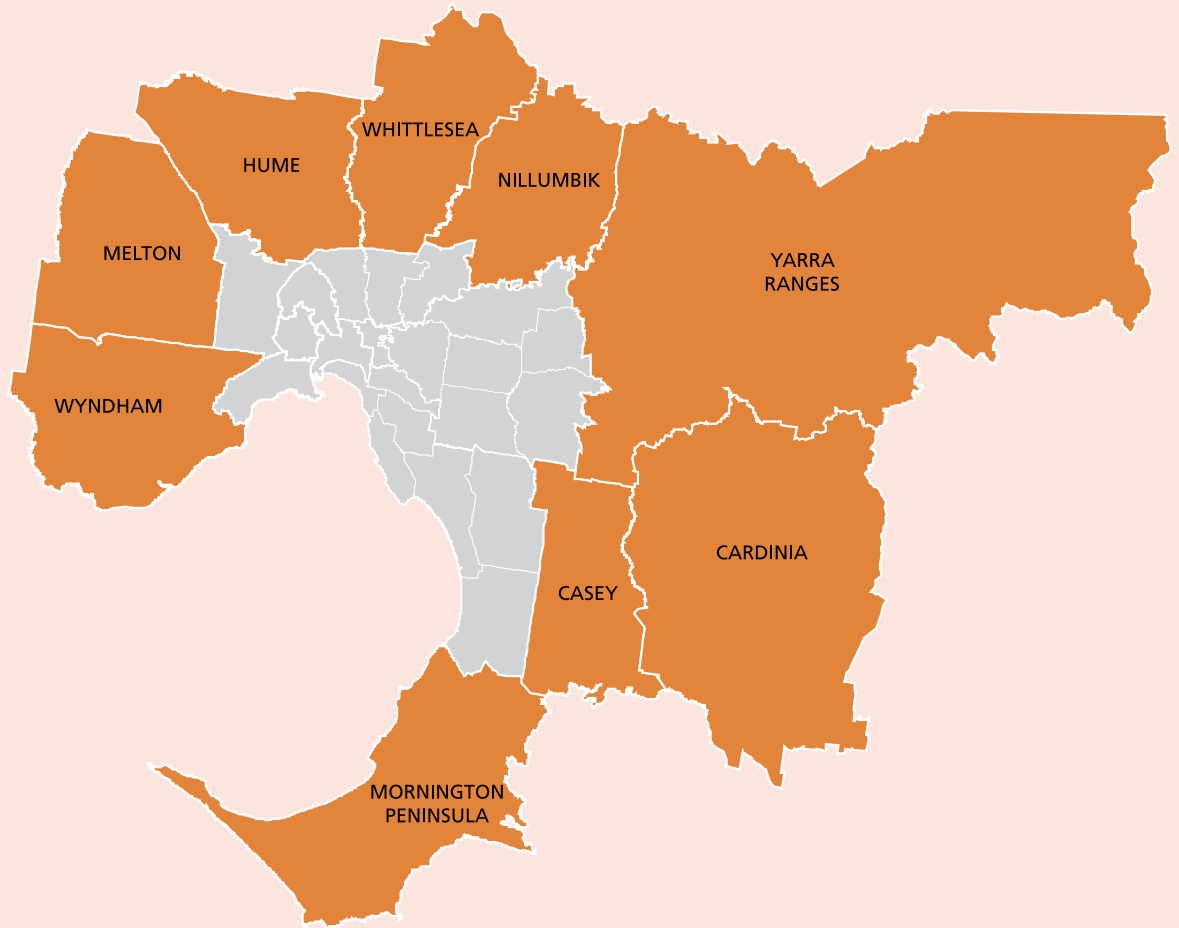
Many of the agencies and services that young families and low income households have traditionally relied on are located in more established parts of Melbourne. This causes difficulties for people in growth areas accessing services and is further complicated by their limited transport options and increasingly, higher fuel costs. If we don't respond now to ensure these communities have good basic services these trends will only become worse.

This is why the Victorian Government has decided to boost the social infrastructure of Melbourne's growth areas and ensure local community services and facilities keep pace with growth and that these new communities become great places to live and raise families.

WHAT WE WILL DO

A *Fairer Victoria* initiatives aimed at improving access to universal services and targeting support to disadvantaged population groups and places will support all Victorians, including people who live in the growth areas. However, the following initiatives have particular application to the outer suburbs areas, including the interface councils:

- Boosting children's services in outer suburbs (see Initiative 1.2);
- Support for Disengaged Youth (see Initiative 2.1);
- Community Renewal (see Initiative 12.4)
- Flexible Transport Solutions (see Initiative 5.7);
- Fair and Affordable credit (see Initiative 6.1);
- Housing Support from the Victorian Property Fund (see Initiative 7.6);
- Neighbourhood Houses in Action (see Initiative 12.1);
- Increased Access to the Arts (see Initiative 5.10); and,
- Addressing Financial Disadvantage of Energy Consumers (see Initiative 6.2).



Increasing services
in the outer suburbs

Investment in *A Fairer Victoria*

The Government is delivering an additional \$851.6 million in 2006 to further support *A Fairer Victoria* through new initiatives. This is on top of the \$788.2 million provided in 2005 for an initial 85 priority actions.

These initiatives are funded through new Budget allocations and from sources such as the Community Support Fund or from within existing departmental budgets.

Combined this represents a total investment of \$1.64 billion dedicated to meeting the goals of *A Fairer Victoria* to address the needs and create opportunities for disadvantaged Victorians.

<i>A Fairer Victoria</i> funding announced in 2005 (\$ millions)	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Total
1 Giving children the best start in life	0.0	20.1	26.0	27.2	28.5	101.8
2 Getting young people back on track	0.0	14.1	14.8	10.5	6.2	45.6
3 Responding to family violence more effectively	0.0	5.9	8.5	9.5	11.1	35.1
4 Helping older Victorians stay independent	0.3	12.5	12.4	12.5	12.4	50.1
5 Providing fairer access to services	0.0	1.9	1.5	1.5	1.2	6.1
6 Making services more affordable	1.5	2.6	1.2	0.8	0.0	6.0
7 Boosting access to affordable housing	10.0	9.9	9.9	9.9	9.9	49.6
8 Improving access to justice	0.0	17.0	24.2	21.0	20.2	82.4
9 Building a new partnership with Indigenous Victorians	0.0	7.9	8.7	6.6	3.8	27.1
10 Creating new opportunities for people with a disability	3.0	33.6	34.3	29.8	18.8	119.5
11 Increasing support for mental health services	0.0	44.6	57.6	41.6	36.5	180.3
12 Building stronger communities	5.3	13.2	21.7	23.5	11.6	75.2
13 Changing the way we work with communities	1.6	3.0	4.3	0.5	0.0	9.4
14 Working together at a regional and local level	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	\$21.7	\$186.3	\$224.9	\$195.0	\$160.2	\$788.2

A Fairer Victoria funding announced in 2006 (\$ millions)	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Total
1 Giving children the best start in life	6.9	58.7	72.0	70.9	74.7	283.2
2 Getting young people back on track	0.0	4.1	5.7	6.4	5.4	21.6
3 Responding to family violence more effectively	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
4 Helping older Victorians stay independent	0.0	18.7	13.4	13.7	13.7	59.5
5 Providing fairer access to services	0.0	14.4	15.5	9.6	3.6	43.1
6 Making services more affordable	0.0	5.6	3.8	1.0	0.9	11.3
7 Boosting access to affordable housing	55.1	8.3	8.8	8.2	5.7	86.1
8 Improving access to justice	0.0	10.2	11.7	9.9	9.5	41.3
9 Building a new partnership with Indigenous Victorians	0.0	12.7	16.7	17.8	14.5	61.7
10 Creating new opportunities for people with a disability	0.0	12.7	18.4	16.4	19.8	67.3
11 Increasing support for mental health services	0.0	35.3	35.3	32.3	33.1	136.0
12 Building stronger communities	0.0	9.0	9.5	11	10.1	39.6
13 Changing the way we work with communities	0.1	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.6
14 Working together at a regional and local level	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Total	\$62.1	\$190.4	\$210.9	\$197.2	\$191.0	\$851.6*
Combined total						\$1,639.8

* Comprising \$818 million budget funding and \$33 million funding from the Community Support Fund, Property Fund and internal reprioritisation

What has been achieved

A Fairer Victoria has delivered real improvements in all of the 14 Strategy Areas identified. A detailed implementation report is contained later in this Appendix, of which some examples are:

GIVING CHILDREN THE BEST START IN LIFE

More children in kindergarten

We encouraged more children into kindergarten programs giving them a sound basis for their future schooling. Nearly a quarter of all kindergarten programs are now operating within long day care settings, making kindergarten much easier for working parents to access. We are also making kindergarten cheaper for more than 17,000 four year olds across Victoria eligible for a \$320 fee subsidy.

Better children's services through *Best Start*

We linked our children's services so parents get the help they need in a more coordinated way through *Best Start* programs in 22 local government areas and six Indigenous communities across Victoria. These innovative programs ensure the right services are delivered in the best and easiest way for families of young children. Each is unique, offering local solutions for local issues to meet the different needs of children and their families.

More help for the most vulnerable families

We provided more flexible and individually-tailored support to families in need through 39 *Family Support Innovation* projects throughout Victoria. Parents and children are receiving support at critical times preventing bigger problems that may have resulted in child protection notifications later on. We have reduced child abuse notifications in project areas by 4.1 per cent and reduced child abuse substantiations by 12.3 per cent overall.

GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE BACK ON TRACK

Mentoring young people

We helped young people at risk of leaving school by linking them with older role models who can give them social and life skills for the future. Mentoring programs like the *Gippsland Mentoring Alliance*, which links separate mentoring projects in Traralgon, Moe and Warragul are helping young people stay involved in school and in their communities.

Creating Job and Training Opportunities

We helped more than 18,000 young people into jobs or training or back to school in 2005 through *Local Learning and Employment Networks* (LLEN) around Victoria. In 2006, the LLENs will particularly focus on assisting Indigenous youth, young people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and young single parents.

RESPONDING TO FAMILY VIOLENCE MORE EFFECTIVELY

Improved responses to incidents of family violence

We introduced a new Police Code of Practice to ensure consistent responses to incidents as well as a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week telephone service. We created new accommodation options to allow more women and children to stay in their homes following family violence incidents. Support for women and children, men's behaviour change programs and counselling were also increased.

Improved legal processes for family violence matters

We are making our court systems more responsive to the needs of people who have experienced family violence. We established new family violence courts at Heidelberg and Ballarat and new family violence services for courts in Melbourne, Sunshine and Frankston. These are making court processes easier for people who have experienced family violence, especially children. They also offer a broader range of services to all involved, including counselling and referrals to address longer-term needs, such as housing, community care and children's services.

HELPING OLDER VICTORIANS STAY INDEPENDENT

More people being supported to live independently

We have expanded the range and types of services available to keep older people in their own homes providing more than 400,000 additional hours of service in 2005-06, including new services for ethnic and Indigenous communities. We have also provided additional funds to approximately 500 agencies to invest in equipment and minor upgrading necessary for improved service delivery.

PROVIDING FAIRER ACCESS TO SERVICES

Tackling Systemic Discrimination

We funded high-profile awareness campaigns to combat discrimination and racism in the community such as *A Seat Beside You*, *Employment 4 All* and *Just Like You*. We have modernised Victoria's laws dealing with vagrancy and street crime.

MAKING SERVICES MORE AFFORDABLE

Giving more people access to the Internet

We provided more people with access to the Internet by funding 66 community organisations to upgrade computer hardware and software or support Internet Service Provider costs. These organisations were in both metropolitan (18) and regional (48) Victoria. More than 12,000 hours of public Internet access has been provided since November 2005. A further 22 organisations will be funded in 2006.

BOOSTING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Increasing social housing for people who need it

A \$100 million funding package for social housing has been announced. This package comprises \$74.5 million of government funding, including \$10 million through *A Fairer Victoria*, and has attracted \$25.5 million of non-government funds for investment into affordable new homes for Victorian families. Under this package, more than 430 new housing opportunities will be delivered to low income Victorians in areas where housing is needed most.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Delivering justice in new ways

We started building Victoria's first Neighbourhood Justice Centre, which will be in Collingwood. The new court's jurisdiction will be enacted by mid-2006. The community has been involved in all steps in the process including selecting the first Magistrate. A *Neighbourhood Justice Centre Community Liaison Committee* has been established to oversee the ongoing development of the centre.

Delivering more legal services to those who need them

We provided additional funding to community legal centres around Victoria, such as the Campaspe Loddon Community Legal Centre, that is providing individual legal advice and legal education in its local community.

BUILDING A NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIGENOUS VICTORIANS

Renewing the Lake Tyers community

We are providing a more coordinated response to community concerns through the *Lake Tyers Community Renewal* project. This project is linking government departments to deliver services in a more integrated and responsive way. We are already seeing improvements in community safety, infrastructure and self image. Breakfast and Walking Bus programs are operating and a night patrol has improved community security.

CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Boosted support packages

We expanded our support for people with a disability and their families by delivering 140 individual support packages, 34 Intensive Transition support packages, 424 Behaviour Intervention support packages and assisted 1271 individuals with aids and equipment.

INCREASING SUPPORT FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Providing more beds and Step Down care for mental health patients

We opened a 25 bed mental health unit at Casey Hospital and expanded the mental health response in the emergency departments of the Western, Werribee, Royal Melbourne, Northern, St. Vincent's, Monash and Dandenong Hospitals.

BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Renewing more neighbourhoods around Victoria

We commenced Neighbourhood Renewal at four new sites in West Heidelberg, East Reservoir, Delacombe and Hastings. There are 19 areas across Victoria with high concentrations of public housing and disadvantage included in the highly successful Neighbourhood Renewal program. Some of the results include reduced crime, more jobs and training and greater community cohesion. These projects link state government departments, local government, business and community agencies to work with residents to solve local problems. Consultations have started with local residents in the new areas to identify local issues and potential areas for action. A *Fairer Victoria* 2005-06 funding of \$29.8 million over four years has also enabled extension of the 15 existing projects.

Providing more transport for local communities

We provided eight additional community buses to Victorian communities in Pearcedale, Bendoc, Melton, Yinnar, Sea Lake and Avoca, bringing the total across the State to 80. These buses are vital to people needing to access services in areas lacking private and public transport services, helping residents travel to community events and to access education and training opportunities.

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK WITH COMMUNITIES

Helping communities help themselves

We helped communities establish community enterprises in Neighbourhood Renewal sites around Victoria. Community groups are establishing sustainable enterprises to provide real opportunities to people living in local areas. For example, the Rosewall Café in Corio and Norlane is a community café nurturing social connections, training and employment opportunities for local residents.

DEVELOPING BETTER WAYS OF WORKING AT A REGIONAL LEVEL

Regional Managers Forums

After aligning the operations of Victorian Government departments to eight standard regions, we set about improving links with local governments. Heads of Victorian Government Departments have worked with Regional Managers and senior council staff to identify regional priorities, 'champion' better services, resolve barriers and cut through red tape in the region.

Implementation reports in detail

Strategy	Progress To Date
1. Giving children the best start in life	<p>Establish an Office for Children and a new Children's Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Office for Children has been operating since March 2005, providing greater coordination on issues impacting on Victoria's children. The Victorian Children's Council was established in July 2005 to provide expert policy advice to the Premier and Minister for Children on the best policies and services for Victoria's children. The Government has begun comprehensive reforms to child protection services for families in Victoria. The new <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> and the <i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i>, provide a modern framework for all those working with children and families to more effectively protect Victoria's vulnerable children. <p>Ensure all children can access kindergarten programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17,000 four-year olds across Victoria are now eligible for an increased subsidy making kindergarten more affordable for low-income families through funding of an additional \$4.1 million, which has been increased the subsidy from \$250 to \$320 per child per annum. In 2005, more than 8000 children attended funded kindergarten programs in long day care settings at 355 long day care centres. That is nearly a quarter (22.6 per cent) of total kindergarten locations. From January 2006, the per capita grant rate for kindergarten in Long Day Care increased from \$857 to \$1325, encouraging more Childcare centres to provide these programs. With further increases by 2009 it will match the standard rate resulting in even more childcare centres providing kindergarten programs. <p>Improve outcomes for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent groups and playgroups for children have been established in Ballarat, Casey, Frankston, Greater Geelong, Hume, Maribyrnong, Greater Shepparton, Whittlesea, Rural City of Swan Hill, Shire of Wellington and Shire of Yarra Ranges. These support and encourage parents to attend maternal and child health services and children to attend kindergarten. <i>Best Start</i> programs are now operating in 22 local government areas around Victoria including Ballarat, Casey, Frankston, Greater Geelong (Rosewall), Hume (Broadmeadows), Maribyrnong, Greater Shepparton, Whittlesea, Rural City of Swan Hill (Robinvale), Shire of Wellington and Shire of Yarra Ranges. These provide more linked, responsive services to improve the outcomes for children. In addition there are six <i>Best Start</i> projects for Indigenous families with young children operating in Victoria including in Horsham and Baw Baw (Morwell). <p>Protect children through early intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thirty nine Family Support Projects now cover 56 per cent of local government areas in Victoria entirely or in part. Notifications of child abuse in project areas are down by 4.1 per cent and overall child abuse substantiations have been reduced by an average of 12.3 per cent across Victoria. By contrast, in other states, child abuse notifications continue to rise. <p>Increase support for Indigenous families and children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Njernda Aboriginal Family Restoration Service in Echuca was launched in April 2006. Funding has been allocated for another in the North and West Metropolitan Region and planning is underway for one more in regional Victoria. These programs allow services to work with families, to address parenting skills, in residential settings, drawing on cultural strengths, preventing children being placed in out of home care. <p>Increase support for children with a disability and their families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A further 460 families were helped with additional <i>Early Childhood Intervention Services</i> and 355 families have benefited from new <i>Flexible Support Packages</i>. This includes those with autism, speech and behaviour problems. Since 2002-03, almost 6000 children with disabilities and additional needs have been helped to actively take part and benefit from quality learning experiences in kindergartens each year. <p>Improve children's safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Bernie Geary was appointed as Victoria's first Child Safety Commissioner in May 2005. Two additional SafeStart projects to help local partnerships work together to reduce childhood injury have been announced in Casey and Geelong, building on three existing projects underway in Ballarat, Dandenong and Yarra Ranges.

Strategy	Progress To Date
2. Getting young people back on track	<p>Boost Youth Mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth mentoring activities have started around Victoria, including in Shepparton where group mentoring activities have linked young parents to older more experienced adults. In Metropolitan Melbourne appropriate adults are being recruited to be trained mentors with people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Community agencies undertaking mentoring in the Gippsland region are meeting as members of the Gippsland Mentoring Alliance to develop a strong practitioner network. <p>Support Local Learning and Employment Networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 18,000 young people were assisted in 2005 to return to school or training or to get jobs with support from Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN) in 2005. <p>Deliver more help for young people in trouble with the law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The age jurisdiction in the Criminal Division of the Children's Court was raised to ensure that young people of 17 years of age are treated as children for the purposes of the criminal law. <p>Reconnect early school leavers to supportive learning environments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Reconnecting Early School Leavers program has resulted in 86 per cent of participants reconnecting to education, training or employment. <p>Reduce Truancy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>It's Not OK to be Away</i> Student Attendance Week was held in Term One 2006. Schools throughout Victoria are being encouraged to take new and improved measures to increase school attendance through the <i>It's Not OK to be Away</i> campaign. <p>Provide new skills for young people with a disability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are helping young people in the <i>Futures for Young Adults</i> program to transition to employment through a working group made up of Victorian and Commonwealth Government departments. This group is mapping the current process for young people with a disability to access employment and identifying the specific barriers they face. We have funded community organisations to develop effective pre-employment programs for young people with disabilities through the <i>Disability Services Innovations</i> Grants program. We have funded the Yooralla Society of Victoria to provide training, support and/or mentoring in governance to eight community organisations that provide services or support to young people with a disability.
3. Responding to family violence more effectively	<p>Improve the immediate response to family violence incidents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional funding has been provided to the statewide after-hours service to enable it to provide 24-hour responses, seven-days-a-week. New accommodation options are being put in place to help women and children stay in the family home after family violence incidents. <p>Expand choices for housing and support in family violence situations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services across Victoria are being funded to supply family violence outreach, intensive case management, links to the private rental market, after-hours support, women's and children's counselling services and men's behaviour change programs. <p>Implement a new approach to dealing with the perpetrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new Police Code of Practice has significantly increased police action in response to reports of family violence incidents. In 2004–05, the number of intervention orders applied for by police increased by 81 per cent. In the same period, the number of charges laid by police in relation to family violence matters increased by 73 per cent. <p>Provide more counselling programs to break the cycle of violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Family Violence Court Counselling Programs</i> are operating at the new Heidelberg and Ballarat Family Violence Courts. These programs provide counselling for men for whom an intervention order has been made and where they have been assessed as eligible. Sixty six defendants at Heidelberg and 97 defendants at Ballarat have been ordered to attend counselling.

Strategy	Progress To Date
3. Responding to family violence more effectively	<p>Speed the justice process through specialist family violence courts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Family Violence Courts opened at Heidelberg and Ballarat on 14 June 2005. Special Registrars, Family Violence Applicant Workers, Family Violence Outreach Workers, Family Violence Defendant Workers, Family Violence Legal Services and Family Violence Police Prosecutors are working at these courts. • The Family Violence Specialist Service at the Melbourne Magistrates Court was launched on 14 February 2006. The Specialist Service will be operational by June 2006 at the Sunshine Court (with a circuit to Werribee for one day per week) and Frankston. <p>Establish more Indigenous family violence programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We developed three holistic family healing services, an Indigenous Men's Resource and Advisory Service (IMRAS) and three counselling scholarships. The healing services will be located in Echuca, East Gippsland and North and West Metropolitan Region.
4. Helping older Victorians stay independent	<p>Implement Support for Seniors program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1900 Personal Alert pendants will have been distributed to older Victorians by 30 June 2006, bringing a total of 18,255 Personal Alert pendants available to older Victorians. <p>Increase support for independent living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government has expanded the range and types of services available to keep older people in their own homes resulting in more than 400,000 additional hours of service in 2005–06, including new services for ethnic and Indigenous communities. We have also allocated nearly \$6 million in one-off funding to approximately 500 agencies to invest in equipment and minor upgrading necessary for improved service delivery. • HACC active service model pilots to support people who are frail or disabled have started in Baw Baw Shire, Yarra Ranges, Moreland and Alpine Shire. These are new programs that help people to continue to live safely at home. Advice is provided on how to conserve physical energy, use lighter cleaning equipment, build low maintenance gardens, introduce aids and equipment, strength building and joining social support groups. <p>Support lifelong learning for seniors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional funding for Universities of the Third Age (U3As) was distributed to 75 providers. <p>Create age friendly communities and workplaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Victorian Employers' Chambers of Commerce was funded to develop an educational toolkit for employers to promote age-friendly workplaces. • Close to 900 metropolitan employers and 180 in regional areas attended <i>Grey Matters</i> briefings aimed at promoting age-friendly workplaces.
5. Providing fairer access to services	<p>Tackle systemic discrimination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have conducted a high profile campaign to increase employment opportunities for people with a disability called <i>Employment 4 All</i>. • We have conducted publicity campaigns to promote community harmony entitled <i>Just Like You</i> and <i>A Seat Beside You</i>. <p>Reform laws on poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Vagrancy Act was repealed in September 2005 and the outdated language and content of Victorian law dealing with public order and 'street crime' was modernised and re-enacted in the Summary Offences Act. Particular attention was given to the disproportionate impact on the disadvantaged who, as a result of homelessness and poverty, use public places for shelter and daily living and are vulnerable to a range of health and social problems. While begging remains an offence, the number of charges laid and the outcomes of ensuing prosecutions will be monitored. <p>Refocus employment programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new <i>Workforce Participation Partnership</i> program has been commenced to increase workforce participation. A comprehensive series of information sessions have been held across Victoria and applications from a range of partnerships that will broker new employment opportunities are now being processed.

Strategy	Progress To Date
5. Providing fairer access to services	<p>Support newly arrived refugees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist nurses have been deployed in eight locations to deliver health assessment, pathways and referrals for refugees in Kensington, Werribee, Northcote, Broadmeadows, Footscray, Dandenong, Warrnambool and Shepparton. Refugee service brokers were established in Shepparton and Warrnambool/Colac. <p>Improve access to the arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly 35,000 Year 9 students visited the Arts Centre over three years to 2005 under the VRAP 9 program, which provides students from rural and regional schools with access to the performing arts and other art forms. Between November 2005 and March 2006, 2405 students (703 metropolitan students and 1702 regional students) visited Scienceworks and 1549 students visited the planetarium as part of the Star 6 program to provide science enrichment experiences for students from metropolitan and regional areas. <p>Promote a new focus for services to veterans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new Veterans Act started in December 2005 establishing the new independent Victorian Veterans Council comprising 11 representatives from across the ex-service community. The Act also establishes the new Victorian Veterans Fund (VVF). Major General Peter Haddad has been appointed inaugural Chair of the Council, which will advise the Government, strengthen the protection of veterans trust funds and distribute funds for the new Victorian Veterans Fund. The VVF has been introduced to provide a new annual stream of funding for commemorative and educational purposes associated with the ex-service organisations (or the ex service community). The Premier is now Minister responsible for Veterans Affairs to ensure the management of veterans services across the whole of government.
6. Making services more affordable	<p>Bridge the digital divide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eighty eight community organisations have received funding to upgrade computer hardware and/or software and Internet connections to provide public access to Victorians unable to access it elsewhere. More than 12,000 hours of access have been provided since the first projects began operating in November 2005. <p>Assess new approaches to addressing energy hardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Committee of Inquiry into the Financial Hardship of Energy Consumers reported to the Government recommending a range of initiatives designed to address energy hardship that the Government is acting on in 2006–07. <p>Improve access to affordable credit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A major report on consumer credit was commissioned and released in March 2006. It contains a series of options the Government is now considering designed to promote affordable small amount credit and more responsible lending, supported by consumer credit literacy, improved financial counselling and universal access to free dispute resolution. <p>Cut energy bills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 1000 homes occupied by pensioners in the four new <i>Neighbourhood Renewal</i> areas (West Heidelberg, East Reservoir, Delacombe in Ballarat and Hastings) are receiving free energy audits and retrofits to reduce energy consumption. The program provides training and paid work for more than 40 local mature age job seekers. <p>Provide extra help for school costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2401 secondary and 1426 primary students received direct monetary assistance to buy shoes and uniforms from the <i>Victorian State Schools Relief Committee</i> through the additional funds provided in 2005.

Strategy	Progress To Date
7. Boosting access to affordable housing	<p>Expand supply of social housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By March 2006 we had built or bought 58 properties with another 12 under construction putting us well on the way to our target of 100 new homes for low income families by 2007. The balance of the funds is being used to acquire social housing in partnership with not for profit Housing Associations. <p>Lead the market through VicUrban to increase supply of affordable housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VicUrban is negotiating with a builder and financiers to develop a pilot scheme to enable one in every 10 new homes in the development to be provided to means-tested buyers at a below-market price. The Government has announced it will amend the state planning policy framework to make it more explicit that councils can consider the need for affordable housing as part of strategic planning activities and when making planning decisions. We have also started to examine potential mechanisms with financial institutions, which can assist low-income Victorians into home ownership through shared equity arrangements. <p>Implement Melbourne 2030 affordable housing actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Growth Areas Authority has been announced, with the aim of achieving good planning, timely, infrastructure and service provisions in Melbourne's growth areas. One of the Authority's roles is to monitor housing affordability in growth areas. Melbourne's councils have a strategic framework to plan for their housing needs, based on projected population and household growth as a result of <i>Regional Housing Statements</i> prepared as part of <i>Melbourne 2030</i>. Three of the five regional housing statements have been released, and the remaining two will be finalised later in 2006. <p>Increase home ownership among low income Victorians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VicUrban is negotiating with financial institutions on shared equity products to finance up to 500 affordable homes in new housing developments. <p>Deliver better services and support for homeless Victorians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have negotiated SAAP V. We are also continuing to implement the <i>Victorian Homelessness Strategy</i> and <i>Youth Homelessness Action Plan</i>.
8. Improving access to justice	<p>Establish a Neighbourhood Justice Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work is well underway to establish Australia's first Neighbourhood Justice Centre. Collingwood has been chosen as the location and a building is currently being refurbished: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Attorney General has involved community representatives on the panel to select the first magistrate for the Neighbourhood Justice Centre; and, a Community Liaison Committee is assisting in the ongoing development of the Centre. <p>Provide additional resources for Legal Centres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New community legal centres have been established in Cranbourne, Melton, Boronia and Bendigo. A neighbourhood mediation pilot is scheduled to commence in July 2006 in the Corio/Geelong region. <p>Break the cycle of re-offending</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New models and facilities to provide better court support services for disadvantaged defendants has been developed in preparation for the launch of new services at the Magistrates' Courts in Melbourne, Sunshine, Moe and Morwell. A total of 310 defendants so far have been referred to the Drug Court program at Dandenong , with a total of 173 orders made and 55 current participants. By providing appropriate alternatives to imprisonment, the Drug Court is having a positive impact for both participants and the community. This includes a reduction in re-offending by serious drug related offenders, reduced and less harmful drug use, improved health and well-being, and increased engagement and retention in alcohol and drug treatment programs. <p>Reduce women's re-offending</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Vietnamese Liaison Officer has been employed at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre as part of the program to reduce women's re-offending.

Strategy	Progress To Date
<p>9. Building a new partnership with Indigenous Victorians</p>	<p>Change the way we work with Indigenous communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victoria's Indigenous communities have been consulted extensively in developing a new approach for Indigenous representation. <p>Establish an Indigenous land and economic development program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key tourism projects have been announced in Victoria's South West under the Land and Economic Development initiative, including establishment of the Brambuk Cultural Centre as a registered training organisation and basic visitor infrastructure at the Tyrendarra Indigenous Protected Area. <p>Provide support for the Stolen Generations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Stolen Generations Victoria Board has met monthly since June 2005 and appointed a Chief Executive Officer for the new organisation. <p>Promote community renewal at Lake Tyers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Lake Tyers Inter-departmental Committee, made up of community state and local government representatives, is overseeing community renewal. Community priorities have been identified and concrete programs initiated, such as Breakfast and Walking Bus programs aimed at improving school attendance, improved community safety through the Night Patrol and a volunteer caretaker at the training centre. <p>Prevent chronic disease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Aboriginal Health Promotion</i> and <i>Chronic Care Partnerships</i> have been established to operate in the regions of Gippsland, Loddon Mallee, Barwon, Southern, Eastern, North and West and Hume. This initiative builds on the strengths of Aboriginal and mainstream agencies to address issues of chronic disease in the Aboriginal community. <p>Invest in better Aboriginal housing and community facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning is well advanced for the <i>Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria</i> to manage Indigenous social housing. • A review has been completed of Indigenous community facilities to ensure the safety and appropriateness of these assets. <p>Promote reconciliation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A three-year funding agreement has been signed with Reconciliation Victoria to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.
<p>10. Creating new opportunities for people with a disability</p>	<p>Introduce a new Disability Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Government has consulted with people with a disability, their families and the service sector to develop the new <i>Disability Act</i> 2006. <p>Boost support packages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments have started, and are on track to deliver by June 2006, 140 <i>Individual Support</i> packages, 34 <i>Intensive Transition Support</i> packages, 424 <i>Behaviour Intervention Support</i> packages and to assist 1271 individuals with aides and equipment. <p>Provide more respite</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service agreements are being finalised to deliver 565 additional respite episodes to support carers by June 2006. <p>Refurbish and renew residential facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixteen sites for shared supported accommodation have been bought and 10 projects are in the construction phase. Kew Cottages buildings have been decommissioned with residents moved to modern community accommodation. New accommodation includes four innovative facilities which meet the needs of residents who are ageing and wish to retire from full time day programs. <p>Establish a new Disability Housing Trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An independent community based charitable Disability Housing Trust has been established and the Board of Directors are developing strategies to improve housing options, with an initial target of providing housing for 100 extra people.

Strategy	Progress To Date
10. Creating new opportunities for people with a disability	<p>Make Victoria a more accessible place for people with a disability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disability Action Plans have been developed by Victorian Government departments. Departments have committed to various initiatives, including employment of people with a disability within the public sector and consultation with people with a disability on all aspects of service delivery. A whole-of-government working group is working towards ensuring greater accessibility for people with a disability by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing current guidelines and standards to improve government capital works in line with contemporary standards in disability access; Ensuring consideration is given to compliance with contemporary disability access standards when making funding decisions about all major public events; and, Driving innovative building design by ensuring contemporary disability access standards are a competitive criteria in tender documentation for government procurement processes. Investigation is underway to expand current Victorian Government Advertising and Communication guidelines to include a reference to the positive representation of people with a disability in government publications and campaigns. <p>Promote employment opportunities for people with a disability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An agreement was signed between the Victorian Government and <i>Disability WORKS Australia</i> to aid the employment of people with a disability to work in government. <p>Provide additional resources for the Public Advocate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six additional Advocates/Guardians were appointed to the Office of the Public Advocate.
11. Increasing support for mental health services	<p>Adopt a stronger focus on early intervention and prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are developing and expanding mental health services which intervene early across the age groups including expanding community based clinical and the Psychiatric Disability and Rehabilitation Service across the state and implementing responses to at-risk groups such as children and young people in schools and in their communities. <p>Expand community-based services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra resources have been provided to South West Area Mental Health service to expand crisis assessment and treatment support to Western Hospital. Twenty eight adult clinical positions were allocated on the basis of assessed need and projected growth, with priority given to growth corridors, to provide a more intensive treatment response to consumers, particularly those with complex needs and reduce avoidable demand for bed-based services by preventing relapses and crises. Additional Child and Adolescent clinical positions have been funded to meet increased demand and complexity. A clinical aged person's mental health position was funded for the Peter James Centre (Eastern region) and the Latrobe Regional Hospital. Psychiatric Disability and Rehabilitation Services across Victoria also received funding to strengthen capacity to provide outreach support and residential rehabilitation services. <p>Target services to support people with particular needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wodonga Hospital and Royal Children's Hospital have been funded to provide Conduct Disorder programs aimed at primary school children with severe problems. Early psychosis programs have been funded to provide for young people aged 16 to 25 years at Orygen, Outer East Area Mental Health Service and Latrobe Regional Hospital. Services have started supporting mothers experiencing severe mental illness to care for their infants, through Southern Health, the Austin Hospital and Werribee Mercy. The Homelessness Outreach Psychiatric Services program was started at Alfred Hospital/Sacred Heart, St Vincent's Hospital, and Werribee Mercy Hospital, to boost services for people with a "dual diagnosis".

Strategy	Progress To Date
11. Increasing support for mental health services	<p>Provide more resources for hospitals and 'step down' mental health care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new 25 bed mental health unit has opened at Casey Hospital. • Eight sub-acute places have been funded at Arion, in the Inner West Area Mental Health Service. • A Prevention and Recovery Care Service is being developed in Gippsland. • Investment in the mental health workforce. • Funding for a dual diagnosis enhanced statewide training function has been provided to St Vincent's hospital. • Mental health responses have been expanded in the emergency departments of Western, Werribee, Royal Melbourne, Northern, St Vincent's, Monash and Dandenong Hospitals. • Additional graduate positions for mental health workers have been allocated for 2005–06 in Southern region, Bendigo, Latrobe, Bayside, Austin and North Western.
12. Building stronger communities	<p>Expand the neighbourhood renewal program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The highly successful <i>Neighbourhood Renewal</i> program has been expanded to four new sites at Heidelberg West, East Reservoir, Hastings and Delacombe (Ballarat). Evaluation shows it is making a real difference for communities by generating jobs, improving housing, creating safer streets, and enabling residents to play a leading role in the transformation of their communities. <p>Modernise neighbourhood houses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Neighbourhood Houses are being funded in areas of high population growth and high need. Existing Neighbourhood Houses are upgrading or establishing computer facilities and improving public access to the Internet. Others are being redeveloped to rectify occupational health and safety issues or to increase the space available for Neighbourhood House programs. <p>Improve public transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New bus services have been provided in the 13 growth areas – Yarra Ranges, Point Cook, Wyndham, Sydenham, Melton, Sunbury, Craigieburn, Roxburgh Park, Pakenham, Epping, Berwick, Frankston and Mornington. <p>Provide more community buses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight community buses have been provided to communities at Pearcedale, Bendoc, Melton, Yinnar, Sea Lake and Avoca. This brings to 80 the total number of community buses funded across Victoria. • Fifty five HACC client transport vehicles have been replaced to improve the quality of the fleet taking seniors and people with a disability to activities such as shopping and community events. New vehicles were distributed in all regions across the State with 32 being provided to rural and regional areas and 23 going to metropolitan sites. <p>Implement a new Community Building Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nineteen Community Building Initiative projects encompassing 102 towns are energising and strengthening communities through active participation in community events and activities that build community capacity and leadership. They are delivering new and improved community facilities, employing local people and increasing economic activity for small business and tourism. Given recent bush fires, the Kinglake and Latrobe communities in particular have valued the fortuitous timing of the community building initiative. <p>Support Victoria's volunteers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six hundred and thirteen Volunteer Small Grants have been approved so far totalling more than \$1.9 million. • The <i>Volunteer Support Grants</i> program was developed through a successful on-going partnership with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV). Made up of a \$6 million grants pool it encourages and extends volunteer participation through resources and support systems, and includes a statewide investment capacity program of \$1 million to provide support for long-term sustainability of project outcomes through targeted investment, research and innovation and the \$650,000 capacity building program for local partnership development.

Strategy	Progress To Date
12. Building stronger communities	<p>Promote schools as community facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of the use of schools as community facilities has continued and a new policy framework and guidelines was launched and distributed to schools and community organisations, including local councils in November 2005. • Sixty one schools have received <i>Communities Facilities Fund</i> grants, which facilitate the use of schools as community facilities. • Student learning and the health, wellbeing, safety and economic security of all community members are being enhanced by communities having close links with their schools. These partnerships range from communities hiring out school basketball courts on weekends, to schools and communities working together to build and share new facilities. <p>Support new community projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A total of 32 Victorian <i>Community Support Grants</i> projects are in place contributing to infrastructure upgrades, skills development, community participation and the optimal use of community resources. • An example of these grants is assistance provided to St Johns Ambulance Australia (Victoria) in upgrading its communications networks and equipment to support its volunteers' network to deliver community events throughout the state.
13. Changing the way we work with communities	<p>Support local government planning for areas of need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Local Area Planning Support Program Guidelines</i> were released in January 2006, and submissions from municipalities are now being processed to determine the distribution of grants under the program. Projects based on partnerships between councils will address planning issues on a local and regional basis and will result in increased capacity among local governments to respond to community needs. <p>Support business involvement in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty two enterprises established under the <i>Community Enterprise Development Program</i> are strengthening communities by providing employment and training opportunities and building skills, confidence and pride within the participating communities. • The Brotherhood of St Laurence is developing community enterprises in neighbourhood renewal areas and 10 other sites. • Adult Multicultural Education Services is assisting in developing social enterprise within culturally and linguistically diverse communities. <p>Implement innovative projects in partnership with community organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Frankston Partnership</i> of Frankston Council and the Brotherhood of St Laurence is focusing on opportunities for young people, assessing education, employment and social attachment and examining existing services and service gaps. <p>Establish the Agora Think Tank</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Agora Think Tank</i> has been established by providing funding to Melbourne City Mission, in collaboration with the Helen McPherson Smith Trust and Ernst & Young. This brings together business, the community and government sectors. • The Agora is exploring opportunities where government, business, local government and the community sector can join forces to develop solutions to disadvantage in new and different ways. The initial focus of the Agora's work will be to increase economic participation of socially disadvantaged young people and their families through workforce participation. Four working groups with memberships drawn from across all sectors have been established to progress this work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ understanding and promoting preventative projects focusing on crime and substance misuse; ■ understanding and promoting asset based approaches to economic participation; ■ understanding and promoting education and training programs for disadvantaged young people; and, ■ understanding and promoting community facilities. • In addition, the Agora will co-host with The Smith Family and Mission Australia a <i>Social Policy in the City</i> seminar series in Melbourne in which issues of significance to community, business and government will be discussed in a public forum.

Strategy	Progress To Date
13. Changing the way we work with communities	<p>Increase diversity in appointments to boards and committees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Victorian Multicultural Register</i> is operational, making possible targeted searches for candidates for government boards and committees.
14. Developing better ways of working together at a local and regional level	<p>Align departmental regional boundaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental regional boundaries have been aligned into eight regions making it easier for councils and organisations to work together. <p>Implement regional management forums</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Management Forums have been established in all eight regions and, following engagement with regional stakeholders, are developing plans to focus on regional priorities.

Acknowledgements



Azhar Almousawy and her children Ali, Saif, Alaa and Nour from Shepparton.



Members of the Bendoc community – Dorothy, Jim, Elizabeth, Ute, Patsie, Shirley, Claire, Lynette, Patrizia, Ray, Derek, Keith and Ruth.



Matthew Murray from Mulgrave.



Sally Gilder and her son Flynn from Northcote.



Angela Casasanta and her children Alessandra and Luca from Bundoora.



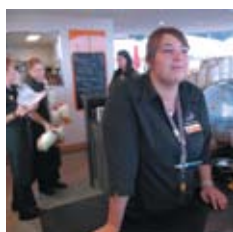
Rahma Ibrahim, Nuria Khalil and Siti Ibrahim from Carlton.



Joyce Castles from Mt Eliza.



Shelley Hermens from Moe and Vanessa Steen from Yarragon South.



Jessica Aiello from Hastings.



Ramon and Rowena Garcia and their children Rheanna, Rizula and Ramon from Cairnlea.



John Tjepkema and his sons Arend and Reggie from Footscray.



Kim Ling Chua from Collingwood.



Walaipan Hatfield and her daughter Vientiane from Seddon.



Shane and Karlie Stanton with their children Hannah, Jorja and Kade from Doreen.



Pam Hood, Tiffany Tregonning, Gina Wilkinson and Mathew Peacock from Lake Tyers Aboriginal community.



Cameron Hoo from Ringwood East with Sam.



Bianca and Ivy-Rose Hood from Lake Tyers Aboriginal community.



Patricia with her daughters Angela and Laura from Cranbourne.



Otha Akoch and Charity Nyinyah with their children Mojwok and Pwoch from Warrnambool.

These photographs were taken by Jerry Galea.



Haileluel Gebro-Selassie and Hamere Alemu with their daughters Loza and Salem from Caroline Springs.



Sofie from Heathcote.

