



Justice & International Mission

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

JUST
focus

**2010 Victorian
Election Kit**



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The purpose of this document

In the *Statement to the Nation* made by the Inaugural Assembly in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia recognised that Christian responsibility to society is fundamental to the mission of the Church. It promised that the Uniting Church response to the Christian gospel would always involve us in social and national affairs.

This document is an expression of our faith as Christians. It illustrates how this interacts with being a citizen of Victoria, and our commitment to share with all Victorians in the search for meaning, purpose and community in life. It contains material to help church members identify important issues facing Victoria, listen to politicians and political parties with discernment, and engage with the political process to seek outcomes for our society consistent with the Gospel.

This document is non-party political. It seeks to explore the implications of the Gospel for society in Victoria. It is an invitation to engage in the political process and take it seriously and it shapes the kind of society we live in.

We believe that these papers seek to take up this responsibility by addressing some of the issues the Justice and International Mission Unit has been working on for some time. They represent areas where a shift in policy would make a significant difference to many people's lives especially the lives of people most disadvantaged.

The position papers seek to express the Synod's position on these matters consistent with resolutions of the Synod over recent years.

The comments on each area about what the parties are saying were from the political parties' policies that were available at the time of writing. Most policies had not been released and therefore it is important to go to the websites of the relevant political parties if you want the full policy as it is released in the lead up to the election.

Participating in pre-election discussions

Talk

- As a congregation, organise a local forum for candidates in your area to talk about issues concerning your community. It is wise to provide clear parameters for such a meeting. This could be a meeting for members of the church, or wider community.
- As an individual or in a group, arrange a meeting with your current local member and other candidates standing in your electorate. Helpful information on how to go about organising a meeting is available on the JustAct website.

<http://www.justact.org.au/how-to-just-act/#5>

Write

- Write a letter to your current local member to seek clarity about their position on these issues.
- Write to other local candidates in your area indicating both local and Victorian issues you would like to see addressed by the Government and community.
- Write to the leaders of all major parties expressing your desire and values for the future of Victoria.
- Write an article for your local paper about the things you are looking for in political leadership and the issues you think need to be addressed.
- Contact your local media about relevant issues.
- Write letters to the editor of local, regional and national papers.

Pray

- Pray for the leadership of Victoria, for those who make decisions, for those who are affected by those decisions and for our nation.
- In Sunday worship, choose a focus issue each week for information and/or prayer.

People, parties and policies

The easiest way to find out more information about political parties, their origins, agendas and policies, is to visit their websites. What follows here is a list of websites of political parties which currently hold seats in the Victorian Parliament:

Liberal Party of Australia, Victorian Branch <http://vic.liberal.org.au>

Australian Labor Party, Victorian Branch <http://www.alpvictoria.com.au>

The Nationals <http://www.vicnats.com>

Australian Greens <http://vic.greens.org.au>

Democratic Labor Party <http://www.dlp.org.au>

Please note that this list is not an exhaustive list of parties and candidates standing for the election, and it does not constitute an endorsement of any political party. For more information about other political parties and candidates as it becomes available, visit the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC) website.

<http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/>

The VEC can also help you find out which Victorian Electorate you are in and who are your local Members of Parliament.

<http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/Lookup/LocalityFinder.htm>

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation also provides online coverage of elections at its dedicated website

<http://www.abc.net.au/elections>

2010 VICTORIAN ELECTION: ALCOHOL REFORM

The 2010 Synod resolved:

To become a member of the Community Alcohol Action Network (CAAN) that has the aims of reducing cultural pressures that encourage Australians to drink unsafely, including the alcohol industries marketing strategies, popular culture's celebration of binge drinking, and social expectations that lead to complacency regarding alcohol problems.

Why this issue?

- The misuse of alcohol is second only to tobacco as a preventable cause of death and hospitalisation.
- More than 3,000 deaths per annum in Australia are attributable to the misuse of alcohol.
- In Victoria alone, there were an estimated 2,879 alcohol-related deaths from the period of 2000 to 2003.

Link between Alcohol Related Violence and Number of Liquor Licences

- Research has established that there is direct link between the number of liquor licences in an area and the level of alcohol related violence, regardless of the type of liquor licence.
- There has almost been a ten-fold growth in liquor licenses in Victoria over the last decade to over 19,000. In the same period the number of people hospitalised by alcohol misuse has doubled.
- Under the existing clause 52.27 of the *Licensed Premises section of the Victorian Planning Provisions*, no planning permit is required for a liquor licensee who sells only packaged liquor for consumption elsewhere.
- This has resulted in bottle shops being set up in inappropriate locations, including an example in Preston where a massive liquor warehouse was allowed to open 200m from a Salvation Army rehabilitation centre for recovering alcoholics, despite the protests of local police and the Darebin Council.
- The Liquor Control Advisory Council recommended to the Victorian Government in March 2008 that the planning exemption for bottle shops should be scrapped. The change has also been recommended by VicHealth, the Australian Drug Foundation, Cancer Council Victoria and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre.

Secondary Supply Laws

- 'Secondary Supply' laws refer to laws which make it illegal for an adult to supply children with alcohol without the permission of the parent or guardian of the child. Such laws exist in Queensland, NSW and Tasmania.
- While children below 18 are generally not permitted to drink on licensed premises, underage persons can be supplied with and consume an unlimited amount of alcohol in private dwellings.
- The three main locations in which teenagers consume alcohol were the family home, a friend's home and at a party.
- The National Health and Medical Research Council advises that young people under 18 years should avoid alcohol. The brain is likely to be more sensitive to damage from alcohol in childhood and adolescence as it is still developing, leading to learning difficulties and memory problems.
- In 2006 the Victorian Parliament's Drug and Crime Prevention Committee recommended that the *Liquor Control Reform Act 1998* be amended to prohibit secondary supply in private residences, but this advice was not accepted by the government. The advice was rejected on the grounds of the difficulties associated with enforcing such a law. However, such a law would empower parents to seek legal action against those who supply their children with alcohol without the permission of the parents.

Fast Facts

- Australia's overall per capita alcohol consumption is high by world standards.
- The National Drug Research Institute has found that more than 23,000 Victorians end up in hospital every year with serious alcohol-related injuries or illnesses such as liver failure.
- The toll does not include thousands more with minor injuries requiring emergency treatment or GP visits – only serious cases of assault, alcohol dependency, serious falls, alcohol poisoning and stomach pumping, attempted suicides and road trauma.
- An estimated 668 Victorians die prematurely each year from alcohol related causes.
- 31% of parents involved in substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect experience significant problems with alcohol use.
- The 2005 Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey found that in the week prior to the survey, approximately 10% of 12 to 17 year olds reported binge drinking or drinking at risky levels (defined as seven or more standard drinks for males and five or more for females). For 16 and 17 year olds, 20% drank at risky levels.
- Over the past five decades, the average age of initiation to alcohol in Australia has dropped from 19 to 15.5.

What are political parties saying?

- The current Labor Government has reformed liquor licensing fees, so that venues that have higher risks of alcohol related violence or repeatedly breach the conditions of their licence pay much higher licence fees.
- The Coalition has promised if elected they would do away with the existing exemption for packaged liquor outlets contained within clause 52.27 of the *Licensed Premises* section of the *Victorian Planning Provisions*.
- The Coalition has also promised to increase the penalties for failing to leave a licensed premise when drunk, violent or quarrelsome.
- The Greens would ban alcohol industry sponsorship of public events and donations to political parties.
- The Greens would also introduce tougher penalties for venues that continue to serve intoxicated patrons.

Ask your candidates

- If elected, what will their party do to reduce the number of liquor licences in Victoria, given the link between the number of liquor licences and alcohol related violence?
- Will they remove the current planning exemption in the *Victorian Planning Provisions* for packaged liquor outlets?
- Will they introduce secondary supply laws in Victoria to empower parents to be able to take legal action against adults that supply their children with alcohol without their permission?

Keep in touch

Contact the Justice and International Mission Unit – let us know what politicians have said to you and consider joining our mailing list (130 Little Collins Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000 / (03) 9251 5271 / jim@victas.uca.org.au)

2010 VICTORIAN ELECTION: CLIMATE CHANGE

The Uniting Church's position:

The Uniting Church regards climate change as a serious threat to the future and integrity of life on earth¹. The Christian commitment to the environment arises out of the belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with creation – a relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God. While the natural environment is a gift to us – its resources being necessary for our survival – it has intrinsic value as part of God's good creation. We believe that God's will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not destruction by human beings².

In 2008, the Synod passed a resolution calling for the need to limit global warming to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels and for Australia to take a leadership role in achieving a global agreement to do this.

Fast facts – what does the research say?

The Impacts of climate change in Australia

- Climate change is expected to have the following impacts in Victoria:
- Increased drought amidst a growing demand for water
- Flooding and sea-level rise
- Increased frequency and intensity of storms
- Greater air pollution and higher urban temperatures
- Higher summer temperatures and heatwaves
- Increased risk of respiratory problems, water quality issues for drinking water³.

Impact on low income earners

Households in Victoria currently contribute 17.5% of Victoria's emissions. Energy and water prices are also increasing. Energy prices increased 50% from 2000 to 2008 and are still rising. Water prices are expected to rise by over 50% in the next four years.

Increasing energy efficiency tackles both these issues, particularly for people on low incomes who often live in houses that are expensive to heat and cool and have inefficient appliances.

What do we need to do?

The Uniting Church is calling on the Victorian Government to:

- Commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% by 2020 and at least 60% by 2050, based on 1990 emission levels.
- To reduce residential, industrial and government per capita electricity consumption and ensure low-income people will still have access to affordable electricity.
- To provide financial incentives for households to take up renewable energy and gas boosted solar hot water where appropriate.

What are political parties saying?

The Australian Labor Party

- Have set a target for Victoria to reduce emissions by at least 20% by 2020 compared to 2000 levels
- Have committed to reducing the greenhouse gas emissions of Victorian brown coal-fired generators by up to four million tonnes over the next four years
- Will implement a plan to raise the energy efficiency of Victorian homes to an average of 5 Stars by 2020;
- Have set a target to generate 5% of our electricity from solar energy by 2020.

The Coalition

The Victorian Coalition supports a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared with 2000 levels by 2020 as well as measures which increase efficiency in energy and water use and ways to improve collaboration between communities, business and government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions⁴.

The Coalition also has a wind farm policy which restricts the placement of turbines to no less than two kilometres from the nearest home unless a contract between the resident and wind farm developer is agreed, the reinstatement of local government as the planning authority for wind farm applications and the exclusion of wind farms in or near National and State Parks, designated tourist areas and designated regional population growth corridors⁵.

The Greens

The Greens would aim to achieve a 20% reduction within 5 years by immediately transitioning forestry operations out of native forests into plantations; change the net feed in tariff scheme to a gross one so that all electricity generated in the home generates income; expand the scheme for changing over to energy efficient appliances; set minimum energy efficiency standards in rental properties; and commit to no new coal generators and a rapid phase out all existing brown coal plants.

Ask your candidates

- How they will support action on climate change?
- What do they propose to do to support renewable energy technologies in Victoria?
- What do they propose to do to support energy efficiency measures?
- What will they do to ensure low income earners can continue to afford basic services like electricity and water?

Keep in touch

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Sources

¹ UnitingJustice, *For the Sake of the Planet and all its people*, November 2006

² UnitingJustice, *Building an Economy for Life*, Federal Election resource 2010

³ Government of Victoria (September 2009) *Climate Change impacts*, Accessed 8/09/10, <http://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/Greenhouse/wcmn302.nsf/LinkView/57A8049B13F0C6EFCA25719A0028D4840CC3BC22387CB40DCA2575BE0002E027>

⁴ *Coalition supports climate action*, Media Release, Friday, September 03, 2010

http://marywooldridge.com/ms_detail.asp?ID=291

⁵ *Wind Farm Fairness and Certainty under a Ballieu Government*, Media Release, Thursday 13 May 2010

2010 VICTORIAN ELECTION: GAMBLING REFORM

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has expressed deep concerns about the on-going expansion of gambling opportunities in Victoria dating back to 1979.

In 1979 the Synod resolved:

To request the State Government not to proceed with the introduction of a casino in this State. Synod believes that there is already more than sufficient facilities for gambling available in Victoria, and there is neither need nor demand for a casino.

In 1990 the Synod resolved to:

To declare its opposition to the introduction of further gambling facilities within Victoria in the form of casinos, poker machines and Tabaret.

In 1999 the Synod resolved:

To call on the State Government to implement strong consumer protection measures for gamblers through legislation to stop their exploitation by the gambling industry.

Why this issue?

- Federal Government assessment of problem gambling within Australia has found that between 80,000 and 160,000 Australian adults have severe gambling problems and estimated the negative social costs of gambling to be at least \$4.7 billion.
- Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs), or pokies, remain the key form of gambling that cause harm in the Victorian community, a point the Premier has made.
- Research released late 2009 found that 91% of people with gambling problems used pokies.
- In this latest work, 64% of people with gambling problems said that pokies were the gambling activity they spent most on, with table games being the next gambling activity most was spent on (11%).
- Problem gamblers were significantly more likely to have experienced a difficult life events such as the death of someone close to them, a divorce, a major injury or illness to either themselves or someone close, or trouble with work, their boss or superiors.
- People with gambling problems are five times more likely to report having poor health compared to non-problem gamblers, with significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders.
- Approximately 0.7% of Victorian adults have gambling problems and a further 2.36% of adults are risky gamblers.
- However, this masks the true extent of problem gambling, with up to 28% of regular pokie gamblers having gambling problems¹.
- Some of the negative impacts from gambling problems include: mistrust, lying and arguments related to gambling²; relationship breakdown and divorce; financial hardship and significant; domestic violence, with 13% of people in counselling for problem gambling (or one in eight) reporting domestic or other violent incidents related to their gambling³; loss of housing; bankruptcy; crime (especially fraud); and contributing to suicide

Fast Facts

- People who gamble on pokies on a weekly basis lose an average of \$7,000 to \$8,000 per year.
- Total losses on gambling in Victoria in the 2008-2009 financial year were \$5,110 million, of which \$2,707 million was lost on the pokies, \$1,218 million at the Casino, \$729 million on wagering (racing, football and sports betting) and \$448 million on lotteries.
- The Productivity Commission estimated that around 40% of pokies revenue came from people with gambling problems⁴.
- The Government taxes on gambling in the 2008-2009 financial year were \$1,647 million, excluding the GST component.

- The Victorian Government continues to spend a pittance on research to identify measures to curb problem gambling, spending just \$1.4 million per year (less than one dollar in a thousand).
- Money for counseling services to assist people with gambling problems is less than \$1 in every \$100 collected in gambling taxes.

What are political parties saying?

- The Labor Government has introduced a range of measures to curb problem gambling, key ones being banning public advertising of pokies, banning smoking in pokie venues (which caused a significant drop in gambling losses by heavy gamblers), running problem gambling advertising campaigns, and getting rid of TABCORP and the Tatt's Group running pokies in Victoria.
- In addition the Labor Government has required ATMs to be removed from pokie venues by 2012 and has promised to introduce a system to allow gamblers to set time and loss limits within a venue by 2013.
- At the same time the Labor Government has indicated that they are willing to allow for the development of a second casino in Victoria in Mildura, allowed for an extra 150 table games in Crown Casino and introduced a system to allow people to gamble through interactive television.
- At the time of writing the Victorian Coalition is yet to release their policy on gambling.
- The Greens are committed to reducing the number of pokies in Victoria to 10,000 from the current 30,000, to seeing pokies located in venues where pokies make up less than 25% of venue revenue, restrict venues to no more than 25 pokies (current limit is 105), remove ATMs from pokie venues, a bet limit of \$1 per button push, introduce an effective system to allow gamblers to set loss limits and winnings over \$250 must be paid by cheque.

Ask your candidates

- What measures their party supports to reduce problem gambling?
- Specifically does their party support:
 - Introduction of a limit of \$1 bet per button push on pokies;
 - Limiting the loss on pokies to a maximum of \$120 an hours;
 - Banning ATMs in pokie venues;
 - Limiting venue opening hours to between 10 am and 12 am;
 - Introducing a 'duty of care' for pokie venues to discourage problem gambling;
 - Introducing a 'pre-commitment' system that allows gamblers to set loss limits that stop the gambler from continuing to gamble on pokies for at least 24 hours after the limit is reached and that is not linked to a loyalty scheme that would encourage increased gambling?
- Does their party support additional casinos being built in Victoria?

Keep in touch

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Sources

¹ Centre for Gambling Research, Australian National University, *2003 Victorian Longitudinal Community Attitudes Survey* Gambling Research Panel, April 2004, pp. 87, 93.

² Productivity Commission, *Australia's Gambling Industries*, Report No. 10, AusInfo, Canberra, 1999, p 7.1.

³ Productivity Commission, 1999, p. 7.28.

⁴ Productivity Commission 2010, *Gambling*, Report No. 50, Canberra, p. 16.



2010 VICTORIAN ELECTION: INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

In 1982, the National Assembly meeting resolved to:

Commit itself to a ministry of reconciliation, recognising the injury inflicted on the Aboriginal and Islander people of Australia by the injustices and exploitation that have accompanied 200 years of colonisation of their land, and call on all Australian Christians, black and white, to participate in this ministry.

Why is this an issue?

- Steps have been taken towards reconciliation and addressing racism and Indigenous disadvantage in Victoria, but there is still more that needs to be done.
- Racism against Indigenous people is still far too common an experience for Indigenous Victorians.
- At the same time the current Victorian Government cut off funding to Reconciliation Victoria for work towards changing attitudes in the non-Indigenous community towards greater respect of Indigenous Victorians.
- Reconciliation Victoria has played an important role in engaging non-Indigenous people to think about, understand and participate in actions that can lead to reconciliation with the Indigenous community. This is essential if racism against Indigenous people is to be addressed. Reconciliation Victoria has provided a valuable networking role for local reconciliation groups and in promoting reconciliation activities and events throughout Victoria.
- Reconciliation Victoria provided co-ordination with the activities of the national body Reconciliation Australia. State Reconciliation Councils exist in NSW, South Australia and Queensland.
- Housing continues to be a significant need for parts of the Indigenous community in Victoria.
- The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) has called for the establishment of an appropriately funded Commissioner for Aboriginal Social Justice. VCOSS has argued that the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in Victorian prisons is symptomatic of the disengagement of Indigenous people with the justice system.
- The establishment of a Commissioner for Aboriginal Social Justice was recommended in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) Implementation Review Report (2005).
- The Implementation Review Report recommended that the on-going monitoring of the Recommendations from the RCIADIC, in partnership with the Indigenous community, cannot simply be left to individual departments or to the Indigenous community alone. Instead it was proposed that this role should be assumed by an adequately resourced independent Commissioner for Aboriginal Social Justice, supported by a monitoring unit.

Fast facts

- The 2006 Australian census shows there are approximately 33,000 Indigenous people living in Melbourne and regional Victoria. This is approximately 0.65% of the total Victorian population.
- Children make up close to 45% of the Victorian Indigenous population, almost double the proportion of children in the non-Indigenous population.
- As a percentage of the total population, the locations with the greatest concentration of Indigenous people outside the Melbourne metropolitan area are: Mallee (including Mildura, Swan Hill and Robinvale), Goulburn (Shepparton) and East Gippsland (Bairnsdale).
- The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report *Indigenous housing needs 2009* found that an additional 523 dwellings were needed to meet extreme need in the Indigenous community in 2008 and 1,058 dwellings were needed to address all needs.
- On almost all indicators, Victoria is doing better than most other states in the provision of Indigenous housing. However, 2.5% of Victorian Indigenous people do not have stable housing, compared to only 1.6% in Queensland and 1.3% in NSW (although the number of Indigenous people sleeping rough in Victoria is half the rate of Queensland).

- The Victorian Government has around 1,380 dwellings in the Office of Housing's Aboriginal Rental Housing Program
- Indigenous Victorians continue to be over represented in the criminal justice system, and in 2007 were 13 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Victorians (ABS, Prisons in Australia — 4517.0, 2007, p. 18).
- The number of Indigenous 3-year-old Victorians in kindergarten increased from 89 in 2008 to 197 in 2009.
- Under the current government, up to 10 hours per week of kindergarten is free for all Indigenous 3 and 4 year old children.

What are political parties saying?

- The Labor Government introduced legislation to make it easier to reach negotiated settlements of native title on Crown Land.
- Both the Liberal-National Coalition and the Greens have stated that they support continuing and increasing funding for Reconciliation Victoria. The Coalition has pledged \$200,000 a year to fund Reconciliation Victoria.
- The current Labor Government has provided \$50,000 for Reconciliation Victoria to assist Local Governments develop plans for Reconciliation activities.
- The Greens say they would resolve all outstanding native title claims in Victoria within 5 years using the Labor Government's new native title legislation.
- The Greens would provide governance training opportunities to Indigenous groups to assist them in taking control of their own affairs.

Ask your candidates

- What steps will their party take to address the housing needs for Indigenous Victorians, as identified by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare?
- What actions would their party take to give Indigenous Victorians greater control over their own lives and government services provided to them?
- Will their party reinstate funding for Reconciliation Victoria, without taking this money from services for Aboriginal people?
- Will their party support the establishment of a Commissioner for Aboriginal Social Justice as recommended in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) Implementation Review Report (2005)?

More information

www.aboriginalaffairs.vic.gov.au

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2010 VICTORIAN ELECTION: MENTAL HEALTH

Christians believe that each person is made in the image and likeness of God, therefore, each person has inherent and equal dignity. The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania believes in the rights of all people to adequate health care and opposes all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms. People, including those living with mental illness should be afforded due respect.

Why this issue?

The Victorian Government has initiated the *Because mental health matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 – 2019*. The strategy shows that around 3% of the Victorian population is estimated to have severe mental illness in any one year. The Synod supports the full implementation of the strategy. However, mental health reform in Victoria remains in desperate need for effective health services as current treatment services are very limited and often ineffectual. Government and community support is required to stem recidivism (i.e. repeat offending) of mentally ill offenders. Of particular concern is the effectiveness of reviews of involuntary treatment orders and complaint handling systems. Other areas that need addressing include: mental health services for older people; capacity building for homelessness, trauma treatment services for asylum seekers and vulnerable children; social inclusion; physical health of people with mental illness; and changes to the *Mental Health Act* in order to make it more accountable and transparent.

Fast facts

Mental Health and Prisons

- The increase of people with mental health problems in our prisons reflects an increasing prevalence of mental illness, a failure of health services to intervene before the illness causes social harm and inadequate prevention or early intervention within the justice sector.
- Almost 50 per cent of offenders in custody have some history of mental illness and 17 per cent are current clients of public mental health services.

Accessing mental health care

- 35% of people with mental health disorders gain access to care compared to 80 – 90% of people with physical disorders.
- Currently, it is estimated that around 56% of people with a mental illness in Victoria are not serviced by either the public or private mental health system.

Prevention and Intervention

- Studies show that assertive, specialised early psychosis intervention models not only produce significantly improved outcomes for young people, but are significantly more cost effective than standard outpatient and inpatient treatment options.
- Many people progress to a state of crisis and significant acute stage of their illness because they have not been able to access an effective intervention at an earlier stage.

Funding

- The burden of disease data for Victoria suggests that the non fatal burden of disease (which covers mental health) is over 20% while the amount of the health budget spent on mental health is 8 – 10%.

What are political parties saying?

Both major political parties (Labor and Liberal) have pledged to expand mental health services in Victoria. Apart from the Victorian Government's "Because mental health matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 – 2019", Labor has pledged to fund mental health teams in major hospitals and have planned more rural mental health services and extra training in mental health.

The Coalition believes that mental health reform in Victoria has stagnated and has pledged to provide a continuous pathway of care, from early intervention to living with a mental illness. As part of the Coalition's mental health reforms, a Mental Illness Research Fund will be established, a *Pathways to Participation* employment program will be initiated and a co-ordinator of mental health beds to get more patients treated sooner.

The Greens' policy aims to increase affordable accommodation being provided for people with mental illness, expanding outreach mental health nursing services for people with mental illness in the community and training police and correctional officers in mental health crisis intervention techniques.

Ask your candidates

- Prison is now increasingly a place for people suffering from a mental illness (there has been an increase in the number of people in prison identified as suffering from a mental illness) — *What will your party do to provide services for mentally ill offenders?*
- Improving the experience of consumers, carers and families has a direct impact on treatment and recovery outcomes. This starts with improved access to services and the ability of consumers and their carers to navigate the service system *What will your party do to support better access to health care for people suffering a mental illness?*
- The appearance of mental health problems in the community could be greatly reduced by promoting positive mental health and responding early in the course of a mental health disorder or illness *What will your party do to support a prevention and intervention approach to mental illness?*
- In receiving adequate care, people with a mental illness need more effective practices and expanded services dealing with this issue *What level of funding does your party support for mental health services in Victoria?*

More information

- Because mental health matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 – 2019
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/reformstrategy/index.htm>
- Meeting the Challenges of Country Health (policy for the 2006 Victorian Election)
<http://www.alpvictoria.com.au/media/docs/Meeting-the-challenges-of-Country-Health-c17191c7-bddb-4d70-ac4a-83d680b68dc3.pdf>
- Meeting our Health Challenges (policy for the 2006 Victorian Election)
<http://www.alpvictoria.com.au/media/docs/Meeting-our-health-challenges-9dc419be-c9f2-40e8-9290-8ea22dd070cd.pdf>
- Coalition re-igniting mental health reform
<http://vic.liberal.org.au/News/Policies/tabid/189/Default.aspx>
- Mental Illness in Victorian Prisons
http://www.smartjustice.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=26&Itemid=40
- The Greens (Health Policy)
<http://greens.org.au/policies/care-for-people/health>

Keep in touch

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Sources

- 'Because mental health matters': Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy;
- Forensicare and Victoria Police 2008, Symptoms in police cells, Part of Project PRIMeD Police Responses to the Interface with Mental Disorder Melbourne;
- Victorian Greens health policy;
- 'Mental health matters for people in prison' Synod 2010 resolution;
- UCA Statement to the Nation 1977;
- McGorry. Pat, Private email;
- Boston Consulting Group, 2006;
- McGorry. Pat 'Back from the brink: Australia's youth health emergency' Orygen Research Centre, Melbourne.

2010 VICTORIAN ELECTION: PRISON - A LAST RESORT

The Uniting Church in Australia supports a restorative and rehabilitative justice system within Australia. The UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania believes that, society must minimise imprisonment; imprisonment must be a last resort in which the loss of liberty is the sole punishment; and, that prisons must be humane, and managed justly.

Why this issue?

Victorians can be proud of the Drug Court of Victoria, Koori Courts, the establishment of the Neighbourhood Justice Centre in Collingwood as well as the new Assessment and Referral Court (ARC) List at the Magistrates' Court of Victoria (designed to treat defendants with a cognitive impairment, intellectual disability or mental illness more fairly).

Many of these initiatives have enjoyed bi-partisan support. However, recently both major parties have been talking about harsher sentencing in Victoria. Rather than rehabilitation - the focus has been on punishment. Instead, more focus should be given to supporting families, provision of education and assisting mentally ill offenders.

Fast facts - What does the research say?

Sentencing

- When people are provided with more information on a particular case similar to the information a judge would have they impose a very similar sentence to a judge.
- Suspended sentences are as effective as prison terms in reducing repeat offending rates (slightly more effective for people who have previously served prison time).

Female prisoners and family

- Around 70% of Victorian female prisoners have dependent children, and children whose primary caregivers are placed in prison suffer adverse effects.
- Repeat offending decreases for those who experience good family contact.

Education

- Analysis shows a drop of around 24%-28% in the rate of repeat offending associated with involvement by offenders in vocational education and training programs.
- Recent changes to the training system in Victoria (e.g. students aged 20 who already have a degree or diploma must now pay the full cost of further training at the same or lower level) may have an adverse impact on prisoners access to education.

Mental illness

- The increase of people with mental health problems in our prisons reflects an increasing prevalence of mental illness, a failure of health services to intervene before the illness causes social harm and inadequate prevention or early intervention within the justice sector.

What are political parties saying?

Both major political parties (Labor and Liberal) are pledging to get rid of suspended sentences. The Victorian ALP supports greater availability of Legal Aid and community lawyers; and, promotes awareness of human rights.

The Victorian Coalition believes that there has been a breakdown of law and order in Victoria. It supports: greater provision of policing (as does the Victorian ALP); the abolition of suspended sentences (and ending home detention); banning violent drunks from licensed premises; banning the sale of knives to minors; tough new anti-hoon laws; and, strengthening Neighbourhood Watch.

Greens policy supports: a criminal justice system based on principles of restorative justice and the rights of offenders and victims; prison as a last resort; upholding judicial discretion in sentencing; a repeal mandatory sentencing legislation; implementation of alternatives to imprisonment where appropriate (including restorative justice and diversionary programs); and increasing and widening rehabilitation programs for offenders.

Ask your candidates

- Suspended sentences can be an effective option for lowering rates of reoffending and reducing prison numbers - *does your party support the retention of suspended sentences?*
- As there is a negative relationship between low levels of education, repeat imprisonment and criminal activity (conversely educational attainment is associated with better employment prospects and higher income) - *does your party support better educational opportunities for offenders?*
- Rather than prison being a last resort, the number of prisoners is increasing in Victoria lots of these are women, many of whom have family responsibilities - *does your party support the prison system providing good family connections to break the cycle of crime?*
- Prison is now increasingly a place for people suffering from a mental illness (there has been an increase in the number of people in prison identified as suffering from a mental illness) — *does your party support greater government and community support for mentally ill offenders?*

More information

- Because mental health matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 2019
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/reformstrategy/index.htm>
- Coalition to end home detention
<http://www.tedbaillieu.com.au/files/releases/100114.pdf>
- Coalition to end suspended sentences
<http://www.vic.liberal.org.au/News/MediaReleases/tabid/159/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/1528/COALITION-TO-END-SUSPENDED-SENTENCES.aspx>
- Community Safety: Labor's plan for keeping crime rates low (2006)
<http://www.alpvictoria.com.au/media/docs/Community-Safety-8ebf60cd-23b8-4ce4-82f5-e11dc19061d4.pdf>
- Smart Justice Fact Sheets
http://www.smartjustice.org.au/cb_pages/factsheets.php
- TAFE4all
<http://www.tafe4all.org.au/>
- Vic Greens (Justice policy)
<http://greens.org.au/policies/human-rights-democracy/justice>
- Victorian Government, truth in sentencing
<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/newsroom/10411.html>

Keep in touch

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Sources

Liberty to the Captives (Mandatory Sentencing) (The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly), Prisons (Synod of Victoria and Tasmania resolution), NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sentencing Advisory Council, Equal Opportunities commission Victoria, Australian Institute of Family studies, Victorian Council of Social Service, Australasian Corrections Education Association Inc, TAFE4all, Because mental health matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy, Media Statement: Attorney General Rob Hulls, Coalition Media Statements (suspended sentences, home detention), Victorian Labor's plan for keeping crime rates low (2006), Kim Wells Budget Reply 2010, Victorian Greens justice policy, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Victorian Corrections Victoria Stakeholders Forum.



Why is this issue?

- The demand on Victoria's water supplies is reaching a critical point. Melbourne uses more than 400 billion litres of water per year¹, almost all of which is sourced from rivers and reservoirs.
- Demand could outstrip supply across the Central Region by 2034 and in some places like Ballarat as early as 2015 if no action is taken². The most prominent reason for this has been the prolonged 'drought' in the face of a growing demand for water.
- Whilst drought has always been a part of our seasonal variations, CSIRO projections for climate change show that this trend is likely to be exacerbated. Whilst there is a high level of variability and uncertainty about how the impacts of climate change will be experienced, what we have experienced over the past 11 years is similar to or greater than those expected under high climate change scenarios³.
- Inflows to water storages have already declined significantly over the last 10 years from a long term average of 588GL to 387 GL. In 2006, there were record low inflows of just 165 GL⁴.
- The rains this year do not indicate that droughts will not be more frequent and prolonged into the future.
- The Victorian Parliament's Environment and Natural Resources Committee released a report in June 2009 looking into Melbourne's future water supply.
- It recommended that:
 - Water Conservation and Efficiency to be maintained as the top priority in water management.
 - As part of its water augmentation program, the Victorian Government continue to promote water conservation to avoid the historically large increases in household water consumption that have accompanied the delivery of 'new' supplies of water.
 - The Victorian Government extend the eligibility of the Smart Gardens and Homes Rebate Scheme to non-residential users. [Adoption of this recommendation would allow churches to be eligible for rebates on water tanks.]
 - Targets for stormwater harvesting be introduced. [Stormwater has huge potential as a water source and currently only 0.25% of stormwater is harvested for re-use]
 - A moratorium be placed on the issue of all new bore construction and groundwater extraction licences covered by Greater Melbourne.
 - The contract for the Wonthaggi Desalination Plant be designed to allow the volume of water the plant supplies to be varied, so as not to provide disincentives for water conservation and the development of other water supplies including stormwater and recycling for Melbourne.
 - No additional dams be constructed to supplement Melbourne's water supply.
- The Victorian budget for 2010 - 2011 included \$10 million for household and industry water-saving measures, compared to the \$3.5 billion committed to building the desalination plant at Wonthaggi, the \$750 million for the Sugarloaf pipeline and the \$688 million for the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.



What are political parties saying?

- The Victorian Labor Government has prioritised two large infrastructure projects; the Wonthaggi Desalination Plant and the North-South pipeline as a means of addressing the projected shortfall in water supply in the long term. Both of these projects have been highly controversial and received opposition from local residents. These projects also risk undoing

the successful water saving conservation and efficiency measures adopted by Victorians.

- The Labor Government says it remains committed to maintaining water conservation and efficiency as a fundamental component to its action plan to secure Melbourne's water supply.
- The Victorian Liberal Party has it will shut down the North-South pipeline, only reopening it in the case of "critical human need".
- The Greens would prioritise harvesting, treatment and use of storm water run-off.
- The Greens would end logging in water catchment areas.

Ask your candidates

- What will their party do to drought proof the State if elected?
- How will they promote water conservation, including use of storm water, uses for recycled water (such as industrial uses) and water efficiency devices?
- How much will they spend annually on promoting water savings and water efficiency?
- How will they balance the needs of farmers for water related to agricultural production versus the need to provide environmental flows in our rivers?

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Sources

¹ Department of Sustainability and Environment (2008), *Victorian Water Accounts 2006-2007*, p.15

² Victorian Government Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Sustainable Water Strategy Central Region: Action to 2055*, October 2006, p.14

³ Department of Sustainability and Environment, (2009) *Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy*, (2009), p.50

⁴ Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Our Water Our Future: The next stage of the Government's Water Plan* (2007)



