



Victorian Government Response

to the

Rural and Regional Committee

**Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage
and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria**

DECEMBER 2011

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BACKGROUND

On 25 November 2009, the Legislative Assembly of the former Parliament of Victoria resolved that the Rural and Regional Committee (the Committee) undertake an Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria. The Terms of Reference for the inquiry were to:

- (a) examine current evidence of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria with a view to identifying the social groups most affected by disadvantage
- (b) identify any gaps and weaknesses in methods for measuring, recording and capturing information on disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria
- (c) identify the key factors of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, such as access to education, health care, employment opportunities, housing affordability and transport
- (d) identify the geographical locations in rural and regional Victoria where disadvantage is most severe with a view to prioritising these areas for future action by Government
- (e) identify rural and regional areas of significant disadvantage and inequity that may be masked by the comparative prosperity of surrounding areas
- (f) investigate the impact of social and economic trends on the future of rural and regional Victoria in the context of disadvantage
- (g) examine current Government responses to rural and regional disadvantage
- (h) identify priorities for action by Government to tackle key rural and regional disadvantage issues
- (i) examine measures taken at a local level to combat problems of hardship and disadvantage
- (j) Investigate approaches in other jurisdictions to combat rural and regional disadvantage.

The Committee's Final Report on the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria (the Report) was tabled in Parliament on 7 October 2010.

Using a series of regional profiles, the Report provides evidence that many rural and regional communities in Victoria continue to experience disadvantage and inequities in service delivery, educational and employment opportunities, and health and well-being when compared to their metropolitan counterparts. Addressing these inequities is central to securing the long-term future of rural and regional communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government welcomes the Report which provides an important new platform for understanding the nature and extent of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria. The Government acknowledges the time and effort that many rural and regional Victorians put into making submissions and appearing before the Rural and Regional Committee. The contributions of communities and their leaders have been carefully considered in the preparation of this response to the Report's recommendations.

The Government is committed to ensuring all Victorians have access to the same opportunities to succeed, no matter where they live. The Report is a timely catalyst to achieving a new approach to tackling rural and regional disadvantage.

The Government has a range of policies already being implemented to support regional communities in creating new prosperity, more opportunities and a high quality of life. The Report provides a sound base on which to progress this commitment and this response to the Inquiry's recommendations marks a significant new direction for regional Victoria.

Regional Victoria

Regional Victoria provides significant economic and social benefits for the State. Among key indicators, rural and regional Victoria accounts for about a quarter of the State's people, jobs and economic activity. Regional Victoria is the primary source of the State's agricultural output, food production and processing, and energy and mineral resources. It is where a significant portion of our secondary goods and services are also produced. All Victorians benefit from strong regions and the prosperity they deliver.

Regional Victoria also boasts a rich and varied social fabric ranging from regional cities, large regional towns and smaller villages. These places are characterised by strong communities with high rates of volunteering and close community connectedness.

However, communities across rural and regional Victoria have experienced a wide range of challenges and pressures over the last twenty years. Challenges such as extended drought, bushfires, floods and structural changes have significant potential to impact upon future growth and prosperity in regional Victoria. These challenges are placing pressures on the quality of life of many country Victorians that are described in the Report.

Challenges

Research conducted by the Department of Planning and Community Development has identified economic restructuring, demographic changes and housing affordability as key structural challenges. These challenges manifest in different ways for some populations and particular areas in regional Victoria. Research undertaken into the causes of disadvantage in different regions also identifies these issues as significant drivers of disadvantage.

Economic Restructuring

Economic restructuring has had an uneven impact on regional Victoria with many farming communities facing significant pressures. While employment in the agricultural sector has declined over the past decade due to a range of factors, over the long term it has still proved to be remarkably productive. In regional Victoria, industries have adapted through innovation, new business models or in ways that demand a higher skilled workforce. These changes have resulted in decreased economic opportunities for some, particularly young people and those with low

skills. This situation is compounded by access to fewer training opportunities in regional Victoria.

The Committee cited first-hand evidence from a range of councils and industry leaders, particularly in the Loddon Mallee region, of the impact of the decline in primary industries. The Loddon Campaspe and the Murray River Group of Councils gave evidence about how the low skill base of many workers in agricultural industries has the potential to lead to substantial unemployment in the region. Further evidence noted that accommodating the evolution from a low-skilled, labour-intensive industry to one that requires a highly skilled workforce has serious repercussions in areas with poor education outcomes.

The proposed introduction of a national carbon price by the Federal Government will also have economic restructuring implications for regional areas with a high dependence on carbon intensive industries, such as the Latrobe Valley. While the region's economy has diversified in recent years, power generation still dominates. A carbon price would have a significant impact on the power generation sector and the region more broadly, and potentially lead to a long-term structural transition in the region. The Victorian Government is giving high priority to making sure that the adjustment of the Latrobe Valley and surrounding areas does not cause further disadvantage, attracts skilled jobs and new investments, and creates new opportunities for the community.

Changing Population Composition

Another structural change affecting disadvantage in some rural and regional communities is the changing composition of local populations. This in turn affects demand for services and viability of local businesses. Towns that have growing populations experience pressure on existing services and may require new or different services. Towns with an ageing population can have difficulty ensuring their services and facilities such as schools, health services and sporting clubs remain viable. When services close residents have to travel further for services which is particularly difficult for older Victorians.

Implications of changes in population composition are illustrated in the Report. Examples are provided of fewer young people remaining in local areas to continue family enterprises resulting in ageing populations and reduced services and smaller towns becoming less able to maintain the basic services required to sustain their communities. A trend of centralising services in major regional centres also contributes to people leaving smaller towns resulting in business closures and reduced services in smaller locations across regions.

Housing Impacts

The availability and affordability of suitable housing in rural and regional Victoria is also causing a range of problems for communities with a lower socio-economic base. This is causing some populations to become concentrated in areas isolated from service providers, social networks, educational opportunities and transport. This predominantly affects two groups. The first comprises residents who are forced to move into these low service areas from high amenity areas as house prices and rents rise. This group is made up of welfare recipients or underfunded retirees who move into more isolated communities because of the availability of cheaper housing. Over the last ten years a significant number of welfare recipients have relocated to regional Victoria in search of cheaper housing. The second group to be affected includes existing residents of these more isolated areas who are unable to move to more expensive, centrally located, well-serviced communities when their need for services increases. This includes social housing tenants who live in more isolated low serviced areas away from labour markets.

The Committee noted that many people seeking cheaper housing can suffer from a number of connected drivers of disadvantage such as intergenerational unemployment and poor education outcomes. This can increase pressure on rural and regional councils and service providers.

The Government Response

Diversity between rural and regional Victoria and Melbourne and within different parts of regional Victoria itself is evident throughout the Report. This diversity emphasises the importance of addressing opportunities and challenges in policy and service delivery using a local or regional approach. The Government is committed to a grass roots approach that values local knowledge and expertise to guide policy and funding decisions.

As a first step in ensuring an appropriate local response, the Government is reviewing data and information to better understand different population groups in the most disadvantaged places in rural and regional Victoria.

Overall the Government is responding to the challenges facing rural and regional Victoria through an approach that:

- invests in regional Victoria
- empowers local decision makers through flexible funding models and increased data resources
- provides a dedicated Ministerial focus on regional cities
- introduces new measures to ensure consideration of rural and regional challenges in policy and program design.

The Government has already undertaken the following key initiatives:

Delivery of the *Regional Growth Fund*

The *Regional Growth Fund* will support growth, opportunities and better quality of life in regional Victoria. As the centrepiece of the Government's plans to deliver better outcomes in the regions, the Fund will provide the flexibility to allow communities to drive important new local initiatives, delivering a range of benefits to regional Victoria including:

- better infrastructure and services
- a stronger economic, social and environmental base for regional communities
- more jobs and improved career opportunities for regional Victorians.

Local and regional infrastructure will be improved through projects such as revitalising town centres, strategic road and bridge improvements and industry infrastructure. This will be achieved through a Strategic Projects Stream complemented by a Local Projects Stream providing targeted support to local communities.

The Fund will supplement, rather than replace, existing government programs. It will assist local communities to shape their own future. Regional Development Australia Committees in each of the five non metropolitan regions will provide advice to the Minister for Regional and Rural Victoria on local priority projects, identified needs and investment opportunities.

Flood Disaster Response

The Government acted swiftly to provide vital support and assistance to the thousands of flood victims in late 2010 and early 2011 in rural and regional Victoria including clean-up and restoration grants, low-interest loans and the waiving of waste levies. The Government is committed to assisting communities in the recovery process and has provided further assistance including support for volunteer management and funding for financial counselling services. The

total cost is estimated at \$676 million (with \$115 million to be recovered from insurance). The Government will spend over \$200 million by 30 June 2011 to repair community assets damaged in the floods and to provide other support necessary to assist communities to recover.

Change and Disadvantage Reports

The Government has prepared *Change and Disadvantage* reports for each of the five non metropolitan regions. These reports provide local communities with increased information on which to base decisions about priorities and resource allocation. The reports contain location specific Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data and analysis to enable local decision makers and local agencies to better assess disadvantage in their local areas and plan collaborative strategies to address it. These are available online at <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/home/publications-and-research/urban-and-regional-research/regional-analysis/chnage-and-disadvantge-in-regional-victoria>.

Satellite Offices of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Government is currently establishing offices of the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) in Bendigo and Ballarat from June 2011, to bring this central agency of government closer to people in regional Victoria. The initial phase of the DPC Regional program will operate for nine months to enable the Government to refine how these offices will operate prior to any expansion to further locations. Five DPC staff are working in a standalone regional office in Ballarat and three DPC staff will be located along with other government departments in the Bendigo office. DPC Regional will enable the Premier's own departmental officers to work more closely with other departments, agencies and local government to fix problems that cross portfolios. The satellite offices will strengthen channels to enable local people to raise issues and suggestions with the Premier.

A Minister for Regional Cities

In addition to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, a new Regional Cities portfolio has been created to provide additional departmental and Ministerial representation for regional Victoria. The portfolio provides a greater focus on the role regional cities can play in the economic and social development of Victoria. As Victoria grows, our regional cities are attracting more people and businesses wanting an alternative to metropolitan Melbourne. Regional cities have a wealth of opportunity and the Government is providing additional support to attract increased investment, services and facilities to ensure they continue to prosper.

Improved Transport Options in Rural and Regional Victoria

The Government will continue with the *Regional Rail Link* project which will provide increased and more efficient access to the city for people from rural and regional Victoria. The Government has taken steps to provide more passenger services linking country Victorians by ensuring the Overland provides additional passenger capacity to Stawell. In addition significant funding is being provided to repair and upgrade country road infrastructure.

Stimulus Package for Latrobe Valley

The Government announced a \$10 million stimulus package for the Latrobe Valley region to help promote jobs and economic growth. The stimulus package, to be administered by Regional Development Victoria and overseen by the recently established Latrobe Valley Minister's Working Group, aims to attract strategic investment leading to sustainable jobs growth in the Latrobe Valley. The package is designed to promote support from local government and business to assist workers to seek additional skills through training and support programs.

Structure of the Response

The Government response focuses on six key themes to address the recommendations and issues raised in the Report. These themes also serve as a basis for funding and policy efforts in relation to addressing rural and regional disadvantage. They include:

1. Better Decisions for Rural and Regional Victorians
2. Early Childhood Development, Education and Skills and Young People
3. Health Inequities
4. Community Services and Housing
5. Transport and Communications
6. Justice.

In addition to these themes, a number of new initiatives in specific regions were referred to in the Report. These are reflected in the Government's response and include:

- \$1 billion over eight years to fund projects under the *Regional Growth Fund*
- \$676 million for the response to the Victorian flood disaster, asset repairs and community recovery
- \$259 million to upgrade regional health services, including \$67 million for hospital upgrades
- \$160 million for roads and bridges
- \$140 million on regional highway upgrades
- \$35.3 million to improve safety at regional railway crossings.

BETTER DECISIONS FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL VICTORIANS

Key Issues:

A number of the recommendations in the Report articulate the unique challenges which rural and regional communities face in achieving equitable outcomes and life opportunities, including:

- recognising the specific needs and impacts on rural and regional Victoria in setting Government policy and allocating resources
- setting minimum wellbeing standards for rural and regional Victorians
- investigating measures to balance additional program costs inherent in rural and regional delivery
- providing for specific data information needs.

What the Government is doing:

The Government is establishing a new strategic policy direction that ensures new investment, a strong voice for rural and regional Victoria, improved government responses and better information to address these challenges. To this end the Government has:

- established the *Regional Growth Fund*
- created the Regional Policy Advisory Committee to ensure impacts on rural and regional Victoria are considered in Government decision making
- released the *Victorian Families Statement* identifying the key issues facing families (including in rural and regional communities) and what the Government is doing to help
- moved Regional Development Victoria to the Department of Planning and Community Development to ensure a more integrated approach to regional development joined with community programs and planning
- started work to establish satellite offices of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Ballarat and Bendigo from July 2011
- commenced providing better data to the regions through the Community Planning Tool and *Change and Disadvantage* reports
- provided both immediate and long term support for rural and regional Victorians affected by the 2010-2011 floods
- providing \$445 million to boost concessions for low income households including \$63 million to increase the cap for water and sewer concessions for eligible Victorians.

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Key Recommendation 1:</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the State Government establish an independent rural proofing advisory body with an ongoing role to monitor and review legislation, government policy, practices and resources allocation as it has an impact on rural and regional Victorians and in order to ensure that government legislation and policy reflects and responds to the diverse needs of rural and regional Victorians.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government supports the establishment of an advisory body to monitor and review legislation, government policy, programs and resource allocation as it impacts upon or responds to, the needs and priorities of rural and regional Victorians. The Government has amended the <i>Regional Development Victoria Act 2002</i> to establish a Regional Policy Advisory Committee (RPAC). Membership of RPAC will include representatives from Victoria's five administrative regions: Barwon South West, Grampians, Gippsland, Hume and Loddon Mallee. RPAC will advise the Minister on the impacts of legislation and government policy upon rural and regional Victorians, resource allocation under the <i>Regional Growth Fund</i>, and on implementation of policy and programs in regional Victoria.</p>
<p>Key Recommendation 2:</p> <p>That the State Government in its development of policy and programs consider the many examples provided throughout this report of evidence that the cost of delivering and accessing services in rural and regional Victoria is higher than delivery in Melbourne, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school travel from Mallacoota to Melbourne for sport, student development opportunities, university open days and so on • travel and accommodation expenses incurred for professional development by teachers in Portland, Lakes Entrance, Robinvale, Mildura, Corryong, as well as costs to schools for replacement teachers, providing teachers are available (refer also to Recommendation 13) • police transport of victims and witnesses to court from Corryong to Wodonga where at times both victims and defendants have been forced to travel in the same police vehicle 	<p>Supported in Part</p> <p>The Government is committed to the principle that Victorians deserve access to services and opportunities wherever they live. An early objective of RPAC (as outlined in Key Recommendation 1) will be to assist the Victorian Government identify situations where current funding models are creating inequality of service delivery. The Government notes that arrangements for service access and delivery vary within regions and is therefore unable to support introduction of a single model of geographic weighting. A uniform system of geographic weighting would not necessarily achieve the improved service outcomes sought through this recommendation.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • health services from centres such as Seymour and Benalla that must travel to outlying rural locations to reach clients; • delivery of university courses to a large geographic area with limited or no appropriate public transport in place • professionals including travel time in their costs for delivering specialist services to Robinvale from Swan Hill or Mildura. <p>Therefore the Committee recommends that the State Government develop, with a view to introducing into all funding models, a form of geographical weighting that more accurately reflects the true costs incurred by service providers in rural and regional Victoria.</p>	
<p>Key Recommendation 3:</p> <p>That the State Government investigate establishing a ‘social contract’ with communities in rural and regional Victoria outlining agreed minimum standards of community wellbeing to be maintained and minimum services that are to be provided on a per capita basis. Further, this ‘social contract’ should be based on a list of social indicators or ‘trigger points’ such that when a community in rural and regional Victoria reaches an agreed point pre-determined Government responses are put in place.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government believes that a base level of service delivery is needed to support all communities. The <i>Victorian Families Statement</i>, announced in February, begins an annual process of consultation and discussion on key issues facing families.</p> <p>The Government acknowledges there are many examples in rural and regional settings where poor social outcomes go undetected due to a lack of critical mass. The Government will continue to develop various data sets, such as the <i>Indicators of Community Strength Framework</i>, that can be used in assessing and responding to the needs of communities in rural and regional Victoria.</p> <p>The Government recognises life for families in rural and regional Victoria presents distinct challenges. To address these, the Government has established the <i>Regional Growth Fund</i> to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide better infrastructure, services and facilities • strengthen the economic, social and environmental base of communities • support local development and planning for rural and regional Victorians. <p>Through the Fund, there will be targeted strategic interventions and flexible local approaches</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>through the <i>Local Government Infrastructure</i> program and the <i>Putting Locals First</i> program.</p> <p>The <i>Local Government Infrastructure</i> program will provide rural and regional local councils with funds for new infrastructure or asset renewal. The <i>Putting Locals First</i> program will deliver long term flexible funding to regional organisations, individual councils and community groups to fund projects that benefit their local community and positively respond to disadvantage.</p>
<p>Key Recommendation 8:</p> <p>That the State Government fund a research body in each of the five regions of Victoria. This research body would undertake the following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collect region-specific, disaggregated data • store relevant data about the region • analyse region-specific data • ensure that the data is made publicly available. <p>The data would be collected and analysed with a view to understanding the demographic profile and needs of rural and regional communities. The data will assist with planning for the future of the region and would be available to all levels of government and other interested groups. The data would also assist with community and regional efforts to determine local priorities.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports enhancing capabilities in regional research dedicated to the collection, storage and analysis of region-specific disaggregated data. The Government already collects a broad range of data to assist with community efforts to identify local needs and priorities. Work is underway to enhance existing capability to facilitate a whole of government system to bring a range of sources across government into one portal. Currently known as the Community Planning Tool, the portal is expected to incorporate but will not be limited to: ABS data; the Victorian Population Health Survey (including indicators of Community Strength); Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System; Transport Statistics; and Department of Sustainability and Environment land-use Spatial Data Platform. The portal will increase accessibility and coordination of information through the establishment of a virtual data library where users can build their own applications to suit their data needs.</p> <p>The Government is also co-funding development of a business plan and model for establishing a regional research and information centre to collect, store, analyse and disseminate regionally-based disaggregated demographic, social, economic, spatial and service data.</p> <p>In addition, the Government has compiled <i>Change and Disadvantage</i> reports for each of the five non-metropolitan regions: Barwon South West, Gippsland, Loddon Mallee, Grampians and Hume. Utilising the most recent ABS data and relevant social and economic research on disadvantage, these reports provide information to assist rural and regional communities address disadvantage through future planning by understanding what resources are needed, and where, for different population mixes. These reports are available at: http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/home/publications-and-research/urban-and-regional-</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>research/regional-analysis/chnage-and-disadvantge-in-regional-victoria .</p> <p>The 2011 <i>State of Victoria's Children</i> report will focus specifically on children, young people and families from rural and regional areas, recognising previous reports have shown they fare less well than their metropolitan counterparts across a range of outcomes.</p>
<p>Key Recommendation 9:</p> <p>That the State Government acknowledge that social indicators of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria should not be measured in numbers alone but rather on a more accurate basis, such as a per capita basis, that provides an accurate picture of conditions in a local community. The Committee further recommends that this lead to a reconsideration of policy and allocation of resources based on more accurate measurements.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government acknowledges the need for empirical data and analysis to provide an accurate picture of local community conditions. The Community Planning Tool (as outlined in Key Recommendation 8) will provide a single portal where all relevant social, economic and infrastructure data will be available to allow planners and regions to assess allocation of resources. The availability of information through this portal will allow for an improved understanding of where particular types of disadvantage exist and assist development of targeted place-based responses.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10:</p> <p>The Committee recommends that in developing funding models for addressing disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria the State Government:</p> <p>a. Work with service providers at a community level to ensure that funding for programs is not spread too broadly or in such insignificant amounts as to be ineffective</p> <p>b. Continue to streamline funding requirements to reduce their bureaucratic impact on local government agencies, service providers, Indigenous corporations and community groups in rural and regional Victoria</p> <p>c. Endeavour to deliver funding in consistent amounts that provide greater financial certainty to these groups, in turn allowing them to provide local workers with greater security of employment</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government accepts that most elements of Recommendation 10 represent good practice in program design and should be applied in the development of funding models, regardless of whether programs are delivered in rural, regional or metropolitan areas.</p> <p>Recommendation 10(e) which refers to making transition funding a mandatory component of funding models is not supported because it will not be appropriate in all cases. However, the importance of sustaining community gains through program investment is clearly recognised and transitional funding will be included in individual programs where appropriate.</p> <p>Many not-for-profit community organisations have multiple funding agreements with different government departments. Work has also been undertaken on developing and implementing a common funding agreement that can be used with these organisations with the intent of reducing as far as possible, duplication of effort. Single funding agreements have similarly been developed for local government and Indigenous organisations to simplify the administrative process.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
d. Ensure program timescales are sufficient to allow programs to have an impact and a better chance of lasting success	<p>A further example is provided by the <i>One DHS Standards</i> project where the Government has undertaken work to develop an integrated standards and quality assurance approach to streamline accreditation requirements among funded community sector organisations subject to one or more external reviews. This approach applies across the three Department of Human Services (DHS) program delivery areas of disability services, housing and community building and children, youth and families.</p> <p>In addition, the <i>Putting Locals First</i> Program—part of the <i>Regional Growth Fund</i>—will deliver long-term flexible funding to assist local communities devise positive strategies to address disadvantage.</p>
e. Ensure that transition funding becomes a mandatory component of funding models for programs, in particular Neighbourhood Renewal, and that the Government should do so with the aim of ensuring communities have the ability to continue the gains made during the lifespan of programs	
f. Continue to acknowledge that all attempts at addressing disadvantage must be multi-faceted, coordinated and involve the community at all times	
g. Recognise and account for critical need to ensure that communities facing significant disadvantage or under stress are funded in a sustained way.	
<p>Recommendation 40:</p> <p>That the State Government consolidate and enhance its policy approach to decentralisation, in particular by including a specific focus on decentralisation to identified areas of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee recommends that to achieve this goal, the State Government investigate the potential of linking decentralisation decisions with areas of need already identified by the Neighbourhood Renewal program.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government understands the need to decentralise government services to better meet the needs of regional and rural communities. There are a number of well resourced regionally-based departmental offices which provide a range of services to local communities. The Department of Premier and Cabinet has commenced the roll out of satellite offices in Bendigo and Ballarat.</p> <p>Any further decentralisation of government services needs to be based primarily on the needs of the whole community but many of the factors which drive disadvantage, especially employment, can be positively influenced as part of the process.</p>

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND SKILLS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Key Issues:

The Committee heard evidence that more rural young children are developmentally vulnerable and fewer rural young people complete year 12, engage in higher education or are fully engaged in learning or earning. The largest single group of recommendations in the Report relate to how government can meet the aspirations of rural and regional Victorians for greater opportunities for their children and young people.

What the Government is doing:

The Government has continued to invest in early childhood services and regional schools to increase opportunities for rural and regional children and young people. The Government will continue to support the aspirations that rural and regional parents have for their children. We will address educational opportunity to ensure all Victorian students are able to achieve their full potential. To this end we have committed:

- \$41 million to continue funding free kindergarten for eligible low income families
- \$18 million to support children in early childhood education settings who have a disability, including 246 additional Kindergarten Inclusion Support packages, which enable the participation of children with severe disabilities in kindergarten
- \$2 million to develop a new parenting strategy including strengthening Regional Parenting Services, \$6 million to provide operational grants of up to \$20,000 for small rural kindergarten services and \$26 million for a Children's Facilities Capital Grant Program including the development of a new early learning hub at Grovedale, a kindergarten at Barwon Heads and expansion of the Torquay kindergarten
- \$124 million to provide 150 Primary Welfare Officers in addition to 256 full-time equivalent positions currently employed across 520 primary schools to enhance the capacity of schools to support students and teachers
- \$1 million over the three years to fund seven demonstration projects, including four in rural or regional areas, to ensure coordinated and holistic support to young people at risk of disengaging from school
- \$102.5 million to reintroduce concession fee places for Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses for young people aged 15-24 years.
- \$156 million for students with disabilities
- \$208 million state-wide to renovate existing government schools, build new ones and acquire new land
- \$1.8 million over four years to the Centre for Multicultural Youth to work in partnership on special programs, including the establishment of two regional offices of the Centre for Multicultural Youth
- to work on initiatives aimed at addressing regional deferral rates and increasing the number of regional Victorians accessing higher education including tackling the cost of living away from home while studying or training
- to establish a *Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund* which aims to provide regional students with greater flexibility, options and choice by increasing alliances between TAFE institutes and universities to deliver a greater range of programs in regional centres

- through the *Regional Growth Fund* finance locally based programs to improve school retention rates in rural and regional schools.

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Key Recommendation 5: That the State Government develop its policy with regard to alternative education models with a commitment to the following for rural and regional Victoria:</p>	<p>The Government supports the development of alternative education settings and is committed to improving student retention rates in rural and regional Victoria by funding schools to develop programs tailored to individual student needs. For those young people aged 15 years and over who are better suited to completing a Year 12 or equivalent qualification in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, the <i>Victorian Training Guarantee</i> provides a government subsidised place in both VET and Adult Community Education (ACE) settings, including in rural and regional locations. Responses to individual elements of Key Recommendation 5 are as follows.</p>
<p>a. An urgent increase in funding for alternative education settings from 1.25 <i>Student Resource Package</i> to 1.4 <i>Student Resource Package</i></p>	<p>Supported in part A review of alternative settings funding was undertaken by KPMG in December 2009, and recommendations are being considered by the Victorian Government. Flexible learning options are critical for children and young people who are disengaged from schooling. To this end, the Government has committed to enable funding to follow students from mainstream schools if they are diverted to alternative settings. The Government is confident this will deliver a significant amount of resources to alternative settings.</p> <p>The 2011-12 Budget provides \$1 million over three years to pilot alternative settings for disengaged students. To ensure the VET system remains accessible and affordable the Government is reviewing fees and funding arrangements to ensure equitable resourcing arrangements across all settings.</p>
<p>b. That funding allocated to students expected to attend a full school year but not in attendance on Census Day be redirected to support re-engagement programs for those students rather than be withheld</p>	<p>Supported in Principle The Government has funding arrangements in place to support students at risk of disengaging from education, including the provision of additional funding to schools for re-engagement of students in the senior secondary years enrolling after Census Day. In addition, the Government has committed to ensuring that <i>Student Resource Package</i> funding follows students from mainstream schools if they are diverted to alternative settings. Options for implementation of this commitment are being explored.</p>
<p>c. That the State Government ensure that the Department of</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Education implement alternative education models in areas of Victoria where there are a high number of disengaged young people. The models should be relevant to local needs and be developed in consultation with local education providers, including Local Learning and Employment Networks, and make use of the expertise of alternative education providers already making a difference, including NETschool and the Doxa organisation.</p>	<p>The Government's commitment to pilot models for disengaged students in 2011-12 and 2012-13 will facilitate finalisation of appropriate models, including alternative education settings. These will form the basis of options for schools and RTOs, including TAFE institutes and ACE providers, to better cater for disengaged students.</p> <p>The Government is committed to improving student retention rates in regional schools. The <i>Regional Growth Fund</i> will enable rural and regional schools through a planned <i>Local Solutions Year 12 Retention Fund</i>, to develop programs tailored to individual student needs to support them completing secondary education.</p>
<p>Key Recommendation 6:</p> <p>That the State Government continue to acknowledge the valuable role early intervention programs play in addressing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria and enhance its policy making efforts in this area. The Committee further recommends that the Best Start program continues to be expanded into more communities across rural and regional Victoria.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government is investigating the feasibility of establishing new programs and enhancing existing initiatives which focus on early intervention approaches in the areas of community services, health, homelessness and education. There are numerous early intervention programs operating across Victoria, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the <i>Family Coaching Victoria</i> pilot program providing tailored support to highly vulnerable families with children at imminent risk of entering out-of-home care • ChildFIRST which connects families to support and early intervention services • <i>Early Childhood Intervention Services</i> to support children with a disability and their families • early childhood development workers to enhance interaction between Integrated Family Services and universal services for young children • <i>Early Intervention in Chronic Disease</i> program delivered by community health services operating in 18 rural LGAs across Victoria • youth mental health teams, which have been extended to Barwon Health and Bendigo Health, providing early intervention for young people with depression and those with more complex and severe problems • homelessness programs to acquire accommodation units throughout Victoria and deliver intensive support to stabilise vulnerable families in long-term accommodation with approximately one third of accommodation targets in regional Victoria.

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>Plans for new programs with an early intervention focus include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community based support for people with a mental illness, including psychiatric disability rehabilitation initiatives, accommodation services and pathways to education and employment opportunities • intensive ante and post natal support for at-risk mothers during pregnancy and until their child is 4 years which build parenting capacity to ensure their children’s health, safety and development thereby reducing the risk of child abuse, neglect and future involvement of child protection services • \$2 million, building on existing efforts, to develop a new parenting strategy, including the development of a service framework to strengthen the approach and focus of <i>Regional Parenting Services</i> to deliver effective parenting support interventions for vulnerable families, including those where children have emerging emotional or behavioural issues • \$6 million to provide operational grants of up to \$20,000 for small rural kindergarten services • \$15 million for a <i>Children’s Facilities Capital Grant</i> program including development of a new early learning hub at Grovedale, kindergarten at Barwon Heads and expansion of Torquay kindergarten • \$10 million to expand kindergarten inclusion support services for children with a disability or developmental delay to attend kindergarten. <p><i>Best Start</i> partnerships have been established in 15 rural and regional areas and assist families to access these services. Two of these have been identified as Enhanced Best Start sites to intensify efforts. The Government notes the recommendation to expand the program and will consider this as part of a statewide outcomes assessment.</p>
<p>Recommendation 11: That the State Government conduct an analysis of remote population needs looking further at evidence of ‘hot spots’ of significant disadvantage with very limited access to youth services. This analysis should seek to improve equity of access to services for geographically isolated young people with</p>	<p>Supported The Government seeks to improve equity of access to services for geographically isolated young people with disadvantage and will continue developing the <i>Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS)</i>. VCAMS maps outcomes for children and young people in Victoria against a range of key indicators relating to their health and well-being. Adolescent Community Profiles are a product of VCAMS and</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>severe disadvantage even though they may not represent large populations. Service models to address access and equity issues for such smaller rural populations need to be further explored and developed to ensure that these vulnerable populations are not overlooked in service planning and provision at regional and sub-regional levels.</p>	<p>provide local area data.</p> <p>The 2011 <i>State of Victoria's Children</i> report will focus specifically on children, young people and families from rural and regional areas, recognising previous reports have shown they fare less well than their metropolitan counterparts across a range of outcomes.</p> <p>The Government is commencing work on three purpose-built 40 unit Youth Foyer Accommodation and Training facilities and five Work and Learning Centres on public housing sites in metropolitan and regional areas. The foyer model provides an affordable, secure housing option for young people providing them with security to seek employment and build their life skills and social networks.</p> <p>The Government will provide \$1.8 million over four years to the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) to work on special programs with disadvantaged Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people, including the establishment of two regional offices of CMY.</p> <p>The Government will provide \$350,000 to the Bairnsdale community to establish a youth drop-in centre at the former police facility.</p> <p>In addition, the Government will build on efforts to develop the capacity of local councils, community based services and youth advisory groups in rural and regional Victoria to provide opportunities for young people to be involved in decisions to determine the direction of their communities. This includes <i>Reaching Out to Rural Young People</i> research grants to Bendigo, Geelong and Swan Hill local governments to explore innovative models of service provision to young people.</p> <p>The Government is investing \$11 million in the <i>Youth Partnerships</i> initiative which includes seven demonstration projects over three years (with four in rural or regional areas) to trial new approaches to delivering coordinated and holistic support services to young people.</p> <p>The Government will also continue to explore opportunities to improve access for young people from rural and regional communities through programs such as the <i>Putting Locals First</i> Program which aims to deliver long-term flexible funding to help local</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
	communities develop solutions to meet their specific needs, including local transport services.
<p>Recommendation 12:</p> <p>That the State Government develop a system of tracking Victorian school students so at all times it is known if a student is engaged in education. The system should especially focus on the ‘transition points’ of education. Such a system could also incorporate tracking of the education, health and wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable young people in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee further recommends that this be suggested by the State Government for the Council of Australian Government’s agenda with a view to development of a national system.</p>	<p>Supported in Part</p> <p>The Government has developed the <i>Victorian School Register (VSR)</i> to maintain student identifying details, such as records of enrolments, changing student details, cancellations and exits from education providers. A Victorian Student Number (VSN) is issued when a student first engages with the Victorian education system.</p> <p>The VSN will improve the accuracy, reliability and completeness of this information, providing a better basis for assessing needs and developing policies to meet them. Currently, the VSR does not directly support tracking of educational or health and wellbeing outcomes, as legislation governing the register does not allow for this.</p>
<p>Recommendation 13:</p> <p>That the State Government ensure teachers in rural and regional Victoria are not financially disadvantaged through meeting their professional development requirements in Melbourne. This could be achieved through direct financial support or by the running of professional development courses in more regional areas, following a consultation process with rural and regional educators.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government is committed to ensuring school leaders have sufficient resources and support. Professional development and fostering leadership skills in teachers are critical to ensuring every child is given the best possible start in life. The Government is using National Partnership funding to develop leadership skills in principals and staff with positions of responsibility.</p> <p>A number of professional learning programs are delivered in rural areas, with support provided to rural participants attending programs in Melbourne. The inclusion of online activities as a component of professional learning reduces the need for rural participants to travel to Melbourne.</p> <p>In rural regions, networks participating in the <i>Leaders in the Making</i> program receive an additional grant to support their participation in professional learning activities.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 14: That the State Government facilitate the development of a rural schools professional association to strengthen the relationships between small schools across rural and regional Victoria and with the aim of reducing the time, travel and financial costs imposed upon teachers in rural and regional locations fulfilling professional development obligations.</p>	<p>Supported in Part School clusters and networks can use the collaborative and supportive functions of the Ultranet and other web 2.0 technologies to support professional development and strengthen the relationships between small schools across rural and regional Victoria.</p>
<p>Recommendation 15: That the State Government continue to increase support for the development of regional facilities and services for students with disabilities.</p>	<p>Supported The Government continues to support the development of regional facilities and services for students with disabilities by creating a more streamlined approach to ensure young people with a disability achieve better outcomes at school and have a successful transition to post-school environments, including further education, training and employment. The formula for allocating funding to <i>Student Support Services Program</i> includes a provision for rurality which is intended to take into account the need for student support services in rural and remote locations.</p>
<p>Recommendation 16: That the State Government continue to ensure provision of trained welfare workers in schools teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This should be done to ensure that teachers who are not qualified are not called upon to provide welfare services.</p>	<p>Supported The Government provides assistance to children and young people through the provision of specialised support at individual, group, school, network and regional levels. This support assists children and young people with additional needs or at risk of disengagement and strengthens the capacity of schools to engage all students. The Government has committed to providing 150 Primary Welfare Officers in addition to 256 full-time equivalent positions currently employed across 520 primary schools to enhance the capacity of schools to support students and teachers. Funding is currently allocated using student enrolment and the Student Family Occupation index, which measures relative disadvantage of school communities. The distributive formula for these services includes specific reference to rurality and disadvantage.</p>
<p>Recommendation 17: That the State Government implement Recommendation 8.1 of</p>	<p>Supported The Victorian Government is committed to increasing choice and availability of higher</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>the Education and Training Committee's report <i>Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in Which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education</i> calling for support for student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students:</p> <p><i>That the Victorian Government work with higher education providers, other levels of government, and developers to evaluate the current availability and potential further development of affordable supported student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students.</i></p>	<p>education courses in regional Victoria, including maximising opportunities to study closer to home. There is enormous potential to achieve this outcome through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more effective utilisation of existing VET infrastructure and facilities in the delivery of higher education programs • deeper collaboration between regional VET providers and universities in designing qualifications, pathways and credit transfer and articulation arrangements. <p>The Government is committed to supporting universities and regional VET providers capitalise on these opportunities through a planned <i>Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund</i>. In addition to supporting institutional collaboration to deliver greater higher education options, the Fund would support tertiary institutions' collaboration to develop programs that respond to the knowledge and skill needs of local industry across regional Victoria.</p> <p>The Government is working with regional higher education institutions to increase availability of student accommodation, including committing funds to assist regional universities secure accommodation under the Commonwealth's <i>National Rental Affordability Scheme</i> (NRAS). Government support for NRAS includes \$5 million towards accommodation for 200 University of Ballarat students and \$10.2 million to develop 411 student beds at Deakin University, comprising 100 student beds in Warrnambool and 311 beds at Waurin Ponds. The Government will consider additional regional student accommodation programs as they arise.</p> <p>In Melbourne, Government support under NRAS is being provided to develop accommodation for 600 Monash University students and approximately 50 Holmesglen Institute students.</p> <p>More broadly, the Victorian Government notes the Commonwealth has commissioned an independent <i>Review of Student Income Support Reforms</i> following its 2010 changes to Youth Allowance. The Victorian Government will continue to advocate the Commonwealth Government introduce fairer access for regional students to income support arrangements.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 18: That, in response to overwhelming evidence to this Committee that professionals educated and trained close to their own area are more likely to remain within that area, and further that they are likely to provide a more comprehensive service than professionals paid to deliver services extraneously, the State Government:</p>	<p>The Government recognises evidence presented to the Committee of identified linkages between perceptions of community connectedness in rural and regional communities, education and training opportunities for professional skills retention and service delivery. Responses to individual elements of Recommendation 18 appear below.</p>
<p>a. Provide an incentive for students who have completed their schooling in regional Victoria to complete tertiary education or training within their region such as the new ‘Tertiary Education Opportunities Package’ as suggested in the Government’s policy document <i>Ready for Tomorrow</i></p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government recognises persistently high levels of disengagement from employment and training among rural young people aged 15-24, and recognises the importance of education and training in creating pathways to sustainable employment. In response, the Government will ensure tuition fees do not pose a barrier to engage in higher level VET qualification through the reintroduction of concession fee places for Diploma and Advanced Diploma courses for young people aged 15-24 years.</p> <p>To improve access for regional students the Government plans to establish a <i>Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund</i> to support collaboration between universities and regional VET providers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more effectively utilise existing VET infrastructure and facilities in the delivery of higher education programs • facilitate deeper collaboration between regional VET providers and universities in designing qualifications, pathways and credit transfer and articulation arrangements • increase the number of degree courses being offered in regional Victoria.
<p>b. Investigate the impact on mid-sized towns in rural and regional Victoria of professional services being delivered extraneously.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government will examine the feasibility of a comparative study. However, the data to effectively measure such impacts is not readily available.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19: That the State Government continue to invest in schools designed along ‘community hub’ models particularly in areas identified as experiencing disadvantage in education outcomes</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>A number of schools and other children’s centres in Victoria have been developed into ‘community hubs’ through co-location of services and increased use of facilities, involving partnerships with local government and non-government organisations.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
and generational disadvantage.	<p>As part of the <i>Smarter Schools National Partnership</i>, four Extended School Hub field trials are currently underway in Victoria involving 17 primary and secondary schools. The field trials seek to strengthen partnerships between schools, communities and business to address barriers to learning by coordinating and focusing activities and services on priority areas of need. Activities and services are delivered before, during and after school hours both on school sites and in neighbouring community based organisations. Two of the four field trial sites are located in regional areas, Eaglehawk in Bendigo and Corio Norlane in Geelong.</p> <p>The Government will continue to identify opportunities to work collaboratively with school communities to improve education outcomes, including through local-level consultation and decision-making.</p>
<p>Recommendation 20:</p> <p>That the State Government investigate the possibility of partnering with the Federal Government in running the Students@Work program. The program should be rolled out across remote parts of Victoria to aid young people looking for employment.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government is committed to increasing participation of young people in education and training, increasing attainment levels nationally and improving successful transitions from school to work. A number of programs are in place to facilitate the acquisition of employability skills by Victorian students. Under the <i>National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions</i>, Victoria has implemented the <i>Workplace Learning Coordinators Program</i>, which expands workplace learning opportunities to support improved outcomes and experiences for all young people. Victoria strongly promotes and supports schools to implement career development programs, including workplace learning, to improve young people’s employability, increase their workplace knowledge and enhance opportunities for part-time and casual employment.</p> <p>The Government is investigating the opportunity to include the Students@Work program or elements of it within existing programs, particularly in remote areas. Further discussions with the Commonwealth Government will be required to determine whether this project is developed.</p>
<p>Recommendation 21:</p> <p>That the State Government increase public transport options for TAFE students and other students accessing training options across rural and regional Victoria. Further, the State</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports increasing access to public transport options for TAFE students and is currently exploring opportunities to provide improved access to the rural and regional school bus network.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Government should fund accessible school buses for students with a disability where required.</p>	<p>In addition, the <i>Putting Locals First Program</i> – part of the <i>Regional Growth Fund</i> – will deliver long-term flexible funding to help local communities devise solutions to meet their specific needs, including local transport services.</p> <p>The Government has committed to providing an equivalent level of access for students with disabilities that may not necessarily be a bus but might be a taxi or other accessible vehicle. The majority of students attending specialist schools access specialised bus services on a daily basis. Students with disabilities attending integration programs in local neighbourhood schools may access a network of free school buses provided in rural and regional Victoria. Where students are unable to access free school buses students receive a conveyance allowance to assist with travel costs for public transport, private car and private bus.</p>
<p>Recommendation 22: That the State Government increase funding from the \$62.5 million currently allocated to support students with a disability who are attending non-Government schools to align more closely with funding to Government schools.</p>	<p>Supported in Part The Government has committed to establishing a funding linkage for non-government schools of 25 per cent of the recurrent cost of educating a student in a government school. This provides an opportunity to inject further funding for students with disabilities and the Government is working closely with sector organisations to develop a common <i>Disability Assessment Framework</i> to facilitate this. The Government also encourages mainstream participation and inclusion of students with a disability in the education system.</p>
<p>Recommendation 23: That the State Government increase funding for literacy and numeracy ‘catch-up’ programs for schools with students beginning their education with poor literacy and numeracy skills. This funding should be allocated automatically when the level of need at a school reaches a pre-determined level.</p>	<p>Supported in Part The Government is committed to improving literacy and numeracy skills for all students. As part of the <i>Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership</i> the Government is delivering a range of programs to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, especially those falling behind. There is a particular focus on strategies to build teacher and school leadership capacity, including through literacy and numeracy coaches and professional learning programs. Further, improved monitoring and use of literacy and numeracy performance information is helping the Government to identify where support is needed most.</p>
<p>Recommendation 24: That the State Government develop a parental engagement</p>	<p>Supported The Government will continue to maximise the engagement of Indigenous parents in</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>program aimed at increasing the involvement of Indigenous parents in their children's schooling.</p>	<p>their children's education through a range of initiatives. As a means of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous children the Victorian Government will consider the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of school community partnership agreements in schools that have Indigenous students enrolled • a requirement that principals and teachers work to remove barriers to Indigenous parents' engagement in school • working with parents and local Indigenous communities to build their confidence in the school system. <p>The Government notes past experience demonstrates the need for school communities to develop their own local approaches to build parental capacity to support children, through initiatives such as the establishment of a Koorie Parents Support Group and capacity building workshops for Indigenous parents.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 25: That the State Government fund early intervention and wellbeing support programs.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government acknowledges the importance of intervening early to address disadvantage, and has committed to a range of new programs to address the safety and wellbeing of students, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$124 million over 4 years to provide 150 Primary Welfare Officers in addition to 256 full-time equivalent positions currently employed across 520 primary schools to enhance the capacity of schools to support teachers and students • enabling funding provided for students in mainstream schools to follow them if they are diverted to an alternative setting • \$500,000 in 2011-12 and 2012-13 to pilot and support selected models to form the basis of options schools can use to better cater for disengaged students • \$4 million to provide more resources and training for teachers on understanding, identifying and dealing with bullying • \$2 million to provide professional development for teachers to manage student behaviour • \$19.5 million for an early intervention program to help vulnerable parents cope with the challenges of child rearing, including intensive ante and post-natal support to ensure dedicated staff work with at-risk mothers (expectant mothers whose unborn child is reported to child protection or are in child protection themselves) from pre-birth until four years of age to build parenting capacity, ensure the child's health, safety and development and reduce the risk of further involvement with child protection • developing options to improve the efficacy and effectiveness of the Early Childhood Intervention Services system by mid-2011.

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 26:</p> <p>That the State Government lobby the Federal Government to ensure that no three-year-old kindergarten services in rural and regional Victoria are reduced as an unintended consequence of changes in legislation intended to ensure that all four-year-olds receive 15 hours of kindergarten per week.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government acknowledges the personal and community benefits to increased participation in quality early years services for Victorian four year olds. However, this should not come at the expense of their participation in three-year-old kindergarten programs. The likely impact of the <i>National Partnership on Early Childhood Education</i> on three-year-old kindergarten services is significant. The Government will negotiate with the Commonwealth Government to secure additional funding for infrastructure, workforce and change management costs associated with implementing universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten, to fund the full cost of the additional hours and to ensure reasonable transitional arrangements and timelines.</p>
<p>Recommendation 27:</p> <p>That the State Government lobby the Federal Government to ensure that the National Broadband Network will allow increased on-line learning opportunities for remote communities in Victoria, and suit the needs in general of teaching institutions including schools and universities in rural and regional locations.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>It is incumbent on the Commonwealth Government to deliver the benefits of the National Broadband Network (NBN), including the provision of high bandwidth broadband services to regional and remote Victorian communities that are under-served by current broadband infrastructure. Furthermore, in order to capture all economic and social benefits of NBN, it will be critical that the network meets rural and regional teaching needs in schools and universities. The Commonwealth will also need to adequately resource non-infrastructure elements for the productive use of NBN to adopt new applications, particularly online education, health and other essential services in regional and remote areas.</p>
<p>Recommendation 28:</p> <p>That the State Government's Vulnerable Youth Framework currently being finalised be further developed to outline specific responses and initiatives to meet the needs of rural and regional communities in relation to service infrastructure, funding, supporting service coordination in geographically large areas and ensure rural young people can access alternative education and training options.</p>	<p>Supported in Part</p> <p>The Government supports development of proposals to meet the needs of rural and regional communities with an investment of \$11 million over the three years 2010-2013 under the <i>Youth Partnerships</i> initiative.</p> <p>Through this initiative, the Government will design and test new ways for the education, youth and family support, justice, homelessness and mental health sectors to work more collaboratively to support young people experiencing problems. The Government will support service providers to work together to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a greater focus on early intervention • more consistent approaches to assessment and referral of young people across

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>sectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearer entry points into the right services at the right time, including tailored education options. <p>Demonstration projects, including in rural or regional areas, will be established to trial new approaches to delivering coordinated and holistic support services to young people.</p>
<p>Recommendation 29: That the State Government conduct research into and combat lowered aspirations of rural and regional students in relation to higher education participation.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government is dedicated to improving educational outcomes for all students, to increasing participation in further education and training and improving school retention rates for students in rural and regional schools.</p> <p>The Government is working with Victorian universities and representatives of non-government schools to facilitate partnerships to increase participation in higher education for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The Government will continue to encourage partnership activities and programs to raise aspirations for students, from rural and regional Victoria.</p> <p>Through the <i>Regional Partnerships Facilitation Fund</i>—part of the <i>Regional Growth Fund</i>—the Government plans to improve school retention rates by supporting schools to develop programs that contribute to increasing the rate of higher education participation and attainment in rural and regional Victoria.</p>

HEALTH INEQUITIES

Key Issues:

The Committee heard evidence that overall the health status and life expectancy of rural and regional Victorians is lower than that of their city counterparts. While in some instances this can be explained by demographic factors, such as ageing, it is also impacted by limited access to critical health services.

What the Government is doing:

The Government is responding to these issues through a new *Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012 to 2022: The Metropolitan Health Plan*. This Framework sets out priorities for the whole state. A key component of this Framework will be a comprehensive *Rural and Regional Health Plan* to be released later in 2011. This will address different health status and outcomes in rural and regional Victoria as well as varying infrastructure needs across Victoria. Issues specific to distance and the efficient and effective delivery of health services will also be addressed. The Government has already committed to a number of immediate actions to improve health services for people in rural and regional Victoria, including:

- \$67m for regional hospital upgrades at Ballan, Echuca, Kerang, Mildura and Warragul through the Government's new *Country Hospital Fund*
- improvements to Bendigo (\$102 million) and Geelong (\$165 million) Hospitals and Ballarat Health Service (\$73m for extra beds)
- implementation of a \$14.2 million *Rural and Regional Overhaul*, including initiatives to support the recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce and improved infrastructure and services
- a share of the 800 new beds across Victoria to improve capacity based on an analysis of bed density and growth requirements
- a share of the \$1 billion *Health Infrastructure Fund* to provide for the planned and strategic investment in hospital infrastructure and equipment for mental health facilities, primary care facilities and health support services
- improvements to ambulance services including \$16 million to upgrade and build new facilities and \$151 million to recruit 340 additional paramedics and patient transport officers across Victoria
- halving the cost of Ambulance Victoria membership fees to support Victorian families
- expand and enhance services for the mentally ill including psychiatric disability rehabilitation and support services, youth mental health services and additional mental health beds
- \$56 million *Rural Capital Support Fund* to enable rural and regional health services to expand
- \$14 million to attract and retain medical professionals in rural areas
- \$11 million to improve dental health including relocation of dental clinicians to rural areas and deliver three new mobile dental clinics in rural and regional and country Victoria

- \$11.2 million to attract graduates and professional dental clinicians to regional areas, provide mobile dental units and dental hygiene programs for families at risk
- \$22.2 million over four years to continue the *Life! - Taking Action on Diabetes* program.

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Key Recommendation 4:</p> <p>That the State Government design and implement a cohesive program of Outreach Workers for rural and regional Victoria, as the permanent and preferred model for providing health and related services such as financial and relationship counselling to farming and agricultural communities. The model implemented should be based on the successful State Government Drought Worker model. To this end the Committee further recommends that funding for each regional health delivery body determined to be the ideal outreach service provider should include an appropriation for employment of an Outreach Worker.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>Further consideration will be given to models that best support service delivery, such as outreach workers, as part of development of a <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i>.</p>
<p>Recommendation 30:</p> <p>That the State Government recognise that local health services throughout rural and regional Victoria are often best placed to determine the type of funding model that best suits their needs. Further, that in cooperation with the Federal Government and Local Governments, the State Government allow health services greater involvement in determining funding models to apply to their service to ensure that, for example, smaller communities can become Multi Purpose Services should they wish, while larger health services can opt for a WEIS model.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>Flexibility in funding models that support local health services is integral to health delivery in rural and regional areas. A variety of funding models currently exist and will be further considered in the context of the development of a <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i>.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 31: That the State Government provide parity for the health sector through the introduction of a flat fee for ambulance transfers between health services so that rural and regional health services are not disadvantaged by being located in non-metropolitan areas.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle The Government understands that costs for rural and regional health services are significantly higher than those for metropolitan services and the need for these to be reduced to address disadvantage. The Government is currently undertaking a major review of issues regarding rural and regional health services including the effective provision of ambulance services. The <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i> will provide the Government's response to this recommendation.</p>
<p>Recommendation 32: That the State Government continue to support the <i>International Medical Graduates Recruitment Scheme</i> in its current form, maintaining the emphasis on directing medical professionals to rural and regional Victoria.</p>	<p>Supported The Government supports the <i>International Medical Graduates Recruitment Scheme</i> and its focus on rural and regional recruitment through its incentive package initiative and the International Health Professionals Victoria website, which facilitates information provision to international medical graduates and their employers.</p>
<p>Recommendation 33: That the State Government use its <i>Young Professional Provincial Cadetship</i> Program as announced in <i>Ready for Tomorrow</i> to target the shortage of health workers in rural and regional Victoria.</p>	<p>Supported in Part The Government partially supports Recommendation 33 as it is currently engaged through the <i>Young Professional Provincial Cadetship</i> Program in connecting young skilled workers with the needs of regional businesses and communities. However, rather than target a particular industry or occupational category, the program is designed to ensure it can meet the diversity of needs and changing circumstances of young professionals and a variety of businesses and different communities across regional Victoria. A review of current guidelines and eligibility criteria indicate this program already applies to younger health workers as it does to other professions in regional Victoria.</p>
<p>Recommendation 36: That, for any category 1–3 rural hospitals, the State Government investigate provision of real-time computer-based trauma checklist facilities similar to those available in metropolitan hospitals.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle The Government supports the delivery of quality emergency care to all Victorians including those in rural and regional areas. Mechanisms to improve this care will be investigated and considered as part of the development of a <i>Health Capital and Resources Plan</i> and in the context of the <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i>.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 38: That the State Government fast track a public health campaign on diabetes among farming communities, including information on how to recognise symptoms, where help can be found and effective preventative measures. The Government could design and implement this program in partnership with the National Centre for Farmer Health based in Hamilton.</p>	<p>Supported The 2011 Budget provided funding of \$22.2 million over four years to continue the <i>Life!</i> Program, which provides a statewide diabetes prevention program in partnership with the National Centre for Farmer Health/Sustainable Farm Families. The program will be further developed and promoted to include a focus on preventing cardio-vascular disease.</p>
<p>Recommendation 39: That the State Government continue to invest in improving dental care across rural and regional Victoria through immediate implementation of the following measures:</p> <p>a. Provision of dental clinics in schools with low socio-economic status with a particular focus on schools in disadvantaged areas where students have a high rate of dental clearance and other dental problems and where waiting times for access to dental care in the community are unacceptably high, based on the Yuille Park P-8 Community College model</p> <p>b. Where it is not possible to establish a permanent school-based clinic, ensure an increase in the number of operational mobile dental clinics throughout rural and regional Victoria</p> <p>c. Develop initiatives for dentists to work in rural and regional Victoria.</p>	<p>Supported in principle The Government supports the need to continue to improve access to dental care for people in disadvantaged areas across rural and regional Victoria.</p> <p>In addition to providing \$1.1 million over four years for rural dental practitioners' relocation support, the Government's dental employment program will provide \$3.3 million to attract dental clinicians to the public sector, with a focus on areas with the highest workforce shortages, including rural and regional areas.</p> <p>Further development of dental health services will be considered as part of the development of a <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i>.</p>

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND HOUSING

Key issues:

A number of recommendations in the Report relate to challenges in providing human services on a scale and to a standard that meets the needs of people living in rural and regional Victoria. The Report notes that population changes as a result of economic restructuring or demographic change, mean that services and businesses in country towns also need to change in order to effectively respond. Rising house prices are having a significant impact in rural and regional Victoria as well, as some disadvantaged populations become concentrated in particular areas.

What the Government is doing:

The Government has an important role in assisting this process in ways that ensure that rural and regional Victorians are not left behind. To this end, the Government has:

- established a Housing Affordability Unit to provide advice to the Minister for Planning on policies, legislation or procedures that could be reformed to deliver improved housing affordability
- committed to creating *Victorian Parliamentary Volunteering Awards* to encourage people to volunteer in providing services
- committed to providing public housing in rural and regional Victoria
- committed to planning and design works of three 40 bed Youth Foyers in Melbourne and regional Victoria
- committed to providing \$100 million from the *Regional Growth Fund* for the *Putting Locals First Program* to deliver projects which help local communities respond to disadvantage
- provided \$445 million for electricity and water bill concessions for low income Victorian households
- provided \$98 million for child protection, including \$19.1 million for the recruitment of 47 additional child protection workers
- extended the *First Home Buyers Bonus* (representing an additional \$6,500 for a new home in regional Victoria on top of \$13,000 in metropolitan Melbourne).

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 34: That the State Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increase funding for Auslan interpreters across Victoria b. Provide urgent funding for areas of acute need in Victoria such as East Gippsland c. Identify other areas of urgent and acute need for Auslan interpreters. 	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The <i>Victorian Training Guarantee</i> provides the opportunity for Victorians to access government subsidised training in a range of accredited courses associated with Auslan and interpreting. The level of funding provided for government subsidised training in Auslan was recently increased in Victoria to ensure continuing and expanded opportunities for accredited training, including at the Diploma level. Accredited Auslan training is recognised as providing an important pathway to employment for both hearing and non-hearing students wishing to work within the deaf community.</p> <p>The Government will review the need for further funding increases for Auslan interpreters against current demand for language services, taking into account uptake of the Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) service in rural and regional areas.</p>
<p>Recommendation 37: That the State Government link its recently announced ‘family coaches’ program with a promotional campaign on parenting to encourage those experiencing difficulties to ask for assistance, and to reduce the stigma that may be attached to doing so.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government is committed to providing assistance and support for parenting. To this end, the Victorian Government is providing \$2 million for a parenting strategy, led by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, to enhance parents' skills and confidence to deal positively with specific behavioural and developmental challenges.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 43: That the State Government ensure all communities in rural and regional Victoria have sufficient emergency accommodation for young people to meet their needs. To achieve this the Committee recommends that the State Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increase funding to organisations providing emergency accommodation in rural and regional Victoria b. Develop emergency accommodation facilities in areas of need in rural and regional Victoria in order to ensure that vulnerable young people are not moved to different parts of the State exacerbating existing problems and causing issues including: removal of young people from their vital support networks; availability of transport back to their community; and long-term problems associated with removing young people from school. 	<p>Supported in Part</p> <p>The Government is currently improving the emergency responses for young people in all regions through enhancements to youth refuge service delivery and funding.</p> <p>The Government is investing in public and social housing, including crisis and transitional housing, and provides support in a number of rural and metropolitan regions.</p> <p>The Government recognises the need for young people experiencing homelessness to receive intensive support and has committed to planning and design works of three 40 bed Youth Foyers in Melbourne and regional Victoria.</p>
<p>Recommendation 44: That the State Government examine current policy on provision of public housing in rural and regional Victoria with a view to ensuring that:</p>	<p>The Government is already delivering one third of planned new stock acquisitions in rural and regional Victoria, and is increasing the supply of one bedroom dwellings in the public housing system. The Government continuously examines the provision of public housing in rural and regional Victoria to ensure services continue to meet the needs and demographics of communities. Responses to individual elements of Recommendation 44 are as follows.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>a. Public housing continues to be spread evenly throughout rural and regional Victoria rather than in concentrated locations as has previously been the case</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>Currently over 30 per cent of all public housing is located in rural and regional Victoria. Major centres for public housing are Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga. Overall density of public housing is evenly spread across regions relative to population.</p> <p>Approximately one third of all <i>Nation Building Economic Stimulus</i> dwellings will be in rural and regional Victoria. New public housing acquisitions are dispersed across neighbourhoods where there is privately-owned housing, so there are mixed and diverse communities. Approximately 25 per cent of Victoria's <i>National Rental Affordability Scheme</i> (NRAS) properties will be delivered in regional areas.</p>
<p>b. Public housing is always provided with the necessary range of services to prevent further disadvantage taking hold</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government ensures that public housing is diverse in type and in size, suits a broad range of people and household types, is in line with demand and is located within easy access to public transport, health and community services, education and jobs. The Government will continue to work in partnership with the not-for-profit sector.</p> <p>In addition, the Government is working to narrow the gap between 19 disadvantaged areas and the rest of the State through <i>Neighbourhood Renewal</i>, by supporting initiatives that increase community participation and connectedness, and linking families with the support they need through joined up government services.</p>
<p>c. To reflect changing community demographics there is an urgent increase in the number of one-bedroom units in the public housing system.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government is continuing to increase the supply of dwellings for smaller families and single people. Almost half of public housing dwellings in rural and regional Victoria are one-bedroom or two-bedroom dwellings.</p> <p>The Government is favouring construction of one and two-bedroom dwellings in line with demand. For example, approximately 75 per cent of 4,500 <i>Nation Building Economic Stimulus</i> dwellings being acquired are one and two-bedroom dwellings suitable for single households.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 46:</p> <p>That the State Government acknowledge the threat posed to Victoria’s strong history of volunteering by an ageing population. That the State Government offer incentives to attract volunteers to positions such as Community Emergency Response Teams.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government recognises there are a number of factors impacting on volunteering levels, including an ageing population. The Government also recognises the importance volunteering plays in building strong and resilient communities which can work effectively together to prepare for extreme events and manage the recovery process.</p> <p>In order to support volunteering the Victorian Government is providing \$9.4 million over four years for the <i>Valuing Volunteers Program</i> which offers a range of initiatives to value, attract, develop and retain Victorian State Emergency Services, Country Fire Authority, Life Saving Victoria and Australian Volunteer Coast Guard volunteers.</p> <p>In addition, the Government will create the annual <i>Victorian Parliament Volunteer Awards</i> to recognise the achievements of 88 of the best and bravest of Victoria’s committed volunteers. Awards will be open to volunteers with Red Cross, Ambulance Victoria CERT teams, Life Saving Victoria, Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, St John’s Ambulance, Victoria’s State Emergency Service, Country Fire Authority and other organisations.</p> <p>Further support to sustain and grow volunteering is provided through the Victorian Government’s online portal www.volunteer.vic.gov.au. Since its introduction (May 2010) the portal has become a vital piece of infrastructure with over 127,000 visits. The portal supports the Victorian flood recovery effort by registering volunteers.</p>
<p>Recommendation 48:</p> <p>That the State Government continue to recognise the role infrastructure such as public libraries and community pools play in the social life of rural and regional Victoria. Further, that the State Government increase funding to rural councils to ensure that these assets are maintained to the highest standard.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government will continue to invest in public libraries, swimming pools and other community infrastructure that strengthens community life in rural and regional Victoria. The Government is committed to establishing a <i>Local Government Infrastructure Program</i>, through the <i>Regional Growth Fund</i>, to support a range of local council initiatives including roads, bridges, new community assets such as halls, theatres, sporting grounds, grandstands, pools, libraries and upgrades to existing facilities. Funding will be flexible to support projects and initiatives that meet strategic priorities and needs identified by local communities.</p> <p>Allocations to individual councils will be based primarily on need and population to</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>ensure smaller rural councils receive their share of funding. This will enable smaller councils to effectively plan their future infrastructure investment programs while recognising financial sustainability pressures faced by councils with large geographic areas and small populations.</p> <p>In addition, the 2011-12 Budget provides \$17.2 million over 4 years for the <i>Public Libraries Capital Works Program</i> to improve Victoria's public library infrastructure by delivering at least 40 new or upgraded library facilities across the State.</p>
<p>Recommendation 49: That the State Government provide financial incentives for local governments operating in areas of disadvantage to identify and prioritise tackling local issues facing their community.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The <i>Putting Locals First Program</i> will deliver long-term flexible funding to help local communities devise positive responses to disadvantage. Examples of projects the Fund could support include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving local transport services • bringing state of the art technology and internet access to public libraries • promoting regional tourism and events • beautifying town centres • developing local marketing initiatives to support small business • supporting local community groups and volunteers • upgrading important community facilities and services. <p>The Victoria Grants Commission also provides funding to local government which accounts for challenges faced by councils and differing capacity to generate user fees and charges.</p>

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Key Issues:

The Report notes that the challenges which regional Victorians face in accessing important educational, employment and human services can be compounded by limited transport options and inadequate communications infrastructure. The Report also noted that good transport is essential if young people are to access education and training opportunities in rural and regional Victoria and for ensuring the long term economic prosperity of regions. At their worst, communications failures can endanger lives. Emergency communications black spots, the challenges faced by police in remote areas in ensuring the safe management and custody of offenders, the time taken for an ambulance to arrive to alleviate a medical crisis are all issues which underline the importance of strengthening communications in rural and regional Victoria.

What the Government is doing:

The Government recognises that reliable and safe transport services are important for Victorians living in rural and regional Victoria and the Government is committed to improving people's access to transport in these areas. To this end, the Government has:

- provided \$160 million over four years to regional roads and bridges
- committed \$140 million over four years to highway upgrades
- reinstated Overland train services from Stawell providing locals with better transport connections to other towns in Western Victoria and Melbourne
- committed funding to run more Ballarat trains to Wendouree
- committed to upgrading bus services across Victoria to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of locals
- commenced work to ensure that there are no black spots for emergency services communication anywhere in Victoria with North East Victoria as a priority
- commenced planning for a rail link to Avalon Airport that will provide direct access to the airport for passengers travelling from Melbourne, Geelong and Warrnambool
- provided \$47 million to upgrade and make safety improvements to regional railway crossings
- provided \$67 million for the CFA to upgrade or build new stations and provide new fire fighting vehicles.

Further to this the Government has committed to:

- develop a *Transport Solutions Plan* in 2011 to facilitate the development and growth of regional industries. The plan will include projects that promote improved business and industry competitiveness, attract new investment and create jobs

- continue with the *Regional Rail Link* separating regional trains from metropolitan trains giving Geelong, Bendigo, and Ballarat trains their own dedicated tracks through the suburban system from Sunshine to Southern Cross Station, increasing capacity and reliability
- undertake a feasibility study of passenger rail links between Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo via Meredith, Maryborough and Castlemaine, adding an invaluable transport link between three of Victoria’s major regional centres
- re-open Talbot station, plan for a new station at Grovedale, upgrade Ballan and Warragul stations and extend Bendigo trains to Epsom and Eaglehawk with a new station and boom gates at Epsom
- re-introduce the NightRider bus service in the Latrobe Valley
- upgrade major rural roads across the State.

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 41: That the State Government acknowledge the current P1 licence restrictions are too restrictive and generic and do not take into account community needs in rural and regional Victoria. Further, exemptions to the restrictions should be made easier to obtain and the process made clearer, more accessible and processed in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Supported in Part</p> <p>Peer passenger restrictions provide a gradual introduction to the risks of driving solo following supervised learner driving. These restrictions balance road safety outcomes and mobility issues for young novice drivers.</p> <p>Young drivers comprise 13 percent of all drivers, but account for over one quarter of driver fatalities. Over the period 2005-2009, 41 18-25 year olds were killed and 942 seriously injured each year in Victoria. More than half of young driver fatalities and 30 per cent of serious injuries occur in rural and regional Victoria. Data from the 2007/08 VISTA travel survey also indicates that young regional drivers have a 15 percent greater crash risk than young drivers in metropolitan Melbourne. Experience with passenger restrictions in North America and New Zealand indicates that they are a proven way to save young driver lives.</p> <p>Allowances have been made for carrying family members and multiple passengers when accompanied by a fully licensed driver (as is the case for learner drivers) and for essential activities such as for emergency services work. An application for an exemption is not required in these circumstances.</p> <p>Exemptions are available where undue hardship can be proven (because of the nature of employment, essential activities, family circumstances or educational requirements) and the Government is satisfied road safety is not compromised.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>The information provided to P1 drivers will be reviewed to determine if advice on requirements for exemptions can be improved to reduce incomplete or insufficient applications. This review will consider the need for greater flexibility in exemptions when no alternative public transport is available and will examine the process relating to the review of exemptions to identify if applications of a more obvious need or limited duration can be expedited. Exemption forms are available from the VicRoads website: www.vicroads.vic.gov.au</p>
<p>Recommendation 42: That the State Government continue state-wide implementation of the L2P program currently operating in some rural and regional communities, to include all disadvantaged communities that would benefit from this program. The Committee further recommends that the State Government develop a promotional campaign encouraging community leaders to volunteer as driving tutors for the L2P program.</p>	<p>Supported As of December 2010 there were 54 L2P programs across Victoria spanning 60 local government areas (LGAs). In total, 35 rural and regional LGAs are covered by 28 L2P programs. Most areas of rural disadvantage now have L2P programs either in operation or funded. The Government is working with individual L2P programs to develop volunteer recruitment and promotional strategies. A web page publicising L2P and listing all programs was added to the VicRoads website in December 2010, and programs are encouraged to list on volunteer.vic.gov.au. The L2P program works closely with the Victorian Youth Mentoring Association as well as the <i>Whole of Government Mentoring and Capacity Building Initiative</i>.</p>
<p>Recommendation 45: That the State Government, with the memories of the Black Saturday bushfires still strong, ensure there are no ‘black spots’ for emergency services communications anywhere in Victoria, with north-east Victoria being a priority.</p>	<p>Supported The Government is working to address ‘black spots’ for emergency services communications in Victoria, with North East Victoria being a priority, within technical and financial limitations. The emergency services have been addressing communications coverage issues under various projects and operational procedures for some time and will continue to do so.</p>
<p>Recommendation 47: That the State Government continue to improve transport services within rural and regional Victoria by undertaking the following measures:</p>	<p>The Government is committed to providing ongoing improvements to transport services in rural and regional Victoria. The Victorian Government recognises the vital role that effective transport services play in maintaining social and economic services in rural and regional Victoria, both between regional areas and Melbourne and among regional centres and rural areas. Responses to individual elements of Recommendation 47 are as follows.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>a. Widening of the <i>Transport Connections</i> program to provide more inter-town services across rural and regional Victoria</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government is committed to increased provision of inter-town services across rural and regional Victoria where a need is identified.</p> <p>The <i>Transport Connections</i> program assists rural and regional communities to identify significant transport challenges and to develop innovative local solutions.</p> <p>The Government's <i>Putting Locals First Program</i> provides support for projects and initiatives that meet the strategic priorities and needs of rural and regional communities, including local transport services.</p> <p>In addition, the Government will undertake a feasibility study of passenger rail links between Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo via Meredith, Maryborough and Castlemaine.</p>
<p>b. Investigation of a solution to improving links between major regional centres – the east–west transport corridors</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government has commenced investigating the improvement of strategic linkages between major regional centres through better coordination of public transport services.</p> <p>Improvements to the Midland Highway are being progressively implemented, on a state-wide priority basis, over its length from Geelong to Mansfield improving east-west movement and accessibility to major regional cities. This includes recently completed shoulder sealing and curve improvement works between Elmore and Stanhope. Duplication of a section of the Midland Highway in Shepparton East between Florence Street and Orrvale Road to improve traffic flow is currently under construction.</p> <p>In addition, the Victorian Government is investigating potential improvements to the Murray Valley Highway near Tallangatta to improve traffic flow and reduce the risk of unsafe overtaking manoeuvres.</p>
<p>c. Prioritisation of the Princes Highway West project to Warrnambool.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government recognises the importance of the Princes Highway West to support access for communities in the south-west and is committed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • duplication from Waurm Ponds to Winchelsea • commencing planning for the duplication from Winchelsea to Colac, working towards

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>preparing this project for the next round of <i>Nation Building Program</i> (2014/15 onwards), which has been committed by both State and Federal Governments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building six overtaking lanes between Colac and the South Australian border. <p>This is in addition to works already done in the Green Triangle area on the Princes Highway West such as bridge strengthening and a commitment to shoulder sealing.</p> <p>Together, these works will continue to improve access into Portland, Warrnambool and Colac from both east and west.</p>

JUSTICE

Key Issues:

The Committee noted that delivering equal access to legal services for rural communities is a shared responsibility between the Commonwealth and State Governments. The Report identified many of the difficulties residents in rural and regional communities face in accessing the legal system.

What the Government is doing:

The Government recognises the difficulties Victorians living in rural and regional areas experience in accessing the justice system and legal services. In recognition of these challenges the Department of Justice has recently established regional offices across the entire state to enable expansion of justice services to rural and regional Victoria. The Government has also:

- committed to increase police numbers by 1700 with significant benefits for rural and regional Victoria
- committed to appoint Protective Services Officers to patrol major regional railway stations
- committed to County Court Judges being located in major regional centres on an ongoing basis rather than just on short-term circuit visits
- introduced additional sittings in 2011 to reduce delays to regional Court hearings
- introduced an online portal for VCAT general list cases
- commenced progressively introducing the recording of hearings outside the Melbourne CBD (currently in operation in Geelong and Bendigo)
- committed \$9 million over four years in the 2011-12 Budget for community legal centres taking on rural and regional clients.

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Key Recommendation 7: The Committee recommends that the State Government further examine and respond to concerns raised before the Rural and Regional Committee during this Inquiry. In particular:</p>	<p>The Government will further examine concerns raised before the Rural and Regional Committee during this Inquiry, which related to improving access to the law. Responses to individual elements of Key Recommendation 7 are as follows.</p>
<p>a. The need for a Community Legal Centre in the Goulburn Valley area</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports the valuable work of Community Legal Centres. The Government has provided \$9 million in the 2011-12 Budget to enable Community Legal Centres to continue to provide legal advice and services to Victorians, with a focus on family violence assistance and maintaining services in rural and regional Victoria.</p> <p>The Government acknowledges the valuable work that has been done to date in piloting a community legal service in the Goulburn Valley. The Government and Victoria Legal Aid will have regard to the Committee’s recommendation in the context of ongoing consideration of Community Legal Centre funding.</p>
<p>b. Certainty of hearing dates at regional circuit courts</p>	<p>Supported in Part</p> <p>The Government supports providing greater certainty of hearing dates at regional circuit courts where possible and appropriate. Current listing practices aim to balance the desirability of greater certainty while making the most effective use of judicial resources.</p> <p>The listing of regional circuit cases for a specific trial date would further exacerbate delays and impede efficiency gains in circumstances where cases are settled prior to court. The Government will continue to assist courts to examine ways to respond to the needs of the public and look to balance the objective of certainty of trial date with the systemic need to reduce trial delay.</p>
<p>c. Variations in the length of time to commence and complete hearings and the frequency of adjournments between Melbourne and circuit courts</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>As part of responding to these issues, the Government is committed to County Courts judges being located in major regional centres on an ongoing basis rather than just on short-term circuit visits.</p> <p>The courts are implementing various initiatives to reduce case backlogs. For example,</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>the County Court has scheduled circuits in 2011 with a focus on backlogs. Judges sat for periods of eight weeks in Bendigo between January and June enabling more cases to be scheduled than would be possible for a four week sitting. Further, between January and March two Judges sat at the one time in Morwell. Additional sittings have also been created to concentrate on reducing the backlog of cases at locations across regional Victoria. The County Court is also working collaboratively with the Office of Public Prosecutions and Victoria Legal Aid to focus on the backlog of cases.</p> <p>As at 30 April 2011, the County Court’s pending criminal cases in regional Victoria had decreased by 32 per cent since February 2010, with the number of cases over two years reduced by over 55 per cent. While this can be attributed in part to an internal audit of the Court’s data, additional sittings in regional areas (on circuit) have produced significant results.</p>
<p>d. The effectiveness and consistency of the listing process between Melbourne and circuit courts</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>Courts continually review their plans with a view to improving processes. The Government is committed to County Courts judges being located in major regional centres on an ongoing basis rather than just on short-term circuit visits.</p>
<p>e. The effect in regional Victoria of the application of the three-month requirement for the commencement of serious sexual offence hearings and ‘special hearings’ in circuit courts</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>Since 2006, a range of measures regarding the way the criminal justice system responds to sexual assault have been introduced. This included amendments to the <i>Crimes Act 1958</i> requiring a sexual offence trial involving a child or cognitively impaired complainant to commence within three months of committal and changes to the <i>Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958</i> allowing evidence involving children and cognitively impaired adults to be pre-recorded at a Special Hearing within three months (unless exceptional circumstances apply) of the defendant being committed to trial.</p> <p>These measures were recently reviewed as part of an evaluation of the <i>Sexual Assault Reform Strategy</i>. The operation of these legislative provisions at regional courts will be considered having regard to that evaluation.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>f. The availability of legal Counsel and support services to circuit courts compared with the Melbourne County Court</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government is committed to working with rural and regional communities to improve access to professional services, including legal services.</p> <p>As stated above in Key Recommendation 7(c), the Government will seek to enable County Court judges to be located in major regional centres on an ongoing basis rather than just on short-term circuit visits. This should assist in improving the availability of legal and support services at those centres.</p>
<p>g. Measures in place to increase the use of court registrars in preliminary planning</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>Listing reforms, including sessional listings, have been introduced and require Magistrates' Court of Victoria registrars to be actively involved in managing and planning court sittings. Registrars work closely with Victoria Police and others on the implementation of case conferencing procedures with a pre-hearing focus.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>h. Further possibilities for the use of telecommunications in rural and regional courts</p>	<p>Supported in Part</p> <p>Most regional courts have video conferencing equipment and access to internet, including processes that allow solicitors to lodge documents with the courts via the internet. However, many smaller courts with visiting Magistrates do not have access to video conferencing facilities. Consideration will be given to extending the availability of video conferencing facilities, or the proposed internet-based conference facility currently being piloted to regional centres.</p> <p>The County Court also offers a facility, known as ‘Court Connect’, to allow the community to see the case logs of all civil cases so that progress can be monitored. A next generation ‘Court Connect’ facility known as ‘eAccess’ is planned to be expanded to all courts and tribunals as part of the <i>Integrated Court Management System (ICMS)</i> program.</p> <p>The Government is currently investigating the use of internet-based video conferencing, as referred to above. Currently, different technologies exist that have varying levels of success. A pilot testing the use of internet-based video technology between the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal (VCAT) has recently commenced.</p> <p>In March 2011, VCAT introduced an online Case Portal for their General List cases. This allows litigants to communicate with the tribunal via the internet, including lodging court documents and receiving Court Orders.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>i. The frequency and impact of regional solicitors initiating proceedings at Melbourne County Court</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>Criminal cases are committed to regional courts from the Magistrates' Court closest to where the offence(s) occurred. Therefore, matters within regional Victoria are not initiated at Melbourne and any transfer of a case to Melbourne would require a change of venue application. The basic principle when considering such an application is where possible, the case is to be heard in the jurisdiction where the case occurred.</p> <p>With regard to Civil initiations, the County Court's case management system does not record information that correlates the address of the plaintiff or where the cause of action arose, with the filing location, thus monitoring of this could be difficult.</p> <p>In the County Court, civil initiating data for regional Victoria has remained static for the past three years and anecdotally the Melbourne Registry receives very few initiating documents from regional solicitors.</p>
<p>j. Current strategies to ensure access for rural and regional Magistrates' Court participants at locations which do not have access to the specialist courts and court programs available at larger centres</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports in principle extending access to specialist courts and court programs in regional areas. The Department of Justice is undertaking an <i>Integrating Court Programs</i> project to identify key elements of specialist courts and court programs that can be more widely implemented across the court system, including in rural and regional locations.</p>
<p>k. The processes of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and their impact on rural and regional Victorians</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government welcomes the work being undertaken by VCAT's proposed initiative <i>Transforming VCAT: A three year strategic plan</i>, released by the President of VCAT, Justice Ross, in September 2010. This strategic plan outlines various initiatives to extend and improve the services delivered to those in both metropolitan and regional Victoria. Many initiatives are already underway, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • piloting services in non-traditional locations (to improve the adequacy of facilities and increase capacity to respond to urgent matters arising outside Melbourne CBD) • piloting sittings in areas of special need (initially in Robinvale and Maryborough) • establishing VCAT 'hub' locations in identified suburban and regional locations

Recommendation	Position and response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progressively allocating additional VCAT staff to key locations in regional Victoria • assigning VCAT Members to identified areas in regional areas (to oversee service delivery and suggest local improvements that will better meet local needs). <p>In terms of recording of proceedings to increase accountability:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progressively introducing the recording of hearings outside Melbourne CBD (currently being done in Frankston, Geelong, Bendigo and Werribee) • purchasing portable recording equipment so that hearings in non traditional locations can be recorded. <p>The above measures are expected to result in providing access to audio recordings of hearings for a fee.</p>
<p>l. Monitoring and data collection of justice system needs and outcomes for rural and regional Victorians</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports in principle the monitoring and data collection of justice system needs and outcomes for rural and regional Victorians. Reliable data and monitoring regarding justice system needs and outcomes is a key element of improving access to justice for rural and regional Victorians.</p> <p>At present, rural and regional court-related data can be gathered based on limited criteria. In the Magistrates' and Children's Courts data can be gathered by court location (for caseflow numbers and details, defendant data and sentencing outcomes) or on postcode of defendant's address (defendant data). In some instances, this can be aggregated into LGA areas.</p> <p>In the Higher Courts, data about cases can be gathered based on court location.</p>
<p>m. Increased funding of rural and regional legal services and legal aid funding and resources in particular</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government funds the provision of Community Legal Centres through Victoria Legal Aid in conjunction with the Commonwealth and the <i>Public Purpose Fund</i>. The Government will give further consideration to this recommendation, although noting that all funding decisions need to be made in a whole-of-budget context.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
n. Methods to attract professional staff to rural and regional areas	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government is committed to improving the attractiveness of rural and regional areas as places to live, including for professionals such as legal practitioners, to help ensure that rural and regional communities can have access to necessary professional services.</p>
o. The application of home detention to rural and regional citizens	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>The Government is committed to abolishing the current system of home detention in Victoria.</p>
p. Plans to roll out current Magistrates' Court pilot programs, such as for mediation, across regional Victoria.	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports moves by the Magistrates' Court to expand the civil mediation processes.</p> <p>The <i>Dispute Settlement Centre Civil Mediation Program</i> is currently available at all Magistrates' Courts in the North Western Metropolitan Region (Broadmeadows, Sunshine and Werribee Courts) and the Latrobe Valley Court.</p> <p>The further expansion of this program will require further consideration by the Magistrates' Court and the Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria.</p>
<p>Recommendation 35:</p> <p>That the State Government recognise the increasing challenges faced by police officers in remote areas of Victoria ensuring that the safe management in custody of offenders is provided in such a way as to allow for police officers, already limited in numbers in rural and regional areas, to resume patrols. The Committee further recommends that future policing strategies around mental health issues be developed in consultation with local stakeholders in communities across rural Victoria.</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government recognises the importance of addressing the specific challenges that face police members in rural and regional areas when responding to the needs of people with mental health issues. To this end, the following initiatives have been implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in May 2007 a network of 12 Mental Health and Disability Liaison Officers were established across Victoria to act as a conduit for information and advice between local areas and central networks, and as a first point of contact for external agencies seeking to discuss mental health responses or issues. This network is used to identify the particular issues and needs of police in rural and regional areas when making submissions in relation to the <i>Mental Health Act</i> review, contributing to the development of the <i>Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy</i> and the <i>Justice Mental Health Strategy</i>, the revision of the <i>Protocol for Mental Health</i> with the Department of Health, and a number of policy and procedure improvements

Recommendation	Position and response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in partnership with the Department of Health, Victoria Police have introduced a two-way reporting regime between 21 local Emergency Services Liaison Committees and the state-wide Inter-Departmental Liaison Committee to better ensure that local service delivery issues are being raised and responded to appropriately • in July 2010 the revised <i>Department of Health and Victoria Police Protocol for Mental Health</i> was released, to delineate respective roles and responsibilities when police, mental health services and ambulance interact to respond to a person with mental health needs • the Mental Disorder Transfer Form is a sensitised form that police members complete for every individual they transfer to a mental health or disability support service to inform future responses and identify areas of good practice and those requiring improvement • Victoria Police also contributed to the revision of the <i>Ambulance Protocol</i>, in which the limits of police involvement are clearly articulated; namely that ambulance has lead agency responsibility and that police transport should be used only as a last resort and where there are safety issues.

SPECIFIC REGIONS

A strength of the Report is that it documents the specific challenges faced by different regions of Victoria. While many of the challenges rural and regional Victorians face are held in common, each region has unique characteristics which can give rise to different problems. These differences need to be recognised if the particular needs of individual communities are to be met.

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>Recommendation 50: That the State Government respond to local needs in the Loddon Mallee region by taking the following action:</p>	<p>The Government recognises specific local needs of communities throughout the Loddon Mallee region, and in particular looks to the community-owned <i>Loddon Mallee Northern</i> and <i>Loddon Mallee Southern Regional Strategic Plans</i>, which provide a direct avenue for the communication of community needs, priorities and issues to the Victorian Government. Responses to individual elements of Recommendation 50 are as follows.</p>
<p>a. Encourage through incentives the provision of a full-time speech pathologist in Maryborough</p>	<p>Supported in Principle The Government supports appropriate access to allied health services for people in rural and regional areas. Access to allied health services will be considered in the context of the development of a <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i>.</p>
<p>b. Provide funding for <i>Our Place</i> in Eaglehawk, a successful initiative of local community leaders responding to those facing disadvantage in the community</p>	<p>Supported The Government funded <i>Our Place</i> in Eaglehawk and acknowledges the good work in assisting people through the fire recovery process and providing security for those most disadvantaged in the community.</p>
<p>c. In response to local needs in Robinvale and suggestions from community workers, that the State Government investigate and establish a program for Indigenous residents to build their own homes. Such action would respond to urgent local needs for accommodation; would provide an opportunity for training in professional and life skills for residents; and would ensure implementation of a local solution to a local problem</p>	<p>Supported in Principle <i>Group Self Build</i> is an initiative where participants contribute 20 hours per household per week for 12 months to build each others' homes. A <i>Group Self Build</i> project was initiated in Robinvale in late 2007 including significant work into identifying suitable sites and attracting potential participants however there was insufficient community interest for the project to commence. The Department of Planning and Community Development Loddon Mallee Regional Team, including the Indigenous Community Development Broker based in Robinvale, could bring together representatives of the Office of Housing and community members with a role and interest in pursuing this program.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>d. Provide funding for an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer and Multicultural Liaison Officer to be stationed in Robinvale.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government will provide \$1.8 million over four years to the Centre for Multicultural Youth to work in partnership on special programs, including the establishment of two regional offices of the Centre for Multicultural Youth and a trial of two bi-cultural youth workers to provide a one stop shop to assist young people from disadvantaged Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.</p> <p>The Government also currently funds an Indigenous Community Engagement Broker in Robinvale to fulfil a community liaison function. The Robinvale Local Indigenous Network is very active and has successfully initiated a number of community capacity building initiatives to support members of Robinvale’s Indigenous community, including Indigenous youth.</p>
<p>Recommendation 51: The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Grampians Northern Victoria region by taking the following action:</p>	<p>The Government recognises specific local needs of communities throughout the Grampians region and in particular looks to the community-owned <i>Wimmera Southern Mallee</i> and <i>Central Goldfields Regional Strategic Plans</i>, which provide a direct avenue for communication of community needs, priorities and issues to the Victorian Government. A response to individual elements of Recommendation 51 follows.</p>
<p>a. Maintain the <i>Start Over</i> program currently operating successfully in Ballarat with the aim of reducing youth offending rates by identifying and addressing behaviours, attitudes, personal and family circumstances that may lead to contact with the Police</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The <i>Start Over</i> program was a pilot that concluded in 2010. The pilot was instrumental in informing the development of the <i>Youth Support Service</i> program commencing operations in Ballarat and five other regional centres (Bendigo, Geelong, Latrobe Valley, Mildura and Shepparton). The <i>Youth Support Service</i> is part of a Government 2010-11 commitment of \$22 million over four years to support 35 youth workers in community service organisations across Victoria, including two with Ballarat Community Health.</p> <p>The <i>Youth Support Service</i> is a collaborative partnership involving the Department of Human Services, Victoria Police and community sector organisations. Similar to the <i>Start Over</i> program, it aims to intervene early and divert young people away from the youth justice system by addressing underlying causes of offending and risk taking behaviour, connecting young people with the support they need and delivering a behavioural change program.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>b. Consider establishment of neighbourhood renewal projects in Horsham North, Sebastopol and Redan.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports Recommendation 51 (b) in principle. The Government is currently implementing programs to address disadvantage in a range of locations in rural and regional Victoria. Identification of new projects is dependent on an analysis of a range of criteria that have been used successfully in the past.</p>
<p>Recommendation 52:</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Barwon South West region by taking the following action:</p>	<p>The Government recognises specific local needs of communities throughout the Barwon South West administrative region and in particular looks to the community-owned <i>Great South Coast</i> and <i>G21 Regional Strategic Plans</i>, which provide a direct avenue for the communication of community needs, priorities and issues to the Victorian Government. A response to individual elements of Recommendation 52 follows.</p>
<p>a. Urgently advocate to the Federal Government for the Corio and Norlane areas of Geelong to be classified as a district of health workforce shortages in order to be able to offer financial incentives to attract health professionals and overseas-trained doctors to ensure improvements to current shortages in the area</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government supports this recommendation. The Victorian government will raise this matter formally with the Commonwealth.</p>
<p>b. That the State Government provide support to the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation to develop small business opportunities for the Indigenous community in far south-west Victoria. Further, that the State Government continue to work with the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation in developing the tourism industry on Aboriginal-owned lands in the region, with the aim of improving employment opportunities for the Indigenous community and the wider economy of the whole region</p>	<p>Supported</p> <p>The Government is committed to building economic independence for Aboriginal Victorians and boosting Victoria's economy. The Government aims to increase the number of commercially successful Indigenous businesses operating throughout Victoria through innovative partnerships with non-government organisations. This includes support for tourism and economic development opportunities for the Indigenous people in the far south-west of Victoria, the Gunditjmarra. A range of government supported activities are proposed or underway in partnership with Gunditj Mirring and Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Development Victoria is working with the Gunditj Mirring to explore funding opportunities to improve tourism infrastructure at the Budj Bim site, including walking tracks, heritage initiatives, cultural facilities and interpretive signage • increased business support and management and employee skills development

Recommendation	Position and response
	<p>opportunities, through the support of the Victorian Government's Koorie Business Network and partnership with Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to support the growth of indigenous tourism/aquaculture enterprises linked to Budj Bim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism Victoria is investigating options to assist the Gunditj Mirring with their existing Budj Bim Tours business, and development of master planning for new and expanded future enterprises • Tourism Victoria is also developing a 10-year <i>Aboriginal Tourism Plan</i> for Victoria, incorporating increased tourism opportunities within the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape.
<p>c. Provide funding to the Glenelg Youth Network for a South West Youth Access Program in the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Shire, to ensure that the program, previously funded by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation and the Proceeds of Crime Act can continue to support young people to access drug and alcohol services, other health services, and early intervention initiatives.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government recognises the importance of providing appropriate support to young people to access treatment services and prevention education. Funding for this program was provided by the Commonwealth. At this stage it is unclear whether there will be further funding for this program.</p> <p>Western District Health and Glenelg Shire currently receive funds through the <i>FReeZA</i> and the <i>Youth Participation and Access Program (YPA)</i>. <i>FReeZA</i> promotes alcohol and drug free music events in communities across the state, led by young people. YPA funds community and local government organisations to deliver local support programs which provide young people who face barriers to participation with opportunities to increase access to social, learning and cultural opportunities in their community.</p>
<p>Recommendation 53: The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Hume region by taking the following action:</p>	<p>The Government recognises specific local needs of communities throughout the Hume administrative region and in particular looks to the community-owned <i>Hume Regional Strategic Plan</i>, which provides a direct avenue for the communication of community needs, priorities and issues to the Victorian Government. A response to individual elements of Recommendation 53 follows.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>a. Provision of funding for North East Support and Action for Youth's family support program which has been successful in keeping young people engaged with education</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government provides funding to North East Support and Action for Youth under the <i>Youth Participation and Access Program</i> (YPA), which includes a contribution to the salary of a Youth and Community Development worker. YPA aims to increase the skills and confidence of young people, strengthen links with peers, family and community, and increase access to information and support services. YPA targets young people who face additional barriers to participation in education, training, employment and community life.</p>
<p>b. Increase funding to North East Support and Action for Youth, which currently receives an insufficient amount of \$8,000 from the Department of Human Services to provide emergency accommodation in Alpine, Wangaratta, Benalla and Mansfield Shires</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government is currently improving emergency responses for young people in all regions through enhancements to youth refuge service delivery and funding. When allocating funding, the Government takes into account the range of agencies undertaking similar services as well as total available funding. Support for regional services, including in the Hume Region, is determined in relation to their index of needs and population. This issue will be examined in the Government's new approach to homelessness, currently under development.</p>
<p>c. Provision of a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program-funded supported accommodation program in Mansfield</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government provides assistance to a range of supported accommodation programs across Victoria. Regions undertake the funding allocation process for supported accommodation assistance in conjunction with their agencies with the objective of allocation of resources to areas of greatest need and demand. This issue will be examined in the Government's new approach to homelessness, currently under development.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>d. Increase funding for Brayton Youth and Family Services to further support its invaluable work in the area of youth homelessness in the Hume region, in particular its Good Lives Model</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government provides assistance in each region to people experiencing homelessness and family violence, including youth. In the Hume region, the Department of Human Services works closely with the Hume Region Homelessness Network and Local Area Homelessness Groups to address issues of homelessness.</p> <p>Resources are and will continue to be allocated with the objective of meeting areas of greatest need and demand. This issue will be examined in the Government's new approach to homelessness, currently under development.</p>
<p>e. Provision of funding for the community's identified need for a dedicated youth counsellor in Benalla</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>As outlined in Recommendation 53(a), the Office for Youth currently provides North East Support and Action for Youth with funding under the YPA program which includes a contribution to the salary of a Youth and Community Development worker. YPA targets young people who face additional barriers to participation in education, training, employment and community life. The program aims to increase their skills and confidence, strengthen links with peers, family and community, and increase access to information and support services.</p>
<p>f. Provision of funding for a Special School in Benalla to ensure that young people with disabilities who are currently required to travel to Wangaratta for schooling can remain and be educated in the community in which they live</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government continues to support the development of regional facilities and services for students with disabilities, including creating a more streamlined approach to ensure young people with a disability achieve better outcomes at school and have a successful transition to post-school environments, including further education, training and employment.</p> <p><i>Benalla Regeneration</i> currently involves planning for future education across four existing school campuses. The leadership working party aims to include special school provision into the master planning phase of <i>Building Futures</i>.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>g. Installation of a helicopter base at Wangaratta that is suitable to provide emergency air services covering north-east Victoria</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government supports appropriate access to emergency services for people in North East Victoria. The most appropriate service platforms will be considered in the development of a <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i>.</p>
<p>h. Installation of pilot-activated lighting at the Corryong airfield</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>The Government provides significant support for regional infrastructure development, including airports and airfields. The Government has provided \$20 million over four years for the <i>Regional Aviation Fund</i>. Applications for infrastructure projects are usually made by local governments, with each project assessed for funding on its individual merits.</p> <p>Corryong airport is owned and operated by Towong Shire Council. An application seeking funding for Corryong airport has yet to be received.</p>
<p>i. Re-establishment of a Victorian Government ‘shop front’ in Corryong to enable residents in the region to submit documents required by government such as VicRoads documents, Business Licensing Authority documents, hunting and fishing licenses and so on.</p>	<p>Supported in Principle</p> <p>A range of Government services are available throughout regional Victoria, with many departments having a regional presence. For example, the Department of Justice has a justice service at Wodonga, a regional office at Wangaratta and other services in the Hume region including a Dispute Settlement Centre; Consumer Affairs; Community Correctional Services; Sheriff’s Operations and Births, Deaths and Marriages.</p> <p>Currently, VicRoads services are provided by agents or through scheduled visits. Licensing and other business documentation is available online through the Business Victoria website: www.business.vic.gov.au. To supplement online services and to extend the provision of these services to businesses throughout rural and regional Victoria, Small Business Victoria, together with the Department of Justice, utilises Mobile Business Centres to travel to regional towns to provide face-to-face contact, advice and services.</p> <p>Corryong sits within a geographically large catchment. The area requires a consistent whole of government approach to overcome isolation and transportation challenges and to ensure adequate uptake of service delivery within the region. The provision of online and mobile services ensures a high standard of service and equitable access throughout</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
	regional Victoria in the absence of a shopfront.
<p>Recommendation 54: The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Gippsland region by taking the following action:</p>	<p>The Government recognises specific local needs of communities throughout the Gippsland administrative region and in particular looks to the community-owned <i>Gippsland Regional Strategic Plan</i>, which provides a direct avenue for the communication of community needs, priorities and issues to the Victorian Government. The Government responds as follows to individual elements of Recommendation 54.</p>
<p>a. Remove classification impediments to the Mallacoota Medical Centre stocking emergency medicine currently limited to hospitals or if that is not possible, provide urgent funding and assistance for the Centre to store emergency medicines</p>	<p>Supported in Principle The Government supports appropriate access to emergency care for people in rural and remote areas. Classification and provision of benefits for emergency medicines at no charge to GPs is a responsibility of the Commonwealth <i>Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme</i>. However the Victorian Government will consult with the Commonwealth on the better provision of emergency medicines in remote locations.</p>
<p>b. Provide vouchers to the Mallacoota community offering dental treatment</p>	<p>Supported in Part Dental health vouchers are accessible from Orbost Community Health Service for residents of Mallacoota.</p>
<p>c. Favourably consider funding and provision of a holding facility at the Mallacoota ambulance centre for patients awaiting air retrieval to a major hospital</p>	<p>Supported in Part The Government supports access to appropriate air retrieval facilities. The most appropriate service platforms will be considered in the development of a <i>Rural and Regional Health Plan</i>.</p>
<p>d. Favourably consider placing a fuel depot at the Mallacoota airport</p>	<p>Supported Mallacoota airport is owned and operated by East Gippsland Shire Council. In April 2008 the Council was granted \$791,000 from the Victorian Government to undertake the Mallacoota Aerodrome Development Project. In part, the project involved the installation of re-fuelling facilities at the airport. The Government is committed to providing funding to support the completion of the project.</p>

Recommendation	Position and response
<p>e. Assist the local community by encouraging VicRoads to change its non-pictorial road sign policy to allow signs alerting tourists of the Mallacoota turn off.</p>	<p>Not Supported</p> <p>Tourism Victoria acknowledges the concerns of the local tourism industry and is undertaking a number of activities to improve visitor navigation to the Mallacoota township through signing and other methods. Tourism Victoria is providing funding for a suite of activities being undertaken in partnership with VicRoads and East Gippsland Shire Council, and in consultation with the tourism industry, to improve visitor navigation. This includes the installation of specially designed Coastal Wilderness trailblazing signs (including reference to Mallacoota), the inclusion of Mallacoota on conventional white on green reassurance signs from Lakes Entrance and establishment of strategically-located information bays at Genoa and Cann River.</p> <p>Developed by Tourism Victoria and VicRoads, Tourist Signing Guidelines set out governing principles on the use of pictorial road signs. The Guidelines promote the use of pictorial signs at gateways to 11 major tourist destinations of national significance determined by Tourism Victoria. This strategic state-wide approach ensures equity across the State and avoids an ad hoc proliferation of promotional signs. Research will be undertaken to establish the extent to which pictorial signs would attract tourists to detour and the strength of the community's desire to reduce unnecessary signing clutter. The guidelines for the use of pictorial signs may be refined in the light of this research.</p>

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