

# Victorian State Budget 2021-22

## ECCV Summary & Analysis

4 JUNE 2021



### OVERVIEW

This 2021-22 State Budget was delivered 6 months from the previous State Budget<sup>1</sup>, which was handed down in late November 2020. Like the previous Budget, the 2021-22 Budget makes several commitments to social spending.

The signature measure in this year's Budget is the Victorian Government's mental health reform package, which commits a total \$3.8 billion over four years for a range of measures. The Victorian Government has committed to implement all the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which will result in significant reforms over several years.

As part of the mental health reform process the Government has committed to a new diverse communities' mental health and wellbeing framework and blueprint for action.<sup>2</sup> While this commitment is necessary and welcome, it is insufficient to have inclusion and equity policy frameworks by portfolio or service sector. We need a commitment from the whole Victorian Government to ensuring that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have equitable access and outcomes from services and systems.

In our [2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission](#), ECCV called for the development of a new Multicultural Strategy for Victoria. We need government agencies to be held to strong requirements, as well as clear reporting on how they are reaching the whole community. The failures we saw over 2020, with inaccessible information, and stigma directed at migrant and refugee communities, show that there is a need for change with much stronger commitments at the highest level.

This Budget outlines the development of an **Early Intervention Investment Framework** that will guide and track initiatives that aim to stop people from needing intensive and acute services. The Framework will initially track ten programs across health, social and community services to determine how successful these are with preventing more severe circumstances such as homelessness, involvement in the criminal justice system, and child protection. ECCV looks forward to the further development of this framework and how it can be applied to identify the benefits of supporting migrant and refugee communities.

The projected Budget deficit is approximately \$11.6 billion in 2021-22. This is down from a projected deficit of \$17.4 billion for 2020-21. The overall Budget strategy relies on economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. ECCV will be monitoring whether people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are benefiting equally from this rapid recovery, as there have been industries that have not recovered as quickly as others. In our [Pre-Budget Submission](#) ECCV sought a commitment to a Multicultural Jobs Plan to ensure tailored support to address exclusion in the labour market for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

### KEY INITIATIVES BY PORTFOLIO

#### MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

The overall Multicultural Affairs budget for 2021-22 is \$54.7 million, down from \$105.4 million in 2020-21. The increased budget in 2020-21 was largely due to temporary initiatives in response to COVID-19 through the **CALD Communities Taskforce**. ECCV has been informed that the CALD Communities Taskforce will continue, however it

<sup>1</sup> See ECCV's [summary and analysis of the 2020-21 State Budget](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [ECCV's further analysis of the mental health reform announcements](#).

will transition to focus on multicultural affairs matters across portfolio areas rather than a specific focus on health. ECCV looks forward to the future activities of the Taskforce.

There are a number of multi-year initiatives in the Multicultural Affairs budget for 2021-22. ECCV particularly commends the commitment of \$8 million over 4 years to **multicultural seniors' clubs**. ECCV has advocated consistently for sustainable resources for ethnic seniors' clubs.<sup>3</sup>

Other initiatives in the Multicultural Affairs portfolio include:

- \$4.5 million over 2 years for **multicultural community infrastructure**, and the development of a **cross-government bicultural worker strategy** to support community recovery from COVID-19
- \$8.7 million over 4 years for **legal support, case management, and Regional Community Hubs to support asylum seekers and people on temporary visas**
- \$1.5 million over 3 years for communication, community engagement and education initiatives as part of the **response to the [Parliamentary Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections](#)**
- \$1.1 million in 2021-22 for **multicultural festivals and events**.

ECCV welcomes these multi-year commitments. The multicultural sector, particularly regional ethnic communities' councils, are well placed to participate in the Regional Community Hubs.

## HEALTH

This Budget commits \$800.7 million (which includes funding from the Commonwealth Government) for **public health responses to COVID-19**, including contact tracing, testing and health promotion. The Department of Health established the CALD Health Advisory Panel in 2021 primarily to provide input to the Department's COVID-19 response. With the end of dedicated funding for health promotion through the CALD Communities Taskforce, ECCV would like to see an equitable proportion of these resources directed to addressing the needs of migrant and refugee communities. In our 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission ECCV sought a commitment of \$40 million over 2 years to support communities to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, including \$7.5 million to support dedicated communications about COVID-19 vaccinations.

Other key measures in health for 2021-22 include:

- \$1.17 billion over 4 years to **upgrade and build new hospital facilities**
- \$91 million over 4 years (\$76.1m in 2021-22) for **health services**, including dental services, cancer screening, and maternal and child health
- \$70.1 million over 3 years to deliver **public fertility care services** (includes \$20m in asset expenditure in 2021-22)
- \$6.5 million for **women's health**, including expanding reproductive health hubs and addressing demand for mental health, family violence response, and sexual and reproductive health.

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## ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS

There are several initiatives to address alcohol and other drug issues in the community, including:

- \$42.3 million over 4 years (\$4.6m in 2021-22) to establish **state-wide specialist services for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction**
- \$40.1 million over 2 years for **medically supervised injecting rooms**
- \$9.4 million over 3 years for **residential rehabilitation treatment expansion**
- \$10.5 million for trials to **decriminalise public drunkenness** and set up a health-based response.

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<sup>3</sup> See the ECCV paper [Connecting CALD seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (2020) for further information.

## MENTAL HEALTH

See [ECCV's analysis of the Victorian Government's Budget measures related to mental health](#).

## EMPLOYMENT

This Budget focuses on support for industry to stimulate employment, in addition to continuing measures as part of the Jobs Plan announced in the 2020-21 Budget. Local businesses, arts and creative industries, tourism and infrastructure are the sectors this Budget focuses on to stimulate economic recovery and employment growth. The Budget is based on current economic indicators that show strong recovery of employment in the first half of 2021. Employment is forecast to grow by 2.5% in 2021-22, with employment rates for a range of population groups increasing over the first half of 2021.

ECCV will be monitoring whether this recovery is equal across the community. ECCV members have reported that employment is a major concern for migrant and refugee communities. This Budget makes a welcome commitment of \$23.4 million over 4 years for **targeted support for people facing barriers to employment**. To address the specific barriers to sustainable employment faced by people from migrant and refugee backgrounds we need a multicultural employment plan, as ECCV's Pre-Budget Submission recommended.

## COST OF LIVING, ENERGY & UTILITIES

The 2021-22 Budget includes some key measures to address the impact of financial insecurity on families:

- \$62.9 million over 4 years (\$16.9m in 2021-22), which includes funding for measures to continue protections for consumers, including through the **Energy Fairness Plan**
- \$14.6 million over 4 years for **Good Money to deliver no- and low-interest loans, financial advice and financial wellbeing services to bushfire affected communities**
- \$5.8 million over 3 years (\$1.9m in 2021-22) for the **Rural Financial Counselling Service**.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

This Budget commits \$85.9 million to establish a new Victorian Skills Authority (VSA), as part of its response to the recommendations of the [Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy](#) review, released in 2020. The VSA will lead the development of an annual Victorian Skills Plan to guide training and education and promote quality teaching and training across the sector.

This Budget also commits:

- \$99.2 million over 4 years (\$14.1 million in 2021-22) in **additional TAFE funding**
- \$15 million over 2 years (\$11 million in 2021-22) for **TAFE reform**, including to continue coordination of **practical placements for TAFE students**
- \$6.2 million over 2 years (\$3.1m in 2021-22) to increase places for pre accredited **digital literacy and employability** training courses
- \$88.8m over 4 years (\$84.3 in 2021-22) for 12,200 **subsidised VET places**, 7,400 of which are at TAFEs. Some of these places will be provided to eligible asylum seekers through the **Asylum Seeker VET program**.
- \$50.9 million over 4 years for continued rollout of the **Global Education Network and Study Melbourne Hubs**, and continued **support for international students through the Study Melbourne Student Centre**.

## FAMILY & SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

There is an overall commitment of \$354 million to address family violence in this Budget, which includes:

- \$225.9 over 4 years for **family violence services** including \$49m over 4 years (\$21.9m in 2021-22) to support victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault, including women on temporary visas
- \$18 million over 4 years for **perpetrator interventions**
- \$44.1 million for **services for children and young people**, including young people using violence.

With greater attention towards sexual violence recently, there is also a welcome allocation of \$2.4 million over 2 years to develop tools and resources for young people for early intervention and prevention of sexual violence.

## GENDER & WOMEN'S EQUALITY

This Budget makes several commitments to promote gender equality, including establishing a **Gender Responsive Budgeting unit**, and committing \$3.2 million for **gender equality programs that support women's financial security**, particularly women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. ECCV is pleased to see this commitment to promoting economic empowerment of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

## YOUNG PEOPLE

This Budget commits \$18.4 million over 2 years to engage **young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds**. This includes \$1.7 million for the Le Mana Pasifika Project to continue its support for Pasifika young people in Melbourne's south-east and west, and a further \$2.4 million to provide a range of wraparound services, including sport and activities for African young people, trauma counselling and alcohol and other drug support.

## OLDER PEOPLE

In addition to the \$8 million for multicultural seniors' groups, this Budget commits \$1 million in 2021-22 for **elder abuse primary prevention, response and early intervention** to continue the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks and to continue the Integrated Model of Care. There is no further commitment to prevent abuse against older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds as ECCV called for in our Pre-Budget Submission.

There is a further \$28.8 million for continued support for **staff-resident ratios in public residential aged care facilities**, an increase of \$1 million compared to the 2020-21 Budget.

## DISABILITY

This Budget allocates a total \$9.2 million over 4 years for initiatives to promote inclusion and access for people with disability, at \$8.1m in 2021-22, with \$1.1m budgeted over the forward estimates. This includes:

- \$1.7 million for **accessible emergency communications** for people with disability during emergencies
- \$6.1 million for **Disability Liaison Officers**
- \$1.7 million for the **Victorian Disability Advocacy Program** to continue promoting the rights and voices of people with disability.

For disability supports, this Budget commits:

- \$100.9 million for the **National Disability Insurance Scheme Stage 2: Out of scope services**, which is an increase of \$21.37 million compared to 2020-21
- \$202.2 million is allocated for the **Home and Community Care Program for Younger People** (HACC PYP), which is a decrease of \$2.7 million compared to last year. HACC PYP funding includes additional in-home support including personal supports, nursing, non-face to face prompting and social engagement.
- \$2 million is allocated to assist smaller not-for-profit services with **infection control and business continuity training**, targeted at regional and culturally specific providers.

## HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

This Budget allocates \$6 million over 4 years for **community engagement with residents in public housing in Flemington and North Melbourne**, with an initial commitment of \$2.4 million in 2021-22. This allocation addresses some of the recommendations of the Victorian Ombudsman's [Investigation into the detention and treatment of public housing residents arising from a COVID-19 'hard lockdown' in 2020](#), which found that the lockdown violated

the human rights of residents. ECCV supports the residents' call for Government to work proactively with them to undertake health promotion and infection control measures.

This Budget commits to continuation of several programs to address homelessness, including:

- \$110 million over 4 years to continue **private rental assistance programs**
- \$47 million over 4 years to re-fund initiatives under the **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan**.

There is also an allocation of \$40.4 million over 4 years for supportive housing for people with mental health conditions as part of the Big Housing Build initiatives announced in the 2020-21 Budget.

## LGBTIQA+ COMMUNITIES

Across the Equality, Mental Health and Justice portfolios, there are several initiatives to promote equality for LGBTIQA+ communities:

- \$2.8 million over 4 years to establish a **civil response to LGBTQA+ conversion practices through the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission**
- Funding for a specialist LGBTIQA+ legal service
- \$21.3 million over 4 years supporting **mental health for trans and gender-diverse young people**
- \$26.2 million over 4 years including \$6.4 million over 4 years to **fully fund the Rainbow Door** service to support LGBTIQ+ people to access and navigate mental health and wellbeing services, and \$2.4 million to continue the Healthy Equal Youth project to support young LGBTIQ+ people.

## JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Budget for the Department of Justice and Community Safety includes significant measures this financial year, particularly a \$54.6 million commitment to reform victim support services, including replacing the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) with a more accessible and trauma-informed scheme for financial assistance.

Other key measures include:

- \$90.2 million over 4 years to **increase courts' capacity** in response to backlogs due to COVID-19
- \$31.1 million for **legal assistance services**, which includes community legal centres, Victoria Legal Aid, and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- \$16.5 million over 4 years for **Countering Violent Extremism** programs.

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## LEGAL RESPONSES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

There are significant initiatives to address family violence within the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Court Services Victoria Budget, including:

- \$78 million over 4 years for **specialist family violence integrated court response including infrastructure, and expansion of specialist family violence courts**
- \$13.7m for **legal services and supports, information sharing and risk management**.

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## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND MANAGEMENT

This Budget also makes a significant commitment to emergency management and recovery, including:

- \$104.4 million over 4 years to support **recovery from the 2019-20 bushfires**
- \$39.2 million to implement **reforms to emergency management agencies** and implement recommendations from reviews and inquiries into emergencies and disasters.

ECCV would like to see emergency management agencies address equity and inclusion for migrant and refugee communities.

*This summary & analysis was prepared by the ECCV Policy & Advocacy Team: Riccardo Armillei, Policy & Practice Advisor; James Houghton, Policy Officer; Martin Plowman, Project Lead - Culturally Safe Practice; Gabriele Rukas, Sector Development Officer - Policy & Practice; Rashmi Kumar, Policy & Advocacy Manager.*

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