

## Submission:

### *Addressing regional disadvantage: Infrastructure priorities for the regions*

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on *Infrastructure priorities for the regions* for consideration by Infrastructure Victoria.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations, students and individuals throughout Victoria working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out-of-home care.

Our members work directly with children and families experiencing disadvantage and hardship and are well placed to identify the needs of their communities and the kinds of infrastructure that would enable delivery of essential services to address disadvantage. Community service organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations need government investment in infrastructure and capital works if they are to grow and respond to long-standing and changing community needs.

This submission is related to addressing regional disadvantage in the following regions:

- Goulburn Valley
- Central Highlands

## Goulburn Valley

### **The main issues of disadvantage in the Goulburn Valley**

While the regional profile provides an accurate reflection of many of the key contributors to disadvantage experienced in the Goulburn Valley, family violence is a critical challenge that has not been captured. Greater Shepparton has the eight highest per capita rate of family violence in Victoria.<sup>1</sup>

Shepparton has also been selected as a trial site for federal welfare programs such as ParentsNext and Income Management. These programs impose punitive conditions that our regional members report have either not resulted in improved outcomes or have in fact increased the level of disadvantage facing families who receive social security benefits in the region. Reducing cost of living, increasing the availability of social and affordable housing and provision of facilities for easily accessible community services are even more critical in this context.

### **Infrastructure barriers contributing to poor outcomes**

The following key issues and challenges were raised with the Centre in relation to infrastructure barriers contributing to poor outcomes in the Goulburn Valley area:

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<sup>1</sup> Crime Statistics Agency 2019, Family incident rate per 100,000 population and number of incidents by local government area, viewed 13 February 2020, <<https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/family-violence-data-dashboard/victoria-police>>.

- The absence of a mother-baby unit, and
- Insufficient social housing and access to affordable rental housing.

### Infrastructure-related solutions

#### *A residential mother-baby unit*

There has been a long campaign, spanning upwards of 20 years in the Goulburn Valley, for the establishment of a mother-baby unit.<sup>2</sup> This is an urgent and widely recognised need in the community, supported by a business case developed by KPMG and commissioned by Goulburn Valley Health.

The Centre further notes that Shepparton has not been selected as a site for an Early Parenting Centre, missing out yet again on an essential service to support families in the first thousand days of a child's life. Establishment of a mother-baby unit would give families in the region access to quality treatment and care in their own community that can support recovery and infant care.

#### **Recommendation**

Build a mother-baby unit in the Goulburn Valley region to provide timely access to quality treatment and care where it is needed.

#### *Social housing*

According to Greater Shepparton City Council:

The evidence of housing need is alarming, with Greater Shepparton estimated to have a rate of 5.56 homeless persons per 1,000 people, the highest in regional Victoria, with 1041 households on the waiting list for social housing. Rental affordability has fallen by 10% between 2008 and 2018, and 27% of low income households are experiencing housing stress.<sup>3</sup>

To meet this demand, more social housing properties need to be urgently built, alongside measures to address rising rental prices.

#### **Recommendation**

Invest in additional social housing supply in the Goulburn Valley region to significantly reduce the number of children, young people and families waiting for safe and stable accommodation.

## Central Highlands

### The main issues of disadvantage in the Central Highlands

Family violence is also a critical challenge in the Central Highlands, which has not been captured in the regional profile. Ararat for example has the eleventh highest per capita rate of family violence in Victoria.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Suzanna Sheed 2018, Parliament: Shepparton early childhood and parenting services, viewed 13 February 2020, <[http://www.suzannasheed.com.au/shepparton\\_early\\_childhood\\_and\\_parenting\\_services](http://www.suzannasheed.com.au/shepparton_early_childhood_and_parenting_services)>.

<sup>3</sup> Greater Shepparton City Council 2019, Draft affordable housing strategy, viewed 13 February 2020, <<http://greatershepparton.com.au/bpi/planning/strategic-planning/current-strategic-projects/draft-affordable-housing-strategy>>.

<sup>4</sup> Crime Statistics Agency 2019, Family incident rate per 100,000 population and number of incidents by local government area, viewed 13 February 2020, <<https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/family-violence-data-dashboard/victoria-police>>.

## Infrastructure barriers contributing to poor outcomes

The following key issues and challenges were raised with the Centre in relation to infrastructure barriers contributing to poor outcomes in the Central Highlands area:

- Limited infrastructure availability and poor-quality facilities create a barrier to the delivery, scope and quality of community services
- Many families need to travel to Melbourne to access services; for many, the cost of such travel is too high, which means families potentially miss out on services that metropolitan families can routinely access
- Lack of infrastructure to enable delivery of holistic prevention and early intervention programs, particularly relating to family violence and preventing children from entering out-of-home care
- There is no infrastructure to meet the specific needs of people in the community who have experienced historical and intergenerational abuse, including members of the Stolen Generation, and
- There are no centralised facilities to support young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage and complex challenges.

## Infrastructure-related solutions

### *Suitable facilities for early childhood services*

There is a need for accessible, safe and child-centred facilities in the Central Highlands that would enable organisations to deliver early childhood programs catering to developmentally vulnerable children and their families. Given that funding for community services does not adequately reflect the additional costs of operating in regional areas, the establishment costs of such infrastructure are often too great for organisations, particularly smaller organisations, to self-fund. Services are available to be delivered if suitable spaces exist and could include early parenting day stay services, parenting programs and therapeutic and psychological supports for families.

### *Enabling organisations to provide holistic prevention and early intervention*

In order to intervene earlier to address the rising numbers of children entering out-of-home care, appropriate local facilities are needed to provide programs that focus on parent-child relationships and family strengthening services centred on the safety, wellbeing and development of children. Such facilities could also play a role in family violence prevention and early intervention, with a range of spaces and programs to engage fathers.

## Recommendation

Build facilities for the delivery of child-centred early childhood programs and family strengthening services across the Central Highlands region.

### *Supporting healing, recognition and reconciliation for survivors of intergenerational trauma*

A facility designed by people with lived experience from the Stolen Generations, Forgotten Australians, child immigrants, former residents of the Ballarat Orphanage and Children's Home and similar institutions could offer an important community space for healing, recognition and reconciliation that does not currently exist in the Central Highlands region.

## Recommendation

Build a facility to support healing, recognition and reconciliation for survivors of intergenerational trauma in the Central Highlands region.

#### *A centralised youth hub facility*

Young people experiencing disadvantage and complex challenges in the Central Highlands region would benefit from a centralised facility that provides a range of integrated services in the one place. Such a facility could be co-designed with young people to meet their needs and to be engaging and accessible.

Best practice co-located centres that enable different organisations to deliver a range of integrated supports to young people has been shown to deliver organisational benefits that improve effectiveness and efficiency.<sup>5</sup> Research on critical success factors has been conducted to assist Australia to strategically plan for and develop effective Not-For-Profit Centres.<sup>6</sup> The Visy Cares Hub located in Sunshine, Victoria, offers a good example of a centralised dedicated youth hub that could be replicated in other areas of the state.

#### **Recommendation**

Build a central youth hub facility in the Central Highlands region to ensure young people have an engaging, safe and accessible space to receive the various supports they may need to overcome disadvantage.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our submission. We appreciate the contributions of CAFS (Ballarat) and FamilyCare (Shepparton) in the preparation of our response. Acknowledging the significant and growing demands on child and family services, we encourage Infrastructure Victoria to continue reaching out to the Community Service Organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that deliver these services to draw on their considerable expertise regarding infrastructure needs in their communities that would address regional disadvantage.

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<sup>5</sup> Hart, K 2018, [\*More than the sum of its parts: an exploration of co-located centres \(NFP Centres\), as a model to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of not-for-profit human services in Australia\*](#), Origin Foundation, Sydney.

<sup>6</sup> Hart 2018.