



# Developing Liveable Communities

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Presentation by

**The Honourable Peter Batchelor MP**  
**Victorian Minister for Community Development**

\*If quoting from this speech, please acknowledge that it was presented to the

**2008 Communities in Control Conference**  
**Convened by Our Community and Centacare Catholic Family Services**

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today and paying my respects to their Elders.

On behalf of the Victoria Government I'd also like to welcome you all to the second day of the Conference.

I want to extend a particular welcome to those of you visiting Victoria from interstate and overseas.

And congratulations again to Our Community and Centacare for organising another extraordinary gathering of people and organisations.

## **WHAT ARE LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES?**

Rhonda has asked me to speak on developing liveable communities.

Liveability often means different things to different people.

But when you ask people the basic question...

*why do you like where you live?*

*or why don't you like where you live?*

... people's answers usually fall into three broad categories.

## **LIVEABILITY ASPECT #1 – PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

**First** people talk about the physical environment.

They talk about things like:

- parks and open space;
- maybe the beach or the bush or rivers and creeks
- and the way their local area is laid out...

...being able to walk or get around their local neighbourhood easily.

## **LIVEABILITY ASPECT #2 – SERVICES & FACILITIES**

The second category of answers is about access to the local services and facilities people need.

That includes access to:

- shops and jobs;
- transport and employment opportunities; and
- school and community centres.

## **LIVEABILITY ASPECT #3 – SENSE OF PLACE & NETWORKS**

The third category of answer to the question – *why do you like where you live?* – is quite different.

People talk about a sense of place and a strong community.

People say they like – or they want – to live in a community that feels special and where there are strong networks.

## **EXAMPLES OF GOVT ACTION TO INCREASE LIVEABILITY**

That's means that if we want to build more liveable communities then we need to be thinking about those three elements of liveability.

And that makes developing more liveable communities a big task.

## **ACTION EXAMPLES – PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

For instance – one of the biggest challenges to our physical environment in Melbourne is our growing population.

As many of you would know – Victoria's population is expected to increase by one million by 2021 – a decade earlier than originally forecast.

It's the result of two factors:

- first, a higher birth rate – and last year we had more than 70,00 babies born in Victoria<sup>1</sup> which is the highest number since the early 1970s<sup>2</sup>
- and second – a growing share of interstate and international migration.

**Even if we had no more children and we stopped all migration from interstate and overseas** – the number of households in Melbourne would **still** keep on growing.

That's because we're choosing to live in smaller and smaller family units and there are more people living alone.

Some of that new housing will be on the borders of Melbourne.

And we need to improve the layout of those new communities – because in the past it hasn't been as good as it could have been.

But we can't have all the new development on the borders of Melbourne.

Some of our new communities will also have to be within the existing areas of Melbourne – and in other cities in Victoria.

And that means creating new types of housing in existing areas.

That won't be easy.

But it will be vital if we want to keep Melbourne – and other Victorian cities – places where people want to live and raise a family.

## **ACTION EXAMPLES – ACCESS TO SERVICES**

The second aspect of liveability was about access to services and local facilities.

With a growing population and with an ageing population there are huge pressures on our state-wide services – like hospitals, schools and transport.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3239.0.55.001?OpenDocument>

<sup>2</sup> ABS cat. no. 3105.0.65.001 Australian Historical Population Statistics

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[www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/cic)

- Over the last 10 years in Victoria we've put large amounts of resources into rebuilding our hospital system.
- We're also providing funding to rebuild or renovate every state school in Victoria over the next 10 years.

And I'll come back to some of the opportunities that creates a little later on.

We've also committed an extra \$10 billion dollars to improve the public transport system.

And that means in particular more buses – for the outlying areas of Melbourne.

But as well as investing in those services we've also put extra funding into making those services more accessible for people who are missing out.

We know, for instance, that some groups miss out on the services that make a big difference to people's lives later on.

That's why in Victoria we've made kindergarten effectively free for low income families.

It's why we've funded 57 new Children Centres that bring different services together under the one roof.

And incidentally those Centres have now become a model for the Commonwealth.

We've provided extra resources:

- so that more new families get access to Maternal and Child Health services;
- so that more women get help to give up smoking and drinking during pregnancy; and
- We're also offering major new investment in disability services – particularly to help people stay independent and to enter the workforce if that's what they want.

We've called that package of extra support *A Fairer Victoria*.

It has been a major area of investment for the Victorian Government – more than \$4 billion dollars in new funding over the last four years including \$1 billion in this year's budget.

We think that better access to services is one practical way of creating fairness.

It's also the practical way of **increasing social inclusion** – because not having access to basic services is part of what creates social **exclusion**.

## **ACTION EXAMPLES – BUILDING A SENSE OF PLACE & STRONG LOCAL NETWORKS**

That brings me to the third aspect of liveability – building a sense of place and that there are strong local networks that can support people if they need it.

It's a crucial element of liveability.

But it's also a challenge because it's an area that Government hasn't traditionally been involved in.

What I want to describe are four practical examples of how we're supporting that aspect of liveability in Victoria.

## **EXAMPLES – \$\$ FOR VOLUNTEERING SMALL GRANTS**

My first example is about volunteering – because volunteers often provide the local support services that help people when they are in need.

There are the high profile examples of how that happens through fire fighting or during emergencies.

But it happens in many other ways.

There are the volunteers who help refugee communities.

There are the volunteers who help drive local country football and netball teams.

And there are the volunteers who help teach seniors how to use the internet.

Whatever they do – we know that the number of people volunteering is still very high – more than one million Victorians volunteer each year.

But we also know that volunteering is changing – as the community itself changes.

That's why – over the last four years – we've put new resources into the sector to help it respond to those changes.

One of the most successful ways of doing that has been through our grants program that helps small volunteer groups.

We've now given out almost 1000 grants to help those groups recruit new volunteers and expand the range of work they do.

We recently revised the guidelines for these grants – to make it easier for small groups to apply.

So I want to urge any Victorian groups here to visit the grants page of my Department's website – at [www.dpcd.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au) – and consider applying.

## **EXAMPLES – \$\$ FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING INITIATIVES & COMMUNITY RENEWAL**

You can also build a stronger sense of place and stronger local networks by involving people in the life of their local community.

At the simplest level – that can mean more people being involved in local sporting clubs or going to local community events.

But we can also go further – by offering people the opportunity to become involved in thinking about and planning the future of their local community.

Over the last three years – through our Community Renewal and Community Building Initiatives – we have been working directly with:

- small communities that are going through very rapid change; and
- communities where we know disadvantage is concentrated.

We've offered those communities the resources and the support to bring people together to agree on the needs of their local community.

Some communities are naturally very good at that.

For example, in Community Renewal projects, more than 6000 hours of volunteer contribution have been made.

And in Community Building Projects, more than 4000 people have attended community workshops.

Some communities need more help – and we've offered those areas extra resources to help them build the skills of community members.

And in areas where disadvantage is concentrated – the support we've offered has included help to coordinate the range of services provided in one area.

That means more linkages between different services and more responsiveness to the specific needs of that community.

## **EXAMPLES – \$\$ FOR COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES**

We are also helping to create new types of local employment and training opportunities.

That's particularly important for people who usually struggle to access mainstream services.

Working with groups like the Brotherhood of St Laurence and AMES [Adult Multicultural Education Services] – we've had particular success with a model called Community Enterprise.

Community Enterprises use a small business model to help people get workplace training and on-the-job experience.

More than 70 community enterprises already exist around Victoria – offering everything from landscaping to catering services.

They've already created more than 280 jobs and helped train more than 390 people.



Because they use a small business model they can become sustainable in the long term.

And in this year's Victorian budget there is new support for a Community Enterprise Catalyst – to help community organisations develop and support new enterprises around the state.

## **EXAMPLES – OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH SCHOOLS REDEVELOPMENT**

My final example of building stronger local communities is **not** about funding!

It's about thinking of new opportunities to coordinate the work of state government, local government and community organisations.

Earlier I referred to our plan to renovate and rebuild every state school in Victoria over the next 10 years.

That will create some unique opportunities for local community groups to piggyback on that redevelopment.

For instance, it could mean libraries and computer centres that are owned and used by schools and the local community.

It could mean new shared community meeting rooms and training centres.

It could mean greater community access to school sport and recreation facilities.

Those new types of shared community facilities will help more people get access to the local services they need.

And they'll also help bring different groups together under one roof – which helps to build greater social inclusion.

## **PLUS A NEW OFFICE FOR THE COMMUNITY SECTOR**

Those are four examples of practical ways that we can help build stronger local communities.

What links all those examples is the involvement of the community sector – the big and small groups that make up the not-for-profit sector in Victoria.

One of the clearest messages we have heard from the community sector in Victoria is that government doesn't always work well with them.

We think that in Victoria we could do more to cut through the red tape that often hampers the community sector.

And we also think there should be a dedicated area of government that can represent the interests of the community sector within government.

That's why in Victoria we have created a new Office for the Community Sector.

It will be headed by Lynne Wannan – and many of you will know Lynne from her long involvement in children's services and adult education in Victoria.

Her experience and her advocacy skills will give the community sector a very strong voice in government.

And I'm keen that the new Office helps to drive some solutions to some of the most pressing problems facing the community sector.

That includes:

- **simplifying** the regulations about reporting and fundraising...  
... particularly for small groups;
- **examining** ways of creating a leadership program that can help to create the next generation of community sector...
- and helping to **establish** a portable long service leave scheme for people employed in the community sector...  
... and that will help the sector to retain the staff they do employ – rather than having them poached by business or by government!

The work of new Office will play a big part in creating more liveable communities in Victoria.

That's because the community sector is one of Victoria's great resources.

Our estimate is that there are around 120,000 community organisations in Victoria.

Some of them are large and employ many staff in many different locations.

Others are small and based entirely on volunteers.

But whatever their size they are also a great resource for Victoria.

That's why I want to thank all of the Victorian groups represented here for the work they do.

Welcome again to our international and interstate guests.

I hope you all enjoy the rest of the Conference.