

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne – Friday 22 May 2026

### **MEMBERS**

Sarah Connolly – Chair

John Pesutto – Deputy Chair

Jade Benham

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Aiv Puglielli

Richard Riordan

Meng Heang Tak



## WITNESSES

Luba Grigorovitch MP, Minister for Youth; and

Argiri Alisandratos, Deputy Secretary, Disability, Fairness and Emergency Management, and

Gerry Goswell, Executive Director, Community Inclusion, Veterans and Youth, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent. On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2026–27 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, any comments that you repeat outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check, and verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Minister for Youth, the Honourable Luba Grigorovitch, as well as officials from DFFH. Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement and presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time the committee will ask you some questions. Your time starts now.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Thank you, Chair. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are meeting and pay my respects to elders past, present and future.

I am pleased to present on the work of the youth portfolio in 2026. The youth portfolio supports young Victorians to take part in education, work and community life. There are more than 1.2 million young people in Victoria, and they make up around 18 per cent of the population. Around one in five live in regional areas. Almost half were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas, and around 12 per cent have a disability. The portfolio runs programs that reach all young people, with extra support for those who face more barriers, including First Nations young people, multicultural young people and young people in regional Victoria. All of this work is guided by *Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022–2027*, which was built with young people for young people.

More than one in five young Victorians identify as LGBTIQ+. They are part of every community, every school, every workplace and every family in this state. Too often LGBTIQ+ young people face barriers that their friends do not face at school, online and sometimes at home. Making sure that they feel safe and seen is part of the work of this portfolio. They deserve nothing less.

Over the past 12 months our main programs reached more than 135,000 young people – Amplify, Engage! and Future Ready. They have provided mentor training, career advice, peer support, volunteering opportunities and youth-led creative and music festivals. In September 2025 Victorian Youth Fest delivered 110 youth-led events across the state, engaging more than 15,000 young people.

We continued our partnership with Scouts Victoria – a new Scout hall in Kalkallo and an upgraded hall in Eltham. That brings out a total of 28 completed Scout hall projects since 2018.

We also continued to deliver the youth strategy. In September 2025 we hosted a youth strategy forum at Parliament with young people and the youth sector to make sure that their voices keep shaping our work. The portfolio also has a focus on young people who face additional barriers. Six community support groups support more than 2500 South Sudanese, Somali and Afghan young people and their families each year. They operate in the north, the west and the south-east of Melbourne. Alongside this, youth support and advocacy services delivered more than 200 episodes of outreach focused on alcohol and other drug harm minimisation for multicultural young people.

We continue our partnership with the Koorie Youth Council in line with the government's commitment to self-determination. The Marram Nganyin aboriginal youth mentoring program supports First Nations young people

in local communities across the state. It will mark its 10th anniversary this year. We also continued to fund the Living Learning program delivered with Melbourne City Mission and Hester Hornbrook Academy, supporting young people to re-engage in education. We continued support for over 1000 Pasifika young people through the Le Mana Pasifika project.

The 2025–26 budget update committed an additional \$5.3 million over two years to community support groups, investment that continues to roll out through 2025–26 and into 2026–27. This funds a new youth employment program that will support more than 350 multicultural young people to find work and build their careers.

The program makes employment services easier to access and helps build cultural understanding among employers so young people are set up to succeed and employers are ready to back them. The same package is expanding sports and recreation activities through community support groups, giving more young people the chance to take part, to stay connected and to build on what was already underway. The work of the youth portfolio is about practical help for young Victorians through good programs, through strong partnerships and working with young people. Looking ahead, engaging young people matters more than ever, and especially for our young adults. Being a young adult is a big stage of life. They are finishing study, they are looking for work, they are moving out of home and they are learning to stand on their own, and they are doing it with the pressure of the cost of living, mental health and the online world every day. The years ahead are about making sure that they get the support that they need. What young people have to say matters to me as the minister for young people. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The first 8 minutes are going to go to Ms Benham.

**Jade BENHAM:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, commitment 2.20 of your youth strategy – and this also relates to budget paper 4, page 37, table 7 as well, just for reference – commits to working with employers to recognise when young people are affected by family violence. The *Age* has reported that Women in Construction, a major Big Build labour hire supplier, was owned by a serial domestic violence abuser with links to bikies, drug trafficking and violent crimes. Have you, as Minister for Youth, sought information on how many young women were placed on government worksites through this company?

**A member:** Sorry, could we get a budget paper reference?

**Jade BENHAM:** Yes, you can. As I mentioned, budget paper 4, page 37 – the ‘Department Performance Statement’.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jade BENHAM:** Stop trying to cover it up. I would like to ask the minister. It is an illustrated strategy. I would just like some answers.

**The CHAIR:** Members will cease interjecting.

**Jade BENHAM:** Has the Minister for Youth sought information on how many young women were placed on government worksites through Women in Construction?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** I thank the member for the question, and I have got to say our youth strategy is very important to the Victorian Allan Labor government. *Our Promise, Your Future* is the Victorian youth strategy of 2022–27. It is the government’s whole-of-government plan for our young Victorians, and it was actually released before my time, in August.

**Jade BENHAM:** Have you sought information on how many women were placed on government worksites through Women in Construction, Minister?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** The strategy is backed by more than \$600 million in investment.

**Jade BENHAM:** Have you sought information? If you cannot answer the question, then I will take it as a no.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** As I was saying, the strategy is backed by more –

**Jade BENHAM:** Okay. As Minister for Youth, under commitment 2.20 what actions have you taken as minister to ensure young people are safe on government worksites, where they have been forced to work under domestic violence abusers?

**Michael GALEA:** On a point of order –

**The CHAIR:** Mr Galea, on a point of order.

**Michael GALEA:** We have been through this time and time and time again.

**Jade BENHAM:** The cover-ups?

**Michael GALEA:** The Minister for Youth is not responsible for infrastructure projects. We have had those ministers before us.

**Jade BENHAM:** We are not asking about construction projects. I am asking in relation to the youth strategy –

*Members interjecting.*

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me, Ms Benham. I will hear the point of order.

**Michael GALEA:** The Minister for Youth is responsible for youth programs. There are youth programs in the budget –

**Jade BENHAM:** So the Minister for Youth is not responsible for youth?

**Michael GALEA:** And a primary school upgrade is not a youth program in the budget.

**Jade BENHAM:** Getting young people –

**The CHAIR:** Ms Benham, it is late in the evening. Would you please ask the minister questions that are relevant to this portfolio and within the budget and the scope of the inquiry before us tonight.

**Jade BENHAM:** As Minister for Youth, under commitment 2.20 what actions have you taken as minister to ensure young people are safe on government worksites, where they have been forced to work under domestic violence abusers?

**Michael GALEA:** On a point of order –

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me, Ms Benham, there is a point of order. Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Ms Benham is now openly defying your last ruling.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Benham, in the time you have left –

**Jade BENHAM:** On the point of order –

**The CHAIR:** You can talk to the point of order. Go ahead, Ms Benham.

**Jade BENHAM:** On the point of order, this directly relates to the portfolio. Under the strategy and also under the ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 37, which is youth, the line item fourth up from the top is youth – that is how it relates. I understand this makes the government and the ministers very, very uncomfortable, and I understand that no-one wants to answer these questions. But the Victorian people, I think, deserve it, particularly the young people in Victoria and particularly young women. I am sure the Minister for Youth has no problem answering these questions.

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me. Mr Hilakari on the point of order.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** Certainly. We have been through this many times across these hearings.

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me, Mr Riordan. If you wish to speak on the point of order, you are welcome to do so after Mr Hilakari.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** The purpose of these hearings is to hear the evidence of ministers relating to the budget that has just been delivered to the Parliament.

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me, Ms Benham.

**Mathew HILAKARI:** It is an opportunity to question ministers about their portfolio area and put that evidence on record, not to just discuss general matters or –

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me. Mr Riordan, do you wish to speak on the point of order?

**Jade BENHAM:** On the point of order – I do.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Benham, you can speak on the point of order.

**Jade BENHAM:** In the slide presentation that the Minister for Youth has just presented, it directed and referenced *Our Promise, Your Future*, Victoria's youth strategy. I am taking strategies out of that and relating them to my questions. How is that not part of this scrutiny process of the budget?

**Richard RIORDAN:** It is a good point.

**The CHAIR:** Did you wish to speak on the point of order? You can continue to do it on Ms Benham's time. Ms Benham, I am going to ask you again to rephrase your question within the terms of reference of the inquiry that we are looking at.

**Jade BENHAM:** How is that not in terms of – I am sorry, Chair. It has been referred to in the presentation. This is an outright protection racket.

*Members interjecting.*

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me, Deputy Chair. Ms Benham, do you have another question?

**Jade BENHAM:** I have the question I have asked relating to strategy 2.20, *Our Promise, Your Future*, Victoria's youth strategy. Has the minister sought information on how many young women have been placed on government worksites through the company?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Through the Chair, I am happy to state that, looking at the youth strategy 2.20, it reads:

Support workforces to better recognise when young people are affected by, or using family violence and help them to access the right support when delivering services to young people across education, health, housing, community and justice services.

That actually falls under the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence.

**Jade BENHAM:** So a handball. The footy is on at the MCG down the road. That was a lovely handball, though. I will play on.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Ms Benham, I have answered your question as you have asked me.

**Jade BENHAM:** I will play on.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** I will happily tell you about what we are doing in the youth portfolio.

**Jade BENHAM:** Honestly.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Benham, ask another question in the time you have left.

**Jade BENHAM:** This is outrageous. Okay. Let us go to budget paper 4, page 48. In 2023–24 the youth output spent \$29.8 million, and the measure ‘Participation by young people in programs that provide opportunities to be involved in social and economic life in their communities’ reached approximately 390,000 young people. Why is this government spending \$3 million more despite planning to help 235,000 less young Victorians than you did three years ago?

*Members interjecting.*

**Jade BENHAM:** If they would let me finish the question, you might be able to hear. I apologise, Minister, for the government members.

*Members interjecting.*

**The CHAIR:** Ms Benham, there has been – Mr Galea!

**Jade BENHAM:** This is ridiculous.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael GALEA:** There are three primary schools on this page that you have mentioned.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Galea. Members will cease the interjections.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** Point of order.

**The CHAIR:** On a point of order, Ms Kathage.

**Lauren KATHAGE:** If it assists Ms Benham, it is the ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 48, not BP4. That is what has caused the confusion.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. I warn members about incorrect references. The minister to proceed.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Thank you, Chair. Ms Benham, which one am I looking at, sorry?

**Jade BENHAM:** The ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 48, apparently.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Okay. Thank you. Sorry, if you could just repeat the question.

**Jade BENHAM:** Why is the government spending \$3 million more despite planning to help, as per the performance outcomes, 235,000 less young people than you did three years ago? We are again paying more, getting less.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** The Victorian Allan Labor government is investing \$33 million in young people in this budget. With that, we are incredibly proud of that investment, because young people matter to us.

*Members interjecting.*

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Members, cease the interjections. Mr Galea.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Good evening, Minister, Mr Alisandratos and Ms Goswell. Thank you for joining us this evening. Apparently, even if it was not planned this way, as the youngest member who is presently here on the committee – I am not the youngest, but Mr Puglielli has left us for the evening, so I get to take the mantle –

**Jade BENHAM:** Wow, that is very judgey and ageist.

**Michael GALEA:** No, not at all, Ms Benham. I think we should have a Parliament full of people of younger and older perspectives. We have that in the upper house, actually, much more than in the lower house, I might just point out, Ms Benham – good age diversity in the upper house. My good colleague is not here. He is –

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** I might agree with you, Ms Benham – either end of the spectrum.

**Richard Riordan** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** I would not dare to speculate on that, Mr Riordan. In terms of your presentation, actually, I would like to take you to the slide –

**Jade BENHAM:** No – point of order.

**Michael GALEA:** Go for it.

**Jade BENHAM:** I was not allowed to make reference to the presentation.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes, you were.

**Jade BENHAM:** No, I was not. I was ruled out of order by the Chair.

**Michael GALEA:** Not because of that but because you drew it to the wrong portfolio.

**The CHAIR:** Excuse me. Mr Galea to proceed.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, you have outlined key achievements over the last 12 months and various initiatives in there, such as the six community support groups providing individual and tailored support to more than 2500 multicultural young people and their families and the youth, alcohol and other drugs outreach support, providing more than 200 individualised episodes of care. Minister, in relation to the community support groups and particularly the very large number of young people that are shown to be affected and supported through them, can you talk to me about how these groups operate and why the approach of early intervention and early community support makes a difference?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Absolutely. I thank the youngest member for his question.

**Michael GALEA:** Second-youngest.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Early intervention is an absolute priority for this portfolio, and I want to start off by saying that we are investing \$33 million in young Victorians in the 2026–27 budget – something we are very proud of. As I was saying, early intervention is an absolute priority, because the cost of not intervening early to a young person, to their family and to the state is unfortunately significant. Getting in early through people young people already trust is the most effective model, and that is why community support groups are so very important.

We have six funded organisations operating across Melbourne’s north, across Melbourne’s west and across Melbourne’s south-east. They provide individual and tailored support to more than 2500 multicultural young people and their families each year. These families are primarily from South Sudanese, Somali and also Afghan backgrounds. I know in my community of Kororoit the funding that has been provided is absolutely crucial. Although I have not been out to visit young people in any of your electorates as yet, I really look forward to getting out there over coming months and doing so.

The total program funding is \$20.9 million over two years, and each CSG, community support group, is embedded in the community that it serves. They are run by the people who share the lived experiences of the families that they each support and who have built trust over years – and trust is incredibly important, especially when we are talking to young people. I had the great honour of going to a Le Mana Pasifika event when I first became the minister – that was out in Melbourne’s west, in Melton, just a little bit past my electorate – and I was really proud to hear the young people there speak up and tell me about their lived experiences and why they find programs so important.

Another example is the Centre for Multicultural Youth, which received \$4.2 million over two years to deliver the Jamma CSG in Greater Dandenong, Casey and also Cardinia, which I believe covers the Member for Clarinda’s electorate, if I have got that correct, the Member for South-East Metropolitan Region and the Cranbourne, Berwick, Narre Warren, Bass and Pakenham electorates. In 2025 and 2026 Jamma delivered AFL

training for more than 200 South Sudanese young people, culminating in a competition with NextGen Unite attended by over 1000 people.

The Melton–Brimbank CSG I am incredibly familiar with. In my electorate of Kororoit we have two local government areas, one being Brimbank and one being Melton, and I must say they work very well together. They have a number of programs that are in connection with the Member for Laverton’s area as well. The Himilo CSG in North Melbourne delivers weekly after-school learning and employment pathways support for young Somali students. Alongside the CSGs, the youth support and advocacy services have delivered more than 200 individualised episodes.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Minister. In terms of the funding, referring to your presentation and also the ‘Department Performance Statement’, page 48, and the output funding in total, I understand there is also an additional \$5.3 million over two years for these community support groups to deliver a new youth employment program, strengthening pathways for around 350 young multicultural Victorians. Can you talk to me a little bit more about this program and why employment is a key part of early intervention?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Absolutely. Again, I thank the member for his question. You are right: \$5.3 million over two years was committed through the 2025–26 budget, as you can see in the papers. It funds two related streams which are delivered through the six community support groups. The first stream is the new youth employment program, and it will strengthen employment pathways for more than 350 multicultural young people. I have got to say, this is really important. We all were young once – some of us still think we are – and having a job is really important, but especially at that tender age of being in your teens. I know I at the age of 14 had three jobs, and I did that because it made me feel appreciated, it helped out with the family and it really assisted with our household at the same time. On top of that, it gives young people direction to have a job, so I am a big advocate for this program. The model brings employment support to young people through the CSGs, again, who are already trusted. Going back to the Jamma CSG, that is delivered by the Centre for Multicultural Youth in Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia. Again, that has helped over 200 young people. It is something that otherwise would not happen if that \$5.3 million was not allocated in the funding.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. Indeed, as you would imagine, I am very familiar with the work of the Centre for Multicultural Youth and the very incredible work that they do in my electorate, so it is great to see them supported through this as well. Further in the slides you mentioned funding for three South Sudanese community support groups in particular, with a one-off boost of I believe \$750,000 in both the west and south-east of Melbourne. Obviously I am very interested in particularly one of those regions, but I would like to get an indication from you as to how that funding – the west is a close second, Mr Hilakari.

**The CHAIR:** Be careful where you are sitting.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes, Chair, I realise where you are. In terms of those programs across both communities, can you explain the importance of this and what this is expected to deliver?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** That was a one-off boost of \$750,000. As you rightly mentioned, it is in Melbourne’s west, Melbourne’s north and of course Melbourne’s south-east. Again, it is about making young people feel connected to community. It is about giving them hope and making sure that they have a pathway that they can go forward to. That is why our government, the Allan Labor government, alongside the department, felt the imperative need for this one-off boost.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you. The Koorie Youth Council and delivery of the Marram Nganyin Aboriginal youth mentoring program for First Nations young people in local communities is also something that is being resourced through your portfolio, as I understand it. What is this work? If you can expand into some more detail, Minister, and specifically to the point: what will it deliver for First Nations young Victorians?

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Yes, absolutely. I might have my departmental colleague help me on this one or assist. It was a total program budget of \$1.677 million over three years. The Marram Nganyin supports five Aboriginal organisations, delivering mentoring programs across the state. The program is marking its 10th anniversary this year – something that I have already been briefed on. I am quite excited to actually attend, but that is why I thought I would hand it over to Ms Goswell, because I know she is quite across the detail and equally as excited.

**Gerry GOSWELL:** Thank you, Minister. And thank you, Mr Galea, for the question. The really exciting part of the Marram Nganyin Aboriginal youth mentoring program is that it is a community led and designed model. We are really pleased that we continue to partner with the Koorie Youth Council, as the peak body for First Nations young people, led by the incredible Bonnie Dukakis. Koorie Youth Council partner with five local Aboriginal organisations to ensure that it is a self-determined and culturally safe approach that is taken. The department is really working with KYC in acknowledgement of their critical leadership role for community, from community.

The five organisations that are funded through the program are Rumbalara Football Netball Club in Greater Shepparton; Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, who works out in Glenelg and Southern Grampians shire; Bunjilwarra Koori Youth healing service, who do incredible work down Mornington Peninsula way but also across the state; Weethunga Health Network, which is closer to home in the City of Yarra; and then Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, which is one of our incredible gathering places in the state in the City of Whitehorse. Each of those five organisations works with Aboriginal elders and Aboriginal young people in their community to design a mentoring program that meets their needs. What we know is that connection to culture is a powerful protective factor around First Nations young people in particular, and we are really proud to see, as the minister said, the program celebrating 10 years this year.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** Thank you, Ms Goswell. Just to supplement, when I learned of this program, when Ms Goswell and I discussed it, I was incredibly impressed, and I am so looking forward to seeing what it achieves.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Ms Goswell, Minister.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Galea. Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing before the committee tonight. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee's request.

I thank all ministers and officials who have given evidence to the committee today as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants. I would also like to thank the cleaning, hospitality and security staff who have looked after all of us today.

The committee will resume its consideration of the 2026–27 budget estimates on Monday 25 May at 8:30 am. I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Committee adjourned.**