



Government programs and policies to support selected VCAMS indicators

The child

Indicator 2.1 Proportion of infants breastfed
(DEECD Maternal and Child Health)

The Victorian Government supports and promotes breastfeeding as an important determinant of maternal and child health and wellbeing.

Breastfeeding help for new mothers is offered through the universal Maternal and Child Health Service, which also supports families through guidance on parenting, health and development, wellbeing and safety, referrals and linking with local communities. The service offers 10 free Key Ages and Stages consultations, with breastfeeding a focus of the initial home visit. At each of these consultations, parents are able to discuss their concerns and experiences, and explore ways to support their child's health, growth and development.

Indicator 3.1a Proportion of children who are fully vaccinated
(Australian Childhood Immunisation Registry)

To raise awareness of the importance of children being fully immunised, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Department of Health are working together on a range of communication activities targeting primary school principals, teachers and parents/guardians. The activities aim to increase the number of parents complying with the legislative requirement to provide an immunisation certificate when enrolling their child and increasing immunisation coverage in Victorian children at five years of age.

Indicator 4.1 Proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable
(Australian Early Development Index)

Local Government Areas use the Australian Early Development Index to assess areas for improvement with a particular focus on early childhood services. An example of this is Frankston which participated in the AEDI Local Champions Project and used the AEDI to identify the local community of North Frankston as an area of high need. The sub-LGA level data available through the AEDI reinforced the views of service providers that a network exclusively addressing the needs of Frankston North was warranted. As a result, the North Frankston Early Years Planning Group was formed to drive program and policy in the area, using AEDI and complementary data. North Frankston has built on this work by recently partnering with the Extended School Hubs Pilot Project.

Indicator 8.1 Proportion of children entering school with basic skills for life and learning

Indicator 10.1 Proportion of children with emotional or behaviour difficulties

Indicator 10.2 Proportion of children whose parents are concerned with their behavior
(DEECD School Entrant Health Questionnaire)

The **smalltalk** early home learning program, funded by the Victorian Government, supports parents to improve the home environment for early learning and development for disadvantaged children aged from 0 to 3 years. The program is provided through Maternal and Child Health parent groups and supported playgroups, with home coaching also available for some families.

A randomised controlled trial of *smalltalk* involving more than 2,200 families found that participants showed significant improvements in parenting, the quality of the home learning environment and child developmental outcomes. Recruitment strategies were successful in reaching families with risk factors for poor child developmental outcomes, and high retention levels were achieved.

Indicator 10.3 Proportion of children who are bullied

(DEECD Student Attitudes to School Survey)

Bully Stoppers is a DEECD initiative which supports parents, teachers and principals in working together to make sure schools are safe and supportive places, where everyone is empowered to help reduce the incidence of bullying in all Victorian schools.

Indicator 10.6 Proportion of students who report feeling connected with their school

(DEECD Student Attitudes to School Survey)

The **School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support program** is an evidence based framework for preventing and responding to student behaviour. It aims to create a positive school climate, a culture of student competence and an open, responsive management system for all school community members. It includes analysis of data in professional learning teams, implementation of evidence based practices and organisational systems for establishing safe, purposeful and inclusive school and classroom learning environments while providing the individual behaviour and learning supports needed to achieve academic and social success for all students.

Indicator 11.1 Percentage of students achieving national benchmark in literacy

Indicator 11.2 Percentage of students achieving national benchmark in numeracy

(DEECD Student Attitudes to School Survey)

The Victorian Government has provided funding to primary schools for **200 specialist maths and science teachers** with the aim of building the foundations and passion to pursue science and maths subjects in senior secondary school and beyond. The first 100 specialist teachers commenced in 2012 with a further 100 commencing in 2014-15.

Indicator 16.1 Year 10-12 apparent retention rate
(DEECD Student Attitudes to School Survey)

Education and Training Reform (School Attendance) Bill 2013

The Victorian Government has committed to the enforcement of compulsory school attendance. The *Education and Training Reform (School Attendance) Bill 2013* (the Bill) was passed through Parliament in early September 2013 and will commence operation from 1 January 2014. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Regional Directors will be re-appointed as School Attendance Officers, and will have the authority to — as a very last resort — issue an Infringement Notice to a parent. This would only occur after a series of other interventions have failed.

A revised attendance support package as well as new attendance and enrolment guidelines will accompany the introduction of the revised attendance laws. These aim to maximise the participation of children and young people in education and support parents to fulfil their responsibilities to ensure children are enrolled and attend school regularly.

The Family

Indicator 20.1 Rate of substantiated child abuse

Indicator 20.2 Rate of children on child protection orders

Indicator 20.3 Rate of children in out of home care

(DHS Client Relationship Information System (CRIS))

The *Victoria's Vulnerable Children Strategy 2013-2022 – Our Shared Responsibility* was released by the Government in May 2013, outlining three strategic goals:

1. Prevent abuse and neglect
2. Act earlier when children are vulnerable
3. Improve outcomes for children in statutory care

The strategy takes a decade-long horizon view. It puts in place the aspiration and system framework that will drive sustained change. The strategy explicitly sets out what changes are sought for Victorian families and children and is underpinned by an investment of more than \$650 million over the past three budgets for vulnerable children.

Child FIRST ensures that vulnerable children, young people and their families are linked effectively into relevant services. There are 24 Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams (Child FIRSTs) across the state. Each Child FIRST provides a central referral point for a range of community based family services and other supports within each of the Child FIRST catchment areas.

Programs and policies related to Child FIRST

The *Strategic framework for family services 2007* outlines Victoria's approach to responding to vulnerable children, young people and their families. It provides guidance on the legislative and policy context, the Best Interests framework for vulnerable children and families, the governance arrangements for child and family services alliances, the role of Child FIRST and integrated family services, the family services principles and service delivery approaches.

The *Child Protection and Integrated Family Services State-wide Agreement (Shell Agreement) 2013* describes the legislative and policy requirements and high level statewide practice guidelines between child protection and Child FIRST/integrated family services.

The *Program requirements for family and early parenting services in Victoria July 2012* has been developed to clearly set out the expectations and requirements to guide, support and inform quality service delivery.

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* provides the legislative basis for an integrated system of services for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

The **Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment** is a partnering agreement between the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria.

The Partnering Agreement:

- outlines strategies to support the educational issues and social needs of children and young people in out-of-home care during the years they attend school, including flexible learning options,

- promotes common practices across Victoria and provides a framework to monitor educational engagement and achievement more closely,
- provides guidance about key areas in which support for children and young people in out-of-home care is required, including school enrolment, transition planning, attendance and engagement, achievement, case planning and school retention and
- outlines a process for implementation of the Partnering Agreement and for monitoring outcomes.

The agreement also outlines expected roles and activities for staff working in schools, case managers in the DHS Child Protection Program or community organisations and relevant staff in DEECD and Catholic Diocesan regional offices.

Five year plan for out-of-home care

A five year plan for children and young people in out-of-home care will be released in early 2014. The plan will examine how outcomes for children in out-of-home care can be improved and also how we might reduce growth in placement numbers in the long-term.

Policy and programs for home-based care in Victoria, including contracted kinship care, and all forms of foster care are contained within *Program requirements for home-based care in Victoria – July 2012*.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/program-requirements-for-home-based-care-in-victoria>

Policy and programs for residential care in Victoria are contained within *Program requirements for residential care services in Victoria – Version 1 July 2012*.

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/program-requirements-for-residential-care-services-in-victoria>

Policy and program requirements for kinship placements that are not contracted to community service organisations are contained in Advice Number 1435 in the *Child Protection Practice Manual*

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/cpmanual/out-of-home-care/kinship/1435-kinship-care-and-assessment>

Indicator 21.2 Proportion of family violence incidents where children and young people are involved as other parties
(VicPol Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP))

Victorian government responses to family violence

Victoria's *Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children – Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012-2015* (Action Plan) was launched in October 2012. The Action Plan engages a range of Government areas and will also be driven through partnerships with community sector organisations. The Government is investing \$90 million in 2012-2013 which will fund a range of prevention, early intervention and response measures.

Victorian Government initiatives to address violence against women and children fall within three streams:

- Preventing violence against women and children: changing attitudes and behaviours to promote respectful non-violent relationships and gender equity.

- Intervening earlier: by identifying and targeting individuals and groups who exhibit early signs of violent behaviour or of being subjected to violence.
- Responding through an integrated system: providing consistent, coordinated and timely responses to women and children who experience family violence and to get tougher on perpetrators and prevent reoffending.

In Victoria, the integrated family violence system involves the police, justice services, and the community services system. The 10 year Aboriginal family violence strategy: *Strong People, Strong Culture, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities* (2008) guides the development of Aboriginal services and policy in this area.

Family violence support services in Victoria provide counselling and support to women and children experiencing family violence. This includes accommodation and support (most with access to Children's Support Workers), outreach, case management and intensive case management, and access to private rental and Safe at Home responses. In addition, two Aboriginal specific family violence crisis and support facilities have been developed to provide culturally sensitive responses to Aboriginal women and children. Across the state, programs aimed at changing men's behaviour and men's case management services operate with a key objective to ensure safety for women and children.

Other related Victorian government initiatives in progress include:

- Delivering *Respectful Relationships Education* in Victorian schools.
- The *Protecting Children: Protocol between the Department of Human Services - Child Protection and Victoria Police* (June 2012).
- *Victoria Police Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model* (EFVSDM) now has 27 Family Violence Teams operating across the state. The EFVSDM was launched in November 2011 and prioritises action on repeat victims and recidivist offenders.
- *Sexual Assault Multi Disciplinary Centres* (MDCs). Three existing MDCs are currently operating involving collocated key partners: police investigators, sexual assault counsellor/advocates, and child protection workers. Three additional MDCs are being established to provide improved cross sectoral support for adult and child victims of sexual assault and victims of child abuse.
- Service responses to adolescents who use violence in the home. Planning is underway for two new demonstration sites for the adolescent family violence program announced in the 2013-14 State Budget.
- Strengthening family violence risk management demonstration projects: Two demonstration projects in the cities of Hume and Greater Geelong to provide more intensive support to high risk families. Both have dedicated child support positions.
- Increasing the number of places available in court-mandated and voluntary men's behaviour change programs.
- Creating new indictable offences with stronger penalties for contraventions of intervention orders and safety notices.

Indicator 24.2 Proportion of children with high levels of family stress
(VicPol Law Enforcement Assistance Program (LEAP))

The **Perinatal Emotional Health** program identifies and supports women with mental health symptoms during pregnancy and in the critical first 12 months of their babies' lives. The program is collocated with rural and regional services already seeing women during the perinatal period, such as maternity services and maternal child health services. The collocation of these services provides a model that aims to increase access to mental health care, improve continuity of care and reduce

stigma by including mental health support as part of normal care for women and their babies in the perinatal period.

The **Families where a Parent has a Mental Illness Strategy** (FaPMI Strategy) was developed in recognition of the impact of mental illness on parents and their families, particularly dependent children. It was launched in 2007 by the Victorian Government to assist services in providing more timely and coordinated family and personal supports for parents experiencing a mental illness, those caring for them, and their children.

The **Supported Play Groups and Parent Initiatives** provide facilitated parent playgroups for vulnerable parents and children to foster children's language development, develop motor skills, expose children to sensory experiences and enhance social skills and provide families with opportunities to establish friendships and long-term social support networks and increase parenting capacity, confidence and enjoyment of family life.

Victorian Government responses to alcohol and drugs

- *Reducing the alcohol and drug toll: Victoria's plan 2013-2017* is a 15-point plan that provides a comprehensive response to alcohol, pharmaceutical drugs and illegal drugs. There are five specific action areas in this Victorian Government plan to reduce alcohol misuse.
- The Victorian Government is working to reduce alcohol-related violence, antisocial behaviour and drink driving through strengthening police powers to discourage irresponsible alcohol consumption and antisocial behaviour. It is also strengthening the partnership between alcohol and drug services, family violence services and Victoria Police in order to better address alcohol and drug use as a risk factor in family violence as part of *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children – Everyone has a responsibility to act 2012–2015*.
- Reform is underway to strengthen Victoria's liquor regulation system and will include putting in place incentives to ensure licensees comply with relevant laws and regulations and increased penalties for non-compliant licensees. The Victorian Government has also introduced legislation banning the supply of alcohol to minors in a private residence without parental consent. These laws return the decision-making about the consumption of alcohol by a minor to parents and help to tackle the prevalence of underage drinking.
- VicHealth is leading a long-term cultural change program to turn around our drinking culture and support Victorians to make informed drinking choices. This \$2.6 million project will take a systematic approach to changing Victoria's ingrained drinking culture, by promoting healthier attitudes to excessive drinking and drunkenness in our community. It will initially focus on young people aged 16–29, who are more likely than other age groups to engage in high levels of risky drinking.
- The Victorian Government is also delivering comprehensive, evidence-based alcohol and drug education and health promotion that will strengthen wellbeing and resilience amongst young people. A new secondary school alcohol and drug curriculum was implemented in 2013, this has a broad focus on fostering resilience and empowering children and young people to be socially confident.
- The Victorian Government is providing better, earlier healthcare for alcohol problems by implementing proven, clinically effective and cost-effective healthcare for people with alcohol problems.

Supports and Services

Indicator 30.3 Proportion of infants receiving a maternal and child health service home consultation

Indicator 30.4 Proportion of infants enrolled at Maternal and Child Health service

Indicator 30.5 Proportion of children attending the 3.5 year Key Age and Stage visit

(DHS Client Relationship Information System (CRIS))

Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services are well placed to identify children at risk and provide a range of resources including BMI education resources for professionals and tip sheets for parents on nutrition and physical activities.

The Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service assertively responds to the needs of children and families at risk of poor outcomes, in particular where there are multiple risk factors. This service is additional to the suite of services offered through the universal MCH service and provides a more intensive level of support, including short term case management in some circumstances.

The trial program right@home seeks to promote family wellbeing and child development through intensive home visits by MCH nurses, from the ante-natal period through to two years of age. The trial will focus on making it easier for vulnerable families to learn about feeding, managing their baby's sleep and parenting, with the intention of improving children's early learning and development by the time they start school. About 300 expectant mothers from Ballarat, Dandenong, Frankston and Whittlesea could potentially be included in the trial.

The **Maternal and Child Health Line** is a 24 hour, 7 day a week statewide telephone service available to Victorian families with children from birth to school age. The MCH Line is available to all Victorian families, with children from birth to school age and is staffed by qualified MCH nurses who provide information, support and guidance regarding child health, nutrition, breastfeeding, maternal and family health and parenting. The service takes around 8,000 calls a month.

In addition, **Parentline** provides anonymous statewide counselling, information and referral services for parents and carers of children aged 0 to 18 years.

The Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Program aims to reduce the burden of chronic disease by addressing risky behaviours by mothers and providing support during pregnancy. It targets pregnant women who are unable to access antenatal care services or require additional support because of socioeconomic disadvantage, language or cultural barriers, their age or the remoteness of where they live.

Best Start aims to promote coordination and cooperation between early childhood services to develop strategies to more effectively engage and work with vulnerable families. Best Start operates in areas of high social and economic disadvantage where health, learning and wellbeing outcomes are known to be lower than for the rest of Victoria. Funding is used to employ a facilitator (usually from local government) who coordinates and supports a group of local early childhood services to develop and implement strategies to improve the quality and linkage between services and increase participation in these services by vulnerable children and families.

Best Start sites focus on achieving improvement in three to seven of the specified 15 health, wellbeing and learning outcome indicators. Strategies include community development and outreach to engage families with services as early as possible.

Regional Parenting Services provide information, education and support on a group or individual basis to parents, carers and professionals who work with children (maternal and child health nurses,

teachers, and child care workers). Most provide group programs to parents and refer individual parent support issues to relevant family support services.

The **Strengthening Parent Support program** is a facilitated group sessions for families with children with a disability or developmental delay for mutual support, networking opportunities, information sharing and training.

Signposts provides facilitated group or one-on-one sessions for parents of children with a disability or developmental delay which provides parenting support, information, advice, referral and resources to parents and training and consultancy to professionals.

The **Rural Playgroup initiative** is a project to build participation in playgroups, improve connections to local parenting support services and more effectively engage with and support transitions to early childhood education and care services. The program is being implemented through existing and new community playgroups in three rural communities where opportunities exist to improve the learning and development outcomes of children to ensure that all families and children have access to early learning and support services.

The **Council for Single Mothers and their Children** is a telephone advice, referral and counselling service for mothers in single parent families experiencing financial or personal difficulties.

Indicator 30.6 Proportion of children in first year of primary school who have been assessed by the school nurse (DEECD School Nursing Information System)

The **Primary School Nursing Program (PSNP)** is a free service offered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to all children attending primary schools and English Language Centre schools in Victoria.

Primary school nurses visit schools throughout the year to provide children with the opportunity to have a health assessment, provide information and advice about healthy behaviours and link children and families to community-based health and wellbeing services.

The PSNP is designed to identify children with potential health-related learning difficulties and to respond to parent/carer concerns and observations about their child's health and wellbeing. Parents or carers complete the School Entrant Health Questionnaire which is distributed during the first year of school. With parent/carer consent, follow-up health assessments are conducted by the school nurse as indicated.

Other activities offered by the program may include formal and informal health education and promotion to the school community.

Indicator 30.10 Proportion of Aboriginal children in out of home care who are placed in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle (DHS Client Relationship Information System (CRIS))

Culturally appropriate child protection and out-of-home care responses to Aboriginal children and their families are also supported. These are referred to in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* and supported through investment in the following initiatives:

- Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service
- Aboriginal Family Decision Making

- Cultural Support Plan Program
- Aboriginal Permanent Care Program
- A range of Aboriginal out-of-home care programs
- Aboriginal Leaving Care program.

Programs and policies related to the placement of Aboriginal Children

The Family Led Decision-Making Program has been developed to implement the Victorian Government's commitment to strengthen and expand the use of family group conferencing and Aboriginal Family Led Decision-Making across Victoria, as set out in *Victoria's Vulnerable Children – Our Shared Responsibility* Directions Paper. Family Led Decision-Making is a collaborative process, which involves active participation of family, extended family and community members in decision-making about safety, stability and development of an Aboriginal child. The model utilises traditional Aboriginal approaches to solving family problems and involves Aboriginal elders and the extended family. The Family Led Decision-Making approach is initiated where:

- protective concerns have been substantiated (except where the matter is proceeding to court)
- a protection order is in place and a meeting is required as part of the usual case planning process.

The Department of Human Services funds Aboriginal community controlled organisations to provide a suite of support services for Aboriginal children/young people and their families. The range of services funded varies across different organisations. Some organisations are funded to provide kinship services, foster care and residential care.

In March 2012, additional funding was allocated to Aboriginal community controlled organisations to strengthen responses to Aboriginal children and families through the Aboriginal Therapeutic Home Based Care Program. The overall objective of the program is to deliver trauma-informed therapeutic responses to children and young people in foster and kinship care through the engagement of locally based therapeutic clinicians appointed or contracted by Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Local clinicians are supported in their role by a statewide therapeutic clinician whose role it is to provide training, consultation, support, professional development and reflective practice.

In the 2012–13 Victorian State Budget, \$29.6 million was allocated over four years for the continuation and expansion of therapeutic residential care. This provided ongoing funding for the therapeutic residential care pilots (40 placements) and for the expansion of therapeutic residential care by an additional 100 placements across Victoria. In terms of new services to Aboriginal community controlled organisations, additional targets/funding have been provided to Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Mildura Aboriginal Co-operative (now known as MDAS).

Indicator 31.1a Kindergarten participation rate

Indicator 31.1b Kindergarten Participation - Aboriginal Status

Indicator 31.3 Proportion of children attending kindergarten whose placement attracts a kindergarten fee subsidy

Indicator 31.4 Number of four year old kindergarten enrolments in a long day care or integrated children's services setting

(DEECD Kindergarten system)

Early Start Kindergarten provides eligible three-year-old children with access to kindergarten for up to 15 hours per week for free. The program is available for three-year-old Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and those who are known to Child Protection (including children referred from Child Protection to ChildFIRST).

Early Childhood Education and Care services

Victoria has invested \$22.6 million between 2010 and 2013 to support the provision of high quality education and care services so that educational and developmental outcomes for all Victorian children are maximised.

The Department contacts all services rated as *Working Towards National Quality Standard* to provide an opportunity to discuss the findings of the report and to identify areas of focus for improvement.

Services rated at *Working Towards National Quality Standard* are referred to the Professional Support Coordinator, Gowrie Victoria, for support and access to professional development.

Support for early childhood professionals

Funding of approximately \$26 million (between 2010 and 2013) has been made available, by the Victorian Government, to the early childhood education and care workforce to support rising demand and sectoral reform.

These include:

- a scholarship and incentives fund to help existing educators upgrade their qualifications and to attract qualified professionals to hard-to-staff locations such as rural communities, Aboriginal services and low income areas,
- professional development to build knowledge and professionalism in areas such as leadership and educational practice and
- scholarships to support more Aboriginal educators to become early childhood teachers.

Since 2010, 1428 early childhood professionals working in licensed children's services have received Victorian Government scholarships to upgrade or attain an early childhood qualification.

Access to Early Learning operates at four sites in Victoria and funding has been committed to expand to an additional three sites. In addition to the Early Start Kindergarten subsidy, the program provides support to families to overcome complex barriers in accessing early childhood education, as well as an outreach program to engage with families to sustain their child's participation in kindergarten. The Access to Early Learning model incorporates five key elements: quality early education and care; a key facilitation worker; outreach family support; professional and practice development; and brokerage funding.

The program also builds capacity in the Early Childhood Education and Care service system to better meet the needs of vulnerable children, to work more effectively with their families and to work more collaboratively with the broader child and family services system. The Access to Early Learning service model currently operating in four locations is designed to improve the engagement of vulnerable children in early childhood education that are referred from child protection, Child FIRST or Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Services. The evaluation of Access to Early Learning found the program has been successful in sustaining access and participation of vulnerable children and is on track to achieve outcomes as intended.

Indicator 34.1 Number of families accessing Family and Community Support Services
(DEECD Victorian Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Survey)

The **Cradle to Kinder** program is an intensive ante and post natal support service to provide longer term, intensive family and early parenting support for vulnerable young mothers and their families, commencing in pregnancy and continuing until the child reaches four years of age. It focuses on the capacity of parents to provide for their children's health, safety and development as well as their ability to maintain self-reliance through access to education, vocational training and employment.

The **streamlining antenatal services for vulnerable children** project, a Government commitment in response to the findings of the *Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, is seeking to better coordinate and link up universal and targeted services across the Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, Human Services and Health. Demonstration projects at three local sites will develop and test options for more collaborative, family-centred practice that promotes ongoing engagement with vulnerable children and families.