The Hon. Natalie Suleyman MP

Minister for Small Business and Employment

Small Business and Employment Portfolio

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into the 2025/26 Budget Estimates

5 June



State of the Portfolio

Small businesses are the foundation of Victoria's robust and thriving economy.

- Over 718,000 small businesses in Victoria, making up 97% of Victoria's business population.
- Over 124,000 new small businesses created in 2023-24.
- Small businesses are responsible for around 39% of private sector employment.
- The highest growth in small business numbers was seen in Melton (+11%) and Wyndham (+10%).
- 22% of Victoria's small businesses are in regional areas.
- 33% of Victoria's small business owners are female, and 35% are migrants.
- Melbourne's CBD retail businesses are booming with vacancy rates down to 6%, the lowest vacancy rate in the country.





State of the Portfolio

Victoria's labour market remains healthy.

- A high share of Victorians are in work, with the number of employed Victorians growing by over 115,000 in 2024.
- Victoria's labour market remains strong, unemployment remaining below historical averages at 4.2%.
- Although outcomes vary by region and cohort, participation remains near record-highs at 68%, above the national average.

Our Achievements

- → The Small Business Toolkits Program supported nearly 4,300 current and prospective business owners with advice, learning and mentoring.
- → The Small Business Bus visited more than 80 locations state-wide so far this financial year as it celebrates 15 years of operation.
- Business Victoria digital channels provided essential business information and resources, with over 4.2 million website visits and over 138,000 subscribers.
- Multicultural traders and precincts were supported through business activation and capability uplift, and re-establishment of the Multicultural Business Ministerial Council.
- Business Friendly Councils Pilot completed with 11 LGAs
 now being rolled out to all councils in 2025.





Our Achievements

- The Victorian Government has secured \$7.84 million from the Commonwealth Government's Outcome Fund to deliver a self-determined Aboriginal employment initiative.
- The Youth Employment Scheme (YES) is on track to place 100 trainees into the Victorian Public Service this financial year.
- Established three Aboriginal Economic Hubs across Bendigo, Gippsland and Ballarat in 2024. Recently, five additional Hubs were approved for funding in Abbotsford, Frankston, Heywood, Shepparton and Warrnambool.
 - Work and Learning Centres (WLCs) have placed over 270 jobseekers facing barriers to employment into work since October 2023.

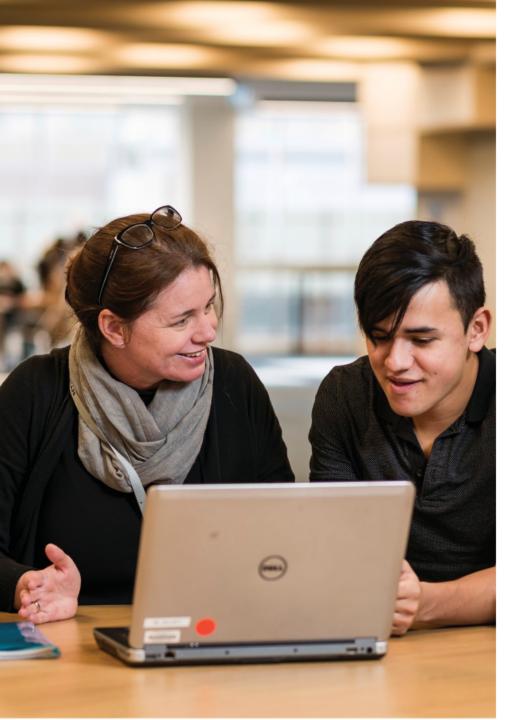
Budget Initiatives

Supporting Victorian small businesses

The 2025-26 State Budget provides funding of:

- \$4.9 million over 2 years for the Supporting Victoria's Small Businesses initiative to continue to save Victoria's small businesses time and money through access to essential and trusted information, tools, templates and advisory services via the Business Victoria Online Delivery and Contact Centre.
- \$3.5 million over 2 years to address recovery needs from the Western Victoria Bushfires.
- \$1.1 million over 2 years as part of the Economic Growth Statement for the Boosting Business Skills Mentoring Program to deliver 3 one-hour mentoring sessions with an experienced professional for 1,000 small business owners across the 5 priority sectors.





Budget Initiatives

Employment

\$5 million across two years to support local employment initiatives

- continuation of **Thrive Hubs** in Broadmeadows and Frankston to support jobseekers to find long-term employment across in-demand industries, delivered in partnership with the Australian Government and Brotherhood of St. Laurence.
- continuation of the Parkville College Program which provides young people transitioning out of Parkville College with workreadiness support and connections to employment and training.
- further local employment initiatives supporting economic participation outcomes.

Self-determination for First Peoples

- \$4.8 million to support First Nations businesses to compete locally and globally, and funding to host the first World Indigenous Business Forum in Melbourne in 2025.
- \$5.0 million to create a First Peoples Leadership Academy, which will grow emerging leaders across business, government and communities.