

Service system, support & intervention for vulnerable young people

Family violence - The State Budget has allocated funding of \$81.3 million to services preventing and responding to family violence (\$10.2 million to assist survivors of family violence including \$3.5 million for counselling services for children and women, \$3.9 million for flexible child protection responses and \$1 million for men's family violence services). We look forward to seeing further commitments coming out of the Royal Commission process.

Homelessness and housing - The Budget has included some initiatives to reduce homelessness, including the allocation of \$40.3 million to continue to fund homelessness innovation action projects. They have acknowledged the large shortfall in actual housing stock but have indicated commitment to tackling this.

Child Protection - increases in child protection and family services funding, including \$48.1 million over four years for Child FIRST and family services, and extending the funding for Springboard (\$21.3 million), a program that supports young people to transition from residential out-of-home care into independent living, and nearly \$2 million to improve support for vulnerable Aboriginal children and families as is being examined by Taskforce 1000.

Youth service funding

8 million for youth affairs providing funding for support to at-risk young people, multicultural youth services and programs delivered by regional councils.

Education, participation, engagement & employment

- the \$8 million for youth participation and engagement programs, es funding to services to reconnect disadvantaged young people with education and employment pathways to build and enhance connections with their communities,
- \$1.6 million for a mentoring program for disadvantaged students
- \$4m over four years to support international students in need or who are facing welfare issues.
- \$300m TAFE Rescue Fund to help re-open closed buildings, upgrade facilities and get back in the black.
- \$50m TAFE Back To Work fund to engage with employers, and create tailored training courses.
- \$32m for Local Learning and Employment Networks over 4 years.
- \$12m of new investment to establish Tech Schools across the State.

Mental Health

- Programs that support the mental health and well-being of same-sex attracted and sex/gender diverse (SSASGD) young people have received a significant boost with \$5.9 million allocated over four years.
- \$1.1m for the Safe Schools Coalition Victoria
- Restoring funding to the Artful Dodgers Studios and Connexions programs for young people at Jesuit Social Services, as part of a \$5 million package to increase the social inclusion of people experiencing mental health concerns.
- Funding is provided to progress planning and development to Orygen Youth Mental Health which is a major clinical and research facility for young people across Victoria with serious mental illness. This will house both Orygen Youth Mental Health Services Clinical Program, and Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health.

What's missing?

- No specific commitment to remove or lower financial and regulation disincentives in the TAFE sector which stops many young people even considering further education and training
- No state funding for the previously federally funded Youth Connections program, which had helped marginalised young people back into school, training or work.
- No further funding allocation for the School Focused Youth Service, a program that helps schools to work with community and health services to support young people at risk of mental illness and suicide.

Crime prevention and diversion from the criminal justice system

Youth Diversion

\$1.2 million for the bail youth diversion program, which helps young people awaiting a court hearing to live in the community and address their behaviour. It provides intensive intervention to assess underlying issues contributing to the offending behaviour, and to link the young person to services that address their needs.

What's missing

While we are pleased about the funding for the bail youth diversion program, there is no allocation in this budget for the Government's state election promise of state-wide youth diversion programs (at the pre-plea stage at Children's Court).

While the Children's Court Youth Diversion Pilot is about to commence for 12 months in three locations, it is imperative Government commit significant resources to a state-wide program to ensure all young people have access to similar services, to help them avoid more serious offending and the stigma of a criminal record.

There was no additional funding allocation to employ youth justice worker and restore the number of youth justice workers to adequate levels, given the increasing number of young offenders on community orders.

Detention, prison and justice reinvestment

We are also pleased to see a shift in approach with more investment in community corrections and prison education, health and programs than new prison beds, with exception of women's prisons being expanded.

\$88.9 million will be provided to expand the community corrections system to meet a continuing surge in demand. This includes \$26 million for community corrections facilities, and \$63 million to fund 147 more community corrections staff and an expanded suite of programs to help stop people progressing to prison.

What's missing

While there were no major new initiatives to reverse the growth in prison numbers, we are encouraged by Government's commitment to "*Over the next four years the Labor Government will focus on the difficult task of slowing the rate of people returning to prison.*"¹

We strongly encourage the government adopt and implement a justice reinvestment approach to reduce crime and incarceration. In particular we urge Government to fund an independent data centre and a justice reinvestment project in Victoria targeting children and young people.

¹ <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/333-million-to-ease-the-strain-on-our-corrections-system>