

Victoria's policies, programs and services

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring appropriate services and supports are available for families and children, including those most vulnerable in our communities. *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children* outlines the long-term strategy for reform of the Victorian children, youth and families system. In addition, the Victorian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and its 10 year plan to achieve the vision of a Victoria free from family violence, will transform how we prevent and respond to family violence.

Acknowledging your request is focused on support for young parents and their children, the information provided does not include the full scope of health, human services and education policies, programs and services in Victoria.

Victoria has a strong universal service system that includes early childhood education and support, maternal and child health services and social services. The initiatives described are targeted services which provide more intensive support to vulnerable pregnant women and families, including young parents, as well as maternal and paediatric services catering to specific health and wellbeing needs. Where evaluation reports and case studies are available, this information is provided.

Recognising many of the initiatives take a person-centred care approach and address multiple needs, they are organised according to the following categories:

- Vulnerable pregnant women and families;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; and
- Specific health and wellbeing needs.

Vulnerable pregnant women and families

Child FIRST and Family Services

Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams (Child FIRST) and Family Services aim to promote the safety, stability and development of vulnerable children, young people and their families, from birth to 17 years of age, by providing casework service and linking families with relevant support services.

Child FIRST is the entry point into family services or other support services for vulnerable children and families. Family Services offer a range of activities including outreach, assessment, case management, counselling, casework, in-home support and group work.

Priority access is given to families where risk indicators are present, including a mental illness, disability, substance abuse, family violence, social and economic disadvantage, involvement with Child Protection or the justice system, risk of family breakdown or teenage parents.

Further information:

Overview

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/plans,-programs-and-projects/programs/children,-youth-and-family-services/family-services-program>

Evaluation

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/child-first-and-integrated-family-services-final-report-2011>

Changing Futures

This is an intensive component of Family Services, targeting highly vulnerable children and families who have been subject to two or more statutory child protection investigations and two or more child protection reports in the 24 months prior to date of referral. The model provides access to a dedicated community-based Child Protection Worker. This is a new program and has not been subject to evaluation.

Priority groups include:

- Families where one or more parents is under 25 years of age;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families; and
- Families with children at Primary School.

Cradle to Kinder

This program is an intensive ante and postnatal support service to provide longer term, intensive family and early parenting support for a group of vulnerable young mothers and their children. The service commences in pregnancy and continues until the child reaches four years of age.

The target group for the Cradle to Kinder service is young pregnant women (under 25 years of age):

- When a report to Child Protection has been received for their unborn child, where the referrer has significant concerns about the wellbeing of the unborn child; or
- Where there are a number of indicators of vulnerability/concerns about the wellbeing of the child when born and the young woman is not yet involved with the Child Protection system.

Further information:

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/plans,-programs-and-projects/programs/children,-youth-and-family-services/cradle-to-kinder-program>

Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service

The enhanced Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service responds assertively to the health, wellbeing and development needs of children and families at risk of poor outcomes by providing an intensive level of support. It is provided in addition to the free, universally accessible MCH service, which is available for all Victorian families with children from birth until school age.

Further information:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/health/Pages/enhancedmchservice.aspx>

Nursery Equipment Program

The Nursery Equipment Program was established to provide safe nursery equipment for vulnerable Victorian families where a safety concern has been identified by a MCH nurse on the MCH Safe Sleeping Checklist. The program is open to all clients of the MCH Service, both universal and enhanced, who meet the eligibility criteria. The Program currently provides cots, mattresses and care seats that meet the Australian Standards.

Further information:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/professionals/health/nurseryequipguidelines.DOC>

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program

The Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies program is a non-clinical antenatal program delivered through Community Health Services that supports pregnant women who are not engaged with maternity services. The overarching aim of the program is to improve the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies, and reduce health inequity by addressing maternal risk behaviours and providing support during pregnancy.

The program is currently being expanded from nine to eighteen sites.

Further information:

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/community-health/population-groups/children-youth-and-families/healthy-mothers-healthy-babies>

right@home

right@home is a randomised controlled trial of sustained nurse home visiting which has been run in four Victorian local government areas since 2013. The trial is led by a research consortium made up of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, the Centre for Community Child Health and Western Sydney University. The right@home program is targeted at families at risk of poorer maternal and child health and development outcomes.

Further information:

<https://www.aracy.org.au/projects/righthome>

Parent Assessment and Skill Development Services

Parent Assessment and Skill Development Services (PASDS) are targeted services provided to vulnerable children who are notified to child protection from birth to two years of age, but can be inclusive of three year old children.

These services are home-based or provided in a community residential setting and consist of an assessment of an individual infant's overall well-being and the parents' capacity to care for and protect the infant.

Referrals for PASDS are taken through regional Child Protection services.

Further information:

<http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/service-descriptions/support-services/parenting-assessment-services-including>

Supported Playgroups

Supported Playgroups target families experiencing disadvantage including young parents, and provide an evidence based program (*smalltalk*) to improve parents' skills and confidence to promote their children's development.

This model was based on a large scale Randomised Controlled Trial study (the Early Home Learning Study) which found that a low intensity program delivered to parents in a playgroup had a significant and sustained impact on the quality of parent/child interactions.

Evaluations

Impact of a Brief Group Intervention to Enhance Parenting and Home Learning Environment for Children Aged 6-36 Months: a Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial (see attached copy)

Early Home Learning Study: Overview and outcomes (see attached report)

Early Start Kindergarten

This grant enables eligible three-year-old children to access kindergarten, for up to 15 hour per week. To be eligible, children must be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or known to Child Protection.

Access to Early Learning

This provides additional support where complex family circumstance mean that the *Early Start Kindergarten grant* alone would be unlikely to be sufficient.

To be eligible, children must be referred by an Enhanced Maternal and Child Health service, ChildFIRST or Child Protection professional. These referrals identify children from families with a minimum of two relevant characteristics (known to Child Protection, intellectual or physical disability, family violence, mental health issues, sexual assault, and alcohol and drug abuse).

Further information:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/kindergarten/Pages/earlystart.aspx>

Early Parenting Centres

Early Parenting Centres offer a range of specialised support, counselling, and advice services aimed at supporting parents who need additional support to care for their infant/toddler.

The services are provided in residential, day stay and home-based settings and are focused on: building parenting capacity and skills; enhancing the parent-child relationship; and strengthening a family's link with their community.

Further information:

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/family-and-parenting-support/about-early-parenting-services>

Parenting Advice and Education Service

Parenting advice and education services (PAES) assist eligible parents to develop parenting skills and knowledge associated with positive, protective, parent-child relationships and social competencies in children. PAES are generally provided over an eight week period through group sessions, individual interventions or telephone advice services.

The target group for PAES is parents with children up to 10 years of age, who are experiencing parenting difficulties through their child/children's challenging behaviour.

Therapeutic Residential Care

Therapeutic Residential Care (TRC) is a contemporary model of residential care informed by an understanding of trauma, attachment theory and child development.

A TRC program may define a specific target group as a priority cohort. There are currently two mother-baby specific TRC programs operating in Victoria that support young mothers in out-of-home care to be able to receive therapeutic services with their child.

Further information:

Evaluation

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/712868/therapeutic-residential-care-report.pdf

Family Learning Support Program

The Family Learning Support Program either fully or partially subsidises the cost of child care where affordability is a significant barrier to parents, guardians or carers participating in Government subsidised training (pre-accredited and accredited) at a Learn Local organisation.

Further information:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/training/providers/learnlocal/memo/2014/pbmemo20141020b.pdf>

Family Learning Partnerships Program

The Family Learning Partnerships Program seeks to improve the educational aspiration, engagement and attainment of parents, guardians and caregivers experiencing disadvantage. Participating Learn Local organisations work in partnership with local community providers to deliver individual projects focused on engagement and improving intergenerational family learning issues.

Children at risk portal and e-learning resources

These online resources are designed to build the capacity of the health system to be more responsive to the early identification of vulnerable children and respond appropriately and in a timely way when vulnerabilities are identified.

Further information:

<http://vulnerablechildren.e3learning.com.au/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Koori Maternity Services

Fourteen Koori Maternity Services (KMS) provide flexible, holistic and culturally safe pregnancy and postnatal care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women having Aboriginal babies and their families. KMS services provide a targeted maternity service for antenatal and postnatal care and partner with a public hospital for birthing care.

Strengthened by Aboriginal culture and practice, the KMS aims to:

- Increase access to antenatal care for Aboriginal women earlier in pregnancy;
- Reduce the rate of Aboriginal perinatal mortality;
- Decrease the percentage of Aboriginal babies born with a low birthweight; and
- Reduce smoking in pregnancy by mothers of Aboriginal babies.

Further information:

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/perinatal-reproductive/maternity-newborn-services/aboriginal-maternity-services>

Specific health and wellbeing needs

Community Health Services child health teams

Child health teams are funded in 12 of Victoria's Community Health Services. Child health teams work with children who have mild to moderate development difficulties and behavioural issues. Child health teams provide coordinated, community-based, multidisciplinary services.

Further information:

Evaluation

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/community-health/population-groups/children-youth-and-families/child-health-teams>

Case studies (available in the Guidelines for the community health program - Child health services)

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/primary-and-community-health/community-health/population-groups/children-youth-and-families/child-health-teams>

Mother Baby Withdrawal Unit

This unit accommodates up to four mothers and their babies to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of treatment services for mothers who are alcohol and other drug dependent, to strengthen parenting skills and reduce risk to children.

This purpose-built facility in Ivanhoe has been designed to increase the safety and wellbeing of mothers and their children during the early stages of treatment, along with providing stronger links to other targeted services to provide longer-term supports for affected families.

Further information:

<http://www.regen.org.au/treatment-support/withdrawal/mother-and-baby>

Mother Baby Units

These provide specialist care for women and their infants while receiving psychiatric assessment and treatment. There are currently 35 beds across six units in metropolitan and regional Victoria.

Statewide Paediatric Integrated Cancer Service

The Paediatric Integrated Cancer Service is a partnership between the Royal Children's Hospital, Monash Health and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Established in 2004, the consortium's remit is to drive quality improvement and innovation in care and support state-wide planning of paediatric cancer services.

Further information:

<http://pics.org.au/>

Perinatal Emotional Health Program

This program is delivered by clinical mental health services in regional Victoria to enhance early detection, support and treatment for pregnant women and new mothers at risk of mental health problems. It is consistent with beyondblue's Clinical Practice Guidelines.

Immunisation

Two specific programs are delivered.

1. Infants and young children up to school entry are provided the opportunity to be vaccinated against 13 vaccine preventable diseases.
2. Parents - the following people living in Victoria are eligible to receive free vaccines:
 - pregnant women from 28 weeks gestation during every pregnancy
 - partners of women who are at least 28 weeks pregnant if the partner has not received a pertussis booster in the past 10 years
 - parents/guardians of babies born on or after 1 June 2015, if their baby is under 6 months of age and they have not received a pertussis booster in the past 10 years.

Further information:

<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation>

Families where a parent has a Mental Illness

This program supports clients of adult Area Mental Health Services who have dependent children. The priority is on better understanding the needs of all families where a parent has a mental illness and the associated risks for all family members, including children.

Further information:

Evaluation

https://www.bouverie.org.au/images/uploads/FaPMI_Pre_Targ_Evaluation_Final_Report_2012.pdf