Building the Scaffolding

Strengthening support for young people in Victoria

Victorian Council of Social Service
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria


**Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS)**

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS works to ensure that all Victorians have access to and a fair share of the community's resources and services, through advocating for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. VCOSS members reflect a wide diversity, with members ranging from large charities, sector peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals involved in social policy debates.

**Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)**

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector in Victoria. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regards to policy issues affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representations to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people. YACVic also promotes and supports the participation of young people in debate and policy development areas that most affect them.

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YACVic and VCOSS wish to sincerely thank the following people, groups and agencies who generously shared their time and expertise in the development of this report:

- The 213 service providers who completed the ‘Who’s Carrying the Can? Services for young people in Victoria: What’s available and where are the gaps?’ survey
- The service providers that have provided case studies which are used throughout this report
- Members of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria’s Policy Advisory Group who provided feedback throughout the development of this report
- Members of the Inner City Regional Youth Affairs Network Middle Years Working Group
- The Interface Council Youth Reference Group
- Erin Ashmore, Coordinator, Way Out — Rural Youth and Sexual Diversity Program
- John Bonnice, Director of Strategy and Innovation, St Lukes, Anglicare
- Emma Breheny, Policy Officer, Youthlaw
- Sarah Davies, Chief Executive Officer, The Reach Foundation
- Robyn Freestone, Senior Policy and Internal Communications Officer, Youth Support and Advocacy Service
- Ian Gough, Manager Consumer Programs, Council to Homeless Persons
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- Dr George Taleporos, Manager, Youth Disability Advocacy Service
- Lottie Turner, Coordinator, Rainbow Network Victoria, Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University
- YACVic acknowledges the funding support of the Office for Youth, Department of Human Services
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Executive Summary

While most young Victorians do well, many face challenges as they move from childhood to adulthood, including homelessness, mental health issues, family violence, abuse and neglect, drug and alcohol issues and involvement in the criminal justice system. One in five young people do not have anyone in their lives to turn to for help and support.¹

Without appropriate and timely support, these challenges can and do have lifelong consequences — poorer health and wellbeing, lower education outcomes and poorer employment prospects, which are not only damaging for the individual but also costly for the wider community.

Providing support for young people can be likened to ‘scaffolding’ — support that is available to young people as they develop their own capacities. The level of scaffolding needed changes through the course of a young person’s life — through early childhood, the middle years (8 to 12 years†), adolescence and early adulthood — and can be built from a number of supports including families, community networks and schools.

This report looks at the role that community sector and government organisations play in reinforcing this scaffolding and considers how supports can be further strengthened to promote better outcomes for all young Victorians.

† Refer to glossary for definition of the middle years
Background

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) conducted this research to:

- identify current gaps in youth support services in Victoria
- assess the impact of those gaps on young people’s health and wellbeing
- identify relevant government policies and program initiatives
- identify solutions or actions to address youth support service needs
- recommend policy changes to improve young people’s health and wellbeing.

To explore these issues from the perspective of organisations that provide services to young people, a survey of 213 community, school and government service providers was undertaken in March 2012.

This research was also undertaken at a time of significant government and sector reform in Victoria, including:

- the implementation of the Community Sector Reform Project which will consider how the Victorian Government and the service sector work together to improve the lives of vulnerable Victorians
- the development of a whole of government vulnerable children’s framework
- the establishment of the Commission for Children and Young People
- the piloting of a new holistic case management model, Services Connect within the Department of Human Services
- the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s (DEECD) review of its approach to vulnerable children and young people
- the ongoing development and evaluation of the DEECD Youth Partnerships model
- the implementation of DEECD’s Towards Victoria as a Learning Community framework
- the development of a Compact between schools and DEECD
- significant changes to the funding and delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET)
- the development of the whole of government Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy
- the reform of the Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services Program
- reforms outlined as part of the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan
- the Economic Study on Service Delivery Reform and Disadvantage
- the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) from 1 July 2013 in Barwon, Victoria.
Findings

The survey of 213 service providers across all local government areas of Victoria highlighted a number of critical issues that need to be addressed to strengthen supports for young people. These issues include:

The identification of critical gaps in:

- specialist services, particularly in housing, flexible education options, and support for young people with disabilities and mental health issues
- policies and services for the ‘middle years’, children aged 8 to 12 years, which means they often go unsupported at this critical time, including the transition from primary to secondary school
- the availability of generalist youth support services
- public transport options, particularly in outer metropolitan, rural and regional areas
- service availability including:
  - after-hours and weekend support for young people
  - services in population growth areas
  - program delivery and staff recruitment in rural and regional Victoria
- ongoing funding challenges including:
  - funding models that exclude young people by imposing age and eligibility criteria
  - short term funding that undermines the sustainability of programs and increases staff turnover which limits relationship development between young people and workers
  - prescriptive funding criteria that does not allow for a holistic service response to the diverse range and complexity of issues young people may experience

- the need for stronger partnerships between all the services that support young people — youth services, schools, specialist adult support services and family services — and the need for these partnerships to be appropriately resourced and coordinated
- the need for stronger and more coordinated needs identification and strategic service planning at the local, regional and state levels
- the lack of a coordinated approach to evaluation and outcomes measurement.

Findings indicate that five key elements are critical to building a strong service system for children and young people:

1. Support across the life course: adolescence is starting earlier and finishing later. This shift demands a rethink about how we respond to children, young people and young adults.
2. Early intervention at every age and stage: a diverse mix of services can provide support to young people at every age and at every stage of an issue, from prevention and early invention to more specialist supports through to crisis support and beyond.
3. Services working collaboratively: youth services must remain at the heart of the service system for young people, but an integrated response also requires the expertise of other services such as family support, adult support services and schools.
4. Accessible and inclusive services: support needs to be accessible, available when and where young people need it and inclusive of a diverse range of young people.
5. Supporting improved outcomes: services and supports need to be built on sound evidence and respond to identified need within communities.
In this report, YACVic and VCOSS primarily recommend strategies that address systemic policy, funding and practice issues. It is only by addressing the systemic issues more holistically that longer term changes can be implemented and service gaps filled at the local level.

In planning the service system at a local level, it is clear that there are a number of supports that all young people should have access to including:

- safe and affordable housing options from crisis accommodation though to private rental
- health services including primary health services, mental health services and drug and alcohol services
- education services at primary, secondary and further education levels, including access to flexible education models
- generalist youth services that can link young people to specialist supports as required
- transport services
- recreation options — both structured and unstructured
- mentors, particularly where young people may have limited or no access to family and other support networks
- disability support services
- culturally appropriate and competent support services.

The types of services needed within a community and the manner in which they are delivered will vary across the state. The implementation of effective planning structures at the local, regional and state levels will help to ensure that policy, programs and funding respond to identified need.

VCOSS and YACVic recommend that a number of overarching system reforms are required to strengthen supports for children and young people:

1. Develop a life course approach to policy and program development

Policy and funding frameworks, at all levels of government, should promote seamless transitions across the ‘life course’ — from the early years to middle years through to adolescence and beyond.

Recommendations

1. That the Victorian Government incorporate a ‘life course’ approach — from birth to adulthood — into policy development beginning with the development of the Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families Framework.

2. That Victorian local governments incorporate a ‘life course’ approach to policy development to better integrate and coordinate policy and programs between the child, family and youth portfolios.

3. That the Victorian Government develops a policy framework for the ‘middle years’ — 8 to 12 years — which incorporates new program development and specific funding for services to support children in the middle years.

4. That the Victorian Government resources a partnership between the early years, family services, youth and academic sectors to address workforce skills and development in relation to the middle years.

5. That the Victorian Government extend the Best Start program statewide and expand the scope of Best Start to 12 years to better respond to the health and wellbeing needs of children in the middle years.

6. That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development increase the assessment of health and wellbeing of children and young people through primary and secondary school based on research about the critical ages to undertake assessment.

7. That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop transition planning for children moving between primary and secondary schools.
2. Develop more effective local, regional and state service planning, development and governance arrangements

YACVic and VCOSS propose a stronger governance structure to support more coordinated policy development and service planning at local, regional and statewide levels with the aim of enhancing outcomes for young people and children in the middle years. The proposed structure includes:

- regional Youth Outcomes Taskforces that include the most senior regional departmental staff from relevant departments as well as senior decision makers from Victoria Police and the community sector. The Taskforce would be responsible for strategically planning youth service delivery across the DHS and DEECD region, and would be required to demonstrate significant gains in life outcomes for young people, defined in key performance indicators, linked to the Victorian Children and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS)

- local youth outcomes collaboration groups that are responsible for developing local partnerships and processes to ensure that services are working together to address issues. The Group would include the local community agencies that deliver services to young people, local government, local education providers, including schools, and local police

- children and Youth Services Coordination Board — the name and scope of the current statewide Children's Services Coordination Board should be amended to a Children and Youth Services Coordination Board to address systemic issues for children and young people 0 to 25.

Recommendations

8. That the Victorian Government creates a new governance framework to assist evidence based and coordinated service planning, development and delivery for children and young people across Victoria. This framework would include a Regional Youth Outcomes Taskforce and Local Youth Outcomes Collaboration Groups.

9. That the Victorian Government change the name and extend the scope of the Children's Services Coordination Board to the Children and Youth Services Coordination Board.

3. Strengthen early intervention support through effective education and community sector organisation partnerships

Victoria needs a school system that responds to the evidence that children and young people learn at different rates, in different ways and at different times — particularly when they have to deal with difficult issues in their lives. More work is needed to develop learning environments, both in mainstream schools and alternative settings, in which young people can access quality prevention and early intervention support, and where young people needing additional support are identified early and supported in a timely way.

Recommendations

10. That the Victorian Government commit to collaborative models that will engage vulnerable young people in learning taking into consideration the system reform initiatives identified from the Youth Partnerships demonstration sites.

11. That the role of partnership brokers between schools and community sector organisations, incorporating the strengths of the School Focussed Youth Service program, be retained in future models of support for vulnerable young people developed by DEECD.

12. That the Victorian Government trial a ‘youth workers in schools’ model where youth workers from local services are funded to participate in multidisciplinary student wellbeing teams within school settings.

13. That the Victorian Government work with community sector organisations and schools to develop and resource more flexible models of education across Victoria.
4. Align funding models with policy frameworks

While policy and service delivery is shifting towards a more holistic and coordinated ‘people centred approach’, funding remains in silos which could undermine policy reform. Funding models need to evolve to align with the policy vision.

Recommendation

14. That the Victorian Government develops more flexible and transparent funding models that support coordinated youth centred models. This should include the establishment of a shared pool of funding across government departments that can be utilised for more holistic service delivery approaches.

5. Build the capacity of the workforce that supports young people

Anyone who works with young people — whether in schools, government agencies or community sector organisations — needs to have the skills to ensure that any young person they support receives a service response that is appropriate, is based on the Code of Ethical Practice and is inclusive of young people’s diverse backgrounds, issues and needs.

There is also a need to increase the availability of generalist youth support services which play a pivotal early intervention and prevention role in promoting the wellbeing of young people and improving coordination between service providers. Specialist adult support services, such as drug and alcohol, mental health, and housing services also need additional resources to be more family sensitive — that is, inclusive of the children and young people in the family when working with the adult.

Recommendations

15. That the Victorian Government develop a workforce strategy that ensures all workers with young people, including DHS Services Connect case management staff, are familiar with the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice and that all organisations that support children, young people and their families undertake cultural competence and disability competence training.

6. Develop tools to better measure outcomes for children and young people

Government and community sector organisations share the concern that the system currently focuses more on inputs and outputs than outcomes. There is also agreement that outcomes are difficult to measure, particularly over the longer term. Community sector organisations, in partnership with government, must work together to inform the development of a range of measurement tools that can capture the complexity of working with children and young people.

Recommendation

16. That the Victorian Government, in partnership with local government, invest resources to create more generalist youth support services across Victoria.

17. That the Victorian Government fund specialist adult services to develop family-sensitive practices as recommended by the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry.

18. That the Victorian Government, in partnership with the community sector, local government and schools, develop measurement tools to monitor the health, development and wellbeing of young people and children in the middle years building on the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS).
Introduction

The scaffolding that supports young people

While most young Victorians fare well, many face challenges as they move from childhood to adulthood. Too many disengage from education at an early age, become involved in the child protection and youth justice systems or experience significant health and mental health issues. These and other experiences can affect young people for life.

Adolescence is a critical phase of emotional, social and physical growth and development. We know that getting the right support at the right time can help young people lead healthy lives and stay connected, engaged and participating in their communities.

Parents, carers, friends and relatives are the main sources of advice and support for young people during adolescence. However, important support can come from elsewhere — teachers, mentors, employers, coaches, broader community networks, religious organisations and formal social support services such as youth services and mental health services. But not all young people have support networks in place: 20 per cent of those surveyed by Mission Australia in 2011 said they had nowhere to go for advice and support.

It is important that supports are available and accessible for all young people. Everyone needs a safety net and someone to turn to for support at some point in their life.

Young people and the issues they experience cannot be considered in a vacuum. It is important to view the development of issues along the life course to take into account what proceeds adolescence in early childhood and what longer term issues may emerge in adulthood.
There is sound evidence that prevention and intervention strategies applied early in life and in the life of a problem are more effective for individual outcomes, and deliver a better economic return to the state, than intervention applied later in life.

These strategies can include:

- prevention-focused activities such as community or school based mental health promotion, mentoring, youth engagement and life-skills programs
- early intervention support, such as counselling
- more specialised and longer term support to address a serious or chronic issue or set of inter-related issues such as homelessness, mental health and drug and alcohol issues.

Young people require different types of support at each developmental stage and for different periods of time. Young people may also shift in and out of levels of need. They may require intensive support at times and little or no assistance at other times.

The provision of a holistic system of support for young people — where services are ‘linked-up’ — can be likened to ‘scaffolding’ — support that is available to young people as they build their own capacities. Scaffolding can be increased, reduced or removed as needs change across the life course. Scaffolding can be built from a number of supports including families, social networks, schools, youth services and other community services.

This report looks at the role that youth, community and government services play in providing this scaffolding and how supports can be further strengthened to promote better outcomes for all young people.

Interventions that reduce youth disengagement could potentially return 23.6 times the government’s initial investment to society.
The features of a strong and supportive service system

In reforming service delivery, the Victorian Department of Human Services posed the question: ‘What would a more effective and efficient human service system look like?’ This report asks: ‘What would a more effective and efficient service system for young people look like?’ It is by answering this question that we can start to build the necessary scaffolding.

VCOSS and YACVic believe that five elements are crucial to building this scaffolding.

Support across the life course
Adolescence is starting earlier and finishing later. This shift demands a rethink about how we respond to children, young people and young adults. We must ensure that children, adolescents and young adults don’t fall through the gaps that currently exist between age based programs. Service responses must support transitions and recognise the complexity of development across the life course.

Early intervention at every age and stage
A diverse mix of services can provide support to young people at every age and at every stage of an issue, from prevention and early intervention to more specialist supports through to crisis support and beyond. Early intervention can operate at any stage along this continuum. It is never too late to offer support that may prevent the escalation of issues for a young person.

Services working collaboratively
To respond to young people’s issues more holistically, services across the spectrum need to work together. Youth services must remain at the heart of the service system for young people, but an integrated response also requires the expertise of other services such as family support and adult services and importantly, universal services such as schools. Collaboration across the universal and specialised sectors must be strengthened.

Accessible and inclusive services
Support needs to be accessible and available when and where young people need it, ‘whether they live in Fitzroy or the Mallee’. Supports also need to be welcoming and inclusive of a diverse range of young people.

Supporting improved outcomes
Services and supports need to be built on sound evidence and respond to identified need within communities. What services are required will necessarily differ according to community need. Identifying this need requires effective planning and coordination at the local, regional, state and federal levels. Services must also be resourced to strengthen evaluation capacity so they can demonstrate improved outcomes for young people at individual, organisational and community levels.

A strong and complementary policy and funding framework must underpin this scaffolding. And, most importantly, the needs of children and young people should drive the continuous development of the system that supports them.
Why is this issue important now?

This report is written at a time of significant government and sector reform in Victoria, including:

- the implementation of the Community Sector Reform Project which will consider how the Victorian Government and the service sector work together to improve the lives of vulnerable Victorians
- the development of a whole of government vulnerable children’s framework and the establishment of the Children and Young People’s Commission which will monitor whole–of–government performance against this framework
- the piloting of a new holistic case management model, Services Connect within DHS
- the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s (DEECD) review of its approach to vulnerable children and young people and the development of the DEECD Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- the ongoing development and evaluation of the DEECD Youth Partnerships model
- the implementation of DEECD’s Towards Victoria as a Learning Community policy which emphasises the importance of partnerships between schools and other agencies, including local community sector organisations, to support improved learning outcomes
- the development of a Compact between schools and DEECD that emphasises the autonomy of schools and stresses the need for greater accountability relating to student outcomes
- significant changes to the funding and delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Victoria
- the development of the whole of government Victorian Alcohol and Drug Strategy and the release of the Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria’s plan 2013–2017
- the reform of the Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services Program, to be reframed as Community Based Mental Health Services
- reforms outlined as part of the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan including the Homelessness Action Plan System Reform Project which will consider the effectiveness of the current service system in meeting the needs of people who are homeless
- the Economic Study on Service Delivery Reform and Disadvantage project which will consider all services currently funded or delivered by DHS and mental health and alcohol and drug services funded by the Department of Health. The study will be used in developing plans for ongoing service delivery reform and in building the case for investment in their implementation
- the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) from 1 July 2013 in Barwon, Victoria.

It is critical that services supporting young people are part of these processes so that the needs of young people, and the experiences of the services that support them, inform reform and achieve improved outcomes.

These reforms are also underway at a time of economic ‘belt tightening’ coupled with significant population growth which places additional demands on service provision.

The Victorian Government has outlined a vision of ‘quality services that are coordinated, easy to navigate and responsive to individual needs and aspirations’. The challenge for all levels of government and service providers is to explore new or different approaches — at legislative, policy, funding and practice levels — to ensure young people do not fall between gaps in the service system and are effectively supported when and where they need it.

The policy context around achieving improved outcomes for young people is discussed in more detail in chapter one.
Building the Scaffolding

In 2006 YACVic and VCOSS published *Who’s Carrying the Can? A report into youth services gaps in Victoria* which highlighted a range of service delivery gaps across Victoria, particularly in the areas of:

- psycho-social counselling services for young people
- early intervention mental health services for young people
- culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal young people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- affordable housing options for young people
- supports for young people with a disability
- outreach support, particularly in rural and regional Victoria
- supports for children and young people in the ‘middle years’, that is 8 to 12 years old.

*Who’s Carrying the Can?* recommended investment in a locally-based, integrated and comprehensive youth service system that is structured along a prevention — early intervention — secondary — tertiary service continuum.

In the same year, research commissioned by the Melbourne Interface Councils reiterated that there were insufficient services to meet current and projected demand from young people on the urban fringe. Key gaps included:

- crisis services, such as emergency housing and primary health services
- outreach services
- services to support young people with complex care needs.

The *Staying Connected* report made a number of recommendations, including investment in generalist youth workers, better prevention and early intervention strategies to address mental health issues and engagement in education, and the creation of local youth service partnerships. The Interface Councils recently released a new report projecting the implications of population growth in interface councils on resources and infrastructure requirements.

Much has changed since 2006, including governments at both state and federal levels. It is therefore a good time to reflect on the findings of *Who’s Carrying the Can?* to see whether and where the gaps have been filled and what more needs to be achieved to strengthen outcomes for young people.
The aim of this report

The objectives of this report are to:

- examine what progress has been made in the provision of and access to youth services across Victoria since 2006
- identify current gaps in youth support services
- assess the impact of those gaps on young people’s health and wellbeing
- identify relevant government policies and program initiatives
- identify solutions or actions to address youth support service needs
- inform government policy that impacts on the health and wellbeing of young people.

To explore these issues from the perspective of organisations that provide services to young people, a survey of 213 community, school and government service providers was undertaken in March 2012.

Any consideration of supports for young people should take into account young people’s views. VCOSS and YACVic did not have the resources to do this directly as part of this project. However, we have included a chapter on young people’s voices to capture current research into young peoples’ needs and experiences of the service system.

The focus of this report is on ‘services for young people’ rather than ‘youth services’. This approach recognises that many services provide support to young people, including schools, health services — including community health services — disability services and adult services that work with the family.

This broad range of services need to be engaged in this discussion to ensure we gain an accurate picture of what services are available to young people, where there are gaps and how we can enhance coordination across all services to develop a more responsive service system.

This does not ignore the central role that traditional youth services, including generalist services, play in supporting young people. Youth services should be at the centre of an integrated approach to supporting young people.

Where this report refers to ‘children’, it primarily refers to children in the middle years, ages 8 to 12. This reflects the critical importance of the ‘middle years’ as an age group and as part of the life course approach.
The structure of this report

Chapter 1 outlines the current mix of services for young people across universal and specialist services and the policy context, at state, local and federal levels, that impact on the development of services for young people.

Chapter 2 outlines the findings from the survey of 213 service providers in Victoria.

Chapter 3 outlines recent research about young people’s experiences of the service system.

Chapter 4 considers how to strengthen the scaffolding that supports young people, including:

- the need to develop an overarching policy framework that reflects a life course approach
- the importance of early intervention support at every age and every stage of a problem
- the characteristics of integrated and coordinated service delivery models
- the need for services to be accessible and inclusive of all young people
- the need to build strong evaluation methods to support improved outcomes.

Chapter 5 considers the key findings arising from this research and proposes recommendations for future action.

Case studies are used throughout the report to highlight relevant work underway in Victoria and elsewhere. The case study material has been provided by the organisations involved or obtained through research. The use of case studies does not suggest that the program is necessarily best practice. Rather, the case studies are used to highlight the diversity of service responses across the state.
The policy, program and funding framework that underpins the services supporting young people is complex and involves all three levels of government. Programs are also developed and run by community sector organisations and schools and the system is supported by philanthropic, business, community and academic partnerships. This complexity is currently heightened because there are multiple streams of reform underway.

This chapter will outline the current mix of services for young people across both universal and specialist service systems, and the major reform processes and policy initiatives that are underway that will impact on the services that support young people.
The largest government funded service for young people is school education. Schools and other universal services (those that are available to all young people) form a critical part of the platform of support to respond to young people's needs. Many young people also need additional support through specialist services, including youth, family, disability, mental health and housing services.

A challenge in Victoria is that while there are many high quality programs for young people, coordination across universal and specialist services, and between different 'silos' of specialist services, can be limited. In part this is because funding is fragmented across three levels of government and hundreds of discrete program streams.

Addressing this coordination needs to be a priority. This does not mean losing the unique and specialist skills of each sector, but rather promoting a shared understanding, common language and common vision across sectors to better support children, young people and their families.

The following section outlines the current service system that supports young people in Victoria.

The youth services sector
Developing a comprehensive picture of the youth services sector is challenging, as services are provided to young people by a range of professionals across a multitude of contexts. Despite this, our shared understanding of the role and purpose of the youth sector has progressed significantly in recent years.

In a Victorian context, the promotion of consistent, ethical and evidence-based youth work practice has been aided by the publication of the *Code of Ethical Practice — A first step for the Victorian Youth Sector*. The Code was developed by YACVic, in partnership with the Victorian youth sector, and provides a clear framework for youth work practice. It is taught in Victorian youth work courses and has been adopted as organisational policy by many youth services across the state.

Youth workers operate according to the 'best interest' principle. They recognise the young person as the primary client, acknowledge their developing independence and support them to take control of the decisions which affect their lives.

Youth services provide many different kinds of support for young people including:

Generalist youth support services
As noted above, youth work is predicated on the idea that all young people should have access to someone who is able to support them.

† The Code prescribes eight 'youth work practice principles' that describe what youth work achieves:

- the empowerment of all young people
- young people's participation
- social justice for young people
- the safety of young people
- respect for young people's human dignity and worth
- young people's connectedness to important people in their lives, such as family and community
- positive health and wellbeing outcomes for young people
- the positive transitions and healthy development of young people.
who they can rely on to uphold their interests. For young people without family, friends or others to act in this way, generalist youth services play a vital role in helping them navigate challenges and develop pro-social coping skills. They act as a gateway to, and an advocate within, specialist services that may otherwise be daunting or inaccessible, particularly to young people experiencing acute disadvantage.

Generalist youth services also often provide civic engagement and leadership opportunities and an avenue through which all young people can access information and support to increase their health and wellbeing. Generalist youth support services are youth specific and universal; that is, available to all young people, and can include holiday programs, life skills, drop in programs, homework programs, recreation and leisure events and arts programs. While the mode of service delivery may vary, their common aims are to provide support to young people to prevent problems occurring and to be a point of direct support and referral where intervention is needed. Local government has traditionally been a major provider of generalist youth support services.

Generalist services may also provide secondary intervention to address the impact of any issues that have arisen. Services can include those targeted to young people who are more at risk of family breakdown, early school leaving, bullying, and mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety, and that are not experienced at an acute level. These programs may include family mediation, counselling, advocacy and case work.

Specialised youth support services

Youth services are also provided for young people facing particular challenges. These specialist services incorporate service models that are designed to specifically address and best meet young people’s needs. The following information highlights examples of these services.

Youth housing and homelessness services

Services for young people who are homeless are provided by both generalist services, catering to all ages, and youth specific services and include a range of responses, which may comprise supported accommodation, such as youth refuges, or outreach based support of varying types, intensity and duration. Youth homelessness responses typically focus on stabilising a young person’s housing situation and addressing those factors that led to their housing insecurity. Alongside existing services, the Victorian Government has announced funding for three 40-bed Youth Foyers, which will provide young people with accommodation as well as support to re-engage or remain engaged with education, training and employment. A number of youth specific Innovation Action Projects are also being piloted under the Victorian Government’s recently released Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011-2015.

Youth justice services

In Victoria, both government and community based services deliver programs for young people in contact with the justice system, depending on their level of engagement with criminal justice. Community based programs include the Youth Support Service (YSS), funded by DHS, which assists young people aged between 10 and 17 years, who are ‘in the early stages of involvement’ in the juvenile justice system or who are at risk of involvement.

Residential care services

In Victoria, approximately 5,600 children and young people aged between 0 and 17 years live in out-of-home care, and approximately 9 per cent of those are in residential care. A variety of community sector organisations are funded by DHS to provide out of home care placements for children and young people who cannot live at home. This includes foster and residential care and case management responsibility for some kinship care arrangements.

Drug and alcohol services

Many drug and alcohol services across Victoria provide support for young people with problematic substance use. Services include, but are not limited to, the Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), a state-wide service that provides a range of specialist drug and alcohol services for young people aged between 12 and 25 years. YSAS services include an Alcohol and Drug Youth consultant, withdrawal services, a supported accommodation program, residential rehabilitation services and a service for young parents.

Mental health services

In Victoria, specialist youth mental health services are available for young people. Services include Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which are funded by DoH and involve crisis assessment and case management. Other services include intensive outreach services, acute inpatient services, Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services (PDRSS), and Youth
Early Psychosis (YEP) Services. Orygen Youth Health also provides specialist mental health services for young people aged between 15 and 24 years.

In addition, headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation and provides a wide range of mental health services for young people aged 12 to 25 years in all states and territories. headspace aims to provide holistic and ‘evidence–based, quality services delivered by well–trained professionals’ to improve young people's mental health and overall wellbeing.

Employment assistance services
Services to young people who need assistance finding and maintaining employment are provided in the main by the Federal Government program, Job Services Australia (JSA). While most young people would access mainstream JSA providers, a number of youth–specific JSA providers offer specialised employment services to young people.

Young people may also receive assistance through the Youth Connections program, a Federal Government initiative aimed at providing support to young people who have disengaged from or are at risk of disengaging from ‘education and/or family and the community’. Services are generally provided to young people aged between 13 and 19 years, though states and territories may have different age brackets. Youth Connections includes case management, outreach and support to help strengthen young people’s engagement with education, as well as their transition into employment.

Youth mentoring
Youth mentoring provides a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with adults who offer guidance, support and encouragement. Youth mentoring programs primarily focus on the social and emotional wellbeing of a young person. However, some programs may also look at education, faith and culture, life skills, or leadership.

Mentoring is usually site–based, in a school or youth centre, or community–based where mentors and mentees catch up anywhere in their local neighbourhood. Mentoring relationships are generally ‘one–to–one’ or occur in small groups. Mentors are mostly adult volunteers, recruited from the local community. The cohort of young people involved in mentoring ranges dramatically depending on the program design and groups of young people targeted.

The family services sector
Any discussion of children and young people under the age of 18, particularly those who are vulnerable, needs to be considered in the context of their families and the family services sector.

There has been a shift in focus in recent times around the role of the family in youth services, with growing awareness of the benefits of working with a young person in their family context where appropriate, while balancing the autonomy and privacy needs of young people.

While the relationship between young people and their families changes during adolescence, and family can be the source of problems for many young people — because of abuse, neglect and family conflict — families also play a very important role in supporting, sympathising, guiding and setting boundaries.

As the survey respondents to this report noted, parents and families also need support to deal with the issues that arise during stages of childhood and adolescence. This will require different service models — online, outreach and program based — and strategies to engage harder to reach families.

The aim of family services, funded by DHS and provided through community based family services, is to promote the safety, stability and development of vulnerable children, young people and their families. Family services may intervene to improve parenting capacity and skills, parent–child relationships, child development and social connectedness.

Family services are typically delivered through a case work model which involves an assessment of need and the development of an action plan to address the identified needs of the child and family. It details the planned interventions, such as outreach, in–home support, family group conferencing and counselling.

Family services have the capacity to provide intensive, multidisciplinary responses and are authorised to consult with or make reports to Child Protection when a child is believed to be in need of protection.

Family services have a legislated mandate to work with children and young people under 18 using the Best Interests Framework (see breakout) which has arguably promoted a more consistent practice approach between services.
ChildFIRST

ChildFIRST was established in 24 catchments across Victoria to provide a point of entry into a local child and family service, to promote earlier intervention supports, to enhance coordination and integration across services, and to divert families from Child Protection where possible.44

Each of the 24 ChildFIRST catchments have developed local Alliances — groups of local family service providers and statutory child protection services — which are responsible for operational management, catchment planning and providing service coordination at the sub-regional level.

Some Alliances have appointed a coordinator role to facilitate the development of partnerships and this has led to greater capacity for catchment planning analysis. This role is seen as critical in maintaining the momentum of the partnerships.45

The legislative mandate for family services and the Best Interests framework46

The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 places responsibilities on child and family services to respond according to need and in culturally appropriate and inclusive ways, and recognises the importance of the right mix of professionals and high quality programs to meet the changing needs of children and families.

The Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 outlines additional considerations for promoting positive outcomes for children and their families. At the heart of the Act is a set of ‘best interests principles’ that requires family services, child protection and placement services to protect children from harm, protect their rights and promote their development in culturally and age appropriate ways. Section 10 states that “the best interests of the child must always be paramount” and “when determining whether a decision or action is in the best interests of the child, the need to protect the child from harm, to protect his or her rights and to promote his or her development (taking into account his or her age and stage of development) must always be considered”.

The Best Interests framework was developed:

- to create a shared understanding, a common language and a consistent approach to ensuring the best interests of vulnerable children, young people and their families across assessment, planning and action
- to assist family services, child protection and placement services to respond to a child’s needs for safety, stability and development, in coherent and holistic ways that recognise and strengthen the links between a child and family and their local community resources
- to give the needs and interests of Aboriginal children and their families appropriate attention and prominence and drive the development of more coherent, integrated and culturally aware service responses
- to provide a shared framework for reviewing the outcomes of work with a child and their family
- to provide a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of child and family support services in protecting and promoting the best interests of vulnerable children and families using the Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework (see chapter four). The Outcomes Framework provides a common basis for setting objectives and planning for children 0 to 18 years across the whole of government.47
Specialist adult support services
Specialist adult services that have a role to play in supporting children and young people include:

- alcohol and drug services
- mental health services
- disability services
- housing and homelessness services.

There were about 17,600 families with children living in public housing in June 2011. About 16,400 families with children were waiting for public housing in June 2010.\(^{48}\)

The Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry noted the importance of specialist adult support services in responding to the needs of children and young people and the need for these specialist services to develop family sensitive practices — that is, to both support adults in parenting or caring roles and address any risks for children and young people. The Inquiry recommended that the Victorian Government fund the development of such practices in specialist adult services, starting with an audit of current practices prioritising drug and alcohol services.\(^{49}\)

It recognised this will place added demands on those organisations including the need for new infrastructure, staff training, new treatment models, new data recording systems and new screening and assessment procedures.

Health services
Health services are an important part of the support system because they are in regular contact with children, young people and families. They include:

**Public hospitals:** for example, the Royal Children’s Hospital operates the Centre for Adolescent Health, which includes the Adolescent Forensic Health Service for clients of youth justice and the Young People’s Health Service for homeless young people.

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Community health services: provide drug and alcohol, dental, disability, and family violence services, home and community care, medical, mental health, and post-acute care at 351 sites across Victoria. The Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry notes that ‘the early intervention potential of community health services to reduce the vulnerability of children and young people needs further consideration’.\(^{50}\)

**General practitioners (GPs):** The Inquiry also noted that GPs are the first point of contact for medical care and referral in Victoria. This broad coverage means they are well placed to identify vulnerable children, young people and families who would benefit from early intervention programs.\(^{51}\)

**Schools**
Schools play a critical role in the development and wellbeing of children and young people, and can be the only formal institution many families engage with. This puts a responsibility on schools to develop supports for students within the school setting and refer children and young people to specialist services where necessary. A range of support services are outlined on page 26.

There is also clear need to develop specific strategies to respond to those children and young people who are not engaged in any form of education. This group should not be put in the ‘too hard basket’ simply because they are not enrolled in a mainstream school, but rather be prioritised in education policy and funding.

“As a universal and compulsory service, schools are uniquely placed to identify vulnerable children and young people, to provide additional support to children in need, and to refer children and their families to other specialist services where appropriate.”\(^{52}\)
Current supports for students in Victorian schools

The Primary School Nursing Program
A free service provided by DEECD to all children attending primary schools in Victoria. Primary school nurses visit schools and can undertake health assessments, provide information about health and link children and families to community services.

School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ)
This is offered to students in Prep. It asks a range of questions about the child’s health history, wellbeing and family circumstances and provides an opportunity for parents and carers to express any concerns that they may have about their child. Based on results, the school nurse makes a health assessment and any necessary referrals, such as a vision or hearing test.

Student Support Services
Includes psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers and other allied health professionals. This service is currently changing direction with support services now being determined by Principals on a network basis rather than being allocated to specific schools.

Koorie Education Coordinators
Lead the regional implementation of the Wannik Strategy — Learning Together — Journey to Our Future and assist schools and Koorie students with a range of programs and initiatives.

Koorie Engagement Support Officers
Focus specifically on the engagement of Koorie students, families and communities within the government school and early childhood systems, as well as kindergartens and other areas of early childhood.

Koorie Transitions Officers
Develop relationships with Koorie young people and their families to increase the number who remain in education or training and engage in post-school pathways.

Primary Welfare Officers
Aim to enhance the capacity of schools to develop positive school cultures and to support students who are at risk of disengagement and not achieving their educational potential.

Student Welfare Coordinators
Located in all government secondary schools to help students address issues such as truancy, bullying, drug use and depression. They are mostly part-time and work with other professionals to address needs.

School Focused Youth Service
A statewide service to support young people aged 10 to 18 years, who are at risk of self-harm, disengagement from school, family or community. Funding for this program ends on June 30, 2013 and the State Government is considering other ways to support young people in learning.

Secondary school nurse program
This program aims to reduce negative health issues and risk taking behaviours among young people and can provide primary health care through professional clinical nursing, including assessment, care, referral and support. About two thirds of government secondary schools take part in this program and most nurses are allocated to two secondary schools.

Program for Students with Disabilities
Provides additional resources to government schools (primary and secondary) to help deliver educational programs for eligible students. Support can include specialist staff, teacher professional development, specialised equipment/materials, and education support staff.
Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs)

Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) were established in 2001 to improve the education, employment and training outcomes of 10–19 year olds in their local areas. The 31 LLENs now in operation are made up of individuals and organisations who wish to assist young people’s engagement in school, training and employment, including government, employers and local businesses, education and training providers and others in the community.

LLENs particularly focus on assisting young people who are disengaged or disengaging from school through:

- the brokerage and support of partnerships
- local strategic planning
- facilitation and support of community initiatives and collaborations
- information gathering about issues affecting young people and organisations providing support to young people
- the development of resources.

LLENs also deliver the School Business Community Partnership Brokers Program, a joint initiative by the Federal and Victorian Governments as part of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions.

LLENs are currently under review.

School – community partnerships

Vulnerable children and young people do better with the support of programs and policies that integrate and link education, health and community services. These supports also foster social inclusion and strengthen community involvement by building links and networks between schools and broader community supports.

Research undertaken by the DEECD and reinforced by the survey responses for this report indicate that many service providers and schools have formed partnerships, but there is little information available about their exact nature. Figure 1 below highlights the need for stronger partnerships between schools and community organisations. More research is needed to determine the nature and extent of partnerships between schools and community organisations and where they can be strengthened.

Figure 1: Which organisations do secondary schools most commonly partner with?69

“Engagement with schooling through youth and adolescence has been found to be associated with positive outcomes in almost every facet of life – not only through improvements in employment and earnings – but also in health, family life and community participation and cohesion.”57
**CASE STUDY**

**Partnerships with Schools: Shellharbour Youth Services Program — NSW**

As part of the Shellharbour Youth Services Program on the south coast of NSW, youth workers are employed by an independent organisation (in this case local government) and work with local high schools for a dedicated number of hours per week per school.

The youth workers in schools program is part of a broader outreach approach of youth services, who also engage with young people in a range of other community settings. Youth workers focus on case management, group work, counselling and referral.

The youth worker’s time is divided between providing support or programs to young people and engaging directly with teaching staff. Youth workers also provide support, information and advice to teachers.

**Flexible learning options**

Keeping more young people engaged in education requires more flexible learning environments with alternative curriculum and education settings, both in and out of mainstream schools.

DEECD has done significant work on developing flexible learning options including commissioning KPMG to inform the development of a consistent policy framework. Any further action needs to build on this valuable work.

Community sector organisations provide many flexible learning options within and outside schools; many, in fact, are the sole provider of alternative and flexible learning environments in some communities and for some vulnerable young people.

Community sector organisations also operate and fund other education programs, such as breakfast clubs or learning support programs that operate outside school hours. These programs often rely on philanthropic funding to cover costs.

**CASE STUDY**

**NETSchool**

NETSchool Bendigo works with young people (15-20 years) who are experiencing difficulties with mainstream schooling but who have a desire to continue learning.

Established in 2005, NETschool is a program developed and supported by Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) to provide an ‘alternative’ educational approach for students who, for a variety of reasons, have difficulty completing high school through a ‘mainstream’ secondary school but who wish to continue with their education.

NETschool enhances the concept of schools working with and within their school networks and communities to meet the learning needs of all young people; it promotes the concept of community responsibility for and ownership of the issue of youth retention and education.

NETschool provides student-centred curriculum with intensive support through two program streams. There is a centre based program where learners attend a mix of traditional classes and/or do their school work from the NETschool rooms following either a personalised learning project or VCE curriculum. There is also a home based program for both young mothers and for learners whose mental health is a barrier to participation in the centre based program. Home based learners undertake formal curriculum based work assisted by technologically delivered content and mentor support. The ‘NET’ in NETschool refers to the virtual and personal network connections to the worlds of knowledge, support and vocation.

NETschool works with one student at a time. Each learner decides what they wish to study and with the support of their NETschool mentor, goals are set and achievable steps are taken to move forward. Learning can take place at the NETschool Centre, or online via the NETschool Bendigo Online Community.
CASE STUDY
Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) — SA

ICAN is a South Australian model designed to address school retention. ICANs offer flexible learning options to 12–19 year old students who are:

- enrolled in school but at risk of leaving early
- attending school but not actively participating in their education
- leaving school early and are not pursuing employment or further education.

ICAN provides students with access to individual case management services, life skills training, literacy and numeracy support, e-learning opportunities and flexible learning program in school and/or in a community setting. ICAN students work with a school coordinator, case manager or youth worker, and their parents, to identify their strengths, interests and areas where they need support.

Each ICAN region is governed by an ICAN Management Committee that typically includes peak and advocacy groups, neighbourhood houses, community health centres, community service, sporting, arts groups and local businesses and a number of government agencies.

Current policy and reform relating to support for young people

Victoria is currently in the midst of unprecedented reform activity that aims to significantly change the shape of service delivery. Major federal and state policy initiatives and reforms, and the shape of local government services are outlined here.

The Commonwealth Government

Social Inclusion Agenda
The Social Inclusion Agenda is a key driver for service reform at a federal level. While not specifically for young people, the guiding principles of the agenda emphasise early intervention and prevention, joined-up services and place-based approaches. The priorities of the agenda are:

- targeting jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity
- improving the life chances of children at greatest risk of long term disadvantage
- reducing the incidence of homelessness
- improving outcomes for people living with disability or mental illness and their carers
- closing the gap for Indigenous Australians
- breaking the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods and communities.
Building Australia's Future Workforce
The Building Australia’s Future Workforce package builds on this agenda and involves several initiatives being implemented in 10 sites across Australia, including Greater Shepparton. These initiatives include:

- Income Management: The roll out of income management† as part of the Better Futures, Local Solutions initiative began in July 2012 in Greater Shepparton, Victoria
- Helping Young Parents: The Helping Young Parents initiative aims to assist young parents to attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification and to participate in activities that focus on the health and early childhood development of their children.\(^{63}\)

These initiatives are likely to place additional demands on local community sector organisations to provide the necessary supports for the families involved, such as financial counselling, drug and alcohol counselling, family violence programs, legal assistance and child and family services. Education providers will also support young people to engage or re-engage in education and training.

National Strategy for Young Australians
The National Strategy for Young Australians outlines the Government’s vision ‘for all young people to grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient and to have the opportunities and skills they need to learn, work, engage in community life and influence decisions that affect them.’\(^{64}\)

The strategy identifies eight priorities for supporting young people across health and wellbeing, education, families, community participation, employment, online engagement, early intervention, and safe behaviour.\(^{65}\)

The Strategy highlights critical areas of support for young people including:
- accessible and affordable healthcare
- help for parents to support young people
- peer to peer support
- early intervention supports including tailored approaches that suit the needs of each young person, their problem and their context and additional support for some young people including Aboriginal Australians, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young people with disability or caring responsibilities, and those from rural and regional areas or low socio-economic communities.

National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions
The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Education Agreement sets out the following targets:

- 90 per cent of school students obtaining a year 12 or equivalent qualification by 2015
- halve the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018 and reduce the gap by at least half between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020
- 50 per cent of the 20—64 year old population hold qualifications at Certificate Level II or higher.\(^{66}\)

The agreement increases the school leaving age to 17, offers an education or training entitlement to 15 to 24 year olds and makes full time participation in education, training or work compulsory until the age of 20 as a precondition to receiving Family Tax Benefit Part A or Youth Allowance.

In order to meet the COAG National Education Agreement targets, the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions was established. Through this Partnership, the Federal Government has provided funding for a range of programs and initiatives such as Youth Connections and School Business Community Partnership Brokers and each State and Territory has individual implementation plans.

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\(^{†}\) Income management involves a percentage of social security payments (including Newstart, Disability Support Pension, Youth Allowance, Austudy, and Parenting payments) being withheld from individuals and placed in an income management account to pay for ‘priority needs’ such as housing, food, utility costs, education and health costs.
In 2012, the Victorian Auditor General found that despite the focus on student completion rates over the past decade, there has been no significant improvement in Year 12 or equivalent completion rates for 19-year-old students in Victoria since 2008. Of concern is that students from lower socio-economic and non-metropolitan schools have significantly poorer Year 12 or equivalent completion rates than students from higher socio-economic and metropolitan schools.

**The Victorian Government**

**Youth Partnerships**
Youth Partnerships began in 2011 to drive reform and strengthen collaborative practice in youth services. It aims to ‘design and test new ways for services across all youth sectors to work together more collaboratively to support vulnerable young people aged 10 to 18 years’. Taking place in seven demonstration sites across the state, Youth Partnerships seeks to improve engagement in education and training, and to reduce the escalation of problems for individual young people.

Youth Partnerships involve the engagement of local youth services in a collaborative effort to ensure there is a greater focus on early intervention; clear entry points into the right services at the right time, including tailored education options; and establishment of a Common Practice Framework to support services.

The lessons of Youth Partnership demonstration sites will inform changes in the way the education, training and broader human services system works with vulnerable young people.

Youth Partnerships is due to conclude in mid-2014.

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† Greater Geelong, Queenscliff and Surf Coast, Yarra Ranges, Maroondah and Knox, Frankston and Mornington Peninsula, Swan Hill, Gannawarra, Buloke and Mildura, Ballarat, Hepburn, Pyrenees, Moorabool, Golden Plains, Greater Bendigo, Central Goldfields, Mount Alexander, Campaspe, Macedon Ranges and Loddon, Wyndham and Hobsons Bay.
Reforming Support to Vulnerable Young People
The Youth Partnerships Secretariat has also been undertaking consultation on measures to reform support to vulnerable young people following the 2012 decision to cease School Focused Youth Services† funding after June 2013.

The Reforming Support to Vulnerable Young People discussion paper proposes a model of youth services coordination including Regional Level Governance Groups that would have responsibility for ‘strategic planning, cross sector alignment and decision making’ and Local Level Governance Groups that would be responsible for ‘implementation of the new approach… within a defined locality’. There would be joint responsibility to achieve key performance indicators and outcomes.

This work also incorporates the ongoing evaluation and development of the Youth Partnerships program and the review of Local Learning and Employment Networks.

Engage, Involve, Create: Youth Statement
The Engage, Involve, Create: Youth Statement outlines the Victorian Government’s vision ‘that all young Victorians experience healthy, active and fulfilling lives and have the opportunity to achieve their full potential, participate in the workforce and be involved in their community’. Importantly, the Engage, Involve, Create: Youth Statement makes a commitment to early identification and early intervention in supporting the health and wellbeing of young people and to ensuring support is available and accessible. The Statement also notes the value of ‘addressing the important connections between the support provided in the early years of a child’s development through to middle years and early adulthood’.

The Statement outlines the following priorities:

• Getting young people involved: supporting the full and active participation and engagement of all young people to ensure social participation, community participation and economic participation

• Services that meet the needs of young people: creating better outcomes by allowing young people to access services that are young person focused, integrated and provided at the right time

• Creating new ideas and partnerships: families and young people, government, business, community, and philanthropic organisations all working in partnership to deliver a range of outcomes for young people.

The Statement makes a number of important references to the service system that supports young people. A priority for the Government is:

“providing services that meet young people’s needs, will keep them engaged in the education, training and employment they need to meet their aspirations, keep them involved with their families and connected to the community and their peers, and empower them to create the change and innovation that will drive the next wave of industry and culture in Victoria.”

To do this the Government is ‘working to change the way (it does) business to deliver (its) vision of quality services that are coordinated, easy to navigate and responsive to individual needs and aspirations’.†

† The School Focused Youth Service was an established program to support young people aged 10 to 18 years, at risk of self-harm, disengagement from school, family or community.
The Youth Statement notes that navigating the service system can be difficult for young people and their families and that the number and range of services are limited in some areas, particularly rural and regional Victoria.

To work towards coordinated youth services, the Government states that it will:

- acknowledge and build on existing successes while testing and trialling new approaches for coordinated and holistic support for young people through the Youth Partnerships demonstration sites
- coordinate service delivery and information sharing using locally led examples of good practice
- build the capacity of schools, services, police and community organisations in early identification and assistance of young people and their families in difficulty
- improve young Aboriginal Victorians’ access to culturally responsive services and support to maintain or enhance their connection to family, community and culture
- continue to support programs that target assistance to young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly refugees and young people from smaller migrant communities
- support the development of experienced, professional youth, education and community sectors. Services for young people should be consistent, of high quality and delivered by people who have appropriate skills or capabilities
- continue working with health services to improve treatment and care for all young people with serious mental health problems and their families.

Office for Youth Initiatives
The Office for Youth, within DHS, fund a range of programs to enhance partnerships and engage young people at the local level. These include:

**Advance:** Advance is a school-based program to assist young people to volunteer in their community. It is a partnership between the DHS, Victorian Government secondary schools and community organisations.

Through Advance, young people, schools and community organisations develop networks of relationships while achieving shared goals. The program also encourages communities to support and recognise young people’s participation and positive role in society.

**FReeZA:** FReeZA is a youth development program providing young people between the ages of 12 and 25 with the opportunity to attend affordable, accessible and drug and alcohol free music and cultural events.

FReeZA provides young people with the opportunity to become part of a local FReeZA committee to plan and deliver these events, develop a broad range of skills and the opportunity to stage events for other young people in their local community.

**Engage!** Engage! aims to provide early support and engage with young people 12-25 years to actively participate in and benefit from civic, economic and social activities in their community.

Engage! provides opportunities for young people to:

- participate in volunteering opportunities in their community and contribute to decision-making and initiatives.
- participate in activities that build their skills, knowledge and pathways.
- develop support networks and strengthen their connections with families, peers and community.
Building the Scaffolding

The Case for Change

The Victorian Government’s vision for human services is that individuals and families are efficiently and effectively assisted to access whatever range of services and support they need.

The Case for Change outlines the Victorian Government’s commitment to developing models of more integrated service delivery, and provides an overview of the significant reform required in the way in which DHS funds and delivers human services. The paper notes that the current system needs to change as the growth in demand for services is unsustainable.

The Case for Change outlines key challenges that need to be addressed including poor coordination between services and a system that is perceived to be program focused instead of people focused. It also notes that the system focuses on the immediate, presenting problems rather than the needs of the ‘whole person’.

The Case for Change sets out five principles that will guide government progress:

- people are at the centre of everything that government does
- people in need should have access to the right support, provided in a cost–effective way
- all parts of the human services system should work together
- a skilled workforce is key to a more integrated system and to better client outcomes
- Victorians who access government services will be valued, respected and treated fairly at all times.

The Case for Change reform focuses on holistic case management and a ‘joined up service model’ where there are no wrong doors for people seeking support.

Importantly, DHS has implemented an internal restructure to support these reforms by removing departmental ‘silos’. The previous eight regions have been replaced by 17 smaller, locally–based areas supported by four divisions (North, South, East and West) and three main central office groups (Policy and Strategy, Service Design and Implementation and Corporate Services). The new structure is designed to support stronger collaboration at the local level.

Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee

The Human Services and Health Partnership Implementation Committee (HSHPIC) (previously HSPIC) is a joint committee of peak bodies and DHS and DoH representatives formed in 2004 to implement the aims of the Partnership Agreement between the Department of Human Services and the health, housing and community services sector. The committee aims to promote and facilitate collaborative activities between DHS, DoH and the community sector. HSHPIC focuses on:

- strengthening DHS, DoH and community sector partnering to achieve effective and respectful relationships
- auspicing projects that improve business processes to reduce the regulatory burden on the community sector
- addressing strategic challenges facing the human services industry through partnering dialogues and shared action.

The Committee is currently finalising the 2012-15 Partnership Agreement between the Department of Human Services, Department of Health and VCOSS (on behalf of the sector). The agreement will reaffirm the ongoing commitment to a shared vision and a strong relationship between the departments and the sector.
Victoria’s Services Connect
From early 2012, DHS began piloting the Services Connect case management model outlined in the The Case for Change, in two lead sites, Dandenong and Geelong/South West Coast. Services Connect is expected to start rolling out to other sites later in 2013.

The new model involves working with people with complex needs, through a single, coordinated case plan and key worker. Services Connect is characterised by:

- coordinated access and screening – a coordinated response will begin when an individual or family comes into contact with the human services system, via a community or government–run service
- holistic needs identification – all individuals and families will be offered a single simple process to identify their needs, the immediacy of those needs and the intensity and type of supports required to address them
- targeted service responses – the intensity of assistance provided to people will vary depending on their support needs and capacity for self–management
- person directed planning – planning and support will be:
  - person centred and directed: person–centred workers are flexible and work towards individual goals rather than tailoring their responses to meet program–directed service requirements
  - holistic: workers will provide support and planning across an integrated platform of personal, economic and community issues
  - family–focused: when providing services to adults, it includes considering the interests of children as a crucial part of decision making about an individuals’ needs
  - strengths–based: this approach recognises an individual’s strengths, capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions and hopes in planning to ensure they and their family get the right level of support

- personalised service offers – the new model will respond to the needs of each individual and family by offering a personalised service response. A service offer may include one or more DHS or Department of Health services, plus support and information in mainstream services offered by other government agencies.80

For an individual person accessing a number of programs or a family with a range of issues, there will be one skilled support worker to plan and coordinate support across the range of services and specialist support required. Where the primary person for case management is an adult ‘the interests of children as a crucial part of decision making about the person’s needs’ will be an important focus.

Services Connect presents a challenge for effective work with young people as the single ‘skilled support worker’ coordinating support to a family won’t necessarily be trained to work with young people.

Service Sector Reform Project
The Victorian Government is undertaking the Service Sector Reform Project81 to improve how government and the community sector work together to improve the lives of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians. The project developed as there is increasing recognition that Government and the sector face a range of challenges that put pressure on the ability to continue delivering high quality and effective services:

- demand for services is projected to increase further with population growth and population ageing
- pressure on government finances will increase due to population ageing, as the proportion of working age people declines
- the nature of demand is changing with more people presenting with multiple issues and particular areas of the state experiencing rapid demand for social services
- services tend to be structured around programs instead of people, and are often focussed on outputs over outcomes
- there is fragmentation of services and providers
- costs within the sector are increasing, particularly the cost of wages.†

† This follows the decision by Fair Work Australia on 1 February 2012 to award pay increases of between 23 and 45 per cent to certain social and community services (SACS) workers.
This whole-of-government project is being led by the Department of Human Services in partnership with the Office for the Community Sector and VCOSS and is focused on services funded by DHS, DEECD and the Departments of Health and Justice.

The Service Sector Reform Project aims to identify actions to assist government and the community sector to deliver more effective services, and to adjust to increasing cost and demand pressures to ensure the sustainability of the community services system.

The Service Sector Reform Project is considering eleven possible pathways for reform across three broad themes:

**Improving outcomes:**
- put people at the centre of service delivery
- focus more on supporting people to build their capabilities
- develop place-based approaches
- recognise and reward good outcomes

**Improving how the system is funded**
- consolidate government funding programs
- adopt different funding models
- explore the range of social finance opportunities

**Improving how the system operates**
- change ‘who does what’ in the system
- make the system more collaborative
- make the system more effective and efficient
- use digital technology to empower people and Community Sector Organisations
Economic Study on Service Delivery Reform and Disadvantage
The Department of Human Services developed a tender process in 2012 to undertake an *Economic Study on Service Delivery Reform and Disadvantage* which will consider all services currently funded or delivered by DHS, including disability, housing, child protection, youth justice and, where relevant, Department of Health services such as mental health and alcohol and other drugs.82

The tender document noted that:

“the social and economic costs of disadvantage imposed on the Victorian Government and Victorians are escalating, due to the failure of current service systems to effectively address existing, and evidently, growing levels of disadvantage.”

The commissioned study will consider these costs ‘as they accrue to clients, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments and the economy’. The study will consider:

- the costs to DHS of administering services
- the impact and potential savings deliverable under reformed service delivery models
- the costs and benefits associated with service delivery reform to vulnerable Victorians, the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, and the Victorian and Australian economies
- the current and future costs of disadvantage to these same groups.

This study will be used in developing plans for ongoing service delivery reform and in building the case for investment in their implementation.

The Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry
The *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* report provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges facing vulnerable children, young people and families in Victoria and the reforms required to better support them. Among 90 recommended reforms, it highlights the need for more integrated and multidisciplinary services and a whole-of-government strategy.

The report finds that the service system is struggling to address the increasingly complex needs of vulnerable groups due to a:

- lack of resources, skills and knowledge
- lack of services in key geographical areas
- limited capacity or willingness of some community sector organisations to adopt new approaches
- lack of coordination and integration between services.83

Although Victoria has a wide range of programs that offer early intervention to vulnerable young people, the report notes that:

“these programs have not been recently evaluated, are not necessarily well connected with the broader service system supporting vulnerable children, are not well coordinated with each other and require specialist access arrangements. This lack of coordination and integration leads to less than optimal service delivery for vulnerable youth and their families.”84

The report does note the development of the Youth Partnerships pilots as ‘an encouraging initiative to address what is presently an uncoordinated and inefficient service sector’ and hopes that the lessons from trial sites can be implemented statewide.85
Building the Scaffolding

Victoria's Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility

Following the publication of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry report, the Victorian Government committed to develop a whole-of-government Vulnerable Children's Strategy to be developed by a Ministerial Cabinet Committee, reporting to the Premier. Government performance against this strategy will be monitored by the new Children and Young People's Commission. The Government also developed a reform agenda outlined in Victoria's Vulnerable Children: Our Shared Responsibility Directions Paper.

The paper recognises that responsibility for improving outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families is shared across government. Importantly, the directions paper involves a commitment to deliver the reforms from the Premier, Deputy Premier, Minister for Community Services and Mental Health, Minister for Children and Early Childhood, Minister for Housing, Minister for Education, Minister for Higher Education and Skills and the Attorney General.

Our Shared Responsibility outlines five action areas for reform, with the first being to build ‘effective and coordinated services’. This requires:

- a family-centred approach in which adult and family services consider the needs of children and young people in the family
- building understanding, connection and accountability across program and organisational boundaries.

It states that services should be delivered where children and young people live, guided by trends in population growth and service use. Providing a more individualised service for children, young people and families seeking support is also identified as a priority.

Victorian Commission for Children and Young People

The Victorian Government has established an independent Commission for Children and Young People, operational from March 2013. The objective of the Commission is to promote continuous improvement and innovation in:

- policies and practices relating to the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people generally
- the provision of out of home care services for children.

The functions of the Commission are:

- to provide advice to ministers, government departments, health services and human services about policies, practices and the provision of services relating to the safety or wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people
- to promote the interests of vulnerable children and young people in the Victorian community
- to monitor and report to Ministers on the implementation and effectiveness of strategies relating to the safety or wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people
- to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister about child safety issues, at the request of the Minister
- to promote child-friendly and child-safe practices in the Victorian community
- to oversee functions relating to working with children checks
- to monitor out of home care services
- to undertake inquiries concerning the deaths of child protection clients.

The Commission may conduct inquiries concerning the provision of services provided by a health service, human service or school in relation to systemic issues, subject to resources.

In addition to the Principal Commissioner, additional Commissioners can be appointed as required. Initially, the Commission will include a Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People.
Building the Scaffolding

Victorian Families Statement
The Victorian Families Statement outlines the main challenges facing Victorian families. Many are relevant to young people and the services that support young people, including:

• the rising cost of living
• the importance of education starting in early childhood
• keeping young people engaged in education
• youth unemployment levels
• the need for better skills development through vocational education
• the importance of a reliable, efficient, affordable and safe public transport system
• the importance of safe and friendly neighbourhoods
• the limited infrastructure, services and skill shortages in rural and regional Victoria
• the need for ongoing investment to assist families to recover from natural disasters.
• the challenges people with a disability and their carers face in studying, working, getting around and participating in community activities.
• the impact of mental health issues and the lack of support currently available.

“Victorians deserve to have access to services and opportunities wherever they live”.

Towards Victoria as a Learning Community
The Towards Victoria as a Learning Community position paper is based on these key themes:

• lifelong learning: Victorians from all social–economic and cultural backgrounds are supported to be successful life-long learners
• family, community and business partnerships: partnerships between education providers, families, communities and business will help providers meet current and future needs
• high quality empowered services: early childhood, education and training providers and schools are empowered to design local solutions to meet local needs and to deliver quality services
• strong local pathways: Victorians can move more easily between levels of education and work.

The position paper outlines the benefits of strong educational outcomes for individuals and the state.

• education drives growth, productivity and global competitive advantage: education is seen as the most important policy lever to increase workforce participation
• high levels of education have a direct impact on individuals’ success in life: more education leads to a higher income and enhanced life chances
• education is the basis of a good society: education leads to better physical and mental health, increases social cohesion, reduces crime and lowers welfare needs.

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 is based on the principle that all young Victorians, regardless of what school or training institution they attend, where they live, or their social or economic status, should have access to a high quality education. The Act requires all students up to the age of 17 to be engaged in school, training employment or a combination of these for a minimum of 25 hours per week.
This ‘third wave’ of reform, which builds on reforms in the 1990s and 2000s, is underpinned by a focus on professional trust for education leadership and teachers, strengthening the autonomy of schools, including responsibility to decide how to support students and those at risk of disengagement, and accountability with a greater focus on outcomes.

Towards Victoria as a Learning Community also considers issues related to student behaviour and making student enrolment contingent on students and their parents meeting school behaviour standards. School leaders will retain the responsibility to facilitate student referral to other education settings in instances where the needs of the student cannot be met in the school.

The position paper notes that schools need to work in partnership with other schools, the local community and business, and other government services to achieve all these aims.

Meaningful engagement between schools, families and the wider learning community will be essential to drive sustainable system-wide gains in Victoria. Victorian schools will only be able to fully meet the future needs of students by collaborating and fostering networks of partners to build personal learning experiences for each student. This is particularly true in addressing the complex needs of students who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

As a first step to implement this vision, the Government has developed a Compact to outline expectations about the respective responsibilities of schools and DEECD.

Principles guiding the Compact

1. All students can exercise education choices that meet their learning needs, aspirations and interests, and will be supported to reach their full potential.

2. Schools and the Department share a professional commitment to continual, evidence-based improvement in teaching and learning and to improving student outcomes.

3. Schools provide inclusive, safe and orderly environments for all members of the school community.

4. Resources are managed effectively, efficiently and fairly to deliver the best possible education experiences for all students.

5. Schools and the Department are open and responsive to communities, and are held accountable for outcomes.
DEECD — Community Sector Partnership Agreement

In June 2010 the DEECD and VCOSS (on behalf of the community sector) signed the Partnership Agreement between DEECD and the Victorian Community Sector 2010–2014. The Partnership Agreement is based on the following principles:

- A shared vision to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children and young people, particularly the vulnerable or disadvantaged
- Mutual respect for each partner’s autonomy and responsibilities, while recognising that true partnership may require change, innovation and risk
- Collaboration and the fostering of opportunities to work together on issues of mutual benefit or concern
- Communication, consultation and engagement on decisions by one partner that will impact upon the other
- Transparency of financial relations between the Department, VCOSS and the sector, subject to relevant legislation and policies
- A relationship that celebrates success, addresses challenges and acknowledges contributions to outcomes that are achieved
- Joint leadership of the partnership, including joint agenda setting.

The Partnership Agreement provides an opportunity for action to develop improved partnerships between schools and local community sector organisations.

Refocusing Vocational Education and Training in Victoria

Vocational Education and Training (VET) provides a significant education pathway into, or back into, education for many young Victorians, particularly those who may not fit the more formal education system:

- In 2011, 597,000 Victorians were enrolled in VET. Around 43 per cent were aged under 25.
- Around a third of 15–19 year old VET students were undertaking VET in Schools (VETiS); the rest were in outside settings such as TAFEs.
- 18.6 per cent of Victoria’s Year 12 graduates surveyed in 2011 went into Certificates I–IV, and the rates were slightly higher for young people who left school before finishing Year 12.

VET has undergone significant changes over the past few years. In 2008, the Victorian Training Guarantee implemented changes in the subsidy arrangements resulting in significant growth in enrolments, particularly in the private sector.

In 2012 the Victorian Government announced a series of reforms outlined in Refocusing Vocational Training in Victoria, which included changes to VET funding to curb rising costs and to target subsidies to courses judged to deliver the greatest public and economic benefit. Key changes include:

- All providers (public and private) will receive the same subsidy rates and subsidy levels will be calculated according to an assessment of the courses’ ‘value’ to the economy. Many of the courses receiving lower subsidies are programs in which young people are over-represented.
- Maximum caps on fees have been removed and concession card holders will no longer pay a fixed concession fee, but instead will pay a concessional rate of 20 per cent of their course fees, for courses up to Certificate IV. This raises concerns about the potential for fee increases and for young people and families not being able to meet these costs.
- Base funding to TAFEs, which was used to maintain facilities and student services, has been removed.
- Young people in state care, or exiting it, will now be eligible for ‘zero fee’ training places.
- The allocation of a 1.3 loading for any young person under 20 who did not have a Year 12 qualification has now been tightened, and will only apply to under-20s without a Year 12 qualification who are also defined as being from low socio-economic status backgrounds.
- A 1.05 loading will be provided for all providers delivering training to regional areas. The 1.5 loading for Aboriginal students will be retained.

Other implications of VET reform include:

- Adverse impacts upon young women, especially those who leave school early, who are especially vulnerable to financial hardship, and are more likely than young men...
to be studying at Certificate I–III levels and in subjects such as commerce and hospitality, now vulnerable to low subsidies and possible cuts.\textsuperscript{100} 

- adverse impacts on rural communities, where students have fewer options (private RTOs are relatively scarce), are more likely to be facing disadvantage, and more likely than their metropolitan peers to be studying at Certificate I–III levels.\textsuperscript{101} 

- community sector workforce issues: continuing skills shortages, particularly in regional and rural areas may be further affected by the loss of courses, VET providers and the rising cost of fees.

As part of the reforms, the Government established an independent TAFE Reform Panel to provide advice on how to strengthen TAFE. The Government has responded to the Panel’s final report\textsuperscript{102} with a series of commitments outlined in \textit{Next Steps for Refocusing Vocational Training in Victoria — Supporting a Modern Workforce}\textsuperscript{103} including reinstating $200 million of funding over four years to TAFE. However, there is still concern that this additional funding does not address key concerns including participation of concession card holders, students with disabilities and young people.

**Local government**

In Victoria, local government is a major provider, planner and coordinator of services for children, young people and their families.

All local governments are required to develop a Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYPs) as a framework for appropriate service delivery and infrastructure provision for children aged 0–8 years.\textsuperscript{104} Some councils have extended this plan to 10 years of age.

There is no statutory requirement for councils to have a middle years or youth policy strategy or plan. A survey of all 79 Victorian local governments in 2010 found that 80 per cent of councils either had an action plan or a statement of commitment around services for young people.\textsuperscript{105} However, these commitments vary across the state.

A Municipal Association of Victoria survey of all local governments highlights the significant role that local government’s play in service provision and coordination for children and young people. The role of local government in reinforcing the scaffolding for young people is a key issue to be considered in developing a more integrated system for young people.\textsuperscript{106} 

Key findings of the survey included:

**Provision of services**

There is a wide variation in council involvement in supporting young people and there are also differences between metropolitan and rural councils as illustrated in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services provided by local government relevant to young people include:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• sport and recreation and leisure services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• community planning/advocacy/safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• multicultural services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• arts and culture services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• children’s services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• library services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• disability services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• vacation care services and school holiday programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• occasional school hours care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• services for Aboriginal people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• public health — generalist and complex case management services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3: Where councils directed resources in 2010 by metropolitan and rural councils.†

† This information taken from: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Municipal Association of Victoria, Victorian Local Government Support for Children, Young People and Their Families, Melbourne, 2011.
Growth corridor councils — Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Whittlesea and Wyndham — were more likely than other metropolitan councils to be involved in supporting young people in most areas of activity, particularly in relation to youth groups/clubs, holiday programs for secondary school children and sexual health issues.

**Expenditure**

Over two–fifths of councils reported annual expenditure in the $0–250,000 range, all being rural councils. Fewer than five per cent of councils had recurrent annual expenditure over $125 million. The largest contributors to annual recurrent expenditure on youth services were councils themselves, with about two–thirds of councils reporting provision of more than half the expenditure. The Victorian Government was the next major source, while the Commonwealth Government and other sources provided minor levels of funding.

There was a related pattern in employment of effective full–time staff who are involved in 'supporting young people' with just over a half of councils employing 1–2 staff who are 'allocated to youth issues' and a minority of councils with staffing numbers of three or more. Fifteen per cent of councils employed more than 10 staff to support young people.

Figure 4: Number of youth support staff in local councils†

† Please refer to footnote for Figure 3 on page 44.
Coordination role
The majority of councils reported that they had a major role in coordinating youth service provision. Coordination included staffing positions, developing a youth strategy, developing new programs and services, participation in Youth Partnerships, facilitating community connections and local service networking and providing community hubs to bring together services. The councils reported the following challenges in coordinating youth services:

- services are provided across municipalities
- there is no single entry point into services
- services have different working hours
- there is a lack of strategic partnerships
- there is a lack of funds and resources including lack of staffing and complicated funding arrangements
- delivering services to a dispersed population
- there are gaps in the data available to support improved coordination of services.

Middle years
Just under half of the councils had initiatives for the ‘middle years’ — in this survey middle years was defined as 8 to 12 years — and just under two-thirds indicated this was an area where more work was needed. Initiatives included extending youth services to a younger age group, for example down to 10 years, and providing services such as school holiday programs. Concerns identified by councils in this area included a lack of programs, insufficient funding and a lack of strategic service planning.
Chapter Two

Voices from the sector: the experiences and insights of services

This chapter outlines the major experiences, issues and concerns reported by respondents to the ‘Who’s Carrying the Can?’ survey of service providers undertaken in 2012.

Quotes are used extensively throughout the chapter to capture voices as accurately as possible. All quotes are taken directly from survey responses but may have been edited for clarity. The survey results have been analysed thematically rather than question by question to highlight recurring themes.
In March 2012, an online survey was sent through YACVic and VCOSS networks using Survey Monkey. The survey was targeted at organisations, services and programs that provide services to young people in Victoria (the survey is included in appendix 1). It attracted 213 responses.

There are limitations to this survey. For example, it was designed with a control (only one response per computer) to avoid duplicates but this does not preclude multiple responses from one agency. However, we are confident most responses are unique to a particular agency as no duplicates were found in the data where participants provided contact details.

Not every question in the survey was compulsory; 154 respondents completed every question. In the following analysis, the number of respondents for each question is provided where relevant.

Who responded
The 213 survey respondents came from service providers operating across every local government area in Victoria. Nine were part of a state–wide service, three operated in Victoria and interstate, and two operated nationally. See appendix 2 for a list of local government areas where respondents provided services to young people.

A breakdown of the service providers surveyed showed that:

- 61 per cent were community sector organisations
- 12 per cent were local government services
- 15 per cent were state or federal government services.

Of the community sector organisations:

- 13 per cent provided services/programs only to young people
- 9 per cent had one or two services or programs provided to young people
- 39 per cent provided three or more services or programs to young people.

Responses in the ‘other’ category (12 per cent) primarily included community sector organisations such as neighbourhood houses, disability services, mental health and child protection. In addition, this category included a private hospital, three tertiary institutions and three other education providers.

One organisation was an adult service that had been contracted to provide services to young people given the lack of services for young people in the area:

“We are a private organisation that is DHS funded to provide services to adults. However given the lack of youth specific services in this region, we have been granted permission to provide services to young people when there is no youth service available to meet their needs.”
Sources of funding

The Victorian Department of Human Services funds most of the services that survey respondents provide to young people. The following graph indicates the variety of sources of funding that organisations receive to provide services to young people.†

Figure 5: Sources of funding for support service (n = 211)

Other included: Victorian Department Of Transport – through Vic Roads, Federal Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Immigration, Department of Industry Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) and the Federal Attorney-General’s Department.

Services typically received funds via a number of agreements, grants or other sources of funding to provide services to young people as illustrated in Table 1 below. These figures are indicative only as we expect some survey respondents would not necessarily have access to accurate data about funding agreements. However, this table does indicate that services tend to rely on multiple streams of funding.

Table 1: Number of funding streams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of funding agreements</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10-20</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>Several</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Acronyms are defined in the glossary
Services provided to young people

Figure 6 highlights the range of supports provided to different age groups of young people 12–25. This question allowed for multiple responses.

Figure 6: Services provided to young people by age group

Of the 167 respondents:
- 34 per cent provided specific services to young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- 29 per cent provided specific services to Aboriginal young people
- 20 per cent provided specific services to same sex attracted young people.
Access to and availability of services

How young people can access services
Young people are able to access services in a variety of ways as illustrated in Figure 7. Of the 167 services which responded, most provide drop-in (65 per cent), program based (56 per cent) or school based (56 per cent) services.

Figure 7: How young people can access services

‘Other’ ways of accessing services included text messaging (SMS) and social media such as Twitter.

Availability of services
Seventy-seven per cent of respondents indicated that their services were only available during business hours (9am-5pm, Monday to Friday). Figure 8 illustrates that few services are available after hours or on weekends, which is when many young people want or need support:

“High risk young people need help and care 24/7 they don’t just need it in business hours!!”

Figure 8: When services are available to young people

Fifty-three per cent of the 167 respondents indicated that there was a demand to provide services to young people, and their families as relevant, at different times, most notably after hours and on weekends, and on more of a drop-in basis where possible:

“Not everyone has a computer or decent internet access, especially for homework. We need our 10 free PCs to be open at night.”

“Often for family therapy, families would like services after hours.”

“School buses leave at 7:30 and don’t return until 4:30–4:45 (so) there is a need for an after hours service.”

“Young people who are working full time or studying at remote schools cannot make it to appointments by 5pm.”

A critical barrier to after hours work is the additional cost associated with staffing:

“Staff wage costs on weekends are prohibitive.”

“Shift loading has an effect on salary costs, not financially viable for (our) organisation.”
Waiting lists
Of the 167 respondents, 44 per cent had a waiting list for the services they provide to young people, 42 per cent did not and 14 per cent were unsure.

One organisation noted that they ‘do some active holding in the intake stage’ to avoid a waiting list. Another indicated that they ‘try not to keep waiting lists and rather try to respond and refer when we don’t have vacancies’. Several agencies noted they were ‘not allowed’ to maintain a waiting list but that there is ‘more demand than we can supply’.

Waiting lists often develop as services have to prioritise young people in crisis and so young people with less serious issues have to wait. Paradoxically some will develop more serious issues as a consequence of not receiving timely support.

“But we are seeing the more serious clients the work takes longer and we are not getting to the ones we should be dealing with who are early intervention.”

“Twenty five children on the waiting list (at March 2012) with some on there since May 2011. Adolescent counselling: 39 young people on the waiting list, with some on the list since October 2011. Psychosocial rehab for young people with mental health issues: 6 to 8 week wait (for a counselling service).”

Current and emerging service issues
Changes in service provision over five years
The survey considered whether service provision has changed in five years since the publication of Who’s Carrying the Can?:

- 27 per cent (of 158 respondents) reported service provision had increased
- 13 per cent thought services had reduced
- 35 per cent reported that service provision had remained the same
- 25 per cent were unsure.

The key changes included:

- an increased focus on young people by government: several respondents welcomed an increased focus on young people with investment by successive governments in Youth Partnerships and Youth Connections, headspace and the Youth Support Program. Several also commented that while the number of services had not increased in their area, there was a sense of a ‘more coordinated approach’ between services

- bushfire response and recovery: several respondents noted that service provision had increased in their area in the aftermath of the bushfires. However, there was concern that this funding was not sustainable and that services may soon start winding up:

  “The additional supports have begun to decrease and will cease operation in the near future. Service availability will then return to the previous levels.”

  “Funding from the bushfires is running out and will not continue beyond March 2013. This will greatly reduce our capacity to offer youth support services.”

- increased demand: several respondents noted an increase in services in their area but felt this was simply responding to increased demand and, in some cases, was not keeping up with demand:

  “Services provision has slightly increased, however the demand has rapidly increased.”
population growth: growth in population has in some areas spurred a growth in service provision. However, other respondents noted that services have not kept pace with growth:

“The population has grown but the service providers remain in the larger cities.”

“No change detected, despite a large increase in the number of young people in the area.”

“We have some outposts in the Casey/Cardinia areas that are one of the largest growth corridors in the state and have no capacity to deal with perceived growth.”

decrease in generalist youth services: a critical issue was the loss or reduction of generalist youth services and related community development activities:

“The withdrawal of funding for generalist youth workers has had a huge impact. Youth often do not access specialist services.”

“Our capacity has been reduced due to funding cuts and therefore the essential community development work that has us linked in with other agencies has fallen off the agenda. In essence we do not have the luxury of knowing what's out there and don't have time to map these options.”

decrease in accommodation options: a reduction in accommodation services for young people — crisis and transitional housing — was highlighted. This issue is considered in more detail later in this chapter

funding changes: some respondents noted that services had decreased either because of a loss of funding or more prescriptive government funding criteria:

“We have lost funding or not had funding increase with CPI. We are struggling with complex cases that take longer to resolve, leading to longer waiting lists and less availability of staff.”
**Gaps in vital services**

“Demand exceeds supply. Young people are presenting with additional complex needs which we struggle to support due to lack of staff funding.”

Seventy-one per cent of survey respondents (n = 118) indicated that demand for services exceeded supply, 13 per cent did not and 16 per cent were unsure.

Respondents were asked to identify the gaps in services for young people in their local government area/s. Figure 9 provides a breakdown of responses.

It is important to note that a ‘gap’ in service provision does not just mean a lack of services, but may also mean an inability to access available services.

“We have youth AOD workers, however if young people want to access residential detox or rehab, the nearest service is in Melbourne — 3–4 hours away.”
**Housing**

Access to crisis accommodation (61 per cent) and transitional housing (52 per cent) are the most critical gaps. Lack of access to stable housing can exacerbate other problems, putting young people at risk of violence, worsening mental health problems and reducing school engagement.

“The available (housing) services are overflowing with requests for support and are not able to meet the demands.”

“We see young Indigenous youth all the time that have been impacted by lack of housing. This group has either come from a broken family, overcrowded housing or lack of family support. There is a high demand for crisis accommodation due to them not feeling comfortable approaching mainstream organisations as they feel that they have a lack of understanding and usually have a long waiting list.”

“Housing is always an issue. A generation of teenage couch surfers has appeared.”

“I do not believe there is enough accommodation for youth that are not ready to live on their own yet but cannot stay in residential care due to their age.”

“Homelessness is increasing, and the housing is not... For youth to stay at school and stay around connections it is difficult to find housing in the area they wish.”

“Housing is very difficult to find and given that youth are on a minimal income then it becomes difficult to find affordable housing and vacancies available.”

Respondents noted a number of reasons why housing is such an issue for young people including:

- income support levels have not kept pace with the cost of private rental
- young people are not able to exit crisis and transitional housing options quickly due, in part, to the high cost of private rental
- the 2009 bushfires placed significant pressures on public housing availability
- some young people face additional barriers to accessing housing and may be discriminated against because of their age and their lack of rental and income history.

**Mental health**

Fifty two per cent of respondents cited mental health services as a critical gap, with a further 27 per cent noting gaps in formal counselling services.

“Youth specific mental health/psychological counselling services are limited. The nearest headspace is some distance away and, with the limited public transport available, it makes access to a service such as this difficult.”

“Mental health crisis services are not offered for anyone under 18 in my region. It creates logistical nightmares for kids and teens in need.”

“Young people are eligible to attend headspace, but often unable to get there independently on public transport.”

“We have one counsellor to 14,000 young people.”

“Because of the lack of mental health services for young people in our region, caseworkers are faced with assisting young people with these issues.”

**Generalist youth services**

Almost a third of respondents cited generalist youth services as a critical gap. Generalist youth services are an important avenue for engaging with young people and providing links to other relevant services.

“Lack of access to generalist youth workers has meant young people are falling through gaps. They may not meet certain (specialist service) criteria at this point. But they may well do if they are not linked in with generalist supports as an early intervention strategy.”

“Desperate for a generalist youth support worker. (It is) our biggest gap.”

“No capacity to provide generalist services to young people as funding is all targeted.”
Education
There is a general concern about the number of young people disengaging from school at an earlier age. Respondents noted:

- a lack of alternative education settings
- a need for early intervention support in schools for young people with behavioural issues
- a need to support young people with the cost of food, transport, clothing and books
- a lack of career support including job readiness and work experience preparation.

“They are coming to our service (aged) 12 to 14 and are disengaged from school. This is happening much earlier and schools do need to take some responsibility for attendance as do parents.”

“I am constantly amazed at how these children as young as 13 have been lost (fallen through the gaps) from the school system with no one focus to track them. It appears if mainstream school loses them... this in turn leads to 17 year olds coming across my desk who have not been engaged in education for many years.”

Employment
Several respondents mentioned a growing issue of intergenerational unemployment and lack of employment options in their area.

“Young people have been the hardest hit since the global financial crisis with apprenticeships in the trades drying up, leaving young people exposed.”

Drug/alcohol issues
There is a concern that the use of drugs and alcohol appears to be increasing and at an earlier age which leads to the need for more specific drug and alcohol services:

“Young people in this area need the support to navigate situations when they are having problems concerning drugs dealers and debt. When there is no support, this escalates to theft and property damage then more legal issues.”

Support for young people with a disability
Thirty per cent reported gaps in services for young people with disabilities. This includes specialist supports such as facility-based respite support. However, many respondents also noted that young people with disabilities want to access mainstream services and activities — they want to participate as a young person rather than the focus being on their disability.

“Specific services for youth with disabilities and allied support services for their families/advocates are very much missing and absolutely crucial.”

“Better training for career practitioners regarding options and supports for people with a disability. Living and work skills programs for people with a disability in rural and remote areas.”

“More supported accommodation/respite services for young people with a disability.”

Support for siblings was also noted as a gap.

“We find it very difficult to secure government funding to support siblings (young people who have a brother or sister with a disability). Their particular needs are not recognised as deserving/requiring support by many funders.”

Mentors. There is demand for funding for mentors, both to support young people in education and learning and other programs such as the L2P program (which supports young people to learn to drive) and mentoring for young parents.

“The need (for mentors) is far greater than the resources we can provide, due to lack of funding. Operating within one of Victoria’s largest high schools, with nearly 2,000 students, mentors are spread thin on the ground.”

Family violence and breakdown. There is a lack of family services and specific supports for young people who are the victims or perpetrators of family violence.

“(In this area there is) no funding for family violence programs that target young people, sibling violence, child to parent, or same sex relationships (violence). Family violence funding is adult, heterosexual, couple targeted.”
Leaving care support
There is a perceived lack of support for young people exiting residential care. While the Department of Human Services does operate leaving care programs including the Post Care Support, Referral and Information Service for young people exiting care, survey respondents noted that this cohort of young people still often miss out on support.

“Leaving care is another serious issue. Eighteen is simply too young for a young person to be sent on. I’d like to see our young people being supported through early adulthood just as would be the case in most well-functioning families.”

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.
There was a concern about specific issues arising in CALD communities and a lack of responsive services to address these issues. Emerging issues included the number of unaccompanied minors who are living independently in the community, family conflict issues and the need for more appropriate educational support.

“Culturally diverse people (are) arriving into the region and there appears to be a lack of understanding about their needs and requirements by services and the general population. (There is) a lack of training for workers in this region on working with culturally diverse people.”

Lack of activities
A lack of age-appropriate activities was linked to increasing boredom and social isolation. There is a need for more affordable and supervised activities, particularly outside of school hours and during holidays.

“Clients identify that they wish to change behaviour but find it too difficult as limited support is given during this time (no groups in area for meeting new people/activities at an affordable cost, community activities) and boredom, isolation and depression arises in clients which makes them go back to behaviours that they were trying to change.”

“Young people are connected through social networking devices but a space for play or gathering is missing. After being moved on from Flinders Station steps what are the options?”

Transport
While not listed as a service gap in the question, several respondents in outer urban and rural areas noted transport as a key gap in the service system as lack of transport limits young people’s access to services.

“Transport system is very poor on the Mornington Peninsula which hinders young people and their families in accessing services.”

“Transport is an issue for our young people as we are a regional area with very little transport in our infrastructure. If young people don’t have a bike then they can be fairly much left at home.”

Outreach
The need for outreach both to young people’s homes or other locations was a commonly cited gap. Outreach can enhance service accessibility and assist in building relationships with young people and their families. A critical barrier to offering or extending outreach is a lack of funding for outreach programs, workers and associated costs such as transport.

“Whilst funded to provided outreach services, (we) are finding our area of outreach is expanding (geographically) without matching resources.”

The impact of service gaps on young people
Gaps in service provision affect young people in a number of ways.

Having to travel to services
For many young people, particularly those on the urban fringe or in rural and regional areas, gaps in services mean they have to travel or move closer to services in larger regional areas or the city and this can impact on their community connections:

“Due to lack of crisis accommodation/housing, young people often have to leave their local area to access services which impacts on their capacity to continue with education, social activities and maintain links to their community.”

“As a Transitional Support Service, we spend considerable time transporting young people out of the area to access services.”
Failing to seek support
If a young person cannot access a service or they have had a previous bad experience with a service, they may not seek further support.

“Without access and support locally, those most in need do not seek out assistance.”

“Young people are accessing services for particular needs that are not addressed by that service. Too often these young people are turned away, leaving them with a negative experience of services and they are reluctant to ask again.”

“Young people cease help-seeking behaviour if they attempt to seek help and it is not available. Their mental health, physical health, living situation worsens before they again seek assistance and some situations become intractable (e.g family relationships) that may have been salvageable if earlier intervention was available.”

“Many of the most vulnerable do not stick at support if there is no person developing the relationship and in a position to drive them to appointments, or pick them up to get them to school.”

Lack of knowledge of services also poses a barrier.

“Young people are not comfortable to access or don’t know how to get the information and services that they need.”

“Young people sometimes are unaware of services and feel they are not able to approach general services that apply to everyone.”

Issues escalate
An inability to access timely support can result in issues escalating. This not only impacts on the young person but also on services which are then required to address more complex issues.

“Problems end up much worse as they are not addressed. Positive outcomes are diminished.”

“There is often a mammoth waiting list for these things and young people are therefore unable to receive necessary support in a timely manner and potentially before things escalate to a level where they are very difficult to manage.”

Social isolation and boredom
An inability to access services can lead to social isolation. Some services noted that boredom can lead to involvement in risk taking and anti-social behaviour.

“There is not much in the way of recreation except for the sporting clubs which is sometimes out of reach financially for some families.”

“Young people are often saying they are bored, there is limited (late) after hours and weekend activities.”

“(Many young people with a disability) feel socially isolated and lonely. They do not have the funds to join groups.”

Health and wellbeing
Health concerns can escalate when young people do not or cannot access services. Issues cited included depression and suicide – this was particularly noted in relation to same sex attracted young people, an increase in rates of sexually transmitted infection and teen pregnancy and poor dental health.
Disengagement from education/employment
Failing to effectively respond to young people’s needs may lead to disengagement from education.

“Given that our organisation resides in one of the lower income areas of the region, we see a growing number of young people falling out of mainstream schooling with nowhere else to go. Our resources are already strained in terms of being able to assist in re-engaging such young people.”

Increased family stress
Several respondents noted an increased strain on family relationships where services are not available or accessible to address family issues.

“Without appropriate respite options, family (parent and sibling) relationships can become strained and cause family breakdown.”

One respondent noted an increase in families relinquishing children with disabilities because they did not have access to disability supports.

What needs to change to improve services for young people?
The survey asked ‘what service improvements do you believe are needed in your area to meet the needs of young people?’ The following section highlights the key issues raised by respondents.

Housing
Not surprisingly access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing — emergency, transitional, public, private, and supported accommodation services for young people with a disability — was identified as a priority by many respondents.

“A crisis accommodation unit specifically for young people in the east.”

“Specific crisis accommodation...particularly for young parents.”

“Greater capacity to respond to youth homelessness by provision of appropriate crisis accommodation. Funding early intervention responses including Time Out response for young people at risk of homelessness due to family breakdown. Increase in level of public housing located in LGAs.”

“Local councils should all have a youth housing policy and a committed group to initiate the policy. A ‘FOYER’ like response in each municipality is logical and should be locally driven, with links to youth services.”

Education
A need to provide more infrastructure and support to engage or re-engage young people in education and for an expansion of alternative education options.

“More resources and options for alternative education programs. These programs often require a high concentration of staffing and the resources and funding are always difficult to obtain.”

“More readily available tutoring, mentoring and education support programs as a means to keep children engaged with school, to assist in reducing the number of teenagers who end up falling out of the schooling system due to issues not being picked up in earlier years.”

Activities and facilities
There was a call for more supervised and affordable recreational activities, including suitable facilities, and drop in spaces for young people.

“We are in a rapidly growing regional location, however infrastructure has not grown. We need somewhere where young people can access, that is safe and welcoming, where they can access technology and services – which does not necessarily need to be youth specific. We have a centrally located library, however young people aren’t welcomed, which has created a number of issues.”

“Development of a youth centre that outreach workers can visit on a regular basis, that can provide social and recreational activities as well as life skills activities. It could also include access to health services, and maybe training opportunities.”

“Financial assistance for young people wanting to join sports clubs (uniforms, fees etc.)”
**Building the Scaffolding**

**Funding**

Suggested improvements to funding models included longer term funding, less emphasis on pilot funding and increased funding based on identified community need.

“Government has a lack of understanding that it takes a service provider at least six months or more to develop a rapport with a young person but by this stage they are about to cease the funding. Until government understands the day to day struggle of a young person and that miracles don't happen over night programs will continue to fold. If they are going to fund a program why not do it for three years rather than six to twelve months.”

**Increase access to services**

This includes geographically accessible, affordable and available services.

“Accessibility is important for young people and we should be able to be responsive to this in terms of the types of services that are provided, informed by young people themselves. This may mean different hours, more places, etc. The diversity of programs is essential as a one size fits all approach cannot be expected to capture all young people’s needs.”

“Recognition that services need to be funded in local areas rather than expecting young people to access geographically distant services (especially in rural areas where public transport is not an option).”

“Availability of new services in more areas. Not just the main regional town.”

“More services operating using the No Wrong Door framework so that young people, once having requested assistance, do not fall through the gaps. More capacity within existing services to support the needs of local young people, particularly in mental health and housing.’

“Funding for services to be provided in the hours that meet young people’s needs (12–8pm rather than 9–5pm).”

“As agencies are unable to be physically present, we need to improve access by other means (virtual / video conference etc).”

This also involves the need to improve information to young people about what services are available in their area.

“Need for improved dissemination of information to young people about what services are available i.e. using websites, online forums, Twitter, Facebook etc.”

**Access to transport**

Access to transport significantly impacts on young people’s access to services and so is a critical issue in improving service accessibility.

“(We need) youth resource services where there is easy public transport.”

**Outreach**

There was a call for more outreach, including after hours outreach, where young people gather.

“There are currently very few well resourced mental health and drug and alcohol youth programs that are outreach based. To expect at risk young people to make their own way to an appointment with a mental health clinician say at CAMHS is a waste of tax payers’ money as the young person is unlikely to be able to do this without outreach support. Provide more funding so that more professionals can engage the young person on an outreach capacity.”

**Collaborative service provision**

There was recognition of the need for greater collaboration between services, including working more effectively with universal and adult services.

“We need to create softer program boundaries between government programs, departments and levels of government so that we can tailor programs of support to individual children, young people and their families. It's not unusual for us to work with a young person in one program where the mother is in another and a sibling in yet another. This work could be better coordinated and we could get better outcomes for these families, if we had softer program funding and planning boundaries.”

“More awareness of children with multiple and complex needs for example the relationship between Acquired Brain Injury and issues of youth justice. Better partnerships across sectors i.e. disability and youth sector OR disability and education sector.”
“SCHOOLS CAPACITY TO ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY IMPROVED! (yes it’s in capital letters deliberately)"

“Funding to allow people to attend vital meetings – everyone is so busy trying to provide services to our young people that often networking meetings are overlooked, impacting on knowledge of new services.”

Focus on early intervention
There is a need for services to be funded to provide more early intervention support.

“New services that target early intervention (such as younger target groups) would support current services as hopefully they would reduce need down the track”

“Overall services that focus on early intervention and the prevention of disengagement...it is cheaper in the long run!!”

Planning and evaluation
Improved local planning including more consultation with young people, community organisations, schools and parents on the needs of the community.

“It would be good to be able to fund current services to continue to step up a notch in terms of proper evaluation (need more money to do this!) that will make sure young people’s needs are continually being met and evolving.”

Generalist youth services
There is a need for more generalist youth services and accessible drop in services.

“We need more generalist youth support services, who can work with who ever, on what ever.”

“More generalist youth workers not tied to specific age groups or issues would be fantastic.”

“Bring back the generalist youth worker!”

What are the challenges in making these improvements?
There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed to improve service provision to young people. Funding is the overwhelming challenge noted by participants. Funding directly impacts on other challenges, including staffing and the capacity to develop appropriate infrastructure.

The key message was that current funding models pose significant challenges to service providers which impact on their work with young people. Criticism of current funding models was directed at all levels of government.

It should be noted that there is a distinction between recurrent program funding and project funding. Many recurrent services are funded for three–four years. The funding challenges cited below often relate to project funding agreements which are shorter in term. However, other challenges such as overly prescriptive criteria were cited across both recurrent and project funding.

Funding is too short term
While several providers welcomed the move towards three year funding contracts, many providers still receive short term project grants of one to three years or less.

Short term funding does not enable workers to develop the necessary relationships with young people or families and makes it difficult for services to attract and retain staff.

“Project funding is incredibly difficult — by the time the project is planned and the young people are engaged, the funding ends, which is inadequate for our clients and potentially setting them up to fail. The lack of recurrent funding also impacts on employees and their ability to deliver a service in short time frames, often with staff leaving due to no further funding prior to the projects ending.”

“With the high turnover of youth workers and funding agreements it can just be another adult who abandoned these young people, another person that they need to re–tell their story to. Not having stable youth service funding means that young people who need help and support because they don’t have it at home or at school really lose out.”
Related to this was a concern that pilots often do not translate into ongoing funding for the program even where there are demonstrated positive impacts of the program through program evaluation.

“Non–recurrent grants make it difficult to have sustainable impacts on issues for young people. Pilots and one off funding need to be revamped so (that) those programs meeting criteria and demonstrating real change can continue.”

If funding ceases, local governments may plug the gap in some instances if there is still an identified need for the service.

“If the funding is discontinued or the funding criteria changed, the Council is usually placed in a position of having to fill the funding gap or deal with the political and community fall out.”

All these issues undermine efforts to increase coordination at the local level as program and staff turnover limit opportunities for effective partnership.

“Constant changes mean no one gets to really understand who is doing what and where to go to get help.”

Several providers recommended funding agreements of three to five years to enhance the sustainability of services to young people, to aid planning and to assist partnerships between schools, local government and support services.

Late notice of funding
Significant concern was expressed about the length of time it can take to learn whether a program is to be funded or refunded. These delays compromise the capacity to plan and disrupts established relationships between workers and young people where workers leave because they are unsure if their funding will continue. Service providers recommended longer notice of funding continuation or discontinuation to allow for better planning.

“Job insecurity is a problem — I found out less than one week before Christmas (2011) if I would have a job for 2012.”

“It would be highly beneficial to have a more informed and clearer picture of future funding availabilities and for this to be announced well within the existing funded period to allow for seamless continuation of a program and the associated staff.”

Service providers voiced concern about repeated variations to service agreements which extend funding only by six or twelve months undermining longer term planning and recruitment.

“(We've) been subject to five variations in three and a half years, with annual funding being unpredictable — in one year we received a $250k reduction and needed to cut services accordingly. Additional funding was later received in another variation, but by that time (we) had lost the staff and had difficulty recruiting again.”

Funding criteria is too prescriptive
Several respondents commented that funding criteria is often too specific and does not allow for the diverse range and complexity of issues young people may experience. The prescriptive nature of funding, and therefore services, means that young people may fall through gaps where they do not have a specific problem such as homelessness or drug and alcohol issues or where their issues cannot be addressed in a specific time period. There was a call for a generic pool of funding that would allow service providers greater flexibility about how they develop their programs to respond to young people’s needs more holistically.

“(Ours) is a unique and specialist program and therefore does not really ‘fit’ easily into mainstream funding sources. We seem to fall in between the cracks of funding bodies... some believe we are an arts program, others mental health and well being, education pathway service, etc.”

“Funding is increasingly prescriptive in its scope about what type of activities and initiatives can be run and increasingly focused on ‘hard outcomes’. This means that programs that are arts based or aim to develop community connectivity are harder to get funding to run. It shouldn't all be about preparing young people for the labour market... social and cultural capacity building is just as important.”

“Time allocated support means many young people are falling through the safety net of service providers due to increasingly narrow funding priorities.”
Administrative burden
While several respondents indicated that reporting requirements have improved over the years, there was still concern about the burden associated with reporting against multiple funding systems and to a number of Program and Service Advisers (PASAs) and other contract managers. The key challenge was the time that this reporting takes, which is often disproportionate to the amount of the grant. These administrative challenges clearly undermine productivity.

“The amount of time and effort that is required to apply for small funding rounds is significant but necessary if we wish to survive. The length of service agreements vary significantly so there is a lot of juggling going on.”

“Funding from different departments and funding bodies can waste time in admin and data collection when all systems are different but work on the ground is very similar.”

“Local government grants tend to be of smaller value and shorter delivery period (yet) come with rigorous reporting requirements … Local government needs to be mindful that many of the organisations applying for this type of funding have other reporting requirements with other state and federal departments.”

Services recommend more streamlined funding and reporting processes.

“A consistent measure and collection of data into one common system would be much more user friendly.”

“Governments need to streamline administrative and reporting processes and onerous red tape. This is particularly so for smaller grants of $20,000 or less.”

It should be noted that the Victorian Government has initiated several processes to try to reduce reporting burden, including the One DHS Standards and the recent Common Funding Agreement.

Difficulty attracting funding
Several providers reported that they had difficulty attracting funds given their program or organisation was relatively new. The irony is that organisations are often encouraged to develop new and innovative approaches to respond to issues and yet funding bodies may be cautious about funding unknown programs.

“As a newer organisation, it's rather difficult to gain legs without funding. However it seems to be a catch 22 that no funding is available until an organisation is proven of worth.”

Other respondents commented on the lack of funding sources available and the need to rely on philanthropic and other sources of funding for what is considered ‘core work’.

“Our organisation relies totally on grants to fund our programs. The area is very low socio economic, and has very little recreational or social opportunities for young people. Without our programs there would be nothing for youth in the area to do apart from hang out on the streets or BMX bike track.”

Funding not covering the cost of outreach
Outreach models are an essential means of ensuring the availability of services to geographically isolated young people. In some cases, the additional costs of providing outreach were not recognised in service and funding agreements such as the costs of travel and additional worker time.

Funding not based on evidence
A critical challenge is for funding to respond to identified need and for funding allocation to be evidence based. There is a perception that government funding does not adequately address need or can be based on inaccurate data:

“(Our LGA) has mixed demographics — the data reflects affluence however this is not the case. Additional data needs to be captured to provide an accurate picture of the demographics (here).”

“(The) majority of program funding is dealt with in higher (levels of) government and there is lack of true consultation within the community. For example the last ABS statistics state that there are only 1800 indigenous people within the Greater City of Shepparton but yet our local Aboriginal cooperative have over 4000 indigenous patients on their records!! Until proper consultation is done locally, this will never change.”
Lack of funding for prevention services
Several respondents noted a lack of funding for preventative services.

“Inability to attract funding to the growth area to establish preventative programs — often deemed not bad enough or sufficient numbers in the area.”

“We are so busy picking up the pieces that there is not enough focus on preventative programs.”

Lack of appropriate infrastructure
Several respondents also cited lack of venues and facilities as a barrier to service improvement and called for greater funding of infrastructure to provide suitable venues for services.

Workforce
Funding models need to allow services to employ qualified and skilled staff — both specialist and generalist staff. It is particularly difficult in rural and regional areas to attract and retain staff and volunteers.

“Staff recruitment is difficult — even if increased services were funded in rural areas we would have difficulty attracting qualified staff.”

Negative community attitudes towards young people.
Negative community attitudes towards young people is seen to lead to a lack of political will to address youth issues and fund appropriate services. These negative attitudes may also mean that some universal services are reluctant to provide services to young people. This is of concern given the greater push for more integrated services. There was call for greater community education about young people’s needs.

“(A challenge is the) identification of appropriate sites for refuges/foyer like models of accommodation due to perception by community of negative youth specific behaviour.”

Lack of understanding about youth work.
Related is a lack of understanding about the role of youth services.

“(Lack of) understanding about what youth services actually do with young people and the value that is placed on this work. The way we as a sector are able to articulate our work and provide evidence and research of the impact (we have) and outcomes (for young people).”

Lack of coordination
A critical barrier is the lack of coordination or collaboration between services and the need for more partnerships between organisations and sectors whilst retaining specialist knowledge. There is sometimes a lack of communication between service providers, competition for funding or simply a lack of knowledge about what other services are available. There is also a need for funding to help build and maintain better partnerships.

“Hard to know who is out there doing what. If we in the industry don’t know, how can we refer clients and families?”

“Unclear on who can take the lead in bringing key stakeholders together to coordinate, plan and implement a strategy to make it happen.”

“Fractured networks i.e. not enough communication between general services, youth services, disability services etc.”

“We really need better planning and integrated funding models that also include education, justice and health program areas as well as housing, disability and children and families etc.”
Geographical barriers
Geographical isolation is a key barrier for services in rural and regional Victoria. Rural areas also have smaller populations and thus a smaller rate base which means less money is available for local government service provision.

“Geographic distance is a major impediment — lack of public transport to major service hubs, and cost of petrol or lack of access to private cars mean young people do not access early intervention services. Staff recruitment is difficult — even if increased services were funded in rural areas we would have difficulty attracting qualified staff.”

Participation in partnerships
A significant number of organisations and programs participate in formal networks or alliances:

- Youth Partnerships: 52 per cent
- ChildFIRST: 38 per cent
- Primary Care Partnerships: 28 per cent
- Best Start: 11 per cent
- National Schools Partnerships Extended School Hub: 2 per cent

- other: 24 per cent — this included networks such as Regional Youth Affairs Networks, disability specific networks, homelessness networks, local council youth networks, education and training networks (including Local Learning and Employment Networks), early childhood networks and specific consortia and alliances such as headspace, the Regional Leaving Care Alliance and Opening Doors Local Area Services Network.

As this survey only asked about formal partnerships, it is safe to assume that this underestimates the level of partnering in Victoria as this data does not capture informal partnerships at a local level. This indicates that partnerships already underpin much of Victoria’s service provision. The issue is not getting services to partner but rather making these partnerships more effective and supporting more services to participate.

Sixty three per cent of respondents had formal links to or partnerships with schools. Partnerships were both informal and formal. The most cited partnerships included School Focused Youth Services, mentoring, VET in schools, LLENS, Learning Beyond the Bell, secondary consultation regarding mental health issues, education program regarding resilience and life skills, health promotion activities, arts programs and referrals from the school to community agencies.

Awareness and impact of partnership programs
The survey respondents were asked whether they were aware of current State or Federal Government partnership programs or initiatives operating in their area and what impact these initiatives had had or were expected to have (see figure 10).

Figure 10: Awareness of current state or federal government partnership programs or initiatives (n=102)
This meant greater support for young people:

“Positive impact on families generally, so one assumes young people might benefit from this service.”

“Youth Connections appear to have a credible relationship within the community and work well engaging young people disengaged from education and training in creative ways.”

“Funding through Youth Partnerships has allowed flexible learning options to be developed in our secondary colleges to give young people an (alternative) option to mainstream schooling. Hopefully will be ongoing funding as this has been a huge gap in secondary education in our region.”

The challenges included:

**Overstretched services**

“Youth Connections is not really working in this area as there is a waiting list of 340 young people. The workers of this program do not have enough time to assist the young people with linkages to work and study.”

“Have received a magnitude of negative feedback in regards to both Youth Connections and ChildFIRST in regards to young people and families feeling they were not important and that they were being rushed through.”

“Youth Connections are at capacity — would be good to see further funds allocated.”

**Need to support sustainable education and employment outcomes**

“Youth Connections is more about getting young people into training and education. More assistance is needed to help young people obtain and sustain employment.”

“Important initiatives but they work at the individual level rather than addressing the structurally disadvantaged position that young people (and families) that need these services inhabit.”

**Administration burden**

“Due to the basis of these being mostly operational in a consortia model, the administration often gets in the way of service delivery, but the workers on the ground are doing a fantastic job and have supported our programs with referrals and are able to fund projects we cannot.”

**Time limitations.**

“Youth Partnerships could be fantastic but needs at least another three years.”

**Not inclusive of young people**

“ChildFIRST mainly only see young people in families under 12 years. They will not pick up referrals of the older young people.”

“Adolescence usually missed by ChildFIRST.”

“Many of these services are tailored for families and are not youth specific.”
Services for the ‘middle years’: 8 to 12 years

A significant number of survey respondents also provided services to the ‘middle years’. For the purpose of this survey the ‘middle years’ was defined as 8 to 12 years to distinguish it from services provided to young people 12 to 25 years.

Of the 206 respondents, 59 per cent provided services to the ‘middle years’, 38 per cent did not and three per cent were unsure.

It is interesting to note the diverse range of programs provided to children in the ‘middle years’ and the complexity of the issues addressed which would normally be perceived as adolescent issues. Services included:

- mental health services, including outpatient and inpatient psychiatric services and counselling
- FREEZA. Children 8–12 participate in FreeZa events such as the skate park competition
- Youth Connections. Funded to engage young people from age 13, however services report a number of younger clients seeking support
- diversionary programs, most notably the Youth Support Service and Youth Justice Community Intensive Case management programs
- school holiday activities. Some are targeted at this age group, others are targeted at older groups but attract younger participants
- homework programs
- education programs, most notably one on one mentoring
- family services
- family violence programs
- disability services. For the carers of children of this age, sibling support and respite care

- sexual assault services. Therapeutic responses for children who have experienced sexual assault and for children who engage in problem sexualised behaviour and/or sexual assault
- newly arrived programs to assist settlement at primary school
- behavioural programs to address challenging behaviours that are “akin to that of high risk adolescents.”

Funding sources

Services for the middle years were funded by a wide variety of sources, most notably DHS, DEECD, local government youth services and philanthropic grants as shown in Figure 11 (this question allowed for multiple responses).

Figure 11: Funding sources for ‘Middle Years’ services (n=119)

Other included; the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Commonwealth Carer Respite and Carelink Centre, Federal Chaplaincy Funding Program.
Partnerships
Fifty seven per cent of survey respondents (n = 67) partnered with other organisations to provide services to the middle years, 34 per cent did not and nine per cent were unsure. Partnerships included:

- with State Government agencies such as Victoria Police
- with Federal Government agencies such as Centrelink
- with community sector organisations including in kind arrangements such as sharing resources and transport
- with local government: for example accessing library space
- with schools: for example, the school provides the venue for homework support
- with sporting clubs
- with alliances such as Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and ChildFIRST.

Demand for services to the middle years
Sixty–seven per cent of respondents (n = 181) indicated that there was a need for services for children between 8 to 12 years in their local government area/s that are currently not being provided, three per cent of respondents answered no and 30 per cent were unsure.

“The age group from 8–12 is a significant gap. They’re no longer considered early years, but they’re not yet considered young people. If the gap could be taken up at each end there would hopefully be a smoother transition for service provision and partnership development.”

“They are too old for children’s services and too young for youth services.”

“Youth services are seeing more and more children in this age bracket presenting with issues that were present for teenagers only a few years back. Youth services and the sector are not adequately resourced to deal with this age group.”

“We often work with families with children this age and find it very difficult to find support for the children that age. There is something for the younger ones and something for teens but nothing for the in between age.”

Several respondents noted that the ‘middle years’ are a critical age for early intervention to prevent more complex issues developing in the adolescent years and beyond.

“Targeting children between eight to 12 can prevent issues as they progress into the teen years. Generally children within this age group are more open to connecting with leaders and mentors, and forming an early relationship can greatly assist their psychological growth. Prevention is far better than intervention.”

“We recently did a series of murals at the Atherton Gardens Housing Estate and the number of young children wanting to participate was extraordinary. Although this was not the target group intended we were required to accommodate the group. As with many programs early intervention is the key... rather than waiting for them to become disengaged from community and learning and then having to access services.”

Several respondents commented that although they do not receive funding to provide services to this age group, they often do, given the lack of other supports available.

“We have quite a bit of interest from young people in the 10 to 11 years age bracket. Where appropriate we do permit these younger children to take part in the programs...We see this as engagement of the young people who are very close to transitioning into the funded age range as a way to develop the relationships and interest in youth activities which will continue into adolescence.”

“I provide services to 12 year olds with current funding however young people aged 10 to 11 often want to come along too. Depending on the suitability/high risk/need of these clients I sometimes make a judgement call to include them. Where possible I refer them on to other services but it’s not always suitable.”

“We... face a dilemma of sometimes providing services outside our service agreements in an attempt to reduce the impact later on.”
There was a call for more targeted programs that address the needs of this age group in a developmentally appropriate way.

“It’s important that each age group is recognised and considered … you can’t just treat upper primary school students the same way you treat high school or university students. New programs need to be developed in which they feel involved and appreciated.”

“Certainly preventive programs (are needed). However, these would need to be provided by services with childhood development knowledge as well as expertise in the youth field.”

Several respondents noted the need to view the age group in the context of family support services.

“I would prefer to see services aimed at this age range to be part of a family service. If there are concerns about 8 to 12 year old young people, it is likely the parents or careers need some sort of intervention.”

“(We need) support and crisis services integrated within a family services model. Currently the support needs for this cohort are not being met and it is not appropriate that they are supported through a current youth services model.”

### Key gaps in service provision to the ‘middle years’

“It is a more specialised area and there is a real lack of tailored services for these young people.”

A broad range of service gaps for the middle years were identified.

### Recreation/events

Several respondents commented on the lack of recreational facilities, events, clubs, and groups for this age group. There were calls for more free, accessible, supervised and developmentally appropriate activities.

“Need for more free activities on school holidays. Currently programs are mostly for teenagers.”

### Mental health services

Several respondents commented on a need for a model like headspace to be developed for a younger age group. This call included support for parents to deal with their children’s mental health issues.

“Children with challenging behaviours and specialist mental health needs. (There is) no capacity in the system to pick up the numbers of these children we are seeing.”

### Education support

Many respondents highlighted the critical transition between primary and secondary school and the gaps in education support that currently exist:

“Transition period between grade 6 and year 7 (is) critical. (There) should be more attention focused in this area to ensure young people don’t fall through the gaps.”

“The earlier they can intervene with the kids and get them back into education and enjoying it, the better the school system will be. It’s too late once they hit 15 to try and get them back into education. They have already have missed way too much.”

“There is a need for a transition program from primary school to high school … If we could work with young people in primary school to build their capacity for resilience and tolerance, the work that we do around bullying and school refusal in the beginning of high school could be minimised.”

“There are children who are not classified as having a disability but cannot cope at school due to lack of understanding. These children fall through the gaps in the system and are often left to cope the best way they can.”

“Severe lack of alternative education programs for highly disengaged young people in this age bracket.”

There were a number of recommendations made to strengthen education engagement at the primary school level including:

- more mentoring programs
- education support programs such as tutoring for those children who are struggling but not eligible for an aide
Building the Scaffolding

more school refusal programs
behaviour management programs
working more closely with parents to assist re-engagement
the need for more alternative educational options for this age group
assisting families with the cost of education such as camps and excursions.

Children with disabilities
Several respondents highlighted the need for more support for children with disabilities in this age group. This included the need for:
more after-school care, vacation care programs and weekend recreation programs that take into account the needs of children with disabilities
increased respite options including facility based respite
accommodation options for children with a disability who are currently living in facility based respite
increased funding for schools supporting students with a range of disabilities (acquired brain injury was specifically noted several times)
improving the availability and affordability of paediatric specific therapy services
programs that help foster social networks — children with a disability are often isolated socially, especially in regional or rural areas.

Sexuality
While only mentioned by one respondent, it is worth noting that the issue of dealing with gender identity and sexuality issues was mentioned for this age group:
“Trans kids coming out younger — definite need.”

Homelessness and drug and alcohol services
Need for an increased focus on this age group in homelessness and drug and alcohol services, either as members of families of adults presenting to these services or as service users individually.

Behaviour programs
The need for early intervention, such as anger management programs, when behavioural issues begin to emerge.
“Anecdotal evidence would suggest that this age group is presenting with issues that would have previously presented in an older cohort such as aggressive behaviour, school refusal, anti social behaviour.”

Parenting programs
The need to support parents of ‘middle years’ children to assist them to support their children.

CALD children
The specific cultural needs of CALD communities need to be addressed in program development. The issue of young people caring for younger siblings was noted. This meant that they either had to bring their siblings along to a program which may not be developmentally appropriate or they miss out on programs.
“Often if the younger siblings can’t attend then older young people, particularly young women from refugee and CALD communities, are unable to participate in youth activities.”

Community engagement
Youth participation programs tend to be targeted at young people 12 years and over. Several respondents recommended that there could be more programs available for the middle years to start engaging them in community participation activities earlier.

Facilities
Appropriate infrastructure needs to be available to enable programs to work with children in the middle years. Infrastructure that is built for the early years or young people may be inappropriate or unavailable, particularly in rural areas.
Barriers to providing services to the ‘middle years’

Seventy per cent (of 179 respondents) indicated that there were barriers to providing services to children in the middle years, 18 per cent experienced no barriers and 12 per cent were unsure. The key barriers to service provision include:

Funding

Forty-six per cent of respondents cited funding and service criteria as the key barrier to service provision. Most noted that they were only funded to provide services for young people in the 12 to 25 age range. Several services indicated that their funding agreement specifically precluded them from working with a younger age group.

“The three most significant barriers are the LACK OF ONGOING FUNDING for any successful pilot programs, and the NARROW CONFINES / guidelines imposed by State Government agencies. However the largest problem is LACK of ACTUAL SERVICE PROVISION that many piloted programs offer.”

“If we are not funded to deliver the existing services properly — and we have a workforce that is qualified to only provide services to 12 to 25 year olds – how are we best placed to meet the needs of children aged eight to 12? Fund the services adequately and train the workforce — then ask us to provide the service.”

“It costs more money to have staff on weekends, and children are mostly in school during the normal working hours.”

Workforce development

Most workers are trained to work with young people and expressed concern that they did not have the skills or knowledge to work with children in the middle years:

“I am a youth worker and only work with those aged 12 to 25. I am not trained or able or wish to work with younger children. This is a specialist area requiring trained workers in child development.”

“Our workforce has been trained to work with a significantly different model of practice. Youth services are qualified to work within three main models of practice: harm minimisation, youth participation and community development. Children’s services work within a child welfare model of practice.”

A contentious issue is whether youth workers should receive more training and professional development to work with this age group or whether workers specifically trained in child development are more appropriate to work with this age group.

Service appropriateness

Many services indicated that it would be inappropriate for them to work with this age group as it would mean mixing with an older age group. Related to this is the need for more specific facilities:

“Youth spaces do not function well with primary aged students so we are secondary age only. We need to be VERY careful what we offer to the primary school aged group, we do not wish to compromise the work with teens.”

Middle years policy and planning

Respondents were asked whether their organisation has a specific policy or strategy for the ‘middle years’. Of the 181 respondents, the majority (71 per cent) did not have a policy, 20 per cent were unsure and only eight per cent were aware of a policy. Several respondents noted that their policy was to refer this age group to Child FIRST, or that they were developing different guidelines regarding consent and confidentiality for young people aged 10 to 12 years.

Three respondents noted that there is work underway in their area to address this policy gap:

“There is not a current policy but council is part of a working group which includes the LLEN, schools, children’s services at council and SFYS to look at coordinating services with a view to developing a policy or strategy to work in this space as a community.”
Building the Scaffolding
Chapter Three

Young people’s voices

In any person-centred service system it is critical to hear the view of those who use the services in the planning, design and delivery of services. It was beyond the scope of this project to elicit young people’s views of the service system. However, several research projects have generated young people's views on this issue. This chapter provides a snapshot of this research.
In 2012, YACVic conducted a research project on behalf of the Youth Partnerships Secretariat of the DEECD. The research was designed to identify approaches that can be taken in school and youth service settings to prevent disengagement and enable better involvement of all young people in learning and other pathways. The research is informed directly by young people and includes a synthesis of 72 relevant studies in which young people were participants, in-depth qualitative interviews with 78 young Victorians who had experienced significant barriers to educational engagement, and an online survey of 228 young people that explores the relevance of the themes elicited through the qualitative interviews with a more general sample.

Young people who took part in the interviews experienced profound and complex challenges in their lives and most had accessed youth support services at some time. Ensuring timely access to appropriate support often had a marked positive effect on young people. Young people described positive experiences with support services in school and community settings when workers advocated for the things that they themselves thought were important. Workers who provide support in this way acted as a gateway to other services which results in a whole range of health and wellbeing needs being met.

Problems arose when young people did not have access to services, or when service providers failed to respect young people’s right to privacy and to have control over their own lives. Young people described greater levels of engagement with services when they had the opportunity to form relationships with professionals in which they feel respected, supported, and heard.

Approximately half of the young people who took part in the online survey had accessed services in a community setting. The most common services accessed by these young people were after school programs, holiday programs and health services. Young people were asked to rate their experience with services and to describe the reasons for this rating. Although the majority of young people described positive experiences with services, there was also a large number who described mixed or inconsistent experiences and a small group who described negative experiences. As young people were asked to comment on their service use overall, it is difficult to speculate about which particular services are performing well and which are performing poorly. Despite this, it is interesting to note that, in the information that was available, no clear themes emerged to explain the variation in ratings. This, combined with a large number of free text responses that described average, mixed or inconsistent experiences, and the varied experiences of interview participants, suggests that there is some work to be done in streamlining the way that community services are delivered in Victoria.
Mission Australia’s 2012 National Survey of Young Australians

Each year, Mission Australia undertakes a national survey of young people. In 2012, Mission Australia surveyed 15,351 young people aged 15–19. 3,579 were from Victoria. The following is a summary of the Victorian data which looks at the issues young people face and where they go to for support.

What do young Victorians most value?
Young Victorians value friendships, family relationships and school or study satisfaction:

- friendships were highly valued by 85 per cent of respondents
- family relationships were highly valued by 83 per cent of respondents
- school or study satisfaction was rated at extremely important by 38 per cent and very important by 40 per cent of respondents
- physical and mental health were rated at extremely important by 37 per cent and very important by 37 per cent of respondents
- financial security was rated as extremely important by 17 per cent and as very important by 37 per cent of respondents.

What issues are of greatest concern to young people in Victoria?
When asked what issues are of ‘personal concern’ to them, Victorian young people reported being most concerned with:

- coping with stress. Sixteen per cent of respondents were extremely concerned and 24 per cent were very concerned
- school or study problems. A major concern for 36 per cent of respondents
- body image. Fifteen per cent were extremely concerned and 19 per cent very concerned
- depression. Ten per cent extremely concerned and 13 per cent very concerned.

What are the main sources of support for young people in Victoria?
Young people were asked whether they had someone to ask for any support in a time of crisis.

- the internet was the primary source of information for young people (78 per cent) followed by parent/s (58.3 per cent) and magazines (56 per cent)
- young people feel comfortable going to friend/s (74 per cent), parent/s (66 per cent) and relatives/family friends (59 per cent) for advice
- the top three sources of support for young people from Victoria were friend/s (74 per cent), parent/s (56 per cent) and relatives/family friends (54 per cent)
- 60 per cent of young people from Victoria indicated that they were not comfortable using a telephone hotline and 47 per cent were not comfortable contacting a community agency for advice, support or information.

It is important to consider these figures in light of the survey methodology. Of the 3,579 young people from Victoria aged 15 to 19 years, 91.6 per cent of these young people were living with family and 95.4 per cent engaged in education. This is a limited cohort that may not have had a lot of experience engaging with the formal service system.
Youth Voices: Peer Research into Youth Transitions

In 2007, the Youth Collaboration, a coalition of youth policy and service delivery agencies, government departments and philanthropic organisations, published Youth Voice: Peer Research into Youth Transitions. This peer research project was designed to inform the development of transition programs and support services. Research for the project was undertaken in Shepparton, Frankston and Braybrook/Maidstone. The main findings of the research included:

- among young people, knowledge of available local services is very limited. Significant numbers of young people who had left school did not recognise the name of most local youth support services. They are generally unaware of the various options that are available for obtaining transition support and services. This is exacerbated by the ways in which services are branded and identified by funding sources. Young people are confused by the names given to programs and services. Services using acronyms or based on complex concepts were not easily understood. On the other hand, a service such as Centrelink not only acted as a hub linking to other services, but the title fitted the function and made sense to those who used it

- young people also indicated that they would prefer ongoing support relationships to assist with their transition. Young people would like a more personal form of assistance than that which is frequently available through short-term, ‘outcome-focused’ government-funded services. Case study interviews indicated that receiving personal help from someone with rapport was considered to be the best form of assistance

- the research also identified the need for more support services to be made available to young people at an earlier age, as problems for some young people emerged while they were still at primary school. There are relatively few services available to support young people at an early age. Disengagement that is evident by the time students are in their final years of secondary school has its roots in experiences occurring both in and out of school during their earlier years

- parents, family members and friends are consistently cited as important sources of help during the transition period as was the internet

- processes and mechanisms for government-wide and cross-sector responses should be developed to address the complex issues surrounding youth transitions. This research clearly shows that collaborative approaches produce better outcomes for young people in education and training. Providing improved support for young people to address the wide range of issues increases their capacity to remain in education and in employment

- there needs to be more active involvement from parents in the transition process, given their important role as a source of information and support to their children, and the high priority that young people place on this support.

The report recommended that local and state government should explore ways to bring together and simplify access to the various youth and transition services within communities in order to improve access to information and services on transition for young people.
Chapter Four

Opportunities to strengthen the scaffolding that supports young people
As outlined in chapter two, the sector has highlighted the need for:

- more investment in services that support young people — particularly more affordable and appropriate housing options, programs to reengage young people in education, mental health services, recreation options and generalist youth support services
- more collaborative approaches
- more investment in early intervention approaches
- more support in the middle years.

In this chapter YACVic and VC OSS discuss opportunities for strengthening outcomes across five areas that together address the key issues raised by the sector and by young people. These five areas also address the major threads of the reform agendas being driven by government and the current research about young people’s support needs. They include:

- investing across the life course
- early intervention at every age and at every stage of a problem
- working in partnership
- ensuring supports are accessible and inclusive
- strengthening the focus on outcomes.
1. Investing across the life course

Services provided to children and young people tend to be compartmentalised and focus on particular chronological ages — the early years, 0 to 8 years, and young people, 12 to 25 years — rather than taking an approach that recognises the connections and transitions between age groups. This leads to gaps in policy and service provision, particularly in the middle years.

Recent research highlights the importance of taking a ‘life course’ approach — that is, considering adolescence in the context of what precedes it and what follows. This is particularly important as changes in our society create changes in the experience of ‘youth’ as a period in the life course. At the lower end, pre–teens are exhibiting behaviour and having experiences previously associated with the teenage years. At the upper end, social and economic drivers, such as housing affordability, longer periods spent in formal education settings and changing patterns of family formation mean that many young people are still negotiating the transition to adulthood well into their twenties. This has led to a growing consensus that the period in which someone is considered to be a young person now begins earlier, at around 9–12 years and ends later, for some not until their mid–twenties or beyond.

“The... problems facing young people’s policy is that it is based firstly on separate ages of children, such as ‘early years’ or ‘youth’, so it doesn’t capture the interconnectedness of children’s development; and secondly it is based on siloed services to children, such as education, health or disability, so it is based on needs in isolation from each other and doesn’t see the whole child.”

We also know that what happens in infancy and early childhood can significantly affect adolescence and adulthood. A life course approach would draw attention to how the current needs of children and young people may affect later outcomes. Employment policies, for example, tend to focus on the education and skills young people need at secondary and tertiary levels. If social policy is to respond more effectively to issues such as youth unemployment, skills such as literacy and social skills, and structural issues such as access to healthcare, safe housing and income support, need to be addressed earlier in the lifespan, when foundational skills are being developed.

Scaffolding for young people could be strengthened with a more seamless system of support from childhood through to adulthood, which does not suddenly stop at a particular age but takes developmental needs into account. This does not mean that every service has to provide support to every age group, but a more coordinated system would help to ensure that children and young people do not fall through the current gaps between child, adolescent and adult services.

The critical ages and stages requiring different approaches that would need to be included within a life course approach include:

**Early childhood: 0 to 8 years**

Early childhood, 0 to 8 years, is a time when important brain development occurs and foundational skills are developed. A strong service system is essential to support families to provide a safe, loving and stimulating environment and to connect children to universal services — services that are available to all people, such as schools and health services.

This understanding has led to all levels of government in Australia now having a welcome focus on early childhood, including significant reforms in Victoria stemming from the Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005 and the Child, Youth and Families Act 2005.

Also in Victoria, the 2004 Joining the Dots report outlined the need to strengthen universal services to children while acknowledging the importance of local diversity in service models. That resulted in the roll out of the Best Start program, with its focus on prevention and early intervention, and the establishment of Children’s Centres which co–located early childhood education and care services. Capital funding has been essential to this model.
Best Start

The overall aim of Best Start is to improve the health, development, learning and well-being of all young children across Victoria from pregnancy through transition to school. It is targeted at children aged 0 to 8. Best Start aims to ensure that vulnerable young children and their families can participate in and benefit from the universal service platform.

Best Start provides funding to engage and support families, local services and local government in a collaborative local planning partnership. The partnerships focus on changing the ways existing services are provided at the local level to improve health and wellbeing, education and schooling, and housing and child protection outcomes.

The 2011 statewide evaluation of Best Start confirmed its value and recommended it be extended to more disadvantaged communities.124

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)125

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population measure of young children’s development. The AEDI was implemented by the Australian Government in 2009 and data is to be collected nationally every three years for approximately 270,000 children in their first year of full-time school.

Teachers complete a checklist for children in their first year of full-time school. The checklist measures five key areas of early childhood development: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based), communication skills and general knowledge. These areas have been chosen as they are linked to the predictors of good adult health, education and social outcomes.

As a population measure, the AEDI results allow communities to see how local children are doing relative to other children in their community, and across Australia.
The middle years: 8 to 12 years†
The middle years is a time of significant physical, social, emotional and psychological change. It is a critical transition period with children moving from primary to secondary school — the time when many start to disengage from learning. Greater independence and responsibility mean that young people of this age start to spend more time away from adult supervision and can be more influenced by peers.

Risk factors during the middle years include:
- conflict with parents
- peer group pressure
- bullying and discrimination
- self-esteem issues
- feelings of loneliness
- depression and alienation
- the start of substance abuse behaviour
- initial contact with the criminal justice system
- heightened risk of disengagement from school.126

The middle years provide an important opportunity to identify and respond to any early warning signs. However, the middle years have been virtually ignored as a significant stage of development and, as a result, there is a yawning gap in the services available to young people in that age group.127

It is also unclear which agencies — children or youth services — should respond to the middle years age group, and what expertise and practice models are appropriate.128

Significant gaps in services for the middle years were identified by a New South Wales parliamentary inquiry.129 Local governments, some of which are moving towards a more life course approach to policy and program development (see case studies), have also indicated concern about the lack of programs for this age group, the lack of qualified staff and the lack of data.130

The findings of the Mapping the Middle Ground forum hosted in 2010 by YACVic and the Inner City Regional Youth Affairs Network also remain relevant, highlighting the need for better collaboration between schools and community services and earlier identification and support for young people who are at risk.131

“While there is now greater awareness of the issue of mental health in adolescence, there has been less focus on the prevention of mental illness from early childhood. Pathways to poor mental health start early in life often before 12 years of age yet our general understanding of mental health concerns in childhood are poor.”132

† Definitions of the middle years vary. It is usually defined as between 8 to 14 years. In this report we focus on 8 to 12 years given current policy and service gaps.
CASE STUDY

City of Whittlesea Municipal plan for children, young people and their families

The City of Whittlesea is developing Connect: A Municipal plan for children, young people and their families in the City of Whittlesea 2013-2018. This is Council’s first unified plan for the family and youth departments. It provides a framework for integrated planning from 0 to 25 years for children, young people, their families and local communities.

Connect proposes the creation of place–based multidisciplinary teams from across Maternal Child and Health, Early Years and Youth Services and to develop strategies addressing the middle years and family strengthening to:

- increase opportunities for preventative and strengths–based practice
- improve holistic work practices with young people, in the context of their family
- bring together the experience, skills and knowledge of practitioners from across sectors
- create more opportunities for young people to access support early, particularly in new growth areas
- address current policy and program gaps.

CASE STUDY

Developing policy across the life continuum - City of Port Phillip

The City of Port Phillip is developing a Family, Youth and Children Strategy. Its focus is to provide a seamless service continuum for all families, young people and children in the municipality.

An internal review of current services showed gaps in the current framework, policies and service delivery and a subsequent external review recommended better links between council policies and service delivery.

A working team was established with team leaders, coordinators and managers of Council’s Family, Youth and Children (FYC) department to identify key themes, trends and services.

A strategy that will inform the Council’s direction for the next five to 10 years is expected to be delivered by the end of 2013. This plan will be supported by a clear evidence base and will support resource allocation, funding proposals and budget bids.

The Family, Youth and Children Strategy will underpin the Early Years Plan and the development of the new Youth Strategy and Middle Years Strategy to ensure an integrated policy across the FYC department.
CASE STUDY

Adventure playgrounds† are one example of a program catering specifically to young people in their middle years. They provide a play space for children (usually between 5 to 12 years) and families who may experience financial or social barriers to accessing other recreational activities. The playgrounds are supervised and staff may run programs and provide referrals to support services. There are five Adventure Playgrounds in Australia, all in Melbourne — St Kilda, South Melbourne, Kensington, Fitzroy and Prahran.

An example of one of the playgrounds is Skinners Adventure Playground in the City of Port Phillip. The playground is based at the bottom of the public housing high rise in South Melbourne and provides a social network and programs for children and families experiencing disadvantage. The playground is staffed, is open seven days per week, 51 weeks of the year and has extended hours during school holidays. It incorporates a breakfast program and after-hours programming. Skinners works in conjunction with local youth agencies to ensure clients are connected to the local community. It has close ties to counsellors as well as to Family Support at the City of Port Phillip, enabling quick referrals and help for families where and when they require it.

An example of one of the services associated with Adventure playgrounds is the Family Education Support Partnership (FESP), connected to the Prahran Adventure Playground. The FESP, a partnership between Stonnington Youth and Adventure Playground Services (SYAPS) and CatholicCare and funded by Cabrini Health, aims to engage vulnerable children in education pathways. The program is targeted at children aged 5 to 12 years residing in the Horace Petty and surrounding housing estates in Prahran. FESP aims to actively engage with parents and promote positive parent and child interaction to benefit the child's education engagement. This is done through:

- case management - working closely with and within schools, being part of multidisciplinary care teams and referring and providing information to families where appropriate
- programs - hosting a weekly ‘parent drop in’ at the community room on the Estate, monthly barbecue and homework club
- collaboration - basing the worker at SYAPS and working closely with the Adventure Playground and other key stakeholders
- networking - building relationships with businesses, schools and volunteers to be involved in projects.

† Adventure playgrounds are funded through the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and relevant local governments.
Adolescence and young adulthood — 12 to 25 years

Vital emotional, social and physical growth and development, including brain development, continues to take place from 12 to 25 years. Significant connections and remodelling occur during this time in the frontal lobe — the area of the brain responsible for a range of functions including coordinating behaviours, impulse control, decision making, judgement, planning and other higher order cognitive functions. Adolescent brains also show more activity in the emotional parts of the brain (the limbic system) which can make young people vulnerable to depression and anxiety.

At the same time, young people are negotiating difficult social and cultural transitions as they move from childhood into adulthood. Issues that are commonly associated with adolescence include:

- stress - In 2012 for the first time, coping with stress overtook body image as the most pressing issue for young people in the Mission Australia survey. School and study problems also ranked highly.
- substance use - Nearly 13 per cent of young Australians aged 16 to 24 have a substance abuse issue; half of people who experience a substance use disorder are estimated to do so before the age of 20.
- mental health issues - These are more prevalent for young people aged 16 to 24 than any other age group.

Young people and mental health

One in every four young people in Australia experience a mental disorder in any 12 month period. Mental and substance abuse disorders account for over 60% of the health burden in the 15 to 24 year age group.

In Australia, the prevalence of mental health problems for young people aged 13 to 17 years is 19 per cent and 27 per cent in young adults aged 18 to 24 years.

Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health issues experienced by young people, with around 30 per cent of adolescents experiencing a diagnosable depressive episode by the age of 18 years.

Although young people have higher rates of mental disorder they are less likely than other age groups to seek professional help. Only 31 per cent of young women and 13 per cent of young men with mental health problems have sought any professional help over the previous 12 months.

The Inspire Foundation and Ernst and Young have considered the cost of young men’s mental health to the Australian economy. The report finds that:

- mental illness in young men aged 12 to 25 costs the Australian economy $3.27 billion per year or $387,000 per hour across a year in lost productivity
- the Federal Government bears 31 per cent of this cost via direct health costs, disability welfare payments, unemployment benefits and the direct costs of imprisonment
- Australia loses over 9 million working days per annum to young men with mental illness.
Key issues and concerns across the life course

Each year Kids Helpline, an Australian counselling service for children and young people aged 5–25 years, publishes an overview of the contacts it has had. The top 10 concerns by age group and gender give a snapshot of concerns across the life course and are tabled below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Female 5-9 years</th>
<th>Female 10-14 years</th>
<th>Female 15-18 years</th>
<th>Female 19-25 years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>Emotional wellbeing and managing responses</td>
<td>Emotional wellbeing and managing responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bullying (school-related)</td>
<td>Relationships with friends and peers</td>
<td>Mental health concerns</td>
<td>Mental health concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Emotional wellbeing and managing responses</td>
<td>Emotional wellbeing and managing responses</td>
<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>Partner relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Relationships with friends and peers</td>
<td>Bullying (school-related)</td>
<td>Partner relationships</td>
<td>Suicide-related concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Child abuse</td>
<td>Suicide-related concerns</td>
<td>Family relationships</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Grief and loss</td>
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<td>Physical health concerns</td>
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<td>Loneliness</td>
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<td>Homelessness or leaving home</td>
<td>Child abuse</td>
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<td>Eating and weight concerns</td>
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<td>Study issues</td>
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<th>Male 15-18 years</th>
<th>Male 19-25 years</th>
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<td>Family relationships</td>
<td>Partner relationships</td>
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<td>Bullying (school-related)</td>
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<td>Partner relationships</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Partner relationships</td>
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<td>Drug and alcohol issues</td>
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<td>Physical health concerns</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>School-related authority and physical health concerns</td>
<td>Study issues</td>
<td>Study issues</td>
<td>Self-image</td>
</tr>
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</table>
2. Early intervention: early in life and early in the life of a problem

“Early intervention must not be limited to intervention at an early age. It must also extend to timely intervention to support families whenever problems surface, intervening early to prevent their escalation.”

There is considerable evidence that early intervention, both early in life and early in the life of a problem, is the most effective way to improve outcomes. Yet ongoing gaps in the provision of early intervention support, means that much investment is focussed at the crisis end of service delivery.

The challenge for government is finding a balance between adequately meeting the demands on the tertiary system while also investing in early intervention services that support young people before they reach crisis point.

The social and economic benefits of early intervention

Economists have used the life course approach to model returns on investment to estimate the costs and benefits of preventative and remedial interventions. Modelling on the ‘early years’ has led to greater investment in evidence-based prevention and treatment programs for preschool-age children and their families. Several studies are starting to demonstrate the benefit of investment in prevention and early intervention services for young people.

A report commissioned by Victoria’s Interface Councils in 2008 found that intervening early to re-engage young people in education improved both the young person’s quality of life and had a net financial benefit for government. Access Economics concluded that:

“In interventions that reduce youth disengagement could potentially return 23.6 times the government’s initial investment to society and 7.6 times directly to the government through increased taxation revenues.”

In an economic analysis of interventions for young people at a federal level, Access Economics found the following economic gains over both five and 42 years:

- investment in human capital (education and skills) could save around $1.7 billion over five years ($87 billion over 42 years)
- successful childhood obesity prevention programs could save around $370 million over five years ($21 billion over 42 years)
- mental health initiatives could save around $240 million over five years ($12 billion over 42 years)
- prevention of child abuse could save around $100 million over five years ($5 billion over 42 years)
- initiatives to reduce alcohol harms, prevent teen pregnancies, address crime and delinquency and reduce bullying could save around $46 million ($2 billion over 42 years).

Deloitte Access Economics have undertaken an analysis of the socioeconomic benefits of investing in the prevention of early school leaving. The research highlights the costs to the state and the individual of early school leaving across several domains:

- Employment and income. Young people who do not complete school or the equivalent are more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for extended periods of time, earn lower wages and accumulate a lower level of wealth through their lives (see figures 12 and 13).
Building the Scaffolding

- Health outcomes. There is a strong correlation between educational attainment and better health outcomes.
- Education and crime. Young people with insufficient education and/or poor literacy skills are disproportionately found within the criminal justice system.
- Intergenerational impact. People with at least one parent with a year 12 completion are much more likely to complete year 12 themselves.\textsuperscript{144}

The cost of ill health, disengagement from education and employment, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and interaction with the youth justice and child protection systems is enormous for the individual, their families and the state.\textsuperscript{145} Research has found that ‘poor outcomes in childhood and adolescence become the antecedents of costly, chronic, complex and disabling problems in the adult years.\textsuperscript{146}

A recent study calculated the life course institutional costs of homelessness for 11 individuals (that is the cost of repeated interactions with housing, health, community services and criminal justice agencies). The current costs ranged from around $900,000 to $5.5 million per person.\textsuperscript{147} The 11 case studies feature a common denominator – each came to the attention of a government agency in their early teens or even earlier in childhood. The report found that:

‘In almost every case discussed, significant disadvantage, vulnerability and risk factors are obvious from early adolescence and, for several individuals from early childhood, yet here there is systemic failure, where care and protection and early intervention do not occur in any substantial or sustained way’.
A United Kingdom analysis of social return on investment for young people aged 16 to 25 years — that is, the social, environmental and economic value created by an intervention — found there was a return of $8 for every $1.50† invested when there is increased one–on–one early support and better coordinated services for young people. It was also noted that ‘positive returns for the state are likely to mount up over the longer term, as investment in young people today will result in considerably improved outcomes for individuals and society, both now and in future generations’.

Failure to address the issues affecting vulnerable young people produces a classic ‘false economy’ — save money now, but pay much more later.

Refocussing on early intervention

This economic evidence demonstrates that the focus of any service system reform must be improving prevention and early intervention responses. This will improve health and wellbeing outcomes for young people and their families and in turn, have significant benefits to the state.

Early intervention responses need to occur:

- along the age continuum to address issues before or as they emerge
- along the service continuum, from universal services such as schools, to more specialist supports through to tertiary services such as out–of–home care

Different stages of early intervention that need to be addressed include:

- universal primary prevention. Initiatives that address the entire population and aim to reduce the later incidence of problems, for example through universal services such as primary health and schools
- selective primary prevention. Initiatives that focus on groups at higher than average risk of developing particular issues, for example additional educational support services to young people in care
- secondary prevention. Programs that respond quickly when low level problems arise in order to prevent them getting worse
- tertiary help/prevention. Services that respond when the problem has become serious, for example, in child protection and criminal justice
- quaternary help/prevention. Services that provide therapeutic responses to address trauma and lessen longer–term harm, for example therapy for victims of sexual abuse
- Stages of ongoing recovery. Young people may dip in and out of services for ongoing periods of support as part of their recovery.

† Converted from British pounds on 10 March 2013.
3. Working in partnership

There is considerable evidence that good partnerships lead to more coordinated services and address service gaps. In Victoria, partnership approaches are well underway as evident in the survey responses. These approaches are also increasingly driving government policy and practice reform, such as Services Connect (outlined in chapter one). Government also often specifies partnership as a condition of funding.

Our survey results indicate that while partnership models are well developed in many local areas in Victoria, there remain challenges including:

- developing shared protocols around assessment, referrals and information sharing
- bringing together workers who are specialised in different areas so they can understand different work philosophies and practices
- time-consuming and costly networking and meetings
- limited or no funding to coordinate the partnership.

There is also a need to strengthen partnerships across the many specialist services that respond to young people. Currently these services are planned and delivered as separate ‘siloes’, with many ad hoc and short-term initiatives. This makes effective collaboration in local areas very difficult, and results in very uneven availability of services and service delivery ‘black holes’ across many areas.

This section outlines best-practice approaches to partnership and proposes a planning and governance model for Victoria. This model aims to create the framework by which the many services for young people can be better coordinated.

**The importance of coordination**

Partnerships are more sustainable when there are resources dedicated to coordinating them. This coordination role can also help to develop a shared vision and common frameworks between partners. A coordination role can also help overcome the issues that arise when staff leave organisations as the partnerships are not so reliant on the personnel involved but rather the shared vision. This coordination role has been a critical part of the development of ChildFIRST alliances, the Better Youth Services Pilots (the precursor to Youth Partnerships), and Local Learning and Employment Networks which include Partnership Brokers.

“The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.”
The partnership continuum\textsuperscript{155}

There is a wealth of information available about developing partnerships and many examples of best practice models.\textsuperscript{156} The term partnership can be defined as two or more organisations that ‘make a commitment to work together on something that concerns both, to develop a shared sense of purpose and agenda, and to generate joint action towards agreed targets.’\textsuperscript{157} Partnership implies the sharing of decision making, risks, power, benefits and burdens.\textsuperscript{158}

There are different forms of partnership along a continuum — from networking to cooperation to coordination to collaboration and finally integration or full partnership — see Figure 14. The type of partnership depends on what outcomes are desired.

Collective impact

More recent thinking is taking partnership to a new level. There is increasing recognition that ‘large–scale social change comes from better cross–sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organisations.’\textsuperscript{159} This scale of coordination has been termed ‘collective impact’ and involves ‘the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.’\textsuperscript{160} Not all issues require collective impact but ‘adaptive problems’ — those that are more complex — may benefit from this more comprehensive approach.

Unlike most collaboration, collective impact initiatives involve a centralised infrastructure, dedicated staff and a structured process to help bring partners together around a common agenda and to develop mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.\textsuperscript{161}
Collective impact requires that funding bodies support a long-term process of social change without identifying any particular solution in advance, recognising that social change ‘comes from the gradual improvement of an entire system over time, not just from a single breakthrough by an individual organisation.’

The key features of the collective impact model are:

- **a common agenda.** All participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Collective Impact initiatives build on existing efforts already underway rather than creating an entirely new solution from scratch.

- **shared measurement systems.** A common set of measures are developed to monitor performance, track progress toward goals, and learn what is or is not working.

- **mutually reinforcing activities.** Stakeholders each undertake specific activities based on expertise but coordinated with the actions of others and fitting an overarching plan.

**Isolated impact vs collective impact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolated impact</th>
<th>Collective impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding bodies select individual grantees that offer the most promising solutions.</td>
<td>Funding bodies understand that social problems, and their solutions, arise from the interaction of many organisations within a larger system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations work separately and compete to produce the greatest independent impact.</td>
<td>Progress depends on working toward the same goal and measuring the same things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation attempts to isolate a particular organisation’s impact.</td>
<td>Organisations actively coordinate their action and share lessons learned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large scale change is assumed to depend on scaling a single organisation.</td>
<td>Large scale impact depends on increasing cross-sector alignment and learning among many organisations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate and government sectors are often disconnected from the efforts of foundations and non-profits.</td>
<td>Corporate and government sectors are essential partners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Strive Partnership USA

The Strive Partnership was launched in 2006 in the United States and has now been developed in 27 states. The Partnership brings together education providers at preschool, primary school, secondary school and tertiary levels and non-profit, community, philanthropic and business sectors to improve education outcomes ‘every step of the way, from cradle to career’.

The Partnership was initiated to address the problem of being ‘program rich and system poor.’ The Strive Partnership works across sectors and along the educational continuum to ensure that every child is prepared for school, supported inside and outside of school, succeeds in school, enrols in some form of post-secondary education, graduates and enters a career.
Partnerships in action in Victoria
This section of the chapter highlights a number of case studies to illustrate the variety of ways organisations in Victoria are working in partnership to enhance outcomes for young people.

CASE STUDY
Go Goldfields

Members of the Alliance are diverse and include Central Victorian Health Alliance, Central Goldfields Shire and related project areas, Goldfields Education and Learning Centre, Maryborough District Health Service, St Luke's Anglicare, Maryborough Education Centre, Maryborough Police, Asteria Disability Services, Emergency Accommodation and Support Enterprise Inc. (EASE), Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (GLLEN), and the Salvation Army Maryborough.

The Go Goldfields Initiative is established under Section 86 of the Local Government Act 1989, which makes the Alliance accountable to the Council and the local community.

The Action Plan refers to difficulties experienced by children and families in the Central Goldfields area. These include socio-economic disadvantage, poor health and wellbeing, high rates of child protection notifications, and issues regarding violence.

To address these and other local issues, the Plan sets out the following action areas:

- supporting young parents and families with parenting and daily living skills
- encouraging a collaborative ‘joined up’ approach to the provision of learning opportunities for young people who are not engaged in education and training opportunities
- providing strong connections between young people and stable community members
- developing a strategic plan for the provision of family violence services by the network of service providers
- building the aspirations and culture of families by using the arts to challenge impressions about life in Maryborough
- assisting to develop a whole-of-Shire approach to the early development of communication skills, language and literacy for all family members
- further developing collaborative approaches to the provision of community services for families across the Central Goldfields Shire.
CASE STUDY

headspace/Time for Youth

Research has long shown a strong link between homelessness and mental health issues. headspace Barwon saw an opportunity to collaborate with their neighbour organisation, Time for Youth, to deliver more targeted services in this area.

Time for Youth and headspace Barwon negotiated to recruit a mental health clinician who would be employed by headspace Barwon but would be located within the Youth and Family Options team at Time For Youth. This clinician was to specifically provide mental health treatment to young people (aged 12 to 25) but also to support Time for Youth staff in responding to mental health issues affecting the young people and families they work with. This support occurred through secondary consultation, case conferencing, and a streamlined referral process between Time for Youth staff and the mental health clinician.

The clinician was funded through the Department of Health and Ageing Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program.

The program was successful in relation to collaboration and service integration. The clinician was empowered to utilise the relationships formed with the Time for Youth team, as well as other service providers, to provide a holistic response to a young person's needs. This sometimes took the form of care coordination rather than providing psychological treatment. Also, Time for Youth staff benefitted from informal education on mental health issues, through secondary consultation, which enhanced their family support work.

Approximately 80 clients were referred to the service, with approximately 65 receiving some direct counselling service. Almost all of these clients were linked in to other services as needed.

More successfully, the clinician conducted 100 to 150 secondary consultations with Time for Youth staff. Anecdotal responses from Time for Youth staff and their clients suggest this enhanced the Time for Youth staff members' ability to respond appropriately to these presentations and navigate the mental health service system more successfully.

The relationship between Time for Youth and headspace Barwon overall was also enhanced, with more collaboration occurring between those services.

The co-located clinician element of the program has now ceased operation, but headspace Barwon and Time for Youth will continue to actively collaborate to provide appropriate services to this client group.
CASE STUDY

Connect Central Youth Service Bendigo

Connect Central Youth Services (CCYS) was initiated in August 2010 in Bendigo to better integrate local youth services and to make it easier for young people experiencing vulnerability and disconnection to access support. CCYS was developed by St Luke’s in partnership with the City of Greater Bendigo’s Better Youth Services Initiative.

CCYS brings together a range of services including Youth Connections Program, Reconnect, Youth and Family Mediation Service, Youth Support Service, Finding Solutions, Youth Specialist Homelessness Service, and the Youth Homelessness Early Intervention program. It has the following features:

- a single intake and entry point for the range of youth services under the CCYS banner that enables simple access for young people and their families seeking support
- its intake and assessment process provides advice, information, secondary consultation, immediate outreach support and links to ongoing youth support and case management services
- arrangements with other youth services to ensure a ‘no wrong door approach’ to young people seeking support
- a Memorandum of Understanding with local schools which outlines clear arrangements for schools wishing to refer young people to a youth support service
- entry and links to CCYS based on youth vulnerability and the young person experiencing disconnection and not on service criteria that focuses on single issues facing a young person
- CCYS works closely with Child FIRST and the DHS Child Protection Intake and Response team. These linkages are critical as it ensures a coordinated approach to providing youth support in the City of Greater Bendigo.

In the past two years CCYS has demonstrated the value of simplifying access and entry points to youth services, recording a significant increase in the number of young people and their families seeking support particularly at the ‘early intervention’ phase.

CCYS is located in central Bendigo, at the Bendigo Youth Services Centre (BYSC), one of five centres that was funded nationally through the Federal Government’s Nation Building program.

The Youth Services Centre contains three sections — CCYS, the Chutzpah Factory and headspace — which together enable a ‘one stop shop’ approach to the delivery of a range of youth support services and programs. The Chutzpah Factory includes an alternative education facility, a young women’s arts program (Smart Art), a youth music program (Real to Reel) and an outdoor education program.
CASE STUDY

Education Engagement Partnership

The Education Engagement Partnership (EEP) was developed across the Cities of Port Phillip and Stonnington in response to an increasing demand on support services and anecdotal evidence of young people falling through gaps between services and education providers.

Fifteen agencies working with ‘at risk’ young people (10 to 19 years) across the two municipalities came together to develop an innovative piece of social infrastructure connecting all youth education and support points.

The EEP includes a range of services including non-mainstream schools, local state schools, local councils, Inner Eastern Local Learning Employment Network (IELLEN), TAFE, community health, Victoria Police, youth services and DEECD.

The EEP has been funded over a three year period by City of Port Phillip and City of Stonnington with additional funding from the Ian Potter Foundation. Money and in-kind support has also been provided by Swinburne University of TAFE and the IELLEN.

The EEP model includes four main elements:

- a phone line that provides information and referrals for parents, schools or services working with young people aged 10 to 19 years who are at risk or have disengaged from education, employment or training
- a multi-service action team of eight case managers who meet monthly to undertake reflective practise on complex cases and to provide data
- data collection and tracking of young people. The EEP has collected data of over 700 young people aged 10 to 19 years who are at risk of or have disengaged from education, employment and training who are living or studying in or visiting the Cities of Port Phillip and Stonnington
- analysis and response to the evidence provided by the data

Challenges that the EEP has successfully addressed include ensuring clear and transparent processes are in place, learning and developing a common language and sharing priorities across 15 services.

Work at the Oakwood School in South Melbourne is a good example of how the EEP model assists service providers and young people. EEP’s data identified a cohort of ‘at risk’ young people aged 10 to 14 years who had disengaged from education for an extended period of time. Drawing on the data the partnership successfully advocated for a DEECD satellite school to be introduced in South Melbourne to provide specialised education to this highly disengaged group, specifically the 10 to 14 year group, and more broadly for the 10 to 18 year group.
CASE STUDY

Connect Central Castlemaine

In 2010 a Youth Connections Management Group was established in Mount Alexander Shire to increase options for vulnerable young people in the Shire. It became apparent that inadequate resources were available to service the Shire and that a range of training and education options could be developed.

The Group is now called Connect Central Castlemaine (CCC) and includes: Castlemaine District Community Health, Mount Alexander Shire Council, Castlemaine Secondary College, Castlemaine Health, Castlemaine and District Accommodation Resource Group, School Focused Youth Services, Goldfield Local Learning and Employment Network (Partnership Broker), Bendigo TAFE – Southern region, Castlemaine Community House, Castlemaine Continuing Education, Central Victorian Health Alliance (CVHA), St Luke’s Anglicare (Bendigo), and the Castlemaine Police. Associate and non-voting partners are Centrelink Bendigo and the Job Network providers.

CCC undertakes service planning for vulnerable youth in Mount Alexander Shire, aiming to create a coordinated place–based plan and the governance structure to support it. The group reports that successes to date include:

- better communication around targeting specific training to vulnerable young people at TAFE and Continuing Education
- a strong partnership built with the local secondary college resulting in a flexible program being offered off–site for disengaged students
- a survey of 42 young people identifying issues that contribute to their disengagement from school that will be used by Castlemaine Secondary College as a tool for early identification of issues for Year 8 students
- 20 agencies have participated in a pilot No Wrong Door resource evaluation, through which CCC will identify professional education needs for workers on trauma in young people.

The Partnership is based on a Memorandum of Understanding. Partners have signed on and ensure the ongoing relationships and commitment to the work. The challenge for sustainability is the partner input particularly in planning and working groups.
CASE STUDY
The Barwon Adolescent Taskforce (BATForce)

The Barwon Adolescent Taskforce (BATForce) is an alliance of organisations in the G21 region† with a stake in the provision of services with and for young people. The organisations focus on young people 10 to 25 and from all socio-economic, cultural and geographical areas within the region. These organisations also focus on services that range from universal, to early intervention to tertiary services.

As an alliance, BATForce identifies, develops, implements and evaluates service and sector enhancement activities that optimise the capacity of each independent organisation. BATForce has the scope to focus on the themes that are broader than any one individual agency.

BATForce has a small secretariat of staff who maintain the alliance, coordinate local networks and work as a conduit between agencies, government, schools and community. The team work for the alliance members and are managed by an elected executive from the alliance.

BATForce does not deliver services in competition with its members, any work that BATForce delivers has come as a direct result of ‘gap identification’.

† The G21 region includes five municipalities: Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliff and Surf Coast.
Strengthening local youth service planning, coordination and delivery

What are the core services that young people should be able to access in their community? Based on survey responses, young people need access to services including (but not limited to):

- safe and affordable housing options from crisis accommodation through to private rental
- health services including primary health services, mental health services and drug and alcohol services
- education services at primary, secondary and further education levels, including access to flexible education models
- generalist youth services that can link young people to specialist supports as required
- transport services
- recreation options — both structured and unstructured
- mentors, particularly where young people may have limited or no access to family and other support networks
- disability support services
- culturally appropriate and competent support services

The types of services needed within a community and the manner in which they are delivered will vary across the state. However, the implementation of effective planning structures at the local, regional and state levels will help to ensure that policy, programs and funding respond to identified need.

A more effective service system for young people would include much stronger integration of youth–focused planning across senior levels of government and the community sector. An effective system would also recognise that different local communities face specific challenges, as well as having particular strengths and networks to build on. The right balance between consistency and localism can be achieved by complementing stronger central and regional level planning with robust mechanisms to foster local collaboration and implementation.

The survey results in this report and subsequent consultation with YACVic members† highlight the need for:

- stronger integration of service delivery, across education and health and human services
- more effective planning at all three levels of government
- engaging the relevant community organisations and networks, schools and young people in planning processes.

The youth sector noted in particular the need for local ‘community’ planning to:

- identify existing needs
- inform planning at a regional and central level
- tailor local collaboration and services to local needs.

The youth sector noted that regional level planning needs to:

- ensure universal services more effectively meet the needs of the diversity of young people in the community
- break down barriers to better integration between universal and specialist services, and between different program siloes
- gather, analyse and publish data about young people and outcomes across the region
- develop regional plans for service delivery across the region.

The sector also noted that each level of planning needs to be supported by a strong governance approach with inbuilt mechanisms that ensure accountability back to communities.

YACVic and VCOSS have developed a new collaborative model that suits the Victorian context as well as specifically addressing these criteria. Its adoption is among the main recommendations of this report and its features are outlined below.

† In January 2013, YACVic hosted a forum attended by over 50 senior youth sector leaders to discuss a version of the regional planning model identified below. Forum feedback has been incorporated.
Regional planning – a Youth Outcomes Taskforce

Effective regional planning requires active engagement and leadership from the most senior regional departmental staff from each government department that delivers significant programs for young people, including DEECD, DHS and DOH, as well as senior decision-makers from Victoria Police and the community sector. Only leadership at the most senior levels can enable to change needed remove barriers to service integration.

This report proposes the creation of a planning group, called a ‘Youth Outcomes Taskforce’, which would be accountable for a small number of performance indicators that:

- are measurable
- demonstrate significant improvements in life outcomes for young people
- have broad community support.

Performance indicators that meet these criteria could include the goals to:

- increase young people’s participation in education, training and employment
- improve young people’s health and wellbeing
- reduce young people’s contact with the criminal justice system

The Youth Outcomes Taskforce would include the main agencies that plan and deliver programs to young people from both within and outside of government.

This governance group would be responsible for strategic planning, answering the critical questions:

- What does the youth services system need to look like in this region?
- what service mix is needed?
- what suite of learning settings?
- what suite of generalist and specialised services?
- What reforms are needed to bridge the gap from the status quo to this new system plan?
- what reforms are needed to improve outcomes?
- how can better integration be achieved by ‘flexing’ the boundaries of existing service streams, or reforming funding?
- what new investments are necessary?

The governance group would also be responsible for the collection and analysis of region-wide data to monitor progress against the strategic plan and KPIs.

The Youth Outcomes Taskforce could span a DEECD and DHS region and engage regional managers, however, as service accessibility and availability, and population types and density are so different in Melbourne compared to rural and regional areas, it may make more geographic sense to have a metropolitan taskforce and rural/regional taskforce in each region.
Building the Scaffolding

This group would have shared responsibility with the regional group for achieving the strategic plan outcomes and performance indicators and undertake the following:

- implement the local youth service plan
- map local services
- respond to local issues
- develop collaborative approaches to intake
- strengthen links between schools and community services
- engage young people — provide a platform for their perspectives
- inform the strategic direction of the Youth Outcomes Taskforce.

Across Victoria, local networks are already undertaking many of these functions as outlined in the case studies throughout this chapter. These networks could provide the foundations of the local Youth Outcomes Coordination Groups.

Children and Youth Services Coordination Board
Currently the Children’s Services Coordination Board brings together the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and the Secretaries of the Departments of Premier and Cabinet, Treasury and Finance, Education and Early Childhood Development, Human Services, Health, Planning and Community Development and Justice to coordinate cross departmental activities relating to children.

The role of the Board is to:

- review the outcomes of government actions related to children, especially the most vulnerable, on an annual basis
- settle action plans for agreed cross agency collaboration
- consider how to address other cross-government issues as required

In order to effectively lead reform, YACVic and VCOSS propose that the Government change the name and scope of the current statewide Children’s Services Coordination Board to a Children and Youth Services Coordination Board addressing systemic issues for children and young people aged 0 to 25.
Building the Scaffolding

4. Ensuring supports are accessible and inclusive

Often the supports that young people need are not available in their local areas. Even when services are available, they may not be accessible or inclusive. Services, facilities and supports are of strongest benefit to young people if they:

- know the services exist
- feel comfortable to contact the service and feel welcomed by the service
- can access the service
- feel safe using the service.

Services need to be designed with these issues in mind to maximise the participation of those young people who would most benefit from additional support.

Visible services

Young people need to know what services exist. Too often young people do not know that relevant services are available, or are confused by the names and acronyms given to programs.

Welcoming services

Many young people are not comfortable contacting a community agency for support or information.

Easy transport access

Young people are often reliant on public transport and struggle to reach services that are not located near affordable transport options, particularly in outer urban, rural and regional areas.

Issue - Planning for growth

Any consideration of policy, planning and service development must take into account Victoria’s population growth:

- Victoria’s population is expected to grow from 5.6 million in 2011 to 7.3 million over the next 20 years
- Melbourne’s population is expected to grow from 4.1 million to 5.4 million.

While all local government areas in Melbourne will increase in population over the next 20 years, growth in Melbourne is expected to be strongest in the areas of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Whittlesea and Wyndham, as well as inner-city areas such as the City of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Yarra and Maribyrnong. Population growth is also expected in the regional cities of Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Latrobe Valley, Shepparton, Mildura, Wodonga and Warrnambool. Obviously this growth will place increasing pressure on services, infrastructure and transport.

The Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) plays a key role in the planning and development of communities throughout Victoria.

The Interface Councils have recently released a report to project the implications of population growth in Interface Councils on resources and infrastructure requirements.
Building the Scaffolding

CASE STUDY
Assisting young people with transport costs: Pathways to Education Program, Travellers Aid Australia

The Pathways to Education program is part of the Travellers Aid’s Emergency Relief program and provides student travel passes to young people who are experiencing financial difficulties. These travel passes help them attend school and social opportunities and stay connected with family, friends and the community.

Travellers Aid used to provide monthly, half-yearly and annual travel passes to students from families of low socio-economic backgrounds, students experiencing various stages of homelessness and students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This assistance is provided in collaboration with referring agencies such as youth and family services, schools and migrant centres.

The travel passes give the students ‘transport security’ and the confidence that they can get to and from school and other extracurricular activities as well as social activities and appointments safely, easily and reliably.

Funding for this program has not kept pace with increasing demand, and so Travellers Aid has had to restrict support to secondary students who attend alternative education settings.

Open at the right times
Services need to be available at times that suit young people. As identified in the survey responses, services are typically provided in business hours which makes it very difficult for many young people and their families to access support — particularly those engaged in education or employment. Where relevant, funding models need to allow for services to be available after hours and on weekends.

Flexible access
Services need to be accessible in different ways, such as by ‘drop in’, outreach, by telephone or online — particularly in areas, such as the urban fringe or rural locations, where physically getting to a service can be difficult.

Affordable
The cost of services or activities — such as public transport, entry fees, or the cost of uniforms and equipment for sport — prevents many young people from participating. Free or low cost activities enable all young people to get involved and develop the social networks and skills they need.

Safe spaces and developmentally appropriate spaces.
Children and young people should have access to safe and affordable leisure facilities such as open spaces, play equipment, swimming pools, bikes tracks, and skate parks. However, leisure activities are often not available, not open at appropriate times, too costly or so rundown that young people do not want to use them. Too often leisure facilities that are available cater only to particular age groups — either young children or older adolescents. As highlighted in the survey, there are often specific gaps in recreational facilities for the ‘middle years’. Improving public space can improve young people’s participation in activities outside school hours.
Rural young people and access to services

Approximately a quarter of Victorians live outside of Melbourne and young people under 20 make up a higher proportion of the population in some rural areas than in Melbourne. Some of the issues facing young people in rural and regional Victoria include:

- limited access to mental health, sexual health and dental health care
- a lack of local services or limited choice of health professionals
- the need to travel to Melbourne or a regional centre to access services
- fears around privacy and anonymity when seeking support
- young people and their families face greater socio-economic disadvantage as family incomes are lower in rural areas than Victoria state-wide
- rural young people are especially vulnerable to transport disadvantage:
  - only 56 per cent of young people in rural Victoria report having access to public transport where they live, compared with 81 per cent of metropolitan young people. This makes rural young people especially reliant on private vehicles
  - 51 per cent of rural young people say transport shortages make it hard for them to study, work, see a doctor or socialise, compared to 41 per cent of metropolitan young people
- year 10 to 12 retention rates are significantly lower in rural regions (74 per cent) than in metropolitan areas (87 per cent). Young people leaving mainstream education in rural communities often have fewer options than their peers in metropolitan areas
- students in non-metropolitan areas are significantly less likely to complete school than students in metropolitan areas. In 2010, completion rates for non-metropolitan students were about 10 per cent lower than for metropolitan students — 73 per cent versus 83 per cent
- rural and regional year 12 completers are less likely to pursue higher education, with only 37 per cent going on to Bachelor degrees compared to 54 per cent of metropolitan year 12 completers. Rural and regional students were more likely to go straight into work from school
- the birth rate to teenage young women in rural areas has been approximately twice that in metro areas since at least 2003
- sexually transmissible infections are also more common in rural areas — in 2010, there were 4.2 diagnosed infections per 1,000 teenagers in rural Victoria, compared to 2.3 in the city. Accessing appropriate sexual health services is also much more difficult in smaller rural communities
- same sex attracted and gender questioning young people are at greater risk of discrimination and harmful behaviours than their metro peers
- offenders in rural and regional areas are more likely to be sentenced to remand as bail supports such as mental health services, accommodation services and drug and alcohol services are less available.

The Victorian Government’s 2010 Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria raised concerns that the cost of delivering and accessing services appeared to be higher in rural and regional areas than in metropolitan ones, due especially to the large geographical areas covered and the demands of travel on workers’ time and resources.
CASE STUDY

City of Whittlesea integrated service model and youth centred facility: EDGE

EDGE, the City of Whittlesea's first significant youth centred facility, opened in 2008 at Plenty Valley Town Centre. Young people were engaged in the design process, and the naming of the building. EDGE signifies being at the edge of the metropolitan area, at the interface with the rural north. The spaces within EDGE were designed to be welcoming, flexible and safe, where young people can engage in civic actions, learning, training, personal development, social, recreational, art and cultural activities.

EDGE does not operate as a drop in centre or a one stop shop. Young people connect to workers for a range of reasons including information, to attend school, to participate in programs, or to access specialist support through referrals. Services within EDGE also offer support and resources for families of young people.

Council's Youth Services, Baseline, is based at EDGE together with a range of other service providers for young people. Council's Youth Development Officers outreach from EDGE to various locations within the municipality to cover the vast geographical area (490 square kilometres) and to work with young people in their local context.

Practitioners from other agencies 'hot desk' at EDGE, using it as a base to extend their reach from outside the municipality, into the municipality. This approach is opportune as it enables services to quickly and progressively become available as the population grows.

The primary tenant at EDGE is The Pavilion, a government funded school for young people who have disengaged from mainstream education. Co-location has promoted a shared approach to solutions and strengthened effectiveness through integrated service delivery. It allows for improved comprehensive support for young people, on site, and across a number of domains in their lives. The EDGE model has broadened the system of support available to young people. This is critical in growth Councils with scarce resources.
Online tools and social media

As social media has become an almost universal feature of young people’s lives — 90 per cent of young people 12 to 17 and 97 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds use social media — services have begun developing support models that incorporate online tools, such as social media, to improve their ability to reach young people.

These tools are popular — over three quarters of young people responding to Mission Australia’s Youth Survey 2012 nominated the internet as their primary source of information — both in Victoria and nationally. However, as the Mission Australia report noted, the widespread use of the internet as a source of information has both positive and negative implications:

“The internet can provide young people with a quick, easy and anonymous avenue to obtain information on issues which they may feel too self-conscious or embarrassed to ask about in person. It also provides an easily accessible medium for organisations to provide reliable, evidence-based information and services to young people.

However, a concern about young people using the internet as their primary source of information is that young people may not have the skills to critically evaluate the content of websites. Navigating and trying to understand various sources of information, particularly if the information accessed is conflicting, may actually heighten a young person’s anxiety about an issue.”

This increases the onus on services to ensure information provided online is accurate and that all online supports are subject to quality review processes.

Australia’s National Youth Mental Health Foundation, headspace, has developed eheadspace, an online ‘space’ in which young people aged 12 to 25 years may register and receive ‘esupport’ or ‘etherapy’.
CASE STUDY

Improving access to services: Youthlaw Online Via Skype

Young people in rural and regional Victoria are particularly disadvantaged by a general lack of age-appropriate, accessible legal services.

In response, in 2009 Youthlaw launched Youthlaw Online — a Skype online legal service for young people in outer urban and rural Victoria. Under the program, Youthlaw has partnered with seven local youth services in rural and regional areas. These services act as ‘hosts’ for Youthlaw Online by providing a confidential physical space in which young people can use computer and internet facilities to access the legal advice service and have an interview with a lawyer. Youthlaw Online is currently available at Healesville, Ringwood, Knox, Cobram, Shepparton, Seymour, Rosebud, Hastings, Mt Eliza, and Barwon. Youthlaw Online has been funded by the Federal Attorney-General’s department. This funding ends June 30, 2013.

Young people access the service via the local youth or community service. They are helped to identify their legal problems and linked up to other services they need. The local youth service also connects Youthlaw to the local community so it can build relationships, conduct legal education and pick up on local issues of concern.

The model allows Youthlaw to support and build trust with a hard-to-reach client group, to build strong relationships and networks with host services, local youth networks and local legal practitioners and to identify local issues that inform Youthlaw’s law reform programs.

Building on this model, Barwon Youth additionally fund a worker on site a day per week to assist young people to use the computer facilities, train other staff how to use the Skype service, manage the appointment process, help to advertise the service to young people and provide follow up support and advocacy and/or local referrals.

Issues have arisen in the use of technology such as audio quality, calls dropping out and time delay due to bandwidth.

Even when it is working well, technology does not replace the need to invest time in regular site visits and face to face catch ups to maintain relationships of trust.
Inclusive services

Services need to be inclusive of all young people, and be sensitive of and responsive to the needs of different groups of young people, including young people with disabilities, Aboriginal young people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and same sex attracted young people. It is important to recognise that supporting improved outcomes for diverse young people is not the sole responsibility of specialist organisations. It is essential that universal services and services provided by mainstream community sector organisations recognise their responsibility to ensure services are inclusive, safe and welcoming.

Aboriginal young people†

Aboriginal young people may experience a range of barriers that limit the accessibility of and their participation in community services. Systemic racism in institutions and the community, the long history of dispossession and marginalisation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, intergenerational disadvantage, and a lack of culturally competent services and supports all negatively impact the health and wellbeing of many Aboriginal young people.

Aboriginal young people continue to be substantially overrepresented in both the criminal justice system and out-of-home care system, as well as having poorer outcomes in health, education and employment. Cultural disconnection is also reported as a factor impacting wellbeing.

In order for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal young people to be improved and for these disparities to be eliminated, a number of elements are critical.

Importance of cultural safety

It is important that Aboriginal young people feel safe and secure, respected, and able to ‘be themselves’ when accessing support services in the community. By adopting cultural competence frameworks (see below), community sector organisations can ensure culturally safe environments are created.

Culturally competent organisations

In order for Aboriginal young people to feel respected, valued and secure, all mainstream and specialist community organisations and universal services supporting Aboriginal young people must be culturally competent. While all mainstream organisations need to be culturally competent to ensure Aboriginal young people can access services across Victoria, cultural competence can be further enhanced when services employ Aboriginal staff, and involve Aboriginal young people in the development of the programs and services.

Ultimately, there is a need for greater understanding of Aboriginal cultures within the mainstream community services sector. An important aspect of this involves service providers considering the ways in which understandings of ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ are culturally constructed. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) explains that:

“...Indigenous communities generally do not individualise focus on children and young people, but see them rather as members of family and community.”

Cultural awareness and cross cultural training are crucial to improving service accessibility.

Meaningful partnerships between Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and community sector organisations are also essential in improving the cultural competence of community organisations. ACCOs provide important information and advice regarding Aboriginal culture and good practices in working with Koorie young people.
Increased investment in Aboriginal specific services and programs for young people

Many Aboriginal young people prefer to access Aboriginal specific services because such organisations are uniquely able to ‘embed culture in their service delivery.’ However, limited resourcing means that specific services are not available for all young people who wish to access them. As such, it is even more important that all community sector organisations adopt culturally safe and competent practices. However, additional investment in and support of ACCOs is fundamental in ensuring that all Aboriginal young people who wish to access Aboriginal specific services in Victoria are able to do so.

Greater emphasis on Aboriginal history, culture and traditional stories in schools

To address the racism that continues to exist, in either overt or more subtle ways, in institutions and communities in Victoria and throughout Australia, it is important that schools continue to embed Aboriginal history in classes throughout primary and secondary school. A greater emphasis on Aboriginal culture, history and traditional stories in schools would ensure that all children and young people would have an improved knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and Australian history which would help counter the racism and discrimination many Aboriginal young people experience.

Young people with disabilities

Young people with a disability are often unable to access community services, education opportunities and other opportunities for participation that are generally available to other young people, denying their right to have their needs and aspirations as young people understood, validated and met. Instead, service responses tend to focus on the disability the young person experiences, and provide a support or service response that is specific to their disability but not necessarily age appropriate. A holistic service response would ensure that the young person has the opportunity to choose to participate in age appropriate activities and spaces with their peers because supports are in place that remove barriers to access.

Currently barriers to access and participation for young people with a disability include:

Funding of services or programs

Services often do not have adequate funding (or are not aware of funding they may draw on) to meet additional costs of supporting the engagement of young people with disabilities.

Funding agreements, applications and program budgets need to be drafted on the presumption that young people with disabilities will be accessing these services/programs. Services also need to be more aware of funding that can be accessed to support young people’s participation.

Inadequately trained or a lack of skilled staff who can support the engagement of young people with a disability

Youth service staff and managers often lack the professional expertise to know how to develop and plan programs and services to ensure accessibility for young people with a disability, and manage any behavioural issues that may relate to a young person's disability. Training for workers with young people needs to include components related to program planning for accessibility and experience in working directly with young people with a disability.

Services should provide regular professional development to youth services staff to strengthen disability awareness, and include expectations in management position descriptions that youth service management staff have the skills to lead the development of accessible service models and programs.

Inaccessible infrastructure, transport and program equipment

Transport, such as buses are rarely accessible and often venues do not have accessible entrances, toilets or floor plans. While this is a typical experience in both rural and metro areas, it can be a particular barrier in isolated and smaller communities where resources may be tighter and where there is a smaller range of public facilities, some of which may be old and less likely to meet current accessibility standards. Accessibility needs to be more clearly prioritised within funding and by service providers.

Services also need to be ready to grasp new opportunities. For example, the roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme might see opportunities for community organisations to improve their accessibility to young people with a disability. The Services Connect pilot areas may uncover valuable learnings in improving client centred service provision to young people with a disability for the community and youth services sectors more broadly.
CASE STUDY

Footy 4 All

‘Footy 4 All’ was established in August 2012 to provide a sustainable football program for people with disabilities aged 16 years and over living in the south west of Victoria.

The South West Disability Network (a partnership of South West Disability Support agencies) helped to identify a number of people interested in playing ‘Aussie Rules’ football. While opportunities existed for club involvement there were limited opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in training and to play competitively.

Warrnambool City Council’s Rural Access program, in partnership with South West Sport, Hampden Football League, the Football Integration Development Association (FIDA) and local disability service agencies developed a steering group to progress the opportunity. It identified the following objectives for the program:

- develop a partnership approach to program provision
- run a series of ‘Come and Try’ football clinics for people of all abilities, with each clinic to include a range of drills, games and exercises
- link in with state–wide initiatives
- identify a modified rules format that could be tailored to individual needs
- promote club participation and develop pathways for participants to compete in mainstream competition and FIDA competitions
- promote healthy eating and active participation.

Over 40 players aged between 17–65 years participated in the six one–hour training sessions held in August and September 2012. Sessions included training drills and modified games facilitated by local well–known football identities. The last training session concluded with a barbecue and medal presentation for participants and supporters. With family, friends and supporters in attendance, training sessions attracted over 100 people.

In addition to the contribution of the steering group members, the Footy 4 All program also received community support through the South Warrnambool Football Club, Deakin University, South West TAFE, the Eat Well Be Active program and local businesses.

All participants have expressed their interest in continuing their involvement in the sport. In 2013 the Footy 4 All steering group will seek to further improve the program, promote club participation and develop pathways for participants to compete in mainstream competition and FIDA competitions.
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people
A range of barriers have been identified that may impact on, and impede, CALD young people’s ability to access services including:

Language and communication barriers
Service accessibility is reduced when information and resources are not available in diverse languages, when services do not make appropriate use of interpreters or cannot access interpreters or fail to adopt culturally appropriate methods of communication. This issue can be addressed by increasing access to translation and interpreting services, as well as employing staff with skills in languages other than English.

Difficulty navigating new and complicated systems and services
CALD young people may not be aware of the range of education or support services, or financial supports that are available, and may also find it difficult to navigate systems that are unfamiliar to them. Seeking help from outside their family, community or religious institutions may be unfamiliar and some young people or families may fear talking to ‘outsiders’ about their personal situations.

Information about the range of systems and services needs to be available in a variety of languages and provided to all newly arrived CALD young people.

Supported referrals can also assist young people to navigate complex service systems. Face-to-face introductions by familiar and trusted workers, who can help advocate alongside young people when needed, can help reduce fears young people may have about accessing unfamiliar services.

In addition, broader, community development approaches, which engage with CALD young people, their families and communities can assist in developing trust in and increasing understanding of services that are available and increase services’ understanding of how programs may be tailored to more effectively meet the various cultural and religious needs of CALD young people.

Need for culturally competent services
It is important that services, both mainstream and specialist, are culturally competent if CALD young people are to feel comfortable and respected when accessing information or services, or participating in programs. This includes employing staff and managers with high levels of cultural competence and may also include engaging with community leaders and working with young people in a family context, to help to build trust and understanding amongst parents and communities.

Those providing services to young people who are seeking asylum or who are newly arrived refugees need to also understand the experiences young people may have gone through during their journey to Australia, including experiencing or witnessing trauma and persecution. Young people may be separated from members of their family or in Australia alone. It is critical that services supporting refugee young people or young people seeking asylum are skilled in issues such as trauma, grief and loss as well as an understanding of resettlement needs such as finding appropriate housing and a source of income.

CALD young people, especially if they are newly arrived in Australia, may also be experiencing social and geographic isolation depending on where they can find accommodation. It is important that culturally competent services are available statewide to provide services and opportunities for social support to young people who may be experiencing such isolation.

Experiences of discrimination and racism
CALD young people in Australia may experience racism, discrimination and negative stereotyping. Encountering such attitudes from peers or the public may prevent CALD young people from seeking to access support services as well as reduce their desire to participate in community activities. Experiencing racism while at school may reduce CALD young people’s educational engagement and learning, as well as negatively affect their physical and mental health.

Schools and other education settings have an important role in preventing, as well as responding to, racism within educational communities. The recognition of cultural diversity by schools, and the development of a school culture which values different cultural identities, is critical to ensuring that educational settings are positive places for CALD young people.
Same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse (SSAIGD) young people

In Australia, between seven and 11 per cent of young people are same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse (SSAIGD). While many will have positive experiences when exploring their sexuality or gender and are well supported, high levels of discrimination, harassment, as well as verbal and physical abuse, continue to be common experiences. In a survey of SSAIGD young people undertaken in 2010 by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society:

- 61 per cent of young people indicated that they had experienced verbal abuse due to homophobia
- 18 per cent had been subject to physical abuse
- 58 per cent of respondents had experienced other forms of abuse, including rumours, tolerating homophobic language, social exclusion and humiliation
- 80 per cent of this abuse occurred while young people were at school.

Research indicates SSAIGD young people who experience discrimination based on their sexuality or gender identity are at an increased risk of homelessness as well as poor mental health.

This highlights the importance of improving the support provided for SSAIGD young people, both by mainstream services and specialist supports. A particular area of need is opportunities for more social opportunities for SSAIGD young people to both create a sense of community, as well as to be an avenue through which young people explore their sexuality.

Services that meet the needs of SSAIGD young people

To facilitate access and engagement by SSAIGD young people, services should create an environment in which young people feel safe to share information, confident that their physical and emotional safety will be maintained and that they will not be judged or discriminated against. It is also important that practitioners have a thorough understanding of the relational and other difficulties young people may be dealing with.

Confidentiality is particularly important as young people may not have come out to their families or friends and others.

Services must be locally accessible

A lack of services, particularly in rural areas, means that some SSAIGD young people are prevented from accessing support or may need to travel long distances. In rural or regional areas, services can support young people by assisting them to access regional transport and free and confidential internet access.

Recognition of same sex attraction and gender diversity by schools

SSAIGD young people have identified an urgent need for sex education to be more inclusive of same sex attraction and gender diversity to ensure that all young people have access to necessary health information. This education can also help break down discriminatory attitudes, decrease bullying and other homophobic and transphobic abuse.

In addition, schools need to develop and implement school policies to create safer school communities that celebrate diversity.

† Safe Schools Coalition Victoria provides resources, assistance and training aimed at addressing homophobic and transphobic attitudes in schools. The Rainbow Network Victoria also provides information, resources, training and support to those working with SSAIGD young people. The 2010 DEECD resource, Building Respectful and Safe Schools: A resource for school communities provides information to schools about responding to ‘homophobic bullying’.
CASE STUDY

HEY! Improving the quality of life for SSAIGD young Victorians

The Healthy Equal Youth Project (HEY Project) is a four-year initiative (2012–15) to improve the mental health and quality of life for SSAIGD young Victorians funded by the Victorian Department of Health.

The Project provides funding to a coalition of seven gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) and mainstream organisations that provide support to SSAIGD young people. The project aims to expand the services they provide, to develop more integrated responses across these services — so a young person accessing support from one service can find information about other available supports — and to build the capacity of mainstream youth services, particularly those providing mental health support, to meet the particular mental health and wellbeing needs of SSAIGD young people.

The HEY Project also includes an annual grant round called the HEY Grants. The grants provide one-off funding to assist organisations in the design of innovative, local projects that address the mental health and well-being of SSAIGD young people. The grants aim to promote new ways of working with SSAIGD young people and assist organisations in the development of mental health related training and resources.
CASE STUDY

Space 8 to 12: Creating engaging spaces for young people

The City of Whittlesea recognises the opportunity to support the healthy development of young people through inclusive design of open spaces, play spaces, parks, streetscapes, aquatic facilities and town centres. Consultations with young people in the City of Whittlesea indicated that:

- the design of the public realm needs to be inclusive of young people, offering legitimate places for them to congregate, but not segregating them from the general population
- young people need safe, affordable, welcoming places to meet and interact with their peers and to enjoy themselves
- young people value being involved in the design process
- design should reflect the needs of diverse young people
- the public realm should encourage young people’s pride in their neighbourhood and connection to their community.

In response to this evidence, Council commissioned Space 8 to 12: Creating Engaging Spaces for Young People. It draws together what young people say, what research says, and matches these with case studies and resources for planning and designing the public realm for young people.

Space 8 to 12 proposes key principles to underpin the design of the public realm:

- accessibility - The location of public spaces and facilities should maximise young people’s use and ability to independently access them.
- diversity - A range of public facilities and spaces should be provided for young people to reflect their diverse needs and identity.
- social inclusion and connection - The use of public facilities and spaces should increase the capacity of young people to feel connected to their communities.
- safety - The planning and design of public spaces should enable young people to be safe and feel safe.
- partnerships with young people and with stakeholders - Young people should participate meaningfully in the planning and design of public space and facilities.
5. Supporting improved outcomes

There is increasing pressure on and need for services to demonstrate their value by more concretely demonstrating outcomes that have been achieved. Pressure is driven by:

- constrained government spending and community sector budgets
- recognition of the benefit of evaluation on organisational performance
- calls for greater accountability and transparency in relation to funding
- governments seeking to understand the impact of policy changes
- community sector organisations calling for increased investment in early intervention supports.

Given the reform processes underway, discussed in chapter one, now is a critical time to develop more effective models of measuring outcomes — at the individual level, the organisational level and the system level.

However, it is notoriously difficult to quantify outcomes in some program areas because of the nature of working with young people, the time it can take to see results or because young people may only use a service for a short period of time.

Outcomes are often categorised as:

- ‘soft’ or ‘internal’ outcomes: a change on the ‘inside’, for example, enhanced self-esteem and skill development such as better management of mental health issues.
- ‘hard’ or ‘external’ outcomes: changes that can be observed on the ‘outside’, for example, finding a job, securing a tenancy, enrolling in a training course.

‘Internal’ changes, such as enhanced confidence, can lead to ‘external’ changes such as finding a job, but programs that develop them are often hard to quantify in the short term.

Despite these challenges, considerable research is underway to develop tools to link evidence-based practice, which tends to draw links between program interventions and achievement of ‘soft outcomes’, and the ‘hard’ outcomes focused on by funding bodies. Work is also underway to strengthen the measurement of soft outcomes.

In Victoria, further work is needed to translate this research into workable tools for effective evaluation and reporting. These tools should enable organisations to capture the processes that work as well as the outcomes.

Demonstrating ‘external’ and ‘internal’ outcomes

The Young Foundation in the UK has undertaken work to develop a framework to assess the value of ‘softer’ outcomes such as social or emotional skills, in relation to longer-term ‘hard’ outcomes such as educational attainment and employment outcomes.

The work responds to concern that while there is significant evidence that changes to ‘softer’ outcomes (such as self-esteem and resilience), are pre-requisites for ‘hard outcomes’ the sector has nonetheless struggled to make the case for investment in ‘soft outcomes’.

The challenge of measuring ‘soft outcomes’ have also resulted in services for young people articulating the value of their work through measuring activities, such as number of accreditations achieved, number of hours of services provided, or attendance, all of which fail to reflect the value of social and emotional capabilities.

The framework proposes a model of seven interlinked clusters of social and emotional capabilities that benefit both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ outcomes:
• communication
• confidence and agency
• planning and problem solving
• relationships and leadership
• creativity
• resilience and determination
• managing feelings

The framework also provides a matrix of tools to measure these capabilities. Selecting the appropriate tool depends on its suitability to the young people involved and the nature of the program. The process is illustrated in Figure 15 and the report provides case studies of the different choices made by different users.

Figure 15: A framework of outcomes for young people

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth have also started looking at how to better measure outcomes for young people and this national work should continue to inform work at a Victorian level.

Measuring outcomes is one of the key areas of reform being considered as part of the service sector reform project outlined in chapter one. Organisations working with young people need to engage in this discussion to ensure that any measurement tools that are developed effectively capture outcomes for young people.
Measuring individual outcomes: The Outcomes Star model

In Victoria, the Outcomes Star model is being used as part of the Services Connect pilot. An evaluation system that was originally designed for a housing charity in the United Kingdom, it provides a set of tools for workers and clients to measure progress across a number of identified domains and set goals.

There are 15 versions of the ‘Outcomes Star’ adapted for different client groups and services including a Youth Star and a Teen Star. The Youth Star captures young people’s progress in six areas:

- making a difference
- hopes and dreams
- well-being
- education and work
- communicating
- choices and behaviour
All versions consist of a number of numerical scales which the worker and client use to plot where the client is at over a period of time. An Outcomes Star reading is taken by the worker and client at the beginning of their time with a program and repeated at regular intervals to track progress.

The Outcomes Star is seen as applicable where:

- an on-going relationship exists between the worker and the service user such as in case management
- organisations want to measure outcomes as an integral part of their work
- services want to measure progress on a range of areas
- services want to measure distance travelled towards outcomes rather than just whether or not an end outcome has been achieved
- services want to use the data in an on-going way for learning and service-improvement.

Workers should be trained in the use of the Outcomes Star and recognise that this is just one tool and may not be suitable for all clients in all services.
Building the Scaffolding

Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS)
The Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS) monitors how children and young people are faring from birth to adulthood across 35 domains such as social and emotional development, physical healthy, language and cognitive development, behaviour and mental health.\textsuperscript{239}

VCAMS was established to support governments and communities to plan priorities and efficient allocation of resources and to evaluate whether programs and policies are making a difference. Significant reports include the State of Victoria’s Children and State of Victoria’s Young People series from 2006 to 2011.\textsuperscript{240} This data needs to be utilised more strategically in local planning and in the assessment of the effectiveness of initiatives.

Children and young people
- optimal antenatal/infant development
- optimal physical health
  - adequate nutrition
  - free from preventable disease
  - healthy teeth and gums
  - healthy weight
  - adequate exercise and physical activity
  - healthy lifestyle
  - safe from injury and harm
- optimal social and emotional development
  - positive child behavior and mental health
  - pro-social teenage lifestyle and law-abiding behaviour
  - teenagers able to rely on supportive adults
- optimal language and cognitive development
  - successful in literacy and numeracy
  - young people complete secondary education

Community
- safe from environmental toxins
- communities that enable parents, children and young people to build connections and draw on informal assistance
- accessible local recreation spaces, activities and community facilities
- low levels of crime in community

Families
- healthy adult lifestyle
- parent promotion of child health and development
- good parental mental health
- free from abuse and neglect
- free from child exposure to conflict or family violence
- ability to pay for essentials
- adequate family housing
- positive family functioning

Society
- quality antenatal care
- early identification of child health needs
- high quality early education and care experiences available
- adequate supports to meet needs of families with children with a disability
- children attend and enjoy school
- adult health and community services that meet the needs of parents critical to parenting
- adequate supports for vulnerable teenagers
Chapter Five

Strengthening the scaffolding: key findings, policy implications and recommendations

This chapter draws together the key themes raised by service providers in the survey, the research about young people’s voices, and the broader policy and theoretical context to consider what changes are required to strengthen supports for children and young people across Victoria.
VCOSS and YACVic believe that a number of overarching system reforms are required:

1. Develop a life course approach to policy and program development.
2. Develop more effective local, regional and state service planning, development and governance.
3. Strengthen early intervention support through effective education and community sector organisation partnerships.
4. Align funding models with policy frameworks.
5. Build the capacity of the workforce that supports young people.
6. Develop tools to better measure outcomes for children and young people.

By implementing these reforms the system will necessarily shift to a greater focus on prevention and early intervention. Each of these themes is discussed below and strategies recommended to implement the reforms.

Systemic reforms and service improvements

In this report, YACVic and VCOSS primarily recommend strategies that address systemic policy, funding and practice issues rather than a suite of new services per se. It is only by addressing the systemic issues more holistically that longer term changes can be implemented and service gaps filled at the local level. For example, it would be easy to recommend the need for more housing, mental health, education and drug and alcohol programs based on survey responses. More of these services are clearly needed across Victoria, particularly in outer metropolitan and rural and regional areas. However, to ensure the right mix and spread of services, governance arrangements need to be strengthened at the local level to ensure that the necessary data collection and planning is undertaken and appropriate partnerships are developed to address specific service gaps at the local and regional levels.

In planning the service system at a local level, it is clear that there are a number of supports that all young people should have access to including (but not limited to):

- safe and affordable housing options from crisis accommodation though to private rental
- health services including primary health services, mental health services and drug and alcohol services
- education services at primary, secondary and further education levels, including access to flexible education models
- generalist youth services that can link young people to specialist supports as required
- transport services
- recreation options — both structured and unstructured
- mentors, particularly where young people may have limited or no access to family and other support networks
- disability support services
- culturally appropriate and competent support services.

The types of services needed within a community and the manner in which they are delivered will vary across the state. However, the implementation of effective planning structures at the local, regional and state levels will help to ensure that policy, programs and funding respond to identified need. It is by enabling all children and young people to access the supports they need, when they need it and wherever they are, that will promote their best outcomes.
1. Develop a life course approach to policy and program development

There are many highly effective services for children and young people across Victoria. However, to date there has been no coherent framework incorporating clear principles, policy, funding and measurement to underpin the development of these services and drive system reform. This results in inconsistency of service delivery and access to support for young people across Victoria.

Policy and funding frameworks, at all levels of government, should ensure children and young people do not fall between the cracks in the service system because available services are focused on particular ages. Seamless transitions are needed across the ‘life course’ — from early years to middle years through to adolescence and beyond. Within this framework, strategies need to reflect the discrete practice specialities for each age:

- early years (0 to 8 years)
- middle years (8 to 12 years)
- young people (12 to 25 years, and beyond as required).

(a) Develop the vulnerable children, young people and families framework

Following the Protecting Victorian’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry, the Victorian Government made the welcomed commitment to develop a new vulnerable children and families strategy, as outlined in Victoria’s Vulnerable Children — Our Shared Responsibility. The proposed strategy will include performance measures that cover all relevant government departments across human services, education, justice and health.

VCOSS and YACVic believe that the proposed Framework should specifically refer to young people both in the title and the strategies and performance indicators that are developed. This would be consistent with the Child, Youth and Families Act 2005 and better reflect the interconnectedness between childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. This framework could provide the first step in adopting a ‘life course’ approach when developing other government strategies.

At the local government level, a number of Victorian councils have undertaken work to develop a more coordinated policy response across early childhood, youth and family portfolios. These examples provide the basis for sharing knowledge across the state to achieve a more consistent approach to policy development across local governments.

Recommendations

1. That the Victorian Government incorporate a ‘life course’ approach — from birth to adulthood — into policy development beginning with the development of the Vulnerable Children, Young People and Families Framework.

2. That Victorian local governments incorporate a ‘life course’ approach to policy development to better integrate and coordinate policy and programs between the child, family and youth portfolios.

(b) Recognise the middle years as a critical stage of development

Middle childhood is a time of significant change, both emotionally and physically. Despite increasing evidence about the importance of this period of development, it tends to be overlooked by policies and practices, leaving a gap between early years and youth policies and a lack of clarity about the responsibilities of children, family and youth services when working with ‘middle years’ children.

A middle years policy should be developed at a state government level in close collaboration with relevant community sector organisations. This plan should consider how best to fill the current gaps in policy development and service delivery and what specific program responses are needed for children in the middle years to address issues such as mental health, substance use, education, disability and recreation. As a first step, the Victorian Government needs to address:

- workforce development: Youth workers are trained to work with young people aged between 12 to 25 years, not those in the middle years. The youth, early childhood and family service sectors, along with academic institutions that are involved in training, should be brought together to develop shared approaches to working with this age group.
Building the Scaffolding

transition to secondary school: To more effectively support children and young people, transition plans should be developed for all children moving from primary to secondary school (see recommendation 7 below).

the Best Start program: The BestStart program provides an early warning mechanism for many families in need, identifying health, development, learning and wellbeing issues for children 0–8 years. This program should be extended state-wide, to enable greater access to services in growth suburbs and rural and regional areas, and be extended to children up to the age of twelve who may otherwise lack developmentally appropriate health and wellbeing supports.

Recommendations

3. That the Victorian Government develops a policy framework for the ‘middle years’ — 8 to 12 years — which incorporates new program development and specific funding for services to support children in the middle years.

4. That the Victorian Government resources a partnership between the early years, family services, youth and academic sectors to address workforce skills and development in relation to the middle years.

5. That the Victorian Government extend the Best Start program statewide and expand the scope of Best Start to 12 years to better respond to the health and wellbeing needs of children in the middle years.

(c) Assess health and wellbeing from childhood into adulthood

In Victorian schools, the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ) is offered to children in Prep, the first year of school. It asks a range of questions about the child’s health history, wellbeing and family circumstances. Based on results, the school nurse makes a health assessment and any necessary referrals, such as a vision or hearing test. There is currently no screening later in primary school, in the transition to secondary school, nor during secondary school.

The Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry recommended that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should better respond to the needs of vulnerable children and young people by ‘introducing a population health and wellbeing questionnaire of students as they make the transition from childhood to adolescence, and publishing the outcomes in the State of Victoria’s Children report’. YACVic and VCOSS support this recommendation and also recommend that this assessment is undertaken at a number of ages, not simply between primary and secondary school although this transition is a critical starting point for future assessments.

VCOSS and YACVic also note the value of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), detailed in chapter four which has the potential to be extended to older age groups.

Recommendation

6. That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development increase the assessment of health and wellbeing of children and young people through primary and secondary school based on research about the critical ages to undertake assessment.

(d) Implement transition plans between primary and secondary school

The transition between primary and secondary school is significant for both children and families and research about the middle years has highlighted the significant risk of children disengaging from education during these years. Despite this, there is currently no formal system to support children, parents and teachers to plan for this transition. Currently teachers prepare transition plans for all children when they move from kindergarten to primary school. Children with disabilities in government schools, who receive support through the Program for Students with Disabilities (levels 1 to 4), undertake a Year 6 to 7 Review.

Transition plans should be developed for all children moving from primary to secondary school. This would assist in identifying the specific learning, development and support needs of all students, particularly those with additional needs.

Recommendation

7. That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop transition planning for children moving between primary and secondary schools.
2. Develop more effective local, regional and state service planning, development and governance arrangements

Currently the many education, health and support services for young people are planned and delivered as separate ‘silos’. The result is a fragmented and complex service system, with service delivery ‘black holes’. Young people are falling through the gaps.

Better outcomes for young people would be achieved with more collaborative planning across universal and specialist services. A stronger governance architecture would also better enable decision making driven by data and evidence.

YACVic and VCOSS propose creating interlinked governance to support better outcomes for young people, and children in the middle years, at local, regional and statewide levels. The structure is outlined in detail in chapter four, and described briefly below.

Regional Youth Outcomes Taskforce
YACVic and VCOSS propose that Regional Youth Outcomes Taskforces are developed that include the most senior regional departmental staff from each of the departments that deliver significant programs for young people, as well as senior decision makers from Victoria Police and the community sector.

The Taskforces would be responsible for strategically planning youth service delivery across the DHS and DEECD region, and would be required to demonstrate significant gains in life outcomes for young people, defined in key performance indicators, linked to the Victorian Children and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS).

This high-level input and strategic approach would help to address statewide and systemic barriers to service provision with the aim of improving outcomes for young people.

Local Youth Outcomes Collaboration Group
The Taskforce would be supported by a Local Youth Outcomes Collaboration Groups responsible for developing local partnerships and processes to ensure that services were working together to address issues. The Group would include the local community sector organisations that deliver services to young people, local government, local education providers, including schools, and local police. Local Youth Outcomes Collaboration Groups should align with the 17 DHS Local Area parameters.

As Victoria already has a number of very successful local coordination groups focused on youth outcomes, the processes for establishing these collaboration groups should build on existing networks, where they exist, rather than imposing a rigid, one-size-fits-all model.

Children and Youth Services Coordination Board
YACVic and VCOSS also propose changing the name and extending the scope of the current statewide Children's Services Coordination Board to a Children and Youth Services Coordination Board to address systemic issues for children and young people 0 to 25.

While strategic planning would be primarily driven by the Regional Level Outcomes Taskforces, both the Taskforces and the Children and Youth Services Coordination Board would be responsible for addressing statewide and systemic barriers to more collaborative approaches.

Recommendations
8. That the Victorian Government creates a new governance framework to assist evidence based and coordinated service planning, development and delivery for children and young people across Victoria. This framework would include a Regional Youth Outcomes Taskforce and Local Youth Outcomes Collaboration Groups.

9. That the Victorian Government change the name and extend the scope of the Children’s Services Coordination Board to the Children and Youth Services Coordination Board.
3. Strengthen early intervention support through effective education and community sector organisation partnerships

The Victorian Government is mandated to provide an education to all children and young people, however too often young people miss out on the additional supports they need to engage in education opportunities. Too many young Victorians disengage early from schools and leave with low levels of literacy and numeracy and other social and developmental concerns.

Victoria needs a school system that better responds to the evidence that children and young people learn at different rates, in different ways and at different times — particularly when they have to deal with difficult issues in their lives. More work is needed to develop learning environments, both in mainstream schools and alternative settings, in which young people can access quality prevention and early intervention support, and where young people needing additional support are identified early and supported in a timely way.

Strengthening partnerships between schools and community sector organisations is well recognised in Victorian Government policy and program development as a strategy to improve both learning and wellbeing outcomes. Some valuable programs are already in place, including the Youth Partnerships initiative that is trialling models of collaboration to improve the educational engagement of vulnerable young people. Youth Partnerships, along with other best practice models, need to be further resourced and developed to improve educational engagement of all young Victorians.

Partnerships enhance educational engagement and re-engagement in several ways:

- by supporting the early intervention capacity of schools to identify and support children and young people experiencing vulnerability
- by building stronger pathways of support across educational and specialist service settings to help keep children and young people engaged with school or to support their re-engagement
- by working together to develop more diverse models of education, including flexible education models.

Strengthening multidisciplinary support in schools has been successful at increasing schools’ capacity to engage vulnerable children and young people and their families. While some schools already engage community based workers, such as youth workers, social workers and psychologists, as partners, these learnings have not yet been consolidated to inform broader student wellbeing practice across the school system. More models of multidisciplinary support need to be developed and resourced to ensure broader application across Victoria.

In addition, VCOSS and YACVic recommend that the Victorian Government trial a ‘youth workers in schools’ program as one model of enhancing partnerships between schools and community sector organisations. Objectives of youth workers in schools would be to:

- strengthen the capacity of the school to deliver prevention and early intervention health and wellbeing programs (utilising DEECD resources and programs where appropriate)
- provide advice and support to staff in areas such as managing challenging student behaviours
- partner with specialist workers in other health and wellbeing disciplines to enhance needs identification and referral expertise within the school team
- provide outreach capacity to the student wellbeing team, supporting students to access external supports when appropriate and engaging with families.

Partnership brokers have an important role to play in supporting collaborative efforts between schools and community sector organisations. A key strength of the School Focussed Youth Service (SFYS) (for which funding will expire in June 2013) has been its capacity to actively support the brokerage of partnerships between schools and community sector organisations. The loss of the SFYS will leave a significant gap in the youth services sector and in schools in Victoria and needs to be addressed as part of any service reform. This partnership broker role is one of the critical functions of the local Youth Outcomes Collaboration Group outlined in recommendation eight.
Building the Scaffolding

There are also a number of successful partnerships between education providers and community sector organisations delivering flexible education models, however these models are limited across Victoria. More flexible education models need to be developed to enable more young people, and children in the middle years, who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education, to access education and learning opportunities across Victoria. The foundations for this work have been laid245 but further action is required to build on it.

Recommendations

10. That the Victorian Government commit to collaborative models that will engage vulnerable young people in learning taking into consideration the system reform initiatives identified from the Youth Partnerships demonstration sites.

11. That the role of partnership brokers between schools and community sector organisations, incorporating the strengths of the School Focussed Youth Service program, be retained in future models of support for vulnerable young people developed by DEECD.

12. That the Victorian Government trial a ‘youth workers in schools’ model where youth workers from local services are funded to participate in multidisciplinary student wellbeing teams within school settings.

13. That the Victorian Government work with community sector organisations and schools to develop and resource more flexible models of education across Victoria.

4. Align funding models with policy frameworks

While policy and service delivery is shifting towards a more holistic and coordinated ‘people centred approach’, funding remains in silos which could undermine policy reform. Funding models need to evolve to align with the policy vision.

Funding is one of the key challenges facing service providers. Interestingly, survey responses suggest that it is not simply the level of funding that is a challenge but the inflexibility of funding models which limit the capacity of services to respond to the complexity of young people’s needs.

Funding models need to:

- allow organisations to respond to the ‘whole person’, not simply the presenting issue
- allow more flexible criteria to support young people at different developmental stages rather than strictly within a specific age range
- recognise and resource the inherent and significant costs associated with partnerships — this may include funding for a coordination role
- enable services to be delivered outside normal hours, including the additional staffing costs
- enable organisations to provide outreach services as required including the cost of travel, staff time and training
- recognise and resource the inherent and significant costs associated with evaluation
- enable government departments to ‘pool’ funding to encourage the development of local services models that respond to young people more holistically
- transparently identify the full cost of service delivery and implement agreed pricing in a timely way.

Decisions about funding allocations need to be made in a timely way to allow for adequate service planning and to support workforce retention and capacity. Community sector organisations require adequate notice regarding the renewal or lapsing of program funding.
Recommendation

14. That the Victorian Government develops more flexible and transparent funding models that support coordinated youth centred models. This should include the establishment of a shared pool of funding across government departments that can be utilised for more holistic service delivery approaches.

5. Build the capacity of the workforce that supports young people

(a) Developing the skills to work with young people
Anyone who works with young people — whether in schools, government agencies or community sector organisations — needs to have the skills to ensure that any young person they support receives a service response that is appropriate; that is, one that recognises the young person’s developmental stage, increasing independence and decision making capacity and is cognisant of the range of influencing factors in their life.

In Victoria, the recognised framework for working with young people is the *Code of Ethical Practice*.† Although this is taught in all Victorian university and TAFE-based youth work courses, many people who work with young people have other qualifications.

VCOSS and YACVic welcome the person-centred approach outlined in *Human Services: The Case for Change* that is being piloted in the *Services Connect* case management model. This model involves individuals working with one skilled support worker who will coordinate support across a range of services as required by a family or an individual. While this role enhances the capacity for service coordination, it is very likely that workers who do not have specialist skills in working with young people, will be delivering support to them. These workers need additional training in child and adolescent development and established practice frameworks.

† The Code of Ethical Practice, A first step for the Victorian Youth Sector was developed by YACVic in 2007 following broad consultation with the youth sector. It is available for download from the YACVic website at www.yacvic.org.au/sector-info/yacvic-s-code-of-ethical-practice
All young people regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, background or sexual identity have the right to access services and be treated in a fair manner. Workers need skills to work with children and young people in their diversity, including cultural competence training and skills to work with young people with disabilities.

Recommendation

15. That the Victorian Government develop a workforce strategy that ensures all workers with young people, including DHS Services Connect case management staff, are familiar with the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice and that all organisations that support children, young people and their families undertake cultural competence and disability competence training.

(b) Investing in generalist youth support services

Generalist youth support services play a pivotal early intervention and prevention role in promoting the wellbeing of young people and improving coordination between service providers. Generalist youth support workers also provide a very important link between young people and the specialist supports they may need.

As highlighted in survey results, the lack of generalist youth services in Victoria means that young people often do not receive the support they need when they need it, and these gaps also place increased stress and demand on other community sector organisations.

Generalist youth workers have traditionally been located within local governments. Given the significant role that local governments play both in the provision and coordination of services for young people, it makes sense that generalist youth workers should continue to be an integral part of local government youth service provision. However, these roles should not be the sole responsibility of local government. The Victorian Government needs to partner with local government and invest in generalist youth support services to ensure equitable service provision across Victoria.

Recommendation

16. That the Victorian Government, in partnership with local government, invest resources to create more generalist youth support services across Victoria.

(c) Resource adult services to support the whole family

Specialist adult services, such as drug and alcohol services, mental health services and homelessness services, need to be resourced so they are family sensitive — that is, so they can support adults in parenting or caring roles and address any risks for children and young people.

The Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry recommended that the Victorian Government fund specialist adult services to develop family-sensitive practices, commencing with an audit of current practices prioritising drug and alcohol services.

Relevant organisations need the time, support and resources to review and adapt services so that children’s and young people’s needs are recognised. Funding will be needed for staff training, new treatment models and infrastructure, outreach counselling and new data recording systems.

Recommendation

17. That the Victorian Government fund specialist adult services to develop family-sensitive practices as recommended by the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry.
6. Develop tools to better measure outcomes for children and young people

The Service Sector Reform Project (outlined in chapter one) places a significant emphasis on the importance of effectively measuring outcomes at the individual, organisational and community levels. Government and many community sector organisations share the concern that the system currently focuses more on inputs and outputs than outcomes. There is also agreement that outcomes are difficult to measure, particularly over the longer term.

The challenges that community sector organisations experience in measuring ‘intrinsic outcomes’, such as enhanced self-esteem, and how these outcomes contribute to ‘extrinsic outcomes’, such as employment, are documented in chapter four. Community sector organisations, in partnership with government, must work together to address these challenges and inform the development of a range of measurement tools that can capture the complexity of working with young people and the importance of both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ outcomes when it comes to young people’s health and wellbeing.

As outlined above, funding models need to recognise the significant costs associated with quality research and evaluation and funding bodies need to account for these costs in funding agreements.

Importantly, outcomes measurement needs to inform the ongoing development of service delivery at the program level but also be used to improve policy and program development at local, regional and state planning levels.

Recommendation

18. That the Victorian Government, in partnership with the community sector, local government and schools, develop a range of measurement tools to monitor the health, development and wellbeing of children in the middle years, and young people, building on the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS).
Glossary

**Young people**
Young people are defined as people between the ages of 12 to 25 years. Most youth services in Victoria offer services within this age range. It should be noted, however, that the Department of Human Services’ definition of a child is 0 to 18 years.

**Middle years**
Definitions of ‘the middle years’ generally capture the ages of 8 to 14 years of age. In this report we have used 8 to 12 to capture the years where there is a policy and service gap.

**Youth services**
Services that are targeted specifically at young people. They may be primary/early intervention services such as case management, holiday programs, homework programs, recreation and arts program or programs that support young people’s participation and civic engagement. Secondary intervention services target young people who are more at risk of family breakdown, early school leaving, bullying, and mental health concerns etc. These programs may include family mediation, counseling, advocacy and case work.

**Services for young people**
Services that young people can access but are not youth specific for example general practitioners, allied health services, mental health services and specialist adult services that may work with young people in the family context.

**Acronyms**
- ACCOs Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- CALD Culturally and linguistically diverse
- DEECD Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria
- DEEWR Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth
- DHS Department of Human Services, Victoria
- DoJ Department of Justice, Victoria
- DoH Department of Health, Victoria
- FaHSCIA Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Commonwealth
- YACVic Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
- VCOSS Victorian Council of Social Service
- LLENS Local Learning and Employment Networks
Building the Scaffolding
Appendices

Appendix 1 — Who’s Carrying the Can
Survey

Please find the original survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/youngpeopleservices. The survey questions only are reproduced here.

1. Where does your organisation deliver services to young people?
2. Which category best describes your organisation?
3. Is your agency / program part of a larger organisation?
4. How are the services that your organisation provides to young people funded?
5. In total, how many funding agreements/grants/other sources of funding do you receive to enable your organisation to provide services to young people?
6. Do you have any comments to make about the number or length of service agreements/grants that you receive to provide services to young people?
7. Do you provide any services to children aged between 8 to 12 years?
8. How is this service funded?
9. Does your organisation provide this service/program in partnership with other organisations?
10. Do you think there is a need for services for children between 8 to 12 years in your local government area/s that is currently not being provided?
11. Are there barriers that prevent you from providing services to children aged 8 to 12 years?
12. Does your organisation have a specific policy or strategy for the ‘middle years’ (8 to 12 years)?
13. What services does your organisation provide to young people aged 12 to 25 years?
14. How can young people access the services you listed above?
15. Is there a demand for your organisation to provide services in ways that you do not have the current capacity to meet?
16. Do you provide any specific services for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
17. Do you provide any specific services for Aboriginal young people?
18. Do you provide specific services for same sex attracted young people?
19. When are the services that your organisation provides to young people available?
20. Is there a demand for you to provide services to young people at different times than currently available?
21. Does your organisation have a waiting list for any of the services provided to young people?
22. What do you believe are the gaps in services for young people in your local government area/s? i.e. there is a demand for the service from young people but no service or capacity available?
23. How do these ‘gaps’ impact on young people in your area?
24. Over the last five years, do you believe the availability of youth services in your local government area has included, reduced, remained the same, or unsure?
25. What service improvements do you believe are needed in your area to meet the needs of young people?
26. What do you think are the challenges in making these service improvements in your local government area/s?
27. Please provide a brief description of any new and emerging issues for young people in your area?
28. Is your organisation/program part of any of the following formal networks or alliances?
29. Does your organisation/program have any formal links to or partnerships with schools?

30. Are you aware of current state or federal government partnership programs or initiatives operating in your area?

31. If you are aware of these initiatives, please comment on the current impact, or likely impact, of these initiatives on young people in your area?

32. Are you aware of any research about, or by, young people undertaken by your organisation or another organisation in your region that may be relevant to this VCOSS/YACVic project?

33. Please provide any additional comments you would like to make.
Appendix 2 — Survey responses by local government area

The survey allowed for multiple responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local government area</th>
<th>Percentage of responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine Shire Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ararat Rural City Council</td>
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<td>Bass Coast Shire Council</td>
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<td>Benalla City Council</td>
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