

Context:

Widening gaps, rapid growth

Families, children and young people in the City of Whittlesea are disadvantaged currently in relation to the provision of local human services. This is despite very high levels of demand. In addition, like other Interface Councils, local residents are geographically isolated from service centres and service provision is not keeping pace with population growth and demand.

Despite the current demonstrated needs and the projected growth rates, the City of Whittlesea continues to receive inadequate levels of funding for many basic services. The City of Whittlesea, together with the other Interface Councils, is faced with a unique set of challenges.

Increased State and Federal Government investment in social infrastructure and program delivery is essential to achieve a basic level of service provision. Linked to this is the need for improved public transport provision to enable convenient community access to services. Unless human service systems are responsive, flexible, well resourced and timely, social problems emerging amongst vulnerable communities may develop into longer term and more entrenched disadvantage.

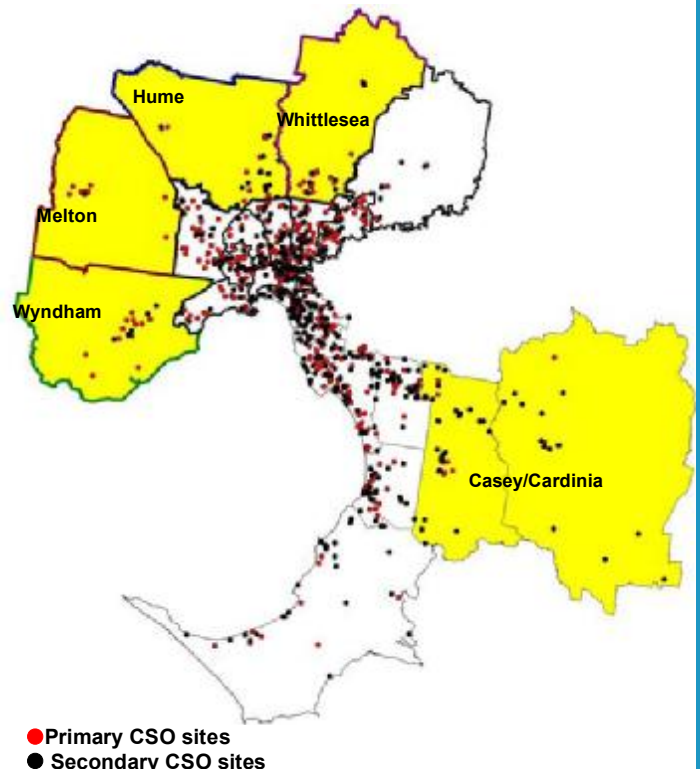
Although additional funding has been delivered through the *Growing Communities Thriving Children* package, which will make some headway in addressing the gaps in services for children, it must be recognised that families span across age groups. The needs of young people have largely been neglected or not addressed in a coherent manner and remain as critical as those of children.

The provision of services, in particular community and health related services, was raised as a community priority in the City of Whittlesea's 2008-2012 Community Plan consultation process.

The graphic below clearly illustrates the disparity in DHS funded community service organisations between the inner city areas and outer growth areas such as the City of Whittlesea.

Concentration of DHS-funded CSOs* in inner suburbs (2007)

(N&WMR and SMR)



* Excludes kindergartens

The following Fact Sheets outline some of the priorities established to address this service imbalance. They represent the required recurrent funding. Related infrastructure is covered under the Community/Neighbourhood Infrastructure sections.

Community Service Priorities



Fact Sheet: Family Support - Child First

Our Municipality

The City of Whittlesea is located 20km north of Melbourne. It is a large municipality covering an area of 490 square km of both urban and rural land and has a current population of over 134,000. The City includes the suburbs of Bundoora, Donnybrook, Doreen, Eden Park, Epping, Humevale, Kinglake West, Lalor, Mernda, Mill Park, South Morang, Thomastown and Whittlesea. The City of Whittlesea is a designated growth area and is experiencing a sustained period of rapid urban growth, particularly on the urban fringe. Since 2001 around 16,000 people have moved in to the municipality and over 9,500 extra dwellings have come on line. This growth is predicted to remain strong for the next 25 years or more with a projected increase in our population to 240,000 by 2031.

The municipality faces the distinctive challenges of balancing the dynamics of urban areas, rural areas, rapid growth, social disadvantage and high demand for services. The City has one of the most culturally diverse populations, with over 48% of residents coming from non-English speaking backgrounds. Whittlesea has also the fourth highest population of Indigenous people in metropolitan Melbourne. The City of Whittlesea is characterised by pockets of high socio economic-disadvantage, ranking the sixth most disadvantaged on the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage and the fourth most disadvantaged on the Index of Education and Occupation.

Currently, families, children and young people in the City of Whittlesea are disadvantaged in relation to the provision of local human services. In addition, like other Interface Councils, local residents are geographically isolated from service centres and current service provision is not keeping pace with population growth and demand.

To accommodate this growth, diversity and high service demand, the City requires practical responses that balance community development, economic growth and environmental wellbeing. The Council believes this can only be achieved in partnership with local community service organisations and the State and Federal Government.

The Need

The health and wellbeing of infants, children and families is important now and for the future of Victoria. The delivery of well funded human service programs that are able to respond appropriately to the changing needs of children and their families rests primarily with the State and Federal government.

Recent years have seen an emphasis on investment in vulnerable children by the State Government in the form of Best Start, Family Support Innovations and most recently Child FIRST (Family Information Referral Support Team).

Child FIRST is a new, visible entry point in the community to an integrated network of child and family supports, providing earlier intervention for vulnerable children in the community and preventing unnecessary exposure to, and progression into, the Child Protection system.

An alliance of State funded family services providers exists to govern this integrated approach, known as the North East Metropolitan Child and Family Services Alliance, and is responsible for Child FIRST and the State funded capacity for family services. The Alliance comprises the State Government funded family services capacity in the North East sub-region and includes: Anglicare, Berry Street, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Children's Protection Society, Darebin City Council, North Yarra Community Health, Kildonan UnitingCare, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, and the Yarra City Council.

Children's Protection Society (CPS) manages Child FIRST in North East Melbourne, a facilitated pathway into the family support services provided in Whittlesea and the four other municipalities.

In Whittlesea, Anglicare Victoria - Plenty Valley takes the lead for coordinating the allocation of referrals for family support services via Child FIRST and via Anglicare Victoria - Plenty Valley, CPS, and Kildonan UnitingCare. Referrals are prioritised for allocation on the basis of highest need.

Vulnerable children, young people and families thus have privileged access to Family Services support for assistance with

- Parenting skills and capacity
- Child-Parent relationships
- Child development
- Social inclusion and family and community connectedness

Characteristics of vulnerable children and families:

- Significant parenting problems that may be affecting the child's development
- Serious family conflict, including family breakdown
- Families under pressure due to a family member's physical or mental illness, substance abuse, disability or bereavement
- Young, isolated and/or unsupported families' significant social or economic disadvantage that may adversely impact on a child's care or development.

New family support resources were invested in Whittlesea as part of this development with an additional recurrent \$480,000 per annum which translated into an additional 1.5 EFT Family Support Workers to each of Anglicare Victoria - Plenty Valley, CPS and Kildonan UnitingCare in Whittlesea. This brought the recurrently funded Family Support program in Whittlesea from \$670, 422 recurrent to \$1,092, 422, representing a 69% increase in resources.

The new system came into effect in April, 2007.

There was an immediate 60 per cent increase in referrals to family services in the North East, through Child FIRST and traditional referral pathways.

Early demand patterns have settled in other municipalities, however Whittlesea sustains a high level of demand with very few cases with lower levels of child risk gaining access to family support services, as they compete unfavourably with families that present with very complex high needs, and higher levels of child risk.

Although Child FIRST has been very successful in ensuring access to support for the most vulnerable, keeping children in their own families and communities if at all possible, there is a significant gap in the capacity for family support services to provide early intervention and prevention services. On at least one occasion since the new system began there was a waiting list of high needs families with no prospect of allocation to a vacancy in family services in a 6 week period.

Whittlesea

- 450 new referrals were received in Whittlesea in 07-08
- Whittlesea cases represents 32% of the demand for family support services in the North East
- Whittlesea case load is an increasing share of North East activity

Table 1: Referral for Family Services in Whittlesea

07-08	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
No.	107	111	113	119
%NE	28%	34%	32%	35%

- Persistent high levels of demand for family casework services for vulnerable children/families unable to be met within a 2 week referral to service time frame.
- Family support services within Whittlesea are already performing or over- performing to funded targets.
- Compared with the other four municipalities in North East catchment where supply and demand track more closely – growth in these areas, mapped to child protection referral activity, has been better predicted by DHS than in Whittlesea. A possible explanation lies in the fact that of the five municipalities in North East catchment, Whittlesea is the only population growth area, and also has the least developed services base.
- The system for managing demand is coordinated and transparent within the family services system in the catchment therefore the demand outlined is a true demand picture.

- There is a resultant under resourcing of prevention and early intervention services in Whittlesea and it is not apparent how this will be resolved within current Federal and State funding levels for family services.
- The Commonwealth funded Family Relationship Centre's (FRC's) are in Broadmeadows and Greensborough with no services outlet in Whittlesea.

Proposal

Increase investment of State Government and Federal Government family support into prevention and early intervention services in Whittlesea to the equivalent level of investment in tertiary end prevention accessed through Child FIRST priority allocation arrangements i.e \$1 million recurrent per annum.

This would take the form of parenting groups, supported playgroups, early childhood interventions with vulnerable children, wrap around family support to universal services – child care, schools, birthing services and community development.

Cost

\$1 million

State and Federal Government Policy Alignment

A Fairer Victoria: Strong People, Strong Communities

Getting the best start in life is critical for successful learning and development in future years. The better a child's start in life, the greater his or her chances of attaining the education and training they need to get the job and lifestyle they want later in life. Developed nations all over the world are making strategic investments in children in the early years to provide the core building blocks for all children to have a successful life. This is important for breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage that can lead to deep divisions within society and result in higher levels of crime, poor health and family breakdown.

A Fairer Victoria – The Continuing Commitment

Ensuring that universal services provide real opportunities for all Victorians by providing support at the most critical transition points in people's lives, especially for vulnerable groups and communities.

Priority Area One: Getting the Best Start

Early years support for children and families most at risk

'Intensive early years support for children and families most at risk can make a profound difference

'Extending home learning and the network of supported playgroups specifically for children from disadvantaged areas, and boosting maternal and child health services to meet the growing number of births, are among further steps to support the development of all Victorian children.'

Every Child Every Chance: Acting in the best interests of vulnerable children and youth, Victorian Government factsheet

Child-centred, family-sensitive practice will be promoted and supported through...a reliable network of services that intervene earlier and provide additional help to families when and where they need it.

Labor's Plan for Early Childhood, Election 2007 Policy Document

The international evidence for investing in the early years – in all aspects of a child's development, including health, education, family and community support – is now overwhelming.

Australia's future will be shaped by how we support our children's development today. Our children's early years are arguably their most important. Federal Labor understands that investing in the health, education, development and care of our young is a sound investment that benefits the individual, our community and the economy.

Fact Sheet: Thomastown- A Site for Community Renewal

Our Municipality

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The Need

The City of Whittlesea recognises that addressing disadvantage and reducing inequality within our communities requires a partnership approach between the community, Council, local businesses, agencies and the State Government. The State Government's Community Renewal program provided an excellent vehicle to improve opportunities for all Victorians, particularly those at risk of being 'left behind'.

The City of Whittlesea calls on the State Government to reinstate funding for Community Renewal in the next budget round and consider Thomastown West-Main St. as a site for attention. The City believes this area has the demography, physical characteristics and the opportunities to significantly benefit from Community Renewal initiatives.

Approximately 7,000 people live in the area. They demonstrate considerable cultural diversity and a number of indicators of disadvantage. Key factors include:

- Over 20% of the population is 60 years of age or older.
- Household incomes are significantly lower than the Melbourne average.
- The proportion of single parent families is higher than the Melbourne average.
- A larger proportion of residents need assistance with core activities.
- Thomastown Primary School has the highest rate of take-up of Education Maintenance Allowance in Whittlesea.
- Low school retention rates.
- Higher unemployment rate than the Melbourne average.
- Over half the population was born overseas.
- 73% of the population speak a language other than English at home.
- The main non-English languages are Macedonian, Italian, Greek, Arabic, Vietnamese and Turkish.

The relative disadvantage encountered by residents within Thomastown is shown by the scores on ABS SEIFA indices. Thomastown is clearly amongst the most disadvantaged suburbs in Victoria, ranking in the lowest decile¹ on the SEIFA indices of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage and Education and Occupation, the second lowest decile on the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage and the third lowest decile on the Index of Economic Resources.

Table 1: ABS SEIFA Indices (2006)¹

	Thomastown	City of Whittlesea	MSD
Advantage-Disadvantage Index Score	898	966	1028
Disadvantage Index Score	892	978	1022
Economic Resources Index Score	961	1010	1018
Education-Occupation Index Score	891	939	1026

The City of Whittlesea recognises that strong communities are built through resident participation and engagement. The Council believes this State Government program provides an excellent opportunity for Council to enhance its work with the community, Government, agencies and businesses to improve the wellbeing of residents, reduce risk factors and ultimately improve life chances for children, young people and families.

The City of Whittlesea is committed to urban renewal in the older established areas of the municipality and has provided funding in its 2008 budget for this purpose. A Community Renewal process would feed into this.

- Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre (TRAC), Thomastown Library and Community Centre precinct are in the heart of the area. The City of Whittlesea is also undertaking a redevelopment of TRAC.

- There are four schools within the designated area including Thomastown West Primary and Thomastown Secondary Schools. There are opportunities to link more with the schools and undertake joint planning.
- Edgars Creek forms the spine running through the centre of the area from north to south, providing an opportunity for environmental projects along the Creek.
- High Street Shopping Centre and Railway Station are important community facilities and infrastructure.
- Council's relationship with the traders would be a basis for engaging them in a Community Renewal process.

Opportunities

The Whittlesea Community Futures (WCF) project, a partnership of State and Local government, not-for-profit agencies and organisations, and the business sector, has Thomastown as one of its areas of focus. The WCF Partnership combines a wide range of expertise, local knowledge and resources with the aim of improving services and facilities for young people, families, children and residents in Thomastown/Lalor, Epping North and Mernda.

The WCF Partnership believes local people can improve the way services are delivered to families, children and young people by sharing their knowledge, opinions and ideas. Hence, the Partnership wants local people to be at the forefront in actively designing, planning, developing and implementing projects within their communities. At this stage in the Project, the established area of Thomastown Main Street is a major focus of the Partnership's work.

Strong communities are built through resident participation and engagement. The Whittlesea Community Futures (WCF) Project Partnership aims to work within a strengths-based, community building framework to improve the wellbeing of residents, reduce risk factors and ultimately improve life chances for children, young people and families in the Thomastown area. There is wide agreement concerning the lack of human services and facilities in the municipality.

¹ Deciles constitute ten percent of a population.

The service delivery goal of the Thomastown Precinct

The project is to develop a holistic and responsive service system for children from early years to young adulthood with the aim of addressing and improving the health and wellbeing indicators for children and young people. The Main Street Thomastown Precinct project has formed four working parties to explore and develop the project directions of:

- Early years & transition to school project that focuses on improving early years outcomes for Thomastown families.
- School to Work project that focuses on post compulsory options for young people and the transition of students from secondary school to work.
- Precinct Alliance - A two-part project that focuses on the physical and alliance relationships between TRAC, the Thomastown Library, the Secondary College and Primary School.
- Parent Education Program – an ongoing program that supports child-parent relationships and parenting skills and includes transition from primary to secondary school.

Community engagement has been prioritised by the Main Street Thomastown Precinct Working Group to ensure that the school communities and the general community understand and have input into the process.

The Proposal

Because the area demonstrates both significant disadvantage and significant opportunities, the State Government should consider the area of Thomastown West, within the City of Whittlesea, as a Community Renewal site in the next round of funding allocation.

Cost

As determined by the Department of Planning and Community Development.

State Government Policy Alignment

A Fairer Victoria: Building On Our Commitment:

STRATEGY 12: BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES: 'Strong communities, where people are actively involved in community life, have better health, higher school retention rates and lower rates of unemployment and crime...Communities with high levels of participation and social connectedness are better placed to deal with disadvantage. Communities are stronger and people are empowered when they are directly involved in making improvements in their local neighbourhoods and when they can have a say in matters important to them'.

A Fairer Victoria: Strong People, Strong Communities A Fairer Victoria – The Continuing Commitment:

Providing targeted support to the highest risk areas with significant effort and resources directed towards addressing place-based disadvantage.

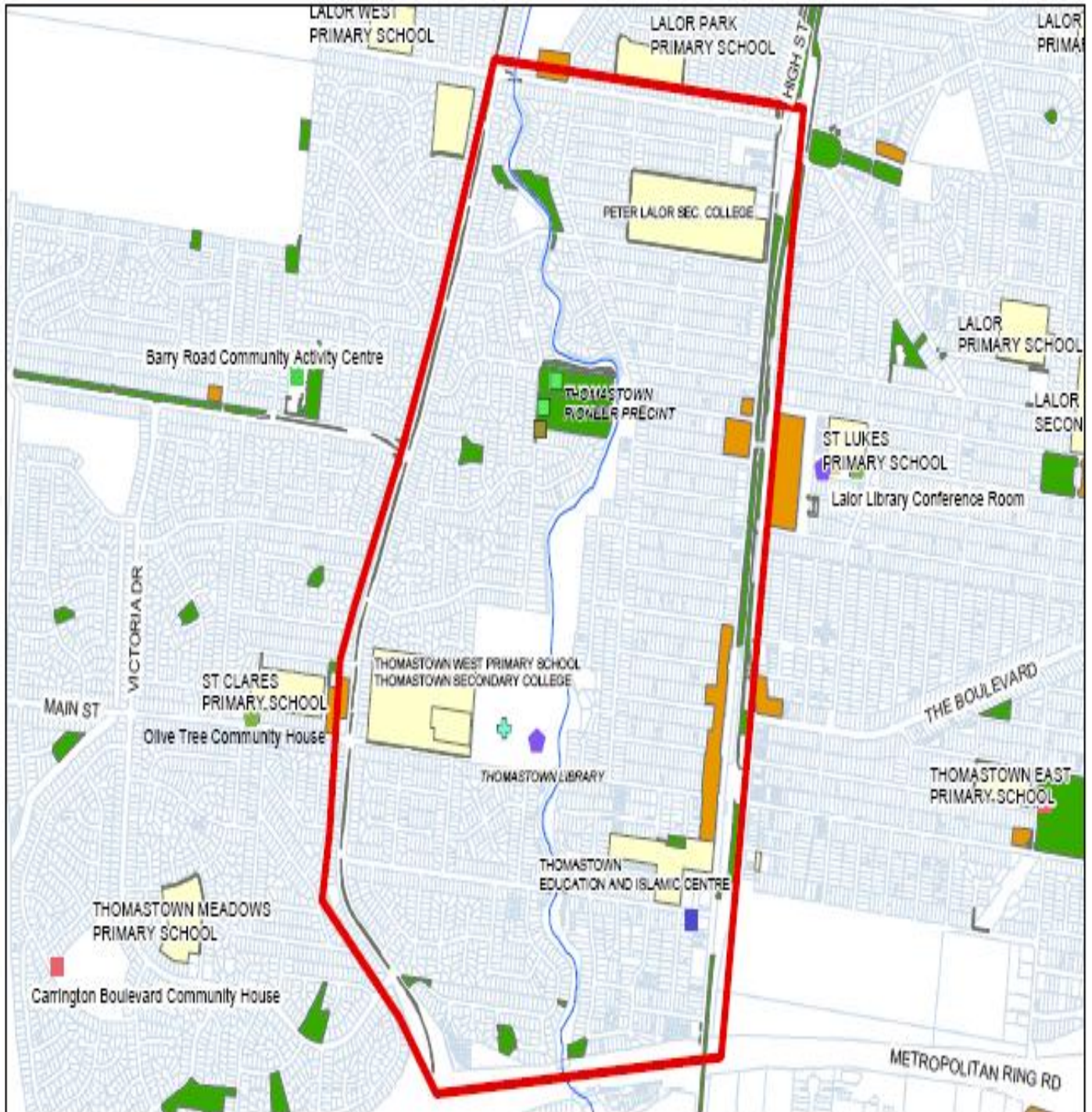
A Fairer Victoria

Priority Area Four: Developing Liveable Communities – *Strengthening neighbourhoods and local communities*

Building up communities' assets make them better places to live and work, helping attract skilled labour and capital investment.Building local strength can be particularly important in places where there are...rapid growth and economic or social change. Integrating investment in community assets with smart planning is critical to these communities. We need to ensure that people are not disadvantaged because of where they live.



Map of Proposed Thomastown Community Renewal Area



Fact Sheet: School Holiday Respite Program

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The Need

Parents of children with disabilities who have high support needs, mainstream vacation care providers, staff of local special schools and the Whittlesea Disability Network have all identified an urgent need for specialist vacation care programs tailored to the needs of local children with high support needs who have experienced difficulty accessing and participating in mainstream vacation care programs.

Council, in conjunction with Whittlesea YMCA, has developed and operated a pilot program, WhiSKHA (Whittlesea Special Kids' Holiday Activities), which has demonstrated quality and appropriate vacation care provision for primary school-aged children with high support needs. This program supports local working parents to balance their work and family responsibilities as well as providing much needed respite for their families.

WhiSKHA has been operating successfully since 2007. The small group program with staff/student ratio of 1:1 takes account of the children's high support needs and allows flexibility to respond to individual children's needs, interests and capabilities. Held in the same facility as a mainstream vacation care program, WHiSKHA aims to include children with disabilities in a range of school holiday activities including swimming, ten pin bowling, music and dance, cooking, art and craft activities and community excursions.

Council currently funds the pilot program at \$32,000 per annum, enabling the program to operate for 1 week of each holiday period. This has enabled 19 children to attend 1 or 2 days each school holiday period. The program is reviewed in conjunction with all stakeholders after each holiday period, with positive feedback from all children and their families.

While access to the program has been extremely valuable to the current users of the program, all families are requesting more days and more sessions and many other families have not been able to access the service.

The Proposal

The mainstream vacation care program operates every day of the holidays. An increase in the number of WhiSKHA places and sessions is urgently needed to enable Council to meet demonstrated need and to provide equity of access to holiday programs for families who have children with disabilities and high support needs.

It is proposed to double the number of places and sessions per holiday period while still retaining the small group size and staffing ratio.

Cost

Council will continue to provide \$32,000 funding per annum and requests additional funding of \$96,000 per annum from State or Australian Government to enable the proposed expansion of service to meet community need.

State and Federal Government Policy Alignment

Funding Boost for Out-Of-School Care, Media Release August 7, 2008, Hon. Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and Hon. Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services

The Australian Government has recently announced \$3.88 million for 769 after school and vacation care places for secondary school-aged children with disability, which includes \$679,000 to create 185 new places in Victoria. According to August 2008 media releases, seven disability and child care providers will deliver the services in the coming months across Victoria.

A Fairer Victoria – The Continuing Commitment:

.....Strengthening assistance to disadvantaged groups including.....new options for people with a disability.

Priority Area Three: Improving Health and Wellbeing – Reducing health inequalities and promoting wellbeing

Much more can be achieved through targeted investments to reduce the unfair burden of disease on disadvantaged Victorians.....continually improving mental health services and the wellbeing and life options of people with a disability are among the important challenges.

Access will also be expanded to early childhood services for children with a disability or developmental delay...

Access to respite services...will be expanded to enable ... more help for carers.

Fact Sheet: Dental Services

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The Need

Good oral health is important for general health, wellbeing and quality of life. A healthy mouth enables people to eat, speak and socialise without pain, discomfort or embarrassment. However, current dental services within the City of Whittlesea fail to meet community needs. Problems with accessibility, lengthy waiting lists and costs all combine to make the provision of dental services problematic and unsatisfactory.

Generally, research has found:

- Over 40% of adult Australians cannot access dental care when they need it.
- Differences in the use of dental services amongst disadvantaged groups, in particular government concession card holders, migrant populations and Indigenous populations.
- There are significant disparities in oral health and access to dental services between low and high income adults. People from low socio economic backgrounds experience:
 - Higher rates of complete tooth loss.
 - Higher rates of extraction and lower rates of fillings.
 - Longer periods since the last dental visit.
 - Avoiding or delaying care because of costs.

In the City of Whittlesea, Plenty Valley Community Health (PVCH) reports that:

- The adult restorative dental services has a 24 month waiting list.
- The waiting list for dentures is 26 months.
- School dental service waiting time is unfathomable. PVCH chair utilisation is stretched to the maximum with access to services severely restricted.

- Despite inadequate levels of resourcing PVCH is piloting innovative dental programs targeted at new and emerging 'in need' communities such as the 'survivors of torture' program and the 'Saturday morning clinic for the Indigenous communities' in a culturally appropriate environment. However, additional resourcing is required if such programs are to be sustainable.
- Being in an Interface municipality the PVCH catchment also includes rural areas stretching out beyond the municipal boundaries.
- The PCVH Dental Services requires additional chairs and professional staff to meet this service demand.

Proposal

Currently, PVCH has 9 Dental Chairs and is establishing a mobile service for Whittlesea Township. Urgent efforts need to be made to lift the Whittlesea community's access to dental services to an adequate level.

In particular, PVCH requires

1. Expansion of services within the Epping location, to better accommodate the existing and growing community.
2. A 2 chair clinic in Whittlesea township to accommodate the needs of residents in the rural north.
3. Extension of services to the proposed South Morang Health precinct.

State Government Policy Alignment

A Fairer Victoria Strategy 5

"Access to universal services is the foundation for addressing disadvantage in the community, but not all Victorians have equal access to the services that meet their fundamental needs. Through A Fairer Victoria, we aim to reduce the barriers faced by some individuals or groups in accessing services and facilities that most Victorians take for granted."

A Fairer Victoria: Strong People, Strong Communities

Priority Area Three: Improving Health and Wellbeing – Reducing health inequalities and promoting wellbeing

'Everyone needs good health to fully participate in employment and community life.'

Priority Area Three: Improving Health and Wellbeing – Reducing health inequalities and promoting wellbeing

'Much more can be achieved through targeted investments to reduce the unfair burden of disease on disadvantaged Victorians. Tackling the causes of preventable disease by encouraging.....better nutrition and oral health...are among the important challenges.'

'Avoidable dental decay is the second most costly diet-related disease in Australia, with an economic impact comparable with that of heart disease and diabetes.'

Federal Government Policy Alignment

Taking Responsibility for Dental Health, Media Release May 13, 2008, Hon, Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health and Ageing

'The Rudd Government recognises the importance of dental care, and will deliver more accessible and better targeted dental care. With 50,000 preventable hospital admissions for dental conditions every year, and 650,000 Australians on public dental waiting lists, the time for action is long overdue.....Many Australians don't even try to get their dental problems fixed, the waiting lists are so bad. Working people are living with decay and oral disease, which can lead to further complications with their health.'