

Infrastructure for diverse communities

Submission to Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy

October 2016



About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS members reflect the diversity of the sector and include large charities, peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups, and individuals interested in social policy. In addition to supporting the sector, VCOSS represents the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in policy debates and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

Authorised by:

Emma King, Chief Executive Officer

© Copyright 2016

Victorian Council of Social Service

Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street

Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

+61 3 9235 1000

For enquiries:

Llewellyn Reynders, Policy Manager

Email: llewellyn.reynders@vcoss.org.au

VCOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country and pays its respects to Elders past and present.

Contents

Executive summary.....	2
Co-design integrated infrastructure solutions	3
Reflect socio-economic composition and change.....	4
Create holistic, integrated health services to reduce acute care demand	6
Inclusive, welcoming, multi-purpose community spaces work best	8
Improve transport accessibility	9
Provide better access to housing for the most vulnerable Victorians.....	11
Address justice system demand increases.....	14
Provide access to high-quality education infrastructure to support lifelong learning	16
Transition to lower carbon energy supply and use	19

Executive summary

VCOSS welcomes the opportunity provided by Infrastructure Victoria to comment on Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy (the draft strategy). VCOSS applauds the scope and depth of Infrastructure Victoria's analysis, and its implications for changes to government operations.

The draft strategy is long, detailed, and informed by a deluge of supporting documents. VCOSS has been unable to examine all material, but provides the commentary and analysis time has allowed.

VCOSS especially welcomes the draft strategy's emphasis on affordable housing. Access to affordable, appropriate and accessible housing provides the foundation for a decent, meaningful life. We applaud Infrastructure Victoria identifying this among its 'top 3' priorities.

A common theme of the draft strategy is getting more use from infrastructure by creating multipurpose, integrated and well-managed facilities. We agree, but emphasise this requires a different culture and approach by infrastructure owners to understand, collaborate and value infrastructure use for broader purposes.

VCOSS draws attention to the socio-economic consequences of infrastructure decision-making, and particularly the differential effects of infrastructure on different communities.

Our central plea is for infrastructure to be planned, designed and available for everyone. Too often, assumptions are made about people's incomes, mobility, capabilities or behavior, excluding them from infrastructure's benefits. Victoria's diversity is a great strength, but harnessing diversity requires understanding difference.

Co-design integrated infrastructure solutions

The draft strategy identifies a common theme for the design, development and use of infrastructure and facilities to achieve multiple purposes for an entire community. This idea is repeated often, whether in using schools as community facilities, integrating justice and human services, developing integrated community health hubs, improving transport accessibility to allow more people to use it, or requiring housing developments to cater to people on more diverse incomes.

In other words, the draft strategy advises the Victorian Government to use infrastructure holistically to maximise public value, and not merely meet a single purpose or narrow goal. Yet Infrastructure Victoria does not explicitly interrogate the reasons this does not already happen.

A central explanation is agencies who own or control infrastructure primarily use them to achieve their own objectives, rather than those of the communities they serve. This includes public, private and not-for-profit organisations. Thus, schools are directed at achieving narrow education outcomes, health facilities at health outcomes, transport infrastructure at transport outcomes, without thinking of the wider benefits these investments might produce for people and communities. This ‘siloes’ approach is widely lamented but rarely addressed.

The draft strategy presents many helpful ways to begin aligning infrastructure provision with people’s needs, including better co-ordination, joint planning, improved integration, and more sophisticated assessment. But creating the conditions for these to occur and endure requires structural and cultural change.

Structurally, it means agencies and organisations relinquishing and sharing decision-making power: with each other and the communities they serve. This means changing decision-making processes, away from narrowly focused centralised hierarchies, and towards new local, inclusive collaborative structures. Many examples already exist, or are being established, but they can be more effective if their influence and decision-making powers are strengthened.

Culturally, it requires agencies to rethink their purpose. Instead of a narrow focus on limited objectives, they can recast their mission to contribute their resources and influence to a more collaborative aspiration for community wellbeing.

Co-designing with communities is one example of collaborating to meet local community challenges, and can be used to design and adapt infrastructure in response to community changes.¹ This co-design builds on genuine and meaningful partnerships, based on mutual respect, reciprocity, shared responsibility and accountability between government and communities. Sustaining effective partnerships requires time and resource investment.

¹ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Walk alongside: Co-designing social initiatives with people experiencing disadvantage*, 2015

Reflect socio-economic composition and change

The draft strategy acknowledges different communities face disparate challenges. It identifies different strategies for areas with high- and low-population growth. It segments challenges for central Melbourne, middle and outer suburbs, and rural and regional Victoria.

But population growth and geography are not the only demand drivers. Socio-economic composition and change have considerable demand effects. For instance, communities with disproportionate disadvantage require more intensive services – and supporting infrastructure. Similarly, economic restructuring affects service and infrastructure demand. For example, the closure of industries in Geelong and parts of Melbourne may increase their community service demands.

The Victorian government can more effectively direct infrastructure investment by accounting for differential demand and impact on different communities. People living in some parts of Victoria experience greater disadvantage,² resulting in less favourable outcomes for health and wellbeing, children's development, educational attainment and employment, amongst others.

The draft strategy views infrastructure as a supply response to a demand problem. But the construction, adaptation and maintenance of infrastructure itself creates economic demand – especially for labour and materials. Infrastructure's location and procurement methods have substantial consequences for local economies and labour demand. Taking social procurement approaches in constructing infrastructure can increase its benefits for communities. For instance, prioritising infrastructure in locations with higher unemployment, or including requirements to hire people experiencing employment disadvantages, can yield superior social outcomes.

Priced out of job- and service-rich inner suburbs by spiraling housing costs, people on lower incomes are now likely to settle in outer suburbs. These communities lack infrastructure for employment, services, social and sporting activities, exacerbating their disadvantage. Timely infrastructure development assists in reducing disadvantage by creating employment opportunities, supporting service development, and improving people's mobility to access services and opportunities elsewhere.

Equally, established areas of Melbourne have ageing or insufficient infrastructure, no longer fit-for-purpose to meet people's needs. This has consequences for providing services. For example, building new infrastructure in established areas can have higher costs, sometimes not recognised by public funding mechanisms. Equally, not-for-profit organisations, often with meagre resources, can be driven to less expensive, but less accessible, service locations.

² Vinson, T., Rawsthorne, M., Beavis, A. & Ericson, M., *Dropping of the Edge 2015: Persistent communal disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, 2015.

Regional Victorians face different challenges accessing jobs and services, including inferior technology and transport access. Declining populations in some smaller towns can compromise service sustainability and the ability to maintain community wellbeing. In particular, VCOSS members highlight the declining presence of young people in many communities, likely as a result of substandard services access, and limited meaningful employment and social opportunities.

The draft strategy recommends investment in ICT infrastructure to ‘maximise benefits from the NBN roll-out’.³ VCOSS supports this recommendation, but notes low-income households, older people and people with disability have relatively low digital inclusion, meaning they find it more difficult to access and afford digital services than other groups.⁴ The strategy can specifically advocate investment in improving ICT access, affordability and skills for Victorians experiencing disadvantage.

³ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria’s Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 12.1.3 ICT Infrastructure, October 2016, p.141.

⁴ Julian Thomas, Josephine Barraket, Scott Ewing, Trent MacDonald, Meg Mundell and Julie Tucker, *Measuring Australia’s digital divide: The Australian digital inclusion index 2016*, Swinburne University of Technology, 2016.

Create holistic, integrated health services to reduce acute care demand

Health infrastructure is not always fit-for-purpose or in the right place. VCOSS commends the draft strategy for articulating the health system is not merely hospitals. Primary and community health services help prevent and manage ill-health and reduce health inequities.

In particular, VCOSS endorses expansion of mental health and alcohol and drug rehabilitation service infrastructure across the acute, sub-acute and community spectrum.⁵ VCOSS members report a chronic shortage of alcohol and drug rehabilitation services, especially in regional Victoria and in the growth corridors around Melbourne's fringe.

Improve community health infrastructure

The draft strategy recommends building community-based health hubs,⁶ like the Melton Community Health Hub under development. Integrated health and human services can potentially improve collaboration. The strategy can consider aligning and coordinating their development with other reforms taking place, especially Primary Health Networks.

The draft strategy appears to prioritise developing new community health hubs in preference to expanding and renewing existing community health facilities. Community health services and Aboriginal community controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) are health system gateways for many people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. They help people manage chronic conditions and stay healthy in the community, and are more cost-effective than acute care.

Many community health and ACCHO facilities are ageing, too small or not fit-for-purpose. ACCHOs and Community Health Services report they cannot accommodate new programs or expand services because their facilities are inadequate. VCOSS supports including an additional recommendation to upgrade, expand and refurbish community health facilities.

Invest in interoperable ICT health infrastructure

The draft strategy prioritises investment in ICT infrastructure and digital systems to improve safety and care quality, improve access for regional Victorians and encourage data sharing.⁷ The benefits of these strategies are not restricted to the public hospital system, or limited to 'clinical' care. These investments can develop interoperability across the broader health system, including with community health and primary care (general practice). They can be developed so people control their health information, with their primary purpose to improve practice.

⁵ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 3.3.2 Mental health/AOD facilities, October 2016, p.68.

⁶ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 3.2.3 Integrated community health hubs, October 2016, p.68.

⁷ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 3.1.1 Health care ICT facilities and 3.1.2 Health care delivery through technology, October 2016, p.67.

Acknowledge telehealth's opportunities and limitations

Advances in telehealth can improve health care access for Victorians experiencing disadvantage, including people living in rural and regional areas. However, some people have limited technology access. Telehealth may be inappropriate for some health services, like therapeutic interventions for people with alcohol and drug dependency or mental illness. While telehealth can overcome some care barriers for regional and rural Victorians, it cannot replace other, face-to-face services.

For example, telehealth has some benefits for rural and remote populations, including access to otherwise unavailable services, satisfaction with the video style of delivery and decreased travel time and costs. However, if given the option, most people prefer face-to-face services in their community.⁸

⁸ Primary Health Care Research and Information Service, *Remote participants experiences with a group-based stroke self-management program using video conferencing*, e-bulletin, 5 April 2012.

Inclusive, welcoming, multi-purpose community spaces work best

Community services support people to overcome challenges, and help prevent isolation, disadvantage and poverty. Community services help build a strong, cohesive and inclusive community, supporting everyone to overcome barriers and fulfil their potential.

Audit and deploy surplus facilities

Many community organisations operate from dilapidated premises. Some are rented commercially, and others are subsidised by local or state governments. Few not-for-profit community organisations can access finance to purchase property. VCOSS endorses better use of existing and surplus facilities owned by state and local governments for community service organisations. Shared arrangements already exist but can be expanded.

Clarify asset refurbishment processes

VCOSS endorses upgrading existing facilities and building new ones 'for more than just one group', responding to changing communities. However, demand for asset refurbishment likely exceeds resources from any incentive fund. Funding can be directed more effectively by designing a clear allocation process. We have little knowledge if community asset 'rationalisation' can contribute to refurbishment of other assets. VCOSS members report many local and state government owned buildings are unproductively used or unused, but much is decrepit.

Upgrade public libraries

VCOSS endorses upgrading public libraries. Libraries are excellent places for people to gather, and are often used for multiple purposes. For example, the Hume City Council's Global Learning Centre has meeting and training rooms, seminar and conference facilities, professional event support and promotion, free wireless and internet access, and art gallery and exhibition spaces, as well as a public library. These are places where the local community, organisations and businesses gather, and share their knowledge and experiences.

Improve transport accessibility

Transport helps people to access work, study, support services and social networks and build a meaningful life. The more limited a person's transport options, the more limited their opportunities.

Provide joined up, accessible public transport

VCOSS endorses recommendations to improve public transport accessibility. Improving public transport accessibility means a wider group of people can use it,⁹ such as people with disability, older people, parents with prams or strollers, or people carrying luggage. People need continuously accessible journey paths from one end of the trip to the other, as any barrier along the journey means the journey cannot be made. This means accessibility is not produced by merely adding isolated upgrades or accessibility features to individual vehicles or pieces of infrastructure - they need to link together to form an accessible journey chain.

Universal design means early user participation

VCOSS echoes the draft strategy in promoting 'the need to get infrastructure right at the design stage'. Universal design principles emphasise including diverse users in determining designs. VCOSS members report state government transport purchasers only consult users after major procurement processes have been completed, meaning deficiencies identified can only be remedied by minor alterations or 'work-arounds' added later, impeding best practice and escalating costs.

Achieve DDA compliance

VCOSS endorses accelerating the public transport retrofit program to achieve DDA compliance. To achieve optimal accessibility, DDA compliance can be a minimum standard, ideally exceeded wherever possible. VCOSS endorses a coordinated program of retrofits to produce accessible journey paths, in preference to mismatched, scattered improvements. For example, the 'Route 96' tram project seeks to produce a fully accessible tram line. This contrasts with single stop upgrades, which may not link to other accessible stops, or lack low-floor tram services.

DDA compliance can be confirmed by audit, and not merely claimed because a project is funded. VCOSS members report, for example, bus stops funded for DDA compliance upgrades not actually meeting the standard. Current claims of compliance rest on unchecked compliance upgrades.

All new transport can meet the full requirements of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport. They should not rely on temporary exemptions, given these investments will last beyond the exemption date.

⁹ Victorian Council of Social Service, *Creating Accessible Journeys*, 2011

Accessible toilets allow free movement

Toilet access is a basic human need, but is often forgotten in the design of transport infrastructure, especially for people with disability. Despite multiple complaints and human rights actions, people with disability still cannot easily access toilets on the public transport system, with many locked or not available at some train stations. Beyond standard accessible toilets, a network of adult change facilities across the transport system can provide easier movement for some people with disability, by extending the 'changing places' initiative.¹⁰

People's behaviour can compromise good design

Accessibility is more than design. Good customer service and staff with skills in operating accessibility features and awareness of people with mobility impairments facilitates people's transport use. Rude, dismissive or disrespectful behaviour by public transport staff is as strong a transport barrier as infrastructure and vehicle quality. VCROSS endorses the draft strategy's recommendation for real-time information,¹¹ which can be extended to include accessibility features for people with vision and hearing impairments, or require information on accessibility features.

¹⁰ Changing Places website: www.changingplaces.org.au

¹¹ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 10.4.1 Public transport real-time information, October 2016, p.115.

Provide better access to housing for the most vulnerable Victorians

VCOSS applauds Infrastructure Victoria's acknowledgement of the housing crisis facing low-income and disadvantaged Victorians, including by identifying it in its 'top 3' priorities. We endorse the strategy's call for more dedicated affordable housing supply in next decade, including by developing a statewide affordable housing plan,¹² and generally endorse the directions for expanding affordable housing in the draft strategy.

Determine housing need

The draft strategy identifies 75,000 to 100,000 households without access to affordable housing. The draft strategy identifies approximately 30,000 new dedicated affordable dwellings as 'an appropriate response to contribute to the current unmet demand',¹³ although considered a higher 50,000 figure for social housing only in its draft options paper.¹⁴ The draft strategy identifies, but does not recommend, a figure.

The housing need assessment primarily relies on Centrelink data identifying 87,700 households receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), having very low or low incomes (quintiles 1 and 2), and paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent. VCOSS observes not all low-income households receive CRA. CRA is not available to some income support recipients (e.g. Austudy for people over 25), and some low-wage earners may not qualify for income support. In contrast, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates 115,000 Victorian low-income private rental households pay more than 30 per cent of their income in rent.¹⁵ Even this figure excludes people in financial difficulty due to paying a very high proportion of their income in mortgage repayments.

In other words, Infrastructure Victoria's housing need estimate may be too low. In any case, 30,000 or even 50,000 dwellings will not meet demand. Despite this, recognising tens of thousands of new affordable properties are required demonstrates the scale of the problem, and the investment required, and VCOSS recognises moving to a high growth path takes time and resources. In short, we need as many affordable homes as possible, as soon as practicable.

Define affordable housing

The term 'social housing' is reasonably well understood to mean dwellings owned or operated by public or community housing organisations. These homes guarantee affordability by linking rents to an individual household's income.

¹² Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 7.4.1 Affordable Housing Plan, October 2016, p.92.

¹³ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, October 2016, p.95.

¹⁴ Infrastructure Victoria, *Draft Options Book – Version 2*, October 2016, p.686

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Housing occupancy and costs 2013-14*, Data Cube: Additional Tables – low income rental households, Cat. No. 4130, 2015.

Increasingly, the term 'affordable housing' is being used as a response to housing hardship. But the term remains ill-defined. References to affordable housing can sometime include housing with discounted rents, even if tenants are still in housing stress, or where tenants do not have low incomes. Similarly, it sometimes includes low-priced home purchase opportunities, even if the purchasers are in mortgage stress, or do not have low-incomes. The application of 'affordable housing' to include private rental or home purchase opportunities is unclear, as there is often no legal or regulatory mechanism to keep it affordable if a household's income changes, make sure it is available to low-income households, and ensure the property remains affordable over its life.

Using the term 'affordable housing' without a clear definition can mean the housing produced does not assist the people in housing need. Infrastructure Victoria can more clearly articulate the meaning intended by 'affordable housing', especially for private providers, and the mechanism proposed to maintain its affordability and availability for low-income households.

Risks and opportunities of private rental subsidies

An increasing number of Victorians are living in private rental for longer periods of their lives. Private rental is no longer a transitional housing option for many people, and the shortage of social housing means many low-income and vulnerable people and families live in private rental homes. Indeed, more low-income Victorians live in private rental homes than are accommodated in social housing.

The draft strategy proposes to 'extend current state government housing rental assistance and advocacy programs over 0-30 years to support people to stay in the private rental market'.¹⁶ VCOSS agrees private rental assistance and advocacy can help people afford and maintain private rental accommodation. In particular, current state government housing advocacy support is piecemeal, and may be limited to certain forms of housing tenure. For example, the social housing advocacy and support program helps people maintain social housing, but no equivalent is available for private rental housing. At best, some forms of legal support may be available from Community Legal Centres and Consumer Affairs, but none of these provide more holistic case management services.

VCOSS members also observe even if low-income people can find an affordable property they often have difficulty securing it, as a result of discrimination or lacking rental history or references. There are options possible by private rental brokerage arrangements that may improve access, including rent subsidies, lead tenant arrangements, bond loans, head-leasing arrangements, negotiating with real estate agents and landlords, loss guarantees, subsidies for establishment costs and providing living skills.

Introduce inclusionary zoning

VCOSS applauds the recommendation to introduce inclusionary zoning. Inclusionary zoning provides a regulatory mechanism to leverage social and affordable housing from private

¹⁶ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 7.1.1, October 2016, p.92.

development. VCOSS observes it provides the benefits of producing ‘salt and pepper’ housing distributed in new communities, encouraging diversity and reducing locational disadvantage risks.

Provide for accessible housing

Infrastructure Victoria considered the option of expanding housing for people with disability,¹⁷ but did not include it in the draft strategy. It was not included as Infrastructure Victoria considered that home modification and specialist disability housing will be funded by the NDIS. VCOSS cautions against relying on the NDIS to provide sufficient affordable housing for people with disability, especially because the NDIS will not provide housing funds merely because it is unaffordable.

While the introduction of the NDIS will provide many people with disability with greater choice and control, not every person with a disability is eligible, with the vast majority ineligible. Even among the proportion likely to be eligible for the NDIS, it has been estimated between 83,000 and 122,000 people will have an unmet need for affordable housing. The introduction of the NDIS is actually likely to increase the demand for secure, affordable and accessible housing as more people have their basic support needs met, providing greater capacity to live independently on a sustained basis.

People with disability and older people have particular accessibility needs from residential housing, and people with mobility impairments can be excluded from mainstream housing because it is inaccessible and cannot be easily adapted. It is unclear to what extent the NDIS will fund disability modifications in social housing or private rental homes. Infrastructure Victoria can reconsider the exclusion of accessible housing from the draft strategy.

Incorporate universal design principles into the building code

The draft strategy recommends the adoption of universal design principles across government.¹⁸ This recommendation can be strengthened by extending its application to private housing. By incorporating minimum accessibility features into the building code for residential housing, the Victorian government provide clarity for builders, architects and developers. In 2010, the Victorian government undertook a regulatory impact statement on the introduction of accessibility standards in the building code. However, these changes never took place.

There are virtually no opportunities to rent accessible housing in the private market, especially at affordable rents. Over the longer term, if universal design standards become mandatory, they eventually become available in the private rental market. However, governments can make affordable and accessible rental housing more available by using planning powers to mandate a proportion of accessible dwellings in multi-unit developments, and by requiring new social and affordable housing dwellings be fully accessible.

¹⁷ Infrastructure Victoria, *Draft Options Book – Version 2*, October 2016, p.602.

¹⁸ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 6.1.1, October 2016, p.87.

Address justice system demand increases

The majority of people who commit crimes in Victoria have experienced significant disadvantage, including unemployment, poverty, homelessness and trauma. VCOSS endorses closer integration of justice and human services, to address the multiple and complex challenges people face.

Adopt a preventative justice approach to addressing the causes of crime

VCOSS supports the draft strategy's approach to addressing demands on the justice system:

... we believe that reform to the way the justice and human services sectors deliver services should drive a preventative justice agenda, to avoid, where possible, the need for more prisons.¹⁹

This approach aligns with VCOSS' call for government to address the underlying reasons people commit crimes by adopting a justice reinvestment approach. Adopting a justice reinvestment approach can help reduce offending rates, reduce spending on prisons and keep communities safer.

Investigate embedding justice services in existing community hubs and facilities

We can learn from and build on the positive outcomes delivered by some integrated justice facilities (such as the Neighbourhood Justice Centre in Collingwood). However, co-location can work best by including justice services in broader health and human service-led facilities. Including health and human services in justice facilities may have unintended consequences in some communities and for some people.

For example, some people, including Aboriginal people, young people in the out-of-home care system, refugees and asylum seekers may have had previous negative experiences with the justice system making them distrustful of justice services. This can lead to a reluctance to engage with other co-located health and human services. A perceived conflict of interest or fear of being seen by other community members (especially in small or rural communities) can discourage people from attending services co-located with justice services. Where people are victims of crime, including family violence, they may feel unsafe attending a venue supporting perpetrators of crime.

It may be better to examine options for embedding justice services in existing community hubs and facilities, where people are already engaged. This can include Aboriginal community controlled organisations, community health services and child and family centres.

Other methods of integrating services and encouraging collaboration can be explored, including stronger information sharing systems, improved referral pathways, partnerships between services (for example health-justice partnerships) and common intake systems.

¹⁹ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, October 2016, p.102.

Upgrade and refurbish Victorian courts

VCOSS supports the recommendation to upgrade or refurbish courts across Victoria, including in high growth areas,²⁰ to improve safety and accessibility, especially for people experiencing family violence and people with disability. Many Victorian court buildings desperately require maintenance and improvements, including separate entrances and waiting areas for victims and defendants, safe interview rooms and IT infrastructure.

²⁰ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 8.1.3 Courts in high growth areas and 8.3.2 courts in Melbourne's CBD, October 2016, pp.99-100.

Provide access to high-quality education infrastructure to support lifelong learning

Participating in high quality education improves future employment and life opportunities, and can help break the cycle of poverty. The strategy can consider infrastructure design and use to support children, young people and adult learners facing disadvantage to engage in education. Children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in early years services.²¹ Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to complete year 12 or equivalent.²² The design and location of education infrastructure affects their ability to participate, alongside other interrelated barriers.

Integrate services

Efforts to transform schools into community facilities²³ can go beyond mere co-location and include integrated service provision. Integrated services, which combine universal health and education services with more targeted services, can effectively reach children, young people and families facing disadvantage. They can provide a welcoming and safe place for family-centred engagement, and promote early intervention by linking children, young people and their families into more targeted services when problems first arise. Integrated service models can deliver positive educational and wellbeing outcomes, including improved attendance, educational attainment, wellbeing, social development and behaviours, increased engagement in learning, earlier identification of issues, and greater family engagement in school.²⁴

Students and the broader community can be actively engaged in the use and design of facilities, including the combination of services offered. For example, the proposed models can be expanded to include other universal and specialised community and health services, such as playgroups, maternal and child health services, parenting services and early intervention support. Other models like child and family centres can be explored. Investment can incorporate best practice evidence, and draw on lessons from existing models, such as Doveton College.

VCOSS recommends prioritising integrated services investment in communities with entrenched social disadvantage. Services can be integrated in existing infrastructure, by education providers making their facilities more available and working more collaboratively with other education providers, health and community services, and the wider community. Funded coordinators can be employed to broker service collaboration and engage in community development and outreach.

²¹ M McDonald et al., Op. Cit.

²² S Lamb, J Jackson, A Walstab and S Huo, *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*, Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute, Melbourne, 2015.

²³ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 9.3.3 Schools as community facilities, October 2016, p.108.

²⁴ S Sanjeevan, M McDonald and T Moore, *Primary schools as community hubs: A review of the literature*, The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Melbourne, 2012.

Doveton College²⁵

Doveton College is a unique partnership between the Victorian state government, the federal government and a non-profit philanthropic organisation. It is a birth-to-Year 9 government school, located in an area of high disadvantage in Melbourne's outer east. It provides 'whole-life' opportunities for children and young people by early intervention, family support and community integration.

Mainstream services such as kindergarten, structured playgroups, childcare and traditional schooling are integrated with multiple services 'wrapping around' children and their families, including Maternal and Child Health services and specialist services such as mental health and Aboriginal services. The college uses outreach services, such as parenting programs, to help reach vulnerable families. Doveton College's success is due to its strong partnerships and shared vision. It is a local response to community need, underpinned by two years of intensive community consultation.

Increase transparency in education planning and investment

VCOSS endorses more transparency in education planning and investment.²⁶ New accessible education infrastructure can be built near the communities they serve, with good public transport connections. VCOSS members warn against selling existing schools sites, noting they are difficult and costly to replace if future demand changes.

The draft strategy recommends addressing the causal factors meaning some schools are considered less desirable.²⁷ Improving demand management efforts can counteract concentrated school disadvantage. Schools with high levels of students facing disadvantage have less capacity to increase revenue by charging families²⁸ or fundraising. They have more students requiring additional help to succeed. With limited resources, these schools can have trouble attracting experienced teachers,²⁹ maintaining facilities, upgrading information technology and providing additional support for vulnerable students.

Use community education providers

Lifelong learning can help people gain qualifications and skills to find and maintain secure, meaningful work. It is particularly beneficial for early school leavers, retrenched workers, parents and carers returning to work, workers upskilling or reskilling to maintain employment, and people facing long-term unemployment.

²⁵ Doveton College, <http://dovetoncollege.vic.edu.au/about-doveton/principals-welcome/>; Victorian Council of Social Service, 'Doveton College Opening Doors out of disadvantage', *Insight*, Issue 9, Melbourne, 2014, <http://insight.vcooss.org.au/doveton-college-opening-doors-out-of-disadvantage/>.

²⁶ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 9.3.1 School investment pipeline, October 2016, p.108.

²⁷ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 9.1.1 School network planning, October 2016, p.107.

²⁸ VAGO, *Victorian Auditor-General's Report: Additional School Costs for Families*, VAGO, 2015, p. 5.

²⁹ L Connors and J McMorrow, 'Imperatives in School Funding: equity, sustainability and achievement,' *Australian Education Review*, ACER, Victoria, 2015, p. 50.

Exploring options to better use TAFE, libraries and school facilities to engage learners is welcome.³⁰ Not-for-profit community education providers, including Learn Locals and neighbourhood houses, effectively support learners facing disadvantage, including young people at risk of disengaging, or who have disengaged from school, and adult learners from different backgrounds and life circumstances.³¹ These providers are embedded in their communities, and offer both pre-accredited and accredited training.

The draft strategy highlights the potential for tertiary education and training to be offered on school grounds, but can also explore expanding VET in schools (VETiS) for senior secondary students.

³⁰ Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 9.4 Support the development of spaces for lifelong learning, October 2016, p.108.

³¹ Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, *Neighbourhood Houses Survey 2015*, p.3.

Transition to lower carbon energy supply and use

Reduce energy demand without increasing costs for low-income households

The draft strategy recommends mandated cost-reflective pricing for all energy customers³² to realise smart meter benefits, help people understand their energy use, and assist in managing energy demand.

Demand management helps reduce carbon-intensive energy use. However, VCOSS cautions against overzealous reliance on pricing for demand management. Infrastructure Victoria can consider non-price ways of reducing energy demand. Price-signaling is among the least equitable ways of changing behaviour, particularly for an essential service such as energy. People living with low-incomes have limited ability to change their energy use patterns, which are affected by the age of household members, health conditions, employment status, and housing tenure. Certain households find it difficult to shift consumption between peak and off-peak periods, including households with children.³³

Rather than premium pricing, behaviour can be changed by informing people of their energy use patterns by information campaigns and alert systems, which encourage shifts in consumption. The 'Target 155' water savings campaign is one example of a successful, non-price based form of demand management, which has reduced water use per capita by more than 20 per cent since 2005-06.

Develop energy efficiency programs to retrofit existing public buildings

The draft strategy recommends the development of targeted energy use efficiency programs to retrofit existing public sector buildings. This can involve maximising social benefits from these programs, such as improving the energy efficiency of public housing to reduce energy bills for tenants.

VCOSS supports energy efficiency retrofits of existing public housing stock fit for long-term use, beginning with the most vulnerable tenants' homes. If stock has reached the end of its useful life, it should be redeveloped or replaced.

Cost effective stock management requires a long-term asset strategy and regular maintenance. This allows tenants to benefit from modern, energy efficient homes.

Require minimum standards for private rental properties

The draft strategy does not recommend improving the energy efficiency of private rental housing. This is a significant deficiency. Approximately 25 per cent of Victorian households are private renters. Private renting is common among low-income households, and is far more common than

³² Infrastructure Victoria, *Victoria's Draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*, 18.1.1 Energy pricing, October 2016, p.189.

³³ Larissa Nicholls and Yolande Strengers, 'Peak demand and the "family peak" period in Australia: Understanding practice (in)flexibility in households with children' (2015) 9 *Energy Research & Social Science* 116.

social housing.³⁴ Given the significant and growing proportion of private renters, Victoria cannot transition to lower carbon use unless the standard of private rental housing is improved, particularly the housing of low-income earners.

There are currently no minimum standards for private rentals in Victoria. Low-quality rental housing (including lacking insulation, major structural defects, and old, inefficient heating) directly causes high energy consumption and unaffordable energy bills. Private tenants represent 37% of people unable to heat their home. Tenants are the group who most often cannot pay their energy bills on time, at 42% of people in payment difficulty.³⁵

Legislated standards are the only viable way of improving housing conditions for low-income and vulnerable tenants who have no market power and are forced to compromise on housing quality due to a very low supply of affordable rental housing. Minimum standards can enable other private rental tenants to benefit from improved energy efficiency.

VCOSS recommends Victoria follow comparable jurisdictions, such as South Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, and Ireland, and introduce minimum standards for private rental housing, including energy efficiency standards. These can be staged so landlords have sufficient time to be educated about and comply with the standards, and can spread the costs of compliance over time.

³⁴ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 'Change in housing tenure for lower income Australian households', <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/policy-development/ahuri-briefs/change-in-housing-tenure-for-lower-income-australian-households>.

³⁵ Francisco Azpitarte, Victoria Johnson and Damien Sullivan, *Fuel poverty, household income and energy spending: An empirical analysis for Australia using HILDA data*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2015, vii.

Victorian Council of Social Service

Level 8, 128 Exhibition Street,
Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

e vcoss@vcoss.org.au

t 03 9235 1000

www.vcoss.org.au

