



# MEDIA RELEASE

## 2023-24 Victorian Budget must focus on regional jobs, liveability, housing and planning issues

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Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) is calling on the Victorian Government to commit to supporting regional growth in the upcoming 2023-24 State Budget.

While the Government continues supporting regional Victoria, especially in the wake of the most recent flood disaster, significant investments are still needed across four interrelated areas to support regional growth and recovery:

### 1. Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund

**RCV Budget ask:** An investment of \$800 million over four years into the Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund. This continuation of the fund will drive local infrastructure projects across regional Victoria, create local jobs and improve the liveability of regional cities.

RCV would also like to see the contingency allowance for regional councils on approved grants be raised from 10% to 20%. This could be trialled for two years as councils struggle to budget for everchanging costs impacted by inflation, the rising costs of construction materials, and workforce shortages.

### 2. Housing shortages and planning issues

Housing shortages and improving planning processes are some of the most critical issues in regional Victoria. It is important that further land supply is unlocked, and local government must play its role in this. However, a lack of enabling or trunk infrastructure, particularly in greenfield 'pioneer developments' on the outskirts of regional cities, is ultimately deterring the development of local industry and private investment in the regions.

**RCV Budget ask:** Establish a \$500 million Growing Regions Development Fund, to relieve the burden currently faced by ratepayers and encourage housing development in new areas. This fund can be replenished with profits derived from the soon to-be-implemented Windfall Gains Tax.

### 3. Increase liveability in the regions

As the populations of our regional cities continue to grow, so too does the demand for improved services and amenities. Regional Victoria must meet the challenges of current growth trends with considered investment in civic, community, cultural infrastructure.

**RCV Budget ask:** Establish a new \$200 million Regional Living Fund to invest in civic, community, and cultural infrastructure and open spaces to enhance the liveability of regional cities and boost the visitor economy. This Fund would complement other economic-focussed programs by investing in art galleries and museums; libraries; playgrounds and parklands; recreation and community health and wellbeing hubs.

### 4. Accelerating regional mental health services

**RCV Budget ask:** Invest in additional acute beds and wraparound healthcare for people experiencing serious mental health and alcohol and drug issues in all regional cities. This investment in Victoria's mental health system would build on significant investments made by the Victorian Government last year to deliver more acute beds in Shepparton and expand services at Latrobe Regional Hospital.

### Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games legacy

The Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games is a once-in-a-life-time opportunity for regional Victoria, and it is essential benefits for local communities extend well beyond the sporting competition and event period.



**RCV Budget ask:** RCV is seeking a commitment from the Andrews Government that the Games will create a legacy for the whole of regional Victoria, that extends beyond the five cities hosting events and creates opportunities across the State.

**RCV Chair Cr Andrea Metcalf** said RCV's Budget priorities would collectively raise the liveability of regional Victoria and sustain its steady population growth it has enjoyed over the past few years.

"The pace of growth in regional Victoria has been very strong for several years now and it is vital that investment and development keeps up.

"Without continued investment in our regions, the liveability of our regional cities will falter, and our residents will not have the adequate access to housing, open spaces and parklands, and cultural and community infrastructure they expect.

"We are grateful for the Victorian Government's continued support of regional Victoria and our members look forward to working with the State Government as we continue our growth, particularly leading into the Victoria 2026 Commonwealth Games."

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*RCV is a regional leadership group dedicated to building a sustainable Victoria by providing strategic advice, coordination and advocacy to State and Federal Governments to support policies which enable Victoria's regional centres to grow and develop.*

*Comprising Mayors and CEOs of the 10 largest cities in regional Victoria – Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga – RCV is focused on achieving real change in regional Victoria through policy development and active implementation of those policies*