

Victorian State Budget 2022-23: Summary & Analysis

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

May 2022

Overview

The 2022-23 Budget was delivered on 3 May 2022, almost a year after the 2021-22 Budget. This year's Budget is designed to address almost two years of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with significant investments in healthcare and service delivery.

Ongoing commitments are also made to support the economic and social recovery of communities from the impacts of the pandemic. Initiatives that were first established in 2020 in response to the pandemic – such as the Disability Liaison Officer roles and the CALD Communities Taskforce – will receive continued funding, however, investments in these have been substantially diminished.

Revised policy frameworks have indicated that some of these initiatives will continue to be built upon and used to inform system improvements, however, it is not clear how these will be progressed.¹ In our [2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission](#), ECCV emphasised the need for a targeted and long-term approach to support migrant and refugee communities, who shouldered much of the burden of the pandemic. ECCV will continue to advocate and monitor developments to ensure that multicultural communities are benefiting equally from recovery efforts.

Unfortunately, no further funding has been allocated to support the design and implementation of Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy. As ECCV has emphasised in our [Consultation Report](#), systemic racism and discrimination remain a problem for many Victorians. We welcome this Budget's investment in **early intervention for violent extremism**, however, ECCV maintains that a long-term and considered approach to racial equity is needed and will continue to advocate for this.

The **signature measure** in this year's Budget is the Victorian Government's **health reform package**, which commits a total \$12 billion over four years for a range of measures in physical and mental health. This includes over \$4 million for continued responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and almost \$4 billion for hospital service delivery and infrastructure. The Budget also contains over \$1.3 billion in additional funding for the state's **mental health system**, in addition to last year's unprecedented spending in this area. Much of the new spending is on the mental health workforce and for community based mental health services, and ECCV hopes that significant portions will be directed to community organisations working with multicultural communities.

¹ See, for example, the new State Disability Plan: <https://www.statedisabilityplan.vic.gov.au/>

This Budget continues investment in the **Early Intervention Investment Framework**, which was first introduced in 2021-22 to guide and track initiatives that aim to stop people from needing intensive and acute services. The \$504 million allocated substantially builds on the investment of \$324 million in the 2021-22 Budget, with a range of initiatives across education, mental health, community services, and homelessness. The most significant of these is the \$73.6 million allocated over four years to reduce involvement and the over-representation of vulnerable groups in the criminal justice system.

The projected Budget deficit for 2022-23 is \$7.9 billion, with a predicted operating surplus of \$650 million in 2023-26. ECCV looks forward to working with the state government to secure equitable outcomes for migrant and refugee communities, and to ensure that funding embeds sustainable and long-term benefits for all Victorians.

Key initiatives by portfolio

Multicultural affairs

The overall Multicultural Affairs budget for 2022-23 is \$51.2 million, down from \$103.3 million in 2021-22. ECCV commends the allocation of \$3.7 million for the **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities Taskforce**. However, the overall reduction in targeted COVID-19 funding will lead to a significant capacity shortfall in the multicultural sector. As ECCV's [2021-22 Budget Analysis](#) highlighted, increased funding for multicultural affairs in the past two years was largely due to temporary COVID-19 related measures. A long-term recovery plan is needed to meet the ongoing social and economic needs of migrant and refugee communities, who were hardest hit by the pandemic.

There is only one multi-year initiative in the Multicultural Affairs budget for 2022-23. Funding of \$6.7 million over two years will ensure that **newly arrived migrants** will continue to receive legal advice, settlement and case management support, with increased funding also provided for Regional Community Hubs. This includes funding for the continuation of the Strategic Engagement Coordinators (SEC) Program.

Other initiatives in the 2022-23 budget for Multicultural Affairs include:

- \$6.4 million to build and upgrade **multicultural community infrastructure**
- \$4.4 million for the **Victorian African Communities Action Plan** to provide educational and social support for students of African heritage, and an Employment Brokers program to facilitate access to training and pathways to employment for African communities.
- \$1.1 million for **multicultural festivals and events**

Health and Wellbeing

Spending related to health and wellbeing (including mental health) was the most significant aspect of this year's Budget. A total of \$12 billion worth of commitments were made for the next four years. Over \$4 billion of this is for continued **public health responses in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic**. This spending includes:

- \$1.06 billion for more than 200 million **rapid antigen tests**
- \$1.58 billion to **support the community and health system through the pandemic**

- \$642 million for the **COVID-19 transitional operating model**, scaling down from a crisis response to a public health stewardship role
- \$257.9m for **COVID-19 immunisations**
- \$960m for the operation of quarantine sites through **Quarantine Victoria**

The Budget also includes \$1.35 billion over the next four years for catch-up on surgeries delayed by the pandemic through the **COVID catch-up plan**.

Other major areas of health spending include \$1.64 billion on **new hospitals and infrastructure**, an additional \$2.34 billion over four years for **service delivery in hospitals**, and \$300 million over four years for the **Regional Health Infrastructure Fund**. In acknowledgement of changes brought on by the pandemic in how many Victorians receive healthcare, \$698.1 million of funding over four years was announced to enable patients to continue to **receive healthcare in their own homes**, through home-based and virtual care models. The Budget also contained \$121.1 million in spending on **ambulances**, and \$333.5 million for 000 call workers through the **Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority**.

As part of the Budget's sweeping investment in healthcare, it is critical to ensure sufficient funding is allocated to culturally appropriate and sensitive services, consultations with CALD communities and increased access to language services.

Health spending specific to multicultural communities comprises \$3.7 million in 2022-23 for continuing COVID-19 support and recovery for multicultural communities, through the continuation of the **CALD Communities Taskforce**. This includes funding for extending the local partnerships model, providing place-based support for COVID-19 preparedness and response and social and economic recovery support for CALD communities. It also includes funding for translations and **delivery of audio-visual content for CALD communities**. This investment is in line with ECCV's recommendation in our pre-budget submission for "continued resourcing for multicultural and ethno-specific organisations to provide material and social support to communities", and our emphasis on the importance of effective translations.

A separate \$3.9 million for 2022-23 was announced from the Department of Premier and Cabinet for **COVID-19 communications**. ECCV emphasises that this should include support for tailored communications in community languages.

ECCV applauds the Government for including an investment of \$5.7 million in 2022-23 for **health services for people seeking asylum** in Victoria, covering primary health care, mental health support, case coordination, and assistance for basic needs, homelessness and utilities, and will also boost **refugee nurse and bicultural health worker capacity**.

ECCV also commends the \$13 million to be spent over two years for initiatives aimed at strengthening the health, wellbeing, social and economic outcomes of **LGBTIQ+ Victorians**, and implementation of the Government's first whole-of-government LGBTIQ+ Strategy. An intersectional approach is taken in the Strategy, and ECCV anticipates that the implementation of these initiatives will support LGBTIQ+ Victorians with overlapping experiences and identities, including people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

As mentioned under "Gender Equality", \$19.4 million over two years has also been allocated to **12 women's health services** across the state.

Mental health

This Budget builds upon the unprecedented \$3.8 billion investment made towards Victoria's mental health system in the 2021-22 Budget as part of the Government's implementation of the recommendation of the Mental Health Royal Commission. ([Click here for a detailed analysis of this investment.](#))

The 2022-23 Budget contains an **additional \$1.3 billion for the mental health system**. \$774 million of this will be spent over the next four years to improve mental health clinical care. This most significant component of this investment is \$363.7 million to strengthen the **workforce of the mental health sector**. The sector's capability in providing **safe and responsive care to culturally and linguistically diverse** and LGBTIQ+ Victorians will also be improved through supporting services to implement capacity uplift strategies. This spending is in line with ECCV's recommendation for funding for "a more accessible and culturally responsive mental health system for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds"

The Government's response to the recommendations of the Mental Health Royal Commission will be further advanced through an additional \$115.6 million over the next four years for **community-based mental health services**, including:

- Includes funding for people with dual diagnosis mental health and substance addiction
- Extension of the TelePROMPT program, which connects paramedics to mental health clinicians during emergencies
- Group-based parenting sessions in regional areas
- A new statewide eating disorder strategy

ECCV hopes that a significant portion of this funding will be directed to community organisations working with multicultural communities to address the significant gaps in this area.

The Budget also includes \$218.4m over four years for **82 new beds** in Victoria's mental health system. A further \$41.4m over four years was announced for **student mental health services in schools**, including the LOOKOUT program, Headspace initiative, and to continue to employ mental health practitioners in specialist secondary schools. \$36 million will be spent to create a mental health and alcohol and other drugs **residential rehabilitation facility in Mildura**.

A total of \$448.1 million over four years will be invested in mental health and clinical care assets, including \$195.8 million for **additional acute mental health beds in regional Victoria**. Finally, \$15 million in 2022-23 is to be provided for mental health community support services, including \$10 million in additional funding to the **Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Facilities Renewal Fund**, and \$5 million for the establishment of the **Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing**.

Employment

The Victorian Government's long-term investments in employment were announced as part of its Jobs Plan in the 2020-21 Budget. The 2022-23 Budget contained only a handful of new announcements for spending on employment initiatives. The most significant new investment is \$212.8 million over the next two years for the continued pilot of the **Victorian Sick Pay Guarantee** (formerly the Secure Work Pilot). This initiative will provide casual and contract workers with access to sick or carers pay so that they can take time off work when if they are sick or need to care for

loved ones. The Sick Pay Guarantee will be particularly beneficial to many Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds, who are more likely to be in casual or insecure work.

Many migrant and refugee business owners effected by the pandemic will also benefit from the \$31.5 million in 2022-23 in the Budget to **support small and medium-sized businesses** impacted by the Omicron variant of COVID-19 over the summer of 2021-22. A further \$29 million in 2022-23 is provided for the **Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund**, to support economic growth and development in rural and regional Victoria.

As mentioned under “Multicultural Affairs”, Victorians from African backgrounds will continue to benefit from targeted employment and education initiatives with a further \$4.4 million announced for the **Victorian African Communities Action Plan**.

In order to encourage partnerships between employers and education providers to **address skills shortages in priority areas**, \$9.6 million will be invested over the next two years to fund collaborations between Government, industry, TAFEs and universities to pilot new training approaches, including short courses and work placements. ECCV encourages the Government to include multicultural community organisations in these collaborations, as recommend in our pre-budget submission, to ensure that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds can acquire the skills they need to access sustainable employment opportunities in a changing labour market.

The \$7 million funding in 2022-23 for **community legal centres** (see “Justice and Community Safety”) will enable them to continue their important work in employment law - particularly with regards to upholding the rights of migrant workers on temporary visas.

Utilities and cost of living

ECCV welcomes the additional round of funding allocated to the **Power Saving Bonus**, totalling \$250 million in 2022-23. The one-off payments of \$250 are no longer means-tested and are now available to **any** Victorian household that uses the Victorian Energy Compare website to search for the cheapest electricity deal. \$9 million over two years will also maintain the Victorian Energy Compare website and fund the Energy Assistance Program to support consumers with navigating the energy market.

Other initiatives in 2022-23 include:

- \$1.2 million to support **gas reliability and affordability** while reducing carbon emissions through regulatory reform
- \$16.3 million over two years for a range of **food relief initiatives**, including Regional Food Hubs, the Food Relief Taskforce, and Sikh Volunteers Australia Incorporated.

It is important that these initiatives extend to all Victorians, including people on temporary visas and international students, who experience food and energy insecurity at higher rates than other groups.

Justice and Community Safety

Several initiatives were made under the **Early Intervention Investment Framework**, the most significant component of which is \$73.6 million over four years to **reduce future justice demand and improve outcomes for groups that are over-represented in the justice system**. Other initiatives include:

- \$7 million to support **community legal centres**
- \$4.8 million over four years will invest in **early intervention to counter violent extremism**
- \$4.5 million to deliver programs that **engage young people in the community** and address key drivers of crime

Multi-year initiatives will help clear court backlogs caused in part by the pandemic and improve the capacity of courts to meet increased demand. These include:

- 11 million over two years to **increase court capacity** and improve the safety of family violence victims
- \$58.9 million over 4 years to provide **additional resources across the justice system** to meet increased demand and improve the operation of Victoria's court network.

These measures are significant as they address systemic access to justice issues for migrant and refugee communities, who face barriers related to limited English language proficiency, legal literacy, and affordability of legal advice and representation.

Disability

\$15.1 million has been allocated over two years to support the implementation of the new **Victorian State Disability Plan**. Funding to the Office of Disability was halved (from \$15.4 to \$7.8), however the funding earmarked for the new plan will invest in the delivery of new and existing initiatives, including:

- \$1.8 million for the **Victorian Disability Advocacy Program**, which is consistent with past allocations for base annual funding. This is disappointing given the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. Migrants and refugees face additional difficulties with accessing disability advocacy services, and increased funding is required to address these issues.
- Funding for **Disability Liaison Officer (DLO)** roles, which were established in 2020 as part of the emergency COVID-19 response.
- **Public transport accessibility**: \$40.5 million over 3 years for trains, \$79.5 million over 4 years for buses, and \$7.2 million over 4 years for trams.

\$35.9 million over two years will **support people with disability who are not eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)**, including support for non-permanent residents. \$13.1 million will be allocated to expand the **Office of the Public Advocate's** support for people with disability, including guardianship services and the Independent Third Person program, and youth justice specialist disability advisers. In total, \$135 million is allocated across education, justice and health to provide tailored support for people who are not eligible for the NDIS.

\$189.7 million is allocated to the **Home and Community Care Program for Younger People (HACC-PYP)**, a substantial decrease from the \$202.2 million allocated in the 2021-22 budget. The Access and Support Program provides crucial support for people who are eligible for in-home care and is funded under both the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and Victoria's HACC-PYP. With the CHSP set to transition to a single Support at Home Program in July 2023, the substantial decrease in funding to the HACC-PYP may risk placing smaller organisations at a funding shortfall.

Older people

Significant initiatives were introduced and extended under the **Ageing Well in Victoria** measure. ECCV welcomes the \$3 million allocated to support social recovery for older Victorians and carers.

This includes \$300,000 for the Commissioner for Senior Victorians to conduct a **review into digital connectedness**. ECCV has advocated for improved digital inclusion for older people and looks forward to engaging with the government to progress this review.² The \$3 million allocated also covers continued funding for several important initiatives, including:

- \$400,000 for the **Victorian Seniors' Festival**, which includes online and radio entertainment
- \$2.3 million for the **Career Pathways into Employment for Unpaid Carers program**, which delivers tailored employment support for carers

Elder abuse measures in 2022-23 include:

- \$2.23 million to continue the Elder Abuse Prevention Networks and the Integrated Model of Care (IMOC) trial for responding to elder abuse
- \$600,000 to continue funding for elder abuse initiatives in bushfire-affected communities, including financial counselling services and other supports.

Gender equality

The Budget makes several commitments to promote gender equality. There is continued investment in the implementation of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, with \$8.4 million over 3 years allocated to support reporting, and \$1.1 million to embed gender responsive budgeting through legislative reform.

Other initiatives include:

- \$19.4 million over 2 years allocated to 12 **women's health services** across Victoria
- \$1 million for a range of leadership programs, including a **Women of Colour Leadership Program**

Family and sexual violence

The Budget makes continued investment in family violence reforms. \$19 million over 3 years will invest in **Respect Victoria** to prevent family and gendered violence. \$19 million over three years will support crisis case management, specialised therapeutic interventions, financial aid for victims, a state-wide 24/7 crisis service, and **women on temporary visas**.

Education

The Budget contained few significant new announcements in the area of education and training. However significant funds continue to flow into the vocational education and training sector, particularly to TAFEs, from funding announced in the 2021-22 Budget. The most significant new funding in the 2022-23 Budget is \$83.2 million over four years for the governance of TAFE by the **Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery**, which will lead strategic projects and enhance collaboration across the TAFE network.

² See ECCV's Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23 and our Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds.

\$30.7 million is to be provided in 2022-23 to continue the **Students with Disabilities Transport Program**, providing transport for eligible students with disabilities to attend their place of education.

Education funding for Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds is headlined by an additional \$23.5m over two years for **English as an Additional Language**. \$4 million will also be provided over three years to extend targeted outreach support for children and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds to **access and engage in kindergarten**, including in public housing communities. International students will benefit from funding of \$2 million over two years to provide access to public transport through the **International Student Travel Pass**.

Young People

The 2022-23 Budget contains funding for various initiatives to support the state's young people. \$36.9 million over 4 years in funding was announced for the **Enhanced Navigator Program**, providing outreach support to young people who are at risk of disengaging or are already disengaged from school. \$1.7 million in funding will be provided for the continuation of **Empower Youth** grants, providing early intervention case management to vulnerable young people

The Budget contains an investment of \$7 million over two years on a campaign to attract more people to **work in community services**, and for scholarships for underemployed cohorts to access training in community services.

As mentioned under "Justice and Community Safety", \$4.5 million has been allocated in 2022-23 to address key drivers of crime. A further \$30.3 million over four years will deliver education and additional supports to improve the educational outcomes of young people involved in, or at risk of involvement with, the youth justice system.

There were no funding announcements regarding the Government's forthcoming **Youth Strategy**, which was announced in 2020. ECCV recommended in its pre-budget submission that the Strategy includes funding for new youth work positions in areas with high concentrations of newly arrived young people. We will await with interest further announcements regarding the Strategy.

Emergency management

\$2.2 million over two years will facilitate **critical emergency management reforms**. This funding will support Emergency Management Victoria's strategic planning and capability to deliver on key reviews and inquiries, including the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

In 2021, ECCV lead the collaborative [Multicultural Emergency Management](#) project to ensure that emergency responses in regional areas effectively engage with local migrant and refugee communities. It is essential that the reform process embeds the multicultural sector and local partnerships in capability-building measures, which have been successful in strengthening emergency preparedness and resilience in regional multicultural communities.

Housing and Homelessness

The Budget contained \$51.3 million over three years for reforms to the **homelessness service system**. This includes funding for:

- A shift to a delivery model that provides tailored support and is focused on prevention, early intervention and sustainable housing
- Flexible case management for Victorians experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping
- An uplift in case management and data collection tools

Further funding of \$9.4 million over two years will be provided for **specialist homeless programs**:

- Homelessness After-Hours Service operated by the Salvation Army
- Holmesglen Education First Youth Foyer operated by Launch Housing

\$42.4 million over the next four years was announced for **refugee and crisis accommodation**, along with \$2.3 million over two years to enable **community housing agencies** to access low interest loans and government guarantees to deliver social and affordable housing.

