

Policy for the 2006 Victorian Election

Addressing Disadvantage

Investing in a fairer Victoria



Steve Bracks
and Labor 

Investing in a fairer Victoria

Labor believes in strong communities where all Victorians have the opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of life. We are working with communities, local government and businesses to help remove barriers to opportunity and provide access and choice for all Victorian families.

Over the next four years a re-elected Bracks Government will:

CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

- ✓ Provide an extra \$90 million for additional aids and equipment, home and vehicle modifications, and support packages.
- ✓ Invest \$3 million for more IT and communications support for people with a disability in a 'Technability' program.
- ✓ Provide a further \$12.3 million to support young people with Acquired Brain Injury.
- ✓ Invest \$15 million for new Shared Supported Accommodation, as well as refurbishment and replacements of existing Community Residential Units.
- ✓ Implement a consultative process to assess the future needs of all residents currently living at Colanda Residential Services in Colac.
- ✓ Allocate an additional \$6 million to provide improved Early Intervention Services for children with disabilities.
- ✓ Build three new or replacement special schools with at least six others to undergo major upgrades.
- ✓ Establish an *Accessible Housing Program* to increase the supply of accessible housing and assist older people and people with a disability to live independently in their own homes.
- ✓ Commit \$2 million in traineeships and 'back to work' grants to assist those with a disability and carers to seek employment.
- ✓ Develop an *Autism State Plan* in partnership with Autism Victoria.
- ✓ Work with the Parents of Hearing Impaired Children Victoria and Deaf Children Australia towards increasing the provision of deaf facilities in mainstream schools.
- ✓ Invest \$20.5 million in initiatives to support carers.

IMPROVE SERVICES FOR HOMELESS VICTORIANS

- ✓ Invest \$7.5 million in a new *Support for Young People that Really Counts* program to deliver a combination of accommodation and mentoring support.
- ✓ Invest \$2.1 million to lift homeless support standards.
- ✓ Introduce the first Homeless Person's Liaison Officer at Melbourne Magistrates' Court.
- ✓ Deliver stage 2 of the *Creating Connections: Youth Homelessness Action Plan*.
- ✓ Deliver the extra \$10.5 million over three years committed under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to fill the gap in Commonwealth funding.
- ✓ Support the Homeless World Cup to be held in Victoria in 2008.

ADDRESS POVERTY AND THE COST OF SERVICES

- ✓ Expand the *No Interest Loans Scheme* across the state to reduce the impact of credit debt and financial hardship.
- ✓ Protect Victorians from predatory credit and finance practices by implementing our comprehensive response to the Consumer Credit Review including:
 - Addressing unfair credit contracts and enhancing the credit provider registration scheme;
 - Promoting national solutions to encourage more responsible lending practices, especially in relation to credit cards; and
 - Introducing more education for consumers especially for senior Victorians considering reverse mortgages
- ✓ Provide assistance to energy consumers in financial hardship including:
 - An expanded Utility Relief Grants Scheme;
 - Providing energy relief training to financial counsellors; and
 - Ensuring our energy consumer protection framework is maintained through the National Reform process.
- ✓ Introduce 'Lemon Laws' that limit the number of repairs tolerated before replacement of motor vehicles and other major product purchases.
- ✓ Further reduce the digital divide through *Connecting Communities*.

TACKLE DRUG AND ALCOHOL ISSUES

- ✓ Extend our alcohol and drug programs with a stronger focus on alcohol, amphetamines and marijuana funded by a further \$180 million over four years from electronic gaming revenue
- ✓ Raise awareness of the serious mental health dangers of marijuana use and the risks of methamphetamine consumption in major state-wide campaigns.

INCREASE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

- ✓ Develop new, stand alone legislation, in close consultation with the community, to better protect women and children from family violence and establish a *Safer Families Training Program* for first contact professionals.
- ✓ Fund a network of six dedicated Family Violence Community Lawyers and increase resources so Community Legal Centres can provide advice at courts to people applying for family violence intervention orders.
- ✓ Invest \$14.2 million to continue the Renewal Strategy of Out of Home Care facilities.

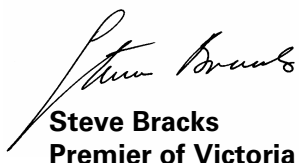
REVITALISE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

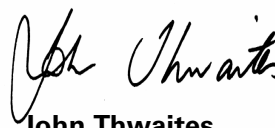
- ✓ Implement the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework in partnership with Indigenous leaders and citizens including:
 - Implement the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and the establishment of the new Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council;

- Strengthen local communities with new representative arrangements for Indigenous communities with \$10.8 million committed in the 2006-07 budget;
- Expand leadership, capacity building and governance training for Indigenous organisations;
- Continue to support the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council;
- Implement the new \$24 million Aboriginal Justice Agreement funded in the 2006-07 Budget including the establishment of three new Koori courts in Bairnsdale, Mildura and Swan Hill;
- Delivering \$14.1 million in human services programs to increase support that promotes healthy families;
- Deliver the new Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Centre; and
- Deliver broader vocational pathways for young Aboriginal people in northern Victoria through the Academy of Sport Health and Education.

INCREASE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES

- ✓ Enhance protections for tenants including residents of rooming houses, mobile home and caravan parks, and student housing.
- ✓ Provide \$60 million to expand the availability of social housing – providing 230 new rental homes for low income families and medium to long term accommodation for 160 single people.
- ✓ Implement partnerships with the private sector to deliver affordable housing for mid and lower income workers including the \$25.3 million Victoria Harbour development.
- ✓ Lead the push for a National Affordable Housing Agreement.
- ✓ Fight for a fair share of funding from the Commonwealth Government under the next Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement, to help meet the need for social housing.
- ✓ Implement our Integrated Victorian Housing Strategy.


Steve Bracks
Premier of Victoria


John Thwaites
Lead Minister for *A Fairer Victoria*

Our values: what the Bracks Government stands for

Over the last seven years, the Bracks Labor Government has demonstrated its commitment that, in addition to ensuring Victoria is the best state to live in, it is the fairest as well. We will continue to ensure that these opportunities extend to those who still experience disadvantage despite the improvements in our economy and in our services.

The Bracks Government has an action plan for tackling disadvantage and creating opportunities for all Victorians - *A Fairer Victoria*. *A Fairer Victoria* recognises that disadvantage can be pervasive and entrenched and may require a commitment to a generation of reform.

That is why, in addition to significant investments in education, health and community safety, the Bracks Labor Government is changing the way government works.

We are developing partnerships and implementing strategies that help people – as individuals and as communities – to help themselves, whether they are families, children, older Victorians, Indigenous Victorians, people with a disability, or homeless people.

We are working to ensure all Victorians have a real say in determining the shape of their communities and the models of service delivery that will best meet their needs.

A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will work with communities, local governments and service providers to reduce disadvantage and promote opportunities for all Victorians, including people experiencing disadvantage.

Labor will also fight hard for decent levels of Commonwealth funding to support the State's efforts.

What the Bracks Government has achieved in the past seven years

The Bracks Labor Government has achieved great results in making Victoria a fairer place to live and raise a family. Our Government has a strong record of investing in important services and addressing areas of social and economic disadvantage. We have committed more than \$1.6 billion since 2005 through *A Fairer Victoria: our action plan to create opportunities and address disadvantage*.

Since 1999 the Bracks Labor Government has:

CREATED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

- ✓ Established the Office of Disability, introduced the State Disability Plan 2002-2012 and passed the historic new Disability Act 2006.
- ✓ Boosted the disability services budget by 82%, from \$572 million in 1999-00 to \$1,041 million in 2006-07 which in turn has seen a:
 - 344% increase in spending for individual support packages.
 - 62% increase in the residential accommodation budget.
 - 78% increase in primary supports, including aids and equipment and respite.
 - 88% increase in funding for respite services.
- ✓ Provided a higher per capita spend on people with disabilities than anywhere else in Australia.
- ✓ Invested \$20.8 million for young people in nursing homes – the first instalment of the Bracks Government's \$30.1 million five year funding pledge, matched by the Commonwealth, for alternative accommodation options to better meet their needs.
- ✓ Committed \$250 million to further improve the accessibility of public transport with low floor trams and buses, new tram super stops and modification of train stations.
- ✓ Recently announced a funding boost of \$215 million over five years for the Program for Students with Disabilities.
- ✓ Provided new supported housing in the community for 377 people who used to live in 19th century conditions at the old Kew Cottages.
- ✓ Reached agreement to increase indexation from 2.6% to 2.9% resulting in an overall funding increase for the sector of more than \$30 million.

IMPROVED SERVICES FOR HOMELESS VICTORIANS

- ✓ Implemented the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy*, which is recognised around Australia for its groundbreaking integrated response to housing crisis.
- ✓ Increased support by 45% for people experiencing homelessness since 1999-2000: from 42,700 instances of support to 62,000 in 2004-2005.

- ✓ Increased the number of individuals and families helped by 27% with support and crisis housing through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program: from 28,500 in 1999-2000 to 36,100 in 2004-2005.
- ✓ Committed \$25.8 million for Stage 2 of our *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* on top of \$8.8 million invested under the landmark Stage 1 Plan.

ADDRESSED POVERTY AND THE COST OF SERVICES

The Bracks Labor Government has an excellent record of achievements in making sure Victorian consumers get a fair go. We have:

- ✓ Reinstated Consumer Affairs as a ministerial portfolio.
- ✓ Outlawed unfair contract terms in consumer contracts, cracked down on pay day lenders and other exploitative credit providers and undertaken a major review of consumer credit.
- ✓ Improved protection for the 25,000 residents of retirement villages with amendments to the Retirement Villages Act whilst reducing red tape for operators.
- ✓ Introduced a *Consumer Education in Schools* program to ensure that young people are informed about their consumer rights and savvy about rip-offs and scams, including a new and an improved Stuff magazine this year.
- ✓ Implemented better protections against unwanted telemarketing and door to door sales and successfully lobbied for a federal Do Not Contact register.
- ✓ Increased security for tenants and improved fair rent assessments by making changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, including relating to caravan parks and rooming houses.
- ✓ Recovered a record of nearly \$3 million in compensation for consumers in 2005-06 through our dispute resolution services.
- ✓ Passed new funeral industry laws to protect Victorians at what is a difficult and vulnerable time.
- ✓ Seized and banned record numbers of unsafe products – we are the most active jurisdiction in the country on product safety.
- ✓ Introduced the safety net price path agreement in 2004, resulting in real price reductions for electricity for Victorians of up to 5.7% and renegotiated it resulting in price cuts of between \$33 and \$57 in 2006-07.
- ✓ Introduced the strongest and toughest energy consumer protection framework in Australia, including the safety net price path agreement, energy retailer hardship programs and a \$250 per day compensation payment to protect consumers against illegal disconnections.

TACKLED DRUGS AND ALCOHOL ISSUES

- ✓ Provided an extra \$255 million for our cross-government program, to prevent young people from taking up drugs, get those who need help into treatment, tackle drug-related crime and reduce drug-related harms.
- ✓ Established Australia's first Chair of Alcohol Policy at Melbourne University.
- ✓ Boosted alcohol and drug service systems to help 6,000 Victorians per year.
- ✓ Increased specialist alcohol and drug treatment beds by more than 80%.
- ✓ Cut waiting times for residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation from 13 days to 4.4 days.
- ✓ Cut waiting times for community based drug treatment from 4.3 days to 0.5 days.
- ✓ Introduced five Melbourne drug 'hot spot' programs in Greater Dandenong, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Port Phillip and Yarra.
- ✓ Introduced tough new smoking laws so people can now dine, shop, work and travel in smoke-free environments.
- ✓ Introduced the Family Drug Helpline, giving 24 hour telephone counselling and support to nearly 6,000 people every year.

INCREASED ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

- ✓ Developed the Women's Safety Strategy 2002-07, becoming the only state to adopt an integrated state-wide approach to family violence.
- ✓ Announced the biggest package to assist family violence victims in Victoria's history, more than doubling funding for family violence services and recruiting more family violence workers in every part of Victoria.
- ✓ Achieved an increase of 72% in the number of intervention orders, and opened a Family Violence Court Division in the Magistrates' Court with specially trained magistrates and support services.

REVITALISED INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- ✓ Made the single biggest investment in Aboriginal Affairs in Victoria's history - more than doubling our investment to improve the quality of life of Indigenous people in areas such as health, education, children's services, justice, economic development and family violence.
- ✓ Changed the Constitution, making Victoria the first Australian state to give Constitutional recognition to our Indigenous people.
- ✓ Arrived at Victoria's first Native Title determination without litigation and with the agreement of all parties.
- ✓ Established the Aboriginal Land and Economic Development Program.

- ✓ Established the first Children's Koori Court as part of a network of Koori courts around Victoria.
- ✓ Passed the Victorian *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* to help protect our Indigenous legacy.
- ✓ Established the *Victorian Indigenous Leadership Centre* in partnership with key community organisations.
- ✓ Invested \$3 million over three years for Leadership and Indigenous Community Capacity Building.
- ✓ Established Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC).
- ✓ Delivered accredited governance training to Boards and CEOs of Aboriginal community organisations.
- ✓ Established Birrarung Wilam as a permanent symbol of Reconciliation.
- ✓ Invested in the Lake Tyers Community Renewal Program.

INCREASED ACCESS TO HOUSING FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES

- ✓ Released *Towards an Integrated Victorian Housing Strategy*, setting out a coherent framework across the whole of government to help address our future housing challenges.
- ✓ Invested more than \$254 million on community strengthening to improve the lives of people living in 19 disadvantaged communities through Neighbourhood Renewal.
- ✓ Provided social housing assistance to more than 75,000 households with short, medium and long term housing, an increase of more than 3000 properties and more than 4000 households since 30 June 1999.
- ✓ Invested \$773 million between 2000-01 and 2006-07 to expand the direct tenure public housing supply by building and buying additional homes as well as \$142 million on redevelopment work.
- ✓ Invested \$1.75 billion between 2000-01 and 2006-07 to improve social housing through maintenance and physical improvement works.
- ✓ Created more than 10,000 new rental homes for low income families.
- ✓ Invested \$210 million to increase the supply of affordable housing through partnerships with local government, community organisations and the private sector.
- ✓ Provided \$58 million in bond loans between 2000-01 and 2006-07 to assist low income private renters.

The contrast with the Liberal Opposition

The Liberal Party listens to no one – organisations had their funding slashed by the previous Liberal Government and this was reflected in their approach to the services those organisations advocated for.

For example, when last in government, the Victorian Liberals did not spend a single extra dollar more than they were obliged to on accommodation and support services for homeless people. Their neglect meant that not enough funding was allocated to homelessness agencies to meet even award wage increases, let alone grow the services available to support people facing housing crisis. The Opposition was also silent last year when Canberra slashed core funding through the core program addressing homelessness – the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP).

True to form, the Liberal Party's promise to dismantle the Department for Victorian Communities would be a disaster for social policy in Victoria.

The Department for Victorian Communities is the government's focal point for the needs of communities – giving local communities a higher priority than they have ever had before.

This Department has specific responsibility for implementing *A Fairer Victoria*. This package of more than \$1.6 billion is the Bracks Labor Government's strategic cross-government framework to tackle disadvantage and create opportunities for all – explicitly aimed at changing the way government works to do it.

Key areas such as youth, women, employment, volunteering, local government and sport and recreation must all work closely together within the Department to deliver *A Fairer Victoria*.

The Department for Victorian Communities is also responsible for local teams around Victoria that work with local communities, especially in rural areas to identify their priorities and work across portfolios to ensure local priorities are addressed and for major grant programs that deliver those priorities.

The Liberals' stance shows they have learned nothing and fundamentally do not understand the need for a strategic, systematic approach to social policy.

Our Vision for the future: What Labor will do

Over the next four years a re-elected Bracks Government will:

CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will continue to make Victoria a more supportive and accessible place for people with disabilities, their families and carers. We have been reforming the way we support people with disabilities – moving away from old approaches where people were expected to fit into pre-designed services and instead designing flexible support programs to fit the needs of each person.

Labor will continue to deliver additional and better matched services which assist more people with disabilities to live active and engaging lives alongside other Victorians. Labor will also show leadership by ensuring state government departments actively recruit people with disabilities and encourage employers in the private sector to employ more workers with disabilities. Labor will also work to improve access to public transport, government buildings and housing.

1. Labor will provide an extra \$90 million to provide additional aids and equipment, home and vehicle modifications and support packages.

Labor will increase support for aids and equipment, home and vehicle modifications, and support packages as a vital means by which many people with disabilities, and the frail aged, will better be able to maintain their independence and continue living in the community.

Labor will also increase subsidy levels for aids and equipment, as well as broadening eligibility for the program to include people on the Commonwealth Aged Care at Home Package or Extended Aged Care at Home Package.

2. Labor will invest \$3 million for more IT and communications support for people with a disability in a 'Technability' program.

Digitalisation offers the opportunity to make a quantum shift in independence and participation for people who are blind and vision impaired, as they currently have access to only around 5% of the information available to those who are sighted.

Labor will contribute \$1 million for new equipment, computer modifications, training and assistive technology; IT support to community residential units; and assist the conversion of Vision Australia's national library from analogue to digital.

Labor will also provide \$2 million to improve access to Auslan interpreters with a new centralised base for interpreters, connected by video or webcams and supported by high speed broadband connections, either in the home or at video kiosks in centres such as hospitals, medical clinics and government offices.

3. Labor will provide an additional \$12.3 million to support young people with Acquired Brain Injury.

Labor recognises that people with an Acquired Brain Injury often require long-term specialist services, including rehabilitation, not available elsewhere in the disability system.

Labor will invest in additional services to build on the services already provided under the Bracks Labor Government. This will include expanding our *Slow to Recover* program to reduce waiting lists, and increasing assessments, case management and support for around 300 Victorians with Acquired Brain Injury with each year.

4. Labor will invest a further \$15 million for both new Shared Supported Accommodation, as well as refurbishment and replacements of existing Community Residential Units.

Labor will invest \$10 million in new services including a range of staffed houses and flats providing both accommodation and ongoing support for people with disabilities. This extra Shared Supported Accommodation, will complement the expanding range of services provided under the Bracks Labor Government.

Labor will also provide a further \$5 million to renew and replace existing Community Residential Units throughout Victoria.

5. Labor will implement a consultative process to assess the future needs of all residents currently living at Colanda Residential Services in Colac.

In consultation with families, carers and staff, a re-elected Bracks Labor Government will assess the needs of all residents currently living at Colanda, with a view to developing more appropriate long term living options. New residential options to be examined will include services on site in Colac and elsewhere in the region. These will be developed according to the diverse needs of residents, many of whom will need support from advocates, family and staff to clarify their wishes and needs.

Any new accommodation services would be managed by the Department of Human Services and residents would also be linked into Day Programs relevant to their needs. Any workforce issues would be managed through a collective union agreement.

6. Labor will allocate \$6 million to provide improved Early Intervention Services for children with disabilities.

Labor recognises the importance of good quality Early Intervention Services when a young child is diagnosed with a disability or developmental delay.

Working with therapists, childcare workers, kindergarten teachers and parents will give each child the very best opportunities as early as possible, maximising the child's potential.

As announced in Labor's *Giving Children the Best Start in Life* policy, Labor will provide:

- ✓ \$3 million for an extra 150 Early Intervention places each year, so that children can access support more quickly.
- ✓ \$3 million for 150 new Enhanced Early Intervention packages, each year, for children with autism and other high needs. Enhanced Early Intervention packages will enable children with these more complex needs to access extra therapy services on top of those already provided to them through regular Early Intervention services.

7. Labor will build and improve special schools

A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will deliver the biggest ever school building program in Victoria.

As part of this commitment, Labor will build three new or replacement special schools with at least six others to undergo major upgrades.

8. Labor will work with parents groups towards increasing the provision of deaf facilities in mainstream schools.

Recently the Bracks Labor Government announced new transport assistance measures to help families of deaf and hearing impaired students to travel to and from school. If re-elected, Labor will work with the Parents of Hearing Impaired Children Victoria and Deaf Children Australia towards further increasing the provision of deaf facilities in mainstream schools.

9. Labor will establish an *Accessible Housing Program* to increase the supply of accessible housing and assist older people and people with a disability to live independently in their own homes.

Planning for an increased supply of accessible housing is about more than meeting the needs of people with a disability today. In thirty years time around one in four Australians will be aged over 65. We need to 'future proof' our housing stock now to ensure there are increased opportunities for people to remain in their homes.

The Bracks Labor Government's Accessible Housing Taskforce has identified structural features that could be incorporated into dwellings, including accessible paths to level entrances, wider doorways and passages, and reinforced bathroom and toilet walls with doors opening outwards. Including these features during construction can save expensive renovations in later years.

In response to the work of the Accessible Housing Taskforce, a re-elected Bracks Labor Government will establish a state-wide *Accessible Housing Program*, delivering the following initiatives:

- ✓ An industry led 'Homes for Life' guide to assist industry and consumers in the delivery of accessible housing.
- ✓ A campaign to promote greater understanding and awareness of accessible building issues within the construction industry and the broader community. This campaign will be delivered by utilising the education and promotional resources of the Building Commission, Human Services, VicUrban, the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Office for Disability.
- ✓ Establish a simple and low cost access rating system to indicate how accessible and adaptable a dwelling is to potential tenants and purchasers.
- ✓ Taking account of the recommendations of the Accessible Housing Taskforce, where local governments propose amendments to their local planning schemes in relation to housing accessibility, Labor will ensure that a consistent approach is achieved by specifying that a suite of standard 'low cost/no cost' measures are included in the amendments. Such measures will apply only to the ground floor of new medium density developments and one out of five units in new high density apartment blocks.

10. Labor will commit \$2 million in traineeships and back to work grants to assist those with a disability and carers to seek employment.

Labor will improve the recruitment, retention and promotion of people with a disability in the public and community sectors, and assist carers who want to re-enter the workforce, through the development of an employment strategy which will include:

- ✓ Investing \$1.5 million in a Disability Trainee Scheme for graduates with a disability to provide 50 traineeship opportunities per annum.
- ✓ Investing \$500,000 in back to work grants to assist carers who wish to re-enter the workforce.

11. Labor will develop an *Autism State Plan* in partnership with Autism Victoria.

Labor will develop an *Autism State Plan*, to build new and better approaches across government for meeting the growing and complex needs of people with autism and Autism Spectrum Disorders.

A *State Plan* would evaluate the current demand on services, develop strategies for improving the effectiveness of the service system, identify service gaps, and evaluate the findings of ACT NOW in relation to the specialist knowledge, skill and expertise needed by professionals across the sector.

12. Labor will invest \$20.5 million in initiatives to support carers.

Labor will recognise and support the critical work of over 100,000 carers – the unsung heroes of our community. For many their role as carers comes at great cost in terms of isolation, personal health and financial security.

Labor also acknowledges that foster and kinship carers are the heart and soul of Victoria's child protection system. These carers give up their homes to help some of Victoria's most vulnerable children and young people.

As announced at our campaign launch, Labor will:

- ✓ Invest \$2.4 million to introduce a Carer's Reward Card focusing on carers under 60 years old and foster carers who are not eligible for other concessions.
- ✓ Fund \$4 million in training and support programs through Carer's Victoria.
- ✓ Invest \$13.1 million in additional respite services.
- ✓ Draw up a Carer's Charter recognising their role and giving them a voice in policy development and service delivery.
- ✓ Invest \$1 million to expand online advice services to include a centralised respite accommodation service.

IMPROVE SERVICES FOR HOMELESS VICTORIANS

13. Labor will invest \$7.5 million in a new *Support for Young People that Really Counts* program combining accommodation with practical day to day assistance to meet their broader individual needs.

The Bracks Labor Government's *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* set new directions in early intervention and flexible support to address the range of issues confronting young people in housing crisis.

Support for Young People that Really Counts will build on the directions in the Plan by providing a combination of safe accommodation and greater day to day support for 16 to 19 year olds in housing crisis. It will also help young people to rebuild relationships with their family or other mentor who can help them to develop the ongoing living skills they need.

Labor will invest \$7.5 million over four years to build transitional homes with onsite support workers in Casey, Melton, Whittlesea and Yarra Ranges. We will assist more young people in housing crisis to renew links with family, friends and their community.

14. Labor will invest \$2.1 million to lift homeless support standards.

Homeless people have increasingly varied and complex needs. They deserve assistance to get their lives back on track delivered by professionally staffed and managed support agencies with the skills to meet those needs.

Labor will work with these agencies to develop an industry plan to ensure the agencies providing support to homeless people are professionally staffed and managed. The industry plan will address improved skills, training, accreditation and career paths for the sector.

15. Labor will introduce the first Homeless Person's Liaison Officer at Melbourne Magistrates' Court.

Homeless people living much of their lives in public spaces are particularly vulnerable to contact with the courts for minor offences. On the other hand, an attendance in court can provide a real opportunity for links to be made to the services that can help homeless people and reduce the risks of further offences.

As announced in Labor's *Access to Justice* policy, \$500,000 will be allocated to establish a Homeless Person's Liaison Officer at Melbourne Magistrates' Court and enhance the service provided by the Homeless Person's Legal Clinic.

For the first time, homeless people will have a dedicated contact at court who can both help ensure they are represented and link them into the accommodation and other services they need reducing the potential for further court appearances. Expanded outreach to homelessness agencies by legal volunteers and the Homeless Person's Legal Clinic will complement the court based assistance.

16. Labor will deliver stage 2 of the *Creating Connections: Youth Homelessness Action Plan*.

The Bracks Labor Government's landmark *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* has been applauded around Australia. Our plan recognises that young homeless people often need someone to mentor them to get their lives back on track before they require more intensive assistance in the future.

Under Stage 2, \$25.8 has been committed for up to an extra 3,000 young homeless Victorians to get the help they need over the next four years. New approaches will be implemented including youth transition hubs, new semi-independent living units and assistance to broker accommodation in the private rental market.

New funds for local agencies will also deliver places for young people in training courses to boost work and life skills, intensive support for people with drug, alcohol or mental health issues, as well as assistance to meet the establishment costs of private tenancies.

17. Labor will deliver the extra \$10.5 million over three years committed under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to fill the gap in Commonwealth funding.

Labor will continue to lobby for more Commonwealth funding for Victorians facing homelessness. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is the key program for assisting people in crisis and relies on matched Commonwealth and state funding.

The Howard Government has imposed savaged cuts to this vital program starving the sector of the resources required to lift people out of homelessness.

Victoria already provides more accommodation for homeless people than any other state. A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will deliver its 2006-07 Budget commitment to invest \$10.5 million over the next three years to meet the shortfall to SAAP created by the Howard Government.

18. Labor will support the Homeless World Cup to be held in Victoria in 2008.

People who are homeless, who have issues around drugs, alcohol and substance abuse or mental illness, need more than just a roof over their heads.

A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will deliver on its May 2006 commitment to provide \$850,000 to run the event, and to support weekly soccer training for homeless people in the lead up to the Homeless World Cup across Melbourne as well as new soccer training programs in Ballarat, Geelong and Shepparton.

Participation in the program offers a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose and the support for homeless people to interact with the community. It's about more than sport; it's about providing positive influences, positive role models and mentoring.

ADDRESS POVERTY AND THE COST OF SERVICES

19. Labor will expand the *No Interest Loans Scheme* across the state to reduce the impact of credit debt and financial hardship.

Labor will expand the *No Interest Loans Scheme* from 41 to 77 locations across the State. The *Scheme* was first announced in *A Fairer Victoria*, and is part of the Department for Victorian Communities' Community Enterprise Strategy developed with community and business partners. \$5.7 million over four years was committed in the 2006-07 budget.

The program includes financial monitoring, support and referral services. It will enable Victorian families on low incomes who would otherwise be unable to afford essential household goods to access credit for items such as fridges and washing machines.

These loans provide a pathway to a better quality of life by helping people to develop financial management skills, build their capacity to participate in the community and labour market, and build a sense of trust in others.

20. Labor will protect Victorians from predatory credit and finance practices by implementing our comprehensive response to the Consumer Credit Review.

Labor will deliver on our response to the Consumer Credit Review by implementing a comprehensive package of measures to reduce the impact of credit debt and financial hardship.

✓ ***Address unfair credit contracts***

Unwise borrowing, irresponsible lending and a lack of access to affordable credit all contribute to people finding themselves burdened with unmanageable debt. Low income consumers are particularly vulnerable to unfair and uncompetitive trade and business practices.

Labor is committed to protecting Victorian families and especially vulnerable consumers from unfair contract terms that may escalate any financial difficulties, especially if the contract terms allow lenders to put unreasonable pressure on consumers already struggling to repay their debt. Labor will work with industry to remove unfair terms from credit contracts ahead of applying laws banning unfair terms to credit. We will also put in place a ban on pre-approved offers to increase your credit card limit where you do not have the ability to nominate the increased limit you would like.

✓ ***Enhance the credit provider registration scheme***

Some unscrupulous lenders give responsible lenders a bad name and should not be allowed to prey on vulnerable Victorians. We will ensure all credit providers have to undergo a proper registration procedure and meet basic standards before they can offer loans to Victorian consumers. This includes requiring all lenders to be members of an approved alternative dispute resolution service. We will also introduce more flexible powers for the government to pursue dodgy credit providers.

✓ ***Promote national solutions to encourage more responsible lending practices, especially in relation to credit cards.***

Labor will pursue streamlined and improved credit regulation at the national level, so that national uniform laws are maintained and red tape is minimised, but consumers still get the benefit of necessary protections. This includes warnings on credit card statements about the dangers of only making minimum repayments, preventing negative equity from reverse mortgages and good practices that lenders should adopt to make sure they do not lend inappropriately. These measures are especially important at a time when uncertainty about job security and rising interest rates are making Victorian families feel more vulnerable.

✓ **Targeted consumer education**

Provide more help on credit for consumers including undertaking targeted education campaigns on credit to vulnerable groups, especially for senior Victorians about the operation of reverse mortgages and development of quality standards for financial counselling.

21. Labor will provide access for energy consumers to in increased government funding and approved innovative energy retailer hardship programs.

No one should be faced with the decision of whether to buy groceries or pay their electricity and gas bills. The measures Labor is committed to maintaining include boosting the Utility Relief Grants scheme to \$11 million and \$600,000 over two years for energy related training to financial counsellors, both promised in the 2006-07 budget under *A Fairer Victoria*. Additional measures to help protect families from financial hardship through energy costs include flexible bill payment options; and flexible options to purchase or supply replacement domestic electrical equipment.

We will continue to help cut the energy bills for pensioners through 1,000 home energy audits and retrofits by an Energy Taskforce focused on new Neighbourhood renewal areas. We are also committed to energy and water measures that will help low income households in rural areas, including changes to the non-mains winter rebate that will assist around 30,000 households.

Labor will also ensure that our energy consumer protection framework will be maintained under the National Reform Initiative.

22. Labor will introduce 'Lemon Laws' by amending the Fair Trading Act to limit the number of repairs that will be tolerated before replacement of motor vehicles and other major product purchases.

Unfortunately sometimes a purchase turns out to be a 'lemon' and no amount of repair will fix it adequately. In those circumstances people should have a right to an exchange or refund.

A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will introduce 'Lemon Laws' to protect consumers if they purchase a 'lemon', giving them a legal right under the Fair Trading Act to an exchange or refund when a product has a major fault or problem that cannot be repaired within a reasonable time.

Amendments to the *Fair Trading Act* will give consumers a legal right to an exchange or refund when a product has a major fault or problem and the supplier is unable to repair it in a reasonable time frame. This will stop suppliers insisting on making repair after repair rather than giving a refund or exchange of clearly faulty goods.

Consumers in the USA used to face the same problem. In response, all 50 states in the USA have now implemented lemon laws. Consumer advocates such as Choice are seeking the same protection for Australian consumers.

23. Labor will further reduce the digital divide through *Connecting Communities*.

Labor is committed to closing the digital divide for those who find it difficult to access or use technology, such as people with a disability, senior Victorians and people who are economically disadvantaged.

At the start of 2005 the Bracks Labor Government committed \$9 million over four years for *Connecting Communities: the Second Wave*. This package of initiatives to promote digital inclusion included \$3.5 million to continue *My Connected Community*. This program extends Internet access to over 2,400 online community organisations and over 41,000 members and includes the *Public Internet Access Program* with a commitment to delivering over half a million hours of free or affordable public internet access.

Through *Connecting Communities* the Bracks Government will also work in partnership with the private and philanthropic sectors to develop new and innovative approaches to close the digital divide for disadvantaged communities.

One such partnership will provide \$20,000 to JewishCare to develop a Digital Inclusion Masterplan for people with a disability who will live in the JewishCare residential care facility under development in Caulfield. The Masterplan and projects resulting from it will provide valuable learnings that can be applied to broader digital inclusion programs for people with disabilities. The working partnership between the government, community organisations and the philanthropic sector created will also serve as a model for other digital inclusion programs.

TACKLE DRUG AND ALCOHOL ISSUES

24. Labor will extend our alcohol and drug programs with a stronger focus on alcohol, amphetamines and marijuana funded by a further \$180 million over four years from electronic gaming revenue

Since the Bracks Labor Government introduced the successful Victorian Government Drug Initiative we have seen drug related deaths and usage decline dramatically. Heroin deaths are down to 18 this year to date. Smoking prevalence has decreased and youth smoking rates have dropped from 21% to 11%. Fewer Victorians are using marijuana, tobacco, analgesics, hallucinogens, inhalants, heroin, steroids and barbiturates.

However alcohol misuse is a continuing community concern, associated with preventable illness such as liver disease, road and pedestrian accidents, assaults and family violence.

Building on our successful strategies including media campaigns targeting binge drinking, and the *Good Sports Program* prompting 1,100 amateur sporting clubs, to promote responsible serving and consumption of alcohol, a re-elected Bracks Government will:

- ✓ Introduce a new four year *Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Strategy*.
- ✓ Explore the benefits of short sharp treatments for alcohol users reluctant to seek help.
- ✓ Extend the focus in drug 'hot spots' to alcohol concerns.

25. Labor will raise awareness of the serious mental health dangers of marijuana use and the risks of methamphetamine consumption in major state-wide campaigns.

As announced in *Connect: New ideas for young Victorians*, Labor will provide \$1 million and lead statewide awareness campaigns highlighting the serious mental health dangers of marijuana and 'ice'.

Labor will lead two state-wide campaigns highlighting the dangers of substance abuse by young people. A campaign aimed at people aged between 15 and 25 to raise awareness of the linkages current research continues to demonstrate between marijuana use and mental health issues.

The second state-wide awareness campaign will focus on the risks associated with methamphetamines, particularly 'ice' or 'crystal meth', which is becoming increasingly prevalent especially among injecting drug users. Health professionals are reporting violence, psychosis and increasing levels of overdose among users.

INCREASE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

26. Labor will develop new, stand alone legislation, in close consultation with the community, to better protect women and children from family violence and establish a *Safer Families Training Program* for first contact professionals.

Family violence has been identified by the World Health Organisation as a major health risk to women generating significant social and economic as well as health problems, requiring urgent attention.

The Bracks Government has already led major reform to improve responses – including the response of the justice system to family violence. Legislative reforms to date have included abolition of the provocation defence to homicide, amendments to the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987* passed in 2004, and the introduction of new holding powers Victoria Police can use when responding to incidents of family violence.

As announced in the *Women's Policy*, Labor will continue its leadership in addressing family violence. A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will develop stand alone legislation to better protect women and children from family violence.

This will form part of a response to the Victorian Law Reform Commission's extensive review of laws dealing with family violence commissioned in 2002 and recently received by the government.

To complement the significant funding already allocated under the Women's Safety Strategy, a *Safer Families Training Program* has been developed to assist people in professional roles who may be the first point of contact for women or children disclosing family violence.

Labor will establish a training program utilising the package to assist professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, police and court workers, who may acquire legal obligations, especially when dealing with disclosures made to them by children.

27. Labor will fund a network of six dedicated Family Violence Community Lawyers and further increase existing resources to enable Community Legal Centres to provide assistance at courts to help people apply for family violence intervention orders.

As announced in the *Access to Justice* policy, a re-elected Bracks Labor Government will build on existing specialist courts at Ballarat and Heidelberg with a network of duty lawyers as a further step in response to the Law Reform Commission's report on family violence.

Additional assistance will be available when Family Violence hearings are held at Dandenong, Sunshine, Broadmeadows, Ringwood, Werribee, Frankston, Melbourne, Gippsland, Geelong, Mildura, Warrnambool, Colac, Wodonga, Wangaratta and Bendigo courts.

A Family Violence position at the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service will assist Indigenous Victorians experiencing family violence in the Melbourne metropolitan, Barwon and Gippsland regions.

28. Labor will invest a further \$14.2 million to continue the Renewal Strategy of Out of Home Care facilities.

Labor will continue the vital work in rebuilding and refurbishing the units that are home for children and young people who are unable to live safely with their own families.

These are some of Victoria's most vulnerable young people. This ten stage Renewal Strategy is central to Labor's ability to ensure that they can live in homes which are well equipped and provide safe and nurturing environments.

Since commencing in 2000-01, 52 projects have been completed including 38 new houses and four refurbishments providing accommodation for 191 young people.

REVITALISE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

29. Labor will implement the Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework in partnership with Indigenous leaders and citizens.

In the 2006-07 Budget, the Bracks Government has made the biggest investments ever in Indigenous affairs by a Victorian Government.

The Indigenous Affairs Framework builds on the investments to date and is Labor's commitment to a sustained, long term, whole of government attack on Indigenous disadvantage. It identifies six clear priorities for action:

1. Support for Koori mothers and children and outcomes in maternal health and childhood development.
2. Improved literacy and numeracy.
3. Year 12 or equivalent completion.
4. Access to land and economic development.
5. Preventing family violence and justice before the law.
6. Capacity building.

Within this clear policy framework Labor will work in partnership with Aboriginal leaders. We will also continue to call on the Commonwealth to start making a serious contribution to this effort in Victoria.

A re-elected Bracks Labor Government will deliver its 2006-07 Budget commitment to provide \$75 million over four years in new investment across government to improve the quality of life and outcomes for Indigenous Victorians, including:

- ✓ *Implementing the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and establishing the new Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.*

The implementation of the new *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, along with funding of \$12.6 million for its implementation, will bring responsibility for aboriginal cultural heritage wholly within Victoria. The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council will ensure the central role of Aboriginal people across Victoria in protecting their heritage

A further \$5.7 million is being provided to refurbish 70 State-funded Indigenous community facilities.

- ✓ *Investing \$10.8 million to strengthen local communities with new representative arrangements for Indigenous communities.*

Labor will provide ongoing support to Indigenous communities to achieve their aspirations and provide opportunities to engage in the decision making processes most affecting them.

We are also funding new Indigenous community networks in 38 Indigenous communities across Victoria – which are particularly important after the Commonwealth's abolition of ATSIC.

- ✓ *Expanding leadership, capacity building and governance training for Indigenous organisations*

Labor is committed to ensuring good governance across all funded agencies and will continue to provide accredited governance training to Aboriginal organisations with \$500,000 in 2006-07 from the Indigenous Community Capacity Building Fund.

The training will use a partnership approach trialled during 2005-06 for board members and key staff of Victorian Indigenous community organisations.

- ✓ *Supporting the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council.*

In contrast to the broader community approximately 60% of the Indigenous community are under the age of 25. Labor will promote ongoing opportunities for young Indigenous people to have their say through the Victorian Youth Indigenous Advisory Council, volunteers from around the state who provide important advice to government. This initiative is supported by \$108,000 allocated through the Department for Victorian Communities.

- ✓ *Implementing the new \$26 million Aboriginal Justice Agreement including establishing three new Koori courts in Bairnsdale, Mildura and Swan Hill.*

Victoria's Aboriginal Justice Agreement commenced under the Bracks Government and in the 2006-07 Budget, the Bracks Labor Government committed to implementing its second phase to improve outcomes at every point in the justice system that Indigenous people fare worse than other Victorians. The Agreement expands the network of Koori courts from the six established to date by a further three courts.

- ✓ *Delivering \$14.1 million in human services programs to increase support that promotes healthy families.*

Labor is committed to expanding maternity services and in-home support. We will boost programs to preserve Aboriginal families and ensure Aboriginal family members, elders and other community members are involved in decisions about the safety of children in their community.

We will provide additional support services to return children who have been removed from their families, extend the involvement of Aboriginal agencies in the investigation and responses to abuse, and assist Aboriginal agencies to support children in longer term placements.

- ✓ *Delivering \$2.7 million to broaden vocational pathways for young Aboriginal people in northern Victoria through the Academy of Sport Health and Education (ASHE).*

- ✓ *Delivering \$3.7 million to establish a Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing centre.*

INCREASE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES

30. Labor will enhance protection for tenants including residents of rooming houses, mobile home and caravan parks and student housing.

The Bracks Labor Government has made significant improvements to residential tenancy laws. But we can make them even fairer for both landlords and tenants, and ensure that some of the most vulnerable tenants are adequately protected.

Labor will implement a package of reforms including:

- ✓ *Regulating tenancy databases so that tenants don't get unfair black marks against their record.*

Landlords will be able to access accurate data if they need it, but data collection will be fair, privacy of data and rights for tenants to access data about themselves will be respected and tenants able to dispute inaccurate data and have it corrected. Labor will seek nationally consistent regulation in this area.

- ✓ *Developing a 'Decent Standards Rental Guide' in collaboration with key groups such as the Tenants Union and Real Estate Institute of Victoria.*

The new Guide will inform prospective tenants about:

- The level of rent they should expect to pay for a given level of amenity.
- Adequate provision of essential utilities, such as water, gas and electricity, safety and security features.
- Legal protections for tenants and where they can get help when problems arise.

- ✓ *Ensuring students living in student housing are protected by appropriate residential tenancy laws.*

This will ensure that housing providers with only a commercial connection to educational institutions cannot take advantage of the provisions applicable to those institutions.

- ✓ *Better regulating rooming houses.*

Strengthening links with local government to enforce health and safety standards in rooming houses, aligning the definition of rooming houses in the *Residential Tenancies* and *Health* Acts and promoting better coordination and regular compliance inspections under these Acts.

- ✓ *Expanding residential tenancy protection to cover consumers renting under rent-to-buy contracts.*
- ✓ *Ensuring that residents of mobile home and caravan parks are protected by appropriate residential tenancy laws.*

31. Labor will provide \$60 million to expand the availability of social housing for low income families and single people to rent.

Labor will fund the purchase or construction of 230 new rental homes for low-income families, and seven new apartment developments providing one-bedroom units and new quality medium to long term accommodation for 160 single people. Priority will be given to areas of Victoria with significant unmet demand including:

- ✓ New homes for single people.
- ✓ Social housing for low income families.

This initiative was first announced in Labor's *Housing Affordability* policy.

32. Labor will implement our commitment to partnerships with the private sector to deliver affordable housing for mid and lower income workers including the \$25.3 million Victoria Harbour development.

Diversity of housing makes a big contribution to social harmony in new residential developments. It also reduces the potential for concentrations of people on low incomes away from job opportunities and social infrastructure.

That is why in *A Fairer Victoria* the Bracks Government emphasised commitments to work in partnership with builders and developers to deliver increased access to affordable housing.

The Victoria Harbour development at Docklands is a good example of this approach with a third of this Lend Lease apartment complex being set aside for rent to households on low incomes.

33. Labor will continue to lead the push to support a National Affordable Housing Agreement.

Affordable housing located close to schools, jobs and services is crucial to both the economy and social fabric. A national response to the need for affordable housing is required urgently.

The Bracks Government has been leading the push by states and territories for a package of reforms to support a National Affordable Housing Agreement. The Agreement could deal with the range of issues from taxation reform to the adequacy of Commonwealth subsidies for families in private rental housing.

A National Agreement could establish a framework for complementary Affordable Housing Agreements between states/territories and local governments. In addition it should clearly define the role of the Commonwealth and states across all forms of housing: home ownership, private rental and social (public and community managed) rental housing.

34. Labor will continue to increase the supply of rental homes for people on low incomes in Victoria under the current Commonwealth State Housing Agreement.

Victoria, under the Bracks Labor Government, is the only state still growing the supply of social housing.

For more than 50 years the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) has been the cornerstone of a national public housing policy. However over the past decade the Federal Government has consistently undermined the national framework cutting its contribution by \$900 million in real terms since 1994-95.

Up to 6,000 more homes could be provided for Victorian families on low incomes today if the Federal Government had maintained its contribution. The Bracks Government has compensated for some of this loss with an investment of \$453 million in additional funds for housing assistance over and above its CSHA obligations since 1999.

The current CSHA is due to expire in June 2008, which is why the Bracks Labor Government has been working so hard with the states and territories to have the CSHA replaced with a National Affordable Housing Agreement under which the Howard Government would pay its fair share.

35. Labor will implement the framework for our own integrated Victorian Housing Strategy.

Though national action is crucial, Labor is determined to do what we can at the state level.

The Bracks Labor Government has designed a coherent and integrated framework for action across government through its *Towards an Integrated Victorian Housing Strategy*. We are committed to implementing this framework to guide us in addressing our future housing challenges at the state level from social housing and private rental to affordable home ownership.

FUNDING OVERVIEW

RECURRENT INITIATIVES	2007-08 \$m	2008-09 \$m	2009-10 \$m	2010-11 \$m	TOTAL \$m
Disability support services	10.0	26.0	26.7	27.3	90.0
Technability program	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	3.0
Acquired brain injury support	-	4.0	4.1	4.2	12.3
Support for young people	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	1.2
Improved employment opportunities	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.0
Training for homeless support workers	0.5	0.8	0.8	-	2.1
TOTAL RECURRENT FUNDING	12.0	32.4	33.1	33.1	110.6
<i>Less: demand contingency</i>	10.0	30.0	30.8	31.5	102.3
TOTAL IMPACT ON OPERATING SURPLUS	2.0	2.4	2.3	1.6	8.3

CAPITAL INVESTMENT	\$m
Supported accommodation	15.0
Support for young people	6.3
Upgrade of DHS Out of home care accommodation	14.2
TOTAL CAPITAL INVESTMENT	35.5

For further details on Labor's policies and team, please contact
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