

The Eastern Metro Bugle

THE LATEST NEWS FROM YOUR STATE LABOR MEMBER FOR THE EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION, SONJA TERPSTRA MP

2022 WINTER EDITION

Biggest Early Childhood Reforms in a Generation

The Andrews Labor Government will deliver an ambitious overhaul of early childhood education and care, with a massive \$9 billion investment over the next decade to save families money and support women to return to the workforce.

The childcare system has been set up to work against working families. While more dads are staying at home with the kids than ever before, it's still mums who do the lion's share of childcare.

Because federal childcare subsidies go down as household income goes up, many families sit around the kitchen table doing their sums and realise taking on extra days or hours at work just doesn't add up when childcare costs are weighed against the extra wages.

Being a stay-at-home parent is a legitimate choice – but it should be one that's made based on what works for individual families, not one forced by the limitations of the childcare system.

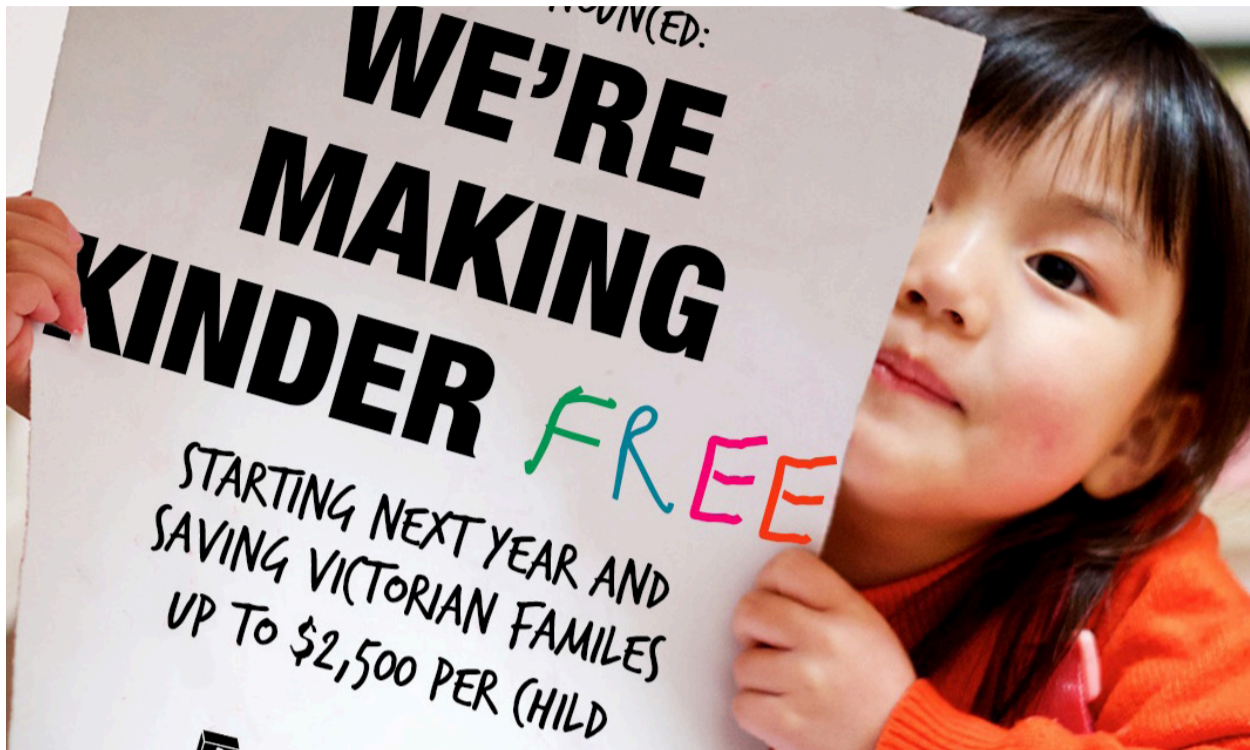
Three-Year-Old Kinder is already rolling out across the state, expanding universal access to 15 hours of government-funded kinder every week – and from next year, it will be free.

Four-Year-Old Kinder will also be free, providing much-needed relief for family budgets and giving more women a choice to return to the workforce.

At the same time, we'll begin work to deliver life changing reform to early education in this state.

With 90 per cent of a child's brain developing before the age of five, early education has a profound effect on the way children develop.

Over the next decade, Four-Year-Old Kinder will transition to Pre-Prep – increasing to a universal 30-hour a week program of play-based learning for every four-year-old child in Victoria.



Pre-Prep will be delivered through kinders and long day care centres, creating a high-quality, universal program to give four-year-old kids the opportunity to socialise and learn through play.

It's not just childcare costs that are holding back women and their families. Childcare is notoriously difficult to access, with some women signing up on waitlists as soon as they find out they're pregnant.

Some families are forced to travel outside of their suburb, adding time to their daily commute, or to enrol their kids in multiple centres to get the days they need.

The Albanese Federal Government is introducing better childcare subsidies for families that taper off less drastically as household income increases.

In concert with those changes, and to help address the current shortage of available childcare places, the Andrews Labor Government will establish 50 government-perated and affordable integrated childcare centres in areas to deliver childcare, kinder and Pre-Prep.

Where possible, the centres will be co-located with schools to avoid the double-drop off, and alongside hospitals, TAFEs and major employers to create convenient access for working parents.

These reforms will make a profound difference, but they need to be done properly.

Putting Patients First in Eastern Metro

The Andrews Labor Government is putting patients first in Melbourne's East.

Across our nation – and around the world – the pandemic has put unprecedented pressure on health systems. From a sharp increase of critical COVID patients to disrupted care, resulting in longer hospital recovery time, the last two years have really knocked our health system around.

When we came to government, we put an end to the war on our paramedics. We took ambulance response times from the worst in our history to the best. Now – just like we did before – we'll ease the pandemic pressure on our hospitals and our healthcare workers.

The Victorian Budget 2022/23 will invest over \$12 billion to put patients first, with a Pandemic Repair Plan for more staff, better hospitals and first-class care.

Our healthcare workers have been on the frontline of this pandemic, and we know how important it is that we support them into the future.



Box Hill Hospital

We're backing our healthcare workers with training and the extra pair of helping hands they need, so they can give you the very best care.

That's why the Budget is delivering funding to train and hire up to 7,000 new healthcare workers, including 5,000 nurses.

We'll provide 1,125 new Registered Undergraduate Nursing Positions and 75 new Registered Undergraduate Student of Midwifery roles over the next two years, and we're also recruiting up to 2,000 ex-pat and international healthcare workers through a global workforce recruitment drive.

Right around the nation, demand for emergency services is at an all-time high. Our Triple Zero call-takers and dispatchers are dealing with unprecedented call volumes.

But when you call for an ambulance, every Victorian should have the confidence one will arrive. That's why we're delivering another 90 paramedics – which means we've added 2000 extra paramedics to the workforce since we came to government.

Continued on Page 2

\$250 POWER SAVING BONUS
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OR EMAIL ME AT SONJA.TERPSTRA@PARLIAMENT.VIC.GOV.AU



TREATY



Premier Daniel Andrews and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gabrielle Williams with representatives of the First Peoples' Assembly and the agreement to create the treaty umpire.

Historic Bill Brings Treaty a Step Closer

The Andrews Government's Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Bill 2022 was passed in June, and is Australia's first-ever legislation to establish First People's Authority over First People's affairs.

The Bill will establish the Treaty Authority as a new 'independent umpire' to oversee Treaty negotiations between the State and First Peoples.

The Treaty Authority serves that role as an institution independent of parliament and government.

The authority will oversee treaty negotiations and if the parties cannot agree on particular matters or the appropriate process, it will act as an independent umpire to help resolve the issue.

This new public law process appropriately recognises the standing of Indigenous cultural approaches.

It forms part of the broader work to provide just and equal participation by First Peoples in our democratic institutions. It complements the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, and the Yoorrook Justice Commission, which address voice and truth respectively.

All of these institutions are part of the overarching treaty process in Victoria.

Treaty is one important way of realising Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination.

Self-determination means the right of a people to make decisions about their own governance and way of life.

Self-determination for Indigenous peoples is also a requirement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other international human rights law.

By drawing on First Nations' "law, lore, and cultural authority" in order to support the treaty process, the Victorian Treaty Authority is demonstrating an innovative approach to realising First Peoples' right to self-determination.

In another important development, the Treaty Authority will have guaranteed government funding, which it controls and manages. This will ensure the authority can perform its functions long-term.

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BUDGET 22/23 (continued)

And to help our frontline workers reach Victorians who need help faster, we're investing \$333 million to add nearly 400 new staff to increase Triple Zero call-taking and dispatch capacity for Triple Zero services, including ambulances, and training more operators to allocate calls across the state.

We're also going to make sure that every local community gets the health infrastructure and services they deserve. That's why this Budget invests \$2.9 billion to build new hospitals and deliver upgrades to health services in every corner of our state.

By expanding our emergency departments, adding more surgical beds to get more elective surgeries done and increasing maternity care services – this Budget will ensure more Victorians get the very best of care, close to home.

As we roll-out our Pandemic Repair Plan to make sure people in Eastern Metro get the care they deserve, we're also getting on with delivering the schools, roads and public transport services they rely on.

Students with special needs should receive the same opportunities as every other student in our state. In this Budget, we're upgrading 36 special schools, including Croydon Special Developmental School – which will receive \$11.75 million for an upgrade – giving students an upgraded gymnasium and hydrotherapy building. This will mean every single special school in Victoria will have received funding for a major upgrade since we came to government.

To make sure every young Victorian gets the education they need for the career they want, the new VCE Vocational Major and Victorian Pathways Certificate will replace VCAL, offering students more choices, a higher-quality curriculum and better workplace experiences – preparing students to jump into further study, training at TAFE or work as soon as they leave school.

The VCAL reforms will save many Victorian families up to \$1,000 by cutting out-of-pocket costs, with students no longer having to pay for essential learning materials for VET studies.

In this year's Budget, we're also backing our apprentices. By investing \$12 million to continue and expand funding for Apprenticeship Support Officers, we are providing apprentices with the right support to complete their apprenticeships and get the training they need to get a good job.

We're continuing to support on-demand workers and giving eligible casual and contract workers up to five days of sick and carer's pay, so Victorians don't have to choose between their health, and the health of their loved ones.

Thousands of Victorians rely on their local bus to get them to work, school and around their community. Now, thanks to the investment in this Budget, we can activate the new Bulleen Park and Ride, connecting it to our bus network so Victorians spend less time waiting at the bus stop and more time at home with loved ones.

Local communities also deserve great places to play sport and under an Andrews Labor Government, they will have them. We're investing \$88 million to build, upgrade and renovate community sporting infrastructure. This will deliver bigger, better change rooms, club rooms and community spaces for our community to enjoy. Locally this means \$500,000 for changeroom upgrades and other improvements at Hughes Park in Croydon North and \$150,000 for floodlighting for sports fields at Rieschiecks Reserve, Doncaster East.

But that's not all. We know that many Victorians are still paying too much for their energy bills – that's why we're stepping in to help families get the best deal. We're providing a once-off \$250 payment for all Victorian households that use the Victorian Energy Compare (VEC) website – the Victorian Government's independent price comparator website – to search for the cheapest electricity plan that suits their needs.

With this Budget, we're getting on with delivering for all Victorians.

HEALTH

Opening the New Ambulance Station in Templestowe

The Andrews Labor Government is boosting ambulance resources and staffing levels and across Victoria, ensuring paramedics have the facilities and support they need to quickly respond to emergencies and save lives.

Minister for Ambulance Services Martin Foley today joined member for Eastern Metro Region, Sonja Terpstra and local paramedics to officially open the new ambulance station in Templestowe – one of 23 new stations delivered by the Andrews Labor Government since 2015.

Operating 24 hours a day, the new purpose-built Templestowe Ambulance Station features a six-bay garage for ambulances, training facilities and eight rest and recline areas for our hard-working paramedics to recuperate.

The new station was built to replace the nearby Doncaster ambulance station, which was shut in 2013 by the Baillieu-Naphthine Government.

It provides easy access to the Austin Hospital and Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, local schools, shopping precincts and community facilities like the Templestowe Leisure Centre Stadium and Westerfolds Sports Centre.

A further 15 ambulance stations are currently either under construction or about to commence, including in Melton South, Mornington, Taylors Lakes, Moe, Oak Park, Clyde North and Warragul – meaning even more paramedics will be able to work from safe and modern home bases, helping them deliver critical care to more Victorians.



Sonja at the official Ambulance Station Opening with Ambulance Victoria staff and the then Health Minister, Martin Foley.

The new stations form part of the Labor Government's continued investment in Ambulance Victoria, bolstered by an additional \$124 million in the Victorian Budget 2022/23 to employ more paramedics, buy new vehicles and get more Victorians the care they need.

Ambulance Victoria recruited 700 paramedics in 2021 – its single largest annual recruitment ever – to help respond to increasing demand. This recruitment drive continues with 174 paramedics already on board so far this year and a further 120 paramedics fast-tracked and starting this month.

Since coming to government in 2014, the Labor Government has expanded the paramedic workforce by more than 56 per cent – with an increase of almost 2,000 paramedics.

Ambulance Victoria continues to experience record demand, with ambulances called to 93,234 Code 1 cases between January and March this year – the busiest quarter in history.

\$12 Billion Boost to Healthcare in Victoria

Thousands more Victorians will now get access to our best clinicians, allied health professionals and nurses from the comfort of their own homes thanks to a massive funding boost in the Victorian Budget 2022/23.

In May Premier Daniel Andrews and then Minister for Health Martin Foley joined some of Victoria's best nurses to announce a \$698 million package to expand the Better at Home program.

We saw how much difference it made to thousands of Victorians who were able to get treatment and support at home during the pandemic - that's why the program is going to become a permanent option for patients under the Andrews Labor Government.

The investment will expand the program to help more than 15,000 Victorians access home-based care each year, in addition to telehealth check-ups.

It allows Victorians to access experienced nurses, clinicians and allied health professionals at home, surrounded by their loved ones as part of a more convenient and tailored experience.

The package will extend the Hospital in the Home beds that were established throughout the pandemic, increasing capacity to 358 virtual beds - providing ongoing care at home for Victorians so they don't need to go to hospital for treatment.

This investment is the equivalent of running a major hospital like Footscray Hospital and will enable health services to perform more elective surgeries and reduce how long patients stay in hospital.

A further \$3.6 million will also be invested to continue the delivery of the Transitional Care Program – a program which helps patients with a disability safely transition out of a hospital bed and into community-based accommodation while they are awaiting their NDIS package to be approved.

Around \$2.1 million will be invested in a pilot Aboriginal virtual specialist clinic, giving Aboriginal Victorians access to culturally appropriate health care and clinicians in rural and regional areas.

Investing in Mental Health Outreach in the Eastern Metro Region

The Andrews Labor Government is investing \$16.3M in targeted mental health outreach to support young Victorians.

This funding will enable all 13 Youth Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services to either stand up or – where a team exists already – expand Mobile Targeted Assertive Outreach mental health teams support more young people across Victoria.

The mobile teams reduce barriers to treatment and care by visiting young people in settings where the young person feels more comfortable and is already engaged or in attendance (for example schools, universities, the young person's home, community-based services and facilities – even a local park or other public setting).

This is about taking mental health services to young people, rather than waiting for them to come to us.

Because we're making sure that no young person with mental health concerns falls through the cracks.

Eastern Health will be delivering this critical program in the Eastern Metro Region.

In addition to this outreach, the Andrews Labor Government is making the mental health pop-up clinics that opened in 2021 a permanent feature of Victoria's mental healthcare system.

The Hubs act as a 'front door' service to the mental health system, providing support without any eligibility criteria or the need for a GP referral, removing the barriers that too many Victorians face when they need support.

These services will provide care and support for adults who are experiencing mild to moderate mental health challenges – including people with co-occurring alcohol and drug addiction treatment and care needs.

The Victorian Budget 2022/23 delivered more than \$1.3 billion to continue the Labor Government's work to rebuild the mental health system – building on last year's record investment of \$3.8 billion and ensuring work is underway on implementing more than 90 per cent of the Royal Commission's recommendations.



ELIGIBLE CASUAL AND CONTRACT WORKERS CAN NOW APPLY FOR SICK OR CARERS PAY COVERAGE

TO APPLY, SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT VIC.GOV.AU/SICKPAY GUARANTEE

Sick Pay Guarantee for Casual and Contract Workers

Casual and contract workers will no longer have to choose between their pay and their health, with the Andrews Government's Sick Pay Guarantee now available for eligible workers.

The program provides 38 hours of paid sick or carers leave for workers working in:

- Hospitality
- Food Services
- Retail
- Security
- Supermarket Supply Chain
- Aged Carer
- Disability Carer
- Cleaning
- Laundry Work

These occupations are highly insecure and workers in these industries do not usually have access to sick and carer's pay.

To check your eligibility and register, scan the QR code on the left or visit vic.gov.au/sickpayguarantee

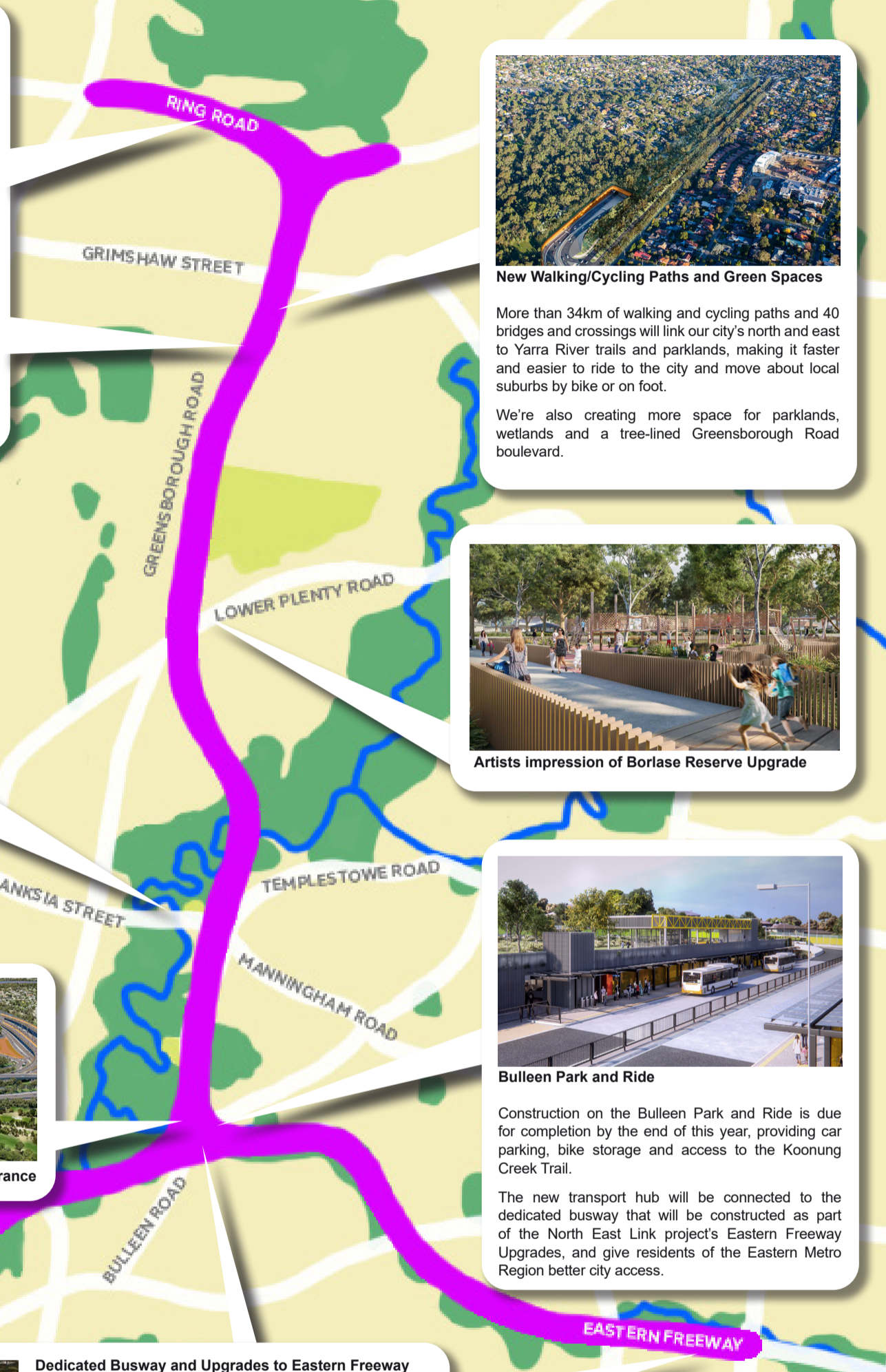
MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS



M80 and Watsonia Station Parking Upgrades

We will upgrade the Ring Road with five new lanes, smart technology and a seamless interchange with North East Link.

From Greensborough to Watsonia, North East Link will pass under Grimshaw Street and 2 green bridges at Elder Street and Watsonia Road – keeping local roads for local trips, providing smoother access for locals to access Watsonia Station and nearby parking.



New Walking/Cycling Paths and Green Spaces

More than 34km of walking and cycling paths and 40 bridges and crossings will link our city's north and east to Yarra River trails and parklands, making it faster and easier to ride to the city and move about local suburbs by bike or on foot.

We're also creating more space for parklands, wetlands and a tree-lined Greensborough Road boulevard.



Bulleen Art & Garden and Bulleen River Red Gum

Thanks to an outpouring of community support, Bulleen Art & Garden will continue to operate and will not be required to close. Some adjustments to the current footprint will be required for future operations and will be incorporated into the design of the North East Link tunnels.

In addition to this, the Manningham Road interchange has been developed to avoid the 300 year old river red gum on the corner of Bridge Street. North East Link Project will make every effort to preserve this tree during construction.



Artists impression of Borlase Reserve Upgrade



Bulleen Park and Ride

Construction on the Bulleen Park and Ride is due for completion by the end of this year, providing car parking, bike storage and access to the Koonung Creek Trail.

The new transport hub will be connected to the dedicated busway that will be constructed as part of the North East Link project's Eastern Freeway Upgrades, and give residents of the Eastern Metro Region better city access.



Artists impression of Bulleen Road Tunnel Entrance



Dedicated Busway and Upgrades to Eastern Freeway

As part of the project, works will deliver a massive overhaul of the Eastern Freeway to improve traffic flow.

This will include the building of a dedicated busway from the Doncaster Park and Ride to Hoddle Street, improving bus travel times by up to 30%.



Suburban Rail Loop - Stage 1 Underway

One of the most important projects in Victoria's history is now underway, with construction starting on Suburban Rail Loop (SRL).

Construction kicked off in June with works to lay a new 630m sewer pipe – dug by a remote-controlled micro-tunnelling machine – beginning a massive program of initial and early works which will create up to 800 local jobs.

The first phase of works for SRL East between Cheltenham and Box Hill will also include road modifications, service

relocation and preparation for three sites where the tunnel boring machines (TBMs) will be launched.

Up to 10 TBMs are expected to carve the 26km of twin tunnels, linking the 6 new underground stations.

SRL East will be open by 2035 – the first of 3 stages of the 90km orbital loop linking every major rail line via the airport – connecting major employment, health and education centres, creating a pipeline of jobs and training opportunities, and slashing travel times. A trip from Cheltenham to Box Hill will take just 22 minutes.



LINKING EVERY MAJOR RAIL LINE

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Getting on with Removing Level Crossings

It's a joy to see the brand new Mooroolbark Station and how it provides a much smoother journey for not only commuters, but also road users who no longer have to deal with the Manchester Road level crossing.

The brand new station at Mooroolbark was opened back in November along with a new station at Lilydale, with a brand new carpark at Mooroolbark station to double the car parking available for commuters and locals.

More than 53,000 vehicles travelled through these level crossings each day, where the boom gates were down for up to a quarter of the morning peak. There has been one collision and 5 near misses across these 2 sites in the past 10 years.

Many of the locals at Mooroolbark contributed to the station design, ensuring what was delivered would be suitable for the local lifestyle and provide improved amenity for the community.

In addition to these removals, the Andrews Labor Government has announced more level crossing removals, including the final two level crossings along the Lilydale line, at Croydon and East Ringwood.

Site investigations have commenced on the Coolstore Road level crossing which will inform the design to ensure this transformational project offers the greatest opportunity to connect Croydon's centre, which is currently divided by the rail line.

To ensure the Lilydale line is level crossing free, we're also removing the crossings at Dublin Road in East Ringwood and Bedford Road in Ringwood, and building a new East Ringwood Station. The new station will be built in a trench, with the nearby crossings also lowered, with an updated car park and walking/bike path to be built.

The final two stations and their nearby level crossings are due to be completed by 2025.

To sign up for updates on the Coolstore Road crossing removal project, or the Dublin Road crossing removal, visit <https://bigbuild.vic.gov.au/projects/level-crossing-removal-project/>



The new Mooroolbark train station.



The Coolstore Road crossing is currently being prepared for removal.

To stay up-to-date on all the infrastructure projects in your area, and get updates on any local disruptions for road and rail, scan the QR code to the right or visit bigbuild.vic.gov.au and sign up for local updates.



An artists impression of the upgraded intersection at Porter Street and Fitzsimons Lane in Templestowe.

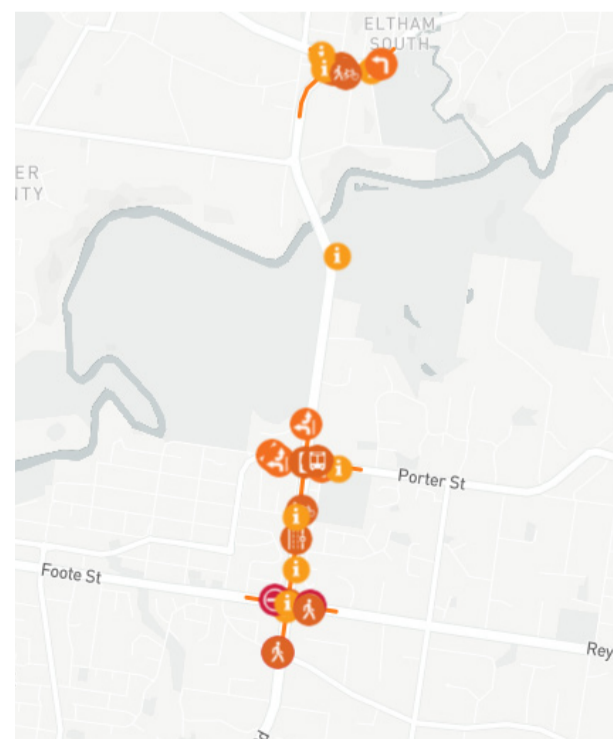
Fitzsimons Lane Upgrade

In early 2021 we started construction on the Fitzsimons Lane Upgrade which is now almost fully completed.

The Fitzsimons Lane Upgrade includes:

- traffic lights to replace roundabouts at the Fitzsimons Lane and Main Road intersection and Fitzsimons Lane and Porter Street intersection
- an upgraded signalised intersection at Williamsons Road and Foote Street
- opening bus lanes to all vehicle use between Porter and Foote Streets
- relocation of the iconic River Peel structure
- new walking and cycling paths
- new traffic lights at the Main Road and Leane Drive intersection
- safety barriers at key locations.

The upgrade will reduce congestion in peak periods to provide more reliable travel times, improves safety and makes walking and cycling around the community safer.



A map of the upgrades happening along Fitzsimons Lane.

Building Boom Set to Deliver New Homes in Croydon

The Victorian Government is ramping up delivery of the Big Housing Build across the state with the first allocation of funds to community housing projects – with more than \$1 billion in projects to commence this year.

The Government is investing \$45.8 million in Croydon delivering 137 new social housing homes, creating more local jobs and supporting those most in need in the community.

The project is part of almost \$740 million the Labor Government is investing in 89 community housing projects across regional and metropolitan areas.

This investment will deliver 2,352 homes across the state giving more Victorians the stability of a home while creating more than 9000 jobs – with shovels expected to be in the ground by the end of the year.

The homes will be made available to those in the most need of housing including people living with mental illness or disability, people escaping family violence, Victoria's First Peoples and individuals experiencing homelessness. The investment includes 62 new supported independent living homes for Victorians living with mental illness being built across four sites announced in June.

The Government's \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is delivering more than 12,000 new homes – boosting Victoria's social housing supply by 10 per cent – while generating 10,000 jobs each year over the four-year program. The Big Housing Build is investing \$1.25 billion in regional areas – ensuring the programs economic and social benefits are felt in communities across the state.

EDUCATION

Opening the New Croydon Community School Campus

The \$18.12 million new campus for Croydon Community School is now complete, and students are enjoying their brand new, purpose built facilities.

I got to tour the school many times during the build, from the sod turn all the way through to seeing students in classrooms.

The new build would not have been possible without the advocacy of my colleague Shaun Leane, MP for Eastern Metro Region.

The school design was based around the needs of the students, with constant contact with principal Bronwyn Harcourt. The design features a 'wagon wheel' layout of the buildings, to keep all the classrooms connected and maintain the community aspect of the school.

Some of the accessible and inclusive features of the school include a townhall performance room that opens to the school's main courtyard, a multimedia room, cooking and wood technology rooms.

Included in the design is an amazing creek that runs through the school and uses harvested rainwater pumped to keep the creek continuously flowing.



Sod turn with Tim Richardson MP.

There is also space for the Doctors in schools program, assistance dogs, even a wood fire pizza oven!

Croydon Community School caters specifically to students with personalised learning needs, with many students having struggled with traditional educational facilities.

During the construction of the project I got to chat to Marcus, a current year 12 student from the school who had secured an apprenticeship to work on the new build and has been assisting in the landscaping of the new campus.



Touring the school with James Merlino MP and Marcus.



The creek running through the school.



An artist impression of the new campus' Wellness building.



A map of the new campus layout highlighting the circular layout



Checking out the wood fire pizza oven.



Visiting the completed school with Shaun Leane MP.

Upgrades Coming to Croydon Special Developmental School



Sonja with then Education Minister James Merlino and Croydon Special Developmental School students.

Pembroke Primary School Inclusive Learning Space Completed

The new outdoor inclusive learning space and yarning circle is now complete and ready for students. The upgrade was part of a \$65,000 upgrade to make Pembroke Primary School Mooroolbark more inclusive.

The upgrade provides a modern learning space, new playground equipment and a yarning circle for students to enjoy.

This new space will make a real difference to students at Pembroke Primary School, who will get the benefits of new inclusive spaces to cater for a wider range of options for teaching and learning.

As we build the Education State, we're continuing to invest in schools to ensure students of all abilities can access a great education – no matter their circumstances.



Sonja and Pembroke P.S. Principal Megan Ganter.

Students with special needs should have the same opportunities as every other student.

Since 2014 the Victorian Government has funded major upgrades to every one of Victoria's 82 special schools, including 36 in the most recent Victorian budget.

I visited the school with Education Minister James Merlino to celebrate the \$11.75 million that Croydon Special Developmental School will receive to upgrade the administrative, gymnasium and hydrotherapy pool buildings.

This funding will change the life of parents, staff and most importantly students of this amazing local school.

Over 50,000 Students Enjoying a Positive Start

The Andrews Government is investing nearly \$113 million in Positive Start, to offer students in all government schools a chance to reconnect with peers and enjoy the kinds of activities many may have missed out on during the past 2 years.

Through Positive Start, Victorian students will be more active, reconnect with friends and find inspiration in new and exciting places.

Almost 300,000 students have now either registered for or attended a Positive Start camp, arts, sporting or cultural program in 2022.

Over 50,000 students have now attended a free cultural, arts or sporting program students, thanks to the Positive Start initiative.

Schools can now book a range of arts, sporting and cultural activities for their students across Terms 1 – 4:

- Hang out with a baby Triceratops or travel back in time and explore an 1850s gold rush township
- Produce and mix songs alongside touring DJs or come face-to-face with an Olympian
- Perform like a star at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl or shoot hoops in a basketball wheelchair program and much more.

For more information or for schools to book Positive Start programs and experiences, visit <https://arc.educationapps.vic.gov.au/eventhub/channels/PosStrtASC>

EDUCATION

New Victorian TAFE Ambassador



Sonja with an apprentice and Minister for Training and Skills, Gayle Tierney.

Back in September 2021 I was pleased to be appointed as the Victorian Government's new TAFE Ambassador, to make skills and training better than ever and showcase the work of Victorian TAFEs and trainers across the state.

TAFE formed the foundation of my career, I studied typing and shorthand at TAFE before securing a job in administration which opened the door to representing working people within the union movement and

eventually led to a career in politics. My son has now started plumbing as part of the signature Free TAFE initiative.

In my role as TAFE Ambassador, I will leverage my personal connection to promote the benefits of TAFE and training and the life-changing opportunities it provides in Victoria.

Visiting Jerring Nyerboing Trade Centre

I had the pleasure of touring the newly constructed Trade Training Centre at Box Hill Institute Lilydale Lakeside Campus, named Jerring Nyerboing Trade Centre by local Wurundjeri traditional owners.

The new (approximately 2,500sqm) trade centre is a modern industrial facility fitted with the latest technology, providing students with skills and a clear pathway from training to employment in the construction industry.

The centre includes nine classrooms, material storage facilities, staff workplaces, two meeting rooms, an outdoor workspace including a sandpit, workshop area, general amenities, and kitchens.

Construction of the building used 91.56 per cent Australian products.

The Lilydale Lakeside campus will also offer, amongst other things, a women in non-traditional trade areas (WINTA) to female students to provide support, skills development and role modelling for women training in trades or non-traditional areas. An Indigenous apprenticeship program with Coranderrk Station will also be established to meet youth development and employment needs in the Yarra Valley Indigenous community.

Victoria's Senior Secondary Education is Changing

From 2023, the new VCE Vocational Major will replace Intermediate and Senior VCAL.

This means the VCE will recognise different students equally. The new Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) will replace Foundation VCAL. Students will have more education choices, a higher-quality curriculum and better workplace experiences – preparing them for further study, training at TAFE or work.

From 2023, more students will study the VCE because the VCE will include the Vocational Major, a 2-year program that sits within the VCE. There will also be the Victorian Pathways Certificate for those who need flexibility in their learning.

A new information and awareness campaign, Many Talents, One VCE will rollout explaining the changes.

Funded Mental Health in Every Public and Specialist School

In June we announced a \$200 million expansion of the 'Mental Health in Primary Schools' program, to give every single government and low-fee non-government primary school in Victoria the ability to employ a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader.

These leaders will ensure young Victorians grow up happy, healthy and that there is someone there to catch any mental health concerns early so our children don't fall through the cracks of the system.

This will support individual students, help teachers better identify and support at-risk students, and build relationships and referral pathways to local mental health services.

This is in addition to the successful implementation of mental health practitioners to every Victorian government secondary and specialist school.

The \$51.2 million Mental Health Practitioners initiative has been finalised a year earlier than originally committed

The changes are a result of the Review into Vocational and Applied Learning Pathways in Senior Secondary Schooling (the Firth review).

The review found we needed to improve vocational learning in schools. Schools currently offering VCAL will switch to the VCE Vocational Major from 2023.

Some schools that do not offer VCAL will expand their options to include the VCE Vocational Major. Teachers and careers counsellors are available to answer questions and to support students as they make decisions about their final years at school.

Now students will have greater access to high-quality, relevant vocational education and applied learning opportunities.

For more information, go to vic.gov.au/oneVCE

to in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and enables schools to employ a practitioner for up to five days a week – with more than 250 suitably qualified and registered mental health practitioners already working across the state's secondary schools.

Already supporting around 188,000 students, these practitioners offer counselling and early intervention services, help students with complex needs, connect students to broader allied and community health services and deliver whole-school mental health promotion and prevention activities – including during periods of remote learning.

The Mental Health in Primary Schools and Mental Health Practitioners initiatives are in addition to the Government's \$28.5 million package to ensure that all Victorian government school students have continued access to professional mental health and wellbeing support during the pandemic.

Free TAFE for Lots of Jobs

The Andrews Labor Government's signature Free TAFE initiative has grown to more than 60 courses in 2022 – giving more Victorians training for more jobs as the state moves through and beyond the coronavirus pandemic.

New courses to be added to the Free TAFE list this year include:

- Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing
- Certificate IV in Leisure and Health
- Certificate III in Information Technology
- Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
- Certificate III in Supply Chain Operations
- Certificate IV in Work Health and Safety
- Certificate IV in Outdoor Leadership
- Introduction to the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Gender Equity
- Identifying and Responding to Family Violence Risk
- Working Safely in the Solar Industry



Free TAFE has delivered students savings of more than \$220 million in tuition fees since it was introduced in 2019, with more than 100,000 people having started a Free TAFE course.

The new additions are part of a regular review of the Free TAFE list, ensuring training meets key government priority areas and skills demands while also boosting the Victorian economy.

More Victorians will have access to the skills they need for the job they want, with funding for an extra 10,000 places across the TAFE and training system in 2022 for people looking to reskill after the pandemic and move into healthcare and other in-demand jobs.

The Government has made a record \$3.2 billion investment in TAFE and training to ensure Victorians have access to high quality education and rewarding career pathways.

To see if you're eligible for free TAFE and to explore your options visit freetafe.vic.gov.au.

Code Breakers Pave the Way for More Women in Tech

The Andrews Labor Government is supporting gender diversity in key digital technology jobs, encouraging the continued growth of career opportunities for women.

An essential part of any digital service is the coding that sits beneath it – and social enterprise Code Like a Girl supports girls and women looking to build rewarding careers in what has traditionally been a male-dominated field.

Paid internships is a key initiative of Code Like a Girl, providing professional experience in a range of environments, enabling participants to contribute to live projects and build skills that can only be learned on the job.

The Andrews Labor Government has joined with Code Like a Girl to deliver five paid internships within government departments as part of a pilot program for women passionate about coding.

The program will also provide women in the public service with an intensive four-month course with Code Like a Girl's School of Code – which turns participants with no coding knowledge into junior web developers.

ELECTORATE UPDATE

COMMUNITY UPGRADES

- 1. Ainslie Parklands Primary School - \$251,165 Playground Upgrade



- 2. Birrale Primary School - \$4.163 Million Building Upgrades
- 3. Bulleen Heights School - \$9.15 Million Masterplan Funding
- 4. Bulleen Park and Ride - Due to be completed this year



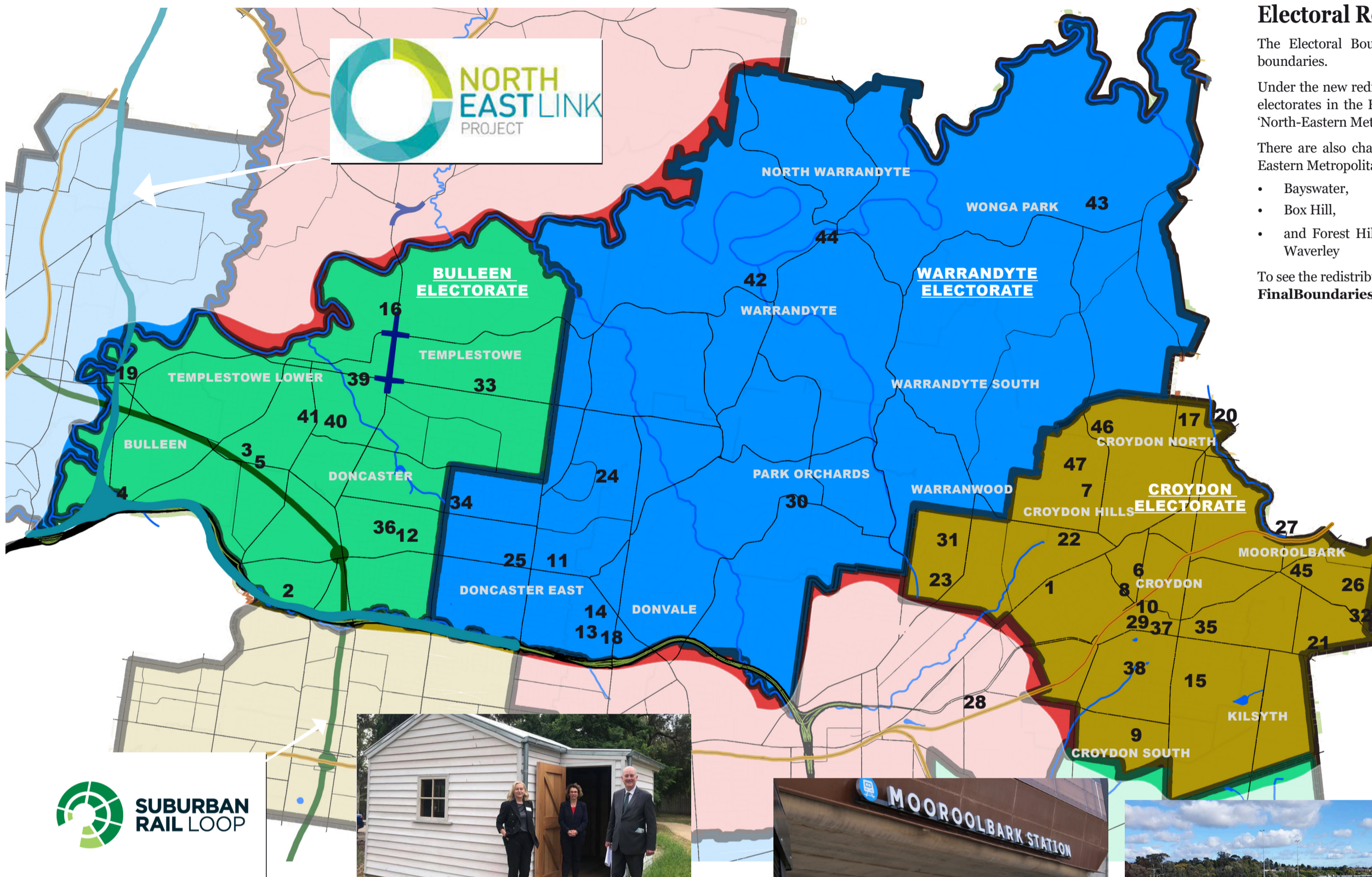
- 5. Chinese Aged Care Home - Site Selected
- 6. Croydon Community School - \$18.1 Million School Rebuild
- 7. Croydon Hills Primary School - \$77,000 Accessible Buildings - \$433,432 Minor Capital Works



- 8. Croydon Primary School - \$1.347 Million Building Upgrades - New 40 kph School Zone
- 9. Croydon Special Developmental School - \$11.75 Million Building Upgrades



- 10. Croydon Train Station - Level crossing removal and new elevated station
- 11. Donburn Primary School - \$155,125 Bathroom Upgrades



- 19. Heide Museum - 'Dolls House' Heritage Restoration



- 27. Mooroolbark Train Station - Level crossing removed and brand new elevated train station



- 20. Hughes Park Sporting Pavillion - \$500,000 Changeroom Upgrade
- 21. Kilsyth Primary School - \$97,665 Playground Upgrade
- 22. Lipscombe Park Kindergarten - new outdoor play space
- 23. McAlpin reserve - \$300,000 Upgrades
- 24. Milgate Primary School - \$57,969 Fencing Upgrade
- 25. Montgomery Reserve - \$60,000 Upgrade
- 26. Mooroolbark Heights Reserve - \$150,000 Playspace Upgrade



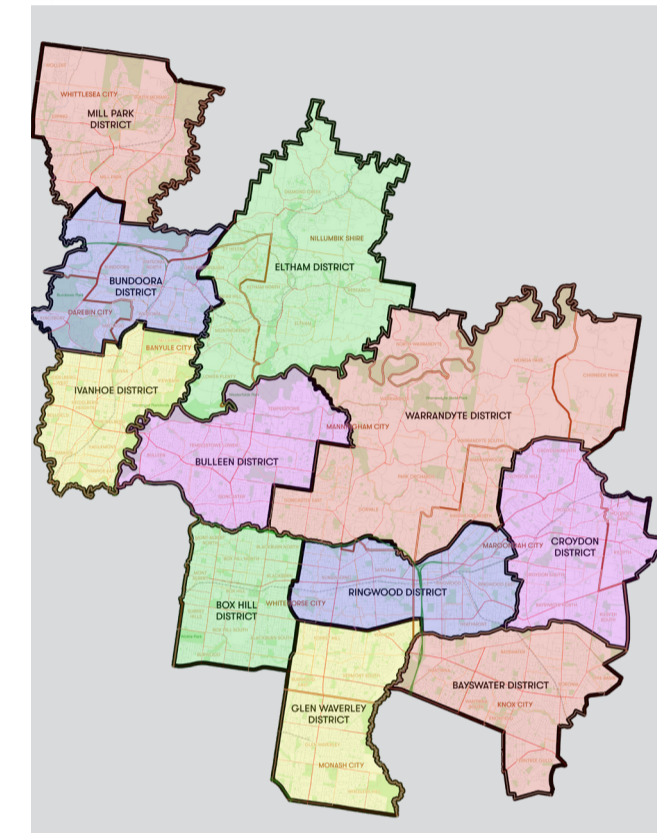
- 28. Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place - \$4.5 Million to purchase a permanent facility
- 29. Orange Door Outer East - New Facility
- 30. Park Orchards Community House - New Childcare Facility
- 31. Parkwood Reserve Dog Park - New Dog Park
- 32. Pembroke Primary School - \$65,000 Inclusive Playspace



- 33. Petty's Reserve - \$800,000 Redevelopment
- 34. Rieschiecks Reserve - \$400,000 Lighting Upgrades
- 35. Ruskin Park Primary School - \$9.5 Million Building Upgrades



- 36. Schramm's Reserve - \$1.27 Million Redevelopment
- 37. Springfield Pavillion - \$513,000 Facility Upgrade



- 38. Taralla Creek - \$1.575 Million Upgrades
- 39. Templestowe Ambulance Station - New Facility
- 40. Templestowe College - \$355,627 Minor Capital Works
- 41. Templestowe Heights Primary - \$11.72 Million Upgrades
- 42. Warrandyte High School - \$3.54 Million Building and Landscaping Upgrades
- 43. Wonga Park Primary School - \$41,120 Playground Upgrade
- 44. Wonguim Wilam - \$300,000 Park Revitalisation
- 45. Yarra Hills Secondary College - \$130,000 Planned Maintenance



- 46. Yarra Road Primary School - Solar Panels and Inverter Installed
- 47. Yarrunga Reserve - \$300,000 Upgrades

Electoral Redistribution of the Eastern Metro Region

The Electoral Boundaries Commission has completed their review of state electorate boundaries.

Under the new redistribution, from November's election a number of changes will occur for electorates in the Eastern Metropolitan Region including renaming of the entire region to 'North-Eastern Metropolitan Region' which will include the seats of Bundoora and Mill Park.

There are also changes to the electoral boundaries to a number of electorates within the Eastern Metropolitan Region including:

- Bayswater, • Bulleen, • Ringwood,
- Box Hill, • Croydon, • Warrandyte,
- and Forest Hill and Mount Waverley will merge to make the new electorate of Glen Waverley

To see the redistribution visit <https://www.abc.vic.gov.au/CurrentRedivision/FinalBoundaries.html>

SPORT

Upgrading Schramms Reserve with Glenn Maxwell



Sonja with Manningham Mayor Michelle Kleinert, Cricketer Glenn Maxwell and members of the Fitzroy-Doncaster Cricket Club committee.

It was incredible to hit a bunch of sixes with the legendary cricketer Glenn Maxwell and announce the redevelopment of the Schramms Reserve Oval 2 Pavilion.

Schramms Reserve is home to the mighty Fitzroy-Doncaster Cricket Club, who will benefit from the almost \$1.6 million redevelopment of the Pavilion.

The dated pavilion will be replaced with a new modular one with a canteen, two change rooms, an umpire's room, amongst other essential features.

The Andrew's Labor Government has contributed \$1,274,980 to the project. Manningham City Council has funded \$293,520 and Cricket Australia \$30,000 to this important project that will help inspire the next generations of cricketing legends.

Game On: Dates Locked in, More Sports for 2026 Commonwealth Games

The Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games dates are locked in and a process is open for additional sports to be added to the program.

The Commonwealth Games will be held between 17-29 March 2026, beginning with the Opening Ceremony at the Melbourne Cricket Ground where athletes and visitors from around Australia and the world will gather to celebrate the start of the Games.

The Opening Ceremony will be followed by 12 days of competition between the Commonwealth's best athletes across regional Victoria, allowing our regions to shine on the world stage.

The Andrews Labor Government will work with the education sector in relation to the school term dates that year to ensure the participation of as many Victorians in the Games as possible.

An expressions of interest process for additional sports to be included in the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games has commenced and will involve submissions

from international sporting federations with support from recognised or affiliated Australian organisations. The period for consideration will close on 19 August.

In a Commonwealth Games first, Victoria 2026 will introduce a multi-city model that delivers global sport to four regional hubs in Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat and Gippsland. Each of those hubs will have its own athletes' village and host a range of sports that will create a legacy for Victoria that extends well beyond the competition period.



COST OF LIVING

The Andrews Labor Government understands the financial pressures being faced by households and we'll keep working to drive down the cost of living for Victorians.

Some of the initiatives that are available to ease the financial burden on Victorians are:

<p>\$250 Power Saving Bonus for all households</p> <p>The Andrews Labor Government has expanded its \$250 Power Saving Bonus payment from 1 July this year to support Victorians doing it tough with energy bills.</p> <p>All Victorian households can now claim a \$250 bill-busting Power Saving Bonus, just by visiting the Victorian Energy Compare price comparison website or engaging with a community outreach partner.</p> <p>To apply: https://compare.energy.vic.gov.au/</p>	<p>Solar Homes</p> <p>The Victorian government is providing a rebate of up to \$1,400 for solar panel (PV) system installation, for homeowners and rental properties plus the option of an interest-free loan. Households can save up to \$890 per year on their electricity bills when they install solar panels.</p> <p>There is also now a program to claim rebates for solar hot water or solar heat pumps.</p> <p>Further information: https://www.solar.vic.gov.au/solar-rebates-rental-properties</p>
<p>Smile Squad</p> <p>Smile Squad is a Victorian Government program that will provide free dental care to all Victorian public primary and secondary school students. It is rolling out across Victoria now.</p> <p>Further information: https://www.smilesquad.vic.gov.au/</p>	<p>Jobs Victoria Fund</p> <p>The Jobs Victoria Fund is providing \$250 million in wage subsidies to assist Victorian businesses to employ at least 10,000 people who are looking for work.</p> <p>Further information: https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/jobs-victoria-fund</p>
<p>Free rapid antigen tests</p> <p>The Victorian Government will continue to provide free rapid test kits to students and staff through schools and early childhood settings for the rest of 2022.</p> <p>Further information: https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/rapid-antigen-testing-schools</p> <p>The Victorian Government will make two million free rapid test kits available to all NDIS participants and disability support pensioners.</p> <p>Further information: https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/rapid-antigen-tests#free-rapid-antigen-test-kits-at-state-run-testing-sites</p>	<p>Affordable Housing Rental Scheme</p> <p>The Affordable Housing Rental Scheme is the Victorian Government's response to the growing gap in housing affordability and supply for many low to moderate income households. This includes essential government funded service delivery workers such as nurses, police, teachers and care workers - who are experiencing rental stress and may be struggling to access home ownership.</p> <p>As part of the \$5.3 billion big housing build, Homes Victoria's Affordable Housing Rental Scheme will deliver an initial 2,400 affordable rental homes to address affordability pressures in metropolitan Melbourne and regional city centres, and supply issues in regional Victoria.</p> <p>Further information: https://www.vic.gov.au/affordable-housing-rental-scheme</p>

Making it Safer for Paddlers to Access the Yarra



The new access point on the Yarra River in Templestowe.

Canoeing, kayaking and all kinds of paddling will be safer and easier to access thanks to major upgrades along the Yarra River at Templestowe.

New pathways and stairs built into the riverbank have been completed at Candlebark Park by Melbourne Water in partnership with Paddle Victoria and Manningham City Council.

The staircase has been built beneath the Fitzsimons Lane bridge to improve access to the banks of the Yarra River for canoers and kayakers. A new viewing area for spectators was also built close to the bank on the southern side of the river.

Melbourne Water funded the \$430,000 project that was delivered nearly \$100,000 under budget and completed in just one year.

The section of the Yarra River near Candlebark Park in Melbourne's north-east, is home to a world-class canoe slalom training course frequented by Olympic Games hopefuls.

The new facilities have transformed the park for casual paddlers and for athletes training on the canoeing and kayaking course.

These works are consistent with the 50-year Community Vision for the Yarra, the first of its kind for an urban waterway in Australia, and public feedback on the Yarra Strategic Plan to improve on-water access at key locations along the river.

WOMEN

Breast Screening Boost to Save More Lives

Thousands more Victorians will have better access to life-saving breast cancer screening and specialist care close to home under a multi-million-dollar investment from the Andrews Labor Government.

Premier Dan Andrews and then Minister for Health Martin Foley MP announced the locations of an additional eight permanent BreastScreen Victoria services across the state – giving more Victorians access to vital preventative breast scans and specialist treatment to find cancer early.

The new services are part of a \$20 million boost in the Victorian Budget 2022/23 – delivering breast screening services to an additional 36,000 eligible Victorians every year by 2026.

Five new permanent breast screening services in the Local Government Areas of Whittlesea, Casey, Greater Geelong/Surf Coast Shire, Melton and Moreland will be established progressively, with all completed by January 2025.

Three temporary sites in Craigieburn (Hume), Pakenham (Cardinia) and Hoppers Lane (Wyndham) will also be converted into permanent sites with greater capacity.

The funding will support the expansion of BreastScreen Victoria's Reading and Assessment services (RAS) in Parkville and Monash. It will also support strategies designed to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women accessing services.

While breast cancer mortality rates have decreased by almost two per cent a year since 1994, in 2020 alone 4,575 Victorian women were diagnosed with breast cancer and 766 died from the disease.

BreastScreen Victoria currently provides services at 46 permanent screening clinics. About six per cent of BreastScreen Victoria clients are called back to a RAS for further investigation.

The Victorian Cancer Plan 2020-2024 has set ambitious targets to reduce the harm caused by all cancers and save 10,000 lives by 2025.

BreastScreen Victoria provides free two-yearly breast screening for eligible Victorians without symptoms.

If you are due to be screened, book an appointment at a service by calling 13 20 50 or visiting www.breastscreen.org.au

Dropping in to see the Orange Door Croydon



Sonja with a staff member at the Orange Door facility in Croydon.

I took some time to visit the new Orange Door facilities in Croydon in May and speak to the staff about how vital the service is to the local community.

Women, children and families across the local councils of Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges can access coordinated family violence and child wellbeing services at The Orange Door, which is available in 10 languages that are most commonly spoken in the outer eastern Melbourne area.

The Orange Door network in Outer Eastern Melbourne is a strong partnership between the Victorian Government and Anglicare Victoria, Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service, and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

The Orange Door is part of the Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence. It strengthens support for children and families.

Healing the Harm of Forced Adoption

Victorian women who had their children taken from them under heartbreaking historic forced adoption practices will receive redress, counselling and formal apologies from the Victorian Government.

The Andrews Labor Government is investing more than \$4 million in response to last year's Parliamentary Inquiry into Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria, including a plan to design and establish Australia's first redress scheme for people affected by forced adoption.

The funding will immediately provide crisis counselling, as well as the option of integrated birth certificates which include the names of both the adopted person's natural parents and their adoptive parents.

A \$500,000 hardship fund will be established to provide discretionary payments to mothers affected by forced adoption with exceptional circumstances, including those who are terminally ill. A further \$200,000 in funding will assist community groups to support applicants.

Tabled in Parliament, the Government's response to last year's Parliamentary Inquiry recognises the trauma experienced by women who gave birth between 1958 and 1984 and were subjected to cruel and damaging forced adoption practices, many of whom have suffered lifelong trauma.

In 1984, Victoria was the first Australian jurisdiction to legislate for openness and properly informed consent in adoption – and continues to lead the way in making amends for these unacceptable historical policies and practices.

In 2012, the Victorian Government issued a formal apology to those harmed by past adoption practices and pledged to provide practical assistance to them.

Over the past year, the Government has put in place sweeping reforms to adoption services, centralised decision making to ensure better oversight and consistency and most importantly provided a better experience for children whose best interests remain central to any decision making.

The inquiry made 56 recommendations across broad themes such as redress, support services, operational changes and legislative amendments. Of those, 33 are supported or supported in principle by the Government, including plans to introduce a redress scheme, with the remaining 23 subject to further consideration.

Several of the recommendations are either already implemented or in the process of being implemented, such as centralised adoption services, retention of birth certificates, management of adoption records and data publication.

Free Pads and Tampons for Victorian Schools

Endometriosis affects 1 in 9 Australian women and girls, and it often takes years to get a diagnosis - we're making sure they know how to seek help earlier so young Victorians don't have to suffer in pain unnecessarily.

In partnership with the Commonwealth Government and the Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia, the PPEP-Talk program will be delivered free to government schools across Victoria to educate students about endometriosis and pelvic pain, to raise awareness and promote early diagnosis and support for those affected.

Students at Victorian government schools have now also accessed more than 4.1 million free pads and tampons, thanks to the Labor Government's \$20.7 million program.

Victoria is the first state or territory in Australia to ensure all students have access to free sanitary products in school bathrooms at all Victorian government schools – saving families money on these costly necessities and making sure students have all the health supports they need at school so they can get on with their learning.

We're proud to be reducing the stigma around pelvic pain and reproductive health in our schools – with free pads and tampons, and new resources to make sure students in the Eastern Metro Region have all the support they need to manage their health.

SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR WOMEN IN THE EASTERN METRO REGION

Family and Domestic Violence

- Djirra Aboriginal Services** - offers practical support to Aboriginal women experiencing domestic violence.

Visit www.djirra.org.au or Ph: (03) 9244 3333.
- Eastern Metropolitan Region Family Violence Partnerships** - family violence and sexual assault services, including children, LGBTIQ+ and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Visit www.rfvp.org.au/family-violence-sexual-assault or Ph: (03) 9259 4200.
- Orange Door Network** - a free service for adults, children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced family violence.

Visit www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au or Ph: 1800 319 355.
- Older Persons' Advocacy Network** - provides free services to support older people.

Visit www.opan.com.au or Ph: 1800 700 600.

Women's Health Services

- Marie Stopes Australia** – independently accredited safe abortion, vasectomy and contraception provider.

Visit www.mariestopes.org.au or call the National Support Centre on 1300 003 707
- WIRE (Women's Information Referral Exchange)** – free support, referral and information for all Victorian women, non-binary and gender-diverse people.

Visit www.wire.org.au or Ph: 1300 134 130.
- Women's Health East (WHE)** – improve health outcomes for women across the seven local government areas of Yarra Ranges, Knox, Maroondah, Manningham, Monash, Whitehorse and Boroondara.

Visit www.whe.org.au or Ph: (03) 9851 3700.

Women's Financial Independence

To assist women in the Eastern Metro Region with their financial independence, I have put together a booklet with resources and advice to help.

Scan the QR code to access the digital booklet, or contact my office if you would like a hard copy.



YOUR COMMUNITY



Sonja with Dustin Halse MP and members of the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place.

Delivering a Permanent Home for Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place

The Victorian Government is supporting Aboriginal Victorians in Melbourne's east with a permanent home for a vital community organisation, and modern facilities for future generations to enjoy for years to come.

Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place provides a culturally safe and inclusive space for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to come together for a variety of cultural activities and programs that incorporate art, music, language and storytelling.

The Government is providing almost \$4.5 million to allow the organisation to purchase the building it is housed in, and carry out critical repairs.

This will ensure Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering

Pembroke High School Retained for Community Use

The future use of the site at 150 Cambridge Road in Kilsyth has been up in the air for many years, with suggestions floated about a variety of uses from different parties involved.

I am pleased to see, thanks largely to a strong community campaign from locals, that the site has been purchased by the local council and will be utilised as a community space.

It is great to see so many locals passionate about their community, and I look forward to seeing how their passion for this outcome will benefit the local community for many years to come.

Place can continue to provide essential services to Community from their headquarters in Patterson Street, Ringwood East.

A community controlled Aboriginal organisation that is committed to retaining, promoting and strengthening cultural identity, Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place has been providing a safe space for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to participate in cultural activities and connect since 2005.

Funding for Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place has been made available through our investment in the Priority Infrastructure and Cultural Heritage Protection for Aboriginal Victorians.



Sonja at the site of the old school on Cambridge Road.

Ensuring Seniors in the Eastern Metro Region Claim the \$250 Power Saving Bonus



The seniors information session at Donvale Bowls Club with Sonja, State Trustees and the University of the Third Age.

Since it was introduced my team and I have been contacting seniors across the Eastern Metro Region to help them apply for the Andrews Labor Government's Power Saving Bonus.

We've made many calls and arranged visits with local groups to help people with their applications.

Earlier this year we arranged for a seniors information session at the Donvale Bowls Club, alongside a representative from State Trustees and the University of the Third Age.

The session covered legal concerns with wills, estate planning, ageing at home and the differences between retirement villages and nursing homes, lifelong learning opportunities with the U3A and government supports available for seniors.

The session was well received from members of the club. It was great to get to have those conversations with locals about this stage in their lives, and what the Government can do to assist them.

-Power Saving Bonus-

Previously available to only those receiving certain concession payments from Centrelink, the Power Saving Bonus program is now available for every household in Victoria to claim, including those who have previously claimed the bonus when it was available for concession holders only.

To find out more information or to apply for your household, visit compare.energy.vic.gov.au or call 1800 000 832

Celebrating our Local Chin Community



Sonja talking with Croydon locals at the Chin Festival.

We had a lot of fun at the Croydon Chin Community Festival back in February.

Croydon is home to one of the largest groups of Chin migrants anywhere in the world, and it was a joy to be able to spend the afternoon getting to see how proud the community is of their heritage and culture.

I had many great conversations with the locals about how they've been accepted into their local community and feel a strong sense of home here in the Eastern Metro area.

I'm looking forward to next year's festival which should be bigger and better than ever.

Having a Yarn with the BJ Quilters



Sonja and the BJ Quilters showcasing some blankets.

It was a pleasure to be out again at the BJ Quilters to see the amazing creations they make and donate to Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Refugee Vic (a domestic violence group in Knox), and Ronald McDonald House Charities Australia.

This incredible group gets together regularly to utilise their talents to make bags, quilts and seat belt covers. This includes quilts which are donated to shelters for women and children escaping family violence who often arrive with very few possessions.

This year BJ Quilters donated 800 capes to childrens hospital cancer wards.

Cancer is a devastating illness that many people within the Eastern Metropolitan Region suffer from, but thanks to the efforts of BJ Quilters over the last 15 years, people who are afflicted can receive a little a bit of comfort, solace, warmth and love through these beautiful, hand made quilts.

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