



priority area four

Developing Liveable Communities

priority area four

Developing Liveable Communities

Strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities

The Government will invest an additional \$225 million over the five years to 2011-2012 through *A Fairer Victoria 2008* in developing liveable communities.

Liveable communities are where people feel safe, there is a sense of belonging and community pride, and where there are job opportunities, affordable housing, good local services and facilities, and enjoyable environments.

Building up communities' assets make them better places to live and work, helping attract skilled labour and capital investment. These assets may be physical, such as transport, public spaces, and housing, but they also include 'social capital' or the stock of skills, creative capacity and entrepreneurialism of the population and the strength of its local leadership and community networks.

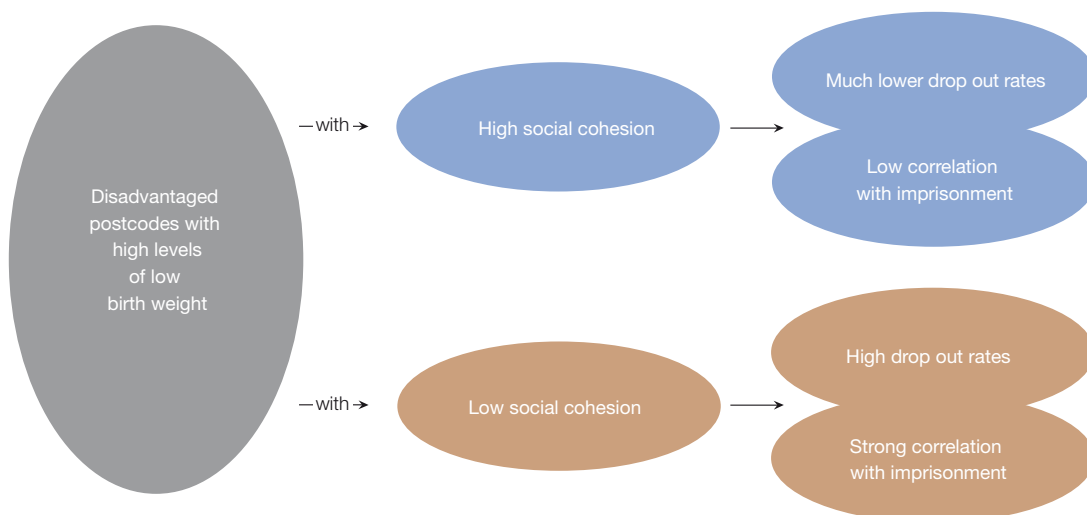
Research shows that investment in community strengthening can help stop a cycle of disadvantage experienced in low socio-economic communities. Building local strength can be particularly important in places where there are low levels of economic and social participation, rapid growth,

and economic or social change. Integrating investment in community assets with smart planning is critical to these communities. We need to ensure that people are not disadvantaged because of where they live.

Given that homelessness remains one of the most severe manifestations of disadvantage in Victoria, we must tackle it in a concerted way. Housing costs have risen nationally over the last decade, adding stress and insecurity for some households, particularly low-income renters.

Homelessness brings major disruption to people's lives from which they may take years to recover. Being without a home exacerbates personal difficulties such as social isolation, poverty, ill health and substance abuse. The impact for each individual or family can be devastating. Family violence is a major driver of family breakdown and homelessness and the Government's family violence strategy is one important element in our efforts to reduce homelessness.

Community Strengthening Intervention Can Drive a Wedge in Cycles of Disadvantage



Source: Vinson, *Dropping off the Edge* (2007)

What We Have Already Done

Two important programs – *Neighbourhood Renewal* and *Community Renewal* – have achieved significant successes in strengthening specific communities. More than 5,000 jobs and training opportunities have been created in *Neighbourhood Renewal* areas and property crimes and crimes against persons are down 70% and 50% respectively. Many other place-based initiatives such as *Transit Cities* and the *Community Building Initiative* have made important contributions to reducing social isolation by linking Victorians to networks, employment, social supports, and revitalised facilities and public spaces.

Since 1999 the Victorian Government has delivered more than 11,500 new social housing properties including 1,400 homes delivered through not-for-profit housing associations, private developers, local government, VicUrban and other organisations. The Government has already made a \$646 million investment in making housing more affordable through *A Fairer Victoria* alone, including \$510 million in 2007.

We are already allocating around \$140 million for homelessness assistance each year. Innovative ways to help people who are homeless are being introduced, including better accommodation and support services for young people and tailored approaches to assist people with specific needs, including people leaving prison, people with a mental illness and/or people with drug and alcohol problems.

Other achievements that have improved local communities include:

- 80 infrastructure projects as part of *Neighborhood Renewal* including improvements to 6,000 homes
- funding for 76 community enterprises that have created 286 jobs and skills training for more than 400 people
- small grants to more than 880 community organisations that have helped attract 13,000 more Victorians to volunteering, and
- 12 new neighbourhood houses and funding for a further 51 redevelopments.

Next Steps

Problems entrenched over decades will not be turned around in a few short years, even though for some individuals and some communities the improvements have been dramatic. We will continue to support projects in specific Victorian communities which improve employment and build stronger partnerships between community groups, local businesses and government. We will help communities by funding, planning and coordinating new initiatives, particularly where these link infrastructure with positive social outcomes. Low income Victorians will be encouraged to participate in work and in their communities through the *Neighbourhood and Community Renewal* programs. Social housing tenants will continue to be supported to solve problems that may otherwise lead to property abandonment and eviction.

There is more that we can do to prevent homelessness, improve housing affordability and reduce the duration and impact of episodes of homelessness when they occur. The Government will build on its work to increase the overall supply of social housing in partnership with registered housing associations and by continuing to work with the Commonwealth and other State and Territory Governments to negotiate a broader National Affordable Housing Agreement and develop a national homelessness strategy.

More support will also be given to low income families to reduce pressure on budgets, through concessions and incentives to reduce energy bills.



An SES volunteer cuts up a tree felled by a recent storm in Melbourne.

Matching Volunteers to Community Organisations

'We used our \$4785 Victorian Volunteer Small Grant from the State Government to put together two brochures, which were delivered to every house in Benalla. The first explained what the SES does – and invited people to come down and take part in our weekly training.'

'A week later, our second brochure reminded Benalla people that we would love to have them visit us.'

'And the response was great. In the first three weeks, 12 people came to training and went on to join the unit.'

'Funding like this is a great way to improve the support we can give our local community – and get a little bit back from the community in response.'

Our Goal

Strengthen neighbourhoods, particularly in areas of high need and high growth and reduce the risk of homelessness

Strengthening Community Support and Community Organisations

Community organisations are an essential part of Victorian life and play an important role in places with high levels of disadvantage. They enable us to participate in our communities, share our passions and interests, develop skills, make connections, offer and receive mutual support and access important services.

As part of our recently launched *Action Plan: Strengthening Community Organisations*, a Community Enterprise Catalyst will provide business and financial advice to community enterprises. The Government will provide establishment and matched funding for Community Foundations in 12 disadvantaged communities to bring together philanthropic organisations and businesses to support community activities and establish sustainable investment streams. We will also establish an Office for the Community Sector to provide much stronger assistance to community organisations and the not-for-profit sector. The Office will also address important workforce challenges, including helping to establish a portable long service leave fund.

Some of these reforms, such as Community Foundations, will be linked to the work of urban renewal programs which have successfully promoted social inclusion in locations across Victoria.

We will maintain the *Public Tenant Employment Program* which provides training and employment opportunities for public housing tenants, and support community enterprises in *Neighbourhood Renewal* sites, pending the establishment of the Community Enterprise Catalyst.

Providing Additional Support for Communities with Special Needs

Each year several thousand people from a refugee background settle in Victoria. Refugees have faced significant personal hardship, such as experience of war and civil unrest, torture and trauma, loss of family members, grief and displacement. During settlement, refugees may face limited access to resources, family and community support and language barriers.

The Government is supporting refugees to re-establish their lives in Victoria, and will expand our successful refugee health nurse program by appointing an additional six nurses. We will help refugee children adapt to our school system, by funding the *Refugee School Support Program* and after-school homework support. The Government will also fund three regionally based multicultural liaison officers and six multi-lingual community education officers to work initially with East African communities to provide information on the justice system and improve access to relevant services.

Opening Up Libraries and Other Community Services To All

Victoria's libraries contain a rich warehouse of treasures to entertain, educate and inform. We will improve access to these materials by investigating how to establish borderless libraries through single library membership. We will also provide wireless internet access at all libraries in addition to existing desktop access, and improved computer safety as part of a comprehensive package to close the digital divide in Victoria.

Creating Connections Through Youth Transitions Hubs

At the age of 23, Di was not only grappling the emotional affects of her experience of family violence – she was also homeless and feeling powerless in the face of ever increasing debts.

Despite her best efforts, her age and her personal situation made it difficult for Di to settle in mainstream housing. She was greatly relieved when she got a referral into *Youth Transitions* accommodation, and then moved into a unit through the program.

Two years after she was first referred to *Youth Transitions*, Di's life is transformed. After finishing her course, Di found a full time job as a concierge. A year later, she still has – and loves – the job. With the support of *Youth Transitions*, she's made good progress on her debt and is sharing a private rental unit with friends.

As part of *Neighbourhood Renewal*, a major redevelopment of the Parkside public housing estate in Shepparton will include the creation of a new \$3 million community hub to deliver vital services and provide a place for the community to come together and socialise. Currently in the design stage, the facility will include a neighbourhood house and deliver educational programs, drug, alcohol and counselling services, aged and disability services, clinical services, child and maternal health services, tenancy services, local government and aged care services. The project involves all three levels of government.

Reducing Financial Pressure on Victorians

Rising petrol and housing costs are putting pressure on many low income families.

Low income Victorians will be assisted to maintain access to essential services through increases to the water and sewerage concession cap, extension of the medical cooling concession, improvement in household appliance and infrastructure grants for customers in hardship, and free water audits and retrofits for people experiencing hardship.

The Government will also increase the pensioner and concession cardholders' duty concession thresholds, the fourth increase since 1999.

The threshold for the full concession for stamp duty on land transfers increases from \$300,000 to \$330,000 and the threshold for a partial concession increases from \$400,000 to \$440,000. Concession cardholders also benefit from the Principal Place of Residence stamp duty on land transfers concession. As a result, these reforms deliver real stamp duty savings to more than 1,600 concession cardholders, including 400 people who would not be eligible if the thresholds were not increased. This is in addition to the 6,000 concession cardholders who have benefited from the concession scheme in the last year.

A land transfer duty exemption for homes transferred into special disability trusts will also be introduced in recognition of the particular nature of the arrangements for persons with a severe disability. The current land tax exemption for aged care facilities, supported residential care services and rooming houses will be extended to facilities that cater for groups including young people with a disability.

The Water and Sewerage Concession provides a 50% discount on water consumption, sewerage disposal and service charges. The maximum cap on this concession has been increased by 14.8% to \$182 from 1 July 2008, and by Consumer Price Index (CPI) thereafter.

The Medical Cooling Concession of 17.5% has been extended to more people and from three to six months. This was formerly known as the Summer Multiple Sclerosis Concession.

The *Home Wise* program (formerly known as the Capital Grant Scheme) will be extended to include ceiling insulation for eligible large households in hardship. This will reduce energy consumption costs and allow customers to make two applications within a 10 year period (presently grants are once in a lifetime).

Victorians living in rural areas will also be given much stronger incentives to switch to solar water heating, to save on energy prices and reduce the impacts on climate change.

A rebate for switching old hot water systems to solar will be expanded in rural areas. From 1 July 2008, up to \$2,500 will be available to reduce the cost of installing an electric/solar system (where reticulated gas is not available) or a gas/solar system (where gas is available). The value of the rebate will be determined in each case by the size and performance of the new system, and whether the applicant qualifies for the Australian Government rebate of \$1,000.

Under the new scheme people living in rural Victoria will be able to switch to environmentally friendly solar hot water at a one-off cost between \$500 and \$800, with ongoing savings of about \$245 on their power bills each year. Funding is also provided for 2,600 retrofits for low income households for energy efficiency measures such as insulation and weather seals. This builds on the 4,700 retrofits undertaken since 2003.

Funding will be provided to provide free water audits and retrofits to low income households.

The Government will also continue to assist people facing financial hardship through financial counselling and advisory services.

Opening Doors to Homeless People

Providing homeless people with the support they need when they need it, is essential to getting people back on their feet. The *Opening Doors* initiative will streamline access to social housing and homelessness services, reduce duplication and time wasted on unnecessary assessments and referrals, improve access to critical medical, mental health and drug and alcohol services and help reduce the need for people to revisit homelessness services.

Knowing where to go for help is central to achieving this. Local Area Service Networks will be the new access points for people, providing initial assessment and planning teams at every access point into the homelessness system.

A state-wide number will divert calls to appropriate access points, and a resource register will give real time information to the assessment teams about the availability of local accommodation options.

A Boost to Social Housing and Affordable Housing

Major investment is underway to boost social housing in Victoria, with funding for 80 public housing properties in 2008-09 for low income people and families. These properties will be predominantly delivered close to public transport in safe, vibrant, communities where there is easy access to jobs, training, shops and services.

Land will be purchased in Dandenong, Frankston, Footscray, Werribee, Ringwood, Ballarat and Bendigo *Transit Cities* as well as in the regional centre of Horsham, and be developed by not-for-profit housing associations to deliver a further 50 new affordable homes. We will be strengthening housing associations further, by converting a portfolio of their leased properties to ownership.

Aboriginal housing will also be strengthened through the *Aboriginal Rental Housing Program* (ARHP) with the acquisition of 30 homes in areas of highest need, doubling the number of properties purchased. The ARHP is currently managed by the Victorian Office of Housing, in partnership with Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV), a non-profit, non-government housing organisation. These 30 additional homes will ultimately be owned and managed by the Victorian Aboriginal community.

An important element of the housing affordability challenge is to increase housing choice so that access to quality housing is available at an affordable price. We will work with metropolitan councils to improve planning for population and housing growth and reduce planning impediments to housing supply. We will also strengthen policy and research capacity to develop strategies to improve efficiency in the housing market.



The Urban Renewal Employment Enterprise Program (UREEP) is one of 11 Community Works Enterprises operating across Victoria under the *Neighbourhood Renewal* program. These were created to undertake minor capital works on public housing properties and many now take on additional work in their local area, generating 60 jobs each year for disadvantaged jobseekers. In 2008, UREEP, and the other Community Works Enterprises will deliver around \$3.2 million of public housing improvement works, including energy retrofits to make housing more sustainable.

Support for Vulnerable People to Reduce the Risk of Homelessness

A pilot program that has been supporting social housing tenants with complex needs will now be funded on a permanent basis. This is supporting people with mental illness, drug and alcohol, health and behavioural problems, who require intensive support from a range of different services and who are at high risk of homelessness.

This joined-up approach will assist approximately 300 people each year by employing regional staff across Victoria to improve coordination of support services in their local area. This will help vulnerable tenants get the assistance they need, so they can avoid a spiral into homelessness. Brokerage funding will also be available to provide individuals with any additional specialist services they require to help them get their lives back on track. This will assist some of the most vulnerable people in the community to stabilise their housing.

This initiative is complemented by *New Integrated Supportive Housing* (included as part of the Improving Mental Health Services investment under Priority Area 3) that assists long-term homeless people experiencing mental illness to achieve stability in accommodation and other aspects of their lives. It recognises that people need a home first, followed by time to address the issues that have led to their homelessness.

This new approach builds on supportive housing models pioneered in North America and will be adapted to meet the local needs of homeless Victorians located in the inner city area of Melbourne. Up to 50 clients with a mental illness will be supported in affordable housing through this initiative. A range of other supports will be provided, including significant mental health support services, which will play a vital role in stabilising the lives of this highly vulnerable group.

Like people with a mental illness, ex-prisoners are also vulnerable to homelessness. Post-release housing and support for former prisoners has been shown to facilitate reintegration into the community and longer term diversion and rehabilitation. It can reduce re-offending by as much as 50% for people at risk of homelessness. By piloting housing support to ex-offenders the Government has significantly reduced recidivism in Victoria. This initiative will provide housing options for ex-prisoners to assist in supervision, reintegration and a further reduction in Victoria's re-offending rate which has fallen from 41% in 2002 to 36% in 2006.

Extending Reforms on Sexual Assault to Rural and Regional Areas

A wide range of reforms was introduced during 2007 to improve the way the criminal justice system responds to sexual crimes, including a specialist approach to the prosecution of sexual assault offences to minimise the trauma experienced by victims. Additional resources will improve the prosecution of sexual assault cases in rural and regional Victoria. The extended services, which will include a regional office in Geelong, will be supported with improved audio-visual technology so that victims can give their evidence from various remote facilities across the state rather than having to attend court in person.

Together, these measures will strengthen neighbourhoods and communities across Victoria and improve the lives of the people who live in them.

Priority Four: Developing Liveable Communities: Strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities	Total \$ Million Investment Over 4 Years
Strengthening Community Organisations	\$13.9
Creating Liveable Neighbourhoods and Communities	\$3.4
Refugee Support Strategy	\$17.7
Connected Libraries	\$3.0
Concessions :	
Stamp Duty on Land Transfer Concession	\$25.8
Water and Sewerage Concession cap increase	\$41.3
Medical Cooling Concession	\$2.5
Water Wise Homes	\$0.7
Home Wise ++	\$9.2
Solar Hot Water Rebates	\$33.0
Low Income Home Retrofits †	\$4.1
Helping Victorians Recover From Financial Hardship	\$9.4
Improving Access and Pathways to Homelessness and Housing Services - Opening Doors	\$29.1
Improving Housing Affordability	\$15.0
Support for Vulnerable Tenants in Social Housing	\$4.2
New Integrated Supportive Housing Model *	-
Building Confidence in Corrections - post release housing and support	\$4.7
Sexual Assault Reform (Rural and Regional and Geelong)	\$6.7 \$1.3 TEI
Sub Total ^	\$224.8

Summary of Initiatives Funded Through Other Sources:

Shepparton Parkside Estate Community Hub

More Affordable Homes in Transit Cities

Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP)

Community Works Enterprises - Urban Renewal
Employment Enterprise Program (UREEP)

‡ Over two years.

‡‡ For consistency the 2011-2013 allocation of \$2.4m has not been included in this table. Total funding for this initiative is \$11.6m over 5 years to 2012-2013.

* Funding for this initiative is included in Improving Mental Health Services

^ Table does not add due to rounding.