

# a fairer victoria



## Strong People, Strong Communities

May 2008

# foreword



*A Fairer Victoria* is our Government's landmark action plan to reduce disadvantage and share our State's prosperity with more Victorians by building stronger and more inclusive communities.

Since *A Fairer Victoria* was first launched three years ago, \$3 billion has been committed to reducing barriers to opportunities, creating more jobs and strengthening assistance to groups and communities with complex needs.

We are making progress, forging effective community partnerships and creating a new optimism in places which have been starved of opportunities for decades.

Real gains are emerging from this previous investment, such as the establishment of new early year children's services as well as initiatives to get young people back on track and prevent family violence. The mental health system is being strengthened, disability support services reformed, seniors are being helped to remain independent, and Indigenous communities are being strengthened through new economic opportunities. These positive results provide a solid platform on which to base our future work.

In this fourth year of *A Fairer Victoria*, our focus has intensified on four critical preconditions for economic and social participation: a good start, a high-quality education that leads to a rewarding job, good health and liveable communities.

I am pleased to announce new investments totalling \$1 billion in areas which we know will make a real difference, including:

- More maternal and child health support for parents of young children and an expansion of home learning, playgroups and three-year old kindergarten to help children who may otherwise fall behind;
- Increased individualised support for Victorians with a disability and their families with \$261 million to enable greater independence and participation in Victoria's social and economic life;
- A major expansion of support for schools to boost their performance, which will especially benefit schools with higher numbers of disadvantaged students, and a stronger focus on Indigenous students with learning plans for every student; and
- More emphasis on health prevention to break the link between low income and chronic disease.

There are no shortcuts to addressing disadvantage. Building stronger communities takes time, and the progress of *A Fairer Victoria* will be measured in generations.

But we are confident we are on the right track and making the right investments to tackle disadvantage and improve the lives, wellbeing and opportunities of many Victorians.

With a new Federal Government committed to social inclusion, there are now new opportunities for Victoria to share our experience and work in partnership with the Commonwealth towards not just a fairer Victoria, but a fairer Australia.

I look forward to working with you to meet the challenges of giving our children the best start, to improve education and get more people into work, to improve health outcomes for everyone and to keep building social and economic opportunities for disadvantaged Victorians.

John Brumby  
Premier of Victoria



*A Fairer Victoria: Strong People, Strong Communities* outlines the Brumby Government's vision for a fair and inclusive state with opportunities for all. It builds on the strategic approach set in 2005 with a range of new actions and commitments to progress a fairer Victoria.

The reforms through *A Fairer Victoria* we have undertaken so far – early intervention and place based approaches; giving families and communities a greater say in determining their futures; streamlining the way government departments work together and in partnership with community organisations and businesses – will be enhanced over the next 12 months.

The recent report on *A Fairer Victoria* achievements found that:

- 90% of children up to six years old are now fully immunised, the first time an Australian state has achieved this benchmark
- absences from school have been reduced by about five per cent – or more than 370,000 school days
- the number of Indigenous children going to Maternal and Child Health services has increased by 40% over the last four years
- new Koori Courts have reduced recidivism rates among Indigenous offenders to half of that for the general population, and
- we've helped more than 4600 public housing tenants to get jobs.

These achievements are not simply those of the State Government, but are due to the efforts of a wide range of people and groups in local communities who are striving to make a difference.

We know that real success requires persistence, cooperation, and harnessing the goodwill and resources of government, business and community.

Our commitment is to stay the course and to assist all Victorians to secure healthier and brighter futures for their families and communities, no matter where they live.

This year we are consolidating our efforts to focus intensively on four priorities for social inclusion:

- giving all Victorian children the best start in life
- giving all people a good education to help them into work
- lifting health outcomes and reducing health inequalities, and
- strengthening our social infrastructure to build liveable communities.

Our strategy responds to strong evidence such as the *Strong Communities: Ways Forward (2007)* report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Victorian Communities that found social and economic participation is critical for ensuring social inclusion.

Our goal is for communities in which everybody shares in the benefits of growth. Our new priorities build on past efforts and the best available evidence about the areas where government and community effort is most likely to result in sustainable gains for vulnerable Victorians by addressing the underlying causes and not just the symptoms.

Peter Batchelor  
Minister for Community Development

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# introduction

## **A Fairer Victoria: The Journey Continues**

*A Fairer Victoria* is unique in Australia as a long-term commitment to reducing inequality and disadvantage. First launched in April 2005, *A Fairer Victoria* followed the release of a detailed analysis on the nature and extent of disadvantage in Victoria, and marked a new approach to reducing it.

Since then, over \$3 billion of actions and new partnerships have begun to improve access to vital services, reduce barriers to opportunity, strengthen assistance for disadvantaged groups and places and give people the help they need at critical times in their lives.

This is a social inclusion approach, one that understands that inequality and disadvantage can result not only from inadequate income, but inadequate opportunities to participate in what most Victorians take for granted – kindergarten, school, work, sport, recreation, community events, social networks and a myriad of other activities that make up our daily lives.

In April 2008, the Victorian Government released the report *A Fairer Victoria: achievements so far*. It details significant improvements to universal and targeted service delivery, achievements in places and population groups of high need, and major improvements in areas needing a joint approach by government, such as reducing family violence.

A reduction in public housing waiting lists, the development of 57 new children's centres and a 40% increase in the number of Indigenous children receiving maternal and child health services are just some of the improvements.

The gains are encouraging, but there is much more to do. *A Fairer Victoria: Strong People, Strong Communities* intensifies our efforts on the most critical fronts: building better education, knowledge, and health (human capital); strong communities (social capital); and well-designed and planned neighbourhoods with good facilities (physical capital).

This year we are providing a further \$1 billion for new initiatives, bringing total investment in *A Fairer Victoria* since 2005 to over \$4 billion.

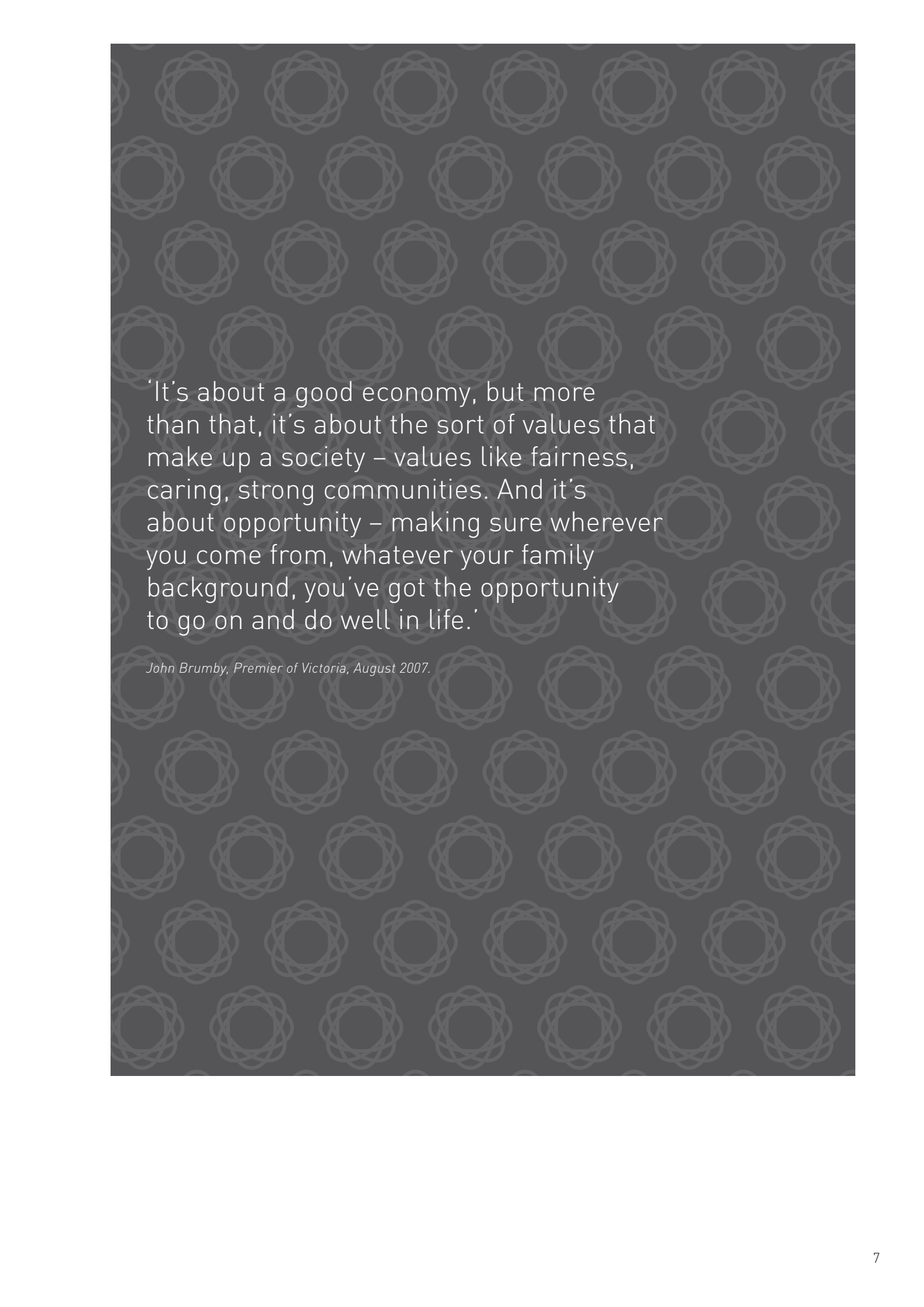
## **Economic and Social Participation**

The evidence is clear – opportunities for social and economic inclusion bring greater levels of wellbeing for both individuals and communities.

The Productivity Commission has estimated that investment in human capital (linked to our priorities to build better skills, knowledge, health and strong communities) can increase net household disposable income and consumption by 7% over 10 years.

Equally importantly, by building opportunities for all Victorians to participate, we can reduce disadvantage and strengthen social inclusion.

Victoria's future prosperity depends on a population that is highly skilled, cohesive and healthier and, as a consequence, better able to contribute economically and socially.

The background of the entire page is a dark grey or black color, covered with a repeating pattern of light grey interlocking circles. These circles are arranged in a grid-like fashion, with each circle overlapping its neighbors, creating a complex, geometric texture.

'It's about a good economy, but more than that, it's about the sort of values that make up a society – values like fairness, caring, strong communities. And it's about opportunity – making sure wherever you come from, whatever your family background, you've got the opportunity to go on and do well in life.'

*John Brumby, Premier of Victoria, August 2007.*

The challenge is to improve the choices and opportunities for people to be included – to have a decent job, to increase education and skill levels over time, to have decent health and housing and to be part of inclusive and liveable communities.



There are still many people who continue to have low levels of participation in education, training, work and community life because they miss out on support at critical times. This includes children and young people from families with low socio-economic backgrounds who experience lower educational achievement. It includes lower-skilled adults and those with a disability or health problem who have difficulty in finding and retaining work. In some instances these factors multiply and compound disadvantage over generations. Adults and children from particularly vulnerable groups and places require more help.

### Focusing on What Matters Most

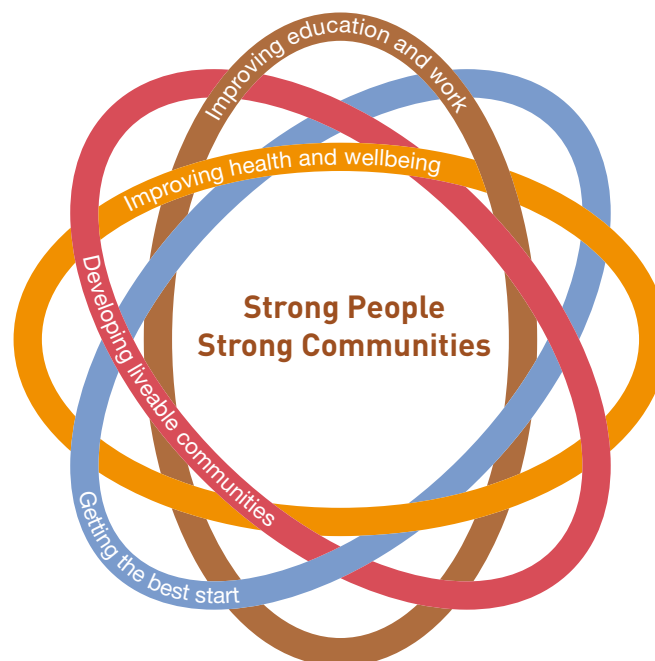
*A Fairer Victoria* achievements so far show that significant improvements are being made in the 14 strategic areas of the framework. Continued improvements across the board are expected as initiatives roll out. In *A Fairer Victoria 2008*, the focus is intensively on the issues and areas where we can have the biggest impact and that matter most to Victorians.

Four critical priorities for economic and social participation are:

- giving all Victorian children the best start in life
- improving education and helping people into work
- improving health and wellbeing, and
- developing liveable communities.

Each priority influences the others, and improvements in one area will flow to another. Reducing health inequalities will improve workforce participation. Family-friendly communities will help children get the best start. Having a job improves the health and wellbeing of individuals and their families.

These priorities form the interlacing threads that will help build strong people and strong communities – people who have the skills and ability to participate in the economy and in social and civic life, and communities that provide the opportunities to participate without discrimination or impediment.



**Getting the best start in life** is critical for successful learning and development in future years. The better a child's start in life, the greater his or her chances of attaining the education and training they need to get the job and lifestyle they want later in life. Developed nations all over the world are making strategic investments in children in the early years to provide the core building blocks for all children to have a successful life. This is important for breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage that can lead to deep divisions within society and result in higher levels of crime, poor health and family breakdown.

**Improving education and helping people into work** are essential to overcoming disadvantage and improving quality of life. A good job depends on a decent education. We are working hard to equip all Victorians with the education and skills to participate in a strong economy. Having a full-time job is the best way to avoid poverty for individuals and their families. The Ministerial Advisory Committee for Victorian Communities' recent report on social inclusion highlighted workforce participation as the critical driver for increasing the social and economic participation of Victorians.

**Improving health and wellbeing** is fundamental to economic and social inclusion. Despite having world class health levels, high life expectancy and one of the best hospital systems in the world, the poorest Victorians continue to experience the highest levels of chronic diseases – most of which are preventable. Health status improves demonstrably with each step up the income ladder. Reducing inequality will improve the health of disadvantaged Victorians. Preventing illness will improve quality of life and stop the compounding impacts of job loss, poor school attendance and social exclusion.

**Liveable communities** are places where Victorians want to live, work and raise families. Social exclusion manifests most starkly in places with poor outcomes in terms of employment, income, housing, crime, health, disability and family conflict. In a small number of Victorian locations there are significant concentrations of people experiencing one or more of these poor outcomes. Often these places lack the key ingredients for strong communities – such as business and industry, housing choice, education, transport, health services, or community networks that support the full participation of their residents. This kind of location-specific disadvantage in Victoria is deep but not widespread. A focus on place is important to reduce inequality in Victoria.

Further investment in these four priorities – a good start, good education and a job, good health and liveable communities – will bring significant benefits to Victoria's social and economic development, particularly if we can develop the assets and capacities of Victorians who have been least likely to share the benefits of a strong economy.

## Improving the Way We Work: A Focus on People and Place

*A Fairer Victoria* is based on new ways of doing things, not just about additional investment. Over the past three years we have forged new partnerships with communities and other levels of government based on the principles of prevention and early intervention and a focus on people and places with high needs.

### The Importance of a Whole of Government Approach

Key whole of government initiatives will continue to help tackle complex problems that cut across the traditional responsibilities of individual Ministers and departments.

We will continue our reforms to improve the life choices and opportunities of people with a disability, people with mental illness, women and children experiencing family violence and to close the gap in the life expectancy, education and health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians.

*A Fairer Victoria* maintains the reform effort in each of these areas, with significant initiatives this year in:

**Disability** to provide more individualised support for people with a disability and their families – especially with the transition from school to work – among other initiatives to lift participation in employment and community life and provide more respite for carers. We will also support more children with a disability or developmental delay. Collectively, the initiatives represent a major new investment by the Government.

**Family violence** to continue building on the new culture of collaboration between police, health and support services to reduce the impact and repetition of violence. A new package of initiatives will significantly strengthen prevention capacity and increase services.

**Indigenous** partnerships to address disadvantage through our sustained, long-term plan – the *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework*. This aims to achieve measurable improvements against 21 key outcomes for Indigenous people over the next generation, including closing the 17-year gap in life expectancy. The strategic areas for action have a strong focus on young children and their education and are driven by a Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs chaired by the Deputy Premier.

**Mental health** with a greater emphasis on early intervention, recovery and ongoing social support. We will further enhance the links between high quality mental health services to areas such as housing, alcohol and drugs, and child protection. We will redevelop specialist mental health services for children and young people and establish a 24/7 referral and advice service for the community.

*A Fairer Victoria* 2008 continues to take a strong 'life cycle' approach to building capability and breaking cycles of disadvantage, especially in the transition from early years of life to school; the transition from school to work; the movement from joblessness to employment; and recovery from ill health to tackle inequality and disadvantage at its roots by building confidence, capacity and potential, particularly of younger Victorians.

### The Importance of Place

Place-based initiatives bring community, government and business together to identify and address issues in particular local areas. Such initiatives have been a feature of *A Fairer Victoria*, understanding that place can influence people's health, wellbeing and opportunities. Actions at the level of place, through local area partnerships, also involve the community in identifying issues and developing appropriate solutions. By giving attention to particular places we can improve social inclusion and reduce inequality in Victoria.

With Victoria's population growing at a rate not seen since the post-War boom, we are improving the way we plan for growth to ensure that new communities have the transport, education, health services, libraries, social facilities and public space they need, and the economic opportunities for quality jobs that are sustainable.

In other areas we are seeing long-standing patterns of disadvantage. Some parts of Victoria have large numbers of people who have been unable to access important services and opportunities. These areas often have poorer infrastructure as well as more people experiencing multiple and compounding problems.

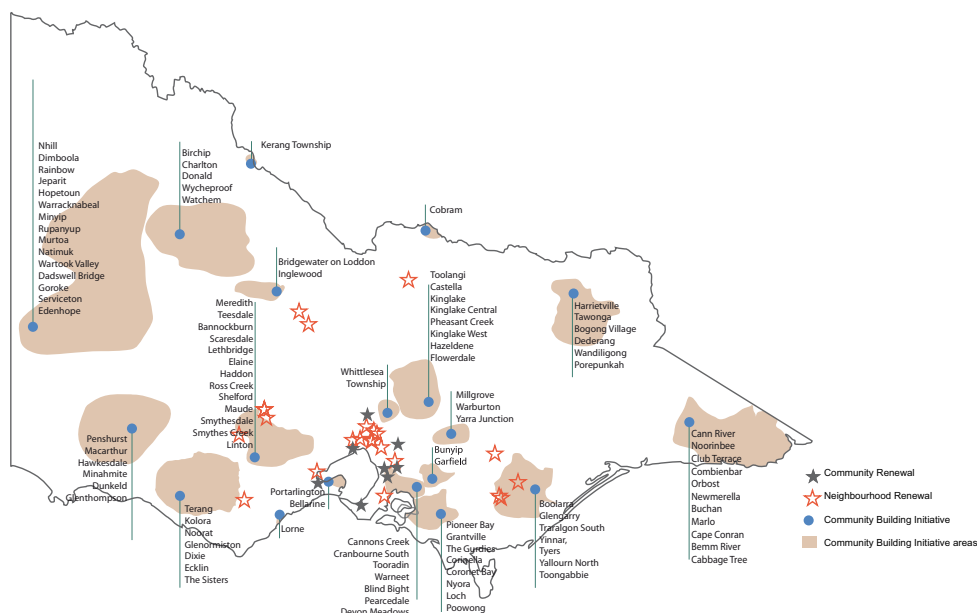
The engagement of local community members in planning, policy development and priority setting is vital. Three important programs through *A Fairer Victoria* have brought community members together with local businesses, government and community organisations to revitalise local communities and improve wellbeing. The locations of these programs – *Neighbourhood Renewal*, *Community Renewal*, and the *Community Building Initiative* – are shown on the map below.

These initiatives equip local communities to make real change by setting up effective partnerships, developing skills and knowledge, building on local strengths, and coordinating the responses of governments. This is leading to real improvements in:

- housing
- local facilities
- jobs and services
- safety, and
- the built environment, with better design and improved outdoor spaces.

We need to maintain our place-based focus. Responding to long-standing disadvantage requires a long-term commitment. There will be a continued focus on socio-economic disadvantage as well as on areas experiencing rapid growth and population decline.

Locations of *Neighbourhood Renewal*, *Community Renewal* and *Community Building Initiative*



## Co-operative Federalism for A Fairer Australia

*A Fairer Victoria* is unique in Australia for its size and scope, and there is the potential for this model of social inclusion to be adopted at the national level.

Victoria has placed human capital – health, education and training – on the national agenda through the Council of Australian Governments, and the Federal Government has indicated a renewed interest in social inclusion as a key goal.

There are now new opportunities for partnerships between the State and Federal Governments to address the early years, educational disadvantage, health and social inclusion more broadly. These partnerships need to be locally focussed on new ways of working together across levels of government, with other sectors and with local communities to ensure people are able to shape their own directions and set their own priorities in their neighbourhoods. The partnerships should build on what is already in place and delivering results.

With policy expertise in building social capital through *A Fairer Victoria*, the Brumby Government will maximise opportunities for co-operative federalism to achieve a more inclusive Australian society and to improve the life chances of all Victorians.

## Maintaining Our Effort

### A Fairer Victoria - The Continuing Commitment

In the last three years we have invested heavily in building the universal service platform and at the same time targeting services to those most in need. Work is continuing through these earlier investments and is having a real impact. Many investments are being incorporated into ongoing programs. They have been directed towards meeting the following objectives:

- **Ensuring that universal services provide real opportunities for all Victorians** by providing support at the most critical transition points in people's lives especially for vulnerable groups and communities. This will continue with a focus on ensuring that such services meet the needs of those most at risk, including children who may start school behind others and young people less likely to complete Year 12.
- **Reducing barriers to opportunity** with a sustained focus on identifying and redressing those factors that prevent people gaining access to opportunities for a better life. The effort this year is to assist more Victorians to overcome barriers to economic and social participation.
- **Strengthening assistance to disadvantaged groups** including additional support to Indigenous Victorians, new options for people with a disability and help for senior Victorians to remain independent. We will continue to focus efforts on at risk groups including Indigenous Victorians, children, young people, and people at risk of homelessness or experiencing mental illness.
- **Providing targeted support to the highest risk areas** with significant effort and resources directed towards addressing place-based disadvantage. These efforts will continue and will extend work with new and emerging communities to plan and build support to prevent community disadvantage before it takes hold.
- **Making it easier to work with Government** by working differently - in collaboration with other organisations and sectors and giving citizens a greater say in determining their futures. Providing responsive services and streamlining how governments and communities can work together are core features of building strong, liveable communities and can also inform a new co-operative federalism.

These five objectives - access, opportunity, support for disadvantaged groups, support for disadvantaged places and enabling approaches - continue to provide a sound basis on which to build capacity in those Victorians at risk of missing out.





## Intensifying the Focus

### A Fairer Victoria 2005-2007

#### Access to universal services

1. Giving children the best start in life
2. Keeping young people on track
3. Responding to family violence more effectively
4. Helping older Victorians stay independent

#### Reducing barriers to opportunity

5. Providing fairer access to services
6. Making services more affordable
7. Boosting access to affordable housing
8. Improving access to justice

#### Support for disadvantaged groups

9. Building a new partnership with Indigenous Victorians
10. Creating new opportunities for people with a disability
11. Increasing support for mental health services

#### Support for disadvantaged places

12. Building stronger communities

#### Making it easier to work with Government

13. Changing the way we work with communities
14. Developing better ways of working together at a regional and local level

Intensifying  
the focus



### A Fairer Victoria 2008

#### Getting the best start

Early years support for children and families most at risk

#### Improving education and helping people into work

Reducing educational inequality, supporting young people at risk and reducing barriers to workforce participation

#### Improving health and wellbeing

Reducing health inequalities and promoting wellbeing

#### Developing liveable communities

Strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities



# putting our priorities into action



## priority area one

Getting the Best Start

# priority area one

## Getting the Best Start

### Early years support for children and families most at risk

#### Why Early Years Support?

**The Government will invest an additional \$163 million over the next four years through *A Fairer Victoria 2008* to help all Victorian children get the best start.**

Intensive early years support for children and families most at risk can make a profound difference. A child's cognitive development and emotional resilience provides a foundation for many of the health-related behaviours they take into adulthood as illustrated in the studies depicted on page 19. Cognitive functioning and emotional wellbeing are developed most strongly in the foetal and early childhood periods and, without proper support, these can lay the basis for inequalities in adult health.

Missing out in the early years also reduces the chances of success at school and the opportunities that brings for employment and quality of life in adulthood. Impacts are largest when family disruption and poverty are experienced before the age of 5. Without early childhood enrichment programs, children with low socio-economic status but high cognitive development scores at age two are, on average, overtaken by their wealthier peers by the age of 10. The results at age 10 are highly predictive of educational attainment by age 26. The key window for stopping this trajectory of disadvantage is early childhood.

Quality maternal and child health programs provide a boost to long-term health and development prospects of children. Quality kindergarten programs have been shown to improve the long-term probability of attaining a quality education and making a successful transition to employment. Together, they can reduce exposure to high risk behaviours in adolescence and contribute significantly to achieving long-term gains in health, wellbeing, education and income into adulthood.

#### What We Have Already Done

Investments of more than \$500 million to date to support maternal and child health and early childhood development have already been made through *A Fairer Victoria*. This provides a solid platform of universal early years services, with four-year-old kindergarten now effectively free for most children from low income families.

The Government has released discussion papers on a *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform* which outlines the new stages of our ongoing reform of early childhood programs. Other achievements include:

- developing 57 new children's centres, with 39 already offering a combination of childcare, kindergarten, maternal and child health and early intervention services from the one building
- 99.3% of newborns now checked by a maternal and child health nurse and 90% of children are fully immunised by age six, and
- almost 6,000 children with disabilities and additional needs have been helped to take part in kindergarten.

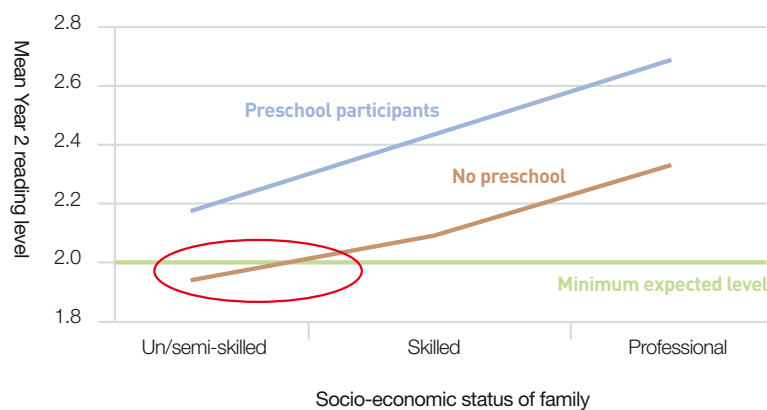
#### Next Steps

While we have achieved high levels of participation in early childhood services across the state generally, children in some geographic areas continue to have lower participation rates. Meeting the remaining gaps in addressing maternal and child health needs, extending early education and supporting the most vulnerable three-year-olds and children with disabilities are priorities. Extending home learning and the network of supported playgroups specifically for children from disadvantaged areas, and boosting maternal and child health services to meet the growing number of births, are among further steps to support the development of all Victorian children.

## Our Goal

Improve maternal and childhood health, safety and development

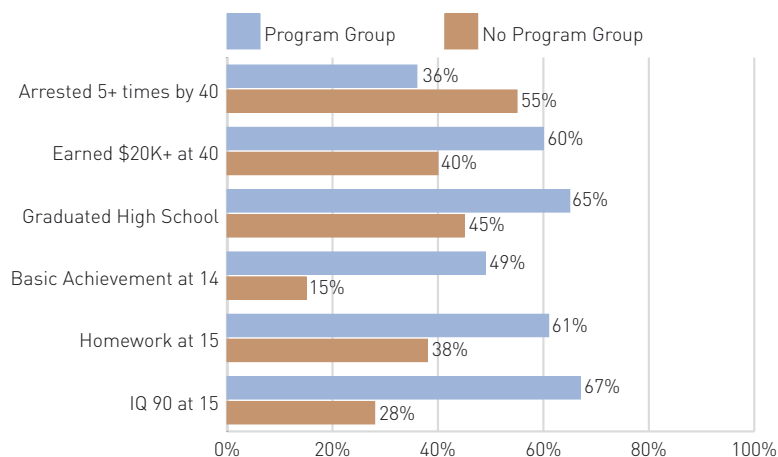
### Effective Education Project



The UK Effective Education Project found that preschool participation is linked to higher Year 2 reading levels. For children from lower socio-economic families, preschool participation can lift their reading level above the minimum expected standard.

Data from the UK Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 Project, July 2007.

### High/Scope Perry Preschool Study



The US High/Scope Perry Preschool study demonstrates that youth and adults born into poverty who participate in high-quality preschool programs commit fewer crimes, have higher earnings, are more likely to hold a job, and are more likely to graduate from secondary school.

Source: High/Scope Perry Preschool Longitudinal Evaluation Study







### **Healthier Mothers and Babies**

To give every child the best start in life, we will ensure that every newborn baby and their family continues to receive access to a quality Maternal and Child Health Service. Additional funding is provided to help services meet the projected growth in births. The Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service will assist an additional 1,132 families to support vulnerable babies.

A key focus will be to get the first steps in chronic disease prevention right by implementing a pilot support program for pregnant women in the outer suburbs. New efforts will be aimed at modifying risk behaviours during pregnancy such as smoking or alcohol use and encouraging positive behaviours such as good nutrition. A series of education and support sessions for women will be made available throughout their pregnancy with links to a range of health professionals and other important services.

### **Extending Access to Kindergarten Programs and Playgroups**

We will make kindergarten and playgroups more accessible with additional support for up to 2,000 children known to child protection to attend three-year-old kindergarten so they can be school-ready.

Greater investment in playgroups will support a further 1,700 children in their socialisation and development. An additional 13 local areas will receive funding for playgroups to prepare children for kindergarten and provide vital support networks for parents.

Home learning programs will also be developed to support parents to provide a positive learning environment for their children to complement formal early education and care services.

We will continue to refurbish and rebuild early childhood services in priority areas, co-locating where possible with schools to ease the pressure on parents and carers for child drop-offs and pick-ups, and assist with a child's transition from kindergarten to school.

### **More Support for Children with a Disability**

Early intervention strategies help build resilience in families to support children with a disability or developmental delay, through a range of coordinated services including therapy, respite and support. An additional 1,000 Early Childhood Intervention Service places will help children and their families achieve their personal goals with extra support, and a further 150 support packages will help children with a disability attend kindergarten in their community.

### **Ensuring Quality in Family Day Care and Outside School Hours Care**

Ensuring the quality of care for children who attend after-school care and family day care is behind important new regulations that will apply to outside school hours care providers and family day care services across Victoria. Minor capital grants will be provided where needed to help services comply with the regulations. A children's services database will be redeveloped to incorporate new services and new regional and central office staff will be employed and trained to administer the *Children's Services Act 1996*.



*Cindy Gong plays with her daughter Annie at the playgroup in Bundoora*

### **Playgroups Preparing Children for Kindergarten**

Every week, Yan Ni Zhang and Gloria Wang like to organise time to play. At playgroup that is. Both from Chinese backgrounds, they help coordinate playgroups for newly-arrived Chinese families.

Yan runs a junior playgroup for children aged two months to four years, which gives the children a chance to have fun in a secure environment and the parents a chance to meet other people, learn about the community and exchange information.

Gloria's group for two-year-olds to early school years help prepare children for kindergarten and school. There is also a strong focus on learning about and taking pride in Chinese culture.

*"I like playgroup as it was where I met my first close friend in Australia and I like the activities. It is good that my mum can be there too."*

*Kang Kang (Gloria's son)*

*"Playgroup is the first step into childcare – preparing children for the routine and structure they will experience when they get to school."*

*(Christy Guo, Victorian Cooperative of Children's Services for Ethnic Groups, in Coburg)*



### **A Whole of Government Approach: Tackling Family Violence**

Family violence costs the Victorian economy around \$2 billion a year and, more importantly, is a major threat to child development and women's health. It is a factor in around half of all child abuse substantiations in Victoria and up to half of all incidents of homelessness. It is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 45 years and presents a bigger health risk than blood pressure, smoking and obesity.

Building investment in preventing violence is central to the ultimate goal of eliminating family violence. Much has been done in earlier reforms to change the culture around how we address family violence. Now we will have a stronger focus on primary prevention with new evidence to inform a State Prevention Plan.

We will increase intensive case management, improve crisis responses, and increase access to men's behaviour change programs.

More specialised support will be provided to those communities and people at greatest risk. Evidence indicates that women at a social and economic disadvantage are particularly vulnerable to the wider impacts of violence. The reform package will deliver appropriate cultural responses to improve the safety of women and their children.

Women from Indigenous backgrounds face significantly higher risk of exposure to violence and suffer more severe forms of abuse. The package will also support a 10-year plan addressing Indigenous family violence, developed by the Indigenous community in partnership with the Government.

Significant law reform underpins the new approach in Victoria, and the Government will introduce a new Family Violence Bill in 2008 to better protect victims of family violence. Proposed reforms in the Bill include making it easier for victims of family violence to remain in the family home with their children while the perpetrator of violence may be required to leave, and ensuring that self-represented respondents cannot cross-examine their alleged victims in court, unless they consent.

A state-wide campaign will underpin the release of the new legislation and will increase community awareness of family violence, its unacceptability and the increased protections and responses available to victims.

These family violence reforms will be complemented by a range of other initiatives in *A Fairer Victoria* 2008 that also impact on family violence, including initially targeting mental health and substance abuse.

<b>Priority One:</b> <b>Getting the Best Start:</b> Early years support for children and families most at risk.	<b>Total \$ Million</b> <b>Investment Over 4 Years</b>
Healthier Mothers and Babies	\$69.9
Early Childhood Education and Care for 3 year olds Known to Child Protection	\$5.2
Engaging Vulnerable Families Through the Promotion of Home Learning and Supported Playgroups	\$15.1
Refurbishing and Rebuilding Early Childhood Services †	\$2.6
Early Childhood Assistance for Children with a Disability or Developmental Delay*	\$29.0
A New Focus on Quality in Family Day Care and Outside School Hours Care	\$16.5
Victorian Family Violence Reform	\$24.7
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$163.0</b>

† One year only.

\* When added to the Enhancing Disability Services and Outcomes initiative in Priority Area 3 the total investment in disability is \$262m over 5 years to 2011-12.

## Protecting Families from Violence

Sophia has been in Australia for less than three years.

With English as her second language and with two small children, she has limited social support.

Sophia's partner has a history of violence towards her, including sexual assault, verbal abuse and making threats to kill her.

A recent incident of violence resulted in police using their new holding powers and removing Sophia's partner from the home, at the same time issuing a complaint and warrant for an Intervention Order against him.

Police directly referred Sophia to Women's Health West, the family violence service in her local area, which ensured that support was available to Sophia at court.

The Court Support Worker worked with Sophia to undertake an immediate risk assessment and safety plan which also included a referral to ongoing case management support from Women's Health West.

An Intervention Order was made by the Magistrates Court 48 hours after the initial police action, with the Order including conditions that excluded Sophia's partner from the home.

Women's Health West provided continued support to Sophia, which included connection with Centrelink, ongoing counselling and access to Private Rental Brokerage, as well as help with changing the locks on the house, so that Sophia and her children could stay safely in their family home.

*This is an actual case. Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.*



## priority area two

Improving Education and Helping People into Work



Reducing educational inequality, supporting  
young people at risk and reducing barriers  
to workforce participation

# priority area two

## Improving Education and Helping People into Work

Reducing educational inequality, supporting young people at risk and reducing barriers to workforce participation

### Why Education, Skills and Work?

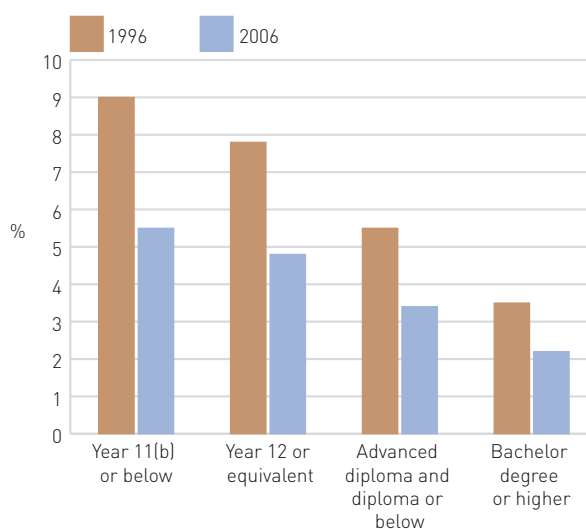
**The Government will invest an additional \$218 million over the five years to 2011-2012 through *A Fairer Victoria 2008* to reduce educational inequality and helping Victorians into work.**

In a knowledge economy good education and skills are fundamental to obtaining quality employment. Achieving Year 12 or its equivalent opens up a lifetime of learning and exciting career prospects. Student destination data from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development found that in 2005, students completing Year 12 were over three times more likely to undertake higher level vocational education and training two years after leaving school and four times less likely to be unemployed than those who didn't. (OnTrack data from DEECD, 2007.)

The following graph shows the ongoing importance of education attainment for employment prospects. It shows the higher a person's educational attainment, the less likely they were to be unemployed.

Research completed for the Business Council of Australia and Dusseldorp Skills Forum estimates that, across Australia, \$8.2 billion (in net present value terms) could be gained for the economy by halving the numbers of early school leavers between 2004 and 2012.

National unemployment rate by highest level of education (a)



(a) People aged 25-64 years.

(b) Includes people who are still at school.

Source: ABS 1996 and 2006 Survey of Education and Work, Cat. No. 4102.0

## What We Have Already Done

The proportion of young Victorians completing Year 12 or its equivalent has improved from 81.8% in 2000 to 86.1% in 2007, the highest of the Australian states. A raft of new initiatives has helped achieve this, including the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) which is reaching students who may otherwise have dropped out of traditional learning.

More students are also enrolling in training courses to help them transition from school to work. Enrolments in Vocational Education and Training (VET) increased from 28,000 in 2002 to 51,000 in 2006. Local Learning and Employment Networks and youth transition workers are also engaging with young people, and finding them new avenues to learn and work. Of the young people participating in the *Early School Leavers* (ESL) program, 91% have returned to education or training or moved into the workforce.

The TAFE guarantee, introduced in 2007 through the *Education and Training Reform Act*, guarantees all young people under 20 a training place to help them complete Year 12 or equivalent through TAFE or Adult Community Education. This is bringing significant benefits, along with programs in government schools that are giving all students plans for their future careers.

In December 2007, the unemployment rate in Victoria was 4.7% and workforce participation reached 65.4%. Regional Victoria has recorded employment growth of more than 134,000 jobs since October 1999 and reached a near record workforce participation rate of 63.7% in 2007.

Our *Workforce Participation Partnership* initiatives with some 146 employers and other partners have made a real difference, with more than 3,200 people who faced significant barriers to finding work now in ongoing employment.

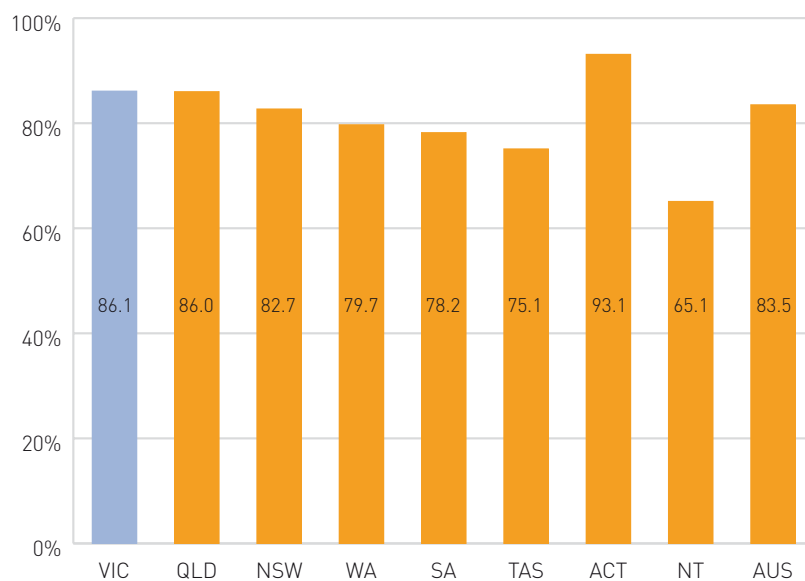
The Government has an ambitious reform agenda to address disadvantage in education and training and has released discussion papers on a *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform*. The aim is to improve education and early childhood outcomes so that all children learn and develop, with stronger attention on the needs of Indigenous children and young people with a disability, and increased support for vulnerable families. More accountability for educational outcomes and greater community and business involvement in schools are proposed to give young people more experience and avenues to work.

The discussion papers are currently the subject of public consultation, which will shape the content of the final *Blueprint* to be released later this year.

Other achievements that are improving education and helping people into work include:

- increasing the Educational Maintenance Allowance by more than 60% to help low income families with education costs
- assistance for more than 2,000 students into further education, training or work as part of the *OnTrack* program, and
- help for almost 30,000 young people a year through Local Learning and Employment Networks.

Persons aged 20-24 years with Year 12 or equivalent



Source: ABS Survey of Education and Work (Attainment Rate 2007)

## Next Steps

The aim of new initiatives this year is to provide increased support for young people to maximise outcomes in education and work. Greater support will be given to early school leavers in particular parts of the state where there are risks of non-completion and unemployment, and to Indigenous young people and children being cared for out of the family home. There will also be a revitalised effort to improve workforce participation among adult jobseekers with low skills and other disadvantages. Victorians who have most difficulty getting and staying in paid work will be assisted by linking community support services with new employment and training opportunities.

## Stronger Support for Students with High Needs

Consistent with the objectives of the *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform*, new incentives and more support will be provided for schools to boost their performance. We will provide well-targeted, systemic interventions to lift performance, focusing on strengthening school governance, developing the teaching workforce and greater resourcing of schools and their students. Schools with larger numbers of high-need students are expected to benefit significantly as we improve the opportunities and outcomes for all students, including young people at risk of dropping out.

Schools will also be assisted by new regionally based support systems, with the establishment of 67 school improvement leader positions (one for each school network). They will provide more support for teachers to keep abreast of new developments in teaching practice and assist schools to develop improvement strategies.

## Our Goal

Increase the proportion of young people who complete Year 12 or its equivalent and reduce barriers to employment

The student support program - which provides psychologists, guidance officers, speech pathologists and visiting teachers to step in when a student needs extra assistance - will also be expanded. By providing early, targeted intervention and specialised support, this program helps to improve educational outcomes for students who require assistance for learning, disability or behaviour-related needs. This program will also be better linked to early childhood intervention services, other student wellbeing programs and school improvement initiatives.

Building on the lessons of *A Fairer Victoria 2007*, literacy programs will be significantly boosted as the building block for successful learning. More than 55% of the 6,000 students who were assisted by Literacy Improvement Teams have progressed beyond expectations, with almost 15% of students progressing nearly two years ahead of where they were six months earlier.

We will extend the Literacy Improvement Teams of 45 experts for a further three years and appoint an additional 15 literacy experts for schools with high enrolments of Indigenous children. These teams build the capacity of classroom teachers and school leaders to achieve sustained improvement in literacy outcomes for all students.

Children in State care face more hurdles in staying in school and training and need greater support to increase their opportunities for education and employment in later life. A new, stronger, therapeutic model of residential care will be piloted for these children and young people, along with greater support and training for staff and carers and improved support for kinship care placements.

Access to the *VET in Schools* program will also be strengthened by giving schools additional funding to provide these programs, so that students are less likely to be excluded from taking the course of their choice.

Mentoring has proven highly successful in engaging young people at risk of dropping out of learning, employment and social life. We will continue this vital work.



*Paul Kelly points out a koala to eco-tourists in the Tower Hill Nature Reserve.*

### **Indigenous Victorians Setting and Achieving Economic Goals**

Through the Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Co-operative, Tower Hill Nature Reserve provides an economic boost to the local Indigenous community. Worn Gundidj provides training and work for Indigenous people in community managed activities and enterprises and operates the Tower Hill Visitor Centre.

Under the careful guidance of CEO John Collyer, Worn Gundidj has drawn on the *Aboriginal Land and Economic Development Program* to help fund the employment of a business manager, marketing, staff training, improvement of interpretive materials and signage, and installation of a hospitality service in the Visitor Centre.

As John noted recently, while the funding they've received through *A Fairer Victoria* has helped the Worn Gundidji Co-operative maximise its business potential, the greatest benefit to local people has been the freedom they've had to set – and achieve – their own goals.

### **A Whole of Government Approach: Closing the Gap in Indigenous Outcomes**

Since 1999, the Government has made the biggest investment in programs to address Indigenous disadvantage in Victoria's history. This is framed by a sustained, long-term plan - the *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework* - aimed at achieving measurable improvements against 21 key outcomes over the next generation.

*A Fairer Victoria 2008* builds on these investments and reinforces new priorities to improve education and employment opportunities for Aboriginal children through a significant schools' reform package.

As detailed in *Wannik: Learning Together - Journey to Our Future (February 2008)* which outlines the education strategy for Koorie students, each Indigenous student will have their own educational plan to lift their educational achievements and job prospects. The Koorie Education Support Workforce will better support students and forge better links between schools, families and their communities.

The key focus is on improving literacy and numeracy, with specialist support staff to run accelerated literacy and numeracy programs for under-performing students. Fifteen specialists will be targeted to schools with high numbers of Indigenous students.

We will also increase economic opportunities with a tailored *Learning and Working* program to reduce the number of young Indigenous people in Victoria who become long-term unemployed. This practical program will help Indigenous young people gain the skills and find the jobs, and work with families and communities to get over the local barriers to jobs and training.

These education and work reforms support other important initiatives that will build on the strength of Victoria's Aboriginal communities.

The welfare and safety of Aboriginal children with complex needs and who are unable to live at home will be improved by expanding the level of support for their kinship carers. This will improve the sustainability of care placements and increase the child's life chances.

More resources will also be provided to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop the skills and management of their workforce, and improve in-house systems to meet requirements under Victoria's child protection legislation, thereby improving the delivery of services to vulnerable children and families.

Following on from the success of Koorie courts at a Magistrate's level, the Koorie County Court will be established to provide access to a higher court that is more culturally accessible, acceptable and comprehensible to the Koorie community. This will increase community confidence in the criminal justice system and reinforce the status of Elders and Respected Persons.

Together these initiatives will contribute to the Government's overarching goal through the *Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework* to close the gap in life expectancy and improve quality of life for Indigenous Victorians. Breaking the cycle of disadvantage for children, reducing education inequalities and getting more people into jobs are important objectives in the partnership between the Brumby Government and Victoria's Indigenous leaders.

### **Integrating Education and Community Facilities for Lifelong Learning**

Beyond places for learning, schools are important social hubs for children and families to connect. We will continue to support new partnerships that bridge schools to the wider community, developing facilities for increased use by all the community.

Major school redevelopments across the State will provide opportunities to regenerate entire neighbourhoods such as in Geelong, where a community hub and global learning centre is being created as part of the redevelopment of Western Heights College. Similarly in Colac, a state of the art facility that will house a school and community library, TAFE shop front, technology hub, meeting and seminar space will form part of the redevelopment of Colac High School and Colac College.



The Government is creating a new lifelong learning precinct in Wendouree West as part of the Neighbourhood Renewal program. Community wellbeing will be significantly boosted. This will co-locate occasional care, a kindergarten, a Prep to Year 8 school, information technology centre, adult education services and a Neighbourhood House.

### Helping People into Jobs

Skills are a critical driver of economic growth and are associated with higher productivity and higher participation. A more skilled workforce is also fundamental to social inclusion, providing more rewarding employment opportunities and reducing poverty.

The Government is considering a range of initiatives to overcome skill shortages and ensure we have the right number and mix of skilled workers to keep our economy and communities strong. On 30 April we released a discussion paper on skills reform entitled *Securing our future economic prosperity*.

The principles informing consideration of these reforms include:

- boosting numbers of individuals and businesses accessing training, which will increase the skills of Victoria's workforce
- developing a Vocational Education and Training system that is easier to navigate
- ensuring the system is more responsive and flexible to the changing skills needs of individuals and businesses, and
- creating a stronger culture of lifelong learning.

The aim of these reforms is to enable more Victorians to fully participate in the workforce and in their communities, by making it easier to access the foundation skills in literacy and numeracy that are required to be job ready.

Not only does the Government want to encourage and support thousands of Victorians to take up training for the first time, we also want to attract thousands more people to upgrade their qualifications.

A consultation with key stakeholders is now being undertaken to inform the nature and extent of the reform required in the training system to tackle our skills challenges.

The major investments we are making in lifting school completion and skills training will be complemented by efforts to assist disadvantaged job seekers into sustainable jobs. The focus will be on new workforce partnerships for migrants, Indigenous Victorians, *Neighbourhood Renewal* residents, people with alcohol and drug problems, mental health issues or in transition from care or the justice system. This initiative is about treating disadvantaged job seekers as people with complex needs rather than clients of single services and helping them get a foothold in the job market.

A new 26 week fixed rent policy will reduce the current disincentives for people living in public housing to return to work. Until now, rent for public housing tenants was reviewed and backdated to whenever household income changed. Now, residents will have an increased incentive to start work and earn extra income because they will no longer face an immediate increase in rent. This has the potential to encourage up to 60,000 public housing residents to get into work or extend existing part-time jobs. There will be no backdating of rent, reducing pressure on tenancies. This initiative meets multiple priorities of *A Fairer Victoria* and mainstreams a reform approach piloted successfully through the *Neighbourhood Renewal* initiative.



Steve Bruhn applies his machinist skills at Jenkin Bros Engineers in Bayswater.

### **New Partnerships to Get People into Work**

Despite having experience in electronics and engineering, 59 year old Stephen Bruhn was unemployed for six years.

With the assistance of the Skill-Up and Placement Project, Stephen completed a 12-week full time Computerised Numerical Control (CNC) operation and programming course and is now working for Jenkin Bros Engineer's (Australia) Pty Ltd, in Melbourne's eastern suburbs.

The Skill-Up and Placement Project is run by the Australian Manufacturing Technology Institute Limited (AMTIL), a national body that represents the interests of companies in the machine tool and ancillary equipment sector. With the sector facing severe skill shortages, AMTIL has been working with Federal and State Governments to promote training and employment.

The Victorian Government's *Workforce Participation Partnerships* (WPP) program has been important in helping AMTIL address workforce issues.

The WPP project is also supporting long-term unemployed people build their confidence, as well as their skills, and return to work.

Stephen Bruhn now sees each day as a learning experience. He also sees a brighter future for himself. "I want to learn more about CNC manufacturing, become a CNC specialist and contribute to improved designs for CNC work cells."

*Together, this package will assist more young people complete their education and help the most vulnerable jobseekers find work.*

<b>Priority Two:</b> <b>Improving Education and Helping People Into Work:</b> Reducing educational inequality, supporting young people at risk and reducing barriers to workforce participation.		<b>Total \$ Million Investment Over 4 Years</b>
School Reform Resourcing to Support the Blueprint		\$71.4
Expanded Student Support Funding to meet the Learning and Development needs of at risk Students		\$33.2
Literacy Improvement Teams		\$22.1
Improving Outcomes for Children in Out of Home Care Services		\$39.4
Improving Year 12 or Equivalent Completion by Young People in Victoria - VET ‡		\$7.3
Youth Mentoring		\$3.8
Improving the Lives of Indigenous Victorians ‡‡		\$36.2
New Workforce New Workplace ‡		\$5.0
<b>Sub Total</b>		<b>\$218.4</b>
Summary of Initiatives Funded Through Other Sources:		
Vines Road Community Precinct at Geelong		
Colac Shared School and Community Library		
Lifelong Learning Precinct in Wendouree West		
26-week Fixed Rent Policy		

‡ One year only.

‡‡ Over five years.



## priority area three

Improving Health and Wellbeing

# priority area three

## Improving Health and Wellbeing

### Reducing health inequalities and promoting wellbeing

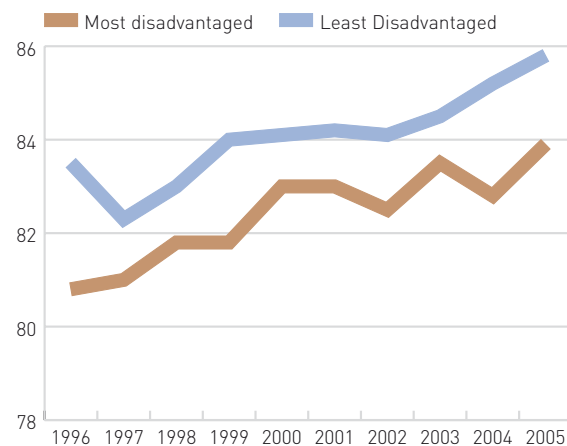
#### Why Health and Wellbeing?

**The Government will invest an additional \$410 million over the five years to 2011-2012 through *A Fairer Victoria 2008* to reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of more Victorians, through a stronger focus on health prevention and reducing chronic disease.**

Everyone needs good health to fully participate in employment and community life.

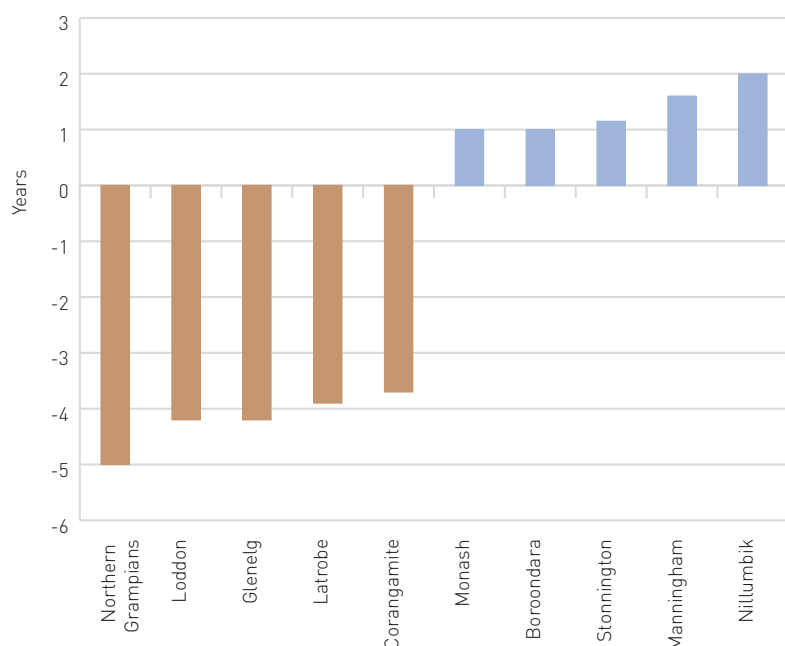
The link between poor health and poverty is startling, with the highest burden of chronic disease experienced by the poorest Victorians. Those with the least resources suffer the most illness, pain, chronic disease and reduced life expectancy. Inequality is particularly evident for Indigenous Victorians, people from low socio-economic backgrounds, refugees and those who live in rural areas.

Female life expectancy in Victoria 1996-2005



Source: Life expectancy at birth: Victoria 2001-2005, Department of Human Services.

Life expectancy at birth: Difference in years from total male life expectancy by bottom and top five LGAs



Source: Life expectancy at birth: Victoria, 2001-2005, Department of Human Services.

Inequalities in health can spiral into lower education and employment outcomes, deepening social exclusion. Health economists estimate that raising the health status of all Australians to the levels of the wealthiest 20% would reduce government health costs paid by all Australians by \$3 billion each year<sup>1</sup>. Addressing health inequalities is complex as there is no single cause but it represents a critical front in reducing inequality and disadvantage, especially as many chronic diseases are avoidable.

## What We Have Already Done

As well as building the best acute health system in Australia, Victoria is recognised as a world leader in the prevention of disease, particularly chronic illnesses and preventable diseases. Victoria has some of the most progressive laws to reduce smoking levels and this year set the global standard for tackling chronic illness in the workplace through the establishment of WorkHealth.

The mental health system is being rebuilt in Victoria, and *A Fairer Victoria* over the past 3 years has contributed towards this with a \$386 million investment in reducing the impact of early onset psychosis and strengthening child and adolescent services.

Overall life expectancy of Victorians has continued to grow over the past decade although significant differences in outcomes remain as outlined on the chart on the previous page.

Other achievements through *A Fairer Victoria* that are improving the health and wellbeing of Victorians include:

- specialist Refugee Health Nurses who have helped more than 3,300 new Victorians access primary health care
- greatly expanded mental health services and facilities including 40 more prevention and recovery care places and 28 more child and adolescent mental health positions
- tailored services to support 8,200 people with a disability, and
- a 40% increase in the number of Indigenous children receiving maternal and child health care.

## Next Steps

Much more can be achieved through targeted investments to reduce the unfair burden of disease on disadvantaged Victorians. Tackling the causes of preventable disease by encouraging physical activity, better nutrition and oral health, continually improving mental health services and the wellbeing and life options of people with a disability are among the important challenges. Strategies addressed in other sections such as preventing family violence (the single most important contributor to ill health for women aged 15-45 in Victoria) and improving outcomes for Indigenous Victorians are also critical elements in our plan to reduce health inequalities.

The Victorian Government is also preventing ill-health through vigorous health promotion, and continuing to provide quality and accessible health services. We are also making a significant additional investment in innovative services for people with a disability to improve their wellbeing and ensure they have the opportunity to get involved in the day to day activities other Victorians take for granted.

<sup>1</sup> Walker, A. Economic and Health Impacts of Narrower Health Inequalities, Australia (2003) National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra. Paper No CP38. [www.natsem.canberra.edu.au](http://www.natsem.canberra.edu.au)



## Our Goal

Reduce health inequalities by minimising and ameliorating the prevalence of key risk factors that contribute to chronic conditions

### Reducing the Burden of Chronic Disease

Well-targeted prevention and intervention programs will be expanded to reach people and places that carry a disproportionate burden of disease.

Water fluoridation will continue to be extended to major rural and regional centres across Victoria to close a critical gap in the dental health of children living in regional and rural Victoria. Avoidable dental decay is the second most costly diet-related disease in Australia, with an economic impact comparable with that of heart disease and diabetes.

Social marketing campaigns will strengthen the prevention effort for HIV and other sexually transmissible diseases for the most vulnerable groups: young people, Indigenous people, gay men, the prison population, and culturally and linguistically diverse populations and those living in rural Victoria. A rural centre of excellence in sexually transmissible infection (STI) prevention will be established at Shepparton in partnership with the rural clinical school of the University of Melbourne. An initiative to provide testing, treatment and prevention programs to prisoners in relation to HIV, hepatitis B and C and Chlamydia, will be funded on an ongoing basis.

*Go for your life!* is the Government's overarching healthy and active living campaign, and this will be built upon with well-targeted programs in communities with a low health status. Indigenous communities will be a major focus to help close the 17-year gap in life expectancy. The successful Aboriginal Health Promotion and Chronic Care Partnerships, funded through *A Fairer Victoria* 2005, will be expanded to improve access to adult and child health checks, allied and oral health services, among other health prevention strategies. More work will be done to bridge mainstream and Aboriginal health services to better meet the needs of Indigenous Victorians. In addition, under *Go for your life!*, more support will be provided through physical activity grants to reduce ill-health linked to lifestyle.

To promote healthier eating and good social networks, 19 Community Kitchens will open in all public housing *Neighbourhood Renewal* areas. Developed by Peninsula Health, Community Kitchens involve a group of people with similar backgrounds or interests coming together to cook and socialise. They are a great way of promoting nutrition on a budget, improving social connection and teaching life skills.

### A Whole of Government Approach: Innovation in Disability Service Support

Providing better support to improve the wellbeing and life choices of people with a disability has been a focus of *A Fairer Victoria* since its inception in May 2005. Since then, \$388 million has been invested through *A Fairer Victoria* to assist people with a disability and their families to make real choices and participate in the same way as other Victorians.

*A Fairer Victoria* 2008 continues the approach from a whole of government perspective to ensure that the vision of the State Disability Plan 2002-2012 can become a reality for people with disabilities and their families. It includes a significant funding boost of \$262 million over the next five years to 2011-2012 for the planning and delivery of more individualised supports for people with a disability, further easing the pressures on families and carers. Access will also be expanded to early childhood services for children with a disability or developmental delay. The capacity of the non-government sector will be strengthened to deliver essential supports for people to participate in all facets of community life.





*Nurse Kofi Ofei from Ghana checks the respiration of Achok Deng, a refugee from the Sudan.*

### **Rebuilding the Health of Victorian Refugees**

When Wadi and Loloa arrived in Australia in July 2006, five of their seven children had spent their entire lives in an Ethiopian refugee camp.

Luckily for the family, one of the first people they met in Australia was Sue Willey – a refugee health nurse whose passion for her job underpins her warm, trusting relationships with refugees across south-eastern Melbourne.

When they met Sue, Loloa was in desperate need of urgent medical help. All of the children had vitamin D deficiencies, and most needed paediatric care to help them bridge the gaps in their physical and medical development.

Sue quickly became an invaluable resource for the family. Her ease in navigating the Victorian health system and willingness to act as a link to other health-care providers meant that every member of the family quickly got access to the services they needed.

This new investment will also expand individual packages to support people to live in their own homes or in community-based accommodation. More individualised planning will be made available at key transition points across the life-cycle, particularly the transition from school to employment when building individual capabilities and skills is so important. Access to respite services and aids and equipment will be expanded to enable community-based living and more help for carers. More sustainable funding will be provided for attendant care-related services provided by the non-government sector and for the development of more individualised funding approaches for people using day programs.

Disability Action Plans will be extended to more public and community organisations to address physical, technological and attitudinal barriers and to promote employment opportunities for people with a disability.

A community awareness strategy will also tackle discriminatory attitudes and practices that prevent people with disability from full participation in the social, economic and cultural life of the community.

### Removing Barriers to Quality Health

Interpreting and translating services reduce the barriers which some people face in accessing health and other critical public services. We will investigate the use of technology such as video conferencing and the internet in the provision of language services to open up more services. Funding is also provided to develop a targeted Workforce Strategy and to purchase more language services pending the development of the Strategy.

Some people who grew up in State care in Victoria between 1920 and the introduction of the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989* experienced harm and abuse by the people entrusted with their care. These experiences have been captured in a Commonwealth Senate report known as *Forgotten Australians*. In response to a recommendation from that report, a new service will be established to address some of the special needs of these people and their families. This is an important step towards acknowledging past failures and assisting those affected to deal with the legacy of their childhood experiences and improve their wellbeing.



### **A Whole of Government Approach: Building Better Mental Health**

Strengthening the mental health system has been a major focus of *A Fairer Victoria* with investments in forensic, emergency and intensive care, outreach and prevention, and recovery services right across the state. We have opened around 100 new beds to ease pressures on the acute system and made important reforms to early psychosis prevention and intervention to assist people get the help they need earlier.

The investment in *A Fairer Victoria* 2008 starts a broad program of service reform that reinforces our focus on early intervention and gives emphasis to recovery and ongoing social support, linking high quality mental health services to areas such as housing. We will provide:

- new support for children, young people and families including help for the children of parents with a mental illness
- early work on redevelopment of specialist mental health services for children and young people
- a 24/7 information, referral and advice service for the community, supported by improved specialist mental health triage
- a significant increase in Prevention and Recovery Care residential services (PARC), and
- improvements to services for people with multiple needs including innovative housing and support options for people at risk of homelessness.

Improvements to Victoria's mental health facilities will continue, with improved access and client amenity at Ballarat Hospital and refurbishments to accommodate Community Mental Health facilities. Detailed planning of the proposed redevelopment and expansion of mental health facilities at the Dandenong Hospital will be progressed. A new Centre for Trauma Related Mental Health Services at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital will be redeveloped as a free-standing, purpose built facility for highly specialised trauma related mental health services. Completing the 2006 Government commitment to the development of 70 new PARC services, we will now deliver 30 new beds in three new community-based facilities in Ringwood, Clayton and Frankston.

These measures will collectively begin to tackle health inequalities and raise the health status and quality of life of many Victorians.

*These measures will collectively begin to tackle health inequalities and raise the health status and quality of life of many Victorians.*

<b>Priority Three: Improving Health and Wellbeing:</b> Reducing health inequalities and promoting wellbeing.	<b>Total \$ Million Investment Over 4 Years</b>
Reducing the Burden of Chronic Disease	\$20.1
Oral Health Promotion in Rural Victoria †	\$11.4
HIV and Chronic Communicable Disease Prevention	\$16.6
<i>Go for your life!</i> - building a healthier Victoria	\$8.1
Enhancing Disability Services and Outcomes * ††	\$233.4
Industry Reform of Interpreting and Translating in Victoria †	\$2.0
Forgotten Australians	\$7.1
Improving Mental Health Services **	\$76.6
Ballarat Hospital - Mental Health Redevelopment	\$5.5 TEI
Dandenong Hospital Mental Health Redevelopment and Expansion - Planning	\$3.0 TEI
Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital Mental Health Redevelopment	\$15.5 TEI
Prevention and Recovery Care Services (PARC) Stage 2	\$10.4 TEI
<b>Sub Total ^</b>	<b>\$409.6</b>
<b>Summary of Initiatives Funded Through Other Sources:</b>	

Community Kitchens

† Over two years.

TEI = Total Estimated Investment.

†† Over five years.

^ Table does not add due to rounding.

\* Including the Early Childhood component of this initiative (See Priority Area 1) brings total investment in disability to \$262m over 5 years.

\*\* Includes New Integrated Supportive Housing (Model described in Priority Area 4).





## priority area four

Developing Liveable Communities

# priority area four

## Developing Liveable Communities

### Strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities

**The Government will invest an additional \$225 million over the five years to 2011-2012 through A Fairer Victoria 2008 in developing liveable communities.**

Liveable communities are where people feel safe, there is a sense of belonging and community pride, and where there are job opportunities, affordable housing, good local services and facilities, and enjoyable environments.

Building up communities' assets make them better places to live and work, helping attract skilled labour and capital investment. These assets may be physical, such as transport, public spaces, and housing, but they also include 'social capital' or the stock of skills, creative capacity and entrepreneurialism of the population and the strength of its local leadership and community networks.

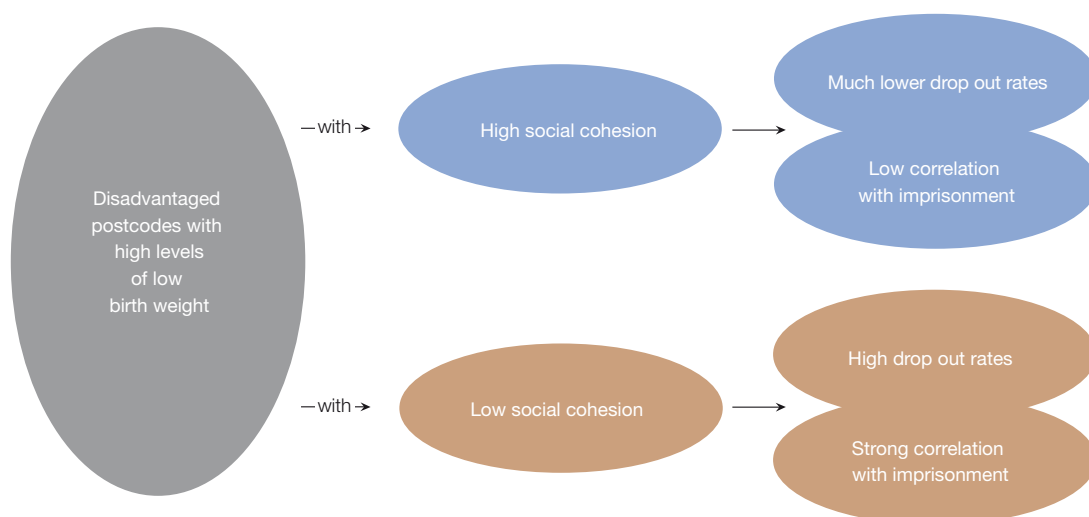
Research shows that investment in community strengthening can help stop a cycle of disadvantage experienced in low socio-economic communities. Building local strength can be particularly important in places where there are low levels of economic and social participation, rapid growth,

and economic or social change. Integrating investment in community assets with smart planning is critical to these communities. We need to ensure that people are not disadvantaged because of where they live.

Given that homelessness remains one of the most severe manifestations of disadvantage in Victoria, we must tackle it in a concerted way. Housing costs have risen nationally over the last decade, adding stress and insecurity for some households, particularly low-income renters.

Homelessness brings major disruption to people's lives from which they may take years to recover. Being without a home exacerbates personal difficulties such as social isolation, poverty, ill health and substance abuse. The impact for each individual or family can be devastating. Family violence is a major driver of family breakdown and homelessness and the Government's family violence strategy is one important element in our efforts to reduce homelessness.

#### Community Strengthening Intervention Can Drive a Wedge in Cycles of Disadvantage



Source: Vinson, *Dropping off the Edge* (2007)



## What We Have Already Done

Two important programs – *Neighbourhood Renewal* and *Community Renewal* – have achieved significant successes in strengthening specific communities. More than 5,000 jobs and training opportunities have been created in *Neighbourhood Renewal* areas and property crimes and crimes against persons are down 70% and 50% respectively. Many other place-based initiatives such as *Transit Cities* and the *Community Building Initiative* have made important contributions to reducing social isolation by linking Victorians to networks, employment, social supports, and revitalised facilities and public spaces.

Since 1999 the Victorian Government has delivered more than 11,500 new social housing properties including 1,400 homes delivered through not-for-profit housing associations, private developers, local government, VicUrban and other organisations. The Government has already made a \$646 million investment in making housing more affordable through *A Fairer Victoria* alone, including \$510 million in 2007.

We are already allocating around \$140 million for homelessness assistance each year. Innovative ways to help people who are homeless are being introduced, including better accommodation and support services for young people and tailored approaches to assist people with specific needs, including people leaving prison, people with a mental illness and/or people with drug and alcohol problems.

Other achievements that have improved local communities include:

- 80 infrastructure projects as part of *Neighbourhood Renewal* including improvements to 6,000 homes
- funding for 76 community enterprises that have created 286 jobs and skills training for more than 400 people
- small grants to more than 880 community organisations that have helped attract 13,000 more Victorians to volunteering, and
- 12 new neighbourhood houses and funding for a further 51 redevelopments.

## Next Steps

Problems entrenched over decades will not be turned around in a few short years, even though for some individuals and some communities the improvements have been dramatic. We will continue to support projects in specific Victorian communities which improve employment and build stronger partnerships between community groups, local businesses and government. We will help communities by funding, planning and coordinating new initiatives, particularly where these link infrastructure with positive social outcomes. Low income Victorians will be encouraged to participate in work and in their communities through the *Neighbourhood and Community Renewal* programs. Social housing tenants will continue to be supported to solve problems that may otherwise lead to property abandonment and eviction.

There is more that we can do to prevent homelessness, improve housing affordability and reduce the duration and impact of episodes of homelessness when they occur. The Government will build on its work to increase the overall supply of social housing in partnership with registered housing associations and by continuing to work with the Commonwealth and other State and Territory Governments to negotiate a broader National Affordable Housing Agreement and develop a national homelessness strategy.

More support will also be given to low income families to reduce pressure on budgets, through concessions and incentives to reduce energy bills.



*An SES volunteer cuts up a tree felled by a recent storm in Melbourne.*

### **Matching Volunteers to Community Organisations**

*'We used our \$4785 Victorian Volunteer Small Grant from the State Government to put together two brochures, which were delivered to every house in Benalla. The first explained what the SES does – and invited people to come down and take part in our weekly training.'*

*'A week later, our second brochure reminded Benalla people that we would love to have them visit us.'*

*'And the response was great. In the first three weeks, 12 people came to training and went on to join the unit.'*

*'Funding like this is a great way to improve the support we can give our local community – and get a little bit back from the community in response.'*

## Our Goal

Strengthen neighbourhoods, particularly in areas of high need and high growth and reduce the risk of homelessness

### Strengthening Community Support and Community Organisations

Community organisations are an essential part of Victorian life and play an important role in places with high levels of disadvantage. They enable us to participate in our communities, share our passions and interests, develop skills, make connections, offer and receive mutual support and access important services.

As part of our recently launched *Action Plan: Strengthening Community Organisations*, a Community Enterprise Catalyst will provide business and financial advice to community enterprises. The Government will provide establishment and matched funding for Community Foundations in 12 disadvantaged communities to bring together philanthropic organisations and businesses to support community activities and establish sustainable investment streams. We will also establish an Office for the Community Sector to provide much stronger assistance to community organisations and the not-for-profit sector. The Office will also address important workforce challenges, including helping to establish a portable long service leave fund.

Some of these reforms, such as Community Foundations, will be linked to the work of urban renewal programs which have successfully promoted social inclusion in locations across Victoria.

We will maintain the *Public Tenant Employment Program* which provides training and employment opportunities for public housing tenants, and support community enterprises in *Neighbourhood Renewal* sites, pending the establishment of the Community Enterprise Catalyst.

### Providing Additional Support for Communities with Special Needs

Each year several thousand people from a refugee background settle in Victoria. Refugees have faced significant personal hardship, such as experience of war and civil unrest, torture and trauma, loss of family members, grief and displacement. During settlement, refugees may face limited access to resources, family and community support and language barriers.

The Government is supporting refugees to re-establish their lives in Victoria, and will expand our successful refugee health nurse program by appointing an additional six nurses. We will help refugee children adapt to our school system, by funding the *Refugee School Support Program* and after-school homework support. The Government will also fund three regionally based multicultural liaison officers and six multi-lingual community education officers to work initially with East African communities to provide information on the justice system and improve access to relevant services.

### Opening Up Libraries and Other Community Services To All

Victoria's libraries contain a rich warehouse of treasures to entertain, educate and inform. We will improve access to these materials by investigating how to establish borderless libraries through single library membership. We will also provide wireless internet access at all libraries in addition to existing desktop access, and improved computer safety as part of a comprehensive package to close the digital divide in Victoria.

## Creating Connections Through Youth Transitions Hubs

At the age of 23, Di was not only grappling the emotional affects of her experience of family violence – she was also homeless and feeling powerless in the face of ever increasing debts.

Despite her best efforts, her age and her personal situation made it difficult for Di to settle in mainstream housing. She was greatly relieved when she got a referral into *Youth Transitions* accommodation, and then moved into a unit through the program.

Two years after she was first referred to *Youth Transitions*, Di's life is transformed. After finishing her course, Di found a full time job as a concierge. A year later, she still has – and loves – the job. With the support of *Youth Transitions*, she's made good progress on her debt and is sharing a private rental unit with friends.

As part of *Neighbourhood Renewal*, a major redevelopment of the Parkside public housing estate in Shepparton will include the creation of a new \$3 million community hub to deliver vital services and provide a place for the community to come together and socialise. Currently in the design stage, the facility will include a neighbourhood house and deliver educational programs, drug, alcohol and counselling services, aged and disability services, clinical services, child and maternal health services, tenancy services, local government and aged care services. The project involves all three levels of government.

### **Reducing Financial Pressure on Victorians**

Rising petrol and housing costs are putting pressure on many low income families.

Low income Victorians will be assisted to maintain access to essential services through increases to the water and sewerage concession cap, extension of the medical cooling concession, improvement in household appliance and infrastructure grants for customers in hardship, and free water audits and retrofits for people experiencing hardship.

The Government will also increase the pensioner and concession cardholders' duty concession thresholds, the fourth increase since 1999.

The threshold for the full concession for stamp duty on land transfers increases from \$300,000 to \$330,000 and the threshold for a partial concession increases from \$400,000 to \$440,000. Concession cardholders also benefit from the Principal Place of Residence stamp duty on land transfers concession. As a result, these reforms deliver real stamp duty savings to more than 1,600 concession cardholders, including 400 people who would not be eligible if the thresholds were not increased. This is in addition to the 6,000 concession cardholders who have benefited from the concession scheme in the last year.

A land transfer duty exemption for homes transferred into special disability trusts will also be introduced in recognition of the particular nature of the arrangements for persons with a severe disability. The current land tax exemption for aged care facilities, supported residential care services and rooming houses will be extended to facilities that cater for groups including young people with a disability.

The Water and Sewerage Concession provides a 50% discount on water consumption, sewerage disposal and service charges. The maximum cap on this concession has been increased by 14.8% to \$182 from 1 July 2008, and by Consumer Price Index (CPI) thereafter.

The Medical Cooling Concession of 17.5% has been extended to more people and from three to six months. This was formerly known as the Summer Multiple Sclerosis Concession.

The *Home Wise* program (formerly known as the Capital Grant Scheme) will be extended to include ceiling insulation for eligible large households in hardship. This will reduce energy consumption costs and allow customers to make two applications within a 10 year period (presently grants are once in a lifetime).

Victorians living in rural areas will also be given much stronger incentives to switch to solar water heating, to save on energy prices and reduce the impacts on climate change.

A rebate for switching old hot water systems to solar will be expanded in rural areas. From 1 July 2008, up to \$2,500 will be available to reduce the cost of installing an electric/solar system (where reticulated gas is not available) or a gas/solar system (where gas is available). The value of the rebate will be determined in each case by the size and performance of the new system, and whether the applicant qualifies for the Australian Government rebate of \$1,000.

Under the new scheme people living in rural Victoria will be able to switch to environmentally friendly solar hot water at a one-off cost between \$500 and \$800, with ongoing savings of about \$245 on their power bills each year. Funding is also provided for 2,600 retrofits for low income households for energy efficiency measures such as insulation and weather seals. This builds on the 4,700 retrofits undertaken since 2003.

Funding will be provided to provide free water audits and retrofits to low income households.

The Government will also continue to assist people facing financial hardship through financial counselling and advisory services.

### Opening Doors to Homeless People

Providing homeless people with the support they need when they need it, is essential to getting people back on their feet. The *Opening Doors* initiative will streamline access to social housing and homelessness services, reduce duplication and time wasted on unnecessary assessments and referrals, improve access to critical medical, mental health and drug and alcohol services and help reduce the need for people to revisit homelessness services.

Knowing where to go for help is central to achieving this. Local Area Service Networks will be the new access points for people, providing initial assessment and planning teams at every access point into the homelessness system.

A state-wide number will divert calls to appropriate access points, and a resource register will give real time information to the assessment teams about the availability of local accommodation options.

### A Boost to Social Housing and Affordable Housing

Major investment is underway to boost social housing in Victoria, with funding for 80 public housing properties in 2008-09 for low income people and families. These properties will be predominantly delivered close to public transport in safe, vibrant, communities where there is easy access to jobs, training, shops and services.

Land will be purchased in Dandenong, Frankston, Footscray, Werribee, Ringwood, Ballarat and Bendigo *Transit Cities* as well as in the regional centre of Horsham, and be developed by not-for-profit housing associations to deliver a further 50 new affordable homes. We will be strengthening housing associations further, by converting a portfolio of their leased properties to ownership.

Aboriginal housing will also be strengthened through the *Aboriginal Rental Housing Program* (ARHP) with the acquisition of 30 homes in areas of highest need, doubling the number of properties purchased. The ARHP is currently managed by the Victorian Office of Housing, in partnership with Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV), a non-profit, non-government housing organisation. These 30 additional homes will ultimately be owned and managed by the Victorian Aboriginal community.

An important element of the housing affordability challenge is to increase housing choice so that access to quality housing is available at an affordable price. We will work with metropolitan councils to improve planning for population and housing growth and reduce planning impediments to housing supply. We will also strengthen policy and research capacity to develop strategies to improve efficiency in the housing market.





The Urban Renewal Employment Enterprise Program (UREEP) is one of 11 Community Works Enterprises operating across Victoria under the *Neighbourhood Renewal* program. These were created to undertake minor capital works on public housing properties and many now take on additional work in their local area, generating 60 jobs each year for disadvantaged jobseekers. In 2008, UREEP, and the other Community Works Enterprises will deliver around \$3.2 million of public housing improvement works, including energy retrofits to make housing more sustainable.

### **Support for Vulnerable People to Reduce the Risk of Homelessness**

A pilot program that has been supporting social housing tenants with complex needs will now be funded on a permanent basis. This is supporting people with mental illness, drug and alcohol, health and behavioural problems, who require intensive support from a range of different services and who are at high risk of homelessness.

This joined-up approach will assist approximately 300 people each year by employing regional staff across Victoria to improve coordination of support services in their local area. This will help vulnerable tenants get the assistance they need, so they can avoid a spiral into homelessness. Brokerage funding will also be available to provide individuals with any additional specialist services they require to help them get their lives back on track. This will assist some of the most vulnerable people in the community to stabilise their housing.

This initiative is complemented by *New Integrated Supportive Housing* (included as part of the Improving Mental Health Services investment under Priority Area 3) that assists long-term homeless people experiencing mental illness to achieve stability in accommodation and other aspects of their lives. It recognises that people need a home first, followed by time to address the issues that have led to their homelessness.

This new approach builds on supportive housing models pioneered in North America and will be adapted to meet the local needs of homeless Victorians located in the inner city area of Melbourne. Up to 50 clients with a mental illness will be supported in affordable housing through this initiative. A range of other supports will be provided, including significant mental health support services, which will play a vital role in stabilising the lives of this highly vulnerable group.

Like people with a mental illness, ex-prisoners are also vulnerable to homelessness. Post-release housing and support for former prisoners has been shown to facilitate reintegration into the community and longer term diversion and rehabilitation. It can reduce re-offending by as much as 50% for people at risk of homelessness. By piloting housing support to ex-offenders the Government has significantly reduced recidivism in Victoria. This initiative will provide housing options for ex-prisoners to assist in supervision, reintegration and a further reduction in Victoria's re-offending rate which has fallen from 41% in 2002 to 36% in 2006.

### **Extending Reforms on Sexual Assault to Rural and Regional Areas**

A wide range of reforms was introduced during 2007 to improve the way the criminal justice system responds to sexual crimes, including a specialist approach to the prosecution of sexual assault offences to minimise the trauma experienced by victims. Additional resources will improve the prosecution of sexual assault cases in rural and regional Victoria. The extended services, which will include a regional office in Geelong, will be supported with improved audio-visual technology so that victims can give their evidence from various remote facilities across the state rather than having to attend court in person.

*Together, these measures will strengthen neighbourhoods and communities across Victoria and improve the lives of the people who live in them.*

Priority Four: Developing Liveable Communities: Strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities	Total \$ Million Investment Over 4 Years
Strengthening Community Organisations	\$13.9
Creating Liveable Neighbourhoods and Communities	\$3.4
Refugee Support Strategy	\$17.7
Connected Libraries	\$3.0
<b>Concessions :</b>	
Stamp Duty on Land Transfer Concession	\$25.8
Water and Sewerage Concession cap increase	\$41.3
Medical Cooling Concession	\$2.5
Water Wise Homes	\$0.7
Home Wise ++	\$9.2
Solar Hot Water Rebates	\$33.0
Low Income Home Retrofits †	\$4.1
Helping Victorians Recover From Financial Hardship	\$9.4
Improving Access and Pathways to Homelessness and Housing Services - Opening Doors	\$29.1
Improving Housing Affordability	\$15.0
Support for Vulnerable Tenants in Social Housing	\$4.2
New Integrated Supportive Housing Model *	-
Building Confidence in Corrections - post release housing and support	\$4.7
Sexual Assault Reform (Rural and Regional and Geelong)	\$6.7 \$1.3 TEI
<b>Sub Total ^</b>	<b>\$224.8</b>

#### Summary of Initiatives Funded Through Other Sources:

Shepparton Parkside Estate Community Hub

More Affordable Homes in Transit Cities

Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP)

Community Works Enterprises - Urban Renewal  
Employment Enterprise Program (UREEP)

<sup>‡</sup> Over two years.

<sup>‡‡</sup> For consistency the 2011-2013 allocation of \$2.4m has not been included in this table. Total funding for this initiative is \$11.6m over 5 years to 2012-2013.

\* Funding for this initiative is included in Improving Mental Health Services

<sup>^</sup> Table does not add due to rounding.



# summary of investment

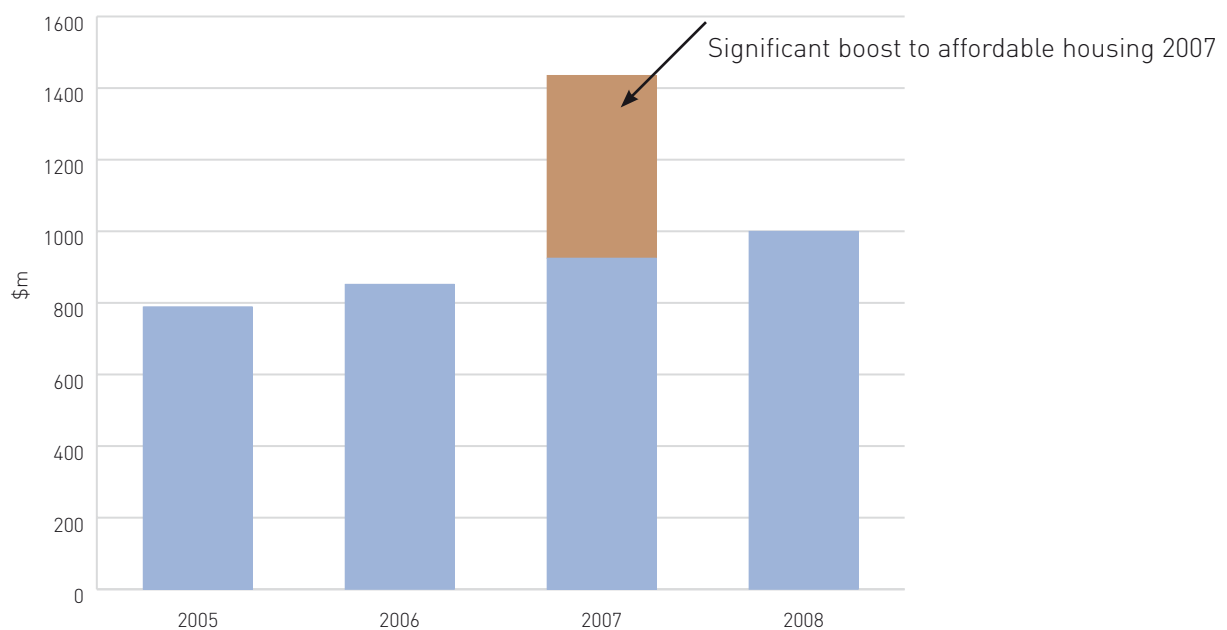
# summary of investment

## A Fairer Victoria 2008

A Fairer Victoria Budget Overview	\$ million over 4 years*
Priority Area 1 - Getting the Best Start	\$163.0
Priority Area 2 - Educational Inequality and Helping People into Work	\$218.4
Priority Area 3 - Improving Health and Wellbeing	\$409.6
Priority Area 4 - Developing Liveable Communities	\$224.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,015.8</b>

\* Period is 2008-09 to 2011-12. Includes some individual initiatives with funding in 2007-08.

## A Fairer Victoria Investment 2005-2008





**Cover photo** - John Haig and Tin Yan Tsang from Sprout Community Enterprises in Thornbury with neighbours, Margaret Arabatzis and grandson, Alexander, and Sharon Bamblett from Gurwidj Neighbourhood House.

*Sprout Community Enterprises is a leading recovery service for people with mental health issues, involving them in range of horticulture and enterprise activities.*



**P.17: Priority 1** – Zhu Jie Tang nurses her one month old son, Xing Wang Huang at the Chinese Playgroup run by Gloria Wang at Bundoora.



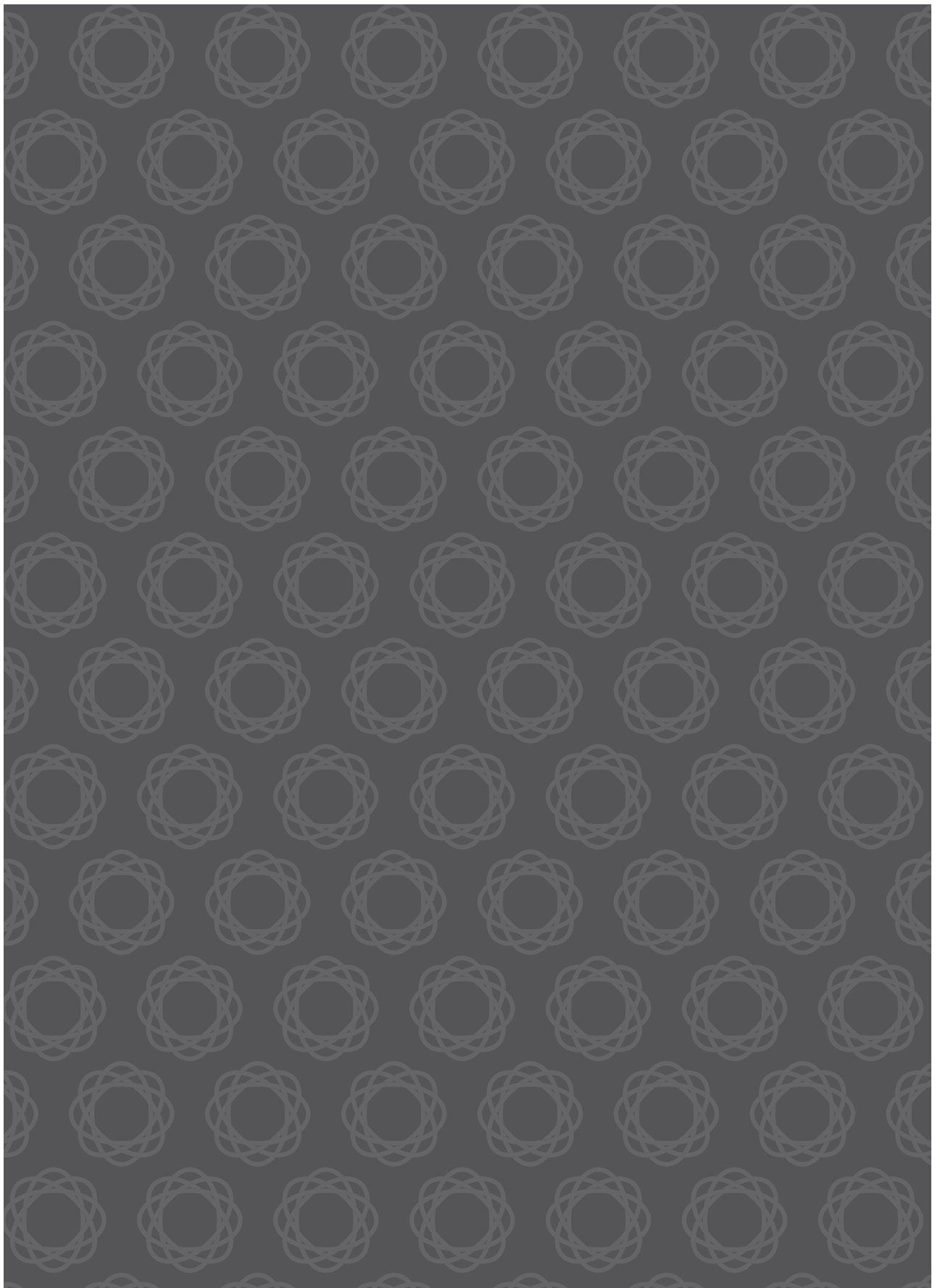
**P.26: Priority 2** – Isabel Tickle, a Year 10 student at Irymple Secondary College, near Mildura.



**P.37: Priority 3** – Dr George Taleporos, Coordinator Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS), Youth Affairs Council of Victoria



**P.45: Priority 4** – Australia's most environmentally sustainable public housing, the award winning K2 Apartments in Windsor.





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