
Government Responses to the Recommendations of

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE'S

Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Pursuant to Section 36 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*, this paper provides a response to the recommendations contained in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's (PAEC) Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Guide for readers - Following is the explanation of the format of this paper.

1 Title		
2 Chapter number and topic		
1 PAEC recommendation	2 Response	3 Action taken to date and commitment to further action

Row 1: Indicates the title of this paper.

Row 2: Indicates the number and topic of the response to the PAEC recommendations.

Column 1: Contains PAEC's recommendations as published in its Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Column 2: Indicates the Government's response to each recommendation: 'Support', 'Support-in-principle', 'Support-in-part', 'Not support', or 'Under review'.

Column 3: Provides an explanation of the Government's position on the recommendation, indicates the actions that have been taken to date relevant to the implementation of the recommendation, and outlines commitment to further action relevant to the implementation of the recommendation.

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic		
Chapter 2: Managing the health pandemic		
<p>Recommendation 1: The <i>Victorian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza</i> and the <i>Victorian Action Plan for Influenza Pandemic</i> be reviewed.</p>	Support	A new State Viral Pandemic Plan, currently under development, is intended to cover all viral pandemics including influenza and coronavirus (COVID-19). A State Viral Pandemic Plan Working Group has been established and draft input from key stakeholders and subject matter experts is underway. The second iteration of the State Viral Pandemic Plan will be co-designed and inclusive of a broader, whole of sector engagement.
<p>Recommendation 2: The Victorian Government clearly define and make public the roles and responsibilities of officials during any state of emergency and state of disaster, to ensure clarity, accountability and transparency.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government is assessing potential communications channels which could be used to publicise relevant information about the functions of public officials in declaring or exercising a State of Emergency under the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i> or a State of Disaster under the <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i>.</p> <p><u>State of Emergency</u></p> <p>In relation to the State of Emergency under the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>, the Minister for Health may, on the advice of the Chief Health Officer and after consultation with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Emergency Management Commissioner, declare a state of emergency arising out of any circumstances causing a serious risk to public health. The following directions have been made (among others) under s 200 of the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>, which can only be exercised while a state of emergency declaration is in force:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gathering restrictions; • requirement to wear or carry a face covering; • business and work premises restrictions (including additional industry obligations); • care facility restrictions; • self-isolation for persons diagnosed with COVID-19 and close contacts; • hospital visitor restrictions; • border crossing permit. <p>During a state of emergency declaration, the Chief Health Officer may, if reasonably necessary to eliminate or reduce a serious risk to public health, authorise authorised officers under s 199 to exercise emergency powers under s 200 of the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>, including the ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detain any person or group of persons in an emergency area for the period reasonably necessary to eliminate or reduce a serious risk to public health; • restrict the movement of any person or group of persons within an emergency area; • prevent any person or group of persons from entering an emergency area; and

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give any other directions that the authorised officer considers is reasonably necessary to protect public health. <p>Under s 198(8) of the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>, the Minister for Health must report to Parliament on the declaration of a state of emergency and the powers exercised during the state of emergency. Under s 198(8A), if a state of emergency declaration is extended beyond 6 months in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic then the Minister must report to Parliament on the reasons for the extension and the public health risk powers and emergency powers exercised and include in the report a copy of the advice of the Chief Health Officer in respect of the extension.</p> <p><u>State of Disaster</u></p> <p>In relation to a State of Disaster under the <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i>, the Premier may declare a State of Disaster if there is an emergency which the Premier, after considering the advice of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Emergency Management Commissioner, is satisfied constitutes or is likely to constitute a significant and widespread danger to life or property in Victoria. Declaring a state of disaster gives the Minister for Police and Emergency Services the power to direct, coordinate and allocate government activities and resources to the disaster area. Under s 24(2) of the <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i> this may include: directing any government agency; declaring any Act or instrument to be suspended; taking possession and making use of any property; controlling and restricting movement within and around the disaster area; compelling evacuation of persons from the disaster area.</p> <p>There were four State of Disaster declarations made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on 2 August, 2 September, 13 September and 11 October (ending at 11.59pm on 8 November 2020). The Minister for Police and Emergency Services made directions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to allow police officers and PSOs to exercise public health risk powers under s 190 of the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>; • an order suspending the requirement in s 30 of the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i> that authorised officers be employed under Part 3 of the <i>Public Administration Act 2004</i>; and • an order suspending the operation of procedural requirements in s 200(2)-200(9) of the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i> relating to detention in relation to the directions giving effect to “stage 4” restrictions in metropolitan Melbourne. <p>Under s 23(7) of the <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i>, if a State of Disaster has been declared, the Premier must report to Parliament on the State of Disaster and the powers exercised under s 24 of the <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i> as soon as practicable after the declaration.</p> <p>The functions of public officials are currently enshrined in the <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i> and the State Emergency Management Plan. Roles and responsibilities for different classes of emergencies are outlined in the State Emergency Management Plan which can be found at https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/sempp. A review of the State Emergency Management Plan in 2021 will ensure emergency management arrangements are unambiguous, comprehensive, and commonly understood.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 3: For future pandemics, the Government consider the early release of modelling scenarios and underlying assumptions to provide the community with insight, and promote confidence in the Government's response.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>The Victorian Government agrees that it should consider releasing modelling scenarios including any modelling assumptions in future pandemics. For the COVID-19 pandemic, modelling scenarios and underlying assumptions used to inform the government's response to the first wave were released in April 2020. Following increasing cases during the second wave, the government again released modelling work on the effect of stage 4 restrictions in early September 2020. Transparency of the information and methods used in generating a model by the government is crucial. The use of modelling in public communications, however, needs to be appropriately supported with expert epidemiological advice and explanation.</p> <p>The results of mathematical models are highly dependent on assumptions about disease characteristics and human behaviour. They are not predictive tools; they assess the potential impact of various interventions and will always have inherent uncertainty. A high degree of technical expertise is required to interpret modelling results and there is a risk subsequent public reporting misrepresents elements causing public confusion or alarm.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: The Victorian Government commission modelling of the broader health and mental health impacts of the pandemic and associated non-pharmaceutical interventions, if such modelling has not already been commissioned.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government is in the process of commissioning independent and expert modelling of the broader health and mental health impact of the pandemic and associated non-pharmaceutical interventions.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: The third contact tracing benchmark being used in Victoria be amended from 'Percentage of known contacts notified within 48 hours of the Department of Health and Human Services being notified of positive result' to 'Percentage of known contacts notified within 24 hours of the Department of Health and Human Services being notified of positive result' in line with the Chief Scientist's recommendation.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>The Victorian Government supports in principle the inquiry's recommendation to amend the third contact tracing benchmark to the 'percentage of known contacts being notified within 24 hours of the [Department of Health] being notified of a positive result'.</p> <p>The government is committed to aligning with the Chief Scientist's National Contact Tracing Review recommendations and will update the approach to operational reporting to support this alignment. The Victorian Government will also work with the Commonwealth Government and other states and territories as required to ensure alignment with national reporting requirements.</p> <p>It is important to note that in some instances, particularly for community close contacts resulting from exposure sites, the government relies on third party organisations to provide timely access to contact tracing information. The government continues to utilise all avenues available to ensure information is sufficient to allow communication with close contacts.</p> <p>Effective from 28 May 2021, all Victorian venues and facilities presently required to use electronic record keeping must use the free Victorian Government QR Code Service through the Service Victoria app. The requirement is mandated under Chief Health Officer directions and provides contact tracers with immediate access to electronic records to rapidly contain an outbreak.</p> <p>Expansion of this record keeping requirement to all industries is underway following the state-wide lockdown in late May 2021 and will further strengthen the availability of information for contact tracing.</p>

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Chapter 3: Health system, aged care and mental health		
<p>Recommendation 6: The Department of Health and Human Services review the effectiveness of its COVID-19 pandemic communications plan and operations in relation to multicultural communities and primary health networks, including General Practitioners.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government has improved its communication and operations in relation to multicultural communities, primary health networks and General Practitioners in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In August 2020, \$14.3 million was committed to improve engagement and outreach for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities affected by the pandemic. The CALD Communities Taskforce was established to provide a coordination and leadership role across the Victorian Government’s response, and to work in partnership with community organisations, local governments, and the Victorian Multicultural Commission. • An additional \$18.8 million was committed in late 2020 to extend and expand on the communications, translations, engagement and funding support programs such as the Priority Response for Multicultural Communities (PRMC) grant program, providing emergency relief, outreach supports, and development of tailored messaging and communications to promote testing and encourage COVIDSafe behaviours. • The CALD Health Advisory Panel was established to bring together general practitioners and CALD community leaders to provide ongoing advice and expertise to government. • The C-19 Collaborative, a consortium of five community health providers was established to deliver rapid engagement, testing and vaccination with diverse and vulnerable populations. This includes the employment of nine bi-cultural workers who are selected for their close ties with priority communities. • \$2 million has been provided for the CALD Communities Urgent Response Brokerage Fund to engage grassroots CALD organisations during outbreaks. The fund was effectively mobilised during the Black Rock and Holiday Inn outbreaks early in 2021 through funding local organisations resulting in 200-300% increase in testing rates for priority communities. The funding is now being expanded to partner with CALD health associations to drive vaccination rates. • COVID-19 public health campaigns are now routinely translated into 57 different languages and appear across multicultural print, radio and social media. • In-language videos with the latest public health advice have also been produced using community ambassadors. <p>The Victorian Government makes use of a range of channels to communicate with general practice through primary health care networks (PHNs), the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Australian Medical Association (AMA). The Department of Health has and continues to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actively engaged with PHNs, RACGP and AMA to support communications and information sharing through regular departmental meetings with representatives and through participation on the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) taskforce, healthcare worker infection taskforce, primary care expert advisory groups and the COVID-19 vaccine steering committee • collaborated with the RACGP to deliver a general practitioner COVID-19 webinar series. Webinars have been held at least fortnightly and have been presented by the department’s Chief Health Officer or Public Health Commanders. Webinar attendance has ranged from 70-300 GPs over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<p>Recommendation 7: The Department of Health and Human Services review the effectiveness of its communication of COVID-19 data across the public health system and primary care networks.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government is constantly reviewing the COVID-19 information that has been made publicly available. Following the implementation of the new contact tracing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, the information available on public websites was updated and extended.</p> <p>Local Public Health Units (LPHUs) have access to the contact tracing CRM system to support their operational role in managing local outbreaks.</p> <p>In addition, the central public health team is working in collaboration with LPHUs to continue to improve the quality of reporting and data.</p> <p>The government has established the COVID-19 Pathways of Care strategy to ensure that COVID-19 positive people have access to local care if needed. Within this care model, COVID positive patients are followed up by their local health service once they test positive to ensure they are getting the care they might require. Further, the relevant Primary Health Network is involved in Emergency Management Team meetings related to any outbreak and can share information with relevant primary care partners, as needed.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8: The Department of Health and Human Services ensure the timely supply of P2/N95 respirator masks and associated fit testing across all high-risk Victorian health settings, and consider publishing the results of the fit-testing trial.</p>	Support	<p>The fit testing trial was conducted by Northern Health to inform the procurement of P2/N95 respirators. Further testing of 20 respirators was also conducted by Monash Health early in 2021. The results of these pilots and the fit testing data provided by health services has informed the purchase of new respirators. (e.g. Industree Trident) and reduction in supply of other masks (e.g. Honeywell and Detmold).</p> <p>As at 24 May 2021, fit testing is being reported by 64 Health services, Ambulance Victoria and COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria (CQV), which have reported more than 45,000 fit tests. Current advice regarding PPE requirements and data regarding the current supply of respirators is available on DH website at:</p> <p>https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/personal-protective-equipment-ppe-covid-19</p> <p>The Department of Health is working with health services to accelerate fit testing for priority healthcare workers by 30 June 2021. This has included the procurement of an additional 50 fit testing machines (taking the total number of machines to 194 state-wide, of which 21 were directly procured by health services) and commissioning fit tester training for health service staff across the state. To 24 May 2021, seven one-day training programs have been delivered and 85 health service staff have participated. Fit tester training has been offered state-wide including a session for Ambulance Victoria staff.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 9: The Victorian Government develop a long-term mental health support program to assist the community's recovery from the pandemic.</p>	Support	<p>Innovative mental health initiatives were a core component of the Victorian Government's COVID-19 response strategy and additional funding was directed to mental health services throughout 2020, including \$152.5 million allocated in the 2020-21 State Budget for the COVID-19 mental health response.</p> <p>Enduring social and economic recovery relies on a mental health system that is well-equipped to meet increasing levels of demand, and which can adequately support people across all levels of needs.</p> <p>The establishment of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in 2019 recognised that Victoria did not have such a system in place. With the release of the Royal Commission's final report in March 2021, which was informed by the pandemic, we now have a blueprint for delivering one of the biggest social reforms in a generation. All Victorians will benefit from this reform agenda and the Victorian Government is committed to, and has commenced, implementing every recommendation. The Royal Commission's suite of recommendations set out a bold vision for a new mental health and wellbeing system that is responsive to people's varying levels of need and where services help people to maintain good mental health and wellbeing at all times.</p> <p>Delivering on this vision will ensure Victorians will be offered genuine alternatives to hospital or crisis care, and community-based services will offer the full range of supports that people living with mental illness or psychological distress need to recover and to participate in society.</p>
Chapter 4: Victoria's economic response		
<p>Recommendation 10: The Government develop a future employment strategy for vulnerable cohorts of the workforce in response to the COVID-19 pandemic not limited to, but including young people, women working part-time, Aboriginal people and older workers.</p>	Support	<p>In recognition of employment barriers, the Victorian Government has developed a comprehensive approach to support vulnerable cohorts prepare for and secure employment. This approach is being implemented through Jobs Victoria, which provides jobseekers with advice and support to navigate a pathway to work. The government has invested over \$1 billion in wage subsidies and employment services through Jobs Victoria since the beginning of the pandemic and ensured delivery of investments in a coordinated way. This investment includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The \$500 million Working for Victoria fund which has created jobs for more than 13,500 Victorians across the state since its launch in April 2020. • The Jobs Victoria Fund, providing \$250 million in wage subsidies to create new jobs for at least 10,000 people with \$150 million of the fund dedicated to supporting women back into work, including \$50 million supporting women over the age of 45. This also includes targeted support for young people, Aboriginal people and older workers. A further \$266.5 million investment in Jobs Victoria to deliver face-to-face intensive support to those who need extra help – a trebling of the existing support and creating positions for more than 450 new Advocates, Mentors and Career Counsellors to support jobseekers on the ground. • A \$15 million investment will also support JobsBank – an independent not-for-profit organisation established in 2019 – to support employers in undertaking inclusive employment practices, including supporting greater understanding of the Victorian Social Procurement Framework.

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Chapter 6: Jobs and industry		
<p>Recommendation 11: The Victorian Government consider developing a comprehensive manufacturing plan to identify ways to protect and strengthen local supply chains, particularly for essential medical and health equipment.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>The Victorian Government has had a longstanding commitment to local supply chains through the <i>Local Jobs First Act 2003</i>, which ensures local businesses are able to compete for government contracts. The Victorian Government has committed to establish the \$20 million Australian Medtech Manufacturing Centre (AMMC) to strengthen manufacturing of essential medical and health equipment and supplies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central to the objectives of AMMC will be to work closely with health procurement agencies to achieve the shared objective of growing Medtech manufacturing in Victoria, increasing local content in health procurement and helping to address sovereign risk for key products. • AMMC will develop and implement plans, strategies and programs to achieve this objective. <p>An overarching PPE strategy is under development for the health sector by Safer Care Victoria. This will include a section on local manufacturing and locally produced PPE.</p> <p>The Victorian Government has committed \$60 million towards the Manufacturing Industry Development Fund to support sovereign manufacturing capability in Victoria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This fund will support the reorientation and ‘retooling’ of Victoria’s existing design, engineering and advanced manufacturing capabilities towards essential and sovereign products. • It will also secure and facilitate access to multinational supply chains for Victorian companies and build resilience in critical supply chains.
Chapter7: Transport and infrastructure		
<p>Recommendation 12: The Department of Transport prioritise investment in safe cycling infrastructure to address the increase in demand.</p>	Support	<p>One hundred kilometres of new and improved bike riding lanes will be delivered across key inner-Melbourne suburbs to make it easier and safer for people riding to and from the CBD. The Victorian Government’s \$15.9 million investment in our inner-city cycling network will help promote safer bike riding to and from the CBD when it is safe to do so. We know the way people travel will look different as we move to a COVID normal – these pop-up bike riding paths provide options to all road users.</p> <p>Cycling safety has been a key barrier to encourage more riders on to the network and with this initiative of providing greater separation, we are making it safer for people to choose to ride to work, school and to local activity centres.</p> <p>Minimum Passing Distance Rules took effect on 26 April 2021. The rules make it law for motorists to give people riding bicycles at least one metre clearance when overtaking on roads with speed limits up to 60km/h, and 1.5 metres on roads with speed limits above 60km/h. Minimum Passing Distance Rules also support plans to increase active transport through the delivery of the Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018 – 2028.</p>

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Chapter 8: Response to social impacts of the pandemic and associated restrictions

<p>Recommendation 13: The Department of Health and Human Services work with the Victorian community services sector to identify existing and future workforce shortages and formulate a strategy to create attractive community services jobs in the recovery phase of the pandemic.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government is developing sector workforce strategies for community service sectors including: Child Protection, Family Violence, Children and Family Services, and homelessness. Further work will be undertaken with the community services sector to formulate a strategy to create attractive jobs in the recovery phase of the pandemic.</p> <p>Jobs Victoria is ensuring people looking for work and businesses get the support and advice they need through an integrated system of employment services. Jobs Victoria offers a flexible approach so all jobseekers can find the support that is right for them. The Jobs Victoria Fund is providing \$250 million through investments including wage subsidies, to assist Victorian employers grow and employ at least 10,000 people who are looking for work. This includes investments to grow the supply of job-ready people into key sectors facing workforce shortage, including disability, family safety and community services.</p>
<p>Recommendation 14: The Victorian Government consider extending Working for Victoria placements in the community services sector beyond six months to assist in the post pandemic recovery period when demand for community services is expected to increase.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>The Working for Victoria initiative was an emergency response and is now fully expended. As the Victorian economy shifts from response to recovery, the Jobs Victoria Fund is providing \$250 million in wage subsidies to assist Victorian organisations to employ at least 10,000 people who are looking for work.</p> <p>Through the Jobs Victoria Fund, community service organisations are eligible to apply for wage subsidies of up to \$20,000 to employ eligible workers for at least 12 months. This includes people previously employed under the Working for Victoria initiative.</p>
<p>Recommendation 15: Comparative data on family violence incidences—including number of people remanded, bailed and charged on summons due to family violence incidences—by month be published in Victoria Police’s annual report to gauge the achievements of Operation Ribbon during the pandemic.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>The Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) produces recorded crime statistics for the state of Victoria, including those relating to the incidence of family violence. Some of the suggested measures are already published and are available for Victoria Police to republish in their annual report (for example the number of people charged on summons). Other measures, including the number of people remanded and bailed, however, will require the development of data by the CSA, in collaboration with other justice agencies, to develop and test whether the data could be effectively and reliably produced for publication.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 16: The Department of Health and Human Services ensure additional funding for the specialist family violence service sector is distributed in a timely manner.</p>	Support	<p>Significant additional funding for crisis accommodation and support for people experiencing family violence and sexual assault during COVID-19 was allocated between May and December 2020.</p> <p>The Victorian Government is working to streamline funding approval, allocation and agency notification processes.</p>
<p>Recommendation 17: Opportunities for family violence services to further develop and implement discreet alert systems that have been used during the pandemic be explored.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government manages the Personal Safety Initiative which is specifically designed to provide victims with, amongst other things, technology devices to maximise their safety.</p> <p>In recognition of the impact on women and children being able to access specialist services, the government developed and printed information that was distributed to local supermarkets and through GP clinics. These resources were also translated into different languages. Family violence identification training and support was also provided to front-line COVID-19 staff, such as staff who were supporting people in quarantine hotels.</p> <p>During COVID-19 lockdowns, agencies instigated pilot programs whereby safe rooms were set up in some supermarkets and pharmacies so that women could have a space where they could call for assistance away from the perpetrators. Two agencies also established webchat as another point of access for victims. All Specialist Family Violence Services encouraged their clients to establish codes such as safe words or signals whereby friends or neighbours would know to call police on their behalf. The Victorian Government is committed to exploring the suite of safety strategies available in the system.</p>
<p>Recommendation 18: The Department of Health and Human Services, as well as service providers, assess the efficacy of remote service delivery for victim survivors and perpetrators during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government is commissioning targeted research projects to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on family violence service delivery, including service responses and innovations such as remote service delivery. In 2020, the Centre for Evaluation and Research Evidence undertook defined, point in time reviews of remote service delivery of victim survivor family violence programs and perpetrator intervention programs.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19: The Victorian Government ensures the timely distribution of announced funding for Aboriginal homelessness infrastructure and services.</p>	Support	<p>In 2020-21, the Victorian Government, through Homes Victoria, allocated funding for the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$300,000 for Aboriginal Specific Homelessness Access Point Feasibility Study • \$1.06 million for Building Better Connections Project (Aboriginal Homes Connect) • \$440,000 for an additional six homelessness support workers in the Aboriginal Community-controlled sector <p>This funding formed part of a \$23 million rapid funding package for housing and homelessness services to support Aboriginal Victorians through the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The recommendation refers to design and implementation of the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program (APRAP). Funding for APRAP was committed in response to the Victorian Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework (VAHFF) and was not a</p>

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		<p>response to COVID-19. Delays in implementation were due to prioritisation of COVID-19 homelessness responses.</p> <p>Building Works Maintenance Stimulus</p> <p>In May 2020 the Victorian Government announced a \$2.7 billion state-wide Building Works infrastructure program to deliver new infrastructure and upgrade existing infrastructure across Victoria.</p> <p>The Building Works Stimulus Package is part of this funding and includes \$498 million to fund the maintenance and upgrade of 23,000 social housing properties across Victoria and build 168 new social housing dwellings.</p> <p>This funding was provided to rapidly stimulate the Victorian economy and as at April 2021, of the \$498 million, \$365.1 million is already committed for delivery. This includes \$170 million allocated or approved for distribution by sector agencies and partners. These improvements include painting, roofing and renovating kitchens and bathrooms.</p> <p>Social housing in metropolitan and regional Victoria will benefit from this funding. Five of the ten streams delivered through the Building Works program include projects that will benefit Aboriginal communities across Victoria. Aboriginal housing projects value over \$50 million, which is approximately 10 per cent of the entire stimulus package.</p> <p>In keeping with Aboriginal self-determination for Aboriginal Victorians, the \$35 million Aboriginal housing package will be delivered by a consortium of 18 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations led by Aboriginal Housing Victoria.</p> <p>Through the community housing stream of works, over 600 dwellings within the Aboriginal Housing Victoria portfolio are to receive upgrade works.</p> <p>Through the housing stream of works, a dedicated project to deliver new housing for first nations men leading to vocational training is being developed. The program is funding Aboriginal Housing Victoria to undertake two projects – one in Hampton Park which has delivered two new dwellings, and one in Dandenong to deliver ten new dwellings.</p>
<p>Recommendation 20:</p> <p>The Victorian Government in partnership with Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations develop a disaster management plan with the Victorian Aboriginal community.</p>	<p>Support-in-principle</p>	<p>The Victorian Government is working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in considering the best approach to develop a disaster management plan.</p>
<p>Recommendation 21:</p> <p>The Victorian Government in partnership with Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations develop a COVID-19 recovery plan with the Victorian Aboriginal community to</p>	<p>Support-in-principle</p>	<p>The Victorian Government has finalised allocation of grants under the \$10 million Coronavirus Aboriginal Community Response and Recovery Fund. The government will use learnings from this Fund and its work with the Victorian Aboriginal Social Recovery Advisory Group to develop high level social recovery priorities which will inform sector strengthening plans being developed through the Closing the Gap implementation plan. The Victorian Government will continue to work with Aboriginal organisations and communities through the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan to achieve parity in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
underpin the Coronavirus Aboriginal Community Response and Recovery Fund.		
Chapter 9: Education		
<p>Recommendation 22: The Department of Education and Training in conjunction with schools develop and implement a strategy to ensure equitable access to technology for all Victorian students including low income students, Aboriginal students and specialist school students during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government, in partnership with schools, is working on three initiatives related to equitable access to technology for all Victorian government school students.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. During the 2020 school year and Term 1 of 2021, the Department of Education and Training ensured more than 25,000 devices and 28,000 internet access services were available for schools to provide to students who needed a device or internet connectivity to participate in remote learning. This included supporting internet access until the end of the 2020 school year and for one month during the 2021 circuit breaker lockdown. 2. The 2020-21 State Budget allocated \$24.5 million through the Bridging the Digital Divide initiative to allow government school students to permanently retain over 57,000 school-owned computer devices, loaned to them in 2020, to ensure they are not educationally disadvantaged. This initiative is supporting schools' transition back to business as usual computer provision operations, during 2021, through providing a financial contribution towards the costs incurred by schools in students retaining their loaned school-owned computers. Where appropriate a school may be provided with similar computers in lieu of the financial contribution. 3. The Department of Education and Training is making a Donate your Data program available to up to 10,000 low income students. This program provides a zero-cost mobile service, with unlimited calls and texts and an allowance of mobile data between 10G – 40G per month for a period of either 12 or 24 months. To support this, the Department of Education and Training is considering options for the low-cost provision of internet devices for families to utilise this service.
<p>Recommendation 23: The Department of Education and Training implement a study to assess the long-term effects of remote and flexible learning on the education outcomes of primary and secondary students.</p>	Support	<p>During 2020, there were disruptions to usual data collections that limited analyses into student outcomes during remote and flexible learning. The Victorian Government has carried out a preliminary research scan of available evidence on the impact of remote and flexible learning from other jurisdictions and consulted with research providers on possible future analysis pathways. The Department of Education and Training also commissioned independent analysis of the lessons of remote learning, which is published on the Department of Education and Training website.</p> <p>The government will commission further internal research on long term effects of COVID-19 on student health, engagement, and academic performance. This will include student level analysis of attitudes to school, attendance patterns, and academic performance before, during and after 2020.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p>Recommendation 24: The Department of Education and Training evaluate the assessment process for the 2020 Victorian Certificate of Education and Certificate of Applied Learning to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on this cohort.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) implemented a range of strategies in 2020 to support students, teachers and schools to take into account the impacts of the 2020 bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic on student performance to support the satisfactory completion of the senior secondary certificates (Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)). These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • modifications to VCE Unit 4 learning requirements, School-based Assessment and reductions in the content covered in related VCE examinations • rescheduling the dates for the delivery of the 2020 VCE external assessment program • providing updated advice and clarification to schools and students in relation to COVIDSafe requirements for the conduct and administration of all VCE examinations • Consideration of Educational Disadvantage (CED) process for VCE Unit 3-4 studies • Special Consideration for VCAL students in their final year of schooling • unspecified credit for Vocational Education and Training (VET) studies (as part of both VCAL and VCE). <p>As part of finalisation of the results for VCE 2020, significant statistical analysis and quality assurance, including external review, was undertaken to ensure fairness and confidence in results and maintaining the integrity of the VCE.</p> <p>The VCAA has completed close out reports following the release of results for the 2020 VCE/VCAL and embedded a number of improvement processes that were implemented in 2020 in response to the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
<p>Recommendation 25: When preparing for periods of remote and flexible learning in response to a pandemic, the Department of Education and Training consider providing the same number of pupil-free days in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria if any further periods of remote learning are required, as well as greater learning opportunities for teachers working with children with additional needs.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>The Department of Education and Training continues to work closely with the Victorian Chief Health Officer and experts at the Department of Health to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks in Victoria. Decisions regarding remote and flexible learning are informed by point-in-time health advice, and this in turn informs operational decisions such as changes to pupil free days.</p> <p>Should a future period of remote and flexible learning be required, the Victorian Government will consider how to best support staff across mainstream and specialist schools to meet the needs of the Victorian school community, including provision of additional pupil free days for metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria where appropriate.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p>Recommendation 26: The Department of Education and Training establish clear, objective, publicly available guidelines on access to on-site schooling for students with a disability for any future periods of remote and flexible learning.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>The Department of Education and Training continues to work closely with the Victorian Chief Health Officer and experts at the Department of Health to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks in Victoria and ensure children’s health, wellbeing and learning needs are central to decision making.</p> <p>Access to on-site supervision and care during periods of remote and flexible learning is informed by point-in-time health advice. This advice considers any relevant epidemiologic factors which may impact how on-site activity can be safely operationalised during a given outbreak, including eligibility criteria for attendance on-site.</p> <p>In the event of increased restrictions in Victoria, guidance on access to on-site supervision and care is published in the School Operations Guide, accessible by all Departmental staff.</p> <p>This advice considers the needs of all students in all settings, including students with disability. To support implementation, the Department supports schools with template communications and guidance to disseminate to their school community.</p> <p>In addition, principals have flexibility to support local decision making and communication regarding on-site provision, working in partnership with their school community to ensure the individual needs of students and families are met.</p> <p>In line with public health advice and intent, the Department of Education and Training supports and encourages school communities to implement health directives in the context of the needs of their local community and individual students and parents.</p>
<p>Recommendation 27: Through the new tutoring program announced on 13 October 2020, the Department of Education and Training provide targeted and tailored outreach to students with a disability that disengaged from school during the pandemic.</p>	Support	<p>In October 2020, the Victorian Government announced the \$250 million Tutor Learning Initiative to support students whose learning was disrupted during the remote and flexible learning periods in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative provides funding to government schools and non-government schools in need to engage approximately 4,100 tutors to provide additional targeted learning support to around 200,000 students, including students with disability.</p> <p>The Initiative also provides funding to engage 16 additional Koorie Engagement Support Officers for schools that have Aboriginal students who require additional support, and 60 additional multilingual and bicultural workers to work as Family Liaison Officers in schools that have students who need support to re-engage in schooling, including students with a disability. This workforce is intended to provide outreach support to our most vulnerable students and their families where appropriate.</p> <p>Schools determine the most appropriate model of tutoring for their school and students, with support from regional staff and guided by the evidence, resources, and professional learning developed by the Department. For specialist schools, the Tutor Learning Initiative is being implemented in the context of existing supports and teaching and learning models applicable to these settings. Schools can also choose to use a proportion of their allocated Tutor Learning Initiative funding to engage allied health support staff.</p> <p>Departmental policy advice and guidance developed for government schools to support implementation of the Initiative included advice relating to supporting students with disability, such as the use of assessment tools including ABLES and monitoring of student learning through Individual Education Plans.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
		<p>The Tutor Learning Initiative suite of professional learning and resources includes webinars and resources designed to support students with disability such as 'Creating Individual Education Plans (IEPs)', and resources to support inclusive practice and planning for effective differentiation. This suite has been delivered in Term 1 and Term 2 to support tutors working with students with disability.</p> <p>Targeted professional learning for tutors has been developed in consultation with key stakeholders including Association for Children with a Disability, Deaf Victoria, Amaze and others. This includes webinars and video case studies to demonstrate best practice implementation of the Tutor Learning Initiative.</p>
<p>Recommendation 28: The Department of Education and Training facilitate work experience and vocational opportunities for specialist school students graduating from their final year of schooling.</p>	<p>Support-in-principle</p>	<p>The Department of Education and Training provided a range of resources to support decision-making and actions for students with disability in their final year of schooling, transitioning to post-school destinations.</p> <p>Schools were provided with curriculum and assessment advice and support to ensure students were progressing with their studies, with a view to completing their courses of study and engaged in their plans for positive transitions post-school.</p> <p>For 2020 school leavers with disability, mainstream and specialist schools received additional funding to support their transition to post-school options in 2021. This extra support (\$750 per student) provided students opportunities to familiarise themselves with their new settings, learn new skills, and transition confidently with help from teachers and staff from their school.</p> <p>In addition, the Department collaborated with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to promote supports available through the NDIA School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES). This included the delivery of state-wide parent webinars for 2020 school leavers with disability in all schools.</p> <p>Through SLES, students who are National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants may receive assistance with developing the skills and confidence to help transition from school to employment. Individualised support is offered for up to two years after finishing school, and may include work experience in open employment, jobs skills training and travel training.</p>
<p>Recommendation 29: Specialist school students graduating from their final year of schooling be provided with the opportunity of repeating their final year if appropriate.</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>Schools work closely with families to ensure that students are supported with effective transition at the end of the school year, whether progressing to the next year of schooling or post-school options. Decisions are made based on the individual needs of students. To support schools, the Department distributed transition advice and the Department's public-facing website was updated with links to resources to support decision-making around transition.</p> <p>Specialist school students undertaking their final year of schooling in 2020 were provided with tailored support to graduate and transition to post-school options. 2020 school leavers with a disability attending mainstream and specialist schools received additional funding (\$750 per student) to provide opportunities to familiarise themselves with their new settings, learn new skills, and transition confidently with help from teachers and staff from their school.</p> <p>In certain circumstances, schools worked with students and families to support an additional year of schooling. In accordance with Department policy, these decisions are best made on an individual basis in partnership with students and their families.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p>Recommendation 30: The Victorian Government establish a standard of support for students with a disability learning remotely including minimum requirements regarding access to education support staff and personalised learning adjustments.</p>	<p>Support-in-principle</p>	<p>The Department of Education and Training is committed to supporting and enabling every student to reach their full potential through equitable access to the Victorian Curriculum: Foundation to Level 10, which describes a common set of knowledge and skills required by students for life-long learning, social development and active and informed citizenship. As a requirement of registration, school-based curriculum programs must substantially address this curriculum.</p> <p>The Department’s Students with Disability policy outlines the requirements for Victorian government schools to support the inclusion of students with disability and additional needs.</p> <p>These requirements include a set of legal obligations under the <i>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)</i>, the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</i> and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disability.</p> <p>To build on these legal obligations and policy framework, throughout the period of remote delivery schools benefited from additional Departmental guidance and resources in making personalised learning adjustments. This included information for teachers about learning from home, delivering the curriculum remotely and how to support students with additional needs.</p> <p>For students with disability, schools were advised to use a personalised approach to ensure the appropriate educational supports were in place. Teachers were guided by age-equivalent daily minimum guidelines, with consideration given to each student’s stage of learning and Individual Education Plan (IEP). The Department’s ‘learning from home’ communication approach advised schools and families to identify the staff, teaching and education support (ES), who would be involved.</p> <p>In addition, the Department developed inclusive remote teaching and learning resources for students with disabilities and resources for parents and carers to support their child’s engagement in their schoolwork while learning from home. These resources were publicly available via the Department’s website, as well as on FUSE, the Department’s repository of curriculum-aligned resources.</p> <p>To assist parents, carers and families, the Department also provided devices to every child that needed one, as well as free internet access to thousands of Victorian students. Over 70,000 devices were loaned to students since the start of Term 2 2020, including approximately 2,000 laptops and tablets for students at specialist schools. The State Budget 2020-21 ensured that students were able to retain all devices loaned to them through the Bridging the Digital Divide — Loaned School Owned Computers Support Initiative.</p> <p>All teaching and learning resources developed by the Department are also already compliant with Victorian Government’s Make Content Accessible -- Digital Guide, including the WCAG 2.0 Accessibility Standards (Level AA). The Guide explains how to make content accessible for those with a disability including self-assessment tools.</p> <p>The Department considers that the current legislative, policy frameworks and additional guidance and resources provide adequate coverage in relation to establishing a standard of support for students with disability during remote learning periods.</p> <p>The Department will ensure that, in any future period of flexible delivery, continuity of learning for students with a disability is closely monitored, and additional policies, guidance and/or resources are developed should challenges emerge.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p>Recommendation 31: The Victorian Government ensure support for the mental health of specialist school students to assist students, and the families of students, with a disability through any future periods of remote and flexible learning.</p>	Support	<p>On 7 August 2020 the Victorian Government announced the expansion of the Mental Health Practitioners (MHP) initiative to all Victorian Government specialist schools with secondary aged students. Mental Health Practitioners in Specialist Schools (SSMHP) was implemented state-wide from Term 1, 2021.</p> <p>As part of the initiative, every Victorian Government specialist school campus with secondary aged enrolments has received funding to recruit a mental health practitioner for between one and four days per week (0.2FTE to 0.8FTE depending on enrolments) for two years to the end of December 2022.</p> <p>The Department of Education and Training central and area teams will continue to support schools in their recruitment efforts throughout 2021/22. DET has engaged an independent consultant to evaluate the rollout and impact of the initiative.</p>
<p>Recommendation 32: Updates on Victorian early childhood education infection rates (children and workers) and care service closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic be contained in the next Quality Assessment and Regulation Division’s annual report.</p>	Support-in-part	<p>The Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD) annual report provides information about the composition and quality of the early childhood sector. It reports on the regulatory activities undertaken within the scope of the <i>Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010</i> and <i>Children’s Services Act 1996</i>. The 2020 QARD Annual Report will include data about services closures notified to QARD due to COVID-19. However, data relating to infection rates of children and workers is not held by the Department of Education and Training.</p>
<p>Recommendation 33: Future messaging on education restrictions cover all parts of the sector including Vocational Education and Training to ensure there is clarity regarding the implementation of any pandemic related restrictions.</p>	Support	<p>The Department of Education and Training has sent ‘direct send’ emails to the higher education and skills (HES) sector (RTOs, TAFE CEOs, Learn Locals and, where appropriate, to universities) when there has been a change in the COVID-19 restrictions. These emails provide advice to the HES sector on the implementation of restrictions.</p> <p>In addition, the Department has engaged and communicated with the HES sector regularly through a range of forums including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorian Vice-Chancellors Committee • TAFE Network Leaders Forum • Whole of sector briefings conducted in collaboration with the primary non-TAFE peaks (ITECA and ACE Victoria) <p>The Department has also developed and maintained COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for tertiary education providers. These FAQs are published on the Department’s Skills Victoria Training System.</p> <p>The Department will continue with these communication and engagement avenues to support the HES sector understand and implement COVID-19 settings and restrictions.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
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Chapter 10: Justice response: Police, emergency management, courts, corrections and the Hotel Quarantine Program

<p>Recommendation 34: Fines Victoria consider publishing its review of the COVID-19 infringement process.</p>	Support-in-principle	The Attorney-General, not Fines Victoria, may publish reports made under the Infringement Act's internal review oversight powers (s 53D (2)). Fines Victoria is currently finalising its review of the COVID-19 infringement process and intends to make formal recommendations (under s 53C of the Infringements Act) to Victoria Police, to which Victoria Police is required to respond. Once Victoria Police has responded, the Department of Justice and Community Safety will provide a report to the Attorney-General on its findings and on Victoria Police's response. Once the report has been received by the Attorney-General (anticipated to be by 31 July 2021) consideration will be given to public release of the report.
<p>Recommendation 35: Victoria Police consider the release of deidentified demographic data related to all COVID-19 enforcement activities.</p>	Support	The Crime Statistics Agency (CSA) is responsible for the release of recorded crime statistics for the state of Victoria, including those relating to Penalty Infringement Notices (PINs) issued for breaches of the Chief Health Officer's COVID-19-related public health directions by Victoria Police. These constituted the output of Victoria Police's COVID-19 enforcement activities. The CSA has released analyses of these data on the CSA website (www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au) and documented the limitations that exist in relation to demographic data for these PINs. These data and analyses are already released and available in the public domain.
<p>Recommendation 36: Emergency Management Victoria publish the <i>Victorian Action Plan for COVID-19 Pandemic</i> on its website.</p>	Support-in-principle	The new State Viral Pandemic Plan will replace the current Victorian Action Plan for COVID-19 Pandemic. Pending its formal approval, the Victorian Government supports the publication of the plan.
<p>Recommendation 37: The Department of Health and Human Services update the <i>State Health Emergency Response Plan</i>.</p>	Support	A review of the State Health Emergency Response Plan will commence by 30 June 2021. The review will take into account the broader emergency management arrangements including the State Emergency Management Plan.
<p>Recommendation 38: The Department of Justice and Community Safety work with Victorian Courts to ensure equitable access to technology for individuals required to attend remote hearings in the future.</p>	Support	All Victorian courts and tribunals will continue to work with all court users and justice agencies, including the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and improve their practices and processes, to ensure equitable access to technology for individuals required to attend remote hearings. As announced by the former Attorney-General Jill Hennessy in December 2020, the Magistrates' Court, the Children's Court, and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal will utilise government funding to allow more matters to be heard remotely and safely. New judicial registrars and support staff will also be appointed to expand the Online Magistrates' Court and the Children's Court Online Case Management. The Magistrates' Court new Accessibility and Engagement Strategy, released in May 2021, aims to ensure equitable access, in particular for vulnerable court users.

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<p>Recommendation 39: The Department of Justice and Community Safety, in conjunction with Victorian Courts, explore options to amend the <i>Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Out of Home Care Age) Act 2020</i> to enable judicial consideration of children’s placements through the Children’s Court.</p>	Support-in-principle	The Victorian Government will consider amendments to the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> to support the intent of this recommendation.
<p>Recommendation 40: The Department of Justice and Community Safety report on access and completion rates of rehabilitation programs in prisons and youth justice facilities during the pandemic in its next annual report.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>In relation to access and completion rates of rehabilitation programs in adult prisons, any proposal to include this data in future reporting will be subject to data availability and existing reporting arrangements (for example, Report on Government Services or BP3 reporting). It is important to note that service delivery was severely impacted by lack of access to adult prisons, social distancing and a range of other COVID-19 restrictions that were in place during this time.</p> <p>Further consideration will be given to this recommendation for Youth Justice, noting data limitations.</p>
<p>Recommendation 41: The Attorney-General review: a. the changes to the <i>Children, Youth and Families Act 2005</i> that allow for children in youth justice facilities to be isolated for health purposes during the pandemic b. the use of isolation in youth detention facilities during the pandemic and set out the findings in the next Department of Justice and Community Safety’s annual report.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>a. Isolation for health purposes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is being reviewed and consulted on with relevant stakeholders as part of the development of a new Youth Justice Act.</p> <p>b. Data on the use of isolation in youth justice facilities is reported quarterly on the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) website since Q1 of 2020-21 (July to September 2020). DJCS also provides data on the use of isolation monthly to the Commission for Children and Young People (Commission) for monitoring. The Commission publishes this data in its annual report.</p>

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<p>Recommendation 42: A scheme comparable to the Emergency Management Days available to incarcerated adults under the <i>Corrections Act 1986</i>, be developed for children and young people.</p>	Under review	The introduction of such a scheme is being carefully considered and consulted on with relevant stakeholders as part of the development of a new Youth Justice Act.
<p>Recommendation 43: People in protective quarantine should be provided supports and services (including mental health services and cultural supports and services provided by Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations) and means by which to contact family, lawyers, independent oversight bodies and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, including the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.</p>	Support	<p>The Victorian Government takes seriously its Human Rights Charter obligations to mitigate the impact of protective quarantine on prisoners, and has enhanced supports and safeguards for prisoner mental health and wellbeing, including increased mental health services, access to phone calls and video visits with families, activity packs, TVs and time out of cells. This includes proactive psychological well-being services through the protective quarantine support service.</p> <p>Prison and health staff, including Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers and specialist mental health services, are regularly checking in and monitoring the health and wellbeing of all prisoners.</p> <p>The government has recently completed a formal review of the arrangements for protective quarantine. The review contains updated health advice, situates protective quarantine as an acceptable and successful strategy both in Australia and internationally, and identifies Correction Victoria’s intention to enhance prisoner supports.</p> <p>The government is currently investigating opportunities to further support vulnerable prisoners in protective quarantine. In addition, the government continues to review quarantine arrangements to ensure they remain proportionate to the risk.</p> <p>Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Justice and Community Safety has made a concerted effort to maintain cultural supports for Aboriginal prisoners and offenders in light of restrictions placed on movement, access and visitation.</p> <p>Throughout this pandemic, the following supports have been provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers (AWOs) continue to actively support Aboriginal prisoners with most AWOs continuing to work onsite. • Aboriginal prisoners can contact the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) should they wish to access further support or should they wish to have a welfare check performed. • Aboriginal prisoners have been encouraged to maintain contact with family and social supports by mail, telephone, video or email. <p><u>Youth Justice</u></p> <p>Services have continued to operate during the pandemic and additional supports, including daily wellbeing checks from trained professionals for young people isolated for COVID-19 reasons have been put in place. Access to Aboriginal Liaison Officers has continued face to face, and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency’s Through Care program has continued to operate at custodial centres. Aboriginal organisations have been provided with extra funding during the pandemic to address the needs of children and</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
		young people, and in custody, additional cultural items and specific activities were provided to young people subject to isolation due to COVID-19 matters.
<p>Recommendation 44: Enhanced options for communication via technology between Aboriginal people in the justice system, and their families and legal representation, be maintained after the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Support	<p><u>Youth Justice</u> Personal and professional visits occurring virtually will continue to be supported alongside the reintroduction of face to face visits, given the significant increase that has been achieved in connecting young people to their family and professional support teams via the process.</p> <p>Remote court appearances are also being supported through the uplifted technology capacity in custodial centres (commenced late-March 2020).</p> <p><u>Corrections Victoria</u> Opportunities to integrate service innovations – including technology and remote service provision – into Corrections Victoria’s future operating model will be pursued, noting some of the successes identified over the course of the pandemic.</p> <p>Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Justice and Community Safety has made a concerted effort to maintain cultural supports for Aboriginal prisoners and offenders in light of restrictions placed on movement, access and visitation. Throughout this pandemic, the following supports have been provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers (AWOs) continue to actively support Aboriginal prisoners with most AWOs continuing to work onsite. • Aboriginal prisoners can contact Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service should they wish to access further support or should they wish to have a welfare check performed. • Aboriginal prisoners have been encouraged to maintain contact with family and social supports by mail, telephone, video or email. <p>Remote service delivery options have been established for cultural programs to ensure that delivery is possible.</p>

PAEC recommendation	Response	Action taken to date and commitment to further action
<p>Recommendation 45: Corrections Victoria undertake a comprehensive long-term review of the health risks, including mental health and long terms risks, associated with imprisonment of vulnerable and adults and children during pandemics, including the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	Support-in-principle	<p>A range of measures were in place to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission in Victorian correctional facilities and to protect the health and wellbeing of all prisoners, young people in Youth Justice, and staff.</p> <p>Measures were put in place to support the health, mental health and wellbeing of children and young people during the pandemic, as well as to continue services (including education) through remote means. Data is regularly considered about the health and wellbeing risks of young people, including providing information to the Commission for Children and Young People.</p> <p>The range of measures were effective in preventing transmission, while also continuing to provide prisoners with access to services and supports through the use of technology.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Community Safety is currently considering potential options to improve the collection and analysis of data regarding the health of individuals in the adult corrections system. This might include building on existing initiatives like the prisoner experience survey, potentially developing bespoke surveys, and research partnerships.</p>
<p>Recommendation 46: The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions consider publicly releasing the results of the review of security services used in the Hotel Quarantine Program.</p>	Not support due to the commercial-in-confidence nature of the information in question	<p>The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions engaged independent auditors to assist the department with a review of payment claims made by three security firms for work performed in the hotel quarantine program between March-June 2020. The payment claim review began in July 2020 and was initiated after media reports of ‘ghosting’ and underpayment of staff by the security firms.</p> <p>The review is still ongoing. Even once fully completed, it will not be possible to release the results of the review in full because much of the information was provided by the security companies on a commercial-in-confidence basis.</p>
<p>Recommendation 47: The Government consider making public the results of the forensic audit relating to contracts for the Hotel Quarantine Program.</p>	Not support due to the commercial-in-confidence nature of the information in question	<p>The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions engaged independent auditors to assist the department with a review of payment claims made by three security firms for work performed in the hotel quarantine program between March-June 2020. The payment claim review began in July 2020 and was initiated after media reports of ‘ghosting’ and underpayment of staff by the security firms.</p> <p>The review is still ongoing. Even once fully completed, it will not be possible to release the results of the review in full because much of the information was provided by the security companies on a commercial-in-confidence basis.</p>