



Children and Youth Area Partnerships overview

Children and Youth Area Partnerships (Area Partnerships) are a new way of working to more effectively join-up social services in Victoria to support better outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

Many vulnerable children and young people are not achieving the same outcomes in health, education and wellbeing that we expect for all children. Despite many genuine efforts by government and other stakeholders, the impact needed to make a lasting positive difference for all children and young people has not been achieved.

The Area Partnerships initiative takes a holistic view of child vulnerability. It will be a mechanism by which the expectations for vulnerable children will be raised to that of other children. Area Partnerships will contribute to a collaborative and broad-based model of governance that will help drive improved outcomes.

Area Partnerships bring together the most senior representatives in a local area from State and local governments, the community sector and the broader community, who are most able to make a difference for vulnerable children and young people.

Two key priority areas

Area Partnerships will identify local priorities to improve outcomes in two key areas:

- Support the learning and development of all children and young people, particularly those who are at risk of disengaging or who have disengaged.
- The creation of safe and supportive communities and environments in which children live free of abuse and neglect.

The local priorities that are developed will be informed by data and the local experience of those in the Area Partnerships who work across the system with vulnerable children, young people and families.

Area Partnerships – Summary of key features

The table below provides an overview of the key features of Area Partnerships.

Purpose	Reducing children and youth vulnerability together.	
Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and Young People 0–18 years. Aligned to the 17 DHS Areas. 	
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent abuse and neglect. Act earlier when children are vulnerable. Improve outcomes for children in statutory care. 	
Focus	<p>To be determined through a local planning process, but will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The creation of safe and supportive communities and environments in which children live free of abuse and neglect. Support the learning and development of all children and young people, particularly those who are at risk of disengaging or who have disengaged. 	
Accountability	Children's Services Coordination Board	
Functions	<p>In scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information sharing. Planning and priority setting. Service coordination. Commit co-design. Community engagement. Performance monitoring. 	<p>Out of scope:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy-making. Individual case management. Pooled funding. Service commissioning. Planning for all clients and services.
Membership/ Model	<p>There are three elements to the Area Partnerships structure:</p> <p>Steering Group</p> <p>The most senior individuals in an area most able to make a difference for vulnerable children and young people, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DHS, DEECD, DH and DoJ: Regional or Area Directors VicPol: Superintendent Local Government: CEO or Human Services Director (for each local government in the Area) Community sector organisation representatives: from key local structures such as Child and Family Alliances, and CEOs or deputies from key service delivery organisations Others as determined by the Area Partnership. <p>Working Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determined locally: likely to include service commissioners, managers, providers, practitioners and independent experts whose work relates directly to an identified priority. The Working Group will engage with local service providers, service users and other key stakeholders. <p>Area Partnership Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed at all those in the Area who want to contribute to the work of the Area Partnership and to ensure that the priorities and work plan reflect the needs and knowledge of the local community. <p>Area Partnerships will seek participation by local Aboriginal community members and/or local Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOS) at each level of the Area Partnership structure.</p>	
Implementation approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model tested and developed in eight launch sites. Learning from launch sites to inform roll out across Victoria by the end of 2015. 	

What's different about Area Partnerships

Area Partnerships will take a holistic view of vulnerability and will be implemented across Victoria, with the shared definition of vulnerability as their foundation. Previous initiatives have had a partial view of either the individual, the state or risks to be addressed.

Build on existing expertise, knowledge and local connections

Place-based, collaborative approaches have long been recognised in Victoria and internationally as effective in improving outcomes for people in communities.

In Victoria, a range of collaborative, place-based approaches have been implemented, including: Best Start, Neighbourhood Renewal, Primary Care Partnerships, Child FIRST, Local Learning and Employment Networks, Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committees, and Youth Partnerships. Significant expertise, knowledge and local connections have been developed through these. Area Partnerships will build upon these place-based approaches to problem solving, leadership and performance improvement.

Membership of senior decision-makers

The membership of Area Partnerships is focused on decision-makers and those with the authority to get traction on issues where previous area based approaches have not been able to achieve the systems change required. The Area Partnerships ensure that there is a leadership group with the authority to make decisions at a local level to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

Area Partnerships will also have direct access to the Children's Services Coordination Board, which will be a key enabler through addressing state-wide policy and systems issues that are impacting the work of Area Partnerships at the local level.

Drive system-level change

A key aspect of what is different about Area Partnerships is that they will support system-level change to support improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. Previous area-based approaches have been able to achieve some key changes within a defined issue area and supported improvements at an individual-level with some minimal system-level change. Area Partnerships are a platform to get traction on issues where previous area based approaches have not been able to achieve the system-level change required.

Information and data

Bringing together key information and robust data across a range of areas will be a central part of the role of Area Partnerships. Area Partnerships will utilise data to drive decisions and actions at every point, and to monitor and report on progress against identified objectives.

Stronger collaborative approaches driving better ways of working

Strong partnerships within each of the Area Partnerships will be critical to their success. Area Partnerships will work in collaboration with a broad range of partners from across the public, community, business, academic and philanthropic sectors to maximise effort and drive the change required to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

Collective impact framework

In implementing Area Partnerships, a collective impact framework will be used to support the large-scale cross-sector change needed to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. Collective impact is discussed in further detail on the following page.

Eight Area Partnership launch sites

Eight Area Partnership launch sites have been established across Victoria:

- Central Highlands
- Inner Gippsland
- Mallee
- Loddon
- Outer Eastern Melbourne
- Ovens Murray
- Southern Melbourne
- Western Melbourne.

The Vulnerable Children Reform Unit (VCRU) will support the implementation of the eight Area Partnerships.

Area Partnership engagement with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal community controlled organisations

Engagement with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal community controlled organisations is a priority for both the Vulnerable Children Reform Unit and the Area Partnerships. Ensuring cultural responsiveness will be critical to the success of Area Partnerships.

Area Partnerships will seek participation by local Aboriginal community members and local ACCOs at each level of the Area Partnership structure, including the Area Partnership Steering Group, in Working Groups and in Community Forums.

Collective impact framework

There is increasing recognition that large-scale social change comes from better cross- sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organisations. This scale of coordination has been termed 'collective impact'¹ and involves the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific problem to achieve significant lasting change.

A collective impact framework will be used to support the large-scale cross-sector change needed to address child and youth vulnerability.

The five enabling factors of collective impact are:

1. Common agenda: a shared vision for change and joint approach to achieving it.
2. Shared measurement: consistent collection of data and measurement of outcomes achieved.
3. Mutually reinforcing activities: activities coordinated through agreed plan of action.
4. Continuous communication: consistent and open communication
5. Backbone support: staff within an organisation(s) to serve as the backbone for the initiative and coordinate participating organisations and individuals.

Further information

Website

Further information is available on the [Area Partnerships](#) website.

Contact

The Vulnerable Children Reform Unit can be contacted regarding Area Partnerships:

Phone: 03 9096 2601

Email: areapartnerships@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Area Partnerships are an opportunity for each part of the system to respond differently to the particular characteristics of their communities, better recognising that local needs vary from one community to another.

¹ F Hanleybrown, J Kania & M Kramer, *Channelling Change: Making Collective Impact Work*, Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2012.