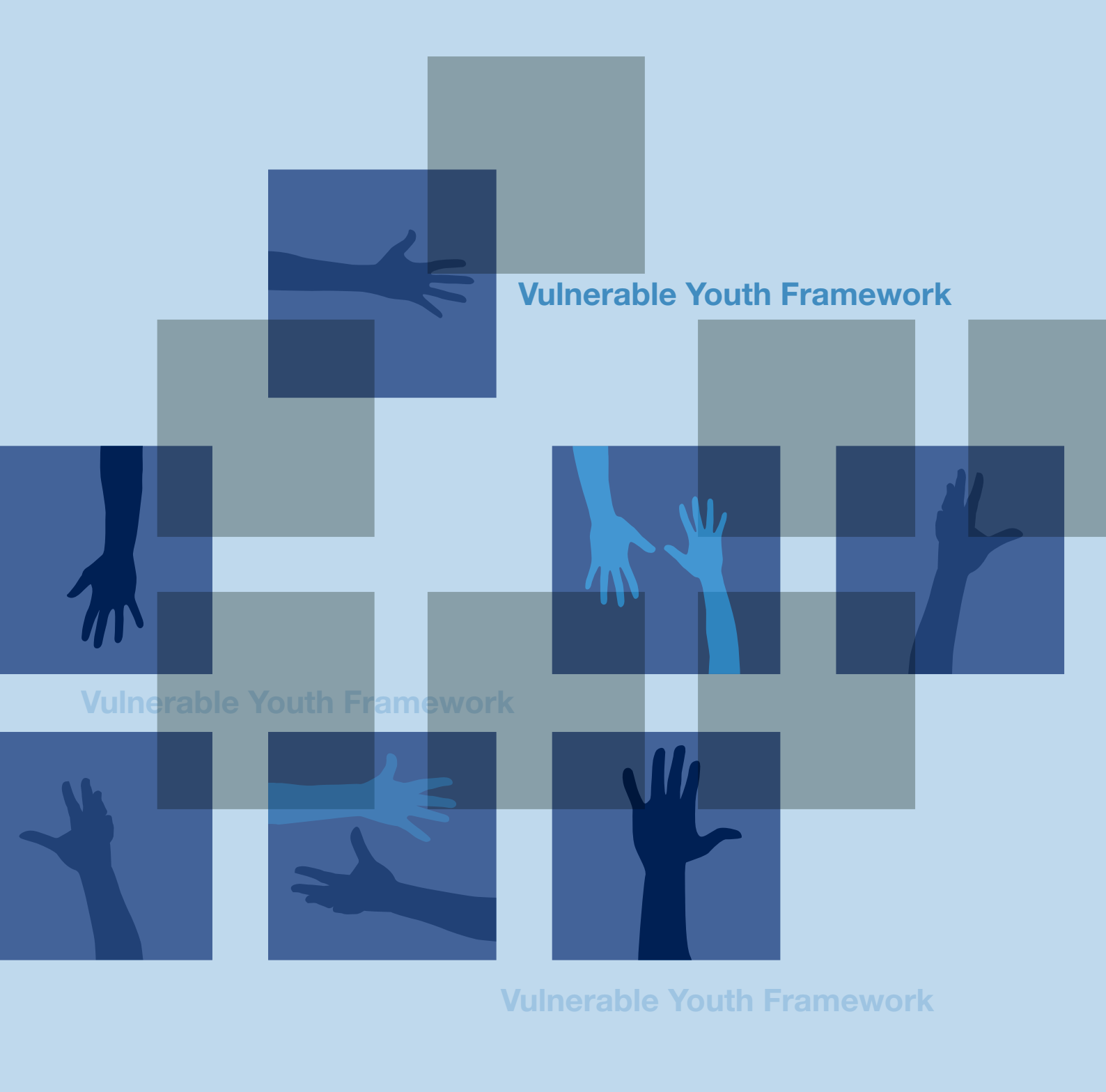


Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people

A policy framework to support vulnerable youth



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Prepared by:

Department of Human Services
Department of Planning and Community Development
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Victoria Police

If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format, please phone 9096 7468 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email <vulnerableyouthframework@dhs.vic.gov.au>. This document is also available in PDF format on the internet at <www.cyf.vic.gov.au/youth-services/vulnerable-youth-framework>.

Published by the Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne, Victoria
August 2010

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Authorised by the State Government of Victoria, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.
Printed on sustainable paper by BigPrint, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne.

Ministerial foreword

In the midst of new opportunities, young people today face ever-changing challenges and pressures. Economic change, new technologies and the media are constantly altering the context of adolescence and the transition to adulthood.

Most Victorian young people are faring well in many aspects of their lives. They are studying, in training or working. Many enjoy sports or participate in other positive community activities and have supportive families and friends. The majority of young Victorians participate in and contribute to their communities. There are, however, a small but significant number of young people who are facing considerable challenges that require sustained support and interventions to enable them to reach their full potential. This, in turn, requires our services to adapt the way they respond to vulnerable young people.

We sought feedback through the *Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper* to assist us in creating a framework that would enable better outcomes for this small but significant group of young people. The overwhelming majority of those consulted confirmed that a framework was needed to ensure better coordination of services on the ground and to facilitate mechanisms for cross-portfolio work across government. Feedback revealed a great deal of goodwill between the government, schools and other organisations that work with young people and a willingness to work together to enable an integrated service response for vulnerable young people. We wish to recognise the organisations and people who made such valuable contributions to the development of this framework.

Through these consultations we have gained a better understanding of the challenges ahead. We have a better appreciation that, for many vulnerable young people and their families, we need to do things differently – in early intervention, family support, health, housing, education, social participation and employment – and we will need strong and coordinated planning mechanisms to ensure that positive pathways are available to these young people.

The Victorian Government has now finalised the Vulnerable Youth Framework into this document: *Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people: a policy framework to support vulnerable youth*. With the release of this framework, the Government is also investing \$11 million over the next three years to trial innovative tools and service approaches targeting young people aged 10 to 18 to improve their engagement with appropriate services, particularly education, and minimise escalation of the issues they face. We will work with the range of providers and government departments in seven local areas to test models for a consolidated and integrated youth service system which can better identify and respond to young people at risk and their families.

Together, this investment and the policy framework represent the government's commitment to improving its response to vulnerable youth. It reflects the need to connect youth to their communities and enable their active participation in family, school and community life as key to reducing vulnerability. It also recognises the role that government has to play in facilitating these connections.

We have the opportunity to build on what we currently do well to enable earlier intervention for vulnerable young Victorians and to respond quickly to their needs when and where they require it. Local services (including schools, youth and family services, health and mental health services) will be encouraged to develop localised approaches that respond more flexibly and holistically to the needs of the vulnerable young people in their communities. At the same time, the government will undertake to examine avenues to better assist these efforts, to improve our response on the ground, including strengthening earlier intervention services and to ensure all future policy commitments that impact on young people are implemented with a shared understanding and consistent approach that will enable better outcomes for young Victorians.

We are pleased to release *Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people: a policy framework to support vulnerable youth* and look forward to seeing vulnerable young Victorians achieve their full potential, within strong families and vibrant, inclusive communities.



The Hon. Lisa Neville MP
Minister for Community Services



The Hon. Maxine Morand MP
Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development



The Hon. James Merlino MP
Minister for Youth Affairs



The Hon. Bronwyn Pike MP
Minister for Education
Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation

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Executive summary

The Victorian Government recognises that some young people require particular support and intervention to do well in life. This is ideally provided early in life and early in the occurrence of a problem. However, the current service system is complex and difficult for young people and families to navigate. By promoting and facilitating a more collaborative approach to services, there is the opportunity for government and service providers to work together more effectively to provide the necessary holistic supports that will enable more vulnerable young people to have positive life outcomes.

For the purposes of this framework, vulnerable young people are described as:

young people who, through a combination of their stage of life, individual, family and community circumstances and barriers to participation, are at risk of not realising their potential to achieve positive life outcomes.

Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people: A policy framework to support vulnerable youth (the framework) is the result of widespread consultation and feedback from the *Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper*. The framework sets out the Victorian Government's commitment to better support vulnerable young people and their families, moving towards improved integration of services, stronger localised approaches and earlier and more effective responses for these young people and their families.

The framework is structured around five focus areas to guide existing and future development in youth services across Victoria at a statewide and local level. These focus areas address both the needs of young people and the systems that deliver services. They have been validated through numerous public forums and written submissions.

The actions and targeted investments within the framework seek to ensure that vulnerable young Victorians are supported to achieve the same outcomes that are sought for all young Victorians – that they have a strong sense of belonging, are motivated to create and share in opportunities and are valued for their contributions and influence in their communities.

Areas of focus in the framework

Focus area 1: Engagement in education, training and employment

The majority of young Victorians aged 10–18 years attend school. Education not only provides an avenue to break cycles of disadvantage but is also a powerful way to reduce exposure to harm or participation in risky behaviours or crime. The Victorian Government proposes coordinated effort by both government and service providers to improve engagement with education and training and to increase the completion of Year 12 or equivalent for vulnerable young people, providing them with pathways to skills and qualifications to make a successful transition into employment.

Focus area 2: Early identification of vulnerability

Research tells us that early intervention can give young people better life outcomes. One of the key goals of the framework is to address issues earlier to prevent the escalation of issues faced by individual young people. For earlier intervention to occur, systems must be in place to identify vulnerability and respond to it in a timely manner. The framework outlines key actions across services sectors to develop early identification approaches and responses. This will involve schools, police, health and community services as well as other services that support young people.

Focus area 3: Tailored responses to particular groups

Some groups of young people can be particularly vulnerable by virtue of their cultural background, Aboriginal status or economic, social and physical circumstances. The framework sets out avenues to enable better consideration of the needs of particularly vulnerable groups, including any specific cultural needs, and to enable representation or guidance from peak bodies and local networks, such as local Indigenous networks, to inform service planning where appropriate.

Focus area 4: Local partnerships, planning and participation

Traditional models of service delivery do not always enable access to services for those young people who are most in need. Local planning and partnerships can improve access to services and responsiveness to young people, allowing services to focus on the unique characteristics of each locality. Initiatives within this focus area will facilitate the development of these partnerships to plan and implement better coordinated services, through the sharing of information about effective practice and by providing profiles of how young people are faring against key indicators. This work will enable local efforts to be targeted where it is most needed.

Focus area 5: Effective services, capable people

Research, evaluation and training of staff are vital if we are to have evidence-based services that improve outcomes. The government will focus on measurable outcomes and a system for monitoring progress to enable continuous service improvement within youth focused services. Alongside this, efforts will also be targeted at workforce development across sectors in response to identified opportunities for skill development and implementation of best practice.

Implementation and monitoring

Government effort in each of the five focus areas of the framework will be monitored by the Children's Services Coordination Board (the board). This includes monitoring the implementation of the new investment of \$11 million over three years to support young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education, their families or communities by trialling innovative tools, service approaches and models for a consolidated and integrated youth service system in seven demonstration projects. It also includes overseeing a \$22 million package over four years for an additional 55 youth workers across the state, to enable earlier identification of young people who are showing signs of vulnerability with a particular focus on those who are at risk of entering the youth justice system.

The board brings together senior decision-makers from key departments that are responsible for and contribute towards improved outcomes for young people. The board comprises the Chief Commissioner of Police and the Secretaries of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health, the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Justice.

This representation from senior areas of government means that the board is well-placed to facilitate coordination of the range of activities and programs across several departments that impact on young people and ensure that future government policies and reforms align with the framework's directions. This new whole-of-government approach will build on and add value to the range of local partnerships and alliances already working to better integrate support for vulnerable young people in their community.

The data collected through the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS) and other government datasets will provide a strong basis for examining how the framework is implemented. Additionally, an evaluation will be undertaken to examine the extent to which the use of innovative tools and approaches in local settings contributes to the achievement of better engagement with services and education and reduced escalation of issues for vulnerable young people. Together, this data and the evaluation will inform future action by government for this cohort of young people.

Conclusion

Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people recognises that connecting vulnerable young people to their communities and enabling their active participation in family, school and community life is key to reducing vulnerability. To support these connections, the framework has been developed to facilitate effective planning and service delivery for vulnerable young people at both local and statewide levels. This planning will enable localised approaches that respond more flexibly to the needs of vulnerable young people and their families within their communities, and assist these vulnerable young people to receive services early in the onset of any issues.

The government, in partnership with organisations providing services to young people, will be able to use the framework to better coordinate activities under the five broad focus areas. Through this framework, the government will ensure that major policy reforms and government commitments are properly aligned to the needs of young people to collectively improve life outcomes for vulnerable young Victorians and, consequently, for the community as a whole.

Context

The white paper *Protecting children: the next steps* made a commitment to developing a framework for vulnerable young people that would establish common goals and shared principles for youth services and identify clear future directions for development.

The feedback from those who participated in the public forums and wrote submissions in response to the *Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper* has helped shape this final framework, including the proposed five focus areas.

Purpose of the framework

While the majority of Victoria's young people are faring well, there is a small but significant number of young people aged 10–25 years who, through a combination of their circumstances, stage of development and barriers to participation, are at risk of not achieving positive life outcomes.

Heightened vulnerability is often influenced by negative interactions between aspects of individual, family, peer and community life. Young people are not always able to control these aspects or their impact upon themselves and their families. Negative experiences during adolescence can have consequences in later life, including diminished employment prospects, social and emotional wellbeing and poor health outcomes. For these young people, the government recognises that problems and issues are best dealt with as early in life or early in occurrence as possible.

The framework and associated investment seeks to support the development of services that respond a more timely and systematic way to minimise negative impacts on a young person and to link vulnerable young people into education. At the same time, the framework recognises that some young people will continue to require a high level of support, and therefore the development of services across a continuum is required. Figure 1 (page 11) is a conceptual model that depicts 'layers' of vulnerability across young Victorians aged between 10–25 years, describing risk factors and issues which may lead to escalating vulnerability in young people.

There are no hard boundaries between these layers and the degree and type of vulnerability experienced by any young person will vary according to individual factors. The diagram's layers represent increasing degrees of vulnerability as the cumulative effect of these factors become more intense.

Although spanning more than the typical period of adolescence, the age range of 10–25 years recognises that evidence of vulnerability can emerge in late primary school and reflects changes in social expectations of young people. It also acknowledges that for some young people, the transition into young adulthood and the transition to post-school study, training or employment can be a time of significant change and increased vulnerability.

The framework brings together various parts of government, schools and education providers and the community services sector to share in policy development and the planning of a more collaborative and integrated approach to services for this group of vulnerable young Victorians.

The actions contained in the framework seek to ensure that vulnerable young Victorians are supported to achieve the same outcomes that are sought for all young Victorians – that they have a strong sense of belonging, are motivated to create and share in opportunities and are valued for their contributions and influence in their communities.

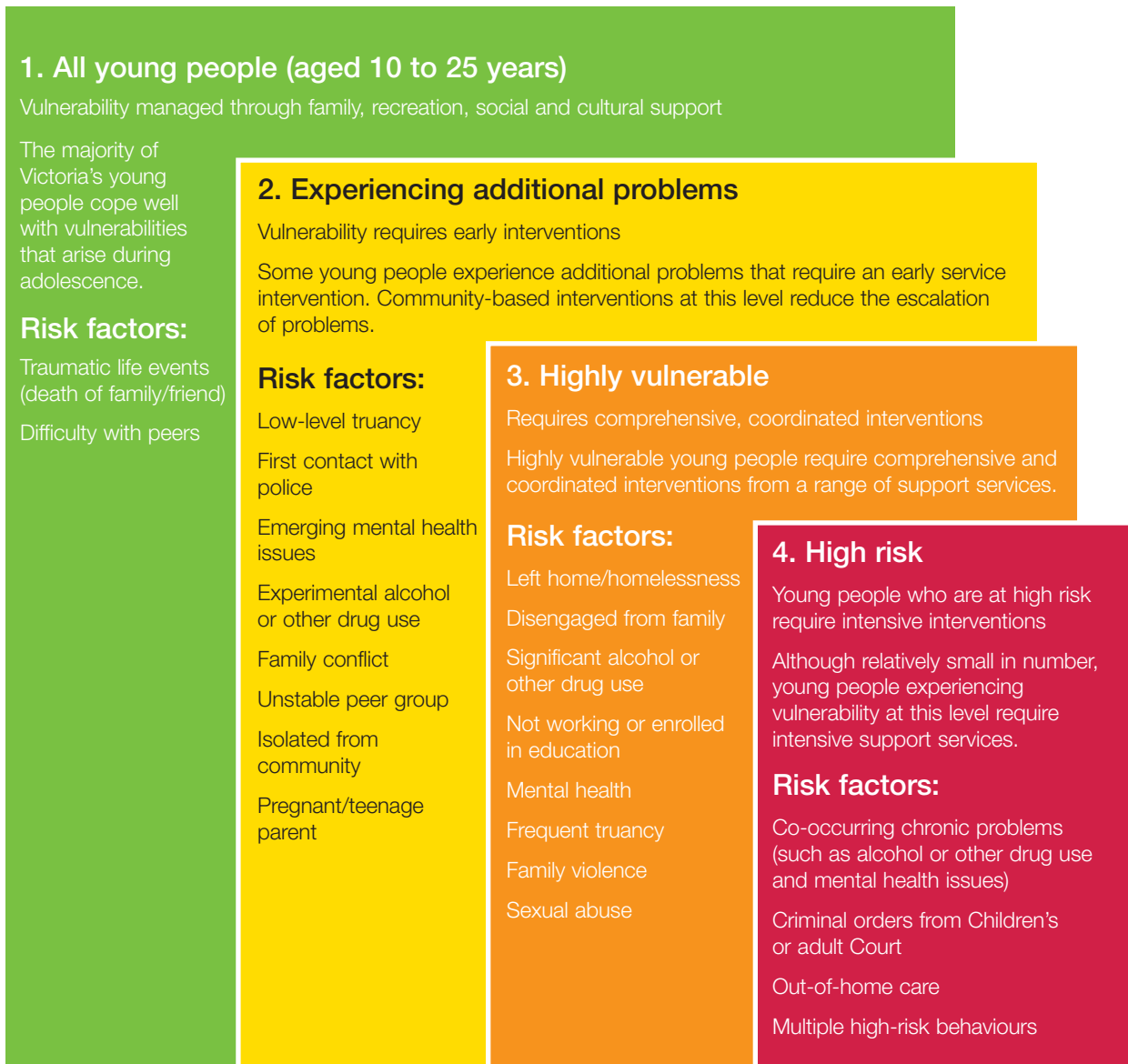


Figure 1: Layers of vulnerability

Leadership and coordination arrangements

Four government Ministers have a direct interest in the activities and outcomes that fall under the framework: the Minister for Community Services, the Minister for Education, the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development and the Minister for Youth Affairs.

Supporting the Ministers, the Children's Services Coordination Board will monitor the government's efforts within each of the framework's five focus areas as an authorised central leadership body.

The board brings together senior decision-makers from key departments to ensure leadership and coordination of activities across departments impacting on children and young people. It comprises the Chief Commissioner for Police and the Secretaries of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health, the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Justice.

The board's role includes:

- annually reviewing the outcomes of government actions related to children and young people, especially the most vulnerable
- setting action plans for agreed cross-agency collaboration
- considering how to address other cross-government issues as they emerge.

The representation from key areas of government means that the board is well-placed to ensure the necessary alignment of all future youth services policies and reforms.

As the responsible body for monitoring outcomes for children and young people, the board will also take a lead role in facilitating mechanisms for cross-portfolio work and overseeing the processes for supporting development of integrated services for youth.

The framework's governance arrangements are also set out below in Figure 2.

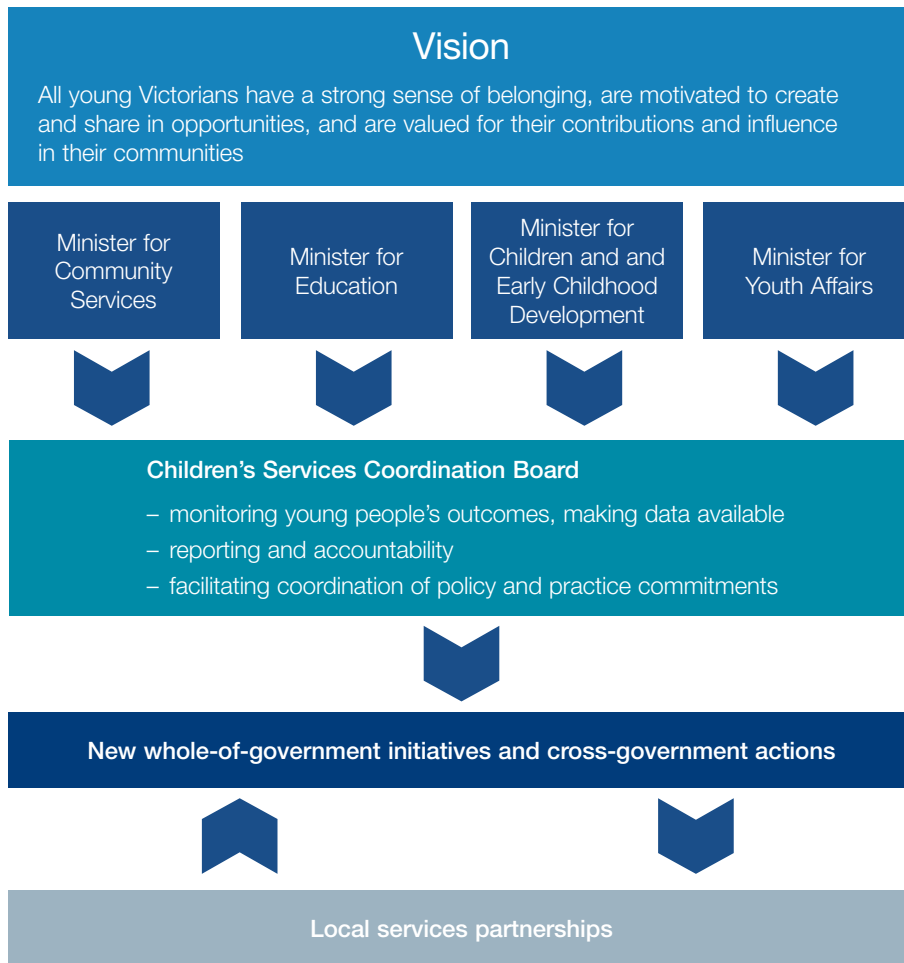


Figure 2: Implementation of the framework – a coordinated approach: centrally and locally

Key underpinning policies

At a policy level, Victoria currently considers the needs of its young people through a range of strategies. *Growing Victoria Together* and *A Fairer Victoria* establish the overarching strategic goals to be achieved for all Victorians, including a particular focus on reducing disadvantage.

At a youth level, *Future directions: an action agenda for young Victorians* is the government's overarching policy for all Victorian young people. It encompasses community participation, education, information, health and safety and provides the government's vision for all young people:

All young Victorians have a strong sense of belonging, are motivated to create and share in opportunities, and are valued for their contributions and influence in their communities.

The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* also plays a significant role, by setting out Victorian citizens' freedoms, rights and responsibilities. The aim of the Charter is to protect people from injustice and allow everyone to participate in and contribute to society.

The framework works under these overarching policies to provide an approach to improve the way support is provided to vulnerable young people. A rights-based approach is reflected within the framework to ensure that the rights of vulnerable young Victorians, who are often disengaged and disenfranchised, are protected.

The framework also aligns with the approaches of the *Dardee boorai: Victorian charter of safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and young people* and *All of us*, Victoria's multicultural policy. The framework also connects with a range of major government policies, which are described further within the focus areas.

The relationship between the key underpinning policies and the framework is shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Victorian policy for vulnerable young people

Areas of focus in the framework

The government recognises that the tireless efforts of local governments, community service organisations and the not-for-profit sector have resulted in many good outcomes for vulnerable young people. However, due to a range of factors, activities are not always brought together in a way that best addresses the multifaceted issues faced by young people.

The fact is that no one agency can provide a holistic response on its own. Therefore the Victorian Government has taken responsibility for coordinating efforts across its relevant departments, community service organisations, local government and the Commonwealth, to facilitate holistic policy, program and service planning. The Victorian Government is also taking a leadership role in driving the necessary changes which will lead to a less fragmented, better integrated array of universal and targeted services that succeed in identifying and supporting vulnerable young people to achieve their full potential.

This framework identifies five focus areas to target our efforts towards holistic youth-centred and family-friendly responses. Focus areas 1, 2 and 3 centre on young people and their needs, while focus areas 4 and 5 relate to the service systems which support young people. Each focus area includes whole-of-government initiatives aimed at supporting systematic responses and improving access to services. In many instances, the government has already made progress and this is outlined throughout the document.



Figure 4: Framework focus areas

Underpinning principles for the youth service system

If the service system is to reduce vulnerability of young Victorians, service planning and delivery must be underpinned by the following principles. These principles will create the necessary environment to assist these young people to connect, or reconnect, to their communities and actively participate in family, school and community life.

- **Freedom from discrimination**
 - Young people will be free from stigma and discrimination due to age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, culture, religion, disability or other circumstances.
 - Policy, program and service delivery will reflect respect for young people, promote equity in access to services and preserve the dignity of young people, their families and communities.
- **Inclusiveness**
 - Vulnerable young people need to be understood in the context of their social world: school, family, community and culture. They need to be given ongoing opportunities to participate in a wide range of engaging, positive and successful experiences.
 - Behaviour will not be a barrier to inclusion – active outreach and innovative engagement is necessary to help young people who are disconnected.
 - Reform efforts need to be informed by listening to children, youth and families and involving them directly in decision-making about policy and service practice reforms.
- **Responsiveness**
 - *Developmentally responsive* – an understanding of development will underpin all service design and specific interventions for vulnerable young people. Tailored responses need to consider individual developmental, social and environmental circumstances.
 - *Gender responsive* – young women and young men experience vulnerability differently and require different and gender-specific service responses in recognition of their differing needs.
 - *Culturally responsive* – the cultural context for a vulnerable young person and their family is important. Early identification mechanisms need to be understanding and sensitive to particular cultural values and beliefs.
- **Timely and proactive**
 - Vulnerable young people need a proactive response and early in the onset of a problem or early in life. Vulnerability is less likely to compound if timely and proactive responses are provided.
- **Place-based**
 - Most young people identify strongly with their local communities and their peers. Responses for vulnerable young people need to be available locally and be coordinated and tailored to both individual and group interventions.
- **Comprehensive, flexible and enduring**
 - Vulnerable young people require coordinated responses from all the services involved in their lives.
 - The duration of services offered to vulnerable young people and their families should be flexible with a variety of short- and long-term interventions available.

Focus area 1: Engagement in education, training and employment

Education is the most effective means to enable young people to thrive, learn and grow to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life. It is also an avenue to break cycles of disadvantage and a powerful way to reduce exposure to harm or participation in risky behaviours or crime.

Victorian Government schools aim to give every young person every opportunity, focusing on their engagement, learning and transitions. Retaining vulnerable young people in the education system and assisting them to access training or employment opens up broader opportunities that lead to better personal, social and economic outcomes.

The education and training system is well-placed to identify vulnerability early and to link young people with additional services where required. Active partnerships between schools and the wider service system can assist in ensuring that the right supports are available and accessible. TAFE institutes, adult and community education (ACE) providers and registered training organisations also engage in partnerships with community organisations and industry to improve transitions into training for young people who have been disengaged from education and training for an extended period.

One of the key goals of the framework is to improve engagement with education and training for vulnerable young people and increase the completion of Year 12 or equivalent, through coordinated effort by both government and service providers. The aim is to provide these young people with pathways to skills and qualifications to make a successful transition into education and training or into the labour market in order to attain positive life outcomes.

Priorities for action

Support for vulnerable young people and their families to continue being engaged in education and training, including individual plans for highly vulnerable young people.

Strengthen partnerships between schools and the broader service system to support the entry of vulnerable young people into further education, training or employment.

Current approach to engagement in education, training and employment

As part of the *Blueprint for education and early childhood development*, the Victorian Government is implementing a suite of strategies that will better engage vulnerable young people in education. These strategies will better support their transitions from school and into further education, training or employment, and develop the partnerships – between schools and with community agencies and business – that will make improved engagement and transitions possible.

The focus on engagement is underpinned by new initiatives encouraging schools to form stronger links with parents and broader partnerships with communities, while continuing to emphasise quality teaching and inclusive learning environments – so that schools are places young people want to be. New student engagement policy guidelines have been implemented. A new guide to help schools increase completion has been introduced, providing secondary schools with the latest information on successful, proven ways to enhance engagement and lift retention.

Although the primary goal remains that young people remain engaged in or return to school full-time, students who are experiencing significant difficulties within mainstream schooling have access to a range of alternative programs and flexible learning options, including off-site programs. Many secondary schools have introduced re-engagement programs for senior secondary students both to retain students at high risk of disengaging from education and training and to re-engage students who have already left school. These programs deliver a senior secondary qualification (either Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning or Victorian Certificate of Education) at a site external to the school campus, and may involve partnerships with registered external providers. The government is now implementing reforms to strengthen the delivery arrangements of these re-engagement programs so as to improve educational outcomes for this cohort.

Education, training and employment remain a priority for the small number of young people facing serious difficulties. Education re-engagement for young people is an explicit goal being pursued in youth justice and homelessness services funded by the Department of Human Services, in recognition of its pivotal role in improving life chances.

Better support for transitions is also a major focus. Implementation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions is delivering major improvements to the way young people are supported to make the transition from school to further education, training and employment. Commonwealth and Victorian Government effort is being combined to deliver career development and transition programs, including case management and support for at-risk young people.

Victoria's vocational education and training system supports the participation and re-engagement of young people who are vulnerable because they have left school early, or lack the skills required for ongoing or meaningful employment. Since 1 July 2009, the Victorian Government's Youth Guarantee, which provides a government-subsidised place in Victoria's registered training providers including TAFE and ACE providers, has been broadened to all young people aged 15–19 years, as agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Additionally, as part of COAG's Compact with Young Australians, from 1 January 2010 young people aged 20–24 years who are seeking to upgrade their qualifications are also able to access a subsidised place.

The government's *Securing jobs for your future: skills for Victoria* statement is delivering broader and more responsive training options for both individuals and business providing an additional 172,000 training places and further strengthening Victoria's world-class TAFE network. At the same time, the *Working Victoria: Victoria's workforce participation strategy* also recognises the need to maximise the skills and opportunities for young people, and particularly to overcome labour market barriers for those who would otherwise be disadvantaged in the job market.

To help young people gain employment, targeted labour market assistance is being provided through Victoriaworks for Young People (formerly the Youth Employment Scheme). Public sector apprenticeships and traineeships are available to early school leavers and young people whose backgrounds or circumstances reduce their labour market chances. Other programs offer targeted assistance to particularly vulnerable groups, including youth justice clients and young people with a disability.

Partnerships are a key element in the Victorian Government's strategies to support vulnerable youth to access education, training and employment opportunities. Across the state, Regional Youth Commitments have been implemented to ensure there is continuous support for a young person to remain in or re-enter education and training and to attain, as a minimum, Year 12 or equivalent qualifications. These are negotiated between local and regional stakeholders to link and coordinate pathways and transitional support arrangements for 15–19 year olds.

Strategic whole-of-government initiative

Taking advantage of the developments outlined above, and the partnerships that are developing between government schools, community services, local government, local youth services, business, training and employment services, will be central to future efforts in this area.

1.1 Improve educational opportunities for young people at risk of disengaging from education

The new \$11 million initiative will trial innovative tools and service approaches over three years to better address the needs of young people aged 10-18 and facilitate engagement in appropriate education and training options, and minimise escalation of the issues they face. A new whole of government Secretariat will be established as part of this initiative to ensure that the trialling of innovative tools and approaches aligns with and builds upon existing strategies to improve engagement of vulnerable school-aged young people in education and training.

As the initiative has a particular focus on improving young people's engagement with education, the education system has a key role in leading the new arrangements so that schools and youth services work collaboratively towards these common goals. This will include exploring the range of flexible learning options available to young people and enhancing options where required, including vocational and training options where this is more appropriate for an individual young person's circumstances.

Further government actions

1.2 Better identification of students at risk of disengaging from education

Schools have a critical role in early and timely identification of those young people at risk of disengaging from education. The demonstration projects will test whether more extensive usage of the Student Mapping tool can assist with earlier intervention. The Student Mapping tool utilises existing school data to identify those students who may be at risk of disengaging from education and enables the recording, tracking and evaluation of interventions made to support them. The tool, which is already mandatory for all government schools with one or more Koorie student enrolments, will be implemented in all government primary and secondary schools. Options for adapting the tool for use in Catholic and Independent schools will also be explored.

1.3 Expand investment for young students with special support needs

The government is investing in extra support for young people with disabilities across Victoria's education system including \$38.1 million over two years to expand the Program for Students with Disabilities to meet increased demand and \$18.5 million over three years for the Students with Disabilities Transport program.

Funding of \$4.4 million in 2010–11 has also been allocated to establish satellite classrooms in partnership with special schools for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream government schools and inclusion support programs for students with autism.

An investment of \$16.69 million over four years has also been allocated to strengthen the pathways to employment for young people with a disability through the Futures for Young Adults Program.

1.4 Create new educational options for young Aboriginal Victorians to pursue their goals

Investment of \$1.7 million over three years in the development of five football academies and three dance academies for Indigenous students will aim to close the gap in educational outcomes for Koorie students, and help them develop life skills and pursue employment opportunities. This evidence-based model of engagement requires students to attend school regularly, apply themselves to the study of appropriate courses, and embrace requirements for behaviour and self-discipline.

1.5 Investing in new models of support to improve educational engagement

Through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments have committed \$3.3 million over four years to establish new models that will support 90 young people each year. These new models will focus on engaging young people in education, employment and training opportunities by integrating: safe, secure and affordable accommodation; personal support services; support to reconnect young people to learning and skills development; and opportunities for work experience and access to jobs that are sustainable.

This work builds on the investment by the Victorian Government on new accommodation and support models through the Support for Young People That Really Counts program. This program targets young people who are able to benefit from moving from crisis housing or intensive support services to more independent housing that provides additional levels of support, life skills training and a focus on participation in education, employment and training.

Focus area 2:

Early identification of vulnerability

For many young Victorians, a combination of personal resilience, safe and supportive families, a good network of friends and strong ties to schools or recreational, cultural or faith-based activities protects them from the problems and risks that present as a normal part of the transition to adulthood. However, for a minority of young people it does not. Through a combination of individual, family and community circumstances and barriers to participation, these young people face markedly higher risks of doing poorly and not reaching their full potential.

Research tells us that intervention early in life or early in the emergence of a problem can give young people better life outcomes. For effective intervention to occur, systems must be in place to identify vulnerability and respond to it.

One of the key goals of the framework is to address issues earlier to prevent the escalation of issues faced by individual young people. The Victorian Government will build early identification approaches across schools, community and youth services and police, promoting local partnerships that can take advantage of the referral networks already in place and linking them with the government's major policy reforms that focus on early identification.

Priorities for action

Improve access to supports for vulnerable families and communities in their care of young people.

Link systems for early identification with early intervention strategies that are easily accessible and available at the local level for vulnerable young people.

Facilitate a coordinated continuum of youth-focused services that support early intervention.

Current approach to early identification

Increasing the capacity for earlier identification of vulnerability in children and young people has been a key feature of the Victorian Government's major reforms in the areas of policing, family services, early childhood development, education and mental health. Central to these reforms has been the recognition that effective and prompt identification of vulnerability should be matched with early interventions suitable for young people. Working collaboratively across sectors is essential if this is to be achieved.

The *Victoria Police child and youth strategy 2009–2013* commits Victoria Police to working locally with other agencies to increase opportunities to intervene early with vulnerable young people in order to reduce the potential for harm from offending and improve life outcomes.

The *Blueprint for education and early childhood development* recognises the critical role for schools and early childhood services in identifying the early signs of vulnerability. Under the blueprint, schools and early childhood services are being supported to work in partnership with specialist services to identify and assist young people and families who are experiencing difficulties, such as homelessness, postnatal depression, mental health concerns, drug and alcohol problems and family violence.

All government schools have access to the Student Mapping Tool referred to in Action 1.2 above, which helps to systematically identify students likely to need particular attention. It enables schools to track, monitor and evaluate interventions used to address the risk factors that contribute to early leaving.

Victorian Government schools also have access to psychologists, speech pathologists and social workers through a strengthened student support service program. To ensure this and other health and wellbeing services are effective and available to schools, the government is developing a health and wellbeing service framework for children and young people aged 0–18 years.

Additionally, there are 100 secondary school nurses working in 198 targeted government secondary schools across Victoria, to promote better health in areas of greatest health need and socio-economic disadvantage. Health promotion activities most frequently delivered are in relation to sexual health, drug and alcohol use and mental health. Nurses also work in collaboration with schools and the wider service system to identify emerging vulnerability, provide advice and counselling, and support young people with access to external services when additional health support is required.

Strategic whole-of-government initiative

The framework creates the opportunity to explore ways to drive greater consistency in the tools and platforms used for the early identification and referral of vulnerable young people. This is important so as to simplify the interface and improve the responsiveness of referrals between different systems, including schools, police, family and youth services.

2.1 Improve service system identification of vulnerability

The new demonstration projects to support young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education, their families or communities will involve the development of a common assessment and referral framework, a common practice framework and a system of coordinated access points to youth services. These tools will assist service providers to deliver timely, consistent and quality responses to those young people requiring support. The development of these tools will draw on evidence from the government's various early intervention reforms, the experience of the Better Youth Service pilots and international best practice. These approaches will be trialled and evaluated in the seven demonstration project sites. The work will consider the scope for these tools to be tailored to meet local needs.

Further government actions

2.2 Expand service system capacity for early identification

The pathway to increased vulnerability is not always linear. Investment is required at various points to prevent escalation of issues. The government's recently announced investment package targeted towards young people who are showing signs of vulnerability has a particular focus on those who are at risk of entering the youth justice system. The package, with \$22 million over four years, will provide an additional 55 youth workers on the ground across the state to connect these young people with the support they need to help them address the underlying causes of offending behaviour. This initiative will also establish a new response team that will work in partnership with Victoria Police to provide a rapid response to identified vulnerability.

2.3 Improve initial response to emerging signs of mental health issues

The government has invested over \$300 million in mental health since the release of *Because mental health matters: the Victorian mental health reform strategy 2009–2019*. Additional investment will focus on improving the mental health of young Victorians. This includes \$4.9 million over four years for new mental health teams in rural and regional areas to help hundreds of isolated young Victorians, \$3.5 million over four years to create two community-based youth crisis response teams, and \$3.6 million over four years for a major focus on preventing youth suicide.

This investment builds on the \$150.6 million boost to mental health reform over four years in 2009–10 and is consistent with *Because mental health matters*. This strategy is driving a stronger focus on intervening early as mental health problems emerge for children and young people (0–25 years) by strengthening the capacity of early childhood services, primary care and schools to identify emerging problems and assist young people to access age-appropriate treatment.

Focus area 3:

Tailored responses to particular groups

Particular groups of vulnerable young people require tailored responses. Vulnerability experienced by these groups can be due to disability, inter-generational disadvantage (including for Aboriginal young people), chronic economic and social disadvantage or the experience of migrating from a very different culture and society. Especially vulnerable groups also include young people who reside in out of home care, those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, those at risk of, or experiencing family breakdown and those who have poor mental health.

The framework recognises that tailored responses are required in order to effectively support particular groups of young people wherever they may find themselves along the spectrum of vulnerability. Taking this further the Victorian Government will build connections between a wider range of community networks and organisations at the local level to increase the say of particularly vulnerable groups of young people in the way services are organised and delivered to them.

Priorities for action

Support the identification of the needs of particular groups living in local areas to inform local service planning, which will lead to better tailored support for particularly vulnerable young people.

Develop partnerships with local youth networks, organisations and communities to develop strategies to address the needs of particularly vulnerable young people.

Current approach to tailoring responses

The Victorian Government has invested strongly in tailored strategies and the capacity of services to engage and support young people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

In relation to Aboriginal young people, *Dardee boorai: the Victorian charter of safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and young people* commits the Victorian Government and the Victorian Aboriginal community to a set of principles, including the central place of families and culturally competent universal services in Aboriginal children's health and welfare.

More specifically, the Wannik Education Strategy for Koorie Students has seen a more individualised approach and additional, culturally sensitive supports put in place to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students with a strong focus on assisting mainstream schools to better meet the needs of Indigenous students. This approach is supported by some targeted programs such as four Koorie Pathways Schools, which provide individualised assistance and support for some Koorie students aged 12–16 who are not engaged in their mainstream school or who are at serious risk of disengagement. A Wannik Education Scholarship program is in place for high-achieving Koorie students and tutorial assistance schemes have been established for students who need additional support. Additional literacy coaches are assisting teachers in schools with large numbers of Koorie students.

The government has also recently developed *Balert Boorron*, a broader Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010–2020), setting out future directions through which the Victorian Government will work together with Victorian Aboriginal communities and organisations to close the gap in young people's health, development, learning and wellbeing.

Current reforms under the *State disability plan 2002–2012* will create self-directed approaches to service delivery for young people with a disability, who will be better able to plan, access, implement and monitor supports with the assistance of their family, carer/s or other support people as required.

The Victorian Government has also developed *Better Opportunities, Better Outcomes*, a whole-of-government strategy for children and young people aged 0–18 years with a disability or developmental delay. The strategy aims to establish a more sustainable service system that improves the wellbeing, development, education, community participation and future economic participation of all Victorian children and young people with a disability or developmental delay and their families.

For young people with a disability, the *Statement of principles to support children and young people with a disability and their families* affirms the government's commitment to protecting and promoting the rights and participation of children and young people with a disability and their families on the same basis as other Victorians.

In the *Autism state plan* (2009), efforts are focused on building the skills and support for staff across child and adolescent mental health services, early childhood services, schools and disability services to be able to assess and effectively work with children and young people with an autism spectrum disorder.

For young people in out of home care, there is major reform in the out-of-home care system through *Directions for out-of-home care* (2009), with the government bolstering the localised assessment and referral capacity in Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams (ChildFIRST) and also piloting new models of intensive family-based interventions to assist children to safely remain with or return to their families.

For vulnerable culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people and young refugees, Victoria's multicultural policy *All of us* (2009) focused on tailored support strategies. This includes resources to help schools manage the impact of the refugee experience on students and tailored supports, such as homework programs, to assist young refugees to stay connected with school and training.

Training resources for teachers and service providers to improve communications with CALD audiences have also been developed. These include the use of language services, the information needs of parents, communication at transition stages and better use of schools as community hubs.

Under *Creating connections: youth homelessness action plan 2006–2010* there is a combination of tailored accommodation and housing support options and individualised living and life skills programs for each homeless young person. Guidelines for schools have been developed to enhance support for children, young people and their families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The guidelines document, *Supporting children, young people and their families affected by homelessness*, aims to achieve improved educational outcomes for homeless students by building the capacity of schools to identify and appropriately respond to issues of homelessness. In 2010 a new Homelessness 2020 Strategy will be released, with young people experiencing homelessness as one of the focus areas.

In response to the particular needs of rural communities, the government is developing a Rural Education Framework, an overarching framework that will align with existing and emerging initiatives and will assist in the implementation of the school improvement agenda for rural schools. The framework will address inequities between rural and metropolitan student outcomes through a focus on the key domains of leadership, workforce, 21st century curriculum provision and partnerships.

More generally, a bilateral agreement between the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments for the National Partnership for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities has also been developed. The agreement provides the foundation to develop a broader, statewide strategy to improve participation and outcomes for children and youth from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. This will include strategies for supporting collaboration and coordination between: the government; the Catholic and independent school sectors; government and non-government agencies and organisations; business; and parents, all in a comprehensive whole-of-state approach.

The government has also created the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Health to advise Ministers for Health and Community Services on the development and delivery of its work program. This committee has an interest in young people and has developed *Well proud: a guide to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex inclusive practice for health and human services* to support health and human services to improve service delivery for GLBTI people.

Strategic whole-of-government initiative

The Victorian Government supports a range of forums where young people can raise issues which are important to them and contribute to the development of government policy and actions. Forums include the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council, the Multifaith Multicultural Youth Network and the Young People Direct initiative. This framework supports the Government maintaining structured approaches for vulnerable young people to participate in local service planning where they live.

3.1 Extend opportunities for vulnerable young people to have a say in policies that affect them

Drawing on the models of youth participation which were established through the Better Youth Service pilot projects, opportunities will be identified for established groups of young people, such as those participating in Local Indigenous Networks or Refugee Action Partnerships, to influence localised service planning, beginning with the seven demonstration sites.

This valuable feedback will ensure that services targeting particular groups are tailored to their particular needs. This principle of user-guided design will extend to key future investments by the government including the following initiatives detailed below.

Further government actions

3.2 Preventing cyberbullying

Tackling cyberbullying is one of the key actions under the government's Respect Agenda. New funding of \$3.7 million over four years will provide community-based cybersafety programs to groups of young people most vulnerable to bullying, including those from marginalised backgrounds, same-sex-attracted young people, young Indigenous people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

A further \$10.6 million will be directed to a new eSmart initiative, which will educate students about the dangers of cyberbullying and other cyber-risks and provide professional development for teachers on how to deal with it. This investment, which will be rolled out in every Victorian Government school and 300 non-Government schools, will ensure cybersafety is a normal part of a young person's life.

3.3 Tailored support for young unaccompanied refugees

The government is investing in Stronger Futures for Refugee Youths to respond to the complex and individual needs of young unaccompanied refugees in settling into the community. A \$3.8 million investment over four years will support community involvement and integration, transition into independent living and education and employment.

3.4 Additional supports for young people involved with child protection and out-of-home care

To ensure the safety and healthy development of vulnerable young people, the government is investing \$6.2 million over four years to maintain a team of child protection workers at the Frankston multidisciplinary centre and establish two new teams in Mildura and Geelong. These teams will ensure that the centres can continue to provide timely, sophisticated responses to high risk and complex cases.

For young people who are unable to stay at home, significant investment of \$23.3 million over four years is being made to secure more appropriate home-based and residential care placements. This builds on the significant investment in placement and support services, including the \$135 million funded over four years under the new *Directions for out-of-home care reform strategy*. This strategy directly aligns with the directions of the framework, by placing a greater focus on prevention of at-risk children as well as tailored responses seeking to reunite removed children with their families as quickly as possible and provide specialist-care-placement alternatives outside of residential care to children under 12-years-of-age. Also consistent with the framework is a focus on changes to culture, operations and funding structures to make sure the needs of children and young people shape the service systems and the processes which serve them.

To support ongoing improvement in the way these services are delivered, investment is also allocated to provide targeted support services for Aboriginal kinship carers, expand the health services provided to highly traumatised young people in secure welfare and to continue the therapeutic residential care pilots.

3.5 Additional supports for young people with a disability

The government will also provide a further \$8.3 million over four years to expand the Disability Services Aids and Equipment Program, which will enable an additional 957 people to receive aids and equipment assistance, including 100 children and young people.

3.6 Investment and reform to support homeless young people

The new National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness funding has a focus on prevention, early intervention and building a foundation to reform and diversify the response to homelessness in Victoria. Under this agreement, \$3 million will be provided to expand the capacity of the homelessness service system to deliver responses for young people who are newly homeless or at risk of becoming homeless due to family and relationship breakdown. This funding will be rolled out progressively over the four years of funding to 2012–2013. New family reconciliation positions will focus on working with those young people aged 16–18 years to address the issues of conflict between young people and their families, with a focus on healing and restoration of relationships to support young people to move forward with their lives.

The Commonwealth and Victorian Governments have also committed \$13 million over five years to Victoria's 20 youth refuges to implement a service system reform approach that will give youth refuges a new and enhanced role in improving outcomes for young people who are homeless. These service reforms will support a whole-of-government response to homeless young people and will allow youth refuges to work more effectively in the prevention of young people at risk of transitioning from youth homelessness to adult homelessness. Additionally, these reforms will allow for greater support of young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour.

Focus area 4:

Local partnerships, planning and participation

Services can be difficult for young people to access and navigate. Local planning – including the positive involvement of young people in planning processes, is critical to improving service coordination, information sharing, cross-sector understanding of local needs and decision-making.

Currently, in any one local area there may be one or more partnerships of community services operating with some responsibility for identifying, assessing, referring or supporting vulnerable young people in their catchment (for example, Child and Family Services Alliances, Primary Care Partnerships, Regional School Networks and networks focusing on homeless young people). However, few partnerships have access to strong local outcomes data to be able to identify, plan for and track the status of vulnerable young people in their communities and few have the breadth of partners to be able to coordinate services working across the spectrum of vulnerability from mainstream to statutory services. This is a common experience across regional, interface and metropolitan areas.

The Victorian Government will strengthen the capacity of local service networks to develop cross-sector partnerships and implement localised plans for reorganising services to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people in their communities.

Priorities for action

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| Promote local partnerships that bring together services working across the spectrum of vulnerability to provide the right service at the right time. | Improve collaboration between state government, local governments and community service organisations. | Embed an outcomes focus into locally-based planning for young people and their families to enable effectiveness of supports to be measured. | Implement processes that support vulnerable young people to actively participate in local partnerships. |
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Current approach to localised planning, partnerships and participation

As indicated above, a range of recent Victorian Government place-based service strategies are improving localised planning and coordination of support for young people to get the help they need when they need it, and to build sustainable pathways into education, training and employment.

To improve coordination of community based services, ChildFIRST sites have been established in 24 catchments across the state to provide a central, community-based intake and referral point to a range of community-based family services and other supports to ensure that vulnerable children, young people and their families are linked effectively into relevant services. To support planning and coordination of ChildFIRST, Child and Family Alliances, involving local family and child protection services, have been established in each ChildFIRST catchment.

Over a number of years, 31 alliances of primary care providers have also been formalised as Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) with each PCP covering two or three local government areas. PCPs aim to improve the health and wellbeing of their catchment's population by better coordinating services to provide continuity of care, more responsive primary health services and integrated health promotion initiatives. PCP memberships vary, but many include family and mental health services as well as schools and police in some areas.

Partnerships are also an important part of the Victorian Government's strategy to support young people, including vulnerable youth, to access education, training and employment opportunities. The 31 Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) broker partnerships between education providers, industry, community organisations, individual and government organisations to improve education, training and employment outcomes for young people in communities across Victoria. Since January 2010, the School Business Community Partnership Brokers program in Victoria has been delivered through the LLEN initiative funded by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions. Additional funding expands the role of LLEN to brokering partnerships with parents, extends the age range from 15–19 to 10–19-year-olds and includes a stronger focus on career development.

Under the *Blueprint for education and early childhood development* the role of local school networks has been expanded, including employing new network leaders who will provide intensive support to schools where performance needs to improve. Under the new network strategic plan, networks will collectively support all government schools to improve student outcomes and investigate broadening its role to include a wider range of local schools and early childhood services.

The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) supports the goals of the Blueprint and aims to strengthen the support for 10–18-year-old vulnerable children and young people by facilitating partnerships and the coordination of services between schools and community service organisations at a local level. These partnerships facilitate the identification of key issues and the development of innovative strategies to address service gaps for vulnerable children and young people. Forty-one SFYS coordinators are employed by funded agencies to work with government, Catholic and independent schools across the state.

Since the release of the *Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper*, the Victorian Government has finalised six Better Youth Service pilot projects (at Frankston, Wyndham, Greater Bendigo, Swan Hill, Geelong and Yarra Ranges) to examine local data needs so as to enable better planning of local services and identify options to improve coordination and delivery across the range of services supporting vulnerable young people. A key consideration of the partnerships formed under the projects has been to identify common service approaches, such as for intake and assessment that can span existing local service sectors and networks to improve consistency of access and support for vulnerable young people.

Through the Smarter Schools National Partnership Project in Low Social Economic Status School Communities, a joint initiative of the Australian and Victorian Governments, four Extended School Hub field trials have been put in place. The field trials will strengthen partnerships between schools, community and business to address the barriers for students in achieving their education potential. The Extended School Hub field trials are a place based approach that aim to reduce barriers to learning as well as connect, coordinate and collaborate with families and external agencies to provide complementary learning for students and families. The field trial sites have been selected to leverage the local partnerships between schools, community services and government departments developed through the Better Youth Service pilot projects in Wyndham, Corio, Norlane, Eaglehawk and Frankston North.

Strategic whole-of-government initiative

This framework will create an opportunity to address key gaps identified by current service networks, including more comprehensive local outcomes data and the capacity to engage across the spectrum of mainstream, early intervention, specialist and statutory services.

4.1 Greater coordination and flexibility at the local level

The government's seven demonstration projects will consider the extent to which these tools and models can reflect local requirements. Local projects will play a key role in informing the development of the innovative tools which are to be tested, such as a common assessment and referral framework. This investment will extend the work undertaken by the Better Youth Services Pilots, with governance arrangements for the seven demonstration projects building on the partnerships already in place.

4.2 Support local efforts by sharing information and research

To facilitate the planning of local service responses, the Victorian Government is developing local community profiles showing how young people are faring. This data, coupled with information from local schools, police and other agencies, will underpin local planning to target effort to where there is most need and allow tailored responses. This data will also support rural and regional communities to provide a different response to urban communities, in line with their unique characteristics.

Further government action

4.3 Strengthening capacity locally across ChildFIRST sites

A step in this direction is found in the new investment of \$3.8 million in 2010–11 to appoint new early child development workers in every ChildFIRST catchment. This pilot project is designed to better integrate child protection, family services and universal early years services, building stronger partnerships between different services providers to deliver integrated and targeted support to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

This investment will add to the strong and robust partnerships between government services, community leaders and organisations.

Focus area 5: Effective services, capable people

Young people experiencing vulnerability are most likely to benefit when the services they receive are provided by a workforce that is effectively supported. The quality of the workforce is the major factor driving quality in services and outcomes for vulnerable youth. Excellent service provision will result when people are equipped with the capabilities and training to respond flexibly and holistically to the needs of vulnerable young people. Several key policy commitments are being implemented across Victoria with an emphasis on building a knowledgeable, skilled and sustainable workforce to assist and support vulnerable young people. This includes work being done to build capacity for early intervention and family-based practice.

This work, in conjunction with the central governance arrangements established under this framework, will support efforts for sharing good practice and innovative intervention strategies. This will help build a body of evidence on practice that can be accessed across all local areas.

Priorities for action

Build and enhance the capability and capacity of people who work with vulnerable young people.

Embed quality assurance and evaluation processes into the service system to inform best practice models and improve access to evidence-based practices.

Current approach to effective services, capable people

In recognition of the importance of facilitating strong community organisations, the Office for the Community Sector has been established within the Department of Planning and Community Development. The office will implement a suite of actions including strategies to streamline the government's interactions with not-for-profit community organisations and assist not-for-profit community organisations to invest in their own capabilities and long-term sustainability.

In the homelessness services sector, efforts are being targeted towards introducing new practice approaches under *Creating connections: youth homelessness action plan*. This strategy includes key practice concepts around a pathways approach that examines young people's experiences from a longitudinal perspective in order to understand the triggers and effects of homelessness. There is a focus on providing a more tailored, timely, coordinated response for young people reflecting different stages in young people's development.

Additionally, the *Because mental health matters* strategy commits to improving workforce quality, recruitment and retention by providing mental health staff with ongoing professional development, and developing the expertise and capacity of relevant workforces to use evidence in designing and implementing mental health promotion.

Key components of the student support services reforms, as outlined in *Strengthening student support services directions paper: the way forward*, will be advanced and implemented during 2010.

As part of the Wannik strategy, the Koorie education workforce has been expanded and upgraded together with a strategy to support workers to acquire skills to enable them to better fulfil their role. The government is also developing a strategy to encourage and enable effective school teachers and leaders to work in areas of high need and low performance.

The government is currently developing a framework for collaborating with the community sector on education and early childhood development. Community sector partners provide an important role in fostering better outcomes and participation for children and young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This can only be achieved through collaborative and consultative relationships with these partners, including not-for-profit agencies and peak bodies such as the Victorian Council of Social Service. During 2010, a framework for collaboration with the community sector on education and early childhood development will be developed.

Strategic whole-of-government initiative

While there has been significant investment in workforce capacity across a range of sectors that support vulnerable young people, there is an opportunity to promote more consistent skills and practices between sectors to facilitate a coordinated response to young people and their families.

5.1 Improving the capacity of workers supporting vulnerable young people to better identify and respond to their needs

The Government's demonstration projects will include work to improve the capacity of workers supporting young people. A Common Assessment and Referral Framework and a Common Practice Framework will be developed to ensure that the diverse range of programs funded across a range of departments will have a common approach to meeting the needs of the target group while retaining their specialised knowledge and forms of assistance. This will ensure that young people and their families receive a coordinated service irrespective of the number of providers necessary to meet their needs.

Implementation of these common frameworks within the seven demonstration projects will include training of key workers so they will have a common understanding of the risk factors for disengagement and other social problems as well as an agreed understanding of what is best practice in relation to their respective roles in engaging and supporting young people and their families

Further government actions

5.2 Training for teachers to support vulnerable young Victorians

A new \$9 million Victorian Deaf Education Institute will be established with funding over four years to support and train teachers working with deaf students. Additionally, \$2.5 million will be provided over four years for specialist mental health training to teachers and early childhood professionals, including funding for 70 Mental Health Graduate Diplomas for Teaching Professions at Monash University.

5.3 Training for child protection workers to improve system capacity and retention

The government is committed to strengthening the capacity of child protection service providers to manage the emerging challenges in the system and improve outcomes for vulnerable young people. Investment so far includes \$77 million over four years for extra frontline child protection workers, a specialist intervention team to tackle child protection trouble spots, and new principal practitioners to improve decision-making, enhance skills and overview regional case practice.

This funding will also provide additional training for child protection workers in dealing with sexual offenders and interventions with infants, a regional audit and monitoring system to improve regional operations, services and consistency in decision-making and a child protection workforce recruitment and training campaign. Additionally, the government has provided a \$2.1 million over four years for the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner, which will enable improved accountability and monitoring of child protection practices.

5.3 Dual diagnosis response within the youth homelessness sector

Through the allocation of \$3.5 million over four years of National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness funding, the Victorian Government has established a specialist dual diagnosis response team within the youth homelessness sector to assist young people aged 16–25 who access homelessness services and present with problematic drug or alcohol use and/or emerging mental health issues. The model includes nine youth homelessness dual diagnosis clinicians employed through the existing Victorian Dual Diagnosis Initiative (VDDI), delivering services to the youth homelessness sector through a partnered relationship with a host youth homelessness organisation.

Monitoring implementation and measuring outcomes

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the framework is fundamental to its ongoing success. This will enable lessons to be learned, best practice to be disseminated around local areas and investment to be targeted to the services that are making a difference in the lives of vulnerable young people.

The Children's Services Coordination Board will monitor the effectiveness of government efforts to promote coordination at local and regional levels. It will oversee the whole-of-government initiatives under the five focus areas and monitor the impact they have on outcomes for young people. This includes monitoring the implementation of the new investment of \$11 million over three years to support young people who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education, their families or communities by trialling innovative tools, service approaches and models for a consolidated and integrated youth service system.

Monitoring will use data drawn from a multidimensional set of outcomes for children and young people based on measures from the Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework (Figure 5). These indicators will provide a strong basis to assess the impacts of actions aligned to the framework on the outcomes of vulnerable young people, particularly where data is available at a local level or for particular population groups. At the same time, the success of programs and interventions will take into account the individual needs and circumstances of vulnerable young people.

Additionally, an evaluation will be undertaken to examine the extent to which the use of innovative tools and approaches in local settings contributes to the achievement of better engagement with services and education and reduced escalation of issues for vulnerable young people. Together, this data and the evaluation will inform future action by government for this cohort of young people.

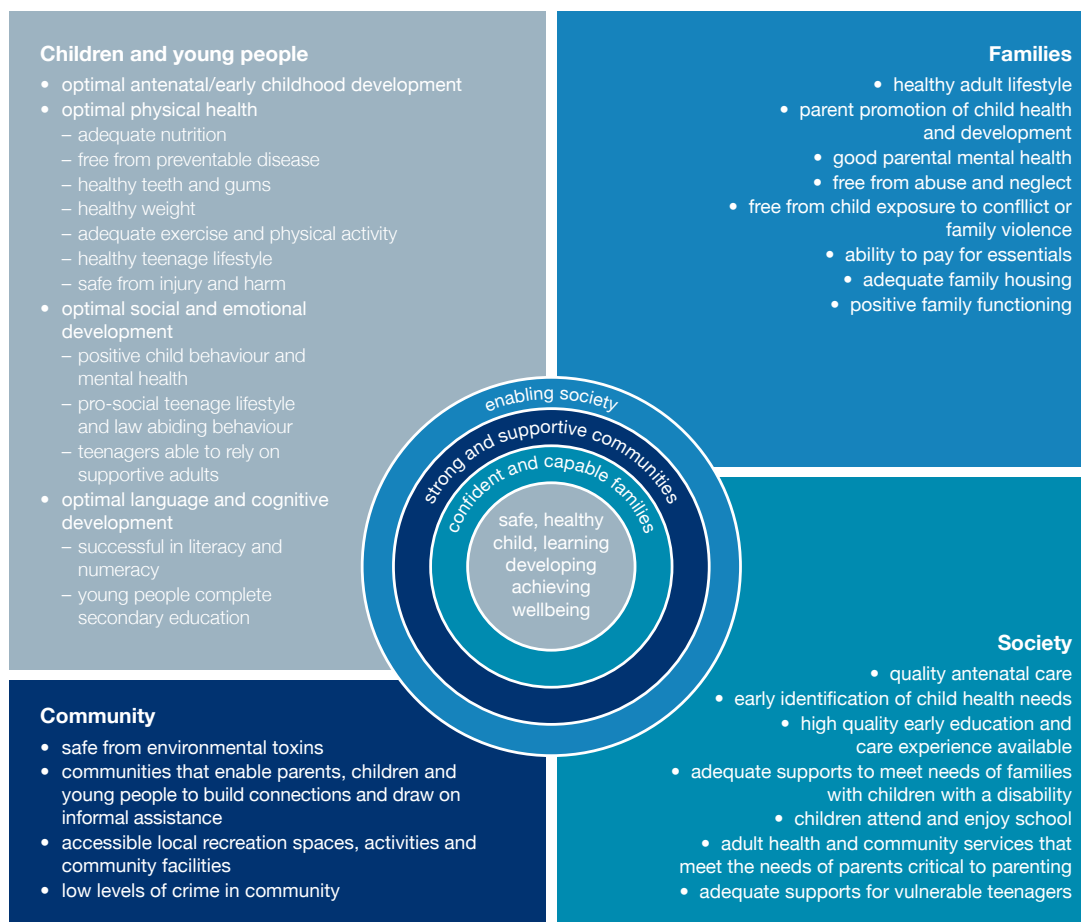


Figure 5: The Victorian Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework

Conclusion

Victoria currently makes a significant investment in services for young people, including interventions delivered through state and local government, community service organisations and schools. However, there are some young people who, because of individual circumstances, their history and environmental circumstances, may experience vulnerability and require a more holistic response from services.

The framework reinforces the need for services to be inclusive of all young people and recognises that connecting them to their communities and enabling their active participation in family, school and community life is key to reducing vulnerability. The framework and the new investments in youth-related services have been developed to facilitate effective planning and service delivery for vulnerable young people at both local and statewide levels. This planning will enable localised approaches that respond more flexibly to the needs of the vulnerable young people in their communities and assist vulnerable young people to receive services early in the onset of any issues.

Earlier interventions will improve the chances for vulnerable young people to achieve better educational and employment outcomes, and reduce the need for homelessness services, youth justice and tertiary services, such as intensive mental health and alcohol or other drug services.

At the same time, central governance structures play a key role in monitoring and coordinating policy. This improved coordination across government departments and with local government and community service organisations will also allow greater effectiveness and efficiency and reduced duplication of effort. The collaborative work completed by the government so far shows promising signs of service reform that can occur when government and local services develop collaborative working arrangements.

By taking responsibility for coordinating efforts across the services sector and taking a leadership role in driving the necessary changes which will lead to a better integrated array of universal and targeted services, the Victorian Government will successfully identify and support vulnerable young people to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable youth and consequently reach better outcomes for the community as a whole.

