

CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING DISADVANTAGE IN VICTORIA

Reporting on progress
Identifying future directions



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MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER AND DEPUTY PREMIER

A **STRONG, PROGRESSIVE** and prosperous democracy is founded on fairness: on each and every person having a fair opportunity to participate in the social and economic life of the community.

Without fairness, some people and places will slip further into hardship and deprivation, generating deep divisions within society and creating negative social and economic consequences for everyone. Without fairness, it becomes much harder to maintain attractive and safe communities where people want to live. Without fairness, it becomes more difficult to secure the long-term economic growth needed to create jobs and raise living standards.

Creating a more prosperous Victoria means making sure all Victorians have access to the basic building blocks of fairness: high quality education and health services, the chance to develop skills and find meaningful work, and the opportunity to live, work and raise a family in safe and friendly communities.

The Victorian Government has made substantial progress towards reducing disadvantage and creating a fairer Victoria. But there is more we can – and must – do.

Across Victoria, some people and places continue to face significant barriers in gaining access to the opportunities they need to build a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

This report provides a picture of the nature and extent of disadvantage in Victoria, identifies areas where Victorians aren't getting a fair go and makes the case for reducing disadvantage in the interests of all Victorians. The report also outlines the future approach the Government will take to reduce disadvantage.

A pre-budget statement will follow this report, setting out the first steps in a strategy for reducing disadvantage across Victoria over the next five years.

As Victoria's strong economic performance continues, the Government remains committed to improving opportunities for the most disadvantaged people and places in our State. Through this report and our pre-budget statement, the Government will work to make sure that all Victorians can contribute to the challenge of building a fair and prosperous Victoria.



STEVE BRACKS MP
Premier of Victoria



JOHN THWAITES MP
Deputy Premier of Victoria
Minister for Victorian Communities

OVERVIEW

IN 1999 THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT

was elected with a clear agenda for Victoria's future. The Government committed to delivering improved services in education, health and community safety, to growing all of Victoria, restoring democratic processes and safeguards, and being financially responsible.

Over the past five years, the Government has met each of those commitments.

The Government has focused on strengthening the Victorian economy, recognising that sustained long-term economic growth is the key to creating greater opportunities, more jobs and higher living standards for all Victorians.

Today, Victoria's economy continues to grow strongly, creating new employment opportunities across the State. After years of decline, Victoria's regions are enjoying population and jobs growth and receiving record levels of investment and support.

The Victorian Government has also focused on rebuilding essential services and infrastructure, following extensive cutbacks to these services during the 1990s. Services in health, education and community safety have been restored and improved.

Many more nurses, teachers and police have been employed and new hospitals, schools and police stations have been built. New funds have been invested in disability services, children's services, housing, public transport, aged care and neighbourhood renewal.

The Government has made strong progress in social investment, tackling difficult problems by working together with communities, exploring innovative approaches to delivering services and introducing new initiatives based on the principles of prevention and early intervention.

Despite these substantial improvements, not all Victorians are getting a fair chance to share in the benefits of the State's strong economic performance. Some groups of people and some places in Victoria still experience disadvantage, hardship and barriers to opportunity.

This entrenched disadvantage has a negative impact on the entire Victorian community. It affects the lives and aspirations of individual Victorians, restricting access to the opportunities they need to achieve their full potential. It also undermines Victoria's capacity to sustain the strong economic and productivity growth needed to create a fairer, more prosperous society.

As Victoria continues to grow and change, significant benefits will be generated for the entire community from taking action to reduce disadvantage.

Over the past five years, the Victorian Government has learnt important lessons about how best to improve the lives of Victorians. This report sets out those lessons, charts Victoria's progress in addressing disadvantage and identifies the challenges ahead.

The report outlines the Government's proposed long-term framework for providing new and improved opportunities for people, groups and places to overcome disadvantage.

Prior to the 2005-06 Victorian State Budget, the Government will release a detailed statement, outlining the further steps Victoria will take within this new framework as part of a focused and sustained effort to reduce disadvantage over the next five years.

The Victorian Government will tackle disadvantage in five key ways:

1 Reducing barriers to opportunity

The Government will act to address barriers which prevent people from having opportunities for a better life. This includes the structural challenges that prevent people from fully participating such as mobility and access. Action will also be taken to strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities in order to increase their choices and control over life's opportunities.

2 Ensuring that universal services provide equal opportunity for all

The Government will continue to rebuild essential public services and make sure these services meet the needs of disadvantaged groups, individuals and communities.

3 Strengthening assistance to disadvantaged groups

The Government will develop innovative approaches to help disadvantaged groups access services and opportunities available to other members of the Victorian community.

4 Providing targeted support to the highest risk areas

The Government will direct effort and resources into creating new opportunities in places and communities with high levels of disadvantage.

5 Involving communities in decisions affecting their lives and making it easier to work with Government

The Government will explore new ways of working directly with communities, enabling groups and communities to have a greater say in determining their futures. There will also be a focus on streamlining the delivery of services across different levels and functions of government.

The new framework will also drive ongoing reform in the delivery of government services. The Government will seek new and different ways to deliver responsive services to Victorians by promoting innovation, introducing more services based on prevention and early intervention, developing co-ordinated approaches to solving complex problems and developing partnerships with local government, community groups and business.

The Victorian Government recognises the economic and social benefits to Victoria of tackling disadvantage. The Government will use the experience, lessons and evidence set out in this report as the basis for a fresh approach to reducing disadvantage, strengthening communities and improving opportunities for all Victorians to fully participate in the State's economic and social life.

CHANGING VICTORIA

IN LESS THAN A GENERATION

Victoria has already undergone many changes – we are more socially diverse, more mobile, and our economy has opened up. There are several key areas where major changes are emerging which will fundamentally affect Victorian communities and provide future challenges.

Changing patterns of employment

The Victorian economy has grown strongly over the last decade and unemployment has reached the lowest levels for decades. However the benefits from economic growth have not been evenly distributed.

There has been growth in service and knowledge industries, combined with a decline in manufacturing. While part-time and casual employment has grown strongly, many people are unable to get as much work as they would like. Many Victorians cannot find work because their skills are out of date and need to learn new skills. It is a major challenge managing the many changes and transitions now required in a working life.

The changing character of our cities and towns

Changes in the labour and housing markets in Melbourne and in regional centres have created opportunity for some, but disadvantage for others. Many people cannot afford to live in areas close to transport, employment, education and other services. Concentrations of disadvantage (low income, higher unemployment) have emerged in some parts of Victoria's cities and towns.

Ageing of the population

The size, composition and distribution of our future population will have significant influence on the future sustainability of many areas of Victoria. Currently birth rates are declining, life expectancy is increasing and consequently, the population is ageing.

Over the next 40 years or so the proportion of those working to those not in the labour force will be half the rate it is now. There will also be significantly greater numbers of people aged 85 and older.

Changing social landscape

Family structures are changing with more people living in single or couple only households, and marrying and having children later than previous generations. Adult children are leaving the family home later in life as training and job seeking are more demanding. Families in mid life now have more demanding caring responsibilities as our population ages.

SOCIAL INVESTMENT IN VICTORIA

THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S

social investment aims to share the benefits of economic growth more fairly while restoring the public services on which both the wider community and disadvantaged Victorians depend. Investment has focused on taking action in areas where the greatest need exists:

- The Government has made a substantial investment in recruiting skilled people to work in these areas, particularly in education, health, community safety and children's services. An additional 5,000 full time teaching and other staff, 5,766 new nurses and an extra 1,150 police have been employed across the State.
- The Government has invested to record levels in rebuilding the infrastructure and assets that are essential to the provision of high quality services, including schools, hospitals, aged care facilities, police stations and community centres.
- Where particularly difficult issues have been identified, the Government has provided additional investment and introduced new ways of working to tackle these problems.

Outcome Highlights

- From October 1999 to December 2004, 266,000 new jobs have been created in Victoria. Unemployment is now 5.5% compared with 10% in October 1999.
- Since 1999 there has been a 100% increase in the number of apprentices and trainees in Victoria and 90% of young Victorians aged 15 to 19 years are engaged in full-time education, training or full-time employment.
- The Government has built 60 new police stations, 51 new and replacement schools and re-built 34 aged care facilities. A new hospital has been built at Casey, and 11 metropolitan and 15 country hospitals have been expanded or re-built.
- Prep to Year 2 average class sizes have reduced from 24.3 in 1999 to 20.9 in 2004.
- Literacy and numeracy levels in Victoria's schools have improved between 1999 and 2003. For example, the proportion of students achieving the required reading level in Year 1 has improved from 76.4% to 85.7%.
- The number of young Victorians completing Year 12 or its equivalent has risen from 81.2% in 1999 to 86.2% in 2004.
- The Government stopped privatisation of the Austin Hospital and is now re-developing the Austin including a new, relocated Mercy Hospital for Women on the Austin site, Victoria's largest joint hospital project.
- Victoria's public hospitals admitted over 182,000 more patients in 2003-04 than in 1999-2000, an 18% increase.
- Support for families with young children has improved significantly as the result of a \$37 million funding boost including a \$32 million increase to the grants paid to kindergartens, \$4 million to increase the fee subsidy available to health care cardholders, and the balance to provide additional support services to children, and assistance to kindergartens for administration.
- An additional \$78.5 million has been provided since 2002 to protect children at risk including new preventative programs and measures to improve residential, foster and kinship care services. More culturally sensitive approaches have been developed to meet the needs of Indigenous communities.
- The number of individual support packages for people with a disability has more than doubled since 1999-2000.
- Since 1999, the Government has acquired or funded 8,540 social housing units, helping low-income Victorians access secure appropriate and affordable housing.
- Rates of violent crime have fallen significantly since 2000-2001 including a 27% reduction in robbery. Victoria is the safest State in Australia with a crime rate 23% below the national average.
- More Victorians say that there are opportunities to have a real say on issues that are important to them, 46%, up from 36% in 2001.

More details on the Government's actions and progress achieved in key areas of social investment are outlined in the Appendix.

INVESTMENT IN A THRIVING ECONOMY

A strong economy is essential to raising living standards and reducing disadvantage. The Government has invested heavily in the drivers of a modern and flexible economy, including improving physical infrastructure, boosting research and development and implementing tax cuts to ensure Victoria retains its competitive advantage.

The Government recognises that for most people, gaining access to a good, meaningful job is the first step to overcoming disadvantage. The Government has given priority to securing strong employment growth for Victoria, with 266,000 new jobs being created across the State from October 1999 to December 2004.

The Government has also acted to turn around decades of decline in regional areas, delivering record levels of investment for regional infrastructure and services. Through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, the Government is providing \$180 million to support major infrastructure projects that are driving strong jobs growth in country Victoria.

One of the key initiatives promoting regional development has been the active role the Victorian Government has played in attracting strong growth in the numbers of skilled migrants coming to Victoria. The Regional Migration Incentive Fund provides assistance to help attract and settle skilled and business migrants, as well as their families, in regional Victoria. Victoria strongly supports the Commonwealth Government's plan to increase skilled migration and will continue to make it attractive for migrants to come to Victoria.

The Government has acted to ensure that Victorian workers have the right skills to succeed in a knowledge-based economy. There has been a 100% increase in the number of apprentices and trainees in Victoria since 1999 and 90% of young Victorians aged 15 to 19 years are engaged in full-time education, training or full-time employment.

CASE STUDY

The *i.can.connect* Innovation Fund Initiative

New technologies open up a wide range of information, connections and opportunities. However, some young people and their families do not have ready access to these new technologies or lack the skills to use them.

The *i.can.connect* Initiative is an innovative teaching program, providing 'at risk' youth and their families with the knowledge and skills to use new technologies. The program aims to increase opportunities for these families to engage with the community, access education and training services and improve their employment options.

Using local centres known as Community Learning Technology Centres, the program is delivered through a partnership between TAFE institutes and agencies such as The Salvation Army, Mission Australia, Scope Victoria, The Smith Family as well as social entrepreneurs in Eaglehawk.

The *i.can.connect* initiative has delivered training to 321 young Victorians in 10 metropolitan and regional areas. A 2004 survey of participants showed a significant increase in the interest of these young Victorians in continuing their education and training.

CASE STUDY

Employment Skills Centre

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of skilled migrants coming to Victoria. Many of these, including the highly skilled migrants, find it very hard to get that first start in work. To help migrants find employment the Government set up an Employment Skills Centre. This was launched in 2003 as part of the Government's training and further education policy, *Knowledge and Skills for the Innovation Economy*.

At the Australian Multicultural Education Service Employment Skills Centre, migrants can be helped to find the right job by working with counsellors, language teachers, work placement officers and employment consultants. The Centre provides a combination of skills workshops, work placements and individual counselling sessions. Work placements are particularly helpful because they give migrants first hand experience of the Australian workplace.

INVESTMENT IN HIGH QUALITY UNIVERSAL SERVICES

Universal access to high quality, essential services, such as health and education, is vital to reducing disadvantage and improving the lives of all Victorians.

The Government recognises that education is the key to Victoria's long-term growth and has made education its highest priority, boosting investment in education by more than \$4 billion since 1999 in capital and recurrent expenditure and recruiting an extra 5,000 teachers and support staff into Victoria's schools.

The Government has also set targets for education, including improving basic literacy and numeracy skills, increasing Year 12 or equivalent completion rates and making sure Victorians of all ages have access to training and learning programs.

Since 1999, literacy and numeracy levels have improved, class sizes in Prep to Year 2 have fallen, vocational education and training activity has increased significantly and the number of young Victorians completing Year 12 or its equivalent has risen to 86%.

The Government has also substantially increased investment in health and community services. To meet the challenges of a growing and ageing population, the Government has employed an extra 5,766 nurses and substantially increased the capacity of public hospitals to treat more patients.

Significant additional investment has been directed into providing new treatment options for people with chronic disease, using prevention, early intervention and improvements in community management to help reduce avoidable hospital use.

As a result of these strategies, Victoria's public hospitals admitted 182,000 more patients in 2003-04 than in 1999-2000, an 18% increase. Access to care in hospital emergency departments has improved, and waiting times have been reduced, with the number of patients admitted from hospital Emergency Departments within 12 hours increasing by over 16%. Patients with chronic diseases who are participating in community management programs have reduced their use of public hospitals by 40%. Substantial improvements have also been recorded in aged care, disability and mental health services.

The Government has recognised the critical importance of the early years of childhood in a child's long-term health, development, education and social wellbeing. Government actions have focused on broadening access to health and social support services, improving access to kindergarten for low-income families, providing higher quality kindergarten programs and boosting maternal and child health services. The Government has improved its capacity to protect children at risk by introducing new approaches involving early intervention and support for families under stress.

The Government is committed to maintaining Victoria's record as Australia's safest state and has recruited an additional 1,150 police and built 60 new police stations across the State. Rates of violent crime have fallen significantly since 2001 and Victorians' feelings of personal safety have improved.

The Government has also acknowledged the need to develop greater flexibility in its management of services provided by community organisations. It has entered into partnership agreements with Local Government and not-for-profit service providers, aiming to involve communities more closely in planning and implementing locally based approaches to meeting social needs.

The Government has introduced new ways of delivering services, including combining the resources of several government departments and adopting ideas that emphasise early intervention and prevention.

CASE STUDY

Best Start

The early years of a child's life are a time when all families need advice and support. Much can go wrong, sometimes with lifelong consequences. However, much can be done in these early years to improve the health, development, learning and well-being of young children – and improve their life chances.

While many Victorian families and children already benefit from services such as a world class Maternal and Child Health Service, local kindergartens and a range of extra support services, the challenge is to ensure that all Victorian families and children have access to these services.

The Victorian Government's *Best Start* initiative is aimed at improving child health, development, learning and well-being. *Best Start* supports communities, parents, families and service providers to improve early years services. Thirteen local partnerships of schools, councils, parents, Elders, government and non-government agencies have been formed to provide better access to services and improve support for parents. The partnerships are trialing new ways to improve outcomes for children in their communities and innovative activities include:

- programs to encourage parents to read to their children from the first months of life;
- conducting activities such as dental checks and immunisation sessions at the same time to increase participation in both; and
- introduction of a walking bus so that children travel to school safely and absenteeism is discouraged.

Two Aboriginal *Best Start* projects are underway, testing how this new thinking can contribute to improved health and education outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

CASE STUDY

Innovations in aged care

As people get older they need more assistance from medical and health services. Over the past five years, significant improvements have been made to services for older Victorians, with hospitals and health care services playing a stronger role in ensuring that older people are able to live independently for as long as possible.

In late 2003, the Victorian Government released *Improving Care for Older People – a policy for Health Services*, which sets out a framework for future development in aged care.

As a result of this new framework, Centres Promoting Health Independence have been developed. The Centres provide improved access to specialist assessment, treatment and support services to enable older people to maintain their independence in the community. Fifteen Centres will be developed across Victoria.

TARGETED SUPPORT TO PEOPLE REQUIRING ASSISTANCE

In addition to improving universal services, the Government has targeted increased levels of support to particular groups of disadvantaged Victorians.

The Government understands that low-income families often face great difficulty in paying bills for basic household expenses such as energy and water, council rates and costs associated with schools. As a result, in 2004, the Concessions Program was reformed to ensure concessions provide more help with bills and are more fairly distributed. Funding for concessions was increased by over \$400 million over four years and concessions in the key areas of education, water and municipal rates were indexed for the first time.

For decades, the Education Maintenance Allowance has helped families meet the incidental costs of schooling such as books, uniforms and excursions. Over time, the real value of the Allowance was severely eroded by cost increases. In 2004, the Government increased its investment by \$74 million over four years and, for the first time, provided \$4 million to index the payments annually in line with living costs. This means families receiving the Allowance are paid \$200 for primary students (increased from \$127) and \$400 for secondary students (increased from \$254), nearly a 60% increase.

At the same time, the Government introduced a new way of charging for water usage. This has reformed water prices with lower charges for basic household use and increased charges for higher use. This generally benefits low-income families who tend to use less water. The Government also increased the overall water concession and targeted assistance is being provided to large families to help them adopt water saving approaches.

As a result, low-income families with children benefited from increased funding for dental services and the improved education allowance; pensioners received more help with council rates and indexed payments for water costs; and tertiary students and other low-income groups were given public transport concessions.

With housing costs continuing to be a source of stress for many disadvantaged households, the Government has improved access to affordable housing by providing 8,540 social housing units through direct investment and joint community ventures. The Victorian Homelessness Service System has also been expanded.

The Government has directed additional investment towards reducing the high levels of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Victorians, including the development of a new family violence strategy, the introduction of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and exploring new ways of working in partnership with Indigenous communities.

People with a disability are among the most disadvantaged groups in Victoria and the Government is rebuilding disability support services with a 60% funding boost since 1999-2000. This year, new and more flexible approaches to disability services will allow 7,800 people with a disability to receive care packages tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Waiting lists for day services and Community Residential Units have been reduced and access to respite care has been increased.

The importance of access to justice and a comprehensive approach to crime prevention that emphasises early intervention have been recognised through a range of initiatives, including increasing the age limit of the Children's Court from 17 years to 18 years so that young people are not caught up in the adult criminal justice system.

Considerable effort and investment also continues to be directed into reducing the extent and impact of problem gambling on disadvantaged groups.

The principles which have led to Victoria becoming a vibrant and culturally diverse community have been reinforced through the introduction of the Multicultural Victoria Act. The Government has ensured that such fundamentals as valuing cultural diversity and encouraging harmony and tolerance in our community are now enshrined by legislation.

Additionally, through the provision of grants to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities by the Victorian Multicultural Commission, smaller and newly emerging communities, women's support groups and regional communities have been strengthened and more effectively linked to other communities, business and Government.

CASE STUDY

Fairer For All – Expanding and Reforming Concessions

In 2004 the State Government undertook a major reform of its concession programs to ensure that they were better targeted and created greater equity and fairness. The focus of the Fairer For All package was low-income families, health care cardholders and students. In the four years, starting 2004-05, \$403 million is provided to:

- Increase the municipal rates concession to pensioners;
- Annually index the Education Maintenance Allowance, rates and water concessions to ensure the real value of benefits is maintained;
- Extend eligibility for concessions on public transport to all health care cardholders;
- Reduce the tertiary student public transport concession card annual fee from \$87 to \$8, bringing it into line with the fee for primary and secondary students;
- Increase the Education Maintenance Allowance from \$127 to \$200 for primary students and from \$254 to \$400 for secondary students;
- Reduce dental waiting lists and reduce the need for emergency treatment;
- Provide free dental services to preschool-aged children of low-income earners and more frequent dental services to school-aged children of low-income earners; and
- Expand the current conveyance duty exemption for concession cardholders.

CASE STUDY**Aboriginal Justice Agreement**

Compared with other Victorians, Indigenous people experience much higher rates of unemployment, lower rates of educational attainment, higher rates of illness and a much higher likelihood of imprisonment.

The Government developed the Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) to provide a dynamic way for justice agencies and the Aboriginal community to work together to solve the complex issues that lead to the over-representation of Indigenous Victorians in the prison population.

Koori Courts, which include Aboriginal Elders and respected community members, ensure that justice is administered in a way that recognises cultural issues, while being concerned with delivering real justice and preventing crime. Koori Courts have been successfully established in Shepparton, Broadmeadows and Warrnambool, with further plans for courts in Gippsland and Mildura and a Koori Children's Court.

The AJA recognises that problems within Indigenous communities are best identified by the community; that the primary decision makers are indigenous people; and that the main vehicles for change are increasing community control and improving community services.

The Koori Court has reduced re-offending rates by as much as 80%, while the Night Patrol Program, which involves community members removing Koori people from at-risk situations, has reduced the rates of contact between Indigenous young people and the police.

CASE STUDY**Family Support Innovation Projects**

Throughout the 1990s demand for child protection services grew each year, with much of the increased demand due to multiple or repeat reports involving the same families. In 2002, the Victorian Government recognised that a new approach was needed to protect vulnerable children and established eight place-based pilot projects, including two Indigenous projects.

Projects are run by community service organisations in areas with very high rates of child protection notifications. The projects aim to reach out to children at-risk at an earlier stage, attempting to break the cycle of family breakdown, child abuse and neglect.

An independent evaluation of this initiative found that child protection notifications fell by an average 4% and actual substantiated cases of child abuse fell by an average 10%. The Government has now funded an additional 19 projects.

Over the last five years, while the number of child protection notifications in Australia has more than doubled, Victoria has experienced only a 0.5% increase. This reflects Victoria's strong focus on improving support services available to vulnerable children and their families.

TARGETED SUPPORT TO PLACES EXPERIENCING DISADVANTAGE

The Victorian Government is committed to building communities that are safe, friendly and confident. The Government is working closely with communities to stimulate economic growth, create new employment and investment opportunities, rebuild rundown physical infrastructure, tackle local causes of inequality and reduce concentrations of disadvantage.

The Government has also directed substantial new investment into exploring new ways of working with particular communities to address disadvantage.

The highly successful Neighbourhood Renewal program is revitalising 15 communities across Victoria by using public housing works to leverage additional investment to stimulate local economic growth, create new jobs and improve local services.

New initiatives are helping small regional communities create investment and employment opportunities, develop vital community infrastructure and better plan for change and growth. For example, the Transport Connections Program has delivered innovative transport solutions in rural and regional communities, including the coordination of community bus services to reduce duplication and the alteration of public bus routes to better meet passenger requirements.

CASE STUDY**Neighbourhood Renewal**

Despite Victoria's growing prosperity over the last decade, poverty and disadvantage continues to concentrate in particular neighbourhoods. These communities experience high rates of unemployment, poor educational outcomes, higher levels of crime and widespread health problems.

The Neighbourhood Renewal program is reversing these trends and gives residents a real say in shaping the future of their neighbourhoods. In each Neighbourhood Renewal project, residents work with leaders in local and state government, business managers, service providers and community groups to develop community action plans. Fifteen communities – ranging from inner urban, high rise estates to regional centres – have benefited from housing upgrades, new jobs, safer streets and better access to essential services.

More than \$100 million has been invested in the program to date. This investment has made a big difference to people's lives – more than 2,500 properties have been upgraded, 130 new properties built and over 1000 jobs created with job training opportunities linked to the works program. Previously unemployed residents have been trained with new skills and 60% of participants in the program are going onto further employment or training. Residents now feel greater pride in their community and crimes against people have fallen in 90% of Neighbourhood Renewal locations.

The changes being driven by the Neighbourhood Renewal program are regenerating once neglected communities, creating vibrant places that promote opportunity and a better quality of life for all residents.

CASE STUDY**Revitalising the Latrobe Valley**

Throughout the 1990s, the Latrobe Valley experienced high levels of unemployment and associated social problems. In 2000, the Victorian Government established a Ministerial Taskforce to create the conditions that would attract investment and new residents to the area, with economic growth and employment to follow. In 2001, following advice from the Taskforce, the Government committed \$105 million for projects in the Latrobe Valley across eight themes:

- Marketing and investment attraction
- Industrial development
- Civic infrastructure and transport
- Building a dynamic small business sector
- Health and community wellbeing
- Skills, education and information and communications technology
- Tourism opportunities
- Research and development

As a result of Government action and investment, new industries relating to aviation, logistics and innovative products were promoted; research and development were boosted in areas such as cleaner energy and dairying; extra resources were devoted to secondary education and apprenticeships; several cities and towns were revitalised; rundown infrastructure was replaced or upgraded; new facilities were planned; and innovative approaches were introduced for youth and family services, public housing, health services and the justice system.

DISADVANTAGE IN VICTORIA

WHILE STRONG PROGRESS has been made in reducing disadvantage, some people, groups and places in Victoria continue to experience significant barriers to fully participating in Victoria’s economy and society. Ongoing disadvantage is linked to several factors, including:

- inadequate levels of income due to unemployment, high housing costs or low levels of government benefits;
- family poverty and its impact on future life chances;
- low levels of skills, such as poor English language skills among recent arrivals or skills made redundant through economic restructuring;
- physical, intellectual and psychiatric disability;
- chronic illness or severe injury;
- children growing up in an environment of family violence, drug or alcohol abuse;
- the results of discrimination based on such factors as gender, age, disability, sexual preference or ethnicity; and
- geographic isolation, such as in some of Melbourne’s outer suburbs and rural and remote areas, which are poorly served by public transport.

Disadvantage may be temporary or long-term, even persisting from generation to generation.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE NATURE OF DISADVANTAGE IN VICTORIA

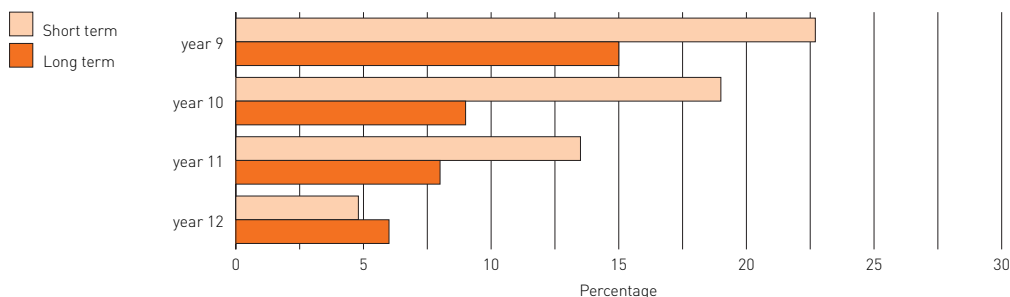
Several key factors influence the nature, extent and distribution of disadvantage in Victoria.

Access to education

Research indicates that completion of Year 12 or its equivalent is a good indicator of better health and higher income later in life. Completion of Year 12 or its equivalent opens doors to a wider range of opportunities when moving from school to work or further education. As shown in Figure 1, young people are more likely to be unemployed in both the short and long term, the earlier they leave school.

Some young Victorians continue to have limited school and training opportunities, which can affect their chances in later life. For example, young people from low socio-economic backgrounds complete Year 12 or equivalent at much lower rates than young people from higher socio-economic backgrounds with young men completing Year 12 or equivalent at a substantially lower rate than young women. Participation in education and training by young Indigenous Victorians continues to be at much lower rates than other young people in Victoria and is not showing significant improvement.

FIGURE 1
 PROPORTION OF VICTORIAN SCHOOL LEAVERS UNEMPLOYED, ACCORDING TO LEVEL ACHIEVED
 Source: Applied Economics (2002). Young Persons’ Education, Training and Employment Outcomes with Special Reference to Early School Leavers



Access to health and community services

Disadvantage affects people’s health throughout life and the effects are cumulative. Poor health can contribute to perpetuating cycles of inequality, poverty and crime, and place major pressure on health and community services.

Research has identified that:

- people with low incomes are more likely to smoke, be less physically active and be more overweight or obese (as shown in Figure 2);
- life expectancy of Indigenous Victorians is around 20 years lower than the general population and admissions for renal failure among Indigenous Victorians increased by 100% from 1999 to 2001;
- mental health issues are a major cause of illness in Victoria and highly prevalent among young people; and
- addictive behaviour relating to drugs, alcohol and problem gambling tend to be more prevalent among disadvantaged groups and communities.

A good start in life

Physical and mental development between the ages 0 to 8 is crucial to the life chances of individual Victorians. Providing opportunities for the best intellectual and emotional development in the early years is fundamental to ensuring young Victorians continue to engage successfully in education as they get older.

Some Victorian families still face difficulties in providing children with a good start in life:

- some low-income families struggle to access affordable child care, with a family on an annual income of \$27,000 with one child in childcare spending an average of 10% of their weekly disposable income on child care;
- 25% of Indigenous children are missing out on kindergarten education in the year before school;
- in 2001, 64% of Indigenous students achieved the Year 3 reading benchmark compared with 89% of all Victorian students;
- 80% of Indigenous students achieved Year 5 numeracy benchmarks in 2001 compared with 95% of all students; and
- Indigenous children are 5.7 times more likely to be notified for child protection.

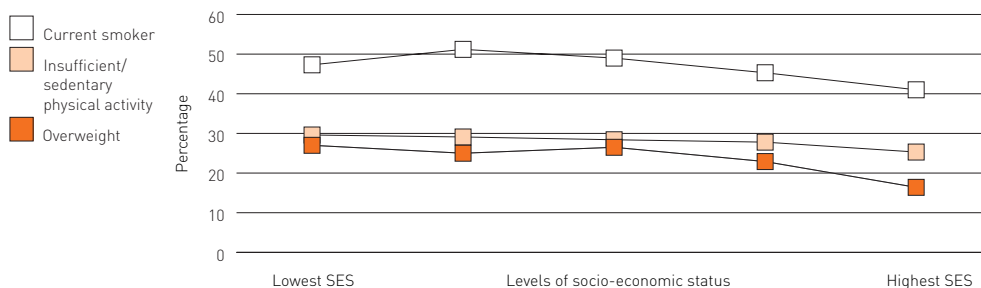


FIGURE 2
BEHAVIOURAL RISKS
AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC
STATUS
Source: Victorian
Population Health
Survey (2003),
Department of
Human Services

Access to affordable housing

Access to affordable housing has a positive impact in addressing related areas of disadvantage, such as family breakdown and poor educational achievement. At the extreme, a lack of affordable housing leads to an increase in homelessness and greater demand for crisis accommodation from the most disadvantaged groups.

High rental housing costs and the inability to purchase a home means that savings and equity are denied to a growing number of Victorians. Recent research estimates that around 200,000 low-income households in Victoria have housing costs greater than 30% of household income.

Access to justice

Disadvantaged groups face significant barriers in accessing justice. For disadvantaged Victorians, access to the civil justice system is often simply not affordable. Within the justice system, many people also need legal advice and assistance to resolve issues without going to court. Others require better access to information to resolve disputes without calling in professional assistance.

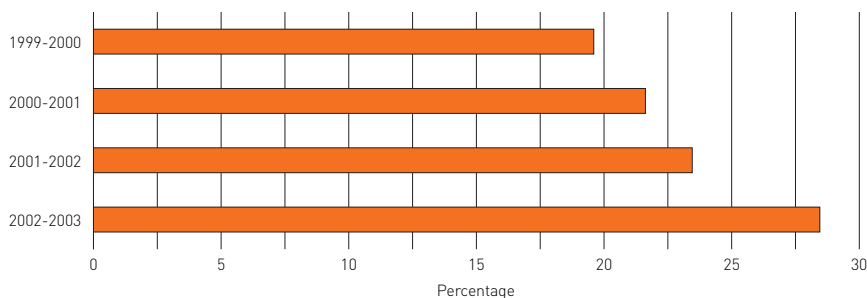
Safe streets and homes

Disadvantaged groups are more affected by crime and violence. Research shows that a small number of offenders commit a disproportionate number of crimes and this pattern also applies to victims of crime:

- 15 to 29 year old males represent 11% of Victoria's population, but comprise 47% of offenders processed by police; and
- 32% of female sexual assault victims are repeatedly victimised, with both offenders and victims more likely to be from lower socio-economic circumstances and areas.

Family violence is a significant problem in Victoria, with serious economic and social consequences for individuals, families and communities. Family violence is a leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 45 years. Between 1999 and 2003, family violence incident reports increased by 45% (as shown in Figure 3) and substantiations of child abuse are still high.

FIGURE 3
FAMILY VIOLENCE
REPORTS
Source: Victorian Police
Crime Statistics



Access to employment

The main source of wellbeing for individuals and households in Victoria is income earned through employment. Examples of disadvantage experienced by certain groups as the result of limited access to work include:

- around 150,000 Victorian children, or 17% of those aged under 15, live in families where no one has a job;
- labour force participation is lowest amongst sole parents;
- rates of underemployment for women are nearly twice those of men;
- in 2001, the unemployment rate for 15 to 19 year-old Indigenous young people was 32%; and
- members of communities from culturally diverse backgrounds on average have lower labour force participation rates than other Victorians.

DISADVANTAGE AMONG PARTICULAR GROUPS OF VICTORIANS

Some groups within the Victorian population experience disadvantage to a greater extent than the overall community. The reasons for this concentration of disadvantage among certain groups include:

- language barriers faced by newly arrived migrants, often compounded with severe trauma in the case of many humanitarian entrants;
- the extra costs of caring for children, difficulties in finding affordable housing, and problems experienced in finding employment faced by many sole parents;
- the lack of employable skills possessed by groups such as homeless youth or redundant older workers;
- limited job opportunities available to people with disabilities; and
- discrimination faced by several groups, including former prisoners and sufferers of mental illness.

Indigenous communities

Indigenous Victorians continue to experience disadvantage across a range of areas.

- In 2002, Indigenous perinatal mortality was more than double the rate of non-Indigenous perinatal mortality.
- The rate of hospital admission of Aboriginal children for upper respiratory tract infections is nearly double that for non-Aboriginal children.
- 53% of Indigenous young people aged 20 to 24 are regarded as 'at risk'.
- Babies born to Aboriginal mothers weigh less on average than babies born to non-Aboriginal mothers and infants with lower birth weights are more likely to die or to have problems early in life.
- The rate of suicide for Indigenous people as a proportion of all deaths was 4.7% in 2002, compared to 1.5% for non-Indigenous people.
- Rates of vaccination of Indigenous children are less than half those of non-Indigenous children.
- Substantiated notifications of child abuse or neglect are almost 8 times more likely for Aboriginal children than for non-Aboriginal children.

DISADVANTAGE IN PARTICULAR PLACES IN VICTORIA

Many communities experience a concentration of several of the factors associated with disadvantage. For example, Figure 4 shows the significant difference between some Victorian Local Government Areas (LGAs) in terms of unemployment rates.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has mapped the distribution of disadvantage at the Local Government level, based on the 2001 Census. Proportions of disadvantaged households are calculated using income, employment status, education level, occupation, housing type and measures of wealth such as home ownership, numbers of cars and numbers of bedrooms. The results showing the socio-economic distribution of households in Victoria are shown on Figure 5. The results showing the socio-economic distribution of households in Melbourne are shown on Figure 6.

FIGURE 4
LARGE DIFFERENCES IN UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
Source: Small Area Labour Markets Australia, Dept of Employment and Workplace Relations, Sept Quarter 2004

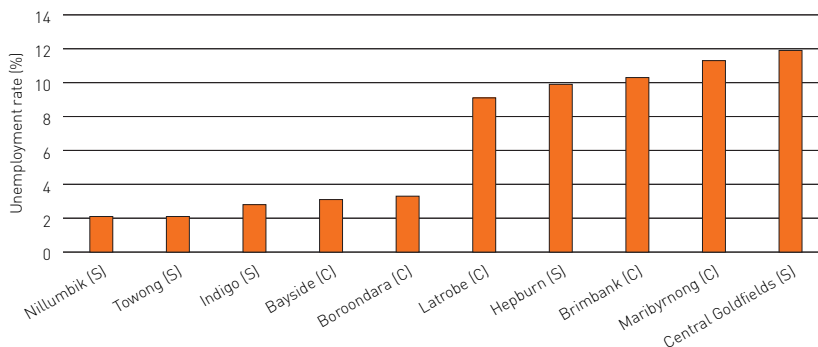


FIGURE 5
2001 CENSUS OF
POPULATION AND
HOUSING

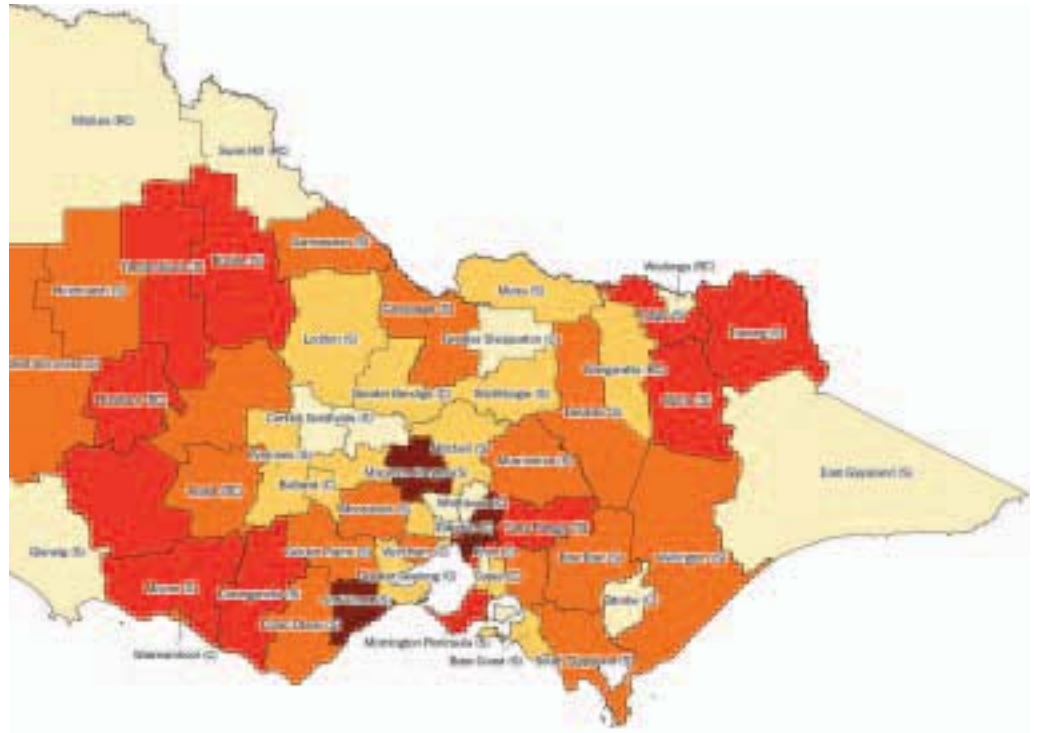


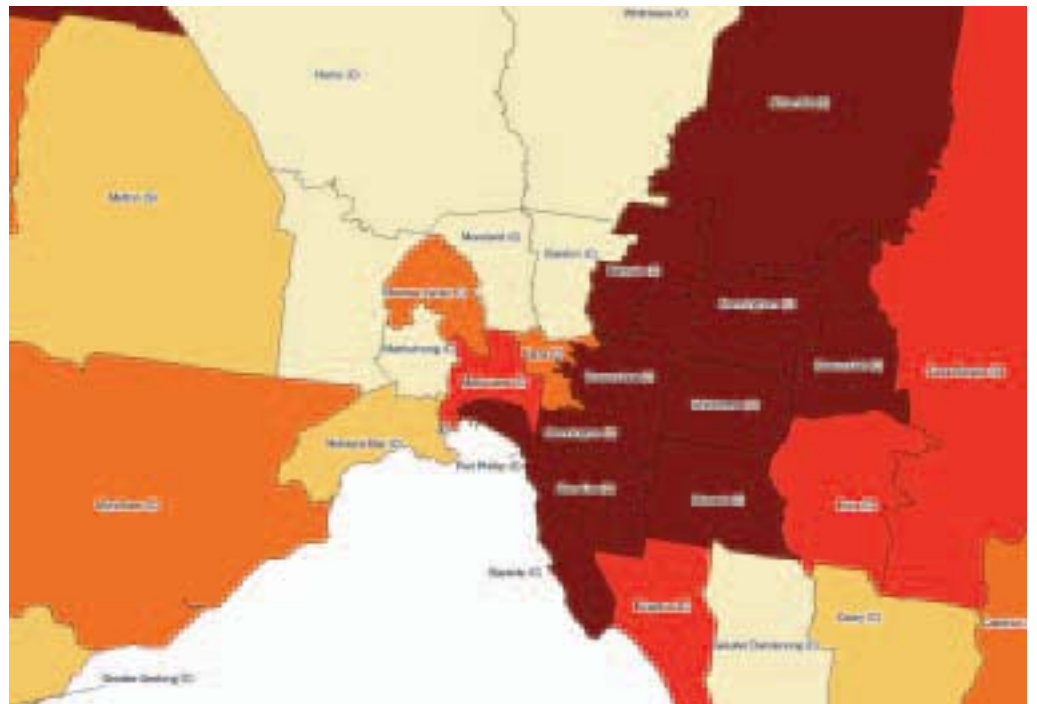
FIGURE 6
2001 CENSUS OF
POPULATION AND
HOUSING



Based on Legal Local Government Area Boundaries 2001 Edition
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004

Socio Economic Indexes for Areas - Index of Disadvantage - Melbourne LGAs

1,052 and over	(14)
1,022 - 1,051	(14)
1,001 - 1,021	(19)
985 - 1,000	(15)
985 or less	(17)

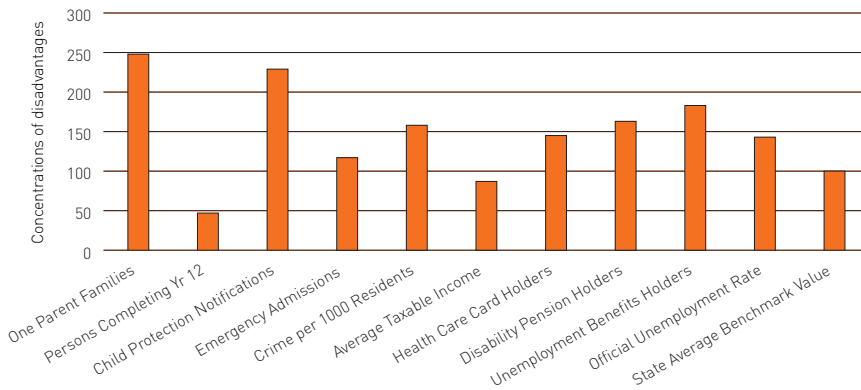


The uneven distribution of disadvantage can also be seen by comparing State averages for certain indicators of disadvantage with areas where the Victorian Government is undertaking Neighbourhood Renewal projects, as summarised in Figure 7.

As shown by the Census results and the Neighbourhood Renewal survey, a number of communities across Victoria experience high concentrations of disadvantage. In some areas, disadvantage is concentrated even further in particular suburbs, neighbourhoods or small country towns. Strategies to successfully tackle disadvantage in these places will require concerted effort from government, business and the communities themselves.

FIGURE 7
INDICATORS OF
DISADVANTAGE IN
NEIGHBOURHOOD
RENEWAL AREAS
COMPARED TO STATE
AVERAGES

Source: Klein (2003)
Neighbourhood Renewal:
Growing Victoria Together,
VCOSS Congress



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

WHY VICTORIA SHOULD REDUCE DISADVANTAGE

There are important reasons for the Victorian Government to target disadvantage.

Fairness is a fundamental Victorian value

Victorians value fairness as a fundamental principle and recognise that it is not fair for some people and places to miss out on the opportunities and benefits being generated by a strong Victorian economy.

People living in hardship and deprivation is unacceptable within a civil society

A prosperous democracy like Victoria has the resources to work towards eliminating hardship and deprivation arising from economic and social disadvantage and to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to fully participate in society.

Victoria needs to be a united society

A cohesive and united society is best placed to meet the challenges arising from a rapidly changing world. Continuing disadvantage can erode cohesion and create deep divisions within society, generating negative social and economic consequences.

Victorians must have the chance to develop valuable skills

Victoria's continuing strong economic performance relies upon improving productivity, becoming more innovative and increasing the proportion of people participating in the workforce. A skilled and educated population is essential to achieving these goals. Giving Victorians the chance to develop skills will also create new employment and investment opportunities, as well as improving the capacity of Victorians to fully participate in community life.

Victoria needs strong and thriving communities

Addressing disadvantage will lead to more people becoming actively engaged in and contributing to Victoria's economy and society. Higher levels of engagement create strong and thriving communities that are able to create new opportunities and attract people and investment. These communities also provide attractive, safe and friendly places to live and work.

Reducing disadvantage will free up community resources

High costs are incurred in treating the symptoms of disadvantage, such as poor health, family breakdown and crime. Reducing disadvantage will free up resources that can be spent in other areas, such as further improvements in services.

LESSONS LEARNT

Over the past five years, the Victorian Government has learnt important lessons in re-building Victoria.

Lesson 1

Restoring and improving access to high quality, universally provided services in health, education and community safety is the basis of a strong and prosperous society.

Disadvantaged groups and communities all benefit from access to universally provided services. The Government will continue to invest in these services to ensure that all Victorians have access to high quality education, health and community services and public transport.

Lesson 2

There is a need for universally provided services to respond to the specific circumstances of groups or places that experience disadvantage.

Specific additional measures often need to be taken to ensure that disadvantaged people and places have access to – and benefit from – universal services. For example, the Government recently introduced a new resource allocation model for schools: the Student Resource Package. This package provides additional and better targeted funding to government schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students to meet the additional costs of improving outcomes for lower performing students.

Lesson 3

Targeted support is needed to ensure equality of opportunity for some groups and places.

Investment and support must be focused on reducing barriers and expanding access to high quality services for disadvantaged groups. For example, the Government's recent increase in the Education Maintenance Allowance will provide parents on low incomes with extra money to spend on school related costs.

Lesson 4

Better and more lasting outcomes are achieved when people in local communities have more power to make decisions determining their own futures.

Lasting outcomes are more likely to occur when communities develop local solutions to local problems. Greater community engagement requires governments to work in close partnership with communities, listening to their concerns, improving the capacity of individuals and communities, building leadership and providing support to develop locally based initiatives.

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

As a result of the lessons learnt over the last five years, the Victorian Government has developed a new framework to reduce disadvantage. The Government recognises that tackling disadvantage requires a long-term approach and that ongoing action is needed over the next five years.

The Government will take action in five ways to tackle disadvantage in Victoria as part of a new framework for improving opportunities for disadvantaged people, groups and places in Victoria.

The framework acknowledges that many problems of disadvantage are linked and reinforce each other, and that an effective response to disadvantage must have the capacity to deliver combinations of services and responses.

This new approach recognises that the needs of some groups will be met by providing better access to mainstream services, while other groups with more complex needs will require more targeted, innovative responses. The basis for a successful approach lies in delivering these targeted initiatives within the structure of a strong and efficient system of universal services.

1 Reducing barriers to opportunity

People experiencing disadvantage face a range of barriers which prevent them gaining opportunities for a better life. These barriers may relate to such problems as a lack of skills to get into the job market, poor housing or health, disability, language or cultural differences, or the effects of family violence.

Barriers may also relate to the built environment, including physical infrastructure, roads, urban development and even access to buildings for those with disabilities. Poor urban planning and inadequate transport can lead to difficulties in getting to work, education and access to services. Action is needed to improve access and provide greater flexibility and mobility.

The Government will act to address these barriers, working in partnership with other levels of Government, business and the community sector. Action will also be taken to strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities in order to increase their choices and control over life's opportunities.

2 Ensuring that universal services provide equal opportunity for all

The Government has made significant progress in restoring essential public services following the rundown of these services during the 1990s and will continue to rebuild the basic services that Victorians use on a daily basis.

The Government will take action to ensure these services meet the needs of disadvantaged groups and increase the capacity of universal services to respond to particular issues of disadvantage.

3 Strengthening assistance to disadvantaged groups

While continuing to improve universal services, the Government will target investment in new ways to tackle the most entrenched disadvantage.

Around the world, governments are developing new approaches to work more effectively with disadvantaged people. Features of these new approaches include:

- greater flexibility, time and resources for service providers to meet the needs of disadvantaged people;
- a client-centred approach that includes individually tailored help and support, and the capacity to address different sets of multiple needs;
- closer working relationships between government agencies and voluntary and community groups to ensure that services are accessible at times and locations appropriate for clients;
- user involvement in the design and delivery of services; and
- giving disadvantaged groups more choice and capacity to make decisions about matters affecting their lives.

The Government will give priority to finding ways to roll out these and similar new approaches more widely through mainstream services.

Over the past five years, the Government has directed significant resources into encouraging generic services to better coordinate their efforts at the local level. The development of these services will continue, focusing on promoting greater flexibility and responsiveness to individual circumstances expanding prevention, early intervention and self-help approaches; and enabling departments to work together on multiple and complex problems.

Examples of these approaches in Victoria include:

- Flexible models of support for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, which allow assistance to be tailored to individual needs and preferences. This includes assistance to access crisis accommodation; support for family reconciliation and access to skills training for young people and assistance for women and their children experiencing family violence.
- Use of the community health system as a platform for prevention and early intervention initiatives, targeted to low-income communities and those groups and places where health inequalities and risks are increasing.

4 Providing targeted support to the highest risk areas

Some local areas experience the effects of disadvantage to a greater degree than others and need additional effort and resources to access opportunities. The Government has developed successful approaches to addressing localised disadvantage, including the Neighbourhood Renewal initiative and projects in disadvantaged regional areas.

These experiences will form the foundation for developing further programs to address disadvantage where it is concentrated in particular locations.

The Government will support a co-ordinated approach in these areas, involving all levels of government, non-government agencies and the local community.

5 Involving communities in decisions affecting their lives and making it easier to work with Government

Government traditionally works through separate departments providing discrete types of services. The Victorian Government recognises that these structures frequently cause difficulties for community organisations delivering support services for groups or places facing complex problems. It also causes difficulties for individuals trying to find solutions to local issues.

Government guidelines and business rules need to be more flexible and focused on outcomes. Several community organisations have worked closely with government agencies to address these difficulties, developing innovative services that demonstrate the effectiveness of focusing on client outcomes.

As well as the provision of more responsive and accessible government services, groups and communities need to be consulted and actively involved in developing approaches to local issues. In this environment new types of relationships are needed with Government working in partnership with the business and community sectors to improve local outcomes.

The Government will continue to develop new ways of working directly with communities, focusing on streamlining the delivery of services across different levels and functions of government, encouraging the greater involvement of business, and giving communities a greater say in determining their futures.

Business has an important part to play in collaborations with government and community. Business can be a partner with community groups through volunteering, donations, mentoring and advice. Business-community partnerships can create innovative approaches to addressing community concerns by drawing on the expertise of both the business and community sector.

Local communities may form community owned businesses to provide services that are not delivered by the private sector. Not-for-profit sector organisations may establish business ventures that either earn income for their mission or help their clients in innovative ways, especially by creating more accessible employment.

The Government will work with business and community organisations to encourage the development of corporate social responsibility and community owned businesses.

In delivering initiatives under this framework, priority will be given to initiatives that:

- enable the State Government to have the maximum impact on the causes and consequences of disadvantage;
- address the greatest areas of need;
- involve new ways of tackling problems through mainstream programs, including more flexible ways of delivering services; and
- emphasise preventive approaches.

CASE STUDY

Business Community Partnerships – Community Development Finance Models

One of the major barriers facing low-income households is their inability to access affordable financial products such as low interest loans, difficulties in developing savings patterns, and their vulnerability to predatory finance practices. Businesses have developed appropriate financial services for low income groups and ways to improve skills regarding management of financial matters.

- Several organisations have developed no-interest loan schemes which provide small loans at no interest to people on low incomes. The loans are usually for purposes such as purchase of essential household items.
- Some financial institutions have implemented savings programs to encourage low-income households to develop savings habits. These programs are most successful when provided in a partnership between a financial institution and a community not-for-profit organisation. An example is the ANZ Saver Plus program offered by the ANZ and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Offered to low-income parents of children in participating Government schools for educational purposes, the program provides assistance from a Relationship Manager and matches savings upon the achievement of a specified goal.
- A critical ingredient of the Saver Plus program is the development of financial management skills. The ANZ has developed MoneyMinded, a comprehensive adult learning program aimed at systematically teaching these skills. MoneyMinded is designed for use in partnerships with community organisations and currently the Brotherhood of St Laurence is providing the program throughout its work in Victorian communities, especially those involving Neighbourhood Renewal projects.

CASE STUDY**The Slingshot Community Enterprise and Employment Centre**

The Slingshot Community Enterprise and Employment Centre (SCEEC) commenced as a three year pilot project funded by Melbourne Citymission, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, the Myer Foundation, the Big Brother Movement and Growth Solutions Group. The project also received start up funding from the Department for Victorian Communities.

Slingshot was designed to assist young people aged 18 to 24 years with a desire to run their own businesses, but who face barriers to education, skills development and employment.

The outcomes of this pilot project were:

- 89 young people and more than 50 mentors participated in the Slingshot program (41% of these young people were early school leavers);
 - a dramatic improvement in the employment status of the participants, with unemployment falling from 62% on commencement to 8% six months after completion of the project; and
 - 40% of the participants were in self-employment activities six months after completion of the project.
- The success of the Slingshot pilot project led to the development of an enhanced model that provides a Technology Centre, a Self Employment Micro Incubator, an Enterprise Culture and Skills Development service and a Social Enterprise service.
 - The SCEEC further integrates service delivery by joining up with other government services, such as the Community Hub in Brunswick (funded by the Department of Human Services), the Youth Transitions Model in Melbourne's Central Business District (funded by the Office of Housing) and Frontyard Youth Services (jointly funded by the Department of Human Services, the Office for Youth, the City of Melbourne and the Office of Housing).
 - The SCEEC partnership brings together all sections of the community: young people, businesses, the three levels of government, the philanthropic trusts and community organisations all contribute to the SCEEC's aim of giving disadvantaged young people the resources and support to turn self-employment initiatives into sustainable businesses.

APPENDIX: SOCIAL INVESTMENT IN VICTORIA

IN 2001 THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT released its 10-year vision for the State, *Growing Victoria Together*. The Government identified 11 broad policy areas where it would focus efforts to create a fair and prosperous Victoria by balancing economic, social and environmental actions.

The Government's social investment has focused on five priority areas. Key actions and results in each of these areas are set out below.

HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Key actions taken

- Upgrading, replacing and building new schools and TAFE facilities through investment of an additional \$1.28 billion, including constructing 51 new and replacement schools and investing \$200 million in new and upgraded TAFE infrastructure.
- Recruiting more than 5,000 full time teaching and other staff in Victoria's schools, including \$34.6 million being allocated for early years numeracy co-ordinators and \$54.9 million provided for student welfare co-ordinators in secondary schools.
- Reducing average Prep to Year 2 class sizes from 24.3 in 1999 to 20.9 in 2004, by providing an additional \$220.7 million for Prep, Year 1 and Year 2 teachers.
- Improving opportunities for life long learning through initiatives such as \$65.3 million for a completion bonus scheme for young apprentices and trainees.
- Developing the new Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) to provide alternative educational options.

Progress achieved

- Literacy levels have improved in Victorian schools – between 1999 and 2003 the level of reading accuracy of students in years Prep – 2 improved (Prep: from 66.2% achieving the required reading level in 1999 to 77.9% in 2003, Year 1: from 76.4% to 85.7%, Year 2: from 90.3% to 94.5%).
- On the latest available data, 89% of Victorian students met national reading and numeracy benchmarks for Years 3 and 5.
- More young Victorians now successfully complete year 12 or its equivalent. The proportion of Year 7 students staying on at school to Year 12 increased to 86% in 2004, and the percentage of 20 to 24 year olds in Victoria who had completed year 12 or its equivalent rose to 86% in 2003, above the national average of 82%.
- Total vocational educational and training activity has increased by 22% since 1999 and the proportion of Victorians participating in post compulsory education and training has increased.

HIGH QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Key actions taken

- Shelving proposals to hand over public hospitals to private interests.
- Introducing new strategies that combine resources across government departments, focus on early intervention and prevention and incorporate community partnerships.
- Modernising health and aged care facilities across Victoria with new investment of \$2 billion, including the opening of Melbourne's first new suburban public hospital in over two decades at Casey and major redevelopments of the Austin Hospital, Mercy Medical Centre and the Royal Women's Hospital.
- Employing an extra 5,766 nurses and introducing new systems to increase the capacity of public hospitals.
- Introducing the Hospital Demand Management Strategy to increase the number of patients hospitals are able to treat while reducing unnecessary hospital admissions through prevention and rehabilitation programs.
- Increasing funding to ambulance services by 86%, providing 453 more paramedics, 50 extra ambulances and 15 new and 39 upgraded ambulance stations.
- Rebuilding 34 aged care facilities across Victoria.
- Increasing funding for disability services by nearly 60% to \$910 million per year.
- Launching the Home and Community Care Culturally Equitable Gateways Strategy to improve access to mainstream Home and Community Care services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Funding aged care projects to increase independence, reduce falls and help to maintain people living independently at home.
- Funding three health services through the Rural Maternity Initiative to improve the continuity of midwifery care and help to attract and retain midwives in rural areas.
- Implementing the Dental Workforce Strategy to improve dental workforce recruitment and career structures and better manage demand for dental services, including reviewing waiting list management strategies to ensure people with the greatest need receive priority for dental treatment.
- Improving mental health services by increasing access to acute inpatient beds, rolling out services to enable the earlier discharge of long stay patients and shifting the orientation of the mental system towards early intervention and relapse prevention.
- Boosting health and development services for young children by investing an extra \$37 million into Victorian kindergartens, an additional \$78.5 million since 2002 to protect children at risk, an extra \$7.6 million into Maternal and Child Health services and increasing salaries for kindergarten teachers by 26%.

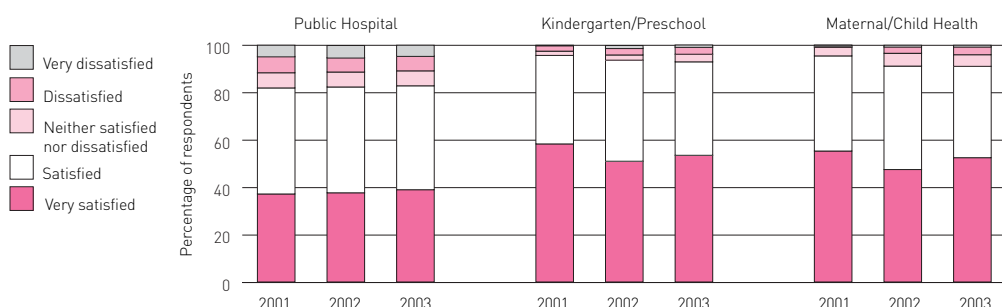
Progress achieved

- Victoria's public hospitals admitted over 182,000 more patients in 2003-04 than in 1999-2000.
- The proportion of patients treated in hospital emergency departments within clinically recommended times is now significantly higher than the national average.
- All Category 1 (urgent) elective surgery patients are treated within 30 days and the average waiting time of elective surgery patients has decreased by over 60% for targeted specialist services. 44,000 long-waiting elective surgery patients have been treated over the past three years.
- An additional 2000 public dental patients have been treated and general public dental care was provided to 174,242 Victorians in 2003-04.
- Through the Public Dental Workforce Project, the number of community dental clinicians increased by 17% from December 2002 to June 2004 and the clinician vacancy rate reduced from 22% in December 2002 to 14% in June 2004.
- The needs of older Victorians are being better met, with more nursing home places being provided and more people able to continue to live at home and receive Home and Community Care.
- There has been a 15% increase in the number of Victorians being provided with mental health services.

- People with a disability now have a wider range of support to participate in the community and live more independently. The number of individual support packages provided has more than doubled since 1999-2000. In 2004/05, 7,800 individuals will receive packages tailored to their specific support needs and circumstances.
- The provision of respite has also increased substantially, assisting the carers and families of people with a disability. This year, 16,400 episodes of respite will be provided, an increase of more than 2,500 from 1999-2000.
- The redevelopment of Kew Residential Services (previously known as Kew Cottages) for people with an intellectual disability is well under way, with over 140 former residents having left the outmoded institution and moving into new, state-of-the-art community homes across Melbourne and regional Victoria.
- Drug treatment services now see significantly more clients, with a dramatic reduction in waiting times, as a result of the \$77 million Victorian Drug Initiative.
- The proportion of Victorians rating their health as excellent, very good or good increased to 85% in 2003, up from 82% in 2001. Victorians are getting more encouragement to lead healthier lives through programs to promote positive ageing, reduce the chance of contracting diabetes, immunize children, screen for breast cancer and reduce smoking.
- As shown in Figure 8, research indicates high levels of satisfaction among Victorians using public hospitals, community health centres, home nursing services, kindergartens and maternal and child health centres.

FIGURE 8
COMMUNITY SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Source: Victorian Population Health Survey (2003), Department of Human Services



BUILDING SAFE, FRIENDLY AND CONFIDENT COMMUNITIES

Key actions taken

- Increasing the numbers of police by 1,150 and building 60 new police stations across Victoria. A further 135 police stations are on track for building or upgrading.
- Reducing Victoria’s road toll through initiatives such as *arrive alive!*, 11 new booze buses and 800 new alcohol screening devices.
- Providing \$86.4 million to reduce offending and re-offending rates, with the aim of reducing Victoria’s prison population.
- Creating and conducting Community Safety Month, which has successfully mobilised 550 organisations and over 900 community safety related activities.
- Providing well resourced emergency services by recruiting, developing and retaining emergency services volunteers through volunteer recognition initiatives and campaigns.
- Building the capacity of government agencies, businesses and community groups to implement solutions to local crime problems.
- Introducing the Handgun Buyback scheme to rid Victoria of easily concealable guns. Through the scheme, over 18,000 firearms were destroyed and Victoria Police took possession of around 605,000 items of ammunition, parts and accessories.
- Providing support for Victims of Crime through the creation of a Victims Support Agency and a Victims Register to inform victims of crime of the impending release of offenders.

- Significantly boosting funding by more than 25% to Legal Aid from 1999-2000.
- Significantly increasing funding for equal opportunity education and training since 2000-01.
- Improving access to dispute resolution through the Dispute Resolution Centre of Victoria, which has 160 mediators across Victoria (including more than 60 from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds).
- Improving local community facilities and sports, recreation and cultural infrastructure across Victoria and investing an extra \$14 million to enhance the capacity of local communities.
- Providing \$9 million to connect communities to the Internet and ICT infrastructure and assist Victorians to access and use the Internet.
- Providing \$20 million to encourage higher levels of volunteering and build greater support for volunteering among Victorian businesses.

Progress achieved

- The incidence of certain categories of crime has been substantially reduced. Robberies have decreased by 27%. As shown in Figure 9, crimes relating to property have fallen significantly since 2001, including reductions in burglary and theft of and from motor vehicles.
- In response to surveys, the majority of Victorians say they feel safe going about their normal daily activities – at home, at work and on the streets – and the percentage of Victorians concerned about being a victim of crime has decreased.
- As shown in Figure 10, Victoria’s roads are safer, with 2003 recording the lowest road toll (330) since comprehensive records began in 1951.

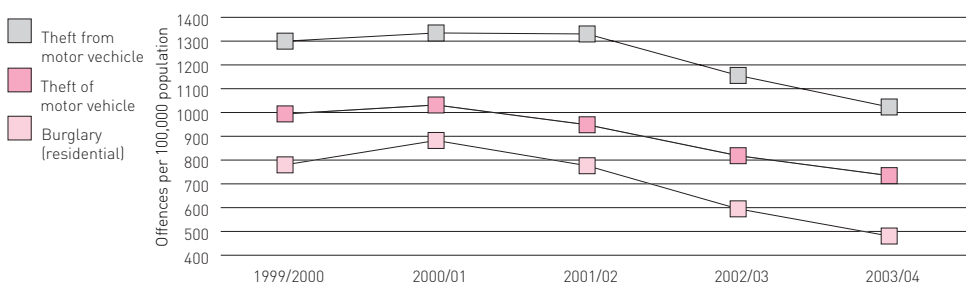
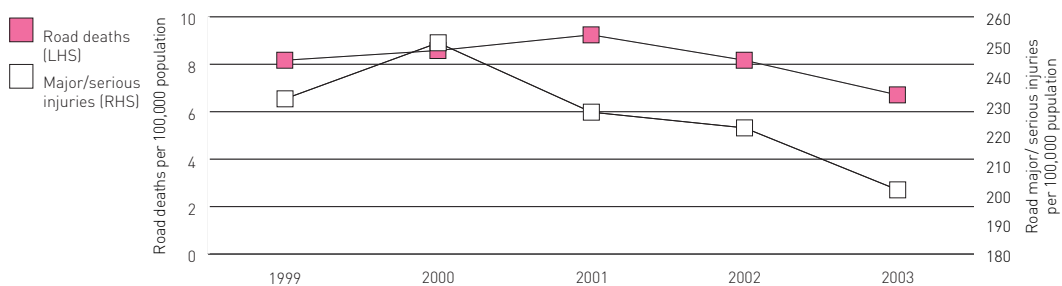


FIGURE 9
INCIDENCE OF CRIME,
VICTORIA 1999-2004
Source: Victoria Police

- In 2003-04, approximately 47,000 calls for assistance have been received by the Victims Support Agency and over 8,000 clients of the Agency have completed a course of therapeutic counselling.
- Since 2001-02, approximately 27,000 new applications for Legal Aid have been approved each year and the proportion of applications processed within 15 days is over 98%.
- Equal opportunity education and training has been provided to around 21,000 people since 2000-01. Public information services provided by the Office of the Public Advocate have increased by 35% and the number of advocacy interventions undertaken by the Office has increased by 21%.
- The number of disputes received for resolution by the Dispute Resolution Centre has increased by 35% since 1999-2000, while more than 90% of clients surveyed are satisfied with the outcome of the alternative dispute resolution process.
- More than a third of all Victorians help out as volunteers.
- Research shows that the majority of Victorians (73%) enjoy the diversity and multiculturalism of their local communities and feel they can get help from friends, families and neighbours when they need it.
- Surveys show that 3 in 4 Victorians are aware of Victorian Government organisations that provide services and assistance to victims of violent crime and 82% are aware there is a Victorian Government organisation that deals with unlawful discrimination.
- Surveys also show that the majority of Victorians (82%) are aware of Victorian Government organisations that protect consumer rights. Approximately 40% of Victorians also indicate that they would specifically contact Consumer Affairs Victoria if they had a consumer problem.

FIGURE 10
ROAD DEATHS AND SERIOUS INJURIES, VICTORIA 1999-2003
 Source: Victoria Police, Australian Bureau of Statistics



MORE QUALITY JOBS AND THRIVING INDUSTRIES ACROSS VICTORIA

Key actions taken

- Creating more jobs for those Victorians most in need through initiatives such as the Community Jobs Program and the Jobs for Young People program.
- Ensuring fairer employment conditions by extending the federal award safety net to all Victorian workers and seeking to eliminate the exploitation of outworkers.
- Attracting more skilled migrants to Victoria through the Skilled Migration Strategy.
- Promoting a better work-life balance through the Action Agenda for Work and Family Balance.

Progress achieved

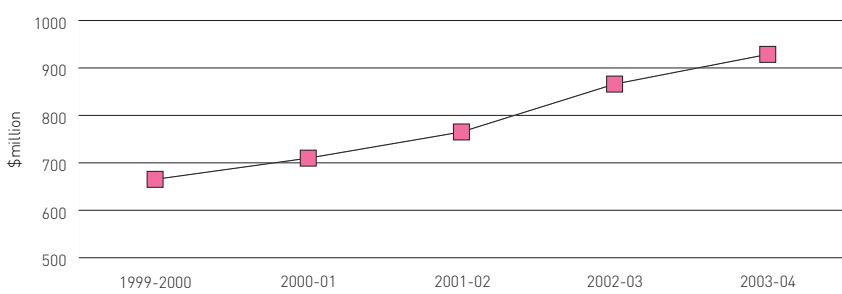
- Between October 1999 and December 2004, 266,000 new jobs have been created across the State. Employment growth has averaged nearly 2% each year and Victoria's unemployment rate was lower than the national average for more than four years from 2000.
- The percentage of Victorians participating in the labour force has increased from 60.9% in 2001 to 64.4% in December 2004.
- Average weekly earnings per worker in Victoria were \$783.80 at November 2004, up 26% from November 1999 and ahead of the national figure.
- More Victorians are learning new skills, with 90% of young Victorians engaged in full time education and training or full time employment, a higher level than the rest of Australia and more than in 1999.
- At June 2004, there had been a 100% increase in the number of apprentices and trainees in Victoria since 1999, close to record levels.

A FAIRER SOCIETY THAT REDUCES DISADVANTAGE AND RESPECTS DIVERSITY

Key actions taken

- Building more secure, affordable and appropriate public housing by providing 8,540 housing units and an extra \$985 million for physical improvements to social housing stock.
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing for low income Victorians by investing \$94.5 million in partnership with community based agencies to deliver 800 new affordable housing units and a further \$70 million to establish new Housing Associations.
- Launching the Neighbourhood Renewal program to create new opportunities in disadvantaged communities and neighbourhoods.
- Developing a new \$8.8 million Youth Homelessness Action Plan.
- Improving responses to problem gambling by providing \$41.3 million for Problem Gambling Services and a Problem Gambling Communication Strategy.
- Introducing a new Justice Statement to improve Victoria's justice system over the next five years, including community consultation on a human rights charter.
- Improving services for Indigenous Victorians, including implementing the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy, increasing housing options for Indigenous Victorians and testing new ways of working in partnership with Victoria's Indigenous community.
- Implementing the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which has established Koori Courts in Warrnambool, Shepparton and Broadmeadows, funded six Koori crime prevention projects and provided Aboriginal welfare officers to support Koori prisoners.
- Improving access to the legal system by increasing funding for legal aid and Community Legal Centres and setting up a Victims Support Agency.
- Reforming the State Government concessions program to ensure concessions are better targeted and more fairly distributed to assist disadvantaged Victorians. (See Figure 11).

FIGURE 11
VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT CONCESSION PROGRAM
 Source: Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance



Progress achieved

- Low-income earners and other disadvantaged Victorians now receive more assistance from concessions for gas and electricity bills, transport fares, education expenses, dental services, council and water rates and conveyancing duty.
- Fifteen communities experiencing major disadvantage have been revitalised through the Neighbourhood Renewal program, resulting in improved housing, new jobs, falling crime rates, new education opportunities and greater community pride.
- Expanded services are assisting higher numbers of homeless Victorians.
- The concentration of the damaging effects of problem gambling within particular disadvantaged groups has been recognised and ongoing effort is being directed into reducing the extent and impact of problem gambling.
- Indigenous Victorians are benefiting from a comprehensive family violence program and testing new ways of working between Indigenous communities, State Government agencies, local business and councils.
- Barriers to social participation for Victorians with disabilities have been reduced and the structures for consultation between the Government and people with disabilities have been improved.
- Progress has been made in recognising the prior ownership of land by Indigenous Victorians through constitutional reform and the extension of Indigenous rights to manage land.
- Interpreting services and initiatives promoting greater cultural awareness have been improved.

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