



RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE

FINAL REPORT

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

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Terms of Reference

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES ACT 2003

REFERRAL OF INQUIRY TO THE RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE of the PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

INQUIRY INTO THE EXTENT AND NATURE OF DISADVANTAGE AND INEQUITY IN RURAL AND REGIONAL VICTORIA

Referred by the Legislative Assembly on 25 November 2009: That under s 33 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* the Rural and Regional Committee be required to inquire into, consider and report no later than 7 October 2010 on the extent and nature of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, and in particular to -

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

- (i) examine measures taken at a local level to combat problems of hardship and disadvantage; and
- (j) investigate approaches in other jurisdictions to combat rural and regional disadvantage.

Referred: 25 November 2009

Due: 7 October 2010

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| MEMBERS AND STAFF | i |
| TERMS OF REFERENCE | iii |
| CHAIR’S FOREWORD | xiii |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | xvii |

PART A : Regional Profiles

| | |
|---|----------|
| CHAPTER ONE : Introduction | 1 |
| The Committee | 2 |
| Terms of Reference | 3 |
| The Evidence Gathering Process | 4 |
| > Regional Hearings | 4 |
| Measuring Disadvantage: Social Justice and Equal Societies..... | 5 |
| The Loddon Mallee Region | 9 |
| The Grampians and Northern Victoria Region | 10 |
| The Barwon South West Region | 11 |
| The Hume Region | 12 |
| The Gippsland Region | 13 |
| Key Recommendations | 13 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| CHAPTER TWO : The Loddon Mallee Region | 15 |
| Introduction | 15 |
| Understanding the Region | 16 |
| Table 1: Loddon Mallee Statistics | 17 |
| Indicators of Wellbeing in the Loddon Mallee Region | 17 |
| > Self-reported Health | 17 |
| > Child Health Assessments | 18 |
| > Perceptions of Safety | 19 |
| > Feeling Part of the Community | 19 |
| > Social Support | 20 |
| > Volunteering | 20 |
| > Highly Skilled Workforce | 21 |
| > Educational Qualifications | 21 |
| Combating Hardship in the Loddon Mallee Region | 21 |
| Education | 22 |
| The Early Years | 23 |
| Chances for Children | 24 |
| The Early Years Network | 25 |
| So Great | 26 |
| Promote a School Ready Culture | 28 |
| Completing School | 32 |
| NETschool Bendigo | 34 |
| Doxa School Bendigo | 35 |
| Community Learning | 36 |
| Total Learning Centre, Mildura East | 38 |
| Raising Aspirations | 40 |
| Building a Strong Community | 42 |
| The Tyranny of Distance | 43 |
| Funding Models | 45 |
| Public Housing | 47 |
| Water Quality | 48 |
| Attracting and Retaining Qualified Staff: Beyond the General Practice Model | 49 |
| Community Legal Centres | 50 |
| The Impact of Drought | 51 |
| The Evolution of Industry | 52 |
| Local Community Solutions | 54 |
| Our Place Drop in Centre | 55 |
| Indigenous Communities | 59 |
| Enterprise Education | 60 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| CHAPTER THREE : The Grampians and Northern Victoria Region | 65 |
| Introduction..... | 65 |
| Understanding the Region..... | 66 |
| Table 2: Grampians and Northern Victoria Statistics | 67 |
| Indicators of Wellbeing in the Grampians Region..... | 67 |
| > Self-reported Health..... | 68 |
| > Child Health Assessments..... | 68 |
| > Perceptions of Safety..... | 69 |
| > Feeling Part of the Community..... | 69 |
| > Social Support..... | 70 |
| > Volunteering..... | 70 |
| > Highly Skilled Workforce | 71 |
| > Educational Qualifications..... | 71 |
| Funding Models | 71 |
| Renewing Communities..... | 73 |
| One Size Doesn't Fit All..... | 75 |
| Start Over Project | 75 |
| Forging Partnerships..... | 78 |
| Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre Inc. | 79 |
| Funding that Reflects Delivery Costs..... | 79 |
| Changing Demographics..... | 80 |
| Population Growth and Decline | 81 |
| Communities and Education | 85 |
| Yuille Park P-8 Community College..... | 86 |
| Dealing with Disengagement..... | 89 |
| Neighbourhood Renewal: A Community Approach | 92 |
| Aspirations..... | 93 |
| The Unique Needs of Rural and Regional Schools | 94 |
| Wimmera Virtual Learning Network | 94 |
| Information and Communications Technology..... | 97 |
| Health | 98 |
| > Access to Services..... | 98 |
| > Attracting Health Professionals..... | 101 |
| Living with Drought | 104 |
| A 'Social Contract' with Regional Victoria | 107 |
| Decentralisation/Population Increase..... | 110 |
| Collecting Information..... | 111 |
| Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership – Health and Wellbeing Needs Analysis..... | 113 |

CHAPTER FOUR : The Barwon South West Region..... 115

Introduction 115

Understanding the Region 116

Table 3: Barwon South West Statistics117

Indicators of Wellbeing in the Barwon South West Region117

- > Self-reported Health117
- > Child Health Assessments118
- > Perceptions of Safety118
- > Feeling Part of the Community119
- > Social Support119
- > Volunteering120
- > Highly Skilled Workforce120
- > Educational Qualifications121

Geographic Disadvantage121

Emergency Medicine123

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs)124

Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine126

Community Health and Wellbeing Profile 2009129

National Centre for Farmer Health and Sustainable Farm Families132

Mental Health133

Headspace.....134

Funding140

Education: Expectations, Engagement and Opportunities.....142

Glenelg Transition Support Team146

The SWEET Program148

School Readiness149

Corio Bay Senior College Family Centre150

‘Making Tracks’152

Professional Development.....154

Transport.....157

L2P Driver Mentor Program.....161

Advantages and Disadvantages of Rural Living162

Neighbourhood Renewal Project.....166

Stigma168

Warrnambool Alternative VCAL Education (WAVE)172

Indigenous Community176

Rainbow Serpent of the Hopkins River178

CHAPTER FIVE : The Hume Region 181

Introduction 182

Understanding the Region 183

Table 4: Hume Statistics.....184

| | |
|---|------------|
| Indicators of Wellbeing in the Hume Region | 184 |
| > Self-reported Health | 184 |
| > Child Health Assessments..... | 185 |
| > Perceptions of Safety..... | 186 |
| > Feeling Part of the Community..... | 186 |
| > Social Support | 187 |
| > Volunteering | 187 |
| > Highly Skilled Workforce | 188 |
| > Educational Qualifications | 188 |
| Education | 188 |
| School Readiness: A Focus on the Early Years..... | 189 |
| Benalla Regeneration | 191 |
| Community Hubs | 195 |
| The McAuley–Champagnat Program..... | 197 |
| Long-term Solutions | 197 |
| Community Strength | 198 |
| Mission Australia’s Urban Renewal Project | 201 |
| Tertiary Education | 202 |
| > Transport and Education | 203 |
| Housing | 206 |
| > Emergency Accommodation | 210 |
| The Good Lives Model | 213 |
| Mental Health..... | 214 |
| > Outreach..... | 214 |
| Workforce..... | 219 |
| Funding | 222 |
| Community Needs Survey | 224 |
| Remote Challenges..... | 227 |
| South Mitchell Health Precinct..... | 231 |
| Volunteerism | 237 |
| Transport | 239 |
| Information and Communications Technology..... | 242 |
| Community Cooperation and Partnerships..... | 246 |
| Small Town Flexibility | 247 |
| | |
| CHAPTER SIX : The Gippsland Region..... | 251 |
| Introduction..... | 251 |
| Understanding the Region..... | 252 |
| Table 5: Gippsland Statistics..... | 253 |
| Indicators of Wellbeing in the Gippsland Region | 253 |
| > Self-reported Health..... | 254 |
| > Child Health Assessments..... | 254 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| > Perceptions of Safety | 255 |
| > Feeling Part of the Community | 255 |
| > Social Support | 255 |
| > Volunteering | 256 |
| > Highly Skilled Workforce | 256 |
| > Educational Qualifications | 257 |
| Education: Funding Models | 257 |
| Raising Expectations | 259 |
| Transport..... | 265 |
| Health: Challenges for Remote Areas..... | 268 |
| The Transforming Rural Urgent Care Services Committee..... | 276 |
| Air Retrieval | 278 |
| Dealing with Disability in Rural and Regional Victoria: A Twofold Vulnerability..... | 280 |
| A Focus on Decentralisation | 283 |
| A Police Presence in Rural and Regional Victoria | 287 |
| A New Approach to Measuring Disadvantage..... | 289 |

CHAPTER SEVEN : Government Programs 293

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 293 |
| Policies and Programs: In Brief | 294 |
| Understanding Disadvantage..... | 296 |
| Figure 1: The Population ‘Pinch’ | 298 |
| Government Policies..... | 300 |
| Figure 2: Victoria’s Approach to Social Inclusion..... | 301 |
| > Principles..... | 301 |
| > Priorities for <i>A Fairer Victoria</i> Since 2008..... | 307 |
| > Regional Development..... | 316 |
| Figure 3: Population Growth in Regional Victoria | 319 |
| Figure 4: Employment Growth in Regional Victoria | 320 |
| Figure 5: Total Building Approvals in Regional Victoria..... | 320 |
| Benchmark Projects | 321 |
| Ready for Tomorrow..... | 322 |

PART B : Tackling Disadvantage

Key Recommendations 1–3 : Rural Proofing 323

| | |
|--|-----|
| Rural and Regional Victoria Wants Rural Proofing | 327 |
| Tasks for a Rural Proofing Body | 330 |
| > Geographic Weighting | 330 |
| > A ‘Social Contract’ | 332 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Conclusion | 332 |
| Key Recommendation 4 : Outreach | 333 |
| Why Outreach?..... | 334 |
| A Tsunami of Diabetes..... | 335 |
| Figure 6: Diabetes Rates Victoria 2001 | 335 |
| Figure 7: Diabetes Rates Victoria 2006 | 336 |
| Figure 8: Diabetes Rates Victoria 2008 | 336 |
| Drought..... | 338 |
| Outreach Worker Position..... | 340 |
| Funding | 343 |
| Key Recommendation 5 : Alternative Education..... | 345 |
| Retention and Completion Rates | 347 |
| Alternative Education Models | 349 |
| Key Recommendation 6 : Early Intervention..... | 353 |
| ‘Getting in Early’ | 354 |
| Early Intervention Programs..... | 355 |
| Key Recommendation 7 : Access to the Law | 359 |
| Access to the Law in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia | 361 |
| Access to the Law in Victoria: A Statewide Survey..... | 363 |
| Courts..... | 365 |
| > County Courts | 366 |
| > Magistrates’ Court | 370 |
| > Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal | 371 |
| Penalties and their Effects..... | 372 |
| Legal Practitioner Issues | 373 |
| Conclusion | 377 |
| Key Recommendations 8–9 : Regional Research Body | 379 |
| Problems with Some Forms of Data | 383 |
| Types of Data..... | 384 |
| Why Measuring Disadvantage is Important..... | 387 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Appendices..... | 391 |
| Appendix One: References | 391 |
| Appendix Two: Submissions | 399 |
| Appendix Three: Public Consultation Program - Witnesses..... | 405 |
| | |
| Minority Report..... | 419 |

Chair's Foreword

This Report on the Rural and Regional Committee's *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria* is worth its weight in gold. Why? Because it contains the voices of many rural and regional Victorians from all walks of life – successful business people dedicated to addressing issues in their communities, farmers, teachers, doctors, community health workers, lawyers, police, academics.

This Report reflects regional voices, regional concerns and community-based solutions.

Ross Lake, a leader of the Mildura community, told the Committee:

I appear here making some underlying assumptions, that the government, whoever it is...has a genuine desire to deliver equal social opportunity and justice for all Victorians. I have to assume that that is your underlying assumption: that if disadvantage is discovered and acknowledged, a genuine desire to regenerate and support these communities exists, that a non-partisan approach to evidence-based findings of disadvantage will be acknowledged, not disputed and challenged on party lines, and that a genuine desire to proof the key performance indicators – and there is some irony in using that phrase – of disadvantage and measure its impacts exists, and that, once proofed, better targeting and better resourcing will occur against some agreed minimum standards.¹

As Ross points out, this is what those we represent expect – that we will all work towards the same goal.

If country people are not, as the statistics indicate, as healthy or as educated as city people, if their children don't have access to the same opportunities and if country

¹ Mr Ross Lake, Chair, Audit Committee, Mallee Family Care; Chair, SunRISE 21, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

people don't have the same access to services that are taken for granted in the city then solutions must be found and implemented.

This Report takes a positive approach to a subject that isn't always comfortable but that must be dealt with. The leadership, care, the hard work of rural and regional Victorians who are dedicated to combating hardship and disadvantage in their communities is inspiring. So much good work is being done on a daily basis. In terms of long-term solutions communities themselves know what is needed. The role of government is to respond to and engage with those concerns.

The Terms of Reference for this Inquiry was originally inspired by compelling evidence that I heard during our previous *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*. Ken Carr, who has long been involved in the community sector in Mildura, told us that low school completion rates are the reason for low income levels in the Loddon Mallee region.² That evidence remains compelling to me, as a resident and representative of a rural and regional area and as a father of four children growing up in Bendigo.

Clearly education is key to the development of rural and regional Victoria. Young people living outside metropolitan centres should have the same opportunities as those in the city. The reverse is untenable.

The Recommendations in this Report focus firstly, on broader issues around putting in place long-term measures to ensure that rural and regional Victoria is not adversely affected by Melbourne-centric governments.

Key Recommendation 1 harks back to this Committee's first Recommendation in our previous Report, on Regional Centres, but is a refined version which responds directly to advice we heard in every regional centre we visited during this Inquiry into Disadvantage. Simply, that rural and regional Victorians must have a voice at the table in Spring Street and that policy and legislation must be 'rural proofed'.

Key Recommendation 2 is based on overwhelming evidence that it simply costs more to deliver the same services outside the city – funding models must include provision for geographical weighting. Key Recommendation 7 asks the Government to make investigating rural and regional access to the law a priority.

A number of Recommendations in this report, such as Key Recommendations 4 and 5, focus on education and ways that we can better support the education sector.

The other Recommendations made in this Report reflect many of the concerns that we heard during our public hearings, including concerns specific to towns we visited, and have picked up on the key issues raised.

In many instances those in our communities who are facing disadvantage and hardship are not able to advocate for themselves. I commend the witnesses who came before the Committee during our hearings for this Inquiry and who advocated so well for their communities. This Report, I believe, reflects their advice.

Our approach has not been to provide an assessment of the theories or textbook approaches to disadvantage but to reflect what we heard in rural and regional communities through a number of regional profiles.

The Regional Profiles in this Report tell a story about the positive approaches to hardships that people face and the inequities that can be encountered in rural and

² Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 18 March 2009.

regional Victoria. Each profile is a snapshot of what we heard in that region, of what is being done and what should now be done.

Many people gave up their time in good faith to talk to the Committee and to provide thoughtful and well-researched advice and brilliant ideas and solutions to the problems they face every day of their working lives. The input we got for this report was amazing.

We heard from 195 witnesses, at 15 public hearings throughout Victoria, including the more isolated locations, and received 63 submissions.

My heartfelt gratitude to all witnesses for this Inquiry. The individuals we met with love where they live and love what they do and their contribution to their communities is priceless.

I encourage you all to keep up the good work.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Committee I acknowledge the hard work of the Secretariat over the course of this Inquiry and towards the preparation of the Report: Lilian Topic, Patrick O'Brien and Eleanor Howe.

I thank my colleagues on the Committee who were willing to take a regional approach to this report and to base it on the advice that we heard. Over the last three years we have worked hard to engage with people in rural and regional Victoria and with the pressing issues facing them. We are committed to giving country people a voice, to listening to their concerns with open minds and to working as hard as we can to represent their interests.

I must acknowledge the disappointing behaviour of Government members throughout our regional hearings for this Inquiry. From our first hearings in Warracknabeal and Donald witnesses, all respected local leaders, were confronted by an extremely hostile and close-minded approach from Government members focussed on minimising embarrassment to the Government. They showed little interest in issues or solutions to inequity that were identified by local people. This is not the reception I wanted witnesses to receive from my Committee members.

The lack of cooperation from Government members, who did not volunteer information during the course of this Inquiry or cooperate any way with our efforts, is immensely disappointing.

The Committee has taken great care to ensure that the Recommendations in this Report directly reflect the concerns expressed by witnesses and submissions to this Inquiry. I believe their implementation would support the positive efforts taking place in regional and rural Victoria to combat disadvantage.

I commend the Report to the Parliament.



Damian Drum MLC
Chair

October 2010

Recommendations

Key Recommendations

Key Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the State Government establish an independent rural proofing advisory body with an ongoing role to monitor and review legislation, government policy, practices and resources allocation as it has an impact on rural and regional Victorians and in order to ensure that government legislation and policy reflects and responds to the diverse needs of rural and regional Victorians.

Page 323

Key Recommendation 2

That the State Government in its development of policy and programs consider the many examples provided throughout this report of evidence that the cost of delivering and accessing services in rural and regional Victoria is higher than delivery in Melbourne, such as:

- school travel from Mallacoota to Melbourne for sport, student development opportunities, university open days and so on;
- travel and accommodation expenses incurred for professional development by teachers in Portland, Lakes Entrance, Robinvale, Mildura, Corryong, as well as costs to schools for replacement teachers, providing teachers are available (refer also to Recommendation 13);
- police transport of victims and witnesses to court from Corryong to Wodonga where at times both victims and defendants have been forced to travel in the same police vehicle;
- health services from centres such as Seymour and Benalla that must travel to outlying rural locations to reach clients;
- delivery of university courses to a large geographic area with limited or no appropriate public transport in place; and
- professionals including travel time in their costs for delivering specialist services to Robinvale from Swan Hill or Mildura.

Therefore the Committee recommends that the State Government develop, with a view to introducing into all funding models, a form of geographical weighting that more accurately reflects the true costs incurred by service providers in rural and regional Victoria.

Page 330

Key Recommendation 3

That the State Government investigate establishing a 'social contract' with communities in rural and regional Victoria outlining agreed minimum standards of community wellbeing to be maintained and minimum services that are to be provided on a per capita basis. Further, this 'social contract' should be based on a list of social indicators or 'trigger points' such that when a community in rural and regional Victoria reaches an agreed point pre-determined Government responses are put in place.

Page 332**Key Recommendation 4**

That the State Government design and implement a cohesive program of Outreach Workers for rural and regional Victoria, as the permanent and preferred model for providing health and related services such as financial and relationship counselling to farming and agricultural communities. The model implemented should be based on the successful State Government Drought Worker model. To this end the Committee further recommends that funding for each regional health delivery body determined to be the ideal outreach service provider should include an appropriation for employment of an Outreach Worker.

Page 333**Key Recommendation 5**

That the State Government develop its policy with regard to alternative education models with a commitment to the following for rural and regional Victoria:

- a. An urgent increase in funding for alternative education settings from 1.25 Student Resource Package to 1.4 Student Resource Package.
- b. That funding allocated to students expected to attend a full school year but not in attendance on Census Day be redirected to support re-engagement programs for those students rather than be withheld.
- c. That the State Government ensure that the Department of Education implement alternative education models in areas of Victoria where there are a high number of disengaged young people. The models should be relevant to local needs and be developed in consultation with local education providers, including Local Learning and Employment Networks, and make use of the expertise of alternative education providers already making a difference, including NETschool and the Doxa organisation.

Page 345

Key Recommendation 6

That the State Government continue to acknowledge the valuable role early intervention programs play in addressing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria and enhance its policy making efforts in this area. The Committee further recommends that the Best Start program continues to be expanded into more communities across rural and regional Victoria.

Page 353

Key Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the State Government further examine and respond to concerns raised before the Rural and Regional Committee during this Inquiry. In particular:

- a. The need for a Community Legal Centre in the Goulburn Valley area.
- b. Certainty of hearing dates at regional circuit courts.
- c. Variations in the length of time to commence and complete hearings and the frequency of adjournments between Melbourne and circuit courts.
- d. The effectiveness and consistency of the listing process between Melbourne and circuit courts.
- e. The effect in regional Victoria of the application of the three-month requirement for the commencement of serious sexual offence hearings and 'special hearings' in circuit courts.
- f. The availability of legal Counsel and support services to circuit courts compared with the Melbourne County Court.
- g. Measures in place to increase the use of court registrars in preliminary planning.
- h. Further possibilities for the use of telecommunications in rural and regional courts.
- i. The frequency and impact of regional solicitors initiating proceedings at Melbourne County Court.
- j. Current strategies to ensure access for rural and regional Magistrates' Court participants at locations which do not have access to the specialist courts and court programs available at larger centres.
- k. The processes of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and their impact on rural and regional Victorians.
- l. Monitoring and data collection of justice system needs and outcomes for rural and regional Victorians.

- m. Increased funding of rural and regional legal services and legal aid funding and resources in particular.
- n. Methods to attract professional staff to rural and regional areas.
- o. The application of home detention to rural and regional citizens.
- p. Plans to roll out current Magistrates' Court pilot programs, such as for mediation, across regional Victoria.

Page 359

Key Recommendation 8

That the State Government fund a research body in each of the five regions of Victoria. This research body would undertake the following tasks:

- collect region-specific, disaggregated data;
- store relevant data about the region;
- analyse region-specific data; and
- ensure that the data is made publicly available.

The data would be collected and analysed with a view to understanding the demographic profile and needs of rural and regional communities. The data will assist with planning for the future of the region and would be available to all levels of government and other interested groups. The data would also assist with community and regional efforts to determine local priorities.

Page 379

Key Recommendation 9

That the State Government acknowledge that social indicators of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria should not be measured in numbers alone but rather on a more accurate basis, such as a per capita basis, that provides an accurate picture of conditions in a local community. The Committee further recommends that this lead to a reconsideration of policy and allocation of resources based on more accurate measurements.

Page 380

Other Recommendations

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that in developing funding models for addressing disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria the State Government:

- a. Work with service providers at a community level to ensure that funding for programs is not spread too broadly or in such insignificant amounts as to be ineffective.
- b. Continue to streamline funding requirements to reduce their bureaucratic impact on local government agencies, service providers, Indigenous corporations and community groups in rural and regional Victoria.
- c. Endeavour to deliver funding in consistent amounts that provide greater financial certainty to these groups, in turn allowing them to provide local workers with greater security of employment.
- d. Ensure program timescales are sufficient to allow programs to have an impact and a better chance of lasting success.
- e. Ensure that transition funding becomes a mandatory component of funding models for programs in particular Neighbourhood Renewal and that the Government should do so with the aim of ensuring communities have the ability to continue the gains made during the lifespan of programs.
- f. Continue to acknowledge that all attempts at addressing disadvantage must be multi-faceted, coordinated and involve the community at all times.
- g. Recognise and account for critical need to ensure that communities facing significant disadvantage or under stress are funded in a sustained way.

3.27

Recommendation 11

That the State Government conduct an analysis of remote population needs looking further at evidence of 'hot spots' of significant disadvantage with very limited access to youth services. This analysis should seek to improve equity of access to services for geographically isolated young people with severe disadvantage even though they may not represent large populations. Service models to address access and equity issues for such smaller rural populations need to be further explored and developed to ensure that these vulnerable populations are not overlooked in service planning and provision at regional and sub-regional levels.

4.51

Recommendation 12

That the State Government develop a system of tracking Victorian school students so at all times it is known if a student is engaged in education. The system should especially focus on the ‘transition points’ of education. Such a system could also incorporate tracking of the education, health and wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable young people in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee further recommends that this be suggested by the State Government for the Council of Australian Government’s agenda with a view to development of a national system.

4.82

Recommendation 13

That the State Government ensure teachers in rural and regional Victoria are not financially disadvantaged through meeting their professional development requirements in Melbourne. This could be achieved through direct financial support or by the running of professional development courses in more regional areas, following a consultation process with rural and regional educators.

3.98

Recommendation 14

That the State Government facilitate the development of a rural schools professional association to strengthen the relationships between small schools across rural and regional Victoria and with the aim of reducing the time, travel and financial costs imposed upon teachers in rural and regional locations fulfilling professional development obligations.

3.98

Recommendation 15

That the State Government continue to increase support for the development of regional facilities and services for students with disabilities.

5.135

Recommendation 16

That the State Government continue to ensure provision of trained welfare workers in schools teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This should be done to ensure that teachers who are not qualified are not called upon to provide welfare services.

4.95

Recommendation 17

That the State Government implement Recommendation 8.1 of the Education and Training Committee's report *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in Which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education* calling for support for student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students:

That the Victorian Government work with higher education providers, other levels of government, and developers to evaluate the current availability and potential further development of affordable supported student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students.

4.76

Recommendation 18

That, in response to overwhelming evidence to this Committee that professionals educated and trained close to their own area are more likely to remain within that area, and further that they are likely to provide a more comprehensive service than professionals paid to deliver services extraneously, the State Government:

- a. Provide an incentive for students who have completed their schooling in regional Victoria to complete tertiary education or training within their region such as the new 'Tertiary Education Opportunities Package' as suggested in the Government's policy document *Ready for Tomorrow*.
- b. Investigate the impact on mid-sized towns in rural and regional Victoria of professional services being delivered extraneously.

5.107

Recommendation 19

That the State Government continue to invest in schools designed along 'community hub' models particularly in areas identified as experiencing disadvantage in education outcomes and generational disadvantage.

3.73

Recommendation 20

That the State Government investigate the possibility of partnering with the Federal Government in running the Students@Work program. The program should be rolled out across remote parts of Victoria to aid young people looking for employment.

6.64**Recommendation 21**

That the State Government increase public transport options for TAFE students and other students accessing training options across rural and regional Victoria. Further, the State Government should fund accessible school buses for students with a disability where required.

6.57**Recommendation 22**

That the State Government increase funding from the \$62.5 million currently allocated to support students with a disability who are attending non-Government schools to align more closely with funding to Government schools.

Recommendation 23

That the State Government increase funding for literacy and numeracy 'catch-up' programs for schools with students beginning their education with poor literacy and numeracy skills. This funding should be allocated automatically when the level of need at a school reaches a pre-determined level.

3.97**Recommendation 24**

That the State Government develop a parental engagement program aimed at increasing the involvement of Indigenous parents in their children's schooling.

4.159

Recommendation 25

That the State Government fund early intervention and wellbeing support programs.

2.42

Recommendation 26

That the State Government lobby the Federal Government to ensure that no three-year-old kindergarten services in rural and regional Victoria are reduced as an unintended consequence of changes in legislation intended to ensure that all four-year-olds receive 15 hours of kindergarten per week.

2.47

Recommendation 27

That the State Government lobby the Federal Government to ensure that the National Broadband Network will allow increased on-line learning opportunities for remote communities in Victoria, and suit the needs in general of teaching institutions including schools and universities in rural and regional locations.

6.43

Recommendation 28

That the State Government's Vulnerable Youth Framework currently being finalised be further developed to outline specific responses and initiatives to meet the needs of rural and regional communities in relation to service infrastructure, funding, supporting service coordination in geographically large areas and ensure rural young people can access alternative education and training options.

Recommendation 29

That the State Government conduct research into and combat lowered aspirations of rural and regional students in relation to higher education participation.

2.73

Recommendation 30

That the State Government recognise that local health services throughout rural and regional Victoria are often best placed to determine the type of funding model that best suits their needs. Further, that in cooperation with the Federal Government and Local Governments the State Government allow health services greater involvement in determining funding models to apply to their service to ensure that, for example, smaller communities can become Multi Purpose Services should they wish, while larger health services can opt for a WEIS model.

5.116**Recommendation 31**

That the State Government provide parity for the health sector through the introduction of a flat fee for ambulance transfers between health services so that rural and regional health services are not disadvantaged by being located in non-metropolitan areas.

3.111**Recommendation 32**

That the State Government continue to support the International Medical Graduates Recruitment Scheme in its current form, maintaining the emphasis on directing medical professionals to rural and regional Victoria.

3.116**Recommendation 33**

That the State Government use its Young Professional Provincial Cadetship Program as announced in *Ready for Tomorrow* to target the shortage of health workers in rural and regional Victoria.

3.121

Recommendation 34

That the State Government:

- a. Increase funding for Auslan interpreters across Victoria.
- b. Provide urgent funding for areas of acute need in Victoria such as East Gippsland.
- c. Identify other areas of urgent and acute need for Auslan interpreters.

6.119

Recommendation 35

That the State Government recognise the increasing challenges faced by police officers in remote areas of Victoria ensuring that the safe management in custody of offenders is provided in such a way as to allow for police officers, already limited in numbers in rural and regional areas, to resume patrols. The Committee further recommends that future policing strategies around mental health issues be developed in consultation with local stakeholders in communities across rural Victoria.

6.139

Recommendation 36

That, for any category 1–3 rural hospitals, the State Government investigate provision of real-time computer-based trauma checklist facilities similar to those available in metropolitan hospitals.

4.31

Recommendation 37

That the State Government link its recently announced ‘family coaches’ program with a promotional campaign on parenting to encourage those experiencing difficulties to ask for assistance, and to reduce the stigma that may be attached to doing so.

5.79

Recommendation 38

That the State Government fast track a public health campaign on diabetes among farming communities, including information on how to recognise symptoms, where help can be found and effective preventative measures. The Government could design and implement this program in partnership with the National Centre for Farmer Health based in Hamilton.

4.43**Recommendation 39**

That the State Government continue to invest in improving dental care across rural and regional Victoria through immediate implementation of the following measures:

- a. Provision of dental clinics in schools with low socioeconomic status with a particular focus on schools in disadvantaged areas where students have a high rate of dental clearance and other dental problems and where waiting times for access to dental care in the community are unacceptably high, based on the Yuille Park P-8 Community College model.
- b. Where it is not possible to establish a permanent school-based clinic, ensure an increase in the number of operational mobile dental clinics throughout rural and regional Victoria.
- c. Develop initiatives for dentists to work in rural and regional Victoria.

5.138**Recommendation 40**

That the State Government consolidate and enhance its policy approach to decentralisation, in particular by including a specific focus on decentralisation to identified areas of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee recommends that, to achieve this goal the State Government investigate the potential of linking decentralisation decisions with areas of need already identified by the Neighbourhood Renewal program.

6.125

Recommendation 41

That the State Government acknowledge the current P1 licence restrictions are too restrictive and generic and do not take into account community needs in rural and regional Victoria. Further, exemptions to the restrictions should be made easier to obtain and the process made clearer, more accessible and processed in a timely manner.

4.123

Recommendation 42

That the State Government continue statewide implementation of the L2P program currently operating in some rural and regional communities, to include all disadvantaged communities that would benefit from this program. The Committee further recommends that the State Government develop a promotional campaign encouraging community leaders to volunteer as driving tutors for the L2P program.

4.124

Recommendation 43

That the State Government ensure all communities in rural and regional Victoria have sufficient emergency accommodation for young people to meet their needs. To achieve this the Committee recommends that the State Government:

- a. Increase funding to organisations providing emergency accommodation in rural and regional Victoria.
- b. Develop emergency accommodation facilities in areas of need in rural and regional Victoria in order to ensure that vulnerable young people are not moved to different parts of the State exacerbating existing problems and causing issues including: removal of young people from their vital support networks; availability of transport back to their community; and long-term problems associated with removing young people from school.

5.83

Recommendation 44

That the State Government examine current policy on provision of public housing in rural and regional Victoria with a view to ensuring that:

- a. Public housing continues to be spread evenly throughout rural and regional Victoria rather than in concentrated locations as has previously been the case.
- b. Public housing is always provided with the necessary range of services to prevent further disadvantage taking hold.
- c. To reflect changing community demographics there is an urgent increase in the number of one-bedroom units in the public housing system.

5.75**Recommendation 45**

That the State Government, with the memories of the Black Saturday bushfires still strong, ensure there are no 'black spots' for emergency services communications anywhere in Victoria, with north-east Victoria being a priority.

5.145**Recommendation 46**

That the State Government acknowledge the threat posed to Victoria's strong history of volunteering by an ageing population. That the State Government offer incentives to attract volunteers to positions such as Community Emergency Response Teams.

5.150**Recommendation 47**

That the State Government continue to improve transport services within rural and regional Victoria by undertaking the following measures:

- a. Widening of the Transport Connections program to provide more inter-town services across rural and regional Victoria.
- b. Investigation of a solution to improving links between major regional centres – the east–west transport corridors.
- c. Prioritisation of the Princess Highway West project to Warrnambool.

5.158

Recommendation 48

That the State Government continue to recognise the role infrastructure such as public libraries and community pools play in the social life of rural and regional Victoria. Further, that the State Government increase funding to rural councils to ensure that these assets are maintained to the highest standard.

3.144

Recommendation 49

That the State Government provide financial incentives for local governments operating in areas of disadvantage to identify and prioritise tackling local issues facing their community.

2.127

Recommendation 50

That the State Government respond to local needs in the Loddon Mallee region by taking the following action:

- a. Encourage through incentives the provision of a full-time speech pathologist in Maryborough (2.37).
- b. Provide funding for Our Place in Eaglehawk, a successful initiative of local community leaders responding to those facing disadvantage in the community (2.124).
- c. In response to local needs in Robinvale and suggestions from community workers, that the State Government investigate and establish a program for Indigenous residents to build their own homes. Such action would respond to urgent local needs for accommodation; would provide an opportunity for training in professional and life skills for residents; and would ensure implementation of a local solution to a local problem (2.139).
- d. Provide funding for an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer and Multicultural Liaison Officer to be stationed in Robinvale (2.145).

2.145

Recommendation 51

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Grampians Northern Victoria region by taking the following action:

- a. Maintain the Start Over program currently operating successfully in Ballarat with the aim of reducing youth offending rates by identifying and addressing behaviours, attitudes, personal and family circumstances that may lead to contact with the Police (3.33).
- b. Consider establishment of neighbourhood renewal projects in Horsham North, Sebastopol and Redan (3.83).

3.154**Recommendation 52**

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Barwon South West region by taking the following action:

- a. Urgently advocate to the Federal Government for the Corio and Norlane areas of Geelong to be classified as a district of health workforce shortages in order to be able to offer financial incentives to attract health professionals and overseas-trained doctors to ensure improvements to current shortages in the area (4.28).
- b. That the State Government provide support to the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation to develop small business opportunities for the Indigenous community in far south-west Victoria. Further, that the State Government continue to work with the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation in developing the tourism industry on Aboriginal-owned lands in the region, with the aim of improving employment opportunities for the Indigenous community and the wider economy of the whole region (4.161).
- c. Provide funding to the Glenelg Youth Network for a South West Youth Access Program in the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Shire, to ensure that the program, previously funded by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation and the Proceeds of Crime Act can continue to support young people to access drug and alcohol services, other health services, and early intervention initiatives.

4.162

Recommendation 53

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Hume region by taking the following action:

- a. Provision of funding for North East Support and Action for Youth's family support program which has been successful in keeping young people engaged with education (5.46).
- b. Increase funding to North East Support and Action for Youth, which currently receives an insufficient amount of \$8,000 from the Department of Human Services to provide emergency accommodation in Alpine, Wangaratta, Benalla and Mansfield Shires (5.83).
- c. Provision of a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program-funded supported accommodation program in Mansfield (5.84).
- d. Increase funding for Brayton Youth and Family Services to further support its invaluable work in the area of youth homelessness in the Hume region, in particular its Good Lives Model (5.88).
- e. Provision of funding for the community's identified need for a dedicated youth counsellor in Benalla (5.103).
- f. Provision of funding for a Special School in Benalla to ensure that young people with disabilities who are currently required to travel to Wangaratta for schooling can remain and be educated in the community in which they live (5.136).
- g. Installation of a helicopter base at Wangaratta that is suitable to provide emergency air services covering north-east Victoria (5.143).
- h. Installation of pilot-activated lighting at the Corryong airfield (5.144).
- i. Re-establishment of a Victorian Government 'shop front' in Corryong to enable residents in the region to submit documents required by government such as VicRoads documents, Business Licensing Authority documents, hunting and fishing licenses and so on (5.181).

5.186

Recommendation 54

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Gippsland region by taking the following action:

- a. Remove classification impediments to the Mallacoota Medical Centre stocking emergency medicine currently limited to hospitals or if that is not possible, provide urgent funding and assistance for the Centre to store emergency medicines (6.101).
- b. Provide vouchers to the Mallacoota community offering dental treatment (6.102).
- c. Favourably consider funding and provision of a holding facility at the Mallacoota ambulance centre for patients awaiting air retrieval to a major hospital (6.106).
- d. Favourably consider placing a fuel depot at the Mallacoota airport.
- e. Assist the local community by encouraging VicRoads to change its non-pictorial road sign policy to allow signs alerting tourists of the Mallacoota turn off.

6.149

Chapter One

Introduction

A strong, progressive and prosperous democracy is founded on fairness: on each and every person having a fair opportunity to participate in the social and economic life of the community.¹

Victorian Government.

- 1.1 This *Report into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria* is the Final Report of the last Inquiry to be conducted by the Rural and Regional Committee during this Parliament.
- 1.2 The subject of disadvantage in our rural and regional communities and how to tackle it is one that has occupied the minds of governments and oppositions, Members of Parliament, policy makers, and community leaders for many decades.
- 1.3 The Committee is pleased to have had this opportunity to contribute to the thinking on disadvantage and how to tackle it.
- 1.4 The need for this Inquiry arose as the Committee conducted hearings and investigations around rural and regional Victoria for other Inquiries, such as

¹ Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2005.

the *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*. A longer timeframe and greater resources would have allowed for a more in-depth study of all of rural and regional Victoria. However, these were not available and the need to examine the issues from a bipartisan point of view remained compelling.

- 1.5 Notwithstanding the lack of time or comprehensive resources we believe this report and the Committee's Recommendations, if implemented, will contribute to the development of rural and regional communities, and to ensuring that all members of our communities who are facing disadvantage have greater opportunities to get ahead and to contribute fully to their communities.

The Committee

- 1.6 The Rural and Regional Committee ('the Committee') is a Joint Investigatory Committee of the Parliament of Victoria. It was first established in 2007 and is preceded by the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee. The Committee comprises seven Members of Parliament drawn from both Houses and all Parties. The Committee is chaired by Mr Damian Drum MLC, Member for Northern Victoria.

- 1.7 An important feature of the work of the Rural and Regional Committee is the commitment that its members have to conduct its work through extensive consultation with local people. More often than not rural and regional communities themselves, and their leaders, understand what is required to deal with the issues they confront.

- 1.8 The powers and responsibilities of the Rural and Regional Committee are determined by the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*. The functions of the Committee, as defined by s16(1) of the Act are:

To inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with the provision of services to, or the development of, regional Victoria if the Committee is required or permitted so to do by or under the Act.

- 1.9 Matters are referred to the Committee either by resolution of the Council or the Assembly or by Order of the Governor-in-Council. The *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* also enables a Joint Investigatory Committee to inquire into and report to Parliament on any annual report or other document relevant to its functions and which have been laid before either House of Parliament.

Terms of Reference

- 1.10 The Terms of Reference for the Rural and Regional Committee's current *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria* were given to the Committee by the Legislative Council on 25 November 2009 under s33 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*.
- 1.11 According to the Terms of Reference the Committee was to inquire into, consider and report on the extent and nature of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, and in particular to:
- a. examine current evidence of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria with a view to identifying the social groups most affected by disadvantage;
 - b. identify any gaps and weaknesses in methods for measuring, recording and capturing information on disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria ;
 - c. identify the key factors of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, such as access to education, health care, employment opportunities, housing affordability and transport;
 - d. identify the geographical locations in rural and regional Victoria where disadvantage is most severe with a view to prioritising these areas for future action by Government;
 - e. identify rural and regional areas of significant disadvantage and inequity that may be masked by the comparative prosperity of surrounding areas;
 - f. investigate the impact of social and economic trends on the future of rural and regional Victoria in the context of disadvantage;
 - g. examine current Government responses to rural and regional disadvantage;
 - h. identify priorities for action by Government to tackle key rural and regional disadvantage issues;
 - i. examine measures taken at a local level to combat problems of hardship and disadvantage; and
 - j. investigate approaches in other jurisdictions to combat rural and regional disadvantage.
- 1.12 The Committee's reporting date is 7 October 2010.
- 1.13 At the heart of this Report, the Committee's response to the Terms of Reference, is a belief that rural and regional Victorians face disadvantages and inequity in both their access to services and many of the indicators of health and wellbeing. We also believe that much can be done to improve this situation.

The Evidence Gathering Process

Regional Hearings

- 1.14 In determining where public hearings should take place for this Inquiry, the Committee drew heavily on Professor Tony Vinson's 2007 report, *Dropping Off the Edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia*.² Vinson relied on a range of statistical measures to identify the postcodes in Victoria displaying the highest concentration of disadvantage. Vinson then framed his research around several components of disadvantage – such as education, health and community engagement. These factors informed the Committee's research prior to engaging with witnesses throughout rural and regional Victoria.
- 1.15 The Committee was keen to visit the 'four corners' of Victoria, to ensure that we heard strongly the voices of Victorians living in towns and regions that are isolated and can sometimes feel left outside of decision-making processes. By conducting hearings in these areas and speaking to local communities, the Committee endeavoured to gain a full understanding and genuine appreciation of both the causes of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria and possible solutions.
- 1.16 Aside from our public hearing in Melbourne, the Committee visited 14 towns across Victoria, listed here in chronological order:
- Warracknabeal;
 - Donald;
 - Mildura;
 - Robinvale;
 - Portland;
 - Benalla;
 - Corryong;
 - Lakes Entrance;
 - Mallacoota;
 - Bendigo;
 - Maryborough;
 - Ballarat;
 - Geelong; and
 - Seymour.
- 1.17 The Committee is grateful to all the members of these communities who took time away from their commitments to appear as witnesses at our hearings. In total, 195 people presented compelling evidence to this Inquiry totalling 1,047 pages of transcripts.

² Vinson T, *Dropping Off the Edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services / Catholic Social Services Australia, Melbourne 2007.

- 1.18 We heard from a wide range of professionals and members of the general public – many of them directly involved in working with those who face disadvantage – including: school students, teachers and principals; health professionals; mayors; chief executive officers of local governments and private companies; social workers; and committed community advocates.
- 1.19 It is clear from the evidence we heard that Victorians are committed to social justice. The Committee was left in no doubt as to the number of passionate Victorians living and working throughout rural and regional Victoria dedicated to tackling disadvantage and ensuring that their communities are able to avail themselves of ‘...the necessary ingredients of a decent life in Australia today’.³
- 1.20 A total of 64 submissions were received by the Committee for this Inquiry from a broad range of relevant stakeholders. Detailed analysis of the public hearings transcripts and submissions was conducted to identify themes and issues of importance to participants in the Inquiry process. Some of this material has been included through direct quotes within the Final Report. The remaining material informed the deliberation process which was undertaken by the Committee and which led to Recommendations being formed.
- 1.21 The Committee also received a comprehensive submission from the Victorian Government, outlining its approach to addressing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria. Information based on the Government’s submission is provided in Chapter 7. The Committee acknowledges the time and energy allocated to compiling the submission and the Government’s presentation at the public hearing in Melbourne.
- 1.22 The evidence gathered directly from stakeholders in rural and regional Victoria was supplemented by extensive original research conducted by the Committee, which is also reflected in this Report. It is important to note that this Report focuses on oral evidence from hearings. This evidence is extremely informative and compelling and comes from the direct involvement of individuals working with disadvantaged communities. It also provides an intimate picture of what people are facing, how the issues are being dealt with, as well as an insight into what the future holds and what must be urgently considered by policy makers.

Measuring Disadvantage: Social Justice and Equal Societies

- 1.23 The subject of disadvantage (often also discussed using terms such as ‘social cohesion’ and ‘social inclusion/exclusion’) is a complex one comprised of a number of contributing factors. For example, a 2008 report on health inequality in Victoria prepared for the Department of Human Services by the

³ Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M *et al*, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and social exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007.

Allen Consulting Group states that poor health is a critical component of social exclusion, which itself is linked to other poor outcomes such as low education outcomes.⁴ Whereas VicHealth takes the view that, for an individual, low income levels and unemployment precede social exclusion, and that social exclusion then causes poor health.⁵

1.24 When identifying disadvantage and its causes, therefore, it is important to understand that it includes complex and inter-related elements. Thus, Vinson makes reference to a 'web of disadvantage', and explains that it is necessary for governments to tackle the many causes of disadvantage simultaneously:

Progress in overcoming one limitation, say, unemployment, can be inhibited by related factors like limited funds, poor health, inadequate training or having a criminal record. This web-like structure of disadvantage restricts attempts to break free of it...If, as is commonly the case, unemployment and crime correlate with limited education and limited work skills then the preventive pathways need to take heed of these interconnections.⁶

1.25 Importantly, studies of disadvantage go beyond a simple measuring of income levels – what has traditionally been referred to as 'poverty' – to include factors such as:

- working conditions;
- community facilities;
- access to health services; and
- participation in community activities.⁷

1.26 Vinson joins other social researchers in arguing that cumulative instances of disadvantage in communities should be the priority of governments; that is, resources should be focused on identifying and helping both people and places experiencing multiple factors of disadvantage.⁸ For example, Daly *et al* refer to research showing that for governments '...identifying concentrations of disadvantage can improve the targeting of policies'.⁹ In a report on liveability, the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission

⁴ The Allen Consulting Group, *Are We There Yet? Indicators of inequality in community health*, The Allen Consulting Group, Melbourne 2008.

⁵ VicHealth, *Key Influences on Health Inequalities, Research Summary*, VicHealth, Melbourne 2008.

⁶ Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: Markedly socially disadvantaged localities in Australia: their nature and possible remediation*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009.

⁷ Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M *et al*, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007.

⁸ Vinson T, *Dropping Off the Edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services / Catholic Social Services Australia, Melbourne 2007; Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M *et al*, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007.

⁹ Daly A, McNamara J, Tanton R, Harding A and Yap M, 'Indicators of risk of social exclusion for children in Australian households: an analysis by state and age group', *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, Volume 14, Number 2, 2008.

states: 'Liveability measures might contribute substantially to public policy development.'¹⁰

- 1.27 It is therefore important for policy makers to be aware of all of the many causal factors of disadvantage when making policy decisions. Holdsworth and Hartman discuss this idea in terms of social cohesion, arguing that policies aimed at strengthening communities can only succeed once there has been a formal 'mapping' of all of the issues surrounding disadvantage:

Local government authorities and service providers are doubtlessly already aware of many of these issues. However, there is a need to formalise and conceptually map the relationships between the various elements which together comprise social cohesion. This, it is hoped, will assist such bodies in the design and implementation of policies and initiatives which can strengthen the 'social glue' that binds potentially fragile communities together.¹¹

- 1.28 Disadvantage, then, can also be discussed in terms of social justice. Under Premier Steve Bracks, the Victorian Government saw disadvantage as a way of measuring fairness for individual Victorians, arguing that without fairness in society disadvantage takes form in the shape of '...negative social and economic consequences for everyone'.¹²

- 1.29 Similar social justice ideals are expressed by Saunders *et al*:

In order to ensure that the benefits associated with economic and social progress are more widely shared, it is necessary to identify who is missing out and/or being left out, in which areas, and why.¹³

- 1.30 Professor Vinson argues that the very process by which societies choose to measure disadvantage '...is linked to more general beliefs about what is fundamentally important in society';¹⁴ that is, why we choose to measure what we do says a lot about our values. Following a similar line, the values of the Victorian Government can be identified in documents such as *A Fairer Victoria 2010*,¹⁵ which is divided into four main areas of focus: the early years; education and employment; health and wellbeing; and liveable communities.

¹⁰ Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, *A State of Liveability: An inquiry into enhancing Victoria's liveability, Final Report*, Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, Melbourne 2008.

¹¹ Holdsworth L, Hartman Y, 'Indicators of community cohesion in an Australian country town', *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*, Volume 1, No 2, 2009.

¹² Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2005.

¹³ Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M *et al*, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and social exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007.

¹⁴ Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: The origins, meaning, definition and economic implications of the concept social inclusion/exclusion*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009.

¹⁵ Department of Premier and Cabinet, *A Fairer Victoria 2010: Real support, real gains*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

1.31 Vinson adds that tackling disadvantage benefits not just individuals but society as a whole, both socially and economically. Using the example of employment, he says that ‘...participation in work is associated with reduced crime and social problems and reduced demands upon welfare budgets’.¹⁶ The same thinking can be found in the United Kingdom, where the Equality Trust was established in 2009. Inspired by the book *The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone*,¹⁷ the Equality Trust provides evidence of links between unequal societies and different factors of disadvantage. It finds that unequal societies perform poorly on all of the following indicators:

- physical health;
- mental health;
- drug abuse;
- education;
- imprisonment;
- obesity;
- social mobility;
- trust and community life;
- violence;
- teenage births; and
- child wellbeing.¹⁸

1.32 With echoes of the ‘web of disadvantage’, the Trust has found that societies that do badly on one factor of disadvantage tend to do badly on a wide range of social problems. It also suggests that in unequal societies ‘...inequality affects the vast majority of the population – not just the poorest’.¹⁹

1.33 The length of the Victorian Government’s submission to this Inquiry, listing a broad range of programs aimed at addressing disadvantage, as well as the theoretical discussion covering current research and pertinent concepts around disadvantage contained within its pages, is noted by the Committee. Indeed, Victoria is recognised as performing well on several measures of disadvantage in comparison both to other states in Australia and internationally.²⁰

1.34 However, disadvantage is by its very nature a dynamic concept, forever evolving as our communities evolve. The Committee commends the

¹⁶ Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: Outlining economic implications of social inclusion/exclusion*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009.

¹⁷ Wilkinson R, Pickett K, *The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone*, Penguin, London 2009.

¹⁸ See: <<http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/>>, accessed 10 August 2010.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, *A State of Liveability: An inquiry into enhancing Victoria’s liveability. Final report*, Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, Melbourne 2008; Daly A, McNamara J, Tanton R, Harding A and Yap M, ‘Indicators of risk of social exclusion for children in Australian households: an analysis by state and age group’, *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, Volume 14, Number 2, 2008; Department of Human Services, *Measuring Disadvantage across Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2003.

Victorian Government's efforts to address disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria, but constant vigilance is required to ensure all Victorians have the opportunity to achieve optimum outcomes in their lives. In particular, this Report highlights that in rural and regional Victoria disadvantage is experienced by many in the community and problems are becoming compounded by many disparities in access to services and in health outcomes across rural and regional communities compared to metropolitan Melbourne.

- 1.35 It is the Committee's remit to examine the issues and forces that have the largest impact on the lives of everyone who lives and works in rural and regional Victoria.
- 1.36 The majority of this Final Report is comprised of Regional Profiles covering the five non-metropolitan regions in Victoria. It is the Committee's aim to deliver an overview of the main concerns and priorities in each region as presented to us in towns in rural and regional Victoria. Had time and resources permitted, the Committee's investigations would have been more extensive. We hope that we have reflected each community faithfully.
- 1.37 Rural Victoria is not one homogenous area. While there are overlapping concerns – particularly in the fields of education, health and transport – these were expressed with a differing emphasis, using different language and with differing priorities, depending on where the Committee heard them.
- 1.38 It is for this reason that this Report focuses on communities through Regional Profiles and why they contain a number of Recommendations specific to particular areas as well as general Recommendations. Further, each Regional Profile includes a number of outlines of programs and initiatives that the Committee wishes to applaud because of their great benefit to their local communities. It is hoped that these outlines may also offer perspectives for other communities who may be struggling with similar issues.

The Loddon Mallee Region

- 1.39 Through holding public hearings in Mildura, Robinvale, Bendigo and Maryborough, the Committee heard clearly that communities in the Loddon Mallee region value education highly, recognising it as one of the main determinants of outcomes for individuals and communities as a whole. Early intervention programs were felt to be important, with witnesses arguing that governments need to stay committed to ensuring all Victoria children are 'school ready' when they begin their education.
- 1.40 Schools do not exist in isolation and therefore are vulnerable to the effects of disadvantage prevalent in the wider community. Schools are, however, well placed to deliver a number of services and programs aside from

education; designing schools as ‘community hubs’ in areas struggling with disadvantage is achieving positive results and the number of such schools is growing steadily as the popularity of the idea spreads.

- 1.41 With the whole community benefiting from these hubs, positive educational aspirations and expectations rise alongside a strengthening of social cohesion. The Committee learnt that this model is helpful in re-engaging young people who have become disengaged from traditional education models.
- 1.42 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in the Loddon Mallee Regional Profile include:
- that the cost of tertiary education, and the distance needed to travel to access it, is harming young people’s aspirations and expectations surrounding further education;
 - the quality of services, in particular health services, is reduced when these are not locally based;
 - why long-term, flexible funding models work best in rural Victoria;
 - the need for timely and place-specific data around disadvantage;
 - the role of public housing, and amenities in general, in disadvantaged communities;
 - difficulties attracting and retaining skilled staff, including for community legal centres;
 - the financial and social implications of the ongoing drought and a changing rural economy;
 - reasons why central governments should work in partnership with communities when devising responses to disadvantage, potentially under the terms of an agreed ‘social contract’; and
 - social problems facing the Indigenous community, including health, education and housing, as well as other cultural groups making a home in the Loddon Mallee region.

The Grampians and Northern Victoria Region

- 1.43 The Committee’s first regional consultations for this Inquiry were held in Warracknabeal and Donald. Issues raised here informed the general tone of the rest of the Inquiry as it travelled throughout rural and regional Victoria. In particular: the importance of long-term funding models; why transitional funding can assist communities in adjusting to programs coming to an end; and that local communities have the energy and expertise to devise solutions to their problems.
- 1.44 Communities in the Grampians and Northern Victoria are experiencing dramatic demographic changes, both cultural and socioeconomic. These

changes are being witnessed in the peri-urban towns, such as Ballarat, as well as the more remote parts of the region.

1.45 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in the Grampians and Northern Victoria Regional Profile include:

- delivering education equal to that available in the rest of Victoria;
- the role that Information and Communications Technology plays in the delivery of services;
- health issues including public transport, access to services, and attracting and retaining staff;
- the impact of drought on the social fabric of communities;
- the advantages of rural living;
- forming a 'social contract' between small communities and central governments; and
- the challenges associated with data collection.

The Barwon South West Region

1.46 The Committee travelled to two communities in the Barwon South West region: Portland in the west and Geelong in the east. Evidence was heard about the health status of the region, including oral health, emergency medicine, mental health, farmer health, and the poor survival rates for cancer patients in south-west Victoria.

1.47 The Committee also heard several views on the lack of available data presenting an accurate picture of the health of communities across the region. It was evidence from the Barwon South West region on data addressing disadvantage in general that led to Recommendations 8 and 9 on the establishing of Regional Research and Information Centres.

1.48 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in the Barwon South West Regional Profile include:

- the need for flexible funding models, with consideration being given to geographic weighting in recognition of the difficulties involved in delivering services across large distances;
- the impact that distance has on educational outcomes;
- other education issues, including: low take-up of tertiary education among young people in the region, disengaged young people at school level and early years students being 'school ready';
- the important role employment plays in tackling disadvantage;
- the challenges school teachers and private industry face in trying to access professional development;
- public transport as a social justice issue and possible changes to the P1 licence restrictions;

- the advantages and disadvantages of rural living;
- the issue of stigma in the Corio and Norlane areas of Geelong and the benefits of the Neighbourhood Renewal program; and
- Indigenous Australians in the region – their health, housing, employment and education, as well as programs that are working well and potential business opportunities.

The Hume Region

1.49 Witnesses in the Hume region, in the towns of Benalla, Corryong and Seymour, joined those in other regions stressing the importance of education in determining life outcomes. There was also agreement that early intervention is vital for communities wanting to ensure young peoples' 'school readiness' and that establishing schools as 'community hubs' is an effective tool for tackling disadvantage throughout the whole community. Inequity in education in rural and regional Victoria is seen in country schools which offer a limited curriculum, and the financial costs and large distances that need to be overcome to access higher education.

1.50 The Committee was told of a link between public housing and disadvantage, as well as the ability to break this link through community renewal programs, such as the Victorian Government's Neighbourhood Renewal program. We also heard of the successful way in which Drought Outreach Workers can deliver services to those communities in rural and regional Victoria, such as farming communities, that suffer from many lifestyle-related negative health outcomes and that have traditionally been hard to reach.

1.51 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in the Hume Regional Profile include:

- attracting and retaining teachers and health professionals;
- how the shortage of GPs in the region is placing a strain on hospital emergency departments;
- the need for flexible funding models, with consideration being given to geographic weighting in recognition of the difficulties involved in delivering services across large distances;
- the need for timely and place-specific data around disadvantage;
- the value of community health models in rural Victoria, as well as discussion around the health needs of people with disabilities, limited oral health services and the state of emergency medicine;
- the ways in which small communities rely on volunteers, or 'community philanthropy';
- the role of public transport and Information and Communications Technology in addressing disadvantage;
- why decentralisation can help shires remain financially viable; and

- how small towns in Victoria develop flexible partnerships among different community organisations.

The Gippsland Region

- 1.52 Travelling to the Gippsland towns of Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota, the Committee was involved in discussions on how best to fund programs tackling disadvantage. Flexibility was said to be important in recognising the different challenges faced by, for example, schools in remote parts of the state, in particular in their need to respond to generational disadvantage; that is, disadvantage that is experienced in one family across a number of generations. The ‘tyranny of distance’ was felt keenly in Gippsland, where public transport is recognised as having a central role to play in ensuring communities are able to access the services they need.
- 1.53 Health in Gippsland is considered in terms of issues – like oral health and mental health – as well as groups, Kooris, farmers and people with disabilities, for example. The Committee also heard first-hand evidence of the unique lifestyles of health professionals in small towns.
- 1.54 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in the Gippsland Regional Profile include:
- the need for a holding bay at Mallacoota ambulance station;
 - the need for a full-time Auslan interpreter in Gippsland;
 - why sparsely populated areas deserve the same level of services as larger centres;
 - how the concept of ‘rural proofing’ would benefit disadvantaged communities in Gippsland;
 - policing issues in remote Victoria, including staffing and professional approaches to mental health issues; and
 - a new approach to measuring disadvantage based on a community’s resilience, vulnerabilities and adaptive capacity.

Key Recommendations

- 1.55 Finally, the Committee has expanded on a number of Key Recommendations, which focus on the most pressing concerns that we heard throughout rural and regional Victoria. These can be found in summary at page xvii. The Recommendations look at policy development and funding models, access to the law, early intervention, and education and health issues.

- 1.56 Disadvantage and the web of problems associated with it will not be fixed overnight by quick solutions. However, it is the Committee's belief that by accepting the Committee's Recommendations the State Government would take an important step towards ameliorating much of the disadvantage and inequity currently facing communities in rural and regional Victoria.

Chapter Two

The Loddon Mallee Region

Introduction

- 2.1 In many ways the hearings conducted throughout the Loddon Mallee region are representative of those in the rest of State, in particular the fact that education is one of the main determinants of outcomes for both individuals and communities as a whole. In this region the Committee was introduced to a number of programs focusing on the early years. Targeting intervention during this period is seen universally as the best way of effecting change. Programs that we heard about include State Government programs such as Best Start,¹ which aims to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of all Victorian children (from zero to eight years) to ensure that young people are ‘school ready’ – that is, their mental and physical health is such that they are ready to learn.
- 2.2 In towns in the region the Committee heard that schools are not immune to wider social problems, such as declining industries and limited public housing. These affect students, their families and the wider school community and are also factors that have an impact on an individual’s life outcomes. Designing schools as ‘community hubs’ where a number of services are available to the community recognises the potential schools have in involving the whole of the community in efforts to address disadvantage. This is especially the case in the areas of literacy and numeracy as identified by a number of schools and communities in the Loddon Mallee region.

¹ See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/beststart/>>, accessed 26 August 2010.

- 2.3 The lower school completion rates prevalent in the region sparked discussion on young people who are disengaged from education. Many questions arose about how to identify and locate these young people as well as methods which can be implemented to re-engage them. The Committee also heard evidence from witnesses about educational aspirations, how they are formed and the strong suggestion that they are the responsibility of the whole community. Linked with this discussion is the idea of social cohesion. We heard many times that strong communities, with the right amount of support, are better equipped to tackle disadvantage.
- 2.4 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in this Regional Profile include:
- that the cost of tertiary education, and the distance needed to travel to access it, is harming young people's aspirations and expectations surrounding further education;
 - the quality of services, in particular health services, is reduced when these are not locally based;
 - why long-term, flexible funding models work best in rural Victoria;
 - the need for timely and place-specific data around disadvantage;
 - the role of public housing, and amenities in general, in disadvantaged communities;
 - difficulties attracting and retaining skilled staff, including for community legal centres;
 - the financial and social implications of the ongoing drought and a changing rural economy;
 - reasons why central governments should work in partnership with communities when devising responses to disadvantage, potentially under the terms of an agreed 'social contract'; and
 - social problems facing the Indigenous community, including health, education and housing, as well as other cultural groups making a home in the Loddon Mallee region.

Understanding the Region

- 2.5 The Loddon Mallee region is a geographically large area where distance divides the major centres. During its consultations in the region the Committee heard that there are a number of issues that are relevant to the entire region. However the region is not a homogenous one with some areas facing more significant disadvantage than others.
- 2.6 The statistics and information below paint a broad picture of the region. From these we see that there are differences in employment levels, wealth in the region and for example, access to Information and Communications Technology. This information is cited here with the intention of providing a statistical 'snapshot' for the reader.

Table 1: Loddon Mallee Statistics

| | Mildura | Robinvale | Bendigo | Maryborough |
|---|---------|-----------|---------|-------------|
| Unemployment Rate (2008) | 7.7% | 6.3% | 6.2% | 8.9% |
| Average Taxable Income (\$) (2007) | 32,432 | 30,403 | 34,345 | 28,946 |
| Population Density (persons per km²) (2008) | 102.0 | 5.1 | 178.3 | 327.4 |
| Indigenous Population (2006) | 3.2% | 9.5% | 1.2% | 1.0% |
| Access to Internet at Home (2006) | 51.3% | 41.6% | 57.3% | 39.9% |
| Gross Value of Agriculture (\$m) (2006) | 179.5 | 121.1 | 42.3 | 0.4 |

Source: ABS National Regional Profile 2006–2008.² Data chosen was based on Statistical Local Areas.

Indicators of Wellbeing in the Loddon Mallee Region

2.7 Community Indicators Victoria uses a range of factors to measure wellbeing at Local Government Area level.³ This statistical information is more broadly informative, providing a picture of the region beyond the economic indicators illustrated in the table above.⁴ A selection of information is reproduced here to provide a snapshot of the region:

Self-reported Health

2.8 There is a strong link between health and life outcomes. Professor Tony Vinson, who is well known for his work in this area, argues strongly that measuring self-reported health provides an accurate picture of an individual's wellbeing. Professor John Wiseman from the McCaughey Centre,

² See: <<http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/nrpmmaps.nsf/NEW+GmapPages/national+regional+profile?opendocument>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

³ See: <http://www.communityindicators.net.au/lga_profiles>, accessed 15 July 2010.

⁴ Further information can be found at: <<http://www.communityindicators.net.au>>.

responsible for these indicators, stated to the Committee during a previous Inquiry that self-reported health "...aligns pretty closely with a whole range of more objective measures of health".⁵

2.9 Self-reported health was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their health as excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. The percentages of people reporting that their health was either excellent or very good in the regional centres in Loddon Mallee, the overall region and the State average are:

- Mildura: 50.4%
- Swan Hill: 54.2%
- Greater Bendigo: 58.7%
- Central Goldfields: 45.9%⁶
- Loddon Mallee Region: 55.0%
- Victorian State average: 54.3%

Child Health Assessments

2.10 Child Health Assessments are routinely undertaken by the Maternal and Child Health Service in Victoria to monitor child health and development. Ten visits are anticipated according to key ages and stages until a child reaches 3.5 years of age. Data relating to the activities of the Maternal and Child Health Service are collated on a financial year basis by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The rates of participation for children eligible for an assessment at 3.5 years are:

- Mildura: 156.9%
- Swan Hill: 63.3%
- Greater Bendigo: 63.1%
- Central Goldfields: 67.5%
- Loddon Mallee Region: 67.8%
- Victorian State average: 60.1%

2.11 Figures are expressed as a rate per 100 children enrolled in Maternal and Child Health Centres born 3.5 years before visiting. It is possible for the rate to be greater than 100 if visits are not made in the financial year they are due.

⁵ Professor John Wiseman, Director, McCaughey Centre, University of Melbourne, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 4 May 2009.

⁶ In conducting this Inquiry the Committee heard overwhelming evidence linking socioeconomic disadvantage with poor health. In its submission to this Inquiry (Number 21, 24 March 2010) Central Goldfields Shire Council provided evidence that for Victoria '...the Australian Bureau of Statistics advises that Central Goldfields Shire can be classified as the 79th out of 79 municipalities in terms of overall SEIFA [Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas] scores'. Such a result clearly matches the low self-reported health score listed.

Perceptions of Safety

2.12 Perceptions of Safety were measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate how safe they felt when walking alone in their local area during the day and at night. The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the day are:

- Mildura: 94.6%
- Swan Hill: 97.4%
- Greater Bendigo: 97.9%
- Central Goldfields: 98.2%
- Loddon Mallee Region: 97.5%
- Victorian State average: 96.0%

2.13 The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the night are:

- Mildura: 52.1%
- Swan Hill: 73.4%
- Greater Bendigo: 69.8%
- Central Goldfields: 75.2%
- Loddon Mallee Region: 72.2%
- Victorian State average: 66.5%

2.14 Communities who self-identify as being safe places also usually exhibit clear patterns of social cohesion and community strength. This is born out in the following statistics on 'Feeling part of the community', 'Social support' and 'Volunteering', where rural and regional areas generally perform higher than the Victorian State average.

Feeling Part of the Community

2.15 Community Connection was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with feeling part of their community and answers are presented according to a 0–100 range. Normative data from the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index indicates that the average Community Connection score for Australians is approximately 70. Across Loddon Mallee the following scores were recorded. Community Connection is clearly high within the region and confirms the long-held view that living in smaller communities fosters more tightly knit connections amongst members:

- Mildura: 78.0
- Swan Hill: 78.2
- Greater Bendigo: 74.6
- Central Goldfields: 74.5

- Loddon Mallee Region: 76.3
- Victorian State average: 70.7

Social Support

2.16 Social Support was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked if they could get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it, either definitely, sometimes or not at all. The percentages of people reporting they could definitely get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it are:

- Mildura: 91.7%
- Swan Hill: 93.8%
- Greater Bendigo: 93.4%
- Central Goldfields: 90.6%
- Loddon Mallee Region: 92.4%
- Victorian State average: 91.7%

2.17 Again statistics are for the most part higher than average across rural and regional Victoria and demonstrate that inherent aspects of community life in regional Victoria provide community and lifestyle benefits.

Volunteering

2.18 Volunteering was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked whether or not they helped out as a volunteer. The percentages of people reporting that they helped out as a volunteer are:

- Mildura: 44.7%
- Swan Hill: 47.9%
- Greater Bendigo: 31.9%
- Central Goldfields: 44.8%
- Loddon Mallee Region: 50.8%
- Victorian State average: 40.8%

2.19 Reliance on volunteering in rural and regional communities emerged throughout the Committee's *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria*. In many cases community members hold a number of honorary positions in community groups. This contributes to community life, a sense of belonging and social cohesion. However, it also puts pressure on individuals on whose enormous and time consuming contribution community-based programs are often dependent. The Committee also heard concern expressed in many areas

that as demographics change it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract people to volunteering.

Highly Skilled Workforce

2.20 There is a symbiotic relationship between a highly skilled workforce and an area's ability to support a dynamic and broad-based economy. 'Highly skilled' has been defined as occupations with ANZSCO⁷ Skill Levels 1–3. The data has been collated from customised Census tables obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The percentages of employed people working in highly skilled occupations are:

- Mildura: 52.7%
- Swan Hill: 55.0%
- Greater Bendigo: 52.8%
- Central Goldfields: 53.4%
- Loddon Mallee Region: 54.4%
- Victorian State average: 56.3%

Educational Qualifications

2.21 As can be seen throughout this Report, education is a key to tackling disadvantage. The percentages of people aged 25 years and over who had Tertiary or TAFE qualifications calculated from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census are:

- Mildura: 37.0%
- Swan Hill: 35.1%
- Greater Bendigo: 47.2%
- Central Goldfields: 35.9%
- Loddon Mallee Region: 43.1%
- Victorian State average: 50.7%

Combating Hardship in the Loddon Mallee Region

Consideration of most socio-economic indicators highlights a disparity between rural and regional Victorians and their metropolitan counterparts. Rural and regional Victorians generally earn less, have lower levels of educational attainment and do not live as long. This is particularly the case in the Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray River Group of Councils where they achieve

⁷ An ABS classification: Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

below the average for regional Victoria on many counts. Moreover, these averages hide some areas of acute disadvantage, which suffer combinations of generational poverty, young children at risk, poor health and domestic violence.⁸

Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils.

- 2.22 The overview of disadvantage in the Loddon Mallee region in the quotation above was presented to the Committee in a joint submission by the Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray River Group of Councils.
- 2.23 This straightforward assessment from the Loddon Campaspe Councils and Murray River Councils is both compelling and confronting. It highlights very starkly what socio-economic indicators show, which is that:
- regional Victorians generally earn less;
 - regional Victorians have lower levels of educational attainment; and
 - regional Victorians do not live as long.⁹
- 2.24 Furthermore the Councils point out that their particular region, which includes towns as diverse as Mildura, Swan Hill, Bendigo, Echuca and Yarrawonga, sit below the regional Victorian average for these indicators. And also that figures based on averages hide areas of acute disadvantage.
- 2.25 This is an unacceptable situation and one that policy makers must consider in planning and advocating for regional Victoria. Governments of all persuasions have long been grappling with what can be done to turn these statistics around, and to ensure that programs are effective in achieving long-term change.
- 2.26 During the Committee's Hearings in the Loddon Mallee region, and indeed throughout regional Victoria, many suggestions were made and advice provided about how to combat hardship and disadvantage at a local level. These are explored in this chapter in relation to the Loddon Mallee region.

Education

- 2.27 To begin to tackle some of these issues, and improve life outcomes for rural and regional Victorians, the Committee heard overwhelming evidence that education is the key. Ms Margaret Kent, a passionate advocate for her region and for those facing disadvantage represents the views of witnesses that came before the Committee throughout regional Victoria – and as she points out, experts throughout the world – in saying that:

⁸ Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils, *Submission*, Number 31, 31 March 2010.

⁹ ABS, *2006 Census of Population and Housing*, Commonwealth of Australia 2006; ABS, *National regional profiles*, accessed 19 March 2010, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005; DHS, *Life expectancy at birth Victoria 1997 – 2001*, <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/le-97-01.htm#summary>>; accessed 19 March 2010.

I really firmly believe what the World Health Organisation says, and that is that education is the single biggest protective factor against poverty, and I believe that we have to do everything in our power to get those kids to school so we can educate them and they can break the cycle of poverty themselves and take control over their own lives.¹⁰

- 2.28 The Committee was also told that education is not just important for an individual, but for communities as a whole. Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council expressed the view that education is the “common denominator” of strong communities and although it is not necessary for everyone to obtain a university degree, a high level of education is a prerequisite for societies that wish to avoid being plagued by a high level of disadvantage.¹¹

The Early Years

- 2.29 Moreover, the evidence presented to this Inquiry in hearings in the Loddon Mallee region overwhelmingly supports the idea that early intervention in education provides the best outcomes for young people. In Robinvale, for example, an Early Years Network has been developed with the support of the State Government, taking an holistic approach to early intervention that links disadvantaged families with wider community services via a dedicated early years management unit.¹²
- 2.30 While in Mildura, Ms Fiona Harley, Deputy Executive Director at Mallee Family Care, agreed that education is the common factor when it comes to improving life outcomes and outlined how working closely with Professor Tony Vinson had led to Mallee Family Care deciding to focus on the first five years of life when, it was said, brain development is at its most active.¹³
- 2.31 Mr Kenneth Carr, a volunteer worker at Mallee Family Care, outlined the success that organisation is achieving with its Chances for Children program, saying that:

...children who are ‘school-ready’ after being appropriately engaged in learning from early years onwards develop lifelong dispositions to learn, which translate into success in later life; and evidence from longitudinal studies showed clear benefits in terms of academic achievement, school retention, employment outcomes and skills

¹⁰ Ms Margaret Kent, Place Manager, Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

¹¹ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹² Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹³ Ms Fiona Harley, Deputy Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

acquisition after school ends. These results also include lower rates of poverty, crime, ill-health, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy.¹⁴

- 2.32 Mallee Family Care Executive Director Vernon Knight reinforced Mr Carr's ideas around the importance of children needing to be ready for learning when they begin school.
- 2.33 A number of witness in Mildura, including Mr Hawson¹⁵ and Mr Carr,¹⁶ raised concerns about the high rate of mental health problems in Mildura, as well as high rates of child maltreatment reports. Cr Knight suggested that "...if we have got families growing up experiencing poor parenting, then ultimately their children are going to become inadequate parents, so that is the cycle we have to break".¹⁷ These observations are backed up by statistics showing that the Greater Red Cliffs area of Mildura has rates of psychiatric hospital admission more than three times that of Melbourne and cases of child maltreatment in the whole Mildura region are also three times as high as those found in Melbourne.¹⁸

Chances for Children

Chances for Children arose out of an informal meeting at a regular lunch gathering of friends.

At this Inquiry's public hearing in Mildura, Ross Lake, a highly respected entrepreneur and community leader recounted how Chances for Children was formed:

It was one of those Friday lunches which I am sure all of us have attended. A young girl served us, and of course we are all blokes, and she was a pretty young girl, so we thought we would be cheeky and ask her what she was up to. She told us she was waitressing because she was from a single-parent family and could not afford to go on to university. We asked her what VCE score she got, and she told us she had got 98 per cent.

I guess the bottom line was that there was only one reason why this kid was not going off to university and that was because she could not afford to. That was the beginning of Chances for Children. That year we put five kids into university, and remarkably, all of that batch completed their courses. These days, 80 children are supported by that particular program.¹⁹

¹⁴ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁵ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁶ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁷ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁸ Mildura Rural City Council, *Mildura Social Indicators Report 2008*, Mildura Rural City Council, Mildura 2008.

¹⁹ Mr Ross Lake, Chair, Audit Committee, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

The aim of Chances for Children is to address economic and social disadvantage in the Mallee by working to remove obstacles which inhibit the achievements of young people in the region.²⁰ Chances for Children is committed to ensuring that young people in the Mallee have the opportunity to reach their potential irrespective of their financial and social circumstances and has a firm belief that in turn, this will lead to strengthening regional community capacity.²¹

The Chances for Children program is based on a self-help model of community building and has relevance for many regions in Australia.²² The program consists of two discrete components, financial assistance and a mentoring program. Since its commencement in 2000 approximately \$2 million has been raised and distributed to 430 young people and their families throughout the Mallee, enabling young people to achieve goals in cultural, social or educational pursuits which otherwise would not have been within their reach.²³

Grants of financial assistance are provided to support a broad range of needs such as: offers of tertiary education to students facing financial restraints; help for young people with disabilities unable to participate in full-time education because of a shortfall in funding; assisting young people with artistic, sporting or other talents to develop their skills; and helping young people take up apprenticeship offers.²⁴

Mr Lake believes that Chances for Children is an excellent example of how money can break through the disadvantages that rural and regional young people can face in achieving their educational goals.²⁵

Early Years Network

The Early Years Network demonstrates how the Robinvale community is addressing hardship and disadvantage.²⁶ The Early Years Network brings together everyone in the community who works or is interested in early childhood education.²⁷ As part of the Early Years Network a Family Centre has been established providing services for children aged 0–5 years and their families in one location.²⁸

Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Robinvale District Health Services told the Committee that "...early years programs are typically disaggregated across a

²⁰ See: <<http://www.chancesforchildren.com.au/about.htm>>, accessed July 2010.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mr Ross Lake, Chair, Audit Committee, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

²⁶ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, Speaking notes from *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²⁷ Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing* Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²⁸ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, Speaking notes from *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

number of departments and a number of different service agencies”.²⁹ In Robinvale, however, via the So Great program (see below) “...the initiative was taken to start pulling all of those different agencies and different government representatives together into one forum to talk about whole-of-community early years issues”.³⁰

At the public hearing in Robinvale, Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council explained that in the past Robinvale has had a Best Start Partnership Group, so rather than recreate another committee:

...the partnership which was representative of all early years service providers in Robinvale was used to identify the key issues for early years in Robinvale. From there a strategic plan was established and the major project identified in this plan was the development of a family centre.³¹

Ms Beauliv described school readiness and a lack of childcare as major issues for Robinvale. The Family Centre focuses on these local needs while raising ‘...awareness of the services available to the multicultural families who are one of the most disadvantaged in our community’.³²

The creation of the Early Years Network has also boosted employment in Robinvale: “It has been an opportunity to upskill local people in the early years field where no opportunity existed before.”³³

So Great

So Great (Sustainability of Government and Rural Enterprises Advancing Together) aims to ensure that Commonwealth, State and local government agencies delivering services in the Loddon Mallee region work together to develop a more integrated and effective system of service delivery for the Robinvale community.³⁴

In partnership with all levels of Government, So Great has worked on five broad strategic objectives over the last four years. These objectives are:

1. Youth, children and family.
2. Housing.
3. Safety and environment.
4. Education and training.

²⁹ Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Robinvale District Health Services, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, Speaking notes from *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing* Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

³⁴ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, Speaking notes from *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

5. Community leadership, governance, partnership and identity.³⁵

In 2006, Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council began working with both the Swan Hill Rural City Council and the Loddon Mallee Regional Management Forum to develop what she described as a "...unique project for Robinvale to look at the whole of government service delivery in the community".³⁶

By using a whole of government approach, So Great has been able to implement creative, innovative, effective solutions, to improve government service delivery in Robinvale.³⁷ However, Ms Beauliv feels there is still some way to go:

[So Great] has pulled everyone together at the local level to develop a cohesive community that are planning together on how to tackle the issues, but now what is needed is the support of all levels of government to put these solutions into practice.³⁸

So Great has been credited with building an alliance of trust in the Robinvale region, where information, planning and discussion has resulted in the sharing of resources, skills, facilities and knowledge.³⁹

Regional Management Forums were established in 2006 to facilitate collaboration between Victorian Government departments and local government. They bring together the chief executive officers of local government councils and senior representatives from State Government departments. The Forums were established under the Victorian Government's social action plan *A Fairer Victoria*,⁴⁰ which included two other initiatives:

- aligning departmental boundaries based on the eight existing regions of the Department of Human Services; and
- establishing cross-government Community Project Teams.⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale 3 March 2010.

³⁷ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, Speaking notes from *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Carr T, Chief Executive, Victorian Healthcare Association, *Submission*, Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission Inquiry into the Sharing of Government and Community Facilities, 30 January 2009.

⁴⁰ Victorian Government, *A Fairer Victoria*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne 2005.

⁴¹ State Services Authority, *Review of Regional Management Forums, Final Report*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2007.

Promote a School Ready Culture

- 2.34 Cr Knight added that an important problem facing the Mildura community in ensuring that young students are 'school-ready' is literacy. Literacy issues affect parents as well as children. As a response, Mallee Family Care runs a reading program for preschool children that also involves parents:

We use volunteers who simply engage with families where they can go in with a new collection of books and sit down and read to children — just read and play and draw and create. But you know who is glued to the story the most, don't you? It is mum; she probably cannot read. So it is no surprise that we are getting kids turning up in our school system who simply do not have anything in the tool kit.⁴²

- 2.35 Cr Knight, a long-time advocate for Mildura and an expert on program development for disadvantaged communities puts education front and centre in his approach to tackling disadvantage. Educational outcomes are, as he infers above, "...one thing that I would change if I could change anything". What effective programs must do, according to Cr Knight is to ensure that young people are prepared for school with the right tools in their 'kitbag' – these are an appreciation of literacy; and a readiness for learning.

- 2.36 Ms Margaret Kent, Place Manager, Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal would include a full stomach as another tool in the 'kitbag'. Being 'school-ready' also implies being fed, but in Maryborough, Ms Kent, revealed that such an assumption cannot always be made and education providers may need to begin feeding children before they can teach them:

In our LGA 12.5 per cent of families ran out of food in the past 12 months, and couldn't afford to buy more. That compares with 5.6 across other rural areas in the state, and that also affects school attendance and access to education, because many children who haven't had breakfast, their families don't send them to school.

We set up a breakfast program at the Maryborough Education Centre, but that's drawn very heavily on welfare funds that could have been used elsewhere. It's a real issue for us.⁴³

- 2.37 Both low levels of literacy and numeracy were identified as problems at the Maryborough Education Centre. Principal Barney Healey said that the school has a Student Family Occupation (SFO) score of around .68, meaning that nearly seven out of every ten families in the school community are considered to be disadvantaged in some way:

Part of the issue around that is that the children lack role models. They come from quite a deprived background. One of the indicators

⁴² Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁴³ Ms Margaret Kent, Place Manager, Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

is their oral language. Students from a poor background may, in fact, have a third of the vocabulary of age-appropriate when they are entering school, and that's clearly going to impact on things like their literacy and numeracy in their early years of schooling. **So, a lot of our kids start very low, and the challenge really for us is to accelerate them.**⁴⁴

- 2.38 Mr Barney Healey, school Principal at Maryborough, believes that "...we have a lot of kids who want to be at the school, but they are in such a state, that they are not necessarily going to be in a position to do a lot of learning when they get there".⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Mr Healey informed the Committee that the Maryborough Education Centre's VCAL completion rates have been above the state mean for the past two years, thanks to the hard work and dedication of the students and staff.⁴⁶
- 2.39 Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director of the Loddon Mallee Region of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, informed the Committee that an SFO of .64 is a 'trigger point' at which increased funding is put into a school. Mr Lake said that along with the Maryborough Education Centre, 30 other schools in the region are currently receiving this funding, focused mainly around Robinvale, parts of Mildura and parts of Bendigo.⁴⁷
- 2.40 Similarly, at the Robinvale P-12 College its Principal, Mr Robert Biggs, told the Committee that the lack of a reading culture among the children's parents means that the children are beginning their school experience with a severe disadvantage around literacy and numeracy. Mr Biggs said that the school is appointing extra literacy and numeracy coaches to assist the hard-working teachers tackling this problem but that more experienced teachers will be needed to achieve optimum outcomes for students at the College.⁴⁸
- 2.41 Mr Chris Meddows-Taylor, Mayor of the Central Goldfields Shire, pointed out that the State Government's Best Start program was working well, adding the warning that "...if we don't get the early years right, we will not get anything right".⁴⁹
- 2.42 The Committee did in fact hear from Ms Robyn Mawdsley from the Central Goldfields Best Start program,⁵⁰ who agreed that the Best Start program was seeing a degree of success in the area. Ms Mawdsley believed that the work of the program is very much needed, listing a number of problems children in the Maryborough region bring with them to preschool and

⁴⁴ Mr Barney Healey, Principal, Maryborough Education Centre, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁴⁸ Mr Robert Biggs, Principal, Robinvale P-12 College, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

⁴⁹ Mr Chris Meddows-Taylor, Mayor, Central Goldfields Shire, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

⁵⁰ A Best Start case study is included in the Victorian Government's submission to this Inquiry. See: <<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc/article/895>>.

primary school – including bad diets, poor oral health, physical and learning disabilities, and lack of toilet training – problems which she believes can be directly traced back to the social issues that developed as a result of the recent decline of local industry,⁵¹ an argument also presented in the Central Goldfields Shire Council's submission to this Inquiry.⁵² In 2008, the unemployment rate for the Central Goldfields LGA was almost twice the State average, at 8.6 per cent.⁵³ (For further discussion see 'The Evolution of Industry' below at paragraph 2.113.)

Recommendation 25

That the State Government fund early intervention and wellbeing support programs.

- 2.43 Similarly in Robinvale, Mr Gary Letts of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative described clearly how overcrowding in houses impacts on how prepared a child is to learn at school, such that:

...if a child is living in a house and there are three different family groups in that one house, that child, firstly, has to compete for a bed to sleep for that night and a meal, without even trying to look at adapting themselves to educational competitiveness at school. This multiplies down to the actual units of children going to school. They get so inbound with home issues that it is difficult to relate to what they are actually going to school for.⁵⁴

- 2.44 Ms Mawdsley also expressed concern over the recent changes to the four-year-old kindergarten provision, saying that while the extra hours and improved ratios are a positive step, there are concerns over attracting enough qualified staff and the threat these changes pose to three-year-old kindergarten resources.⁵⁵

- 2.45 This concern was also heard by the Committee in Bendigo⁵⁶ and in Mildura, where Ms Lisa Barham-Lomax, Manager Community Care, Mildura Rural City Council was worried that a loss of three-year-old kindergarten services would threaten the efficacy of early intervention work, especially among the most disadvantaged members of the community:

⁵¹ Ms Robyn Mawdsley, Central Goldfields Best Start Program, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

⁵² Central Goldfields Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 21, 24 March 2010.

⁵³ See: <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/LGA21670Economy12004-2008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=LGA21670&issue=2004-2008>>, accessed 04 June 2010.

⁵⁴ Mr Gary Letts, Chief Executive Officer, Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

⁵⁵ Ms Robyn Mawdsley, Central Goldfields Best Start Program, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

⁵⁶ Mr John McLinden, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

We know for three-year-old kindergarten that the issue around losing three-year-old places is that some of the children in child protection and Indigenous children are offered free kindergarten at the three-year-old level.

When we lose some of those places we might potentially lose the engagement in the early education system for those children. That is why three-year-olds are a big concern for us.⁵⁷

- 2.46 The changes to kindergarten provision referred to here and in other chapters of the Committee's Report are a part of the Early Childhood Education National Partnership, which introduces universal access to kindergarten for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks per year, in the year before school. Information on the Early Childhood Education National Partnership is available on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website.⁵⁸
- 2.47 The Committee agrees with the many witnesses it heard from that although the changes to four-year-old kindergarten are welcome, extra funding must be provided wherever it is needed to ensure that no three-year-old kindergarten places are lost anywhere in rural and regional Victoria. It is the Committee's opinion that the State Government should advocate to the Federal Government to provide this funding.

Recommendation 26

That the State Government lobby the Federal Government to ensure that no three-year-old kindergarten services in rural and regional Victoria are reduced as an unintended consequence of changes in legislation intended to ensure that all four-year-olds receive 15 hours of kindergarten per week.

- 2.48 Ms Gayle Farnsworth expanded on the role of education in combating disadvantage. She contributed the idea that poor education outcomes in a town can have an impact on the whole community, by shrinking the pool of educated people towns need to draw on to fill positions such as child care roles.⁵⁹ This idea was also espoused by Associate Professor Amanda Kenny, around healthcare workforce issues in general, at the Committee's hearing in Bendigo.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ms Lisa Barham-Lomax, Manager Community Care, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁵⁸ See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/nationalpartnerships/ecdevelopment.htm>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

⁵⁹ Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

⁶⁰ Associate Professor Amanda Kenny, Director La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

Completing School

- 2.49 At the other end of the educational timeline, the Committee was presented with evidence about the poor completion rates of young people in the Loddon Mallee region. As seen earlier in the Chapter, in 2006 the Victorian average of the percentage of people aged 25 years and over who had Tertiary or TAFE qualifications was 50.7 per cent. Across the Loddon Mallee region the percentage falls to 43.1 per cent.
- 2.50 Ken Carr, from Mallee Family Care, and a well respected community leader in Mildura, believes that this low level of completion rates is the main reason for the low income levels found in the region.⁶¹ Indeed, it was Mr Carr's comments on this subject to the Committee at a Public Hearing during a previous Inquiry that inspired the need for the Committee's current Inquiry into Disadvantage, the subject of this Report.⁶²
- 2.51 One of the discussion points around poor completion rates at school surrounds how to address young people who become disengaged from schooling. As Mr Paul Bird, State Director of Mission Australia said: "...engaging young people who are at school or at risk of leaving school is very, very difficult. Despite the challenges involved in engaging students a number of terrific programs exist in regional Victoria that are doing just that."⁶³
- 2.52 Ms Barbara Wilson, Principal of Two Rivers College in Mildura aimed at Koori students (see below at para 2.135), told the Committee that Years 7 to 10 are significant and challenging 'transition points' for students where efforts need to be focused to keep young Indigenous students engaged.⁶⁴ During those years students are at a higher risk of exhibiting bad behaviour and becoming disengaged, but with particular care paid to assisting students to manage those years renewed engagement with schooling is possible. See Recommendation 12.
- 2.53 Among the wider Mildura youth community, Mr Hawson estimated the number of disengaged young people who could potentially be in schooling to be around the 450 mark.⁶⁵ However, as Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer of the Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network identified, putting an exact figure on the problem is very difficult, because young people who are not in school "...do not say, 'Hi, I am disengaged. Count me'".⁶⁶
- 2.54 Ron Lake discussed the challenges involved in keeping track of young people in a community who have disengaged from formal learning or

⁶¹ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁶² Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 18 March 2009.

⁶³ Mr Paul Bird, State Director, Mission Australia, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

⁶⁴ Ms Barbara Wilson, Principal, Two Rivers College, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁶⁵ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁶⁶ Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

employment networks. Mr Lake confirmed that the only way in which disengaged students can be tracked once they have left school is "...if another agency picks them up and refers them back to us and tries to get them back into school. But we wouldn't be good at doing that ...".⁶⁷

- 2.55 Mr Broadhead supported Ms Wilson's comments in stating that communities need to focus strongly on ensuring young people don't become disengaged in the first place, while also offering support for the Federal Government's Youth Connections program aimed at re-engaging young people who have lost touch with mainstream education.⁶⁸
- 2.56 The difficulties involved in determining an exact number of disengaged students in a region was acknowledged in a number of areas during the Committee's Inquiry. Notwithstanding those difficulties Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer of St Luke's Anglicare and a respected advocate for young people facing disadvantage in the region offered the Committee a suggestion for targeting disengaged young people. Mr Pugh suggested to the Committee that given funding is not released to schools if young people are not enrolled at a school on Census Day, that funding should in fact be allocated to programs aimed at linking these young people with some sort of education or training.⁶⁹ The Committee has addressed this in Key Recommendation 5.b.
- 2.57 This concept is also supported in Mission Australia's submission to this Inquiry, in which it states that the State Government should introduce '...arrangements to allow student funding to be linked to the student regardless of whether they are pursuing school-based learning or accessing alternative learning pathways'.⁷⁰
- 2.58 The Committee also heard from Ms Julie Connell, a Team Facilitator at Bendigo's NETschool. Ms Connell spoke of the school's high success rate targeting young people who have become disengaged from mainstream education, with the success explained by a number of factors, including:
- small teacher–student ratios (around one–ten);
 - a commitment to engaging with young mothers; and
 - working closely with local service providers.⁷¹
- 2.59 NETSchool was funded initially by the State Government's Leading Schools Fund, but has now been 'mainstreamed', with students funded at a funding rate of 1.25 Student Resource Package (SRP). This still leaves a shortfall, however, made up by Bendigo Senior Secondary College on which

⁶⁷ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁶⁸ Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁶⁹ Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer, St Luke's Anglicare, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

⁷⁰ Mission Australia, *Submission*, Number 44, 31 March 2010.

⁷¹ Ms Julie Connell, Team Facilitator, NETschool, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

NETschool is annexed.⁷² Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, confirmed that he would like to see the funding rate raised to 1.4 SRP.⁷³ ('SRP' is a term referring to the way in which Victorian school students are funded; ie a student in a mainstream school is funded at the rate of 1 SRP.)

- 2.60 Drawing on the benefit of many years of experience in rural and regional education, Mr Lake added that it is preferable for governments to spend a larger amount of money on a focused target, rather than spread money around thinly in small amounts. He argued that focused spending, combined with a philosophy of keeping disengaged students physically in touch with mainstream education is much more likely to achieve positive outcomes. He explained his approach:

The NETschool is a very good model. But, **in fact, we should try and have more alternative programs embedded in schools**, so they are still there with the social group, and if you put 20 kids together, there's a lot of reinforcement in their social behaviour. And we also know they need differentiated curriculum, preferably a mainstream setting.⁷⁴

- 2.61 Ms Connell confirmed that once young people have regained their confidence and been helped through any problems they may have had with mainstream education it is possible to "...reconnect them back to the learning and to work...".⁷⁵

NETschool Bendigo

NETschool Bendigo works with young people between aged 15–20 years who are experiencing difficulties with mainstream schooling but who have a desire to continue learning.⁷⁶ NETschool works with students to determine what they wish to study. With the support of a mentor, goals are set and achievable steps are taken to move forward.⁷⁷ NETschool Bendigo is an annex of Bendigo Senior Secondary College. It resides off-site and currently rents rooms from the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE.⁷⁸ NETschool relies heavily on welfare support, community agencies, St Luke's Anglicare and Bendigo Community Health. Students are funded at a rate of 1.25 SRP, however the Committee heard evidence that this rate should

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ms Julie Connell, Team Facilitator, NETschool, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

⁷⁶ See: <<http://www.netschoolbendigo.vic.edu.au/index.shtml>>, accessed July 2010.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ms Julie Connell, Team Facilitator, NETschool Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

be increased to 1.4 SRP.⁷⁹ The school has built a very strong relationship with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development district staff.⁸⁰

Students must apply to get into NETschool and learners are chosen by staff based on who will have the best chance of success in the program.⁸¹ There are two programs which students can choose from: a home-based program catering for young mothers; and a centre-based program with a mentor–learner ratio of around 1–10.⁸²

With an option for students to complete Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, Vocational Education and Training, and Victorian Certificate of Education studies through Bendigo Senior Secondary College, NETschool learners can learn through focussing on their own interests or plan work around ‘real world’ projects and research-based learning. Running much like a business, NETschool gives each learner their own workstation and assists students to overcome social and literacy barriers by offering work experience on a daily basis.⁸³ Ms Julie Connell, NETschool Bendigo’s Team Facilitator, believes that this personal interaction with the community makes learners feel like a part of the community and in turn become accepted by the community: **“They have to behave and act appropriately as a team and go and get a real job done.”**⁸⁴

Ms Connell informed the Committee that the essential ingredient of NETschool Bendigo is the development of a close, trusting relationship between a young person and their mentor. A strong sense of personal change is ingrained into the program so that the students learn to trust, build social skills, and recognise and manage their mental health and behavioural issues. NETschool aims to build individual confidence, self-belief and a desire to succeed.⁸⁵

Doxa School Bendigo

Formed in 1972, the Doxa Youth Foundation is a philanthropic organisation originally established by the Marist Brothers. First introduced in West Melbourne in 2000, Doxa School students enrol in an 18-month program, combining a six-month intensive education program with a year of mentor assistance when students return to their regular school.⁸⁶ During the first six months students have a chance to learn at their own pace in a supportive environment.⁸⁷

Established in 2006, Doxa School Bendigo provides an alternative time-limited education program for 11–14 year olds who face various forms of disadvantage that

⁷⁹ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁸⁰ Ms Julie Connell, Team Facilitator, NETschool Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See: <<http://www.doxa.org.au/feature.php?pageID=15>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

make staying at school challenging for them.⁸⁸ All Doxa students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The students face poverty, disrupted housing, poor health, educational gaps and lack of educational opportunities, oppositional behaviours, and social dislocation.⁸⁹

Criteria for acceptance into the program include:

- the prime carer of the student must agree to the student's enrolment and be willing to actively support the programs of the school;
- the student must be willing to attend the school and also demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the school;
- the student must be prepared to attempt the required changes necessary for successful re-integration into mainstream education;
- the referring school must be committed to the support of the student both during and after enrolment at Doxa; and
- the behaviours of the student must be able to be addressed through the expertise of the current staff.⁹⁰

The Doxa School day is divided into two parts. During the first half students concentrate on progressive-based learning focusing on literacy, numeracy and the world around them. Students are asked to identify their areas of interest and Doxa tailors school work to suit them.⁹¹ The second half of the day is dedicated to activities designed to build and enhance the students' social skills and self-esteem.⁹²

Doxa also supports Victorian Certificate of Education students by assisting talented young people from socially and financially disadvantaged backgrounds who have demonstrated leadership qualities and academic capability during Year 12 and aspire to complete tertiary education.⁹³ The Doxa Cadetship Program provides students with an annual book allowance, a relationship with a corporate partner organisation relevant to their degree, eight weeks' work experience per year and a workplace mentor.⁹⁴

Community Learning

2.62 In discussing both mainstream and alternative models aimed at keeping young people engaged with education the particular influence that a background of generational disadvantage has on education often emerges as an issue. For example, there are many difficulties involved in engaging

⁸⁸ Murphy B and McLean S, *Doxa School West Melbourne: Outcomes for students 2000–2006*, Australian Youth Research Centre and The University of Melbourne.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ See: <<http://www.doxa.org.au/feature.php?pageID=15>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

children of parents who have themselves had an overwhelmingly poor experience of education. In this context the Committee heard about inspiring programs in rural and regional Victoria that are achieving success through engaging parents in learning at the same time as their offspring. In some cases this occurs in facilities specifically designed as learning ‘hubs’.

- 2.63 Mallee Family Care’s preschool reading program discussed earlier is one such program. Another successful program is that organisation’s Total Learning Centre. Set up in partnership with Mildura Primary School, the Total Learning Centre was envisioned as a place where parents could accompany their children to school, picking up some valuable skills themselves that they could then use to improve their own life situations. In the extract below Ms Fiona Harley from Mallee Family Care describes how the program emerged as a response to the needs of the community and how its success is in part due to the fact that it involved the community directly in the design of the program:

Our thought was that if we could start to get those families through that school gate when their kids are still little, the families are going to become engaged with that school and perhaps, become a part of the school community and not just arrive on the first day of prep with a child who has had no playgroup or kindergarten experience. That was what we went about doing.

We were a bit concerned that we might have trouble getting people through the school gate, I have to tell you, but we have not. We have managed to engage very well with all different parts of the community but particularly the Mildura East community. We did not go with any set ideas about what we were going to be providing. We did not go along and say, ‘Come along and we will do this, this and this’.

What we said was, ‘What would you like to see? What would you be interested in finding out more about?’ People said they would like a playgroup, they would like somewhere that they could drop in, have a cuppa and hear some information about a particular thing. We then had families who thought they would be interested in some basic computer skills so we partnered with MADEC.

They came down and brought laptop computers and 12 parents have now done Certificate I in the information technology course. They came to the centre to do that. Those people would drop their kids off at school — they might have another little one who might be involved in a playgroup — and they would do their part of Certificate I in IT. Those people have now gone on to do Certificate II and we hope that in time they may gain employment in the community.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Ms Fiona Harley, Deputy Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

2.64 This informal community-based model has led to the establishment of a Centre which has provided formal learning opportunities for parents of schoolchildren.

Total Learning Centre, Mildura East

The Total Learning Centre is a collaboration between Mallee Family Care, the Aboriginal Cooperative and Mildura Primary School, where it is based.⁹⁶ The goals of the Total Learning Centre are to enhance the early education experience of both young children and their parents. This positive engagement with education, it is hoped, will lead to good life outcomes for families in the community.⁹⁷ The Centre runs playgroups, contact groups to engage with mums before their children reach school age and courses where parents can pursue their own learning interests.

Ms Fiona Harley, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Community Development at Mallee Family Care believes that a Centre that addresses the needs of pre-school children will achieve better life outcomes for those it works with.⁹⁸ **Up to 60 per cent of children enrolled in prep at Mildura Primary School had language deficiencies to the level of a two-year-old.** Ms Harley informed the Committee:

These kids are not school-ready. They do not have language skills, they do not have play skills and school is not going to be a positive engagement or a positive environment for them.⁹⁹

The Total Learning Centre aims to engage with families and with children in the learning and education process through a partnership model. The Centre has also established 'Munchers and Movers', which is run in partnership with Sunraysia Community Health. This group focuses on movement and nutritious eating:

Through play we are having kids taste different foods. You will do colours, you will do textures, you will do all those sorts of things but also do some exercise as well, and their families engage with that. They might have lunch one day, and the families help in preparing a nutritious lunch for their kids.¹⁰⁰

Another successful Total Learning Centre initiative is the Reading Discovery Program providing in-home support for the development of early literacy and imaginative play. The Centre connects the support program recipients with the playgroup.¹⁰¹ The majority of funding for the Total Learning Centre is sourced from a private trust,

⁹⁶ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁹⁷ Ms Fiona Harley, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Community Development, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

the Alfred Felton Bequest, via Mallee Family Care. In 2010, the Centre also received funding from the Department of Justice.¹⁰²

- 2.65 St Luke’s Anglicare’s Early Years Program was initiated to assist young single mothers with child protection issues. The program at St Luke’s took a similar approach to that of Mallee Family Care in developing a partnership with the local TAFE college. The college conducts a Certificate II in childcare for these mothers in Bendigo and Maryborough. Young mothers, with no previous interest in parenting programs, are now working closely with childcare experts. Furthermore, they are also developing study skills, completing other TAFE courses and running their own playgroups, a result Mr Pugh described to the Committee as “quite phenomenal”.¹⁰³
- 2.66 The theory of involving a whole family in the child’s education was one supported by Ron Broadhead, an education expert. He said that it is important for these programs to connect with disadvantaged families who may be facing a number of difficult issues that leave little space to focus on their child’s education:
- ...the education of their son or daughter falls down to about 10, 11 or 12 on their priority list because there are so many difficult issues. Those types of things need to be given a good chance to work, because I believe that is the next part of the link in working with the families these children come from and working with school communities to have pathways back.
- I know there is a lot of work happening in the schools about changing the culture of how they do that. That is the right direction in which to go.¹⁰⁴
- 2.67 Robyn Mawdsley, who works in Maryborough, outlined a potential obstacle to this approach – the fact that some parents who have bad experiences themselves at school may be “...frightened about setting foot in the place, and would just rather leave the education to you, that’s your job...”.¹⁰⁵
- 2.68 However, designing schools as the central hub of a community, a place that offers more than only education, is an important step in overcoming such an obstacle. Expanding on the origins of the Total Learning Centre, Mr Carr said the aim was to “...create an environment within the school grounds where families could come to socialise, learn new skills and have their

¹⁰² Ms Fiona Harley, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Community Development, Mallee Family Care, *Personal Correspondence*, 7 September 2010.

¹⁰³ Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer, St Luke’s Anglicare, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Ms Robyn Mawdsley, Central Goldfields Best Start Program, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

children engage in early learning opportunities. They could also gain confidence in being in the school environment.”¹⁰⁶

- 2.69 Concerning ways in which to approach disengaged students, and referring to the possibility of schools being one physical location housing many service providers, Mr Hawson followed a similar line of reasoning:

One of the things that has happened in recent times — I do not know how recent it is; it is recent knowledge to us — is the shift with education in regard to making schools the centre as opposed to supporting alternative education settings; saying to schools, ‘You are now responsible for the broader community’. **Whether it is socially disadvantaged or not, the school needs to be the centre because it has the resources**, but at the same time we need to look at changing the suite of options that a school can offer because that mainstream school is not necessarily going to provide a solution to these disengaged kids.¹⁰⁷

- 2.70 According to Mr Ron Lake, schools are already well-placed to act as a community hub because “...in these towns, the school is very much part of the community. You can see when we have any tragedies the school often is the leader in the re-building of social wellbeing. You can see that from Cardross right through to Robinvale...”.¹⁰⁸ See Recommendation 20.

Raising Aspirations

- 2.71 ‘Aspiration’ is a term that the Committee heard time and again in conducting this Inquiry. It is a widely held belief amongst education experts and practitioners that areas do well when there is an expectation that young people will achieve their full potential. An example provided to the Committee in Mildura by Cr Knight concerned the town of Ouyen:

That is, as you would know, the area 100 kilometres south of here, and the logic would suggest this does not make sense. How does a community that is even more isolated than Mildura, probably less able to attract teaching staff, less subject choices et cetera, produce students that are achieving so high, and I do not just mean a few standout students; I am talking about the averages across that community?...

I visited those communities...to try and get a handle on what was happening in Ouyen that was not happening elsewhere, and I did it as respectfully as I could. I said, ‘You must be very proud of your

¹⁰⁶ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

kids. Your community is achieving wonderful things educationally, but you have to tell me how you are doing it', and it was not until afterwards that an older woman came up to me quietly and she said, 'Vernon, you need to understand that these communities were built by nurses and kindergarten teachers who came to the Mallee and married farmers. They actually set the aspirations of the community.' We talk about mentoring now. This was the way in which those families got mentored. There would not be a family in the Mallee track that does not have an auntie or a grandmother or somebody who was an import to that community with a professional background and an aspiration to see their children or their grandchildren succeed. Now somehow or other we have to import that sort of aspiration into those communities that do not have it.¹⁰⁹

- 2.72 Conversely, Mr Broadhead argued that a community with lower levels of educational expectation tends to infuse its young people with fewer aspirations. Mr Broadhead suggested that to turn around a situation where a community's expectations are low requires a whole-of-government response.¹¹⁰ This idea was further expanded on in Maryborough by Barney Healey¹¹¹ and by Deakin University's Professor Sue Kilpatrick who says that it is the responsibility of the whole community to raise aspiration. Professor Kilpatrick outlined how the private sector can also become actively involved in improving educational outcomes in regions:

There is a lower aspiration towards higher education in regional areas. It is a whole community responsibility to raise aspiration, it's the government's responsibility, it's the education providers but also the business and industry's responsibility. There are some practical things that can be done. People can be employed on cadetships by businesses, and so you can say to a young or not so young person well, look, yes we would like to have you in our accounting firm. As part of the condition of the job, you need to do a Bachelor of Commerce, and we will give you time off to do that. So, you study part-time and work. Or they could say, oh, yes, we will have a student on an industry-based work placement so they can find out about us, and we can find out about them, and they may pay the student to do a small project. The Fair Work Act has made it a little harder to have somebody who is just there on a voluntary basis. But, there are, nonetheless, ways around that, so it's part of the business and industry culture as well.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹¹⁰ Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹¹¹ Mr Barney Healey, Principal, Maryborough Education Centre, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

¹¹² Professor Sue Kilpatrick, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Rural and Regional), Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

- 2.73 Referring to tertiary participation rates in rural and regional Victoria, La Trobe University suggests that it is not possible to lift rates without first improving the aspirations of both parents and students in secondary schools.¹¹³

Recommendation 29

That the State Government conduct research into and combat lowered aspirations of rural and regional students in relation to higher education participation.

Building a Strong Community

- 2.74 Aspiration links in closely with the idea of social cohesion or community strength; the notion that a community whose strengths people believe can be built on and developed and whose residents deserve support is a strong community. Cr Knight gives one example of community spirit, telling the Committee that the “good spirit in Mildura” contributes to the high levels of volunteerism found in the region, with Mallee Family Care having around 700 volunteers working for the organisation:

Not only is that a great testament to those communities, and they are in a wide range of areas — provision of out-of-home care; you do not get more avid volunteers than people who give 24/7 to raise someone else’s child; but there are also pro bono lawyers; there are folk who work in our op shop to raise some money for us; there are our volunteer readers, and the list goes on — but they are also part of the network of the community.¹¹⁴

- 2.75 **Mr Hawson confirmed that Mildura Rural City Council relies on the strong social cohesion of the Mildura region to effectively implement many of its social programs and policies.**¹¹⁵ In Robinvale, Reverend Evan Bradley Harris revealed the role that informal networks and cultural events such as choirs and bands play in strengthening a small community the size of Robinvale¹¹⁶
- 2.76 The importance of strong informal networks in small communities was revealed by Mallee Family Care’s Mr Ross Lake, when he mentioned that the successful Chances for Children program arose out of a meeting “...when a few of us were sitting around a table at a hotel”.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ La Trobe University, *Submission*, Number 49, 6 April 2010.

¹¹⁴ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹¹⁵ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹¹⁶ Reverend Evan Bradley Harris, Uniting Church, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹¹⁷ Mr Ross Lake, Chair, Audit Committee, Mallee Family Care; Chair, SunRISE 21, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

- 2.77 Cr Knight agreed that social cohesion in Mildura is strong and explained how social gatherings can often turn into impromptu drivers of change:

I engage my community every day. I can do one lap of the block down there and have 20 conversations. It is a warm, friendly place. The network works very well...

The amount of social planning that takes place in the pizza café or the brewery or whatever is just fantastic. It involves a five-minute ring around on a Friday night to say, 'Hey, listen, we need to get together on this stuff', and the folks will turn up. That has a lot of appeal to me. It is a terrific place to achieve change if you want to, because it is relatively easy.¹¹⁸

The Tyranny of Distance

- 2.78 Regarding tertiary study, the Committee heard from several witnesses that the recent changes to the Youth Allowance independent rate were causing some concern among young people wishing to attend university, and their parents.¹¹⁹

- 2.79 It was also put to the Committee that the cost of tertiary education was prohibitive for many rural families. Cr Knight suggested that it costs around \$20,000 per child per year for a family to support an independent student out of home,¹²⁰ a cost impediment that Mr Carr argues proves "...further education is out of reach for many regional students who need to travel and live away from home to study for their preferred course options unless of course financial assistance is given".¹²¹

- 2.80 Mr John McLinden, Loddon Shire's Chief Executive Officer, argued that the cost of tertiary education is "...a significant structural issue that disadvantages rural families...".¹²² Ms Wilson added that for young people in Mildura, there is frequently no choice but to leave home if they wish to further their careers:

Parents I talked to are single-income, one-parent-working families, and they just asked me to raise the issue of the changing conditions for kids living away from home and the fact that their kids are very disadvantaged by where they live. If a family lives in the city, then they have access to a whole range of education and the kids can live

¹¹⁸ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹¹⁹ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010; Cr Greg Cruickshank, Mayor, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010; Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹²⁰ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹²¹ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹²² Mr John McLinden, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

at home. If these kids want to do anything basically other than teaching or nursing, they do not have that option.¹²³

- 2.81 In Robinvale, the Committee heard from Cr Greg Cruickshank, Mayor of Swan Hill Rural City Council, who elaborated on the effects long distances can have on families sending their children to university in Melbourne or a regional centre. Cr Cruickshank believed that the strain of maintaining support over a long distance is an experience unique to those living in remote parts of Victoria.¹²⁴
- 2.82 Robinvale's remote location was also raised with regard to the delivery of health services. Ms Hodi Beauliv of Swan Hill Rural City Council told the Committee that because Robinvale is "lumped in" with Swan Hill and Mildura, many services are delivered on an outreach basis to Robinvale. **This means that health professionals' travel time of between two and three hours eats into the time spent on the ground actually delivering services to clients.**¹²⁵
- 2.83 Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer of Robinvale District Health Services, provided evidence about six different agencies delivering mental health services to Robinvale, four of which are based in Mildura. Mr Burt was of the belief that Robinvale "...has reached a stage of complexity and size that warrants being able to employ its own resources, but for greater benefit".¹²⁶
- 2.84 Gayle Farnsworth also raised the issue of remote service delivery. She spoke about delivery of maternal and child health services to the Robinvale community. These services were previously delivered from Swan Hill, with the inherent impact on service level due to travel time. This service was improved with great benefits for the community, as she describes below:
- Robinvale District Health Service, as Laurence said, took over the management of the maternal child health service in late 2007 and has been able to turn it into a five-day-a-week service. That has been huge for Robinvale. They are currently investigating options to extend that service even more. That is a great way that we can meet the complex needs of the caseload in Robinvale.¹²⁷
- 2.85 Ms Farnsworth added, in relation to family day carers: "Swan Hill Council is aware of the difficulties in servicing carers in Robinvale, and again it is

¹²³ Ms Barbara Wilson, Principal, Two Rivers College, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹²⁴ Cr Greg Cruickshank, Mayor, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹²⁵ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹²⁶ Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Robinvale District Health Services, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹²⁷ Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

currently considering options in partnership with Robinvale District Health Services.”¹²⁸

- 2.86 Indeed, Ms Beauliv argued that the success she is achieving in her role in Robinvale can be attributed to the fact that she is placed right in the heart of the community, learning what the community’s needs are, and with the ability to bring the relevant stakeholders together whenever an issue needs to be addressed.¹²⁹ See Recommendation 19.

Funding Models

- 2.87 Mr Burt also praised the Multi Purpose Service (MPS) funding model attached to Robinvale District Health Services for its inherent flexibility, especially for its ability to have an impact on the whole community, even if that may make its achievements more difficult to measure:

Providing a service with flexibility to be able to respond to a whole range of needs does not necessarily have the flexible health outcomes that a department of health would want to see. It has some really positive outcomes for a community as a whole — for example, our ability to get in and sponsor things like playgroup and things that we believe will make a contribution to generational change and ultimately improve the social determinants of health.

But it is not something that really hits the radar in terms of an immediate health outcome. Those four-year-olds are not at risk enough for our reporting processes. The government is keen to see and to try to measure the success of the MPS model. I think it will find it very difficult.¹³⁰

- 2.88 Mr Burt argued that when funding is based on per capita ratios rather than outcomes, service gaps develop and the disadvantaged, who are the least skilled at accessing services, may not be receiving the services they deserve.¹³¹ Health service models are the subject of Recommendation 30.
- 2.89 On a similar note, the Committee heard from Ms Sue Clarke, Chief Executive Officer of Bendigo Community Health Services. Ms Clarke spoke about the importance of providing bulk billing services to low income areas. She told the Committee that the Health Service in Eaglehawk is the only fully bulk billing general practice within a 150-kilometre radius, and that in terms of their practice’s patients, around 80 per cent are healthcare card holders. It was surmised that if this service were not available, there would

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹³⁰ Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Robinvale District Health Services, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹³¹ Ibid.

be many people in the Eaglehawk region and surrounding areas simply unable to afford access to a general practitioner.¹³²

2.90 The importance of funding models focussed on long-term outcomes was emphasised by Ms Farnsworth, in presenting the Best Start model as being a good example.¹³³ This approach was also suggested as being the best way to achieve success by Mr Broadhead¹³⁴ and Mr Biggs,¹³⁵ in the field of education.

2.91 Long-term, flexible funding models were thought to be most appropriate for Robinvale because of the problems identified as being unique to that region:

I think the issue is that Robinvale, regardless of whether it is with Swan Hill or Mildura, has its specific issues that are unique to Robinvale so it does not matter if it is with Mildura council or it is with Swan Hill council, it needs to be treated as an individual identity and have the issues addressed by the community according to what is relevant to the community.¹³⁶

2.92 Mr Burt added that Robinvale is a “complex and diverse community” that experiences high levels of social disadvantage,¹³⁷ although Senior Sergeant Kathy Zierk was keen to point out that the town does at times have a reputation that is undeserved:

From a personal perspective I think Robinvale has a reputation for violence and other offences that it does not deserve. When it happens it is usually in a spectacular fashion which creates news, but the rate of serious incidents, not just the day-to-day run-of-the-mill work we get, from what I have seen is not really much different to anywhere else...Without doubt there are problems here and they do happen, but its reputation is far worse than it really is.¹³⁸

¹³² Ms Sue Clarke, Chief Executive Officer of Bendigo Community Health Services, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹³³ Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹³⁴ Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹³⁵ Mr Robert Biggs, Principal, Robinvale P-12 College, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹³⁶ Cr John Katis, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹³⁷ Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Robinvale District Health Services, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹³⁸ Senior Sergeant Kathy Zierk, Victoria Police, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

Public Housing

- 2.93 Mr Burt told the Committee that one of the reasons he believed Robinvale to be so complex was the high proportion of local residents living in public housing or rented accommodation.¹³⁹ The quality of this housing was also of concern to Reverend Harris, who argued that in Robinvale “...poor housing permeates all health and education outcomes”.¹⁴⁰
- 2.94 Ms Kent believes public housing to be a problem in Maryborough as well, with a large number of people on waiting lists, and in some cases facing exploitation by landlords:
- They fall prey to the private rentals of low income or low rental housing, which is often still higher than public housing rents. And there are some unscrupulous landlords around who are taking advantage of these people. Often the tenants tend not to know their rights, and the landlords either don't know their responsibilities or choose to ignore them. Often the poor communication skills of the residents can affect their ability to negotiate their situation. So, from our point of view as a team there's a whole other subgroup out there other than the public housing residents that we're working with.¹⁴¹
- 2.95 The provision of cheap housing in rural and regional areas is one which raises sensitive disadvantage issues. An issue over comparatively cheap housing in the region, in relation to metropolitan Melbourne, is that, according to Mr McLinden, “...cheaper housing attracts people who also suffer a number of causes of disadvantage such as...intergeneration unemployment, poor education outcomes, and the like...”,¹⁴² thus putting pressure on service providers in these areas.¹⁴³
- 2.96 The Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils provided evidence in a joint submission about recent State Government changes to housing policy. Their evidence suggests that the change to current policy that leads to restricting funding for social housing infrastructure to incorporated housing associations is a retrograde step, as it means councils will be unable to access funding for infrastructure development from the State Government and will either have to find alternative funding sources or hand over their social housing to housing associations. Councils view this development poorly because “...they do not want to cede ownership of a community asset to a private body and consider it important that social

¹³⁹ Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Robinvale District Health Services, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Reverend Evan Bradley Harris, Uniting Church, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁴¹ Ms Margaret Kent, Place Manager, Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

¹⁴² Mr John McLinden, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁴³ Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils, *Submission*, Number 31, 31 March 2010.

housing be provided locally to be responsible to local needs”.¹⁴⁴ This view was also expressed by Macedon Ranges Shire Council in its submission.¹⁴⁵

- 2.97 Housing is also relevant when considering the needs of an ageing population, a demographic trend that dominates most rural areas in Victoria. As a population ages, housing needs to be adapted to suit the needs of an older population. Carolyn Wallace from the City of Greater Bendigo provided figures to the Committee on the great cost savings that councils can make by keeping people in their homes as opposed to placing them in residential care.¹⁴⁶ On a similar line, in its submission to this Inquiry, Macedon Ranges Shire Council outlined the benefits to be gained by providing smaller, unit-style accommodation for recipients of Home and Community Care services, with councils making savings of around \$2,000 per person per year compared to when services are provided in a larger home.¹⁴⁷

Water Quality

- 2.98 Another problem unique to an area visited by the Committee is the quality of the water in Maryborough, which is poor enough to force the population to depend on filtered or bottled water. The Committee heard that unfortunately, as soft drinks are cheaper than bottled water, people on low incomes consume high-sugar drinks. This is linked to health outcomes in the region. For example, **children in Maryborough have the highest dental clearance (the removal from the mouth of all teeth) rate in the State.** These in turn lead to development difficulties. For example the detrimental impacts on speech development that flow from dental clearance.¹⁴⁸
- 2.99 The quality of the drinking water in Maryborough is only one issue for the Maryborough Education Centre, another being that aside from access to the town water supply for drinking water the Centre has no access to water to maintain the grounds. The Committee was shown photographs of the school grounds which reveal a dusty barren landscape in place of a playground. As the Principal Mr Healy said: “...you wouldn’t leave a school like that in a middle-class or privileged community”.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils, *Submission*, Number 31, 31 March 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Macedon Ranges Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 17, 23 March 2010.

¹⁴⁶ Ms Carolyn Wallace, Manager Community and Cultural Development, City of Greater Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Macedon Ranges Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 17, 23 March 2010.

¹⁴⁸ Ms Margaret Kent, Place Manager, Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

¹⁴⁹ Mr Barney Healy, Principal, Maryborough Education Centre, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

Attracting and Retaining Qualified Staff: Beyond the General Practice Model

- 2.100 The Committee heard about the difficulties experienced by both government and non-government sector employers in regional Victoria attracting and retaining qualified and skilled staff. Mr Biggs, who has experience recruiting staff in schools both in Australian and overseas, was of the opinion that Robinvale had presented him with the biggest challenges in this regard he has experienced so far in his career.¹⁵⁰ Senior Sergeant Zierk said that not only are police numbers low in Robinvale, many of the police there are also very inexperienced, especially considering the variety of ethnic groups that they need to communicate with.¹⁵¹
- 2.101 Mr Fred Tassone from the Table Grape Growers Association added that when it comes to filling positions in the private sector Robinvale businesses are forever battling their isolation: “Even by comparison to, say, Mildura we...have a disadvantage in attracting the right sort of people when we need them.”¹⁵²
- 2.102 As part of her presentation to the Committee, Ms Beauliv was of the view that this constant shortage of staff that isolated communities endure affects the whole community, by increasing the workload and stress levels experienced by the workers who do remain, thereby having a negative impact on the quality of services delivered to the local community.¹⁵³
- 2.103 Concerning the difficulty schools frequently experience filling teaching positions, Mr Ron Lake informed the Committee that he had been having trouble filling particular vacancies in Swan Hill. He believes this is primarily because as Regional Director he is unable to offer the sort of financial incentive necessary to attract applicants. However, he added that even if the money were available, sometimes “...it’s not a matter so much of funding, it’s a matter of a shortage of those people, as they will go to other, more attractive places”.¹⁵⁴ This view is supported by Ms Kent, who told the Committee she thought professionals will balk at moving to a town that offers challenging work because “...they don’t want to uproot themselves and/or their family and move here, and the costs associated with that in case they can’t hack it”.¹⁵⁵
- 2.104 In Bendigo, Associate Professor Kenny listed a number of health fields in which there are staffing shortages, including oral health, nurses and podiatry, but she also proposed a number of solutions that require

¹⁵⁰ Mr Robert Biggs, Principal, Robinvale P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁵¹ Senior Sergeant Kathy Zierk, Victoria Police, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁵² Mr Fred Tassone, Chair, Robinvale Table Grape Growers Association, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁵³ Ms Hodi Beauliv, Senior Executive Officer, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Ms Margaret Kent, Place Manager, Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

innovative thinking on behalf of the State Government as much as increased financial commitments. This includes questioning whether sending metropolitan students to rural areas is as effective as educating local communities themselves and ensuring, as Ms Farnsworth suggested earlier, local communities are 'skilled up' to be able to provide their own health professionals.¹⁵⁶

- 2.105 Another possible solution, according to Associate Professor Kenny, is to question whether the types of service models we are relying on in smaller communities can be altered and improved. Professor Kenny suggests looking and planning beyond reliance on the general practice model:

There's some interesting work happening in Scotland that I'm aware of where they're actually getting communities to design the types of health professionals and the types of services that they need. And, they do some economic modelling around it where they'll say to a small community, 'okay, you really are very much focused on general practitioners. You see that as the panacea to all of the problems that you are facing.' But, when you look at the cost of recruiting, trying to bring doctors in and trying to retain them, and then you look at some of the more innovative models around service providers, that is about breaking down things like professional silos. Because, one of the examples I would give you is that if you're talking about building health promotion, building wellness within a community, you really don't need a highly qualified Masters-prepared physiotherapist to be leading walking groups. It is about really thinking about different service models, and I think in some ways the focus on general practice is flawed in many of these communities.¹⁵⁷

Community Legal Centres

- 2.106 Issues around staffing of rural and regional community legal centres was introduced to the Committee in Bendigo. Mr Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor at Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, said that he believes the State Government is committed to locating community legal services in the regions. However, he explains that one of the biggest battles regional centres face is that nearly 40 per cent of regional practitioners say that they will be retiring in the next five years, and that 80 per cent of regional legal practices are concerned about how they will manage the issue of succession. Mr Noble explains that this is an issue that is exacerbated by the tendency for rural and regional clients to take their sophisticated work to Melbourne, contributing ultimately to the lack of high level work available for professionals to maintain their skills:

¹⁵⁶ Associate Professor Amanda Kenny, Director La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

So, it's about being able to you know, attract and retain solicitors of a high enough calibre to do the sort of work that's generated regionally, and sophisticated work gets generated by the regions. It just goes to Melbourne, and it becomes a self-feeding process. As the regional firms who would otherwise have done that work deskill, they're not going to get the work, so that you probably have a trend in some regional areas to doing more lower level, generalist work.¹⁵⁸

- 2.107 The concept of deskilling and its impact on staffing levels in small communities was also raised by Ms Farnsworth, who told the Committee that even though some of her children who work in the health industry were able to complete all of their education in Robinvale, they aren't currently working in Robinvale. She says this is: "...because we have a limited acute medical service and they find that deskilling. They are attracted to other areas that provide them with the opportunity to maintain their skill level."¹⁵⁹
- 2.108 The issues discussed here are further discussed in a Recommendation on access to the Law in rural and regional areas. Discussion of this Recommendation, number 7, can be found at page 359.

The Impact of Drought

- 2.109 In Mildura, the Committee heard that the drought and accompanying water shortages is having a significant impact on the financial and social strength of the region. Mr Ross Lake suggested that up to half of farmers in the region were at risk of going out of business.¹⁶⁰ Mr Broadhead outlined how the effects of drought impact not just on farmers but education, training and employment opportunities in north-west Victoria.¹⁶¹
- 2.110 The far-reaching impact of the drought in rural and regional Victoria was also discussed in Robinvale. Mr John Tate, President of the Robinvale Euston Business Association, outlined exactly how businesses in towns dependent on a strong agricultural economy can suffer when farmers' incomes are hit by events such as a long-term drought. This in turn reduces the amount of money that normally flows through the region.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Mr Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor at Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁵⁹ Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Mr Ross Lake, Chair, Audit Committee, Mallee Family Care; Chair, SunRISE 21, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁶¹ Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁶² Mr John Tate, President, Robinvale Euston Business Association, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

- 2.111 Mr Secombe reinforced the view that the impacts of the drought are far-reaching and, despite recent rainfall, ongoing in areas such as mental health and education:

...even though we've had recent rains, and conditions, climatic conditions are more favourable in terms of rainfall, the impact of drought is still ongoing. I think it's important to note that farmers are not seeking help. They don't, for some reason, endeavour to avail themselves of the assistance that is available...**There is a concern that mental health issues are evident but are not recognised.** There's an increasing reliance in off-farm income, and what we found also in terms of just picking up again on the mention of education earlier, Mr Chairman, there is less rural youth engaging in tertiary education, because of perhaps the need to stay on the land...¹⁶³

- 2.112 The issues discussed here are further discussed in a Recommendation on Rural Outreach Workers. This Recommendation, number 4, can be found at page 333.

The Evolution of Industry

- 2.113 Mr Hawson identified Mildura as being vulnerable to the swings in fortune that define primary industries.¹⁶⁴ Cr Cruickshank painted a picture of the sort of downward spiral that can occur in a rural community when the impact of a downturn in primary industries is fully felt:

The Swan Hill economy has been largely driven in the past by agriculture and irrigated horticulture, and the changing economics for family farms. Fewer young people are staying on to take up the family enterprises, and as a result populations in the rural areas and in our rural towns in the Swan Hill municipality are decreasing and ageing, and the small towns are becoming less able to maintain the basic services required to sustain the communities. The trend for centralising services into the major regional centres has meant that people are leaving the small towns. That generates a spiral of businesses closing and less services being available in those towns. For the aged and for young people there are less social services available in the smaller towns, so they all leave to find bigger opportunities in larger centres. We have an issue with the liveability of the small towns within the municipality, and they are the towns

¹⁶³ Mr Barry Secombe, Director Community Wellbeing, City of Greater Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

that are below 1,000 people, such as Lake Boga, Ultima, Manangatang, Piangil, Nyah and Nyah West.¹⁶⁵

- 2.114 Cr Katis from Swan Hill Rural City Council added his view that the problems caused by a decline in primary industries around Robinvale were exacerbated by the relocation of State Government agencies such as the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission to larger regional centres. Cr Katis believes this created disadvantages for the region that are experienced today.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, the benefits of the State Government decentralising departments and service providers was suggested by Ms Mary Chandler in her submission to this Inquiry.¹⁶⁷ See Recommendation 40.
- 2.115 Regional and rural industries themselves are changing and evolving and this in turn has impacts on communities. Mr Carr provided evidence that industries such as the horticulture industry are restructuring in order to accommodate their evolution from a low-skilled, labour-intensive industry to one that increasingly requires a highly skilled workforce – a shift that has serious repercussions in areas with poor education outcomes.¹⁶⁸
- 2.116 The Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray River Group of Councils provided evidence that a low skill base can have serious repercussions for an area if a dominant industry falls into decline:
- Should this decline occur, it has the potential to lead to substantial unemployment given the low skill base of many workers in the agricultural industries. Where this has occurred elsewhere, people with skills have left the district and unemployment and welfare dependence amongst those remaining is increasing.¹⁶⁹
- 2.117 Confirming the importance of evidence that the Committee heard from Associate Professor Kenny and Ms Farnsworth, Mr Tassone, a local Robinvale businessman, suggested that **one way to improve the life outcomes of young people in Robinvale would be to tailor education to impart the new professional skills necessary to prosper in this changed environment.** Speaking of the table grape industry, Mr Tassone said, “There is no qualification for what we do, but we have to be skilled in so many different areas.”¹⁷⁰
- 2.118 It was suggested to the Committee that one of the reasons the Loddon Mallee region is so susceptible to disadvantage is because of its heavy reliance on agriculture.¹⁷¹ There is also an awareness that diversification of

¹⁶⁵ Cr Greg Cruickshank, Mayor, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Cr John Katis, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Ms Mary Chandler, *Submission*, Number 52, 23 April 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils, *Submission*, Number 31, 31 March 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Mr Fred Tassone, Chair, Robinvale Table Grape Growers Association, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁷¹ Mr John McLinden, Chief Executive Officer, Loddon Shire, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

not just the primary industries themselves but the economy of the whole region is crucial to improving sustainable outcomes for any region. In Maryborough, for example, Mr Meddows-Taylor stressed that the causes of disadvantage, in that case generational socioeconomic problems, can be linked to the decline in manufacturing as opposed to agriculture¹⁷² (as suggested earlier in the discussion on education by Ms Mawdsley).

- 2.119 The Committee was presented with evidence that the Central Goldfields Shire Council is currently engaged in a process of diversifying the economy in the region as a way of tackling the levels of disadvantage that are prevalent.¹⁷³ However, the unintended consequences of diversification away from traditional industries can be "... a loss of employment for older males and increases in lower paid and casual employment".¹⁷⁴

Local Community Solutions

- 2.120 While the Committee heard from witnesses in Robinvale in particular that the factors of disadvantage are unique to that town, it is true that similar views were expressed everywhere the Committee visited. Furthermore, throughout regional and rural Victoria the overriding view was expressed that local problems require local solutions. In Mildura, Mr Carr supported an approach that includes "locally specific measures that might be required to supplement general policy".¹⁷⁵ Mr Hawson described "place-based planning" that the Shire is developing in conjunction with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, planning that involves the whole community.¹⁷⁶

- 2.121 Mr Graem Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Castlemaine Health took the whole-of-community approach slightly further for the Committee. He warned that when central governments are approaching a subject such as disadvantage in a community, it can be easy for 'silos' to develop: that is, different government departments working separately, in a way which does not benefit the community as a whole. He said:

And, so, that leaves a real dilemma in terms of how do you get that whole of community sorted and on the same page, so that the dollars you're investing don't build the best school, but behind the

¹⁷² Mr Chris Meddows-Taylor, Mayor, Central Goldfields Shire, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

¹⁷³ Perry M, *Gold Prospects. Business Case for Whole-of-Community Planning and Development 2008/2016*, Central Goldfields Shire Council, Maryborough, 2008.

¹⁷⁴ Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils, *Submission*, Number 31, 31 March 2010.

¹⁷⁵ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁷⁶ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

scene, the police station is falling down, and the hospital is falling down, and at the end of the day, your investment is wasted.¹⁷⁷

- 2.122 Mr Kelly’s concern is also expressed in the joint submission by the Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray River Group of Councils. Those Councils suggest that bringing government departments together in a coordinated approach to tackling disadvantage “...can be difficult as they are often answerable for narrowly defined performance measures, have independent policies and operate in isolation”.¹⁷⁸
- 2.123 Local councils can encourage a whole-of-community approach, Mr Kelly added, by ensuring representatives from schools, the police and local businesses, for example, have a permanent input into council decision-making processes.¹⁷⁹
- 2.124 In Bendigo, the Our Place drop-in centre, which began as a response to the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009, is achieving successful outcomes with people in Eaglehawk who are experiencing disadvantage. Its Director, Reverend Tracey Wolsley, ascribed this success to the support the Centre receives from the local community. The local supermarkets and other businesses provide goods and the landlord of the building the centre is located in charges Our Place half the market rent.¹⁸⁰ The Committee recommends government support for the Centre in Recommendation 50.b.

Our Place Drop in Centre

In March 2009, Our Place – “A Place of Hope” – opened its doors in Eaglehawk as an emergency centre in response to the Black Saturday fires.¹⁸¹ A grassroots community initiative predominately set up to provide a place of comfort and support for fire-affected residents, Our Place has now grown into a community space that engages with a broad range of people.

At the public hearing in Bendigo the Committee heard from Reverend Tracy Wolsley, Director of Our Place, and an inspiring community leader:

Our Place community assistance centre, as I said earlier, started mainly as a fire recovery centre. However, since opening, it's been shaped by the community, for the community, as a place where people on the way to the supermarket can drop in and have a chat, where the lonely person can come in, not with a pre-organised appointment, and just engage in a conversation.

¹⁷⁷ Mr Graem Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Castlemaine Health, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Loddon Campaspe Councils and the Murray Group of Councils, *Submission*, Number 31, 31 March 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Mr Graem Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Castlemaine Health, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Reverend Tracey Wolsley, Director, Our Place Community Centre, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Where Mrs Smith can drop in and tell you how she misses her recently deceased husband. Where the kids on the way home from school can call in and have a Milo or tell you that they won pupil of the week. Where the mum can drop in and grab a litre of milk because pay day is not until tomorrow and she needs it now. Where the alcoholic can celebrate with you that now it's six weeks since they haven't had a drink, and this is the alcoholic, who, for months, just walked past, while you had your free community breakfast, but now they're volunteering at your resource centre.¹⁸²

In its first month of opening, Our Place averaged 70 visitors, rising to 139 visitors in its second month. Just over a year later **Our Place welcomes an average of 500 people each week**. Reverend Wolsley informed the Committee that of the 500 people who visit Our Place each week, 27 per cent seek assistance because of issues relating to poverty, homelessness and disadvantage. These people need help with food, winter clothing, financial assistance, bedding, counselling, drug or alcohol-related issues, housing, accommodation referral, or personal support. Many need someone to talk to, someone to advocate on their behalf, a place to connect or simply somewhere to belong.¹⁸³

With four paid staff and over 50 volunteers Our Place provides many activities that benefit the community. One event that Reverend Wolsley labelled a 'people gatherer' is the free weekly community breakfast:

Every Friday morning about 60 people come along, from the Mayor to the bloke who's got nowhere to stay this week. A full breakfast is served and there is singing from local artists, a trivia competition, speeches and lots of laughs and sharing.¹⁸⁴

Our Place is also where the rollout of the bushfire Asset Recovery Program is taking place. Funding to the amount of \$300,000 has been allocated for the purpose of helping residents with items such as fencing, water tanks, sheds and garden restoration.¹⁸⁵ However it is Our Place's wish, supported by this Committee, that the Victorian Government provide ongoing funding for the running of the service.

2.125 Many witnesses at hearings for the Committee's Inquiry into Disadvantage suggested that local councils could improve the outcomes achieved for their communities by ensuring high quality planning processes and data collection. For example, Mildura Rural City Council places enormous energy and resources into its biannual Social Indicators reports (as referred to earlier in the discussion on education) and its community development planning. Mr Hawson, from the Council Executive, believes this reflects well

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ See: <<http://shareappeal.org.au/what-we-do/bushfire-disaster-appeal/rev-tracy-wolsley/>>, accessed July 2010.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

on the Council when applying to the State Government for public money needed for the community:

It is easy to pick up the big-ticket items and say, ‘We will build a such and such’ and ‘We will build big infrastructure’. But then to translate that into, ‘Is that driving what it needs to drive to address the disadvantage?’; that is really where we need to do the work...

From my viewpoint we are in a better position because we are doing better planning so the State Government and Commonwealth Government have more confidence in saying, ‘They are doing the hard yards and finding out the real story and they have the data to back it up’. Whatever government is in power would see that as a good thing because you are getting the real story and not a glossed over, ‘It is a good thing to put some money into that particular local government’ approach...¹⁸⁶

- 2.126 Martin Hawson describes how planning, consulting and setting priorities can lead to confident investing for the community:

We need capacity so that our local communities can go through that process, or perhaps we need to streamline the process so that we can access it more readily and get to the pressure points, but that is all dependent on how good our planning is in the first place and what confidence you have in that information so that you can say that the no. 1 priority in that community is to address that school, that kindergarten, that sporting facility or whatever. Once we have that confidence the rest will flow. Investing in that priority setting would mean you are on a winner if that is the answer.¹⁸⁷

See Key Recommendations 8 and 9.

- 2.127 The confidence that communities can have in their ability to address their own problems from within was expressed by Cr Knight, who said of Mildura: “...**this community is an incubator for good and creative thinking**”.¹⁸⁸

Recommendation 49

That the State Government provide financial incentives for local governments operating in areas of disadvantage to identify and prioritise tackling local issues facing their community.

¹⁸⁶ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

- 2.128 Planning can also be tied in with the idea of a ‘social contract’; that is, what is the minimum level of service that a town can expect, depending on its size. Mr Dean Wickham, Chief Executive Officer, Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council proposed that councils could require businesses and industry to address specific cases of disadvantage in communities where they open new businesses or premises. This could include targeting youth or Indigenous unemployment.¹⁸⁹
- 2.129 The importance of Victoria maintaining a social contract with its smaller towns was backed up many times. In Robinvale it received support from Cr Cruickshank¹⁹⁰ and in Bendigo from Ms Wallace¹⁹¹ and Mr Pugh, who discussed the concept in relation to youth services:

So, for example, in the mental health world – and we deliver lots of mental health services as an agency – the Government funds us per LGA [Local Government Association]. I think that's a good model. It makes sure that we have an investment in every LGA in this region, of having mental health staff based on the ground, in partnership with clinical staff.

There are many LGAs in this region that have no direct funding for youth services. So, what is our social contract with small LGAs about youth services? I know it's complex. A town like Boort might only have 30 young people, and we have to compare that with fringe parts of Melbourne. But I think the whole conversation about what is our social contract with small towns is critical to thinking about the needs around disadvantage.¹⁹²

- 2.130 In Mr Pugh’s view, there needs to be more clarity in defining the roles and responsibilities of service providers throughout rural and regional Victoria. Mr Pugh explained this in the context of a house fire in Maryborough in which three young children died:

Now, we are the main family service provider in Maryborough, but our agency's head office is in Bendigo. When it came to the emergency response plan for those children, we were heavily engaged, but council didn't have us named in their...emergency management plan...there should be a contract that probably says to us in a way – and we've got our own responsibilities to this – that says ‘what is your engagement with local government in each of the areas that you work in?’¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Mr Dean Wickham, Chief Executive Officer, Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁹⁰ Cr Greg Cruickshank, Mayor, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

¹⁹¹ Ms Carolyn Wallace, Manager Community and Cultural Development, City of Greater Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁹² Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer, St Luke’s Anglicare, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

- 2.131 Mr Pugh’s recounting of this incident demonstrates very starkly that cooperation across all agencies, government and otherwise, working in the community sector is a valuable asset for the community.
- 2.132 The Victorian Farmers Federation adds:

People in rural and regional areas should be able to rely on a base level of service for government and other services. It is obviously difficult to determine exactly what that base level of service should be, and this could perhaps be a topic for further inquiry.¹⁹⁴

Indigenous Communities

- 2.133 Mildura is home to the third-largest Indigenous community in Victoria, many of whom live transitory lifestyles.¹⁹⁵
- 2.134 For those more permanent members of the community, the Committee heard from Ms Wilson, who spoke of her experience teaching disengaged Koori students at the Two Rivers College. As with other alternative education programs, Ms Wilson stressed the importance of small teacher-student ratios, as well as the need for schools to develop strong relationships with the community, in this case both parents and Elders:

We have Elders who are on our school council, and some of them have actually been on our school council — or it used to be called the committee of management — from the day it was established. They actually worked to establish the school, so they have a real sense of ownership. We are probably close to the only school in Victoria that has an Indigenous school council. One of our operating guidelines is that we do not have a council meeting if we do not have a majority of Indigenous people...

We employ Elders, because I believe if you want to use people’s knowledge, you have to pay them the respect of paying what that knowledge is worth. We have had debates over time about how much we pay people. But the knowledge they bring to the school, and in particular to kids who are growing up in an urban community and who may not have a link to their cultural history, I think that is really vital.¹⁹⁶

- 2.135 A recent initiative of the College is an approach known as ‘enterprise education’, a program that sees students working for local businesses for one day a week. The students keep any money they make, but for Ms Wilson the important feature of the program is that disengaged young

¹⁹⁴ Victorian Farmers Federation, *Submission*, Number 29, 30 March 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁹⁶ Ms Barbara Wilson, Principal, Two Rivers College, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

people are shown another pathway in life. They learn that even if mainstream education does not suit them, for whatever reason, paid employment is a preferable, meaningful alternative option to simply dropping out of education.¹⁹⁷

Enterprise Education

Ms Barbara Wilson, Principal of Two Rivers College in Mildura explained to the Committee that the Enterprise Education Program aims to engage kids who “...leak out of the secondary system, often in that transition period of Year 7, and again at Year 10”.¹⁹⁸

Ms Wilson described these students as young people who:

...just really struggle, for a whole range of reasons, to cope with education. I am sure you are aware of the multiple issues that some kids bring to the table. It is very difficult to focus on education if you have drugs and alcohol, homelessness and domestic violence, and a whole range of other issues in your life, it makes education, to some extent, irrelevant.¹⁹⁹

Ms Wilson told the Committee that the school’s challenge is to enhance their efforts to engage some of the kids who were struggling:

We have a school community that is very supportive and for that we are very grateful. **The issue of how you actually re-engage 12 to 16-year-olds once they have dropped out of school is really challenging.** It is quite difficult to find a pathway.²⁰⁰

To overcome this issue and re-engage 12–16-year-olds Two Rivers College chose a slightly different track: Enterprise Education. The College has organised projects run by individuals with skills in areas as varied as horticulture and hospitality:

Kids get to work for a day a week, and they get to keep the money they work for. We are not talking about big dollars, but they get around \$5 an hour. They do a range of things from gardening to catering for events for hospitality, and the money that comes in pays their wages. They get to keep a virtual bank, and we run it on a small business line.²⁰¹

Ms Wilson explained that the College is hoping to give young people with differing aspirations and skills different pathways to the work force.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

- 2.136 Overall, the approach taken by the College, which receives additional funding from the State Government’s Wannik unit, is achieving results. For example, Ms Wilson revealed that “...our attendance...has improved a lot. I do not pretend to know the reason why; I just know it seems to be a more welcoming environment for the kids.”²⁰³
- 2.137 In Robinvale, where the Committee heard 13 per cent of the total population identifies as being Indigenous,²⁰⁴ issues mentioned as being of concern in the Indigenous community include family violence, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, unemployment, and poor health.²⁰⁵ See Recommendation 50.d.
- 2.138 However, one of the main issues within the Indigenous community, and one that was said to be at the root of many of the problems, is poor housing. This refers to both the overcrowding that many families experience (as Mr Letts referred to in the earlier discussion on education) and the actual quality of housing stock. Mr Baymos Handy, a worker at the Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative who had recently returned to the Robinvale community after 17 years away, told the Committee that the quality of the available housing was hugely detrimental to the Indigenous community:

Every person I talk to in the community is disheartened because they are living in a shitty hole. It is as simple as that. I actually went and drove around and sat out the front of my old home that I grew up in. It is a mess. It should have been knocked down 20 or 30 years ago before I actually moved into the place. Nothing has changed at all.²⁰⁶

- 2.139 As a solution, Mr Handy suggested a project of Indigenous workers building their own homes. Such a program would have the dual benefit of improving the housing stock in Robinvale, increasing local skills and boosting the lack of self-esteem which Mr Handy identified as plaguing much of the community:

These fellas around town, since I have come home, are walking around with their heads down. They have lost their self-respect. When we get that back into them, things might change. We actually need to be doing stuff ourselves and not just relying on the government all the time.²⁰⁷

This suggestion is taken up in Recommendation 50.c.

- 2.140 Mr Letts added that the Cooperative already does have a housing program that entails members of the Indigenous community carrying out repair work

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Mr Laurence Burt, Chief Executive Officer, Robinvale District Health Services, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²⁰⁵ Mr Baymos Handy, Services Coordinator, Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

on their houses. This has many positive spin-off benefits, including raising self-esteem. This program was a result of the Federal Government recently handing responsibility for housing to the State Government. However the caveats for the properties in Robinvale remain held by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Mr Letts argued that it would be beneficial for the Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative to be handed these caveats when it completes its current process of becoming a registered housing provider. The Cooperative could then use these caveats when approaching banks for funding for further development:

Then as an organisation we have got the equity in the value of those homes to be able to go and commercially borrow from a banking institution and establish our own housing program — that is, buy homes. That is self-generated, because we would have the tenancy to fill them. We have people who pay through Centrepay.

It would solve a lot of problems about having to wait. [We would] be able to get in and look at some housing development, some enterprise development and structural employment in programs that we could train.²⁰⁸

- 2.141 The Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative works in partnership with Victoria Police in Robinvale (and several other community organisations and State Government departments) as part of the Robinvale Community Resilience Forum. Senior Sergeant Zierk outlined to the Committee how the Forum works at addressing areas of disadvantage amongst the Robinvale community. Senior Serjeant Zierk expanded on a number of other programs that she believed are achieving successful outcomes in the town:

With the Indigenous community we have got a Dream program. This is a youth leadership program for ages 12 to 18 years, and it incorporates wellness, culture and leadership. There is also the Strong program, which is about sticking together, respecting others and new goals. It is a program aimed at Koori children aged between 8 and 16 within the Robinvale community. The three key objectives of this are to keep young people attending school and being positive contributors at their school; to keep young people out of the juvenile justice system; and to develop the relationship between young people and Robinvale police. This has been running for approximately 18 months now, with what I believe and have been informed is a fair amount of success. This program has also helped in developing the relationship between the older males in the Koori community and police. Funding is currently being sourced for the next 12 months in that program.

There is also the Harmony Committee, which is the Pacific Islander and Indigenous Harmony Committee. This came about as a result, I

²⁰⁸ Mr Gary Letts, Chief Executive Officer, Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

believe, of an assault last year between two youths, one being a Koori and the other one being a Pacific Islander. It is my understanding that there is a lot of friction between these two groups, and that is where the Strong program developed from, to try to balance out the disagreements between the two groups and create a bit of harmony and get them all working together.²⁰⁹

2.142 The number of different cultural groups in Robinvale – one estimate put the figure as being around 50²¹⁰ – was raised to the Committee. Mr Tassone discussed the “...challenge of trying to cater for all the different sorts of cultures, yet trying to be inclusive at the same time and getting a system that works...”²¹¹ In Mildura a similar picture was painted when Mr Hawson told the Committee that the town is home to 52 different cultures.²¹²

2.143 Mr Tate said that concern among the community in Robinvale surrounds the pace of change and that, with Robinvale’s multicultural history in mind, there is a great deal of understanding and sensitivity around the issue:

I was having this conversation with one of the blockies yesterday, and there is no doubt that multiculturalism has enriched both Robinvale and the rest of Australia. He is a first-generation Australian born and bred here of Italian parents, and he said what he feels is going on at the moment is that we are going through a gap like they did 40 years ago when a lot of the people who had come to the town, come to Australia, were real strugglers and battlers. That is what I think too.

Believe me, we have compassion for those people. I often say to my wife that this is really quite difficult. We cannot complain, because these poor people are out in the heat, working their guts out and probably getting paid wages we would not have accepted 20 years ago.²¹³

2.144 Indeed, Mr Wickham explained how tensions can rise in an agriculture-based town such as Mildura, when workers are forced to accept as little as \$27 a day picking fruit or vegetables. He qualified this by saying that the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council is working with the Victorian Multicultural Commission to address issues around employment opportunities for immigrant communities.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Senior Sergeant Kathy Zierk, Victoria Police, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²¹⁰ Mr John Tate, President, Robinvale Euston Business Association, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²¹¹ Mr Fred Tassone, Chair, Robinvale Table Grape Growers Association, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²¹² Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

²¹³ Mr John Tate, President, Robinvale Euston Business Association, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

²¹⁴ Mr Dean Wickham, Chief Executive Officer, Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

2.145 Senior Sergeant Zierk also informed the Committee of the success of Victoria Police's cultural training package aimed at making police work easier for police recruits when they first become part of the Robinvale community:

This is mainly for the new police members who come into the area to make them aware of the different cultures, in particular the Aboriginal culture, to introduce them to the Elders of the communities and just to create a better understanding among the new members up here who may not have had much contact with these groups at all, and it allows us to better interact with them.²¹⁵

See part d. of Recommendation 50 below.

Recommendation 50

That the State Government respond to local needs in the Loddon Mallee region by taking the following action:

- a. Encourage through incentives the provision of a full-time speech pathologist in Maryborough (2.37).
- b. Provide funding for Our Place in Eaglehawk, a successful initiative of local community leaders responding to those facing disadvantage in the community (2.124).
- c. In response to local needs in Robinvale and suggestions from community workers, that the State Government investigate and establish a program for Indigenous residents to build their own homes. Such action would respond to urgent local needs for accommodation; would provide an opportunity for training in professional and life skills for residents; and would ensure implementation of a local solution to a local problem (2.139).
- d. Provide funding for an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer and Multicultural Liaison Officer to be stationed in Robinvale (2.145).

²¹⁵ Senior Sergeant Kathy Zierk, Victoria Police, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

Chapter Three

The Grampians and Northern Victoria Region¹

Introduction

I think the issue has got to be a national recognition that if you want the assets that are essential to an efficient rural economy to be maintained, there are services that you have to make sure continue to support the people who are going to be essential to make sure that occurs.²

Warwick Heine, Buloke.

- 3.1 The Committee began its regional consultations for this Inquiry in Warracknabeal and Donald, where it heard many concerns both local to the region and those communities and more general. These concerns directed subsequent hearings for the Inquiry into Disadvantage undertaken by the Committee throughout the rest of Victoria.
- 3.2 The Committee heard from regional Victorians committed to their communities. During many hours of testimony and discussion they brought to the table persuasive and pragmatic reasons for tackling disadvantage and inequity. In the quote that opens this Chapter Warwick Heine, Chief Executive Officer of Buloke Shire Council provides one of many compelling examples. He observes that an efficient rural economy is an intrinsic element

¹ Due to the way in which the Committee organised its regional consultations for this Inquiry, evidence given from Buloke Shire representatives is being included in the Grampians Regional Profile.

² Mr Warwick Heine, Chief Executive Officer, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

of our national economy, and that it is rural and regional people who must be supported to ensure the maintenance of that efficiency.

- 3.3 Many witnesses appearing before the Committee in Northern Victoria expressed the view that central planners in government need to acknowledge three main concerns if programs tackling disadvantage are to truly take root in communities and achieve their full potential.
- 3.4 Firstly, funding for programs to tackle disadvantage needs to be long-term; secondly, provision for transitional funding should be built into the design of programs in order to assist communities to adjust when funding comes to an end and to ensure that programs are effective for the long-term; and finally, local communities should be recognised as being best placed to identify their own needs and determine their own solutions.
- 3.5 The Committee also heard about the changing nature of demographics in the Grampians and Northern Victoria. This region is experiencing change in both the cultural and socioeconomic mix of communities. This in turn is having an impact on peri-urban and remote areas of the region. Witnesses also described the challenges facing education providers trying to deliver education in the Grampians and Northern Victoria that is equal to that available throughout the rest of Victoria.
- 3.6 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in this Regional Profile include:
 - the role that Information and Communications Technology plays in the delivery of services;
 - health issues including public transport, access to services, and attracting and retaining staff;
 - how the drought is having an impact on the social fabric of communities;
 - the advantages of rural living;
 - forming a 'social contract' between small communities and central governments; and
 - the challenges associated with data collection.

Understanding the Region

- 3.7 The Grampians region is a geographically large area, where distance divides the major centres. During its consultations in the region the Committee heard that there are a number of issues that are relevant to the entire region. However the region is not a homogenous one with some areas facing more significant disadvantage than others.
- 3.8 The statistics and information below paint a broad picture of the region. From these we see that there are differences in employment levels, wealth in the region and for example, access to Information and Communications

Technology. This information is cited here with the intention of providing a statistical 'snapshot' for the reader.

Table 2: Grampians and Northern Victoria Statistics

| | Warracknabeal (Yarriambiack South) | Donald (Buloke South) | Ballarat Central |
|---|--|--------------------------|------------------|
| Unemployment Rate (2008) | 4.7% | 3.4% | 7.2% |
| Average Taxable Income (\$) (2007) | 28,089 | 25,879 | 37,168 |
| Population Density (persons per km ²) (2008) | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1,026.8 |
| Indigenous Population (2006) | 0.6% | 0.9% | 1.0% |
| Access to Internet at Home (2006) | 48.3% | 46.2% | 52.9% |
| Gross Value of Agriculture (\$m) (2006) | 128.3 | 109.2 | 0.4 |

Source: ABS National Regional Profile 2006–2008.³ Data chosen was based on Statistical Local Areas.

Indicators of Wellbeing in the Grampians Region

3.9 Community Indicators Victoria uses a range of factors to measure wellbeing at Local Government Area level.⁴ This statistical information is more broadly informative, providing a picture of the region beyond the economic indicators illustrated in the table above.⁵ A selection of information is reproduced here to provide a snapshot of the region:

³ See:
<<http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/nrpmmaps.nsf/NEW+GmapPages/national+regional+pr+ofile?opendocument>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

⁴ See: <http://www.communityindicators.net.au/lga_profiles>, accessed 15 July 2010.

⁵ Further information can be found at: <<http://www.communityindicators.net.au>>.

Self-reported Health

- 3.10 There is a strong link between health and life outcomes. Professor Tony Vinson, who is well known for his work in this area, argues strongly that measuring self-reported health provides an accurate picture of an individual's wellbeing. Professor John Wiseman from the McCaughey Centre, responsible for these indicators, stated to the Committee during a previous Inquiry that self-reported health "...aligns pretty closely with a whole range of more objective measures of health".⁶
- 3.11 Self-reported health was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their health as excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. The percentages of people reporting that their health was either excellent or very good in the regional centres in Loddon Mallee, the overall region and the State average are:
- Yarriambiack: 50.3%
 - Buloke: 53.9%
 - Ballarat: 54.5%
 - Grampians Region: 54.1%
 - Victorian State average: 54.3%

Child Health Assessments

- 3.12 Child Health Assessments are routinely undertaken by the Maternal and Child Health Service in Victoria to monitor child health and development. Ten visits are anticipated according to key ages and stages until a child reaches 3.5 years of age. Data relating to the activities of the Maternal and Child Health Service are collated on a financial year basis by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The rates of participation for children eligible for an assessment at 3.5 years are:
- Yarriambiack: 51.7%
 - Buloke: 67.8%
 - Ballarat: 61.5%
 - Grampians Region: 65.3%
 - Victorian State average: 60.1%
- 3.13 Figures are expressed as a rate per 100 children enrolled in Maternal and Child Health Centres born 3.5 years before visiting. It is possible for the rate to be greater than 100 if visits are not made in the financial year they are due.

⁶ Professor John Wiseman, Director, McCaughey Centre, University of Melbourne, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 4 May 2009.

Perceptions of Safety

3.14 Perceptions of Safety were measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate how safe they felt when walking alone in their local area during the day and at night. The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the day are:

- Yarriambiack: 99.3%
- Buloke: 99.6%
- Ballarat: 96.2%
- Grampians Region: 97.4%
- Victorian State average: 96.0%

3.15 The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the night are:

- Yarriambiack: 87.8%
- Buloke: 92.7%
- Ballarat: 61.1%
- Grampians Region: 73.3%
- Victorian State average: 66.5%

3.16 Communities who self-identify as being safe places also usually exhibit clear patterns of social cohesion and community strength. This is born out in the following statistics on 'Feeling part of the community', 'Social support' and 'Volunteering', where rural and regional areas generally perform higher than the Victorian State average.

Feeling Part of the Community

3.17 Community Connection was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with feeling part of their community and answers are presented according to a 0–100 range. Normative data from the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index indicates that the average Community Connection score for Australians is approximately 70. Across Loddon Mallee the following scores were recorded. Community Connection is clearly high within the region and confirms the long-held view that living in smaller communities fosters more tightly knit connections amongst members:

- Yarriambiack: 83.3
- Buloke: 84.0
- Ballarat: 71.7
- Grampians Region: 74.6
- Victorian State average: 70.7

Social Support

3.18 Social Support was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked if they could get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it, either definitely, sometimes or not at all. The percentages of people reporting they could definitely get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it are:

- Yarriambiack: 91.0%
- Buloke: 95.8%
- Ballarat: 96.2%
- Grampians Region: 92.2%
- Victorian State average: 91.7%

3.19 Again statistics are for the most part higher than average across rural and regional Victoria and demonstrate that inherent aspects of community life in regional Victoria provide community and lifestyle benefits.

Volunteering

3.20 Volunteering was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked whether or not they helped out as a volunteer. The percentages of people reporting that they helped out as a volunteer are:

- Yarriambiack: 65.9%
- Buloke: 63.9%
- Ballarat: 38.5%
- Grampians Region: 51.0%
- Victorian State average: 40.8%

3.21 Reliance on volunteering in rural and regional communities emerged throughout the Committee's *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria*. In many cases community members hold a number of honorary positions in community groups. This contributes to community life, a sense of belonging and social cohesion. However, it also puts pressure on individuals on whose enormous and time consuming contribution community-based programs are often dependent. The Committee also heard concern expressed in many areas that as demographics change it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract people to volunteering.

Highly Skilled Workforce

3.22 There is a symbiotic relationship between a highly skilled workforce and an area's ability to support a dynamic and broad-based economy. 'Highly skilled' has been defined as occupations with ANZSCO⁷ Skill Levels 1–3. The data has been collated from customised Census tables obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The percentages of employed people working in highly skilled occupations are:

- Yarriambiack: 66.2%
- Buloke: 65.4%
- Ballarat: 52.6%
- Grampians Region: 55.3%
- Victorian State average: 56.3%

Educational Qualifications

3.23 As can be seen throughout this Report, education is a key to tackling disadvantage. The percentages of people aged 25 years and over who had Tertiary or TAFE qualifications calculated from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census are:

- Yarriambiack: 33.9%
- Buloke: 34.5%
- Ballarat: 48.0%
- Grampians Region: 44.6%
- Victorian State average: 50.7%

Funding Models

3.24 The Committee heard throughout regional Victoria that successful funding models for tackling disadvantage in rural and regional communities include the following elements:

- a streamlined transparent process;
- a single point of contact;
- a long-term approach;
- a transition plan out of the program to ensure benefits are maintained;
- a rural and regional approach;
- a flexible not a one-size-fits-all approach; and
- geographically based weighting to recognise the higher costs of rural and regional program delivery.

⁷ An ABS classification: Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

- 3.25 These elements are discussed in greater detail below.
- 3.26 Critical to ensuring the ongoing provision of services, according to witnesses in this Inquiry, is long-term support for programs and a streamlined funding process. (See Recommendation 10.c.) Cr Reid Mather, Chairperson of the North West Municipalities Association, spoke of the time and effort councils expend applying for funding for short-term programs. While acknowledging the support offered by the State Government, Cr Mather suggested that this time and effort could be reduced if the number of applications submitted were reduced:

[Regional Development Victoria] are great with their funding, and so are Sport and Recreation Victoria and so are the Department of Health. They are all great with their funding, but you have to go to them each time. Why not just have one go at it? We employ a full-time officer, which is costing us about \$75,000 a year, plus another officer to assist her. We are probably spending \$100,000 to \$120,000 a year. Yes, we get very good grants, but it is a big expense and they spend a lot of their time dealing with different silos in the government sector to get funding.⁸

- 3.27 Speaking specifically about the benefits of programs tackling disengaged school students, Professor John Smyth presented a case for the financial benefits of long-term funding programs.⁹ Mr David Beaver, Centacare Ballarat's Director, spoke of the efficacy of State Government programs aimed at early intervention for at risk families that are based on "...allowing you to work longer with the family".¹⁰

⁸ Cr Reid Mather, Chairperson, North West Municipalities Association, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁹ Professor John Smyth, Research Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁰ Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that in developing funding models for addressing disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria the State Government:

- a. Work with service providers at a community level to ensure that funding for programs is not spread too broadly or in such insignificant amounts as to be ineffective.
- b. Continue to streamline funding requirements to reduce their bureaucratic impact on local government agencies, service providers, Indigenous corporations and community groups in rural and regional Victoria.
- c. Endeavour to deliver funding in consistent amounts that provide greater financial certainty to these groups, in turn allowing them to provide local workers with greater security of employment.
- d. Ensure program timescales are sufficient to allow programs to have an impact and a better chance of lasting success.
- e. Ensure that transition funding becomes a mandatory component of funding models for programs in particular Neighbourhood Renewal and that the Government should do so with the aim of ensuring communities have the ability to continue the gains made during the lifespan of programs.
- f. Continue to acknowledge that all attempts at addressing disadvantage must be multi-faceted, coordinated and involve the community at all times.
- g. Recognise and account for critical need to ensure that communities facing significant disadvantage or under stress are funded in a sustained way.

Renewing Communities

They've been empowered. We need to keep them empowered.¹¹

Carolyn Barrie, Ballarat

3.28 Ms Carolyn Barrie from the City of Ballarat raised the issue of a community's options when funding comes to an end. She spoke of how communities sometimes doubt the sustainability of any success that has been achieved by a program and wonder about their ability to move forward once a program has reached its conclusion. As Ms Barrie said when referring to the successful outcomes for the local community achieved by the Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal program: 'They've been empowered. We need to keep them empowered.'¹²

3.29 This concern that communities risk regressing once funding for, in particular, community renewal programs is removed was also raised by Mr Denis

¹¹ Ms Carolyn Barrie, Director People and Communities, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹² Ibid.

Fitzgerald, Executive Director at Catholic Social Services Victoria,¹³ and Mr Peter Appleton from the City of Ballarat. They described how communities can sometimes be left looking for leadership at the end of programs:

In November of last year a community alliance was established, and an action plan to further enhance community projects for Wendouree to take place over the next five years. There is probably a question mark there in terms of where we go with this. It is great to have a new action plan, a sustainability arm for Neighbourhood Renewal, but it's really around that commitment, what happens in terms of how we actually progress that action plan. Who is left actually driving that, and I think that's a little bit unclear at the moment, as we go from that transition where we've had – something has been very organised and streamlined and functional, to a process now where we are a little bit unclear as to the key drivers within actually implementing that action plan process.¹⁴

- 3.30 These comments are testimony to how successful and well received the Neighbourhood Renewal Program has been and how attached residents are to the goals of the program.
- 3.31 Mr Beaver from Ballarat added that the Wendouree West community is actually currently engaged in trying to 'skill up' local members of the community to ensure the area continues to build on the success of the Neighbourhood Renewal program. To this end he suggested that the State Government should consider some form of 'transitional funding' to facilitate the process,¹⁵ an idea supported by the Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal Manager, Ms Geraldine Christou who said: "Things need to continue to happen."¹⁶ Also see Recommendation 10.e.
- 3.32 Neighbourhood Renewal projects include what is described as a 'mainstreaming' component. 'Mainstreaming' refers to how projects are ended at both a state-wide and local level. Locally projects can be continued by local councils. On a state-wide level targets are set for different departments who monitor projects past their completion. Some areas have also received transition funding, such as Wendouree West which received \$10,000.¹⁷

¹³ Mr Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁴ Mr Peter Appleton, Manager Community Development, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁵ Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁶ Ms Geraldine Christou, Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal Manager, Department of Human Services, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁷ Mr Harold Klein, Director, Neighbourhood Renewal, Department of Human Services, *Personal Communication*, 25 August 2010.

One Size Doesn't Fit All

Each community is different, and Government responses need to vary accordingly.¹⁸

Bendigo Bank

- 3.33 Another issue around funding, with regard to program structure and spending requirements, heard by the Committee was a perceived Melbourne-centric focus. Mr Beaver, for example, informed the Committee of the 'Start Over' pilot program aimed at recidivism that Centacare Ballarat has run for Victoria Police. Mr Beaver was of the opinion that, despite the success achieved by the program in Ballarat, the decision not to continue with the program was made "...across a state basis rather than what works".¹⁹

Start Over Project

The Start Over Project aims to reduce youth offending through diversion.²⁰ Established in 2006, the voluntary juvenile diversionary program assists young people to identify and address behaviours, attitudes, personal and family circumstances that contributed to behaviours and actions that have lead or may lead to contact with Police.²¹ Start Over delivers a coordinated and comprehensive program of support to young people to assist them to break the cycle of behaviours and actions that have placed them at risk of becoming persistent offenders.²²

At the public hearing in Ballarat the Committee heard from Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat who explained:

The Start Over Project is an early intervention program designed for young people who would get official warnings in the past, so it is very early intervention. It has shown a recidivism rate of under 30 per cent, and provided a lot of support for the police here in Ballarat.²³

Start Over utilises referral and advocacy access services, coordinates supports and collaborates with schools and services to ensure consistent and focused support to the young person and their families as well as provide intensive case management and support for high risk participants.²⁴

The program targets young people between the ages of 10 and 18 who have been officially processed by police, are a risk of becoming a persistent offender or who

¹⁸ Community Bank Strategic Advisory Board of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, *Submission*, Number 19, 23 March 2010.

¹⁹ Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

²⁰ See: <[http://www.centacareballarat.org.au/index.php?p=11&t=family and youth](http://www.centacareballarat.org.au/index.php?p=11&t=family%20and%20youth)>, accessed July 2010.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

²⁴ See: <[http://www.centacareballarat.org.au/index.php?p=11&t=family and youth](http://www.centacareballarat.org.au/index.php?p=11&t=family%20and%20youth)>, accessed July 2010.

are exhibiting early offending behaviours.²⁵ The youth involved in the program must be willing to actively participate and cooperate with workers.²⁶

Mr Beaver told the Committee that the Start Over Program has:

...re-connected children back into school, so that they aren't re-offending.
One of the indicators of offending is lack of going to school.²⁷

Potential participants can be referred to Start Over by the Police, schools, other community agencies, a family member or they may make a referral themselves.²⁸

3.34 In its submission to this Inquiry, the Community Bank Advisory Board of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank says of towns in rural and regional Victoria: **'Each community is different, and Government responses need to vary accordingly.'**²⁹ Yet the Committee heard evidence that people in rural and regional Victoria are of the opinion that some State Government policy is decided on a 'one-size-fits-all' basis. Mr James McKay, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Shire Council referenced this opinion in regard to recent changes to liquor licensing laws, a decision, it was felt, that was made in Melbourne with little understanding of its impact in remote parts of the State:

The classic is the recent liquor licensing changes. I understand why they did it, but it has had a significant effect on Edenhope's Lake Wallace pub. The pub has probably had one or two fights in the last two years. They hardly ever play loud music, but the additional licence fee has hurt them, and there are some questions about their future. So they need to be careful with that type of stuff.

It is almost like at times the legislators become lazy: 'Let's just do blanket legislation. That's easy. We don't have to worry about it. Then we will go back and fix it'.³⁰

3.35 Since hearing this evidence, the Committee notes that the liquor licensing legislation has been altered to take into account the wide variety of situations in which it applies across the State.

3.36 Mr Peter Valance from Donald Community Care provided an example of what he considered to be an unreasonably inflexible funding situation, in the form

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

²⁸ *Centacare: Family and Youth*, see: <[http://www.centacareballarat.org.au/index.php?p=11&t=family and youth](http://www.centacareballarat.org.au/index.php?p=11&t=family%20and%20youth)>, accessed July 2010.

²⁹ Community Bank Strategic Advisory Board or Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, *Submission*, Number 19, 23 March 2010.

³⁰ Mr James McKay, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

of a client in need of a refrigerator being told that one could be provided but that it would take the Department of Human Services (DHS) three months to deliver it:

For instance, a lady came to me who had a refrigerator that had blown up. You can get whitegoods through DHS by contacting them. There is a program which will replace whitegoods. When I spoke to them they said, 'Yes, we can do that. It will take three months'. This is coming into summer. What do we do; buy blocks of ice for her for the first three months? It is that sort of system. I understand that they need to be sure that everything is genuine, but that is just crazy. It is useless having a system like that there that says 'Yes, we can do it for you, but it will take three months to get it through this system' when you have a pensioner that has no refrigerator for three months.³¹

- 3.37 Mr McKay added that when it comes to allocation of funding, the concept of 'subsidiarity' should be applied; that is, local councils are best placed to decide where money would be most effectively spent. He outlined to the Committee that, as is the case with Federal Assistance Grant funding, this would not abrogate councils of fiscal responsibility:

Our belief is – and as I said, it has been discussed at several other forums – it would still be an allocation of money, and it would not be open slather. The councils would still have to come to you with a series of projects, so you would still know what they are going to spend it on generally, but then they can apply the money as they need to those projects.

Rather than having to acquit each project, they acquit the quantum of money against those projects. So you still have an indication in there of where we are going to be spending the money. It is not as open slather as you might think. It is not a matter of saying, 'Here is the money. You do with it what you want, and we'll give you a sign-off at the end' – and it could be that we bought ten red cars or something when we were supposed to do two public toilets.

No; it needs to be a bit more specific and a bit more controlled than that. It just gives us a bit more discretion when it comes to managing the grants...³²

³¹ Mr Peter Valance, Manager, Donald Community Centre, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

³² Mr James McKay, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

Forging Partnerships

- 3.38 Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor of Buloke Shire Council, was also of the view that central governments can sometimes lose sight of the fact that policy needs to be developed in partnership with rural communities themselves, to recognise that models that may work in a large city or regional centre may not always suit remote areas with small, scattered populations and that repercussions of such decision-making are only fully apparent once a program has been rolled out.³³
- 3.39 As a principle, the Victorian Government understands that the expertise and understanding about what is required is available at a local level, as it states in *Ready for Tomorrow: A blueprint for regional and rural Victoria*: ‘The Government recognises that local communities are best placed to develop their own priorities for the future growth and development of their regions.’³⁴
- 3.40 In Warracknabeal, Dorothy McLaren provided the specific example of being unable to spend Transport Connections money on petrol, a policy that does not reflect the true situation in remote areas, where many volunteers rely on their own vehicle to provide services to a sometimes scattered population:
- If we have got a volunteer driver there, a car over here, the person is up there and the service is down there, the person with a disability is still paying the cost of moving all those people around albeit subsidised in various ways that we have in local communities but it is inequitable and there is a possible solution to that.³⁵
- 3.41 Ms McLaren also provided a written submission to this Inquiry in which she states, in support of the need for unique community-specific responses, that disadvantage would be best tackled if the State Government would ‘...allow flexible responses in rural, regional and remote areas...’.³⁶
- 3.42 Another specific example the Committee heard in Warracknabeal was around Adult, Community and Further Education funding, with Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council presenting a case that the funding “...does not take into account rural circumstances such as smaller class sizes, high travel costs and overnight accommodation for tutors...”.³⁷

³³ Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

³⁴ Victorian Government, *Ready for Tomorrow: A blueprint for regional and rural Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

³⁵ Ms Dorothy McLaren, Rural Access Officer, Rural Access Wimmera, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre Inc.

Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre Inc. is a community focal point offering residents a diverse range of adult learning and other activities.³⁸ The Centre aims to be responsive to learners in a climate of social change by providing training and general learning opportunities, fostering cooperative community partnerships, and addressing community health and wellbeing.³⁹

In the past the Centre has provided the following business courses:

- Basic Book Keeping;
- Basic Office Administration; and
- Job Ready Skills.⁴⁰

The Centre has also offered the following Nationally Accredited Industry Training Courses:

- Construction Induction Card (Red Card);
- Traffic Controller;
- Confined Space Entry;
- Operate and Maintain Chainsaws;
- Forklift Training and Safety.⁴¹

Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre Inc. also provides the Take A Break Occasional Childcare Centre, offering five weekly sessions from Monday to Thursday during school terms throughout the year. The Take A Break service was developed to meet the needs of children attending through social interaction, communication and social skills, education, and stimulation within a safe environment. Parents are accommodated for in the form of health information and support.⁴²

Funding that Reflects Delivery Costs

3.43 Mr John Smith, the Chief Executive Officer of West Wimmera Health Service was of the opinion that the extra cost of delivering services across large distances in remote areas to small populations is not reflected in funding models.⁴³ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) outlined how the costs incurred by a rural

³⁸ See: <<http://warracknabeal.wordpress.com/centre-information/>>, accessed August 2010.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See: <<http://warracknabeal.wordpress.com/business-courses/>>, accessed August 2010.

⁴¹ See: <<http://warracknabeal.wordpress.com/industry-training-courses/>>, accessed August 2010.

⁴² Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre, *Submission*, Number 08, 09 March 2010.

⁴³ Mr John Smith, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

LLEN may be similar to those for a LLEN based in Melbourne, even if the number of people being provided the service is lower:

Given that the work is facilitation and not case management, the fact that I am negotiating with the local IGA and drive 150 kilometres to meet with him and the fact that the program that we partner might only benefit ten young people and that the city's LLEN might be negotiating with the head of Woolworths and might affect 1,000 people, the cost of building that partnership is not very different.⁴⁴

See Key Recommendation 2 on Geographic Weighting on page 330.

- 3.44 In the context of healthcare reforms, the Federal Government outlined its commitment to providing funding for program delivery in rural and regional locations that reflects the higher costs of delivering those programs outside of metropolitan centres. A 2010 Budget Statement said: '... the Government is working to ensure all Australians have access to world-class health care no matter where they live by ensuring funding reflects higher costs in rural and remote Australia...'.⁴⁵

Changing Demographics

- 3.45 Cr Leo Tellefson agreed that there is a lack of geographic weighting in funding models "...across the whole range of essential public services...[and] the situation is only getting worse as the demographic becomes older".⁴⁶
- 3.46 In dealing with an ageing population, responding to an increased demand for services – "We have greater periods of life, but it is also putting one hell of a strain on the resources that we have"⁴⁷ – is just one challenge facing rural and regional communities. For example, **in Ballarat the Committee heard that as much as 25 per cent of the Ballarat population will be aged over 60 within a decade.** As a response, the City of Ballarat is developing a Positive Ageing Strategy⁴⁸ aimed at helping elderly people stay in their own homes.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁴⁵ 'Stronger Rural and Regional Communities', Statement by The Honourable Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; The Honourable Tony Burke MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Minister for Population; The Honourable Martin Ferguson AM MP, Minister for Resources and Energy, Minister for Tourism; The Honourable Maxine McKew MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; The Honourable Gary Gray AO MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, 11 May 2010.

⁴⁶ Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁴⁷ Mr Rob Gersch, Chairman, Wimmera Development Association; Chair, Rural Councils Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

⁴⁸ Ballarat City Council receives \$75,000 per year from State Government Housing and Community Care funding which it spreads across senior care and which represents 25% of funding for the Positive Ageing Strategy. The City of Ballarat provides the majority of the funding (75%).

- 3.47 Yarriambiack Shire Council, on the other hand, has identified a need for independent living units in Hopetoun. The Council believes that providing these enables elderly people to downsize, thereby achieving the dual purpose of keeping them connected to their communities and freeing up larger housing stock:

We up Hopetoun way are well aware that independent living units have been needed for some years. We did have six government flats before the new health service was built up there but somehow they disappeared. They have been needed ever since. That particular community has conducted a lot of research and has the need and demand information to prove that it would be worthwhile for someone to provide some housing there. I guess that raises one of the inequities that I see within our shire and probably the region. A number of aged persons are leaving and relocating to places like Horsham, Mildura, Bendigo and Ballarat, but if we had appropriate housing in the larger towns for them to downsize into, they may prefer to stay, apart from the ones who need specialised medical services. Generally speaking, some of the ones who have moved miss their social networks and family networks.⁵⁰

- 3.48 Horsham Rural City Council told the Committee about its commitment to providing appropriate housing to assist farmers who have sold their property but wish to remain on the house plot. The Council recognises that these members of the community risk becoming isolated. Ms Angela Murphy explained to the Committee the importance of helping people remain in touch with their local communities.⁵¹

Population Growth and Decline

- 3.49 Along with an ageing population, many towns in the Grampians region are experiencing a decline in population numbers. The Committee heard that a declining population affects the quality of life in these towns already struggling to access services, as economies of scale may provide “...further argument for other service providers to reduce services further”,⁵² or, as Mr Miller said: “It is just a further decline in standards of living, further inequities and further disadvantage.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Mr Peter Appleton, Manager Community Development, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁵⁰ Cr Helen Ballentine, Councillor, Yarriambiack Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

⁵¹ Ms Angela Murphy, General Manager Community and Enterprise Services, Horsham Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

⁵² Mr James McKay, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁵³ Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

- 3.50 Cr Tellefson, meanwhile, focused on Victoria's strong tradition of volunteering, fearing that changing community profiles pose a threat to traditional community organisations that have been prominent in rural communities for many years:

Many of the traditional support and service club activities that have historically been the backbone of rural communities are under stress due to population decline, an ageing population, a reduced pool of young people prepared to commit to the levels of community service required to ensure these institutions continue to play a significant role in the future as they have in the past. High levels of volunteerism remain a characteristic of rural communities but the nature of that volunteer activity is changing as the population ages and new values evolve.⁵⁴

- 3.51 Mr McKay also outlined the advantages that larger regional centres enjoy when it comes to attracting people compared to smaller, more remote towns. He suggests that this can impede the ability of smaller towns to thrive:

One of the things I will stress is that regional cities fare better in all of these outcomes, but in their efforts to grow and strive for a sustainable future, which they are doing as well, they sometimes deflect valuable resources from smaller rural areas and towns which are as vital to their survival as they are to us. Because they have got the liveability drawcard and we have not, because they have more services – they have got the picture theatres and things like that – sometimes they can attract the people and the services that we cannot.⁵⁵

- 3.52 Indeed, the Committee was presented with evidence that, for example, Ballarat's population is growing faster than the Victorian average, which presents the Council with an opportunity "...to offer an increased range and frequency of community services to support a culturally and socially diverse population".⁵⁶

- 3.53 Another demographic change noted in Donald was the introduction of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are attracted to the area because of its relatively cheap housing. Cr Mather told the Committee that in a small community, even a relatively small number of people with high needs, such as is often found in low socioeconomic groups, can have a relatively large impact on a community. Cr Mather used schools in the area as an example to suggest that limited resources can be diverted to respond to these new needs:

We can have a very comfortable school environment and then two or three families can move in and they have a high need, some of

⁵⁴ Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁵⁵ Mr James McKay, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁵⁶ City of Ballarat, *Ballarat. Today. Tomorrow. Together*, Ballarat, City of Ballarat.

them, which takes away the resources from the teaching of the children who were originally at that school. The way the funding model works, it is often reactive.

We have to have the problem for X amount of time, then we apply to the department before we can get some assistance to go back. It kills the smaller, one or two-teacher schools...⁵⁷

- 3.54 Mr John Richmond, Principal of Birchip P–12 School explained to the Committee the way in which recent changes in the social make-up of his school had impacted upon his staff. Mr Richmond’s statement shows how greater responsibility for the families of schoolchildren is being placed on schools and teachers in rural locations:

We have only got about 900 people. It is a vibrant sort of town but it is becoming more disparate in that we are actually getting a greater variety, or a more varied type of person, moving into our town, or associated towns in the area. They tend to have greater needs, of course.

As a principal, I have even gone on to do a counselling course so that the assistant principal and I – and then another teacher we have had trained as a counsellor too – can deal with all those issues. **We find ourselves now becoming more required to deal not only with the students and their issues but also their families.**⁵⁸

- 3.55 Currently funds are made available to all Government Secondary Colleges to employ Student Welfare Coordinators. See Recommendation 16 of this Report. The Government’s Student Wellbeing Policy is currently being updated and is due for release in September 2010.⁵⁹
- 3.56 Education is discussed in all Regional Profiles.
- 3.57 The settling of refugee families in rural and regional Victoria is also contributing to changing demographics. Ballarat, once home to as many as 20 different nationalities after the discovery of gold in 1851, is a place that has ongoing experience of cultural and ethnic diversity.⁶⁰ Mr Appleton suggested that the City of Ballarat needs to consider the current evolving mix of nationalities in its planning for the region. In his view this would ensure that different cultural groups become a part of the community rather than isolated disadvantaged groups forced to fend for themselves.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Cr Reid Mather, Chairperson, North West Municipalities Association, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁵⁸ Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P–12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁵⁹ See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/policy.htm>>, accessed 10 September 2010.

⁶⁰ City of Ballarat, *Ballarat. Our Health and Wellbeing Plan 2009–2013*, City of Ballarat, Ballarat, 2009.

⁶¹ Mr Peter Appleton, Manager, Community Development, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

- 3.58 In Warracknabeal, Cr Mandi Stewart from Horsham Rural City Council explained to the Committee that while rural and regional Victoria is a very welcoming place, at times Councils and communities can struggle with their ability to provide adequate services for those in need. In some cases, Cr Stewart explains, this is a result of a lack of knowledge or understanding about an unfamiliar nationality:

For all of the Wimmera this is something new...There is a lot of work we need to do to support those communities because often they are isolated and the system does not sit there to support the kids in schools.

We have a school in Horsham that has said, 'Please do not send us any more migrant students because we do not have the systems in place to properly support those kids in the class and make this a good experience'. They have been very welcoming up to a point, but now the school is at an overload with supporting ESL students when the systems have not been in place. There are certainly things that we are looking at working on doing.⁶²

- 3.59 The lack of knowledge Cr Stewart describes is exacerbated by a need for services that are not as readily available in rural and regional areas but which are required to help local councils support the specific needs of refugee families and their children in small communities.
- 3.60 The Committee also heard the views of Ms Talia Barrett of the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council on the social isolation risks that many refugees can face when they first arrive in rural and regional Victoria. Ms Barrett suggested that while pre-existing cultural networks in a city such as Melbourne can help recent arrivals settle in more easily, in Ballarat this is not the case. The two main issues for refugees flagged by Ms Barrett were: affordable and adequate housing, particularly as many refugees have large families; and challenges obtaining employment, with the latter linked to lack of childcare options and a need for more English classes.⁶³
- 3.61 Using the example of TAFE courses, Ms Barrett also explained how refugees who have spent time in refugee camps, where positions of authority are never to be challenged, can find it difficult to understand their rights when it comes to making the most of opportunities in a new country. Ms Barrett added that even when educational opportunities are fully understood, for many refugees outside forces in the form of social problems, such as the aforementioned childcare and housing issues, can mean that they are not fully prepared for learning.⁶⁴

⁶² Cr Mandi Stewart, Councillor, Horsham Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

⁶³ Ms Talia Barrett, Chair, Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Communities and Education

- 3.62 Following up his earlier evidence on the different social issues having an impact on the Birchip P–12 school, and how several members of the school staff have become trained as counsellors, Mr Richmond told the Committee that the scale and intensity of problems that students are facing and that teachers encounter has left him ‘staggered’. The amount of counselling the school needs to do at the moment is, as suggested earlier, very resource intensive:

Although she teaches two classes, the rest of the assistant principal’s time is all welfare, and after school it is all welfare. It is welfare at the weekends. It is welfare lots of the time, so our time is taken up so much in that area. We just about need another staff member to say, ‘Let’s deal with welfare’.⁶⁵

- 3.63 Mr Richmond was also keen to highlight the willingness of parents in the community to take an interest in social issues. He told the Committee of a forum on alcohol run by the school, which was attended by 95 out of 117 parents. “We do have parents who are prepared to support us...,” Mr Richmond said.⁶⁶

- 3.64 Professor Smyth told the Committee that “...it’s clear you can’t contain the issues within the...walls of the school because these issues come with kids to schools. They’re issues that actually can’t be solved by schools on their own.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 2 in reference to the Loddon Mallee region, schools are seen as responsible for students and in fulfilling their obligations to students principals and teachers often become involved in the overall wellbeing of students and their families.

- 3.65 Mr Valance revealed that problems such as youth homelessness are not confined to cities such as Melbourne:

We have kids who are still at school who are nearly on the street; they are living in caravan parks and that type of thing. It is a problem when you have that sort of thing. It is not unique to Melbourne; we have it in the bush as well and we have it here in Donald. I have had people come to me and say, ‘Where can I get some money to be able to pay a bond to get into the caravan park?’.

The first thing I say is, ‘Why?’ They have problems with parents or whatever. There is a whole range of problems. Those problems do not stop at the edge of Melbourne; they come right out to the edge of the bush and we have to deal with them. In small community

⁶⁵ Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P–12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Professor John Smyth, Research Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

centres we have to deal with them. You cannot just say, 'Sorry. Go away'; we have to deal with it.⁶⁸

- 3.66 Evidence from Centacare Ballarat would suggest that providing a dedicated welfare worker in schools would indeed benefit both the schools' ability to teach and students' readiness to learn:

...people in education think they're the world, and for families, they're a minor part of their world. But, they're where you can contact families and work with it.

[Social issues] are preventing kids really learning, and I think, unfairly, schools are expected to respond to all that. It's interesting, we've got family workers in a couple of schools funded under the Federal Government's Values Chaplaincy Program, and one Principal would say having that worker in their school has freed him up two days a week to do education.⁶⁹

See Recommendation 16 of this Report.

- 3.67 This picture of schools taking responsibility and assisting students and families with their 'life issues' is one that the Committee saw throughout regional Victoria. In Ballarat, the notion that schools are a central and accessible location where services can reach disadvantaged families, particularly in smaller communities, is in fact a defining theme of Yuille Park P-8 Community College.

Yuille Park P-8 Community College

'Living to learn, learning to live'

In 2008, Yuille Park P-8 Community College was formed from the merger of Yuille Primary School and Grevillea Park Primary School.⁷⁰ Situated in the heart of the Wendouree West community and part of the Victorian Schools Plan, Yuille Park Community College provides students with technology-rich classrooms along with specialised arts, music and sports facilities.⁷¹

Emerging from the Department of Human Services' Neighbourhood Renewal Program, Yuille Park P-8 Community College operates as a "linked-up model of delivery of engagement and education".⁷² At this Inquiry's public hearing in Ballarat, Mr Clete Paige, Principal of Yuille Park College, told the Committee that:

....we merged two schools together, two disadvantaged schools. Ron mentioned before the [Student Family Occupation] index was .7. We are .89. Probably it is one of the highest in the state. Three years ago we had

⁶⁸ Mr Peter Valance, Manager, Donald Community Centre, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁶⁹ Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁷⁰ See: <<http://www.yuilleparkcc.vic.edu.au/>>, accessed July 2010.

⁷¹ See: <http://yuilleparkcc.vic.edu.au/school_profile/school_background>, accessed July 2010.

⁷² Mr Clete Paige, Principal, Yuille Park Community College, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

the highest take-up of education maintenance allowance of the state, and that was at 97 per cent, so we have reduced that figure in the community. We have a very transient community, we would turn over something like anywhere between 45 to 35 per cent of our school population in any one year, so that has an impact on some of our data sets that we have out there in the community.⁷³

Mr Paige explained that the College engages the whole of the local community in rebuilding and making generational change:

It is about not only community and Neighbourhood Renewal, it's about renewal and education, and the engagement of parents, the valuing of the parents. A lot of the parents of our children that come to this school in this disadvantaged, disengaged area, disenfranchised area, have had bad experiences with education. Now, they are starting to engage in the school. We have school council elections now where I have a full book for school councillors, which hasn't happened before. So, there are a number of indicators we have along there. I had 250 students; 40 of those who are the disengaged students go to our second campus. Of the 210 I have on this site, 85 of them had 100 per cent attendance in Term 1, and that is unheard of in this school before.⁷⁴

The College is part of the Wendouree West Community Hub shared facilities which include:

- commercial kitchen;
- dental clinic;
- function and meeting rooms;
- technology lab;
- gym;
- visual and performing arts facilities;
- library;
- workshop space;
- band room;
- recording studio; and
- community garden and kitchen.⁷⁵

Yuille Park has introduced modern and innovative teaching strategies and changed the traditional class structure to create student learning communities.⁷⁶ The learning communities are divided into: Prep to Year 2; Year 3 to Year 5; and Year 6 to Year 8. They aim to promote interaction between students across year levels and enable exposure to wider educational choices, as well as encouraging engagement

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Victorian Government, *Yuille Park Community College: Student Engagement and Well-being Policy*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, September 2009. See: <http://yuilleparkcc.vic.edu.au/school_profile>, accessed August 2010.

⁷⁶ See: <http://yuilleparkcc.vic.edu.au/school_profile/school_background>, accessed July 2010.

with teachers and mentoring.⁷⁷ Teachers, who work in teams, teach in a more collaborative way involving students in how and when they learn.⁷⁸

Yuille Park Community College aims to engage its students and encourage them to develop lifelong learning skills in an atmosphere of cooperation and respect.⁷⁹

3.68 Yuille Park P–8 Community College acts as a hub for the community, providing a number of facilities, including:

- a daily breakfast club for students;
- a permanent on-site dental clinic with two chairs;
- a gym for students and their families;
- arts facilities;
- a kitchen linked to its own garden; and
- a training facility offering courses for parents, including a Certificate III in Childcare.⁸⁰

3.69 The College’s Principal, Mr Clete Paige, a passionate advocate of engaging with all aspects of a student’s life, explained to the Committee some of the ways in which the school contributes to the wellbeing of the community. For example, families benefit through parents, many of whom have had bad experiences with education in the past, becoming involved with the school. This includes parents undertaking further studies, thus establishing a culture of learning at home, and developing an improved attitude to diet:

The [training facility] is visually linked so as the students go past they see their parents in there doing homework. **Afterwards, the parents said ‘I couldn't believe the impact that that had, because my child wanted to do homework. I had to do some reading. They sat down at the kitchen table’. Never been done before.**

...we've done food handling courses for our parents. Now, they're working in the Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden program with us. The children now go shopping with their parents. They want to prepare food and meals for their parents, ‘Can I cook for you?’⁸¹

3.70 Mr Paige added that the College works hard to maintain a strong relationship with the local Wendouree West community, opening up the centre for community events. The wider community believes that the school is well placed to help people develop skills and improve their life outcomes: “It is

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Yuille Park Community College: Student Engagement and Well-being Policy*, Victorian Government, September 2009, see: <http://yuilleparkcc.vic.edu.au/school_profile>, accessed August 2010.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Mr Clete Paige, Principal, Yuille Park P–8 Community College, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁸¹ Ibid.

about we can listen, and we can listen, but true listening is being able to find avenues, to find pathways, to really engage these people and give them something at the end of the track.”⁸²

- 3.71 In a submission to this Inquiry, Mr Tony Shaw, Principal, Glen Park Primary School, also discusses the idea of schools acting as community hubs, in this case as agents for all three levels of government. Mr Shaw proposes providing schools with computers and printed material relevant to government departments that visitors can access and, as is the case at the Yuille Park school, funding schools to open up libraries and other school spaces to be used by the local community.⁸³ In smaller communities where resources are limited these initiatives are an efficient way to use resources.
- 3.72 Education hubs were raised in the Victorian Government submission to this Inquiry. See Chapter 7.
- 3.73 Mr Richmond was another witness who told the Committee of the importance of schools in small communities opening their doors and classrooms to parents, who seek access to training and education opportunities.⁸⁴

Recommendation 19

That the State Government continue to invest in schools designed along ‘community hub’ models particularly in areas identified as experiencing disadvantage in education outcomes and generational disadvantage.

Dealing with Disengagement

- 3.74 The Committee heard that Yuille Park P–8 Community College is succeeding in tackling the problem of disengaged students, those students who do not fit into normal mainstream education. It is, however, a very resource-intensive effort, with Mr Paige explaining that if a student is not in attendance when rolls are recorded, staff make phone calls to parents and even take the time to make house visits to check on the welfare of their students.
- 3.75 Yuille Park College has developed links between students and local industry as another education option so that, as Mr Paige said, “...**we’re keeping them engaged, but we’re also providing pathways for them, and that’s**

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Mr Tony Shaw, Principal, Glen Park Primary School, *Submission*, Number 61, 18 May 2010.

⁸⁴ Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P–12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

- important”**.⁸⁵ These initiatives are not funded separately to the school’s Student Resource Package funding.
- 3.76 As well as offering alternative life choices apart from dropping out of school, another benefit of linking school students with local businesses is the potential to engage positive role models or mentors. Mr Paige described how critical an approach like this is to young people, especially young males, who because of the social problems they have encountered in their lives may be lacking in role models at home.
- 3.77 In Donald, Ms Debra Borden spoke of the lack of role models young people can turn to within their own age group, especially outside of sporting clubs.⁸⁶ Ms Karen Douglas discussed the high number of students at Ballarat University who are the first in their family to engage in further study, be that academically or working towards a trade, and the need to support these people and raise their aspirations. She also broadened the discussion to suggest that in our society physical signs of wealth, such as the brands of cars that young people see in their community, can also shape a young person’s expectations and motivation.⁸⁷
- 3.78 The problem of young people becoming disengaged from education is one that Professor Smyth likened to a “silent epidemic”.⁸⁸ The Committee heard about the challenges that young people who are disengaged from school, and also in many cases from employment, pose for rural and regional communities. However, we also heard about innovative and successful programs that have been initiated in local communities to deal with these challenges. In Donald, Ms Nelson identified 57 disengaged young people in the North Central Local Learning and Employment Network area and told the Committee of an alternative education pilot in St Arnaud that has so far involved 27 young people. However, the pilot is struggling for funding and, according to Ms Nelson, “...should it fall over, we will not have a single alternative education program”.⁸⁹
- 3.79 Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) were established in 2001 in Victoria. Their aim is to improve education, training and employment options for 15–19-year-olds, particularly those at risk of making poor transitions from compulsory schooling to the next stage of their lives and careers. There are 31 LLENs throughout Victoria. Each of the 31 LLENs has a three-year contract (2008 to 2011) managed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Mr Cleve Paige, Principal, Yuille Park P–8 Community College, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁸⁶ Ms Debra Borden, Assistant Nurse Unit Manager, Donald Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁸⁷ Ms Karen Douglas, Chair, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁸⁸ Professor John Smyth, Research Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁸⁹ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

⁹⁰ See: <<http://www.llen.vic.gov.au/what/default.asp>>, accessed 25 August 2010.

3.80 Another way in which Yuille Park P–8 Community College approaches the idea of preventing students from becoming disengaged sits around the ‘transition point’ in schooling, the point of change from primary school to secondary school. Mr Paige questioned the reasoning behind the sudden change students in Victoria experience at the end of Year 6, from a more supportive style of schooling to the greater independence and individual responsibility of secondary school education. Mr Paige argued that because this is exactly the stage of young people’s lives where so much change is occurring, this time period needs to be better managed for students at risk of becoming disengaged. As such, Yuille Park P–8 Community College is divided into three learning groups, or learning ‘pods’: Prep to Year 2; Year 3 to Year 5; and Year 6 to Year 8. **Mr Paige explained that approaching the middle years of Year 6 to Year 8 separately has greatly reduced the number of disengaged young people in the Wendouree West area.** The model is built on the notion that students should not move to secondary school until they can do so smoothly and with greater student and leadership skills:

The 6 to 8 is built on the middle years model, and that came about because we had 65 per cent of our students that left this setting, didn't complete Year 8, they dropped out before then. We have reduced that down, because we have multiple levels of transition. When they come to us, we have a conference with the parents. The secondary school at Wendouree we usually feed to, and we say this child is now ready because they ticked all these boxes and they move on. Since then, some of our students have gone on and become parent leaders in Years 8 and 9. So, it's about that engagement, that philosophy.⁹¹

The Committee has made a Recommendation to government with regard to the need to better track disengaged young people. See Recommendation 12.

3.81 Professor Smyth agreed that the model around transition points developed by the College should be applauded, particularly for the way in which it involves the students themselves in the decision-making process:

...this place here has I think done something quite innovative in that it has actually allowed kids to make decisions about when that transition actually occurs. I think the effect of that is quite dramatic in terms of kids who are actually continuing to hang in there. So, it's at those transition points where if kids are given a greater say on that – and this one has got a process where they can actually leave at the end of Year 6 or at the end of Year 7 or Year 8, I think, and if it doesn't work out, it's not a one-way track. These kids can actually move back and forward, and they can admit to programs across this and the secondary schools. I mean, those are, I think intelligent responses to the issue.⁹²

⁹¹ Mr Clete Paige, Principal, Yuille Park P–8 Community College, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁹² Professor John Smyth, Research Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

- 3.82 In Wendouree West the community has benefited from being involved in the Yuille Park P–8 Community College project.

Neighbourhood Renewal: A Community Approach

- 3.83 Projects have the best chance of succeeding when the whole community is involved. Speaking about the Neighbourhood Renewal project in Wendouree West that led to the community college being created, Ms Christou described how, along with having all three levels of government on board, the most important factor in the project's success was the involvement of local residents: "We did this only with very strong resident support, and that has been the key to the successes that we've had here."⁹³
- 3.84 Professor Smyth reinforced the value of involving the whole community, telling the Committee that as someone who grew up very near to Wendouree West, he has been able to observe the positive changes that came about from the Neighbourhood Renewal project, a change he ascribed to the fact that "...the community has been given a significant chance to have a say in both the nature of the problem as well as the resolution of it..."⁹⁴
- 3.85 Ms Karen Hunter, a resident of Wendouree West described the impact of the Neighbourhood Renewal program simply: "I mean, I've been here forever, and the change in Wendouree West is fantastic."⁹⁵
- 3.86 Mr Geoff Sharp expanded on the concept of programs needing to take a 'whole-of-community' approach to stand a better chance of succeeding, suggesting that once all the stakeholders, the relevant sectors, have become involved and started working together, local communities then develop a sense of ownership and can themselves become a driver of positive change to address disadvantage:

My biggest challenge is telling people why they need to support their local community. It's not the City Council's problem, it's not the State Government's problem, it's not the Federal Government's problem, it's my problem, and actually trying to build that sense. As a community, it's been very easy for people to say 'I don't need to worry about it'. So, we're trying to build that back in and bring everyone, the education sector, the corporate sector, the philanthropic sector, the government sector, the social services sector, together to actually begin to make those changes, and that's when you start to get community impact when all of those come together. This is what we're saying right around the world right now.

⁹³ Ms Geraldine Christou, Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal Manager, Department of Human Services, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁹⁴ Professor John Smyth, Research Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁹⁵ Ms Karen Hunter, Wendouree West Resident, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

It's people, when they come together as an entire community, that's when changes happen.⁹⁶

- 3.87 Using similar language to that heard earlier from Cr Tellefson about the need for governments to develop policy in consultation with rural communities themselves, the Committee heard of a positive example of the Department of Justice consulting with the local community in Ararat, to locate a half-way house for prisoners in the town. In complimenting the Department for its approach, Mr Fitzgerald said that reaching agreement on something as contentious as a half-way house “...can only be done in partnership”.⁹⁷
- 3.88 In discussing the Neighbourhood Renewal program in Wendouree West, Ms Christou expressed concern around the fact that an integral component of the program had been the creation of jobs for members of the local community. Ms Christou said that this had indeed been successful, but not as successful as she would have liked because (as referred to earlier by Mr Beaver) “...we were coming from a very poor base. People didn’t have the skills.”⁹⁸
- 3.89 Ms Bronwyn Herbert, Coordinator Community Planning, City of Ballarat also identified this relatively low skill base as an impediment to job creation in the Ballarat region,⁹⁹ while Mr Beaver made the direct link between poor educational outcomes and long-term unemployment.¹⁰⁰ Dimboola resident Mr Tony Schneider, in a submission to this Inquiry, suggests that areas with lower levels of education experience ‘...a reduced ability to advocate and lobby for the improvement and advancement of the local community...’.¹⁰¹

Aspirations

- 3.90 Relevant to this discussion on education, Mr Richmond expressed concern about the cost for families in rural Victoria of sending their children to university in Melbourne or a regional centre such as Bendigo or Ballarat, in particular the cost of accommodation. He suggested that, especially for farming families struggling with the drought, financial worries are impeding educational aspirations for young people:

The ABC asked me to do a bit of a study on that so I got a heap of the kids at the school to come in and we had a conversation. From that conversation I had an interview with Jonathan Riddnell on the

⁹⁶ Mr Geoff Sharp, Chief Executive, United Way Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁹⁷ Mr Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁹⁸ Ms Geraldine Christou, Wendouree West Neighbourhood Renewal Manager, Department of Human Services, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

⁹⁹ Ms Bronwyn Herbert, Coordinator Community Planning, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Mr David Beaver, Director, Centacare Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁰¹ Mr Tony Schneider, *Submission*, Number 7, 20 February 2010.

ABC – this is a couple of years ago. Some of the kids were saying that they hear mum and dad worrying about the drought, therefore they then do not say, ‘I want to go to uni’.¹⁰²

- 3.91 Regarding aspirations, Mr McKay provided an illustration of the role parental expectations play in shaping their children’s aspirations towards education: “I have been telling my girls, ‘You can’t wait to get to uni. Wait till you see the café. The café life is the best part’.”¹⁰³

The Unique Needs of Rural and Regional Schools

- 3.92 Mr Richmond argued that a strong education system clearly benefits the whole country, and that more needs to be done to support students in rural and regional Victoria. Mr Richmond provided the example of the Wimmera Virtual Schools Network, a reciprocal arrangement whereby Birchip P–12 School delivers a variety of subjects via videoconferencing to schools in the region who are unable to provide these subjects due to low student numbers. In return it receives classes from other schools for its own students. Although there are minimal ongoing costs for the schools involved, Mr Richmond informed the Committee that he considered it unfair that the schools had to fund the majority of the start-up costs for the videoconferencing equipment. In the case of Birchip P–12 School an amount of \$27,000. He explained that without the Wimmera Virtual Learning Network subject options for students in the region would be greatly restricted.¹⁰⁴

Wimmera Virtual Learning Network

The Wimmera Virtual Learning Network operates in Victoria’s north-west and comprises 14 regional and rural schools.¹⁰⁵ The Network aims to provide a blended learning delivery model for two clusters of secondary schools in the Wimmera and Highlands area.¹⁰⁶ Involving a total of 18 schools – 11 from the Wimmera and seven from the Highlands – project management is the responsibility of the principals with the support of the region Wimmera Project Officer, Mr Gary Schultz.

The Network has grown from seven classes in 2009 to 16 classes in 2010, involving over 100 students.¹⁰⁷ Classes consist of at least two weekly 90-minute videoconferencing sessions with both ‘local’ and ‘remote’ students, allowing for teachers

¹⁰² Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P–12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁰³ Mr James McKay, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P–12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Victoria’s Rural Education Framework*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

¹⁰⁶ See: <<http://wimmeravirtualschool.wikispaces.com/>>, accessed August 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Victoria’s Rural Education Framework*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

to provide instruction to students simultaneously in three different schools in the Network.¹⁰⁸

A component of a rural curriculum provision pilot across Loddon Campaspe and Grampians regions, the Wimmera Virtual Learning Network focuses on building the capacity of students and teachers to embrace the new technology. An extension of the project is exploration of the blended provision across the P–10 years.¹⁰⁹

The Wimmera Virtual Learning Network has launched into a new era of curriculum provision with the installation of video conferencing infrastructure to deliver subjects such as Physics, Psychology, Mathematical Methods, Chemistry and Physical Education.¹¹⁰ The Network's online learning management system enables students to access content, revision notes and practice tests from remote locations, as well as podcasts, relevant YouTube clips and screencasts recorded by their teacher.¹¹¹ According to *Victoria's Rural Education Framework*, this blended model of curriculum delivery is negotiated by teachers and students to incorporate the best mix of technology and face-to-face instruction to suit the geographical situation and subject requirements.¹¹²

The program has enabled the schools to begin addressing some of the problems associated with disadvantage in the remote Wimmera area, assisting with the following:

- schools have made savings in the teacher allotments, enabling greater diversity in lower-level provision;
- the program has led to an increase in teacher participation in professional development by allowing meetings online or via video-conferencing, removing the need for costly and excessive travel by staff; and
- students are now able to receive tuition in a wider range of subjects.¹¹³

3.93 In Ballarat, Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director, Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development suggested that while videoconferencing technology is helpful, online learning has greater potential because it does not depend on schools having linked timetables and students can learn at a time that is suitable to them:

And you talked about the video conferencing, but that requires every school to have aligned timetables, and in the end, it breaks down because it is synchronous, it is point-to-point at the same

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See: <<http://www.vitta.org.au/conferenceinfo/cid/123/parent/0/pid/39/t/conferenceinfo/title/principals-conference>>, accessed August 2010.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Victoria's Rural Education Framework*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

time. Asynchronous we know works. Kids can actually access the materials at times that suit them, which might be a spare period during the day. It might be at home but, also we have the technology to put learner in contact with learner, which is very important, and learner in contact with teacher, which can be 24/7 if you've got the right teacher.¹¹⁴

3.94 Mr Richmond informed the Committee that the Wimmera Virtual Schools Network does make use of 'Moodle', an online education tool.¹¹⁵

3.95 Mr Richmond also raised the issue of staff having to cover expenses when travelling to Melbourne for events such as school excursions or professional development:

Our personal development budget is about \$20,000 to \$25,000 already. We cannot pay more on top of that, so we try to say, 'Hey, listen. Live with a relative for the next couple of days'. Compared to the corporate world, schools are poor. That is not just at Birchip; it would be replicated in many other areas. I am on a VASSP [Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals] committee in Wimmera, so I am connected with Dimboola, Rainbow, Hopetoun, Warracknabeal, Edenhope, Kaniva, Dimboola, Murtoa, Donald and St Arnaud. I meet with all of those principals. I do not think that would be dissimilar to a certain extent.¹¹⁶

3.96 Referring to the Loddon Mallee region, Mr Lake told the Committee that schools struggling financially to send students on excursions or teachers to professional development courses in, for example, Melbourne should look for assistance from their Regional Network Leaders, who, in Mr Lake's region, have a budget of \$40,000 set aside to be spent at their discretion.¹¹⁷

3.97 There are also examples of the Department of Employment Education and Community Development providing training courses in the Grampians. For example, the Grampians Region of the Department offers Reading Recovery™, a literacy program aimed at students in Year 1 who are falling behind in their reading and writing skills. Training for Reading Recovery™ teachers takes place every year in Ballarat and every second year in Horsham.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹¹⁵ Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P-12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹¹⁸ See: <<http://www.grampians.vic.edu.au/readincrecovery>>, accessed 11 June 2010.

Recommendation 23

That the State Government increase funding for literacy and numeracy ‘catch-up’ programs for schools with students beginning their education with poor literacy and numeracy skills. This funding should be allocated automatically when the level of need at a school reaches a pre-determined level.

3.98 However, it would still seem to be the case that, as Mr Shaw says in his submission, when it comes to professional development ‘...small schools especially those in remote areas find themselves at a significant disadvantage compared to their metropolitan counterparts’.¹¹⁹

Recommendation 13

That the State Government ensure teachers in rural and regional Victoria are not financially disadvantaged through meeting their professional development requirements in Melbourne. This could be achieved through direct financial support or by the running of professional development courses in more regional areas, following a consultation process with rural and regional educators.

Recommendation 14

That the State Government facilitate the development of a rural schools professional association to strengthen the relationships between small schools across rural and regional Victoria and with the aim of reducing the time, travel and financial costs imposed upon teachers in rural and regional locations fulfilling professional development obligations.

Information and Communications Technology

3.99 Concerning the link between information and communications technology and services that are made available to small towns, Cr Mather introduced the subject of remote diagnostics in health. He proposed that this technology “...will be as essential as water and electricity if we are to grow our region”.¹²⁰

3.100 Similarly, Mr Rob Gersch, attending the Committee’s hearing at Warracknabeal, expressed concern that some communities will miss out on the potential education and health benefits to be gained by the national

¹¹⁹ Mr Tony Shaw, Principal, Glen Park Primary School, *Submission*, Number 61, 18 May 2010.

¹²⁰ Cr Reid Mather, Chairperson, North West Municipalities Association, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

broadband rollout.¹²¹ According to the Federal Government optical fibre networks delivering speeds of up to 100 megabits per second will be limited to ‘towns with a population of around 1,000 or more people’, with wireless and satellite technology delivering speeds of around 12 megabits per second provided for those living in smaller towns.¹²²

3.101 Mr Gersch told the Committee that communications in general is a pressing concern for the region. For example, the lack of mobile phone coverage affects safety, especially during bushfire season:

With regard to communication, at a WDA [Wimmera Development Association] meeting the other night when we went through this, communication was possibly one of the major things that we had in our area – or the lack of, I guess. There is the lack of mobile coverage throughout the region – the safety issues, the fire warnings and emergency work throughout the Grampians in some areas of the north-west associated with mobile phones that do not work. So when these warnings are about, we do have a problem.¹²³

3.102 Overall, though, according to Ms Joanne Bourke, the National Broadband Network is eagerly anticipated by businesses in the Grampians, as the current information and communications technology capacity is insufficient for businesses to be competitive on a global scale:

Mobile telephone coverage, internet access, while people are out working in their enterprises, is putting people at such a disadvantage when decisions need to be made quickly, and opportunities are missed because the technology just is not available in some areas.¹²⁴

Health

Access to Services

3.103 It was suggested that local authorities and the State Government, with the concept of ‘connectivity’ in mind, could improve resident access to health services by improving public transport between towns and regional centres.

¹²¹ Mr Rob Gersch, Chairman, Wimmera Development Association; Chair, Rural Councils Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹²² Prime Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Finance, Minister for Broadband, ‘New national broadband network’, Joint Media Release, 7 April 2009, see: <http://www.minister.dbcde.gov.au/media/media_releases/2009/022>, accessed 10 June 2010.

¹²³ Mr Rob Gersch, Chairman, Wimmera Development Association; Chair, Rural Councils Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹²⁴ Ms Joanne Bourke, Chair, Regional Development Australia, Grampians Region; Project Liaison Officer, Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

Making it easier for people to reach services is a simpler and more realistic option than providing health services in each and every town.¹²⁵

3.104 Mr Valance provided an example of how in rural areas a short journey in a car can become an extremely long journey by public transport:

We have another bus that runs from here to St Arnaud and then across through Ararat and then back to Stawell. **Some people go to see doctors in Stawell, which seems crazy because it is about a two-and-a-half-hour round trip to get to Stawell by bus compared to 40 minutes from here if there were a vehicle available. That is just the inadequacy of public transport.**¹²⁶

3.105 As Ms Borden said in relation to bus services between Bendigo and Donald: “The disadvantage of living in a small country town is that you have to problem-solve this sort of stuff all the time.”¹²⁷

3.106 On the issue of connectivity, there are disability service providers that ensure good access for their clients – such as Woodbine in Warracknabeal, which runs a bus to and from Horsham. However, for some families caring for family members with a disability, the time taken to access specialised health services in towns a great distance from where they live is “...a huge social cost and enormous disadvantage”.¹²⁸

3.107 Specialised health services are available in towns such as Horsham, Hamilton and Ballarat. However, for some people in the Wimmera accessing these services can be problematic, both for patients and their carers. Rob Gersch explains: “In my own shire, my own town, we have 75- or 80-year-old volunteers driving people around down to Ballarat or Hamilton for services. Some of these people driving is also a major problem from a safety point of view.”¹²⁹

3.108 In Donald, the West Wimmera Health Service has identified the following health services as those that residents of West Wimmera must travel to access:

- CT;
- MRI;
- oncology;
- radiotherapy;
- chemotherapy; and

¹²⁵ Mr Colin Kemp, Acting Executive Officer, Wimmera Development Association, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹²⁶ Mr Peter Valance, Manager, Donald Community Centre, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹²⁷ Ms Debra Borden, Assistant Nurse Unit Manager, Donald Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹²⁸ Ms Dorothy McLaren, Rural Access Officer, Rural Access Wimmera, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹²⁹ Mr Rob Gersch, Chairman, Wimmera Development Association; Chair, Rural Councils Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

- rehabilitation services in particular mental health and drug and alcohol services.¹³⁰

3.109 Evidence from Ms Borden suggests that radiotherapy services are lacking in other regions as well: “We have had instances where young people have broken bones playing sport on Saturdays but that has not been picked up until the radiology service has been available on Tuesdays.”¹³¹

3.110 The Chief Executive Officer of the West Wimmera Health Service, Mr Smith, was keen to compliment the State Government for supporting an increase in dialysis services at West Wimmera Health Service that is needed to cope with growing incidences of diabetes in the region.

3.111 The disadvantage people in rural and regional Victoria face when it comes to the cost of accessing an ambulance was raised as a concern. Mr Smith provided the Committee with a specific example that he believes explains his concern:

One really big issue that I have with travel relates to ambulance costs. I do not know whether you are aware of this, but it is charged on a time and distance calculation. Metropolitan road ambulance users pay a similar flat-rate fee and do not have to pay time or distance. What I am saying is that in the metropolitan area they pay a flat rate of \$897.28 flag fall and no time and distance charge. In rural areas we pay a flag fall of \$893.95, time per minute of \$10.82 and distance per kilometre of \$1.06.

When you add all that up – and I sent someone from Rainbow to Horsham, which is 225 kilometres over 185 minutes; that is, \$3,447.40. **I can take you to the extreme: from Nhill to Melbourne, which is 750 kilometres over 713 minutes, it is \$9,403.** I am very, very opposed to the way this is funded. I do not have an answer for you. It has been around for a long time, but it is very much a disadvantage. The further away from Melbourne you live the more you pay.¹³²

Recommendation 31

That the State Government provide parity for the health sector through the introduction of a flat fee for ambulance transfers between health services so that rural and regional health services are not disadvantaged by being located in non-metropolitan areas.

¹³⁰ Mr John Smith, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹³¹ Ms Debra Borden, Assistant Nurse Unit Manager, Donald Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹³² Mr John Smith, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

Attracting Health Professionals

3.112 Mr Smith raised the issue of the ability of remote communities to attract health professionals. Smaller towns have difficulty competing with larger metropolitan and regional centres without offering incentives in the form of, for example, housing, transport and relocation reimbursements. However, Mr Smith said that providing such incentives erodes an organisation's ability to deliver services. He did also mention that West Wimmera Health Service has had some success in attracting allied health professionals through use of a bursary system that bonds workers to an organisation for a set amount of time.¹³³

3.113 In Hindmarsh, Mr Miller revealed that although he considers the quality of health care overall in the Shire to be good and well-resourced:

...there are gaps, and the gaps are in the areas of maternity services, psychological services and emergency services. In Nhill, for example, we have got a brand-new set up for paediatric services, but the last paediatrician left there about five years ago and moved to Hamilton to get a better education for his children. There has been a gap there for four or five years that we have not been able to fill. We have got the resources in the town, we have got the nurses there, but we just cannot attract a paediatrician.¹³⁴

3.114 In Donald, Ms Borden told the Committee that nurse shortages have an impact on rural health services in two ways: budgets are used hiring nurses from agencies at higher pay rates; and permanent staff face an increased risk of burn-out and leaving the profession, exacerbating the problem.¹³⁵

3.115 Mr Nat Rodinov, Practice Manager at the Donald Family Clinic, informed the Committee that the risk of burn-out is also a major problem for rural doctors. This is a problem that he partly ascribed to the long working hours many doctors endure in small communities, particularly due to being on-call for long periods of time. Mr Rodinov suggested that a two-tier payment system distinguishing between doctors who work in cities and doctors who work in remote areas might be one idea that could help alleviate the problem, by attracting more local medical graduates.¹³⁶

3.116 Mr Rodinov was also of the view that without the number of international medical graduates (IMGs) working across the country rural communities would not have many of their health needs met.¹³⁷ This argument was supported by Mr Miller, who said that any change to the International

¹³³ Mr John Smith, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹³⁴ Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹³⁵ Ms Debra Borden, Assistant Nurse Unit Manager, Donald Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹³⁶ Mr Nat Rodinov, Practice Manager, Donald Family Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Medical Graduates Scheme “...would be disastrous for places like Hindmarsh Shire”.¹³⁸

Recommendation 32

That the State Government continue to support the International Medical Graduates Recruitment Scheme in its current form, maintaining the emphasis on directing medical professionals to rural and regional Victoria.

3.117 Mr Gersch argued that larger communities are better placed to offer services and facilities for professionals and their families, such as bigger schools and more recreation facilities. On the other hand small communities will always struggle to attract and retain professionals such as health specialists, even though funding exists for these positions.¹³⁹ However, one of the reasons why programs such as the International Medical Graduates program and the bursary approach as described earlier by Mr Smith are successful is because doctors, although initially contracted to work in a small town, do often find themselves attracted to the lifestyle advantages of living in a small community. This was the case for Dr Tanya Rodinov in Donald. When questioned by the Committee about why she remains working and living in Donald, even though as a fully registered doctor she is able to work anywhere in Australia:

Initially I did not have a choice. It was only because I was from overseas and I was likely to get a job here, and I like my job very much. Another reason was I became the principal of the practice. I still had not passed all the exams, but I continued to carry on my duties and prepare for the exam. Eventually I passed my fellowship exam. **Now I have freedom, I can go everywhere, but I still like the community and I like my job.**¹⁴⁰

3.118 Indeed, Mr Miller was keen to stress what he considered to be the advantages that living in rural areas has over life in larger centres and cities, including “...cleaner air, less traffic congestion, lower crime rates, high levels of community participation and connectedness...”.¹⁴¹ Cr Helen Ballentine also explained what draws people to rural and regional Victoria:

I live where I live because I love the wide open spaces. That is number 1. I love the open skies, sunsets and sunrises. I love the

¹³⁸ Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹³⁹ Mr Rob Gersch, Chairman, Wimmera Development Association; Chair, Rural Councils Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Dr Tanya Rodinov, General Practitioner, Donald Family Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁴¹ Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

trees. I love the feeling of freedom. My particular interest is in farming, so for me living on a farm is a wonderful life...

I have raised happy children here. It is safe. As I said before, there is that inequity of having to have a car and you must have a reasonable income. I have basically lived a middle-class life and I find that most farming families have. When things are good, the comfort and the benefit of living that type of life compensates for the isolation and for having to drive everywhere. I might have fellow committee members who live in Hopetoun, and they just walk down to a meeting whereas everything I do involves getting in the car, putting fuel in the car and driving. But basically I just love the geography and I love the culture.¹⁴²

3.119 Ms McLaren, as another self-identified “newcomer” to a small town, in this case Noradjuha, expanded on the lifestyle advantages she experiences, including tranquillity and a genuine sense of belonging to a community: “I think when we are thinner on the ground there is a greater sense of camaraderie.”¹⁴³

3.120 Ms McLaren added that one of the ways in which this “camaraderie” can express itself in a small community is that people with a disability, lacking the access to day services that they may otherwise expect in a larger town or city, are simply accepted as another part of the community and “...receive support from other citizens that are due to them...”¹⁴⁴

3.121 Mr Rodinov held a similar view in relation to elderly patients. He believes that being part of a small community means that elderly members receive better treatment from the services that are available.¹⁴⁵ Dr Rodinov added the proviso that this does depend on being able to access a basic level of service provision and that if doctors “...will not be able to work or continue to work in small communities like Donald, St Arnaud or Wycheproof, all services will disappear”.¹⁴⁶

Recommendation 33

That the State Government use its Young Professional Provincial Cadetship Program as announced in *Ready for Tomorrow* to target the shortage of health workers in rural and regional Victoria.

¹⁴² Cr Helen Ballentine, Councillor, Yarriambiack Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁴³ Ms Dorothy McLaren, Rural Access Officer, Rural Access Wimmera, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Mr Nat Rodinov, Practice Manager, Donald Family Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁴⁶ Dr Tanya Rodinov, General Practitioner, Donald Family Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

Living with Drought

- 3.122 Mental health issues were raised by Cr Ballentine, who described to the Committee the stress rural communities feel after a decade or more of drought. Cr Ballentine spoke of what is for a rural community a relatively recent development, that of men coming forward to express concern about the state of their friends' mental health. A mental health forum held several weeks before this Inquiry's hearing in Warracknabeal drew 330 people, a figure that Cr Ballentine identified as being significantly high.¹⁴⁷
- 3.123 Mr Valance provided the Committee with evidence on how the drought has affected communities in north-west Victoria:

The drought has probably been the biggest hammering of us. We have really been in drought for 15 years. As the drought goes on the time frame is getting shorter, but it has been 15 years since the farmers have had a decent return. If a farmer was working in a normal retail business, he would have been bankrupt years ago. He would have gone out the door. They have not got the money. They might have enough money to keep the wolf from the door with the bank manager, but they have not got enough money to go out there and buy food and that sort of thing.

The men do not come in to us; it is the women. There are probably not a lot of places that women can go. That was the reason we set up Donald Friends and Neighbours Society, and we have a drop-in centre there. That was set up so that when the women came in to do the shopping they had someone to talk to. Farmers go down the back paddock and will talk to their neighbour over the fence, and they generally ignore the situation that the farm is actually in. The women are the ones who do all the tallying with the money and add it up, and they are generally the ones who put their hand up and say to their husbands, **'We can't keep going like this. We're going nowhere, and the bank account is going to run dry next month'. There is a lot of pressure on those people.**¹⁴⁸

- 3.124 In Willaura, a small town south-west of Ararat, the drought has impacted the social fabric of the whole community:

The effects on a farming population of ten years or so of dry years have been wide reaching. There is economic harm but in our small district the ripples go much further than the economic losses and heartbreak incurred by our individual farmers.

Help is not only required by individual farmers to assist with the rebuilding of their infrastructure and stock numbers but is also needed by the rest of the community as well. Our town is small, the

¹⁴⁷ Cr Helen Ballentine, Councillor, Yarriambiack Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁴⁸ Mr Peter Valance, Manager, Donald Community Centre, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

number of willing volunteers very limited, and our capacity to keep our social fabric together is not diminished. We are ‘dried out’.¹⁴⁹

- 3.125 Mr Valance also explained to the Committee how community groups struggle when funding for particular needs, such as food parcels and fuel vouchers, is no longer available:

One of my arms is Donald Friends and Neighbour Society. We deal with churches, the service clubs and all that sort of thing; they give us money and fund us. Also at our community centre we provide relief packages, food parcels, wherever we can give people a help with relief. We used to get a lot of people coming in just to get fuel so they could get to a doctor’s appointment and that sort of thing, but that has dried up at the moment. We have not been able to issue a fuel voucher – that is the way we do it: we go and buy the voucher and then issue it.

We do not have that facility, we cannot do it because the money has dried up. People come in and I say, ‘Look, I am sorry, you cannot’. We send them around to the various churches like the Uniting and all the rest of it. I do that sometimes knowing there is nothing where I am sending them, but they might get around there and some good Samaritan has dropped some money in to go towards that. That is what we live with in the bush.¹⁵⁰

- 3.126 As a response to the threats to communities delivered by the sort of long-term drought experienced in the Wimmera, Horsham Rural City Council provided a submission to this Inquiry. The Council proposes that: ‘Continued engagement of counsellors to support rural communities is essential to assisting with change, transition and the wellbeing of the Wimmera communities.’¹⁵¹ This is addressed in Key Recommendation 4 on Outreach Workers.
- 3.127 In Ballarat, the Committee heard that the pressing concern there is a severe shortage of emergency accommodation in the region. Mr Terry O’Shannassy from Catholic Social Services Victoria said that the most likely offer a person in need of emergency accommodation will receive is “a bus or train ticket to Melbourne”.¹⁵² His colleague Mr Fitzgerald told the Committee of 7,500 low-cost housing units that are being subsidised under a public–private agreement¹⁵³ but expressed doubt that these units will be directed where

¹⁴⁹ Willaura Community Development Group, *Submission*, Number 54, 28 April 2010.

¹⁵⁰ Mr Peter Valance, Manager, Donald Community Centre, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁵¹ Horsham Rural City Council, *Submission*, Number 30, 30 March 2010.

¹⁵² Mr Terry O’Shannassy, Member Support and Project Officer, Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁵³ At the launch of the Victorian Integrated Housing Strategy in March 2010, the Victorian Government announced the building of 4,500 homes aimed at Victorian families on low and moderate incomes. This is in addition to the 3,000 homes already planned for Victoria as part of the Federal Government’s National Rental Affordability Scheme. More information on the Victorian Integrated Housing Strategy is available at:

they are most needed: “It’s sort of left to the market and the market doesn’t necessarily spread things across the state.”¹⁵⁴

3.128 Mr O’Shannassy’s comments can be seen to relate to the Federal Government’s Nation Building: Economic Stimulus Plan, released in February 2009. The Victorian Government is implementing the component of the Plan concerned with affordable rental housing and has allocated further funding to it.¹⁵⁵

3.129 Victorian Government Principles to guide the allocation of National Rental Affordability Scheme funding in Victoria for Round 4 are detailed below:

- Victoria’s highest priority is for projects that are located in:
 - Central Activity Districts;
 - Principal Activity Centres;
 - Major regional cities, regional cities and centres (*Victoria in Future 2008*); or
 - Major Activity Centres (*Melbourne@5 Million and Melbourne 2030*).
- Projects within walking distance of public transport (no more than 800 metres) and close to services and amenities.
- Projects that include medium and high density urban infill sites within 20km of Melbourne CBD or within 5km of major regional cities.
- Projects that involve a rental housing agency registered in Victoria under the Housing Act (1983), either as an owner or a tenancy manager.
- Proposals that offer, on average, a greater discount to market rent than the mandatory 20% stipulated by the National Rental Affordability Scheme.
- Proposals that demonstrate a capacity and willingness to advertise National Rental Affordability Scheme dwellings as they become available in line with State initiatives, and select suitable tenants from a list of eligible tenants who may be referred by the Director of Housing.
- Proposals which provide housing for a range of income groups and a mix of tenures within the development, or in the context of the surrounding locality.
- Proposals which reflect relevant local government priorities and strategies for affordable housing in the area.
- Proposals which include a percentage of smaller dwellings (1 and 2 bedrooms) reflective of the housing need in the location.¹⁵⁶

<<http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/publications/strategies-and-frameworks/strategies/victorian-integrated-housing-strategy>>.

¹⁵⁴ Mr Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Minister for Housing, ‘\$177 million boost for affordable housing in Victoria’, Media Release, 12 March 2010.

¹⁵⁶ See: <<http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/housing-and-community-partnerships/funding-initiatives/national-rental-affordability-scheme/principles-to-guide-the-allocation-of-nras-funding-in-victoria>>, accessed 25 August 2010.

3.130 The Committee considers it to be a matter of concern that the policy does not prioritise rural Victoria.

A ‘Social Contract’ with Regional Victoria

3.131 Regarding the level of services expected in a region of Victoria such as the Grampians, Mr Colin Kemp of the Wimmera Development Association raised the idea that many people who have lived in the region for a number of years have become used to a certain level of service provision that was based on larger population numbers in the past, but they may need to realise that “...we need numbers to retain their services”.¹⁵⁷ Comments like this were made by a number of witnesses during this Inquiry. This response highlights the reasonable and common sense approach that is taken by country Victorians to services in the regions. However, it is also noted that a contrary view, that services to regions could not logically be based solely on population, was also put to the Committee.¹⁵⁸

3.132 Cr Tellefson introduced the concept of a ‘social contract’, or ‘universal service obligation’, for small towns in Victoria.¹⁵⁹ Mr McKay defined this concept of a ‘social contract’ as one which could be based on an agreed minimum range of services guaranteed to be delivered locally by one level of government, with other services provided in regional centres.¹⁶⁰ These suggestions are taken up in Key Recommendation 3.

3.133 Deciding on a ‘minimum’ standard would ideally result from an ongoing discussion between communities and central governments. Nevertheless there are occasions when the absence of a particular service seems to be contrary to the spirit of any social contract. For example, in Donald the Committee heard that there are currently no childcare facilities available, a situation Ms Borden considered to be “...a huge disadvantage specific to us...”.¹⁶¹

3.134 Responding to the childcare issue, Cr Tellefson, referring to the earlier issue of the difficulties small towns can experience in trying to attract and retain professional staff, explained how the situation in Donald arose:

¹⁵⁷ Mr Colin Kemp, Acting Executive Officer, Wimmera Development Association, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Mr Dean Wickham, Chief Executive Officer, Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010; Cr Greg Cruickshank, Mayor, Swan Hill Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010; Ms Carolyn Wallace, Manager Community and Cultural Development, City of Greater Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010; Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer, St Luke’s Anglicare, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁵⁹ Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Mr James McKay, Chief Executive Officer, West Wimmera Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁶¹ Ms Debra Borden, Assistant Nurse Unit Manager, Donald Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

...in Donald's case, two normal suppliers of childcare have just stopped doing it since December, so you have got to try and find people who want to do it, who are geared up to do it as well. I think there is some interest, but it is just not that easy in a town this size to find somebody who is prepared to take it on straight away.¹⁶²

- 3.135 In its submission to this Inquiry, the Willaura Community Development Group provided another perspective on the idea of the social contract, outlining clearly what this small community of around 500 people does and does not expect to have access to:

The delivery of government services to geographically dispersed populations is more costly than for higher density areas. We do not expect trains every eight minutes, or in fact passenger trains at all, nor do we expect a university close enough that our children can attend and still live at home, or even the choice of primary school.

But what we do feel we are entitled to expect is sufficient resourcing so our children can attend kindergarten, our elderly can remain in the community they have lived in their entire lives, our children's school delivers results at least equal to the state average, our roads are not dangerous and our health is not poor.¹⁶³

- 3.136 The Victorian Farmers Federation expresses similar thoughts in its submission:

No one expects that major hospitals, government departments or universities be placed in every rural town. Rather, what is expected is that rural people have access to such services without having to travel unreasonable distances, or face unreasonable costs as compared with their metropolitan counterparts.¹⁶⁴

- 3.137 In its submission to this Inquiry, Golden Plains Shire indicates that it has a high number of towns with a population of fewer than 200 people, as such its residents access services outside of the Shire:

Services and infrastructure provided by Colac, Ballarat, Geelong and Melbourne are appealing to residents of the Golden Plains Shire because it presents them with the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of rural/semi-rural living and the benefits of city lifestyles close by.¹⁶⁵

- 3.138 The difficulty Shires and Councils can experience providing the level of services expected by the local communities was further outlined by Mr Miller, who told the Committee that Hindmarsh Shire is responsible for 7,500 square kilometres of land, including 3,500 kilometres of roads, four small towns and 18 other smaller communities. With a population of only 6,100

¹⁶² Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁶³ Willaura Community Development Group, *Submission*, Number 54, 28 April 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Victorian Farmers Federation, *Submission*, Number 29, 30 March 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Golden Plains Shire, *Submission*, Number 13, 16 March 2010.

people, many of them farmers, this means that for Hindmarsh Shire rates only make up 31 per cent of its total revenue.¹⁶⁶

- 3.139 Cr Ballentine spoke of the difficulty Yarriambiack Shire faces determining priorities for its spending:

More and more needs and services are arising that we find we have to fund, and that cuts back our road program. We have farmers who are asking, 'Why can't my back road be done up? It is affecting my livelihood'. We have the dilemma of deciding what is more important – our aged community in our towns who need better footpaths or our farmers who are trying to make a living. We are getting to a point where we cannot do without the assistance that we have had from the State Government and the Federal Government over the last few years.¹⁶⁷

- 3.140 Considering the frequently publicised need for more housing in Victoria, the difficulty government decision makers and communities can face even determining local needs was displayed in Ballarat. In a conversation about vacant land in Wendouree West, Karen Hunter, a local resident, preferred the option of building a playground there, rather than more housing.¹⁶⁸

- 3.141 The Chief Executive Officer of Yarriambiack Shire Council, Mr Ray Campling, informed the Committee that just over half of the Shire's budget comes from its rates base and also that with more than 5,000 kilometres of roads in the Shire, around 60 per cent of the budget is spent maintaining these roads. Mr Campling, bringing to mind the idea of the social contract, said that "...it is frustrating for our community that we do not have the ability to undertake and provide programs to meet their needs and to their satisfaction".¹⁶⁹

- 3.142 A specific example of an amenity that Buloke Shire Council would like to improve is its swimming pools. Mr Warwick Heine, Chief Executive Officer, Buloke Shire Council explained that the Shire is finding it hard to maintain pools dating back to the 1950s, but that it is important to do so, as: "They are the centres of our community."¹⁷⁰

- 3.143 Ms Borden confirmed the importance of pools in small communities as meeting places facilitating informal networking:

We have issues with the limited pool opening hours. This has only been a recent occurrence, probably in the last couple of years. **Once upon a time, not so many years ago, our shire pools were social gathering places, especially for women with small children.** Now

¹⁶⁶ Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Cr Helen Ballentine, Councillor, Yarriambiack Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Ms Karen Hunter, Wendouree West Resident, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Mr Ray Campling, Chief Executive Officer, Yarriambiack Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Mr Warwick Heine, Chief Executive Officer, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

with a pool only being open after 2.00 p.m. mothers of small children are no longer able to take them to the pool in the sun smart hours of the morning and before the influx of the noisy, boisterous schoolchildren.¹⁷¹

3.144 Ms Borden also said that the lack of a public library in Donald impinges on the cultural life of the community, as the mobile library visits each Friday but closes at 4.00pm, thus making it hard for working people to access.¹⁷² Mr Heine explained that although Donald is not lacking in buildings which could be converted into a permanent public library, funding for the initial stock of books to fill the library would be hard to find in Buloke Shire Council's budget.¹⁷³

Recommendation 48

That the State Government continue to recognise the role infrastructure such as public libraries and community pools play in the social life of rural and regional Victoria. Further, that the State Government increase funding to rural councils to ensure that these assets are maintained to the highest standard.

Decentralisation/Population Increase

3.145 A possible solution to boosting the economies of rural and regional Victoria, and thereby Councils' rate bases, was raised by Mr Mario Plazer, President of the Horsham and District Commerce Association. In a submission to this Inquiry, Mr Plazer outlined the way in which he believed decentralisation of State Government Departments to regional centres and towns would provide a buffer to economies held hostage to external shocks such as recession and drought, while also adding to the pool of people willing to participate in local committees and sporting groups.¹⁷⁴

3.146 Mr David Matthews, Director of the Wimmera Grain Co. provided a submission to this Inquiry arguing that disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria can best be addressed by increasing the population base. One way in which this could be achieved, he suggests, is through providing incentives, such as Regional Enterprise Zones, encouraging businesses to locate in areas that most need assistance to grow:

...I believe government can drive repopulation of the regions by providing suitable industries with fairly blunt incentives to establish

¹⁷¹ Ms Debra Borden, Assistant Nurse Unit Manager, Donald Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Mr Warwick Heine, Chief Executive Officer, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Horsham and District Commerce Association, *Submission*, Number 1, 29 January 2010.

their operations outside the major cities. Regional Enterprise Zones that provide business with lower establishment and operating costs eg. lower rates, no payroll tax, stamp duty concessions, would encourage business development and in turn, population growth. But without a strong lead from government I fear the current trend will continue.¹⁷⁵

- 3.147 The Committee notes that in June 2010 the Victorian Government announced the relocation of a number of Victorian public service jobs to regional Victoria as part of a decentralisation policy.¹⁷⁶ The Committee's view is stated in Recommendation 40.

Collecting Information

- 3.148 The issue of data on disadvantage, the type of data collected and the frequency with which it is collected, was raised by several witnesses to this Inquiry, as it has been at all of the Rural and Regional Committee's Inquiries. A key factor is the absence of information specific to rural and regional Victoria and the heavy reliance on aggregated data that describes the whole state or an entire region. Accurate information is essential for decision making. A number of specific information-related issues are discussed in this section.

- 3.149 The Committee heard, for example, that although there is a lot of data available on a variety of issues, it is currently being collected in 'silos', so that trying to determine an overall picture of how a community is progressing can be difficult:

There is a lot of vertically integrated data, and by that, I mean, the data relates to a specific issue or a specific department or a specific – you know, it might be education data, police data, crime data, court data, social services data, but there's not a lot of horizontal integration. So, looking across all of those things to say what's actually happening to the life of our community.¹⁷⁷

- 3.150 Mr Sharp in Ballarat proposed that placing towns and regions in strict ladder format from 'best' to 'worst', without external benchmarks against which data can be compared, is not always enlightening.¹⁷⁸

- 3.151 Using the example of a regional skills shortage survey, the Executive Officer of the North Central Local Learning and Employment Network suggested that grouping towns and regions together can also make it difficult to identify

¹⁷⁵ Wimmera Grain Co., *Submission*, Number 19, 19 March 2010.

¹⁷⁶ 'Vic public service jobs going regional', *The Age*, 15 June 2010, see: <<http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-national/vic-public-service-jobs-going-regional-20100615-ybmu.html>>, accessed 28 July 2010.

¹⁷⁷ Mr Geoff Sharp, Chief Executive, United Way Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

priorities. This is because there is a risk of forcing communities together that while geographically close have, in fact, very little in common, such that: "...I guarantee you that what is represented in those surveys does not represent the access to training and the skills shortages or any of those issues that exist in rural communities".¹⁷⁹ See Key Recommendations 8 and 9 discussed at page 379.

- 3.152 Evidence that is focused on a reliance on longitudinal data collection as a way of measuring a program's efficacy may not be valid in parts of rural and regional Victoria. This is because population numbers are much smaller compared to larger towns and cities, and measuring participation numbers alone does not always reflect the importance of a particular initiative or program:

Traditional longitudinal data collection that we use to make a case for funding in our areas and to give you a picture of what it is like to live here does not always really reflect what it is like to live on the ground.

This actually came up in a RuralAccess meeting last week in Melbourne when I said, 'If you want to measure success based on the number of people who attend an event, I have only got three people who qualify in some of my communities. They are not all interested in everything and I cannot multiply them over time so it is really hard to show an increase in service use'. That is not a relevant measure for this particular area.¹⁸⁰

- 3.153 From the City of Ballarat's perspective, relying on census-based data such as the SEIFA Index is problematic due to the five-year gap in the data, although the Council is aware that it can do more in obtaining more timely information.¹⁸¹ The SEIFA Index was also mentioned in the City of Ballarat's submission in the form of a warning that interpreting the Index requires 'statistical literacy' and '...careful interpretation and use, especially when comparing between Census periods'.¹⁸²

- 3.154 Ms Nelson added another opinion on the importance of agencies using the available information to determine the correct response:

There has been some really good research. It is about what we are doing with it and what types of resources support the outcomes of that research. I have a concern that we are actually doing the research and that it is coming up well; it is providing us with

¹⁷⁹ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Ms Dorothy McLaren, Rural Access Officer, Rural Access Wimmera, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁸¹ Ms Bronwyn Herbert, Coordinator Community Planning, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

¹⁸² City of Ballarat, *Submission*, Number 45, 31 March 2010.

information, but I am just not convinced that we are actually taking that information and moving it onto the ground.¹⁸³

Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership – Health and Wellbeing Needs Analysis

In 2008, the Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership contracted the University of Ballarat to undertake a comprehensive health and wellbeing needs analysis for the four Local Government Areas in the Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership catchment region: the City of Ballarat, Golden Plains Shire, Hepburn Shire and Moorabool Shire.¹⁸⁴ The primary intention of the analysis was to assist with current and future health and wellbeing planning and service development for the Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership and its 34 member agencies.¹⁸⁵

The project was comprised of three inter-related stages:

1. Comprehensive data collection of local health and community-based data (socioeconomic; health; population trends; determinants of all health) for the four catchment Local Government Areas, including identification of all relevant data sources from the Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership member agencies.
2. Presentation of data in a summary document that has a strong focus on the health impacts in the region and contains a critical analysis of community needs and the changing role(s) of local service providers.
3. Identification of appropriate evaluation tools and templates that can be centrally accessed via the website to support member agencies when using data.¹⁸⁶

The analysis looked at a Population Health Profile examining the demographics, health and disease indicators, and lifestyle and community indicators for the four Local Government Areas in the Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership catchment. The analysis also looked at the social determinants of health focusing on elements that attributed to inequities and disadvantage in the Central Highlands area:

- equity from the start;
- fair employment and decent work;
- affordable and secure housing;
- healthy places equal healthy people;
- social protection across the course of life; and
- universal health care.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁸⁴ *Health and Wellbeing Analysis*, see: <<http://jed.cecc.com.au/clients/chpcp/index.php>>, accessed August 2010.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

The analysis presented 20 recommendations to be considered by Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership for inclusion in its community health plan to bring about improvement and change.¹⁸⁸

Recommendation 51

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Grampians Northern Victoria region by taking the following action:

- a. Maintain the Start Over program currently operating successfully in Ballarat with the aim of reducing youth offending rates by identifying and addressing behaviours, attitudes, personal and family circumstances that may lead to contact with the Police (3.33).
- b. Consider establishment of neighbourhood renewal projects in Horsham North, Sebastopol and Redan (3.83).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Chapter Four

The Barwon South West Region

Introduction

- 4.1 In attempting to understand the key issues affecting the Barwon South West region of Victoria the Committee visited the town of Portland in the extreme west and the city of Geelong on the eastern boundary. Witnesses expressed concern about the health status of the region, including oral health, emergency medicine outcomes, mental health (of young people in particular), the health of the farming community and, considering the poor survival rates for cancer patients in south-west Victoria, the need for an MRI scanner to be located in Warrnambool.¹
- 4.2 It was suggested that there is a lack of information around many health factors in the region, and that where it does exist the areas it covers are too broad to provide an accurate picture of the situation in small communities. This criticism is also levelled at data surrounding disadvantage more generally. A solution proposed by witnesses and submissions to the Inquiry is the establishment of Regional Research and Information Centres (see Key Recommendations 8 and 9.).

¹ Mr Jim Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Ms Vicki Jellie, Director, Peter's Project, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Mr Glyn Palmer, Chief Executive Officer, St John of God Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

4.3 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in this Regional Profile include:

- the need for flexible funding models, with consideration to be given to geographic weighting in recognition of the difficulties involved in delivering services across large distances;
- the impact that distance has on educational outcomes;
- other education issues, including: low take-up of tertiary education among young people in the region, disengaged young people at school level, and early years students being 'school ready';
- the important role employment plays in tackling disadvantage;
- the challenges school teachers and private industry face in trying to access professional development;
- public transport as a social justice issue and possible changes to the P1 licence restrictions;
- the advantages and disadvantages of rural living;
- the issue of stigma in the Corio and Norlane areas of Geelong and the benefits of the Neighbourhood Renewal program; and
- Indigenous Australians in the region – their health, housing, employment and education, as well as programs that are working well and potential business opportunities.

Understanding the Region

4.4 The Barwon South West region is a geographically large area, where disadvantage divides the major centres. During its consultations in the region the Committee heard that there are a number of issues that are relevant to the entire region. However the region is not a homogenous one with some areas facing more significant disadvantage than others.

4.5 The statistics and information below paint a broad picture of the region. From these we see that there are differences in employment levels, wealth in the region and for example, access to Information and Communications Technology. This information is cited here with the intention of providing a statistical 'snapshot' for the reader.

Table 3: Barwon South West Statistics

| | Portland | Geelong |
|---|----------|---------|
| Unemployment Rate (2008) | 5.3% | 4.5% |
| Average Taxable Income (\$) (2007) | 38,149 | 42,196 |
| Population Density (persons per km²) (2008) | 195.4 | 942.3 |
| Indigenous Population (2006) | 2.0% | 0.5% |
| Access to Internet at Home (2006) | 53.7% | 54.7% |
| Gross Value of Agriculture (\$m) (2006) | 5.6 | 0.0 |

Source: ABS National Regional Profile 2004–2008.² Data chosen was based on Statistical Local Areas.

Indicators of Wellbeing in the Barwon South West Region

4.6 Community Indicators Victoria uses a range of factors to measure wellbeing at Local Government Area level.³ This statistical information is more broadly informative, providing a picture of the region beyond the economic indicators illustrated in the table above.⁴ A selection of information is reproduced here to provide a snapshot of the region:

Self-reported Health

4.7 There is a strong link between health and life outcomes. Professor Tony Vinson, who is well known for his work in this area, argues strongly that measuring self-reported health provides an accurate picture of an individual's

² See: <<http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/nrpmmaps.nsf/NEW+GmapPages/national+regional+profile?opendocument>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

³ See: <http://www.communityindicators.net.au/lga_profiles>, accessed 15 July 2010

⁴ Further information can be found at: <<http://www.communityindicators.net.au>>.

wellbeing. Professor John Wiseman from the McCaughey Centre, responsible for these indicators, stated to the Committee during a previous Inquiry that self-reported health "...aligns pretty closely with a whole range of more objective measures of health".⁵

4.8 Self-reported health was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their health as excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. The percentages of people reporting that their health was either excellent or very good in the regional centres in Barwon South West, the overall region and the State average are:

- Glenelg: 51.1%
- Greater Geelong: 59.8%
- Barwon South West Region: 58.3%
- Victorian State average: 54.3%

Child Health Assessments

4.9 Child Health Assessments are routinely undertaken by the Maternal and Child Health Service in Victoria to monitor child health and development. Ten visits are anticipated according to key ages and stages until a child reaches 3.5 years of age. Data relating to the activities of the Maternal and Child Health Service are collated on a financial year basis by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The rates of participation for children eligible for an assessment at 3.5 years are:

- Glenelg: 80.5%
- Greater Geelong: 54.2%
- Barwon South West Region: 59.3%
- Victorian State average: 60.1%

4.10 Figures are expressed as a rate per 100 children enrolled in Maternal and Child Health Centres born 3.5 years before visiting. It is possible for the rate to be greater than 100 if visits are not made in the financial year they are due.

Perceptions of Safety

4.11 Perceptions of Safety were measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate how safe they felt when walking alone in their local area during the day and at night. The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the day are:

⁵ Professor John Wiseman, Director, McCaughey Centre, University of Melbourne, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 4 May 2009.

- Glenelg: 97.5%
- Greater Geelong: 97.5%
- Barwon South West Region: 97.9%
- Victorian State average: 96.0%

4.12 The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the night are:

- Glenelg: 80.9%
- Greater Geelong: 65.7%
- Barwon South West Region: 71.7%
- Victorian State average: 66.5%

4.13 Communities who self-identify as being safe places also usually exhibit clear patterns of social cohesion and community strength. This is born out in the following statistics on 'Feeling part of the community', 'Social support' and 'Volunteering', where rural and regional areas generally perform higher than the Victorian State average.

Feeling Part of the Community

4.14 Community Connection was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with feeling part of their community and answers are presented according to a 0–100 range. Normative data from the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index indicates that the average Community Connection score for Australians is approximately 70. Across the Barwon South West region the following scores were recorded. Community Connection is clearly high within the region and confirms the long-held view that living in smaller communities fosters more tightly knit connections amongst members:

- Glenelg: 79.5
- Greater Geelong: 72.9
- Barwon South West Region: 75.0
- Victorian State average: 70.7

Social Support

4.15 Social Support was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked if they could get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it, either definitely, sometimes or not at all. The percentages of people reporting they could definitely get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it are:

- Glenelg: 93.0%
- Greater Geelong: 90.7%
- Barwon South West Region: 93.0%
- Victorian State average: 91.7%

4.16 Again statistics are for the most part higher than average across rural and regional Victoria and demonstrate that inherent aspects of community life in regional Victoria provide community and lifestyle benefits.

Volunteering

4.17 Volunteering was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked whether or not they helped out as a volunteer. The percentages of people reporting that they helped out as a volunteer are:

- Glenelg: 49.8%
- Greater Geelong: 38.3%
- Barwon South West Region: 46.7%
- Victorian State average: 40.8%

4.18 Information about the reliance on volunteering in rural and regional communities emerged throughout the Committee's *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria*. In many cases community members hold a number of honorary positions in community groups. This contributes to community life, a sense of belonging and social cohesion. However, it also puts pressure on individuals on whose enormous and time consuming contribution community-based programs are often dependent. The Committee also heard concern expressed in many areas that, as demographics change, it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract people to volunteering.

Highly Skilled Workforce

4.19 There is a symbiotic relationship between a highly skilled workforce and an area's ability to support a dynamic and broad-based economy. 'Highly skilled' has been defined as occupations with ANZSCO⁶ Skill Levels 1–3. The data has been collated from customised Census tables obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The percentages of employed people working in highly skilled occupations are:

- Glenelg: 52.0%
- Greater Geelong: 52.7%

⁶ An ABS classification: Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

- Barwon South West Region: 54.3%
- Victorian State average: 56.3%

Educational Qualifications

4.20 As can be seen throughout this Report, education is a key to tackling disadvantage. The percentages of people aged 25 years and over who had Tertiary or TAFE qualifications calculated from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census are:

- Glenelg: 38.6%
- Greater Geelong: 47.8%
- Barwon South West Region: 46.5%
- Victorian State average: 50.7%

Geographic Disadvantage

4.21 In Portland, the administrative centre of Glenelg Shire, more so than in other areas, the Committee observed that the examples of disadvantage raised by witnesses were identified as being located in geographically specific pockets, as opposed to being spread broadly across the region. Both Mr John O’Neill, Chief Executive Officer, Portland Health⁷ and Ms Suzanne Patterson, Careers and Pathways Adviser at Portland Secondary College,⁸ spoke of these pockets, or clusters, which Glenelg Shire Council identified as being mostly restricted to the towns of Merino, Digby and Casterton, as well as parts of Portland itself.⁹

4.22 While this clustering would seem to make targeting a response to disadvantage easier to facilitate, the challenge may, in fact, be becoming greater as the problems straddle several generations and become more ingrained. Addressing the Committee, Ms Caroline Byrne, Director, Psychiatric Services, South West Healthcare said: “For areas that suffer particular social disadvantage there is the compounding nature of generations of families with difficulty, young people with no positive role models in their lives.”¹⁰

4.23 Generational disadvantage was also raised in the Geelong hearing, where Mr Ken Massari, the Principal of North Shore Primary School, told of his

⁷ Mr John O’Neill, Chief Executive Officer, Portland Health, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁸ Ms Suzanne Patterson, Careers and Pathways Adviser, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁹ Ms Adele Kenneally, Group Manager, Community Development, Glenelg Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁰ Ms Caroline Byrne, Director, Psychiatric Services, South West Healthcare, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

experience with families who have been out of work for three generations.¹¹ Also in Geelong Ms Clare Barrett from Centacare Catholic Family Services spoke about the difficulty of tackling generational disadvantage once the problems have become “entrenched”.¹²

- 4.24 Mr O’Neill from Portland Health provided the Committee with some statistics surrounding the level of disadvantage in Portland:

...respiratory infections are 12 per cent above the state average. Asthma is 21 per cent above the state average. Cardiovascular disease is nine per cent above the state average. Diabetes is 24 per cent above the state average. Dementia is 12.5 per cent. Suicide rates are 31 per cent above the state average. Motorcar or traffic injury rates are 48 per cent above the state average.¹³

- 4.25 In Geelong, Dr Mark Kennedy, a respected, experienced and committed GP who has worked in the Corio and Norlane areas since 1989 and is involved on a number of development boards, listed many health problems in which the residents of Corio and Norlane represent at rates higher than the Victorian average. These include emphysema, obesity, mental illness and diabetes. Dr Kennedy advised the Committee that more than 20 per cent of Geelong’s diabetic patients are located in Corio and Norlane, despite comprising less than ten per cent of Geelong’s population.¹⁴

- 4.26 Dr Kennedy also raised the issue of poor oral health outcomes for the people of Corio and Norlane:

Across Australia, about ten per cent of all the adult population have lost their natural teeth, but, amongst pensioners and healthcare card holders, that's 25 per cent. It is cheaper to have teeth pulled out than it is to actually have appropriate treatment for dental abscesses and serious dental infections. Waiting lists for adult public dental treatment in Corio Norlane are 24 to 27 months, and they're continuing to rise. We don't have waiting lists for children. The largest proportion of patients waiting to be seen are those under 15.

There's been little or no increase in dental chair numbers in the area for over ten years, despite a marked increase in demand. Until only 12 months ago we didn't have fluoridation in Geelong, either, which obviously compounded that problem.

In Geelong each week there is an average of three two-year-olds admitted to hospital for dental treatment under a general anaesthetic, and in many of these cases more timely intervention by

¹¹ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹² Ms Clare Barrett, Coordinator, Outpost Program, Centacare Catholic Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹³ Mr John O’Neill, Chief Executive Officer, Portland Health, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁴ Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director, Corio Medical Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

access to dental care out in the community would have averted much more expensive and serious hospital intervention.¹⁵

- 4.27 As Dr Kennedy suggested, this oral health problem presents across the whole of Australia, where people experiencing pain from their teeth turn to GPs for pain relief as a result of not being able to access a dentist. This ensures that an initial dental problem inevitably worsens before it is finally treated.
- 4.28 The general health problems specific to Corio and Norlane can, according to Dr Kennedy, be ascribed to two main factors: low levels of health literacy, where health information is written at a level that is above the education standards of many people in the area; and the increasing reliance on public health services that are struggling to meet demand:

The Emergency Department, Outpatient and surgical levels [for Corio and Norlane residents] in fact account for about 40 per cent of all the Emergency Department attendances at Geelong Hospital. One-third of all the ambulatory care admissions to Geelong Hospital are from Corio and Norlane, and almost all the dental, mental health, and allied health services for this community are supplied through community health services from Barwon Health...

The public health system, you know, is inadequate for the size of or the proportion of the community dependent on it. It may have worked well 30 years ago when 30 per cent of the population was uninsured. But, now that we've got 60 plus per cent of the population reliant on the public health sector it is woefully inadequate, and waiting times are much too long.¹⁶

Emergency Medicine

- 4.29 In Portland, the Committee also heard about the differences in outcomes around medical emergencies between people in rural Victoria and those in urban centres. The Committee heard compelling evidence from Associate Professor Timothy Baker from the Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine, a partnership between Alcoa Australia, the Department of Human Services and Deakin University. He advised the Committee that the chance of a person in rural Victoria surviving a witnessed cardiac arrest, for example, is about one-quarter that of someone in an urban area. There would appear to be a similar level of inequity surrounding outcomes for trauma.¹⁷ This Committee

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director, Corio Medical Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁷ Associate Professor Timothy Baker, Director, Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

believes that these disparities in health outcomes for rural and regional people are unacceptable.

- 4.30 Ambulance response times were linked to the figures on cardiac arrest outcomes. This is clearly a difficult issue to address in any rural area characterised by small population numbers and large distances, as acknowledged by Associate Professor Baker when discussing the Community Emergency Response Teams program introduced by Ambulance Victoria.¹⁸

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs)

Community Emergency Response Teams are teams of ambulance volunteers who function as 'first responders' within communities where the nearest ambulance branch is some distance away. Although ambulances are always dispatched, CERT teams provide basic emergency care until an ambulance arrives.¹⁹

CERT teams are a relatively new initiative of Ambulance Victoria (the initial trial was in Lavers Hill in 2001). They provide an advanced level of first aid to small communities where ambulance response times are significant. The areas in which they operate are isolated and with an extremely low workload, therefore making the establishment of an ambulance centre economically unviable.²⁰

At present Ambulance Victoria has 28 CERT teams operating throughout rural and regional Victoria. Training of CERT Officers is overseen by Monash University and entails 70 hours of first aid training, with the CERT Officer receiving a Certificate in Health (Emergency Medical Responder). Once qualified an additional three hours per month training is required.²¹

CERT Officers are able to perform automatic defibrillation and administer the following medications:

- anginine (for cardiac chest pain);
- aspirin (for cardiac chest pain);
- penthrane (for pain); and
- salbutamol (for asthma).²²

Throughout Victoria CERT teams play a valuable role in providing sustainable emergency care. As volunteers, CERT Officers are not paid for their time, work or commitment. Mr Paul Kent, an Ambulance Victoria Team Manager told the Committee of the high esteem with which he holds CERT Officers and the work they do:

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See: <<http://www.ambulance.vic.gov.au/Paramedics/Types-of-Paramedics/Community-Emergency-Response-Team.html>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

²⁰ See: <http://www.colacambulance.com/colac_cert.htm>, accessed 16 August 2010.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

I just want to underpin the importance of any support the Government can give to these community teams...they are now, I would say, firmly an essential part of the local community...I cannot stress enough to you the amount of responsibility that a CERT member takes on in that role. They are our representatives until we get there, and it could be 30 or 40 minutes before we get there.²³

The Committee commends CERT Officers for their dedicated service.

- 4.31 In discussing trauma outcomes Associate Professor Baker raised concerns about provision of instant access to treatment guidelines in rural and regional areas for health professionals. Associate Professor Baker advised that, paradoxically, medical professionals in busy metropolitan regions, where treating trauma is a daily event, have far better access to information and advice about how to respond to trauma than those in smaller towns where incidents appear less frequently, and better information may save lives. Associate Professor Baker said: "...the people who do it all the time have the checklist, and people who do not do it very often do not have any checklist". He expands below:

If you go to the Alfred Hospital, which deals with a lot of trauma, on its big computer screens it has a stage-by-stage computer program that tells them what they should do, and they tick that off as they do it. They already know how to do that, because they do it all the time, but if you come into Timboon hospital and you have a multi-trauma – some nasty multi-traumas turn up at small hospitals like that every couple of years – there is none of that. So the people who do it all the time have the checklist, and people who do not do it very often do not have any checklist.

I worked for the paediatric retrieval team, and I would fly out from the children's hospital. We would have a bit of paper with the problem, the age and the weight of the child, and it would give me a cookbook of what I should do. I did that all the time so I knew what to do, but the people who were sitting in Swan Hill did not have any of that. **I think we need to provide some resources to help them, to support what they are doing.**²⁴

The Committee is concerned that trauma centres in rural and regional Victoria are not provided with stage-by-stage computer programs advising on correct procedures. These programs should be made available throughout

²³ Mr Paul Kent, Team Manager, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²⁴ Associate Professor Timothy Baker, Director, Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

small trauma centres in rural and regional Victoria where the need for such information is greatest.

Recommendation 36

That, for any category 1–3 rural hospitals, the State Government investigate provision of real-time computer-based trauma checklist facilities similar to those available in metropolitan hospitals.

4.32 One of the main problems in identifying the exact state of emergency medicine in rural Victoria is obtaining accurate data. Because emergency departments in smaller hospitals are not separately funded as they are in metropolitan hospitals, they do not have to provide statistics to obtain specific funding and therefore often do not gather them. In fact, Associate Professor Baker revealed that of the smallest 55 hospitals in Victoria it is not clear which ones even have an emergency department. As a result, the Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine which Professor Baker leads has prioritised the collecting of statistics that are needed to paint a true picture of emergency medicine in rural Victoria.²⁵ This information is important to establish an understanding of how to improve facilities.

Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine

The Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine is a joint initiative between the State Government, Alcoa of Australia and the Deakin Medical School. Its aim is to contribute to the coordination and delivery of effective emergency medical management in western Victoria and provide national leadership in emergency medicine research.

The Centre was established in 2009.

The Centre operates through the Deakin Medical School's Greater Green Triangle Clinical School based at Warrnambool's South West Healthcare and Portland District Health, as well as through a network of regional doctors. Financial support for the Centre is provided by Alcoa, the Victorian Government and both health services.²⁶

A key project of the Centre is collecting data on emergency medical outcomes for rural people, determining if it is poorer than those for urban populations and, if so, what can be done to correct the situation. One of the difficulties the Centre faces in collecting this data is the fact that many rural emergencies are treated by general practitioners who collect data in their own private records. Another problem is that

²⁵ Associate Professor Timothy Baker, Director, Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²⁶ See: <<http://www.deakin.edu.au/giving/news/crem.php>>, accessed 24 August 2010.

although hospitals are required to provide data to the Department of Health to continue to receive funding, emergency departments in smaller hospitals are not funded separately, therefore are not required to provide data.

At the public hearing in Portland, Associate Professor Baker told the Committee that this lack of data on emergency medicine can see rural areas miss out on Government funding for programs:

We have these fantastic initiatives that would like to help the small hospitals, but someone from the cardiac initiative talked to me and said, ‘How many people in Victoria present with a heart attack to the 55 small hospitals? Is it a big problem or a little problem?’. I said, ‘I think it is a big problem’. ‘But how many people?’. We do not know how many people present with heart attacks to these small hospitals. We certainly see them commonly, but it is very hard for them to interact without some of the data that they rely on when they are doing their work in the large hospitals. The inter-hospital transport inquiry that has just been completed excluded the 55 smallest hospitals because they could not collect the same data.²⁷

- 4.33 In Portland itself, Mr O’Neill told the Committee that the standard of emergency care at Portland Hospital had recently improved with the appointment of two emergency physicians. He also reported that more people were being transported safely by fixed wing or helicopter services to Warrnambool, Geelong or Melbourne. There has, however, been an ongoing issue over the building of a permanent landing site at the hospital, with Portland District Health conducting ongoing negotiations with the Department of Sustainability and the Environment and Glenelg Shire Council to amend planning regulations.²⁸
- 4.34 The Committee also heard from two witnesses in Geelong that data can occasionally be too broad to give a precise picture of what is happening in different suburbs. Both Dr Kennedy²⁹ discussing health topics such as pap smear rates and Mr Grant Boyd³⁰ talking about family services, believe that data covering the whole of Geelong will ‘mask’ the true level of disadvantage in areas such as Corio and Norlane.
- 4.35 The South West Local Learning and Employment Network in its submission to this Inquiry suggests that including Geelong data in the Barwon South West

²⁷ Associate Professor Timothy Baker, Director, Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²⁸ Mr John O’Neill, Chief Executive Officer, Portland Health, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²⁹ Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director, Corio Medical Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

³⁰ Mr Grant Boyd, Chief Executive Officer, Bethany Community Support, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

cohort will not accurately represent the situation in smaller rural and remote communities in the region.³¹

4.36 Ms Irene McGinnigle from the City of Greater Geelong provided the specific example of the Department of Planning and Community Development's Indicators of Community Strength as being too broad to reveal the exact situation in each area of a community the size of Geelong (as well as the SEIFA index not being timely enough). However she did describe the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) as a reliable tool for determining pockets of disadvantage among children,³² as did Mr Boyd.³³

4.37 The City of Greater Geelong lists its concerns over ABS, SEIFA and AEDI data as:

- lagging indicators, meaning the community may have changed by the time the statistics are made available;
- macro indicators, meaning they are too broad for some areas; and
- inconsistent boundaries, where, for example, ABS boundaries do not match council boundaries.³⁴

4.38 In its submission to this Inquiry, the G21 Geelong Region Alliance discusses its '...frustration with the ongoing dearth of reliable, contemporaneous, integrated data at the regional and local level...'. What this ongoing frustration stems from is that rural and regional Victoria first and foremost must be able to understand the needs of disadvantaged members of their communities. According to G21, one solution to improve both the quality and availability of data surrounding disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria, as submitted to the State Government's G21 Interdepartmental Committee in September 2009, would be the establishment of a Regional Research and Information Centre:

The establishment of a Regional Research & Information Centre would contribute to understanding the extent and impact of rural and regional disadvantage and inequity. It would achieve significant improvements in building evidence; assist in identifying priority areas of need and appropriate action; establish comparative & longitudinal analyses with other jurisdictions and regions; contribute to the development of effective measures that capture what is working, where it is working and where, and what, else might work.³⁵

See Key Recommendations 8 and 9.

³¹ South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission*, Number 48, 31 March 2010.

³² Mr Irene McGinnigle, General Manager Community Services, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

³³ Mr Grant Boyd, Chief Executive Officer, Bethany Community Support, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

³⁴ City of Greater Geelong, *Submission*, Number 23, 26 March 2010.

³⁵ G21 Geelong Region Alliance, *Submission*, Number 47, 31 March 2010.

- 4.39 The G21 Geelong Region Alliance is a relatively well resourced organisation which does produce comprehensive statistics itself, including the 135-page *Community Health and Wellbeing Profile 2009*.³⁶

Community Health and Wellbeing Profile 2009

The *Community Health and Wellbeing Profile 2009* is aimed at service providers in the G21 region. Comprising more than 130 pages the report sets out to provide information that is accurate, accessible and up to date, an aim the authors admit is particularly challenging.³⁷

Subjects covered in the report include:

- Community capacity (demographics, family structure, disabilities).
- Socioeconomic factors (social gradient, employment, education, wellbeing, public amenities).
- Environmental factors (water, fluoride, air quality, climate change).
- Health behaviours (obesity, nutrition, mental health, workplace injuries, hospital admissions).
- Health status (ambulatory care sensitive conditions, chronic disease, self-reported health, oral health).³⁸

The authors found that:

...socially and economically disadvantaged communities with the five LGAs of the G21 region have poorer determinants of health outcomes, have higher levels of physical and mental ill health, and have higher rates of chronic disease and lower life expectancies.³⁹

These outcomes were attributed to factors ‘...beyond the prevention, treatment and management of disease...’, such as low levels of education and low income.⁴⁰

- 4.40 The need for accurate data about farmers in Victoria was also raised in a presentation to the Committee in Portland by Associate Professor Susan Brumby from the National Centre for Farmer Health. Professor Brumby said that because the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare does not order its data set by occupation it can be difficult determining issues of particular importance for the farming community. Nevertheless, based on the National

³⁶ G21 Partnership Project, *Community Health and Wellbeing Profile 2009*, G21 Partnership Project, Geelong, 2009.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Centre's research, Professor Brumby has identified several areas of disadvantage for the farming community. These present immediate problems which require solutions urgently. Issues include:

- diabetes (which, according to Associate Professor Brumby, has the potential to overwhelm services in the near future);
- cardiovascular disease;
- cancer survival rates;
- mental health (see paragraph 4.45)
- ageing population;
- financial pressure;
- respiratory problems;
- accidents (second only to the mining industry);
- pesticide exposures; and
- zoonoses (diseases spread by animals).⁴¹

4.41 Alcohol abuse among farming communities was also identified as a factor of disadvantage, albeit one linked to the wider rural community. For example, in relation to the reliance that sporting teams have on fundraising through the selling of alcohol.⁴²

4.42 The Committee also heard that problems with alcohol abuse have been increasing in line with the long-term drought gripping most parts of Victoria. This is a drought that is also said to be having an impact on the health of farmers in other ways, including obesity and mental health:

People have got reduced sports activities because populations are going: the tennis is shut down, footy cannot be played because the oval is dry or whatever and there are not enough people to make a netball team. They are not as busy on their farms because of climate problems in particular. Not so much in the south-west but in other parts of Victoria they are so demotivated. They do not have enough energy to get out because they do not have anything growing, there are reduced livestock numbers, the gardens are predominantly dead and there is stuff everywhere. We hear people say, 'I've got more time, but I just can't do it'.

They have decreased farm physical work, which they will tell you, plus if they are doing it with tractors, they are not getting the activity. We have seen the increased health risks of this. There is decreased social interaction, or if they do mix, it is to have a beer, a chardonnay or whatever, and then they have got decreased financial resources to get off the farms. We are hearing that it was looking like it would last two years, but it has now been nine or ten years for the

⁴¹ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁴² *Ibid.*

farmers out there. What happens is that they have a decrease in activity and then, if you know anything about exercise, when you exercise you produce endorphins and when you release endorphins you feel a lot better. What is happening is that they are not getting as many endorphins, they are stressed – we know that from the work we have done with them – and it is our hypothesis that they are getting increased cortisol, which then has a feedback mechanism for obesity.⁴³

- 4.43 Associate Professor Brumby challenged the notion of farming communities as being defined by their stoicism, arguing that they are, in fact, “...very keen on learning about health, wellbeing and safety...”. Professor Brumby believes the problem is that the community is being let down by:

...inappropriate methods of delivering services, and that is an area that we should be addressing in terms of inequity and disadvantage...

...for me clearly we need a healthy, skilled agricultural workforce. We need one that is not crippled by disadvantage and inequity in access to whatever services. Whether you are talking about education, broad health services and those kinds of things, it is very important. **Instead of saying there are less people out there and therefore they are not entitled, we should be saying there are less people out there, so we need to make it easier for them.**⁴⁴

The Committee believes that it is crucial that the State Government take on board Associate Professor Brumby’s comments regarding the accessibility and delivery of ongoing health care and health monitoring to rural and regional Victoria. Particularly given that, as Associate Professor Brumby pointed out, without a commitment to well-targeted health care there will continue to be an unacceptable disparity between rural and regional Victoria and metropolitan centres.

Recommendation 38

That the State Government fast track a public health campaign on diabetes among farming communities, including information on how to recognise symptoms, where help can be found and effective preventative measures. The Government could design and implement this program in partnership with the National Centre for Farmer Health based in Hamilton.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

4.44 The work done by the National Centre for Farmer Health and Sustainable Farm Families was recognised by Jim Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer of the Western District Health Service, as important work that needs to continue:

...the Sustainable Farm Families program and the Centre are making a significant difference in terms of awareness around health and welfare for farming families. Funding continues through to 2012 at this point in time. We need to look at ways of being able to continue to target farmers in Victoria through the Sustainable Farm Families program but also to continue with the research and education work started by the National Centre for Farmer Health.⁴⁵

National Centre for Farmer Health and Sustainable Farm Families

Since November 2008, the National Centre for Farmer Health has provided national leadership to improve the health and wellbeing of farmers, farm workers, their families and communities across Australia.⁴⁶ Based in Hamilton, the Centre is a partnership between Western District Health Service and Deakin University⁴⁷ and operates ‘...through leadership, advocacy, service delivery, research and education’.⁴⁸

As a non-profit organisation the National Centre for Farmer Health is funded through the Victorian government’s Future Farming Strategy and the Helen and Geoff Handbury Trust, as well as numerous research grants for specific projects.⁴⁹ The Centre evolved from two initiatives: the Sustainable Farm Families program, a health promotion program which addresses farmer health, wellbeing and safety issues; and the Victorian Travelling Fellowship which examined overseas models for working with agricultural populations.⁵⁰

The objectives of the Sustainable Farm Families program are to:

- identify and track farming family health indicators for inclusion in Farm Management quality assurance processes;
- design and deliver a training program that assists farming families to identify strategies to enhance individual, family health and relevant Occupational Health and Safety practices;
- communicate program findings to farming families and the health and agricultural sectors; and

⁴⁵ Mr Jim Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁴⁶ *About us*, see: <<http://www.farmerhealth.org.au/page/about-us>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁴⁹ *About us*, see: <<http://www.farmerhealth.org.au/page/about-us>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

- provide information on the relationship between family health, health as a social issue in rural communities and farm productivity.⁵¹

The approach of the Centre is a practical one that involves workshops with farmers and their families, monitoring of the health status of participants, and assessment of risks to health.

According to the Department of Primary Industries over 1,000 Victorian farmers have participated in the program. An important endorsement of the effectiveness of the program is that so far 100 per cent of participants say that they would recommend it to other farmers.⁵²

Mental Health

4.45 Mental health, and services related to care of patients were raised throughout regional and rural Victoria. In the Barwon South West region a number of particular issues were raised that affect smaller communities. For example the issue of providing confidential services in small towns, especially for young people, was raised. Breaches of confidentiality are not the issue, rather, as Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager of Headspace's south-west Victoria office told the Committee, young people can find it confronting to access services and speak to professionals who they or members of their family may have regular personal contact with:

The biggest barrier that young people talk about directly getting in the way of their asking for help is that fear of lack of confidentiality. They do not think they can ask anonymously; they do not think that they will get a confidential service. That is particularly true in rural and regional areas...

In rural areas it is hard to be confidential. Often the GP service is the first port of call. It is a universal service; it is probably the one health service that young people will know about. If a young person is brave enough to go to their local GP, who are they going to run into while they are in the waiting room? I guess you can see the scenario that I am pointing to. In a small rural town a young person going into a GP service is very likely to run into someone they know in that waiting room. It might be their neighbour or someone else on the footy team. Of course that person has no idea why the young person is seeing the doctor but is very likely to see their mother down the street and ask, 'How is young Joel? I saw him at the GP clinic the

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

other day', and the mother has no idea that her son has been seeking a service at the GP.

It is actually quite difficult to provide a confidential service, even though I would have confidence that the GP would provide one and that the receptionist at that GP would keep it confidential too.⁵³

Headspace

Headspace provides physical and mental health wellbeing support information and services to young people and their families across Australia.⁵⁴ Established by the Federal Government in 2006, Headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing solutions for young people aged 12 to 25 years.⁵⁵ Headspace South West Victoria covers towns such as Warrnambool, Portland, Camperdown and Hamilton and is a partnership of 13 local agencies and programs.⁵⁶

While Headspace is a federally funded project it also draws on a number of state-funded programs. At the Public Hearing in Portland the Committee heard from Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace who explained that Headspace:

...is a consortium of agencies, wherever they may be set up, that work together to provide services to young people a little bit differently to how they otherwise provide them.⁵⁷

The Headspace service in Warrnambool was designed in consultation with young people.⁵⁸ It provides a service that is welcoming of young people, that is youth friendly and that is able to be responsive in the time frame that is important to young people.⁵⁹

Headspace South West Victoria staff includes youth workers, psychologists, counsellors, education and employment specialists who are all experienced and passionate about working with young people.⁶⁰

4.46 Another issue surrounding mental health brought to the Committee's attention by the South-west Regional Youth Affairs Network is that Portland is the only town in the whole Glenelg Shire offering access to psychologists. However demand has outstripped supply and psychologists have now closed

⁵³ Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁵⁴ See: <<http://www.headspace.org.au/about/>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See: <<http://www.headspace.org.au/southwestvictoria/>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

⁵⁷ Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See: <<http://www.headspace.org.au/southwestvictoria/>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

their books. Added to this is concern about the ongoing funding arrangements for youth-specific alcohol and drug workers in Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Moyne and Corangamite Shires.⁶¹

- 4.47 The Committee heard about the effectiveness of linking mental health services for young people with other services, such as sexual health, in particular through a 'soft entry' or 'back-door' approach; that is, a building or space which young people can feel confident attending for a variety of reasons. Ms Laussel used the Warrnambool Headspace service as an example, stressing the importance of confidentiality:

We have a part-time GP on site. We have family and adolescent support workers on site. We have sexual health nurses on site. We have a range of allied health professionals who can provide a service to a young person the minute they walk through the door...If they are able to make the comment that they are needing support, we have got someone who can talk to them. But we also have what we call a 'soft entry'. Those young people who are not yet ready to say that they have a problem can come in and engage in a number of activities: surfing lessons, music lessons, breakdancing lessons and a whole range of other things. They are sussing us out while they are doing that; they are seeing whether we are going to listen to them, and over time they do engage with us, but it takes time to do all that work with the young people.

Importantly, when they walk into that service they are accessing a very, very confidential service. No-one knows whether that young person is coming in to go breakdancing or to see a psychologist about some trauma that has been happening in their lives. It remains confidential, and it is visibly confidential to their peers, which is really important.⁶²

- 4.48 In Geelong, Mr Maddie Ecles confirmed the good work that Headspace is doing with young people there.⁶³ Danielle Parker, the City of Greater Geelong's Youth Development Officer, described a recently opened space for young people in Corio and Norlane called 'The Fort'. The Fort operates on a similar principle of being a place where young people can feel confident attending. Youth workers hope that they attend "...to do whatever they feel like would be a good outcome".⁶⁴
- 4.49 Ms Laussel suggested that youth services in the region would be improved with the introduction of a generic youth worker. She argued that such a worker can be successful in tackling disadvantage experienced by young

⁶¹ South-west Regional Youth Affairs Network, *Submission*, Number 35, 31 March 2010.

⁶² Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁶³ Mr Maddie Ecles, Student, Western Heights Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁶⁴ Ms Danielle Parker, Youth Development Officer, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

people in rural and regional Victoria because the role engages with young people at an early stage. Furthermore a youth worker can direct young people to services designed to tackle specific problems. While some local governments may have a rate base sufficient to fund such a role, Ms Laussel told the Committee that there are regions where such funding would be financially impossible but that local youth networks across the State have the capacity to use their current funding to "...look at where the gaps are and use existing service models to fill them. What they are not able to do in some instances is actually put a physical body on the ground..."⁶⁵

4.50 The important role youth workers play in assisting young people in rural and regional Victoria is also addressed in a joint submission to this Inquiry from the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Victorian Rural Youth Services.⁶⁶

4.51 The Committee also heard from Ms Lisa Hutchins, Manager of the Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre, who described how effective bush nursing centres can be in supporting healthy communities in remote parts of Victoria. This is especially so when the centres themselves are well supported by the State Government. The Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre, for example, completed an \$800,000 redevelopment in 2008, which has "...enabled significant partnerships to occur that have really changed the social fabric of our community".⁶⁷

Recommendation 11

That the State Government conduct an analysis of remote population needs looking further at evidence of 'hot spots' of significant disadvantage with very limited access to youth services. This analysis should seek to improve equity of access to services for geographically isolated young people with severe disadvantage even though they may not represent large populations. Service models to address access and equity issues for such smaller rural populations need to be further explored and developed to ensure that these vulnerable populations are not overlooked in service planning and provision at regional and sub-regional levels.

4.52 Ms Hutchins provided a number of examples of how the nursing centre has increased its engagement with the community, including a Men's Shed, literacy support for children and increasing childcare services from one to four days a week. The advantage of bush nursing centres is that they are located in a smaller community and therefore able to respond more quickly to their communities' needs. Nurses are qualified to provide medication and

⁶⁵ Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁶⁶ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Victorian Rural Youth Services, *Submission*, Number 56, 3 May 2010.

⁶⁷ Ms Lisa Hutchins, Manager, Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

emergency treatments to the standard of a MICA paramedic, a skill their colleagues in other hospitals are unable to make use of.⁶⁸

- 4.53 Ms Hutchins also informed the Committee of what, in her opinion, remote communities expect from their health services:

Sustainable communities will have a holistic health services model that promotes all aspects of wellbeing and has a recognised and valued role in health service provision. Communities need to access help when they need it. They value advocacy and support as highly as empowerment, and local health services should be positioned to provide this.⁶⁹

- 4.54 Representing the Dartmoor and District Bush Nursing Centre, Ms Pamela Godfrey-Smith told the Committee that workforce issues are a constant problem for health service providers in rural and regional Victoria. She pointed out that, in remote locations in particular, “...if we do not have a staff, there is no service”.⁷⁰
- 4.55 In the field of mental health, Ms Byrne said that for South West Healthcare attracting specialists such as psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric disability support services is a “chronic problem”,⁷¹ albeit one that, as was recognised by a number of other witnesses, is not confined to south-west Victoria nor to the field of health specialists.⁷²
- 4.56 Ms Byrne added that a person suffering an acute phase of mental illness in towns in south-west Victoria such as Hamilton and Camperdown that only have one ambulance may have to wait for a number of hours to be transported to the acute mental health unit in Warrnambool. This is an experience that can be “...very distressing for them and certainly for the staff around them trying to care for them, and often for the family”.⁷³
- 4.57 A number of solutions to the problem of attracting and retaining professional staff outside of metropolitan Melbourne were proposed to the Committee. For example, encouraging and assisting local government to employ full-time skills officers to find professionals and encourage them to move to their region.⁷⁴ Another suggestion is placing students in regional Victoria, an idea

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ms Pamela Godfrey-Smith, Manager, Dartmoor and District Bush Nursing Centre, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁷¹ Ms Caroline Byrne, Director, Psychiatric Services, South West Healthcare, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁷² Mr Peter Musson, Dairy Farmer and Board Member, WestVic Dairy, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Ms Ann Kirkham, School Focused Youth Worker, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁷³ Ms Caroline Byrne, Director, Psychiatric Services, South West Healthcare, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁷⁴ Mr William Millard, Director City Growth, Warrnambool City Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

proposed by Ms Laussel⁷⁵ as well as Associate Professor Baker, who explained how this can help young people develop roots in small towns:

You have to get [students] there when they are young. They have to build their life in country areas. They have to do their medical school, as much as possible, in country areas, and they have to do much of their training in country areas. Then they play for the local footy teams, they get a spouse from the same town and their whole life is set for rural areas rather than disappearing for their 20s, which is going to really decide what they are going to do for the rest of their life.⁷⁶

The Committee heard repeatedly about how providing training places for students in rural and regional Victoria increases the likelihood of those students remaining in the towns and regions in which they study. This is taken up in Recommendation 18.

4.58 In Geelong, Mr Richard Coverdale was of the opinion that part of the specialist workforce problem rests with the education system in rural and regional Victoria. He argues that it does not produce enough students with appropriate qualifications to be able to fill the specialist positions available even in university towns or areas around universities.⁷⁷

4.59 Overall, a standout issue heard by the Committee in Portland was the need for an MRI scanner to be located in Warrnambool, to service the whole of south-west Victoria. Ms Vicki Jellie, the Director of Peter's Project, an organisation dedicated to acquiring an MRI scanner for the region is a passionate advocate of the need for cancer services in the region. Peter's Project is named in honour of Ms Jellie's husband, Peter, who died from oesophagus cancer in 2008. Ms Jellie, with support from the Chief Executive Officer of the local health service, provided several reasons why Warrnambool deserves a scanner, including:

- poor survival rates for cancer patients in south-west Victoria;
- the closest MRI services are found in Geelong, Melbourne and Bendigo, meaning some patients don't seek treatment because of the financial and social costs of travelling long distances;
- Warrnambool is well-placed to service the growing population in the region (as also suggested by Mr Fletcher⁷⁸); and
- an MRI scanner in Warrnambool would help attract medical specialists to the region.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁷⁶ Associate Professor Timothy Baker, Director, Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁷⁷ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁷⁸ Mr Jim Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

- 4.60 Mr Glyn Palmer, Chief Executive Officer at Warrnambool's St John of God Hospital, told the Committee of his support for Peter's Project, not just because the people of south-west Victoria deserve better access to cancer services, but also because MRI scanners can assist in the delivery of other services to the region such as orthopaedic surgery and treatment of stroke.⁸⁰
- 4.61 During the Committee's hearing in the region Mr Palmer questioned plans to install a fourth MRI scanner in Geelong, resources which he felt would be better allocated further west. Since this Committee's hearing of evidence in the region concerns raised have clearly been noted by the State Government. In August 2010, Warrnambool Base Hospital installed an MRI scanner. Without a Medicare Licence, the cost for patients is currently priced at around \$500 per scan. Warrnambool Base Hospital and St John of God Hospital are considering subsidising the cost, reducing the price to around \$250 per patient.⁸¹
- 4.62 The decision to grant a licence falls under Federal jurisdiction. A request is currently with the Federal Government, with a decision expected early next year. It is the Committee's wish to see a Medicare Licence granted to Warrnambool Base Hospital as soon as possible.
- 4.63 South-west Victoria's need for specialist radiotherapy services also forms part of Community Southwest's submission to this Inquiry.⁸²
- 4.64 In June 2010, Victoria's Health Minister Daniel Andrews announced a review of cancer services in south-west Victoria. The review will be carried out by Victoria's Chief Cancer Adviser Professor Robert Thomas. Professor Thomas will lead a project team made up of senior health planning staff from the Department of Health and two independent consultants, as well as senior staff from South West Healthcare, St John of God Warrnambool, Barwon Health, a South Australian health planning representative, regional cancer clinicians and cancer consumer representatives.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ms Vicki Jellie, Director, Peter's Project, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 May 2010.

⁸⁰ Mr Glyn Palmer, Chief Executive Officer, St John of God Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁸¹ Mr Glyn Palmer, Chief Executive Officer, St John of God Hospital, *Personal Communication*, 23 August 2010.

⁸² Community Southwest, *Submission*, Number 27, 29 March 2010.

⁸³ Minister for Health, 'Further details of south west cancer review announced', Media Release, 24 June 2010.

Funding

- 4.65 The Committee heard about the importance of continuity when it comes to devising funding models for service providers.⁸⁴ Ms Barrett was in no doubt about the need in the Corio and Norlane communities for the services provided by Centacare Catholic Family Services. However she was worried about the threat to the organisation's sustainability that comes from continually having to "...sing for our supper every time there's an acquittal report due or a funding application that has come across our desk".⁸⁵ Ms Barrett said: "...the need is great and the dollars are not".⁸⁶
- 4.66 Where funding is provided, Ms McGinnigle spoke of the benefits of 'block funding'. That is where central governments provide local governments with funding tied to set outcomes but with the design and implementation of expenditure left to the community.⁸⁷ This is similar to the concept of 'subsidiarity', as raised in the Grampians regional profile (see paragraph 3.37), and other ideas of flexible funding allocation expressed by other jurisdictions during this Inquiry.
- 4.67 The Committee heard support for the multipurpose service model for funding rural hospitals and health services, an "excellent model" according to Mr Fletcher.⁸⁸ Another consideration that the Committee heard about a number of times and which requires greater recognition is the need for geographical weighting in funding formulas, in recognition of the greater cost to agencies delivering services to small populations spread out across large distances.⁸⁹ This is an important concept that should be central in determining funding formulas for programs that are to be implemented in rural and regional areas. See Key Recommendation 2.
- 4.68 Ms Byrne spoke about the link between services and distance from the point of view of patients accessing mental health services, arguing that the situation for some people in south-west Victoria is worse than that of other rural Victorians:

Based on population-type formulas the disadvantage for us is that we have a large geographical area. We cover 26,000 square kilometres, but with a population of around 110,000 it does not mean we always get the same service system that you might in other rural areas. I would say it is really semi-remote, a long way from Melbourne and

⁸⁴ Ms Suzanne McLean, Resident, Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁸⁵ Ms Clare Barrett, Coordinator, Outpost Program, Centacare Catholic Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Mr Irene McGinnigle, General Manager Community Services, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁸⁸ Mr Jim Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁸⁹ Ms Toni Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

from statewide services. It means that if we have children who require residential care and we are not able to look after them at Warrnambool Base Hospital, they need to go to Melbourne, and for young people, especially children, who are experiencing either very early episodes of psychosis or whatever the disorder might be, it is very disruptive for them to be dislocated from families and very difficult for families to be away from them.⁹⁰

- 4.69 While in Geelong, Mr Coverdale provided an example of how Victorians living some distance from Melbourne can be disadvantaged when it comes to access to the law:

I have certainly been told of instances with the Family Law matters where people have had to travel in from Gippsland into Dandenong where the Family Court sits, and arrived there, been there for half a day waiting for the hearing and it is postponed, and this has gone on half a dozen times. I mean, the impacts are significant.⁹¹

This issue is discussed extensively in Key Recommendation 7.

- 4.70 The Committee also heard from Mr Peter Musson, a Macarthur dairy farmer, who outlined the challenges faced by parents in remote communities raising children with disabilities. Mr Musson explained that while some families are able to relocate to regional centres to be able to access services not available in smaller towns, for people such as himself, with a commitment to and investment in a large farm, this is not always possible.⁹²
- 4.71 Regarding disabilities and housing, in its submission to this Inquiry Community Southwest indicates that there are around 300 intellectually disabled people in south-west Victoria who need accommodation.⁹³
- 4.72 Mr Musson also provided an insight into the decisions parents of children with disabilities in remote parts of the State are forced to make when it comes to choosing a school suitable for their children. Parents sometimes must decide between a school that is close but that may not have the best available facilities and one that has good facilities but is much further away.⁹⁴ However like many witnesses the Committee heard from across Victoria whilst conducting this Inquiry, Mr Musson acknowledged that determining

⁹⁰ Ms Caroline Byrne, Director, Psychiatric Services, South West Healthcare, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁹¹ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁹² Mr Peter Musson, Dairy Farmer and Board Member, WestVic Dairy, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁹³ Community Southwest, *Submission*, Number 27, 29 March 2010.

⁹⁴ Mr Peter Musson, Dairy Farmer and Board Member, WestVic Dairy, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

the correct solution is difficult for any government: “If there was a simple answer, I am sure it would have been done.”⁹⁵

Education: Expectations, Engagement and Opportunities

4.73 The subject of education in general received much attention from witnesses in the Barwon South West region. Ms Mary Pendergrast, the Principal at Warrnambool College, spoke of the difficulties small schools can experience in delivering a broad subject range that suits the interests and needs of their students:

If you think of Heywood, Mortlake, Camperdown et cetera, you have small schools, a small Year 12 group and small groups coming through the school, and so it is very hard to give them what they need in terms of personalised learning. The economies of scale do not work.⁹⁶

4.74 Ms Toni Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer of the South West Local Learning and Employment Network agreed, providing a direct comparison with the wider curriculum available in metropolitan schools:

We have a system of broad provision and choice and access to services for young people in the metropolitan areas, and we have a system in rural and regional Victoria which provides narrow provision, little or no choice and little or no services for young people, and especially those young people who are disadvantaged.⁹⁷

4.75 Ms Pendergrast added her concern about the low educational aspirations of parents and students in rural and regional Victoria, many of whom are on low incomes restricting their ability to attend university. She informed the Committee that it had cost her \$158,000 to send three children to university, one of whom had recently deferred studying because of the financial pressures.⁹⁸

4.76 Corangamite Shire in its submission to this Inquiry also argues that a high number of young people in the Barwon South West region are not taking up tertiary education places because of financial restrictions.⁹⁹ Toni Burgoyne, Principal at Portland Secondary College, identified that the accommodation costs faced by parents based in rural and regional Victoria can be a challenge.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁹⁷ Ms Toni Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁹⁸ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁹⁹ Corangamite Shire, *Submission*, Number 15, 23 March 2010.

Paying for accommodation in addition to other university expenses is a restriction generally not faced by parents in metropolitan areas.¹⁰⁰

Recommendation 17

That the State Government implement Recommendation 8.1 of the Education and Training Committee's report *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in Which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education* calling for support for student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students:

That the Victorian Government work with higher education providers, other levels of government, and developers to evaluate the current availability and potential further development of affordable supported student accommodation in Melbourne for rural and regional students.

4.77 Rural and regional parents also face other demands and restrictions. The process of applying and travelling to residencies and applying for scholarships for financial assistance before courses begin is both time consuming and costly. Ms Patterson suggested that centralising the process surrounding residency and scholarship applications would be a great assistance for many parents in rural and regional Victoria. A centralised process that allowed for a single application to be submitted would greatly simplify a cumbersome system.¹⁰¹

4.78 Regarding scholarships, it was proposed by Ms Pendergrast that a centralised system could also assist to ensure more equal opportunities for more disadvantaged families:

Some are very good writers for the applications. We had one boy who got an \$18,000 scholarship and then a \$4,000 scholarship. If there had been two children who had got half each of that, it would have worked very nicely. So it sort of depends on the capacity of the family to drive that, because we do not have the resourcing to cater for every child to do it. We have about 125 kids in Year 12 this year and one careers counsellor and a MIPs coordinator. You do not have the capacity.¹⁰²

4.79 Ms Pendergrast also argued that increasing the number of people acquiring a university education would boost the Barwon South West region as a whole, helping local industry fill its specialists positions, "...the chemists at GlaxoSmithKline, the water scientists at Wannon Water, the agricultural

¹⁰⁰ Ms Toni Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁰¹ Ms Suzanne Patterson, Careers and Pathways Adviser, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁰² Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

science at Warrnambool Cheese and Butter et cetera”.¹⁰³ In a submission to this Inquiry Professor Sue Kilpatrick from Deakin University links education outcomes to both regional growth and personal prosperity.¹⁰⁴

4.80 Mr Massari echoed the view that for low socioeconomic areas expectations around education can be very low, saying that in Corio and Norlane aspiration is a “really limiting thing”.¹⁰⁵ Professor Kilpatrick adds that parental aspirations in rural and regional Victoria can also be explained by barriers to access that they themselves encountered in the past,¹⁰⁶ while Mr William Millard from Warrnambool City Council agreed that these low aspirations can harm both individuals and whole regions in country Victoria.¹⁰⁷

4.81 As well as concern about the cost of attending tertiary education, Ms Ann Kirkham outlined other factors she felt can limit aspirations in rural and regional Victoria. These include family history and access to higher education facilities:

If they are the no. 4 child, there is no money left. I am not even going to go into it, because I think you all know the whole scenario. It is that aspirational thing, too. Especially for young people in our community there is no incentive. Some of them would not even think of going to university, whereas if you grow up in the city there is much more thought around, ‘It’s there; I might be able to catch a tram or a bus’, and there is not the cost of sending people away. There are many levels of disengagement that can start quite young. It can be around your whole family structure, that no-one has ever been to university or no-one has ever finished school type of aspiration right up to, ‘What’s the point? We can’t afford it’.¹⁰⁸

4.82 Although there is not an agreed data source providing exact numbers of disengaged students concerns were often expressed around tracking students making the transition from their last year of high school to their first year of further study:

We do not know statistically; a lot of it is anecdotal evidence. Statistically it is really hard, because some young people are not making it from Year 6 to Year 7. Once they are in Year 7, even though we should be able to track them, they are not always trackable; they fall off the radar. They might move from schools. Around us, in Portland we only have the option of two schools in town and one in

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Professor Sue Kilpatrick, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Rural and Regional), Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 40, 31 March 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Professor Sue Kilpatrick, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Rural and Regional), Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 40, 31 March 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Mr William Millard, Director City Growth, Warrnambool City Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Ms Ann Kirkham, School Focused Youth Worker, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

Heywood. Sometimes if they are not suitable to one, they do not make the transition.¹⁰⁹

Recommendation 12

That the State Government develop a system of tracking Victorian school students so at all times it is known if a student is engaged in education. The system should especially focus on the 'transition points' of education. Such a system could also incorporate tracking of the education, health and wellbeing outcomes for vulnerable young people in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee further recommends that this be suggested by the State Government for the Council of Australian Government's agenda with a view to development of a national system.

- 4.83 Ms Jenkins also revealed that she did not have exact statistics on disengaged students but said that in her experience, the problem of students becoming disengaged from education is happening earlier than these 'transition points' around Years 6 and 7.¹¹⁰ Glenelg Shire Chief Executive Officer Mr Stuart Burdack told the Committee that fewer 15–19-year-olds in Glenelg Shire are fully engaged in work or study than in both Barwon South West and Victoria as a whole.¹¹¹
- 4.84 Ms Pendergrast said that it is possible to look at the information collected around students in Year 7 and, based on information about literacy levels, mental illness or their family history, make an accurate prediction as to their chances of remaining engaged with schooling. In her view, it is incumbent upon the education sector to ensure that education levels in rural and regional Victoria are as high as those in Melbourne, both for the sake of the students, who deserve a good education, and as a way of ensuring Victoria benefits from a more skilled workforce.¹¹²
- 4.85 The Committee heard about an initiative of the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network aimed at reducing the number of young people disengaging from education around the transition points. Here, young people at risk of disengaging are linked with a multidisciplinary 'transition support team' comprised of a number of different support agencies who together develop what they consider to be an appropriate solution or pathway for that young person.¹¹³ The fact that it is a multidisciplinary team is an acknowledgement of the importance of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ms Toni Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹¹¹ Mr Stuart Burdack, Chief Executive Officer, Glenelg Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹¹² Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹¹³ Glenelg Youth Network, *Submission*, Number 26, 26 March 2010.

maintaining a 'no wrong door' policy; that is, ensuring people in need get help the first time they ask for it. As Ms Kirkham said: "What happens is that young people cycle around the services and in the end, say, 'I cannot be bothered any more, I am not telling my story 17 times before the issue is addressed'."¹¹⁴

- 4.86 In its submission to this Inquiry, the South-west Regional Youth Affairs Network suggests that these transition support teams are an example of the innovative forms of collaboration that are produced by the inherent characteristics of towns in rural and regional Victoria. That is, smaller populations limit what agencies can achieve and therefore necessitate collaboration. Such collaboration is in fact made easier by the strong networks that are possible in small towns.¹¹⁵

Glenelg Transition Support Team¹¹⁶

The Transition Support Team is an initiative of Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network and a sub-committee of the Glenelg Youth Network. It was developed to support young people who are disengaged from school and works on a case by case basis. A real life confidential local case study is presented to a multidisciplinary team who develop appropriate pathways or solutions for the young person.

The team strives to improve the knowledge of the workers, and provides collegiate support, development of strategies and improves understanding of referral pathways, especially for young or new workers. It improves pathways and future options for the young person, preventing them from falling through the gaps or being 'cycled around' services where the danger is they will disappear from the system completely.

The model is successful because it is flexible and allows solutions to be developed locally and emerge out of a local need. Those involved in the Glenelg Youth Network firmly believe that communities understand and recognise the local issues in their region and the unique impact decisions and programs will have.

The team relies on strong relationships developed over time, the willingness and commitment of members, and a large amount of shared knowledge. Consequently, it has the capacity to provide local solutions that are realistic, achievable and supported: it has the 'right' people sitting around the table, who are able to support the decisions made and can provide genuine pathways for young people.

¹¹⁴ Ms Ann Kirkham, School Focused Youth Worker, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹¹⁵ South-west Regional Youth Affairs Network, *Submission*, Number 35, 31 March 2010.

¹¹⁶ Glenelg Youth Network, *Submission*, Number 26, 26 March 2010.

- 4.87 Transition points were also raised as an area of concern in Geelong, with Ms Christine Ferguson from the Department of Human Services arguing that one of the core features of the planned Education Regeneration Project in Corio and Norlane, which grew out of the Neighbourhood Renewal project and will amalgamate nine government schools into one entity spread across five campuses, is to reduce the risks of ‘losing’ young people from education around these transition points.¹¹⁷
- 4.88 Mr Massari expanded on the Education Regeneration Project, talking about the reasoning behind turning the separate schools into one K–12 entity, and also discussed the benefits of introducing a separate Year 9 centre, another risk point in his experience, that will link into a new trade centre for young people in need of an alternative pathway in their schooling.¹¹⁸
- 4.89 Regarding alternative education options, the Committee heard evidence of several ways in which young people in rural and regional Victoria are disadvantaged. Ms Pendergrast spoke of the difficulty she had experienced getting internet access for a Community VCAL school in Warrnambool aimed at “...the most disadvantaged and disengaged kids in town. It is insane.”¹¹⁹ However, in its submission to this Inquiry, the South West Local Learning and Employment Network is supportive of the State Government’s Community VCAL program but believes that more must be done for early school leavers in rural and regional Victoria:
- ...it is crucial to note that early school leavers are particularly vulnerable in smaller communities with no alternative provision and access to second chance education, and so care must be taken to ensure the equitable coverage and additional funding of this program in rural communities. It is disappointing that initiatives such as the successful Youth Transitions Support Initiative were not trialled in smaller regional communities but rather in major regional centres such as Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat. There is an opportunity for the department to work with rural LLENs in the development of similar initiatives which would assist in the development of specific supports for early school leavers in smaller communities.¹²⁰
- 4.90 Ms Burgoyne added that schools in country Victoria need specific funding to provide alternative education options in their schools. This would benefit both students at risk of dropping out of school and those happy to stay within a mainstream education setting:

On access to alternate education programs, there is little opportunity for schools in rural and regional areas to share the opportunities of offering alternative programs or a second chance to students at

¹¹⁷ Ms Christine Ferguson, Manager, Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal, Department of Human Services, Barwon South West Region, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹¹⁸ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹¹⁹ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹²⁰ South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission*, Number 48, 31 March 2010.

risk...It is funding that does not really show up in our SRP [Student Resource Package]. We need something like a base funding grant to enable us to offer these programs, because what happens is that kids come from across a number of year levels. You do not collapse a class to run an alternate settings program two or three times a week, therefore you do not have staff savings in your budget. I believe it needs new money in that area. That therefore helps those kids stay engaged in school. It also assists the other students in their class who have peers who are happy and more engaged in school and less disruptive.¹²¹

- 4.91 In Geelong, Mr Massari described the transport hurdles families in Corio and Norlane face trying to cross the city to access an alternative education setting located in Whittington. He added that Victoria's education system needs more alternative options for young people.¹²² These should include options that can provide a permanent career pathway, such as the SWEET alternative education program for young people whose educational needs aren't being met by mainstream education. That program was described to the Committee by Ms Parker.¹²³ Alternatively a program that simply acts as a "circuit-breaker", to diffuse the effects of the social problems disadvantaged young people are bringing with them to schools across Victoria.¹²⁴

The SWEET Program

The SWEET (Success With Employment, Education and Training) program offers disadvantaged young people the chance to work towards a full certificate or credits in a senior secondary qualification (VCAL) at Foundation and Intermediate levels, in a flexible adult environment. The program is run by the Diversitat community organisation and is located at the Old Post Office in Geelong.¹²⁵

Up to 72 young people aged between 15–19 years attend the program, the majority of whom ask to engage in counselling with the program's full-time welfare officer. Overall, 11 full-time and part-time staff are employed by the SWEET program, with class sizes of between 10–13 young people.

¹²¹ Ms Toni Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹²² Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹²³ Ms Danielle Parker, Youth Development Officer, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹²⁴ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹²⁵ See: <<http://www.diversitat.org.au/services/youth-services/education/25-sweet-program>>, accessed 23 August 2010.

Young people initially attend SWEET for a period of six months before being assessed. The aim is to move them on to further education, training or employment. Most stay for 12 months before they are ready to leave the program.¹²⁶

School Readiness

We are now having to [solve] the ills of society before we can teach.¹²⁷

Mary Pendergrast.

4.92 Mr Massari believes that the Corio and Norlane areas are vulnerable to a number of social problems. Problems which not only erode teachers' ability to teach through being forced to deal with these problems, but also prevent children from being 'school ready' when they begin their education. As Mr Massari put it: "...a lot of things that set the child off on a path of education which is behind the eight ball".¹²⁸

4.93 Toni Burgoyne, in the context of talking about clusters of disadvantage in the Portland region believes that schools have to deal with social problems that occur outside the school but that manifest themselves within the school environment.¹²⁹ Ms Pendergrast described the pressure and frustration teaching professionals in rural and regional Victoria feel when these new burdens are added to their teaching responsibilities:

We have now moved into – and it has been acknowledged in Melbourne, certainly at regional director level – the most intensive period ever in both teaching and principalship. Kids are different; kids have changed. There is a different classroom environment occurring, and **we are now having to go into what Toni [Burgoyne] was talking about before: solving the ills of society before we can teach. That has become a real pressure.** That then marries against the need to teach differently, the need to upskill to teach differently, the need to have a different space to teach differently and the need to have technology to teach differently. When you collapse all that into the issues that we have, we get frustrated.¹³⁰

This issue is taken up in Recommendation 16.

¹²⁶ Ms Christie Ditcham, Youth Education Manager, Diversitat, *Personal Communication*, 23 August 2010.

¹²⁷ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹²⁸ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹²⁹ Ms Toni Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹³⁰ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

4.94 The Committee Heard about a program at Corio Bay Senior College that operates from the belief that the best way of ensuring children are school ready is to include the parents as much as possible in the program. Ms Helen O'Connor, the Coordinator of the Corio Bay Senior College Family Centre, told the Committee about a young parents access program aimed at helping young mothers re-engage with education. A childcare centre on the school premises provides regular meals and nutrition advice (including oral health), while the Family Centre offers both education and career advice for its students.¹³¹

4.95 This Committee was impressed both with the dedication of the staff to those in the region facing disadvantage and with the innovative nature of this school-based program. Ms Barrett added that the program is proving very popular across the whole of Geelong:

...because this model only exists in Corio young girls from the other side of the city have bent over backwards to get transportation over to the program. I remember when we were supporting a young 16-year-old mum who got her mother to drive her over to one of the workshops. It is good work and I think the girls really feel supported when they are engaged.¹³²

Recommendation 16

That the State Government continue to ensure provision of trained welfare workers in schools teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This should be done to ensure that teachers who are not qualified are not called upon to provide welfare services.

Corio Bay Senior College Family Centre

The Corio Bay Senior College Family Centre is a community development program co-located on the Corio Bay Senior College campus. The primary aim of the Family Centre is to re-engage young pregnant women and young mothers with education, while also offering a variety of youth-focussed pregnancy information and early parenting programs, playgroups and other early years activities. Assistance finding employment is also offered if needed.¹³³

The Family Centre opened in 2005 and an average of 90 families attend each term.

¹³¹ Ms Helen O'Connor, Coordinator, Corio Bay Senior College Family Centre, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹³² Ms Clare Barrett, Coordinator, Outpost Program, Centacare Catholic Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹³³ See: <http://www.coriobaysc.vic.edu.au/text/family_centre_avxr.htm>, accessed 23 August 2010.

Critical to the success of the Family Centre’s programs is the use of mentors. These are young women who have attended the Centre and then moved on either to re-engage with their schooling or find employment. The mentors play an important role in encouraging the young women who attend the Family Centre and in reinforcing that, as Helen O’Connor said: “...we’re not upholding a model of something that is unattainable at all. It is something that can be obtained with good support, and that’s the picture that we try to build for them.”¹³⁴

The Committee heard about two programs run by the Family Centre:

- the ‘Young Parents Access Program’, which sets out to assist young pregnant women in the completion of their VCE; and
- the ‘Me and My Baby Program’, a pregnancy information and early parenting support program for young mothers.

4.96 Mr Massari was keen to stress to the Committee all the ways in which parents in Corio and Norlane work hard to support their children. He pointed out for example that many parents used the Federal Government’s recent stimulus package money to pay off computers for their children. He also added his voice to those arguing for the importance of involving parents in their children’s school environment: “My aim would be for lots of those families to see that there’s a chance for education. It also tells their kids very strongly that their parents value education.”¹³⁵

4.97 This involving of whole families in education is predicated on the concept of schools acting as hubs within their communities. For example in Corio and Norlane schools are offering after-hours courses on subjects as varied as Information and Communication Technology and cooking.¹³⁶ Dr Kennedy spoke about taking this role one step further and the need to set up community schools “...where health services and community support services are actually working in the schools to deal with the problems as they arise...”.¹³⁷ See Recommendation 19.

4.98 Mr Massari was of the view that schools in rural and regional Victoria are well-placed to act as these community hubs because parents are turning to teachers and principals for help in their lives. As Mr Massari said: “...we’ve got great trust with our families”.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Ms Helen O’Connor, Coordinator, Corio Bay Senior College Family Centre, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹³⁵ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director, Corio Medical Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹³⁸ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

4.99 In Portland, Ms Hutchins told the Committee about a positive situation in Balmoral, where a K–12 school maintains close links with the Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre. This results in improved connections between services and students at the school, to the ultimate benefit of young people:

...one project that we are in the process of doing at the moment is a youth transport program, brokered through the South-West Community Connections, which is the Western District Health Service. That is supporting VET and VCAL students to access work placements in Horsham and Hamilton. The school effectively arranges the VET placements but the issues are around those families travelling those huge distances one or two days a week to give students access to those placements. As part of our brokerage with a youth focus we have been able to initiate that project.¹³⁹

4.100 Another project the Committee heard about that is achieving good results with young mothers is 'Making Tracks', run by the Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre. The program was instigated to improve the confidence levels of young mothers with previous bad experiences of education.

'Making Tracks'

'Making Tracks' is a community learning partnership program aimed at young mothers. The program, run by the Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre in Geelong, is a two-part project.

'My Tracks' is a ten-week program that aims to boost the confidence of young mothers through identifying their skills and their targets in life. The second component, the 'Our Tracks' project, includes involvement by the participants in a community project. The example that the Committee heard about was a local festival with a budget of \$10,000. So far, results have included some of the mothers going on to achieve a Certificate III in Aged Care, with another completing a Certificate III in Office Administration.

Funding for 'Making Tracks' comes from the Department of Planning and Community Development's Adult, Community and Further Education Board. Ms Bev Brown from the Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre informed the Committee that the underpinning funding for 'Making Tracks' has decreased dramatically in recent years, making it difficult to sustain the work of the program.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ms Lisa Hutchins, Manager, Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Ms Beverly Brown, Manager, Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

- 4.101 Providing employment options for students was also considered to be important, with Ms Patterson outlining the way in which Portland Secondary College maintains close contact with employment agencies.¹⁴¹ In Geelong Mr Massari described the role of schools in maintaining strong links with local industry. This can assist students, particularly those from families suffering from generational unemployment, understand the subjects they need to focus on to prepare for employment:

We were hoping to get our kids into industry and have a look at different employments and look at – ‘What do you do for your job?’. As mathematics – ‘I do mathematics’ and...a child will say, ‘Well, look, I like maths too, so it's a job that I could look at’ and start to work on some of those buy-ins being a child actually visualising what a job could look like, because some of our families have been two or three generations without work in the family, and that's certainly a challenge for them.¹⁴²

- 4.102 Being ‘job ready’ was identified as the equal of being ‘school ready’, particularly in Geelong, with Ms Margret Lewis linking the strength that the Corio and Norlane areas enjoyed in the past to the ready availability of jobs.¹⁴³ Mr Justin Giddings, Chief Executive Officer of Avalon Airport called for the return of industry to the region, ascribing the success he has enjoyed to a mixture of hard work and the ability to find a job at a crucial stage in his life:

I suppose from a business perspective, for this community to thrive longer term, we really do need the industry to come. At the end of the day, a lot of these problems we're talking about is because of higher unemployment, lack of motivation and goals to go out there and work and so I suppose from my perspective that is really where I would like to see more emphasis put.

I'll just give you a bit of my background. I have lived at Lara all my life but I went to secondary school at Corio, at Corio North High School, Flinders Peak Secondary College. I completed a whole six years there. I missed out on university and went on the dole for a few months with many of my mates who were at Corio North as well, and eventually got a job at Avalon Airport as a trade assistant and worked my way up studying, and now I'm CEO of Avalon Airport.

I say that because, really, the reason why I didn't go off the rails was because I happened to go to Avalon Airport at a very good time when Lindsay Fox purchased it, and there were other guys who couldn't get in at Avalon and now they really haven't certainly achieved what they

¹⁴¹ Ms Suzanne Patterson, Careers and Pathways Adviser, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁴² Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁴³ Ms Margrette Lewis, Resident, Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

probably could have achieved. And so, hence my view that we really do need more industry and more support around this area.¹⁴⁴

Professional Development

4.103 Another issue brought to the attention of the Committee in the Barwon South West region, and one that shares similarities to the problem of delivering health services across large distances discussed earlier, is that of the financial and time costs of school teachers and principals attending professional development programs in Melbourne. Ms Pendergrast provided figures on accommodation costs for Warrnambool College to send teachers to Melbourne for courses (money that schools in Melbourne do not have to find in their budgets). She also described the personal time sacrifices that are required. She spends many hours travelling in order to ensure that she is abreast of developments in education and that her school is able to provide education to a level equal to that available in Melbourne:

I came back from Melbourne last night. I have got a high-performing principal program on Monday. I have VASSP [Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals] on Friday. You can appreciate, coming down here, that in seven days I have three trips up and back to Melbourne. There is no accommodation provided for me to attend those sorts of things. As a principal alone there is a cost to me to be involved in the things that we are involved in. I have a firm belief that unless we connect with those programs we allow our rural schools to fall behind. To remain relevant and contemporary and have our kids with the other kids, we make a huge effort to be connected to the metropolitan programs that are running. But it comes at our cost...

I think broadly for principals in rural areas that becomes a health issue – you are on the road out of hours so much. You drive back at the end of the day. Yesterday I went to work at 7.00, finished at 9.00, got up this morning at 6.30, worked till 12.30 and came over here. I have got the leadership induction tonight. Tomorrow I am chairing a network meeting. There are a lot of pressures on the principal class, let alone the teaching staff or the kids. I think that is overlooked a little bit in terms of rural inequity for rural principals.¹⁴⁵

4.104 Ms Burgoyne acknowledged that there is some professional development funding provided within the Student Resource Package, but she was of the opinion that the amount is nowhere near the true cost for schools in rural and regional Victoria. Nor does it allow for the impact that time spent away from the school has on school staff when positions need to be covered:

¹⁴⁴ Mr Justin Giddings, Chief Executive Officer, Avalon Airport, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

...it is also for VCE staff who want to attend personal development days for their particular subjects. That means they have actually got to be out of their VCE class for perhaps two days to go and attend a seminar on how best to teach this particular subject. It really does have a back flow to all staff in rural and remote areas as well.¹⁴⁶

See Key Recommendation 2 and Recommendation 13.

- 4.105 The issue of professional development was also raised in relation to businesses in remote parts of the Barwon South West region. Mr Mike Weise told the Committee about the financial and time costs of sending staff and management to Melbourne for important training and conference events. Business people need to attend these in order to stay competitive and in regular face-to-face contact with their peers:

Yesterday a colleague and I were in Melbourne to collect strategic information that was valuable to our business, and that is a regular cost for our business. A workshop was set up with a large amount of information that we needed to help the WestVic Dairy business run. We went down on the train and stayed over the night before because the workshop started at nine – often in Melbourne meetings often start at nine – and went through to five. There were two aspects to that: firstly, the extra cost of doing business, in collecting that information, and secondly, the time it took for the acting chairman of our board and me to go down and collect that information. It is also important to be in that network of decision-makers in the particular area we are working in.¹⁴⁷

- 4.106 The importance to professionals of personal contact with their peers is highlighted in the South West Local Learning and Employment Network's submission to this Inquiry. Their submission argues that in the context of education, creating lasting change is much easier for metropolitan education providers than their rural colleagues who have limited contact with policy makers located in Melbourne '...and much change is based upon quality personal relationships'.¹⁴⁸
- 4.107 Ms Burgoyne did list the attributes of a local education network that has been formed, the South West Association of Post-Primary Principals. This Association meets in Warrnambool twice each school term for discussing and sharing ideas, although she questioned whether the onus should be placed on local networks to develop lobbying skills to present their needs to central

¹⁴⁶ Ms Toni Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Mr Mike Weise, Chief Executive Officer, WestVic Dairy, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁴⁸ South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission*, Number 48, 31 March 2010.

governments: "Is it our job? We assume that the right things should be happening for remote schools and communities."¹⁴⁹

- 4.108 On a similar line, Ms Anita Rank from the Committee for Portland spoke of how local communities have the power and knowledge to develop their own workshops aimed at boosting their local economies, even tapping into other similar networks. Identified benefits include limiting the need of businesses to travel great distances for professional development:

One of the other projects we have for achieving those goals is looking at workshops and training for our people. With regard to small business workshops, we have a calendar of events that we have been rolling out over the past two years that we have done in conjunction with small businesses or companies in our region. But we have had to do that ourselves to provide those small business workshops. Agencies like VECCI service Melbourne, Ballarat, Geelong and to a lesser extent Warrnambool. If you are training, you either have to develop it yourself or go somewhere else. The agenda of the Committee for Portland is to have it here in Portland so we can keep driving our economy...

With the upper end of management et cetera, through our networking and having the committee we have members functions where we bring along guest speakers. Having that sort of calibre of presentations where people can get inspiration and learning means that they do not have to go off to Melbourne to get that – even though that is extremely beneficial. But I think what we are starting to do here is to tap into that. Being a part of a 'committee for', we are hosting the next 'committee for' conference here in Portland, which is extremely beneficial because that taps into the Committee for Perth and the Committee for Auckland. Having those people here and giving that exposure to our local business people is another avenue of doing that.¹⁵⁰

- 4.109 Ms Rank also mentioned that local communities can develop programs internally that may reduce the risk of professionals leaving their regions to progress their careers:

With regard to skilling up our management people or business people, we have instigated a diploma of management. We have had to roll that out here in conjunction with South West Institute of TAFE...That is what we need, or people will go to Melbourne and they will leave the area.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Ms Toni Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁵⁰ Ms Anita Rank, Executive Director, Committee for Portland; Executive Officer, YMCA Portland, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Transport

4.110 The Committee heard a variety of views on the issue of public transport in the Barwon South West region, especially during the Portland hearing, both as a basic need and a solution to the problems people in the region experience accessing services. Mr Musson discussed the difficulty all governments face providing public transport to areas with small populations. Even though it is important for the State Government to support rural areas, subsidising transport does come at a financial cost for the public. On the other hand, Mr Musson said, the cost of travel currently weighs heavily on individuals living in rural communities.¹⁵²

4.111 Mr Fletcher conceded that while demand for public transport in rural areas is low in terms of numbers, subsidising transport can be viewed through the prism of social justice:

...getting access to transport in from outlying areas, where you live in Coleraine or Balmoral et cetera, and being able to access the service is an issue for young people. Public transport is improving through the Transport Connections program, and Western District Health Service is the lead agency for transport in the south-west area. Still, one of the things that strikes me is that there is always going to be a need to subsidise it. The model has been set up so that hopefully it will be self-funding, but unfortunately that is not likely to be the case. The demand is there but it is low, and it is generally the most financially disadvantaged who need the transport, so basically it will need ongoing subsidisation.¹⁵³

4.112 Ms Godfrey-Smith provided similar evidence to the Committee about the effect limited public transport has on those facing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria:

We have public transport – a bus that picks up patients or picks up passengers at 20 to 9 in the morning and does not get back until 20 past 7 at night. If we are referring people off for medical appointments or just for their daily activities, they are in a centre like Portland, Warrnambool and Heywood for a long length of time. That is quite unacceptable if you are elderly, disabled or your family has kids.¹⁵⁴

4.113 The link between public transport and health was also made at the Geelong hearing. Dr Kennedy not only suggested that the residents of Corio and Norlane have a strong reliance on public health services, as discussed earlier,

¹⁵² Mr Peter Musson, Dairy Farmer and Board Member, WestVic Dairy, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁵³ Mr Jim Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Ms Pamela Godfrey-Smith, Manager, Dartmoor and District Bush Nursing Centre, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

he also argued that the lack of public transport linking the residents to these services is a “major problem”. The problem is one that is exacerbated by the low level of access to private vehicles in Corio and Norlane.¹⁵⁵

- 4.114 Cr Kylie Fisher from the City of Greater Geelong viewed the subject in a similar way to Mr Fletcher, linking public transport with the whole issue of social inclusion for residents:

Transport is another issue that we have in Norlane Corio. Inadequate public transport has an effect on getting to and from employment or potential employment. It is also a barrier for social inclusion for many people of all ages. If you don't have a car, you get the bus and the train, and if you can't get the bus or train, your participation suffers, and it can be from getting children and babies to maternal health visits, kinder, school, sport, outings such as shopping, medical appointments, meeting friends for a coffee. Anything, I think.¹⁵⁶

- 4.115 In its submission to this Inquiry, Corangamite Shire provides more evidence of the role public transport plays in improving social cohesion, referring to a recent Transport Connections program that:

...identified a huge need for a bus service from Camperdown and Terang into Warrnambool to enable young people to access education at Deakin University and South West TAFE and also for older people to get to medical and specialist appointments as well as having access to the larger retail centres in Warrnambool.¹⁵⁷

- 4.116 Public transport was also mentioned as a potential impediment for educational outcomes in the Barwon South West region, both at school level¹⁵⁸ and at tertiary level.¹⁵⁹

- 4.117 In Portland, the Committee heard from Mr Jacob Tober, a gap year student who told the Committee about the impact the P1 graduated driving licence restrictions is having in the region. The restrictions, which limit P1 drivers to carrying no more than one passenger aged between 16–21 years (excluding family members), mean unintended consequences for young people in south-west Victoria. Mr Tober provided the Committee with a number of examples of how he had been affected negatively by the restriction, including attending sporting, social and education events. He pointed out that the restrictions prevent carpooling and lead either to young people making more journeys in their cars or calling on their parents to drive them. In one example, Mr Tober applied for a temporary exemption from VicRoads in order to attend a lecture in Warrnambool with several of his peers, but to no avail:

¹⁵⁵ Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director, Corio Medical Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Cr Kylie Fisher, Corio Ward, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Corangamite Shire, *Submission*, Number 15, 23 March 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁵⁹ Ms Adele Kenneally, Group Manager, Community Development, Glenelg Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

...midway through the year there were lectures in Warrnambool, which is an hour away from here. I applied to VicRoads through the full system to get an exemption for that weekend to take two classmates to Warrnambool just for the lecture, which started at 10.00 and finished at 1.00, so I would have been home by three o'clock. Instead of being able to take two mates I could only take one. I applied two weeks before the lecture. I did not get my reply until the month after the lecture. In the meantime three cars with three sets of parents and three kids went instead of one car with three people in it. So my mum's time got wasted, my friend's time got wasted and another person's time got wasted as well, instead of just the one car with the three of us, who were the only ones who needed to go to Warrnambool that weekend.¹⁶⁰

- 4.118 Mr Tober added that despite being a responsible person with a track record of driving with no alcohol in his system, the distances he needs to travel, combined with the limited public transport network in the region, mean that the P1 system imposes restrictions that are close to impossible to live with:

I live five kilometres out of town, which is about a 20-minute bike ride or a ten-minute car trip at the speed limit. I have mates who live further out of town in Heywood and Narrawong, which are 20 minutes away. It means I have to go and get one, then come back in and go and get another. We just risk it anyway, to be honest. I am not the only one; we all risk it.¹⁶¹

- 4.119 Mr Tober was accompanied at the Portland hearing by Ms Lee-Ann Nelson, a Victoria Police Youth Resource Officer. Ms Nelson agreed that the restriction is causing hardship for young people in the Portland region. It means an increase in the number of journeys that need to be taken, making it harder to access education in other towns and creating a barrier for those who wish to volunteer, in particular through the obtuse exemption process:

A lot of the time you cannot foresee when you are going to need the exemption. It is okay for the lecture period, but it is hard to go in and say, 'I want a permanent exemption because on Thursdays I coach a junior basketball team of 16-year-olds'. These are young people volunteering their time and trying to do the right thing, but VicRoads is not going to do it. They are not going to say, 'Yes. Every Thursday you can carry five passengers'.¹⁶²

- 4.120 Ms Nelson also suggested that the restriction does not take full account of the situation in a town such as Portland and that many young people find they have no other option but to ignore the restriction:

¹⁶⁰ Mr Jacob Tober, Gap Year Student, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ms Lee-Ann Nelson, Youth Resource Officer, Victoria Police, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

It is making people become more creative at getting around the issues, because they are big issues for them. These are people who are not really wanting to break the law per se; they value their licence, they see it as a way to get home and to go off to university. It decreases costs for a family. Especially in Portland, where there is a high percentage of shift workers, it is not always viable. Mum and dad are not necessarily off on Friday or Sunday. That does not always happen in this town, so it means that they may not be able to get back. It increases the severity of the problems for those students going to university, especially if they cannot afford a vehicle and one of their mates can.¹⁶³

4.121 The impact of the graduated licensing system on the social inclusion opportunities of young people in rural and regional Victoria also forms part of the South-west Regional Youth Affairs Network's submission to this Inquiry.¹⁶⁴

4.122 Possible solutions to the problem proposed by Mr Tober include:

- a curfew system, whereby the restriction applies between the hours of, for example, 8.00pm and 8.00am, allowing young people to car pool for some sporting events and attend lectures;
- VicRoads making the exemption process transparent and faster; and
- setting the passenger limit at two or three people instead of one.¹⁶⁵

4.123 The implementation of this program consistently across Victoria demonstrates that the varying and unjust impact of state wide programs on rural and regional Victoria must be considered before they are implemented.

Recommendation 41

That the State Government acknowledge the current P1 licence restrictions are too restrictive and generic and do not take into account community needs in rural and regional Victoria. Further, exemptions to the restrictions should be made easier to obtain and the process made clearer, more accessible and processed in a timely manner.

4.124 Also on the subject of driving licences, Mr Broekman spoke highly of the L2P program aimed at helping disadvantaged young people obtain their licence. Mr Broekman said that the program will be of great assistance to young people trying to secure employment:

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ South-west Regional Youth Affairs Network, *Submission*, Number 35, 31 March 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Mr Jacob Tober, Gap Year Student, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

We know in a regional area public transport is always going to be an issue. I keep getting back to the point that if we can build the capacity of young people to be able to get their licences, then we are going to be able to support them in employment. No licence, no employment; it is as simple as that. A benefit is also that you have a supervisor who then becomes a mentor, because if you are going to spend 120 hours with a learner, not only would you probably need some medication and stress relief but you would also understand that particular kid really well. I think that relationship would be really important. It is a very small project, but it will have an enormous impact in relation to young people...

If you can get those kids who were never ever going to get their licence and therefore unemployment was going to be part of the rest of their lives, then for them to be able to get it is going to make such a difference to that small group. It makes so much sense I cannot understand why I never saw it 20 years ago, but it is so significant.¹⁶⁶

Recommendation 42

That the State Government continue statewide implementation of the L2P program currently operating in some rural and regional communities, to include all disadvantaged communities that would benefit from this program. The Committee further recommends that the State Government develop a promotional campaign encouraging community leaders to volunteer as driving tutors for the L2P program.

L2P Driver Mentor Program

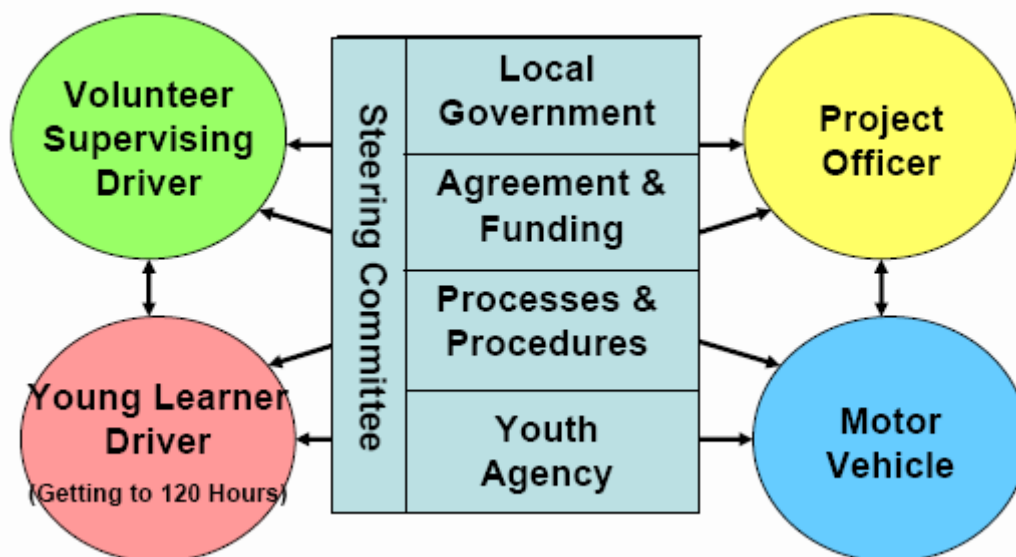
The L2P (Learner to Probationary) program is a VicRoads initiative offering young people who face a significant barrier (economic, social or other) the opportunity to successfully obtain their licence with the support of a skilled local mentor. The program focuses on young people aged 16–21 years.

The first of its kind in the Barwon South West region, the VicRoads-funded program ensures that participants, through the support of a professional driving instructor, undertake lessons in the basics of driving a car. Participants involved in the program need to have basic car control before beginning driving sessions with their volunteer supervisor/mentor. To ensure this, participants will have to take up to seven lessons with a registered driving school during their time in the program to assess progress.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁶⁷ See: <http://www.leadon.com.au/browse.php?contID=bendigo_l2p>, accessed 16 August 2010..

L2P organisational structure¹⁶⁸



Road safety research has identified novice drivers as being two to three times more likely to have an accident in their first years of driving, increasing by nine to ten times at night, than experienced drivers. By increasing the time of supervised driving to 120 hours crash rates can be reduced by up to 30 per cent.¹⁶⁹

As well as Warrnambool, the L2P Program has been implemented in a number of local councils throughout Victoria, including: Latrobe City Council; Yarra Ranges Council; City of Casey; City of Greater Bendigo; City of Wodonga; Swan Hill Rural City Council; Hume City Council; and Bass Coast. These councils, along with others involved in the L2P Program, are seeking community support from fully licensed drivers to help learner drivers by acting as a supervising driver.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Rural Living

4.125 As well as the problems that arise from living in rural and regional Victoria, the Committee heard from a number of witnesses about the strengths that many communities are able to draw on to tackle disadvantage. Ms Laussel, for example, spoke of how the social attributes associated with living in a small community can be both a blessing and a curse when it comes to tackling the issue of young people’s mental health:

¹⁶⁸ See: <www.saferoadsconference.com/.../Seymour_R_Wed_1330_Str.pdf>, accessed 16 August 2010.

¹⁶⁹ See: <<http://www.casey.vic.gov.au/volunteerpositionsatcasey/article.asp?Item=15374>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

We have regional areas that involve geographic distances that create major problems, but we also have really close social proximity. We might live a long way away, but everybody knows each other. The confidentiality problem is an issue that emerges from that social proximity, but the flip side of that is that it is also a community that notices what is happening in its community and can care about its community. If we support it to be a youth-focused and young-caring community, it can really make the difference.¹⁷⁰

- 4.126 Ms Pendergrast, who has lived and worked in Melbourne as well as Warrnambool, agreed that the attributes of life in small towns can be both a strength and a weakness. Personally she enjoyed the chance to be a bigger part of the community that living in Warrnambool offers:

There is something about identity and belonging to your place. I think that is pretty powerful in a lot of people, and there is that notion of family. I came home because I have an elderly mother; she is 80, and I was not sure that she would be around for much longer. I am a sole mum, and bringing my children up in a rural setting was really important to me. I think there is a greater sense of community – and I certainly did discover that in Melbourne. Initially one of the attractions in going to Melbourne was the anonymity. Where I am at the moment the level of scrutiny in my role is pretty high, but I am a fairly extroverted, gregarious person, so I do not mind knowing everyone in the street, if you like.¹⁷¹

- 4.127 Mr Musson added that for parents the disadvantage of having to drive their children long distances can actually be turned into an opportunity: “But you also have time with your kids in the car and are able to find out what they have been up to on the trips...”¹⁷²

- 4.128 Indeed, Mr Burdack outlined several reasons Glenelg Shire has to be confident about the future:

To start with I would say there is a lot to like about our future and the shire. We have the advantages of a coastal lifestyle, and in the hinterlands we have the national parks...The port of Portland generates about \$1.5 billion worth of economic activity each year. We will become Australia’s largest woodchip exporting port. As Mike [Weise] probably mentioned, our region accounts for 25 per cent of Australia’s dairy product. There is 17 per cent of Australia’s plantation forestry within our region. We have a big mineral sands industry. Victoria’s biggest exporter in Portland Aluminium is located in Portland. There is about \$8.7 billion of private investment on the planning books across our region at the moment, and the large

¹⁷⁰ Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁷¹ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁷² Mr Peter Musson, Dairy Farmer and Board Member, WestVic Dairy, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

majority of that is in renewable energy. That paints a fairly optimistic picture for the region.¹⁷³

4.129 Warrnambool City Council is also optimistic about its future, anticipating a growing population (reversing the trend of other rural areas) that will be well-supported by a strong industry base. In its submission to this Inquiry, the Council reveals that the Gross Regional Product for the City of Warrnambool in 2008 was \$1.5 billion with the biggest industries being:

- health and community services (13 per cent of total Gross Regional Product);
- retail (12 per cent of total Gross Regional Product);
- property and business services (11 per cent of total Gross Regional Product); and
- manufacturing (nine per cent of total Gross Regional Product).¹⁷⁴

4.130 However, growth also presents its own problems and Mr Millard expressed concern that Warrnambool City Council's responsibility to match capital contributions for roads and drainage for new development in the region may impact on its ability to deliver community services. Keeping in mind the State Government's commitment to growing rural and regional Victoria, Mr Millard suggested that developing social infrastructure is as important to a community as developing physical infrastructure:

One of the things we try to do in structured planning when looking at a bigger area of development is we find then that the social development is just as important as the physical development. I have our social and community services people in the room when we are talking about access issues, community health issues and how many new residents we add before we need a kindergarten. It is almost social planning in a broader sense. We absolutely try to cater for that as well. It is just at what stage does the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development say, 'You have added 3,000 new residents there. We have got our birth rates. We know what is happening post-kindergarten. But when do we trigger a new school?'. In a structure planning sense, we can cater for the area for it. But it is actually getting it on the agenda and actually having the school built.¹⁷⁵

4.131 In its submission to this Inquiry, Surf Coast Shire raises the impact that growth in rural and regional Victoria will have on land use, asking the Committee to focus attention on '...demand for and pressure on productive

¹⁷³ Mr Stuart Burdack, Chief Executive Officer, Glenelg Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Warrnambool City Council, *Submission*, Number 12, 15 March 2010.

¹⁷⁵ Mr William Millard, Director City Growth, Warrnambool City Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

rural land for rural living/lifestyle uses and the pressure of urban expansion'.¹⁷⁶

4.132 Colac–Otway Shire, too, is concerned about its responsibility to its infrastructure asset base. It informed the Committee that a low population base combined with a large area to support means that basic infrastructure requirements often take priority over social welfare. In its submission to this Inquiry, the Shire outlines how maintaining roads (the Shire has responsibility for 1,700 kilometres of roads), bridges and footpaths comes at the expense of being unable to employ community development staff. Where Colac–Otway Shire differs from Warrnambool City Council is in linking these infrastructure requirements to a concern over a lack of growth. It argues that the Council's perceived inability to improve 'liveability' in the region through community development initiatives impedes its capacity to attract new residents.¹⁷⁷

4.133 Intrinsic to the discussion around growth in rural and regional Victoria is housing. Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services argued that there is not enough affordable housing, both in the public and private sectors, to support the current population growth in south-west Victoria. This is having a particular impact on youth homelessness (with Community Southwest estimates to be around 50 per cent higher in south-west Victoria than the State average¹⁷⁸). One suggested solution is to build accommodation suitable for 'youth foyers'; that is, suitable housing for young people where shelter is combined with on-site training and education, with the aim of preventing long-term homelessness from taking root:

If you can engage them in that window of opportunity within the first six weeks of them leaving home and you can set up some stable accommodation for them and support them through that, our practical research shows it impacts significantly in terms of their not moving into a career of homelessness.¹⁷⁹

4.134 In Geelong, Ms Cathy Walker, a Community Development Officer at the City of Greater Geelong, told the Committee that she has also noticed a shortage of affordable public and private housing. Furthermore the support periods that homeless agencies are able to offer may be too short-term to be truly effective.¹⁸⁰

4.135 Ms Ferguson provided evidence that through the Neighbourhood Renewal project in Corio and Norlane work has been done on around 1,400 properties, from minor repairs to complete upgrades. However, there is certainly space

¹⁷⁶ Surf Coast Shire, *Submission*, Number 2, 6 February 2010.

¹⁷⁷ Colac–Otway Shire, *Submission*, Number 50, 9 April 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Community Southwest, *Submission*, Number 27, 29 March 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Ms Cathy Walker, Community Development Officer, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

for further investment. She also outlined how a process exists for matching the needs of public housing tenants with the appropriate services:

...where a tenant's health is of concern – and particularly their mental health – or they have any other identified support need which is typically known when they make application to us for housing, then appropriate services are matched up with that person. So, the person will be referred to the funded agencies that are able to provide the professional support to that person that is evident of any need.¹⁸¹

Neighbourhood Renewal Project

Neighbourhood Renewal is a long-term commitment by the Victorian Government to narrow the gap between disadvantaged communities and the rest of the State. It is an approach that brings together the resources and ideas of residents, governments, businesses and community groups, to tackle disadvantage in areas of Victoria distinguished by concentrations of public housing.¹⁸²

Current Neighbourhood Renewal projects have been progressively launched from 2001 onwards, with more than 20 areas having been chosen across Victoria.¹⁸³ Communities selected for Neighbourhood Renewal are ones which have missed out on Victoria's growing prosperity in the past and may be characterised by any or all of:

- run down housing;
- growing rates of crime;
- low levels of school completion and further education qualifications;
- rising unemployment;
- poor health; and
- lack of adequate community infrastructure and access to services.¹⁸⁴

The Corio and Norlane areas in Geelong were identified as a Neighbourhood Renewal site in December 2002 in recognition of the community's high levels of social, economic, physical and environmental disadvantage.¹⁸⁵ Just over 18,000 people live in Corio and Norlane, approximately 17 per cent in public housing.¹⁸⁶

The Neighbourhood Renewal Project in Corio and Norlane had six key action areas:

1. Improvements to health and wellbeing.

¹⁸¹ Ms Christine Ferguson, Manager, Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal, Department of Human Services, Barwon South West Region, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁸² See: <<http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au/>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

¹⁸³ See: <<http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au/projects>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ See: <<http://www.deakin.edu.au/.../Summary%20Corio%20Norlane%20Major%20Projects.pdf>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

¹⁸⁶ See: <<http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au/projects>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

2. Housing and the physical environment.
3. Education, employment and the local economy.
4. Crime and safety.
5. Access to government services.
6. Civic pride and participation.¹⁸⁷

At the Public Hearing in Geelong, the Committee heard from Cr Kylie Fisher, Councillor from the Corio Ward, City of Greater Geelong who spoke about the process of Neighbourhood Renewal in Corio and Norlane:

Corio and Norlane have been under a Neighbourhood Renewal process for the past eight years and is undergoing some significant changes now. Corio and Norlane has just received some \$10.2 million through the State Budget process, and this will see major educational changes and is also going into a housing renewal process seeing the built environment changing and looking much better.¹⁸⁸

The Neighbourhood Renewal in Corio and Norlane came to an end on 30 June 2010. However, it is hoped that long-term change will be seen in the form of a Regeneration Project that involved all eight government schools in the area: Corio Bay Senior College; Flinders Peak Secondary College; Norlane High School; Corio Primary School; Corio South Primary School; Corio West Primary School; Norlane West Primary School; and North Shore Primary School.¹⁸⁹ This project involved the schools working as a collaborative federation with an agreed commitment to:

- educational provision across the Corio and Norlane Precinct;
- transformational pedagogy linked to stages of schooling from birth to adult;
- developing schools as community hubs; and
- a reduction in the number of schools from nine down to five (three K–9; one K–6; one Years 10–12).¹⁹⁰

It is also hoped that the benefits of the Neighbourhood Renewal project in Corio and Norlane are to be sustained through the work of the Corio and Norlane Development Advisory Board.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ See: <<http://www.deakin.edu.au/.../Summary%20Corio%20Norlane%20Major%20Projects.pdf>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

¹⁸⁸ Cr Kylie Fisher, Councillor, Corio Ward, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁸⁹ See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/region/barwon/initiatives/projects.htm>>, accessed August 2010.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ See: <<http://www.corionorlane.org.au/>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

Stigma¹⁹²

- 4.136 The power of stigma was brought to the Committee's attention by the first witness in Geelong. Cr Fisher spoke of the negative image that the Corio and Norlane areas has in some people's minds. This sense of negativity is automatically triggered when residents tell outsiders where they live:

I would actually like to start with talking about the stigma attached to this area, and how much of a disadvantage that is to live with. I have found all too often a stigma attached to Norlane, and no matter where I went, first impressions unfortunately, didn't count very much when people found out where I lived, and I know many people feel like this when you go into the community, and you say you are from Corio Norlane. A stigma is attached automatically.

It is a constant put down, and interesting just to see how far the stigma of an area can carry. I know people living in Melbourne's east, shoot cheap shots at people living in the Norlane, Corio area. It is very, very clear they have no idea or know nothing about this place. The stigma also impacts in many ways, such as employment. I have faced that myself and I know other people have faced decreased employment opportunities, social networks and community expectation. There are people living in Norlane and Corio without a doubt who have issues such as mental health, physical illness and personal crisis. I have no doubt about that. But there are also people living in Corio and Norlane that are fully employed, part-time, casual, full-time, studying, volunteering, and lead a full and content life. However, the stigma of disadvantage linked to this place looms.¹⁹³

- 4.137 Mr Mitch Malden, a student at Western Heights Secondary College, also argued that people from Corio and Norlane are discriminated against in the job market:

...it's like if we go for a job somewhere...you might have exactly the same qualifications as someone else, but if they've got Newtown on their resume, they're going to choose them over Norlane. So, it'd be nice for someone to be like oh, well, they could talk to you about it and see like who's the better person for the job instead of just over where you live.¹⁹⁴

- 4.138 Stigma can be imposed on from outside a community, as revealed by Ms Jane Wager from the City of Greater Geelong. She told the Committee about the negative stereotypes of Corio and Norlane frequently portrayed in the local

¹⁹² For more on the concept of stigma, in particular how it applies to the Corio and Norlane areas, see: Warr D, *'There's Good and Bad Everywhere You Go': exploring local contexts for social capital*, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, Melbourne 2004.

¹⁹³ Cr Kylie Fisher, Corio Ward, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁹⁴ Mr Mitch Malden, Student, Western Heights Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

media.¹⁹⁵ Mr Massari described how some parents in the area attach such negative connotations to the local postcode (3214) and that they prefer to send their children to schools in neighbouring suburbs:

One of the challenges is perceptions of families in our area, so the perception of a family would be that if they wanted something better for their child than they got, they might try a different secondary school than they went to. If it looked the same as what they went to, didn't get them what they wanted, so maybe going somewhere else will help them.

North Geelong, Lara, are the two suburbs either side of us, and they are getting a lot of our enrolments. Not a lot of them can afford to go to private schools, and so that's the next best option, to go to a government school just outside of the 3214 postcode.

One of the things in our area is you hear that reference to a postcode. I taught in the Latrobe Valley...I've never heard of people talk about postcodes like they do with 3214, and having grown up in that area, it still rings fairly strongly.¹⁹⁶

- 4.139 However, another witness from the City of Greater Geelong, Ms Anne Horsley, told the Committee that although negative stereotypes can have a strong hold within a community, there are in fact ways in which self-image can be improved. Speaking about a community survey instigated as part of a Community Renewal program in the Geelong suburb of Whittington, Ms Horsley said that initially residents who had volunteered to run the survey in the suburb were concerned for their own safety, until they actually walked around the streets, spoke to their neighbours and realised their fears had been misplaced:

After the first day or so of knocking on people's doors, these local residents realised that other local residents weren't going to bite their heads off or you know, there were people who said, no, I don't want to do it. But, in fact, they made these interesting connections with other people. I think for the interviewers, they came away with a perception of being much safer in their suburb that they lived in, than they started off with. So, I think what we need to do is we need to do things some people might think are wishy-washy and soft things, but create, work with residents to create opportunities for people to get together in a way which is family friendly and celebrates the community.

But we also need to do two other things: we need to work with people who are from areas which are stigmatised, being out there and being show-cased, and we need to be getting people who don't

¹⁹⁵ Ms Jane Wager, Coordinator Community Development, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁹⁶ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

live in those areas to come to the area and see that they are quite fine, just like your own neighbourhood.¹⁹⁷

- 4.140 Ms Parker described how the local communities in Corio and Norlane can be angered by people from outside the region refusing to notice the positive attributes of the area:

This is where they live. This is their home. You know, their families live here. They've got history here. There's heaps of great things here. We do great stuff all of the time, and they've got amazing skills and talents...and to be quite honest, it angers them and it annoys them that people instantly think the negative rather than looking at the other stuff when they are no different to young people that go to school in Newtown or Highton or anywhere like that.¹⁹⁸

- 4.141 Indeed, many witnesses spoke strongly about their belief in the inherent qualities of the area. Mr Malden, for example, told the Committee how, even though there is room for improvement in the type of work available in the area, most of the residents do work very hard.¹⁹⁹ This view was backed up by Mr Giddings, who saw the area as potentially a rich source of staff for future expansion planned by Avalon Airport because "...the type of people in this area are very genuine people".²⁰⁰

- 4.142 Ms Joan McGovern, Shell's Manufacturing Communications Manager, believes that there are a lot of highly skilled people in Corio and Norlane and that the residents feel that they have been "...fed second-best for a very long time".²⁰¹ This was supported by Cr Fisher, who instead of describing the area as disadvantaged believes that Corio and Norlane had been "...overlooked for a very, very long time...".²⁰²

- 4.143 Cr Fisher, though, was keen to point out the improvements in Corio and Norlane that have come about as a result of the Neighbourhood Renewal project. This includes the improved self-image of the residents: "It has been said before when people start feeling good...it just changes a person's perspective of themselves and the area they live in."²⁰³

- 4.144 Ms Ferguson confirmed to the Committee that community surveys have shown a high level of community satisfaction with the Neighbourhood

¹⁹⁷ Ms Anne Horsley, Place Manager, Whittington Community Renewal, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁹⁸ Ms Danielle Parker, Youth Development Officer, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Mr Mitch Malden, Student, Western Heights Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁰⁰ Mr Justin Giddings, Chief Executive Officer, Avalon Airport, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁰¹ Ms Joan McGovern, Manufacturing Communications Manager, Shell, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁰² Cr Kylie Fisher, Corio Ward, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

Renewal project in Corio and Norlane and outlined a number of improvements in the community, including in the areas of:

- self-rated health;
- personal safety; and
- perception of the availability of education and training opportunities.²⁰⁴

4.145 Concern was expressed about the future of Corio and Norlane now that the Neighbourhood Renewal project has ended. Both Mr Boyd²⁰⁵ and Ms McGovern said that the important achievements of the project need to continue into the future to counter the damage done to Corio and Norlane by underinvestment in the past:

I've observed it's a very disadvantaged community that we're sitting in, but that in that time, it's actually benefited greatly from the input of the State Government's Neighbourhood Renewal program. I have watched the residents who have I guess grown throughout the program and had all sorts of involvement in what Neighbourhood Renewal has done. I think they see themselves quite differently from how they saw themselves in the past. I think they have a view now that they can achieve things and know how to go about it, whereas before I think they were quite unempowered, and I don't think how they are behaving these days would have been possible five or six years ago. I really put that down to the work that the Neighbourhood Renewal program has put in.

The research that was done through Neighbourhood Renewal as well as through the feasibility study underscores the identified needs for improvement, but there's a lot more work that needs to be done to help lift the community to the standing of the neighbouring suburbs, let alone the rest of Geelong and the rest of Victoria actually enjoy...On a personal note, I would encourage politicians of all persuasions to keep the money coming because I think this neighbourhood really genuinely deserves better treatment than it's had and deserves to have the health and education and housing and other infrastructure developed.²⁰⁶

4.146 An important factor in the success of the Neighbourhood Renewal project identified by Ms Ferguson was the recognition by agencies of the importance of involving the community as much as possible in the project.²⁰⁷ Community involvement was also identified by several other witnesses in the Barwon

²⁰⁴ Ms Christine Ferguson, Manager, Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal, Department of Human Services, Barwon South West Region, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁰⁵ Mr Grant Boyd, Chief Executive Officer, Bethany Community Support, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁰⁶ Ms Joan McGovern, Manufacturing Communications Manager, Shell, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁰⁷ Ms Christine Ferguson, Manager, Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal, Department of Human Services, Barwon South West Region, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

South West region spanning a broad range of fields. Mr Burdack, for example, said that Glenelg Shire Council recognises that in order to tackle disadvantage the Shire must include "...total engagement with disadvantaged communities so that they participate in the process".²⁰⁸ Ms Kenneally added that the overall aim of governments should be "...empowering those communities to take charge of their issues and work with us in addressing them".²⁰⁹

- 4.147 Associate Professor Brumby told the Committee that the success of programs run by the National Centre for Farmer Health depends on working closely with local communities.²¹⁰ Further evidence came from Mr Broekman who spoke about the achievements the WAVE community building project in Warrnambool was able to achieve through community involvement or, as he described it, "ownership".²¹¹

Warrnambool Alternative VCAL Education (WAVE)

The Warrnambool Alternative VCAL Education program offers young students the chance to complete high school studies in a supportive environment.²¹² Instead of completing the traditional VCE requirements, students aged between 15 and 19 pursue a Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) qualification.²¹³

At the public hearing in Portland the Committee heard from Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services, who told the Committee that the program:

...was just massive in terms of the way in which it was able to deal with disadvantage, because what it did was create a community environment and community development strategies to work with targeted groups particularly in housing estate areas and to work across sectors. There were police, local government, education services — for example, Warrnambool College was part of that — youth services and family services all working together for this community to try to deal with some of the issues. As soon as they felt empowered and knew that we were keen to work with them, it had a significant impact.²¹⁴

²⁰⁸ Mr Stuart Burdack, Chief Executive Officer, Glenelg Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²⁰⁹ Ms Adele Kenneally, Group Manager, Community Development, Glenelg Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²¹⁰ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²¹¹ Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²¹² 'WAVE project offers another way to learn', *The Warrnambool Standard*, 2 February 2010, see: <<http://www.standard.net.au/news/local/news/general/wave-project-offers-another-way-to-learn/1739383.aspx>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

The Warrnambool Alternative VCAL Education program works closely with Brophy Family and Youth Services, South West TAFE and the Kikkabush cooperative.²¹⁵

4.148 Mr Broekman added that the success of community building projects, such as the WAVE project, is also reliant on ‘joined-up thinking’; that is, where people working in the project have the ability to work across a number of government departments and across sectors:

...what really worked well was having community development workers who were located with local government. There was sign-on by all those department heads from Spring Street saying, ‘You will assist on the ground to make this happen’. So the police officer who was liaising with that particular project had the mandate to make things work rather than the project sitting in the silos and having to go up and down the chain to see whether it was okay or not. There was a devolution of responsibility by secretaries to say, ‘Make this happen’.²¹⁶

4.149 In its submission to this Inquiry, Colac–Otway Shire expresses concern over the absence of a ‘...single authorising environment to oversee and coordinate activities across government’.²¹⁷ However Ms Byrne did compliment a recent mental health position created by the Department of Human Services with the responsibility of reporting to government but with the capability to work across a number of different departments. The creation of the position suggests that mental health issues can be a factor in any number of areas of disadvantage across Victoria, including housing and transport.²¹⁸

4.150 The Neighbourhood Renewal project in Corio and Norlane was also complimented by Mr Boyd. He commended the way in which it had managed to bring together a number of different State Government departments to work together in order to tackle disadvantage in that part of North Geelong. Mr Boyd was of the opinion that the project could be considered one of the best across the State:

...in part due to the strong governance structure which does bring the players around the table and make us have those conversations about how we can join up the investment that's going in to get better

²¹⁵ ‘School of thought as WAVE is launched’, *The Warrnambool Standard*, 29 March 2010, see: <<http://www.standard.net.au/news/local/news/general/school-of-thought-as-wave-is-launched/1788175.aspx>>, accessed 16 August 2010.

²¹⁶ Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²¹⁷ Colac–Otway Shire, *Submission*, Number 50, 9 April 2010.

²¹⁸ Ms Caroline Byrne, Director, Psychiatric Services, South West Healthcare, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

outcomes. So, for example, things like the community schools hub, the work that's going around there in developing the role of schools more broadly to support families through the Department of Education. We're linked in through some of our DHS [Department of Human Services] funding as an agency, so there's opportunity to bring the resources together, but you need the structure that sits over the top of it.²¹⁹

- 4.151 As referred to earlier by Ms Kirkham in a discussion on youth education, such a coordinated approach can reduce the risk of people withdrawing from the system in frustration through being referred to a number of different agencies.²²⁰ The Committee also heard that local government can assume the responsibility of ensuring that the various sectors involved in tackling disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria work together to provide a coordinated service. Ms Walker, for example, said that she formed a community development network, "...making sure that all the agencies and professionals working out here and around the region have an opportunity to share what is actually going on and partner up".²²¹ Bev Brown alluded to the fact that such networks can in fact occur in an informal manner:

Just over the last 12 months, the organisations that are working in that precinct, we have been doing a lot of cross-referral which kind of happened in a very casual, ad hoc, manner initially, and in the last 12 months we have come to realise we've got something that is really good here. We have a hub, a community hub that has grown organically, and we realise there are lots of other places around that have this aspiration to have this hub where there's a really good working partnership and cross-referrals between agencies and that sort of thing...

And the cross-referral is on a very informal basis a lot of the time. Because Clare comes into our building to make a cuppa and that sort of thing and it is those casual chats in the corridor about 'Did you know that so-and-so is going through a hard time at the moment?'. You can just pick up on some of those needs in that sort of a setting. We have seen some great outcomes as a result of that...I've got a lot of referrals that have come to us directly from the kindergarten teacher who would be physically able to walk down the passageway 30 metres to talk to me about a parenting crisis, for example.²²²

- 4.152 The importance of networks was referred to earlier in discussions on education and professional development opportunities. Ms Walker added

²¹⁹ Mr Grant Boyd, Chief Executive Officer, Bethany Community Support, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²²⁰ Glenelg Youth Network, *Submission*, Number 26, 26 March 2010.

²²¹ Ms Cathy Walker, Community Development Officer, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²²² Ms Beverly Brown, Manager, Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

that one of the strengths of the community sector in Geelong is its long history of informal networking devoted to tackling disadvantage.²²³ This is something that Mr Burdack identified as also occurring in the far south-west of Victoria, albeit while pondering a way of formally solidifying the links that already exist between community leaders in the region.²²⁴

- 4.153 As well as avoiding duplication of the work done by the many agencies tasked with addressing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria, support for this ‘joined-up’ or coordinated approach across government departments and community sectors is an acknowledgement that the causes of disadvantage are multifaceted (or as Glenelg Shire Council says ‘multidimensional’²²⁵) and hence need a multifaceted response. Ms Ferguson was of the belief that education is the key driver of disadvantage, but “...poor health, poor employment history, poor social connections, poor access to a range of other services all play their role”,²²⁶ while Dr Kennedy suggested that for any approach to work in Corio and Norlane it has to improve “...health, education, public transport, public housing, and all those infrastructure needs that probably haven’t been addressed for three or four decades”, an approach he considered the Neighbourhood Renewal project to have taken, but one that must be “...supported beyond this current electoral cycle because it is the only way to change it”.²²⁷ And in its submission to this Inquiry, the G21 Geelong Region Alliance argues that in disadvantaged communities poor health and education outcomes directly harm employment, income, housing and transport.²²⁸
- 4.154 This multifaceted approach is also necessary in tackling the areas of disadvantage that are prevalent in the rural farming community as well, according to Associate Professor Brumby. In answer to a question about how to deliver health services in rural communities if traditional approaches based on visits to general practitioners at the time of illness are not sufficient, Associate Professor Brumby made the following comment :

The answer is definitely multipronged, because I would not like you to think that the answer is that there are more diabetes educators or there is more this or more that. But there definitely needs to be a genuine appreciation that this group of people requires a targeted effort. And that effort is about making educational opportunities for their children easier to access; it is definitely about making sure our professionals – and I do not mean just health professionals but anyone working with agricultural populations – are aware and have

²²³ Ms Cathy Walker, Community Development Officer, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²²⁴ Mr Stuart Burdack, Chief Executive Officer, Glenelg Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²²⁵ Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 28, 30 March 2010.

²²⁶ Ms Christine Ferguson, Manager, Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal, Department of Human Services, Barwon South West Region, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²²⁷ Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director, Corio Medical Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²²⁸ G21 Geelong Region Alliance, *Submission*, Number 47, 31 March 2010.

their whole level of radar really lifted about the challenges of working with these people; and it is about making sure that the services that are getting out there are appropriate and are getting delivered by people who know.²²⁹

Indigenous Community

4.155 In Portland, the Committee heard from several members of the local Indigenous community – whose population is roughly three-times the rate of the State average – outlining a number of ways in which they felt that disadvantage is impacting their community. Regarding life expectancy, Mr Denis Rose, Chief Executive Officer of the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, told the Committee about the “unfortunately clear gap” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across Glenelg Shire, especially Indigenous males.²³⁰

4.156 Mr Rose also said that although he did not think substance abuse itself was a bigger problem in the Indigenous community than the rest of the State, it is causing mental health problems, especially marijuana smoking among young people. Furthermore the community is concerned that there are a lack of services focused on dealing with the issues.²³¹

4.157 As well, Mr Rose drew a direct causal link between poor education and employment outcomes (Glenelg Shire Council puts the Indigenous unemployment rate in Glenelg at 28.8 per cent²³²) and the number of Indigenous people in the prison system. Ms Pamela Rose added that, as with the mainstream population, the ‘transition point’ around Year 7 was a problem for young Indigenous people in school, “...but if you can keep them there, you will get them right through to Year 12”.²³³

4.158 Ms Bernadine Haby-King from the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group suggested that one of the main impediments to improving education outcomes for Indigenous young people is the lack of support many of them receive from their parents:

I guess the big thing is we are lacking parental support. They are not coming along to our LAECG [Local Aboriginal Education Consultative

²²⁹ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²³⁰ Mr Denis Rose, Chief Executive Officer, Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 28, 30 March 2010.

²³³ Ms Pamela Rose, Secretary, Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group; Chairperson, Dhauwurd–Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

Group] meetings. They are not having input into what they want to see in their children's futures at the various schools that we are operating in. Even the principals and teachers are crying out to have this more one-on-one approach with parents. It is sad that some parents cannot cross over that little line to say, 'All right, I will give it a go'. They might get keen for one or two meetings and then it just slips right off.²³⁴

- 4.159 The Committee was made aware of a program run by the South West Local Learning and Employment Network in conjunction with Warrnambool College, 'Rainbow Serpent of the Hopkins River'. One aim of the program is to '...increase the engagement of parents and families of young Indigenous people within the school community'.²³⁵

Recommendation 24

That the State Government develop a parental engagement program aimed at increasing the involvement of Indigenous parents in their children's schooling.

- 4.160 Ms Haby-King offered her support for the work done by the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation. She explained to the Committee the important role the Corporation plays within the Indigenous community.²³⁶ Mr Rose expanded on the areas within the community that the Corporation is involved in, including health, housing, education, employment, training, land management and tourism. He also provided the Committee with an example of how the absence of a source of long-term funding can impede the efforts of community organisations tasked with tackling disadvantage:

I think last year we had about 93 different funded projects – Commonwealth, State and some private funding...Sometimes it is feast or famine. You get showered in dollars one year and then in the next couple of years you do not get anything. Sport and recreation is a really good example. It is a really important one. In my eight years here we have got \$5,000, \$10,000, nothing, nothing, \$5,000, \$20,000 and then \$20,000 again, although that did not turn up until about two weeks before the end of the financial year. You try to do some planning with all that sort of stuff, but it is really difficult to keep staff. We get someone on to do a little bit of sport and recreation

²³⁴ Ms Bernadine Haby-King, Chairperson, Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²³⁵ South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission*, Number 48, 31 March 2010.

²³⁶ Ms Bernadine Haby-King, Chairperson, Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

work, and you say, 'Look, we can't keep you on' or 'We can't have you full time'.²³⁷

4.161 Mr Rose added that for the local Indigenous population, opportunities for the future rest, not on large projects requiring equally large amounts of funding, rather on small packages providing support for microbusinesses that local entrepreneurs, with their local knowledge, are well placed to take advantage of. Another good source of jobs for the Indigenous community, according to Mr Rose, is land management and tourism, which he suggested can offer hope to the community for the long-term.²³⁸

4.162 Regarding housing and the Indigenous community, Mr Rose told the Committee that Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation is working in consultation with the Office of Housing to build six units in Heywood and Portland. He also suggested reintroducing a scheme such as the Federal Government's Home Purchase Incentive Scheme aimed at helping people in public housing purchase their home:

I think it is the way to do it. There are a couple of things. One is to get people who look after their houses. There were some rules with it; you had to be a tenant of three years with no arrears and who looked after the place. It was not just, 'I've been in the house for six weeks and I want to buy it off you'. They had to live in it for a certain amount of time. There were some reasonably stringent rules around it. It seemed like a low-cost thing. It helped us.²³⁹

Rainbow Serpent of the Hopkins River

'Rainbow Serpent of the Hopkins River' was developed by South West Local Learning and Employment Network and Warrnambool College in order to design and develop an Indigenous-focused learning program to embed local Indigenous knowledge and history into the Year Nine curriculum at Warrnambool College. The program aimed to:

- utilise the local community in the development and delivery of content;
- increase the engagement of parents and families of young indigenous people within the school community;
- assist young Aboriginal students to rediscover their cultural heritage and take pride in their history and stories; and
- build teacher and school leadership capacity to address the best possible learning outcomes for all Koori students.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Mr Denis Rose, Chief Executive Officer, Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission*, Number 48, 31 March 2010.

Achievement indicators for this project were very positive, particularly in survey responses from both students and teachers. The success of the pilot program has prompted the South West Local Learning and Employment Network to approach the State Government's Wannik Koori education strategy unit with a proposal for funding to broaden the availability of the program to other secondary schools in the region.²⁴¹

The title of the program comes from a children's manuscript written by artist Patricia Clarke, who is also an academic lecturer in Education at Deakin University, Geelong. Patricia is also the coordinator of the Koori Intern Program at Deakin.²⁴²

Recommendation 52

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Barwon South West region by taking the following action:

- a. Urgently advocate to the Federal Government for the Corio and Norlane areas of Geelong to be classified as a district of health workforce shortages in order to be able to offer financial incentives to attract health professionals and overseas-trained doctors to ensure improvements to current shortages in the area (4.28).
- b. That the State Government provide support to the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation to develop small business opportunities for the Indigenous community in far south-west Victoria. Further, that the State Government continue to work with the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation in developing the tourism industry on Aboriginal-owned lands in the region, with the aim of improving employment opportunities for the Indigenous community and the wider economy of the whole region (4.161).
- c. Provide funding to the Glenelg Youth Network for a South West Youth Access Program in the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Shire, to ensure that the program, previously funded by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation and the Proceeds of Crime Act can continue to support young people to access drug and alcohol services, other health services, and early intervention initiatives.

²⁴¹ See: <<http://swllen.net.au/our-projects-&-events/178/>>, accessed 23 August 2010.

²⁴² See: <<http://www.patriciaclarke.com.au/story/index.html>>, accessed 23 August 2010.

Chapter Five

The Hume Region

I just wondered why have you come? We work very hard here to use every possibility and every capability. Any talent that is in the town is sought out. A lot of our people are often burnt out, because we try so much to give the community so much. I am just wondering why have you come? Have you come to really look at our needs? Have you come to make a response to them? Are you going to go, and does all of this wonderful technology go somewhere? Is it going to go somewhere on a shelf, or is it going to really be used to help rural people like us? Because living in rural areas is very difficult. I know cities have their problems. They have got very big problems that we know nothing about and that we are spared from, but some of the problems that both Maxine and Cate have touched on are so very real for us, because these mountains throw them back at us all the time. They are in our face. We are always trying to see what we can do for our people.¹

Sr Patricia George RSJ, Corryong

¹ Sister Patricia George RSJ, Community Liaison Group, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

Introduction

- 5.1 The Committee travelled to three towns spread across the Hume region – Benalla, Corryong and Seymour – where it heard a great deal of evidence proving what a powerful impact education has on both individuals’ lives and the strength of whole communities.
- 5.2 The Committee heard community concerns about young people in the region not being ‘school-ready’ when they begin their education. We also heard that schools need to intervene during the early years of their students’ lives to tackle disadvantage exhibited by students as soon as they reach school. An important development that the Committee heard about and witnessed in the region is the establishment of schools as ‘community hubs’ to, for example, improve the literacy of young mothers in their school community. Schools are seen as pivotal in breaking the cycles of generational disadvantage that have taken hold in some parts of the region.
- 5.3 Disparities in access to education can be seen in the shape of schools in remote parts of Victoria being unable to offer as broad a curriculum as schools in metropolitan Melbourne. There are also inequities in how the cost of tertiary education, and the distance needed to travel to access it, harms young people’s aspirations and expectations surrounding further education.
- 5.4 Public housing, often located in and part of pockets of disadvantaged communities, was raised as a factor impeding young people’s education.
- 5.5 However the Committee also heard that strong communities are well placed to address disadvantage, in particular with the assistance of programs such as Neighbourhood Renewal, and there is much confidence in the Hume region about the future of their communities.
- 5.6 Success in the region can be found in the role played by drought outreach workers who have focused on improving the mental and physical wellbeing of farming communities. The seemingly informal nature of the way these health workers conduct their outreach role – talking to farmers in a shed or over a cup of tea – has gained the trust of the communities in which they are located. This has enabled outreach workers to act as a first port of call for farmers to discuss their health issues and as an invaluable go-between for farmers and service providers. Indeed, we heard that without such work farmers may not access the services available to them, with catastrophic consequences.
- 5.7 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in this Regional Profile include:
 - attracting and retaining teachers and health professionals;
 - how the shortage of GPs in the region is placing a strain on hospital emergency departments;

- the need for flexible funding models, with consideration being given to geographic weighting in recognition of the difficulties involved in delivering services across large distances;
- the need for timely and place-specific data around disadvantage;
- the value of community health models in rural Victoria, as well as discussion around the health needs of people with disabilities, limited oral health services and the state of emergency medicine;
- the ways in which small communities rely on volunteers, or ‘community philanthropy’;
- the role of public transport and Information and Communications Technology in addressing disadvantage;
- why decentralisation can help shires remain financially viable;
- the difficulty air ambulances can face reaching far north-east Victoria; and
- how small towns in Victoria develop flexible partnerships among different community organisations.

Understanding the Region

- 5.8 The Hume region is a geographically large area where distance divides the major centres. During its consultations in the region the Committee heard that there are a number of issues that are relevant to the entire region. However the region is not a homogenous one with some areas facing more significant disadvantage than others.
- 5.9 The statistics and information below paint a broad picture of the region. From these we see that there are differences in employment levels, wealth in the region and for example, access to Information and Communications Technology. This information is cited here with the intention of providing a statistical ‘snapshot’ for the reader.

Table 4: Hume Statistics

| | Benalla | Corryong (Towong) | Seymour (Mitchell North) |
|---|----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Unemployment Rate (2008) | 5.9% | 2.8% | 4.8% |
| Average Taxable Income (\$) (2007) | 32,487 | 28,064 | 34,267 |
| Population Density (persons per km²) (2007) | 399.9 | 0.6 | 5.9 |
| Indigenous Population (2006) | 1.2% | 0.8% | 1.7% |
| Access to Internet at Home (2006) | 47.3% | 49.5% | 55.1% |
| Gross Value of Agriculture (\$m) (2006) | 1.1 | 62.7 | 24.5 |

Source: ABS National Regional Profile 2006–2008.² Data chosen was based on Statistical Local Areas.

Indicators of Wellbeing in the Hume region

5.10 Community Indicators Victoria uses a range of factors to measure wellbeing at Local Government Area level.³ This statistical information is more broadly informative, providing a picture of the region beyond the economic indicators illustrated in the table above.⁴ A selection of information is reproduced here to provide a snapshot of the region:

Self-reported Health

5.11 There is a strong link between health and life outcomes. Professor Tony Vinson, who is well known for his work in this area, argues strongly that measuring self-reported health provides an accurate picture of an individual's

² See: <<http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/nrpmnsf/NEW+GmapPages/national+regional+profile?opendocument>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

³ See: <http://www.communityindicators.net.au/lga_profiles>, accessed 15 July 2010.

⁴ Further information can be found at: <<http://www.communityindicators.net.au>>.

wellbeing. Professor John Wiseman from the McCaughey Centre, responsible for these indicators, stated to the Committee during a previous Inquiry that self-reported health "...aligns pretty closely with a whole range of more objective measures of health".⁵

5.12 Self-reported health was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their health as excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. The percentages of people reporting that their health was either excellent or very good in the regional centres in Hume, the overall region and the State average are:

- Benalla: 60.4%
- Towong: 63.2%
- Mitchell: 51.2%
- Hume Region: 54.3%
- Victorian State average: 54.3%

Child Health Assessments

5.13 Child Health Assessments are routinely undertaken by the Maternal and Child Health Service in Victoria to monitor child health and development. Ten visits are anticipated according to key ages and stages until a child reaches 3.5 years of age. Data relating to the activities of the Maternal and Child Health Service are collated on a financial year basis by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The rates of participation for children eligible for an assessment at 3.5 years are:

- Benalla: 68.2%
- Towong: 111.5%
- Mitchell: 62.1%
- Hume Region: 67.6%
- Victorian State average: 60.1%

5.14 Figures are expressed as a rate per 100 children enrolled in Maternal and Child Health Centres born 3.5 years before visiting. It is possible for the rate to be greater than 100 if visits are not made in the financial year they are due.

⁵ Professor John Wiseman, Director, McCaughey Centre, University of Melbourne, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 4 May 2009.

Perceptions of Safety

- 5.15 Perceptions of Safety were measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate how safe they felt when walking alone in their local area during the day and at night. The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the day are:
- Benalla: 98.8%
 - Towong: 99.0%
 - Mitchell: 99.0%
 - Hume Region: 97.5%
 - Victorian State average: 96.0%
- 5.16 The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the night are:
- Benalla: 79.2%
 - Towong: 93.0%
 - Mitchell: 73.9%
 - Hume Region: 73.6%
 - Victorian State average: 66.5%
- 5.17 Communities who self-identify as being safe places also usually exhibit clear patterns of social cohesion and community strength. This is born out in the following statistics on 'Feeling part of the community', 'Social support' and 'Volunteering', where rural and regional areas generally perform higher than the Victorian State average.

Feeling Part of the Community

- 5.18 Community Connection was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with feeling part of their community and answers are presented according to a 0–100 range. Normative data from the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index indicates that the average Community Connection score for Australians is approximately 70. Across Hume the following scores were recorded. Community Connection is clearly high within the region and confirms the long-held view that living in smaller communities fosters more tightly knit connections amongst members:
- Benalla: 78.3
 - Towong: 80.0
 - Mitchell: 74.1
 - Hume Region: 76.4
 - Victorian State average: 70.7

Social Support

5.19 Social Support was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked if they could get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it, either definitely, sometimes or not at all. The percentages of people reporting they could definitely get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it are:

- Benalla: 90.3%
- Towong: 94.7%
- Mitchell: 91.3%
- Hume Region: 91.8%
- Victorian State average: 91.7%

5.20 Again statistics are for the most part higher than average across rural and regional Victoria and demonstrate that inherent aspects of community life in regional Victoria provide community and lifestyle benefits.

Volunteering

5.21 Volunteering was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked whether or not they helped out as a volunteer. The percentages of people reporting that they helped out as a volunteer are:

- Benalla: 49.2%
- Towong: 62.3%
- Mitchell: 31.8%
- Hume Region: 48.0%
- Victorian State average: 40.8%

5.22 Reliance on volunteering in rural and regional communities emerged throughout the Committee's *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria*. In many cases community members hold a number of honorary positions in community groups. This contributes to community life, a sense of belonging and social cohesion. However, it also puts pressure on individuals on whose enormous and time consuming contribution community-based programs are often dependent. The Committee also heard concern expressed in many areas that as demographics change it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract people to volunteering.

Highly Skilled Workforce

5.23 There is a symbiotic relationship between a highly skilled workforce and an area's ability to support a dynamic and broad-based economy. 'Highly skilled' has been defined as occupations with ANZSCO⁶ Skill Levels 1–3. The data has been collated from customised Census tables obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The percentages of employed people working in highly skilled occupations are:

- Benalla: 54.3%
- Towong: 65.2%
- Mitchell: 53.3%
- Hume Region: 54.3%
- Victorian State average: 56.3%

Educational Qualifications

5.24 As can be seen throughout this Report, education is a key to tackling disadvantage. The percentages of people aged 25 years and over who had Tertiary or TAFE qualifications calculated from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census are:

- Benalla: 43.3%
- Towong: 44.8%
- Mitchell: 43.6%
- Hume Region: 43.8%
- Victorian State average: 50.7%

Education

5.25 The importance of education in determining life outcomes was brought to the attention of the Committee in the Hume region. Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor of Benalla's Tomorrow:Today Foundation, a philanthropic organisation formed to bring about positive change in the Benalla district, discussed the interplay between education and social disadvantage. Ms Chapman argued that **poor educational outcomes can be both a cause and a product of disadvantage.**⁷

⁶ An ABS classification: Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

⁷ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

- 5.26 Ms Chapman added that in her view, education touches every member of a community and poor education outcomes limit the overall potential of a town such as Benalla:

It is not just individual families falling through the cracks that is having a negative consequence for others; it is a whole dampening effect across the community. I agree, there is a level of disadvantage, and then when you look at the Benalla-specific educational data the link between the two is very stark and very clear, and it is just not okay. I cannot give you an answer as to why it is as bad as it is, but our own kids self-assess their wellbeing as being very bad. That is where I found the energy to work on this: the fact that our own kids do not feel safe, they do not feel connected, and they do not feel motivated. And look at this beautiful town!⁸

School Readiness: A Focus on the Early Years

- 5.27 Communities in the Hume region are increasingly aware of the number of children arriving at school without being 'school-ready'. Cr Patricia Claridge from Benalla Rural City Council informed the Committee that the Salvation Army is providing breakfast to between 20 and 30 children in Benalla several times a week "...because their parents cannot get them breakfast, there is no food at home or there are other issues".⁹ In Seymour, Ms Kimberley Tempest is Director at the McAuley–Champagnat alternative education program for severely disadvantaged young people. She outlined to the Committee the barriers that she believes are standing between her students and a good education. These include:

- poverty;
- drug and alcohol abuse;
- significant time out of school;
- serious family illness;
- involvement with the police; and
- learning difficulties.¹⁰

- 5.28 In recognition of the problem of ensuring the 'school readiness' of socially disadvantaged young people, schools in the Hume region have begun to appoint coaches to work with teachers to help them respond to at-risk children (according to one witness this is ten per cent of children in Benalla's

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁰ Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley–Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

schools¹¹). The coaches work in particular in the fields of literacy and numeracy which are trending downward in the statistics looking at students from Benalla Primary, Benalla East Primary and Benalla West Primary Schools.¹² These efforts are yet to lead to results for primary students, as Ms Janet Kirkman from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development explained. She told the Committee that there has yet to be a consistent improvement in results for these students, with secondary students responding well but outcomes for primary students declining.¹³

5.29 Ms Tempest raised the important issue of supporting teaching staff in schools, informing the Committee that in her view the McAuley–Champagnat Program would not be able to provide education to disadvantaged young people without offering support to their staff. This support includes psychological counselling.¹⁴

5.30 Kimberley Tempest’s leadership of the McAuley–Champagnat Program and her discussion of the program’s goals and achievements highlights the support that is given in the Shepparton community to those students who do not have other supports. However, her involvement and observation of the siblings of students she works with has also highlighted for Ms Tempest the difficulties that younger students face. She expanded on how the social problems presented by students in the Program also affect younger members of their families:

The other thing is that there are numbers, huge numbers of children, that have undiagnosed mental health or medical conditions, and we pick them up. We pick up students with intellectual disabilities or who are borderline at high school age. Now, they should be diagnosed at a much younger age, so there is a lack of resource in the primary school area, and there needs to be early intervention in the primary area, and we're not doing that. And so there is not enough resource going on. It is our dream. We are already struggling funding-wise with this. But it's our dream to look at primary areas because these children have brothers and sisters that are – I cannot imagine how they are coping at these schools.¹⁵

5.31 In Benalla, Ms Chapman was clear as to the importance of ensuring young people are ready for school every day, arguing: **“We see the school readiness and early years...as crucial for the foundation of everything else that we are trying to do.”**¹⁶ Greater Shepparton City Council believes that the poor education outcomes achieved by the Indigenous population in Shepparton

¹¹ Ms Margot Sherwill, Project Officer, Benalla Regeneration, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹² Ms Margot Sherwill, Project Officer, Benalla Regeneration, *Submission*, Number 51, 8 April 2010.

¹³ Ms Janet Kirkman, Regional Network Leader, Hume Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁴ Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley–Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

can be directly attributable to the levels of disadvantage experienced from birth and through their early years up until the time young Indigenous people start school.¹⁷

- 5.32 Mr Anthony Putt was another member of the Benalla community keen to identify the early years as the focus point for enhancing young people's capacity for learning. Mr Putt believes that, especially for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing a positive experience as early as the kindergarten years can develop social and education skills as well as help those families in need make the most of the services available to them:

I have been involved in the Benalla regeneration group, looking at ways and means of setting up appropriate ways of getting people into schools. It seems to be through early childhood intervention that families that have the ability to understand the system would seek the support. If you are from a disadvantaged background and you do not understand the system, generally you are not going to seek that support, even if it is offered.¹⁸

- 5.33 A lack of literacy skills amongst disadvantaged young people in the Hume region was identified by Margot Sherwill from the Benalla Regeneration project. Given that literacy is one of the "foundation building blocks"¹⁹ for education this poses enormous challenges for the region.²⁰ Ms Tricia Quibell from the child and family welfare organisation Berry Street told the Committee about a program enjoying some success around literacy titled 'Early Learning is Fun'.²¹ The program distributes reading material to young mothers, many of whom have low literacy and education levels themselves, to encourage them to begin reading with their children.²²

Benalla Regeneration

The aim of the Benalla Regeneration project is to maximise educational opportunities for Benalla's young people. The project aims to achieve this through providing options for a collaborative approach to better align resources and services and maximise service delivery via co-location, increased use of school facilities, and the creation of children's centres and community hubs.²³ Benalla Regeneration

¹⁷ Greater Shepparton City Council, *Submission*, Number 36, 31 March 2010.

¹⁸ Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁹ Ms Margot Sherwill, Project Officer, Benalla Regeneration, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁰ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010; Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley–Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

²¹ See: <<http://www.berrystreet.org.au/index.cfm?p=3052&search=early learning is fun>>, accessed 23 June 2010.

²² Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

²³ Benalla Regeneration, *Submission*, Number 51, 8 April 2010.

works with the Federal Government to ensure that the Government's investment in education in Benalla is well spent and coordinated.²⁴

At the public hearing in Benalla, the Committee heard from Ms Margot Sherwill, Benalla Regeneration's Project Officer:

As a past principal of Benalla East and as a principal sharing with other principals in this town for years we have talked about issues surrounding education in this town and felt they needed to be addressed, but it was not until last year that Stephen Brown, our regional director, officially invited the team to commence negotiations to bring about change for the future...

When we started to unpack the data for a student in Benalla we found that it is not a pretty picture...We are talking about four schools on five sites. We have a sixth site in town with no buildings on it. We are looking at significantly falling enrolments, we are looking at a significant shift to other schools either in this town or out of this town, which is having an enormous impact on our ability to provide breadth and choice in the curriculum and programs we want to provide for our children.²⁵

In its submission to the Committee, Benalla Regeneration provided data regarding the Student Family Occupation index, which describes the socioeconomic status of families in a school community.²⁶ In Benalla, the recent negative trend in Student Family Occupation scores reflects disadvantage in areas such as readiness to learn, low prior educational experiences, and family problems or other person circumstances.²⁷

For the four schools in Benalla this means:

- increased welfare issues;
- low levels of engagement and high levels of absenteeism;
- lower aspirations of their students;
- significantly low levels of students continuing with their education; and
- a need for special education services.²⁸

Benalla Regeneration has identified several areas of pressing need:

- recognise that Benalla has large numbers of disadvantaged families and that this is increasing;
- increased funding for welfare officers in all of the Benalla government schools;
- increased funding for intervention programs within Benalla schools to redress falling student outcomes;

²⁴ Bill Sykes, 'Sykes wins Minister's support for Benalla education regeneration', Media Release, 31 July 2010, see: <<http://vic.nationals.org.au/news/Article.aspx?ID=9152>>, accessed August 2010.

²⁵ Ms Margot Sherwill, Project Officer, Benalla Regeneration, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁶ Benalla Regeneration, *Submission*, Number 51, 8 April 2010.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

- need to upgrade the facilities so that the Benalla community develops pride in its schools;
- support the development of facilities and services for students with disabilities; and
- support an inquiry into travel and accommodation issues for students to access higher education.²⁹

5.34 The Tomorrow:Today Foundation is one organisation actively addressing social disadvantage through working with young mothers. In one case taking advantage of maternal and child health visits to encourage participation in other social activities, such as playgroups and allied health treatment. Echoing Ms Quibell's words on mothers who have had unhappy experiences themselves, Ms Chapman said that it is important to persevere with young mothers, even if they initially refuse offers of help:

What is needed in addition to that – because there is no doubt that some mums do not want to socialise; they are not comfortable socialising; they do not see themselves as community-connected; they are not engaged – is that it is crucial as part of our program we have family liaison worker backup. If that mum is hesitant or does not come along to the group, apart from maternal and child health encouragement, there is also a knock on the door and a family liaison worker who is someone just like them – a young woman – who engages, encourages and drives mum and bub to the weekly group session until mum is enjoying it so much she gets herself there.³⁰

5.35 Mr Rodney Wangman, Chief Executive Officer of Albury Wodonga Community College, addressed the Committee in Corryong on the issue of the social problems witnessed in the College's early years unit. Mr Wangman, who is responsible for around 400 children across seven Local Government Areas in both Victoria and New South Wales, told the Committee that some children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those from broken families or families struggling with mental health issues, can display antisocial and disruptive behaviour. In Mr Wangman's view, **the State Government needs to provide early intervention behavioural management specialists to childcare organisations** if it wishes to address this problem. It is not financially viable for Albury Wodonga Community College to put on extra staff specially trained to deal with these issues and there is a risk that children may have to be removed from the College's early years unit if direct assistance is not provided.³¹

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

³¹ Mr Rodney Wangman, Chief Executive Officer, Albury Wodonga Community College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

- 5.36 There have been two recent changes to childcare staffing in Victoria that Mr Wangman also commented on. Staff ratios for children aged zero to three years have been reduced from 1:5 to 1:4, with the change to be phased in by January 2014. Plus, as from 1 January 2012 all staff and carers will be required to hold a minimum of a Certificate III in Childcare Services or its equivalent.³²
- 5.37 Mr Wangman expressed his view that while he agrees with the reasoning behind these changes, that childcare is a vital service needing trained professionals to deliver it, in practice the new requirements may be hard for the State Government to implement:
- In the world that we want to create in having qualified teaching staff into childcare as early as possible that then maximises us as a country in terms of intellectual capacity, probably behavioural, civic tolerance, all those sorts of things, that is the right move, but...it is not going to be a matter of just plucking teachers out of Ballarat and saying, 'Go into these venues', because they are not going to go. They are going to go into primary and secondary schools where they see opportunity for advancement, so that is a problem that the current government of the day has, as well as oppositions and other parties have, to think through.³³
- 5.38 Mr Wangman's concern is that if people commit to study a number of years to a Certificate III level it will be hard to persuade them to work in the field of childcare as opposed to choosing a career as a school teacher. This is because of a number of reasons, including comparatively limited career progression in childcare and lower pay compared to school teachers. In his view, Governments will need to develop persuasive 'marketing strategies' to attract professional staff to the childcare field, especially in remote parts of the State.³⁴
- 5.39 Similar doubts about skills shortages are expressed by Greater Shepparton City Council in its submission to this Inquiry, with an additional concern about extra costs being borne by the community: 'The requirement on services to self-fund these changes is likely to see an increase in costs to Greater Shepparton child care users of over 30–40% by 2015.'³⁵
- 5.40 The Victorian Government discusses the issue of skills shortages in its submission to this Inquiry discussed in Chapter 7.

³² See:

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/childrensservices/childservregs2009-statmnt_of_reasons.pdf>, accessed 5 August 2010.

³³ Mr Rodney Wangman, Chief Executive Officer, Albury Wodonga Community College, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Greater Shepparton City Council, *Submission – Addendum*, Number 36, 13 April 2010.

Community Hubs

- 5.41 The Committee heard from a number of witnesses that designing schools in rural and regional Victoria to act as ‘community hubs’, that is one physical space that is the source of a number of services aside from education of students, is an effective way of addressing disadvantage. (On this subject see Recommendation 19.) Ms Tempest, for example, said that parents often turn to schools for help with their children as schools are still trusted by the parents,³⁶ while Ms Sherwill outlined the Benalla Regeneration group’s vision of how community-focused schools in the future can be accessible to the whole community:

We have a long way to go, but **we want to create family-centred schools where we are looking not only at children from Prep to 12 but also our kindergarten children and our pre-preschool, and really working so it becomes a family thing**, not a school that is open 200 school days a year, Monday to Friday, that starts at 9 and finishes at 3.30, but schools that cater for working parents, that cater for children during school holidays, for single parents, for all families.³⁷

- 5.42 In a submission to this Inquiry, Ms Catherine Pianta, Principal of Benalla College, makes a suggestion that the Education Maintenance Allowance for low income families should again be paid in full to schools (currently half is paid to the school, half to the parent or guardian). Schools could then consult with parents on how the money could be best spent to benefit the student. Ms Pianta believes that competing financial priorities in families from low socioeconomic backgrounds and parents’ own poor education outcomes in the past can sometimes combine to ensure the money is not spent directly on the students’ education needs. Needs such as camps, uniforms or books. For this same reason, Ms Pianta argues that the School Start Bonus for Year 7 students should be paid directly to schools, with ‘...stringent guidelines around its application...’.³⁸
- 5.43 Another effective program the Committee heard about was a ‘homework club’ set up by the Seymour Neighbourhood Renewal program. The club is aimed at students, mostly at the primary and lower secondary level, who are falling behind in their education. This group of anywhere between 12–20 students, facilitated by local residents including ex-teachers, meets on a Monday night and the students are provided with a meal because, as Mr Darryl Leggo from Seymour Neighbourhood Renewal explained: “...most of these kids come from impoverished households. They make sure they get at least one decent meal a week on that program.”³⁹

³⁶ Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley–Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

³⁷ Ms Margot Sherwill, Project Officer, Benalla Regeneration, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

³⁸ Ms Catherine Pianta, Principal, Benalla College, *Submission*, Number 32, 31 March 2010.

³⁹ Mr Darryl Leggo, Chair, Resident Action Group, Seymour Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

- 5.44 At the heart of early intervention programs is a desire to break what Ms Sherwill described as “...this generational poverty and this ongoing unemployment...”,⁴⁰ which Ms Pianta says leaves young people with “...little or no aspiration to develop life-long skills for employment and strong citizenship”.⁴¹ Mr Putt also identified generational disadvantage as being an important problem to tackle,⁴² as did Rodney Wangman. Mr Wangman told the Committee that as part of his work at the Albury Wodonga Community College he is coming into contact with families experiencing a third generation of unemployment, making it increasingly unlikely that young people will learn behaviour patterns necessary for successful engagement with education and employment.⁴³
- 5.45 As the Mitchell Shire Council’s Mr Rob McVernon said: “**...what the children expect is really what the parents expect...**”.⁴⁴
- 5.46 An identified need in Benalla is work around helping young people from disadvantaged communities who have become disengaged from school. Cr Claridge spoke to the Committee about 37 young people who had recently been successfully re-engaged with education. She suggested that North East Support and Action for Youth Inc (NESAY) is in need of further funding for a family support worker who has been working at keeping young disadvantaged people at school.⁴⁵
- 5.47 Goulburn Valley Primary Care Partnership did provide figures on disengaged 15–19-year-old school leavers in its submission to this Inquiry, stating that the number of disengaged school leavers in Greater Shepparton is ‘significantly higher than the Victorian rate’.⁴⁶ However, determining the exact number of disengaged students in Victoria is difficult, as pointed out by Mr Putt:

I would suggest the first place you would start would be at the education department, because if people are not going to school it is the responsibility of schools to let the education department know they are not attending. That would be my first port of call. Other than that, I could not give a definitive answer.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Ms Margot Sherwill, Project Officer, Benalla Regeneration, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁴¹ Ms Catherine Pianta, Principal, Benalla College, *Submission*, Number 32, 31 March 2010.

⁴² Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁴³ Mr Rodney Wangman, Chief Executive Officer, Albury Wodonga Community College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

⁴⁴ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

⁴⁵ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁴⁶ Goulburn Valley Primary Care Partnership, *Submission*, Number 18, 23 March 2010.

⁴⁷ Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

The McAuley–Champagnat Program

The McAuley–Champagnat Program run in conjunction with Notre Dame College in Shepparton commenced in 2006 as a response to the increasing number of school-aged young people unable to succeed in mainstream education. The Program is a joint initiative between Notre Dame College, the Catholic Education Office of the Diocese of Sandhurst, and the Salvation Army’s Brayton Youth and Family Services.

The initial aim of the McAuley-Champagnat Program is to provide an alternative education setting for students in the Goulburn Murray region who are already disengaged from school or who are at significant risk of:

- disengaging from educational opportunities;
- long-term unemployment; or
- detention within the Juvenile Justice System.

The program aims to provide a pathway for its students to either:

- return to mainstream education (usually at their former school); or
- enrol in a TAFE program; or
- take up an apprenticeship; or
- take up other employment opportunities.⁴⁸

Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director at the McAuley–Champagnat Program, appeared at the Committee’s public hearing in Seymour. She told the Committee about the extreme level of disadvantage presented by students, and the challenges faced by the young people who benefit from the support offered by the Program.

Long-term Solutions

5.48 Throughout this Committee’s Inquiry practitioners in rural and regional communities advised that for any solution tackling disadvantage to be effective it must be long-term. Ms Quibell, speaking about a Moira Shire program aimed at disadvantaged young mothers, informed the Committee that these mothers may be wondering about how much trust they can place in a person who may not be there for more than a short period of time. It was seen in the past when services have only been funded for the short term that “...young people become very disillusioned about ‘Well, why would I bother

⁴⁸ See: <http://www.notredame.vic.edu.au/mcauley-champagnat_programme/mcp.htm>, accessed 16 August 2010.

because you're not going to be here in six months' time?', and that's something we often hear..."⁴⁹

- 5.49 An effective long-term program that the Committee heard about in Benalla is the Reconnect program. The program is a Federal Government initiative aimed at helping young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness re-engage with education, training, employment and the community at large.⁵⁰ Mr Mark Rumble, Brayton Youth and Family Services' Chief Executive Officer, made reference to the State Government's Youth Homelessness Action Plan 2 in recommending the wider roll-out of the Reconnect program, and also intimated that such programs need to be given time to work: "It is a long-term program, so you're not going to see immediate results, but over a couple of years you will definitely see results."⁵¹ With regard to funding see Recommendation 10.

Community Strength

- 5.50 A further prerequisite for programs tackling disadvantage to be successful, as identified by a number of witnesses in the Hume region, is a strong community. Mr Putt, for example, argued that "...if you have a community that understands the people living in your community, you have a better chance of providing better outcomes for all".⁵² Ms Chapman believes this is an inherent strength of the Benalla community:

Perhaps that is why we are able to embark on a ten-year program that is going to sustainably change educational attainment levels – because we have a baseline of community cohesiveness. Even though the data is very confronting in all sorts of ways, we also need to be very aware – and thank you for the opportunity to put it on the record – that this is a can-do community.⁵³

- 5.51 Mr Putt told the Committee of the ways in which the Neighbourhood Renewal program in Shepparton North had increased the strength of the community in the area. For example, in increasing community pride:

The community – the people who live in the houses – is very proud of what it now has and guard it with their lives. Just recently there was a bit of a fire in one of the areas there. The community got together

⁴⁹ Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

⁵⁰ See: <<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/reconnect.htm>>, accessed 23 June 2010.

⁵¹ Mr Mark Rumble, Chief Executive Officer, Brayton Youth and Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

⁵² Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁵³ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

and they worked very hard to see what happened, who was involved and how they could rectify that situation. They went to great pains, albeit informally, to let people know, 'This is our turf. If you are going to denigrate our turf, then we have got no hope of being included or involved in other areas of community'. What that said to me is that, even though we were probably still talking about pockets of the community, **I think we have raised the level of expectation of people who live in that area to being one of being a little more proud about where they live and what they do.**⁵⁴

5.52 The Neighbourhood Renewal program in Benalla was also complimented by Mr McVernon, who said that the State Government had worked well with local agencies to bring about "...some significant changes".⁵⁵ Mr Leggo told the Committee that Seymour had responded positively to being identified by Professor Tony Vinson as one of Victoria's most deprived communities and outlined a number of ways in which he felt this had been achieved, including:

- forming a number of youth groups (including the homework group, discussed previously in this Chapter);
- increasing the confidence of local residents to engage with the wider community, including local and State Government agencies;
- involving the whole community in decision-making; and
- improving the skills base of the area while tackling disadvantage.⁵⁶

5.53 One area of concern raised by Mr Leggo, however, was around the issue of the end of funding to the Neighbourhood Renewal program (Neighbourhood Renewal in Seymour finished in July 2010). Mr Leggo suggested that there is a need for some sort of 'transition funding', to enable the good work begun by the program to continue into the future.⁵⁷ Mr McVernon, meanwhile, argued for a 'tapered' approach to ending Neighbourhood Renewal funding, explaining that negotiations had taken place with the Department of Human Services around this issue:

...my real concern is that the tap just turns off. So, all of the work that has been done by the community – and community development is really about assisting the community to stand up for themselves and do their own thing and empower them – but we none of us have children who at 18, you're an adult, that's it, sorry, you're out. And, so, that question about what happens after July is a significant one for us, particularly from the perspective of local government because they're our residents, and if the caravan packs

⁵⁴ Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁵⁵ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

⁵⁶ Mr Darryl Leggo, Chair, Resident Action Group, Seymour Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

up and leaves, we have not got the internal resources to work anything like that level.⁵⁸

5.54 Suggestions about ensuring a transition period for Neighbourhood Renewal funding were also heard in the Grampians region.

5.55 Overall, the Committee was informed repeatedly that, with the right amount of support, communities have the wherewithal to respond to the factors of disadvantage that appear in the region. In Seymour, Ms Rhonda Sanderson spoke of the community's "strength" and "sense of empowerment", referring to the town as a "well-kept secret".⁵⁹ Cr Claridge talked about the confidence the residents of Benalla have in their ability to find their own solutions to their own problems.⁶⁰ Ms Maxine Brockfield from Upper Murray Health and Community Services spoke equally well of the "very supportive community" in Corryong.⁶¹

5.56 The Committee also heard of the strong link between employment and disadvantage. Anthony Putt explained that in a small town such as Benalla, with its limited employment opportunities, low-skilled workers with a chequered working history can find themselves struggling to obtain employment:

If I can give an analysis on Benalla alone. Schneider Electric, D. & R. Henderson and Benalla Spinners could be three major employers. You may be employed by Schneider and you have a history of working for only two months. Then you go to work at D. & R. Henderson and you are there for three or four months. Then you resign and move on. What we are finding, from talking to those HR people, is they are saying, 'The history says that these people do not have good employment ethics'. Therefore they are not going to spend their time and energy in employing people in a third opportunity which is around, generally, the unskilled component.⁶²

5.57 Mr Putt added that it is important to re-engage people in full-time employment in order to prevent a downward spiral of unemployment, with the inherent disadvantage that implies. A solution proposed by him was for community organisations working with the long-term unemployed to win contracts with either the State or Federal Government that bypass the procurement guidelines, as happens federally with Australian Disability Enterprises.⁶³

⁵⁸ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing, Seymour*, 19 May 2010.

⁵⁹ Ms Rhonda Sanderson, Secretary, *The Seymour We Want, Public Hearing, Seymour*, 19 May 2010.

⁶⁰ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing, Benalla*, 7 April 2010.

⁶¹ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

⁶² Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing, Benalla*, 7 April 2010.

⁶³ Ibid.

- 5.58 Australian Disability Enterprises are commercial businesses that employ people with a disability. There are more than 600 Australian Disability Enterprises employing over 20,000 people across Australia, with funding and support provided by the Federal Government's Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Changes to the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines allow Federal Government departments to consider purchasing from an Australian Disability Enterprise without the need to go to tender. These changes took effect from 1 December 2008.⁶⁴ The Victorian Government also allows an exemption from the tender process for purchases from: 'Australian Disability Enterprises and other businesses that primarily exist to provide services to people with a disability, philanthropic or not for profit institutions'.⁶⁵
- 5.59 This approach is reflected in the Committee's view that a Government-based decentralisation policy ought to focus its efforts on shifting jobs to areas where employment is most needed and could most benefit a community that is striving to overcome problems of disadvantage.

Mission Australia's Urban Renewal Project

Urban Renewal is a transitional labour market program providing opportunities for disadvantaged and jobless individuals to access waged employment in a supported, real work environment with the aim of enabling a successful transition to employment. Urban Renewal is a registered building practitioner providing services in the landscaping, construction and building maintenance industries, which have relatively low barriers to entry and have been identified as experiencing skills shortages.

Over a period of 12 months, Urban Renewal assists trainees to achieve hard outcomes (e.g. obtaining a qualification, finding work, securing a place in a training course) and soft outcomes (e.g. self-confidence and self-perception of job readiness, improved physical and mental health, motivation, time management, improved appearance/presentation, improved language or literacy and numeracy skills, teamwork and communication skills).

A 2008 review of an Urban Renewal program in Melbourne found the main strengths of the program are:

- patient support for personal and vocational skills development;
- a social context for training and development;
- a partnership approach to training and development;
- holistic support for transitions from exclusion to participation; and

⁶⁴ See: <<http://www.australiandisabilityenterprises.com.au/>>, accessed 27 August 2010.

⁶⁵ See: <[http://www.vgpb.vic.gov.au/CA2575BA0001417C/pages/procurement-practitioners-stage-2---bid-process-and-contract-award-step-4---preparation-of-bid-documents-\(rfqs---rfts\)-exemption-from-seeking-multiple-quotes,-open-or-selective-tendering-\(limited-tendering\)-and-ict-ip-default-position-policy](http://www.vgpb.vic.gov.au/CA2575BA0001417C/pages/procurement-practitioners-stage-2---bid-process-and-contract-award-step-4---preparation-of-bid-documents-(rfqs---rfts)-exemption-from-seeking-multiple-quotes,-open-or-selective-tendering-(limited-tendering)-and-ict-ip-default-position-policy)>, accessed 27 August 2010.

- dynamic training in a live industry context.

The Shepparton program worked with ten trainees in 2008–2009 and four of these are now employed. This year of nine trainees commencing, five have gone onto full-time employment and four are still completing their traineeship.

In the past the majority of Urban Renewal’s work has been secured through contracts with local government and State Government agencies such as the Department of Sustainability and the Environment. Due to price competition with commercial and other businesses, the quantity of work undertaken for these purchasers has reduced significantly in the past 12–18 months. As a result, the Urban Renewal teams are underutilised at present and the ongoing viability of the business has become uncertain.⁶⁶

Tertiary Education

5.60 The Committee heard from a number of witnesses that the high cost of tertiary education is harming educational aspirations for low-income areas of the Hume region. Ms Chapman, for example, said that she had noticed a lack of conversation about tertiary education among families in Benalla. These families believe they do not have the financial ability to support their children during further education. Along with other factors of disadvantage, such as the social problems students are presenting with in their early years, this serves to limit education outcomes in Benalla:

We know Benalla does not transition well onto higher education. It was starting way back, because there was a lack of conversation. We know that our schools have been adapting and responding for a number of years, but **it is the impact of disadvantage we have found at home and in the community, as well as at school, that is limiting our children’s life chances**, because it is the combination of attitudes, wellbeing, early success in literacy and numeracy, financial constraints and positive role models. They all have a role to play in a young person’s decision to stay on or turn away from education.⁶⁷

5.61 Ms Chloe Bennett, a student at FCJ College in Benalla, told the Committee that, as is the case with some of her peers, she has plans to defer her university placement and work “...because we need the money”.⁶⁸ Ms Quibell suggested that the high cost of tertiary education may actually make it more difficult for rural areas to attract professionals with children who are planning

⁶⁶ Mission Australia, *Submission*, Number 44, 31 March 2010.

⁶⁷ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁶⁸ Ms Chloe Bennett, Student, FCJ College, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

to undertake a university education. They will have to “...weigh up is it worth the \$30,000 or \$50,000 it will cost them to put their own child through a degree in Melbourne and send them back down there”.⁶⁹

- 5.62 The loss of young people in rural areas to universities in either Melbourne or large regional centres was another concern expressed by both Chloe Bennett, a young student, who suggested that a lack of role models partly explained a culture in Benalla of not expecting to attend university,⁷⁰ and Tricia Quibell, who worried about the ability of community organisations to employ highly skilled professionals from among the local population.⁷¹
- 5.63 Mr Vincent Branigan, a teacher at FCJ College, believes that when young people leave Benalla to go to university they are unlikely to return. This may mean the loss of ‘future leaders’ for the community: “I worry that our brightest and best like Chloe Bennett will not be coming back and contributing to rural and regional Victoria in the future.”⁷² More remote communities and smaller towns also experience the day-to-day loss of students to better resourced neighbouring locations. In Corryong a local teacher, Ms Christine McKimmie, outlined how the lack of education options for school children forces many to seek their schooling in Albury Wodonga: “That takes them out of the sport in our community and means they are not contributing to our community in lots of other ways as well.”⁷³
- 5.64 Losing students to other towns also has the effect of reducing the variety of subjects a school can offer. Ms McKimmie informed the Committee that Corryong College has been forced to reduce its Year 11 and 12 curriculum by six subjects over the past several years. This is due to a combination of lower school numbers and a lack of specialty teachers⁷⁴ a combination Ms Bennett also blamed for the fact that there is “...often a lack of subjects in country schools”.⁷⁵

Transport and Education

- 5.65 In Seymour, Mr McVernon labelled the loss of young people to universities as a ‘knowledge loss’ for Mitchell Shire, and argued that although there is a TAFE option in the Shire, accessing it via public transport is problematic:

If you are a young person who lives in Yea, and you get into TAFE, you need to be fairly good at negotiation because there's an 8.30 bus

⁶⁹ Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing, Seymour, 19 May 2010.*

⁷⁰ Ms Chloe Bennett, Student, FCJ College, *Public Hearing, Benalla, 7 April 2010.*

⁷¹ Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing, Seymour, 19 May 2010.*

⁷² Mr Vincent Branigan, Teacher, FCJ College, *Public Hearing, Benalla, 7 April 2010.*

⁷³ Ms Christine McKimmie, Teacher, Corryong College, *Public Hearing, Corryong, 8 April 2010.*

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ms Chloe Bennett, Student, FCJ College, *Public Hearing, Benalla, 7 April 2010.*

that will get you there at five past nine. Hopefully your classes will start at five past nine or you can negotiate that. However, if you miss that one, you actually end up having to catch the bus to Melbourne and the train to Seymour. So, on a Thursday afternoon or on a Friday afternoon if you don't catch the half-hour bus, you have a four-hour trip home. **Getting east–west across our part of the world is a real issue for many people.**⁷⁶

- 5.66 Ms Quibell agreed that while Mitchell Shire is well-served by north–south transport options, travelling east–west is more problematic. This can impact on education opportunities:

So, in terms of transportation, in this particular region there is a degree of service if you look north to south along the train and bus routes that go into Melbourne. But, if you look east to west, it is very spasmodic, if anything, and very – it doesn't service the community's needs very well at all. For instance, if you are a young person who lives in Euroa, and you wanted to access a TAFE in Shepparton, there is a community Transport Connections Program, there is a bus that now runs a couple of days a week, but it doesn't necessarily meet up with times of classes and also there is some capacity to go on to one of the school bus routes, but that's only if those school buses aren't full already, which they predominantly are. So, that's an issue that exists across our entire region.⁷⁷

See Recommendation 47.

- 5.67 An identified transport solution, which may also help keep young people in the Mitchell Shire, would be providing a train from Seymour to La Trobe University's campus in Bundoora. This would potentially allow people to more easily commute to university while still living in the Shire.⁷⁸ Another solution to retaining young people suggested by Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer of Upper Murray Family Care would be to increase the ability of TAFEs – which already have a wide presence in rural and regional Victoria – to issue degrees. This idea also has the potential of improving education outcomes for disadvantaged young people in rural and regional Victoria. TAFE courses can provide a 'gateway' to a new life:

The idea of TAFE being beefed up, or whatever the word would be, to issue degrees is a very positive development. I was fortunate to be a guest speaker at Wodonga TAFE a couple of weeks ago. I was struck by and very impressed with the background of the students. It was an award presentation for the best students in the classes. Almost

⁷⁶ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing, Seymour*, 19 May 2010.

⁷⁷ Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing, Seymour*, 19 May 2010.

⁷⁸ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing, Seymour*, 19 May 2010.

without exception, you would class these people as coming from disadvantaged and impoverished backgrounds and TAFE was clearly the gateway for them in changing their lives. That is a great platform.⁷⁹

- 5.68 In its *Ready for Tomorrow* Regional Blueprint, the Victorian Government outlines its Regional Tertiary Education Partnerships program, in which it states:

The Government will support universities and TAFEs to improve access, pathways and participation in tertiary education by young people in regional Victoria. This may include new approaches to course delivery, the sharing of resources, such as a university delivering a course on a TAFE campus, or the delivery of courses utilising technology. This initiative strengthens successful regional delivery models and provides greater flexibility and choice to regional and rural students, with more opportunities to undertake the qualification of their choice in the location of their choice.⁸⁰

- 5.69 Regarding the teaching workforce in the Hume region, the problem of distance was raised with reference to the cost of teachers attending professional development seminars or arranging excursions for their students. In Corryong, Ms McKimmie revealed that **teachers are often left covering the cost of accommodation in Melbourne when attending professional development courses**, a cost that teachers in Melbourne do not have to cover. She also spoke of the need for financial support to assist Corryong College support school students' tertiary aspirations by taking them to visit universities in Melbourne, trips that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds risk not being able to attend:

We do that in year 11. We go around to the universities. Again, there is the barrier. I was just talking to the VCE coordinator. It costs us \$1,800 just to get the bus there, and the low socioeconomic students cannot always afford to go. There are grants that I apply for — the Anglicare one, for example, that funds up to \$1000 for a female student in Years 11 and 12. Those sorts of ones we apply for.⁸¹

This issue is taken up in Recommendation 13.

- 5.70 Cr Peter Joyce, the Mayor of Towong Shire, added that Corryong's remote location makes it difficult to attract teachers to the town. Cr Joyce stressed that the level of education provided by teachers in the town is very good, but recruitment is made difficult by the distance to the nearest regional centres,

⁷⁹ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁸⁰ Victorian Government, *Ready for Tomorrow: A blueprint for rural and regional Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

⁸¹ Ms Christine McKimmie, Teacher, Corryong College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

as well as the fact that the small number of businesses in the area makes finding employment for the partners of teachers difficult as well.⁸²

Housing

- 5.71 Education was linked strongly with housing in the Hume region. Many of the education needs discussed earlier in this Chapter in the section on school readiness are a feature of families living in public housing. Cr Claridge identified the high turnover rate of public housing residents as a particular problem. This is because programs that tackle the factors of disadvantage that public housing presents require a long timeframe to be effective. In Benalla, according to Cr Claridge, difficulty dealing with this 'churn factor of turnover' is exacerbated by the fact that the public housing estate in the town is isolated from service providers due to limited public transport.⁸³
- 5.72 Mr Rumbold agreed that public housing estates can be considered as pockets of disadvantage in rural communities "...because they tend sometimes to be geographically separate from the main centre and not well-connected with public transport".⁸⁴ This is a problem that was also raised in Seymour by Ms Herma Duthie. She traced social problems, such as domestic violence and child abuse cases, back to the decision to turn Department of Defence housing in the region into public housing allocated to long-term unemployed people from Melbourne.⁸⁵
- 5.73 Mr McVernon also linked issues arising with pockets of disadvantage in Seymour with changes in housing policy. He argues that **the social problems experienced by residents were exacerbated by the fact that they had been removed from their social networks and located more remotely.**⁸⁶ This perspective was also proposed by FamilyCare's Ms Angela Armstrong-Wright:

We would spend 80 per cent, often, of our EFT, our working staff, actually working in particular parts of Seymour, and that is where the public housing is concentrated. And it's a huge ask. I mean, you have somebody, a young mother from Melbourne with four kids who has come out of a violent relationship, who is on the brink of poverty and...potentially a mild intellectual disability and place them in Seymour. I mean, the ask to have one worker, let alone a team of people around to get systemic change around that family and actually give those kids a good start in life, and, first of all, to keep

⁸² Cr Peter Joyce, Mayor, Towong Shire, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

⁸³ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁸⁴ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁸⁵ Ms Herma Duthie, President, The Seymour We Want, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁸⁶ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

them safe...it's really difficult. So, I have no doubt, absolutely, there is a direct correlation between them.⁸⁷

5.74 A joint submission to this Inquiry from the City of Wodonga and La Trobe University (Albury Wodonga) raises the issue of affordable housing. The submission states that because higher-needs households earning less than 50 per cent of median household income are allocated public housing, affordable housing initiatives in the Hume region should focus on households earning between 50–80 per cent of median household income. However, the authors warn that housing stress is likely to become more prevalent in the region ‘...because public housing stock is not expected to remain proportional with population increases’.⁸⁸

5.75 Ms Armstrong-Wright acknowledged that many of these problems are the result of past policies that grouped public housing together in clusters (and indeed are long-term problems that as a society we are only now trying to address in a systematic manner). However, she stressed that she is concerned with the capacity of some parents in the Hume region to provide proper care for their children:

...it's not the hardcore, over the line, child protection stuff, so physical or sexual abuse, it's that whole next area, which is around attachment and bonding and growth and ages and stages, so knowing what a three-year-old is meant to do, and having a relatively clean house.⁸⁹

Recommendation 44

That the State Government examine current policy on provision of public housing in rural and regional Victoria with a view to ensuring that:

- a. Public housing continues to be spread evenly throughout rural and regional Victoria rather than in concentrated locations as has previously been the case.
- b. Public housing is always provided with the necessary range of services to prevent further disadvantage taking hold.
- c. To reflect changing community demographics there is an urgent increase in the number of one-bedroom units in the public housing system.

5.76 Ms Armstrong-Wright added that the State Government’s Child FIRST program was achieving successful results in this area. Child FIRST is a Department of Human Services program linking vulnerable children, young

⁸⁷ Ms Angela Armstrong-Wright, Director Service Development, FamilyCare, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

⁸⁸ City of Wodonga and La Trobe University (Albury Wodonga), *Submission*, Number 55, 3 May 2010.

⁸⁹ Ms Angela Armstrong-Wright, Director Service Development, FamilyCare, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

people and their families with relevant services. There are currently 24 Child FIRST sites located across Victoria.⁹⁰

5.77 Angela Armstrong-Wright also proposed two initiatives that she felt would assist in helping parents in disadvantaged communities. The first was a public information campaign, along the lines of anti-smoking public health campaigns. FamilyCare could run a campaign informing parents that parenting can, in fact, be very hard at times and encouraging them not to be afraid of asking for help should they need it and before the problem becomes too hard to manage.⁹¹ This is supported in Recommendation 37.

5.78 Ms Armstrong-Wright's second proposed solution revolves around an innovative use of available resources. She suggests placing community workers with families experiencing problems. Community workers could regularly visit and be present to provide practical care and assistance as a way of helping solve those problems without having to split up families:

You know, if someone has a disability or has a terminal illness, we would tend to put a home care service in, you know, the HACC [Home and Community Care] services where you have a worker to come in two hours every morning and help people get dressed and have a shower. You know, that could be something that we could do in terms of these really complex families. We could actually have a worker that goes in and helps mum get the kids up, gets some breakfast, dresses them, gets them to school every day, with the knowledge that the mother may not ever get it, and really pick those skills up. But in order to keep the family functioning and safe, it might be a model we can use...

I think there will always be a percentage of parents that actually aren't going to get over that threshold, but...is it better for us to actually keep them together with mum, who they love, etc? **This is quite controversial, I am aware, but is it better to try and keep that family unit together with those supports until we get a 16-year-old who is still at school or a 17 or 18-year-old who is still together with family, been to school, had food, a meal on the table every night and done their homework? Probably yes. It's worth us actually looking at something like that.**⁹²

5.79 In January 2010, the Victorian Government announced the trial of in-home specialist staff for parents struggling with difficult social problems.⁹³ The program plans to build on the early intervention work that is part of the

⁹⁰ See: <<http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/family-services/how-to-make-a-referral-to-child-first/first-child-and-family-information-referral-and-support-teams>>, accessed 30 August 2010.

⁹¹ Ms Angela Armstrong-Wright, Director Service Development, FamilyCare, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Minister for Community Services, 'Super nannies set to fly into Victoria', Media Release, 18 January 2010.

Department of Human Services Child FIRST family support system.⁹⁴ The Victorian Government has provided \$19.1 million to pilot family-based interventions (Family Coaching Victoria) aimed at preventing at-risk children and young people being removed from their homes. Stage One of the pilot, located in metropolitan Melbourne, commenced in July 2010 and will run until 30 June 2013. Stage Two of the pilot, covering metropolitan Melbourne as well as the Loddon Mallee and Barwon South West regions are due to run from October 2010 until 30 September 2012.⁹⁵

Recommendation 37

That the State Government link its recently announced ‘family coaches’ program with a promotional campaign on parenting to encourage those experiencing difficulties to ask for assistance, and to reduce the stigma that may be attached to doing so.

- 5.80 In Corryong, Ms Catherine Wheeler from Upper Murray Health and Community Services, told the Committee that there is a lack of public housing in the area, especially for single people. This is an issue she believed may be storing up problems in the long term as “...a number of people with mental illness and drug and alcohol issues come here because they think they can hide in the hills”.⁹⁶
- 5.81 In Benalla, Luke Rumbold expressed a view on the insufficient level of public housing in rural Victoria in general.⁹⁷ Ms Cheryl Sanderson also identified a specific need for single-unit public housing.⁹⁸ Ms Sanderson raised this issue again in her submission to this Inquiry.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ See: <<http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/family-services/how-to-make-a-referral-to-child-first;>>, accessed 5 August 2010.

⁹⁵ Shantai Croisdale, Senior Policy and Program Advisor, Child Protection, Placement and Family Services Branch, Department of Human Services, *Personal Communication*, 6 September 2010.

⁹⁶ Ms Catherine Wheeler, Mental Health Nurse, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

⁹⁷ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁹⁸ Ms Cheryl Sanderson, Chair, Ovens Valley Awareness Group, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

⁹⁹ Ms Cheryl Sanderson, Chair, Ovens Valley Awareness Group, *Submission*, Number 14, 19 March 2010.

Emergency Accommodation

5.82 Regarding emergency or crisis accommodation, Mr Rumble from Brayton Youth and Family Services was of the opinion that the level of accommodation across the Hume region is “pretty limited”.¹⁰⁰ This is an assessment Ms Quibell agreed with, adding that this is straining services, and affecting both clients and service providers:

At the moment, Berry Street has 16 funded residential care placements through child protection, but there are 40 young people on placement across this region alone and they are in a number of contingency placements with other agencies such as Brayton. [But] there's not enough beds for the kids that we've got, so that then brings on issues of how do we match the right young person to the right unit, so that we don't exacerbate any issues they are already carrying with them, and it has issues around for our staffing as well, because we struggle to have service across the region.¹⁰¹

5.83 In Benalla, the Committee heard from Ms Glenyis James, NESAY's Chief Executive Officer. Ms James spoke to the Committee about homelessness in the region.¹⁰² Towong and Alpine Shires have the highest per capita number of homeless people in Victoria.¹⁰³ Nevertheless Ms James said that the Department of Human Services provides NESAY with only \$8,000 to provide emergency accommodation in Alpine, Wangaratta, Benalla and Mansfield Shires. The nearest youth refuges are located in Wodonga (six beds) and Shepparton (eight beds). This raises issues around transport and the problem of removing young people from school.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Mr Mark Rumble, Chief Executive Officer, Brayton Youth and Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁰¹ Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁰² Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010. Information and statistics on homelessness can be found at: <http://www.chp.org.au/public_library/items/2005/01/00045-upload-00001.doc>.

¹⁰³ Chamberlain C, MacKenzi D, *Counting the Homeless 2006: Victoria*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

Recommendation 43

That the State Government ensure all communities in rural and regional Victoria have sufficient emergency accommodation for young people to meet their needs. To achieve this the Committee recommends that the State Government:

- a. Increase funding to organisations providing emergency accommodation in rural and regional Victoria.
- b. Develop emergency accommodation facilities in areas of need in rural and regional Victoria in order to ensure that vulnerable young people are not moved to different parts of the State exacerbating existing problems and causing issues including: removal of young people from their vital support networks; availability of transport back to their community; and long-term problems associated with removing young people from school.

5.84 Ms James also identified a gap in service provision in the town of Mansfield. NESAY is funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to provide services in Wangaratta and Benalla (funding which it also uses to provide outreach services to Myrtleford, Chiltern, Rutherglen, Bright and Mount Beauty). However, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program funding is not available for Mansfield, despite there being a recognised need:

It is very cold in Mansfield in winter. There is no SAAP [Supported Accommodation Assistance Program]-funded program. We are the only welfare service that provides a two or three day a week service there. This has been a bone of contention for many years with me. It is appalling. We have young people and we have older families. In one of our programs where we were recently funded through a statewide program based in Melbourne we got \$30,000 for intensive case management; that is to work with very intensive, chaotic and complex clients. Often these are 22 to 25-year-olds with children who are two or three-year olds. They come from Mansfield, Tolmie and all those sorts of areas. We have to house them, in the end, usually in a caravan park in Wangaratta, or even a caravan park in Shepparton.¹⁰⁵

5.85 Anglicare Victoria welcomes the new Victorian homeless hotline and register currently being trialled but warns that its success will be dependent on the level of public housing available for people to be referred to.¹⁰⁶

5.86 In discussing causes of homelessness in the Hume region, Ms James mentioned a number factors including:

- limited employment opportunities;

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

- a high number of early school leavers;
- domestic violence, including young males against other family members (in response to which NESAY's Walk the Talk program was established);
- cyber bullying; and
- poor parenting.¹⁰⁷

5.87 In recognition of the importance of early intervention in tackling disadvantage, Ms James called for a broadening of the reach of homelessness services across the Hume region. She told the Committee that if NESAY is able to work with a homeless young person and their family within the first four weeks of the person leaving home, results are usually very good. However, if services are not available the situation for young people frequently becomes worse very quickly. According to Ms James, research conducted by NESAY indicates that more than 80 per cent of NESAY's clients will begin using illegal drugs within six weeks of becoming homeless and at least 90 per cent will experience some form of mental illness if they remain homeless for more than six months.¹⁰⁸

5.88 In Seymour, Mark Rumble informed the Committee that between January and the end of April 2010, Brayton Youth and Family Services had received a total of 97 referrals for homeless youth in need of emergency accommodation. He added that, in his view, there has been a lack of action following 1989's *Our Homeless Children* report (also known as the Burdekin Report) with regard to implementation of their recommendation on increasing emergency accommodation across Australia. He sees this inaction as partly responsible for the serious problems Brayton Youth and Family Services are encountering today. He states: **"We are as busy as we have ever been. The problems that the young people are presenting with are as serious as I have ever seen."**¹⁰⁹ Mr Rumble added that in his view providing only the basic services for young homeless people – such as food and shelter – can result in a 'revolving door' situation, where young people are housed for a short period of time but no issues are resolved. This in turn leads to them returning a short while later for more support. In response (and in addition to the Reconnect program mentioned earlier), Mr Rumble informed the Committee of a program developed by Brayton Youth and Family Services entitled the 'Good Lives Model'. The program feeds and houses young homeless people, and it also addresses any psychological issues that may be causing problems for their clients.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Mr Mark Rumble, Chief Executive Officer, Brayton Youth and Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

The Good Lives Model

The Good Lives Model is a comprehensive, therapeutic case management and staffing model written by a psychologist and developed by Brayton Youth and Family Services using PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) and attachment theories in the context of youth homelessness. The Good Lives Model provides a holistic response to young homeless people with multiple risk factors in a transitional setting. Brayton Youth and Family Services Chief Executive Officer Mark Rumble suggested to the Committee that more 'holistic' programs such as the 'Good Lives Model' are successful in reducing youth homelessness and the State Government should consider funding such models to complement the basic services already provided:

We believe that what the government needs to do is start to look at some of those additions to the basic funding of the SAAP [Supported Accommodation Assistance Program] program and start to explore the need to actually fund some of those add-ons, because I honestly don't know next year where we're going to get the funding to do that...

So, what I would be saying is listen to us when we say to you thank you for the funding; it's awesome. But we need to be able to build on that to create a program that actually really works. I believe what Brayton has done is create a program that really, really works and we have evidence to show that. The dilemma is I don't know when the next bucket of money is coming to top up our therapists. I don't know when the next lot of money is coming from to keep our two case managers in place, and this type of thing.¹¹¹

The Good Lives Model is based on ten principles:

1. Live (general health and functioning).
2. Excellence in work or play (success experiences).
3. Spirituality (sense of meaning and purpose in life).
4. Excellence in agency (initiative and self-direction).
5. Inner calm (freedom from emotional turmoil).
6. Friendship (intimate, family, friends).
7. Knowledge (sporting, manual, musical).
8. Community (sense of belonging, sport and community groups).
9. Happiness (subjective pleasure, transcendence).
10. Creativity (puzzles, problem solving, designing, music).¹¹²

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² See: <<http://www.practice.chp.org.au/information-and-resources/practice/best-practice-grants>>, accessed 5 August 2010.

Mental Health

- 5.89 Mental health featured strongly in general discussions about health in the Hume region. In particular in relation to the ongoing long-term drought. Anglicare Victoria has observed an increase in demand for mental health services as a result of the drought but reported that there is a lack of outreach services available across the Goulburn Valley.¹¹³

Outreach

...the people who are probably in the greatest need in the Benalla community are not coming to us.¹¹⁴

Dan Weeks, Benalla

- 5.90 In Benalla, the Committee heard first hand about the important work done by Drought Outreach Workers, who are said to be very effective in linking health services with farming communities. Mr Ivan Lister, an outreach worker employed by Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, spoke at length to the Committee about his position, providing an insight into the informal nature of his role:

I have been working in the Benalla shire full-on for the last three years. Before that I was in part of Strathbogie shire, part of Shepparton shire and part of Benalla shire. When I first started, say, seven years ago in this area my role was to doorknock – which is the outreach – and see how farming families were.

I sort of carried two messages to get the conversation going. One was to ask, ‘How are you coping with the drought?’, and I would usually see straight away with farm body language that somebody was either coping or not coping well with the drought. **What I am trying to do all of the time is get inside for a cup of tea, sit down and get the full story of what is going on.** I am pretty good at it, and I have had plenty of cups of tea, as you can see. The two things I am interested in are the cost of this drought on farming communities financially and mentally. The outreach part, which I said was full-on when I first started, is now about half doorknocking and half referrals, probably more referrals because I am so well-known, the organisation is so well-known and the action we take is so well-known right across these communities.

There are 800 registered farmers in this shire, the blocks and all of the rest of it, so it is pretty hard to get out to see everybody. My normal day consists of a phone call, usually from the wife who is

¹¹³ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

¹¹⁴ Mr Dan Weeks, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

concerned about her husband. She would ask the question, ‘I do not know if you are the guy but I have heard about you. Could you talk to my husband?’ I would say, ‘Sure I can’. The next bit is her saying, ‘He probably will not talk to you’. I say, ‘You just get me in the door and I will get the talking part organised’.

There are two ways we can do that. I usually want to meet whoever is telling me the information first, to get all of the background on what is going on, so that means plenty of cups of coffee in the street or wherever I can meet people, I get as much information as I can, then if whoever is giving me the information is concerned that the partner or a neighbour or whoever will know who gave me the information and I will just doorknock the area and do two or three farms in the area and end up where I am supposed to be going.¹¹⁵

This issue is explored at length in Key Recommendation 4.

- 5.91 Mr Lister told the Committee that he considers himself to be a “link man”; that is, a person whose job it is to put farmers in touch with the services they require. For the most part these are Centrelink services according to Mr Lister but also include financial advice and relationship counselling.¹¹⁶
- 5.92 It is the outreach component of the job that Mr Lister considers to be the most important, telling the Committee that, for the most part, it is difficult to get farmers to travel into towns or cities to access services. This is because of a combination of farmers and their families being too busy with the work on the farm and also because they are too proud to want to accept help unless it is delivered to them by someone they have known for a long time and trust, someone such as Mr Lister. Indeed, both Anglicare Victoria¹¹⁷ and Mr Lister told the Committee that because drought counsellors have usually been employed on a short-term basis they are not given the time to establish and maintain strong relationships with farmers. It took Mr Lister a number of years before “...I was comfortable about walking into anybody’s place and saying, ‘Chuck the kettle on, I will be inside’”.¹¹⁸
- 5.93 Mr Lister provided the Committee with an example of how comfortable a farming community can become and how this assists with making the initial contact with a trusted outreach worker when they find themselves in need of help:

A farmer rang me about two months ago and said, ‘You do not know me, but I have heard of you’. He said, ‘Could you meet me at the shearing shed?’. He obviously did not want to be at the house where

¹¹⁵ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

¹¹⁸ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

somebody else might see us. That is the first thing I think. We go to the shearing shed. We sit down in the shearing shed and we went through a bit of bulldust like it is a nice day, it could rain or whatever. You go through a bit of that, but not too much though. Then I said, 'Why did you ring me?'. He said that on Saturday morning – and he did not say it as quickly as this – the wife was asleep, and I did not think I had the ability to get the kids out of bed and dress them. He said he was just going to run away from home. I said, 'Can you tell me a bit about leading up to this?'. He did. I said, 'You sound like you have got anxiety'. He said, 'I have'. I said, 'Have you been diagnosed with anxiety?'. He said, 'No, I have been to about eight doctors. I have been doctor shopping, and nobody has said I have got anxiety. I will go for anything. If I hurt my arm, my leg or get a cold, I will go to the doctor'. Part of his anxiety is that he cannot tell anybody. I said, 'Right, I will be telling somebody, because when I book you into see the local doctor I will be telling him you have got anxiety, with your permission'. He said, 'Yes, you have got my permission'. I saw that bloke not that long ago. You know what? He is going absolutely great, because someone was able to see where he was coming from, play a part in diagnosing what he had, get him into the GP in one day and get him to see one of our counsellors as well.¹¹⁹

- 5.94 Two other important factors ensure the success of an outreach worker program, according to Mr Lister. Firstly, Mr Lister said that farmers need continuity of contact; that is, they prefer to speak to someone, to tell their story, just the once, and not be 'bounced' around different agencies for a problem. Secondly, outreach programs work best locally, or as Mr Lister said: "...[farmers] are more likely, if they live in Tatong, to do the program in Tatong. They certainly will not travel to Goorambat to do it. That is like moving across the world."¹²⁰
- 5.95 The need for outreach workers in the field of rural health was in fact supported by a number of witnesses in the Hume region, including Mr Neil Stott, Director Community Health, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital. Mr Stott told the Committee that services will not reach those most at need if agencies expect the most disadvantaged members of the community to bring themselves to where services are located. Instead, according to Mr Stott: "Most disadvantaged groups actually require us to make a major effort to reach them."¹²¹
- 5.96 Mr Dan Weeks, the Chief Executive Officer of Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, agreed with Mr Stott in also stressing his belief in the need for an outreach worker in Benalla:

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Mr Neil Stott, Director Community Health, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

The issue that we have, that I alluded to before and which Neil [Stott] went into in a bit more detail, is that **we know that the people who are probably in the greatest need in the Benalla community are not coming to us.** They will not come to our lovely building. It is a lovely stone-and-glass building, and they will not come. We have put a bus route in there, so we are on the town bus circuit, so transport is not an issue. They just will not come. What we think would work better, and again this is based largely on Ivan's experience, is actually taking our services to where they are.¹²²

5.97 Mr Branigan was another who spoke highly of the important role Mr Lister plays in the Benalla region – “Basically, this guy saves lives...”.¹²³ Ms Wheeler informed the Committee that Upper Murray Health and Community Services is in need of extra funding to employ an outreach worker in Corryong. Currently outreach services are delivered from Albury Wodonga. Although these are provided with the best of intentions, due to the distance needed to travel to reach Corryong workers are only able to see a small number of clients, or none at all if they have been reallocated to a need closer to their home base. Indeed, Ms Wheeler said that she has in fact been acting as an outreach worker herself because the demand is there. However the role needs to be filled by a specialist worker: “I am knocking on doors and I cannot keep it up, I'm sorry...but there is a huge need for someone like that to knock on doors.”¹²⁴

5.98 Mr Stott concurred that outreach workers face a high risk of burnout due to the demanding nature of their job. He told the Committee how important it is for Benalla and District Memorial Hospital to also provide support for Mr Lister:

The burnout factor for workers is really high. We put a lot of protective things around Ivan, even though Ivan thinks he is tough. I put stuff around him to make sure that I protect him from burnout because it is a tremendously difficult thing. It happened recently where a person that he had contact with committed suicide; **these are things that really strike hard at our entire team but especially our outreach workers.** So whatever we put in place, we have to put in strong protective measures.¹²⁵

5.99 Other mental health problems suffered by farming communities in the Hume region that are linked to the drought and which were brought to the

¹²² Mr Dan Weeks, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹²³ Mr Vincent Branigan, Teacher, FCJ College, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹²⁴ Ms Catherine Wheeler, Mental Health Nurse, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹²⁵ Mr Neil Stott, Director Community Health, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

attention of the Committee are issues around families becoming isolated¹²⁶ and extreme financial pressure that is placing strain on families.¹²⁷ In one instance the Committee even heard about young people choosing to become homeless in the belief that it will ease financial worries for their parents.¹²⁸ Indeed, in his submission to this Inquiry Mr Branigan argues that mental health issues among young people in Benalla are currently remaining unaddressed and that there is a need for a counselling service in Benalla "...specifically geared to young people".¹²⁹

- 5.100 An examination of the financial pressure currently experienced by farmers who have seen their incomes eroded by the drought comprises part of Anglicare Victoria's submission to this Inquiry. In its submission the agency expresses concern over the impact the end of Exceptional Circumstances funding in 2011 will have on farming families across the Hume region:

Families from farming backgrounds that have experienced the impact of drought have been most affected by lack of income security. Many have got into major debt trying to survive and hold onto their farms. They are hesitant to ask for help and are often in immense hardship before they come to the attention of support services. All of Hume Region was declared under Exceptional Circumstances (EC) and though many farming families receive EC income support from Centrelink it only continues until 31 March 2011 after which there is no guarantee that this support will continue. For many farmers in industries adversely affected by poor commodity prices (grains and dairy) this income is essential to maintain family living.¹³⁰

- 5.101 The Committee also heard about the stress placed on communities by bushfires over recent years. Angela Armstrong-Wright has observed an increase in suicides and attempted suicides, especially among men and family breakdowns above the rate she would usually ascribe to ongoing rural disadvantage.¹³¹ Ms James added that for young males in particular, bushfires have been a traumatic experience:

...we also service Marysville, Kinglake and Flowerdale down in the south. They are very well resourced with a whole range of services, but the issue for Alpine was that the last bushfire was the third of

¹²⁶ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010; Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹²⁷ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹²⁸ Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹²⁹ Mr Vincent Branigan, Teacher, FCJ College, *Submission*, Number 43, 31 March 2010.

¹³⁰ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

¹³¹ Ms Angela Armstrong-Wright, Director Service Development, FamilyCare, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

three major bushfires and we are finding that our young people, especially our young males, are very traumatised.

They are often the young boys who stayed on the farm with dad to fight the fires while mum and sisters went off into Beechworth, Myrtleford or Bright and the young lads at the first major fire in 2005 were probably eight or nine then, and last year they fought the last major fires, plus they are in the junior fire brigade as well. They are quite traumatised and starting to act up quite a bit.¹³²

- 5.102 Mr McVernon told the Committee that Mitchell Shire is coping with the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires “not badly”, especially in comparison to the neighbouring Murrindindi Shire which he felt was affected particularly harshly.¹³³ Indeed the Committee was notified by Murrindindi Shire Council that it was unable to compile a full submission to this Inquiry ‘due to resources being allocated to Bushfire Recovery’.¹³⁴ Echoing concerns over the conclusion of Neighbourhood Renewal funding, Tricia Quibell did express uncertainty over how the region will fare once bushfire recovery funding comes to an end.¹³⁵

Workforce¹³⁶

- 5.103 The Committee heard from a number of witnesses about the difficulty employers have attracting and retaining staff in rural and regional Victoria. Adding to Cr Joyce’s earlier comments on attracting teachers to remote locations Ms McKimmie, for example, spoke of the problems Corryong College had experienced recruiting teachers.¹³⁷ Ms James, confirming earlier discussion on the loss of young people to universities outside rural areas, said that specialist youth workers were hard to locate because: **“A lot of young people who study in Melbourne stay in Melbourne too because of the opportunities.”**¹³⁸

- 5.104 Mr Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Community Health described one solution to the problem of attracting and retaining staff in

¹³² Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹³³ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹³⁴ Murrindindi Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 10, 15 March 2010.

¹³⁵ Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹³⁶ The Victorian Government refers to shortages in its submission to this Inquiry discussed in Chapter 7.

¹³⁷ Ms Christine McKimmie, Teacher, Corryong College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹³⁸ Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

rural and regional areas implemented by Mitchell Community Health, that of providing placements for third and fourth year students, to give them experience of working in the Mitchell Shire. Believing that financial incentives are not always effective, Mr McDonnell added that providing an employment model that offers a broader range of experiences – allowing people to work across a variety of fields – may be more attractive for health professionals. Even though there are financial implications for health services trying to attract and retain staff “...the cost implication for not doing it means that you actually don’t provide services”.¹³⁹

- 5.105 In Corryong, Ms Wheeler told the Committee that financial incentives for midwives were in fact partly responsible for her own decision to move to Corryong to work. The idea of placing students in a region also has merit, as the reason Ms Wheeler stayed is that she settled in the community:

...my bonus was a farmer and five children; and then they gave a bonus to midwives. That was why I came, because they were giving us a bonus to come to the bush.

For about 28 years I was a general nurse and midwife in the community. When I went into the labour ward one day and a lady said, ‘This is the second generation you are delivering’...¹⁴⁰

- 5.106 The Committee heard that Upper Murray Health and Community Services also boasts a number of initiatives, such as creating scholarships in partnership with Towong Shire Council and employing their own GPs. Ms Brockfield revealed that in 2010, scholarships have been provided in the fields of nursing, pharmacy and dentistry. The success of the package for GPs can be seen in the fact that Corryong has enjoyed access to the same two GPs for the past ten years, both of them Australian doctors, while a third overseas-trained GP had just been added to the list.¹⁴¹

- 5.107 The joint submission to this Inquiry from the City of Wodonga and La Trobe University outlines the La Trobe Regional Community Scholarship scheme that provides funding to regional students who may otherwise not complete their course due to financial pressure. **Over the first three years of the scheme, more than 50 students were assisted with many of these remaining to work as professionals in their region.** The authors state that while an average of 67 per cent of regional students take up a position in rural and regional Victoria, this figure jumps to around 90 per cent for students who are given scholarships.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Mr Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Community Health, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁴⁰ Ms Catherine Wheeler, Mental Health Nurse, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁴¹ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁴² City of Wodonga and La Trobe University (Albury Wodonga), *Submission*, Number 55, 3 May 2010.

Recommendation 18

That, in response to overwhelming evidence to this Committee that professionals educated and trained close to their own area are more likely to remain within that area, and further that they are likely to provide a more comprehensive service than professionals paid to deliver services extraneously, the State Government:

- a. Provide an incentive for students who have completed their schooling in regional Victoria to complete tertiary education or training within their region such as the new 'Tertiary Education Opportunities Package' as suggested in the Government's policy document *Ready for Tomorrow*.
- b. Investigate the impact on mid-sized towns in rural and regional Victoria of professional services being delivered extraneously.

5.108 The same submission describes the Border Medical Recruitment Taskforce, a joint initiative between a number of interested agencies focused on identifying and filling shortages in health services in Albury Wodonga. The Taskforce set up a website¹⁴³ promoting the benefits of living and working in Albury Wodonga, including advice on how to find jobs. Although there is still a shortage of health professionals across the two towns, the medical population is growing. Issues currently being worked on by the Border Medical Recruitment Taskforce around attracting and retaining medical professionals include:

- sustainability of the medical population;
- socialisation of new doctors;
- infrastructure and social needs such as accommodation and education; and
- ensuring work is available for partners.¹⁴⁴

5.109 In Seymour, Mr McDonnell added that accessing GPs, especially after-hours, is a problem in Mitchell Shire, with the four GP surgeries either having closed their books or having long waiting lists. As such, some people are willing to look outside of the public system for help:

...we know that people from Mitchell will go down to the 24-hour corporatised clinic at Mill Park, because they know that if they're taking a child down, then they're more likely to get a service. If it's an earache or something like that, that needs some intervention, that's where you'll get your service, rather than sitting in the Northern Hospital or the Children's Hospital for hours on end.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ See: <<http://www.bordermedicalrecruitment.com.au/>>, accessed 28 June 2010.

¹⁴⁴ City of Wodonga and La Trobe University (Albury Wodonga), *Submission*, Number 55, 3 May 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Mr Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Community Health, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

- 5.110 Seymour District Memorial Hospital's Chief Executive Officer, Ms Doreen Power, added that some people in the Shire are being 'bounced' between hospitals and GP surgeries. She estimated that around 40 per cent of patients at Seymour's emergency department are presenting for primary health care reasons because they have been referred by a GP, after which they are frequently referred back because the emergency department is not designed to treat primary care patients.¹⁴⁶
- 5.111 The Victorian Farmers Federation considers the reliance in rural and regional areas on hospital emergency wards as de facto general practices a 'worrying trend'.¹⁴⁷

Funding

One of the most important foci of any government is to understand the context of the local communities, whether large metropolitan cities and regions, regional centres, rural townships and shires or isolated and dislocated communities. The message should be that one size does not fit all. What will work as a solution for Melbourne transport options will not work for Wodonga and even less so for small rural communities that have poor and inadequate transport options. Even within one shire each community will have many different issues to be addressed.¹⁴⁸

City of Wodonga & La Trobe University

- 5.112 When the issue of funding for programs and services was brought to the attention of the Committee it was not simply with regard to dollar amounts, but more so regarding funding models and their application. It was suggested to the Committee many times that health funding does not reflect the true cost of delivering services to disadvantage communities. For example Dan Weeks, Chief Executive of Benalla and District Hospital advised the Committee that the 'unit pricing' that community-based services receive to tackle disadvantage is exactly the same as that received in more well off communities. Mr Weeks suggests that, highlighting the example of the Mr Lister's crucial outreach work in the region, such funding models "...do not recognise the time and effort to build relationships. They are all premised on people coming to you."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ms Doreen Power, Chief Executive Officer, Seymour District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Victorian Farmers Federation, *Submission*, Number 29, 30 March 2010.

¹⁴⁸ City of Wodonga and La Trobe University (Albury Wodonga), *Submission*, Number 55, 3 May 2010.

¹⁴⁹ Mr Dan Weeks, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

- 5.113 The Principal of Shepparton’s Notre Dame College, Mr Peter White, told the Committee that Notre Dame College has a relatively low socioeconomic status score of 95¹⁵⁰ and requires considerable extra resources to teach students at the McAuley-Champagnat Program. However, Notre Dame College receives the same amount of funding as that allocated to mainstream students who are not experiencing disadvantage.¹⁵¹ His colleague Kimberley Tempest estimated that the program costs around \$20,000 per student per year to run but only receives between \$6,000 and \$7,000 per student per year.¹⁵²
- 5.114 In Corryong, Ms Brockfield explained to the Committee that the multipurpose service model of funding that Upper Murray Health and Community Services operates under means that “...we just get a budget and we can use that money to spend in any particular way that we want to”. She added that this flexibility is greatly appreciated as it allows Upper Murray to design and deliver programs that best suit the community of Corryong.¹⁵³
- 5.115 One of the services that Upper Murray Health and Community Services provides to Corryong College is a counselling service, meaning the school no longer has to bring in a counsellor from Wodonga as previously was the case. Ms McKimmie said that this position is being paid for by recent drought funding received by the school, funding which Ms McKimmie complimented for being ‘untagged’, meaning the school also has the ability to spend the funding when and how it sees fit.¹⁵⁴
- 5.116 Ms Power, on the other hand, argued that because Seymour District Memorial Hospital is not a small rural hospital, its bigger size makes it more suited, not to block funding such as that of an Multi Purpose Service model, but a system based on output such as the WEIS system.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Mr Peter White, Principal, Notre Dame College, *Submission*, Number 62, 19 May 2010.

Information on the socioeconomic status score can be found here: See:

<<http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/schools/ses/index.htm>>, accessed 5 August 2010.

¹⁵¹ Mr Peter White, Principal, Notre Dame College, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁵² Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley–Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁵³ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Ms Christine McKimmie, Teacher, Corryong College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Ms Doreen Power, Chief Executive Officer, Seymour District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

Recommendation 30

That the State Government recognise that local health services throughout rural and regional Victoria are often best placed to determine the type of funding model that best suits their needs. Further, that in cooperation with the Federal Government and Local Governments the State Government allow health services greater involvement in determining funding models to apply to their service to ensure that, for example, smaller communities can become Multi Purpose Services should they wish, while larger health services can opt for a WEIS model.

5.117 Mr Rumbold's evidence would suggest that the agencies delivering services to the communities of rural and regional Victoria are the ones best placed to decide which funding model suits their individual needs: "I think the community service sector has proven that it can do really complicated, sophisticated work with communities and difficult groups if it is given the responsibility and the leadership."¹⁵⁶

5.118 Upper Murray Health and Community Services endorses this idea of decision making being based on the principle of 'subsidiarity' – that matters should be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralised authority. They believe that communities themselves know what their needs are and what they require to assist them. As such, a Community Liaison Group was formed in the region. The head of that group, Sister Patricia George, explained to the Committee how the Group was trained to conduct the first of its (so far) three community-needs assessments:

Somebody from the university came in and trained a group of 12 of us, the Community Liaison Group. We were trained for a good 12 months on how to research, how to go out to people and how to get information. The first one we did by interviews. We went out to the people who had a lesser voice. These are the people who were impoverished and disadvantaged. We sought them out and said, 'Tell us where is your wellbeing being let down? Where are we not meeting your needs?'.¹⁵⁷

Community Needs Survey

The Community Needs Survey was created by Upper Murray Health and Community Services and facilitated by its Community Liaison Group, to ascertain the views of all residents within the Upper Murray Health and Community Services catchment.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Sister Patricia George RSJ, Community Liaison Group, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Community Liaison Group, *Needs Assessment Survey 2008: Summary of Findings*,

Upper Murray Health and Community Services is located in Corryong, and is an isolated community with around 1,500 residents; the health service's catchment is fewer than 3,500 people.¹⁵⁹ As a Multi Purpose Service it '...represents an integrated, flexible service with the ability to shift resources to meet the needs of the community'.¹⁶⁰

Attempting to hear from everyone from their catchment concerning community and health issues is a difficult task, leading the Community Liaison Group to conclude that the best way to include everyone was to mail a questionnaire to every address on the rate payers list in the Upper Murray Health and Community Services catchment.

Each resident 16 years and older was asked to complete their own questionnaire. The questionnaire included a letter about the needs assessment and a postage-paid and addressed envelope to send the questionnaire back to the Community Liaison Group. The questionnaires were confidential and non-identifiable and respondents were assured of this.

A total of 840 questionnaires were returned completed, which is roughly equal to one-third of the population aged 16 and older residing in the Upper Murray Health and Community Services catchment. The questionnaire focused around the following key issues:

- health;
- health services;
- mental health;
- local community;
- community participation;
- social support;
- economic issues;
- education;
- environment;
- agriculture;
- young people;
- crime and safety;
- transport;
- local infrastructure;
- computers and technology; and
- access to information.

The report has identified many issues of concern to residents of the Upper Murray. The study has found that the community in the Upper Murray is highly valued by its residents. Many in the community are active locally and the people, activities, and

¹⁵⁹ Hoodles M, *et al*, 'Quality of rural primary health care: including the consumer', *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, Vol 14, No 2, August 2008.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

relationships are valued. The Community Liaison Group concluded that: ‘...maintaining this community spirit and increasing community connectedness is the key to local resident’s health and wellbeing. Many wanted to lessen divisions in their community.’

According to the *Needs Assessment Survey 2008: Summary of Findings*, the findings from the questionnaire have been presented to Upper Murray Health and Community Services. Upper Murray Health and Community Services has committed to considering each of the issues raised and where possible will pursue changes in services to address community need.¹⁶¹

5.119 Ms Brockfield believes that these community-needs surveys are integral to the successful running of a Multi Purpose Service model by providing a sound basis for determining priorities for the health service.¹⁶² On a slightly different tack, in Seymour the Committee heard of how a community consultation process led to the publication of the Seymour Community Services Directory. Rhonda Sanderson believes the Directory is an example of a community identifying both a need and a way in which this need could be met by the local community.¹⁶³

5.120 In a similar vein, Mr Rumbold suggested that the type of data found in reports such as *The State of Victoria’s Children*,¹⁶⁴ produced in 2008 by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, is helpful research towards identifying disadvantage across Victoria. His wish is that similar publications be produced at a local level across the state on a regular basis. He believes that these would be invaluable for practitioners working with the disadvantaged and communities themselves. Mr Rumbold was also of the view that taking a ‘bundled’ approach to measuring disadvantage – where places are judged according to how they score across a number of factors such as employment, education and health – as opposed to straight measurements of population numbers, produces a more accurate picture of disadvantage. He says: “...that is where a place like Nyah West can get on the map; otherwise it would not get a guernsey just on numbers”.¹⁶⁵

5.121 In Seymour, Mr McVernon described the problem of relying on Local Government Area data that covers the whole of the Mitchell Shire. That data can be skewed by pockets of relative wealth in the rural north-east of the

¹⁶¹ Community Liaison Group, *Needs Assessment Survey 2008: Summary of Findings*, Upper Murray Health and Community Services.

¹⁶² Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

¹⁶³ Ms Rhonda Sanderson, Secretary, *The Seymour We Want*, *Public Hearing, Seymour*, 19 May 2010.

¹⁶⁴ See: <<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/children/sovcreport08.pdf>>, accessed 24 June 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing, Benalla*, 7 April 2010.

shire, an area popular with horse breeders, and the southern part of shire, around the areas of Wandong, Beveridge, Wallan and Yea, where a number of residents live on wages earned working in Melbourne. Mr McVernon added that for Mitchell Shire Council even postcode-based data is too broad. He told the Committee that the Council relies on data based on Statistical Local Areas:

We have a demographic database. I do consulting work with a lot of municipalities, and so we've broken the areas into Statistical Local Areas, and they're really easy to capture. So, for example, when we talk about Seymour, the postcode of Seymour is actually much bigger than the Statistical Local Area, and so we tend not to deal in postcodes as a consequence.¹⁶⁶

- 5.122 Greater Shepparton City Council is another jurisdiction aware of the risks involved in relying on Local Government Area data. The Council revealed that the 'substantial divergence' between data from the regional centre of Shepparton and that of rural towns can only be truly reflected by statistics gathered at Statistical Local Area level.¹⁶⁷ Shepparton was also noted by Catholic Social Services Australia as a Victorian town with clearly identifiable pockets of advantage and disadvantage and that determining '...the reasons for this relative advantage is as important for policy making as is analysis of the needs of less favoured areas'.¹⁶⁸
- 5.123 Regarding not just the type of data surrounding disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria but also the amount of data available, Ms Anna Dominguez Smith, former-Chair of The Seymour We Want Committee believes that there is enough information identifying how and where disadvantage occurs. She particularly praises the work being done by Community Indicators Victoria at the University of Melbourne's McCaughey Centre.¹⁶⁹

Remote Challenges

- 5.124 A number of witnesses also suggested that funding models do not recognise the true cost of delivering services to remote communities across vast distances. Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer of Mitchell Community Health, argued that Mitchell Community Health's funding model recognises the number of clients served but not the effort and expense incurred reaching these clients. He suggested that his funding package should include

¹⁶⁶ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing, Seymour*, 19 May 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Greater Shepparton City Council, *Submission*, Number 36, 31 March 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission*, Number 53, 23 April 2010.

¹⁶⁹ Ms Anna Dominguez Smith, Former-Chair, The Seymour We Want Committee, *Submission*, Number 63, 31 May 2010.

recognition of the number of kilometres Mitchell Community Health has to travel to reach its target numbers:

...our funding is based on the number of clients you see, as it does with metropolitan Melbourne. However, when we look at – **we do anywhere up to about 750,000 kilometres a year across Mitchell and Murrindindi to provide services. Fifteen thousand hours, roughly of travel. None of that is counted towards service, direct service.**

Now, whilst we're not saying that rural areas are unique, metropolitan areas, you know, we've still got to travel and so on, but the quantum of what we do with travelling 750,000 kilometres in a year, 15,000 hours, that can't be matched against our direct client service, so therefore, we can't count that. That's a real problem for us.¹⁷⁰

5.125 Ms James recognised a similar problem delivering services at NESAY:

The majority of funding that NESAY receives is based on unit funding, and often that is equal to or most often less than the metropolitan region, especially in the homelessness sector. The inequalities are the factors of wide geography that we service. We service as far as Corryong, Tallangatta, Mount Beauty, Woods Point, Jamieson, down to Marysville and Kinglake, and the lack of associated services that we have to work with, especially in those more isolated geographic areas, and the cost of infrastructure, fuel, vehicles...¹⁷¹

5.126 In Corryong, Ms McKimmie said that Corryong College does receive some extra funding for teachers to compensate for the school's isolation. However and with reference to the early discussion on partnering with the local hospital to provide counsellors instead of bringing them up from Wodonga, Ms McKimmie did comment on the expense of bringing specialists to the school. This is an expense not faced by schools in larger towns:

It is difficult to get specialists to come here. For example, getting a speech therapist to our school is a challenge I have at the moment. Before they see any student with a speech therapy issue it costs me \$180 to cover the cost of their travel and time to get here. We get the same budget per child as they get in Wodonga but they do not have that expense, for example; the speech therapist comes from there so they just turn up at 9 o'clock whereas we are paying for the time the specialist takes to get here.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Mr Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Community Health, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁷¹ Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁷² Ms Christine McKimmie, Teacher, Corryong College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

- 5.127 And Tricia Quibell from Berry Street suggested that low client numbers does not necessarily equate to low demand:

I think for us, one of the things we recognise is that we have small numbers because of the geographic spread but that they have as high needs as more populated areas, but if it comes down to straight numbers, we look as though we don't have the capacity, or there is not the need to put in place those programs, and we know that our infrastructure costs and our staffing costs are much higher here than they are for if we are operating the same service in Melbourne because of the distance, the transport, the access to additional support programs, especially highly qualified programs.

An example would be – I don't know if you're familiar with the Take Two Program, which is auspiced by Berry Street and the Mindful Centre at the Austin Hospital, which services the most at risk young people in the statutory sector with intense therapeutic services. We have a team of three in this entire region that have a huge number of young people that they are supposed to be servicing, and because of the intensity of supports that they are required to put in, it limits the number of young people they can see. It is not only disadvantaging the children and young people they need to service, but it's also very isolating for those staff themselves.¹⁷³

- 5.128 Ms Quibell added that Berry Street has been in discussion with the Department of Human Services, arguing for the value of applying a geographic weighting to funding formulas as a recognition of the costs involved in delivering services in rural and regional Victoria, what she described as “equitable access to funding”,¹⁷⁴ an idea supported by Mr Rumbold who said that geographic weighting would acknowledge, in his case, “...that if you are in the country area on the map, it might look one inch apart, but there could be a mountain range in between as there is between Mount Beauty and Bright. I am not sure that people understand that.”¹⁷⁵ This issue is taken up in Key Recommendation 2.

- 5.129 Integrated service models – providing health and community services at the one point – were also identified as a valuable tool in tackling disadvantage in remote areas of Victoria. Mr Tony Sullivan from the Walwa Bush Nursing Centre, for example, told the Committee that the centre actively ensures the services it provides are “...not only purely health and medical; we address a

¹⁷³ Ms Tricia Quibell, Senior Manager Community Education and Training Programs, Berry Street, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

lot of community services...”, including involvement in a community centre in Walwa.¹⁷⁶

5.130 Integrated service models may also include financial counselling, which Mr Rumbold identified as being severely under-funded despite being “...one of the most important family support services available”.¹⁷⁷ In fact Anglicare Victoria employs a financial counsellor to provide financial advice, including tax help and no-interest loans, in Wangaratta, Myrtleford, Bright and Benalla.¹⁷⁸

5.131 Following a similar line, Ms Brockfield discussed the concept of a community health model, explaining to the Committee how Upper Murray Health and Community Services examines demographic, epidemiological and socioeconomic data before determining what the best approach is to improve health outcomes in the community. For example, Ms Brockfield said that both heart disease rates for women and numbers of strokes for men have decreased recently in the catchment area. She put this down to a combination of medical treatment and encouraging the elderly population to remain active either in their own homes or by making use of a subsidised gymnasium.¹⁷⁹ This is a general policy that Anglicare Victoria suggests will lower acute rural health costs.¹⁸⁰

5.132 Such an approach was also outlined by Mr McDonnell, who referred to it as an ‘holistic social model of health’. That is, one where the health service provider works closely with other service providers in a region – in the case of Mitchell Community Health, with agencies such as FamilyCare and Berry Street – to provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ where all the needs of the community are met, both medical and social.¹⁸¹

5.133 Mr McDonnell provided an example of how an anti-smoking campaign would address the multiple factors involved in smoking via a social model approach:

Smoking is one of the key factors in disadvantage and inequity...they are really quite closely linked. So, we look at smoking, but we look at the causal factors around smoking and say that there are a whole range of things that contribute to that around socioeconomic status, around what's learnt from parents, what's learnt from the community, and what becomes the norm.

¹⁷⁶ Mr Tony Sullivan, Business Manager, Walwa Bush Nursing Centre, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

¹⁸¹ Mr Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Community Health, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

So, when we look at something like we want to build health infrastructure, we also want to look at how we develop preventative programs, not just the health infrastructure. So, if we're going to deal with the causes of smoking, then we need to provide other preventative, educative, programs as well, not just provide the infrastructure, so not only being centre based but outreach based as well.¹⁸²

South Mitchell Health Precinct

The area of South Mitchell covers the towns of Beveridge, Wallan and part of Kilmore. The population of South Mitchell is predicted to grow by between 50,000–60,000 people between 2010–2025.

To provide for the health needs of this population growth Mitchell Community Health has been leading discussions on the development of a health precinct for the area. The precinct would consist of both health infrastructure and services accommodating the health and wellbeing needs of the South Mitchell community via a social health model. For example, a smoking prevention program looking at the many causes of smoking, including smoking's strong link with disadvantage and inequity, in response to Mitchell Shire's ranking as number one in Victoria for deaths attributable to smoking.

The health precinct would work in partnership with other health providers already in the region, such as Northern Health, and would be developed in three stages:

- Stage 1: Primary and community health.
- Stage 2: Subacute care service model.
- Stage 3: Acute care service model (timed to be introduced as the predicted population peaks).

Mitchell Shire supports the concept of a health precinct and has allocated land to the value of \$5 million to the idea.¹⁸³

Key to the overall health precinct proposal is the building of a 'super clinic' at Wallan. Originally, the Federal Government offered \$1 million for the Wallan super clinic but has since increased that amount to \$3.5 million.¹⁸⁴

5.134 The Committee also heard concerns across the Hume region about the Federal Government's proposed health reforms and the impact they may

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ The Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health and Ageing, 'Wallan and Mt Isa super clinics to receive financial boost', Media Release, 7 July 2010.

have on the autonomy that service providers enjoy to address specific needs in their local communities, in particular from Ms Brockfield¹⁸⁵ and Mr Weeks.¹⁸⁶ Mr McDonnell had similar concerns about the reforms lowering the quality of health care across Victoria:

With the national health reforms coming in, whether you're allowed state variations around what should be there, or whether it's a one-size-fits-all, across all of Australia, I think it is going to be a bit problematic. How do you make Victoria look like the rest of the states, when it's recognised that Victoria has, relatively, a good and robust health system?¹⁸⁷

- 5.135 Another health issue raised by witnesses in the Hume region was that of people with disabilities. Ms Sherwill told the Committee that **the lack of a special school in Benalla is resulting in 17 children having to travel on a bus to access a special school in Wangaratta** (a 52-kilometre journey according to Benalla Regeneration's submission to this Inquiry¹⁸⁸). One of the main concerns Ms Sherwill had with this situation was the fact that these students are being removed from the community in which they live, something that has an impact on both the students and the town of Benalla itself:

Those children are learning living skills in Wangaratta. For example, if they are learning how to post a letter, they go down to the Wangaratta post office – great skill! – however, research will show that those children will probably remain living in Benalla as adults.

They have not learnt how to access the Benalla post office; they have not learnt how to access the Benalla coffee shop, nor has the Benalla community learnt to recognise those people and have those people as part of the community.¹⁸⁹

Recommendation 15

That the State Government continue to increase support for the development of regional facilities and services for students with disabilities.

¹⁸⁵ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁸⁶ Mr Dan Weeks, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Mr Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Community Health, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁸⁸ Benalla Regeneration, *Submission*, Number 51, 8 April 2010.

¹⁸⁹ Ms Margot Sherwill, Project Officer, Benalla Regeneration, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

- 5.136 Ms Sherwill added that it is Benalla Regeneration’s vision to see special education facilities included as part of the infrastructure of the town’s schools, rather than as a stand-alone setting.¹⁹⁰
- 5.137 Mr Putt also expressed concern that Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) were not being provided for students with disabilities if these students have no plans to attend university after they finish school.¹⁹¹ On a related topic Ms Cheryl Sanderson told the Committee that in her experience Disability Self Help Grants¹⁹² are taking a long time to process now that the responsibility has been taken from the Department of Human Services and handed to the Department of Planning and Community Development.¹⁹³
- 5.138 There is an important oral health need waiting to be served in Corryong, both in the school and the wider community. Although Upper Murray Health and Community Services has a dental chair as part of its suite of services it is finding the position difficult to fill, consequently local residents have to travel to Wodonga to access a dentist.¹⁹⁴ School students at Corryong College also have to travel to Wodonga, something which has a negative impact on school attendance according to Ms McKimmie as the students will usually stay in Wodonga for the day to access other services:

The school dentist closed recently. Therefore, again, students have to be taken out of school to travel to Wodonga to get to a school dentist...That takes students out of our school, usually for a day, because if you are going to go to Wodonga, which is 1 hour and 20 minutes away, you do not just go for one dentist appointment – you go for all of the other things you have got to do. Our attendance level is quite low at times because of those sorts of things. There are also visits to orthodontists and other specialist medical appointments, which means attendance rates are sometimes very worrying for our school.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁹² See:

<<http://www.grants.dvc.vic.gov.au/web18/dvcgrants.nsf/AllDocs/2B35D4C86F5AB61ACA2575FA00801A2D>>, accessed 17 August 2010.

¹⁹³ Ms Cheryl Sanderson, Chair, Ovens Valley Awareness Group, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁹⁴ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Ms Christine McKimmie, Teacher, Corryong College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

Recommendation 39

That the State Government continue to invest in improving dental care across rural and regional Victoria through immediate implementation of the following measures:

- a. Provision of dental clinics in schools with low socioeconomic status with a particular focus on schools in disadvantaged areas where students have a high rate of dental clearance and other dental problems and where waiting times for access to dental care in the community are unacceptably high, based on the Yuille Park P–8 Community College model.
- b. Where it is not possible to establish a permanent school-based clinic, ensure an increase in the number of operational mobile dental clinics throughout rural and regional Victoria.
- c. Develop initiatives for dentists to work in rural and regional Victoria.

5.139 In Mitchell Shire Ms Power mentioned oral health as an ongoing issue despite waiting lists there dropping. Other gaps in the provision of health services identified by Ms Power include:

- chemotherapy services;
- mental health services;
- paediatric services; and
- a lack of geriatricians.¹⁹⁶

5.140 When it comes to emergency medicine, volunteer Community Emergency Response Teams were praised for the good work they do being first on the scene at accidents in remote areas, providing life-saving first aid and advice until paramedics arrive. In Corryong, Ambulance Victoria's Mr Paul Kent told the Committee that because Community Emergency Response Teams may be with patients for as long as 40 minutes, the responsibility they assume is very large, not just in saving a patient's life, but also advising ambulances of the seriousness of the situation:

Their level of training allows them to give what we call advanced first aid, so oxygen and drugs that are basically not going to harm the patient. We would do other checks. For instance, they would not be able to give morphine because they do not have the expertise to cope with it if it goes wrong.

We thoroughly research through our clinical department what is a safe drug. Pain relief, oxygen and defibrillation if the patient's heart stops – those are the most important things we can give without doing any harm. They are the first response. They would put an assessment to us over the radio of how many people are in the car

¹⁹⁶ Ms Doreen Power, Chief Executive Officer, Seymour District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

accident, whether they are unconscious or not and whether they need a helicopter. That is a fairly big call, because it is a fairly expensive operation; not that money is the big thing, but you have to justify that, and there are limited helicopters.¹⁹⁷

5.141 Ms Sue Martin, Team Leader of the Walwa Community Emergency Response Team, added that there are 16 qualified Team volunteers in Walwa out of a population of around 100 which, in her view, is "...a fantastic number of people. Everywhere you go and every function you go to there is going to be somebody there who is qualified to save your life if need be."¹⁹⁸

5.142 Regarding the air ambulances, both fixed wing and helicopter, Mr Kent told the Committee that when air support is able to reach the Corryong region and transfer patients to Melbourne, outcomes around strokes and heart attacks in particular are generally good. However, he did provide an example of an accident in the Nariel Valley that stretched resources to the limit:

A gentleman with broken ribs could not be four-wheel driven because of pain and problems with the risk of puncturing a lung. I actually argued for the police air ambulance out of Melbourne. It took two-and-a-half hours to reach me, it had six minutes of fuel time to find me, it was 5.30 in the evening and I had to light a signal fire to get that out. We did the job without much fuss, but this is the issue that we face up here. We are very remote. We have excellent people locally to support us, but the backup resources – I cannot get a MICA ambulance to back me up in under an hour and a half, generally speaking. So there are some issues with air support. We are very remote, and that is an ongoing challenge for us...

If you have a heart attack in Corryong or Walwa, you are disadvantaged because we cannot get you to Melbourne. That is a very real thing we face.¹⁹⁹

5.143 Mr Mike Crothers from Ambulance Victoria explained that the Corryong area is a part of Victoria where a helicopter cannot reach and return to a major hospital without refuelling.²⁰⁰ This led to a comment from Paul Kent, also from Ambulance Victoria, to lend his support to the idea of placing an air ambulance base in Wodonga or Wangaratta. This is particularly important considering that the Corryong ambulance service is responsible for an area reaching as far as the countryside around Mount Kosciuszko.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Mr Paul Kent, Team Manager, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

¹⁹⁸ Ms Sue Martin, Team Leader, Walwa Community Emergency Response Team, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Mr Paul Kent, Team Manager, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

²⁰⁰ Mr Mike Crothers, Acting Group Manager Upper Hume Region, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

²⁰¹ Mr Paul Kent, Team Manager, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing, Corryong*, 8 April 2010.

5.144 Mr Kent also raised the issue of lighting at the Corryong airfield. At the moment, if an air ambulance is arriving at night State Emergency Service volunteers are called upon to travel to the airfield to place beacons along the airstrip, to guide the pilot on landing. Mr Kent advised the Committee that the Civil Aviation Safety Authority is unhappy with this situation. This may mean that lives will be at risk if planes are no longer allowed to land at the airstrip at night to pick up emergency patients. A pilot-activated lighting system was identified by Mr Kent as the preferable solution to this problem.²⁰²

5.145 The issue of airport lighting was also mentioned by Maxine Brockfield in Corryong²⁰³ as well as by Sergeant Paul Brady from Corryong Police Station. Sergeant Brady added a concern about police communications systems around Corryong. Sergeant Brady told the Committee that the absence of a communications tower in the area is resulting in 'black spots' where police are forced to use mobile phones instead of their radios, and this is impeding their ability to respond to road accidents:

Anywhere from Towong down the river road, you can travel right down there on the border, we have no communications at all. They put a submission to government at one stage to upgrade a communications tower on the other side of the hill. Funding-wise and for the population, I do not think it was successful...

Definitely communications are an issue along the river on this side. Again, our motor vehicle crash statistics are not huge, but in our police service area here in Wodonga between Tallangatta and here and Walwa, we have the higher motorcycle accidents which are your serious injuries where you need access to communications to get air support...We have had to put mobile phones in cars. They will work in some spots where the radios will not. Then the phones will not work where the radios do.²⁰⁴

Recommendation 45

That the State Government, with the memories of the Black Saturday bushfires still strong, ensure there are no 'black spots' for emergency services communications anywhere in Victoria, with north-east Victoria being a priority.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²⁰⁴ Sergeant Paul Brady, Sergeant in Charge, Corryong Police Station, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

Volunteerism

5.146 In the context of a discussion about volunteerism the issue of Community Emergency Response Teams was raised. Paul Kent questioned what will happen to the system once the volunteers start to leave, especially in small towns, saying: “I just want to underpin the importance of any support the government can give to these community teams.”²⁰⁵

5.147 It was acknowledged by Mr Rumbold that Victoria has a long history of volunteerism from both individuals and community organisations but that as society changes this culture of volunteerism changes with it. In particular, jobs that used to be filled by volunteers are now being done by professionals, even if salaries and funding, in Mr Rumbold’s opinion, are yet to truly reflect this new situation:

Recently I had a conversation with an unnamed person — it would not be fair to mention the name of that person. We were talking around family services in Victoria. There has been a long campaign by our sector for the unit price in family services to be increased. It has been very low, so we cannot pay our people properly et cetera. This very smart politician said, ‘Can’t you just use volunteers?’. I said, ‘No, it is a professional field’. We have a long way to go to tell people where things are. Victoria has done it really well but it has done it through the hard work of good volunteers and good organisations. I fear we are starting to reach the tipping point where that is starting to run out a bit.²⁰⁶

5.148 Another view was provided by Liz Chapman, who was of the opinion that in towns such as Benalla the spirit of volunteerism remains healthy. Ms Chapman used the term ‘community philanthropy’ to describe the process whereby communities draw on their own resources, both financial and social, to address areas of disadvantage that they identify as being areas of hardship for residents in their town:

It is something you do because you are a citizen. If people are ever asked what is in it for them, they say clearly it is because they are a resident and they love Benalla just like we do. They say, ‘Let’s do it’...

It is about the resource, and the resource is the people. Yes, you need money, so it is about money as well. But the best way I can describe is that it is about people being committed to giving time or effort or their knowledge or their skills for the benefit of the whole. It is about individuals giving for the benefit of the whole. That concept in community philanthropy has taken off and it is a worldwide thing

²⁰⁵ Mr Paul Kent, Team Manager, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²⁰⁶ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

now. There are scores of community philanthropic bodies now Australia-wide.²⁰⁷

5.149 According to Ms Chapman: “We do crisis well.” That is, when a big event such as a flood comes along, the community in Benalla is quick to help those affected. However – and she argued that Benalla is not alone in this – Ms Chapman was not so sure about the town’s ability to address ongoing, more insidious disadvantage. In her view, though, this commitment to community philanthropy, through the ways in which it links social groups and neighbourhoods, will make Benalla a stronger community.²⁰⁸

5.150 Similarly, Sister George informed the Committee about the ongoing commitment service providers in Corryong have to their community. She implored Committee members to use this Inquiry to fix the examples of disadvantage identified across rural and regional Victoria:

I just wondered why have you come? We work very hard here to use every possibility and every capability. Any talent that is in the town is sought out. A lot of our people are often burnt out, because we try so much to give the community so much. I am just wondering why have you come? Have you come to really look at our needs? Have you come to make a response to them? Are you going to go, and does all of this wonderful technology go somewhere? Is it going to go somewhere on a shelf, or is it going to really be used to help rural people like us? Because living in rural areas is very difficult. I know cities have their problems. They have got very big problems that we know nothing about and that we are spared from, but some of the problems that both Maxine and Cate have touched on are so very real for us, because these mountains throw them back at us all the time. They are in our face. We are always trying to see what we can do for our people.²⁰⁹

Recommendation 46

That the State Government acknowledge the threat posed to Victoria’s strong history of volunteering by an ageing population. That the State Government offer incentives to attract volunteers to positions such as Community Emergency Response Teams.

²⁰⁷ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Sister Patricia George RSJ, Community Liaison Group, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

Transport

5.151 It was noted in the Hume region that public transport in remote communities is vital in linking people with services. In its submission to this Inquiry, Greater Shepparton City Council argues that affordable and efficient access to the types of services available only in Melbourne, such as health services and training facilities, is essential if disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria is to be addressed. The Council provided data on the number of fast rail services to Melbourne from various parts of Victoria; for example, that while Bendigo has 17 services from Monday to Friday and Traralgon 18, there are only three running from Shepparton. The Council acknowledges the benefits of the Goulburn Valley Highway Arcadia duplication and Nagambie bypass but believes that an increased investment in rail services between Shepparton and Melbourne is warranted to bring the route up to the same standard as that available in other parts of the State.²¹⁰

5.152 In their joint submission to this Inquiry, the City of Wodonga and La Trobe University discusses the draft 'settlement framework' devised by the Department of Planning and Community Development's Hume Region, in which the region is divided into four categories: regional centres; district towns; towns; and villages.²¹¹ Important to this framework model is the acknowledgement that to accommodate future growth all settlements be linked to each other by efficient transport links, thus allowing all communities in the region (and some from outside) access to services and facilities:

The focus for growth and servicing large populations should be on identified 'Regional Centres' supported by other settlements in the region. This model will provide services and facilities in an efficient manner to communities in the region, providing access to most higher order services and facilities within the region and subregions. Such a model for future development should make best use of existing assets while providing services to the wider regional community in a more efficient and sustainable manner.

The key to this model is transport linkages between settlements in the region and transport linkages with centres outside of the region.

Important existing linkages include the Hume transport corridor. This has a north-south alignment, whilst east-west transport connections are not developed to the same standard. The further development of east-west transport linkages across the region will become increasingly important to ensure regional communities have access to services and facilities in larger centres. These main linkages (east-west and north-south) form the basis of functional relationships between settlements.²¹²

²¹⁰ Greater Shepparton City Council, *Submission*, Number 36, 31 March 2010

²¹¹ City of Wodonga and La Trobe University (Albury Wodonga), *Submission*, Number 55, 3 May 2010.

²¹² *Ibid.*

5.153 The Committee has heard in previous Inquiries – into Tourism²¹³ and Regional Centres of the Future²¹⁴ – that Victoria’s east–west transport corridors are not up to the standard necessary to meet the needs of communities in rural and regional Victoria.

5.154 Cr Claridge acknowledged the reality that providing public transport to a small population can be difficult, but she did identify a need for more public transport aimed at preventing the people living in public housing on one side of Benalla from being isolated from the services which are located on the opposite side of town.²¹⁵ In Corryong, Ms Brockfield also acknowledged that residents there do not expect to have every type of health specialist available on their doorstep – **“We know that if you choose to live in a beautiful part of the world, it is isolated, and you have to go without some things”**²¹⁶– but she did feel that public transport linking Corryong with Albury Wodonga was lacking and not serving, in particular, the disadvantaged members of the community as well as it might:

If you are looking at inequality and in particular in this area, it makes it very difficult because as you know it is about 1½ hours to go to Albury Wodonga for medical appointments which creates great pressure on people. The only public transport that goes out leaves at about 7.00 a.m. and comes back around 5.00 p.m., so for someone who is unwell, that is not a form of transport for them to use.²¹⁷

5.155 Limited public transport in Corryong is also an issue when the police have to transport people without access to private forms of transport to court in Wodonga. Sergeant Brady told the Committee that public transport from Corryong linking in with court times in Wodonga is not available. This situation can lead to, in the case of intervention orders, victims of crime travelling in a police car with the accused:

If it was, say, tonight which is Friday, it would be booked in and bailed to a court date in Wodonga next week, probably Tuesday or Thursday. We have then got to get the family down to the court. There is the mail bus they could hop on at about 7 o’clock in the morning. It gets down there after the court starts to sit and it comes back before the court finishes. If they do not have access to transport, we cannot get them down there. We pile them into a

²¹³ Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2008.

²¹⁴ Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

²¹⁵ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²¹⁶ Ms Maxine Brockfield, Chief Executive Officer, Director of Nursing, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

police car and we take them down. I have had times when I have had the offender and the victim in the car and down we go.²¹⁸

- 5.156 In Seymour, limited public transport was strongly identified as a challenge to education outcomes, as discussed earlier. Ms Power also said that transport is a 'major issue' preventing people in the region accessing chemotherapy. This is an issue she is trying to resolve through initiating a new partnership agreement between Seymour District Memorial Hospital and Goulburn Valley Hospital in Shepparton and Northern Hospital in Epping.²¹⁹
- 5.157 While in Benalla, the Committee heard that for some school children the school bus is the only form of transport available to them. Therefore if transport is not provided for excursions or other extra-curricular activities, these children simply miss out on participating in these events.²²⁰ Ms Stacey Lord added that the Tomorrow:Today Foundation makes good use of the Transport Connections program to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds connect with social activities.²²¹ Cr Claridge suggested that the Transport Connections program could be improved to assist TAFE students who need to travel across the region. She advised that a recently developed transport action group is in negotiation with Transport Connections over this matter.²²²
- 5.158 In its submission to this Inquiry, Anglicare Victoria argues that solutions to the transport needs of rural and regional Victoria should be pilot tested in partnership with local communities '...as often solutions are available, but they are not considered when policies and programs are developed in distant urban and metro locations'.²²³

Recommendation 47

That the State Government continue to improve transport services within rural and regional Victoria by undertaking the following measures:

- a. Widening of the Transport Connections program to provide more inter-town services across rural and regional Victoria.
- b. Investigation of a solution to improving links between major regional centres – the east–west transport corridors.
- c. Prioritisation of the Princess Highway West project to Warrnambool.

²¹⁸ Sergeant Paul Brady, Sergeant in Charge, Corryong Police Station, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²¹⁹ Ms Doreen Power, Chief Executive Officer, Seymour District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

²²⁰ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²²¹ Ms Stacey Lord, Education Program Manager, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²²² Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²²³ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

Information and Communications Technology

5.159 Fast and reliable internet access was seen as a key issue in the Hume region, both socially and economically. Mr Aaron van Egmond, Towong Shire Council's Director of Development Services, said that Towong Shire had identified technology as one of the key drivers of attracting business to the region (along with innovation and sustainability). Mr van Egmond spoke of how communities in Towong Shire have poorer internet access than those in regional and metropolitan regions, including lower take-up numbers and an increased reliance on dial-up services. According to Mr van Egmond, the proposed National Broadband Network will improve the situation by providing better links to satellite and wireless services, although towns in Towong Shire will be among the ten per cent nationwide not to be provided with fibre-to-the-home technology.²²⁴

5.160 Mr van Egmond explained that the lack of competition amongst internet providers in the region is keeping prices high, as the greater number of networks in Albury Wodonga means they are able to provide 'backhaul' – how internet service providers themselves connect to the internet – at approximately ten per cent the cost of that available in Towong Shire. Instead of waiting for something to be done about this, Towong Shire has taken the initiative to create the competition necessary to lower costs:

I guess I am wanting to talk about an example of how we have tried to conquer this particular issue by not wanting to just sit back and put our hands out to government to say, 'Fix the problem'. We have engaged with our community to deliver a telecommunications strategy, which not just talks about the strategic elements around telecommunications and provision but one of the key actions from that was to deliver a working example of how we can effectively create competition in the Towong shire environment.

One of the projects which has been extremely successful...is a Tallangatta wireless backhaul demonstration project. We have essentially installed microwave links from Tallangatta into Albury Wodonga which terminate into competitive fibre where the cost, as I mentioned, is about \$200 to \$300 per megabit, which effectively means that that trial has demonstrated that high-speed broadband and a lot of bandwidth is possible through an innovative approach to delivering that service in the short term.

...Towong Shire was the first to roll out a town-wired wireless mesh across the township in about 2006, which was the first of its kind in Australia, using technology that is not even implemented in metropolitan centres across the board. We are really trying to set the

²²⁴ Mr Aaron van Egmond, Director Development Services, Towong Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

bar as high as we possibly can while realising there is a key issue in terms of backhaul infrastructure.²²⁵

- 5.161 Mr van Egmond said that even though this is traditionally an area that local government steers clear of, Towong Shire Council felt that it was up to them to help their communities where no other help was being provided. Now the Council has received funding for a Broadband Innovation Fund from the Municipal Association of Victoria, Multimedia Victoria and Regional Development Victoria. The Federal Government has also provided funding for an innovative bushfire camera monitoring network which the Council hopes will be able to provide the backbone of a digital network across Towong Shire.²²⁶
- 5.162 Catholic Social Services Victoria identified bushfire technology as a potential source of jobs based on knowledge unique to rural and regional Victoria, believing that ‘...our long history of innovation suggests a regionally based body could refine and develop training services, technology and equipment in this area for export’.²²⁷
- 5.163 A fast and reliable internet service is vital if rural and regional Victoria is to ‘bridge the digital divide’ according to Mr van Egmond; that is, ensuring communities stay as socially connected as those in metropolitan regions.²²⁸ Included in this concept of communities staying socially connected is the matter of school students’ reliance on digital technology for their education – Mr Branigan told the Committee that only three of his students have access to broadband services.²²⁹ Mr Branigan did acknowledge that the internet is a Federal issue, as did Mr McVernon, who raised the issue with the hope that the State Government would use its lobbying powers in Canberra to keep the issue in the Federal Government’s eyeline.²³⁰
- 5.164 Mr McVernon also expressed concern about infrastructure in the lower Hume region, in particular continuity of electricity and water supply, fearing that businesses will be attracted to other parts of the State that can guarantee better, more reliable infrastructure. On the positive side, Mr McVernon did also appreciate State Government support for a new family centre in Kilmore, with the improved facilities there acting as a magnet for other service providers in the region.²³¹
- 5.165 On a similar line, Towong Shire Council has embarked on the Pure Towong Energy project, which has seen Towong Shire generate as much as ten per

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission*, Number 53, 23 April 2010.

²²⁸ Mr Aaron van Egmond, Director Development Services, Towong Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²²⁹ Mr Vincent Branigan, Teacher, FCJ College, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²³⁰ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

²³¹ Ibid.

cent of Victoria's renewable energy output.²³² The Shire is also planning to develop a 'Zero Energy Estate' making use of a number of sustainable development planning methods including: geothermal heating and cooling; water-sensitive urban design; high-level effluent disposal; and off-grid solar, wind and hydro power generation.²³³

- 5.166 Benalla Rural City Council's Chief Executive Officer, Mr Anthony McIlroy, informed the Committee that the Council has an infrastructure team and an economic development team that work together to provide incentives to attract business to the Benalla region. They achieve this through promotion of the Enterprise Park industrial estate on the edge of the town as well as the community facilities available within Benalla. Further, the Council's Benalla Urban Growth project has been implemented with the aim of boosting the population and the local economy. Mr McIlroy estimated that the project will provide as many as 1,000 jobs directly and indirectly to the area.²³⁴
- 5.167 Attracting industry, and therefore jobs, to Benalla was nominated by Mr Branigan as the most important issue for the town, as, in his view, it would go a long way to raising the level of aspiration amongst young people in the region.²³⁵
- 5.168 Mr McVernon believes that the benefits that moving the Transport Accident Commission brought to Geelong could be replicated elsewhere, with decentralisation of State Government departments having the ability to 'kick-start' aspiration in Seymour.²³⁶ In her submission to this Inquiry, Ms Pianta says that decentralising industry to Benalla '...could begin to shift the demographics, from unemployed to employed, from undereducated to educated, from poverty to equity'.²³⁷ See Recommendation 40.
- 5.169 Mr van Egmond discussed the financial viability of Towong Shire Council, informing the Committee that only one-third of the land in the Shire is rateable, the rest being forested public land. This means that the ability of the Council to raise funds through its rates base is limited, with Mr van Egmond revealing that the Council has a recurrent budget of around \$11 million, and that a one per cent increase in rates would only raise around \$45,000 "...so there is not a lot that can come from ratepayers".²³⁸

²³² Mr Aaron van Egmond, Director Development Services, Towong Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²³³ See:

<[http://www.mav.asn.au/CA256C320013CB4B/Lookup/redo0110/\\$file/REDO%20Fact%20SheetTowong%20SC_Zero%20Energy%20Estate%20project%202009.pdf](http://www.mav.asn.au/CA256C320013CB4B/Lookup/redo0110/$file/REDO%20Fact%20SheetTowong%20SC_Zero%20Energy%20Estate%20project%202009.pdf)>, accessed 27 July 2010.

²³⁴ Mr Anthony McIlroy, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²³⁵ Vincent Branigan, Teacher, FCJ College, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²³⁶ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

²³⁷ Ms Catherine Pianta, Principal, Benalla College, *Submission*, Number 32, 31 March 2010.

²³⁸ Mr Aaron van Egmond, Director Development Services, Towong Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

- 5.170 The Committee did hear that Strathbogie Shire Council is very concerned about its future, with Chief Executive Officer Mr Kevin Hannagan telling the Committee that the Council had been identified by the Municipal Association of Victoria as one of the least financially stable councils in Victoria. Mr Hannagan described an upcoming ‘infrastructure tsunami’ of \$60 million needed to upgrade infrastructure across the Shire in the next four to five years. According to Mr Hannagan, to help fund this upgrade the Council is proposing three annual rate increases of 15 per cent, but is conscious that for a small and ageing population, whose businesses have been damaged by the ongoing long-term drought, this will have a huge impact.²³⁹
- 5.171 Mr Hannagan acknowledged that rural and regional Councils must show financial competence before asking for assistance, including a commitment to at least maintain their rate base. He discussed a number of solutions the Council is currently considering, including a regional shared services program for smaller Councils. Keeping in mind that the Strathbogie population currently does not have a lot of potential to absorb rate rises, other initiatives include growing the rate base through ‘new money’ such as establishing a new equine centre and development of the Shire’s housing and commercial sector.²⁴⁰
- 5.172 Financially viable councils are vital tools in fighting disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria, as shown when Mr Hannagan told the Committee about Strathbogie Shire Council’s deliberations around closing the Shire’s public swimming pools and libraries²⁴¹ (along with the closure of the heritage listed Kirwans Bridge²⁴²). Mr McVernon spoke of the important role libraries in particular play in fighting disadvantage and that the Department of Planning and Community Development’s Living Libraries Program had been well-received in Seymour, Wallan and Kilmore. Mr McVernon argued that for local residents libraries are “...not just about recreation but also about education...”²⁴³
- 5.173 The State Government’s Living Libraries Program has also provided a grant of \$500,000 to Benalla Rural City Council for a new Benalla library and community resource centre. The Council has so far committed \$250,000 to the project, but with an estimated overall cost of \$2.4 million, the Council is reliant on a positive outcome from a number of grant requests currently with the Federal Government.²⁴⁴ Cr Claridge sees the library as a critical component of plans to tackle disadvantage in the region: **“If I was the**

²³⁹ Mr Kevin Hannagan, Chief Executive Officer, Strathbogie Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² See: <http://www.strathbogie.vic.gov.au/Files/Kirwans_Bridge_Resolution.pdf>, accessed 25 June 2010.

²⁴³ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

²⁴⁴ Mr Anthony McIlroy, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

Premier I would give us the library tomorrow because it is the foundation of all this stuff that we really need to work on.”²⁴⁵

Community Cooperation and Partnerships

5.174 The importance of partnerships in tackling disadvantage, between all levels of government, was expressed to the Committee. Mr McIlroy provided two examples of successful projects that relied on the State Government working together with local government and other agencies:

...one is the Benalla Performing Arts and Convention Centre, which was State Government, in the form of Arts Victoria; the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE; and council coming together to achieve a project in the order of \$4.2 million. In 2005–06 we concluded the Benalla Community Care Centre, which was a partnership between the State Government, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital and the Council, and that was a \$4.1 million project.²⁴⁶

See Recommendation 48.

5.175 Cr Claridge expanded on the number of partnerships operating in Benalla, telling the Committee about education groups such as Local Learning and Employment Networks, community colleges and TAFEs working together as well as with other agencies such as charities. Each group taps into the knowledge base that exists among these groups. She also described how partnerships can be self-perpetuating, providing the example of an employment and training group in Benalla that, realising the important role schooling plays in employment outcomes, expanded to also include education as part of its remit.²⁴⁷

5.176 Along with developing partnerships, it was felt that it is equally important to ensure that all groups remain aware of what the others are doing to try and avoid duplication, as revealed by Ms Lord, who said that the Tomorrow:Today Foundation is “...not here to reinvent the wheel. We are working with things that already exist and making sure that people in our community are hooked into those...”.²⁴⁸ Furthermore, Cr Claridge commented that new programs are passed around service providers and community groups “...making sure you are not duplicating solutions...”.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁴⁶ Mr Anthony McIlroy, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁴⁷ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁴⁸ Ms Stacey Lord, Education Program Manager, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁴⁹ Cr Patricia Claridge, Councillor, Benalla Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

- 5.177 Dan Weeks confirmed that agencies in Benalla do in fact work well together and with the Benalla and District Memorial Hospital “...across a range of issues, including tackling disadvantage in our community”.²⁵⁰ Ms James outlined the State Government departments that NESAY works closely with, including the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Planning and Community Development, and the Department of Human Services. She did, however, consider the strongest relationships to be with other non-government agencies such as housing associations and community health centres, with whom NESAY runs joint programs.²⁵¹
- 5.178 Brayton Youth and Family Services is one such organisation that works closely with NESAY. Mark Rumble, the Chief Executive Officer, provided the Committee with an example of how welfare groups in the Hume region co-operate to achieve the best outcomes for their disadvantaged clients:

...in Shepparton what we have established amongst the welfare organisations, Berry Street, Brayton, The Bridge, Central Hume Support Services, NESAY, we have an amazing collaborative working relationship. We have what we call the Regional Homelessness Network and so, for example let's say – this has happened in the past – the government says we want to put additional funding into the West Hume region for Reconnect. What would happen is that would then go to the SAAP [Supported Accommodation Assistance Program] regional network and they would say, there's money coming out. 'Hey guys, let's talk about this. Where is it best needed?' We will look at the data and have a look at where the need is. We all put up our arguments, and what we've done with the regional network in Hume was responsible for doing something that no one else did in the State, and that has been when the Creative Connections funding came into our region, one agency didn't get it; four agencies got it, because we sat down and talked about it and we said, 'Where is this money best used?'²⁵²

Small Town Flexibility

- 5.179 Corryong provided a good example of the way in which small towns function. Community organisations in Corryong have adapted to accommodate restrictions, be they physical limitations such as size and distance from

²⁵⁰ Mr Dan Weeks, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁵¹ Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²⁵² Mr Mark Rumble, Chief Executive Officer, Brayton Youth and Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

regional centres and the city or policies they believe to be restrictive when applied to remote areas.

5.180 Sergeant Brady provided several examples of ways in which the community had been creative in response to several issues peculiar to a town such as Corryong. For example, when a death occurs in the community, in the past Sergeant Brady revealed that waits of four hours for an undertaker to arrive from Wodonga were not uncommon, causing stress for family members. As a response, the local ambulance service and hospital changed their policy to allow bodies to be transported to and stored at the hospital.²⁵³

5.181 Sergeant Brady also explained how Corryong residents turn to the police station as a source of services, from internet access to submitting VicRoads forms. The police actually no longer register cars or issue licences, but Sergeant Brady has an agreement in place with VicRoads in Wodonga to clear roadworthy certificates, believing it particularly important for police officers in small towns to be flexible enough to serve the community:

In the case of a person who has to register a motor car that travels to Wodonga, you have got probably a cost of about \$80 in fuel and a day off work...[Clearing roadworthy certificates] takes time away from what my function actually is here, but the way I look at it, it is providing a service for the community.²⁵⁴

5.182 Policing in a small town also differs from a larger regional centre or city in the way in which police officers become such an important figure within the community. In Corryong, Sergeant Brady has the advantage of being able to approach his role in an informal manner should it be required, telling the Committee that in the past he has been able to "...pick up a phone and ring someone and say, 'Hey, you mucked up last night; you had better come down and see me'. Down they come, we process them, charge them, and off they go, and it is okay."²⁵⁵

5.183 More formally, the 'Adopt a Cop' program involves the police spending time at the local schools, with the result that when young people see the police walking through the town, they feel comfortable approaching them to discuss any problems they may have. Sergeant Brady also attends school camps and excursions and sits on a number of community boards and groups. He suggests that in a small town community work occupies the majority of a police officer's caseload:

This is not the community to come to if a police officer is really keen and wants to do heaps of work and advance. There is work here, but it does not present itself as a place like Ballarat or Bendigo. It is

²⁵³ Sergeant Paul Brady, Sergeant in Charge, Corryong Police Station, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

different sort of work. There is a lot of community engagement, a lot of involvement with schools and a lot of time on committees...

...The people that come here sometimes seem to come here thinking that they are not going to be run off their feet as police officers but when you get into a community like this and get involved in it, there is a lot of work to do that is not necessarily locking up bad guys.²⁵⁶

5.184 Workload pressure at the Corryong station is exacerbated because it is rarely fully staffed (in this case full staffing is a sergeant and four senior constables). Sergeant Brady suggested a number of reasons for the difficulties experienced attracting police officers to rural Victorian stations, including:

- no career path for officers;
- lack of work available for officers' partners; and
- insufficient financial incentives.²⁵⁷

5.185 Victorian police officers currently receive an allowance of \$8,369 per year for working in stations classified as one member police stations. There is no allowance specifically related to working in remote areas of the State.

5.186 Proposed solutions to the increasing police numbers in rural Victoria suggested by Sergeant Brady included:

- more police housing;
- increased remuneration for remote placements; and
- [a return to the practice of] employing retired police officers in clerical roles.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Recommendation 53

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Hume region by taking the following action:

- a. Provision of funding for North East Support and Action for Youth's family support program which has been successful in keeping young people engaged with education (5.46).
- b. Increase funding to North East Support and Action for Youth, which currently receives an insufficient amount of \$8,000 from the Department of Human Services to provide emergency accommodation in Alpine, Wangaratta, Benalla and Mansfield Shires (5.83).
- c. Provision of a Supported Accommodation Assistance Program-funded supported accommodation program in Mansfield (5.84).
- d. Increase funding for Brayton Youth and Family Services to further support its invaluable work in the area of youth homelessness in the Hume region, in particular its Good Lives Model (5.88).
- e. Provision of funding for the community's identified need for a dedicated youth counsellor in Benalla (5.103).
- f. Provision of funding for a Special School in Benalla to ensure that young people with disabilities who are currently required to travel to Wangaratta for schooling can remain and be educated in the community in which they live (5.136).
- g. Installation of a helicopter base at Wangaratta that is suitable to provide emergency air services covering north-east Victoria (5.143).
- h. Installation of pilot-activated lighting at the Corryong airfield (5.144).
- i. Re-establishment of a Victorian Government 'shop front' in Corryong to enable residents in the region to submit documents required by government such as VicRoads documents, Business Licensing Authority documents, hunting and fishing licenses and so on (5.181).

Chapter Six

The Gippsland Region

Introduction

Aspirations...it is the creation of those opportunities whereby children are exposed to those experiences which plant seeds, which start a dream and create some passion.¹

Tony Roberts, Mallacoota

- 6.1 The Committee's public hearings in the Gippsland region involved the towns of Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota, one of the last towns in Victoria before the New South Wales border. Issues around funding, such as the need for flexible funding models, were brought to the Committee's attention. In this region flexibility was discussed with reference to education, the difficulty schools in remote parts of Victoria can have attracting teachers and how best to respond to the needs of disadvantaged students.
- 6.2 In particular, witnesses suggested that efforts need to be focused on raising aspirations for disadvantaged students, especially in families without a

¹ Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P-12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

history of high achievement in education (while also providing options such as apprenticeships for less academically minded Victorians).

- 6.3 A related concern about funding that was raised is the need to ensure that funding models are not 'Melbourne-centric'; that is, not truly understanding or reflecting their impact in rural Victoria.
- 6.4 Overcoming the challenges thrown up by the 'tyranny of distance' is an ongoing problem for Gippsland residents. For example there is the question of how to expose students to higher education facilities in Melbourne, or assist teachers fulfil their professional development requirements. Delivering services and ensuring remote communities can access them is another concern and one that is linked to the role that public transport plays in assisting Victorians access services, including health, education and employment opportunities.
- 6.5 Regarding health in Gippsland, discussion revolved around particular issues such as oral health and mental health, and particular communities, including Kooris, farmers and people with disabilities. The Committee also heard about the unique challenges and rewards that health professionals encounter working in small communities in rural and regional Victoria.
- 6.6 Other key issues presented to the Committee and discussed in this Regional Profile include:
- the need for a holding bay at Mallacoota ambulance station;
 - the need for a full-time Auslan interpreter in Gippsland;
 - why sparsely populated areas deserve the same level of services as larger centres;
 - how the concept of 'rural proofing' would benefit disadvantaged communities in Gippsland;
 - policing issues in remote Victoria, including staffing and professional approaches to mental health issues; and
 - a new approach to measuring disadvantage based on a community's resilience, vulnerabilities and adaptive capacity.

Understanding the Region

- 6.7 The Gippsland region is a geographically large area where distance divides the major centres. During its consultations in the region the Committee heard that there are a number of issues that are relevant to the entire region. However the region is not a homogenous one with some areas facing more significant disadvantage than others.

- 6.8 The statistics and information below paint a broad picture of the region. From these we see that there are differences in employment levels, wealth in the region and for example, access to Information and Communications Technology. This information is cited here with the intention of providing a statistical 'snapshot' for the reader.

Table 5: Gippsland Statistics

| | Lakes Entrance (Bairnsdale) | Mallacoota (Orbost) |
|--|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Unemployment Rate (2008) | 6.3% | 6.3% |
| Average Taxable Income (\$) (2007) | 31,874 | 29,859 |
| Population Density (persons per km ²) (2008) | 43.1 | 0.7 |
| Indigenous Population (2006) | 3.2% | 3.9% |
| Access to Internet at Home (2006) | 52.0% | 46.8% |
| Gross Value of Agriculture (\$m) (2006) | 11.1 | 50.8 |

Source: ABS National Regional Profile 2006–2008.² Data chosen was based on Statistical Local Areas.

Indicators of Wellbeing in the Gippsland Region

- 6.9 Community Indicators Victoria uses a range of factors to measure wellbeing at Local Government Area level.³ This statistical information is more broadly informative, providing a picture of the region beyond the economic indicators

² See: <<http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/nrpmnsf/NEW+GmapPages/national+regional+profile?opendocument>>, accessed 15 July 2010.

³ See: <http://www.communityindicators.net.au/lga_profiles>, accessed 15 July 2010.

illustrated in the table above.⁴ A selection of information is reproduced here to provide a snapshot of the region:

Self-reported Health

- 6.10 There is a strong link between health and life outcomes. Professor Tony Vinson, who is well known for his work in this area, argues strongly that measuring self-reported health provides an accurate picture of an individual's wellbeing. Professor John Wiseman from the McCaughey Centre, responsible for these indicators, stated to the Committee during a previous Inquiry that self-reported health "...aligns pretty closely with a whole range of more objective measures of health".⁵
- 6.11 Self-reported health was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their health as excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. The percentages of people reporting that their health was either excellent or very good in the regional centres in Gippsland, the overall region and the State average are:
- East Gippsland: 52.6%
 - Gippsland Region: 52.0%
 - Victorian State average: 54.3%

Child Health Assessments

- 6.12 Child Health Assessments are routinely undertaken by the Maternal and Child Health Service in Victoria to monitor child health and development. Ten visits are anticipated according to key ages and stages until a child reaches 3.5 years of age. Data relating to the activities of the Maternal and Child Health Service are collated on a financial year basis by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The rates of participation for children eligible for an assessment at 3.5 years are:
- East Gippsland: 62.8%
 - Gippsland Region: 64.5%
 - Victorian State average: 60.1%
- 6.13 Figures are expressed as a rate per 100 children enrolled in Maternal and Child Health Centres born 3.5 years before visiting. It is possible for the rate to be greater than 100 if visits are not made in the financial year they are due.

⁴ Further information can be found at: <<http://www.communityindicators.net.au>>.

⁵ Professor John Wiseman, Director, McCaughey Centre, University of Melbourne, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 4 May 2009.

Perceptions of Safety

- 6.14 Perceptions of Safety were measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate how safe they felt when walking alone in their local area during the day and at night. The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the day are:
- East Gippsland: 99.2%
 - Gippsland Region: 98.1%
 - Victorian State average: 96.0%
- 6.15 The percentages of people who feel safe when walking alone in their local area during the night are:
- East Gippsland: 83.7%
 - Gippsland Region: 77.1%
 - Victorian State average: 66.5%
- 6.16 Communities who self-identify as being safe places also usually exhibit clear patterns of social cohesion and community strength. This is born out in the following statistics on 'Feeling part of the community', 'Social support' and 'Volunteering', where rural and regional areas generally perform higher than the Victorian State average.

Feeling Part of the Community

- 6.17 Community Connection was measured in the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with feeling part of their community and answers are presented according to a 0–100 range. Normative data from the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index indicates that the average Community Connection score for Australians is approximately 70. Across Gippsland the following scores were recorded. Community Connection is clearly high within the region and confirms the long-held view that living in smaller communities fosters more tightly knit connections amongst members:
- East Gippsland: 77.4
 - Gippsland Region: 76.0
 - Victorian State average: 70.7

Social Support

- 6.18 Social Support was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked if they could get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it,

either definitely, sometimes or not at all. The percentages of people reporting they could definitely get help from friends, family or neighbours when they needed it are:

- East Gippsland: 90.3%
- Gippsland Region: 92.2%
- Victorian State average: 91.7%

6.19 Again statistics are for the most part higher than average across rural and regional Victoria and demonstrate that inherent aspects of community life in regional Victoria provide community and lifestyle benefits.

Volunteering

6.20 Volunteering was measured in the Department of Planning and Community Development Community Strength Survey in 2008. Respondents were asked whether or not they helped out as a volunteer. The percentages of people reporting that they helped out as a volunteer are:

- East Gippsland: 48.2%
- Gippsland Region: 45.8%
- Victorian State average: 40.8%

6.21 Reliance on volunteering in rural and regional communities emerged throughout the Committee's *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria*. In many cases community members hold a number of honorary positions in community groups. This contributes to community life, a sense of belonging and social cohesion. However, it also puts pressure on individuals on whose enormous and time consuming contribution community-based programs are often dependent. The Committee also heard concern expressed in many areas that as demographics change it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract people to volunteering.

Highly Skilled Workforce

6.22 There is a symbiotic relationship between a highly skilled workforce and an area's ability to support a dynamic and broad-based economy. 'Highly skilled' has been defined as occupations with ANZSCO⁶ Skill Levels 1–3. The data has been collated from customised Census tables obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The percentages of employed people working in highly skilled occupations are:

- East Gippsland: 54.9%

⁶ An ABS classification: Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

- Gippsland Region: 55.2%
- Victorian State average: 56.3%

Educational Qualifications

6.23 As can be seen throughout this Report, education is a key to tackling disadvantage. The percentages of people aged 25 years and over who had Tertiary or TAFE qualifications calculated from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census are:

- East Gippsland: 43.0%
- Gippsland Region: 44.5%
- Victorian State average: 50.7%

Education: Funding Models

6.24 The Committee heard about the issue of flexible funding models with regard to education in remote communities. Early on during hearings in Gippsland the Committee was introduced to the idea that centralised policy making can fail to acknowledge the difficulty that schools in regional Victoria can experience trying to recruit teachers. The challenges involved with ensuring that policy made by a central government for a state or region that is remote from decision-makers is something that was discussed in the Committee's previous *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*.⁷ It is an issue that is relevant to all areas of government policy-making that affect rural and regional areas. In this Regional Profile on the Gippsland region it is discussed in the context of education policy making and provision.

6.25 Mr Craig Sutherland, the Principal of Lakes Entrance Secondary College, told the Committee of the problems he had experienced trying to recruit literacy coaches, even with the assistance of Federal Government funding. Mr Sutherland believes that central governments can make an assumption that the only thing schools need to do is simply advertise a position which is then filled. However, his experience suggests it is not that simple, and that a different approach is required for rural and regional circumstances:

I have just come from a meeting with six of our staff where I had appointed English teachers to positions to release our staff to do that work within the school, so what I am asking for in particular is that the committee give some consideration to the lead time that schools in rural and remote areas have for some of the government projects

⁷ Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

and initiatives. **Thinking back over my career, it does not matter which persuasion is in government and whether it is state or federal, it is simply that we have to go about things in a different way to what might be expected.**⁸

- 6.26 In other words, remoteness needs to be accepted and considered as a factor in both how government education policy is implemented and its effectiveness. As Mr Sutherland explains, schools in remote parts of Victoria "...have to go about things in a different way";⁹ in this case, because recruiting teachers takes longer for a school such as Lakes Entrance Secondary College, it needs to be acknowledged that programs will be implemented in a timeframe that is of necessity different to that of other schools, particularly those in metropolitan regions.
- 6.27 Mr Sutherland also suggested that his school has to 'go about things in a different way' when mainstream education methods fail to meet the needs of some of his Koori students: "You cannot use the same resources; you cannot use the same strategies."¹⁰ This is because, Mr Sutherland argues, the social problems that many Koori students in the area bring with them to school mean that schools must devise individualised programs delivered by specialist teachers.
- 6.28 The way in which funding is linked to the number of Koori students in a school was raised by Mr John Kinniburgh, the Principal of Lakes Entrance Primary School, who has experienced the needs of Koori children which are often greater than those of the mainstream population:

In a school like Lakes Entrance Primary School over the last three or four years the Koori population has gone up significantly, probably from low 20s to low 50s at the moment. This has been a trend through the valley and I know in Bairnsdale West as well. With that trend, when your Indigenous population increases, your non-Indigenous population decreases. At Lakes Entrance, it is not the sole reason, but as the Koori population has increased significantly, the non-Indigenous population has decreased. The percentage of Indigenous students is way higher than it was three years ago. That is the phenomenon that has also happened at Bairnsdale West where they have got a significant Indigenous population. When the funding is based on numbers of kids, there is not much additional funding for Indigenous kids, if any.¹¹

- 6.29 This observation is one that the Committee heard throughout this Inquiry albeit in broader terms; that is, disadvantaged students from all backgrounds

⁸ Mr Craig Sutherland, Principal, Lakes Entrance Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Mr John Kinniburgh, Principal, Lakes Entrance Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

require resource-intensive programs if they are to achieve their optimum educational outcomes.

- 6.30 The State Government has made provision for extra funding for Indigenous students, students facing disadvantage and for schools in rural areas.¹² The Committee heard during its Inquiry that this funding is inadequate to fully cover the existing demands faced by rural and regional schools and needs to be increased.

Raising Expectations

- 6.31 The main time period where education experts and practitioners believe that Koori students experience the most difficulty in learning is around what is described as the education 'transition point'. That is the years between primary and secondary school where problems of engagement can become prominent. The related issue of tracking students is taken up in Recommendation 12.
- 6.32 Reverend Deacon Phyllis Andy, an Aboriginal Development Worker and Board Member of the Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association, agreed that for many Indigenous people in Gippsland, educational outcomes need to be improved, pointing out that: "[Indigenous young people] make it through primary...they will go to Year 7, but after Year 7 we do not have a very high rate of people completing VCE and the like."¹³
- 6.33 Reverend Andy agreed that this problem is a direct result of a larger social problem for Indigenous communities around parenting role models and general expectations. This disengagement from education has repercussions later on in life in the form of poor employment outcomes:

Because there is a mentality of low incomes, it then circles again, to my way of thinking, around the drug and alcohol abuse. If parents are suffering from that, then the kids are not getting a fair deal in being able to get to school. There is transportation; the buses are going out to the trust and they will go into surrounding areas. But

¹² See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/srp/budget/ref004/default.htm>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/srp/guide/studentequity.htm>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

See:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/wannik/programsandreforms/tutorialprogram.htm>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

¹³ Rev Deacon Phyllis Andy, Board Member, Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

yes, education is not very great. It is not grand outcomes for our people.¹⁴

6.34 In its submission to this Inquiry Mission Australia added another voice suggesting that disengagement from education can severely curtail employment options for a young person later in life. As such, Mission Australia is working closely with Indigenous organisations in the region, including the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative. Together they tackle the poor social and educational outcomes faced by many members of the Indigenous community – and the wider Gippsland community as well – by offering youth participation programs aimed at improving outcomes for young people in the region.¹⁵

6.35 Reverend Deacon Andy also presented the Committee with the *Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association Annual Report 2009*, outlining some of the achievements seen in the Indigenous community, including:

- an increase in the number of Aboriginal Health Workers delivering programs in the community;
- the partnership with Gippsland Lakes Community Health winning a 2009 Victorian Public Health Care Award; and
- an increase in the range of health services available in Lakes Entrance.¹⁶

6.36 The level of qualifications among parents in the region was raised with regard to the issue of aspirations for all students in the region. **Mr Sutherland, Principal at Lakes Entrance Secondary College, pointed out that only one of the parents of the children in his school had a university degree.** He believes that it then becomes imperative for schools to raise the expectations of students in order to break the cycle of disadvantage that is so closely tied to low levels of education.¹⁷

6.37 Mr Tony Roberts, Principal of Mallacoota P–12 College, also believes that it is the role of schools to raise aspirations amongst their students, even if, as is the case in many rural communities, higher education is not part of a family's history:

My job is not to change parents' histories and things like that. I guess what we focus on is promoting those ideas and those aspirations within the children who are currently at our school. If we can do that to one or two students a year and their siblings follow that pathway, then we are making a difference, I believe.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mission Australia, *Submission*, Number 44, 31 March 2010.

¹⁶ Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association, *Annual Report 2009*, Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association, Lakes Entrance 2009.

¹⁷ Mr Craig Sutherland, Principal, Lakes Entrance Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

There is nothing worse for a child, in my experience, than having teachers promote ideas of the great things they can do, and they go home and they sit down at the dinner table or they sit down at breakfast and they tell mum and dad these dreams they have, and their parents (a) do not support or (b) almost undermine them. There are a number of reasons why that would happen, but that certainly happens in our game, so we have to be very careful about how we manage these sorts of things.¹⁸

- 6.38 Many parents in Mallacoota make a big effort to increase the expectations of their children. Phillip Counsel, a Community Development Worker at the Mallacoota Outreach Centre said that young people in Mallacoota “...get lots of opportunities particularly through the school but also through the hard work of a lot of the parents”.¹⁹
- 6.39 This transferred to a positive study culture among the young people, with Mr Roberts telling the Committee about a recent bus journey he had taken with a group of his students:

I can tell you when I first started here years ago and I took my first group...and on the bus I had a group of maybe nine students in Years 10, 11 and 12. My experience of buses with students is that there is a bit of talking. I actually stopped the bus at Genoa to turn around to check that everything was all right because I had not heard a person speak. I did not know then that previously there had been fatalities with students on that Genoa road, so the students were still aware of that and they lived that as they travelled on buses up to school. When I turned around, I saw maybe three boys reading the paper, two boys reading their course text for English, another two kids with iPods listening to whatever cast they had to read. So they do that and they have done that, in my experience, over a long time of travelling, and they have got good at it.²⁰

- 6.40 Long journeys are a necessary part of life for students and teachers in remote areas such as Mallacoota. The Committee heard that there is a price to be paid to overcome the ‘tyranny of distance’ between Mallacoota and events held in Melbourne:

Yes, we play a range of sports and we do a range of academic and social activities...The opportunity costs of doing them — when we get back and when we go — are huge.

I will summarise what I think those barriers are; very simply, they are about time: the time sitting on the bus, the time away from your family and the time away from classes. If you are the chairman of

¹⁸ Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

¹⁹ Mr Phillip Counsel, Coordinator, Mallacoota Outreach Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

²⁰ Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

the surf club, if you are a paramedic, if you are a basketball coach back here or whatever you are doing, the time away counts against you, but people will do that...because **we are trying to create the tapestry whereby when our students are in Year 11–12 they are brave enough to say, 'We are going to try something new'**. Because invariably they are going to have to try something new, whether it is academic, whether they are pursuing the arts, chances are they are not going to be able to do it in Mallacoota.²¹

- 6.41 Mr Roberts also elaborated on the cost to schools of sending teachers to Melbourne for required professional development courses:

We have to send someone for a day, they have to stay overnight, they have to attend for the day and then they have to drive back. Do we not go? We do go, because if we do not go we are getting further behind...but of course we have only got one biology teacher, so when that person goes away for that biology training they have to make up their biology VCE classes. So on top of that, we bring in a CRT [casual relief teacher] to take that class, but they will not be biology trained. We are a small town. How many physics teachers have we got walking around Mallacoota? Not a lot.²²

- 6.42 The issue of staff travelling great distances to Melbourne to access professional development training was also heard by the Committee in Lakes Entrance, in the context of social services. Ms Donna Mraz, a Rural Access Project Officer at East Gippsland Shire Council, spoke of a potential solution, in the form of professional development being delivered online by the Regional Communication Service run out of East Gippsland and Wellington Shires.²³ See Recommendation 13.

- 6.43 Online learning was also mentioned as having great potential in delivering education to remote communities, with central Government being encouraged to inject funds into setting up the necessary infrastructure.²⁴

Recommendation 27

That the State Government lobby the Federal Government to ensure that the National Broadband Network will allow increased on-line learning opportunities for remote communities in Victoria, and suit the needs in general of teaching institutions including schools and universities in rural and regional locations.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

²³ Ms Donna Mraz, Rural Access Project Officer, East Gippsland Shire, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

²⁴ Mr Phillip Counsel, Coordinator, Mallacoota Outreach Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

- 6.44 In mid-2010, the Victorian Government launched the \$60.5 million Ultranet, an online learning tool for students, parents and teachers. Students will be able to create a learning portfolio and use online communication tools such as wikis, blogs and discussion boards. Parents will also be able to access the Ultranet, allowing them to keep informed about their child's test results, teacher feedback, timetables, homework and attendance.²⁵
- 6.45 The price paid by students and staff in remote locations accessing events in Melbourne is, according to Mr Roberts, one worth paying because it is important to expose young people to "...experiences which plant seeds, which start a dream and create some passion and that is one of the areas in which we are most disadvantaged".²⁶
- 6.46 Mr Peter Quin, Director Community Services, Orbost Regional Health, emphasises the importance of the State Government supporting students from remote parts of the State travelling to events in Melbourne, believing it to be "...another good way of getting these kids to raise their expectations about what they can achieve".²⁷
- 6.47 Mr Roberts did acknowledge that some additional funding is received by schools in recognition of their remote locations, but felt that the amount needed to be much higher. He went on to provide his estimation to the Committee about how much more difficult it was for a student in Mallacoota to achieve the same ENTER score as an identical student in Melbourne. Mr Roberts estimated, considering factors and challenges faced by students in the region, that it was ten per cent more difficult. However, he said that the local community – students, staff and parents – have all contributed to the high VCE scores currently being achieved in Mallacoota.²⁸
- 6.48 Ms Katherine Rogers, a student at Mallacoota P–12 College, also spoke of how the aspirations of students in remote parts of Victoria to access higher education upon the completion of Year 12 is affected by having to travel long distances. Pressures already present during important years of study are exacerbated:

I and some other students, we have scholarships at Melbourne University. It has open days down there. You travel seven hours for a lunch for a few hours and then you come home. It puts even more stress than we already have on leaving Year 12. A lot of people have part-time work. You are fitting in work, with homework and with sporting things just so when you leave Mallacoota you are able to support yourself.

²⁵ See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/ultranet/default.htm>>, accessed 26 August 2010.

²⁶ Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

²⁷ Mr Peter Quin, Director Community Services, Orbost Regional Health, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

²⁸ Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

Along with the pressures of the classes we have and the VCE subjects, you know you are going to have to leave your support services in Mallacoota to go to Melbourne or wherever you choose to go.²⁹

6.49 Mr Nigel Allison, Lead Teacher at Mallacoota P–12 College told the Committee that he worries that the stress placed on even the most academically talented students would inhibit them from reaching their full potential.³⁰

6.50 Mr Allison also expressed the belief that for less academically minded students, apprenticeship opportunities in the region are limited by a small industry base:

The realities of apprenticeships for our kids is that maybe every couple of years one might find employment in the town, but apprenticeships are pretty competitive these days for our kids. Bairnsdale would be where most of them would try to access those sorts of things, and they are not easy to pick up there, either.³¹

6.51 This is despite, as the Committee heard in Lakes Entrance, a higher percentage of young people in Gippsland taking on an apprenticeship than in any other region in Victoria.³²

6.52 The Committee did hear from the Mallacoota and District Business and Tourism Association that businesses in the area are keen for the Department of Education and Early Development to assist in developing some sort of relationship model with the Mallacoota P–12 College, to make it easier for students to gain an apprenticeship locally.³³

6.53 This is important, because as Mr Sutherland pointed out when discussing pathways for young people: “**...employment is not a second-rate outcome**”.³⁴

²⁹ Ms Katherine Rogers, Student, Mallacoota P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

³⁰ Mr Nigel Allison, Lead Teacher, Mallacoota P–12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Mr Henrie Ellis, Chair, East Gippsland Mentoring Program, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

³³ Mr John Rudge, Mallacoota and District Business and Tourism Association, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

³⁴ Mr Craig Sutherland, Principal, Lakes Entrance Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

Transport

6.54 Linked with education was the issue of transport. In common with other regions in Victoria, Gippsland residents are struggling to understand their rights when it comes to spare seat capacity on school buses.³⁵

6.55 Ms Sherryl McHugh, Transport Project Officer at Wellington Shire Council, said that the Council was currently in the process of determining how access to school buses is affecting young people's education choices:

The On Track data does not show how many students have made choices based on lack of transport. That is one of the issues; we do not know. We are encouraging the TAFEs to record and then document as much of that information as possible as they get student enrolments. Most students will make their own arrangements to try to get to TAFE. We know there are complicated arrangements in place with car pooling and car sharing. They take any opportunity they can to get there. We also know of cases; I have seven case studies from Orbost, for example, where children started the school year on a school bus, capacity was no longer available and they were turfed off. Most of those seven did not continue with their courses. So there are issues. In Wellington alone we have helped over 200 students access school buses...³⁶

6.56 Mr Counsel reported comments from electrical and building apprentices about the financial difficulty they face on apprentice wages reaching Bairnsdale or Sale to access TAFE colleges in those towns, in order to fulfil the theory component of their studies.³⁷

6.57 Further information regarding access to school buses for TAFE students and those young people undertaking apprenticeships was provided in the Wellington Shire Council's submission.³⁸

Recommendation 21

That the State Government increase public transport options for TAFE students and other students accessing training options across rural and regional Victoria. Further, the State Government should fund accessible school buses for students with a disability where required.

³⁵ Ms Frances Ford, Rural Access Project Officer, Wellington Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

³⁶ Ms Sherryl McHugh, Transport Project Officer, Wellington Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

³⁷ Mr Phillip Counsel, Coordinator, Mallacoota Outreach Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

³⁸ Wellington Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 42, 31 March 2010.

6.58 Latrobe City in its submission expressed concern that limited public transport options were having a negative impact on the social inclusion opportunities for all members of the community, in particular young people and older residents. The submission reported that older residents are increasingly reliant on public transport to access services. There is a fear that if service levels decline in line with a shrinking population, the elderly will be forced to move to larger population centres in order to access services. Similarly, it is thought that a lack of public transport options is forcing young people to leave the region in order to access employment and education options located away from Latrobe City.³⁹

6.59 Limited public transport options were also mentioned as a problem for those on low incomes trying to gain regular employment, with timetables not always matching the start and finish times expected by local employers:

For example, for a lot of clients that we deal with in the country, a reason they are not employed would be because they do not have a licence. If they live outside of town or they live in a surrounding community, the accessibility from public transport is very limited and does not necessarily tie in with work routines.⁴⁰

6.60 More generally, when it comes to employment opportunities in the Gippsland region these are limited by the seasonal nature of many rural jobs and the lack of casual employment options that are found in larger regional centres. Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer of Workways Australia Ltd, told the Committee that this is a main contributing factor to a problem of underemployment:

When we are talking about employment in regional Victoria, underemployment is a major issue, apart from unemployment. We find that a lot of job seekers may have seasonal or casual work. It varies according to the area we are operating in. For example, **in the Latrobe area there is underemployment in industrial work and there is casualisation of employment.** In more rural or farm-oriented areas underemployment is seasonal and it is specific to certain areas. If you travel to Lakes Entrance, for example, employment in the fishing industry really depends on the catch on that day...⁴¹

6.61 Mr Hartley suggested that it would be possible to strengthen and diversify the regional Gippsland economy in order to improve opportunities available in the area:

I think agriculture in local areas is something that has synergy with some of the other industry that is local — major industries such as

³⁹ Latrobe City, *Submission*, Number 46, 31 March 2010.

⁴⁰ Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, Workways Australia Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Patties and Vegco. There needs to be alignment, and supply and demand. I think that has worked well. There has been recent initiative to promote the area from a tourism aspect. I think this area has been largely undermarketed as a tourist destination. We find, certainly if you go west of the city towards Lorne and Geelong, it is very well known in comparison to what we have here locally, which is the Gippsland Lakes. It does attract a lot of people, but if you ask Victorians in the city, 'Do you know about the Gippsland Lakes and the surrounding area?', I think it is more likely that they would know more about the Great Ocean Road than Gippsland.⁴²

- 6.62 Looking to tourism as a way of improving economic opportunities in Gippsland was an idea supported by Mr Steve Waixel of the Mallacoota and District Business and Tourism Association:

It is our objective to try to make Mallacoota a year-round tourist destination, not just at Christmas and Easter. I came here ten years ago and bought units here. Ten years ago the tourism period was very much Easter and Christmas, and that was the end of it. Nowadays we are quite proud that our last tourism period started in November last year, which was exceptional — normally it does not start until Christmas — and it has just finished.⁴³

- 6.63 Mr Hartley also spoke of the benefits to be gained by the State Government decentralising services, mentioning the success that Workways Australia Ltd has achieved by decentralising its own services to smaller towns, thereby increasing their ability to deal directly with businesses in these towns:

For example, if you are unemployed you are obligated to attend appointments with a provider of employment services. Driving from Orbost to Bairnsdale is a significant cost, so decentralising our services in Mallacoota, Yarram and Maffra has been a key strategy for the organisation in supporting rural areas and being supported by business itself.⁴⁴

Decentralisation is discussed further later in this chapter at 6.122.

- 6.64 In Lakes Entrance, Mr Quin told the Committee of a program that was achieving success in breaking the cycle of generational unemployment that can often plague a low-income community such as Orbost. The Students@Work program, funded by the Federal Government, aims to raise the aspirations of 24 young people whose parents are unemployed, by organising part-time work in local small businesses. The program subsidises half the wages for the businesses:

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Mr Steve Waixel, Chairman, Mallacoota and District Business and Tourism Association, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁴⁴ Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, Workways Australia Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

It is a really cheap program to run and it does not require a lot of coordination because the schools can do a lot of the work in linking kids up. It takes half a day a week from a coordinator based in a local service. We have found that the local employers have really embraced the scheme. It does not cost them much; it costs them about \$7 an hour and they can afford that. **It gives kids a really good opportunity they would not otherwise have to get a taste of being in a job.** These are kids who are often beaten out of regular jobs by kids from better educated families...⁴⁵

Recommendation 20

That the State Government investigate the possibility of partnering with the Federal Government in running the Students@Work program. The program should be rolled out across remote parts of Victoria to aid young people looking for employment.

- 6.65 Mr Hartley believes that providing incentives to employers to train unskilled workers is an effective measure of breaking cycles of unemployment.⁴⁶
- 6.66 This idea has support in the submission provided by Catholic Social Services Victoria, who held a series of preliminary consultations with its member organisations in Trafalgar and Bairnsdale to elicit views and concerns that they could bring to the Committee's Inquiry. During the consultations it was suggested that incentives to industry, such as subsidies for power rates and apprenticeship assistance, may increase employment opportunities for people in the Gippsland region.⁴⁷

Health: Challenges for Remote Areas

- 6.67 Mr Hartley added that employment motivation for many people in Gippsland is being inhibited by poor health outcomes, in particular in the fields of mental health and dentistry:

There is a lack of mental health services, particularly in this area. The availability of specialists, particularly psychiatrists — I think there is one available in Gippsland — is an issue. The availability of local dental services is also an issue. You may ask how that relates to

⁴⁵ Mr Peter Quin, Director Community Services, Orbost Regional Health, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁴⁶ Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, Workways Australia Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁴⁷ Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission*, Number 53, 31 March 2010.

the services we provide, but the simple fact of a job seeker not having appropriate dental care and how they present in an interview can impact on their motivation and their self-esteem, so we interlink our job seekers with these types of services on a day-to-day basis.⁴⁸

- 6.68 When it came to a broader discussion on health, the Committee heard of a wide range of concerns in the region, including Koori health (diabetes, coronary disease, asthma in particular),⁴⁹ ageing⁵⁰ and isolation.⁵¹
- 6.69 Ms Ailsa Carr from the Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre also brought the matter of the health of the farming community to the attention of the Committee:

We have farming communities, some small and isolated, that certainly over the last ten years have been hit by a series of what you could say are natural events like fire, flood, pestilence, and that has certainly impacted on their capacity to be resilient and manage their own wellbeing, and we are certainly seeing increased use of our services by those communities and needing to outreach to those communities to assist with that.⁵²

Key Recommendation 4 and Recommendation 38 are relevant to these issues.

- 6.70 Mr Bruce Hurley, Chief Executive of Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, spoke positively about successes that have been achieved in programs run in partnership with the TAFE system to boost the number of aged care workers, as well as traineeships increasing the number of Indigenous staff at Gippsland Lake Community Health Centre, thereby creating a partnership with the local Aboriginal population aimed at improving health outcomes.⁵³
- 6.71 The Committee also heard about State Government funding being directed at successful community building programs that hope to strengthen

⁴⁸ Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, Workways Australia Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁴⁹ Rev Deacon Phyllis Andy, Board Member, Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁵⁰ Mr Bruce Hurley, Chief Executive, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁵¹ Ms Ailsa Carr, Manager Family, Youth and Children Services, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Mr Bruce Hurley, Chief Executive, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

communities in East Gippsland Shire⁵⁴ and Latrobe City, including Neighbourhood Renewal.⁵⁵

- 6.72 Another success came in the form of the Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre program targeting young mothers. The program, as described by Ms Carr, aims to break the cycle of poverty frequently linked with teenage pregnancy. Ms Carr stated that the Gippsland region has very high rates of teenage pregnancy. The program works through linking pregnancy and post-natal services into other services such as drug and alcohol, mental health, and education services:

As part of that group, we go through a process of trying to map out with mums — and we have got 15 and 16-year-old mums — and say, ‘Okay, this has interrupted your schooling. Once you are over the birth, which might be six months down the track, what are your plans to link you back in and change what could potentially be a trajectory that takes you into being a single mum on a pension in the long term?’⁵⁶

- 6.73 Catholic Social Services Victoria in its submission also included evidence of the success of programs targeted at young parents, especially when partnered with life skills promotions, such as literacy and numeracy skills, cooking, and budgeting skills.⁵⁷

- 6.74 As with education, perceived ‘city-centric’ policy making and the ‘siloing’ of funding models into inflexible streams and short-term programs was said to ignore the problems inherent in delivering services to sparse populations spread across large distances, as are commonly found in rural and regional Victoria.

- 6.75 Mr Bruce Smith, a social planner with the East Gippsland Shire Council, said that **the cost of service delivery is “...higher in rural areas where clients are more widely dispersed or economies of scale are harder to achieve. We come across this all the time.”**⁵⁸

- 6.76 In Mallacoota, the main issue around distance is locating the nearest hospital:

The hospitals that we transport our patients to include Pambula hospital in New South Wales, which is 104 kilometres and 1 hour and 25 minutes away; Orbost hospital, 145 kilometres and 1 hour and 52 minutes; Bega hospital, 137 kilometres and 1 hour and

⁵⁴ Ms Kate Nelson, Director Planning and Community, East Gippsland Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁵⁵ Latrobe City, *Submission*, Number 46, 31 March 2010.

⁵⁶ Ms Ailsa Carr, Manager Family, Youth and Children Services, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁵⁷ Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission*, Number 53, 31 March 2010.

⁵⁸ Mr Bruce Smith, Social Planner, East Gippsland Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

53 minutes; Bairnsdale hospital, 234 kilometres and 3 hours 2 minutes; Canberra hospital, ACT, 357 kilometres and 4 hours and 29 minutes — and that is our first major trauma centre that we can get our patients to.⁵⁹

- 6.77 The issue of distance was also raised regarding patients travelling to the services:

Our remote location is also a barrier to effective patient care in situations where a multidisciplinary approach is needed, in rehabilitative programs or where patients need a lot of support to enable them to cope and make progress. Examples of this might be complex pain management, trauma, rehabilitation, drug and alcohol-type problems. If there is a need to access therapists, counsellors or support groups on a regular, useful basis this is sometimes just not possible or not possible at all for some people. Many resources that travel to the area are only available, say, once a month and someone with a bad problem quite often needs treatment weekly but the travel involved to attend them can be quite limiting. The pain involved in travelling in a car is often a limiting factor as well. Such patients need a lot of self-motivation to progress. Drug, alcohol and pain rehabilitation programs are quite distant from home and the practicality of such a person attending them is quite remote. Local resources for managing those sorts of problems are inadequate as people usually need quite frequent patient contact and support.⁶⁰

- 6.78 While Ms Mraz, commenting on the recent relocation of a Vision Australia service from Bairnsdale to Warragul, said that: “...if someone with a vision impairment in Mallacoota wanted to access the service in Warragul they would be travelling over 300 kilometres to have a face-to-face conversation”.⁶¹
- 6.79 While the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme covers people who have to travel more than 100 kilometres for medical treatment, in its submission Wellington Shire Council provided evidence that patients on disability or aged pensions in the Shire can be forced to allocate most of their pension to transport costs to access dialysis services.⁶²
- 6.80 While it is clear that there is no easy answer to overcoming service delivery problems with distance, the concern over a lack of recognition of these difficulties was expressed by Ms Carr, who said:

⁵⁹ Mr Terry Houge, Paramedic Community Support Coordinator, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁶⁰ Dr Jenny Schlager, Principal Partner, Mallacoota Medical Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁶¹ Ms Donna Mraz, Rural Access Project Officer, East Gippsland Shire, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁶² Wellington Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 42, 31 March 2010.

There is application by government of what we see are fairly city-centric funding models and setting of targets that are really around assuming a more office-based approach. But obviously when you are working in an area such as East Gippsland what you really need to be able to do is to provide a more outreach approach, and that can be needing to do anything from two to three-and-a-half hours of travel, and a lot of the funding that we get does not really accommodate that fact. It is much more around the assumption that the clients would come to the service rather than the need to go out to the clients.⁶³

6.81 This concern was echoed in the submission from Catholic Social Services Victoria, which states that some of its member organisations in the Gippsland region have at times felt 'disenfranchised' due to their location. They feel far away from where government policy decisions affecting how they conduct their work are made and that the goals they are expected to achieve in order to guarantee a continuation of program funding don't always reflect best possible outcomes, saying, for example: 'How useful a measure of program effectiveness is simply the number of clients seen?'⁶⁴

6.82 Reflecting the concerns expressed earlier in this chapter by the education sector around the time needed to fill teaching places in more remote communities was the issue of inflexible funding models and short-term programs – typically between 12–18 months. It was felt that such modelling is not particularly effective in the health sector in rural areas, where results can take longer to achieve:

Realistic time frames are a factor when projects and funding are rolled out to acknowledge the fact that often in rural areas it takes a lot longer to recruit; it takes a lot longer to establish programs and get things up and running and even to get out and about in an area of this size. Then there is the consideration of urban design that supports that local neighbourhood approach and is not dependent on having a car or a vastly improved public transport system. **Meeting all of those needs in an area of 21,000 square kilometres is probably not realistic.**⁶⁵

6.83 As well as reducing the effectiveness of programs, Ms Rachel Bell of Kilmany UnitingCare told the Committee that it was difficult to retain staff without knowing if funding for a particular project is going to continue. Ms Bell told the Committee of her experience being unsure if several programs were going to remain funded, even to within two months of them coming to an

⁶³ Ms Ailsa Carr, Manager Family, Youth and Children Services, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁶⁴ Catholic Social Services Victoria, *Submission*, Number 53, 31 March 2010.

⁶⁵ Ms Ailsa Carr, Manager Family, Youth and Children Services, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

end. She suggested that a more outcomes-based funding model with a long-term timeframe would be more effective.⁶⁶

6.84 Ms Bell explained to the Committee how such an outcomes-based model could work:

We have been doing a fair bit of work with the Centre for Community Child Health on outcomes-based planning and evaluation. Yes, you do have long-term outcomes that you work towards, but you break that down to a program level and determine what are the outcomes that you actually want from that particular program so that you can monitor whether you have actually made a difference for those families or those children, whatever the population is that you are working with. I think it works much better for much smaller communities, because you are looking at that outcome rather than the numbers of people coming through the door, because that is often our problem, that you do not have the high numbers.⁶⁷

6.85 The key factors of the model that Ms Bell proposes include:

- base results on outcomes;
- long-term funding;
- monitor families and children; and
- base programs on individual and family results rather than numbers taking up the program.

6.86 An unavoidable by-product of short-term programs is the amount of time and energy service providers must allocate to completing funding applications, resources they would rather allocate to tackling disadvantage itself. Both Ms Bell⁶⁸ and Ms Carr⁶⁹ gave specific examples of programs whose effectiveness, they believed, was being limited by their having repeatedly to complete funding applications.

6.87 On a similar note, Ms Carr raised the issue of ‘bundled’ funding, referring to the frustration that service providers can feel when they are given separated parcels of money for several small programs addressing disadvantage, as opposed to one larger amount with an identified outcome:

We get State Government funding for our drug and alcohol program and it comes to us through eight different little bits of funding streams...It is an alcohol and drug program for a rural region, and it would be great to be able to bundle that and say that you need to

⁶⁶ Ms Rachel Bell, Assistant Director, Kilmany UnitingCare, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ms Ailsa Carr, Manager Family, Youth and Children Services, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

provide a suite of programs rather than having \$25,000 for post-withdrawal linkages, which is six targets a year, and 0.2 per cent of an EFT for youth outreach. You have all those different reporting requirements, but it is little bits of money, whereas in an area like this we would not have the numbers and it would be better to have it as a more bundled approach that says that it is alcohol and drugs to meet the needs around all the alcohol and drug issues for a rural region.⁷⁰

See Recommendation 10.

- 6.88 **Integrated or Multi Purpose Service (MPS) models for health services with their inherent flexibility were identified as the best way of achieving optimum outcomes.** Orbost Regional Health, where local service providers identify local needs, is one such model:

Certainly part of the reason Orbost and district is thriving is the existence of the MPS. The local people feel very connected to it, so it is a very good way of not only providing employment but also creating a presence and a very strong understanding about health promotion, health prevention and those sorts of things, because you can link all the services under one operational plan. If that was not there you would have multitudes of visiting services that would not have that connection to the community, because they just have not got the base there for people to get to know them or understand what they are trying to deliver.⁷¹

See Recommendation 30.

- 6.89 Mr Quin added that the Multi Purpose Service model made it easier for Orbost Regional Health to employ General Practitioners and Dentists, an identified shortage in almost every area that the Committee visited during this Inquiry.⁷² See Recommendation 39 with regard to provision of dental services.
- 6.90 An interesting paradox that arose out of the evidence the Committee heard at the hearing in Mallacoota was that the unique position health professionals occupy in small communities – that of being responsible for potentially any and every kind of medical response – is both an attraction and a deterrent.
- 6.91 Dr Jenny Schlager told the Committee about the number of training courses she attends on weekends, in order to stay prepared for any incident that she

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Mr Peter Quin, Director Community Services, Orbost Regional Health, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁷² Ibid.

may have to respond to “...because you might have to deal with it tomorrow, but you might not have dealt with it for a couple of years”.⁷³

- 6.92 This, she felt, not only broadened her skill base but linked her more closely to the community than a doctor would expect in a larger town or city:

But the medicine that you perform up here is certainly a lot more rewarding than I found in the city. I found that straight away, that it was satisfying. It was rewarding doing the comprehensive management of people. People are very grateful and very appreciative. Again, I liked the close-knittedness of knowing your patients well, the personal side of it. We do a lot of palliative care. That is upsetting emotionally on one hand, but on the other hand it is really rewarding in another way, of being close with the families, supporting each other, helping them get through it and the whole thing. So there is a flipside to each of those situations, but it is rewarding of itself.

A lot of the stuff you have to do in emergencies and everything can be very scary. It can be overwhelming to think about what you might have to do, but it is very satisfying and rewarding to have helped someone and to have done that.⁷⁴

- 6.93 The other side of this, the Committee heard, is the risk of early burnout due to the pressure doctors experience, often needing to be on-call at all times. Dr Schlager explained that when she first moved to Mallacoota, no matter how tired she may have been “...ethically I could not be in town and not make myself available for an emergency that was serious, and that’s a real strain”.⁷⁵
- 6.94 Indeed, the ability to ‘switch off’ was mentioned as a special skill that health professionals in small communities must be able to develop, with Mr Mark Ginnivan, Practice Manager at Mallacoota Medical Centre, telling the Committee about a number of internationally trained doctors who were able to spend only one year in Mallacoota before leaving, due to the workload and the immediacy and constancy of the work.⁷⁶
- 6.95 Mr Ginnivan added: “Three years is the window you will be able to keep two doctors in a town, but without support in the long-term, after the three years it is pretty small.”⁷⁷
- 6.96 One of the fantastic initiatives arising out of Mallacoota has been the establishment of a Paramedic Community Support Coordinator.

⁷³ Dr Jenny Schlager, Principal Partner, Mallacoota Medical Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Mr Mark Ginnivan, Practice Manager, Mallacoota Medical Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010

⁷⁷ Ibid.

6.97 The Paramedic Support position was created in 2004 as a result of efforts by the Mallacoota TrUCs (Transforming Rural Urgent Care Services) committee. This position is discussed below:

The Transforming Rural Urgent Care Services Committee

The Transforming Rural Urgent Care Services Committee of Mallacoota and District was formed in 2002 in response to a number of emergency medical events. These events placed enormous strain on medical services in the Mallacoota region. In response, *Mallacoota Emergency and Critical Care Services: a model for transforming rural urgent care* was developed by the Committee and presented to the Victorian Minister of Health in October 2002.

In May 2003, the Mallacoota and Omeo region was allocated \$400,000 from the State Budget to establish paramedic services. A major hurdle at the time was the fact that Medical Schedules did not include adequate items covering doctors who were treating emergency patients outside of hospital settings.

In June 2003, an innovative model for a Paramedic Community Support Coordinator was developed with the aid of Rural Ambulance Victoria, with the first Support Coordinator commencing duty in January 2004.

The implementation of the Support Coordinator position in Mallacoota was assisted by the TrUCs Community Liaison Committee, which consisted of:

- a Senior Constable representing the Police, State Emergency Services and Country Fire Authority (CFA);
- a medical practitioner representing the Mallacoota Medical Centre;
- the Manager of the Mallacoota District Health Support Services;
- an experienced Ambulance Community Officer; and
- the Paramedic Community Support Coordinator.

Since the Coordinator position was filled by a Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance Paramedic in 2004 improvements to emergency care in the Mallacoota region have been observed by many.

The establishment of the Paramedic Community Support Coordinator, an Ambulance Victoria position found only in Mallacoota and Omeo, has been a great success. Mr Houge, who is working in this position in Mallacoota, explained how he is able to treat patients after consulting with the local doctor, rather than simply stabilising a condition and then involving the doctor.⁷⁸ Given the distances that can be involved before a patient can be treated at a hospital or elsewhere this provides a better health service for the community. It also provides greater skilled support for local doctors.

⁷⁸ Mr Terry Houge, Paramedic Community Support Coordinator, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

Other improvements include:

- increased community confidence;
- reduced workload for the Mallacoota Medical Practice;
- recruitment and training of new Ambulance Community Officers and other associated organisations, such as Victoria Police and the Country Fire Authority.⁷⁹

Dr Schlager told the Committee that the Paramedic Community Support Coordinator position in Mallacoota has made a “huge difference”, to the extent where she was considering leaving Mallacoota before the position was introduced:

As it was at that stage every single call came through to the doctor — everything. There was not a situation where it went to the ambulance and the ambulance dealt with it. The ambulance, if they did get the call first, called the doctor to see what to do with it next and we always ended up having to see the patient and send them off or do something so that they could stay. There was never a situation where they were able to actually take that from you. It was a terrible strain because you never really had any skilled support when you did attend critical or seriously ill patients.⁸⁰

Sergeant Stuart Johnston also told the Committee that police officers in Mallacoota were planning to leave the town because of pressure created by the lack of a professional ambulance officer.⁸¹ Based on evidence from the Committee’s hearings the creation and implementation of this position is an effective response to stresses arising in the community.

Also, the problem of the lack of lighting at the Mallacoota aerodrome has since been rectified by the installation of pilot-activated lights.

6.98 The dedication of health professionals the Committee heard from in the Gippsland region was clear. Concern was expressed about the risk of not meeting best practice in medical areas such as stroke and cardiac emergencies due to the challenge of having to cover large distances, as also discussed above.⁸²

6.99 Dr Schlager raised the issue of lack of access in Mallacoota to emergency medicines because the town does not have a hospital:

⁷⁹ *Transforming Rural Urgent Care Services: Issues in Cross-Border Urgent Care Services*. Report to the TrUCs Community Liaison Committee: December 2004.

⁸⁰ Dr Jenny Schlager, Principal Partner, Mallacoota Medical Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁸¹ Sergeant Stuart Johnston, Acting Senior Sergeant, Orbost Police Station, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁸² Dr Jenny Schlager, Principal Partner, Mallacoota Medical Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

These medications are not funded for the doctor's bag but are readily available in a hospital emergency department setting. Examples of these medications are thrombolytic for heart attacks, antiarrhythmic drugs for attending patients with abnormal heart rhythms, Midazolam and Fentanyl, which are important drugs needed in cases involving trauma and advanced airway management, and intravenous cephalosporin antibiotics which are the recommended first line for life-threatening conditions like meningitis and epiglottitis, and yet none of those drugs are available to a doctor without a hospital.⁸³

- 6.100 It is important to note that the nearest hospital is 104 kilometres away from Mallacoota, in the New South Wales town of Pambula. Given that the population expands significantly during summer **the Committee is concerned that both the absence of a hospital and access to emergency medicine means there is an unacceptably high level of risk for residents and visitors.**
- 6.101 Dr Schlager further informed the Committee that such drugs could in fact be stored at the Mallacoota Medical Centre. She gave an example of an occasion when the Mallacoota community held a fundraising event to purchase the drug methylase, commonly used in the emergency thrombolytic treatment of heart attacks.⁸⁴ The impediment to the medical centre having these emergency drugs at hand is the enormous cost to purchase them. The Committee believes that a solution for this situation should be available for the community. One solution may be to categorise the Mallacoota Medical Centre in a way that reflects its remoteness in Victoria and the absence of a hospital in the town.
- 6.102 While in Mallacoota the Committee was contacted by a number of private citizens who raised the issue of access to the town's private dentist. The Committee heard, and later confirmed, that New South Wales residents are provided with vouchers that allow them to access the dentist at Mallacoota free of charge. Mallacoota residents cannot rely on any such system. This represents a clear example of disadvantage and inequity for the citizens of Mallacoota. The Committee believes that the State Government should immediately solve the problem by providing similar vouchers offering the Mallacoota community dental treatment.

Air Retrieval

- 6.103 Being so remote, Mallacoota is reliant on air retrieval, either helicopter or fixed wing, from either Victoria, New South Wales or the Australian Capital Territory. Mr Houge told the Committee that although the flight time is 90

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

minutes, in reality it can take anywhere up to four hours before an air ambulance will be able to arrive in Mallacoota.⁸⁵

6.104 At the moment, patients remain in an ambulance until the helicopter or fixed wing arrives. Whilst this presents no clear medical threat, ambulances are not ideally designed to hold patients for more than a short amount of time. As such, the Mallacoota Paramedic Support Coordinator believes that a dedicated holding facility located at the ambulance station would be a more appropriate solution. This would mean paramedics had sufficient space to perform their duties and families could be present to comfort patients.⁸⁶

6.105 Dr Schlager and Mr Houge were in agreement on Mallacoota's need for a dedicated holding facility located at the ambulance station:

An ambulance is a small, confined area with limited resources to be looking after someone and in the clinic you are taking up one of the rooms and requiring someone to keep the clinic open at all hours of the night in order to keep the patient there...**If it is at two o'clock in the morning, for example, then we cannot just leave other people in the medical centre and go home to bed and leave the ambulance there to look after someone.** That then leaves us needing to stay there and be there. Somewhere independent of the medical centre is more appropriate. It just needs that bit of appropriate space to be able to look after someone and meet their needs while you are waiting for an airlift.⁸⁷

6.106 Mr Houge added that Ambulance Victoria is aware of this need and is currently in negotiation with the community at Mallacoota.⁸⁸ The Committee supports the need for a dedicated facility at the Ambulance Station.

⁸⁵ Mr Terry Houge, Paramedic Community Support Coordinator, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Dr Jenny Schlager, Principal Partner, Mallacoota Medical Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

⁸⁸ Mr Terry Houge, Paramedic Community Support Coordinator, Ambulance Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

Dealing with Disability in Rural and Regional Victoria: a Twofold Vulnerability

6.107 The Committee also heard about the difficulties people with disabilities face in the Gippsland region. It was suggested that people with disabilities in remote areas face a ‘twofold vulnerability’; that is, they have a disability and this is exacerbated by distance to services.⁸⁹

6.108 In its submission to this Inquiry Latrobe City points out that people with disabilities in the Shire are forced to travel to Melbourne to access allied health specialists, such as physiotherapists and occupational and speech therapists. This is because very few specialists either make trips to the region or indeed hold a practice there. Such travel, however, can be difficult for those who are reliant on public transport and whose other options are limited.⁹⁰

6.109 Access to services was linked with the idea of social inclusion by Ms Frances Ford, Rural Access Project Officer, Wellington Shire Council, in particular around physical practicalities such as well-maintained community infrastructure:

I am talking about the basics. I am talking about footpaths with adequate kerb crossings, accessible public toilets and access to community halls, things like that. A member of our access and inclusion group said a while ago that we have Roads to Recovery, so how about footpaths to freedom? It is true that in a lot of country towns we do not have footpaths, let alone ones with good kerb crossings. That is a very basic thing in terms of social inclusion for people with disabilities.⁹¹

6.110 Ms Ford informed the Committee of a Rural Access program called ‘Good Access is Good Business’ that she felt was having some success in improving physical access to the private sector for people with disabilities.⁹²

6.111 However, Ms Ford did express concern about using a statewide formula for judging compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act for example around transport standards:

Unfortunately that is statewide, so **if a lot of work is done in Melbourne, for example super-stops for trams and all the rest of it, it is possible for the State Government to say, ‘We have met our**

⁸⁹ Ms Donna Mraz, Rural Access Project Officer, East Gippsland Shire, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁹⁰ Latrobe City, *Submission*, Number 46, 31 March 2010.

⁹¹ Ms Frances Ford, Rural Access Project Officer, Wellington Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁹² *Ibid.*

target of 25 per cent compliance’, but we actually see very little improvement in rural areas.⁹³

6.112 Concerning State Government programs in the Gippsland region, the Committee heard endorsements for the Let’s GET Connected program that runs under the auspices of the State Government’s Transport Connections program. In particular the program has confirmed the community’s belief in the efficacy of long-term planning:

Finally, a word of appreciation to the Chair of the Let’s GET Connected steering committee. Our transport project is now into about phase 3 after six years of funding. That is a long-term commitment by the State Government. It is important and it is appreciated. We take it as affirmation of the great work that is being done by Transport Connections programs but also a recognition that many transport issues are complex and do not have quick fixes; otherwise they would have been fixed a long time ago. A lot was done in the early days mapping not just needs and problems but possible local solutions and resources and lots has been done to address local needs that were identified.⁹⁴

6.113 However, as Ms Ford said: “Access and inclusion is not just about physical access.”⁹⁵

6.114 Accordingly, it was felt that the State Government should do more around the lack of Auslan interpreters in the region.

6.115 A submission to this Inquiry from Action for Community Living, an advocacy group aiming to enable people with disabilities to fully participate in all areas of community life, states: ‘Barriers to communication can cause social isolation resulting in a severe decline in peoples’ mental and physical health and wellbeing.’⁹⁶

6.116 The Committee also heard from Ms Leanne Wishart, Regional Coordinator at Deafaccess Victoria, that Gippsland has not had a full-time Auslan interpreter since 2008.⁹⁷

6.117 It was argued that this is having a negative impact on the take-up of services by signing deaf people as well as their education and employment prospects, as revealed by Ms Louise Bartheyl, a member of the signing deaf community in Lakes Entrance:

I find it very hard to find interpreters — for example, going to the hospital or a doctor’s appointment is very hard to set up.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Action for Community Living, *Submission*, Number 38, 31 March 2010.

⁹⁷ Ms Leanne Wishart, Regional Coordinator, Deafaccess Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010; Ms Leanne Wishart, *Submission*, Number 22, 26 March 2010.

Community involvement is fairly rare for us because we just do not have that same access. If there is a parent–teacher interview and the school cannot get an interpreter, it means I either go without an interpreter or we have to postpone it until we can find one. **If I would like an interpreter, then we have to wait for one, especially if they are coming from Melbourne because they may have a schedule as well; plus we have to consider the time it takes to get here, and then usually they want to stay overnight because it has been an eight-hour travel day.**⁹⁸

6.118 Ms Wishart confirmed that Deafaccess Victoria does work closely with local schools and Neighbourhood Houses in running Auslan classes and that GippsTAFE currently offers a Diploma of Auslan, the minimum qualification for an Auslan interpreter.⁹⁹

6.119 Her evidence, though, does support the belief that people with disabilities in rural and regional Victoria are suffering a ‘twofold vulnerability’:

I think right across regional Victoria if you go beyond the regional centres. I mentioned Ballarat, Bendigo and Shepparton before. There are fairly large communities of deaf people within those areas, and I guess Ballarat and Bendigo are also reasonably close to Melbourne, or Ballarat is anyway, so there is not a great deal of cost incurred in getting interpreters to and from Melbourne to access those main regional centres. But as soon as you go out into the regional areas like Warrnambool, beyond Bendigo, up to Kerang and Echuca and those sorts of areas and from, say, Shepparton; the Hume region, too, is one of those areas that is a bit like Gippsland.¹⁰⁰

Recommendation 34

That the State Government:

- a. Increase funding for Auslan interpreters across Victoria.
- b. Provide urgent funding for areas of acute need in Victoria such as East Gippsland.
- c. Identify other areas of urgent and acute need for Auslan interpreters.

⁹⁸ Ms Louise Bartheyl, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

⁹⁹ Ms Leanne Wishart, Regional Coordinator, Deafaccess Victoria, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

- 6.120 The Committee heard further evidence that the quality and availability of services in general decreases the further a community is located from a large centre. Mr Hartley observed that “...in regional centres we find that there are services available, but if you move five or ten kilometres out of town, or 100 kilometres if you are talking about Orbost or Mallacoota, the availability of services in general is far less”.¹⁰¹
- 6.121 In her submission to this Inquiry, Ms Marion Marx, a resident of Cann River, suggests that it is unfair to punish residents of sparsely populated communities through lower levels of service. Ms Marx argues that the State requires large tracts of land on which to, for example, graze cattle or grow crops, industries which contribute to the overall wealth and wellbeing of the State. Therefore it is unreasonable to expect rural and regional Victoria to exhibit the same economies of scale as those found in Melbourne. As she says: ‘Can you imagine a dairy farm situated on a 25 story high rise in Melbourne? It is not possible.’¹⁰²

A Focus on Decentralisation

- 6.122 Ms Annette Peisley, a resident of Genoa, suggested that a renewed State Government focus on decentralisation may be one solution to the disadvantage experienced in small communities:

Obviously one of our problems, which we realise, is our small population base. That is one of the key factors underlying our plan. A major cause for this was the Kennett years when the school was closed. VicRoads was also closed and DSE [Department of Sustainability and Environment] was closed. As a result of that, obviously those families with younger children left the area.¹⁰³

- 6.123 *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria* lists examples of decentralisation that have occurred under the current Victorian Government since 1999 – including: Transport Accident Commission to Geelong, the Rural Finance Corporation to Bendigo, the Office of Housing Call Centre to Moe, functions of the State Revenue Office to Ballarat and consolidating the Statewide Rural Emergency Services Dispatch Centre in Ballarat. The *Blueprint* also includes a pledge to locate more government jobs in regional Victoria in the future.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, Workways Australia Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹⁰² Ms Marion Marx, *Submission*, Number 60, 4 May 2010.

¹⁰³ Ms Annette Peisley, Member, Genoa Town Committee and Genoa Sports Club, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Victorian Government, *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

6.124 This Committee's Report on its *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future* recommends that decentralisation be taken on as an aggressive government policy.¹⁰⁵ It is noted here that since the release of the Committee's Report in 2009 the concept of decentralisation has featured in the language of Government. More recently still the Premier has spoken to the media about the Government's plans for decentralisation.¹⁰⁶

6.125 This policy approach is welcomed by this Committee.

Recommendation 40

That the State Government consolidate and enhance its policy approach to decentralisation, in particular by including a specific focus on decentralisation to identified areas of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria. The Committee recommends that, to achieve this goal the State Government investigate the potential of linking decentralisation decisions with areas of need already identified by the Neighbourhood Renewal program.

6.126 It is recognised that there is no easy answer for a government trying to deliver services to sparsely populated communities spread over vast distances. Recognition of the task that faces government was expressed by many witnesses during the Committee's hearings throughout regional and rural Victoria.¹⁰⁷

6.127 An important policy approach that was raised and discussed many times during hearings throughout the State is the concept of 'rural proofing'. The Committee heard that government commitment to such an overarching policy approach would benefit disadvantaged communities in Gippsland. A government commitment to rural proofing would be an effective way to recognise that: "...one size fits all does not fit. If we could get that accepted as a principle, then it can be applied in so many different concepts."¹⁰⁸

6.128 A key recommendation of this Committee's Report on Regional Centres of the Future – as discussed above – focuses on the urgent need for implementation of a rural proofing policy in this state. Such a policy would ensure that government focuses attention on the need to ensure that

¹⁰⁵ Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

¹⁰⁶ 'Vic public service jobs going regional', *The Age*, 15 June 2010, See: <<http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-national/vic-public-service-jobs-going-regional-20100615-ybmu.html>>, accessed 28 July 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, Workways Australia Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010; Dr Jenny Schlager, Principal Partner, Mallacoota Medical Centre, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Ms Frances Ford, Rural Access Project Officer, Wellington Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

legislation, policy and programs do not have a negative impact on rural and regional areas, or indeed cause unintended hardship for rural and regional Victorians.¹⁰⁹

6.129 Both the Wellington Shire Council¹¹⁰ and Latrobe City¹¹¹ in their submissions provide the example of FReeZA funding for youth music events as being a case in point, arguing that funding for such events is the same whether it occurs in Melbourne or rural areas, despite the higher transport costs involved in putting on an event outside of Melbourne.

6.130 Ms Margaret Brereton, Acting Manager Community Strengthening at Wellington Shire Council linked rural proofing with disadvantage thus:

In terms of rural proofing, rural proofing is a measurement of rural disadvantage and inequity. It is the fact of rurality not being taken into account in the development of policies — that is, policies that have been developed without rural proofing. Current policies have been developed without rural proofing in mind, thereby creating rural disadvantage and inequity across our community. Of particular concern is access to transport and access to services for rural people with disabilities.¹¹²

6.131 Ms Brereton added that **“...the benefits of rural proofing to good policy making are wide-ranging and include better decision making, improved communication, strengthened relationships and built capacity”**.¹¹³

6.132 Mr Smith, who argued that rural proofing “has a lens on rurality”, also outlined what he believed to be the benefits of rural proofing, stating that the concept “...dictates a set of criteria which enable and ensure regional and rural communities are not made more vulnerable or less resistant or less able to support adaptation because those policies are metro-centric”.¹¹⁴

6.133 Mr Smith gave an example of rural proofing, linked to his earlier evidence on cost of service delivery to sparsely populated areas, that of geographical weighting:

A possible rural solution for that would be to allow for a higher unit delivery cost in funding formulas — that is a called a sparsity

¹⁰⁹ Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

¹¹⁰ Wellington Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 42, 31 March 2010.

¹¹¹ Latrobe City, *Submission*, Number 46, 31 March 2010.

¹¹² Ms Margaret Brereton, Acting Manager Community Strengthening, Wellington Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Mr Bruce Smith, Social Planner, East Gippsland Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

factor — or when specifying some of those cost efficiency criteria or developing contracts...¹¹⁵

6.134 The concept of rural proofing is predicated on a belief in the inherent strengths of communities. For example many witnesses shared the sentiments expressed by Ms Bell that “...there is a huge amount of strength in the communities across Gippsland and we really like to build on them”.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless the merits in applying a rural proofing approach to policy, legislation and programs is that it ensures that the particular constraints that apply in rural and regional areas are taken into account when these are developed. Key Recommendation 1 discusses this concept in detail.

6.135 Ms Peisley provided several examples of the Genoa community coming together to achieve positive social outcomes:

...obviously with a lesser population basically all we can offer now at the sports club is tennis, but we do so. Our courts are falling apart, but we will maintain them while we can. It is not even just that we get five or ten turn up, it is just that that is one of the things that we have drummed into our children — that is, this is what we do as a community. And we just had the Genoa auction, which is the hall thing, and all the kids are helping out; they just have to. They do not give it a second thought.¹¹⁷

6.136 And it was the same in Mallacoota where the Committee heard from Sergeant Johnston:

You have heard Tony Roberts speak. He is the best principal I have seen in the 25 years that I been member of Victoria Police as far as being up to deliver and being able to move ahead in very innovative ways. He thinks outside the box, and you need someone in a local community with those sorts of abilities to get people together and move them forward on a path that leads to the ultimate result. That happens a lot in far east Gippsland — Mallacoota, Cann River and Orbost. We are very fortunate in that regard. Maybe it is because of the social isolation and the rural and remote locations that we tend to rely on each other a lot more than we would if we were closer to a major regional centre or the city.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ms Rachel Bell, Assistant Director, Kilmany UnitingCare, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹¹⁷ Ms Annette Peisley, Member, Genoa Town Committee and Genoa Sports Club, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

¹¹⁸ Sergeant Stuart Johnston, Acting Senior Sergeant, Orbost Police Station, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

A Police Presence in Rural and Regional Victoria

6.137 With regard to police work in Mallacoota, the statewide problem of attracting and retaining staff was raised – on the day of the hearing, apart from Sergeant Johnston, there were no police officers in the town – with the potential financial and career progression costs being identified as the main hindrances:

I think if you want to encourage quality people from our agency to work in remote locations, there has to be a reason, an incentive to be there. It certainly cannot be a financial disadvantage for them to go there, as it can also be a career disadvantage for them to go there, because once they are in that isolated community they are competing with people in a bigger city or regional centre to return to a specialist-type job. They may not have had the exposure to that type of work, whereas the people in the city and major regional centre have had the ability to do temporary duties at that location. There is that disparity in relation to that.¹¹⁹

6.138 Sergeant Johnston suggested that the use of financial incentives, such as rent assistance, may be one option for increasing police numbers in rural and regional Victoria, as well as using retired police officers – or reservists, as they used to be known – to undertake clerical work in police stations.¹²⁰

6.139 Sergeant Johnston also identified mental health issues as growing in number and taking up an increasing amount of police resources. He gave the example of section 10 of the Mental Health Act, which requires a person arrested to be taken to the nearest hospital, which in the case of Mallacoota is over 100 kilometres away. Sergeant Johnston suggested to the Committee that this may remove a police officer from service for as much as up to ten hours or, on occasion, overnight:

It is not uncommon, and it happened last Saturday night. I was called to a mental health issue at Lakes Entrance and dealt with that one. While that was occurring there was another one between Orbost and Nowa Nowa. The Mallacoota unit attended to that. The Mallacoota unit had to follow the ambulance up from that one through to the Bairnsdale hospital. That member ended up camping at the police station at Bairnsdale that night and returning to Mallacoota later in the day, the following day.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Recommendation 35

That the State Government recognise the increasing challenges faced by police officers in remote areas of Victoria ensuring that the safe management in custody of offenders is provided in such a way as to allow for police officers, already limited in numbers in rural and regional areas, to resume patrols. The Committee further recommends that future policing strategies around mental health issues be developed in consultation with local stakeholders in communities across rural Victoria.

6.140 The Committee also gained an insight into the unique skills required to serve as a police officer in a small rural community with limited resources:

The last one I dealt with in Mallacoota was probably a few months ago. A person had arrived and was causing some problems in the way he dealt with and threatened other people. I guess I talked him into boredom, and eventually he got into the back of the truck. That is essentially the way we are going to go. **That is the way I have always done it because that is the way it has been needed to be done because there is no-one else.**¹²²

6.141 Being a doctor in a small town is very similar to being a police officer – both are well known in the community; both consider themselves to be available ‘24/7’; and both feel more a part of the community than their city peers. Sergeant Johnston said that for professionals such as police officers, this means being able to tap into the sorts of informal networks that are common in small towns, telling the Committee that whenever a problem is identified “...the person who identifies the issue will contact the relevant people...” and the community will come together to determine an appropriate response.¹²³

6.142 The importance of informal networks was echoed by Ms Peisley, who mentioned that the evening before appearing in front of the Committee she “...had a quick ring-around of half a dozen people in the district...”, to determine any problems that they felt were important enough to bring forward to the Committee.¹²⁴

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ms Annette Peisley, Member, Genoa Town Committee and Genoa Sports Club, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

A New Approach to Measuring Disadvantage

6.143 In Lakes Entrance, the Committee heard a presentation from the East Gippsland Shire Council that challenged the current way in which disadvantage is measured and the ways in which we respond to disadvantage. The Committee was told of a new ‘socio-ecological paradigm’ that combines the concepts of vulnerability, resilience and adaptive capacity. Mr Smith felt that disadvantage should always be considered as something determined by context, and gave an example of how interest rates affect the members of a community differently depending on if they are wealthy, in which case rises in interest rates would affect them less than if they are low income earners.¹²⁵

6.144 Mr Smith said that defining communities socioeconomically is too static and can have the result of dissuading people from believing that they are capable of change. Instead, every community is in fact sensitive to different challenges, has different levels of resilience and has different capacities to respond or adapt. As a society, it was felt, we should recognise that these factors are dynamic, not static, and as such should focus on communities’ ability to change. In the case of the 2009 Victorian bushfires, Mr Smith said:

Governments should not be trying to reinstate what was already there and suggesting to people that they need to go back and rebuild where they were or take on the same community that they were, because that changes. These impacts have changed that community and they need to be able to move on to transform and adapt. I guess if there were any lessons for the Royal Commission they are that communities need to do that transformation and that supports their adaptive capacity in the future, if they are allowed to make those transformations themselves.¹²⁶

6.145 Community development programs are important as well, Mr Smith said, in influencing a community’s ability to adapt over the long term, as opposed to reacting to a one-off traumatic incident such as a bushfire. Although, Mr Smith did say that events such as bushfires and floods do reveal a lot about the vulnerabilities of a community and, in the case of East Gippsland, revealed that community strength, or strong social capital, has played a big part in helping the communities rebuild and move on, “...to make those new social and community connections”.¹²⁷

6.146 In its submission Wellington Shire Council proposes a similar change of measurement and response as that offered by East Gippsland Shire Council, and also suggests that the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009 revealed a great

¹²⁵ Mr Bruce Smith, Social Planner, East Gippsland Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

deal about the vulnerability and adaptive capacities of the Shire's communities.¹²⁸

6.147 The East Gippsland Shire Council is taking advantage of funding delivered through the State Government's Community Support Fund to undertake a number of community planning and research projects aimed at identifying the vulnerabilities, resilience and adaptive capacities of communities in the Shire. Local incidents management plans have also been implemented as a way of allowing local communities to decide for themselves what their individual vulnerabilities are. The aim, according to Mr Smith, is to:

...provide an opportunity for transformation to cope with the multilayered impacts on community life, whether they are unexpected disturbances like floods and fires or gradually transforming influences like droughts, the loss of young people from our communities and the ageing community.¹²⁹

6.148 The Community Support Fund was established by the Victorian Government in 1991, to direct a portion of gaming revenue back to the community – a total of 8.33 per cent of revenue from electronic gaming machines located in Victorian hotels. The funds provided to departments are generally then used for grants for a wide range of community-based organisations and councils to support sustainable communities. The State Government describes its priorities for the Community Support Fund during 2010–2014 as:

- addressing problem gambling risk factors – social disadvantage, isolation and mental health; and
- building stronger communities – especially in places experiencing rapid population growth and/or places with entrenched disadvantage, by investing in community facilities, supporting community participation and facilitating greater community connectedness.¹³⁰

6.149 East Gippsland Shire Council's submission to this Inquiry expands on this concept, as well as listing the specific vulnerabilities and resilience factors it believes are prevalent in the communities of East Gippsland. It also provides information about a number of Council initiatives to address these issues.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Wellington Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 42, 31 March 2010.

¹²⁹ Mr Bruce Smith, Social Planner, East Gippsland Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹³⁰ See: <<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/communitysupportfund>>, accessed 26 August 2010.

¹³¹ East Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 41, 31 March 2010.

Recommendation 54

The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to local needs in the Gippsland region by taking the following action:

- a. Remove classification impediments to the Mallacoota Medical Centre stocking emergency medicine currently limited to hospitals or if that is not possible, provide urgent funding and assistance for the Centre to store emergency medicines (6.101).
- b. Provide vouchers to the Mallacoota community offering dental treatment (6.102).
- c. Favourably consider funding and provision of a holding facility at the Mallacoota ambulance centre for patients awaiting air retrieval to a major hospital (6.106).
- d. Favourably consider placing a fuel depot at the Mallacoota airport.
- e. Assist the local community by encouraging VicRoads to change its non-pictorial road sign policy to allow signs alerting tourists of the Mallacoota turn off.

Chapter Seven

Government Programs

Introduction

- 7.1 This Chapter presents information about the Victorian Government's approach to addressing rural and regional disadvantage in this State. It outlines recent Government responses to issues of disadvantage, including issues raised in the policy document released in June this year: *Ready for Tomorrow: A blueprint for rural and regional Victoria*.¹
- 7.2 The Chapter outlines relevant government policies that address issues raised in the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry. The Victorian Government provided a comprehensive submission to the *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria* outlining its approach to identifying and addressing disadvantage in Victoria.² Information provided in this Chapter is based on the Victorian Government submission along with research and other government publications.

¹ Victorian Government, *Ready for Tomorrow: A blueprint for rural and regional Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

² Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010.

Policies and Programs: In Brief

7.3 A number of Victorian Government documents and policies provide information about the Government's approach to rural and regional disadvantage and inequity. These offer insight into the goals of Government in this important area and include:

Health

- *Rural Directions – for a stronger healthier Victoria;*
- *Victorian Tobacco Control Strategy 2008–13;*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008;*
- *Victoria's Cancer Action Plan 2008–2011;*
- *Because mental health matters – Victorian mental health reform strategy 2009–2019;* and
- *Fairer Health: case studies on improving health for all.*

Provincial Victoria

- *Growing Victoria Together;*
- *Moving Forward: Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest;*
- *Distribution of Disadvantage in Hume Region: An Initiative of the Hume RMF;*
- *Regional Strategic Planning Initiative;* and
- *Provincial Victoria: Directions for the Next Decade.*

Transport

- *Victorian Transport Plan;*
- *Improving Options and Reducing Barriers – Addressing Transport Disadvantage: A status report;* and
- *Accessible Public Transport in Victoria Action Plan 2006–2012.*

Employment

- *Securing Jobs for Your Future – Skills for Victoria;* and
- *Working Victoria: Victoria's Workforce Participation Strategy 2008.*

Early Childhood

- *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce;* and
- *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development.*

The Law

- *Justice Strategic Priorities 2009–10;* and
- *Justice Statement 2.*

General Policy

- *A Fairer Victoria;*
- *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria;*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities;*
- *Innovation: Victoria's Future;*
- *Wannik, Learning Together – Journey to Our Future;*
- *Melbourne 2030;* and
- *Melbourne@5 Million.*

7.4 Victorian Government bodies and programs (and Federal programs supported by the Victorian Government) that provide information and research about rural and regional issues and that the State Government has allocated funding to in order to address disadvantage include:³

- Community Indicators Victoria;
- Regional Development Victoria;
- Regional Management Forums;
- Skills Victoria;
- Regional Infrastructure Development Fund;
- Small Towns Development Fund;
- Provincial Victoria Growth Fund;
- Transport Connections;
- VicFibreLINKS;
- Collaborative Internet Innovation Fund;
- Neighbourhood Renewal / Urban Renewal;
- Future Farming Strategy;
- Sustainable Farm Families Program;
- Rural Financial Counselling Service;
- Best Start;
- Children's Capital Program;
- Council of Australian Governments National Partnership Agreements;
- Education Regeneration Projects;
- National Partnership of Youth Attainment and Transitions;
- Student Resource Package;
- Victorian Training Guarantee;
- Wurreker Strategy;
- Koori State Training Plan;
- Industry Workforce Development Strategy Initiative;
- Back to Work;
- Victoriaworks;
- Transition to Employment;

³ Note: This list covers those bodies and programs included in the Victorian Government's submission to this Inquiry. It is not intended as an exhaustive list.

- Clinical Network Program;
- Small Rural Health Service;
- Hospital Admission Risk Program;
- Primary Care Partnership Scheme;
- Aboriginal Health Promotion and Chronic Care Partnership;
- Region of Choice;
- Community Building Initiative;
- Youth Foundations Victoria;
- Count Us In!; and
- Disability Services Changing Days Initiative.

7.5 A number of Government departments deal with rural and regional issues and with disadvantage issues. Information for this Chapter about these activities was sourced from:

- Department of Planning and Community Development;
- Department of Transport;
- Department of Justice;
- Department of Human Services;
- Department of Health;
- Department of Primary Industries;
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development;
- Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development;
- Department of Premier and Cabinet;
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Federal Department); and
- Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Understanding Disadvantage

7.6 According to its submission to this Inquiry the Victorian Government believes that the term 'disadvantage' covers not only economic and material factors – income levels, employment rates and the like – but also '...barriers to participating fully in society', including social inclusion factors such as transport and education and skill levels. Strongly related to these factors is the concept of inequity, which is defined as 'unfair and avoidable discrepancies in outcomes'. For the Victorian Government the term 'inequality' is interchangeable with 'inequity'.⁴

7.7 The Government states in its submission that disadvantage is largely driven by market forces, an area over which the Federal Government has greater control than state governments. This view was reiterated by the Minister for

⁴ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p3.

Regional and Rural Development in her address to the Committee at a public hearing in July.⁵ Nevertheless, the Victorian Government believes it can play a key role in mitigating the negative economic and material effects these forces produce while also promoting social inclusion. It aims to achieve this through its *A Fairer Victoria*⁶ policy and the work of the statutory body Regional Development Victoria. This body acts in partnership with Regional Development Australia to provide ‘...the mechanism for stronger regional co-operation across all levels of government in addressing issues such as disadvantage and inequity in regional Victoria’.⁷

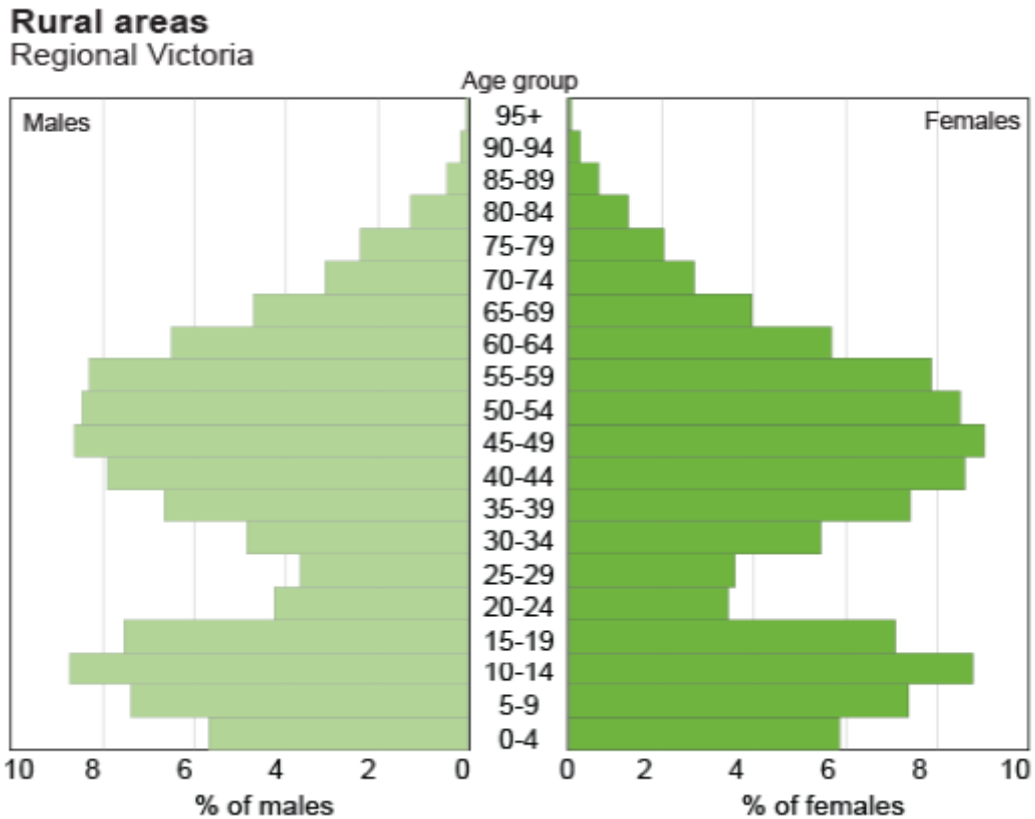
- 7.8 Several population trends noted in the Victorian Government’s submission were also heard by the Committee in public hearings conducted throughout rural and regional Victoria as part of this Inquiry. The first is what has been identified as the demographic or population ‘pinch’; that is, the visual representation on a graph (see Figure 1) of the trend of people aged between 20–30 years moving from country Victoria to regional centres or capital cities, both within and outside of Victoria, usually for reasons of work and/or study.

⁵ Hon Jacinta Allan, Minister for Regional and Rural Development, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Public Hearing*, Melbourne, 26 July 2010.

⁶ Department of Planning and Community Development 2009, *A Fairer Victoria website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:
<<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/dvcmain.nsf/allDocs/RWPBA66A032F874AC59CA2572D00026A891?OpenDocument>>.

⁷ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p4.

Figure 1: The Population ‘Pinch’.⁸



7.9 Another trend observed in the Victorian Government’s submission is the growth in population in regional centres located in the ‘peri-urban’ Local Government Areas around Melbourne.

7.10 Factors that have been identified as influencing population growth in rural and regional Victoria include:

- the size of regional centres and their catchment areas;
- accessibility (such as transport, broadband/mobile phone coverage);
- housing (quality and cost);
- work and lifestyle flexibility (employment has grown by 21.3 per cent in regional Victoria over the past ten years⁹); and
- liveability (including public spaces, health and education resources, and the arts).

7.11 The Victorian Government draws on the 2007 study *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia*¹⁰ in defining

⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p5.

⁹ Due to data volatility, 3 monthly averaged used.
Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010, *Information Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - Electronic Delivery*, cat. no. 6291.0.55.001, Canberra, viewed 2 July 2010,
See: <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6291.0.55.001>>.

¹⁰ Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M et al, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007.

disadvantage through three distinct yet related concepts linked to resources and participation in society:

1. Poverty: one of the main drivers of disadvantage, our standard of living determines our life outcomes.
2. Deprivation: ‘an enforced lack of socially perceived essentials’, including goods and services.
3. Social exclusion: what people are restricted from doing, exclusion is determined by ability to participate as much as financial capabilities.¹¹

7.12 Locations, that is our physical spaces including homes and public spaces, can also be considered to be disadvantaged if they do not provide the basic infrastructure necessary for an individual or population to be a full participant in society. This basic infrastructure refers to jobs, health services, education, transport and other related amenities. In its submission the Victorian Government states that, for these reasons, it believes strongly in the importance of place-based responses to tackling disadvantage in Victoria where postcodes display a disproportionately high number of indicators of disadvantage according the 2007 *Dropping Off the Edge*¹² report by Professor Tony Vinson. The Victorian Government, acknowledging the existence of generational disadvantage in Victoria, states: **‘Without specific, targeted local effort this kind of highly concentrated disadvantage in regional/rural or urban areas will remain entrenched.’**¹³

7.13 Measuring disadvantage is as complex and fraught with difficulty as devising solutions is and the Victorian Government operates under the principle that distinct data sets – such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas; Professor Vinson’s *Dropping Off the Edge*; and Community Indicators Victoria statistics – each have their own inherent strengths and limitations.

7.14 As such, the Government takes the approach that it is necessary to exploit a number of data sets (such as those included in Appendix 1 of the Government’s submission¹⁴) when trying to paint a complete picture of the true extent of disadvantage. Further, quantitative data needs to be accompanied by qualitative measurements, to provide the complex analysis required to understand the rich variety of information available on disadvantage. In its approach the Government also believes that it is important ‘...to consult with local communities to validate findings generated by the data’.¹⁵

¹¹ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p6.

¹² Vinson T, *Dropping Off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*, University of Sydney, Jesuit Social Services / Catholic Social Services Australia, 2007.

¹³ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p6.

¹⁴ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, Appendix 1, p41.

¹⁵ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p9.

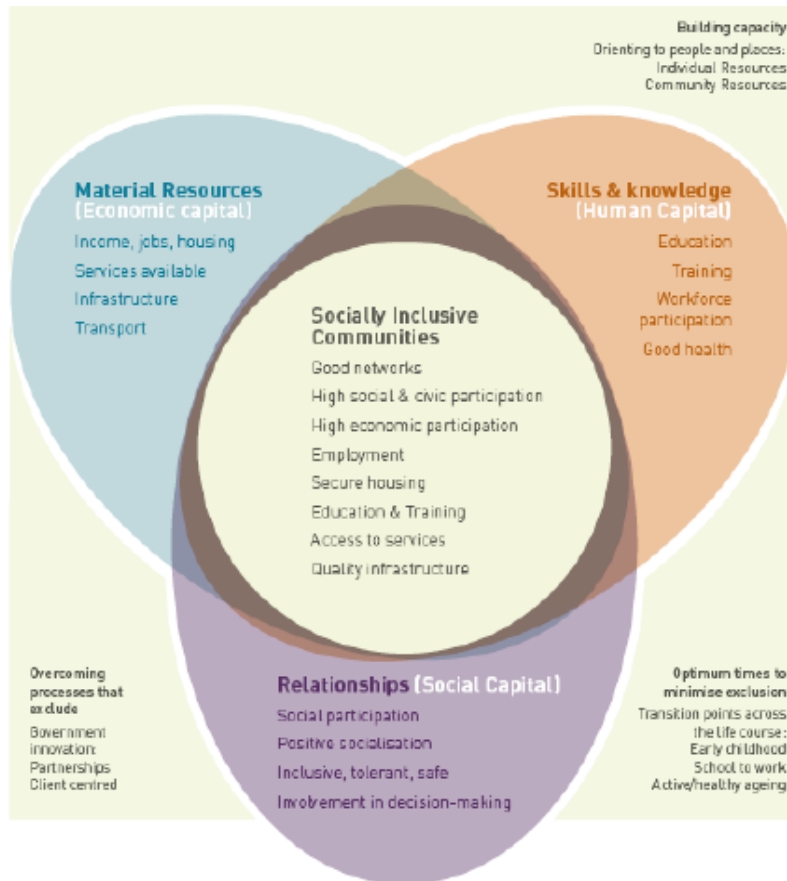
Government Policies

- 7.15 The six volumes of *A Fairer Victoria*¹⁶ have been updated annually since its first iteration in 2005 when it was published alongside *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*.¹⁷ The documents outline the Victorian Government's belief that a holistic, multi-faceted response is needed to tackle the material and social inclusion factors of disadvantage collectively. This is an acknowledgement that factors of disadvantage rarely present themselves in isolation; rather disadvantage is multidimensional and dependent on people's relationships with their families and communities. It is the responsibility of governments to assist citizens to acquire the basic capabilities and knowledge needed either to avoid experiencing disadvantage or develop the ability to escape from its effects.
- 7.16 Societies as a whole can also be assisted in building up strong social capital; that is, the 'social networks and high levels of civic participation that make them resilient in the face of challenges'.¹⁸ The figure below was provided to the Committee to illustrate how economic, human and social capital interact and how this influences the Victorian Government's social inclusion approach to tackling disadvantage.

¹⁶ Department of Planning and Community Development 2009, *A Fairer Victoria website*, Victoria, viewed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/dvcmain.nsf/allDocs/RWPBA66A032F874AC59CA2572D00026A891?OpenDocument>>.

¹⁷ Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005, *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria - Position Paper 2005*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, viewed 2 July 2010, see: <[http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Challenges+in+Addressing+Disadvantages/\\$file/ChallengesInAddressingDisadvantageinVictoria.pdf](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Challenges+in+Addressing+Disadvantages/$file/ChallengesInAddressingDisadvantageinVictoria.pdf)>.

¹⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p10.

Figure 2: Victoria's Approach to Social Inclusion.¹⁹

7.17 *A Fairer Victoria* takes note of the causes of disadvantage identified in *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*. It outlines five principles and four key priorities that guide Government policy. These are outlined below along with specific examples of Victorian Government programs in each area.

Principles

1. Ensuring Universal Services Provide Equal Opportunity For All.

7.18 This principle is based on the notion that access to affordable essential services – education and health – is ‘...fundamental to the quality of life that Victorians enjoy’.²⁰

2. Reducing Barriers to Opportunity.

7.19 Victorian Government policies aims to ensure that ‘...fewer people are missing out and nobody is deliberately left behind’.²¹ Examples of policies that focus on connectivity include:

¹⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p10.

²⁰ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p11.

Addressing Transport Disadvantage

7.20 In 2008, *Improving Options and Reducing Barriers – Addressing Transport Disadvantage: A status report*²² provided a summary of a number of changes to public transport across Victoria, including:

- the introduction of services in new regional growth areas;
- services to connect regional communities to the Regional Network; and
- improved services at night and on weekends in major regional centres including Ballarat, Latrobe Valley and Bendigo.

Regional and Rural Transport

7.21 The 2009 *Victorian Transport Plan*²³ outlines several investments in regional Victoria, including:

- the development of the Regional Rail Link (\$4.3 billion);
- the upgrade of regional railway stations across Victoria (\$30 million); and
- more bus services both within and between regional centres (\$50 million) as well as improvements to bus services and a new central bus interchange for Geelong (\$80 million).

Accessible Public Transport in Victoria Action Plan 2006–2012²⁴

7.22 The Plan highlights a list of actions taken by the Department of Transport and public transport operators towards meeting the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and corresponding standards, to ensure all members of the community, including people with special needs, can access train, tram, bus and taxi services.

Public Transport Concessions

7.23 Transport concessions applying to metropolitan Melbourne, regional town bus networks and V/Line services are now aligned,²⁵ while Health Care Cards

²¹ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p12.

²² State Government of Victoria 2008, *Improving Options and Reducing Barriers- Addressing Transport Disadvantage: A status report*, State Government of Victoria, Victoria, viewed 2 July 2010, see:
<[http://www.transport.vic.gov.au/DOI/DOIElect.nsf/\\$UNIDS+for+Web+Display/A99556E30A86CB71CA25743B0009F008/\\$FILE/Addressing_transport_disadvantage.pdf](http://www.transport.vic.gov.au/DOI/DOIElect.nsf/$UNIDS+for+Web+Display/A99556E30A86CB71CA25743B0009F008/$FILE/Addressing_transport_disadvantage.pdf)>.

²³ State Government of Victoria 2008, *Victorian Transport Plan*, State Government of Victoria, Victoria, viewed 2 July 2010, <<http://www4.transport.vic.gov.au/vtp/pdfs/vtp.pdf>>.

²⁴ State Government of Victoria 2006, *Accessible Public Transport in Victoria Action Plan 2006-2012*, State Government of Victoria, Victoria, viewed 2 July 2010, see:
<[http://www.doi.vic.gov.au/doi/doielect.nsf/2a6bd98dee287482ca256915001cff0c/db09215841890e3eca2571f0000b2760/\\$FILE/Accessible_Public_Transport_2006-2012.pdf](http://www.doi.vic.gov.au/doi/doielect.nsf/2a6bd98dee287482ca256915001cff0c/db09215841890e3eca2571f0000b2760/$FILE/Accessible_Public_Transport_2006-2012.pdf)>.

²⁵ Metlink 2010, *Victorian Fares and Ticketing Manual website*, Victoria, viewed 2 July 2010, see:
<<http://www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au/fares-tickets/victorian-fares-and-ticketing-manual/>>.

can also now be accepted for concession fares on public transport. Furthermore all Victorian Seniors are provided with two off-peak travel vouchers each year, allowing two return trips anywhere in Victoria and free Sunday travel within Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. In March 2010, free Sunday travel for Victorian Seniors was extended to Latrobe City for bus trips that cross two consecutive zones. This includes trips to Latrobe Regional Hospital from all towns but not a continuous trip from Moe to Traralgon, as this crosses three zones.²⁶ Mildura and Warrnambool bus services are also covered by the scheme, as are metropolitan trains, trams and buses.²⁷ This policy is being further developed by the Victorian Government.²⁸

Transport Connections

7.24 The Government's Transport Connections project was also discussed in this Committee's *Final Report on the Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*.²⁹ At the time of writing the Transport Connections page on the Department of Planning and Community Development's website states that there are 32 Transport Connections projects active throughout rural and regional Victoria,³⁰ although a Transport Connections Program Sites map lists 33 projects.³¹ The Committee recognises the achievements of this program and would like to see it continued throughout rural and regional Victoria.

3. Strengthening Assistance to Disadvantaged Groups.

7.25 The Victorian Government recognises that some people – those with a mental illness, the Indigenous community, those on low incomes, for example – are at greater risk of experiencing disadvantage than the rest of society. Below are examples of ways in which the Victorian Government is responding to the disadvantage experienced by specific groups:

Youth Services and Youth Justice³²

7.26 Recognising that distance can impede access to services, each region in Victoria has access to several Youth Justice Units:

²⁶ Peter Hall MP, 'Free public transport travel on Sundays for seniors', Media Release, 15 March 2010.

²⁷ Viclink / Metlink, 'Seniors Travel Guide August 2010'.

²⁸ Minister for Public Transport, 'Free Saturday travel for seniors as myki rolls out', Media Release, 18 August 2010.

²⁹ Rural and Regional Committee, *Final Report on the Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

³⁰ See: <<http://www.dpcc.vic.gov.au/transport>>, accessed 3 August 2010.

³¹ See:

<[http://www.dpcc.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Transport+Connections+map/\\$file/Transport+Connections+A3+map.pdf](http://www.dpcc.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/rwpgslib.nsf/GraphicFiles/Transport+Connections+map/$file/Transport+Connections+A3+map.pdf)>, accessed 3 August 2010.

³² Department of Human Services 2010, *Children, Youth and Families: Youth Justice website*, Victoria accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/youth-justice/home>>.

- Barwon South West: Geelong, Warrnambool.
- Gippsland: Bairnsdale, Morwell, Sale.
- Grampians: Ballarat, Horsham.
- Hume: Shepparton, Seymour, Wodonga, Wangaratta.
- Loddon Mallee: Bendigo, Mildura.

7.27 Outreach work is also considered to be ‘...an important component of youth justice casework with young offenders’.³³

Child Protection and Family Services³⁴

7.28 The Child and Family Information Referral and Support Teams (ChildFIRST) program provides access to integrated family services. The purpose of this program is to deliver early intervention and support services to vulnerable families and children before statutory involvement is necessary. Fifteen ChildFIRST sites are located across rural and regional Victoria offering a central, community-based referral point for a range of Family Services assistance.

Disability Services³⁵

7.29 With the aim of ensuring equitable distribution of funding between Department of Human Services regions, the Government has a Disability Services equity formula which uses various weighting, including ‘rurality’, to calculate the level of disadvantage suffered in a community. This approach stems from the *Disability Act 2006* ‘...whole-of-government, whole-of-community response to the rights and needs of people with a disability’.³⁶

Concessions³⁷

7.30 Department of Human Services concessions and hardship programs are in place to enable access by low-income earners to essential services, including water and energy. The Victorian Government states: ‘Affordable access to services is essential for participation in social and economic life, and provides the basis for a fair and safe society.’³⁸

³³ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p14.

³⁴ Department of Human Services 2010, *Children, Youth and Families website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/>>.

³⁵ Department of Human Services 2010, *Disability Services website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, <<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability>>.

³⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p14.

³⁷ Department of Human Services 2010, *Victorian State Concessions website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/concessions>>.

³⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p15.

Homelessness and Family Violence services³⁹

- 7.31 Homelessness services exist to provide both immediate accommodation needs as well as help overcoming the causal factors of homelessness. Family Violence services provide help for victims ‘...and seek to reduce the incidence of family violence and increase accountability of people who use violence against family members’.⁴⁰

Affordable Rental Housing⁴¹

- 7.32 Along with better and more affordable rental housing stock, the Victorian Government has expressed commitment to offering training and employment opportunities to help public housing tenants who no longer wish to rely on public housing. Bond loans are also provided by the Department of Human Services.

4. *Providing Support for Disadvantaged Places.*

- 7.33 The Victorian Government considers targeting places at risk of disadvantage as important as targeting groups. Projects aimed at specific places experiencing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria may need to tackle a multitude of issues, including:

- economic restructuring;
- drought;
- climate change;
- rural downturn;
- ageing population; and
- loss of skilled labour to cities.

Some Victorian Government place-based programs include:

Neighbourhood Renewal⁴²

- 7.34 A Department of Human Services program, ‘...Neighbourhood Renewal brings together the resources and ideas of residents, governments, businesses and community groups to tackle disadvantage in areas with concentrations of

³⁹ Department of Human Services 2010, *Housing: Homelessness and family violence website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/homelessness-and-family-violence>>.

⁴⁰ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p15.

⁴¹ Department of Human Services 2010, *Housing website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/>>.

⁴² State Government of Victoria 2010, *Neighbourhood Renewal website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au/>>.

public housing'.⁴³ Since 2001, 21 sites have been chosen to receive Neighbourhood Renewal programs.⁴⁴

Drought package⁴⁵

7.35 The Victorian Government has a range of farming assistance programs. However, the Committee heard clear evidence that the overall health status of farming communities – including physical and mental health as well other indicators such as financial stress – is poor. The Committee has made a recommendation relating to rural Outreach Workers, which can be found at Key Recommendation 4. This chapter contains further information on health in farming communities across Victoria.

5. Making it Easier to Work with Government.

7.36 The Victorian Government supports the view that governments should listen to local communities when devising solutions to local problems. As their submission states:

Local communities are best placed to identify their needs and how they should be met. Good outcomes are only possible when all levels of government work closely together and listen carefully to what citizens want. This means governments need to work differently, more collaboratively and respectfully with local experts.⁴⁶

7.37 The eight Regional Management Forums⁴⁷ located across Victoria are an offshoot of *A Fairer Victoria* and put forward by the Victorian Government as an example of place-based theory being put into practice. For example, the Hume Regional Management Forum produced the *Distribution of Disadvantage in Hume Region: An initiative of the Hume RMF* in 2007.⁴⁸ The Loddon Mallee Regional Management Forum is working with the Department of Planning and Community Development '...to highlight disadvantage within the region and provide an evidence base for a place based focus and identify priority areas for whole-of-government efforts'.⁴⁹

⁴³ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p15.

⁴⁴ See: <<http://www.neighbourhoodrenewal.vic.gov.au/projects>>, accessed 3 August 2010.

⁴⁵ Department of Primary Industries 2009, *Agriculture, Food & Forestry: Drought Information for Victoria website*, Victoria, viewed 2 July 2010, see: <www.dpi.vic.gov.au/drought>.

⁴⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p16.

⁴⁷ Department of Planning and Community Development 2009, *Changing the Way Government Works website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/dvcmain.nsf/allDocs/RWPCADF44BBD1E0C269CA25761C000B9848?OpenDocument>>.

⁴⁸ Guiney R, *Distribution of Disadvantage in Hume Region – An initiative of the Hume RMF*, Department of Planning and Community Development, Melbourne 2007.

⁴⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p17.

Priorities for A Fairer Victoria Since 2008

1. Helping Victorian Children Achieve the Best Start in Life.

7.38 Acknowledging international evidence and local research on the value of early intervention when addressing disadvantage, the Victorian Government has implemented a number of early years programs around learning, health and safety, with the aim of improving the life outcomes of all Victorians:

Best Start⁵⁰

7.39 The Best Start program is targeted at children aged 0–8 years. Of the 30 Best Start projects across Victoria, half are in rural and regional Victoria, including:

- Bairnsdale;
- Ballarat;
- Bass Coast;
- Central Goldfields;
- Delkaia Horsham;
- Djillay-Baw Baw / Morwell;
- Echuca Campaspe;
- Greater Shepparton;
- Greater Geelong;
- Latrobe City;
- Mildura Rural City;
- South Gippsland Shire;
- Swan Hill; and
- Wellington Shire.

Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative⁵¹

7.40 At the time of writing, 29 sites in rural and regional Victoria receive Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups funding to help disadvantaged families access universal early childhood services and supports, including playgroups and parent groups. Groups are led by a qualified worker or supervised volunteer, encouraging parents to develop parenting skills and confidence. Focus is placed on the health of the children and participation in the maternal and child health service and kindergarten programs.

⁵⁰ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010, *Best Start website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/beststart/default.htm>>.

⁵¹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009, *Best Start: Supported Playgroups and Parent Groups Initiative website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/beststart/outcomes/support.htm>>.

Children's Centres in regional Victoria

7.41 Children's Centres focus on:

- the quality and accessibility of early childhood services; and
- enabling more integrated learning and care centres being located on or adjacent to school sites.

7.42 Currently, there are 23 Children's Centres across country Victoria funded under the Children's Capital Program, the majority of which are in metropolitan Melbourne and its surrounds. Since 1999, a total of \$134.32 million has been invested in a range of infrastructure initiatives for early years facilities, including new facilities, upgrades, renovation and refurbishments, and minor grants for equipment and IT technology.⁵²

Aboriginal Children and Family Centres

7.43 The Victorian Government plans to build a new Aboriginal Children and Family Centre in Bairnsdale providing the following services:

- long day care;
- kindergarten for three and four-year-old Aboriginal children;
- visiting professionals such as maternal and child health nurses, counsellors and midwives;
- In Home Support;
- Koori early childhood field offices; and
- early childhood intervention services.⁵³

Workforce Reform

7.44 The 2009 strategy *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce*⁵⁴ contains a number of incentives aimed at enhancing regional Victoria's workforce and tackling disadvantage, including the Early Childhood Incentive Fund and Maternal and Child Health Scholarships.

⁵² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010, *Overview of the Children's Capital Program website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmangement/funding/capitalprogram/default.htm>>.

⁵³ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p18.

⁵⁴ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009, *Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce: Working to give Victoria's children the best start in life*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/Policy/ecworkforce.pdf>>.

2. Improving Education and Helping People into Work.

- 7.45 The Victorian Government acknowledges the central role education plays in addressing and preventing disadvantage. The Government's view is that education provides individuals with the necessary skills to participate fully in society and achieve their full potential, while excellent education facilities can help attract new families to regions across Victoria. Remote communities, however, can struggle to provide education opportunities equal to those of larger communities. The groups identified as being over-represented among low education achievers and under-represented among high achievers include Koori children and children from low socioeconomic status backgrounds.⁵⁵
- 7.46 Policies and programs aimed at improving education outcomes for all Victorians are outlined in the Victorian Government's *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (2008),⁵⁶ including:

Smarter Schools National Partnerships⁵⁷

- 7.47 Supported by a combination of Federal and State Government funding the Council of Australian Governments National Partnership Agreements is tasked with addressing issues around literacy and numeracy, improving outcomes for low socioeconomic schools, and teacher quality. The National Partnerships are being rolled out across Victoria⁵⁸ via three reform priority areas:
1. School–community engagement and extended schools.
 2. Recognition and response to individual needs.
 3. Leadership and teacher capacity.

Several programs and projects fall under the umbrella of these three areas:

- 7.48 Extended school hubs: Two two-year hubs pilots (in Bendigo and Geelong) engaged local businesses, local governments and community-based agencies to deliver a range of complementary learning programs for local residents before, during and after school hours.

⁵⁵ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p18.

⁵⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009, *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/blueprint2008/default.htm>>.

⁵⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010, *National Partnerships: Smarter Schools National Partnerships website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/nationalpartnerships/smarterschools/default.htm>>.

⁵⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010, *List of schools participating in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/govrel/natpartnerships/participating-schools_list.pdf>.

- 7.49 Education Regeneration Projects:⁵⁹ These projects are designed as a partnership between a group of schools, local communities, early childhood service providers, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Their purpose is to improve curriculum, allow better learning and development outcomes, and address disadvantage. There are currently 29 Education Regeneration Projects in rural and regional Victoria.
- 7.50 *Wannik, Learning Together – Journey to Our Future*:⁶⁰ This package, developed in 2008, forms part of the Victorian Government's school reform program and is focused on improving education outcomes for Koori students.
- 7.51 National Partnership of Youth Attainment and Transitions:⁶¹ A Council of Australian Governments initiative that is supported by the Victorian Government. The aim of this partnership is to increase participation rates of young people in education and training, attainment levels, and improving transitions from school.
- 7.52 Student Resource Package:⁶² The Student Resource Package is the funding model for government schools in Victoria. The Student Resource Package provides equity funding for rural school size adjustment and small schools, as well as funding for delivery of Vocational Education and Training and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.⁶³

Skills and Training

- 7.53 Wurreker Strategy: The Vocational Education and Training policy framework for Koori students is a partnership between the Victorian Government and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, providing Koori communities with a voice in how they can achieve better training outcomes.
- 7.54 The Koori State Training Plan is also aimed at delivery of training programs to Kooris.
- 7.55 The Academy of Sport Health and Education Shepparton: Launched in 2004 as a partnership between Rumbalara Football and Netball Club and the

⁵⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009, *Regeneration Projects website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/region/barwon/initiatives/projects.htm>>.

⁶⁰ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010, *Wannik Education Strategy website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/wannik/default.htm>>.

⁶¹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009, *National Partnerships: Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/nationalpartnerships/youth.htm>>.

⁶² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009, *Student Resource Package website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/srp/default.htm>>.

⁶³ Funding based on Student Family Occupation can be found here:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/srp/budget/ref011/default.htm>>, accessed 6 August 2010. Funding formulas for the Rural School Size Adjustment Factor can be found here:

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/srp/budget/ref004/default.htm>>, accessed 6 August 2010.

University of Melbourne. The project targets young Kooris residing in the Greater Shepparton region.

- 7.56 Lake Tyers Training Centre: A partnership between Skills Victoria and the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust to provide management and administrative support and the delivery of training programs as determined by the local Indigenous community.

Workforce participation and employment

- 7.57 Workforce participation can be influenced by both individual disadvantage and place-based disadvantage. In rural and regional Victoria employment opportunities are affected by a wide range of factors, including:
- structural changes in the rural economy;
 - skills shortages;
 - transport challenges; and
 - access to affordable childcare and flexible working arrangements.
- 7.58 These issues are discussed in *Working Victoria: Victoria's Workforce Participation Strategy 2008*.⁶⁴
- 7.59 Employment programs aimed at rural and regional Victoria include the Industry Workforce Development Strategy Initiative which is designed to assist five rural areas (Great South Coast, North East Victoria, Mildura, Ballarat and Eastern Gippsland) better plan for and address their skills and labour needs.
- 7.60 Back to Work:⁶⁵ A rapid response service that provides broad information, advice and referral services to retrenched workers and businesses facing retrenchments. As of March 2010, 46 per cent of businesses taking advantage of this program were from regional and rural locations.
- 7.61 Victoriaworks:⁶⁶ A set of programs placing Victorians struggling to access employment in touch with Victorian employers who need to fill skills and labour shortages.
- 7.62 Transition to Employment: A program that began in 2009, Transition to Employment assists school leavers with a disability through the development of 'transitional pathways' and targeted assistance to build skills, capacity and

⁶⁴ Workforce Victoria 2008, *Working Victoria: Victoria's Workforce Participation Strategy*, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/_assets/main/lib60212/5043_working%20victoria_w eb.pdf.

⁶⁵ Business Victoria 2010, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Back to Work website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: http://www.business.vic.gov.au/BUSVIC/LANDING/PC_63524.html.

⁶⁶ Business Victoria 2009, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Workforce Participation Programs website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: http://www.business.vic.gov.au/BUSVIC/STANDARD/PC_62605.html.

work experience, with the ultimate aim of participation in paid employment. Transition to Employment funding has been supplied to all five rural regions in Victoria.

3. Improving Health and Wellbeing and Reducing Health Inequalities.

7.63 The Victorian Government believes that a symbiotic relationship exists between health and disadvantage; that is, bad health can exacerbate factors of disadvantage, such as poor employment and education outcomes, while disadvantage itself can also cause poor health.

7.64 Under the *A Fairer Victoria* umbrella, the Victorian Government has published several health documents, including: *Rural Directions – for a Stronger Healthier Victoria* (2009);⁶⁷ *Victorian Tobacco Control Strategy 2008–13*;⁶⁸ *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*;⁶⁹ *Victoria’s Cancer Action Plan 2008–2011*;⁷⁰ and *Because Mental Health Matters – Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009–2019*.⁷¹

Hospital and associated services

7.65 Victoria is divided up into: regional health services; sub-regional health services; and local health services. The majority of local health services are categorised under the term Small Rural Health Services, of which there are 66 divided into the following:

- Group E Hospital: 17
- Bush Nursing Centre: 14
- Healthstreams: 10
- Group D Hospitals: 9
- Community Health Services: 8
- Multi Purpose Service: 7
- Other: 1

⁶⁷ Department of Health 2009, *Rural Directions - for a Stronger Healthier Victoria*, Department of Health, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/downloads/hs1093_rural_directions_1.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Department of Human Services 2008, *Victorian Tobacco Control Strategy 2008-2013*, Department of Human Services, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/tobaccoreforms/downloads/vtcs0813.pdf>>.

⁶⁹ Department of Health 2010, *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/phwa/>>.

⁷⁰ Department of Human Services 2008, *Victoria’s Cancer Action Plan 2008-2011*, Department of Human Services, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/cancer/docs/vcap/vcactionplan.pdf>>.

⁷¹ Department of Human Services 2010, *Because Mental Health Matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019 website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/reformstrategy/index.htm>>.

- 7.66 The Multi Purpose Service models are: Alpine Health; Mallee Track Health and Community Service; Orbost Regional Health; Otway Health and Community Services; Robinvale District Health Services; Timboon and District Healthcare Services; and Upper Murray Health and Community Services.⁷²
- 7.67 The *Small Rural Health Services Guide 2003-04*⁷³ says rural services ‘...can make decisions, within their agency budget, about the mix of services that will best meet the needs of their local community, subject to the parameters set out below’. That is:
- Agency discretion: acute and sub-acute health; primary health.
 - Limited agency discretion (with the agreement of the department): Home and Community Care; residential aged care; public health, mental health and drugs services.
 - No discretion: Department of Veterans Affairs funding; Transport Accident Commission funding; submission-based funding i.e. non-recurrent grants for specific purposes.
- 7.68 The services provided by each tier are outlined in *Rural Directions – for a Stronger Healthier Victoria*,⁷⁴ with the overarching policy being that health care should be delivered ‘...as close as possible to where people live’, backed up by partnerships and referral arrangements to ensure statewide health coverage. Overall, the Government believes that access to emergency care and electoral surgery in rural and regional Victoria compares well with metropolitan areas.⁷⁵
- 7.69 The Clinical Network Program: Facilitating better engagement of clinicians in service improvement.
- 7.70 The Small Rural Health Service:⁷⁶ This is funding for health services in remote parts of Victoria to deliver more responsive, integrated and enhanced services for their local communities.
- 7.71 The Hospital Admission Risk Program: Preventive models of care for hospitals and community agencies, focussing on people with chronic and complex conditions and prioritising high volume and/or frequent users of the acute public hospital system.

⁷² Department of Health 2009, *Rural Directions - for a Stronger Healthier Victoria*, Department of Health, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/downloads/hs1093_rural_directions_1.pdf>.

⁷³ Department of Health 2008, *Small Rural Health Services website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/hservices/small.htm>>.

⁷⁴ Department of Health 2009, *Rural Directions - for a Stronger Healthier Victoria*, Department of Health, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/downloads/hs1093_rural_directions_1.pdf>.

⁷⁵ Department of Health 2009, *Your Hospital: A report on Victoria's public hospitals*, Department of Health, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/yourhospitals/yourhosps1009.pdf>>.

⁷⁶ Department of Health 2008, *Small Rural Health Services website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ruralhealth/hservices/small.htm>>.

Primary Health and Provision

- 7.72 Each rural region in Victoria is involved in the Primary Care Partnership Scheme⁷⁷ involving hospitals, community health, local government and divisions of general practice as its core members. Each Local Government Area in Victoria is home to a Community Health Service.⁷⁸ A key component of this service is the Early Intervention in Chronic Disease in Community Health program linking disadvantaged people suffering from a chronic disease with nursing, allied health, counselling and self-management services. The Victorian Government is also undertaking a nurse on-call demonstration project that is examining how best to provide telephone-based medical advice to remote parts of Victoria.
- 7.73 Community Health Services also work with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations via the Aboriginal Health Promotion and Chronic Care Partnership,⁷⁹ while Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers focus on increasing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's access to mainstream health services.

Health Workforce

- 7.74 The Victorian Government believes that problems around health care staff shortages in rural and regional Victoria can be addressed by placing students completing their training in areas most affected by shortages. In its submission to the Committee the Government states:

A positive training experience can influence where a student applies for work upon graduation, as such, increased and high quality education opportunities in rural areas could increase the supply of health workforce in those areas that need it most, and improve local community access to healthcare services.⁸⁰

- 7.75 In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments outlined a four-year \$1.55 billion *National Partnership Agreement on Hospital and Health Workforce Reform*,⁸¹ which includes State and Federal Government funding for entry-to-practice clinical training. In Victoria, the Region of Choice program⁸² was

⁷⁷ Department of Health 2010, *Primary Care Partnerships website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pccps/>>.

⁷⁸ Department of Health 2009, *Community Health: About Community Health Services website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/about_chs.htm>.

⁷⁹ Department of Health 2009, *Community Health: Aboriginal Health website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/aboriginal_health.htm>.

⁸⁰ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p25.

⁸¹ Council of Australian Governments 2009, *National Partnership Agreement on Hospital and Health Workforce Reform*, Council of Australian Governments, Canberra, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.nhwt.gov.au/documents/COAG/National%20Partnership%20Agreement%20on%20Hospital%20and%20Health%20Workforce%20Reform.pdf>>.

⁸² Department of Health 2009, *Victoria's Health Workforce: Region of Choice website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/workforce/healthcareers/roc>>.

established in 2006–07 to assist non-metropolitan regions attract and retain allied health staff.

4. *Developing Liveable Communities where Victorians will want to Live, Work and Raise Families.*

7.76 The Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission *Inquiry into Enhancing Victoria's Liveability* found that rural and regional Victoria generally '...reports high satisfaction with liveability'.⁸³ The Victorian Government is keen to stress that in Victoria '...regional and rural towns and communities have great strengths, strong communities and lifestyle options not available in a large city'.⁸⁴ Communities in country Victoria are likely to self-rate as having:

- high levels of community involvement;
- high levels of personal safety; and
- a high standard of public amenities.

7.77 The Victorian Government aims to build liveable communities across country Victoria through a number of programs and policies:

- Community Building Initiative (discussed further below);⁸⁵
- Youth Foundations Victoria:⁸⁶ this program is aimed at facilitating young people's involvement in their local communities;
- Count Us In!:⁸⁷ Count Us In! fosters relationships between community organisations and residential aged care services to encourage social inclusion; and
- Justice and safety: Also identified as important factors in determining liveability by the Victorian Government, *Justice Strategic Priorities 2009–10*⁸⁸ has seven key focus areas:

⁸³ Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission 2008, *A State of Liveability: An inquiry into enhancing Victoria's liveability, Final report*, Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, Melbourne 2008, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.vcec.vic.gov.au/CA256EAF001C7B21/0/6ABDED8EE4E5DE3FCA257372000C9834?OpenDocument>>.

⁸⁴ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p26.

⁸⁵ Department of Planning and Community Development 2009, *Community Building Initiatives website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/Web14/dvc/dvcmain.nsf/allDocs/RWP4A342F50D41829A5CA25761E0008F51F?OpenDocument>>.

⁸⁶ Office for Youth 2009, Department of Planning and Community Development, *Youth Foundations Victoria website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.youth.vic.gov.au/web21/ofy/dvcofy.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/grants+and+program+youth+foundations+victoria>>.

⁸⁷ Department of Health 2009, *Aged Care in Victoria: Count Us in! social inclusion for people living at public sector residential aged care services website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/maintaining/countusin/index.htm>>.

⁸⁸ Department of Justice 2009, *Department of Justice Strategic Priorities 2009–10*, Department of Justice, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

1. Responding to the Victorian bushfires.
2. Restructuring the gambling industry/racing industry.
3. Addressing public safety and crime.
4. Intervening to minimise social harm from alcohol misuse.
5. Implementing *Justice Statement 2*.⁸⁹
6. Closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
7. Sustainable justice.

Regional Development

7.78 Since 1999, the Victorian Government has produced a number of policies which focus on the need to encourage growth in rural and regional Victoria. The submission to this Inquiry cites the following policies in this category:

- *Growing Victoria Together* (2001);⁹⁰
- *Regional Infrastructure Development Fund* (2000);⁹¹
- *Small Towns Development Fund* (2002);⁹²
- *Melbourne 2030* (2002);⁹³ and
- *Melbourne@5 Million* (2008).⁹⁴

7.79 In 2003, Regional Development Victoria⁹⁵ was formed by the Government ‘...to facilitate economic, infrastructure and community development to support prosperity and growth in regional Victoria’.⁹⁶ Regional Development Victoria is responsible for the five-year \$502 million program *Moving Forward: Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest*.⁹⁷

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/8b293180404a842f92e1fbf5f2791d4a/CDD_S09_web.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>.

⁸⁹ Department of Justice 2010, *Justice Statement 2 website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/Home/About+Us/Our+Vision/JUSTICE++Justice+Statement+2+-+interactive+and+PDF>.

⁹⁰ Department of Premier and Cabinet 2009, *Growing Victoria Together website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/CA256D8000265E1A/page/Growing+Victoria+Together!OpenDocument&1=30-Growing+Victoria+Together~&2=~&3=~>>.

⁹¹ Business Victoria 2010, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<http://www.business.vic.gov.au/BUSVIC/STANDARD/1001/PC_60276.html>.

⁹² Business Victoria 2009, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Small Towns Development Fund II (STDF II) Guidelines website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/_assets/main/lib60147/stdf-2009_guidelines.pdf>.

⁹³ Department of Sustainability and Environment 2005, *Melbourne 2030 website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030online/>>.

⁹⁴ Department of Planning and Community Development 2010, *Melbourne @ 5 million website*, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/nrenpl.nsf/fid/A2EF2115B1FB14E0CA2576A40008BDC6>>.

⁹⁵ See: <<http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/>>, accessed 3 August 2010.

⁹⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p28.

⁹⁷ Regional Development Victoria 2005, *Moving Forward: Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest*, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:

<http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/_assets/main/lib60139/pv-movingforward.pdf>.

This project included the *Provincial Victoria Growth Fund* designed to function alongside the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund ‘...by supporting communities to drive economic and population growth, create new opportunities in business and industry and manage the impacts of growth and change’.⁹⁸

Regional Strategic Planning Initiative

- 7.80 The Victorian Government says that there has been an ongoing shift in its approach to regional development policy since 1999. The Government’s aims have shifted from focusing on developing basic services and infrastructure, to a focus on encouraging industry and growth in the regions, to developing skill levels and training, as well as improving liveability. Going forward, the Regional Strategic Planning Initiative was established in 2008. Overseen by a Ministerial Taskforce established in June 2008 chaired by the Minister for Regional and Rural Development,⁹⁹ this Strategic Planning program had as its aim to ‘...underpin[s] the framing of a blueprint for the next decade of regional development’.¹⁰⁰
- 7.81 In May 2008, the Rural and Regional Committee received Terms of Reference for an *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*, focussing on the sustainable development of regional centres in Victoria. As part of the Inquiry the Committee conducted public hearings throughout regional Victoria. The Committee’s Report on the Inquiry was tabled in December 2009.¹⁰¹
- 7.82 The Government’s Planning project drew on two sources to guide its direction. First, Regional Exchange Forums were conducted by the Taskforce in regional Victoria. The Victorian Government also acknowledges research conducted by the OECD¹⁰² on regional development which supports policy favouring long-term growth rooted within local communities and involving the co-operation of all three levels of government. These are favoured by the OECD over transfers of subsidy-based interventions from outside regions. The Government’s submission to the Rural and Regional Committee’s Inquiry states:

The new paradigm focuses more on local assets rather than on external investments and transfers; on opportunity rather than on disadvantages; and on negotiated governance agreements involving national, State and local governments as well as other stakeholders.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p28.

⁹⁹ At the time of writing, the Government’s blueprint for the next decade of regional development, *Ready for Tomorrow*, had yet to be released. See paragraph 7.90.

¹⁰⁰ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p28.

¹⁰¹ See: <<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc/inquiries/inquiry/59>>, accessed 3 August 2010.

¹⁰² OECD Territorial Development Committee 2009, *Policy Report*, Paris.

¹⁰³ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p29.

7.83 As part of this project in September 2009 the Victorian Government released *Provincial Victoria: Directions for the Next Decade*.¹⁰⁴ The Discussion Paper outlines five strategic directions:

1. Positioning regional economies for jobs and growth.
2. Connecting up Victoria.
3. Planning for sustainable growth.
4. Making provincial Victoria an even better place to live.
5. Empowering Victorian communities to plan for their future.

7.84 The Victorian Government is also informed by a 2010 House of Representatives report entitled *The Global Financial Crisis and Regional Australia*,¹⁰⁵ which stresses the importance of infrastructure, education and business support in boosting the economic strength of regional Australia. Key to this is co-operation between local and state governments and the Commonwealth via the Regional Development Australia network. This network is seen by both levels of Government as the ideal body to facilitate locally devised solutions to the factors of disadvantage across regional Australia. In Victoria, Regional Development Victoria delivers administrative support to the network ‘...and is well placed in supporting the regions develop their strategic regional plans through the RSPI [Regional Strategic Planning Initiative]’.¹⁰⁶

Growth in Regional Victoria

7.85 According to the Victorian Government investment in regional development since 2000 has seen growth in the following areas: population; employment; and housing.¹⁰⁷

Regional Victoria’s population growth

7.86 A total of 1.45 million people live in regional Victoria, an increase of 9.8 per cent since 2000. In this Committee’s *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future* it was noted that population growth is not evenly spread across regional Victoria, with almost half the growth between 2001 and 2006

¹⁰⁴ Regional Development Victoria 2009, *Provincial Victoria: Directions for the Next Decade*, Discussion Paper, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see:
<http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/_assets/main/lib60244/provincial%20victoria%20directions%20for%20the%20next%20decade%20discussion%20paper._web3.pdf>.

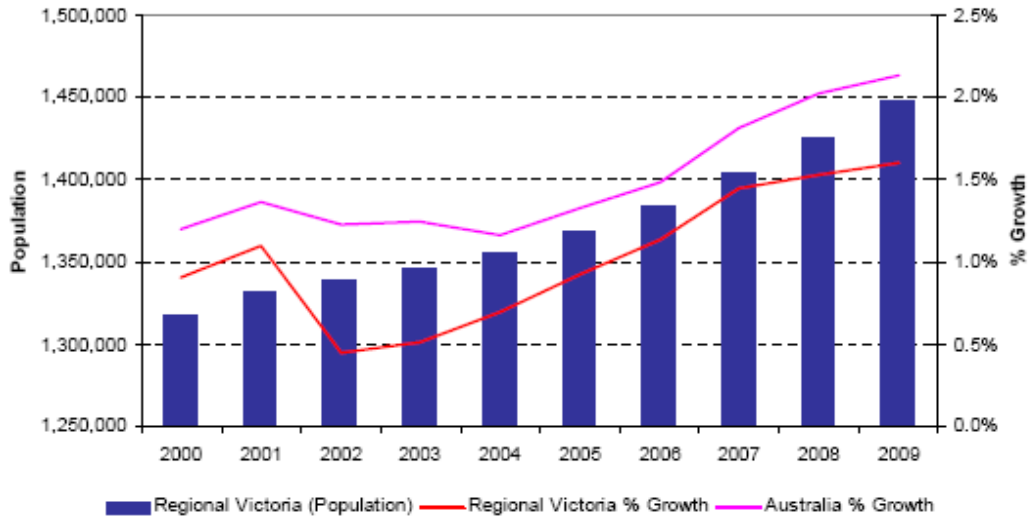
¹⁰⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development & Local Government 2009, *The Global Financial Crisis and regional Australia*, Report, Canberra, accessed 2 July 2010, see:
<<http://www.aph.gov.au/House/committee/itrldg/financialcrisis/report/GFC%20Final%20Report.pdf>>.

¹⁰⁶ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, p30.

¹⁰⁷ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, pp30–31.

occurring in three Local Government Areas: the City of Greater Geelong, the City of Ballarat and the City of Greater Bendigo.¹⁰⁸

Figure 3: Population Growth in Regional Victoria.



Source: ABS cat no. 3218.0 Regional Population Growth

New jobs in regional Victoria

7.87 Employment in regional Victoria increased by 21.3 per cent between February 2000 and February 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Rural and Regional Committee, *Final Report on the Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009, pp28–29.

Figure 4: Employment Growth in Regional Victoria.

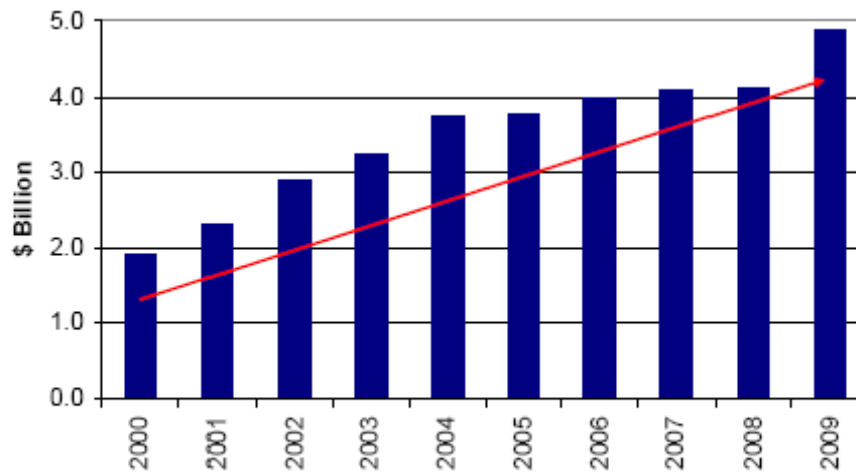


Source: ABS cat no. 6291.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia, Detailed (3 Month moving average)

Doubling in building approvals

7.88 Total building approvals in regional Victoria have more than doubled since 2000, reflecting both population and economic growth.

Figure 5: Total Building Approvals in Regional Victoria.



Source: Building Commission

Benchmark Projects

7.89 The Victorian Government holds up a number of projects as illustrative of its current approach to rural and regional development and its response to disadvantage outside of metropolitan areas. These projects demonstrate how *A Fairer Victoria* and a range of programs and policies outlined in the Victorian Government's submission have been implemented in regional Victoria. Examples that the Government provided to this Inquiry include the following:¹⁰⁹

1: Transport Connections: A project that helps communities work together on projects to improve local transport through the use of existing transport assets and services.

2: Best Start for Koori children in Gippsland: This program aims to assist Indigenous children make the difficult transition from home to school. The project is established in Morwell and Drouin.

3: Peter Harcourt Disability Services – Changing Days Initiative: The goal of the Changing Days Initiative is the reorientation of Disability Day services to provide greater flexibility and choice to people with a disability in how they use the supports available to them. The Bendigo-based Peter Harcourt Disability Services commenced a project through the Disability Services Changing Days Initiative, to 'take the service to the people', rather than having people travel long distances from remote locations to attend a Disability Day Service. This specific project aimed to link people with disabilities living in rural communities into their local community.

4: Corio and Norlane Regeneration: This project is focussed on reorganising and rebuilding schools in northern Geelong to create 'community schools' which integrate education, family and community services. The Government's aim with this project is to boost the outlook for local young people by improving their learning and development and supporting them to make successful transitions into adult life.

5: Wendouree West Community Learning Hub: The highlight of this project is the establishment of the Wendouree West Community Learning Hub, a new resource that encompasses diverse and integrated education, health and community facilities on a single site. The new Yuille Park Community College is located at the Hub.

6: Fairer Health Case Studies: The Government's publication *Fairer Health: Case studies on improving health for all*¹¹⁰ was published in 2009. A number of the case studies are based in regional Victoria. For example:

- Mental Health and Homelessness Partnership;
- Connecting Young Parents;

¹⁰⁹ Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010, pp32–40.

¹¹⁰ Department of Human Services 2009, *Fairer Health: Case studies on improving health for all*, Department of Human Services, Victoria, accessed 2 July 2010, see: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/downloads/fairer_health.pdf>.

- Connect Central;
- WayOut;
- Adds Up;
- Transport Connections – Southern Mallee and Wimmera;
- NEAMI Smoke-free psychiatric services;
- The Ballarat Maternity Unit Indigenous Antenatal Program; and
- Adolescent Antenatal Care and Education Program.

Ready for Tomorrow

7.90 In June 2010, the Victorian Government published *Ready for Tomorrow: A blueprint for regional and rural Victoria*,¹¹¹ in which it outlines its vision for growing country Victoria through a number of areas. For example, skills development, employment, infrastructure, liveability and planning. As well as updates on bodies such as the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and Regional Development Victoria, *Ready for Tomorrow* offers an insight into the Victorian Government's approach to a number of issues relevant to this Inquiry, including:

- education and training;
- attracting and retaining professional staff;
- decentralisation;
- tourism;
- information and communication technology;
- housing; and
- regional planning.

7.91 The policies and programs outlined in *Ready for Tomorrow* are discussed in this Report in relation to the Committee's recommendations to the State Government.

¹¹¹ Victorian Government, *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Rural and Regional Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

Key Recommendations 1–3

Rural Proofing

Key Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the State Government establish an independent rural proofing advisory body with an ongoing role to monitor and review legislation, government policy, practices and resources allocation as it has an impact on rural and regional Victorians and in order to ensure that government legislation and policy reflects and responds to the diverse needs of rural and regional Victorians.

Rural proofing should be introduced to ensure appropriate and proportionate consideration of the impact of new policies and new or amended service arrangements on rural communities...Rural proofing should be a statutory requirement in policy development across all services. It should be implemented from the start of policy processes, not added at the end of the processes as a retrospective tool.¹

Leo Tellefson, Donald

8.1 During this Committee's previous *Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism*² the Committee was introduced to the concept of 'rural proofing' when it heard about the successful implementation of this policy in New Zealand. During the *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*³ the concept of rural proofing arose during the Committee's research into approaches to the development of policy for rural people in the United Kingdom and the Commission for Rural Communities. Those countries had implemented a rural proofing policy to ensure that rural and regional concerns were included in consideration of all government policy and legislation.

8.2 As discussed in Chapter 12 of the Committee's Report on Regional Centres the concept of rural proofing is one that is recognised as contributing to the prosperity of regions. For example, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) itself has identified that the greatest progress is made in those countries where there is a shift to a 'regionalised approach'.⁴ This is described by the OECD as requiring strong institutions at the regional level and a commitment by government to build capacity at the regional level, particularly if '...the country has a short history of decentralisation':⁵

In many instances, partial progress has been made by 'proofing' the impact of sectoral policies on different types of regions and adapting the policy content to specific regional needs. New strategies for spatial planning have been adopted on the basis of a more regionalised approach.⁶

8.3 During the Committee's public hearings held in rural and regional Victoria for both the Tourism and the Regional Centres Inquiries the concept did not arise.

¹ Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

² Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2008.

³ Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Investing For Growth: Building Innovation Regions Policy Report*, Meeting of the Territorial Development Policy Committee at Ministerial Level, Paris, 31 March 2009.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

- 8.4 Nevertheless, based on evidence from overseas work on rural proofing the Committee made a Recommendation to the State Government in its *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future* for a series of Regional Commissions, overseen by a Council, to be established to undertake this role. There is an extensive discussion of the concept of rural proofing as it is used in other jurisdictions in Chapter 5 of the Regional Centres Report, beginning at 5.71.⁷
- 8.5 The Recommendation put forward in the Report was the following:

Key Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the State Government establish a Regional Development Commission for each region of Victoria. These Commissions should be established as statutory authorities with annual budgets to implement strategic projects and provide services to their region.

Each Commission would be overseen by a Board consisting of ministerial appointees, local government representatives, as well as community leaders.

Each Commission will have the following roles:

- *Advocacy: To advocate to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development and the Government on behalf of the regions in support of key regional programs and projects;*
- *Advice: Provide advice to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development and the Government on regional development matters;*
- *Watchdog: To act as a ‘watchdog’ with regard to the impact of government policy on rural and regional Victoria; and*
- *Implementation: To implement programs and projects in the regions.*

The Chairs of each of the Regional Development Commissions would come together periodically to form a Regional Council chaired by the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. The Council would meet to discuss regional issues of state importance and to provide advice to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. Paragraph 12.122.⁸

- 8.6 The Commissions and Council were foreseen as having a major role as a ‘watchdog’ with regard to the impact of government policy on rural and regional Victoria. They were also envisioned as advisory bodies, and as having an important advocacy role on behalf of the regions. We did also foresee that they would be given funding and autonomy in order to implement regional projects. Lengthy discussion of the role of Regional Development Commissions can be found in Chapter 12 from 12.96.⁹ The Government’s response was not to support any part of the Recommendation.¹⁰

⁷ Rural and Regional Committee, *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Victorian Government, *Response to the Rural and Regional Parliamentary Committee’s Report of the Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

- 8.7 Since the Committee's preliminary work on this subject in the Regional Centres Report it has heard many times that rural proofing is an important concept to introduce to government approaches to policy development.
- 8.8 The recommendation from the Mayor of Buloke Shire, quoted above at the beginning of this section, and similarly worded recommendations, were made throughout the Committee's hearings for this *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria*.
- 8.9 Suggestions for a recommendation to the State Government on rural proofing were also made in submissions. Suggestions were made in the context of, for example, access to the law and the workings of circuit courts in regional areas; funding models; education; delivery of health services and so on.
- 8.10 Clearly a shift in thinking had taken place in rural and regional Victoria since our previous Inquiry.
- 8.11 The value of considering the direct impact on non-metropolitan areas of policy and legislation designed to be implemented in a uniform way across all communities and groups is now widely recognised and supported in rural and regional Victoria.
- 8.12 The term has also entered the Labor Party's lexicon on rural and regional Victoria. The notion of rural proofing is included by the Labor Party in its 2010 platform, released earlier this year. This suggests that the concept of rural proofing is supported by all members of the Party including elected members. The platform includes the following statement:
- A commitment to 'rural proof' new policy decisions by requiring the implications for rural areas be considered as part of every Cabinet decision.¹¹
- 8.13 We hope this is based on a recognition that this is now a popular concept amongst community leaders in rural and regional Victoria and one that is worthy of support. An examination of the public hearing transcripts recorded during this Inquiry will endorse the widespread popularity of rural proofing.
- 8.14 Despite the lack of responsiveness by the State Government to this Committee's Recommendation for the establishment of a body to act as a 'watchdog' with regard to the impact of government policy on rural and regional Victoria we believe it remains a concept with a great deal of merit.
- 8.15 A rural proofing body would give rural and regional Victorians a much needed voice in Spring Street. It would also give government an opportunity to ensure that policy development and new legislation reflects the unique and diverse needs of rural and regional Victoria before its final implementation. It may provide a level of scrutiny that means that changes to legislation with immediate negative consequences in rural and regional Victoria are avoided.

¹¹ Victorian Labor, *Leadership for All. Draft of the Victorian ALP Platform for consideration at State Conference, June 19th 2010*, Victorian Labor, Melbourne 2010.

- 8.16 The Recommendations in this Report on Access to the Law (Key Recommendation 7) and also on restrictions to P1 licences (Recommendation 41) are just two examples that illustrate areas of policy and legislation where rural proofing has not occurred and where the repercussions for rural and regional Victorians are not positive. The State Government’s liquor licensing laws announced late last year without consideration of their particular impact on rural and regional Victoria provide another example.
- 8.17 The Recommendation in this report for a rural proofing body is not intended to create, by its implementation, another level of bureaucracy. We believe that this Recommendation can be implemented innovatively by making use of those currently contributing to leadership bodies in rural and regional Victoria. The challenge for the State Government is to establish a body that gathers current leadership and that is given the capacity to scrutinise government policy and legislation in an independent way.

Rural and Regional Victoria Wants Rural Proofing

- 8.18 Support for the concept of rural proofing and similarly worded concepts, as the quote at the beginning of this Chapter flags, can be found amongst many community leaders in rural and regional Victoria.
- 8.19 Indeed, Cr Tellefson requests that rural proofing policy be enshrined in legislation and that designated senior policy makers should undertake rural proofing of policy and legislation in its early stages of development.¹²
- 8.20 At the public hearing in Warracknabeal, Executive Officer of Hindmarsh Shire Council, Mr Dean Miller called for “...the introduction of rural and regional impact statements for new legislation, policies, programs and major projects of the state government and its agencies”.¹³ According to Mr Miller if this approach were to be adopted it would mean that rural and regional Victoria would be at the forefront of the Government’s considerations when it comes to “...making laws, hosting events, delivering services, sharing wealth and building long-lasting infrastructure”.¹⁴
- 8.21 In Mildura, Cr Vernon Knight, a well respected local leader and advocate for the disadvantaged in his community suggested the need for a ‘watchdog’. He provides an example of the effect of the Federal Government’s Youth Allowance Policy on rural and regional Victoria on his own children:

In using that story about my own kids and that opportunity I guess what I was trying to also put to the committee was the need to have a policy framework that says every time a piece of legislation comes

¹² Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor, Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹³ Mr Dean Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Hindmarsh Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Warracknabeal, 16 February 2010.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

up there is a watchdog that sits on it and says, 'What is this going to mean in the regions?'. Because it is all too easy to overlook.¹⁵

- 8.22 A witness at the Committee's public hearing in Geelong described his work on a project examining access to the law in rural and regional Victoria. In the context of what he described as the 'myriad of issues' that had been raised with him he made the following comment:

What seems to be a key within a lot of these is the lack of forethought about the impact on rural and regional communities. It is not just about resources – although that is significant – it is also about sensible policies, legislation, processes that recognise the variation for rural communities, the variation of impact on rural communities. I think probably one of the most significant things I would like to see is, as I suggest in the submission, an independent body that does have the purview of reviewing policy and legislation which has an impact on the rural and regional communities. rural proofing is the term that they use in some quarters.¹⁶

- 8.23 A Councillor who spoke to the Committee in Buloke Shire suggested that "...when a new piece of legislation passes through the houses, I would love to see it put through some hurdles about how that impacts on regional and rural Victoria, because one size does not fit all".¹⁷ He also provided an example of proposed legislation that will impact his region in a way that he believes is not the intent of the Government:

For example, while the intent of the review of the regional waste management groups is really good, the reality is that as far as the carbon footprint goes, our recyclables will need to go further, and I do not think that is actually the intent of what you are trying to achieve, but it is an outcome of the proposed legislation as it is now. I understand that the minister has given an assurance that he will reassess all that, and I am really pleased that we were able to have an opportunity to discuss that.¹⁸

- 8.24 Wellington Shire representatives warned of the hazards of not taking rurality into account in policy development:

In terms of rural proofing, rural proofing is a measurement of rural disadvantage and inequity. It is the fact of rurality not being taken into account in the development of policies — that is, policies that have been developed without rural proofing. Current policies have been developed without rural proofing in mind, thereby creating rural disadvantage and inequity across our community. Of particular

¹⁵ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 02 March 2010.

¹⁶ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹⁷ Mr Reid Mather, Chairperson, North West Municipalities Association, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

concern is access to transport and access to services for rural people with disabilities.¹⁹

- 8.25 The Shire offers the following concepts of a ‘rural filter’ to the discussion of rural proofing:

The Wellington Shire Council offers that these recommendations — the development and adoption of guiding principles and documents on rural proofing — are used by all levels of government and ensure that a rural filter is applied when reviewing, developing and implementing, reporting and evaluating policies and plans. Wellington Shire Council supports the introduction of rural proofing methodologies and policy development and implementation at all levels of government.²⁰

- 8.26 Submissions from a number of bodies requested a focus on rural proofing. The East Gippsland Shire submission suggested ‘...rural proofing is a commitment by Government to ensure domestic policies take account of rural circumstances and needs’.²¹ Wellington Shire includes a recommendation in its submission,²² as well as the evidence presented by representatives and discussed above. Latrobe City Council put forward ‘the idea that all government policies should be checked for implications in rural areas’.²³ The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria/Victorian Rural Youth Services reiterated its support for a Finding of the previous Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee.²⁴ In its Report on its *Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities* Finding No 13 says:

Rural areas of Victoria have distinct geographical, social and economic characteristics. These characteristics often mean general policy processes fail to consider issues of distance and low population density, with negative impacts on service delivery and public administration. Greater attention is needed in policy planning and administration, to the specific needs and requirements of rural and regional Victoria.²⁵

¹⁹ Wellington Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 42, 31 March 2010.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ East Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 41, 31 March 2010.

²² Wellington Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 42, 31 March 2010.

²³ Latrobe City Council, *Submission*, Number 46, 31 March 2010.

²⁴ Youth Affairs Council of Victoria /Victorian Rural Youth Services, *Submission*, Number 56, 30 April 2010.

²⁵ Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, *Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2006.

Tasks for a Rural Proofing Body

Geographic Weighting

Key Recommendation 2

That the State Government in its development of policy and programs consider the many examples provided throughout this report of evidence that the cost of delivering and accessing services in rural and regional Victoria is higher than delivery in Melbourne, such as:

- school travel from Mallacoota to Melbourne for sport, student development opportunities, university open days and so on;
- travel and accommodation expenses incurred for professional development by teachers in Portland, Lakes Entrance, Robinvale, Mildura, Corryong, as well as costs to schools for replacement teachers, providing teachers are available (refer also to Recommendation 13);
- police transport of victims and witnesses to court from Corryong to Wodonga where at times both victims and defendants have been forced to travel in the same police vehicle;
- health services from centres such as Seymour and Benalla that must travel to outlying rural locations to reach clients;
- delivery of university courses to a large geographic area with limited or no appropriate public transport in place; and
- professionals including travel time in their costs for delivering specialist services to Robinvale from Swan Hill or Mildura.

Therefore the Committee recommends that the State Government develop, with a view to introducing into all funding models, a form of geographical weighting that more accurately reflects the true costs incurred by service providers in rural and regional Victoria.

In our funding formula, which is based on student numbers and student levels, there is a formula that applies. We have a very small increase in funding because we are small remote. I do not have to tell you that that is not even a fraction of the reality of it.²⁶

Tony Roberts, Mallacoota

8.27 Examples of important work that could immediately be undertaken by a rural proofing body can be found in many of the Recommendations in this Report.

8.28 One area that requires review is that of funding for State Government programs that are delivered across both metropolitan and non-metropolitan Victoria. At the moment the expectation with many of these is that the cost of delivery will be consistent no matter where delivery occurs. Our hearings for this Inquiry, and submissions received, have shown clearly that this is simply not the case.

²⁶ Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P-12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

- 8.29 For example, this is what the Committee heard in the case of the FReeZA program, an events management and development program for youth run through the Office for Youth:

This program does not consider the additional costs associated with putting on an event in a rural and regional area. The cost of putting on an event in Latrobe City is higher than putting on an event in a Melbourne Metropolitan area; this is primary due to the additional cost of providing transport for young people to attend the event. Young people in the Melbourne Metropolitan area have access to good transport options; young people in rural and regional areas don't. Yet the State Government does not acknowledge this – the funding is capped at a maximum of \$38,900 over a two year period for all applicants regardless of where they are redelivering the program.²⁷

- 8.30 The Committee's Recommendation on geographical weighting results from the concern that programs that are expected to be delivered in rural and regional Victoria do require different levels of funding for their implementation.

- 8.31 Ms Toni Jenkins in Portland talks about issues in the area of education provision:

I think the thing about service and targeted service is that it is based on population. The funding mix does not give recognition to rural and regional locations. Although governments may be able to demonstrate that there is availability of service across a whole state, the way the funding is delivered is geographically centred always where most population is. For instance, if I am a service provider, it is cheaper, easier and much more efficient to deliver to those closest to me, and therefore that is what I do.

In terms of data and stats, the services are being delivered but they are being delivered in the most effective and efficient way they possibly can be. There is no criticism of service providers; it is just the way it works. When we are talking about positive discrimination we are talking about perhaps a weighting for geography.²⁸

- 8.32 Bruce Smith from Lakes Entrance spoke about whether the cost of delivery will be higher in rural areas where clients using government and other services are more widely dispersed or economies of scale are harder to achieve:

²⁷ Latrobe City Council, *Submission*, Number 46, 31 March 2010.

²⁸ Ms Toni Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

We come across this all the time. A possible rural solution for that would be to allow for a higher unit delivery cost in funding formulas — that is called a sparsity factor.²⁹

A 'Social Contract'

Key Recommendation 3

That the State Government investigate establishing a 'social contract' with communities in rural and regional Victoria outlining agreed minimum standards of community wellbeing to be maintained and minimum services that are to be provided on a per capita basis. Further, this 'social contract' should be based on a list of social indicators or 'trigger points' such that when a community in rural and regional Victoria reaches an agreed point pre-determined Government responses are put in place.

- 8.33 The Committee's Recommendation on ensuring that rural and regional communities do not fall below a certain community standard in their health, education and justice outcomes provides a proactive way to look at what can be done to protect rural and regional communities from comparatively unacceptable standards in areas such as health and education.
- 8.34 A rural proofing body could investigate how such a system could be established to ensure proactively the maintenance of standards for rural and regional Victoria.

Conclusion

- 8.35 The Rural and Regional Committee believes that the implementation of a rural proofing body will give rural and regional Victorians a greater voice in Spring Street. This should not mean creating any new levels of bureaucracy; rather by empowering existing leadership to act in an independent capacity as a 'watchdog' over State Government policy and legislation and provide advice that would avoid any negative repercussions for rural and regional Victorians.
- 8.36 Examining the impact of government policy and legislation on rural and regional Victorians should not be an option or choice for government, rather it should be a mandated requirement.

²⁹ Bruce Smith, Social Planner, East Gippsland Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

Key Recommendation 4

Outreach

Key Recommendation 4

That the State Government design and implement a cohesive program of Outreach Workers for rural and regional Victoria, as the permanent and preferred model for providing health and related services such as financial and relationship counselling to farming and agricultural communities. The model implemented should be based on the successful State Government Drought Worker model. To this end the Committee further recommends that funding for each regional health delivery body determined to be the ideal outreach service provider should include an appropriation for employment of an Outreach Worker.

Why Outreach?

There have been inappropriate methods of delivering services [to farmers], and that is an area that we should be addressing in terms of inequity and disadvantage.¹

Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service

- 9.1 For many Victorians, our understanding of farming communities is dominated by stereotypes of rugged, tanned, healthy individuals, what Associate Professor Susan Brumby from the National Centre for Farmer Health referred to as the 'agrarian myth'.² It is a myth because farming communities in terms of their health outcomes are in fact some of our most disadvantaged communities. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states:

People living in rural areas tend to have shorter lives and higher levels of illness and disease risk factors than those in major cities. It is also true that, on average, people living in rural Australia do not always have the same opportunities for good health as those living in major cities. For example, residents of more inaccessible areas of Australia are generally disadvantaged in their access to goods and services, educational and employment opportunities and income.³

- 9.2 In a 2010 report, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare made the following observations:

- mortality rates increase with remoteness;
- the types of cancer more prevalent in rural areas are generally preventable and are linked to smoking, alcohol and sun exposure;
- rates of mental disorder were higher outside of major cities, partly a result of lower access to health services; and
- poor oral health, including tooth loss and decay, is more prevalent in rural areas.⁴

- 9.3 Governments of all persuasions face issues and questions about how best to support agricultural, rural and regional communities to achieve better health outcomes. Based on evidence acquired during hearings for the Inquiry into Disadvantage this Committee believes that the ideal model for provision of health services to these communities is through an outreach worker approach. Many factors point to the fact that medical and health services delivered through traditional means do not reach those in rural and regional Victoria.

¹ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

² Ibid.

³ See: <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/ruralhealth/index.cfm>>, accessed 2 August 2010.

⁴ Australian Government, *Australia's Health 2010: The twelfth biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra 2010.

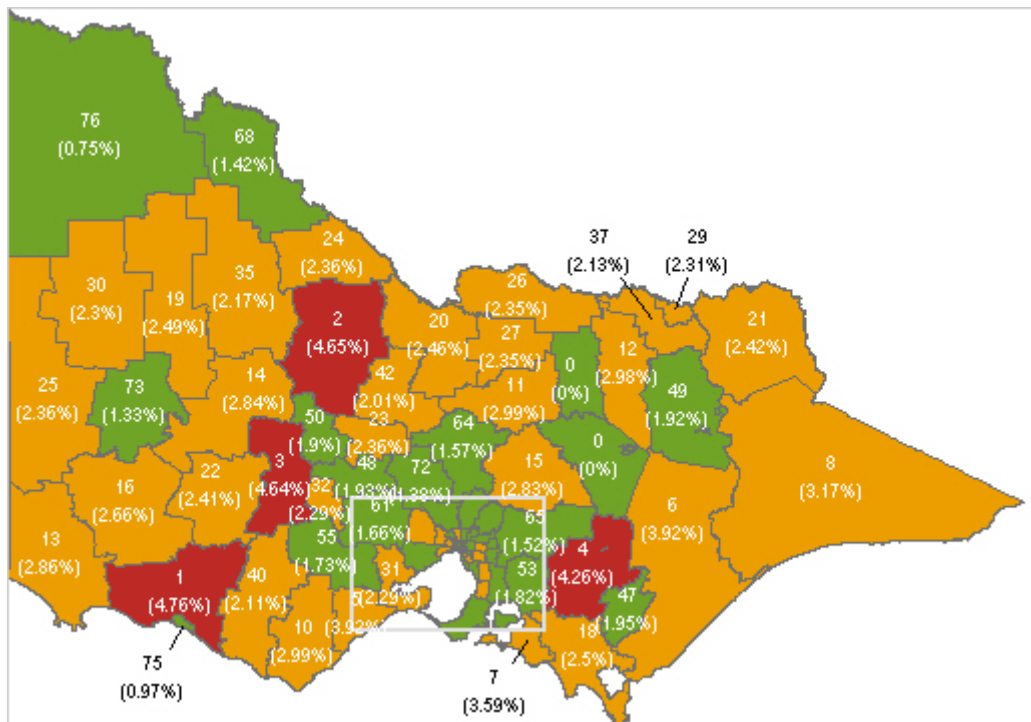
A Tsunami of Diabetes⁵

9.4 Of particular concern is the rapidly growing problem of diabetes in rural and regional Victoria, as the following images show:

- Green: <2% people with diabetes;
- Yellow: 2–4% people with diabetes; and
- Red: >4% people with diabetes.

9.5 The figures below show the Local Government Area's percentage and relative position in Victoria: ie in 2001 Moyne was Number 1 in Victoria with 4.76% of the population living with diabetes.

Figure 6: Diabetes Rates Victoria 2001.



⁵ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

Figure 7: Diabetes Rates Victoria 2006.

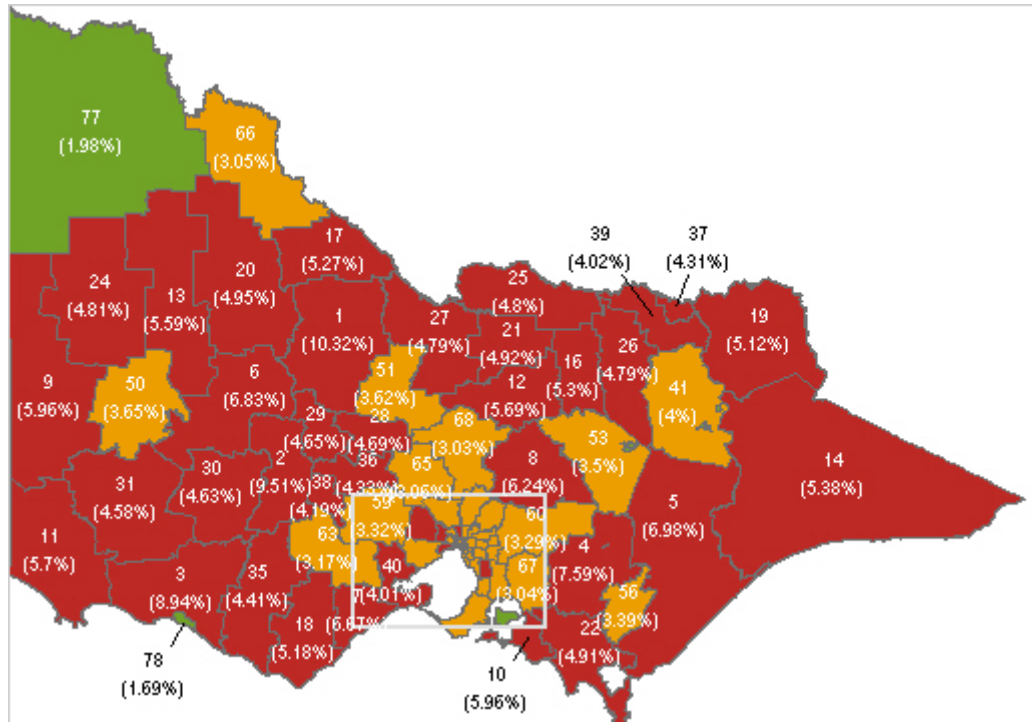
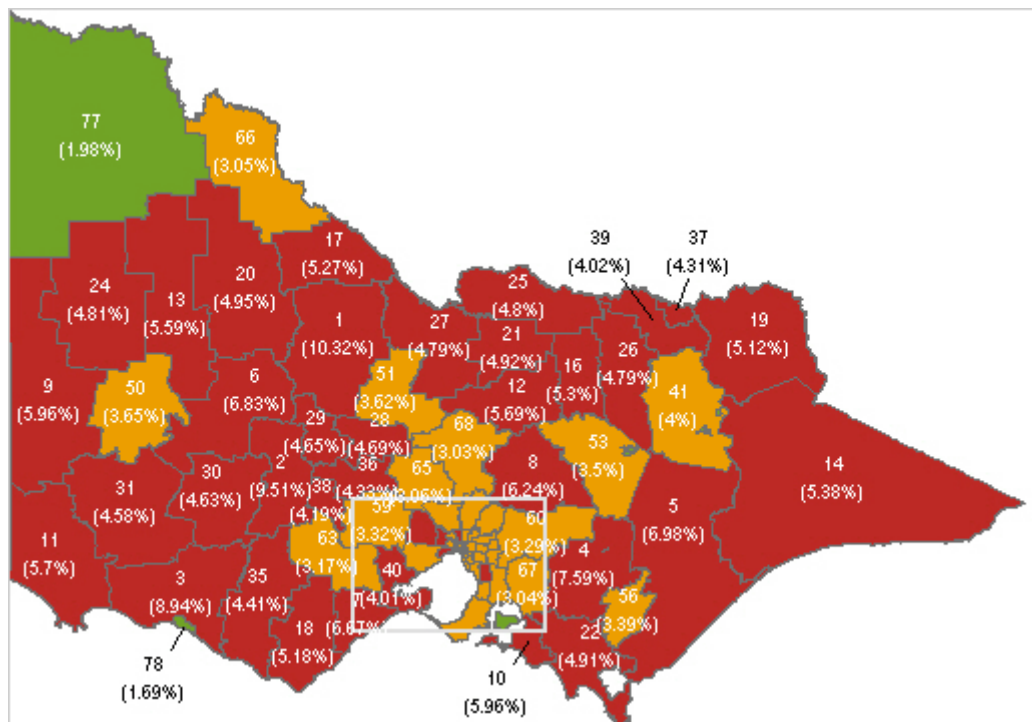


Figure 8: Diabetes Rates Victoria 2008.



Source: Diabetes Australia Victoria.

9.6 The Committee notes that the Victorian Government is aware of the increasing rates of diabetes in rural and regional Victoria. The issue of the disparity between metropolitan and rural hospital admission rates is raised in

the following extract from *Your Health: A report on the health of Victorians 2007*:

A disparity between metropolitan and rural area hospital admission rates for diabetes is apparent when the principal and additional diagnoses of diabetes are combined. In 2005–06 the admission rate for rural areas of 26.63 admissions per 1,000 population (95% CI 26.69–26.86) was significantly higher than the rate for metropolitan areas, 24.34 admissions per 1,000 population (95% CI 24.19–24.49).⁶

- 9.7 In October 2007, the Victorian Government funded a four-year program, 'Life!',⁷ aimed at preventing type 2 diabetes. The program is available in all five non-metropolitan regions in Victoria and is comprised of six 90-minute group sessions. However, this program does not cater well to rural communities. Associate Professor Brumby explained that despite evidence proving that farming communities are displaying rates of impaired glucose metabolism much higher than the rest of the population it is difficult for farmers to access the Life! program:

...farming people are not going to do [the Life! program] because they cannot drive in six times over six weeks, spend an hour in the car, do an hour session and go back; they do not do it. We are one of the biggest referrers to the Life! program, but we cannot get farming people to go.⁸

- 9.8 The fact that farming families are not accessing such services is due to a number of factors, including the financial pressure many are currently experiencing (as discussed below). Another factor that Associate Professor Brumby raised is the fact that running a farm leaves very little time to travel to the services that are made available.⁹ Mr Ivan Lister, a drought outreach worker in Benalla, told the Committee that: "...[farmers] are more likely, if they live in Tatong, to do the program in Tatong. They certainly will not travel to Goorambat to do it. That is like moving across the world."¹⁰
- 9.9 According to Associate Professor Brumby, one-off checks at field days, such as those provided by WorkHealth, are unlikely to prove effective, nor are farming communities able to rely on innovations in areas such as telemedicine due to the poor quality of telecommunications in remote parts of Victoria:

With mobile phones, people do not even have coverage, and some of the people we work with are still on dial-up or do not use computers, in terms of that option of teleconferencing or videoconferencing in. We still try to send faxes, and the electric

⁶ Department of Human Services, *Your Health: A report on the health of Victorians 2007*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2008.

⁷ See: <<http://www.diabeteslife.org.au/>>, accessed 30 July 2010.

⁸ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

fence cuts in – ‘Tick, tick, tick’. It is a huge disadvantage in telecommunications and how we deliver services.¹¹

9.10 It is important to acknowledge that, as Associate Professor Brumby has discovered during her time working with farming communities, far from being ‘stoic’ and immune to opportunities to improve their health when delivered in the right way, “...they are actually quite hungry for some of these opportunities”.¹²

9.11 This is not to ignore the role that pride plays in farming communities, as Mr Lister told the Committee:

What I am looking for all the time is where I can scrounge a few dollars to make anything happen to put a smile on these people’s faces. I get terrific support from everybody. CWA [Country Women’s Association] will load me up with hampers. Foodshare, the local St Vinnies, has some really good food hampers; do you think the farmers will go in there and get them? No, they will not!

In the last three years since they have had them, I have given about 300 of them out. You cannot just go to the back of the ute and say, ‘Here, have one of these’, because people are too proud to take them. You have got to know who you are giving them to, and you have to do a bit of groundwork. They do not knock me back. They will certainly say, ‘There are other people worse off than I am’, and I say, ‘Yes, there probably are, but here, take this’.¹³

9.12 Ivan Lister’s approach demonstrates that an Outreach Worker who is part of the community that he or she works in can better understand and empathise with those in need of assistance.

Drought

9.13 The ongoing drought across much of Victoria has been referred to by the peak social services body in Victoria, the Victorian Council of Social Services, as a ‘slow burn crisis’, eroding the resilience of farming communities.¹⁴ The drought has brought with it increased financial pressure for many farming communities across Victoria. As crops fail, for example, and debts increase, farmers are forced to sell part of their farms. This reduces their ability to make a future profit when rains do return or when a solution is found.¹⁵

¹¹ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁴ Victorian Council of Social Services, *Submission*, Number 59, 3 May 2010.

¹⁵ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

Many cattle farmers have also reduced their stock numbers, but with prices now rising the Committee heard that replacing stock is often not financially possible.¹⁶

9.14 Sorensen argues that rural communities are used to such swings in fortune but provides five examples of ‘additional uncertainties’ contributing to an increased financial strain for many farmers:

- large changes in exchange rates, interest rates and financial liquidity;
- complex environmental policies around water pricing and carbon trading;
- sudden changes in market ideology, for example in dairy deregulation and pork import quotas;
- reduced freedom for farmers to develop their properties as they see fit; and
- rise in ethanol production causing a sudden rise in grain prices.¹⁷

9.15 The experience of service providers in regional Victoria has shown that this financial pressure has caused an increase in rates of depression and other “severe mental health issues”.¹⁸ For example:

There is a high incidence of relationship stressors among struggling farming families. Men feel inadequate as they are no longer able to be the providers that they had been in the past and their wives on many occasions have had to seek out alternative income which further isolates the man. Farmers are isolated by the very nature of their profession. With the pressures of the drought and poor commodity prices this isolation has resulted in many incidents of mental health and depression...[However]...Where women are unable to gain external employment they had expressed intense isolation as they are conscious about keeping costs down and do not use the family vehicle to go to town for themselves. This is causing further isolation amongst rural women.¹⁹

9.16 Isolation implies a lack of peer support that is such a prominent part of life in remote communities. Furthermore isolation is a serious problem and an identified factor in the process of determining when a need exists for support workers and counselling services to be provided in remote rural communities.²⁰

¹⁶ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

¹⁷ Sorensen T, ‘Shifting deckchairs on the Titanic?’, Paper presented at Spatially Integrated Social Science National Conference, Adelaide 2008.

¹⁸ Mr Chris McDonnell, Chief Executive Officer, Mitchell Community Health, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁹ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

²⁰ New South Wales Mental Health Network, *A NSW Farmers Blueprint for Maintaining the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the People on NSW Farms*, see: <<http://www.aghealth.org.au/blueprint/>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

- 9.17 A recent study in South Australia found that farm suicide rates are much higher than those of the rest of the community.²¹ This finding is supported by a report on rural disadvantage which concluded that rural communities deserve better services than they currently receive:

Youth suicide by males in rural and remote areas is at least twice the rate of urban suicides and is thought to be underestimated...Of particular concern is the scarcity of mental health services in rural and remote communities given the prevalence of extreme stress and depression.²²

- 9.18 Commenting on the South Australian study, Professor Ian Hickie, Director of the Brain and Mind Research Institute at the University of Sydney argued that while the actual rates of depression among rural communities may in fact be the same as those found in the rest of the country, the lack of available services to treat them makes rural people much more vulnerable to the risk of the illness progressing into events such as suicide and alcohol dependence. Professor Hicks stated: "It's the lack of access to health services in the country to treat it. That's what we need to be urgently addressing, but we're not."²³

Outreach Worker Position

- 9.19 In its submission to this Inquiry another stakeholder, the Victorian Farmers Federation, also argues that mental health problems in rural Victoria are exacerbated by a shortage of mental health professionals and services.²⁴ Other evidence presented to the Committee from Horsham, Bendigo, Corryong and Lakes Entrance, for example, supported the need for the continued delivery of counselling services to farming communities in Victoria, ideally via an outreach service model.²⁵
- 9.20 In Benalla, the Committee heard first hand from Mr Lister about how effective drought outreach workers can be in linking farming communities with health services. Mr Lister is a trusted and well-known member of the Benalla district community. This makes it possible for him to be welcomed

²¹ Miller K and Burns C, 'Suicides on farms in South Australia, 1997–2001', *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, Volume 16, Issue 6, 2008

²² Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission Secretariat, 'Rural Australia: A litany of disadvantage', Catholic Social Services Australia, 2000.

²³ 'Farmers much more likely to commit suicide: report', see: <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/12/2418096.htm>>, accessed 30 July 2010.

²⁴ Victorian Farmers Federation, *Submission*, Number 29, 30 March 2010.

²⁵ Ms Angela Murphy, General Manager Community and Enterprise Services, Horsham Rural City Council, *Submission*, Number 30, 30 March 2010; Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010; Mr Barry Secombe, Director Community Wellbeing, City of Greater Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010; Ms Catherine Wheeler, Mental Health Nurse, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010; Ms Ailsa Carr, Manager Family, Youth and Children Services, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

into the home of farming communities for an informal conversation, by the end of which any problems weighing heavily on the family have usually been raised. Mr Lister is then able to refer family members to the appropriate services. Most of the time this is Centrelink according to Mr Lister but also other fields as varied as financial advice and relationship counselling, hence his description of himself as a “link man”:

My normal day consists of a phone call, usually from the wife who is concerned about her husband. She would ask the question, ‘I do not know if you are the guy but I have heard about you. Could you talk to my husband?’ I would say, ‘Sure I can’. The next bit is her saying, ‘He probably will not talk to you’. I say, ‘You just get me in the door and I will get the talking part organised’.

There are two ways we can do that. I usually want to meet whoever is telling me the information first, to get all of the background on what is going on, so that means plenty of cups of coffee in the street or wherever I can meet people, I get as much information as I can, then if whoever is giving me the information is concerned that the partner or a neighbour or whoever will know who gave me the information and I will just doorknock the area and do two or three farms in the area and end up where I am supposed to be going.²⁶

- 9.21 As noted above by Mr Lister, it can be difficult for farmers to travel into towns or cities to access services. This is because of a number of issues such as hectic working lives, an associated lack of availability of time and importantly being too proud to accept help. This shows the enormous merit in having a role such as Mr Lister’s in place in a community. Help will be accepted if it is delivered to farmers by someone they have known for a long time and trust, someone such as Mr Lister:

A farmer rang me about two months ago and said, ‘You do not know me, but I have heard of you’. He said, ‘Could you meet me at the shearing shed?’. He obviously did not want to be at the house where somebody else might see us. That is the first thing I think. We go to the shearing shed. We sit down in the shearing shed and we went through a bit of bulldust like it is a nice day, it could rain or whatever. You go through a bit of that, but not too much though. Then I said, ‘Why did you ring me?’. He said that ‘On Saturday morning’ – and he did not say it as quickly as this – ‘the wife was asleep, and I did not think I had the ability to get the kids out of bed and dress them’. He said he was just going to run away from home. I said, ‘Can you tell me a bit about leading up to this?’. He did. I said, ‘You sound like you have got anxiety’. He said, ‘I have’. I said, ‘Have you been diagnosed with anxiety?’. He said, ‘No, I have been to about eight doctors. I have been doctor shopping, and nobody has said I have got anxiety. I will go for anything. If I hurt my arm, my leg or get a cold, I will go to the doctor’. Part of his anxiety is that he

²⁶ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

cannot tell anybody. I said, 'Right, I will be telling somebody, because when I book you in to see the local doctor I will be telling him you have got anxiety, with your permission'. He said, 'Yes, you have got my permission'. I saw that bloke not that long ago. You know what? He is going absolutely great, because someone was able to see where he was coming from, play a part in diagnosing what he had, get him into the GP in one day and get him to see one of our counsellors as well.²⁷

- 9.22 Further support for the need for outreach workers in the field of rural health was expressed in a submission from Anglicare Victoria,²⁸ as well as by a number of other witnesses in the Hume region. Mr Neil Stott, Director Community Health, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, told the Committee that services will not reach those most at need if agencies expect the most disadvantaged members of the community to always bring themselves to where the services are located. Instead, according to Mr Stott: "Most disadvantaged groups actually require us to make a major effort to reach them."²⁹
- 9.23 The Federal Government acknowledges the effectiveness of outreach work in the field of social inclusion. It argues that the 'low visibility' of disadvantaged families, such as those referred to by Mr Stott in the paragraph above, increases both the likelihood of disadvantage taking root in their communities and the need for services to be delivered to them.³⁰ Indeed, Mr Stott informed the Committee that the Benalla and District Memorial Hospital is contemplating how best to construct a town-based outreach worker model that matches the work done by Mr Lister's farm-based model.³¹
- 9.24 Mr Vincent Branigan was another who spoke highly of the important role Mr Lister plays in the Benalla region – "Basically, this guy saves lives...".³² In Corryong, Ms Catherine Wheeler informed the Committee that Upper Murray Health and Community Services is in need of extra funding to employ an outreach worker. Currently, outreach services are delivered from Albury Wodonga. These outreach workers may have the best of intentions, but because of the distance needed to travel to reach Corryong they are only able to reach a small number of clients. Furthermore there are many instances where health workers are reallocated to a need closer to their home base. Ms Wheeler said that she has in fact been acting as an outreach worker herself because the demand is there, but the role needs to be filled

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

²⁹ Mr Neil Stott, Director Community Health, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

³⁰ Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: Social inclusion and early childhood development*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, 2009.

³¹ Mr Neil Stott, Director Community Health, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

³² Mr Vincent Branigan, Teacher, FCJ College, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

by a specialist worker: “I am knocking on doors and I cannot keep it up, I’m sorry...but there is a huge need for someone like that to knock on doors.”³³

Funding

- 9.25 Dan Weeks informed the Committee that the Benalla and District Memorial Hospital is currently able to fund its outreach position because it is in the fortunate position of running a budget surplus, “...but it is never easy and we are not fully funded...[and]...for many organisations carrying unfunded positions it is difficult, if not impossible”.³⁴
- 9.26 The Committee notes that the Victorian Government has funded drought outreach workers in the past. The Benalla Drought Outreach Service was established with the help of funding from the Victorian Government’s ‘Sustaining community wellbeing in drought’ program in the 2007–2008 financial year. Part of the Department of Human Services’ drought response, the program involved 19 Primary Care Partnerships across 47 rural and regional Local Government Areas.³⁵ The drought-related program was a broad one which was based on a flexible model and applied differently in different locations. For example, the Shire of Campaspe employed two drought workers; Southern Grampians and Glenelg developed drought counselling and mental first aid training; while the Loddon Mallee Shire developed a ‘Sustainable Development Network’. While these initiatives proved effective, funding needs to be ongoing to ensure the benefits gained throughout rural and regional Victoria continue.
- 9.27 The Committee is also aware of a number of other temporary outreach initiatives.³⁶ For example an outreach drought mental health clinician role in the Goulburn Valley region that ended in December 2009; and another approach where service providers in the Hume region have been organising community awareness days to raise awareness of the support that is available for remote communities, particularly mental health support. Securing ongoing funding for these initiatives has, however, proven to be problematic.³⁷
- 9.28 Ivan Lister told the Committee that because drought counsellors have usually been employed on a short-term basis they aren’t given the time to maintain strong relationships with farmers. It took Mr Lister a number of years before

³³ Ms Catherine Wheeler, Mental Health Nurse, Upper Murray Health and Community Services, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

³⁴ Mr Dan Weeks, Chief Executive Officer, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

³⁵ Department of Human Services, ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing in Drought: Benalla Drought Outreach Service’, see: <<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/downloads/drought/benalla.pdf>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

³⁶ Victorian Council of Social Services, *Submission*, Number 59, 3 May 2010.

³⁷ Anglicare Victoria Hume Region, *Submission*, Number 57, 3 May 2010.

“...I was comfortable about walking into anybody’s place and saying, ‘Chuck the kettle on, I will be inside’”. Mr Lister added that farmers need continuity of contact; that is, they prefer to speak to someone, to tell their story, just the once, and not be ‘bounced around’ different agencies for the one problem.³⁸

9.29 The Committee believes that because drought outreach workers have a proven track record of delivering vital services to some of the most disadvantaged and hard-to-reach members of the Victorian community the State Government should ‘ring fence’, or guarantee, funding to ensure full-time positions are permanently supported.

9.30 Further to this the State Government must identify areas of rural and regional Victoria where outreach workers are not currently employed with a view to putting in place a statewide system of outreach. Areas of disadvantage are a priority but furthermore, employment of outreach workers should form part of every region's approach to provision of health services. This should also extend to including a general 'outreach' approach to provision of health services to farming communities, as recommended by Professor Susan Brumby from the National Centre for Farmer Health.³⁹

³⁸ Mr Ivan Lister, Drought Relief Coordinator, Benalla and District Memorial Hospital, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

³⁹ Associate Professor Susan Brumby, Director, National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

Key Recommendation 5

Alternative Education

Key Recommendation 5

That the State Government develop its policy with regard to alternative education models with a commitment to the following for rural and regional Victoria:

- a. An urgent increase in funding for alternative education settings from 1.25 Student Resource Package to 1.4 Student Resource Package.
- b. That funding allocated to students expected to attend a full school year but not in attendance on Census Day be redirected to support re-engagement programs for those students rather than be withheld.
- c. That the State Government ensure that the Department of Education implement alternative education models in areas of Victoria where there are a high number of disengaged young people. The models should be relevant to local needs and be developed in consultation with local education providers, including Local Learning and Employment Networks, and make use of the expertise of alternative education providers already making a difference, including NETschool and the Doxa organisation.

In my view, the most important challenging issue for our community and comparable communities is the issue of access to education.¹

Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care

- 10.1 The critical role education plays in determining life outcomes is well known. Saunders *et al*, Vinson and Healey, for example, identify education as one of the most important factors influencing an individual's ability to succeed in our competitive society.² During this Inquiry, Mr Kenneth Carr, a volunteer worker at Mallee Family Care, spoke for many witnesses when he said that education, particularly for young people, is the key to tackling disadvantage:

It was quickly realised in 2002 when [Mallee Family Care] began to find long-term solutions to disadvantage that helping young people overcome obstacles to education achievement would go a long way towards achieving its goal.³

- 10.2 The value of education is acknowledged by the Victorian Government in current documents such as *A Fairer Victoria 2010*⁴ and past publications including *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*, in which it states that '...completion of Year 12 or its equivalent is a good indicator of better health and higher incomes later in life'.⁵
- 10.3 Indeed, evidence linking health and education is clear,⁶ with a 2004 review of the Victorian Government's Neighbourhood Renewal program noting a 'strong correlation between health and education'.⁷
- 10.4 As mentioned, witnesses appearing before the Committee during this Inquiry were unequivocal about the responsibility societies have to ensure all young people are fully engaged in education. In Bendigo, for example, Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer of St Luke's Anglicare was in no doubt as to the urgency of the problem of disengaged young people in rural and regional Victoria, those young people for whom mainstream education models do not work and who are not engaging in any formal education or

¹ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 02 March 2010.

² Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: The origins, meaning, definition and economic implications of the concept social inclusion/exclusion*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009; Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M *et al*, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007; Healey K, Hillman W, 'Young families migrating to non-metropolitan areas: are they at risk of social exclusion?', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Volume 43, Number 3, 2008.

³ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

⁴ Victorian Government, *A Fairer Victoria 2010: Real support, real gains*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

⁵ Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2005.

⁶ Quine S *et al*, 'Health and access issues among Australian adolescents: a rural-urban comparison', *The International Electronic Journal of Rural and Remote Health Research, Education, Practice and Policy*, Number 245, 2003; The Allen Consulting Group, *Are We There Yet? Indicators of inequality in community health*, The Allen Consulting Group, Melbourne 2008.

⁷ Klein H, 'Health inequality, social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal: can place-based renewal improve the health of disadvantaged communities?', *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, Volume 10, Number 3, 2004.

training. Mr Pugh is resolute about what the State's response should be: "I believe they should be gold card carriers...[and]...get the best of services."⁸

- 10.5 Other witnesses and Victorian Government policy makers also agree with extensive research showing that with education improving outcomes for individuals, there is a flow on, or concurrent, benefit to whole communities.⁹ Mr John Richmond, Principal of Birchip P-12 School argued that Australia has an agreed aim of becoming what he termed "the learned country" and that this can only be achieved when all citizens are educated to reach their full potential.¹⁰ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal of Warrnambool Secondary College, concurred that an educated population is of benefit to the broader community, relating the idea to examples of ways in which south-west Victoria specifically would be assisted by a highly educated population: "...the chemists at GlaxoSmithKline, the water scientists at Wannon Water, the agricultural science at Warrnambool Cheese and Butter et cetera".¹¹

Retention and Completion Rates

- 10.6 The Education and Training Committee's *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in Participation in Higher Education in Victoria* compiled statistics on Year 10 to 12 apparent retention rates at Victorian government schools. The 2008 rates, as listed below, were divided into Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regions and show that non-metropolitan regions are performing noticeably worse than metropolitan regions:

- Western Metropolitan: 81.1%;
- Northern Metropolitan: 88.0%;
- Eastern Metropolitan: 85.3%;
- Southern Metropolitan: 79.5%;
- Barwon South Western: 72.2%;
- Grampians: 71.6%;
- Loddon Mallee: 78.0%
- Hume: 67.6%;
- Gippsland: 69.9%;

⁸ Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer, St Luke's Anglicare, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

⁹ Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2005; Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M *et al*, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007; Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: The origins, meaning, definition and economic implications of the concept social inclusion/exclusion*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009.

¹⁰ Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P-12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹¹ Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

- All metro regions: 83.3%;
 - All non-metro regions: 72.2%; and
 - All government schools: 79.7%.¹²
- 10.7 A number of witnesses appearing before this Committee's *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria* expressed concern over poor completion rates in their own regions.¹³ The Committee was also made aware of similar concerns via a number of submissions.¹⁴
- 10.8 Analysis of poor education outcomes was often linked with discussion around disengaged students. Of particular concern to the Committee was the realisation that across rural and regional Victoria it is very difficult, if not impossible to determine the exact number of disengaged young people.¹⁵ In seeking funding to develop programs aimed at disengaged young people, David Pugh revealed that the advice he had received from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development revealed a frustration with the ability of the system to keep track of young people. The advice from the Department was: "If you can find them, we'll help them."¹⁶ This is discussed further in Chapter 4 at paragraph 4.82 where a Recommendation is made for tracking students.
- 10.9 Mr Peter Quin, Director Community Services, Orbost Regional Health also raised the complex issue of collating statistics on disengaged students and express this frustration through a simple analogy: "They come and go here. They are a bit like mist, really."¹⁷
- 10.10 In Portland, Ms Ann Kirkham from Brophy Family and Youth Services told the Committee that although the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development does have its own figures on disengaged young

¹² Education and Training Committee, *Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education, Final Report*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne 2009.

¹³ Mr William Millard, Director City Growth, Warrnambool City Council, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010; Mr Barry Secombe, Director Community Wellbeing, City of Greater Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010; Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010; Mr Bruce Hurley, Chief Executive, Gippsland Lakes Community Health Centre, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹⁴ Corangamite Shire, *Submission*, Number 15, 23 March 2010; Goulburn Valley Primary Care Partnership, *Submission*, Number 18, 23 March 2010; Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission*, Number 28, 30 March 2010; Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Submission*, Number 34, 31 March 2010; Professor John Smyth, Research Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Submission*, Number 39, 31 March 2010.

¹⁵ Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010; Mr Ron Broadhead, Executive Officer of the Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010; Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁶ Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer, St Luke's Anglicare, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

¹⁷ Mr Peter Quin, Director Community Services, Orbost Regional Health, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

people (albeit with concerns over privacy issues¹⁸), “...there are young people who are not even in their data”.¹⁹

Alternative Education Models

10.11 Ms Kirkham added that for some young people, different types of education models will need to be developed if they are to remain engaged in education:

I believe we need to really start looking at traditional forms of education and how they suit all young people. They do not suit all young people. At a time in their lives when they are most active and their hormones are bouncing around, we ask them to sit in a room with four walls and sit still. That is quite flawed.²⁰

10.12 Ms Kirkham was one of several witnesses who informed the Committee that the most vulnerable time for young people is around the ‘transition points’ from primary to secondary education, in particular Years 6, 7 and 8.²¹

10.13 In fact, Mary Pendergrast believes that by looking at data on areas such as poor literacy, family dysfunction, low aspirations and mental illness it is possible to predict the life outcomes of young people entering Year 7:

With a child who walks into Year 7 at my school, based on the incredible data profile that we have I can tell you by the end of term one their retention prediction, their life chances, their family background, their likelihood of employment and roughly how they will progress through the school. We know by now. We already have a captured picture of those kids when they come in. Kids who fail drop out; it is as simple as that. Country kids who fail drop out.²²

10.14 Ms Pendergrast believes that despite the lack of options for regional young people who leave mainstream education, models of education devised to reach all young people can be established in rural and regional locations. She provided the Committee with an example of a community VCAL school in Warrnambool that she had been involved in. The success of this school

¹⁸ Ms Toni Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹⁹ Ms Ann Kirkham, School Focused Youth Worker, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ms Ann Kirkham, School Focused Youth Worker, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010; Mr Cleve Paige, Principal, Yuille Park Community College, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010; Professor John Smyth, Research Professor of Education, School of Education, University of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010; Ms Barbara Wilson, Principal, Two Rivers College, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

²² Ms Mary Pendergrast, Principal, Warrnambool College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

can be measured in how a group of disengaged young people had started to believe that "...they do feel valued, that they do matter..."²³

- 10.15 In Geelong, the Committee heard about the SWEET alternative education program,²⁴ with the City of Greater Geelong's Danielle Parker stating that the success of the program can be ascribed to the fact that it is designed with the young people's needs in mind:

What we generally find is the SWEET program is made up of young people who, I don't like to say don't fit into mainstream school, but who mainstream schooling isn't appropriate for, it doesn't fit them. They're more creative, they like to do things more hands-on and it doesn't allow for that necessarily in the traditional sense of where they would have been attending. It gives them an opportunity to try the education stuff again but in a different way that's probably a bit more gentle, a bit safer, they feel more confident and it's suited to their needs, rather than them having to fit the main curriculum.²⁵

- 10.16 The Committee notes that programs such as SWEET and alternative education settings such as NETschool and the DOXA program (as discussed in the Loddon Mallee Regional Profile chapter) are available, and acknowledges the State Government's financial support of NETschool and the successful Yuille Park Community College. Nevertheless, one of the biggest barriers facing disengaged young people in rural and regional Victoria is the limited options open to them to continue study or training in comparison with young people in metropolitan Melbourne.²⁶ Further, in Mallacoota the Committee heard from the Principal of Mallacoota P-12 College that for young disengaged rural and regional youth there is a small number of alternatives available to them compared to those in metropolitan areas. This lack of access to alternatives results in the exacerbation of related problems.²⁷

- 10.17 Both Mr Ken Massari,²⁸ the Principal of North Shore Primary School in Geelong and John Richmond²⁹ told the Committee that it cannot entirely be the responsibility of mainstream education providers to solve the social problems presented by disengaged young people – the aforementioned poor literacy, family dysfunction, low aspirations and mental illness. This

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See: <<http://www.geelongcity.vic.gov.au/ct/directory/item/106328.aspx>>, accessed 19 August 2010.

²⁵ Ms Danielle Parker, Youth Development Officer, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁶ Ms Toni Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Mr John Hartley, Chief Executive Officer, Workways Australia Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010; Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010; South West Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission*, Number 48, 31 March 2010; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Victorian Rural Youth Services, *Submission*, Number 56, 30 April 2010.

²⁷ Mr Tony Roberts, Principal, Mallacoota P-12 College, *Public Hearing*, Mallacoota, 22 April 2010.

²⁸ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

²⁹ Mr John Richmond, Principal, Birchip P-12 School, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

Committee believes that schools in areas of significant disadvantage would benefit from being established in innovative ways as part of their community. An example is the establishment of Yuille Park College as a 'community hub'. However, the Committee believes that mainstream schools are not currently well enough equipped to deal with all of the social and welfare issues that can arise. The Committee recommends that the State Government increase funding for alternative education models throughout rural and regional Victoria wherever a need is identified.

- 10.18 This need for increased funding is a clear one, presented to the Committee by a wide variety of witnesses³⁰ as well as the South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, which in its submission recommended '...differential funding to allow the provision of alternative and flexible education options'.³¹ Furthermore the Committee supports advice from Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director, Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, who suggested that the correct level of funding for each disengaged young person should be 1.4 Student Resource Package. This advice should be taken on board by the State Government and implemented.³²

³⁰ Ms Toni Burgoyne, Principal, Portland Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010; Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010; Ms Julie Connell, Team Facilitator, NETschool, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010; Mr David Pugh, Chief Executive Officer, St Luke's Anglicare, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010; Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley-Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010; Mr Craig Sutherland, Principal, Lakes Entrance Secondary College, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

³¹ South West Regional Youth Affairs Network, *Submission*, Number 35, 31 March 2010.

³² Mr Ron Lake, Regional Director Loddon Mallee Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

Key Recommendation 6

Early Intervention

Key Recommendation 6

That the State Government continue to acknowledge the valuable role early intervention programs play in addressing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria and enhance its policy making efforts in this area. The Committee further recommends that the Best Start program continues to be expanded into more communities across rural and regional Victoria.

Children, in particular, often carry the negative effects that result from childhood poverty into their adult lives.¹

Saunders P *et al*, Sydney Policy Research Centre

- 11.1 The behaviour traits formed early in life, whether as personal characteristics or those that result from the influence of external forces such as socioeconomic factors, are powerful influences in shaping a person's later achievements and determining the course their life will take.²

'Getting in Early'

- 11.2 In a report on the concept of social inclusion, Tony Vinson quotes the United Kingdom's Social Inclusion Unit, who argue that the type of environment into which we are born, in particular poverty as well as the quality of skills possessed by our parents, to this day remains a major determinant of our life chances:

Social exclusion is about more than income poverty. Social exclusion happens when people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown. When such problems combine they can create a vicious cycle. Social exclusion can happen as a result of problems that face one person in their life. But it can also start from birth. Being born into poverty or to parents with low skills still has a major influence on future life chances.³

- 11.3 This view was also presented to the Committee by Mr Ken Massari, Principal of North Shore Primary School from whom we heard that programs tackling disadvantage should target "...those birth to school age years as being the most vital because that's when the habits start to form".⁴ This approach to early intervention, as being important in shaping habits and behaviour, was also supported by Ms Anne Dark from the St Vincent de Paul Society, a witness in Ballarat.⁵

¹ Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M *et al*, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and Social Exclusion in Australia*, Sydney Policy Research Centre, Sydney 2007.

² VicHealth, *Key Influences on Health Inequalities, Research Summary*, VicHealth, Melbourne 2008.

³ Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: The origins, meaning, definition and economic implications of the concept social inclusion/exclusion*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009.

⁴ Mr Ken Massari, Principal, North Shore Primary School, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁵ Ms Anne Dark, Ballarat Regional Council President, St Vincent de Paul Society, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

Early Intervention Programs

11.4 The evidence, from many years of research into this subject by both academics and practitioners, points clearly to the fact that early intervention programs achieve the best results in breaking the grip that disadvantage can have on communities. In particular, such programs have a large and long-lasting impact across a broad spectrum of factors, including education, employment, welfare dependency and social inclusion.⁶ In the area of criminal justice Professor Ross Homel, a foundation professor of criminology and criminal justice at Griffith University, argues overwhelmingly for what he calls ‘the power of getting in early’⁷. To this list VicHealth would also add health.⁸

11.5 Other research to offer support for early intervention programs includes the Australian Institute of Family Studies:

Early intervention programs have been found to provide psychological and social benefits to children, families and communities. These include: higher rates of employment and skill levels in mothers; decreased welfare expenditure; increased school performance; a lower rate of criminality within families; a reduction of child abuse and neglect notifications and some decrease in health service (emergency room) attendance rates.⁹

11.6 Along with social benefits, early intervention programs have also been shown to offer economic benefits to the wider community, and to lead to fewer requirements for funding of intervention programs in the later years. At the Committee’s public hearing in Benalla, Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer of community organisation Central Access stated: “I think the amount of money we spend in the later years could be significantly reduced if we addressed the problems very early on.”¹⁰ A similar view was expressed in Geelong by Mr Grant Boyd, Chief Executive Officer of Bethany Community Support:

One of our focuses as an agency is to support families in the care of children early on, to prevent progression into the tertiary service system, which is predominately the child protection system or the out of home care system. When a situation reached the point where families are unable to care for their children for whatever reason, and then the state takes responsibility for care – and that might be into programs like Kinship Care or out of home care, where there

⁶ Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: The origins, meaning, definition and economic implications of the concept social inclusion/exclusion*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009.

⁷ Homel R, ‘Taking a long-term view of participation’, *Campus Review*, Volume 19, Number 21, 20 October 2009.

⁸ VicHealth, *Key Influences on Health Inequalities, Research Summary*, VicHealth, Melbourne 2008.

⁹ Fish E, ‘The benefits of early intervention’, *Stronger Families Learning Exchange Bulletin*, Number 2, Spring/Summer 2002.

¹⁰ Mr Anthony Putt, Chief Executive Officer, Central Access Ltd, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

are paid people who then care for children – the costs associated with that are very, very significant. We're looking at our early intervention prevention services running at tens of thousands per annum up to our tertiary service systems running at many hundreds of thousands of dollars per annum when we get to that point.¹¹

11.7 As Mr Boyd said, the main aim of early intervention programs is to prevent people experiencing disadvantage from suffering further – and their problems developing further to the point where they are required to access more urgent and costly services later on in life and are not able to fulfil their own potential or contribute to their community. This view was also expressed by several other witnesses during this Inquiry.¹²

11.8 Other evidence supports the notion that early intervention programs can be of some economic benefit to societies in the form of reducing the need for more complex and expensive services later in life.¹³ However, Tony Vinson provides a warning about the risk of focusing solely on these economic gains:

Needless to say, to emphasise future pay-offs without the balancing requirements of moral obligations is to risk preoccupation with those investments having the highest rates of return on investment. Children would be an obvious priority with declining investment in youth, adults and especially the elderly.¹⁴

11.9 That is, the moral risk of societies' focusing solely on the economic bottom line is that other pressing needs are ignored.

11.10 During this Inquiry's public hearings attention was mainly focused on the importance of early intervention programs and education. The value of education is discussed elsewhere in this Report and in Mildura, Mr Kenneth Carr explained that providing help early, when any problems or difficulties are first identified, can prevent problems becoming entrenched and young people dropping out of school.¹⁵

11.11 Also in Mildura, Mallee Family Care's Vernon Knight spoke of the importance of ensuring young people are 'school ready', that developing strong education habits early will instil the confidence and skills needed to achieve the best possible education outcomes.¹⁶ This idea of running early intervention programs to ensure young people are fully prepared for

¹¹ Mr Grant Boyd, Chief Executive Officer, Bethany Community Support, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹² Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley–Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010; Mr Francis Broekman, Chief Executive Officer, Brophy Family and Youth Services, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

¹³ Fish E, 'The benefits of early intervention', *Stronger Families Learning Exchange Bulletin*, Number 2, Spring/Summer 2002.

¹⁴ Vinson T, *Social Inclusion: The origins, meaning, definition and economic implications of the concept social inclusion/exclusion*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra 2009.

¹⁵ Mr Kenneth Carr, Volunteer, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁶ Cr Vernon Knight, Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

schooling was also raised by a number of other witnesses, often in relation to brain development. However, estimates as to the most important years in which to act varied from zero to five years,¹⁷ zero to eight years¹⁸ and zero to 14 years.¹⁹

- 11.12 Other areas in which early intervention programs were considered to be effective include mental health²⁰ and homelessness.²¹ The inclusion of homelessness in discussions provides support to Vinson’s warning earlier in this Recommendation about the risk of policy makers focusing solely on interventions that will provide the greatest economic returns. In other words, governments should be committed to early intervention programs across the whole policy spectrum, not solely on the early years.
- 11.13 In its submission to this Inquiry, the Victorian Government acknowledges ‘...international evidence and local research on the value of early intervention when addressing disadvantage’.²² This is evidence that guides a number of programs currently operating in Victoria including Best Start.²³ The Best Start program was well supported by a number of witnesses throughout this Inquiry,²⁴ including Ms Clare Barrett from Centacare Catholic Family Services who said: “I can’t speak highly enough of it.”²⁵
- 11.14 It is the Committee’s recommendation, therefore, that State Government continue to acknowledge the valuable role early intervention programs play in addressing disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria. Further, the Committee recommends that the Best Start program be expanded into more communities across rural and regional Victoria.

¹⁷ Ms Fiona Harley, Deputy Executive Director, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁸ Ms Liz Chapman, Convenor, Tomorrow:Today Foundation, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

¹⁹ Mr Rodney Wangman, Chief Executive Officer, Albury Wodonga Community College, *Public Hearing*, Corryong, 8 April 2010.

²⁰ Ms Kimberley Tempest, Director, McAuley–Champagnat Program, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010; Ms Angie Laussel, Regional Manager, Headspace, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010.

²¹ Ms Glenyis James, Chief Executive Officer, North East Support and Action for Youth Inc, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

²² Victorian Government, *Submission*, Number 58, 3 May 2010.

²³ See: <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/beststart/default.htm>>.

²⁴ Ms Carolyn Barrie, Director People and Communities, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010; Mr Barney Healy, Principal, Maryborough Education Centre, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010; Ms Margaret Kent, Place Manager, Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010; Mr Chris Meddows-Taylor, Mayor, Central Goldfields Shire, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010; Ms Robyn Mawdsley, Central Goldfields Best Start Program, *Public Hearing*, Maryborough, 11 May 2010.

²⁵ Ms Clare Barrett, Coordinator, Outpost Program, Centacare Catholic Family Services, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

Key Recommendation 7

Access to the Law

Key Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the State Government further examine and respond to concerns raised before the Rural and Regional Committee during this Inquiry. In particular:

- a. The need for a Community Legal Centre in the Goulburn Valley area.
- b. Certainty of hearing dates at regional circuit courts.
- c. Variations in the length of time to commence and complete hearings and the frequency of adjournments between Melbourne and circuit courts.
- d. The effectiveness and consistency of the listing process between Melbourne and circuit courts.
- e. The effect in regional Victoria of the application of the three-month requirement for the commencement of serious sexual offence hearings and 'special hearings' in circuit courts.
- f. The availability of legal Counsel and support services to circuit courts compared with the Melbourne County Court.
- g. Measures in place to increase the use of court registrars in preliminary planning.
- h. Further possibilities for the use of telecommunications in rural and regional courts.

- i. The frequency and impact of regional solicitors initiating proceedings at Melbourne County Court.
- j. Current strategies to ensure access for rural and regional Magistrates' Court participants at locations which do not have access to the specialist courts and court programs available at larger centres.
- k. The processes of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal and their impact on rural and regional Victorians.
- l. Monitoring and data collection of justice system needs and outcomes for rural and regional Victorians.
- m. Increased funding of rural and regional legal services and legal aid funding and resources in particular.
- n. Methods to attract professional staff to rural and regional areas.
- o. The application of home detention to rural and regional citizens.
- p. Plans to roll out current Magistrates' Court pilot programs, such as for mediation, across regional Victoria.

...country Australia is facing a crisis in the area of access to justice...¹
Law Council of Australia and Law Institute of Victoria

- 12.1 It is the role of government to provide services to ensure effective and efficient administration of justice and to ensure community safety and confidence in law and order.
- 12.2 Justice services provided by government include services for crime prevention, detection and investigation, judicial processes and dispute resolution, prisoner and offender management, and rehabilitation services.
- 12.3 The aim is to protect the rights and freedoms of all people through a fair and just system of criminal justice, an accessible and equitable civil justice system; the preservation of civil order through the prevention and detection of crime and the provision of a safe, just and humane custodial environment.²
- 12.4 This Recommendation to the State Government by the Rural and Regional Committee discusses issues regarding access to the law for rural and regional communities based on evidence put to the Committee during this Inquiry.
- 12.5 There is no doubt that for all levels of government administration of the justice system to ensure effective delivery of services is an important priority. The Rural and Regional Committee heard advice from Victorian Justice

¹ Law Council of Australia and the Law Institute of Victoria, *Report into the Rural, Regional and Remote Areas Lawyers Survey*, July 2009. See: http://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/shadomx/apps/fms/fmsdownload.cfm?file_uuid=5803E106-1E4F-17FA-D237-00BF3991AACA&siteName=lca, accessed September 2010.

² Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Report on Government Services 2009*, Productivity Commission, Canberra 2009.

Department representatives about the good work being done in rural and regional Victoria by those involved in the administration of justice services and State Government efforts to fund and develop those. The Committee also heard from the legal community about issues of concern arising from the administration of justice in rural and regional Victoria in particular. The Committee believes that the issues raised are of great importance, must be seriously considered and merit further examination by Government.

- 12.6 The Committee has heard that an independent review of the County Court and Magistrates Court systems has been instigated by Court leadership and undertaken by Boston Consulting Group. The Committee believes that this report should be released for public discussion. Further, that any recommendations for development and improvement of the operation of court processes in Victoria should be considered.

Access to the Law in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia

- 12.7 The question of equality of the law for rural communities is one of concern to government at all levels and in all jurisdictions in Australia. A 2004 Report by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee found that there was unmet demand for legal services and significant numbers who did not even reach service delivery points.³
- 12.8 The 2009 *Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee – Access to Justice Inquiry*⁴ acknowledged the difficulties rural, regional and remote communities can face accessing the legal system. The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee recommended increased funding for community legal services and a broadening of services available in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia in particular.⁵
- 12.9 In response the Federal Government acknowledged the ‘significant resources’ involved in providing legal services in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia and outlined a number of funding programs aimed at improving services.⁶
- 12.10 A number of Recommendations in that Report are relevant to concerns heard by the Committee in Victoria. Recommendation three calls for greater funding to resource the legal aid system with ‘appropriate funding loadings

³ Parliament of Australia, *Inquiry into Legal Aid and Access to Justice Final Report*, Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, Canberra 2004.

⁴ Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, *Inquiry into Access to Justice*, Commonwealth of Australia, December 2009.

See:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/access_to_justice/report/index.htm>, accessed 20 July 2010.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/access_to_justice/gov_response.pdf>, accessed 21 July 2010.

for high needs areas such as remote, rural and regional areas'. Recommendation Six, to which the Government '...agreed in principle' is:

The committee recommends that federal, state and territory governments provide additional funding to legal aid commissions, community legal centres and Indigenous legal services with a view to expanding service delivery in rural, regional and remote areas. This funding must take into account the significant resources required by legal aid commissions, community legal centres and Indigenous legal services in undertaking resource-building initiatives in rural, regional and remote areas.⁷

12.11 The Federal Government's Access to Justice Taskforce, 'A Strategic Framework for Access to Justice in the Federal Civil Justice System'⁸ was released in September 2009 for public discussion to assist the Federal Government to develop initiatives which appropriately address and improve access to justice for all Australians.

12.12 Currently the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales in conjunction with National Legal Aid are undertaking a national legal needs survey (the *Survey of Legal Needs in Australia*). Some results are expected in late 2010, with the main reports (national, state and territory) to be released in mid to late 2011.⁹ According to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee:

The *Survey of Legal Needs in Australia* will be Australia's first, largest and most comprehensive assessment of national legal needs...¹⁰

12.13 The Rural and Regional Committee looks forward to the outcomes of the survey which will provide much needed information on unmet need in the Australian justice system. We hope that the survey includes particular information about rural and regional locations and disaggregated data which can provide a clearer picture of any discrepancies in the delivery of justice to rural and regional areas compared to metropolitan areas.

⁷ Commonwealth of Australia, *Inquiry into Access to Justice*, Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, December 2009.

See:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/access_to_justice/report/index.htm>, accessed 20 July 2010..

⁸ Attorney-General's Department, *A Strategic Framework for Access to Justice in the Federal Civil Justice System*, Australian Government, Canberra 2009.

⁹ See: <<http://www.nla.aust.net.au>>, accessed, 12 September 2010.

¹⁰ See:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/access_to_justice/report/c02.htm>, accessed 14 September 2010.

Access to the Law in Victoria: A Statewide Survey

12.14 In July 2009, the Rural and Regional Disadvantage in the Administration of the Law in Victoria research project was initiated by Richard Coverdale, a Researcher in the School of Law at Deakin University in Geelong. Along with questions of access the project was established to identify how well current legal processes and the justice system in Victoria adapt to the wide variety of legal needs that present themselves in rural communities. Since then a National Rural/Regional Law and Justice Conference has been convened for late 2010 to highlight the particular concerns and needs of rural and regional areas.

12.15 The project is based at the Deakin University School of Law and is funded by the Victoria Law Foundation.¹¹ Concerns raised by members of the rural and regional legal community involved in the project are discussed in this Chapter.

12.16 The project is due for completion in December 2010. It has included interviews with more than 60 individuals involved in the delivery and administration of the law across Victoria, including lawyers, advocacy and welfare organisations, peak rural industry organisations, private and community legal firms, the Office of Public Prosecutions, and welfare organisations. In addition, 500 surveys were distributed to a variety of organisations working in legal or related fields, with more than 100 returned.

12.17 The research project is overseen by a Reference Group comprised of Deakin University academic staff, lawyers practising in rural and regional Victoria and a representative of the Federation of Community Legal Centres. The Reference Group will review the progress of the research, consultation and survey findings and the analysis of data.

12.18 The aim of the research project is to examine:

...variations in the application and administration of the law in rural and regional Victoria, compared with metropolitan Melbourne, principally focussing on courts, judicial processes and related justice system services.¹²

12.19 The project is described in a Media Release:

...while there had been a lot of anecdotal accounts about the issue there has been little formal investigation.

...In developing the proposal there have been discussions with a range of people involved in the justice system including lawyers, magistrates, and advocacy services, I have not come across a person yet who has not given me further examples of issues of

¹¹ Mr Richard Coverdale states that the views expressed as part of his submission are his alone and do not represent the position of Deakin University, the School of Law or the Victoria Law Foundation.

¹² Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

disadvantage they are aware of. This study will hopefully bring all that together to give a clearer picture of the state of rural disadvantage and the law.¹³

12.20 Tabitha Lovett, Grants Manager at the Victoria Law Foundation which has funded the research through its grants program said:

We receive a number of applications each year from community organisations and legal centres seeking funding to provide legal education in rural and regional Victoria or to expand their services to clients in these areas. The Foundation recognised the value in funding a project which will consider the extent to which people living in rural and regional areas are disadvantaged by their distance from city centres, not only in terms of the legal services available to them but also the administration of the law.¹⁴

12.21 The Rural and Regional Committee will pay close attention to the results of the research and what it concludes about whether the fundamental entitlement to justice through the legal system can be provided to all citizens of the State.

12.22 The most common issues that were raised by those consulted as part of Mr Coverdale's research project, and that are of concern to this Committee, are the following:

- Concerns that County Court regional circuit hearing date-setting practices currently result in insufficient time or notice to adequately prepare legal representation, expert evidence and witnesses.
- Lengthening court delays and frequent adjournments at County Court regional circuits may have a significant impact on outcomes and confidence in the justice system. This issue was also raised at the Committee's public hearing in Bendigo.¹⁵
- Limited access to specialist Magistrates' Courts, or court-based services and programs available at metropolitan Melbourne courts.
- Limited availability of external services in rural and regional communities which are often utilised by the courts. These include: drug and alcohol services; accommodation services; expert psychiatric and medical reports; psychiatric and disability support services; and youth services. This has an impact on the quality of justice and justice system outcomes, depending on where you live.
- Penalties and court orders depending on location can have an inequitable impact on rural/regional defendants/offenders.
- Poor monitoring of outcomes for participants in the justice system on the basis of spatial variations between rural, regional and metropolitan locations.

¹³ See: <<http://www.deakin.edu.au/news/2009/030709rurallaw.php>>, accessed 14 September 2010.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mr Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor, Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

- A declining ability to attract lawyers to rural and smaller regional settings and inadequate funding of rural and regional Legal Aid and Community Legal Services.
- A substantially increased resource burden on rural and regional legal and related services located at or near state borders.

12.23 In Victoria, the Government has undertaken to provide equitable access to the legal system and delivery of justice in rural and regional Victoria through a number of measures. These include:

- Mobile Justice Service Centre vehicles;¹⁶
- Rural Dispute Settlement Centres;¹⁷ and
- the rollout of Koori courts in regional areas¹⁸ and the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.¹⁹

12.24 The Committee heard during its Inquiry that Government efforts can be developed and improved to ensure that the particular legal needs of non-metropolitan communities are taken into account in developing access to the law in Victoria.

Courts

12.25 The Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services 2010 shows that as at 30 June 2009:

In the County Court, there were 1,037 appeal criminal cases waiting to be heard of which 7.4 per cent had been waiting longer than 12 months, compared with 946 in 2008 of which 9.4 per cent had been waiting longer than 12 months.

There were 2,173 non-appeal County Court criminal cases waiting to be heard, the highest number in Australia, of which 31.5 per cent had been waiting longer than 12 months, compared with 2,341 in 2008 of which 27.4 per cent had been waiting longer than 12 months.

¹⁶ See: <<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/doj+internet/home/about+us/our+organisation/mobile+service+centres/justice+-+mobile+justice+service+centres+-+home>>, accessed 4 August 2010.

¹⁷ See: <<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/doj+internet/home/the+justice+system/disputes/mediation/justice+-+rural+dispute+settlement+centre>>, accessed 4 August 2010.

¹⁸ See: <<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/doj+internet/home/courts/victorian+courts/justice+-+koori+court>>, accessed 4 August 2010.

¹⁹ See: <<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/doj+internet/home/your+rights/indigenous+victorians/aboriginal+justice/justice+-+victorian+aboriginal+justice+agreement>>, accessed 4 August 2010.

The number of criminal cases lodged in the County Court as at 30 June 2009 was 4,500, down from 4,700 in 2008.

Victoria's Magistrates' Courts had a backlog of 35,205 criminal cases waiting to be heard, the highest of any jurisdiction in Australia, of which 25.1 per cent had been waiting longer than six months, compared with 34,701 cases in 2008 of which 24.4 per cent had been waiting longer than six months.

The number of criminal cases lodged in the Magistrates' Court as at 30 June 2009 was 180,600, up from 170,700 in 2008.²⁰

12.26 The Committee is aware that cases are increasingly presenting as more complicated and time consuming for the Courts to resolve. In that context, the Committee believes there is a need to examine the extent and effect of the backlog of cases on rural and regional circuit courts.

County Courts

12.27 Dates for County Court hearings should ideally be set months in advance. This provides citizens and those supporting them with adequate notice and time to prepare for their Hearing. However, the Committee heard that in rural and regional circuits, in both criminal and civil matters, dates are sometimes set only days prior to a hearing. *County Court Civil Procedure Rules 2008* 48.09 (2) states:

Setting down for trial elsewhere than in Melbourne shall be taken to be for the next sitting of the Court at the place for which it is set down for trial, unless the Court otherwise orders.²¹

12.28 According to responses to the study being undertaken by Richard Coverdale, the current situation is a disadvantage for all those involved because it leads to a '...reduced capacity to secure well prepared legal counsel and expert evidence, potentially resulting in inequitable outcomes in comparison to their metropolitan counterparts'.²²

12.29 For instructing solicitors this may lead to a number of problems:

- barristers briefed in a case may not be available at such short notice, requiring the appointment at short notice of a new barrister with limited knowledge of the case;
- appointment of barristers without local knowledge that may be relevant to a case;
- problems organising evidence and witnesses; and
- disruption to the schedule of small law firms without large resources.

²⁰ See: <<http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/rogs>>, accessed 14 September 2010.

²¹ County Court Civil Procedure Rules 2008. S.R. No. 148/2008.

²² Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

12.30 Last minute changes can also occur in Melbourne. However the Committee heard that the impacts in rural and regional Victoria are greater.

12.31 Recent legislative changes prioritising sexual offences, which are now required to be heard within three months of a committal hearing,²³ are causing major delays in other serious criminal and civil hearings at regional courts. In a presentation to the Criminal Bar Association in November 2009, Judge Meryl Sexton said:

The effect on the rest of the criminal caseload is that the number of 'not reached' cases is increasing. These include other sex offences trials. The most devastating effect has been on the circuit lists, particularly in those regions where there was already a backlog, or where there are only two or three circuits a year...Combined with other increased caseloads absorbed by the criminal jurisdiction without extra resources (such as Extended Supervision Orders), the court is fast approaching the point at which it simply cannot do more. Delay before trial will increase beyond the 12 months we are already facing, making, I believe, Victoria the worst performing jurisdiction on this measure.²⁴

12.32 Judge Sexton suggested that this situation could be alleviated by extending the time limit within which sexual offences cases must be heard to six months.

12.33 Judge Rizkalla, a senior Judge has called for more judicial appointments to the County Court because of the growing backlog of cases caused in part by lengthy sex offence trials. *The Age* reported:

It was difficult to manage the regional courts because they covered large areas and there was a rising number of trials. But some larger regional centres may soon have circuit judges for up to eight months of the year – an improvement on the past but still less than the metropolitan courts.²⁵

12.34 It has been estimated that at regional circuit courts such as the Mildura County Court Circuit it would take many years to clear all current cases. Even in regard to prioritised sexual offences respondents to the research project suggested that in Morwell it is taking up to three years to hear some cases.²⁶

12.35 In February this year Barrister Daryl Wraith, a barrister practising for more than 40 years, was reported as describing the delays in the Bendigo County Court as 'disgraceful' and that he had matters that he believes will not be

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ See: <<http://www.crimbarvic.org.au/docs/CRIMINAL%20BAR%20ASSOCIATION%20PRESENTATION%20201109.doc>>, accessed 4 August 2010.

²⁵ Lowe A, 'Sex trials prompt call for more judges', *The Age*, 12 July 2010.

²⁶ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

reached for five years. Mr Wraith said that 'Justice delayed is justice denied, from all points of view.'²⁷

12.36 The Committee also heard concerns that delays and the hearing allocation process for circuit courts may contribute to the reduction or demise of regional circuits. This is because, as the rural and regional situation deteriorates, proceedings are increasingly being issued by regional solicitors in Melbourne courts. The Committee heard that Melbourne courts offer greater timeliness and certainty regarding the setting of hearing dates and an ability to attract senior barristers, both for prosecution and defence. However, this in turn causes hardship for rural and regional offenders and others involved in court proceedings who are required to travel to Melbourne to attend proceedings. For example, with regard to travel time, costs, time away from a workplace, stress on families and so on.²⁸

12.37 The Committee believes that this may lead to consideration of the need for permanent courts in regional centres in Victoria such as Warrnambool, Ballarat, Bendigo and Morwell. The establishment of permanent courts would provide a basis for the legal profession to build around in regional Victoria. The Committee believes that there is merit in the Government, in conjunction with the Bar Association of Victoria, exploring the possibilities of establishing permanent courts in regional Victoria.

12.38 Another issue raised through the research work being conducted by Mr Coverdale is that of '...limitations in the availability of court conferencing for victims at regional circuits'.²⁹ Conferencing is a type of dispute resolution that can assist offenders to resolve their dispute without going to court. It is used, for example, with regard to family law or youth matters. Often conferencing involves welfare organisations in its processes.

12.39 The Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria is currently represented in the following locations: Melbourne; Morwell; Geelong; Bendigo; Ballarat; Horsham; Berwick; and Wangaratta. The role of the Dispute Resolution Centre is:

to provide an informal, impartial, accessible, low cost dispute resolution service to all communities in Victoria.

and

to provide an alternative to legal action.³⁰

²⁷ Bucci N, 'Barrister Daryl Wraith lashes out at five-year wait for justice,' *Bendigo Advertiser*, 9 February 2010.

²⁸ Mr Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor, Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

²⁹ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

³⁰ See:

<<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/12a7e500404a539a98a0fbf5f2791d4a/Dispute+Settlement+Centre+Information+Kit+2009.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

12.40 The Committee notes it is an expressed priority of the Department of Justice to improve dispute resolution services across the whole of Victoria.³¹ It is our belief that the Victorian Government should make rural and regional Victoria a priority in implementing these improvements.

12.41 Outcomes for participants in the County Courts may be impeded by the lack of forensic and psychiatric services in many rural and regional locations. Solicitors interviewed for the Rural and Regional Disadvantage in the Administration of the Law in Victoria research project have indicated that:

- As a result of the general scarcity of mental health services in rural areas and the limited financial incentive offered by Victoria Legal Aid for court (medico/legal) reports it is difficult to access a psychiatrist to provide court reports.
- Forensicare – which is responsible for the statewide provision of adult forensic mental health services in Victoria – require that pre-sentenced offenders go to services they recommend for a forensic psychologist’s report. As there are very few forensic psychologists in regional Victoria, this can mean significant travel for offenders with a psychiatric illness in rural and regional Victoria.
- A person with a personal injury claim may not be physically able to travel to Melbourne for medical assessment. Smaller medical practices are unwilling or unable to leave their sole practice for the day to give evidence in court.

12.42 Limited training for police officers in rural areas can result in poor legal knowledge and lower skills for presenting evidence. For example, Video and Audio Taped Evidence is underutilised compared to metropolitan areas.³²

12.43 The Victorian Bar Council has raised the issue of the use of telecommunications in services, and recommended to the Federal Government:

The Attorney-General’s Department should initiate discussions with courts, tribunals, Government agencies, service providers and the legal assistance sector to undertake a ‘stocktake’ of the use of technology to identify opportunities to increase collaboration and expand availability of services, particularly for regional, rural and remote Australia.³³

12.44 At the Committee’s public hearing in Geelong, Mr Coverdale advised that the County Court is currently reviewing services available to rural and regional communities.³⁴

³¹ Department of Justice, *Department of Justice Strategic Priorities 09–10: A statement of our focus and direction*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2009.

³² Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

³³ The Victorian Bar Council, *The Victorian Bar Preliminary Submission to the Access to Justice Taskforce*, 8 December 2009.

³⁴ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

Magistrates' Court

12.45 Respondents to the research project being conducted by Mr Coverdale suggested that there is a '...significant variation in the availability of specialist Magistrates' Courts, court support services and diversional programs between metropolitan and rural and regional courts'.³⁵ The Department of Justice is improving this situation through a number of programs, as listed at paragraph 12.23. The Committee believes that Governments should make a firm commitment to rolling-out these programs and services to rural and regional Victoria.

12.46 Below are some examples of Magistrates' Court specialist courts and court support programs:

- Court Integrated Services Program (established 2006). A multi-disciplinary team-based approach to the assessment and referral to treatment of defendants. Available in Melbourne Magistrates' Court, Sunshine Magistrates' Court and Latrobe Valley Magistrates' Court.
- Credit Bail Program (established 2004). Clients are provided with a range of services while on bail. Available at Ballarat Magistrates' Court, Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court, Dandenong Magistrates' Court, Frankston Magistrates' Court, Geelong Magistrates' Court, Heidelberg Magistrates' Court, Moorabbin Magistrates' Court, Ringwood Magistrates' Court.
- Drug Court (established 2002). Available at Dandenong Magistrates' Court only.
- Family Violence Division (established 2005) and Specialist Family Violence Service. Available at Ballarat Magistrates' Court, Heidelberg Magistrates' Court, Melbourne Magistrates' Court, Frankston Magistrates' Court, Sunshine Magistrates' Court and Werribee Magistrates' Court.
- Neighbourhood Justice Centre (established 2007). Available Collingwood Magistrates' Court only.
- Mental Health Court Liaison Service (established 1994). Determines the presence or absence of serious mental illness, and provides feedback based on these assessments to the court. Available at Melbourne Magistrates' Court, Ringwood Magistrates' Court, Heidelberg Magistrates' Court, Dandenong Magistrates' Court, Frankston Magistrates' Court, Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court and Sunshine Magistrates' Court. Part-time staff at Geelong Magistrates' Court, Shepparton Magistrates' Court, Bendigo Magistrates' Court, Ballarat Magistrates' Court and Latrobe Valley Magistrates' Court.³⁶

12.47 The growing use of therapeutic and diversional programs is a welcome development among many legal practitioners and the broader community. However, it should be acknowledged that services necessary to implement such programs are frequently not available in smaller locations. As a result:

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

...there is a real danger of there being two levels of justice system outcomes – ‘Postcode Justice’, dependent on where you live and the location of the court you attend. One system for metropolitan and larger regional centres with the services available to support more progressive and innovative programs and another for smaller regional and rural communities without the support infrastructures available.³⁷

12.48 Other concerns around the Magistrates’ Courts that the Coverdale research reveals include:

- At regional circuits an individual magistrate who is more likely to have a criminal law background will be responsible for hearing both criminal and civil matters. However, at Melbourne Magistrates’ Courts civil lists are predominantly heard by magistrates with an expertise in civil matters. With the Magistrates’ Court able to hear civil matters of up to \$100,000 individual livelihoods are at stake.
- Many people in rural and regional Victoria are forced to travel to Melbourne to attend specialist jurisdictions.
- Mediation services are limited. This is despite mediation outcomes being preferable in many of the types of cases heard in rural and regional communities, where disputing parties may have to deal with each other on an ongoing basis.
- A mediation pilot program has been set up at the Magistrates’ Court, however as of November 2009 only one regional setting, Latrobe Valley, had been included in the program.³⁸
- The lack of available information comparing outcomes across metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal

12.49 A number of concerns around processes in the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and how these particularly affect rural and regional Victorians were raised with the Committee. These include:

- Limited opportunity to have defended hearings within a number of VCAT lists outside metropolitan Melbourne (planning list, discrimination list, general list were noted as examples).
- Limited capacity to manage urgent hearings outside metropolitan Melbourne.
- The layout of court facilities can influence the capacity to undertake confidential mediations. Facilities are inadequate to accommodate confidential mediations at some rural/regional courts.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ See: <http://www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/justlib/magistrates+court/home/civil+and+money+matters/procedural+information/magistrates+-+mediation+pilot+-+broadmeadows+sunshine+werribee+latrobe+valley>, accessed 4 August 2010.

- Some rural/regional jurisdictions experience long waiting lists. For example, Civil List.
- There is a lack of accountability regarding hearings which are not recorded at rural or regional venues. The Committee notes that it is a stated aim of the State Government for all VCAT hearings to be digitally recorded.³⁹
- The Committee also notes the following from VCAT's Discussion Paper of May 2010, as written by its President, Justice Iain Ross: 'I propose to develop a regional engagement strategy including the establishment of regular circuits and increased use of video conferencing to ensure that we meet the needs of Victorians in regional communities.'⁴⁰

Penalties and their Effects

12.50 Variations in the effect of penalties on those in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas should be considered by policy makers in terms of their impact on the lives of rural and regional Victorians.

12.51 For example, the mandatory loss of driving licences may have a greater effect on communities without access to public transport than it does in inner-Melbourne where public transport is widely available. As such, '...the notion of mandatory policies can have serious consequences, eroding the principle of judicial independence and discretion'.⁴¹

12.52 The Home Detention Program is a program that is supported by legal practitioners and families of offenders. A 2006 Report into home detention concluded that:

In terms of overall cost-benefit, the program yielded superior outcomes for less cost than the alternative of imprisonment. There were also non-costed benefits in the form of low parole breach rates, reduced cost of crime and improved family outcomes.⁴²

12.53 However, Home Detention is only available to those living within a 40-km radius of metropolitan Melbourne.⁴³

12.54 Available statistics based on rural and regional access to the law and justice outcomes point to other inequities. For example, a disproportionate number of young people in custody are from rural and regional Victoria, with

³⁹ Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, *Transforming VCAT: Discussion Paper May 2010*, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, Melbourne 2010.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

⁴² See:

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/280b4000404a6a2893c3fbf5f2791d4a/Home_Detention_Report_Final_May2006.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>, accessed September 2010.

⁴³ Adult Parole Board of Victoria, 'Fact Sheet 7. General Guide to Home Detention', March 2009.

Indigenous young people particularly over-represented,⁴⁴ ‘...a serious and ongoing issue which deserves greater attention at a state and national level’.⁴⁵ Another example concerns programs that form part of sentencing. Some of these programs are only available in Melbourne, putting rural and regional offenders at risk of breaching their sentences. It may also limit options for sentencing of offenders located in rural and regional Victoria.

Legal Practitioner Issues

12.55 Several participants in the Rural and Regional Disadvantage in the Administration of the Law in Victoria research project added their voices to a growing number of reports addressing the decreasing availability of legal services in non-metropolitan areas.

12.56 The Access to Justice Taskforce, ‘A Strategic Framework for Access to Justice in the Federal Civil Justice System’⁴⁶ notes that accessing (publicly or privately funded) legal services is becoming increasingly difficult in rural, regional and remote areas in Australia

12.57 The experience of the Public Interest Law Clearing House (Victoria) is that it is more difficult for people living in rural, regional and remote parts of Australia to access legal representation than for those living in metropolitan areas. Some reasons for this include:

- fewer Community Legal Centres and Legal Aid Commissions in rural, regional and remote areas;
- greater likelihood of conflicts of interest arising;
- time, travel and accommodation costs associated with metropolitan services assisting persons in rural, regional and remote areas; and
- difficulties that rural, regional and remote Community Legal Centres and private firms have in retaining lawyers.⁴⁷

12.58 The Law Council of Australia has conducted a survey on issues for lawyers in rural regional and remote areas, and identifies concerns in Victoria around succession planning and retention of lawyers.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Department of Human Services, *Youth Parole and Youth Residential Board Annual Report 2007–2008 Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2008.

⁴⁵ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

⁴⁶ Attorney-General’s Department, *A Strategic Framework for Access to Justice in the Federal Civil Justice System*, Australian Government, Canberra 2009.

⁴⁷ Public Interest Law Clearing House (Vic) *Submission to the Attorney-General’s Department on the Strategic Framework for Access to Justice in the Federal Civil Justice System*, November 2009, p 31. Also see: Public Interest Law Clearing House (Vic) *Submission to the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on the Inquiry into Access to Justice*, 30 April 2009; and <<http://www.pilch.org.au>>.

12.59 The Law Institute of Victoria has also conducted extensive work on this issue and has called for the Federal and State Governments to continue and increase funding of legal services. In terms of access to justice in the rural and regional context the Law Institute calls on the State Government to support initiatives such as:

- monetary allowances or bonuses for relocation;
- increased opportunities for clinical placements for law students and graduates;
- further collaboration with Victoria Legal Aid on traineeships;
- a scholarship scheme for law students; and
- cash incentive payments upon completion of a specific time period in rural, regional and remote areas.⁴⁹

12.60 The economic viability and social fabric of rural and regional communities is directly linked to the availability of professional services within those communities. This includes legal practices, which make an important contribution to the economic viability of rural and regional small businesses and support local services and social organisations within communities through their pro-bono activities.

12.61 Despite what has been described by Mr Coverdale as a ‘strong sense of moral obligation’⁵⁰ among private law firms across rural and regional Australia to provide Legal Aid services, there are still concerns about unmet legal needs in rural and regional communities. This view was supported by witnesses at the Committee’s public hearing in Bendigo.⁵¹

12.62 The *Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee – Access to Justice Inquiry* recommended a review of funding for legal services available for disadvantaged groups, in particular those living in remote areas. In its response the Federal Government noted the recommendation and said that it is ‘...committed to ensuring that legal assistance programs are appropriately resourced so that disadvantaged Australians who cannot afford legal services are able to receive assistance’.⁵²

12.63 The Committee is concerned that Victoria receives the lowest per capita Federal Government funding for legal aid of any state in Australia.⁵³ We support the Attorney-General’s efforts to increase Victoria’s share of Federal

⁴⁸ See:

<http://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/shadomx/apps/fms/fmsdownload.cfm?file_uuid=5803E106-1E4F-17FA-D237-00BF3991AACA&siteName=lca>, accessed 12 September 2010.

⁴⁹ Law Institute of Victoria, *Advocating Justice for All*, Law Institute of Victoria, Melbourne 2010.

⁵⁰ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Submission*, Number 20, 24 March 2010.

⁵¹ Mr Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor, Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

⁵² See:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/access_to_justice/gov_response.pdf>, accessed 21 July 2010.

⁵³ ‘LIV welcomes Budget increase for Legal Aid’, Media Release, 4 May 2010, see:

<<http://www.liv.asn.au/About-LIV/Media-Centre/Media-Releases/LIV-Welcomes-Budget-Increase-for-Legal-Aid.aspx?rep=1&glist=0&sdiag=0>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

funding through the National Partnership Agreement for Legal Assistance Services.⁵⁴

12.64 The Committee also notes the Victorian State Budget 2010–2011, which included the following spending commitments:

- \$49.9 million over two years for Victoria Legal Aid;
- \$62.3 million over four years to reduce delays in Victoria’s courts;
- \$4 million over four years for the Magistrates’ Court to implement the Government’s proposed personal safety intervention orders; and
- \$11.2 million over four years to fund the Children’s Court new mediation pilot for child protection cases.⁵⁵

12.65 This funding is for statewide programs. The Committee believes that special attention should be directed at rural and regional Victoria, as outlined in the Recommendation on access to the law that is the subject of this Chapter.

12.66 Those taking part in the Rural and Regional Disadvantage in the Administration of the Law in Victoria research project identified the following issues as being of concern:

- country lawyers are expected to cover a broad range of law, while city lawyers are able to specialise;
- the low number of firms in small communities increases the risk of a conflict of interest arising when opposing parties seek the same representation; and
- difficulty accessing senior defence barristers and experienced Crown Prosecutors.

12.67 For those reasons, ideally, all communities should have access to a combination of private law firms, Legal Aid services and community legal centres. This ensures that for both parties in a dispute being financially or otherwise disadvantaged does not affect their ability to gain representation.⁵⁶

12.68 For example, Peter Noble, the Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre’s Principal Solicitor, addressed the Committee’s Inquiry regarding the absence of a dedicated community legal centre in the Goulburn Valley at its hearing in Bendigo.

12.69 During the Hearing Mr Noble suggested that Shepparton in the Goulburn Valley was in great need of a Community Legal Centre because of the unique issues of disadvantage relevant to that community. He told the Committee:

⁵⁴ ‘Federal funding for Victorian Legal Aid a good start’, Media Release, 13 May 2010, see: <<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/component/content/article/10395.html>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

⁵⁵ ‘\$129.4 million boost to give more Victorians swifter access to justice’, Media Release, 4 May 2010, see: <<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/component/content/article/10240.html>>, accessed 29 July 2010.

⁵⁶ Mr Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor, Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

...there's massive issues in the Goulburn Valley. You know, if I had to say, you know, if there was a blank slate and you had to say where are you going to put legal services, Shep would have got one a long time before Bendigo, because of its cultural and linguistic diversity, and the high Indigenous community, as well as all of the normal layers of disadvantage of the wider Australian community, if I can describe it like that.

...It's a fantastic community, a vibrant, rich community, but with significant issues as well. Our statistics, just from offering a pilot service, with support of local practitioners, bear out that, you know, family violence is a big issue, and that migration needs or legal issues of that community are big as well. So, anything that can be done I guess to improve legal services in that region, would be welcome.⁵⁷

12.70 The Committee was also made aware of systemic ways in which rural and regional graduates are drawn to Melbourne rather than staying within or returning to their own communities. For example, while completing courses in Melbourne where they come to the attention of large law firms:

...now there is a requirement rather than doing articles, there are courses available. It is generally metropolitan Melbourne where those courses are available. If you are away for 12 months from your local area involved in one of those courses, you have the large law firms in metropolitan Melbourne who are the only ones who really do any promotional advertising for graduates. You are enticed there. You are immediately sort of removed from the possibility of continuing in your local area.⁵⁸

12.71 Peter Noble believes that attracting graduates to rural legal centres is not as big a problem as retaining them. Mr Noble informed the Committee of a number of organisations, including the Legal Services Board and philanthropic services, working at improving the recruitment and retention of lawyers in non-metropolitan legal centres. Mr Noble makes a number of suggestions:

I think everyone who works regionally would say you just have to work flexibly, and if you can find someone who is skilled and interested, then you do what you can to retain them. And some people would return. Younger lawyers would return. The problem is not being able to attract a graduate. The problem is being able to retain a graduate.

There's stuff from the Law Council – and I can leave any of this material with you – which says in Victoria in the next five years, regional practitioners say that 38 per cent of regional practitioners say that they will retire in the next five years, which is a massive

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mr Richard Coverdale, Research Fellow, School of Law, Deakin University, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

loss, and 81 per cent, I think, say that the major issue for them in their legal practices is managing succession. So, it's about being able to you know, attract and retain solicitors of a high enough calibre to do the sort of work that's generated regionally, and sophisticated work gets generated by the regions. It just goes to Melbourne, and it becomes a self-feeding process. As the regional firms who would otherwise have done that work, de-skill, they're not going to get the work, so that you probably have a trend in some regional areas to doing more lower level, generalist work.⁵⁹

12.72 A further recommendation of the Federal Taskforce is to consider incentives to encourage lawyers to practise in rural, regional and remote areas. This Committee believes that ensuring legal practitioner services are available to people in rural and regional Australia is a high priority for all levels of government. Concerns have also been highlighted by the Law Council of Australia and the Law Institute of Victoria.

Conclusion

12.73 The Committee notes that it is an expressed priority of the Department of Justice to improve access to justice services in rural and regional Victoria as part of the Department's regional management structure.⁶⁰

12.74 The Committee recommends that the State Government respond to concerns raised before the Rural and Regional Committee during this Inquiry by taking into account the issues highlighted in the Committee's Recommendation.

12.75 The Recommendation on access to the law that is discussed and expanded in this Chapter is also closely related to the intentions encapsulated in Key Recommendation 1. The Recommendation on rural proofing calls for the establishment of an independent consultative body to monitor and review legislation, government policy and resources allocation as it has an impact on rural and regional Victorians. The Recommendation on rural proofing and similarly worded Recommendations were suggested throughout the Committee's hearings in the context of access to the law and the workings of circuit courts in regional areas (as discussed in this Chapter), funding models, education, delivery of health services and so on.

⁵⁹ Mr Peter Noble, Principal Solicitor at Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

⁶⁰ Department of Justice, *Department of Justice Strategic Priorities 09–10: A statement of our focus and direction*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2009.

Key Recommendations 8–9

Regional Research Body

Key Recommendation 8

That the State Government fund a research body in each of the five regions of Victoria. This research body would undertake the following tasks:

- collect region-specific, disaggregated data;
- store relevant data about the region;
- analyse region-specific data; and
- ensure that the data is made publicly available.

The data would be collected and analysed with a view to understanding the demographic profile and needs of rural and regional communities. The data will assist with planning for the future of the region and would be available to all levels of government and other interested groups. The data would also assist with community and regional efforts to determine local priorities.

Key Recommendation 9

That the State Government acknowledge that social indicators of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria should not be measured in numbers alone but rather on a more accurate basis, such as a per capita basis, that provides an accurate picture of conditions in a local community. The Committee further recommends that this lead to a reconsideration of policy and allocation of resources based on more accurate measurements.

I would create a department just for the collection and dissemination of joined-up government data that actually addresses the question at hand.¹

Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network

13.1 G21, an organisation comprised of government, business and community organisations from the Geelong region, suggests that when it comes to identifying disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria there is available data. However, what is lacking is local data that is accurate, timely and integrated and can provide clear direction for policy makers. Further, G21 argues (and the Committee also heard this elsewhere²) where the data does exist there is a tendency for it to be unavailable or inaccessible to anyone other than those stakeholders directly involved in its collation.³

13.2 Some examples of data sources already available:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS);
- Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA);
- Social Health Atlas;
- Community Indicators Victoria;
- VicPol Crime Statistics;
- Australian Early Development Index;
- Victorian Population Health Survey;
- Vinson Report;
- Child Social Inclusion Index;
- Department of Human Services Fair Health Facts;
- Australian Unity Wellbeing Index; and
- BankWest Quality of Life Index.

¹ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

² Associate Professor Timothy Baker, Director, Centre for Rural Emergency Medicine, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Mr Denis Rose, Chief Executive Officer, Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, *Public Hearing*, Portland, 17 March 2010; Mr Geoff Sharp, Chief Executive, United Way Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

³ G21 Geelong Region Alliance, *Submission*, Number 47, 31 March 2010.

13.3 That local communities are best placed to collate information need not be questioned:

Rural and regional disadvantage needs to be understood by rural and regional Victoria foremost...[and]...the closer to those affected the solutions are, the greater the likelihood of success.⁴

13.4 G21 envisions a data collection body that would provide demographic, social, economic and service data and information, to facilitate planning and development in areas such as transport, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, and the environment. It could act as a source of vital support for research projects, including in the fields of biotechnology, broadband, urban planning and growth, and ageing populations.⁵

13.5 In its submission G21 states that the idea of a regional research body has already been proposed to the Government via the G21 Interdepartmental Committee in September 2009. The creation of such a body also has the support of Local Government Authorities and businesses in the Barwon region, the Barwon Regional Management Forum, and Deakin University.⁶

13.6 In Mildura, the Committee heard about work being done that results in the *Mildura Social Indicators Report*. This work provides a practical example of the type of data that the proposed research body in this Recommendation would ideally collect and house. The Mildura report is presented in nine sections:

Section 1: Overview of the Region

- Age/gender profile;
- An ageing population;
- Backgrounds of arrivals;
- Family structures;
- Country of birth; and
- Stability of population.

Section 2: Social Distress

- Family income;
- Rental stress;
- Home purchase stress; and
- Lone person households.

Section 3: Health

- Childhood accidents;
- Immunisation cover;
- Disability/sickness payment;

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

- Occupational accidents; and
- Psychiatric hospital admissions.

Section 4: Community Engagement

- Individuals isolated by language;
- Profile of group;
- Education; and
- Social cohesion.

Section 5: Community Safety

- Child maltreatment;
- Crimes against the person;
- Crimes against property; and
- Road trauma.

Section 6: Economic

- Occupations;
- Occupational categories;
- Types of businesses;
- Employment within business categories;
- Unemployment;
- Long term unemployment;
- Taxable income;
- Tourism; and
- Internet connection/access.

Section 7: Education

- Attendance at pre-school;
- Incomplete education/training (17–24-year-olds);
- Overall education; and
- Post-schooling qualifications.

Section 8: Cultural Indicators

- Art gallery; and
- Library visits and membership.

Section 9: Environmental Indicators⁷

⁷ Mildura Rural City Council, *Mildura Social Indicators Report 2008*, Mildura Rural City Council, Mildura 2008.

Problems with Some Forms of Data

- 13.7 For a Local Government Area with a population the size of Geelong information provided by sources such as the Department of Planning and Community Development's Indicators of Community Strengths is too broad to be of much use to the City of Greater Geelong in its efforts to address disadvantage in the community:

Geelong is fairly large. It has a population of 220,000. It has enormous diversity across the population. For us to get an indicator that goes right across a municipality, actually really doesn't tell us an awful lot, and we do find that with quite a number of documents which come out of the State Government in relation to some of the housing, crime statistics. They are often done on a municipal-wide basis.⁸

- 13.8 Problems can also occur when communities are linked through geographical proximity alone rather than relevant similarities. Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network provided an example of a skills survey that presented an inaccurate picture because of the locations under examination: "...Boort, Wedderburn and Inglewood, for example, are lumped in with Bendigo, and Wycheproof is lumped in with Swan Hill".⁹

- 13.9 Regarding statistical information covering the whole of a large municipality, there is a further complication more damaging than that of simply being unhelpful. Daly *et al* stress that the mere identification of an area as being at risk of experiencing disadvantage does not mean that everyone living in that area is at risk.¹⁰ Conversely, Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director at the Corio Medical Clinic, told the Committee that disadvantaged communities, such as those of Corio, Norlane, Colac and Whittington, can be overlooked because health statistics on Geelong as a whole suggest that the area is doing very well. Dr Kennedy added that a lack of action on poor doctor–patient ratios in disadvantaged communities can similarly be ascribed to data delivered via broad brushstrokes:

You know, we've got every man and his dog has set up a practice down near Deakin University in the last 18 months and so the doctor–patient ratios there have improved considerably. Central Geelong, we've got a number of practices and not a lot of residents. So, the doctor–patient ratio is good. But out here there's been no change, and certainly no improvement. It may have actually

⁸ Ms Irene McGinnigle, General Manager Community Services, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

⁹ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹⁰ Daly A *et al*, 'Indicators of risk of social inclusion for children in Australian households: an analysis by state and age group', *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, Vol 14, Number 2, 2008.

deteriorated. But that gets hidden when you look at workforce figures for all of Geelong.¹¹

- 13.10 Such a statistical 'distortion' occurs in other parts of the State as well. Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor of Buloke Shire Council, stated that pockets of disadvantage can be hidden by areas of affluence. As such: "Small-area statistics and other tools should be used to reveal those pockets of deprivation."¹²
- 13.11 Mitchell Shire, as revealed in the earlier Regional Profile on the Hume region, also produces a wide spectrum of demographic data, from relative poverty to relative affluence. This means that Mitchell Shire Council is required to eschew postcode-based data in favour of data based on Statistical Local Areas.¹³ Mildura Rural City Council, on the other hand, while also agreeing that the sort of regionally based statistics produced by some State Government Departments are too broad for Council use, finds postcode-based data of great assistance as it "...enables you to target smaller catchments within a community".¹⁴
- 13.12 In Bendigo data based on Local Government Areas (LGAs) was favoured as a way of 'drilling down' through more broad data, to help the City of Bendigo acquire a true understanding of how communities in the region are faring:

If I could just add in there, because I am the person who loves the data part of it, we also did put a statement in there around continuing to invest in provision of comprehensive data at the LGA level, that makes such a difference for local planning and our capacity to target resources and then even down below LGA level, because Barry has demonstrated the diversity of people's experiences if you take it down to a sort of neighbourhood level. But LGA data is very powerful, especially to help our councillors gain a closer understanding of issues; if you give them state data it can wash over. Once it's their LGA, it starts to make sense, and have a bit more reality to it.¹⁵

Types of Data

- 13.13 As discussed above, although some forms of data measuring disadvantage are not in themselves lacking, there are some areas of concern regarding the type of data collected, whether it is disaggregated, whether it relates to

¹¹ Dr Mark Kennedy, Medical Director, Corio Medical Clinic, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

¹² Cr Leo Tellefson, Mayor of Buloke Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

¹³ Mr Rob McVernon, General Manager Community and Recreation, Mitchell Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Seymour, 19 May 2010.

¹⁴ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

¹⁵ Ms Carolyn Wallace, Manager Community and Cultural Development, City of Greater Bendigo, *Public Hearing*, Bendigo, 11 May 2010.

rural and regional Victoria specifically, and how it can be used. For example, communities who present poorly on the Socio Economic Index for Areas index produced by the ABS frequently cite this material as a reference providing evidence of how disadvantaged they are. However, the Committee heard that this is very complex measurement data requiring advanced ‘statistical literacy’ to interpret properly.¹⁶

13.14 One witness the Committee heard from referred to the risk of ‘ecological fallacy’¹⁷ that can occur when trying to draw generalisations about individuals and families based on the Socio Economic Index for Areas index. Indeed, the ABS itself ‘...recommends caution when reporting’.¹⁸

13.15 Golden Plains Shire suggests there may be gaps in the ABS data concerning rural areas of Victoria due to the ‘...extremely isolated and remote nature of some locations’.¹⁹

13.16 Speaking more generally on the topic of social exclusion and data, Saunders *et al* posit that much data around disadvantage is fundamentally flawed by being focused on what people are able to do rather than what is denied them:

...all attempts to identify social exclusion face a major practical problem because the concept is designed to capture things that people do not or cannot do, whereas most of the data used to study it describe what people actually do. There is thus a methodological challenge associated with drawing inferences about the existence of exclusion by observing actual behaviour.²⁰

13.17 The issue of quantitative data is another issue peculiar to more remote regions; that is, because of the small population numbers found across rural and regional Victoria relying on numbers alone will not always provide an accurate picture of either the needs of local communities, or the efficacy of programs. In Robinvale, for example, the Committee heard that only qualitative data can show the true extent of the problems caused by limited child care options, in this case where school-age children are sometimes missing school through taking on childminding duties while their parents go to work.²¹

13.18 As discussed in Chapter 3 of this Report, profiling the Grampians region, the Chief Executive of United Way Ballarat, Mr Geoff Sharp, argued that data measuring disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria, although readily

¹⁶ City of Ballarat, *Submission*, Number 45, 31 March 2010.

¹⁷ Mr Bruce Smith, Social Planner, East Gippsland Shire Council, *Public Hearing*, Lakes Entrance, 21 April 2010.

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘ABS releases measures of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage’, Media Release, 26 March 2008.

¹⁹ Golden Plains Shire, *Submission*, Number 13, 16 March 2010.

²⁰ Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and social exclusion in Australia*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney 2007.

²¹ Ms Gayle Farnsworth, PhD Candidate, University of South Australia, *Public Hearing*, Robinvale, 3 March 2010.

available, is 'vertically integrated', or locked in 'silos'. He believes that this makes it difficult to determine exactly what programs tackling disadvantage are achieving. In his view better outcomes would be possible by integrating data from State Government departments, service agencies, community organisations and so on, to provide an overall picture of how much progress is being made in tackling disadvantage.²²

- 13.19 Mr Sharp suggested to the Committee that ranking systems and placing towns and communities on a hierarchical table of disadvantage is not in itself useful. What is required to make that approach worthwhile is an external marker to compare outcomes with and guide judgement of progress:

There is data out there. A lot of it is comparative data...when you're busy ranking everyone against what they should be, you end up splitting hairs, and you end up with we're – well, just like I did, we're 20th on the list of 79. Well, what if everyone's really close?...we need external benchmarks to actually access that data.²³

- 13.20 In Mildura, Mr Ross Lake also highlights how useful comparative information is for community organisations who are attempting to measure their own progress.²⁴ This is important because, as Saunders *et al* argue, it is the job of governments, those in the community sector and citizens to work together '...as part of a concerted attack on the root causes of social disadvantage'.²⁵ This partnership approach was also promoted by the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission in its 2008 report, *A State of Liveability*.²⁶

- 13.21 Mr Lake was highly complimentary of the Victorian Government's *Regional Matters: An atlas of regional Victoria*, but argued that such a document should be produced annually, as frequent measuring of progress is a regional and rural priority:

If you ask me what I would like to see, I would like to see you guys coming to me more often with a completed study that said, 'Comparatively this is where we think you sit. Which problem is the priority? And when we measure it again next year, have we improved it?'. This is not rocket science.²⁷

- 13.22 In Ballarat, Ms Carolyn Barrie from the City of Ballarat suggested that providing timely and relevant data to the community is the responsibility of

²² Mr Geoff Sharp, Chief Executive, United Way Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mr Ross Lake, Chair, Audit Committee, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

²⁵ Saunders P, Naidoo Y, Griffiths M, *Towards New Indicators of Disadvantage: Deprivation and social exclusion in Australia*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney 2007.

²⁶ Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, *A State of Liveability: An inquiry into enhancing Victoria's liveability. Final report*, Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, Melbourne 2008.

²⁷ Mr Ross Lake, Chair, Audit Committee, Mallee Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

all levels of government. She informed the Committee that the City of Ballarat is in fact working closely with Community Indicators Victoria²⁸ to source up-to-date demographic information best suited to informing the City's policies and programs.²⁹ In Geelong, too, local leaders believe that both the size of the municipality and the pace at which it is growing and changing can mean data becomes outdated very quickly.³⁰

- 13.23 Problems around data measuring disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria, then, are found not so much in the amount collected, more so in the type of data collected and how it is used. The Committee believes that regions would benefit from the funding of a body that can collate the type of data the regions feel they need to understand their communities and the ways in which the data is best used.

Why Measuring Disadvantage is Important

- 13.24 The importance of being able to source reliable data of an agreed standard, while perhaps self-evident, is nonetheless worth discussing. Measuring disadvantage can help governments determine geographical locations where disadvantage is prevalent,³¹ as well as areas where disadvantage is becoming entrenched or 'generational'.³² In relation to children at risk of social exclusion, Daly *et al* suggest that widening the spectrum of data collected to include more than just income '...adds to our knowledge of those areas where children are more likely to be at risk of social disadvantage...'.³³
- 13.25 Considering earlier discussions in the Regional Profiles on public housing residents from low socioeconomic backgrounds, a 2008 article by Associate Professor Karen Healy and Dr Wendy Hillman on social exclusion among families moving to rural areas argues that there is little evidence available on the reasons why these families relocate or indeed their experiences once they have relocated.³⁴ Such evidence would be worth acquiring. Given the nature of the public housing demographic (many are facing disadvantage)

²⁸ See: <<http://www.communityindicators.net.au/>>, accessed 2 August 2010.

²⁹ Ms Carolyn Barrie, Director People and Communities, City of Ballarat, *Public Hearing*, Ballarat, 12 May 2010.

³⁰ Ms Irene McGinnigle, General Manager Community Services, City of Greater Geelong, *Public Hearing*, Geelong, 18 May 2010.

³¹ Department of Human Services, *Measuring Disadvantage across Victoria*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, 2003.

³² Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Markedly Socially Disadvantaged Localities in Australia: Their nature and possible remediation*, Australian Government, Canberra 2009.

³³ Daly A *et al*, 'Indicators of risk of social inclusion for children in Australian households: an analysis by state and age group', *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*, Vol 14, Number 2, 2008.

³⁴ Healy K, Hillman W, 'Young families migrating to non-metropolitan areas: Are they at increased risk of social exclusion?', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol 43, Number 3, 2008.

this would provide governments with valuable information on which to base decisions about service provision.

- 13.26 In his foreword to the *Mildura Social Indicators Report 2008*, Professor Tony Vinson applauds Mildura Rural City Council for ‘...using systematically gathered data, to guide the choice of community priorities and community strengthening activities and to monitor progress in achieving community objectives’.³⁵ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, a witness at this Inquiry’s public hearing in Mildura, added that another benefit of the report is that the information contained within it can be shared throughout the community as “...community non-government organisations can use it in lobbying for funding and for identifying key issues and working on them”.³⁶
- 13.27 A practical example of how the sharing of knowledge can assist an organisation tasked with addressing disadvantage, in this case education, was provided in Donald. Ms Nelson informed the Committee that the Local Learning and Employment Network had recently spent \$30,000 from its budget collecting information based on 2006 data that implied there were 34 young people receiving youth allowance in the Local Learning and Employment Network’s region. However, Ms Nelson reports that “...when we actually had someone who had contacts and could get the third quarter 2009 data, which I do not seem to be able to get by just asking for it, we found we actually have 87 young people”.³⁷ For a small community this is a very significant difference.
- 13.28 In Mildura, Mr Hawson informed the Committee that for Mildura Rural City Council to be confident it has identified the most pressing priorities requiring action within the community it first has to have confidence in the data it is collecting.³⁸ The Victorian Government has invested \$6.4 billion in ‘helping those members of our community who are disadvantaged’³⁹ and reliable data can prove invaluable in ensuring policies addressing disadvantage are being implemented effectively,⁴⁰ an idea the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission discusses in terms of ‘liveability measures’:

Liveability measures might contribute substantially to public policy development. If changes or comparisons in liveability measures can provide useful (relevant and timely) insight into particular issues,

³⁵ Mildura Rural City Council, *Mildura Social Indicators Report 2008*, Mildura Rural City Council, Mildura 2008.

³⁶ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

³⁷ Ms Jerri Nelson, Executive Officer, North Central Local Learning and Employment Network, *Public Hearing*, Donald, 17 February 2010.

³⁸ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

³⁹ Department of Premier and Cabinet, *A Fairer Victoria 2010: Real support, real gains*, Victorian Government, Melbourne 2010.

⁴⁰ The Allen Consulting Group, *Are We There Yet? Indicators of inequality in health*, The Allen Consulting Group, Melbourne 2008.

they may provide a rich source of information to help develop and inform policies.⁴¹

- 13.29 Regarding social cohesion Holdsworth and Hartman provide a worthwhile insight into the valuable role formalised systems can play in helping local governments and agencies identify priorities for tackling disadvantage:

Local government authorities and service providers are doubtless already aware of many of these [social cohesion] issues. However, there is a need to formalise and conceptually map the relationships between the various elements which together comprise social cohesion. This, it is hoped, will assist such bodies in the design and implementation of policies and initiatives which can strengthen the ‘social glue’ that binds potentially fragile communities together.⁴²

- 13.30 It is clear, then, that communities in rural and regional Victoria do not need further initiatives and reports producing more volumes of broad, generalised data covering overall State or regional categories than that already available. What the Committee was told is required is more informative and qualitative, locally specific data to inform rural and regional communities. This data is as highly valued by community groups and statutory organisations tackling disadvantage as it is by all tiers of government.

- 13.31 The need for regional research bodies collecting and storing disaggregated, timely, relevant and reliable data, of the sort determined by the communities themselves, is a real one. Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer of Upper Murray Family Care puts this well when he says:

In terms of data, my personal belief is that I think we are drowning in it. We need more analysis of what we have currently got and much more thinking about what we need to collect. I am not a great fan of more data capture. I am not sure we are using what we have efficiently and effectively. It would be helpful if we had some general principles with data. Is the information already available somewhere else? Will it be used? Is it still useful to capture it? Is it valid and reliable? Can it be widely applied? If we have those sorts of general principles our data collection would be a lot better.⁴³

- 13.32 Data, therefore, is at the core of every effort aimed at tackling disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria. Information puts issues on the radar of the local community, who hold accurate knowledge about what they are facing. It also puts important issues on the radar of government. Martin Hawson explains:

⁴¹ Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, *A State of Liveability: An inquiry into enhancing Victoria's liveability, Final Report*, Melbourne 2008.

⁴² Holdsworth L, Hartman Y, ‘Indicators of community cohesion in an Australian country town’, *Commonwealth Journal of Local Government*, Vol 1, Number 2, 2009.

⁴³ Mr Luke Rumbold, Chief Executive Officer, Upper Murray Family Care, *Public Hearing*, Benalla, 7 April 2010.

There is stuff in [the *Mildura Social Indicators Report 2008*] that is not pleasant. I guess some of the stuff I will go into in a second is quite alarming. But it is really important that it is on the radar and is in the mind's eye of local government and we are doing things to address it.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Mr Martin Hawson, General Manager Community and Culture, Mildura Rural City Council, *Public Hearing*, Mildura, 2 March 2010.

Appendix One

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Appendix Two

Submissions

For its *Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria* the Rural and Regional Committee called for submissions from the general public by placing print advertisements in statewide, and local newspapers in December 2009. The Committee also sent invitations to specific organisations seeking submissions in December 2009. Originally set at 22 February 2010, the deadline for submissions was extended to allow more people to participate in the evidence gathering process.

A list of all submissions received and formally approved by the Committee appears on the following pages.

| <u>No.</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Date Received</u> |
|------------|---|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Mr Mario Plazzer – Horsham and District Commerce Association | Horsham | 29 Jan 2010 |
| 2 | Mr Dennis Barker – Surf Coast Shire | Torquay | 06 Feb 2010 |
| 3 | Ms Julie Edwards – Jesuit Social Services | Richmond | 08 Feb 2010 |
| 4 | Mr Denis Witmitz – Horsham and District Commerce Association | Horsham | 16 Feb 2010 |
| 5 | Mr Dorothy McLaren – RuralAccess | Horsham | 16 Feb 2010 |
| 6 | Mr James McKay – West Wimmera Shire Council | Edenhope | 17 Feb 2010 |
| 7 | Mr Tony Schneider – Citizen | Dimboola | 22 Feb 2010 |
| 8 | Mr Michael Greenleaf and Ms Kathy Gunn – Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre | Warracknabeal | 22 Feb 2010 |
| 9 | Mr Mel Bartlett – Citizen | Bolwarra | 12 Mar 2010 |
| 10 | Mr Rob Croxford – Murrindindi Shire Council | Alexandra | 15 Mar 2010 |
| 11 | Mr W.K Hayes – Citizen | Raymond Island | 15 Mar 2010 |
| 12 | Mr Bill Millard – Warrnambool City Council | Warrnambool | 15 Mar 2010 |
| 13 | Mr David Spear – Golden Plains Shire | Bannockburn | 16 Mar 2010 |

| <u>No.</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Date Received</u> |
|-------------------|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 14 | Ms Cheryl Sanderson – Ovens Valley Awareness Group | Myrtleford | 19 Mar 2010 |
| 15 | Mr Davis Anderson – Corangamite Shire | Camperdown | 23 Mar 2010 |
| 16 | Ms Maria Riedl – Citizen | Mildura | 23 Mar 2010 |
| 17 | Mr Peter Johnston – Macedon Ranges Shire Council | Kyneton | 23 Mar 2010 |
| 18 | Mr Sam Campi – Goulburn Valley Primary Care Partnership | Shepparton | 23 Mar 2010 |
| 19 | Mr David Matthews – Bendigo Bank Strategic Advisory Borad | Kell Mountain | 23 Mar 2010 |
| 20 | Mr Richard Coverdale – Deakin University | Geelong | 24 Mar 2010 |
| 21 | Mr Mark Johnston – Central Goldfields Shire Council | Maryborough | 24 Mar 2010 |
| 22 | Ms Leanne Wishart – DeafAccess | Sale | 26 Mar 2010 |
| 23 | Mr Steven Griffin – City of Greater Geelong | Geelong | 26 Mar 2010 |
| 24 | Cr Judy Verlin – Regional Cities Victoria | Ballarat | 26 Mar 2010 |
| 25 | Mr Glen James – North East Support and Action for Youth Inc. | Wangaratta | 29 Mar 2010 |
| 26 | Ms Ann Kirkham – Headspace | Portland | 29 Mar 2010 |
| 27 | Mr Allan Bassett – Community Southwest | Warrnambool | 29 Mar 2010 |

| <u>No.</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Date Received</u> |
|-------------------|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 28 | Ms Adele Kenneally – Glenelg Shire Council | Portland | 30 Mar 2010 |
| 29 | Mr Andrew Broad – Victorian Farmers Federation | Melbourne | 30 Mar 2010 |
| 30 | Ms Angela Murphy – Horsham Rural City Council | Horsham | 30 Mar 2010 |
| 31 | Mr John McLinden – Loddon Shire Council | Wedderburn | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 32 | Ms Catherine Pianta – Benalla College | Benalla | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 33 | Mr Paul Westcott – Public Transport Users Association | Geelong | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 34 | Ms Liz Chapman – Tomorrow:Today Foundation | Benalla | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 35 | Ms Liz Everest – Regional Youth Affairs Network | Geelong | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 36 | Mr Phil Pearce – Greater Shepparton City Council | Shepparton | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 37 | Ms Pat Moran – National Council of Women Victoria Inc. | Shepparton | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 38 | Mr David Craig – Action for Community Living | Northcote | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 39 | Mr John Smyth – University of Ballarat | Ballarat | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 40 | Professor Sue Kilpatrick – Deakin University | Warrnambool | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 41 | Mr Steve Kozlowski – East Gippsland Shire Council | Bairnsdale | 31 Mar 2010 |

| <u>No.</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Date Received</u> |
|-------------------|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 42 | Mr Tim Johnson – Wellington Shire Council | Sale | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 43 | Mr Vince Brannigan – FCJ College | Benalla | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 44 | Mr Paul Bird – Mission Australia | Melbourne | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 45 | Mr Carolyn Barrie – City of Ballarat | Ballarat | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 46 | Ms Jody O’Kane – Latrobe City | Morwell | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 47 | Mr Andrew Scott – G21 Geelong Regional Alliance | Geelong | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 48 | Ms Toni Hancock – South West Local Learning and Employment Network | Warrnambool | 31 Mar 2010 |
| 49 | Professor Hal Swerissen – La Trobe University | Bendigo | 06 April 2010 |
| 50 | Mr Rob Small – Colac Otway Shire | Colac | 09 April 2010 |
| 51 | Ms Margot Sherwill – Benalla Regeneration | Benalla | 09 April 2010 |
| 52 | Ms Mary Chandler – Citizen | Red Cliffs | 23 April 2010 |
| 53 | Mr Denis Fitzgerald – Catholic Social Services Victoria | East Melbourne | 23 April 2010 |
| 54 | Ms Heather Flemming – Willaura Community Development Group | Willaura | 28 April 2010 |
| 55 | Ms Lin Crase and Mr Gavin Cator – La Trobe University and City of Wodonga | Wodonga | 30 April 2010 |

| <u>No.</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Date Received</u> |
|-------------------|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 56 | Ms Georgie Ferrari and Mr Gavin Thomson – Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Victorian Rural Youth Services | Melbourne | 30 April 2010 |
| 57 | Ms Suzanne Don Leonard – Anglicare | Wangaratta | 30 April 2010 |
| 58 | Minister Jacinta Allan – Victorian Government | Melbourne | 30 April 2010 |
| 59 | Ms Carolyn Atkins – Victorian Council of Social Service | Melbourne | 03 May 2010 |
| 60 | Ms Marion Marx – Citizen | Cann River | 04 May 2010 |
| 61 | Mr Tony Shaw – Glen Park Primary School | Glen Park | 18 May 2010 |
| 62 | Mr Peter White – Notre Dame College | Shepparton | 19 May 2010 |
| 63 | Anna Domingues-Smith – Citizen | Seymour | 31 May 2010 |
| 64 | Mr David Matthews – Wimmera Grain Co. | Rupanyup | 19 Mar 2010 |

Appendix Three

Public Consultation Program – Witnesses

Public hearings, workshops, briefings and meetings for this Inquiry were held at the following locations:

| | | |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 16 February 2010 | Warracknabeal | Public Hearing |
| 17 February 2010 | Donald | Public Hearing |
| 3 March 2010 | Mildura | Public Hearing |
| 4 March 2010 | Robinvale | Public Hearing |
| 17 March 2010 | Portland | Public Hearing |
| 22 March 2010 | Melbourne | Workshop |
| 7 April 2010 | Benalla | Public Hearing |
| 8 April 2010 | Corryong | Public Hearing |
| 21 April 2010 | Lakes Entrance | Public Hearing |
| 22 April 2010 | Mallacoota | Public Hearing |
| 11 May 2010 | Bendigo | Public Hearing |
| 11 May 2010 | Maryborough | Public Hearing |
| 12 May 2010 | Ballarat | Public Hearing |
| 18 May 2010 | Geelong | Public Hearing |
| 19 May 2010 | Seymour | Public Hearing |
| 26 July 2010 | Melbourne | Public Hearing |

Detail appears on the following pages

| 16 February 2010 WARRACKNABEAL – Public Hearing | |
|--|--|
| Mr Ray Campling – Chief Executive Officer | Yarriambiack Shire Council |
| Cr Helen Ballentine – Councillor/Formal Mayor (Hopetoun Ward) | |
| Ms Angela Murphy – General Manager, Community and Enterprise Services | Horsham Rural City Council |
| Ms Dorothy McLaren – Rural Access Officer | |
| Cr Mandi Stewart – Councillor | |
| Mr Dean Miller – Chief Executive Officer | Hindmarsh Shire Council |
| Cr Wayne Lovett – Councillor (East Ward) | |
| Mr Mario Plazzer – President | Horsham and District Commerce Association Inc. |
| Mr Dennis Witmitz – Executive Officer | |
| Ms Joanne Bourke – Chair | Regional Development Australia Committee, Grampians Region |
| Mr Rob Gersch – Chairman | Wimmera Development Association |
| Colin Kemp – Acting Executive Officer | |
| SITE VISIT: Mr Michael Greenleaf and Ms Kathy Gunn – Co-Managers | Warracknabeal Neighbourhood Housing and Learning Centre |
| | |
| 17 February 2010 DONALD – Public Hearing | |
| Mr Reid Mather – Chairperson | North West Municipalities Association |
| Mr James McKay – Chief Executive Officer | West Wimmera Shire Council |
| Mr John Smith – Chief Executive Officer | West Wimmera Health Service |
| Mr Peter Valance – Manager | Donald Community House |
| Ms Debbie Borden – Assistant Nurse Unit Manager; Volunteer Youth and Community Worker | Donald Hospital; Fusion International |
| Cr Leo Tellefson – Mayor | Buloke Shire Council |
| Mr Warwick Heine – Chief Executive Officer | |
| Cr Ellen White – Councillor | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Dr Tayna Rodinov – General Practitioner | Donald Family Clinic |
| Mr Nat Rodinov – Practice Manager | |
| Ms Jerri Neslon – Executive Director | North Central Local Learning and Employment Network |
| Ms Karen Douglas – Chairperson | |
| Mr John Richmond – Principal | Brichip P-12 School |
| | |
| 02 March 2010 MILDURA – Public Hearing | |
| Mr Andrew Wood – Board Member | Sunraysia Football League |
| Mr Adrian Kidd – Deputy Chairperson | Sunrayisa Junior Football League |
| Ross Lake – Managing Director; Chair; Chair; Chair; Chair | Tasco Inland Australia; SunRISE21; Malle Family Care Audit Committee; La Trobe University Foundation; Mildura Arts Festival |
| Cr Vernon Knight – Executive Director; Councillor | Mallee Family Care; Mildura Rural City Council |
| Mr Martin Hawson – General Manger, Community and Culture | Mildura Rural City Council |
| Ms Donna Gardner – Manager, Community and Development | |
| Ms Lisa Barham-Lomax – Manager, Community Care | |
| Mr Kenneth Carr – Volunteer | Mallee Family Care |
| Ms Fiona Harley – Deputy Executive Director | Mallee Family Care |
| Mr Ron Broadhead – Executive Director | Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network |
| Ms Barbara Wilson – Principal | Two Rivers College |
| Mr Dean Wickham – Chief Executive Officer | Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council |
| Ms Maria Riedl | Private Citizen |
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| 03 March 2010 ROBINVALE – Public Hearing | |
|---|--|
| Mr John Tate – President | Robinvale Euston Business Association |
| Mr Robert Briggs – Acting Principal | Robinvale High School |
| Mr Greg Cruickshank – Mayor | Swan Hill Rural City Council |
| Cr John Katis – Councillor | |
| Ms Hodi Beauliv – Senior Executive Officer | |
| Mr Baymos Handy – Services Coordinator | Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative |
| Gary Letts – Chief Executive Officer | |
| Sr Sgt Kathy Zierk – Senior Sargent | Robinvale Police |
| Mr Laurence Burt – Chief Executive Officer | Robinvale District Health Services |
| Ms Gayle Farnsworth – Phd Candidate | University of South Australia |
| Mr Fred Tassone – Chair | Robinvale Table Grape Growers Association |
| Reverend Brad Harris – Minister | Uniting Church |
| | |
| 17 March 2010 PORTLAND – Public Hearing | |
| Mr Mike Weise – Chief Executive Officer | WestVic Dairy |
| Mr Peter Musson – Board Member; Dairy Farmer | |
| Mr Stuart Burdack - Chief Executive Officer | Glenelg Shire Council |
| Ms Adele Kenneally – Group Manager, Community Development | |
| Clinical Associate Professor Tim Baker – Director; Director | Centre for Rural Emergency Services Portland Emergency Department |
| Ms Ann Kirkham – School Focussed Youth Worker; Chair | Brophy Family Youth Services; Glenelg Youth Network |
| Ms Lee-Anne Nelson – Youth Resource Officer | Victoria Police, Portland |
| Ms Angie Lassel – Regional Manager | Headspace |

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|---|--|
| Mr Jacob Tober – Gap year student | |
| Associate Professor Susan Brumby – Director | National Centre for Farmer Health, Western District Health Service |
| Ms Toni Jenkis – Chief Executive Officer | South West Local Learning and Employment Network |
| Ms Anita Rank – Chief Executive Officer Executive Director | Committee for Portland; YMCA Portland |
| Ms Toni Burgoyne – Principal | Portland Secondary College |
| Ms Suzanne Patterson – Careers and Pathways Advisor | |
| Ms Mary Pendergrast – Principal | Warrnambool Secondary College |
| Mr Francis Broekman – Chief Executive Officer | Brophy Family and Youth Services |
| Ms Caroline Byrne – Director | Psychiatric Services, South West Healthcare |
| Mr John O’Neil – Chief Executive Officer | Portland District Health |
| Mr Jim Fletcher – Chief Executive Officer | Western District Health Service |
| Ms Pam Godfrey-Smith – Manager | Dartmoor and District Bush Nursing Centre |
| Ms Lisa Hutchins – Manager | Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre |
| Mr Bill Millard – Director | City Growth, Warrnambool City Council |
| Ms Vicki Jellie – Director | Peter’s Project |
| Mr Glyn Palmer – Chief Executive Officer | St John of God Hospital, Warrnambool |
| Ms Bernadine King – Chairperson | Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group |
| Ms Pamela Rose – Secretary Chairperson | Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group; Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly and Community Health Service Inc. |
| Mr Denis Rose - Chief Executive Officer | Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation |
| | |

| 22 March 2010 MELBOURNE – Workshop | |
|---|---|
| Professor John Wiseman - Director | The McCaughey Centre, VicHealth Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health and Community Wellbeing, School of Population Health University of Melbourne |
| Associate Professor Chris Hickey - Deputy Head of School | Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Geelong Campus |
| | |
| 07 April 2010 BENALLA – Public Hearing | |
| Mr Tony McIlroy – Chief Executive Officer | Benalla Rural City Council |
| Cr Pat Claridge – Councillor | |
| Ms Liz Chapman – Convenor | Tomorrow:Today Foundation |
| Ms Stacey Lord – Manager, Education Program | |
| Mr Anthony Putt – Chief Executive Officer | Central Access Ltd. |
| Mr Dan Weeks – Chief Executive Officer | Benalla and District Memorial Hospital |
| Mr Neil Stott – Director of Community Health | |
| Mr Ivan Lister – Rural Outreach Worker | |
| Ms Glenyis James – Chief Executive Officer | North East Support and Action for Youth Inc. |
| Ms Margot Sherwill – Project Officer | Benalla Regeneration |
| Ms Janet Kirkham – Regional Network Leader, Hume Region | Department of Education and Early Childhood Development |
| Mr Luke Rumbold – Chief Executive Officer | Upper Murray Family Care |
| Mr Vince Branigan – Teacher | FCJ College |
| Ms Chloe Bennett – Student | |
| Ms Cheryl Sanderson – Chair | Ovens Valley Awareness Group |
| | |

| 08 April 2010 CORRYONG – Public Hearing | |
|---|--|
| SITE VISIT: Ms Maxine Brockfield | Corryong Food Bank |
| Cr Peter Joyce – Mayor | Towong Shire Council |
| Mr Aaron van Egmond – Director, Development Services | |
| Ms Sue Martin – Leader | Walwa Community Emergency Response Team |
| Mr Tony Sullivan – Business Manager | Walwa Bush Nursing Centre |
| Ms Paul Kent – Team Manager | Ambulance Victoria, Corryong |
| Mr Michael Crothers – Group Manager | Ambulance Victoria, Upper Hume Region |
| Ms Maxine Brockfield – Chief Executive and Director of Nursing | Upper Murray Health and Community Services |
| Sister Patricia George SJ – Head of Community Liaison Group | |
| Ms Kate Wheeler – Mental Health Nurse | |
| Ms Christine McKimmie – Teacher | Corryong College |
| Cr Rodney Wangman – Chief Executive Officer | Albury Wodonga Community College |
| Sgt Paul Brady – Sergeant in Charge | Corryong Police Station |
| | |
| 21 April 2010 LAKES ENTRANCE – Public Hearing | |
| Ms Margaret Brereton – Acting Community Strengthening Coordinator | Wellington Shire Council |
| Ms Frances Ford – Rural Access Project Officer | |
| Ms Sheryl McHugh – Transport Project Officer | |
| Ms Kate Nelson – Director, Planning and Community | East Gippsland Shire Council |
| Mr Bruce Smith – Social Planner | |
| Ms Donna Mraz – Disability Officer | |

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| Mr John Hartley – Chief Executive Officer | Workways Association Inc. |
| Ms Trish White – Employment Services Manager | |
| Mr David Fayolle – Site Manager, Lakes Entrance | |
| Mr Bruce Hurley – Chief Executive | Gippsland Lakes Community Health |
| Ms Ailsa Carr – Manager, Family Youth and Children Services | |
| Reverend Deacon Phyllis Andy – Aboriginal Development Worker; Board Member | Gippsland Lakes Community Health; Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association |
| Ms Rachel Bell – Assistant Director | Kilmany UnitingCare |
| Mr Craig Sutherland – Principal | Lakes Entrance Secondary College |
| Mr John Kinniburgh – Principal | Lakes Entrance Primary School |
| Mr Henrie Ellis – Chair | East Gippsland Mentoring Program |
| Ms Leanne Wishart – Regional Coordinator | Deafaccess Victoria, Gippsland |
| Ms Louise Bartheyl | Private citizen |
| Mr Peter Quin – Director of Community Services | Orbost Regional Health |
| 22 April 2010 MALLACOOTA – Public Hearing | |
| Mr Mark Ginnivan – Practice Manager | Mallacoota Medical Centre |
| Mr Terry Houge – Paramedic Community Support Coordinator | Ambulance Victoria, Mallacoota |
| Mr Tony Roberts – Principal | Mallacoota P-12 College |
| Mr Nigel Allison – Lead Teacher | |
| Ms Katherine Rogers – Year 11 Student | |
| Mr Steve Waxiel – Chairman | Mallacoota and District Business and Tourism Organisation |
| Mr John Rudge – Member; Chair | |
| Sergeant Stuart Johnston – Acting Senior Sergeant | Orbost Police Station |

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| Ms Sue Chapman | Croajingalong Centre for Communication and the Arts |
| Mr Russell Grabert | |
| Ms Annette Piesley | Genoa Resident |
| Mr Mark Ginnivan – Practice Manager | Mallacoota Medical Centre |
| Dr Jenny Schlager – Principal Partner | |
| Mr Phillip Counsel – Coordinator | Mallacoota Outreach Centre |
| | |
| 11 May 2010 BENDIGO – Public Hearing | |
| Ms Julie Connell – Team Facilitator | NETschool Bendigo |
| Mr Barry Secombe – Director, Community Wellbeing | City of Greater Bendigo |
| Ms Carolyn Wallace – Manager, Community and Cultural Development | |
| Mr John McLinden – Chief Executive Officer | Loddon Shire |
| Ms Sue Clark – Chief Executive Officer | Bendigo Community Health Services |
| Associate Professor Amanda Kenny – Director | La Trobe Rural Health School |
| Mr Michael Hogan – Chief Executive Officer | St John of God Hospital |
| Mr Alex Mactier – Executive Officer | Advocacy and Rights Centre Ltd. |
| Mr Peter Nobel – Principal Solicitor | Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre |
| Reverend Tracey Wolsley – Director | Our Place Drop in Centre |
| Mr David Pugh – Chief Executive Officer | St Luke’s Anglicare |
| SITE VISIT: John Russell – Principal | DOXA School |
| | |
| 11 May 2010 MARYBOROUGH – Public Hearing | |
| Professor Sue Kilpatrick – Pro Vice-Chancellor (Rural and Regional) | Deakin University, Warrnambool |
| Mr Paul Bird – State Director | Mission Australia |
| Ms Claire Payne – Manager, Navigating Youth Services System Research Project | |

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| Mr Chris Meddows-Taylor – Mayor | Central Goldfields Shire Council |
| Mr Mark Johnston – Chief Executive Officer | |
| Mr Graem Kelly – Chief Executive Officer | Castlemaine Health |
| Mr Barney Healy – Principal | Maryborough Education Centre |
| Ms Marg Kent – Place Manager | Maryborough Neighbourhood Renewal |
| Ms Robyn Mawdsley | Central Goldfields Best Start |
| 12 May 2010 BALLARAT – Public Hearing | |
| Mr Peter Appleton – Manager, Community Development | City of Ballarat |
| Ms Carolyn Barrie – Director, People and Communities | |
| Ms Bronwyn Herbert – Coordinator, Community Planning | |
| Ms Sally Bodeham – Community Planning and Research | |
| Mr Ron Lake – Regional Director | Loddon Mallee Region |
| Mr Celeste Paige – Principal | Yuille Park P-8 Community College |
| Mr Geoff Sharp – Chief Executive | United Way Ballarat |
| Mr Denis Fitzgerald – Executive Director | Catholic Social Services Victoria |
| Mr Terry O’Shannassy – Member Support and Project Officer | |
| Mr David Beaver – Director | Centacare Ballarat |
| Ms Anne Dark – Ballarat Regional Council President | St Vincent de Paul Society |
| Ms Talia Barrett – Chairwoman | Ballarat and Regional Multicultural Council |
| Mr Tim Harrison – Research Theme Manager | School of Education, University of Ballarat |
| Professor John Smyth – Research Professor of Education | |
| Ms Sharon Lavery – Member | Delacombe Tenants Association |

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| Ms Geraldine Christou – Neighbourhood Renewal Manager | Wendouree West |
| Mr Karen Hunter – Representing the residents | Wendouree West |
| Mr David Koch MLC | Western Victoria Region |
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| 18 May 2010 GEELONG – Public Hearing | |
| Cr Kylie Fisher – Councillor, Corio Ward | City of Greater Geelong |
| Ms Irene McGinnigle – General Manager, Community Services | |
| Ms Jane Wager – Coordinator, Community Development | |
| Ms Anne Horsley – Place Manager, Whittington Community Renewal | |
| Ms Cathy Walker – Community Development Officer, Corio and Norlane | |
| Ms Christine Ferguson – Manager, Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal | Department of Human Services, Barwon South West Region |
| Mr Richard Coverdale – Research Fellow | School of Law, Deakin University, Geelong |
| Ms Beverly Brown – Manager | Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre |
| Ms Clare Barrett – Coordinator, Outpost Program | Centacare Catholic Family Services |
| Ms Helen O’Connor – Coordinator, Family Centre | Corio Bay Senior College |
| Ms Joan McGovern – Manufacturing Communications Manager | Shell Refinery |
| Dr Mark Kennedy – Medical Director | Corio Medical Clinic |
| Mr Grant Boyd – Chief Executive Officer | Bethany Community Support |
| Mr Justin Giddings – Chief Executive Officer | Avalon Airport |
| Mr Jeremy Williams – Student | Corio Bay Senior College |
| Ms Kathleen Wersterschuk – Student | |
| Mr Maddie Eccles – Student | Western Heights Secondary College |
| Mr Mitch Malden – Student | |

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| Ms Danielle Parker – Youth Development Officer | City of Greater Geelong |
| Ms Margrette Lewis | Private Citizen |
| Ms Suzanne McClean | |
| Mr Ken Massari – Principal | North Shore Primary School |
| 19 May 2010 SEYMOUR – Public Hearing | |
| Mr Kevin Hannagan – Chief Executive Officer | Strathbogie Shire Council |
| Cr Bill Melbourne – Mayor | Mitchell Shire Council |
| Mr Bob McVernon – General Manager, Community and Recreation | |
| Mr Mark Rumble – Chief Executive Officer | Brayton Family and Youth Service, Salvation Army |
| Mr Peter White – Principal | Notre Dame College, Shepparton |
| Ms Kimberly Tempest – Director McAuley Champagnat Program | |
| Mr Darryl Leggo – Chair | Resident Action Group, Seymour Neighbourhood Renewal |
| Ms Herma Duthie – President | The Seymour We Want |
| Ms Rhonda Sanderson – Secretary | |
| Mr Tricia Quibell – Senior Manager, Community, Education and Training Programs | Berry Street, Hume Region |
| Ms Angela Armstrong-Wright – Acting Chief Executive Officer/Director of Service Development | FamilyCare |
| Mr Chris O’Donnell – Chief Executive Officer | Mitchell Community Health |
| Ms Doreen Power – Chief Executive Officer | Seymour Health |
| 26 July 2010 MELBOURNE – Public Hearing | |
| Hon Jacinta Allan - Minister for Regional and Rural Development | Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development |
| Mr Justin Hanney – Chief Executive | Regional Development Victoria |

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| Ms Dora Katsaouni - Senior Policy Officer | Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development |
| Hon Lily D’Ambrosio - Minister for Community Development | Department of Planning and Community Development |
| Ms Sue Jaquinot - Deputy Secretary, Community Development and Strategic Policy Research and Forecasting | |
| Ms Alison McClelland - Executive Director, Strategic Policy, Research and Forecasting | |
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Minority Report

MINORITY REPORT

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Introduction | 2 |
| 2. Tackling Disadvantage | 6 |
| 2.1 A Fairer Victoria | 7 |
| 2.2 Early Intervention | 9 |
| 2.3 Rural Health Support | 10 |
| 2.3.1 Mental Health | 12 |
| 2.4 Rural Housing | 13 |
| 2.4.1 Homelessness | 14 |
| 2.5 Regional Education | 15 |
| 2.6 Skills | 16 |
| 2.7 Regional Transport | 18 |
| 3. Investing in our Regions | 20 |
| 3.1 Regional Blueprint | 20 |
| 3.2 Agriculture / Farming Communities | 22 |
| 3.3 New Industry | 24 |
| 4. Response to Recommendations | 25 |
| 5. Conclusion | 30 |

MINORITY REPORT

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

1. INTRODUCTION

Some of the best work of the parliament is done via parliamentary committees, particularly if the committees are seeking a genuinely bi-partisan, constructive outcome. However, from the outset, we were extremely disappointed by the negative terms of reference developed by the Opposition for this Rural and Regional Committee Inquiry.

As Government MPs who represent regional areas, we do understand there are unique challenges of living and working in remote and isolated areas outside of the Melbourne Metropolitan Urban Growth boundary.

Many years of drought have created a great deal of stress and placed enormous pressure on our rural communities.

We also recognise that these communities are resilient and there are numerous opportunities and benefits of living in and being part of a rural community.

These opportunities and benefits – which include a sense of community, strong volunteer networks, safety, lifestyle, access to support services, innovation and leadership – have been well documented.¹ Witnesses to the Committee frequently reinforced this view.

Further, a recent study by the Melbourne Institute and the Brotherhood of St Laurence showed Victoria had lower levels of social exclusion than any other state, a clear indicator of this State Labor Government's commitment and success in tackling disadvantage.²

Even Professor Tony Vinson in his publication *Dropping Off the Edge*, acknowledges that it's this social cohesion that gives rural areas an advantage over metropolitan communities when it comes to taking action to minimise the effects of social and economic disadvantage.³

However, the terms of reference of this inquiry left little room for acknowledgment of this invaluable "social capital": the glue that binds our rural communities together.

On the other hand, the Brumby Labor Government has always recognised the importance of this social capital and has invested heavily in community and social infrastructure across Victoria.

The Brumby Labor Government has been doing this through a range of incredibly successful initiatives, such as Transport Connections; the Country Football and Netball Program; Men's Sheds funding; Community Facilities Funding Program; Community Building Initiative; Rural Access; Neighbourhood Renewal; Victorian Community Support Grants and the Small Towns Development Fund, which all provide support for projects that individual communities have identified as important to them.

¹ Pope J & Zhang W 2010 *Indicators of community strength at the local government area level in Victoria 2008*, DPCD

² Scutella R, Wilkins R and Kostenko W (2009) *Estimates of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Australia: A Multidimensional Approach*. Melbourne Institute Working Paper No. 26/09, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne.

³ Vinson T 2007 *Dropping Off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*, p 98

MINORITY REPORT

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

Time and again, these initiatives – many of them groundbreaking - have been lauded for the way they have helped communities identify priorities, develop appropriate strategies and then deliver on them.

Disappointingly, the inquiry's terms of reference were clearly designed to discourage any positive or constructive feedback on the many successful and innovative programs developed and implemented by and within regional and rural communities. It was obvious the Opposition wanted to talk down rural and regional Victoria.

In fact, the negativity of the terms of reference was noted by presenters:

Graem Kelly, CEO, Castlemaine Health: *I do have some concern that the very nature of the way you worded your [inquiry] ...a positive slant on opportunities to develop social capital and community capacity, would have probably been a better way to approach it...Because all you're going to get is everybody approaching you with the squeaky wheel principle, trying to drag dollars out of you...I would rather say, well, if you're seeking opportunity how are you going to build in out of this opportunity some sustainability and future progress, so that you don't have to come cap in hand to us again.*

Bruce Smith, social planner, East Gippsland Shire Council: *We keep saying that those people are disadvantaged across every aspect of their lives and they are not – they have enormous skills and we need to stop stigmatising those communities....I think we need to look at the way the communities change and not look at that static response to disadvantage...the further away you go from [from regional centres] the more you can point to some indicators of disadvantage but I can also point to some great strengths. That is the positivity I am trying to promote.*

Dean Miller, CEO, Hindmarsh Shire Council: *There could be a risk that the inquiry could be counterproductive in the sense that people could misinterpret the results of the inquiry in a negative way, which could just further exacerbate the situation. So the way the results are released to the public is just as important as the results themselves.*

Many presenters also stressed to the committee that it was important that their comments were understood to be made only within the framework of the terms of reference and that they did not want to “talk down” the many benefits of living and working in regional Victoria:

Mary Pendergast, principal, Warrnambool College: *Our kids once they get into a course, generally stay in a course. A lot of the city kids do not. The preparedness of the staff to work with kids at lunch times and after school...is much higher in the country...The relationships that develop through sporting teams, through bands and through public speaking and debating is very different.*

Dr Tanya Rodinov, GP, Donald Family Clinic: *Elderly patients in Donald get far better treatment than an elderly patient would in Melbourne...[because it's] a smaller community [and has] better access and better support services.*

Police Sgt Brady, Corryong: *We run a program called Adopt a Cop...We start it at primary school and we are seeing the benefits as the kids get older. When they have problems or dramas they are finding the police a lot more approachable. You see the success of programs like that in a community like this, whereas you probably do not see it in bigger places where you are putting band-aids on things all the time.*

MINORITY REPORT

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

At every one of the public hearings we attended, we were inspired by what local people were doing to support themselves - not one community was taking a “not our responsibility” approach to addressing local issues and concerns. Examples of these community-based initiatives, partnerships and models include:

- **The Wimmera Virtual Schools Network:** a number of schools including Birchip, Warracknabeal, Goroke, Hopetoun and Dimboola have aligned their timetables so they can video conference chemistry, physics, health and Japanese classes to VCE students at these schools that may otherwise not have the student numbers to justify the subject being taught at the individual school – it also helps address the shortage or lack of availability of teachers for specialists subjects.
- **Early Years Network, Robinvale:** a suite of programs spanning the early years has been developed by nurturing relationships with organisations and community groups, which has resulted in the establishment of a number of cultural-specific and multicultural facilitated playgroups.
- **Total Learning Centre, Mildura:** collaboration between Mallee Family Care, the indigenous community and Mildura Central School which runs playgroups for two and three year olds from at-risk families. The playgroups help workers engage with parents and children before they get to school by helping them develop good learning and parenting skills through play, reading stories and having fun.
- **Seymour Neighbourhood Renewal Resident Action Group:** a core group of residents who helped identify and facilitate programs to respond to local needs including forming a group, funded through the Department of Justice, for socially isolated women who were involved in risky levels of gambling. Through this group, the women were introduced to hobbies such as quilting, scrapbooking and beading. The level of interest by participants in continuing on with these new hobbies encouraged local businesses to get involved and the group has continued to evolve to such an extent that many of these previously isolated women are now very much part of their community.
- **Students @Work, Orbost:** this scheme subsidises the wages of 24 children, from families where the parents are unemployed, so they can spend five or six hours a week working in a local business after school. This is helping to break the cycle of multi-generational unemployment which is a feature of the community.
- **Koori Strong and Proud, Gippsland:** a reading recovery program for Koori students that has resulted in significant gains in literacy among Koori students in the Gippsland area.
- **Upper Murray Health and Community Services, Corryong:** this Multipurpose Service is also a registered training office. To address some of its skill shortages, it runs a range of nursing courses for local people. The Service has also offered local students scholarships to help them get through university and encourage them to return to the area once they are qualified.
- **Pure Towong Energy, Towong Shire:** an award-winning initiative giving Towong Shire residents access to solar energy systems and finance at a lower cost. The Pure Towong Energy project generates an estimated 5% of Victoria’s domestic solar energy from only 0.1% of Victoria’s population.

MINORITY REPORT

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

- **Bike banks, Maryborough:** bicycles are repaired and provided to schools for students, who may not have any other way of getting to school, to borrow or buy.
- **Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre's session for grandparents:** these sessions advise grandparents on how to deal with issues surrounding family breakdown such as child protection issues, access to support for carers and family law.
- **Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre:** due to an \$800,000 State Government grant to redevelop the facility, the centre now employs 24 part-time staff who service more than 850 people living in the Balmoral district between Hamilton and Horsham. The service has implemented a number of programs including a Men's Shed, a reading buddy program, a child care service and, in partnership with Ambulance Victoria, local nurses who provide medication and emergency treatment to the standards of MICA paramedics.
- **Child FIRST sites:** 24 sites have been established in sub-regional catchments across the state. These 'hubs' provide a central, community-based referral point to a range of community based family services and other supports. Child FIRST is a Victorian initiative and considered to be cutting-edge practice in ensuring that vulnerable children, young people and their families are linked effectively into relevant services.
- **Community health care services:** a unique Victorian approach to providing allied health programs and support to communities, particularly smaller communities such as Corryong and Mallacoota, where shared resources allow for better access and delivery.

However, the terms of reference and time constraints provided little scope for the committee to hear more information about why these programs were so successful and how they could continue to be supported, recognised and expanded.

The inquiry's terms of reference also failed to acknowledge the well-established State Labor Government initiatives and partnerships already in place that benefit rural Victoria.

In particular, these include:

- **A Fairer Victoria:** the State Labor Government's overarching action plan for addressing social disadvantage that evolved from its 2004/05 report *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage*;
- **Moving Forward:** the Brumby Labor Government's \$502 million blueprint for continued growth in regional Victoria and **Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria**, the new \$631 million strategic investment, announced in June 2010, that builds on the work already done through *Moving Forward*; and
- **Future Farming Strategy:** that details investment into research and development, as well as support and services for farm businesses and rural communities to help them make decisions about their future and meet the challenges of uncertain prices and demand, climate change and competitive global markets.

The timing of this inquiry also overlapped with - and the terms of reference developed by the Opposition completely failed to acknowledge - the fact that in September 2009, the Ministerial Taskforce for Regional Planning released a discussion paper, *Provincial Victoria - Directions for the Next Decade*.

MINORITY REPORT

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

The discussion paper summarised the findings of the Taskforce's extensive community engagement process and sought input and feedback on priority areas for action to inform finalisation of the blueprint. It also asked for feedback on the new model of regional strategic planning being developed through the Victorian Government's Regional Strategic Planning Initiative (RSPI).

The Taskforce investigated factors influencing the growth of regional Victoria such as:

- **Population change** – particularly impacts of growth and decline on transport, community services and infrastructure, housing availability and land use;
- **Climate change** – the effects of the worst drought in 100 years on industries, communities and households and the ability to deal with strategies designed to combat climate change;
- **Changing demographic patterns** – the number of older people living in provincial Victoria is expected to double by 2030 while the income earning age group is static or growing at a slower rate; and
- **Economic growth** – the need to further stimulate industry and employment growth and address skills shortages.

During this period, the Brumby Labor Government also worked with regional communities to assist with the development of regional and sub-regional plans that empower communities to set their own priorities, based on their region's unique attributes. A number of these plans have been developed and presented to Government.

The discussion paper generated a strong level of interest with responses from regional stakeholder organisations (local councils), private individuals, regional planning groups, regional economic development agencies, statutory authorities, businesses and industry representative bodies, health and education providers and non-profit agencies.

That is, many of the same groups that made submissions to the Regional and Rural Committee's inquiry covered similar ground and addressed many of the same issues when providing input to the discussion paper used to develop *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria*.

It is worth noting that the Liberal/National Opposition failed to make a submission to the Blueprint's discussion paper.

Given the terms of reference for this RRC inquiry were developed well after the Ministerial Taskforce commenced its investigation – and duplicates much of the blueprint's work – it's hard not to be cynical about the underlying political motives of the Coalition majority RRC committee in conducting this particular inquiry in an election year.

2. TACKLING DISADVANTAGE

We are well aware that more can always be done to tackle disadvantage, however, the State Labor Government has a track record of not only identifying areas of disadvantage but taking action to address them.

MINORITY REPORT

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

It is beyond the scope of this report to go in to significant detail about all the strategies and policies the State Labor Government has implemented since it came in to power in 1999 that benefit regional and rural Victorians.

However, in this section we provide information on some of the key Brumby Labor Government initiatives that address disadvantage and/or provide support and investment in social, economic and capital infrastructure in regional Victoria.

2.1 A FAIRER VICTORIA

Prior to the release of *A Fairer Victoria* in 2005, the State Government produced a companion publication *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage*. That report recognised that the Victorian Government had rebuilt essentials services and infrastructure in health, education and community safety that had been cutback by the Kennett Government during the 1990s. More teachers, nurses and police had been employed; new hospitals, schools and police stations built and/or renewed; new funds had been invested in disability services, children's services, housing, public transport, aged care and neighbourhood renewal; and strong progress had been made in working with communities to deliver services and new initiatives based on prevention and early intervention.

Despite the substantial progress the Victorian Government had made in reducing disadvantage, it realised that there was still more work to be done.

The *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage* report provided a picture of:

"...the nature and extent of disadvantage in Victoria, identifies areas where Victorians aren't getting a fair go and makes the case for reducing disadvantage in the interests of all Victorians."

That is, six years ago, the State Labor Government identified issues around social disadvantage – covering exactly the same ground as this inquiry.

In response to the *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage* report, the government released its ground-breaking statement *A Fairer Victoria (AFV)*, outlining the Government's commitment to tackling disadvantage. The State Labor Government is the only government in Australia to release such a comprehensive statement.

The four key priorities of the state Government through *A Fairer Victoria* are to:

- help all Victorian children get the best start in life;
- improve education opportunities and help people in to work;
- improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequities; and
- develop liveable communities where Victorians want to live, work and raise families.

Since its release, and in addition to general spending on social, education and health programs, this State Labor Government has contributed an extra \$5 billion through *A Fairer Victoria* over the past five years to promote social inclusion.

MINORITY REPORT

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

Each year the State Labor Government announces an updated statement of *A Fairer Victoria's* objectives, priorities and progress. At the launch of the 2010 *A Fairer Victoria*, **VCOSS CEO Cath Smith** acknowledged the State Government's commitment to addressing disadvantage:

Not many governments respect the right to advocate and really listen to what community organisations have to say but this Government does work incredibly hard and most of the time, does get it right and keeps trying to get it right. There are literally billions of dollars and thousands of programs supported by this government that if they were purely 'driven by the dollar' they wouldn't have spent over the last five years of AFV. VCOSS and its 462 members (mainly organisations) have robust relationships with people in government (at both political and bureaucratic levels) and we value our work together - both where we can assist those pushing great ideas from within government as well as where we don't agree – and we seek respectful dialogue and debate.

Julie Edwards from Jesuit Social Services in The Eureka St Journal also stated:

We have supported A Fairer Victoria since its inception ... I believe that the Victorian approach provides a ready template for the Australian Government to adopt to allow for the continuation of economic stimulus measures — but targeted at our most disadvantaged communities.

A Fairer Victoria 2010 saw a further \$1.35 billion of new investment aimed at providing more opportunities for the most vulnerable Victorians.

It included significant funding for a number of components that will continue to benefit rural communities including rural youth mental health teams; ongoing support for the *Victorian Disability State Plan* and increased opportunities for people with a disability to participate in their communities; strengthening Victoria's cultural diversity and support for refugees settling in Victorian communities, including \$3.8 million over four years for refugee youth; helping build stronger communities by supporting infrastructure that encourages participation; investment over four years in the Transport Connections projects to provide reliable transport links to services, employment and other members of the community; and an extra \$56 million over four years to help low-income Victorians with the rising cost of water.

The State Labor Government has implemented many successful programs in regional areas through *A Fairer Victoria* and associated initiatives and time and again at the hearings we heard they had made a real, positive difference to rural communities.

Unfortunately, as pointed out earlier, the limitations of the inquiry's terms of reference provided no opportunity to demonstrate, celebrate, learn and share the success of community-driven initiatives and partnerships; instead, those making submissions found they had to respond in such a way that it often appeared they felt they were being brought to account and had to justify themselves and/or their programs.

The reality is that many of the communities we visited made it clear they embrace the opportunity to drive projects and, with support from all levels of government, are seeing real change and improvement as result.

MINORITY REPORT

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

As Hindmarsh Shire Cr Rob Gersch pointed out in *The Age*:

“Rural people are very resilient and they’re not looking for handouts – what they’re looking for is assistance and partnerships.”⁴

During the hearings, we heard of many examples of where partnerships were working successfully, including:

- Youth Justice Units;
- Transport Connections projects;
- Neighbourhood Renewal;
- Men’s Sheds;
- Sustainable Farm Families Program;
- Best Start;
- Wannik Learning Together;
- The Community Building Initiative;
- Regional Management Forums; and
- Early Learning is Fun (ELF) programs.

2.2 EARLY INTERVENTION

A very clear message from the hearings was that supporting families with high-quality early childhood services and providing extra support and appropriate early interventions was one of the most effective ways of breaking cycles of disadvantage.

Already, thanks to the State Labor Government, 93 per cent of Victorian children participate in a high-quality kindergarten program in the year before school and the vast majority of Victorian families’ access services such maternal and child health.

In June 2010, the Brumby Labor Government announced its \$2.6 million Innovation Fund, a new initiative to trial projects that aim to increase access to early childhood services in disadvantaged areas.

The new projects will target those who are not accessing these vital services with 24 of the 35 projects in regional areas. The projects range from the employment of an early literacy engagement officer, extra training for kindergarten and maternal and child health professionals, research into barriers to using maternal and child health services and the creation of mobile children’s services and subsidised transport to kindergartens in remote areas.

This initiative is simply one of many the Brumby Labor Government has developed since it came to government in 1999.

⁴ Farrah Tomazin , 18/6/10, *After the Gold Rush*, *The Age*, p19

MINORITY REPORT

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

Others include Early Childhood Intervention Services, a \$61 million program that provides support to families with children with disabilities or developmental delays from birth to the early school years; the Preschool Field Officer Program which supports kindergarten teachers in developing strategies for children with additional needs; and supported playgroups that help parents with parenting skills and promote early learning and development of children.

Following are details of some of the other investments made by this government in four of the key areas of health, education, housing and transport – areas which almost all submissions highlighted as “cycle breakers” to disadvantage.

2.3 RURAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Since 1999, the Victorian Labor Government has invested more than \$1.5 billion on almost 90 capital works redevelopment projects, medical equipment and infrastructure upgrades across rural and regional Victoria including hospitals, community health centres and residential aged care facilities.

Many presenters to the inquiry made an effort to highlight the great work done by health service providers in regional Victoria, in particular those servicing the smaller and more remote centres. A good example of the State Labor Government’s support of these rural health services is its investment in the West Wimmera Health Service, which has experienced a 106% increase in recurrent funding - from \$5.3 million to \$11.1 million - since 1999.

In addition, the service has received almost \$15 million of funding for capital works including \$2.6 million for the redevelopment of the Natimuk Nursing Home, \$8.5 million for the Nhill Hospital redevelopment and \$3.7 million for the Rainbow Aged redevelopment.

It is important to note that we heard at many of the hearings held during this inquiry that most of the health initiatives the State Labor Government has facilitated during the past decade have wider social benefits for rural and regional communities. Not only has our investment in health-care delivery and infrastructure improved the health and wellbeing of residents in these communities, it has provided valuable job opportunities, created strong leadership networks and attracted young professionals and families to regional areas further boosting local populations and economies.

Unfortunately, during this inquiry the Opposition failed to acknowledge this. It also failed to acknowledge that the State Labor Government outlined back in 2005, its commitment to the ongoing support and development of the health system in rural Victoria in the *Rural directions for a better state of health* report.

Rural directions provided three strategic directions, each containing a number of specific projects for rural health services to develop their roles in systems of care across Victoria. These three key directions were to: promote the wellbeing of rural Victorians; foster a contemporary health system and models of care for rural Victoria; and strengthen and sustain rural health services. Since then, regional and rural areas have greatly benefited from the innovation and change that has resulted from the increasingly co-ordinated and co-operative model of service delivery provided by rural and regional health services.

MINORITY REPORT

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

During this inquiry, we heard of many examples of innovation in rural health delivery. For example, at Mallacoota we heard about the development and success of the paramedic community support co-ordinator (PCSC) positions that have provided remote rural communities, that otherwise may not have been able to attract a permanent full-time paramedic, with enhanced emergency response capabilities.

Terry Houge, based at Mallacoota, is one of two PCSC with Ambulance Victoria. The other PCSC is based at Omeo. Mr Houge's role "goes beyond that of the traditional paramedic. As well as responding to emergency cases, the PCSC is involved in community-based activities to help meet local health needs ...typically, key work covers support for primary health care and community education. An essential part of the role involves partnerships with other health care providers. PCSCs also co-ordinate the education of the local ambulance team by overseeing the primary and ongoing training of Ambulance Community Officers".⁵ The PCSC role has helped the community attract and retain ambulance volunteers and provided additional support for other local health practitioners.

In 2009, recognising that the health system continues to evolve in response to health-care provision developments and changes in community priorities, the Brumby Labor Government released *Rural directions – for a stronger healthier Victoria*. This update provided an opportunity to build on what has already been achieved and outlined objectives and priorities for the ongoing evolution of the health system in rural Victoria for the next five years.

An example of one of these priorities is the Rural Maternity Initiative that, to date, has funded more than 50 projects and services across the state. This support ensures the viability of rural services and has enabled smaller country hospitals and communities to maintain local birthing services. Other alliances have also enabled a sharing of resources and an increase in capacity of all hospitals to meet patient needs and the growth in birth numbers that have occurred in recent times.

Many of the presentations made at the hearings acknowledged the aging population in many of the rural regions and the importance of providing ongoing support for seniors.

The Home and Community Care (HACC) program, usually run through local councils and community agencies, is funded by the Federal and Brumby Labor Governments through the joint HACC program.

It provides funding to help seniors, people with a disability and their carers by providing services such as help with home maintenance and modification, transport, meals, personal care and allied health and nursing care, which allows them in many instances, to live independently.

Between 1999 and 2010 the State Labor Government's contribution to the HACC Program has increased by 130%.

Of the 265,000 Victorians who received a service from the HACC Program in 2008-09, 65 percent were aged 70-plus and 102,467 live in rural and regional Victoria

⁵ <http://www.ambulance.vic.gov.au/Paramedics/Types-of-Paramedics/Paramedic-Community-Support-Coordiators.html>

MINORITY REPORT

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

It is also important to note in this report that all increases in the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS) have taken place under a State Labor Government. The scheme subsidises the travel and accommodation costs incurred by rural Victorians and if appropriate, their escorts, who have no option but to travel a long distance to receive approved medical specialist services.

The Kennett Coalition Government, during two reviews of the VPTAS in the 1990s, actually reduced access to the scheme, put in place more restrictions on people accompanying sick family members and cut allowances from a maximum rebate of 12.3c/km to a fixed rate of 11c/km.

In contrast, the State Labor Government since 1999 has increased the rate four times (currently 17c/km); increased accommodation rebates; introduced the reimbursement of taxi fares; removed the requirement for petrol receipts; and eased many of the other restrictions the Liberal and National parties had put in place which adversely affected rural families' access to the scheme.

2.3.1 Mental Health

Issues surrounding mental health were raised at many of the hearings by a range of community commentators.

The Brumby Labor Government, recognising the impact of mental illness on people, families and our communities, has increased funding to mental health services by 108 per cent since 1999. Last year, understanding that statistically, 20 per cent of Victorians are likely to experience mental illness in their lifetime and that mental illness costs the Victorian economy \$5.4 billion every year, including over 4.7 million sick days taken due to depression and anxiety, the Brumby Labor Government released its 10-year mental health reform agenda.

The Government's *Because Mental Health Matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019* is about taking action to spot the warning signs of mental illness before people get sick and intervening as early as possible to prevent a lifetime of chronic illness wherever possible.

It included a number of immediate actions relevant to regional areas including: Renew: a psychosocial response to families traumatised by the bushfires, including \$1.8 million of programs targeted at identifying emerging mental illness, supporting community workers to provide a front line response and hiring more experts in post-traumatic stress disorders to work with bushfire-affected communities; and the launch of two new demonstration projects – one in the Grampians – to ensure earlier assessment, treatment and support for more children and young people with a broader range of problems.

Other elements of the reform relevant to regional and rural areas include:

- a mental health advice and referral service available to the public 24 hours a day through a new phone line similar to nurse-on-call;
- reducing inequalities through service redesign and partnerships to provide culturally responsive mental health care for Aboriginal people, migrant and refugee communities and a more integrated response to people with mental illness and co-existing disabilities;

MINORITY REPORT

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

- fostering partnerships and accountability through local planning and service co-ordination, streamlining components of the mental health service system under common catchments; and
- positive mental health and wellbeing will be strongly promoted in schools, workplaces and other community settings.

Further, in this year's state budget, the Brumby Labor Government committed \$4.9 million over four years to introduce and expand rural youth mental health teams, ensuring young Victorians in country areas have access to services tailored to their specific needs.

Funding was also provided for a new approach to reducing suicide among young people aged 10 to 25 years. This initiative will set up two metropolitan and two rural programs targeted at local communities identified as having an increased risk linked to recent incidence of suicide or associated risk factors.

For example, staff will be based in the community in community health centres or youth centres with strong links to schools. They will provide preventive support, activities and early intervention services to young people, their families and friends and other people recommended to them.

Other examples where regional Victorians will also benefit from expanded mental health services is the new \$473 million Bendigo Hospital redevelopment, which will have an expanded new 75-bed mental health in-patient facility, and new adult mental health beds at Geelong.

2.4 RURAL HOUSING

The State Labor Government understands that one of the keys to addressing disadvantage is access to a home that is safe, affordable and secure.

We have invested heavily in social and public housing reducing the state-wide public housing waiting list.

The State Labor Government has committed nearly \$1 billion to building new social housing during 2010-11, on top of the nearly \$1.1 billion invested in 2009-10 and we have outlined plans to acquire more than 3800 new homes for low-income Victorians during 2010-11.

This investment delivers on important commitments including the Federal Labor Government *Nation Building Social Housing initiative*, delivering 4500 new public and social housing units across Victoria in the next couple of years. More than 3000 of these new homes are already under construction with a third of the homes to be built in regional Victoria.

This is on top of the State Government's own record \$510 million investment, which will deliver about 2350 new homes in the same time frame.

The Brumby Labor Government is continuing to work with the Federal Government under the National Rental Affordability Scheme to deliver 7500 subsidised rental homes in the private market over the next two years. This scheme delivers properties at 20 per cent below market rents and is the biggest injection of affordable accommodation into the private rental market in decades.

MINORITY REPORT

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

Buying a home in regional Victoria has also become more affordable. In the 2010 State Budget, Labor boosted the First Home Owners Grant to \$26,500 for new homes in regional and rural Victoria – the best in Australia and \$6500 more than what metropolitan first home owners receive.

2.4.1 Homelessness

Homelessness was another issue raised at some of the hearings, particularly at the hearings held in the north-west, south-west and at Benalla.

While we recognise that more can always be done to address homelessness, we take issue with some of the inaccurate and misleading claims that have been made in the report such as youth homelessness in the state's south-west is 50 per cent higher than in other regions.

As well as this blatant mis-use of statistics, the report fails to acknowledge that the Victorian Government through its 2002 *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* is widely recognised as having one of the best and most innovative approaches to tackling homelessness in Australia.

More recently, the Commonwealth and Brumby Labor governments agreed to an unprecedented \$1.5 billion investment over the next five years in housing and homelessness. Last year, the Brumby Labor Government also announced the development of a new strategy - *Homelessness 2020* - due to be released as this report is being printed.

In the meantime, the Brumby Labor Government has continued to take action to tackle homelessness in regional areas. In April 2010, in direct response to the feedback the Brumby Labor Government received from people who had experienced homelessness and the agencies and services that had work closely with them, the *Opening Doors* service model was re-launched at Seymour in the Hume region.

Opening Doors is a place-based approach to better co-ordination among homelessness services at the local level, so people can quickly and simply access homelessness services. It involves a network of local services that share their support, housing and brokerage resources and communicate with one another more efficiently. This maximises the resources of the homelessness services by reducing duplication. The State Government has committed to \$6.75 million over the next four years to the program.

We also know young people aged between 12 and 25 are the single largest group assisted by homelessness service providers in Victoria.

Another Brumby Labor Government strategy that is of particular relevance to regional youth is its *Creating Connections: Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2*.

Creating Connections provides more help to young people who experience homelessness, with a focus on:

- early intervention and creating connections;
- accommodation and support tailored for each individual young person;
- better access to services for young people with complex needs; and
- services and workers who can assist the young people of today.

MINORITY REPORT

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

A recent evaluation of the action plan by KPMG found that *Creating Connections* responses and service developments were contributing to improved housing stability and social inclusion for young people.

Approaches to addressing youth homelessness continue to evolve and reflect the increasingly complex issues our young people are having to deal with. As pointed out in the report, there is broad international support for the UK “Youth Foyer” model for tackling youth homelessness.

Once again, the Brumby Labor Government has continued to show leadership and has already started investing in this approach, which provides integrated learning and accommodation centres for young people experiencing homelessness. We recognise that young people who are given the chance to participate in study, training, work and community activities, while living in supported accommodation, are more likely break the cycle of disadvantage and move towards independent living, rather than drifting into long-term homelessness.

2.5 REGIONAL EDUCATION

In 2008, the State Labor Government released its five-year education and early childhood services improvement agenda, the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*.

While the blueprint was developed with all students in mind, we know about 165,000 students, representing about one third of all government school students, attend schools in regional and rural Victoria.

As a result, this government has always had a strong focus on rural education, recognising that improving educational outcomes is central to social and economic prosperity. It also recognises that rural schools and communities are not homogeneous and that while broad strategies may be useful, local solutions, good leadership and building capacity are the keys to improving educational outcomes.

Again and again at the hearings, we heard inspiring stories about how individual schools were developing unique strategies to cope with the challenges of their local communities. For example, we heard from Yuille Park P-8 Community College principal Clete Paige how he and his staff, through a range of community engagement programs supported by the State Government, has changed the school’s culture, lifted student attendance rates to “unheard of” levels and engaged previously marginalised families in initiatives that have not only improved their children’s wellbeing but their parents’ health and education outcomes, too.

Initiatives this Labor Government has put in place to build on local partnerships and to support schools include:

- about \$1 billion to rebuild, renovate or extend schools in regional and rural communities;
- the Koorie Education Strategy, Wannik, which will deliver initiatives to close the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students;
- employment of 70 expert Regional Network Leaders who lead and manage a network of Victorian government schools to improve school performance;
- investment in school leadership and development for principals and teachers;

MINORITY REPORT

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

- signing a new collective agreement between the Government and Victorian teachers which means our new graduate teachers and the most experienced classroom teachers become the highest paid in Australia;
- providing record funding of \$2 billion under a historic new Victorian Non-Government Schools Funding Agreement over four years (2010-2013);
- an almost 15 per cent increase in rural and regional-based staff (nearly 2000 new staff) as well as a range of scholarship and incentive schemes to attract and retain teachers in regional and rural schools; and
- making schooling more affordable by introducing the \$300 *School Start Bonus* and providing up to \$450 for eligible families through the Education Maintenance Allowance.

The 2009 National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Final Report results showed this government's investment in education for regional and rural Victoria is attaining results.

The NAPLAN data shows Victoria's rural and regional students are leading in literacy and numeracy with students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 achieving results better than or equal to rural and regional students in other states or territories, other than NSW in Year 7 spelling.

However, the Brumby Labor Government is not resting on its laurels: one of the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development's* priority actions for 2010, which is of particular relevance to this inquiry, is the launch of the *Rural Education Strategy Framework*. The framework consultation draft paper was released in July 2010 after months of consultation and recognises the challenges rural schools face in ensuring equity in access and opportunity for their students.

The framework consultation draft focuses on ensuring leadership and workforce development for regional and rural educators; ensuring that students can participate in high-quality 21st century curriculum options regardless of location; and the need for stronger educational partnerships across regional communities.

Further consultation and work with stakeholders is under way and the finalised framework is due to be launched and implemented later this year.

2.6 SKILLS

The Brumby Labor Government is well aware that a skilled workforce and access to training are the keys to ongoing investment and growth in regional and rural areas.

The number of VET students living in regional and rural Victoria has increased since 1999 to 170,250 in 2008. The rural and regional year 12 student participation rate has risen since 1999 to be 73.5 per cent in 2007 - the highest regional rate in Australia. The Brumby Labor Government's \$316 million reform of the TAFE and training sector and the Victorian Government's response to the Federal Government's reform of higher education has also opened up huge opportunities for rural students. These reforms will create an extra 172,000 places and make VET even more accessible for regional and rural students.

MINORITY REPORT

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

The effects of these reforms have already been noted:

Luke Rumbold CEO Upper Murray Family care: *The idea of TAFE being beefed up ...to issue degrees is a very positive development. I was [recently] a guest speaker at Wodonga TAFE ...at an award presentation ...almost without exception, you would class these people as coming from disadvantaged and impoverished backgrounds and TAFE was clearly the gateway for changing their lives.*

In addition to this post-secondary reform, Victorian government schools have submitted a significant number of applications for funding under the Commonwealth's Trades Training Centres in Schools Program. In the first two rounds of the program, projects led by a Victorian government school in non-metropolitan areas have received \$55.5 million in funding.

The Brumby Labor Government has also spent more than \$600 million in universities, including \$108 million in capital works. We are also developing a Tertiary Education Plan to identify opportunities for the State in the wake of the Federal Government's reforms to the higher education sector and to further boost participation rates in regional communities.

The recently released *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria* \$103.6 million tertiary Education Opportunities package included:

- Tertiary Education Infrastructure Fund: \$75 million, dedicated through the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund to help improve and build new TAFE and university infrastructure, such as student accommodation, designed to provide a local tertiary education choice for regional students. It includes \$2.5 million towards a development of an International Centre of Excellence in water management and farming efficiency – a partnership between the University of Melbourne's Dookie Campus and Colorado State University;
- Regional Tertiary Education Partnerships: \$9 million to encourage universities and TAFEs to work together to deliver more tertiary courses in more regional locations through new models of collaboration between education providers;
- \$7.1 million to improve transport from smaller rural communities to universities and TAFEs. This initiative will support young people through a range of innovative transport solutions which will be developed in partnership with local communities, employers and education providers; and
- Young Professionals Provincial Cadetships: \$12.5 million to help support 1,500 regional students undertake a work-based cadetship in regional Victoria, in a field related to their study, during the semester break.

Once again, these initiatives were the result of an extensive consultation process, where the State Government went out to regional communities and listened. One of the main messages was: we're concerned about young people leaving to pursue career or study options and what that means for the future prosperity of our communities if we can't encourage them to come back.

By improving TAFE and university access and infrastructure, providing a wider variety of university and TAFE courses and creating careers and leadership opportunities in regional areas, we know that more young people will consider staying in the country to further their education and will therefore be more likely to remain in – or return to - these communities.

MINORITY REPORT

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

For those students that live in the more remote, smaller communities and who will have to move to continue their studies, recent Federal Government changes to the Youth Allowance will address many of these concerns raised during the hearings about the effect of the costs on families supporting students.

These changes include raising the parental income test; scholarships for all university students receiving student income support; relocation scholarships of \$4000 in the first year and \$1000 in subsequent years to assist with the costs of establishing accommodation for eligible university students who have to relocate to study; and students who live in very remote, remote and outer regional areas, who have to move away from home to study and whose parents earn less than \$150,000 a year will be eligible for the existing independence test criteria.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Brumby Labor Government has committed to back Fair Work Australia's decision for a pay raise for social and community services sector workers, which will affect many people in rural and regional Victoria.

During this inquiry, we heard over and over again that providing career opportunities was crucial to keeping skilled workers in regional areas. We recognised that the work done by workers who support our most vulnerable families was not always reflected in the pay they receive. By working in partnership with the community sector, the Brumby Labor Government will provide the level of funding the sector needs to pay its workers and help attract and keep them in our rural communities.

2.7 REGIONAL TRANSPORT

Investment in roads helps build better connected communities and supports the growth of industry and jobs across the state.

The Transport Connections Project, which improves regional and rural Victorians' access to services, employment, training and social activities, through innovative partnerships between health services, education and training providers, bus and taxi operators, local and State government and community members was regularly flagged during the hearings as a successful initiative.

Most of the 32 projects currently under way were due to conclude this year, however, recognising the success of the program and in response to the huge community support for increased transport connections in rural areas, the Brumby Labor Government in its 2010 budget allocated \$22.8 million to extend the program beyond 2010.

Another Brumby Labor Government initiative that particularly benefits young people in regional and rural areas by improving their access to more work and education and training opportunities is the VicRoads L2P project.

This community-based program helps young learner drivers who do not have access to a supervising driver or a vehicle due to financial or family circumstances achieve 120 hours of learner driving experience as required under the new Graduated Licensing System in Victoria.

The ability to drive has been noted as a major element providing opportunities for people to escape difficult social and economic circumstances. The L2P Program recognises the social equity benefits which may flow to those involved in the program and equity benefits are identified as a key program objective.

MINORITY REPORT

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

As of early August 2010, there were 27 programs fully operational across Victoria, another 24 funded and in various stages of development prior to launching and a further three programs preparing applications.

To date, 15 of the 27 programs already operating were in regional areas.

Also specifically targeting regional transport is the Brumby Labor Government's \$71.4 million commitment made in *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria* to support improvements to regional road connections as well as assisting local government with upgrades to local roads and infrastructure such as bridges.

This commitment comes on top of the significant commitments the Brumby Labor Government has already made to major roads projects in regional areas: to date, the Victorian Government has invested more than \$3 billion on regional road projects across the state.

This investment includes over \$460 million to deliver more than 1250 road safety projects including the recently completed Calder Freeway project, the Bass Highway upgrades, the Nagambie Bypass, the Western Highway upgrades at Deer Park and the Geelong Ring Road.

It builds on the money invested by the State Labor Government in upgrading freight rail lines across the state and its \$133.8 million buy back of the regional freight network after it was privatised by Kennett in the 1990s. The improved rail access to ports has helped open up export markets and opportunities for agriculture-related industry, by far the major source of employment in regional and rural areas.

The State Labor Government has also returned rail services to Ararat, Bairnsdale and Maryborough; added more than 400 new weekly services and rolled out more than 100 new Vlocity carriages on country rail routes; boosted the frequency and size of regional bus networks; through the North East Rail Revitalisation project removed a number of rail crossings from the centre of Wodonga and upgraded the track and stations between Melbourne and Albury-Wodonga; totally rebuilt Spencer Street Station and carried out the largest rebuilding of the country train network through the Regional Fast Rail project.

During the hearings we also heard that investment in air services was vital for regional communities – particularly in the more remote and isolated parts of the state - to ensure they had the facilities to house aircraft for emergency medical, health, fire and rescue services.

Improved air access also helps regional and rural centres attract more import and export-related business and opens up tourism opportunities.

The State Labor Government has demonstrated its commitment to supporting regional airports through its \$26 million Regional Aviation Fund, which was established in 2006.

Through this fund the State Labor Government has supported airport upgrade projects at a number of regional centres including Mildura, West Sale, Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Stawell, Hamilton, Avalon, Portland, Horsham, Mallacoota, Yarrawonga, Latrobe and Warrnambool.

This massive investment in regional transport has created jobs; improved rail passenger services; expanded community transport connections; and opened up new opportunities for families living and working in regional Victoria.

MINORITY REPORT

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

3. INVESTING IN OUR REGIONS

There was a common message at all hearings about the importance of strong leadership from all levels of government, agencies, business and individuals in developing sustainable communities.

Once again, the terms of reference provided no opportunity to explore – or celebrate - the most effective models for promoting leadership and building on the many remarkable initiatives that have been developed by communities to tackle disadvantage at the local level.

The State Labor Government has always recognised the importance of investing in regional and rural communities.

In 1999, country Victorians, after years of watching a Coalition Government close down and neglect vital infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, rail lines and stations and police stations, elected a Labor Government that was committed to rebuilding regional Victoria.

In December 1999, the State Labor Government established Australia's first stand-alone fund dedicated to supporting regional infrastructure – the hugely successful *Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF)*.

It is worth noting that in a show of total disdain for regional Victorians, the Liberals and Nationals opposed Labor's legislation to establish the RIDF.

The *RIDF* has gone on to provide a much needed boost to regional and rural communities: through it, the State Labor Government has committed more than \$611.2 million and directly helped start 393 projects worth more than \$1.63 billion.

This commitment to revitalise regional Victoria was further strengthened by the establishment in 2003 of Regional Development Victoria, which in 2005, was charged with implementing the government's regional economic statement *Moving Forward*, a \$502 million five-year package to support economic growth in regional Victoria.

The success of Regional Development Victoria can not be understated:

Hindmarsh Shire Council, Cr Rob Gersch: *I believe RDV is one of the great strengths of the local government and the government of today. It is a magnificent organisation and it supports our area extremely well. We have had a lot of funding. We get a lot of support through RDV...*

Strathbogie Shire CEO Kevin Hannagan: *We very much acknowledge the work of Regional Development Victoria...they have been great in us being able to leverage ...economic development in to other initiatives. All I can say is that RDV has been very supportive of what we're trying to do and what I'd call trying to trade our way out of trouble and grow our business.*

3.1 REGIONAL BLUEPRINT

Keen to build on the \$11.7 billion already injected by the State Labor Government in to regional Victoria over the past decade, the Brumby Labor Government released *Ready for Tomorrow: A Blueprint for Regional and Rural Victoria*, a new \$631 million strategic investment that will continue to drive economic growth in regional and rural Victoria by attracting jobs and population growth, major new investment and more opportunities for young people to keep them living and working locally.

MINORITY REPORT

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

Ready for Tomorrow commits \$631 million across five key strategies:

- **\$110.1 million for *Investing in Skills and Young People*** with a new tertiary education package to deliver more opportunities in tertiary education for young people and to make it more attractive for them to stay in or return to the regions. It includes new targets to increase enrolments and graduates, new infrastructure support to encourage investment projects such as specialist research facilities and student accommodation; greater collaboration between regional TAFEs and Universities; leadership and cadetship programs; a new youth strategy; and support to develop new regional leaders;
- ***Backing Jobs and Industry with \$99.4 million*** towards a new action plan to create thousands of new jobs, boost regional industries and help small business. It outlines a commitment to grow government jobs in the state's regions, drive up skills, training, innovation and exports, support farmers, the food and beverage industry and tourism growth;
- **\$203.9 million for *Building Infrastructure, Connecting Communities*** to provide regional Victorians with world-class infrastructure in water, cleaner energy, transport and industry development, improvements to broadband services, local roads, timber roads, bridges, bus service expansion as well as more affordable housing;
- **\$158.4 million for *Supporting the Regional and Rural Way of Life*** with funding for sports clubs, cultural activities and community. It includes infrastructure and amenities support for small communities, promoting regional Victoria as a great place to live and work, a boost to programs to help landholders to better protect and manage native vegetation and funding for building performing arts centres, galleries and other civic amenities; and
- ***Planning Better Regions – A New Partnership backed by \$58.9 million*** to establish a new approach to regional planning and development including significant funding to support the planning and design of regional cities and towns, support for the development of new growth areas in regional cities, support for future planning in coastal areas and local government. It also includes grants to local councils for future planning work and expertise within local councils, fast-tracking projects to help local communities adapt to climate change and support for smaller councils.

The Blueprint was well received:

Steven Wojtkiw, chief economist VECCI: *The blueprint isn't the panacea for all of regional Victoria but it does certainly put commitment and funding behind growth and will help overcome some of the challenges.*⁶

Cr Bill McArthur, MAV President: *The Ready for Tomorrow Blueprint [is] the first co-ordinated State plan to provide strategic direction on regional and rural Victoria's role in responding to our population growth challenges...Elements of the Blueprint particularly supported by the MAV include: \$59 million package for new population growth and land use planning strategies; \$50 million Sustainable Small Towns package; and \$260 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund boost. It's also great to see further investment to build on successful high-profile initiatives such as the 'Make it Happen in Provincial Victoria' campaign and the Small Towns Victoria Program.*⁷

⁶ The Age, Friday June 18, 2010, page 19 After the Gold rush, Farrah Tomazin,

⁷ *Regional Blueprint to help grow rural and regional communities*, MAV press release June 15, 2010

MINORITY REPORT

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

Rural Councils Victoria chairman and Hindmarsh Cr Rob Gersch: *We are happy with the document and the way the government has recognised rural and regional Victoria. The government was asked to put up or shut up and I think it has put up. It's a real win-win and I think they have listened to what people have been saying...The real win...is \$5.5 million for small towns.*⁸

Yet, despite the huge support in regional and rural communities for the work done by Regional Development Victoria; the projects supported through the RIDF; and the time, effort and work regional and rural stakeholders have put in to developing the blueprint, the Coalition has indicated that if it achieves government at the next election, it will disregard regional and rural Victorians' views and instead establish a Regional Growth Fund.

However, this so-called growth "fund" is nothing of the sort: instead it will slash \$1.1 billion of funding from regional and rural Victorian schools, hospitals and other job-creating infrastructure.

The Opposition has only committed to \$500 million from this "fund" in its first four-year term and, even more alarmingly, the Nationals have admitted that the "fund" will include funding for core education and health services as well as other capital works in regional and rural Victoria. Furthermore, the political committee overseeing this funding and the grants is made up of three Members of Parliament, determined to be 2 Liberals and 1 National, which does not bode well for regional and rural Victorians.

On the other hand, the Brumby Labor Government has committed more than \$1.6 billion in the past four years to regional health, education and job-creating infrastructure, more than three times the Liberal-National Coalition's commitment.

In this year's State Budget alone, Labor committed \$618 million to regional hospitals, and upgrades to a further 39 regional and rural schools. This is in addition to the \$600 million plus we have already committed from the RIDF that has supported the creation of more than 390 projects worth more than \$1.66 billion.

3.2 AGRICULTURE / FARMING COMMUNITIES

We were incredibly disappointed that the State Labor Government's drought and farming community assistance packages were given scant acknowledgement in the committee's report.

Victoria's food and beverage production and processing is the foundation of many regional and rural economies: it employs more than 140,000 Victorians and contributes \$25.4 billion to our economy.

The importance of a thriving, sustainable farming sector therefore can not be over-stated and the Brumby Labor Government has a long, strong record of support for the primary industries' sectors.

Over the years this support has included investment in science research and development; skills; more than \$400 million for drought assistance since 2002-03; and substantial investment in infrastructure including the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline, freight rail upgrades, roads and the Food Bowl Modernisation Project.

⁸ Wimmera-Mail Times, *Rural councils welcome blueprint*, June 18, 2010

MINORITY REPORT

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

In 2008, the Brumby Labor Government released its \$205 million *Future Farming* strategy, outlining seven broad Action Areas to help farm business in Victoria become more productive, competitive and sustainable.

As well as ongoing investment in technology, planning, resource management, marketing and infrastructure, the strategy recognised that the health and wellbeing of farmers, farm workers and their families were the cornerstones of strong, resilient rural communities.

That is, the strategy acknowledged that investing in human and economic capital was as important as investing in infrastructure.

The four main initiatives in the strategy that address farming communities' health and wellbeing are:

- The Rural Futures Initiative - the initiative organises community meetings, discussions and forums to understand the implications of likely changes in their community, provides relevant information to farmers and rural communities undergoing change, encourages dialogue between farmers, communities and stakeholders and supports local decision making processes.
- The Sustainable Farm Families initiative supports the physical and mental health and wellbeing of farmers and their families and assists them to manage change. The funding is used to run workshops that focus on practical steps to improve the lives of farm families, targeting farmers in areas undergoing significant change. The workshops include physical assessments that focus on areas including cardiovascular disease, cancer, stress, diabetes, women and men's health, farm safety, nutrition, physical activity, stress and depression.
- The Case Management for Farmers initiative tests a new approach which delivers individual support services for farmers and their families who are considering whether to leave farming. Case managers help farmers and their families make best use of existing support services and gain access to new types of adjustment services.
- The new National Centre for Farmer Health based in Hamilton investigates causes and consequences of poor health within the farming community and develops cost-effective policies and programs to address health and wellbeing issues. The centre reaches out to high risk communities through the Sustainable Farm Families program and delivers undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education for doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, veterinarians, agronomists and government staff.

We heard during the inquiry that these initiatives are working:

Jim Fletcher CEO Western District Health Service: *...the Sustainable Farming Families program and the [National Centre for Farming Health] are making a significant difference in terms of awareness around health and welfare around farming families.*

More recently the Victorian Auditor General's report in to the Sustainable Farm Families program found it was making a real difference to participants' health:

*"Results indicate the program is effective in improving participants' health. Participants are more knowledgeable about their health after attending the program, and their clinical health indicators improve from the first to second year. At-risk males and females had the highest rates of significant improvement."*⁹

⁹ http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/reports_publications/reports_by_year/2010-11/20100109_sff.aspx

MINORITY REPORT

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

The *Future Farming* Strategy also delivers an additional \$12 million for services to support farmers and rural communities to help them face a range of challenges including rapid change, issues related to health awareness and access to services and occupational hazards associated with farming activities.

In addition to health and wellbeing initiatives the *Future Farming* strategy also recognises the importance of boosting regional education and training opportunities that build skills and attract young people to farming.

Once again the committee's final report fails to acknowledge this.

During this inquiry - and during other inquiries undertaken by this committee – we've heard that young people were more likely to remain, return or move to rural and regional Victoria if they had access to education and lifestyle opportunities and great career prospects.

A number of *Future Farming* initiatives are under way to boost regional education and training opportunities related to farming and its support industries. These initiatives are designed to provide young people with access to agricultural studies, skills training and support to build a successful life in the farm sector and are complemented by proposals to develop new trade wings at secondary colleges for trades that are in short supply in primary industries.

3.3 NEW INDUSTRY

The Brumby Labor Government also recognises that we live in a rapidly changing world and the challenges of climate change will have a very real impact on our regional and rural communities.

Therefore, it is necessary to look to the future and take action to ensure that regional Victoria has the industry and infrastructure in place to remain competitive and sustainable.

The measures contained in the Government's recently released *Taking Action for Victoria's Future, the Victorian Climate Change White Paper – The Action Plan* will see significant new investment across regional Victoria in renewable and clean energy generation as well as in new opportunities in environmental technologies.

They include:

- Victoria's five per cent solar target that will see between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion of new solar investment in north-west and northern Victoria;
- around \$4 billion of investment in wind generation and geothermal generation as a result of the 20 per cent national renewable energy target;
- a commitment of \$33 million – through the CarbonNet project – to explore the development of a network of pipelines that transport carbon to storage sites in the offshore Gippsland Basin;
- around \$50 million a year over five years towards energy efficiency measures in households and industries through the *Climate Communities* program, including an ambitious commitment to improving the average energy efficiency of Victoria's housing stock; to be delivered through measures such as the \$8 million over two years for solar hot water rebates;

MINORITY REPORT

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

- at least \$1 billion to \$2 billion of potential new investment in gas generation brought forward as a result of the Government's staged closure of Hazelwood;
- at least \$10 million a year flowing from carbon offset investments from the government's GreenPower purchases;
- the \$25 million Latrobe Valley Advantage Fund to help the region adjust to a low carbon future;
- the voluntary motor registration offset program, providing a massive boost to the local offset industry; and
- \$160 million on refitting Government buildings to a higher energy efficiency standard including upgrades to campuses operated by South West TAFE and 62 regional public schools.

4. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Although most of the inquiry's recommendations are similar to or duplicate existing government policies, programs and initiatives, there are three recommendations that we do not support.

We were also extremely disappointed about the way the recommendations were developed.

Firstly, there was no genuine debate around the development or "flavour" of the recommendations: they were simply presented to us as a fait accompli. The Government members of the committee were not involved in their formulation and had no say in how they were prioritised, which raises serious questions about the integrity and rigour of this committee's processes.

Secondly, as stated above, many of the recommendations duplicate existing State Labor Government initiatives and programs. A substantial number of these initiatives were developed by the State Labor Government during the past decade to specifically tackle disadvantage.

The huge failing of this inquiry is that it is a missed opportunity to examine the effectiveness of the many groundbreaking initiatives government, communities and individuals have implemented in regional and rural Victoria since 1999.

In the following pages, we provide more details regarding those recommendations about which we are particularly concerned.

Recommendation 1 – Rural Proofing and Independent Advisory Body

While we support rural proofing, we do not support this recommendation to establish a rural-proofing advisory body. It is simply a rehash of a recommendation made after this committee's previous inquiry in to *Regional Centres of the Future*.

MINORITY REPORT

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

During that inquiry, our objection to the recommendation was that there was no evidence presented to committee members to support the establishment of such a body. Again, during this inquiry the committee did not investigate or visit any rural-proofing bodies in other states; nor were any witnesses specifically asked about their views on establishing such a body.

Furthermore, establishing such a body abrogates the responsibility of MPs and Ministers within a Government of the need to be aware of and act on these issues. The Coalition members of this committee want to establish a body to do their work for them - that is to stand up for regional and rural Victorians – work that they did not do during the seven years of the Kennett Government, where disadvantage increased markedly as a result of the closure of regional rail lines, hospitals and schools.

Nor was any discussion entered in to on how to strengthen parliamentary or cabinet processes - or indeed the Coalition party room process - to make sure that rural communities' concerns are considered as seriously as they are in the present State Labor Government.

We heard during this inquiry that communities are looking for rural-proofing guidelines, policies or methodologies. What they clearly did not want was another layer of red-tape, bureaucracy, obfuscation and delay.

It would be more appropriate, therefore, for regional and rural communities to determine how a rural proofing initiative would operate and they should be consulted and involved in any such reform.

Recommendation 3 – Social Contract

We are not supporting this recommendation calling for an artificial template – a social contract - to be imposed on communities.

The complexity of trying to define a social contract – let alone determining how it can be applied to a range of community settings - has been the subject of many a distinguished academic's thesis. In other parliamentary committees when a major concept is introduced and put up as a recommendation, substantive discourse and explanation is provided and a full and open debate is had. This has not occurred in this case.

Not only was there no serious discussion about defining a social contract, there was no indication of what the contract's parameters would be, especially in rural areas; how it would be implemented; how communities, key stakeholders and all levels of government would be involved in its development; how it would be enforced; who would enforce it; and what would be the minimum standards and requirement of the contract - the list goes on.

The recommendation also undermines local councils and locally based service providers by implying they have not been, and will not be, competent enough to identify and lobby on behalf of their communities and clients. This flies in the face of the evidence we heard during this inquiry, which clearly showed that those working at the coal face were best-placed to identify community issues and develop ways of addressing these concerns.

It also implies that the issues faced by rural and regional communities are homogenous.

MINORITY REPORT

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

We would be disappointed and extremely concerned if this type of local initiative and leadership was in anyway diluted or limited by the imposition of some kind of notional concept.

We would much rather deal with real facts and real issues so that real solutions can be worked out at a local level, with appropriate community consultation and government assistance.

Recommendation 5 - Alternative Education

We support this recommendation but believe attention needs to be drawn to the misleading wording in Section C that implies the State Labor Government does not support flexible alternative learning models.

The Brumby Labor Government spends more than \$6.5 million a year on supporting 38 flexible learning options across Victoria, to provide alternatives for students with difficulties who attend mainstream schools. The schools also work closely with community organisations and other local service providers to develop appropriate local solutions. Also note that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is developing a new, improved framework for alternative education settings that is due to be rolled out in 2011.

Recommendation Seven – Access to Justice

Circumstances surrounding the development of this recommendation regarding access to the law in regional and rural areas were nothing short of shambolic, embarrassingly amateurish and not up to the standard expected of a parliamentary committee.

The recommendation relied heavily on a research project being under taken by Deakin University School of Law Research Fellow, Richard Coverdale. We make no comment or judgement on that project, but given that the research “is specifically looking at rural disadvantage in the administration of the law”¹⁰ it would have been prudent to have also acknowledged that VCAT President Justice Iain Ross recently released his review of the tribunal; that Boston Consulting has conducted reviews of the magistrates’ and county courts; and that personnel from the administration of the courts should have been invited to make comment to the committee.

Instead the committee chair chose to develop a recommendation that relied on an unfinished report in order to cast a negative light on the justice system. We believe this reflects poorly on the Coalition committee members and question their motives in taking this approach. If those committee members were genuine about exploring this issue they would have engaged with a broader range of stakeholders.

However, it was only at the insistence of the Government members of this committee that an 11th hour briefing addressing justice issues was made by Executive Director of the Courts John Griffin and Magistrates’ Court of Victoria CEO Charlotte Stockwell.

¹⁰ Deakin University School of Law Research Fellow Richard Coverdale, during the hearing held at Geelong on May 18.

MINORITY REPORT

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

During this briefing, it became very clear that the recommendation was built around untried, unsubstantiated and untested information. Mr Griffin also stated that some of the premises on which the recommendation was made were “rubbish”. It became evident to all that the report’s original take on this issue was not correct and that recommendation seven needed to be re-written.

The new draft of the recommendation was only presented to us the evening before the committee adoption meeting.

The re-written recommendation introduced a number of new references but because of time constraints, we had little opportunity to analyse, discuss and test the information the recommendation is based on and therefore we can not support it.

Further, given the rushed nature of the recommendation’s drafting we do not believe adequate recognition has been given to the Brumby Labor Government’s commitment to funding and implementing initiatives that have improved regional and rural Victorians’ access to the justice system during the past decade.

In the interests of providing balance on this issue, we outline some of those initiatives below.

In this year’s budget the Brumby Labor Government announced \$50 million in extra funding for Legal Aid over two years. This is in stark contrast to the previous Kennett Coalition Government which not only cut Legal Aid when in government, but conspired with the then Federal Liberal Government to significantly reduce Victoria’s share of Commonwealth Legal Aid funding.

The State Labor Government has also funded the establishment of six Community Legal Centres across Victoria since 2004.

This State Labor Government has opened or upgraded courts in Wodonga, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Horsham, Mildura and the LaTrobe Valley and as part of its Legal Services Masterplan is currently looking at the future needs of existing court complexes in Wangaratta, Shepparton and Bendigo.

Other State Labor Government initiatives benefiting rural and regional communities include the:

- Expansion of the Rural Dispute Settlement Centre – staff from the centre provide timely dispute advice and can organise mediations.
- Koori Courts – these courts operate in Shepparton, Mildura, Swan Hill, Warrnambool, the La Trobe Valley and Bairnsdale.
- Mental Health Court Liaison Service - provided by the local area mental health services at the Geelong, Shepparton, Bendigo, Ballarat and Latrobe Valley Magistrates’ courts.
- The Youth Justice Court Advice Service - a specialised youth-focused statewide service provided by the Department of Human Services Youth Justice program for young people between 18 and 20 years of age who are appearing in the Magistrates’, County or Supreme courts in relation to criminal matters.
- Regional Justice Service Centres – these one-stop shops have been established in each of the regions to help local residents access a range of justice services and information including: referrals to Consumer Affairs Victoria-funded advocacy service providers; consumer advice; fine payments; and mediation services and dispute resolution.

MINORITY REPORT

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

- Court Integrated Services Program (CISP) - the Magistrates' Court and the Department of Justice are considering ways in which this ground-breaking pilot program – which is currently operating in the La Trobe Valley and two metro courts - can be applied across all Magistrates' Courts in Victoria. The program offers defendants support such as drug and alcohol treatment, crisis accommodation, disability and mental health services.
- Establishment of community-based service providers that deliver the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program across the state. More than 6000 victims of crime have been helped across regional and rural Victoria in the past two years.
- Consolidating and overhauling laws previously contained in four separate pieces of legislation into one streamlined regime - The Criminal Procedure Act 2009 – which has resulted in a number of measures designed to reduce delay in the Courts.

In September 2010, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal announced that as part of the *Transforming VCAT* strategic plan, VCAT staff will now be located at Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Morwell, Mildura, Warrnambool and Wangaratta.

These staff will improve access to VCAT, allowing forms to be lodged locally instead of at Melbourne. On-the-ground mediation services and liaison with community legal centres and Consumer Affairs Victoria will also be provided.

Many of the changes to VCAT were developed in response to community feedback received during a series of public hearings. The initiatives were all aimed at improving access, fairness and efficiency and generated a great deal of positive media coverage in the days immediately following their release.

RECOMMENDATION 12 – TRACKING DISENGAGED YOUTH

While we do not oppose this recommendation, we do not believe adequate recognition is given to processes that are already in place to help track young people through the education system and ensure young people do not “fall through the gaps”.

The Brumby Labor Government's *Youth Connections* initiative focuses on young people who are at risk of disengaging or who are already disengaged from education, family and /or the community. Young people can access Youth Connections services at 31 locations across Victoria. These services provide individual case management to help young people re-engage with education or further training and improve their ability to make positive life choices.

The program is funded at \$16.8 million a year through the *National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions*, which has been signed up to by all States and Territories and the Commonwealth.

Government schools are funded through the Managed Individual Pathways program to provide additional support to students at risk of disengaging from school. The schools are responsible for monitoring young people's pathways until they complete Year 12 or equivalent, even after the young person has left the school. The annual *OnTrack* destination survey is another way of following up on young people and offers referral to *Youth Connections* and other appropriate local service providers.

MINORITY REPORT

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

RECOMMENDATION 39 – DENTAL CHAIRS

Again, we do not oppose this recommendation however it does fail to acknowledge the Brumby Labor Government's ongoing investment in regional and rural dental health services.

Since 1999, this investment has totalled more than \$1.1 billion and has helped reduce waiting times, increase access, continue workforce development, support oral health promotions and build and expand clinics.

There are now 373 public dental chairs in Victoria, many in regional areas, including substantial boosts for clinics in Mildura, Wodonga, Hastings, Morwell and Melton.

The State Labor Government's commitment to supporting the establishment of the new dental school at La Trobe University Bendigo will almost double the number of graduate dentists entering the health system during the next few years. In addition, the school's satellite clinics in other regional areas provide dental students with valuable opportunities to gain experience in a rural setting while exposing them to the many benefits of living and working in non-metropolitan areas.

It is important, too, that the rebuilding of the state public dental system is put in to context:

- The Federal Coalition has blocked funding for the Commonwealth Dental Health Program in the Senate. This is preventing \$72.65 million of funding, for an additional 258,000 dental services over the next three years, flowing in to Victoria.
- The excellent dental service that was previously available to rural and regional people, through a Commonwealth voucher system that cost \$100 million a year, was discontinued by the Howard Coalition in 1996.
- Under the Kennett Government, dentists were discouraged from remaining within the public dental scheme, with many leaving never to return

5. CONCLUSION

This inquiry was a missed opportunity.

It covered much of the same ground regarding social disadvantage that lead to this Government to develop its highly successful *A Fairer Victoria* six years ago; and duplicated work undertaken by the State Labor Government during the past decade in establishing the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and the dedicated regional development agency Regional Development Victoria.

The time, energy and resources that went in to conducting this inquiry would have been far more usefully spent on investigating what was working well in our rural communities; what programs and partnerships needed more support and why; and investigating ways of sharing and adapting successful initiatives and ventures with other communities.

At the Corryong hearing, we were asked what the purpose of the inquiry was.

MINORITY REPORT

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

Labor MP and committee member Don Nardella responded:

What I want is a positive report that can assist rural communities, especially isolated ones...a good, positive report that has the solutions rather than just knocking country communities and other areas [and] would be used in a much more positive way by all levels of government, local, state and federal, to work towards solutions with communities.

In contrast, the Opposition-led and dominated Committee, through its terms of reference, made it clear that there was no room for celebrating rural communities' many, many successful programs, partnerships and initiatives. All they wanted to hear was what was wrong with these communities and – ultimately - talk down regional and rural Victoria.

There was no recognition of the fact that research has shown that people in regional Victoria generally feel they have a better life-work balance than those in metropolitan areas and that people who had made the move to regional Victoria generally felt more satisfied with their lives as a whole than they did in their previous location.¹¹ Nor was there recognition that some inspiring examples of leadership, resilience and innovation have flourished in some of our smallest, most isolated rural communities.

The committee chair instead chose to put down regional areas and the people who live there:

National MP and committee chair Damian Drum at Corryong:

All the indicators, without even having stepped foot in Corryong, would suggest that by going to somewhere like Corryong, we are going to be faced with a range of challenges. That was the driver [for establishing this inquiry].

Yet at Corryong, we found a community that believed the town was great place to live, work and raise a family and despite the challenges proved it had fine leaders, was innovative, inspiring, committed and proud of what it had achieved over the years.

In what can only be described as a calculated move, the Opposition-chaired and dominated committee, knowing the regional blueprint and sixth year of funding commitments through *A Fairer Victoria* were due to be released, established an inquiry to serve its own political needs in the lead up to a State election.

The Coalition committee members were desperate to gloss over the fact that it has been a State Labor Government that has stood up for regional and rural Victorians; it has been a State Labor Government that has committed more than \$1.6 billion in the past four years to regional health, education and job-creating infrastructure; and it has been a State Labor Government that has lead the nation in developing and delivering strategies and action plans to address disadvantage and invest in rural and regional communities.

It has been the Liberal-National Coalition that has continually talked down regional Victoria, claiming that the State Labor Government's hugely successful *Regional Infrastructure Development Fund* was a 'sham', and 'cynical politics'; and it has been the Liberal-National Coalition that has signalled its plans to cut \$275 million a year in regional funding - or \$1.1 billion over its first term - if it achieves Government.

¹¹ Relocated residents' survey, August 2009, ASCET Group and the University of Ballarat.

MINORITY REPORT

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

On the other hand, the Brumby Labor Government knows that by investing in regional communities, supporting its leaders and young people, facilitating investment and creating jobs that these communities will be in a much better position to tackle social disadvantage.

Through the regional blueprint, developed in partnership with regional and rural communities, communities have had an even greater say and improved access to government than ever before.

The regional blueprint consultation process was extensive and inclusive. The Government and regional communities worked together for over 18 months to build on the existing investment the Brumby Labor Government has made in regional Victoria and define a proper framework to lock in prosperity, secure lifestyles and to create new opportunities for regional people and businesses.

We know there is always more work that can be done to address issues surrounding rural and regional social disadvantage and equity. We also recognise that it is local communities that are best placed to identify these local challenges and that they need to be empowered and supported to build their capacity, resources and resilience.

We also know that what we have been doing is working.

During the past decade, we have seen the regions undergo a major renaissance: more than 120,000 new regional jobs have been created; regional population has grown strongly, reaching 1.45 million in June 2009; the State Labor Government has helped facilitate \$11.7 billion in new investments; government services including TAC, Rural Finance, the State Revenue Office, the Department of Housing Call Centre and the Statewide Rural Emergency Services Dispatch Centre have been decentralised; and our regions are contributing \$62.6 billion towards the state's economy, up a massive 30 per cent since 1999.

While we are not supporting the committee's report in full, we would like to reassure everyone who participated in the inquiry that the Government has listened to what has been said and will respond to the report.

We would like to thank everyone that has contributed or presented to the inquiry and who have, very passionately and in a heart felt manner, supported and expanded on the great things that make up rural and regional Victoria.

GAYLE TIERNEY MP
Member for Western Victoria

KAYE DARVENIZA MP
Member for Northern Victoria

DON NARDELLA MP
Member for Melton