



# Victorian Budget 2024-25 Analysis

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria  
May 2024

# Overview

The 2024-25 Victorian Budget was delivered on 7 May 2024. As expected, the government's primary focus is addressing the debt and deficits arising from the pandemic years. The Budget therefore does not include significant spending on new initiatives, but does contain some important measures to help Victorians to meet cost-of-living pressures, and to support our multicultural communities.

The most significant cost-of-living support for Victorian families is the School Savings Bonus – a one-off \$400 payment for each child in government schools, plus eligible concession cardholders in non-government schools. This payment will help cover the costs of uniforms and activities such as school camps, excursions and sporting events.

The budget allocates \$13.6 million for multicultural affairs policy and programs, composed of:

- \$4 million over two years for anti-discrimination measures.
- \$4.4 million over three years to support newly arrived migrant communities, including continued funding for Community Hubs Australia and Refugee Legal.
- \$5.2 million over four years for Victoria's African communities.

ECCV particularly welcomes the funding for anti-discrimination initiatives. We look forward to working with the government to implement the Anti-Racism Strategy due to be released this year, but emphasise that this will require significant investment if it is to drive meaningful change.

Victoria's multicultural communities will also benefit from an additional \$86.2 million for education initiatives over the next four years. Key investments in education include:

- An additional \$12 million for the Victorian African Communities Action Plan, creating a total of \$17.2 million for targeted programs for African communities.
- \$10.4 million for community language schools to help people maintain their cultural identity through language.
- \$45.5 million for the English as an Additional Language program for students requiring support.
- \$6 million for faith-based non-government schools to improve safety and security.

Other welcome investments in the Budget include \$211 million for new family violence prevention programs, and \$196.9 million to tackle homelessness.

ECCV continues to call for the creation of a co-designed multicultural strategy to facilitate longer-term funding to community organisations. This would enable sustainable programs and community engagement, and provide certainty to organisations and end the cycle of constant applications and re-applications for funding.

# Key initiatives by portfolio

## Multicultural affairs

New spending announced for multicultural affairs over the next four years totals \$13.6 million. Combined with spending announced in previous years, this means that total spending in multicultural affairs for 2024-25 will be \$64.6 million, up slightly from \$61.5 million in 2023-24.

The \$13.6 million of new spending consists of:

- \$4 million for anti-discrimination measures.
- \$4.4 million to support newly arrived migrant communities, including continued funding for Community Hubs Australia and Refugee Legal, building community cohesion and extending legal support for asylum seekers and temporary visa holders.
- \$5.2 million for Victoria's African communities, including continued funding for the Victorian African Communities Action Plan, alcohol and drugs outreach and education programs, and the Victorian African Communities Committee.

## Health and wellbeing

The Budget contains a total of \$11 billion in new spending for the Victorian health system, including \$8.8 billion in hospital operations funding over the next four years. There will be \$18.3 million in new funding over two years for women's health services, including \$1.49 million to enable the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health to continue its vital work.

ECCV's Pre-Budget Submission highlighted the barriers faced by members of multicultural communities experiencing alcohol and other drug (AOD) harm in accessing treatment services. Total spending for AOD services in 2024-25 will be \$376.3 million, a 1% increase from 2023-24. This includes \$9.7 million in additional measures under the Victorian Government's Statewide Action Plan. ECCV will continue to advocate for funding to be directed to employ bicultural liaison workers and for the establishment of interagency partnerships between multicultural and AOD services, as recommended in our Pre-Budget Submission.

The community health sector will receive \$368.1 million in 2024-25. This represents a 13.4% increase from 2023-24, but overall community health spending is down significantly from the high of \$507.7 million in 2021-22. The healthcare needs of refugees and asylum seekers who are not eligible for Medicare are recognised with \$4.4 million for tailored care in 2024-25. However it is disappointing that no new funding will be provided for the prevention and promotion programs delivered by community health services.

## Mental health

A total of \$188.5 million will be provided for mental health community support services for 2024-25, which is almost identical to the \$188.4 provided in 2023-24. However, it is regrettable that funding for several initiatives announced in response to the Mental Health Royal Commission has been delayed. In particular, funding is not provided for additional Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals, which provide crucial place-based mental health support through a drop-in service that does not require GP referral. Fifteen Locals have already been established, and a further 35 are due to be rolled out, but the timeline for this is now unclear.

The Budget also does not contain funding to establish a Lived and Living Experience Agency, as recommended by the Royal Commission. This calls into question whether the recommendations of the Royal Commission can be fully implemented within the planned 10-year timeframe.

ECCV also reiterates the call from our Pre-Budget Submission for dedicated funding from the mental health budget to build the capacity and cultural competency of community and mainstream mental health service providers to effectively respond to the mental health support needs of multicultural communities.

## Education and employment

The Budget contains \$1 billion in new funding for 16 new schools, and an additional \$580 million for education and training initiatives.

There is a total of \$86.2 million over four years for multicultural education initiatives:

- \$45.5 million over four years for English as an Additional Language programs.
- \$10.4 million over four years for community language schools.
- \$12 million over four years for education initiatives delivered through the Victorian African Communities Action Plan.
- \$2.9 million in 2024-25 for early childhood intervention services for non-permanent residents.
- \$9.4 million over three years for strengthening participation of CALD children in early childhood education.
- \$6 million over three years for safer Victorian faith-based schools.

ECCV is pleased to see that \$39.1 million over four years will be allocated for the Respectful Relationships program, which supports schools and early childhood educators to promote respectful and positive attitudes and behaviours, with funding going to Safe and Equal, Jesuit Social Services and the Pat Cronin Foundation for program delivery.

We are disappointed however to see that the Victorian Sick Pay Guarantee, which provides access to sick pay and carer's pay to casual workers in selected industries, will not be continued.

## Cost-of-living support

All Victorian families with children in government schools, plus other eligible concession cardholders, will be eligible for the School Savings Bonus of \$400 per child. This payment will help cover the costs of uniforms and activities such as school camps, excursions and sporting events. An estimated 700,000 students will be eligible for the Bonus, with payments to be made this year in Term 4.

Other cost-of-living support will be provided through \$3.5 million in 2024-25 to strengthen food security, including funding for the continued operations of six Regional Food Relief Hubs, and \$2.5 million for food relief funding provided through Neighbourhood Houses. An additional \$1.1 million will be available in 2024-25 for food relief for social housing tenants.

ECCV has consistently stressed the need for additional support for vulnerable customers to pay their energy bills, and we are pleased that the Budget contains \$12.1 million over four years to promote energy affordability and protecting consumers. This funding will maintain the Victorian Energy Compare website (through which consumers can compare electricity and gas prices), and the Energy Assistance Program, which supports vulnerable consumers to navigate the energy market. However, we are concerned that the Budget contains no new initiatives to support consumers struggling to pay high energy bills.

## Disability

A total of \$63.3 million in spending for people with disabilities over the next four years was announced. This includes \$24 million in 2024-25 for another year's funding for the Victorian Disability Advocacy program, and to support Victorians with disabilities ineligible for the NDIS. It also includes \$39.3 million over four years for disability and social services regulation, including to support the new independent Social Services Regulator overseeing the social services sector.

A further year's funding worth \$32.8 million is provided to continue the Students with Disabilities Transport Program. Total spending for the Home and Community Care Program for Younger People in 2024-25 will be \$154.8 million, down from \$195.7 in 2023-24.

## Family violence

ECCV commends the government for continuing to invest heavily in family violence prevention and response.

A total of \$211 million is provided for new programs. \$137.9 million of this is for service delivery, including:

- \$41.6 million to continue the perpetrator case management program, including responses for diverse cohorts, and the specialised intervention programs for diverse cohorts.
- Research under the Early Intervention Investment Framework.
- \$72 million over two years for victim-survivor supports, including workforce capability building to improve responses in multicultural communities.

## Family violence (cont.)

- \$24.3 million over two years for the statewide Central Information Point, a multi-agency service that collates and shares relevant information about the risk of harm posed by perpetrators of family violence.

The Budget also contains \$28.8 million over four years for community sector legal support and early intervention services, including for 22 health justice partnerships and integrated services programs that connect people experiencing family violence to early legal support. Stable ongoing funding for community legal centres is particularly welcome, and will offer them much-needed certainty. The Budget also provides \$6.8 million over four years for financial counselling services for victim-survivors of family violence facing financial stress.

## Housing

The Budget provides \$196.9 million over four years for programs that support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes a new four-year competitive grants process from 2025-26 for homelessness services, and continuation of the Pride in Place, Homelessness After Hours Services, and Better Health and Housing programs.

The Budget allocates \$8 million over three years for organisations providing access to information and advice, advocacy, and legal assistance, as part of a rental stress support package. This includes \$2 million to Tenants Victoria and its community legal centre partners for an initiative to enhance frontline rental services.

ECCV's Pre-Budget Submission recommended funding tenancy support services and renters' unions to partner with settlement services to deliver in-language sessions to new migrants and humanitarian arrivals, and we hope that funding for this important work will be included in an upcoming Budget.

## Other spending

Other notable spending announcements in 2024-25 Budget are:

- Gender equity measures including \$1.8 million in 2024-25 for women's participation, leadership and recognition, with targeted programs to support women from diverse backgrounds and to assist women of colour to navigate barriers to advancement and leadership
- \$1.7 million over four years to support the continued operations of the Queen Victoria Women's Centre.
- \$3 million for over four years for LGBTIQ+ policy and programs.
- \$165.7 million over four years for preventing and responding to gambling harm.
- \$9.5 million in 2024-25 for carer respite.
- \$36.9 million over four years for securing the forest firefighting workforce. ECCV hopes that a portion of this will be dedicated to projects that improve the cultural diversity and cultural responsiveness of the workforce, as recommended in our Pre-Budget Submission.

## Other spending (cont.)

ECCV regrets that the Budget contains no new investment in Seniors Rights Victoria, which is the only integrated statewide legal and advocacy service specialising in elder abuse. It is also disappointing that the rollout of free kinder has been slowed due to workforce shortages.

ECCV welcomes the additional \$6.3 million in 2024-25 to extend the Yoorrook Justice Commission as the formal truth-telling process with Aboriginal Victorians. We reiterate the call from our Pre-Budget Submission for the Government to fund strategies that strengthen relationships between First Nations People and multicultural communities and educate communities about our shared responsibilities to work towards justice and reconciliation.





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