

---

**Government Responses to the Recommendations of  
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE'S  
Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

---

Pursuant to Section 36 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*, this paper provides a response to the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's (PAEC) Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

**Guide for readers** - Following is the explanation of the format of this paper.

<b>1</b> <b>Title</b>		
<b>2</b> <b>Chapter number and topic</b>		
<b>1</b> <b>PAEC recommendation</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Response</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Action taken to date and commitment to further action</b>

Row 1: Indicates the title of this paper.

Row 2: Indicates the number and topic of the response to the PAEC recommendations.

Column 1: Contains PAEC's recommendations as published in its Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Column 2: Indicates the Government's response to each recommendation: 'Support', 'Support-in-Principle', 'Not Support', or 'Under Review'.

Column 3: Provides an explanation of the Government's position on the recommendation, indicates the actions that have been taken to date relevant to the implementation of the recommendation, and outlines commitment to further action relevant to the implementation of the recommendation.

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
---------------------	----------	---

**Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Chapter 2: Health**

**Recommendation 1:**

The Department of Health and Human Services evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the COVID-19 Pandemic Plan for the Victorian Health Sector, including the implementation of its requirements by relevant agencies, and the draft Victorian Action Plan for COVID-19 Pandemic, to inform the development of future pandemic planning.

Support

Due to the constantly changing environment of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Health has continued to review the COVID-19 Pandemic Plan for the Victorian Health Sector to inform the approach to managing the pandemic and the health sector's response.

Work continues within the department to routinely monitor and evaluate COVID-related responses including those set out in the Plan.

The Plan has helped to ensure the health system is well-positioned to respond to a worst-case pandemic scenario. Under the current settings, Victoria has the additional critical care beds and equipment, and stocks of personal protective equipment needed to manage the worst-case hospitalisation scenario.

**Recommendation 2:**

The Government, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services, consider options to amend the Health Records Act 2001 (Vic) to more effectively facilitate the provision of warnings and contact tracing during pandemics and other public health emergencies.

Support

The Department of Health will work with the Department of Premier and Cabinet, key stakeholders including Victorian Health Services and industry bodies to identify opportunities for the effective facilitation and provision of information during pandemics and other public health emergencies without compromising the purpose of the *Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)* to:

- protect the privacy of an individuals' health information
- regulate the collection and handling of health information by the Victorian public and private sectors
- protect individual privacy and autonomy, while also ensuring safe and effective service delivery for the community and continuous quality improvement.

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> The Department of Health and Human Services establish better protocols to facilitate effective communication with Victorian General Practitioners in the event of a pandemic.</p>	Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Department of Health will continue to work closely with primary care practitioners on streamlined processes for communication that can be used during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and beyond including, where appropriate, direct contact with primary care practitioners.</li> <li>• The Department of Health makes use of a range of channels to communicate with general practice through primary health care networks (PHNs), the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Australian Medical Association (AMA).</li> <li>• While communication between the department and General Practitioners during COVID-19 has improved, due to the potential time sensitive nature of the information to be disseminated, further benefit would be gained from an agreed state-wide coordinated mechanism.</li> <li>• The department has actively facilitated communication and engagement of General Practitioners and Public Health Networks in responding to COVID-19 including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in weekly/fortnightly webinars run by the RACGP Victorian office since March 2020.</li> <li>• Establishing a GP expert reference group with representatives from RACGP, AMA and PHNs (established in March)</li> <li>• Regular meetings with the Victorian Primary Health Network Alliance (including all Victorian Primary Health Network CEO's).</li> <li>• Representation of Primary Health Networks (PHNs) in Incident Management Teams to facilitate timely communication of local outbreaks to key general practitioners in the local area.</li> <li>• Promotion of the Chief Health Officer (CHO) Alerts for General Practitioners to receive daily updates on the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> <li>• Provision of Disaster Support and Recovery funding to all Victorian PHNs to assist with a primary health response under the State Health Emergency Response Plan including facilitating communications with the primary care sector.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p><b>Recommendation 4:</b> The Department of Health and Human Services develop measures that enable effective collaboration across primary health networks and the state-run public health sector.</p>	Support	<p>As a signatory to the National Health Reform Agreement, the Department of Health supports this recommendation to improve local accountability and responsiveness to the needs of communities through collaboration between primary health networks and the public health sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary Health Networks (PHNs) are an Australian Government initiative that work collaboratively within their regions to integrate health services at the local level. PHNs are funded by the Commonwealth to undertake activities and commission services to address the prioritised primary health care needs of their communities and to improve efficiency, effectiveness and coordination of care.</li> <li>• The Commonwealth PHN Program Performance and Quality Framework (<a href="https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/PHN-Performance_Framework">https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/PHN-Performance_Framework</a>) provides a structure for monitoring and assessing PHN performance and progress towards achieving outcomes. The framework contains indicators that measure performance of PHNs to support general practices and other health care providers in their region to ensure that health professionals are able to respond appropriately and confidently to the health needs of their region and improve their service delivery.</li> <li>• Through the COVID Positive Pathways program, public health services, community health organisations, PHNs and general practice providers are collaborating to ensure the provision of clinical and social care to COVID positive individuals.</li> <li>• The devolved contact tracing system for metropolitan Melbourne that is being implemented through Local Public Health Units will integrate with local clinical care provision and outbreak management and leverage localised resources by engaging with local health services and organisations including general practice and the PHNs.</li> <li>• A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department of Health and Human Services (to be updated to the Department of Health), Victorian Primary Health Networks and Victorian Primary Health Network Alliance provides a framework of principles, roles and responsibilities that underpin the collaborative relationship. The MOU includes a data management schedule that supports data sharing for improved planning and service delivery between primary health networks and the public health sector.</li> </ul>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p><b>Recommendation 5:</b> The Department of Health and Human Services work with the health sector to develop a comprehensive pandemic preparedness training program for healthcare workers including proper use of personal protective equipment.</p>	<p>Support-in-Principle</p>	<p>The recommendation is ‘supported in principle’ as the department continues to work with sector agencies and representative bodies on preparedness training programs.</p> <p>During 2020, training for acute healthcare workers was predominantly managed by health service IPC teams, however the community sector required guidance and support from the department based on request and needs analysis.</p> <p>From 2021, the management of healthcare worker pandemic training for the community sector is planned to transition to a more central model, with the department providing greater oversight of governance and policy. Notably, this change will utilise capability frameworks and supported by a healthcare worker personal protective equipment (PPE) strategy</p> <p><b>Current Arrangements</b></p> <p>The department’s healthcare worker preparedness training programs are provided on a needs basis by the Infection Protection and Control Advice and Response (IPCAR) unit that includes outreach nurses, Health and Wellbeing division and Safer Care Victoria. In addition, the department routinely collaborates with the VICNISS Coordinating Centre and relevant sector professional groups.</p> <p>The VICNISS Coordinating Centre was established in 2002 with the aim of reducing the occurrence of healthcare associated infections in Victorian healthcare facilities.</p> <p>IPCAR currently provide a consultancy-based model to support organisations that do not have their own Infection Prevention and Control team. Notable recent examples include supporting disability services, emergency services, airport authorising officers and aged care. The unit’s educators provide a “train-the-trainer” model and supporting resources to assist and empower those services to ensure there is a robust process in-place to support worker education. The advice arm of IPCAR review existing education packages used by a variety of organizations to ensure evidence-based content and appropriateness for use.</p> <p>In addition, Monash University has been funded to deliver PPE and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) training to Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) and aged care workers since 11 August 2020. The education package follows the similar template (train-the-trainer) as that provided by IPCAR.</p> <p><b>Committed Further Work</b></p> <p>Having been funded and established in 2020, the Local Public Health Units will continue to develop in 2021. The Local Public Health Units will continue to support wider Department of Health public health policy and processes within their catchment, including health services and healthcare workers. In terms of preparedness training, support provided will include implementing the process for case contact investigations and worker testing protocols during a pandemic.</p> <p>The department’s Emergency Preparedness Training Unit (EPTU) has received funding to develop a centralised repository of educational tools and resources to support preparedness activities. In the short term, this will be delivered through an interactive online learning management system. The learning packages will be variable depending on the worker’s role so that they are</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
		<p>tailored to their specific environment. All education packages (both current and planned) are evidence based and are approved by IPCAR.</p> <p><b>Future Options</b></p> <p>The department has commenced engagement with a local provider to utilise a platform that allows the healthcare workers to maintain correct donning and doffing protocols in real-time. The scoped deliverable is a universal, state-wide, portal for all people required to wear PPE that utilizes artificial intelligence to provide user feedback.</p> <p>In-line with the transition to increased central oversight of pandemic preparedness, the department will explore opportunities to implement and monitor performance and quality metrics to ensure compliance and install an enduring requirement for training and education.</p> <p>All future pandemic preparedness training will be undertaken in partnership with IPCAR, EPTU, Local Public Health Units and Safer Care Victoria.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6:</b></p> <p>The Victorian Government develop a strategy to improve access to mental health support for those struggling with recent circumstances in regional and rural Victoria.</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>The Victorian Government has funded a \$59.4 million Keeping Victorians Connected and Supported Mental Health and Wellbeing COVID-19 Response Package to support the mental health, wellbeing and social connectedness of Victorians in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the post recovery period. The package provides funding for services across Victoria, including those in rural and regional Victoria.</p> <p>The package seeks to reduce preventable or worsening mental illness, promote community connectedness and protect the health system from being overrun by the coronavirus and its associated impacts. The funding supports the continuation of the state-wide roll out of Hospital Outreach Post-Suicidal Engagement (HOPE) program in Shepparton and Bairnsdale, a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System Interim Report. The package also provides funding to expand online and phone counselling services through BeyondBlue, Lifeline, Kids Helpline and Suicide Line Victoria and ensure that Victorians can access support wherever they live.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
---------------------	----------	---

<b>Chapter 3: Economy</b>		
<p><b>Recommendation 7:</b> The Department of Treasury and Finance and State Revenue Office consider publishing data that gives an insight into the impact of the funding initiatives that were announced as part of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Support	<p>During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Treasury and Finance published data on the economic and jobs impact of COVID-19 response initiatives. These publications included the Coronavirus Economic Outlook in April 2020 and the Victorian Economic Update in July 2020, which incorporated the impact of government support on Victorian economic forecasts, as well as the 2020-21 Budget papers which covered the impact of government support on the business sector and jobs.</p> <p>As reported in the 2020-21 Budget, the Jobs Plan, as well as other initiatives announced since the 2019-20 Budget Update, will support around 125, 000 jobs over the life of these initiatives. Deloitte Access Economics estimates that the Government's expenditure and revenue decisions will result in a cumulative \$43.9 billion increase to Victoria's gross state product over the budget and forward estimates period.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the Department of Treasury and Finance will continue to publish information on the impact of COVID-19 initiatives as new data and analysis becomes available.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
---------------------	----------	---

Chapter 4: Jobs and infrastructure		
<p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> The Victorian Government consider collecting gender disaggregated data during the pandemic that can inform decision making and investment to reduce the gender impact of the crisis.</p>	Support	<p>A large number of Victorian datasets already collect gender disaggregated data, with data reporting infrastructure already in place across Victorian departments and agencies. To support decision making in the context of COVID-19 recovery, gender disaggregated data is collected by the Victorian Public Sector Commission, the Centre for Victorian Data Linkage, the Victorian Agency for Health Information, and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions in relation to employment, among other institutions. Gender disaggregated data and insights have also been regularly used in reports including the Victorian Population Health Survey.</p> <p>Throughout 2020, the Office for Women compiled gender disaggregated data from Australian Government and Victorian Government sources to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on women, and the priority policy responses required. This covered a range of domains, including jobs, health and wellbeing and mental health. This work and the production of Victoria’s first Gender Baseline report in 2019, has provided Office for Women with significant insights about the availability/limitations of gender disaggregated data.</p> <p>Gender disaggregated data is also required under Victoria’s <i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i> (‘the Act’), commencing on 31 March 2021, and each department is required to undertake gender impact assessments on new significant policies, services and programs that directly impact the public. In 2021, the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector will continue to work closely with departments to build their data collection and analysis capacity and ensure they have the resources to undertake this work, including providing support and comprehensive guidance materials on collecting and analysing gender disaggregated data. The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector will support departments to use gender impact assessments to inform better outcomes for women.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
---------------------	----------	---

**Chapter 5: Industry**

<p><b>Recommendation 9:</b> Business Victoria consider ways of facilitating employees and employers completing the free online course on operating a hospitality/retail business safely in a COVID-19 environment.</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>Business Victoria is supportive of the Committee’s recommendation to consider ways of facilitating employees and employers to complete the existing free online course on operating a hospitality/retail business safely in a COVID-19 environment.</p> <p>As noted by the Committee, Business Victoria already offers a free online module to support businesses, particularly in hospitality and retail, to operate safely in a COVID-19 environment.</p> <p>Business Victoria also offers many other significant training opportunities through the ‘Upskill My Business Platform’, which helps Victorian businesses develop their existing business skills and strengthen their business. This includes specialised infection control training for the retail and hair and beauty industries delivered in association with the Australian Retailers Association (ARA).</p> <p>In addition, the Victorian Skills Gateway provides free short accredited training courses to help upskill workers to administer and implement infection control policies and procedures within workplaces. Offered in partnership with some of Victoria’s leading TAFEs and Registered Training Organisations, infection control training courses have also been developed for specific industries including retail, disability and aged care, food handling and transport and logistics.</p> <p>DJPR is also pursuing further opportunities to develop educational resources for Victorian businesses across all industries to help them operate safely and flourish in a COVIDSafe and COVID Normal environment.</p> <p>In response to the committee’s recommendation, Business Victoria will work with training provider partners to make sure that existing courses are fit-for-purpose and will help facilitate and encourage uptake and completion by publicising existing offerings and linking to further training opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 10:</b> The Department of Education and Training consider maintaining a record of the Victorian university sector’s research and development expenditure, outlining the impact of the decline on research and development and its effect on the Victorian economy.</p>	<p>Support-in-principle</p>	<p>The Department of Education and Training (DET) will coordinate engagement with universities, in consultation with the Office of the Lead Scientist (the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions), to gather data on the Victorian university sector’s research and development expenditure.</p> <p>DET will work across Government to consider the impact of any decline in research and development, including its effect on the Victorian economy.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
---------------------	----------	---

**Chapter 6: Social impacts**

<p><b>Recommendation 11:</b> The Department of Health and Human Services consider publishing information on how many applications for rent relief have been made in total and how many tenants have been granted rent relief.</p>	Support	<p>Homes Victoria supports the publishing of rent relief grants (grants) information to enable public access to grant information, and greater government transparency.</p> <p>Homes Victoria has published the total number of grants approved, and total value of payments made, on the <a href="#">rent relief grant</a> website. This information will be published on a weekly basis.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 12:</b> Consumer Affairs Victoria consider publishing on its website a breakdown of the type of rental agreements being lodged.</p>	Support	<p>A report providing a further breakdown of data from the Residential Tenancies Dispute Resolution Scheme as at 30 September 2020, including a breakdown of the type of rental agreements being lodged, was published on the Consumer Affairs Victoria website on 23 December 2020. See: <a href="https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/latest-news/residential-tenancy-matters-to-cav-news-alert">https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/latest-news/residential-tenancy-matters-to-cav-news-alert</a>.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13:</b> The Department of Health and Human Services consider undertaking an evaluation of the 'Call It Out' campaigns to determine their effectiveness and impact on service demand.</p>	Support	<p>Respect Victoria (Victoria's independent primary prevention agency) has had responsibility for implementing and evaluating the 'Call it Out' campaign since its establishment in August 2018. 'Call it Out' is a whole-of-community campaign that seeks to change the culture that drives family violence. Respect Victoria has conducted quarterly and annual evaluations of the campaign which have demonstrated its effectiveness in changing the drivers of violence. For example, three in every five Victorians (60 per cent) who had seen the 'Call it Out' public transport campaign (Nov-Dec 2019) said they would speak up if violence against women situation was occurring.</p> <p>In 2021, the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination and Family Safety Victoria will work with Respect Victoria to support their evaluations of the 'Call It Out' campaign, including the provision of relevant data to determine impact on service demand, noting that service demand is influenced by a range of complex factors including community attitudes, cultural norms and beliefs that contribute to family violence. Government and sector investments, made in response to the 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and covering policy, legislation, service design and programming, also contribute to family violence drivers and prevalence, and might also contribute to service demand changes.</p> <p>Respect Victoria will work across the Victorian government to assess the impact of 'Call it Out' campaigns on service demand within the context of these wider government family violence reforms. This includes work to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes generated through the Victorian government Free from Violence prevention strategy, drawing on data linked to Victoria's Family Violence Outcomes Framework.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p><b>Recommendation 14:</b> The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Training, and the family violence sector, establish protocols to facilitate effective collaboration to ensure the safety of at-risk children during and after the pandemic.</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>Family Safety Victoria: DET currently has a range of policies and protocols about required follow up in the context of child abuse (including relating to family violence), including child safe standards (which is primarily a child protection response).</p> <p>These protocols will be strengthened by the prescription of schools and early childhood services under the Family Violence and Child Information Sharing Schemes and the MARAM Framework in April 2021 (an initiative that is being led by FSV). This will allow for the sharing of information in relation to children at risk of family violence between education and early childhood services and the specialist family violence sector. Schools and other education and early childhood services will also be required to align with the MARAM Framework, which will enhance the capacity of these services to respond to family violence risk.</p> <p>FSV will work with government and sector partners to support the implementation of the Family Violence and Child Information Sharing Schemes and the MARAM Framework throughout the year and will ensure practitioners are aware of the resource and training materials on websites. Supplementary training sessions will be provided where necessary. FSV will proactively work with local networks such as the Family Violence Regional Integration Committees to optimise local knowledge and connections.</p> <p>In the event of further lockdowns, FSV will require relevant specialist family violence agencies to undertake rapid research of known victims including children, undertake new risk assessments and regular monitoring of high risk cases and mobilise local networks and information sharing protocols as key element of the monitoring processes. FSV supports the proposal from the Department of Education and Training to establish governance and regular meeting across departments.</p> <p>As the referral point for family violence and vulnerable families, The Orange Door will continue to play a key role in protecting the safety of at-risk children through timely MARAM based risk and need assessment, information sharing, early work with clients to address urgent risk and needs and referral to relevant sector agencies for ongoing support. An effective response to children in The Orange Door is underpinned by strong relationship with family violence services, family services and child protection – all of whom comprise The Orange Door partnership.</p> <p>DET: The Department of Education and Training (DET) will continue to work closely with other agencies supporting vulnerable children during the COVID-19 pandemic, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ establishing governance and regular meetings with Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) and FSV to focus on supporting vulnerable students including those in Out of Home Care, Youth Justice, Aboriginal students and students with disability through COVID-19.</li> <li>○ sharing and tracking key student data with DFFH, DJCS and FSV.</li> <li>○ running Family Violence Principal Practitioner webinars for school and regional staff on identifying and responding to the impacts of family violence on students and staff</li> <li>○ running webinars for school and regional staff with the DFFH Chief Practitioner providing an overview of child safety risks and reporting during remote learning</li> </ul>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ regular engagement with key partners that support vulnerable students, including disability, Koori, mental health, family violence and community services.</li> </ul> <p>From Term 2, 2021, centre-based education and care services, schools and education wellbeing, inclusion and engagement services will join the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS), Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework. DET is collaborating with other agencies with workforces prescribed to CISS, FVISS and MARAM, to ensure aligned implementation of the reforms across whole of Victorian government. The reforms promote increased collaboration between prescribed information sharing entities to promote child wellbeing and safety and manage family violence risk.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
---------------------	----------	---

**Chapter 7: Justice**

<p><b>Recommendation 15:</b> Corrections Victoria confirm all Victorian prisons and youth justice centres comply with the Communicable Disease Network Australia Guidelines for the prevention, control and public health management of COVID-19 outbreaks in correctional and detention facilities in Australia and confirm an infection control program has been formalised and is being fully implemented at each site.</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>The Communicable Disease Network Australia Guidelines provide best practice information on prevention and management of COVID-19 outbreaks in detention, correctional and youth justice facilities. The CDNA Guidelines form the basis of the outbreak prevention and management approach for Corrections Victoria and in Youth Justice, including infection control measures. In line with the guidelines, each facility has prepared an outbreak prevention and management plan, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• key personnel who form the facility’s outbreak management team</li> <li>• information on the set up of the facility, including areas for protective quarantine, quarantine and isolation</li> <li>• local operating procedures for protective quarantine, quarantine and isolation</li> <li>• prevention and infection control measures in place across each facility, including facility wide measures and specific measures for protective quarantine, quarantine and isolation</li> <li>• location of PPE across the facility and stock of each item of PPE</li> <li>• plan for signage in the event of an outbreak (e.g. signage outside isolation areas; at entrances to facility declaring an outbreak)</li> <li>• environmental and terminal cleaning schedule</li> <li>• procedures for evaluation of outbreak management.</li> </ul> <p>The prevention and infection control measures include statewide and facility specific strategies to address transmission risk from external visitors, prisoners and young people with recent community contact, movement of prisoners, young people and staff, as well as strategies to address transmission risk within facilities. These strategies include quarantine requirements, physical distancing measures, screening of visitors, staff, prisoners and young people, PPE requirements, support to maintain good hygiene, and additional cleaning requirements.</p> <p>In line with the guidelines, outbreak prevention and management strategies are informed by both the CDNA guidelines, as well as health and operational advice specific to Victorian prisons, Youth Justice centres and individual facilities.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 16:</b> In its annual report, Court Services Victoria consider detailing how many trials proceeded as judge-alone under the Omnibus Act.</p>	<p>Support-in-Principle</p>	<p>Court Services Victoria (CSV) has considered this recommendation, noting further that the Supreme and County Courts may also include this information in their Annual Reports to the Governor of Victoria.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p><b>Recommendation 17:</b> In its annual report, Court Services Victoria consider publishing information on how each court utilised technology during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Support	<p>CSV has considered this recommendation and will be including information its Annual Report on how CSV (including all Victorian courts and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)) has utilised technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that each of the courts and VCAT are expected to provide further details in their Annual Reports to the Governor of Victoria.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 18:</b> Court Services Victoria consider publishing data on how many matters have been adjourned in each jurisdiction and the nature of any delays each court is experiencing due to COVID-19.</p>	Support-in-Principle	<p>CSV has considered this recommendation, noting further that the courts and VCAT, with approval by the Heads of Jurisdictions, determine how data of this nature is to be published. It should be noted that information regarding pending matters in each Victorian court is available in the Australian Government's annual Report on Government Services, subject to national case counting standards.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
---------------------	----------	---

<b>Chapter 8: Education</b>		
<p><b>Recommendation 19:</b> The Department of Education and Training evaluate the trial at Kalianna School, Bendigo Special Development School and Echuca Specialist School, and consider how the findings can be shared and applied to support students with a disability and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Support	DET supports a post-hoc review of the trial with the aims of understanding the benefits experienced by students and families, and the resources required by schools in order to make decisions about future application.
<p><b>Recommendation 20:</b> The Department of Education and Training consult with specialist educators regarding enhanced cleaning measures to ensure that there is confidence that they are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of specialist schools.</p>	Support	Existing contracts and cleaning arrangements include a schedule specifically for specialist schools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all cleaning requirements are informed by the Department of Health infection control experts and relevant cleaning scopes and guidelines are endorsed by the Department of Health. DET will consult with the specialist school sector in regard to cleaning measures as needed.

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p><b>Recommendation 21:</b></p> <p>The Victorian Government support schools to deliver expanded mental health programs for students, including online support to help address the impact of the pandemic period.</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>The Victorian Government is continuing to provide principals, teachers and school staff with resources to support their students' mental health and wellbeing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p><b>Increased investment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of the COVID-19 mental health package announced in April 2020, the Victorian Government announced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Funding to <u>Smiling Mind</u> (\$465,000) to develop digital care packs, aimed at supporting children and young people experiencing high levels of anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic via their parents and educators.</li> <li>○ Funding to YourTown (<u>Kids Helpline</u>) (\$500,000) for increased capacity to provide free, confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.</li> <li>○ Funding to the <u>Alannah and Madeline Foundation</u> Child Ahead Program (\$700,000) to provide intensive case management and trauma informed/strength based therapeutic interventions to children and young people with complex mental health needs who have been victims of significant trauma or violence.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• On 7 August 2020, the Victorian Government announced a two-year \$28.5 million package to support the mental health and engagement of students, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extending <u>Mental Health Practitioners</u> to 85 secondary and P-12 specialist schools (\$9.96 million over 2 years). This builds on the \$51.2 million invested to support implementation in every government secondary school campus by 2022.</li> <li>○ Continuing the <u>Mental Health in Primary Schools Pilot</u>, in partnership with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and expanding to 25 schools in 2021 (\$3.476 million over 2 years).</li> <li>○ Expanding the <u>headspace mental health training programs</u> for school staff to support all students through SAFEMinds and Suicide Risk Continuum Training (\$0.2 million over 2 years).</li> <li>○ Boosting response capacity of the <u>Navigator Program</u> and building the mental health capacity of Navigator providers (\$6.9 million over 2 years).</li> <li>○ Expanding <u>LOOKOUT</u> to increase support for the educational needs of students in Out of Home Care (\$5.353 million over 2 years).</li> <li>○ Creating <u>Local Wellbeing Networks</u> bringing together mental health services, government and non-government school sectors, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, local governments and community sport (\$2.6 million over 2 years).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Mental health resources and supports for students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DET has developed a suite of mental health and wellbeing resources for students, teachers and families which are available through DET's 'Mental Health Toolkit' webpage.</li> <li>• DET partnered with Smiling Mind to produce mindfulness resources to help students remain positive and engaged in their education during the coronavirus pandemic.</li> </ul>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Victorian secondary school students can access counselling via a voice call or video conference through the headspace counselling partnership or via their school-based mental health practitioner. Mental health practitioners can also coordinate support for students with complex needs and link students to broader health services.</li> <li>• A Regional Health and Wellbeing Key Contact was allocated to each government school during 2020 to plan and respond to the needs of students who may be at risk or require additional support.</li> <li>• DET’s Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion Workforce have adapted to remote delivery where required, including Student Support Service psychologists, social workers, speech pathologists, behaviour coaches, school nurses, the Koorie Education Workforce and visiting teachers. Mental Health Practitioners and Doctors in Secondary Schools delivered remote support to Victorian government secondary students through telephone or videoconferencing.</li> </ul> <p>While this recommendation relates primarily to mental health programs for school students, DET is taking a holistic approach to provide support to children in families experiencing mental health issues to enable participation in quality early childhood education and care. This includes funding received in the 2020-21 Victorian State Budget to expand outreach services for up to 120 vulnerable children each year for four years through the Access to Early Learning program, as a direct response to increased vulnerability experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This effective, evidence-based early intervention program targets children from families with complex needs, including mental health issues.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p><b>Recommendation 22:</b> The Department of Education and Training provide teachers with additional guidance on how to identify and refer students who now require additional support to appropriate mental health services.</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>The Victorian Government is committed to providing teachers with the tools and resources they need to support student mental health.</p> <p><b>Increased investment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On 7 August 2020, the Victorian Government announced a two-year \$28.5 million package to support the mental health and engagement of students, including the following support to schools to help identify and refer students to appropriate mental health services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extending <u>Mental Health Practitioners to 85 secondary and P-12 specialist schools</u> (\$9.96 million over 2 years). This builds on the \$51.2 million invested to support implementation in every government secondary school campus by 2022. In addition to direct counselling and other early intervention services to students, Mental Health Practitioners contribute to whole-school approaches to mental health prevention and promotion.</li> <li>○ Continuing the <u>Mental Health in Primary Schools Pilot</u>, in partnership with the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, and expanding to 25 schools in 2021 (\$3.476 million over 2 years). This program provides evidence-based training and resources to help school staff to better identify and respond to mental health issues affecting primary school students. It will enable schools to build a strong connection with community-based health and other services to better link students and families to these services, where appropriate.</li> <li>○ Expanding the <u>headspace mental health training programs</u> for school staff to support all students through SAFEMinds and Suicide Risk Continuum Training (\$0.2 million over 2 years). This training helps primary and secondary school staff increase their foundational knowledge of mental health, including anxiety and depression, and this investment will support an additional 1500 school staff.</li> <li>○ Boosting response capacity of the <u>Navigator Program</u> and building the mental health capacity of Navigator providers (\$6.9 million over 2 years)</li> <li>○ Expanding <u>LOOKOUT</u> to increase support for the educational needs of students in Out of Home Care (\$5.353 million over 2 years)</li> <li>○ Creating <u>Local Wellbeing Networks</u> bringing together mental health services, government and non-government school sectors, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, local governments and community sport (\$2.6 million over 2 years).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Mental health resources and support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DET has developed advice and resources for teachers to help them support students’ mental health and wellbeing including “Supporting students’ mental health and wellbeing – Advice for teachers”, available on DET’s Mental Health Toolkit webpage.</li> </ul>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers can also access the “Early intervention in youth mental health” practical guide to early intervention in youth mental health. The guide is designed for teachers, school staff and other staff who work with students and available via the Mental Health Toolkit.</li> </ul> <p>A Regional Health and Wellbeing Key Contact was allocated to each government school to plan and respond to the needs of students who may be at risk or require additional support.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 23:</b> The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, in collaboration with Victorian universities and TAFEs, consider collecting data on the international student support fund.</p>	<p>Support-in-Principle</p>	<p>The department collects a range of data in partnership with university and TAFE partners, including funding allocated, applications approved, and aggregate co-contributions. Additional data in line with the committee’s recommendations will be sought, noting that acquiring the additional data will be dependent on negotiation with the partners.</p>