

28 April 2024

Jonathan Spear  
Chief Executive Officer  
Infrastructure Victoria

**RE: Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy**

Dear Colleagues,

The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy.

The planning, design, access to, and use of infrastructure has a significant impact on public health and health equity. Access to, and regular use of well-located, and well-designed infrastructure such as parks, public transportation, and community facilities can help to prevent illness and injury and promote health and wellbeing. When infrastructure investment is focused in areas experiencing higher levels of disadvantage, infrastructure can also help to address health inequities.

The below submission outlines VicHealth's support for Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy. Particularly, it's focus on First People's self-determination, unlocking housing supply, and improving access to healthy, safe, climate resilient infrastructure that supports Victorians health and wellbeing. We also endorse 21 recommendations that are closely aligned to VicHealth's focus on addressing barriers to good health in neighbourhood and built systems in our 10-year strategy.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission in greater detail, including how VicHealth can support the refinement of Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy.

We value the partnership between our two organisations, and our shared commitment to the wellbeing of Victorian communities. We look forward to continuing to work together over the coming years.

Kind regards



Prof Anna Peeters  
Chief Executive Officer

## **VicHealth's submission on the Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy**

### **About VicHealth**

VicHealth was established under the Tobacco Act 1987 (Vic) with a mandate to promote good health for all Victorians. We are a pioneer in health promotion, with a long and strong history of working with our partners, stakeholders, and Victorians to discover, implement and share solutions to the health problems facing Victorians and Australians. Together, we work to keep people healthy, happy and well – preventing chronic disease and reducing the burden of poor health on everyday Australians.

### **About VicHealth's 10-year Strategy and built environment focus**

VicHealth released a 10-year Strategy in 2023, with a vision to transform Victoria's health outcomes and evolve our approach from tackling individuals' behaviours to reshaping systems for a healthier, fairer Victoria. To achieve this, VicHealth are focused on reshaping neighbourhood and built systems, food systems, and commercial and economic systems, supported by a commitment to fairness and equity.

The Strategy's focus on reshaping neighbourhood and built systems is to enable increased physical activity, improve social connectedness, and address systemic discrimination and racism in the environments where Victorians live, work, connect, create and play. Specifically, reshaping and influencing the design, access to, and use of infrastructure, buildings, and spaces within communities to address discrimination and improve social, emotional, physical, and mental health.

This includes VicHealth working with priority communities to influence the planning and design of Victoria's built environment (including infrastructure), and advocating for inclusive, community-led, and place-based planning approaches that enable First People's self-determination and connection to Country, while also addressing or reducing the impact of systemic barriers to health equity.

### **Support for Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy**

VicHealth strongly supports Infrastructure Victoria's draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy. Particularly, it's focus on First People's self-determination, unlocking housing supply, and improving access to healthy, safe, climate resilient infrastructure that supports Victorians health and wellbeing.

These align with VicHealth's strategic priorities for the built environment, including but not limited to:

- Enabling First People's self-determination and connection to Country.

- Ensuring all Victorians have access to healthy, affordable homes in places they want to live, and with good access to daily living destinations
- Accelerating the development of healthy, liveable neighbourhoods, including new and improved public transport and bike riding networks, increasing green space, and enhancing walkability, with an initial focus on areas with the poorest health outcomes.
- Increasing resilience to the effects of climate change, with a focus on the Victorians that are most vulnerable and the areas and infrastructure that are most at-risk.

### **Endorsement of specific recommendations**

The following table outlines the specific recommendations in the draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy that VicHealth endorses. We have focused on the recommendations that can drive forward VicHealth's 10-year Strategy and focus on creating healthier, more equitable, and sustainable built environments in Victoria. Where relevant, we have made suggestions to strengthen recommendations.

| <b>Themes</b> | <b>Recommendations that VicHealth endorses</b>   | <b>Statement of support</b>  | <b>Suggestions to strengthen the recommendation(s)</b>  |
|---------------|--|--|---|
| Housing       | 1: Build more social housing<br>7: Rezone locations near existing infrastructure for more home choices<br>22: Invest in secure homes for Aboriginal Victorians<br>34: Speed up household energy efficiency and electrification | <p>VicHealth endorses recommendations 1, 7, 22 and 34 as these help to ensure all Victorian's have access to healthy and affordable housing. Unlocking a greater supply and diversity of healthy, social and affordable homes in places with good access to daily living destinations is critical to supporting the health of all Victorian's, but especially those facing the greatest systemic barriers to good health.</p> <p>VicHealth also supports rezoning to support compact urban development. In addition to support the development of healthy, liveable neighbourhoods, this reduces the need for additional</p> | <p>It's important that new housing (including social and affordable housing, and housing for Aboriginal Victorians) meets the diverse needs of Victoria's changing demographic profile, household sizes, compositions and preferences, and is located in places where people want to live and with good access to daily living destinations (e.g. education, employment, public transport, shops, services etc).</p> <p>Housing can be protective for physical and mental health; however, it can also be harmful<sup>1</sup>. Many tenants in Victoria have reported issues with dampness, mould, and difficulty keeping their homes warm in winter and cool in summer<sup>2</sup>. It is therefore also important that new housing (including social and affordable housing, and housing for Aboriginal Victorians) meets high health and sustainability standards and is resilient to the effects of climate change.</p> |

<sup>1</sup> **VicHealth**, 'Housing and Health Research Summary', VicHealth, n.d., accessed 11 April 2025. [https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Housing\\_and-Health\\_ResearchSummary\\_web.pdf](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Housing_and-Health_ResearchSummary_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> **Tenants Victoria**, 'Is it liveable?', Tenants Victoria, 2024, accessed 11 April 2025. <https://tenantsvic.org.au/articles/files/reports/CPRC-TenantsVictoria-Is-It-Livable-Feb-2024.pdf>.

|                         |  |   |   |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|
|                         |  | expansion to the Urban Growth Boundary, which is a key tool in protecting food security in Melbourne and increasing climate resilience.   | <p>1: Suggest recommending measures to mitigate any disruption to and/or displacement of social housing residents and communities. Large-scale renewal projects are highly disruptive to existing residents, which can result in displacement and negative health impacts<sup>3</sup></p> <p>7: Suggest recommending measures to ensure rezoning occurs alongside infrastructure planning and investment (recommendations 35 and 36 support this). This would ensure essential community infrastructure gaps are addressed and liveability is enhanced as housing and population density increases. To further support the development of healthier, more liveable neighbourhoods, we also suggest recommending measures to restrict the establishment of harmful industries (e.g. alcohol, vaping, tobacco, gambling establishments) in these growing areas, especially near education infrastructure.</p> |
| Education and childcare | <p>2: Facilitate markets and invest in kindergarten infrastructure.</p> <p>3: Plan and deliver expanded and new schools.</p> | <p>VicHealth supports these recommendations as building more kindergartens and schools in the areas that need it most, will improve access to education and help to address health inequities.</p> <p>Making essential services such as education easily accessible and</p> | <p>We suggest recommending measures to ensure new kindergartens and schools are integrated with public and active transport networks and enhance public open space. This would support recommendations 14, 15, 16, and 26.</p> <p>Providing safe active and public transport routes to kindergartens and schools, and increasing access to public open space and nature would support the health</p>  |

<sup>3</sup> Walker, R., Ballard, J., Taylor, C & Hillier, J., 'The effects of New Living on Indigenous wellbeing: a case study', Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Western Australia Research Centre, 2007, accessed 09 April 2025. <https://jmi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/JMIPolicy-Insights-Paper-Planning-for-the-inclusion-of-families-with-children-in-apartments.pdf>.

|                          |   |  |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|
|                          |   | located closer to current and future housing choices will also support the development of healthier, more liveable neighbourhoods.   | and wellbeing of current and future communities (In line with recommendation 16 and 26).<br><br>2: We suggest including childcare infrastructure in this recommendation. Similar to kindergarten infrastructure, there is a high need for childcare centres in Victoria. According to a recent study, Victoria has the lowest childcare accessibility in Australia, tied with Capital Territory <sup>4</sup> .   |
| Community infrastructure | 5: Build libraries and aquatic centres for Melbourne's growing communities.<br>16: Help government schools share their grounds.<br>26: Better use government land for open space and greenery.<br>35: Prepare and publish infrastructure sector plans to shape Victoria's cities.<br>36: Reform infrastructure contributions. | VicHealth endorses these recommendations as improving access to community infrastructure (e.g. parks, community facilities), supports the development of healthier, more liveable neighbourhoods. It also helps to address health inequities when investment is prioritised in low socio-economic areas, and areas with the poorest accessibility to essential infrastructure. | 35: Suggest recommending measures to ensure infrastructure investment is prioritised in areas where there is the greatest need, including low socio-economic areas, and areas with the poorest accessibility to essential infrastructure.<br><br>32 per cent of adults in Victoria do not always have access to healthy food due to problems with the food supply (lack of variety of quality of healthy food), the expense of healthy food, or transport difficulties in accessing healthy food options <sup>6</sup> . We therefore suggest that recommendation 35 includes infrastructure sector plans for healthy and fresh food. |

<sup>4</sup> Hurley, P., Matthews, H., & Pennicuik, S., 'Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare?', Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, 2022, accessed 10 April 2025. <https://vuir.vu.edu.au/44440/1/how-accessible-is-childcare-report.pdf>; Hurley, P., Tham, M., Nguyen, H., 'International childcare: Mapping the deserts', Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, 2024, accessed 11 April 2025. <https://content.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2024-09/childcare-deserts-international-report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Agency for Health Information, 'Challenges to healthy eating – food insecurity in Victoria: findings from the 2014 Victorian Population Health Survey', State of Victoria, Melbourne, 2017, accessed 11 April 2025. [https://www.safercare.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-09/190226-1\\_VAHI-food-insecurity-full%20report.pdf](https://www.safercare.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-09/190226-1_VAHI-food-insecurity-full%20report.pdf)

|  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
|  |  | <p>VicHealth has worked on Opening the Gate<sup>5</sup> with IV and supportive of recommendation 16). Opening more school grounds for community use would support public health and wellbeing by increasing people’s access to open spaces to gather, move, play and connect. In addition to the scope of this work, there may be further future potential to explore opportunities to make it easier for community members to access non-government school grounds - particularly in cases where those schools are in receipt of government investment.</p> <p>Infrastructure planning and sequencing would also ensure essential community infrastructure</p> | <p>Recommendation 35 could also include infrastructure sector plans for community facilities. Community facilities provide a space for people and communities to engage in regular physical activity, arts, and social interaction, helping to support healthy communities<sup>7</sup>. However, research suggests that many growing outer suburban areas of Melbourne are experiencing a community infrastructure deficit<sup>8</sup>.</p> |
|--|--|---|---|

<sup>5</sup> **VicHealth**, ‘Opening the Gate’, VicHealth, 2024, accessed 09/04/2025. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/resources/resources-download/opening-the-gate>

<sup>7</sup> **Heart Foundation**, ‘Evidence supporting the health benefits of community facilities’, Heart Foundation, n.d, accessed 11 April 2025.

<https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/design-features/community-facilities/evidence>

<sup>8</sup> **Infrastructure Victoria**, ‘Social infrastructure in Melbourne’s growth areas’, Infrastructure Victoria, 2021, accessed 11 April 2025.

<https://assets.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/assets/Resources/Background-paper-Social-infrastructure-in-Melbournes-new-growth-areas-1-2.pdf>; **Grodach, C.,**

**Kamruzzaman, L., Harper, L.**, ‘20-minute neighbourhood- Living locally research’, Monash Urban Lab, Monash University, 2019, accessed 11 April 2025.

[https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/653255/Mambourin-Report-Staging-Community-Infrastructure.pdf](https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/653255/Mambourin-Report-Staging-Community-Infrastructure.pdf)

|                  |   |   |  |
|------------------|---|---|--|
|                  |   | gaps are addressed and liveability is enhanced as housing and population density increases.   |  |
| Public transport | <p>6: Make government infrastructure (public transport stops) more accessible.</p> <p>8: Extend Melbourne’s trams to encourage more new homes nearby.</p> <p>9: Run faster bus services, more often, in Victoria’s largest cities.</p> <p>10: Build a new bus rapid transit network.</p> <p>11: Extend metropolitan train and run more services in Melbourne’s west.</p> <p>12: Run more bus and coach services in regional Victoria.</p> | VicHealth endorses these recommendations as a larger, more frequent and accessible public transport system will increase Victorians access to daily living destinations, and support the development of healthier, more liveable neighbourhoods. Improved public transport systems will also help to address health inequities, through increased transport options and connectivity for all. | We suggest recommending additional measures to ensure public transport infrastructure and service improvements are integrated with enhanced walkability. Walkability, including but not limited to connected and permeable street networks, mixed land uses, safe speeds, and well-maintained pedestrian infrastructure around public transport stops and stations promotes physical activity, and increases access for people with reduced mobility, children, older people and women <sup>9</sup> . This supports health equity and the development of healthy, liveable neighbourhoods. |
| Active transport | <p>14: Make local streets safer for children and communities.</p> <p>15: Build safe cycling networks in Melbourne and regional cities.</p>  | VicHealth supports these recommendations as making active transport options safer, in parallel with improved public transport networks will enhance   | “Greening” walking and bike riding infrastructure and linking it to open space has the potential to achieve co-benefits for human and ecological health, including but not limited to improved air quality, shade and UV   |

<sup>9</sup> **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)**, *‘Integrating walking and public transport’*, UNECE, 2024, accessed 11 April 2025.  
[https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/Walk21%200124%20-%20Walk21%20Intgd%20Walking\\_Public%20Transport\\_v8%20FINAL%20version\\_0.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/Walk21%200124%20-%20Walk21%20Intgd%20Walking_Public%20Transport_v8%20FINAL%20version_0.pdf)

|                    |   |  |   |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
|                    |   | <p>connectivity and access to key destinations, and support the development of healthier, more liveable neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Making local streets around schools and playgrounds safer to walk, especially by lowering speeds, will encourage children to engage in active travel to daily destinations, increasing physical activity, and improving health outcomes. VicHealth research found that safer speeds around schools also provide health benefits for the wider school community, local residents and the broader community<sup>10</sup>.</p> | <p>protection, mental wellbeing, increased biodiversity, and climate resilience (e.g. flood mitigation, urban cooling)<sup>11</sup>.</p> <p>We therefore suggest recommending additional measures to “green” walking and bike riding infrastructure. This ensures that, as walking and bike riding networks are expanded and improved, Victorian’s access to nature and open space increases (this supports recommendation 26).</p> |
| Climate resilience | 27: Better prepare infrastructure for climate change. | VicHealth endorses recommendations 27 and 28 as these will reduce the risk of homes and other infrastructure being   | 27: The effects of climate change disproportionately impact people already experiencing socio-economic disadvantage <sup>12</sup> . It is therefore important to prioritise   |

<sup>10</sup> **VicHealth**, ‘*It’s more than just walking! The value-adding impact of the Walking School Bus program on local environments and communities*’, VicHealth, 2007, accessed 11 April 2025. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Its-more-than-just-walking-publication-final-Aug07.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> **Natural Walking Cities**, ‘*Green corridors- Essential urban walking and natural infrastructure*’, Natural Walking Cities, 2019, accessed 10/04/2025. <https://naturalwalkingcities.com/green-corridors-essential-urban-walking-and-natural-infrastructure/>

<sup>12</sup> **Vardoulakis, S. et al.**, ‘*Building resilience to Australian flood disasters in the face of climate change*’, The Medical Journal of Australia, 2022, accessed 11 April 2025. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.5694/mja2.51595>; **Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS)**, ‘*Melbourne’s hot divide*’, VCOSS, 2024, accessed 11 April 2025. [https://vcoss.org.au/health-and-wellbeing/2024/02/melbournes-hot-divide/?utm\\_medium=em&utm\\_source=ME&utm\\_campaign=heat](https://vcoss.org.au/health-and-wellbeing/2024/02/melbournes-hot-divide/?utm_medium=em&utm_source=ME&utm_campaign=heat).

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  | 28: Use new flood maps to revise planning schemes. | damaged in extreme weather events, which will help to promote community resilience to the effects of climate change. | climate change adaptation infrastructure upgrades and flood mapping in the areas most at-risk and vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events. |
|--|--|--|--|