



Brimbank
City Council

Federal and State Budgets 2021-22

Implications for social justice in Brimbank

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1. Executive Summary

This report assesses the 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets in terms of their implications for social justice Brimbank. It identifies a wide range of relevant program and funding opportunities, while also highlighting gaps that provide a basis for new and ongoing advocacy.

Federal Budget

Through the 2021-22 Federal Budget, the Commonwealth Government announced a range of key initiatives, including:

- comprehensive aged care reforms, including improved residential care, additional Home Care Packages, and measures to grow the aged care workforce
- funding for women's economic security and reduced family violence, including affordable childcare, changes to superannuation and financial support, and additional emergency accommodation for women and children escaping family violence
- improved and expanded mental health services, including adult mental health centres, suicide prevention services, expanded treatment options through Medicare, and further development for the sector's workforce and governance
- investment in early childhood education through a four-year Strategic Reform Agreement that aims to increase participation in the pre-school system, improve school readiness, and expand data collection
- support for employment and training programs for people who are unemployed, including the Local Jobs Program, JobTrainer initiative, and Transition to Work program
- funding to begin detailed design and planning of upgrades on the Calder Freeway (*matched in the State Budget*)
- investment in COVID-19 vaccine purchase and roll-out.

These (and other) initiatives have attracted community support and will guide Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. However, the Federal Budget includes gaps that highlight some of the Commonwealth Government's other priorities, including:

- extending the waiting period for income support for migrants to four years, effectively representing a \$671 million cut in spending
- not allocating funding for the construction of social housing, instead focussing on housing affordability policies that improve access to the private housing market
- introducing further income tax cuts that will cost the budget \$25 billion in 2021-22, provide increased savings for higher income households, and potentially undermine the viability of future essential services
- extending business tax concessions to 2023-24 that will cost the budget more than \$14 billion, despite limited evidence they provide an efficient mechanism for generating employment

- confirming a modest (\$25 per week) increase in JobSeeker payments, while committing additional resources to ensure compliance with stronger 'mutual obligation' requirements
- investing almost half its funds for low emission technologies into additional hydrogen hubs and Carbon Capture Use and Storage, which will prolong reliance on fossil fuels.

State Budget

Through the 2021-22 State Budget, the Victorian Government announced a range of key initiatives, including:

- comprehensive improvements to the mental health system, including community-based care, suicide prevention, improved access to mental health beds, and new local services for adults, older people, young people and Aboriginal Victorians (includes increased capacity at Westside Lodge in Sunshine and a new mental health and wellbeing service for Brimbank)
- investment in public transport infrastructure (e.g. trains, trams and track upgrades), as well as matching funding provided by the Commonwealth Government to commence detailed design and planning of upgrades on the Calder Freeway
- building and upgrading school infrastructure, including \$7.9 million for upgrades at St Albans East Primary School
- supporting the wellbeing of children and families, including an expansion of the child protection workforce and out-of-home care placements, and increased funding to support victims and survivors of family violence
- extension of housing support, including targeted initiatives to address homelessness
- continuing the roll out of universal three-year-old kindergarten to cover the whole of Victoria by 2022
- continuing Victoria's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2021-22 State Budget builds on the Victorian Government's ambitious 2020-21 budget, which included substantial funding for social and affordable housing and support for students with a disability. However, it does include gaps that highlight some of its other priorities, including:

- limited investment in improving the accessibility of public transport, despite national disability standards requiring all networks and infrastructure (with the exception of trains and trams) to be fully accessible by the end of 2022
- the continuation of an electric vehicle road user charge (introduced in the 2020-21 Budget), which largely negates potential benefits from the introduction of an electric vehicle subsidy scheme
- no real increase in funding for the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, despite record losses since gaming venues re-opened in November 2020 and forecast increases in taxes from all forms of gambling over the next four years.

2. Introduction

The 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets were handed down in May 2021. They provide an indication of national and state priorities for the coming year and beyond. The purpose of this report is to assess the budgets in terms of their implications for social justice in Brimbank. It will identify relevant program and funding opportunities, while also contributing to the evidence base for local advocacy.

The City of Brimbank is located in the western and north-western suburbs of Melbourne, between 11 and 23 kilometres from the Central Business District. In 2020, Brimbank's Estimated Resident Population was 208,247, and the population is forecast to steadily increase over the next twenty years.¹ Brimbank is the second most socio-economically disadvantaged municipality in the Greater Melbourne area, and the third most disadvantaged in Victoria.

Brimbank City Council has a long-standing commitment to social justice for vulnerable groups and communities. Since 2014, Council has partnered with the Brimbank Social Justice Coalition to convene the annual Brimbank State and Federal Budget Forum. In 2018, Council adopted the latest version of the Brimbank Social Justice Charter, after being first adopted in 2008. The Charter aims to create a more just society where difference does not lead to disadvantage.²

This report is structured as follows. It begins by outlining the key assumptions and economic forecasts underpinning each budget. It then explores eight 'areas of interest' by describing the local issues, highlighting key budget initiatives, and outlining the impacts for Brimbank.

The 'areas of interest' covered in this report include:

- Employment and Local Economy
- Education and Training
- Health
- Support for vulnerable communities
- Gender Equity and Family Violence
- Housing and Homelessness
- Transport and Connectivity
- Climate Change and Environmental sustainability.

Social justice is an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations. We uphold the principles of social justice when we promote gender equality or the rights of indigenous peoples and migrants. We advance social justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability.

*- United Nations
(World Day of Social Justice)*

The report concludes with suggestions for seeking more information about the 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data presented in this report is sourced from .id Consulting (n.d.) 'City of Brimbank Community Profile', <https://profile.id.com.au/brimbank>, accessed June 2021.

² Brimbank City Council (2018) *Brimbank Social Justice Charter 2018: Being a just and inclusive community*, <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/plans-policies-and-strategies/policies/social-justice-charter>, accessed June 2021

3. Budget assumptions

The 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets are informed by a range of assumptions and economic forecasts. The key assumptions for each budget are presented below.³

Federal Budget

- Economic growth is forecast at 4.25 per cent in 2021-22, and will continue at 2.5 per cent in 2022-23.
- Inflation is forecast at 1.75 per cent in 2021-22, and will rise to 2.25 per cent in 2022-23.
- Unemployment is forecast at 5 per cent in 2021-22, and will fall to 4.75 per cent in 2022-23.
- Wages are expected to grow by 1.5 per cent in 2021-22, and then by a further 2.25 per cent in 2022-23.
- Population growth is forecast to be 0.3 per cent in 2021-22 and will grow by a further 1.2 per cent in 2022-23. *(NOTE: in the decade prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia's annual population growth rate ranged between 1.4 and 1.8 per cent).*

State Budget

- Economic growth is forecast at 6.5 per cent in 2021-22, and will continue at 3.25 per cent in 2022-23.
- Inflation is forecast at 1.5 per cent in 2021-22, and will rise to 1.75 per cent in 2022-23.
- Unemployment is forecast at 5.75 per cent in 2021-22, and will fall to 5.5 per cent in 2022-23.
- Wages are expected to grow by 1.75 per cent in 2021-22, and then by a further 2 per cent in 2022-23.

³ Throughout this report, detailed information on the 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets is sourced from the following government websites: <https://budget.gov.au/2021-22/content/documents.htm> (Federal Budget) and <https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/state-budget/2021-22-state-budget> (State Budget).

4. Areas of interest

4.1. Employment and Local Economy

4.1.1. What are the local issues?

The most recent economic data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, all Australian States and Territories have experienced minimal growth in payroll jobs and total wages.⁴ During that time, Victoria has had the largest reduction (3.7 per cent as at January 2021), reflecting the effect of prolonged Stage 4 restrictions.

However, as restrictions eased in Victoria, the state has recorded an overall increase of 2.2 per cent in payroll jobs, and 5.0 per cent increase in total wages (covering the period between March 2020 and 22 May 2021). Although there appears to be an economic recovery taking place in Victoria, it is worth noting that payroll jobs dropped by 7.7 per cent between March and August, which has had a significant impact on Victoria returning to pre-pandemic levels.⁵

In terms of the economy in Brimbank, some of the key industries operating in the municipality have been amongst the worst affected, including education and training (Victoria University); accommodation and food services; transport, postal and warehousing; manufacturing; and professional services.⁶ Whilst the JobKeeper scheme played a significant role in protecting local jobs, particularly for industries most severely affected, the scheme ended at the end of March 2021.

Data from the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) also highlights the following changes between the September 2019 quarter and September 2020 forecast figures:

- Gross Regional Product (i.e. value of goods and services produced in Brimbank) is forecast to be 14 per cent lower, a larger fall than forecast for Victoria.
- Local jobs in Brimbank were forecast to be 4.1 per cent lower (jobs in Brimbank have fallen at greater rates than elsewhere in Australia).
- The impact on employed residents was higher than the local jobs impact, suggesting that Brimbank residents who work outside the municipality lost jobs at a greater rate than residents who work in jobs within Brimbank.⁷

In March 2020, Council's Economic Development Team launched a Business Impact Survey to inform action and advocacy for government assistance, and to understand short and long-term recovery priorities. Some of the key issues reported by local

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), 'Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia', <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/weekly-payroll-jobs-and-wages-australia/latest-release#data-download>, accessed June 2021.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ .id Consulting (n.d.) 'City of Brimbank COVID-19 Economic Outlook Tool', <http://economy.id.com.au/brimbank/covid19-quarter-impacts>, data provided by National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, accessed June 2021.

⁷ Ibid.

businesses included: loss of customers, loss of revenue, business closures, non-eligibility for JobKeeper or government grants, and inability to operate remotely. These issues, amongst others, highlight the uncertain nature of business in the municipality, and also highlight the precarious nature of employment for many local residents.⁸

The unemployment rate in Brimbank has historically been (and continues to be) substantially higher than the rate in the Western Region and Victoria. Employment data from the March 2021 quarter shows that the unemployment rate in Brimbank was 10.9 per cent, higher than the Western Region (8.5%) and Victoria (6.6%). Furthermore, the data also indicates that the level of unemployment varies greatly amongst the different suburbs within Brimbank. Some of the most disadvantaged suburbs (Delahey, Kings Park, St Albans North, St Albans South, Sunshine North and Sunshine West) had higher rates than Brimbank as a whole, whereas less disadvantaged suburbs (such as Keilor, Taylors Lake and Cairnlea) had lower rates.⁹

4.1.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$20.7 billion in tax relief for businesses over the next four years from 2021-22, including extension of temporary full expensing of eligible business costs and temporary loss carry-back measures.
- \$7.8 billion over two years from 2022-23 to retain low and middle income tax offset for the 2021-22 income year.
- \$2.7 billion over four years from 2021-22 to expand the Building Skills for the Future program, which supports business and training organisations to take on new trainees and apprenticeships.
- \$1.2 billion over six years from 2021-22 for the Digital Economy Strategy to support Australia to be a leading digital economy by 2030.

State Budget

- \$147 million in 2020-21 to support businesses and workers with the Circuit Breaker Action Business Support Package.
- \$50.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the international education sector.
- A number of other budget initiatives are expected to generate employment, including:
 - investment to fund 246 new child protection practitioners around the State
 - funding of \$18 million provided to trial a new whole-of-family support model for families in Brimbank-Melton and Goulburn, will also support 30 jobs

⁸ Brimbank City Council (2021) *COVID-19 Community Impact Analysis – February 2021*, adopted at 16 March 2021 Council Meeting, <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/council/council-meetings/2021-council-meeting-agendas-and-minutes>, accessed June 2021.

⁹ Commonwealth Government (2021) 'National Skills Commission Labour Market Information Portal', <https://l mip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/Downloads/SmallAreaLabourMarketsSALM/Estimates>, accessed June 2021.

- additional 120 graduate placements for nurses, 140 post-graduate mental health scholarships, 60 new graduate placements for allied health professionals and additional rotations for psychiatry
- support for additional 6,000 roles for early childhood teachers and educators, as part of the three-year-old kinder program
- support more than 1,800 local manufacturing and supply chain jobs, as part of \$3.2 billion investment into Public Transport Network
- 10,000 jobs are expected to be created each year over next four years as part of the Big Housing Build project.

4.1.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

The 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets include initiatives aimed at increasing the labour force and reducing unemployment. The Commonwealth Government's incentives to business and training organisations to take on new trainees and apprenticeships are likely to cascade down to local employment and investment in Brimbank in the coming years. The investment in the digital economy is also welcomed and provides opportunities to build on Council's vision for Sunshine as an emerging centre of research, innovation and education. The Commonwealth government's extension of tax relief for low and middle income earners is also likely to be welcomed by a significant portion of the labour force.

However, while the tax cuts are welcomed by many, they will be generally going to people already in paid employment for the next financial year, without addressing the needs of people living in extreme poverty who are either unemployed or on extremely low incomes. In addition, the strong reliance on tax cuts to promote economic growth does not always come to fruition. Many economists have suggested that middle income households tend to save tax cuts rather than spend, and the reduction in tax receipts will reduce available funding for some programs.¹⁰ Similarly, tax cuts for business, do not always lead to increased employment, and the 'trickle down' theory of economic growth remains a contentious issue amongst many economists.

The Victorian Government's investment in supporting industries and workers affected by the COVID-19 crisis will be welcomed by many industries and workers. However, it remains to be seen whether the longer term effects on increasing employment will materialise, particularly now that JobKeeper has ceased. The investment into the international education sector is also welcomed. However, as Australia's international borders remain largely closed, it is uncertain whether this investment will have any positive impact on the economy, at least in the next year.

The Victorian Government has also invested in a range of other projects and programs which are expected to generate local employment, particularly in the early childhood sector, manufacturing and construction industries. This investment should be promoted at the local level, in order to ensure that businesses in Brimbank (and local residents) have the opportunity and encouragement to be involved in a tangible manner.

¹⁰ ABC (2020) 'Budget tax cuts tipped to boost household saving rather than lift us out of COVID recession', <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-08/federal-budget-tax-cuts-tipped-to-boost-savings-not-spending/12736080>, accessed June 2021.

4.2. Education and Training

4.2.1. What are the local issues?

Rates of educational participation and qualification in Brimbank are generally below the rates in other jurisdictions. This has flow-on effects in terms of job satisfaction and socioeconomic circumstances.

Educational participation and qualifications

The 2016 Census showed that 35.9 per cent of Brimbank residents aged 15 years and over did not complete Year 12 or equivalent, higher than the rate for Greater Melbourne (31.8%). These residents were more likely to be female, aged 50 years and over, and unable to speak English well or at all.

At the same time, just 52.3 per cent indicated that they had completed Year 12 or equivalent, lower than the rate for Greater Melbourne (59.4%). Data also revealed that just under one-quarter (24.0%) of Brimbank residents were attending an educational institution (ranging from pre-school to university), marginally lower than the rate for Greater Melbourne (24.9%).

In 2016, 51.0 per cent of Brimbank residents aged 15 years and over had no qualification, higher than the rate for Greater Melbourne (38.6%). A total of 15.0 per cent had a vocational qualification, similar to the rate for Greater Melbourne (15.3%); 8.0 per cent had an advanced diploma or diploma, marginally below the rate for Greater Melbourne (9.5%); and 16.0 per cent had a bachelor or higher degree, substantially below the rate for Greater Melbourne (27.5%).

Children and young people

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) shows a consistent trend of children in Brimbank not achieving optimal developmental markers as they enter and pass through the school system. The 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018 surveys all show significantly higher rates of Brimbank children entering school who were developmentally vulnerable on two or more AEDC domains, compared to the rates for Victoria. Data from 2017 also indicates that Brimbank had a lower proportion of years 3, 5, 7 and 9 students at or above the national minimum standard for literacy and numeracy.¹¹ On a more positive note, children's attendance at pre-school is similar to the rate across Victoria.¹²

Census data from 2006, 2011 and 2016, consistently indicates that Brimbank had a considerably higher proportion of disengaged young people (aged 15 to 24 years), compared to Victoria.¹³ Young people face a difficult time if they are unable to complete school or move into further education or employment. For example, young people are at greater risk of poor health, mental health difficulties and social problems, if they become

¹¹ Victorian Government (n.d) 'Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System', <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/pages/vcams.aspx>, accessed June 2021.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) *Census of Population and Housing 2016*, data retrieved via TableBuilder at <https://auth.censusdata.abs.gov.au/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>, accessed June 2021.

disengaged from activities and institutions which provide opportunities to develop skills and experience positive relationships.

4.2.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$24.4 billion in 2021-22 for recurrent funding for schools across Australia, including \$14.7 billion for non-government schools and \$9.7 billion for government schools.
- \$17.3 billion in 2021-22 funding for higher education, vocational and other education, and student assistance, e.g. Higher Education Loan Program (HELP).
- \$2.0 billion over four years from 2021-22 for a Four-Year Strategic Reform Agreement for the Early Childhood Education Sector.
- \$26.1 million over four years from 2021-22 to support an additional 5,000 short course places in 2021.

State Budget

- \$1.6 billion over four years from 2021-22 for school infrastructure, including building 13 new schools and upgrades at a further 52 schools.
- \$716 million over four years from 2021-22 in school programs and support for Victoria's teaching workforce, including mental health and tutoring programs, and the establishment of the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership.
- \$350 million over four years from 2021-22 for the Higher Education State Investment Fund, which is working with universities to identify innovative and transformative research projects.
- \$209 million over four years from 2021-22 to further support for the TAFE and training sector.
- \$167.2 million over four years from 2021-22 to continue the roll-out of universal three-year old kindergarten to every local government area in Victoria.

4.2.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

The 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets include initiatives aimed at improving the developmental and educational outcomes for children and young adults. For example, the Commonwealth Government's investment into the Early Childhood Education sector is welcomed and has attracted broad support from the sector. Additionally, there is widespread support for the Commonwealth Government's further investment into schools and higher education.

However, closer analysis of the Budget Papers reveals that funding for universities will actually be cut by 10 per cent over the next three years, while TAFE funding will reduce by 24 per cent over the same period.¹⁴ This reduction in funding for higher education is concerning, particularly for a municipality like Brimbank where jobs growth and boosting

¹⁴ The Guardian (2021), 'Australian universities brace for 'ugly' 2022 after budget cuts', <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/13/australian-universities-brace-for-ugly-2022-after-budget-cuts>, accessed June 2021.

vocational education and skills is critical to improving the opportunities and outcomes for young people. The Victorian Government's contribution of \$209 million to support the TAFE and training sector is welcomed, but will not offset these Commonwealth funding cuts over the next three years.

The Victorian Government's investment into school infrastructure is welcomed, including by families and teachers at the St Albans East Primary School, which is one of the schools named to receive an upgrade (\$7.9 million, due for completion in 2024). Furthermore, the State's further investment into the three-year-old kindergarten program is welcomed, particularly as the sector in Victoria has required significant investment for many years.

While the Victorian Government has invested a further \$250 million in a tutoring initiative to support school students worst affected by the pandemic, this has not been renewed beyond 2021-22. Given the impact on Brimbank families and students, the need for further support will be monitored and may become an advocacy focus in the years ahead. Similarly, following significant investment in last year's budget, a modest \$70 million has been allocated to support students with a disability.¹⁵ With support through the 'Inclusion for All' program not expected to reach Brimbank until 2024, this remains an area to monitor for further advocacy.

4.3. Health

4.3.1. What are the local issues?

Health and wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness. It is also a reflection of complex inter-relationships between an individual's physical, mental and emotional state, as well as broader social, cultural, economic and cultural factors. Data from the Victorian Population Health Survey 2017 provides an overview of the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Brimbank residents.¹⁶

Self-Reported Health

Self-reported health assessments are a powerful predictor of future health care use and mortality. The percentage of Brimbank adults reporting 'Excellent' or 'Very Good' health (33.0%), was significantly lower than the rate recorded in Victoria (41.6%) and the West Division (40.2%), which includes Brimbank. Conversely, the percentage of Brimbank adults reporting 'Fair' or 'Poor' health (27.7%) was significantly higher than the rate measured in Victoria (20.3%) and the West Division (21.0%).

Life Satisfaction

The percentage of Brimbank adults reporting a 'low or medium' level of life-satisfaction (25.6%) was higher than Victoria (20.5%) and the West Division (21.4%). Conversely,

¹⁵ The Age (2021) 'Victorian Budget 2021: Health, education, transport, what it means for you', <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/victorian-budget-2021-health-education-transport-what-it-means-for-you-20210519-p57tci.html>, accessed June 2021.

¹⁶ All data in this section is sourced from Victorian Government (2017) *Victorian Population Health Survey 2017*, <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/population-health-systems/health-status-of-victorians/survey-data-and-reports/victorian-population-health-survey/victorian-population-health-survey-2017>, accessed June 2021.

the percentage in Brimbank adults reporting 'high' or 'very high' levels (70.4%) was lower than those in Victoria (73.2%) and the West Division (77.0%).

Physical Activity

Physical inactivity is a major modifiable risk factor for a range of conditions. The evidence suggests that health benefits accrue with increasing levels of physical activity, and this protective effect occurs even if physical activity is adopted in middle and later life. The percentage of adult residents in Brimbank undertaking sufficient physical activity to confer a health benefit (38.3%) was significantly lower than the percentage for Victoria (50.9%) and the West Division (48.8%).

Chronic Diseases

Local data also indicates that adults in Brimbank had a number of chronic health conditions, including:

- 28.5 per cent of Brimbank adults diagnosed with two or more chronic diseases, higher than Victoria (25.5%) and the West Division (25.4%)
- 7.0 per cent of Brimbank adults diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, higher than Victoria (5.5%) and the West Division (5.5%)
- 8.2 per cent of Brimbank adults diagnosed with heart disease, higher than Victoria (6.7%) and the West Division (7.3%)
- 5.2 per cent of Brimbank adults have suffered a stroke, significantly higher than Victoria (2.4%) and the West Division (2.6%)
- 21.0 per cent of Brimbank adults smoke, higher than Victoria (16.7%) and the West Division (17.0%).

Mental Health

Psychological distress is an indicator of poor mental health, and an important risk factor for risky drinking, smoking and drug use. It has also been directly linked to a number of diseases and conditions such as fatigue, migraine, cardiovascular disease, injury, obesity, depression and anxiety. The proportion of adult residents in Brimbank at risk of high or very high psychological distress was higher than in the Western Division and Victoria, although the differences were not significant. Relatedly, the proportion of adults in Brimbank who reported seeking professional help for a mental health problem in the previous year, was higher than in the West Division and Victoria.

These findings from the Victorian Population Health Survey 2017 highlight a range of physical and mental health challenges in Brimbank. More recently, the COVID-19 crisis has caused unprecedented upheaval and disruption, with direct impacts on residents' financial capacity, relationships, health and wellbeing. Indeed, challenges with personal finances are one of the primary drivers of stress, and a survey conducted by Council in October 2020 found that over one-third of respondents had either drawn down from accumulated savings, term deposits, or from superannuation during the height of the crisis.¹⁷

¹⁷ Brimbank City Council (2020) *Brimbank Community Survey – Health and Wellbeing Impacts of COVID-19*, internal Council report.

Additionally, many residents have experienced negative impacts of being isolated due to COVID-19 restrictions, including impacts on mental health. As highlighted by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods, loneliness or an individual's perception of social isolation is a recognised risk factor for poor mental and physical health.¹⁸

4.3.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$6.3 billion in 2021-22 for Victorian hospital services and public health responses, including COVID-19 public health responses.
- \$2.3 billion over four years from 2021-22 to improve and expand mental health services, including 'Head to Health' Adult Mental Health Centres, suicide prevention services, and expanded treatment options through Medicare.
- \$879 million over five years from 2020-21 to support access to affordable medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.
- \$220 million over four years from 2021-22 to update and add new health services to the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

State Budget

- \$3.8 billion over four years from 2021-22 to transform the mental health system, including investment in community-based care, suicide prevention, improved access to mental health beds, school-based initiatives, and new services for adults, older people, young people and Aboriginal Victorians.
- \$3.7 billion over four years from 2021-22 to meet demand for hospital services, including more emergency department staff, extra highly specialised therapies, and support for new wards as they open.
- \$1.3 billion in 2021-22 to continue Victoria's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- \$1.2 billion over four years from 2021-22 to build and upgrade health infrastructure across Victoria, including building and expanding 10 community hospitals.
- \$759 million over four years from 2021-22 for more paramedics, triage care and support staff for Ambulance Victoria.
- \$264 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish 20 new local adult and older adult mental health and wellbeing services, with the first six to be 'fast-tracked', including one in Brimbank.
- \$9.4 million over three years from 2021-22 for an additional 10 beds at Westside Lodge in Sunshine, which provides dual diagnosis and integrated treatment for mental health and alcohol and other drug clients.

¹⁸ Cited in Brimbank City Council (2021) COVID-19 Community Impact Analysis – February 2021, <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/response-and-recovery-strategy>, accessed June 2021.

4.3.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

Investment by Commonwealth and Victorian Governments in mental health will be welcomed by most analysts and health and social welfare agencies, particularly in light of increased demand through the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding will support a range of services and supports, and begin responding to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Local investment in Brimbank is also welcomed and much-needed, including proposals for a new mental health service to be delivered by the end of 2022, and increased capacity at Westside Lodge for people affected by mental health issues and dependence on alcohol and other drugs.

Notably, the Victorian Government has indicated that it will introduce a special levy to fund its investment in mental health, and has indicated that this will apply to fewer than five per cent of businesses.¹⁹ It is hoped that this approach will attract widespread support, given its potential to support vulnerable people without unduly affecting business and employment. Nevertheless, the focus on mental health by the Federal and Victorian Government is very positive, and provides the opportunity for ongoing advocacy and dialogue to ensure that Melbourne's west remains 'front of mind'.

The Federal and State Budgets also included substantial investment in hospital services and other public health responses, including responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Federal funding has also been provided to increase access to affordable medicine through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. This investment is welcomed and will maintain Australia and Victoria's well-established and high quality medical system. However, it is important to note that analysis of the Federal Budget Papers reveal an effective \$93 million funding cut for Victoria through a reduced allocation through the National Health Reform Agreement. It is concerning that Victorian hospitals will receive relatively less funding in 2021-22, particularly in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4. Support for vulnerable communities

4.4.1. What are the local issues?

Brimbank is the second most socio-economically disadvantaged municipality in the Greater Melbourne area, and the third most disadvantaged in Victoria. Its score of 921.0 on the ABS Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage puts it in the second lowest decile nationally.²⁰ However, the level of disadvantage is unevenly spread throughout the municipality, both in terms of location and the communities impacted.

¹⁹ The Age (2021) 'Victorian Budget 2021: Health, education, transport, what it means for you', <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/victorian-budget-2021-health-education-transport-what-it-means-for-you-20210519-p57tcj.html>, accessed June 2021.

²⁰ The City of Brimbank Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) measure the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage and/or advantage based on a range of Census characteristics. The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSD) contains only disadvantage indicators (such as unemployment, low incomes or education levels, lack of internet access), so is best used to distinguish between disadvantaged areas, but doesn't differentiate between those areas which are highly advantaged, and those just lacking a lot of disadvantage. This index is most commonly used for funding allocations and advocacy.

Location

The St Albans (845.4) and Sunshine (880.6) Districts are the most disadvantaged in Brimbank, both positioned in the lowest decile nationally. Conversely, the Keilor District (1,049.0) sits within the third highest decile and experiences relatively low levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. The following Brimbank suburbs all sit within the lowest decile nationally: Kings Park (832.0), St Albans (837.0), Sunshine North (855.0), Albanvale (879.0), Sunshine West (879.0), Albion (881.0) and Ardeer (896.0).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities

Over many years, the inflow of migrants has seen Brimbank develop into one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) municipalities in Australia. A total of 47.8 per cent of residents are born overseas (compared to 33.8 per cent for Greater Melbourne) and 44.6 per cent were born in mainly non-English speak countries (compared to 27.0 per cent for Greater Melbourne).

English proficiency

Over half of our residents speak a language other than English, and there are over 170 languages spoken in Brimbank. Whilst the cultural and demographic diversity within Brimbank has been a source of celebration, it has also highlighted the need to address and support many of the vulnerable groups that reside in our municipality. For example, there are relatively low levels of English proficiency in Brimbank, which can have flow-on effects in terms of employment, education and access to services. Of the Brimbank residents who speak a language other than English at home, more than one in eight (13.4%) either do not speak English well or do not speak it at all. This is substantially higher than the rate in Greater Melbourne (5.6%) and the Western Region (7.3%).

Immigration and Settlement

Data from 2019 indicates Brimbank attracted relatively large numbers of permanent settlers within each settlement stream: Humanitarian (386 people, ranked 4th highest in Victoria); Family (1,004 people, 6th); and Skilled (1,767 people, 11th).²¹ Additionally, data from June 2020 shows that Brimbank attracted 1,037 asylum seekers, second only to Greater Dandenong (1,112 people).²²

Income

In 2016, the median personal income of Brimbank residents aged 15 years and over was \$487 per week, compared to \$673 for Greater Melbourne and \$644 for Victoria. Brimbank also had a higher proportion of residents in the 'lowest' and 'medium lowest' weekly income groups, and a lower proportion of residents in the 'highest' weekly income groups. The situation is similar in terms of household income, where Brimbank had a higher proportion in the 'lowest' (32.7%) and 'medium lowest' (28.8%) income groups, and a lower proportion in the highest income group (14.4%).

²¹ Greater Dandenong (n.d.) 'Social Statistics - Asylum Seekers and Refugees and Immigration and Settlement', <https://www.greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/social-statistics-asylum-seekers-and-refugees-and-immigration-and-settlement>, data provided by Department of Immigration and Border Protection, accessed June 2021.

²² Ibid.

Disability

In 2016, 12,471 residents in Brimbank indicated a need for assistance with core activities, and this represented 6.4 per cent of the total population, compared to 4.9 per cent for Greater Melbourne. Of those residents that needed assistance, over half (54.8%) were female, two-thirds were born overseas, and a total of 68 residents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Furthermore, the need for assistance increases with age: while 10.7 per cent of residents in Brimbank aged 60 to 64 years required assistance with core activities, almost 60 per cent of those aged 85 years and over required assistance.

Indigenous Population

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council recently announced that, from 1 July 2021 under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, the Country in which Brimbank is located is under the statutory care of its Traditional Owners, the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Council (to the south of the municipality) and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (to the north). This follows a rigorous review in which relationship to Country, the inclusivity of their membership, and relationship to Apical Ancestors was considered. Like many parts of Melbourne, the number of Brimbank residents identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is relatively small, with 816 residents (or 0.4% of the population) recorded in the 2016 Census, an increase of 114 people since 2011.

Older Residents

In 2016, 18.9 per cent of Brimbank residents were aged 60 years and above, similar to the rate in Greater Melbourne (19.0%) but higher than the Western Region (15.8%). Between 2011 and 2016, this group grew by more than 6,000 people in Brimbank, creating additional demand for support services and social inclusion activities.

Lone Person Households

In 2016, there were 11,350 lone person households in Brimbank, an increase of 836 households since 2011. Lone person households represent 17.5 per cent of all households in Brimbank, lower than the rate for Greater Melbourne (22.0%) and the Western Region (19.1%). While many residents are comfortable living alone, others (particularly older people) may lack social interaction and be in need of social inclusion activities.

Disengagement of young people

In 2016, more of Brimbank's young people aged 15 to 24 years were not in paid employment or enrolled in education, compared to others across Metropolitan Melbourne.²³ For example, 6.3 per cent of people aged 15 to 19 years were disengaged (compared to 4.6 per cent), while 15.0 per cent of people aged 20 to 24 years were disengaged (compared to 10.7 per cent). More males tend to be disengaged in the lower age group (15 to 19 years), while more females are disengaged in the older age group (20 to 24 years).

²³ Greater Dandenong (n.d.) 'Social Statistics - Education and Literacy', <https://www.greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/social-statistics-education-and-literacy>, accessed June 2021.

Sexual orientation

Local data on sexual orientation is not available. However, the ABS General Social Survey 2019 found that 2.7 per cent of Australians identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual.²⁴ When applied to the Brimbank population, these results indicate that approximately 5,600 local residents may identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Notably, the national survey found that people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual are more likely to report experiencing discrimination and less likely to get support in times of crisis from people living outside their household.

Gambling Harm

Brimbank has experienced the highest losses from electronic gaming machines (EGMs) of any Victorian municipality every year for the past decade. Since July 2011, more than \$1.3 billion has been lost in Brimbank. More recently, more than \$80 million has been lost in the six months to May 2021 at the unprecedented rate of more than \$460,000 per day.²⁵ It estimated that around 60 per cent of EGM losses are incurred by people experiencing severe or moderate harm from gambling,²⁶ and more than 40 per cent of people who use EGMs at least once per month experience some level of harm.²⁷

4.4.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$17.7 billion over five years from 2020-21 to fund aged care reforms, including improved residential care, additional Home Care Packages, and measures to grow the aged care workforce.
- \$13.2 billion over five years from 2020-21 to fund the National Disability Insurance Scheme.
- \$9.5 billion over five years from 2020-21 to increase income support (including the JobSeeker Payment) and further strengthen mutual obligation requirements.
- \$243.6 million over five years from 2020-21 to support improved economic, social and education outcomes for Indigenous people.
- \$29.3 million over three years from 2021-22 to support refugee women and other migrant women's safety and social economic inclusion.
- \$26.0 million over four years from 2021-22 to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who have experienced or are experiencing family violence.

²⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia', <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release>, accessed June 2021.

²⁵ VCGLR (n.d.) 'Gaming expenditure by local area', <https://www.vcglr.vic.gov.au/resources/data-and-research/gambling-data/gaming-expenditure-local-area>, accessed June 2021.

²⁶ Productivity Commission (2010) *Gambling*, Report No. 50, Vol. 1, Canberra, p. 5.34.

²⁷ Armstrong, A., & Carroll, M. (2017) *Gambling activity in Australia*, Melbourne: Australian Gambling Research Centre, Australian Institute of Family Studies, p.33.

- \$17.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish a new Early Childhood Program for young children aged 0 to 8 years with disability or developmental needs, including information, workshops and supported playgroups.
- \$13.9 million over four years from 2021-22 to support early stage social enterprises that improve the safety and security of Indigenous women (part of the Women's Economic Security Package).
- **-\$671.1 million** over five years from 2021-22 by applying a four-year waiting period for newly arrived residents to access most welfare payments.
- Establishment of a new delivery model for the Adult Migrant English Program from 1 July 2023 (*NOTE: the costs for this measure are not published due to commercial sensitivities*).

State Budget

- \$842 million over four years from 2021-22 for mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people, including reformed Infant, Child and Family Mental Health and Wellbeing Services, and expansion of 13 Youth Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services across Victoria (*part of the \$3.8 billion investment in mental health*).
- \$464.9 million in 2021-22 for residential aged care, including an additional \$29 million for the future provision of public residential aged care.
- \$448 million over four years from 2021-22 to support Aboriginal Victorians, including dedicated mental health services, support for self-determination and treaty processes, prevention of deaths in custody, and increased support and responsibilities for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- \$54.7 million in 2021-22 for multicultural affairs policy and programs, including settlement coordination, enhanced engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and support for events and festivals to promote social cohesion.
- \$44.8 million over three years from 2021-22 to support students with a disability, including the Students with Disabilities Transport Program, and extension of outside school hours and school holiday pilot programs for young people with a disability.
- \$45.4 million over four years from 2021-22 to celebrate and support the LGBTIQ+ community, including mental health and wellbeing services for trans and gender diverse young people.
- \$38.4 million in 2021-22 for the Victorian Responsible Gambling Trust.
- \$15.6 million in 2021-22 for the Office for Disability, which supports the development of the State Disability Plan and increased disability advocacy services.
- \$3.9 million in 2021-22 to continue existing mental health supports to people seeking asylum who are ineligible for Medicare and income support.

4.4.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

The Federal Budget included significant funding announcements for older people and people with a disability. The aged care reforms have been widely supported and will deliver an additional 80,000 home care packages and 33,000 new training places for carers. Similarly, funding for the National Disability Insurance Scheme has been welcomed by disability groups and social service organisations. Both programs are expected to directly benefit vulnerable residents in Brimbank. Funding for initiatives to improve economic, social and education outcomes for Indigenous people have also been welcomed, although some First Nations advocates have argued that the current level of investment is not sufficient to make genuine progress to 'close the gap'.

While these announcements have generally attracted support, others have been criticised for not providing enough support for vulnerable groups. For example, the Federal Budget has confirmed a modest (\$25 per week) increase in JobSeeker payments, while committing additional resources to ensure compliance with stronger 'mutual obligation' requirements. Additionally, new migrants to Australia will now need to wait four years before they can access government benefits such as carers' allowance, paid parental leave, and family tax benefits. The Department of Home Affairs has stated that savings from this measure will fund upgrades to onshore immigration detention networks.²⁸ Both measures are expected to directly affect Brimbank residents, particularly those in more vulnerable economic circumstances.

The State Budget includes funding for a range of services and supports that will support vulnerable groups in Brimbank. Investment in mental health, Aboriginal Victorians, and residential aged care are all welcomed, and build on the Victorian Government's previous support for social and affordable housing and improved access for school students with a disability. Additionally, the budget includes further support for CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities, including through settlement coordination, targeted mental health and wellbeing services, and support for events and festivals.

While the State Budget has introduced a wide range of measures to support vulnerable communities, it fails to increase support for people experiencing gambling harm. This is particularly important in Brimbank, which has experienced record losses on electronic gaming machines since gaming venues re-opened following the COVID-19 restrictions. Not only is there no real increase in funding for the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, the Budget Papers also reveal forecast increases in taxes from all forms of gambling over the next four years.

4.5. Gender Equity and Family Violence

4.5.1. What are the local issues?

Gender Equity

According to 2016 Census data, women rank lower than men on a number of key indicators of gender equity. This limits opportunities for women, and can reduce their

²⁸ The Guardian (2021) 'Migrants forced to wait four years for benefits in Australian budget's biggest cost-cutting measure', <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/11/immigration-australia-federal-budget-2021-migrant-families-four-year-wait-benefits-payments-cost-cutting-christmas-island-detention-centre>, accessed June 2021.

capacity to escape family violence if it occurs. It also creates financial disadvantage, both in the short-term (due to reduced incomes) and later in life (due to reduced superannuation). These factors have contributed to women over 55 years, becoming the fastest growing group experiencing homelessness in Australia.²⁹

- Education - according to the 2016 Census, a very similar percentage of Brimbank males and females have completed Year 12 or equivalent (52.7% vs 52.0%). However, there is a higher percentage of females in Brimbank whose highest completed school level is Year 8 or below (10.8% vs 8.5%) or did not attend school at all (3.8% vs 2.7%).
- Qualification - over half (53.1%) of females in 2016 stated they had 'no qualification', compared to 48.8 per cent for males. Fewer females attained a 'vocational' qualification (11.0% vs 19.0%), although a higher percentage of females have attained a Bachelor or higher degree (17.3% vs 14.7%).
- Employment - in 2016, there was a smaller percentage of unemployed males (9.7%) in Brimbank, compared to females (11.2%). In terms of those residents in Brimbank in employment, there was a far lower percentage of females employed on a full-time basis (42.7%), compared to males (63.5%). Additionally, 43.6 per cent of females in the workforce were employed on a part-time basis, compared to just 23.8 per cent of males.
- Income - when examining differences in individual incomes in Brimbank, there were equal percentages of males and females classified in the lowest and medium-lowest weekly wage groups. However, there were large disparities in terms of actual dollars earned. For example, males classified in the lowest and medium-lowest income quartiles earned anywhere up to \$815, while females in the same two classifications earned up to \$516. More recent data collected by the Council highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted men and women differently in Brimbank, particularly in terms of the impact on employment and economic security, health and wellbeing, and the experience of family violence.³⁰

Family Violence

Family violence is a gendered issue, mostly perpetrated by men against women and their children. Many studies have indicated that people who are abused in family relationships are at greater risk of mental health disorders and problems, and their general health and wellbeing are likely to be affected in both the short and long-term.³¹ The Victorian Crime Statistics Agency has indicated that strict COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 contributed to the highest rates of family violence in Victoria's history, including an increase in the first-time use of violence by male perpetrators.

More generally, between 2011-12 and 2017-18, the rate of recorded family violence incidents in Brimbank increased by 27 per cent (to 262.7 per 100,000 residents). The

²⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission (2019) *Older Women's Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper*, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/publications/older-womens-risk-homelessness-background-paper-2019>, accessed June 2021.

³⁰ Brimbank City Council (2021) *COVID-19 Community Impact Analysis – February 2021*, adopted at 16 March 2021 Council Meeting, accessed June 2021.

³¹ Brimbank City Council (2018) *Snapshot of Family Violence*, prepared by the Policy, Advocacy and Research Unit.

rate for the Northern and Western Metropolitan Region (which includes Brimbank), increased by 31 per cent (263.6 per 100,000 residents) and the Victorian rate increased by 33 per cent (290.0 per 100,000 residents).³² The latest data provided by the Crime Statistics Agency (from the LEAP database), indicate that for the year ending March 2021, the rate of family violence incidents was 1,448.6 per 100,000 residents, an increase from the rate for March 2020 of 1,403.1 per 100,000 residents.³³

4.5.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$1.1 billion over four years from 2021-22 to support victims of family violence, including financial support for women and children, additional emergency accommodation, legal assistance services, children's contact services, family law frontline services, and reform of Family Law Courts.
- \$1.9 billion over four years from 2021-22 in measures to support women's economic security, including \$1.7 billion for increased Child Care Subsidy for families with more than one child.

State Budget

- \$1 billion over four years from 2021-22 to expand the child protection workforce, increase out-of-home care placements and a range of other supports for vulnerable families, including funding for 246 new child protection practitioners.
- \$354 million over four years from 2021-22 to support victim survivors and address family violence, including expanding the network of specialist family law courts (including Sunshine), support packages and culturally safe responses, support for children and young people impacted by family violence and sexual assault, and the 'Putting Families First' trial (which includes the Brimbank-Melton region).

4.5.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

The Commonwealth Government's 'Women's Economic Security' Package has been welcomed as a significant improvement on the response provided in the previous budget. It provides a \$3.4 billion investment over five years towards improving the economic security, safety and status of Australian women. Women's Legal Victoria has suggested that it is a 'big win' for women experiencing family violence, particularly increased access to specialist legal assistance and wrap-around support.³⁴

While measures to support an increase in women's economic security are welcomed, analysis of the Budget Papers reveals that increased Child Care Subsidies for families with more than one child accounts for 90 per cent of the investment. Other funding streams (such as health and wellbeing, education and skills, and housing) are set to receive relatively minimal additional funding. More generally, Gender Equity Victoria has

³² Crime Statistics Agency (n.d.) 'Latest crime data by area', <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-crime-data-by-area>, accessed June 2021.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ VCOSS (2021) 'How social service organisations are reacting to the 2021 Federal Budget', <https://vcoss.org.au/analysis/2021/05/federal-response>, accessed June 2021.

highlighted that the Federal investment into gender equity is less than one per cent of total government expenditure.³⁵

The Victorian Government has announced a wide range of initiatives to address family violence and improve safety for women and children. Key measures include increased funding for women's health services, support for victim survivors, perpetrator accountability programs, and a specialist family violence integrated court response (including additional services at Sunshine). Additionally, the Brimbank-Melton region will be a site for the Putting Families First program, a trial of multidisciplinary case management teams that will work directly with families with multiple and complex needs, to provide practical, personalised and targeted support.

These measures have attracted widespread support and will be welcomed in Brimbank. However, increased investment in primary prevention of family violence is one area for further advocacy. Respect Victoria has identified that just three per cent of the family violence budget is directed to prevention, and suggested that this should increase to ten per cent to achieve meaningful behaviour change within families and the community.³⁶

4.6. Housing and Homelessness

4.6.1. What are the local issues?

Housing affordability in Brimbank has declined substantially over the past ten years. The median price of houses in Sunshine (up 85%), St Albans (up 90%) and Deer Park (up 80%) all increased substantially between 2009 and 2019.³⁷ Similarly, the median price for units also increased in these locations: Sunshine (up 50%), St Albans (up 66%) and Deer Park (up 68%). More recently, the sale price of dwellings in Melbourne has increased by 8.1 per cent since the start of 2021.³⁸

At the same time, there is a lack of social and affordable housing in Brimbank. While there are currently around 2,000 social and affordable housing dwellings, unpublished research commissioned by Council in 2020 found that another 4,000 dwellings are needed to meet current demand. Need was highest amongst very low income households, with more than 80 per cent of this group experiencing rental stress.³⁹ Additionally, almost two-thirds of single adult households experience rental stress due to Brimbank's limited housing diversity, with more than 80 per cent of dwellings having three or more bedrooms.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ VCOSS (2021) 'Is this the budget Victoria needed? A VCOSS Guide to the 2021 Victorian Budget', <https://www.vcoss.org.au/advocacy/vicbudget2021>, accessed June 2021.

³⁷ Valuer-General Victoria (n.d.) 'Property sales statistics', <https://www.land.vic.gov.au/valuations/resources-and-reports/property-sales-statistics>, accessed June 2021

³⁸ CoreLogic (2021) 'Hedonic Home Value Index: 1 June 2021', <https://www.corelogic.com.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/20210601-CoreLogic-home-value-index.pdf>, accessed June 2021

³⁹ Rental stress occurs when a renting household pays more than 30 per cent of gross household income on housing costs. Rental stress is an indicator of need for social and affordable housing, particularly when experienced by very low and low income households earning in the bottom 40 per cent of incomes.

Brimbank also has the highest incidence of homelessness in Melbourne's west⁴⁰, and the largest number of people accessing specialist homelessness services in Victoria.⁴¹ Research commissioned by Council in 2020 estimated that between 70 and 80 people sleep rough on any given night in Brimbank.⁴² Additionally, in recent months, there appears to have been an increase in the number and visibility of people sleeping rough.

Despite existing and growing need, housing and homelessness support services in Brimbank and Melbourne's west are severely overstretched. Research conducted by the Western Homelessness Network in 2019 found that the homelessness access point for the Brimbank-Melton region was unable to provide appointments to around 200 people each month due to limited resources.⁴³ Brimbank also has very few supported crisis accommodation options, and many local rooming houses are not appropriate for vulnerable clients.

4.6.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$1.6 billion in 2021-22 for the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, which sets out funding arrangements for housing and homelessness services between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments (includes \$420 million for Victoria).
- \$782.1 million over four years from 2021-22 to increase home ownership and support jobs in the residential construction sector, including by:
 - extending the HomeBuilder program's commencement requirement from six months to 18 months for existing applicants (at a cost of \$774.8 million over two years from 2021-22)
 - establishing the 'Family Home Guarantee' to support single parents with dependants to enter (or re-enter) the housing market with a deposit of at least two per cent of the property price
 - extending the 'First Home Loan Deposit Scheme' to provide an additional 10,000 New Home Guarantees in 2021-22 to support eligible first home buyers with a deposit of at least 5 per cent of the property price.

State Budget

- \$193.7 million over four years from 2021-22 for homelessness services, including support for vulnerable households to establish and maintain private rental tenancies, expansion of housing pathways for people existing prison, and delivery of assertive outreach and supportive housing teams for rough sleepers.

⁴⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness 2016*, Cat. No. 2049.0

⁴¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) *Specialist homelessness Services: Annual Report 2019-20*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary>, accessed June 2021.

⁴² Brimbank City Council (2020) *From At Risk to At Home*, prepared by Black Ink Writing and Consulting, <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/community/homelessness>, p. 17

⁴³ Western Homelessness Network (2019) *Ending homelessness in Melbourne's West*, August 2019, p.5

- \$26.2 million to respond to rough sleeping, including funding for intensive wrap-around support, and additional head-leased properties for people facing long-term homelessness.
- Budget Papers state a target of 1,515 social housing dwellings to be built in 2021-22.

4.6.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

The 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets include important initiatives to address housing and homelessness issues in Brimbank. The Commonwealth Government's contribution to homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (which is matched by the Victorian Government) provides a critical support and service response. It is also noted that the Federal Budget provided funding for the Equal Remuneration Order supplementation for homelessness sector workers (approximately \$56 million), following advocacy from the sector.

While this funding is welcomed, it is unlikely to meet current and emerging need for housing and homelessness services in Brimbank. As noted, the system is currently overstretched and substantial funding increases (over proposed levels) are needed to ease the pressure on local services. This remains an important advocacy priority for the local housing and homelessness sector.

Perhaps the biggest gap in either budget is the lack of investment from the Commonwealth Government in the construction of new social and affordable housing. In fact, federal spending on homelessness services and social and indigenous housing is trending downwards over the forward estimates. While the Victorian Government did not include any new social housing investment, the Budget Papers include a target of 1,515 new social housing dwellings in 2021-22, likely to be delivered through the Big Housing Build program.

By contrast, the Commonwealth Government has focussed primarily on incentives within the private market. The HomeBuilder Program, Family Home Guarantee and First Home Loan Deposit Scheme all provide varying levels of support for households to enter the private housing market. Given the significant shortfall in social and affordable housing in Brimbank, investment by the Commonwealth Government (as proposed by the Opposition in its Budget Reply Speech⁴⁴) is needed to meet future demand.

4.7. Transport and Connectivity

4.7.1. What are the local issues?

Road congestion in Brimbank has increased significantly in the past decade and is likely to worsen if the rate of private vehicle use continues to grow. Council's Transport Priorities Paper 2018 indicates that traffic volumes have increased on almost every

⁴⁴ The Guardian (2021) 'Anthony Albanese pledges \$10bn social housing fund in Labor's federal budget reply', <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/13/anthony-albanese-pledges-10bn-social-housing-fund-in-labors-federal-budget-reply>, accessed June 2021.

major road in Brimbank, with the congestion period now extending beyond the traditional morning (7-9am) and afternoon (4-6.30pm) peaks.⁴⁵

Increased road congestion is also reflected in 'journey to work' data. While the proportion of people travelling to work by car remained steady between 2011 and 2016 (71.4% vs 71.8%), this did represent an increase of almost 3,000 people due to population growth. Additionally, the 2016 figure is above the rate for Greater Melbourne (64.1%) and the Western Metropolitan Region (66.8%). While travel by public transport did increase between 2011 and 2016 (and is slightly above the rate for Greater Melbourne), active transport (walking and cycling) and working from home are well below the average in Brimbank.

This reliance on private cars to travel to work is reflected in car ownership data. Almost one in five households (19.8 per cent) own three or more cars, higher than the rate in Greater Melbourne (15.9%) and the Western Metropolitan Region (16.4%). Additionally, the proportion of households without a car is below the rate in Greater Melbourne (6.8% vs 8.5%). Additionally, some low income households require (often multiple) vehicles to access day-to-day needs due to a lack of feasible alternative modes of transport, which places additional strain on household finances.⁴⁶

Through the Transport Priorities Paper 2018, Council identified the following key transport priorities to build a more efficient and effective integrated transport network:

- Urgent rail grade separations to improve capacity for all transport modes
- Increased train frequencies on the Melton and Sunbury lines
- A high frequency bus network that directly connects residential areas to town centres
- Better links between town centres in the western suburbs and priority for public transport
- Easier to remember public transport frequencies, e.g. every 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 or 60 minutes
- Improvements to the principal road network to manage growth in traffic demand
- Completion of managed motorways on the Calder and Western Freeways
- Upgrade Calder Freeway and Western Freeways to 'freeway standard'
- Road grade separations where there are high turn movements to improve traffic flow.

More recently, Council has led the 'Fix the Calder' campaign, which sought immediate and urgent upgrades along the Calder Corridor between the interchanges of the Western Ring Road and Gap Road in Sunbury.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Brimbank City Council (2018) Transport Priorities Paper 2018, <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/transport-priorities-paper-2018>, accessed June 2021.

⁴⁶ Currie et al (2018) 'Alarming Trends in the Growth of Forced Car Ownership in Melbourne', *Australasian Transport Research Forum 2018 Proceedings*, <https://apo.org.au/node/220716>, accessed June 2021.

⁴⁷ Brimbank City Council (2021) 'Fix the Calder', <https://yoursay.brimbank.vic.gov.au/fixthecalder>, accessed June 2021.

4.7.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$2 billion over four years from 2021-22 for a new Melbourne Intermodal Terminal (*conditional on Victorian Government matching this funding*).
- \$1 billion over four years from 2021-22 to extend the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, which will support local councils to maintain and upgrade community assets and local roads.
- \$1 billion to extend the Road Safety Program into 2022-23, which will fund small-scale road safety projects such as road widening and audio tactile line marking and barriers.
- \$50 million over two years from 2021-22 to commence detailed design and planning of targeted upgrades on the Calder Freeway for safer and more reliable journeys (*funding matched by the Victorian Government*).
- \$10 million over four years from 2021-22 for the Outer Metropolitan Ring/E6 Corridor Detailed Business Case.

State Budget

- \$2.3 billion over six years from 2021-22 for Victoria's rail network, including \$986 million to build 25 brand new modern X'Trapolis 2.0 trains and supporting infrastructure.
- \$367.6 million over four years from 2021-22 to deliver enabling infrastructure for Next Generation Trams including construction of a new tram maintenance facility in Melbourne's north-west.
- \$330.0 million over five years from 2020-21 for initiatives under the new *Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030*.
- \$71.6 million over two years from 2021-22 million to upgrade the Melton and Wyndham Vale corridors to enable the future operation of higher capacity trains.
- \$50 million over two years from 2021-22 to commence detailed design and planning of targeted upgrades on the Calder Freeway for safer and more reliable journeys (*funding matched by the Commonwealth Government*).
- \$39.4 million over four years from 2021-22 for a more productive road network for freight, including a program of priority bridge upgrades and renewal works.
- \$15.9 million over two years from 2021-22 for active transport projects across metropolitan Melbourne.
- \$15.5 million over two years from 2021-22 for public transport accessibility and amenity upgrades.
- \$13.7 million over two years from 2021-22 for bus service improvements and reform.

4.7.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

The 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets include funding for a range of transport projects and programs. The Commonwealth Government's funding for the new Melbourne

Intermodal Terminal (conditional on matching from the Victorian Government) will increase the efficiency and capacity of the national rail freight network. The location of the terminal has not yet been announced, which provides an opportunity to advocate for it to be suitably located in Melbourne's west. Ongoing federal investment in road safety, local roads and community infrastructure is also welcomed, as well as funding to develop a business case for the Outer Metropolitan Ring/E6 Corridor.

The State Budget provides significant investment in public transport rolling stock, including new trains and trams. It matches the \$50 million provided by the Commonwealth Government to make \$100 million available to commence work on upgrades to the Calder Freeway, which was a major pre-budget advocacy priority for Council. Further investment in rail and road upgrades will also be welcomed, including improvements to the Melton and Wyndham Vale corridors.

While the Victorian Government has announced significant infrastructure investment, there is relatively little funding available for active transport projects, bus service improvements and public transport accessibility and amenity upgrades. These remain key transport advocacy priorities, given the barriers to walking and cycling in Brimbank, as well as the need for improved and more accessible bus services.

4.8. Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

4.8.1. What are the local issues?

In 2019, Brimbank's total annual community emissions were estimated at approximately 3 million tonnes of carbon pollution per annum (3,002kt CO₂-e).⁴⁸ Only Wyndham (3.07 million tonnes) recorded higher emissions in Melbourne's west, noting that other municipalities have smaller populations.

The largest source of community emissions in Brimbank is electricity and gas consumed by buildings and facilities, which accounts for 81 per cent of total municipal emissions. Industry is responsible for the majority of this consumption (45%), followed by residential (20%) and commercial buildings (16%). Transport accounts for 16 per cent of emissions, which is equal to or below the proportion in other municipalities in Melbourne's west. Notably, automotive transport (e.g. cars, trucks) contribute 95 per cent of transport-related emissions.⁴⁹

Brimbank has relatively limited tree canopy cover, recording just six per cent coverage in research conducted in 2018.⁵⁰ While this places Brimbank above some other municipalities in Melbourne's west (such as Melton and Wyndham), it is ranked 27th out of 31 metropolitan LGAs on this measure. When coupled with more frequent extreme weather events such as heatwaves, this lack of tree canopy increases the risk of heat-related health impacts, particularly for vulnerable residents.

⁴⁸ All emissions data presented in this section are sourced from Snapshot (n.d.) 'Brimbank 2019 municipal emissions snapshot', <https://snapshotclimate.com.au/locality/australia/victoria/brimbank>, accessed June 2021.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Victorian Government (2018) 'Mapping and analysis of vegetation, heat and land use', <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/planning-for-melbourne/plan-melbourne/cooling-greening-melbourne/mapping-and-analysis-of-vegetation,-heat-and-land-use>, accessed June 2021.

In 2019, Brimbank City Council declared a climate emergency and subsequently adopted the Brimbank Climate Emergency Plan 2020-25.⁵¹ The Plan outlines how Council will implement its climate emergency declaration and commits to the following emission targets:

- zero net emissions for Council operations by 2030
- an interim aspirational target for the Brimbank municipality of 70 per cent less net annual emissions by 2030
- zero net emissions for Brimbank municipality by 2040.

4.8.2. Key budget initiatives

Federal Budget

- \$1.2 billion over ten years from 2021-22 for low emissions technology, including partnership projects, additional hydrogen hubs, and the development of Carbon Capture Use and Storage technologies.
- \$215.4 million over six years from 2021-22 to improve energy affordability and reliability, including funding for battery and 'microgrid' projects, assistance for new gas generators to become 'hydrogen ready', and support for key gas infrastructure projects.
- \$209.7 million over four years from 2021-22 to establish the Australian Climate Service, which will build capacity to anticipate and prepare for more extreme weather events.
- \$11.0 million over four years from 2021-22 to further stimulate and incentivise recycling behaviours among Australian businesses and communities.

State Budget

- \$250 million over four years from 2021-22 to protect and preserve our natural environment, including support for volunteers, grants to protect threatened species, and improvements to waterways and wetlands.
- \$46.1 million over three years from 2021-22 to introduce a \$3,000 subsidy for zero emission vehicles for households and businesses.
- \$5.0 million in 2021-22 to plant half a million trees in Melbourne's west.

4.8.3. What are the impacts for Brimbank?

The Commonwealth Government's investment in the Australian Climate Service will prepare for extreme weather events due to climate change, as well as supporting more informed investment in future risk reduction and resilience projects. This has the potential to support more effective responses to the impacts of climate change in Brimbank.

The federal announcements in relation to low emissions technology are encouraging, but do not appear to be well-targeted. For example, almost half of the funding is for

⁵¹ Brimbank City Council (2020) *Brimbank Climate Emergency Plan 2020-25*, <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/plans-policies-and-strategies/plans/brimbank-climate-emergency-plan>, accessed June 2021.

additional hydrogen hubs and Carbon Capture Use and Storage systems, which aim to prolong reliance on fossil fuels. Additionally, funding to improve energy affordability and reliability rely heavily on support for gas infrastructure projects. These initiatives will not help Australia meet its emissions reduction targets, while contributing to climate change that is likely to impact vulnerable residents in Brimbank.

The Victorian Government has announced significant funding to protect the natural environment, while also introducing a subsidy program to encourage greater uptake of zero emission vehicles. However, the electric vehicle road user charge (introduced in the 2020-21 Budget) remains, which will reduce the effectiveness of the new subsidy program. Nonetheless, in the absence of any significant federal incentives, this program is welcomed and is likely to have some impact.

Funding to plant more trees in Melbourne's west is also welcomed, given the significant lack of tree canopy. However, the State Budget does have some gaps and areas for potential advocacy, including lack of funding for rooftop solar systems on public housing, and no investment in climate-resilient refuges that could provide shelter from extreme weather events such as heatwaves.⁵²

⁵² VCOSS (2021) 'Is this the budget Victoria needed? A VCOSS Guide to the 2021 Victorian Budget', <https://www.vcross.org.au/advocacy/vicbudget2021>, accessed June 2021.

5. More information

Please visit the following websites to learn more about the 2021-22 Federal and State Budgets.

Federal Budget

[The Commonwealth Government's official Budget 2021-22 website](#) - includes all of the Budget Papers, as well as media releases, ministerial statements and other resources.

[Federal Budget 2021: Winners and Losers \(ABC News\)](#) - a brief overview of the 'winners' and 'losers' arising from the 2021-22 Federal Budget.

[Australian Council of Social Service \(ACOSS\) preliminary analysis and briefing](#) - provides a preliminary analysis of the Federal Budget on a range of topics, including income support, climate change, and secure housing for people on low incomes.

State Budget

[The Victorian Government's official 2021-22 State Budget website](#) - includes all of the Budget Papers, as well as media releases, Treasurer's speech and other resources.

[State Budget 2021: Winners and Losers \(ABC News\)](#) - a brief overview of the 'winners' and 'losers' arising from the 2021-22 State Budget.

[Victorian Council of Social Service \(VCOSS\) Budget Analysis](#) - provides analysis of the State Budget on a range of topics, including education and schools, inclusive communities, and women's safety and economic security.

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