

# TANIA MAXWELL MP

MEMBER FOR NORTHERN VICTORIA  
DERRYN HINCH'S JUSTICE PARTY

## 2022-2023 State Budget Submission

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### 1. Drug Court and AOD rehabilitation unit – Mildura (\$35m)

There were 475 drug offences in Mildura in the year to 30 June, 2021. Wastewater analysis confirms that consumption of most drugs is higher per capita in regional communities, including Mildura. Family violence is prevalent in the region and court reports regularly note the incidence of drug or alcohol use in offending. Mildura police report drug use as a contributing factor to many incidents of bad driving. Mildura ranks fifth in Victoria on the SEIFA index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage<sup>1</sup>. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2019 Household Survey found recent illicit drug use had increased in the Murray PHN from 9.5% in 2016 to 14.3% in 2019.

The 2014 KPMG evaluation of drug courts in Victoria found a 31 per cent lower rate of re-offending for drug court participants compared with the control group in the first 12 months, a 34% lower rate of re-offending within 24 months and a reduction in the average seriousness of offences. At an average cost of \$26,000 per participant, including residential rehabilitation if required, drug courts are viewed as an important intervention tool in the efforts to reduce drug-related crime and accrue substantial savings through reducing prison populations.

Drug courts offer a cost-effective alternative to imprisonment and align with the therapeutic justice principles of seeking evidence-based interventions to reduce crime. The KPMG evaluation found the cost of the DCV was \$26,000 per participant compared with \$197,000 for a two-year incarceration. The availability of wraparound supports, such as rehabilitation and housing, are essential to driving down rates of criminal re-offending and improving wellbeing.

Drug courts have been expanded from Dandenong to Melbourne, Ballarat and Shepparton, and there has been a trial of the County Court Drug and Alcohol Court. Mildura, as a remote community with concerning rates of crime and social vulnerability, would benefit from a dedicated drug court and supporting AOD rehabilitation unit to provide a therapeutic-oriented, judicially-supervised intervention for this community. The KPMG report noted Mildura as a potential location to benefit from a drug court, as well as a dedicated AOD rehabilitation facility.



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Derryn Hinch's Justice Party has requested the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) provide an estimate of the cost to establish and run a drug court in Mildura. Based on expenditure in other budgets for drug courts in other regions, DHJP estimates funding of \$15 million could establish a drug court in Mildura, and \$2 million could fund the annual operation of the court<sup>i</sup>. Recognising that drug courts have eligibility criteria, the government could consider operating the court three days a week, with a view to expanding the court in the future to meet demand.

Derryn Hinch's Justice Party has also requested the PBO provide an estimate of funding required to establish and run a residential rehabilitation AOD in Mildura, based on the model being built in Wangaratta. At the time of submission these costings are not available, but DHJP requests the government to commit \$20 million in the forthcoming budget to this important project.

## 2. Education First Youth Foyers – Wangaratta and/or Wodonga (\$24.3m)

GOTAFE (in Wangaratta) and Wodonga TAFE (in Wodonga) are each seeking support to build an Education First Youth Foyer (EFYF) at campuses at Docker Street and McKoy Street, respectively.

In turn, Derryn Hinch's Justice Party is endorsing these requests for State Government funding to help deliver either, or both, of these proposals.

The EFYF model was developed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Launch Housing and already operates successfully, with the support of the Victorian Government, at GOTAFE in Shepparton. EFYFs provide accommodation and supportive, integrated learning for people aged 16 to 24 who are at risk and/or experiencing homelessness.

A five-year, longitudinal study of the three existing EFYFs in Victoria provided clear evidence of the model's sustained positive outcomes. The study showed that 85% of young people were in work or education in the year after their exit from the EFYF and that 75% of young people completed a Year 12 equivalent or higher during their time in the EFYF. Other demonstrable outcomes included increased feelings of safety, better mental health, more stable housing and enhanced living skills, and improved social connection and civic participation.

At its core, the EFYF model is premised on the philosophy that vulnerable young people can best build (or rebuild) improved lives and real independence when they become educated, employable and genuinely empowered as human beings.

### EFYF Wangaratta

Homelessness has been identified as an ever-increasing challenge in Wangaratta, compounded by associated risks of crime, youth disengagement, social isolation, mental health issues and family violence. The rate of registered mental health clients in the city is among the highest in the state (at 23.7 clients per 1,000 population). A 2016 wellbeing and youth study undertaken by the Rural City



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of Wangaratta and the University of Melbourne found depression, anxiety and stress are the major challenges faced by local students.

Family violence and insecure housing are the two most common reasons that young people present to specialist homelessness services for assistance. Wangaratta has a higher incidence both of family violence and child protection investigations per 1,000 population than the state average. For each of these people, engagement with education and employment opportunities are pivotal to improved life outcomes.

GOTAFE seeks \$11.4 million to build and establish an EFYF in Wangaratta and \$1.3 million per year for operational costs. The EFYF Wangaratta will combine 40 studio apartments with community living spaces. A detailed business case, which in part illustrates that the EFY model provides systematic, integrated pathways in a supportive environment to reduce the risk of long-term homelessness and unemployment, has already been prepared for this project and provided to the government.

## EFYF Wodonga

The Wodonga proposal is likewise focused on providing vulnerable youth with stable and affordable accommodation in order to help support them in study and to break the cycle of homelessness and displacement. It is supported by a consortium of seven key stakeholders: Wodonga TAFE, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the City of Wodonga Council, BeyondHousing, Junction Support Services, Yes Unlimited and the Albury City Council.

As in Wangaratta, the creation of the Wodonga EFYF is most directly aimed at:

- reducing the number of young people requiring social housing and homelessness services;
- increasing the number of young people completing education qualifications;
- increasing the number of young people productively employed; and
- building greater levels of confidence, self-worth and mental strength among its clients.

According to the proponents of the proposal, the need for accommodation and education solutions for young people in the Albury-Wodonga region has never been greater – given the devastating collective impact over the past 12 months locally of bushfires, the COVID-19 pandemic and border closures. Youth unemployment numbers and the volume of calls for assistance to homelessness service providers have spiked substantially in Albury-Wodonga during the pandemic.

In the absence of philanthropic funding contributors, the partners in the project need \$12 million in State Government support for construction of the EFYF Wodonga and \$2 million per year for ongoing operational and youth support services. Like the Wangaratta model, there would be 40 studios at the planned foyer in Wodonga.



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## 3. Euroa railway precinct business case (\$100,000)

The Inland Rail Project will have implications for the greater railway precinct of Euroa, which falls beyond the scope of the Australian Rail Track Corporation and into the hands of the State Government.

This presents an opportunity for the Euroa railway precinct to be considered in a holistic sense for rail and road users, pedestrians and cyclists, and for planning to meet future population, tourism and community needs.

The Strathbogie Shire Council has been keen to work with the Victorian Government to ensure that planning, funding and timing for a redevelopment of the Euroa railway precinct is collaborative and includes the community.

Department of Transport officials have issued to the ARTC the state's requirements relating to amenity, accessibility and aesthetics for the Euroa precinct and associated, surrounding networks, and is working with the ARTC to identify the project boundaries.

Strathbogie council requires \$100,000 funding to develop a business case for the Euroa precinct, planning that will involve the wider community and consider development opportunities for areas outside the Inland Rail project boundaries.

## 4. The Wodonga Project (\$2.25 million over three years)

Modelled on the very successful Geelong Project, *The Wodonga Project* brings together schools and service providers, with engagement from Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Department of Education and Training representatives, to apply a collective impact approach and a whole-of-community response to youth disadvantage.

The 'community of schools and services' (COSS) model of early intervention meets many of the recommendations outlined in the Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria and Royal Commission into Mental Health, which is detailed in the attached document. The Geelong Project interim report noted significant improvements for young people, including a 40% reduction in presentations to the Youth Specialist Homelessness Service System, a 20% reduction in Early School Leaving, a shift to improved school engagement and stability of at-risk cases.

A 2017 survey of nearly 700 young people in Wodonga showed that 57% of students in year 7 and 9 felt socially disconnected, 36% witnessed or were involved in family violence, and only 19% accessed mental health services when needed. The Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring Service (VCAMS) found in 2018 that 20.4% of young people in the Ovens and Murray region showed high levels of psychological distress. Referrals of 434 young people have been made to the Navigator program in Wodonga since its inception and a further 200 referrals were held back.



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The Ovens and Murray Regional Partnership made *The Wodonga Project* a priority area for 2021. The project steering group proposes that the project pilot in Wodonga should include three public schools: Wodonga Senior Secondary College, Wodonga Middle Years College (Huon and Felltimber campuses) and the Wodonga Flexible Learning Centre.

Initial modelling in Wodonga suggests the project could be delivered to targeted schools for \$752,000 per year and DHJP asks the government to fund *The Wodonga Project* as an extension pilot site for three years.

## 5. Rural Outreach Service – Benalla Rural City (\$50,000 per year)

Benalla Rural City has funded a successful Rural Outreach Service to provide a vital link between rural residents and appropriate services in the city to support health and wellbeing.

The Rural Outreach Worker, Ivan Lister, is a well known and loved local who has established strong trust between rural residents and support services including Benalla Health, community health nurses and doctors. The program receives referrals from family members, community members, Centrelink, council staff, local schools, general practitioners, police, or self-referral.

The state government provided funding in 2020, through the Minister for Health, for a Rural Outreach Program in the Wimmera Southern Mallee<sup>iii</sup>.

Without any external funding, council has funded this service since 2007 for two days per week because of the continued success of the program and demonstrated demand in the community. The council reports that referrals have more than doubled during the pandemic. A contribution from the government to sustain this high-demand, community-led service would be welcomed in the local community.

## 6. Bright Health Precinct hospital redevelopment (\$10.75m)

Alpine Health has undertaken strategic planning processes since 2015 to determine future needs for Bright and surrounding areas for the next 20 years. As a Multi-Purpose Service, Alpine Health's facility in Bright combines hospital, aged care, medical and allied health services.

Bright hospital was built in the 1970s and 1980s and is no longer fit for purpose. Bright Hospital supports a population of around 5000 people, including residents and visitors, and manages approximately 2500 urgent care presentations each year. During the Legislative Council regional sitting in Bright in 2021, I raised the need for redevelopment with the Attorney-General representing the Minister for Health, and a joint meeting was held with the hospital to discuss future needs. I will continue to collaborate with the Victorian Government and fellow members for Northern Victoria on the region's health needs.



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The Victorian Government supported Alpine Health with money from the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund for a feasibility study and business case for the Bright Health Precinct. The redevelopment of the Bright Health Precinct is a \$40 million project encompassing upgrades to the existing hospital; redevelopment of Hawthorn Village as a new health education facility and health worker accommodation; co-location of new, private medical services; and a new residential aged care facility.

\$10.75m is sought from the state to fund partial-refurbishment of the existing hospital, including nine new acute rooms, a dedicated palliative care suite, a production kitchen, replenishment of engineering infrastructure that is at end of life, and new treatment rooms to expand delivery of specialist medical and allied health services for inpatients, outpatients and aged care. The feasibility study and business case has been provided to the government by Alpine Health to support this funding request.

Alpine Health and the local community are also seeking a funding commitment of \$26m from the Federal Government to develop a new high care residential aged-care facility, so that residents do not have to relocate to other communities to receive the care they need. Once the new aged care facility is complete, Alpine Health will seek a further \$2 million from the state to repurpose the existing Hawthorn Village as a new health education and health worker accommodation facility.. Alpine Health Institute runs education and training programs in healthcare, including nursing, and this program is a key pathway for workforce development in the region. Bright suffers an acute shortage of worker accommodation and affordable housing, which is substantially impacting its local economy and delivery of essential services.

## 7. Murray Basin Rail Project – re-examination of the plan (\$5m)

Completion of the Murray Basin Rail Project is vital to remove more than 20,000 heavy vehicle trips from roads, improve network efficiency and deliver a sustainable freight rail network for the future of the Victorian agriculture sector.

Derryn Hinch's Justice Party seeks \$5m from the Victorian Government to match Commonwealth funding for a re-examination of the Murray Basin Rail project standardisation plan.

The revised business case of 2020 noted performance issues persist with the network while it remains in a configuration state that was 'not intended to be permanent', and is shifting freight from rail to road. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission recent stevedoring report showed a decline in the percentage of freight load into Melbourne Port from 13.9 per cent in 2014 to 6.1% in 2021. VicRoads data reports northbound traffic has tripled to 60,000 more trips each year in both directions, from 40 trucks a day in 2009 to 119 trucks in 2020 along the Sunraysia Highway. This increased, high-load traffic is impacting regional roads including damage to shoulders.

The Infrastructure Victoria *Infrastructure for the Regions Report* (December 2020) notes that freight volumes in regional Victoria are forecast to grow at an average rate of 1.5 percent each year



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between 2014 and 2051, and recommends rail as critical infrastructure to support agriculture, manufacturing, mining and energy sectors.<sup>iv</sup>

The Sunraysia Mallee Port Link (SMPL) intermodal project could carry 60% of 80,000 tonnes of annual freight loads in far north west Victoria – creating jobs, reducing carbon emissions, boosting manufacturing, improving road safety and reducing the cost from paddock to port. This project requires the conversion of the Maryborough to North Geelong line to standard gauge. Ouyen Inc, as a stakeholder in the SMPL intermodal project, has provided some recommendations to government to solve issues relating to the Ballarat line that were one of the reasons for the revised business case. Examination of these solutions would provide certainty to the north west farm sector for the future.

Thank you for considering these important investment requests for Northern Victoria.

Yours sincerely,



**Tania Maxwell MP**  
**Member for Northern Victoria**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://profile.id.com.au/g21-region/seifa-disadvantage>

<sup>ii</sup> [Submission 36 - Drug Court of Victoria.pdf](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [Wimmera Gets Extra Mental Health Outreach Support | Premier of Victoria](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Infrastructure Priorities for the Regions \(infrastructurevictoria.com.au\)](#)

