

# The State of the Sector

## CISVic membership

### Report 2024



**CISVic**

Community Information  
& Support Victoria

## Community Information & Support Victoria (CISVic)

CISVic is the peak body for the community information and support sector in Victoria. Member agencies assist people experiencing personal and financial difficulties by providing information, referral and support, including Emergency Relief.

CISVic standards guarantee that individuals seeking assistance can rely on professional service delivery across the membership. These standards also mandate that members operate as incorporated entities, overseen by a community-represented Board or Committee of Management.

CISVic acknowledges the true custodians of Country and pays our respects to Elders past and present.

This report is a consolidation of the 2023-2024 financial year membership data and other relevant information gathered from 52 CISVic members.

The report offers valuable insights into the activities of members, including their programs and services, funding, resources, innovative approaches, staffing, and the memberships combined impact.

### Membership Reach

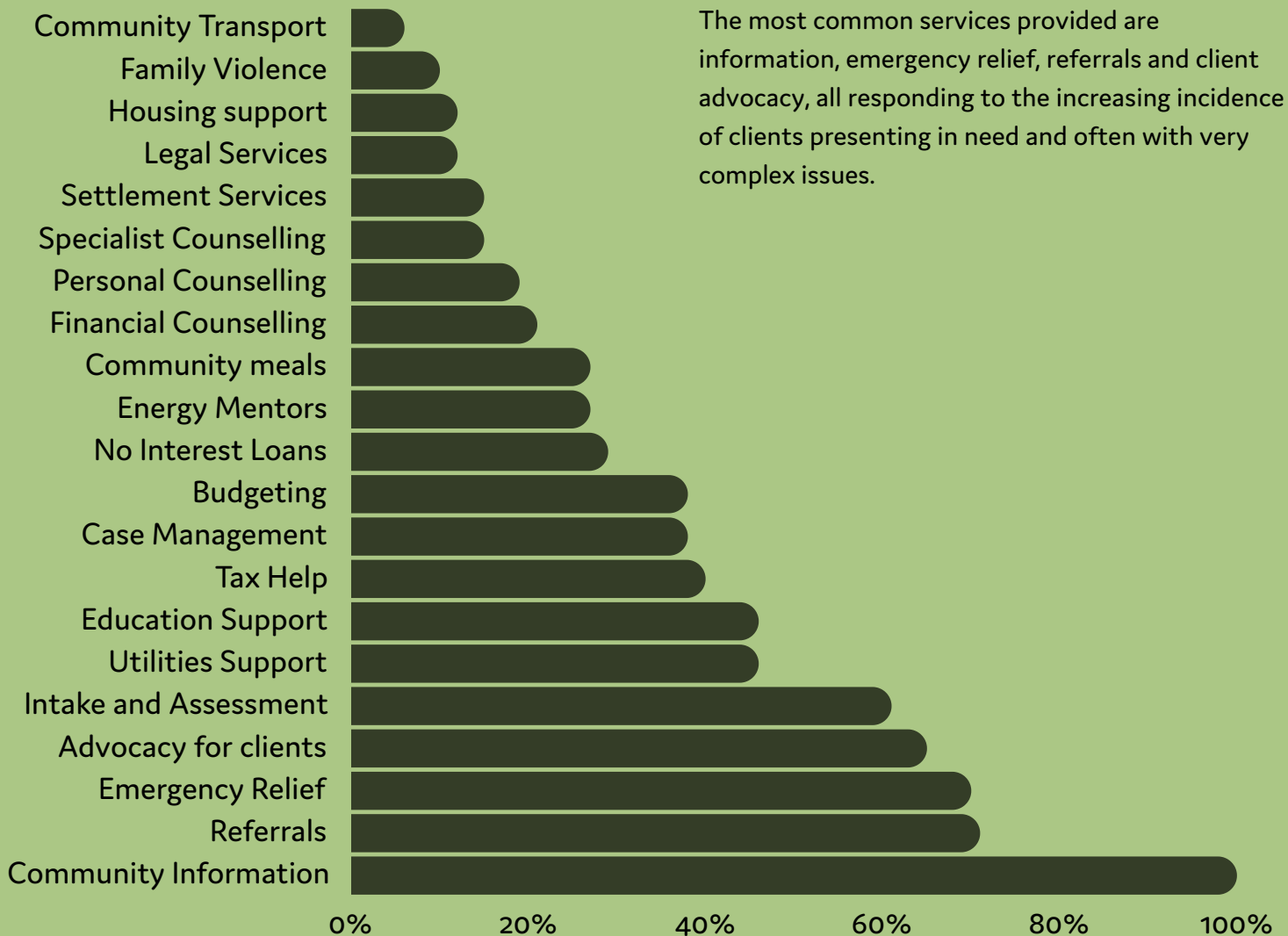
- **52 members operate from 79 unique locations, across 44 municipalities.**
- **This includes coverage in 55% of all Victorian local government areas (LGAs) and 75% of LGAs across the greater Melbourne area.**



## Services Provided

Each of the 52 members have established services and programs to respond to the local needs of the communities they service, within the limits of funding and resources they receive.

The following graph provides an overview of the wide range of services provided by members. While some of the smaller agencies provide a more limited range, other members have many in-house and co-located programs providing a one-stop shop model of service delivery.



CISVic adopts a community-embedded approach to service delivery. In practice, this means that each member is deeply embedded in their community, such as working closely with their local council and other services or making use of local volunteers. This allows them to adapt their services to meet the unique needs of their communities, including demand for services, socio-economic status and cultural diversity.

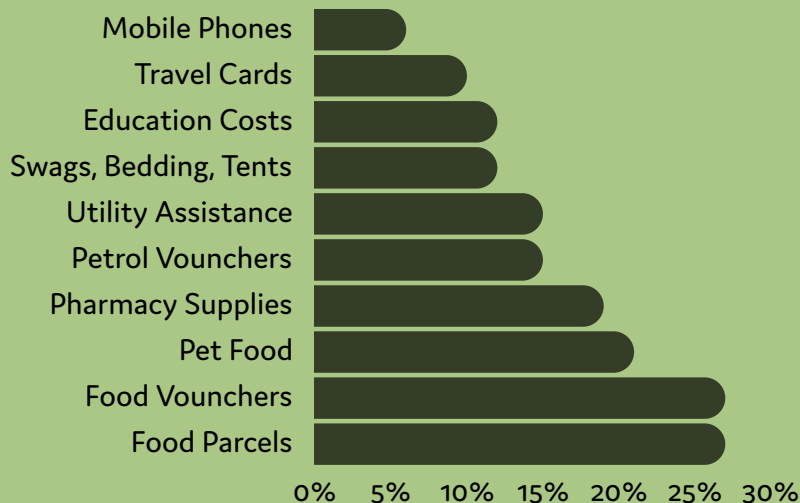
Programs are typically designed to address the needs of the local community seeking assistance, within limitation of funding and resource availability.

The most common services provided are information, emergency relief, referrals and client advocacy, all responding to the increasing incidence of clients presenting in need and often with very complex issues.

## Emergency Relief

Emergency relief typically comprises financial assistance such as vouchers for food, transport or pharmaceuticals, payment for utilities, rent, or other household costs, and material aid, including food, clothing, or household goods.

A wide range of emergency relief is delivered by members, with the most common being food parcels and food vouchers. Emergency relief is aimed at meeting clients' immediate needs to maintaining a basic standard of living. Assistance with health costs, travel and household utilities are in regular demand. Sadly with the current housing crisis and lack of housing options available, 22 (40%) members are responding by providing relief in the form of swags, bedding and tents to assist homeless clients with some comfort.



It is also a sign of the times that it is almost impossible to access basic services without a device such as a mobile phone. Having a device is necessary not only for communication but also for essential transactions such as Centrelink reporting. Consequently, 12 (22%) members are assisting clients with mobile phones and sim cards as needed.

With increasing cost of education, 21 (38%) members are providing help with education costs to ensure that children have the best possible opportunity to participate in their full educational program. Providing the necessary books, resources, and uniforms is essential for helping students feel included and engaged in the classroom.

Members also report a variety of other inclusions in their emergency relief programs, including toiletries, clothing, community meals, Christmas hampers and toys.

### South East Community Links

Building upon the traditional practice of 'Bring a Bill days', our member, South East Community Links elevated this emergency relief support to new heights.

Hosting four events where community members from the south-east could come and discuss their finances with experts from the water, power and service sectors, the impact included:

- 1000+ people assisted
- \$500,000+ in debt resolved
- 210 concessions and grants applied

The top issues for participants attending the events, included fines, bills, tenancy, government payments and energy usage.

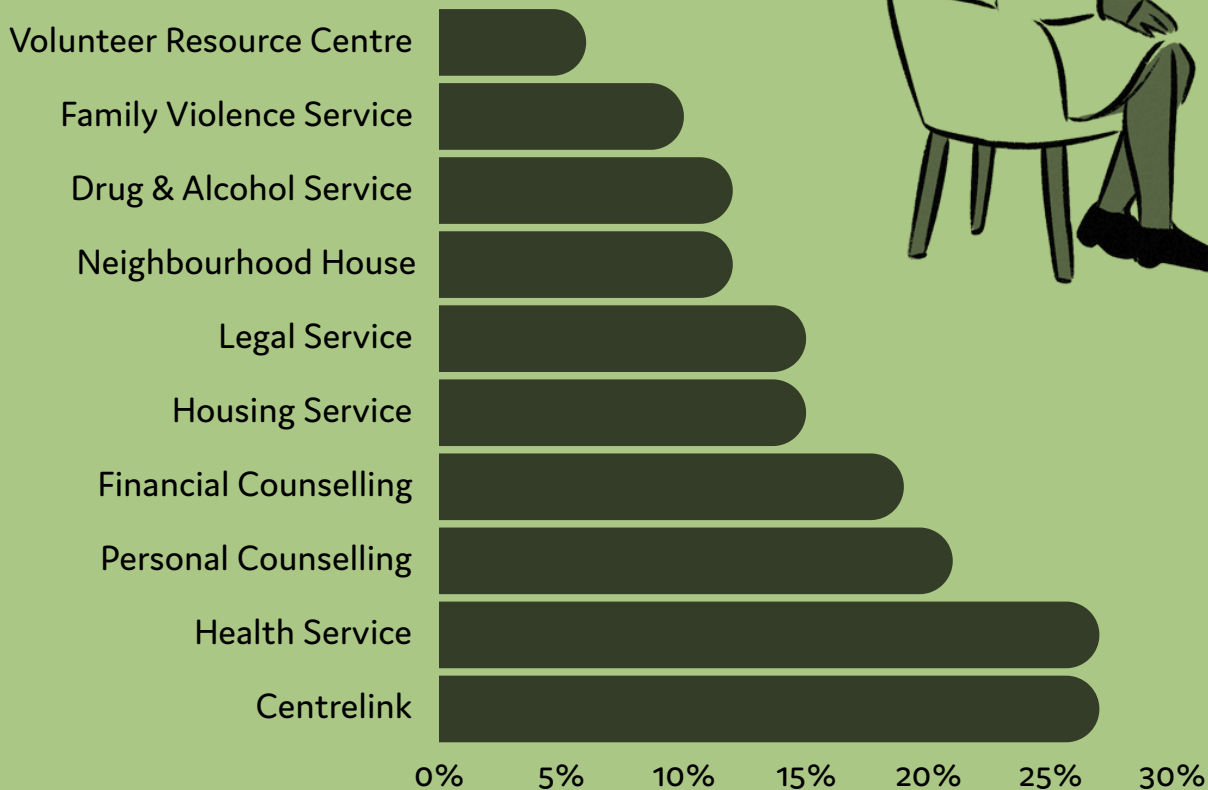
Of those who participated:

- 80% better understood their rights
- 79% were now track with their bills / any debt they have

## Co-located and visiting services

In keeping with the place-based model of service delivery, many members reported the presence of co-located and visiting services to provide a 'one-stop-shop' to meet client needs. These co-located services are extremely valuable in providing successful linkages for clients. Referrals are more direct, and clients do not have to navigate their way to external organisations when they are dealing with multiple issues.

Ten (18%) members reported Centrelink as a visiting agency. This onsite access provides immediate support to clients experiencing difficulties with payments in a place they trust and feel comfortable. This helps reduce the stress and frustration that clients may experience while negotiating income support.



## Funding

Funding support from various levels of government varies among the membership, with some members receiving support from all levels of government while others receive none. Funding amounts also vary widely, with some members receiving only a few thousand dollars and other larger agencies receiving millions.

### 1. Local Government

Funding from local governments is vital for the sector. For many members, ongoing funding from council is their core source of funding, and all members that receive council funding report that they would be unable to deliver services to the community without this funding.

Furthermore, members that reported higher levels of funding from local government were more likely to have longer operating hours, paid staff and receive funding from other levels of government or donors. With this funding, members have a greater capacity to deliver services to the community and to secure funding from other sources, ensuring the ongoing viability and sustainability of these essential services.

Forty-one members (75%) reported receiving funding from their local government.

Across all members, this amounts to over \$6,000,000. However, there is a huge variation in funding received by member agencies from as little as \$1,650 to over \$840,000 allocated.

Many local governments also support our sector with in-kind support. For example, 15 members reported their premises were fully or partially funded by contract or agreement with council. Nineteen reported their operations were partially funded by council and 12 reported their utilities were fully or partially funded by council. For some members, local government funding also includes provision for staffing and a range of programs. Some of the initiatives funded by local government include emergency relief, financial counselling, case management, Christmas programs and school breakfasts.

### 2. State Government

State government funding was reported by 21 (38%) members, amounting to more than \$6,016,000, an average funding amount of \$146,000 per member. This funding was received from various State government departments for a range of programs and short-term projects

These included:

- Family counselling and intensive support services
- TAC funded L2P driver courses

- Food relief
- Neighbourhood House funding
- Volunteer Resource Centre funding
- Homelessness support
- Social transport
- Telephone support line (Council for Single Mothers & their Children)
- Volunteer management
- Breakfast program
- Wollert Community Farm (a project that operates as a social enterprise supporting local First Nations initiatives)

## 3. Court Funds

Court funds allocated by the Magistrates Court in Victoria aim to support individuals in need within the community. Over the past year, 22 (40%) members indicated receiving \$305,825 of these funds, primarily enhancing emergency relief programs.



## 4. Federal Government

The federal government's Financial Wellbeing & Capability program funding is received by 35 members, for emergency relief and financial counselling and capability programs. Some members receive this funding directly and others are part of consortia arrangements where funding is received by a lead agency and is distributed among the members.

CISVic receives funding for one consortium, on behalf of 28 members. CISVic's involvement in this funding has been invaluable to ensuring that members continue to receive funds crucial to responding to local community need.

Small volunteer grants were received by 8 members, and others reported funding received from the Department of Health and the Department of Industry.

The total amount of funding received by the members from the Federal Government (excluding volunteer grants) for the financial year included \$4,953,694 for emergency relief and \$3,391,361 for financial counselling, a total of \$8,345,055.

## 5. Fundraising

To provide the range of services that they do, members often run fundraising events to supplement income and resources. Sixteen members reported that fundraising activities raised a total of \$473,679. This included five that ran sausage sizzles, BBQs and raffles and various others with food drives and annual appeals, such a Christmas and winter food and coat drives.

### Mornington Community Support Centre

Taking a new approach to fundraising, Mornington Community Support Centre collaborated with Peninsula Films to produce a compelling documentary, "The Ranch," showcasing the personal stories of individuals in their community facing homelessness.

The documentary premiere received overwhelming support, selling out two cinemas and sparking meaningful discussions. It also served as a sense of urgency to policymakers, emphasising the pressing need for action to address the ongoing housing crisis in the area.

To find out more about The Ranch documentary visit <https://www.mcsc.au/the-ranch>

## 6. Social Enterprise

A social enterprise is an agency that applies commercial strategies to maximise improvements in financial, social and environmental well-being.

Establishing a social enterprise not only provides a valuable source of funding, but it also provides opportunity for community to come together, work experience for volunteers and a benefit for the local community.

Nine members reported operating social enterprises, these included two cafes, five op-shops, four community markets, a supermarket, and a white goods and furniture shop.

### Diamond Valley Community Support

Diamond Valley Community Support (DVCS) needs their social enterprises to help deliver the level and breadth of emergency relief it provides to the Banyule and Nillumbik communities. In the 2023/24 financial year, these vibrant social enterprises added almost \$500,000 to the resourcing of DVCS.

The two op-shops, at Macleod and Diamond Creek, provide valuable funds and an opportunity for volunteers to support their local community.

DVCS's manages weekly markets at Kingsbury Drive (Bundoora) and monthly markets at Hurstbridge and Macleod. A small part-time paid team (part-time) oversees the booking and collection of fees for stallholders and attends on the day to ensure the market is orderly and safe for stallholders and customers.

### Whittlesea Community Connection

Whittlesea Community Connections' Women in Work is a certified social enterprise that provides a flexible mobile childcare service for organisations that support parents and families.

This innovative and responsive social enterprise was established because the agency understands that a lack of childcare excludes many parents from accessing essential programs and services such as attending legal appointments, health information sessions, family violence support, and education and training opportunities.

Women in Work employs childcare-certified migrant and refugee women experiencing barriers to employment as professional childcare educators. All profits from Women in Work directly support their training, skill development, and pathways to employment.





## Staffing

**Staffing is enormously varied across the membership with a variety of paid and volunteer staff, as well as student placements. However, some members operate solely on volunteers.**

### 1. Volunteers

All 55 members have reported that they rely on volunteer staff. In the past year, a total of 3,636 volunteers dedicated 11,011 hours each week, generously give their time to assist those in need within our community. This effort is equivalent to having 290 full-time workers. The monetary value of this volunteer effort, if replaced by a paid workforce, would amount to approximately \$24,639,975 annually. This underscores the invaluable contribution our volunteers provide and highlights the essential role they play in enabling our members to function effectively.

Twelve members rely entirely on volunteer staff. Within these members the volunteer leaders go above and beyond the typical volunteer role, delivery professional services to the community.

#### Monash Oakleigh Community Support

Monash Oakleigh Community Support and Information Service (MOCSIS) is staffed entirely by trained volunteers. For over half a century, they have played a crucial role in providing services and support to the local community, impacting the lives of its most vulnerable residents.

Running MOCSIS takes immense dedication, often involving long hours and hard work. With a team of 40 active volunteers, the volunteer coordinator and

other critical volunteer roles must juggle multiple responsibilities, such as fundraising, operational management, volunteer recruitment, student placements, reporting requirements, and much more, on a limited budget and with limited resources.

MOCSIS supports various cost-of-living needs via emergency relief through its client-centered, holistic support model. Other services include tax help, a no-interest loan scheme, free on-site op shop and social inclusion opportunities, such as a community garden. Without the sacrifice and personal investment of MOCSIS's volunteers, they could not have assisted the 10,406 individuals who came seeking support in the 2023-24 financial year.

#### Endeavour Ministries

Endeavour Ministries provide support in and around Endeavour Hills in the City of Casey. They operate exclusively with 85 volunteers including a manager, who collectively contribute an average of 260 hours per week, and responded to 20,000 contacts in the last year.

Clients who seek assistance often present with complex issues that require intensive intervention. With all programs staffed by volunteers, they work tirelessly to provide a comprehensive suite of services, including emergency relief, support services, free loan cars, housing assistance and community meals.

With limited government funding, Endeavour Ministries relies heavily on philanthropy, donations and fundraising to deliver their services. This includes two social enterprises, an op shop and community market that help raise funds.

Client-facing volunteers who engage with full members are required to undertake accredited training to uphold high standards of support and service delivery. The Community Support Worker course incorporates the nationally accredited Assess Co-Existing Needs (CHCCCS004) unit of competency. This training equips volunteers with the essential skills and knowledge needed to assess the complex and varied needs of clients effectively, and provide responsive support tailored to those needs. These include information, advocacy, problem-based and emotional support and referrals.

Volunteering is an invaluable resource for the sector, offering significant benefits to both the agencies and the individual volunteer. Engaging in volunteer work at a member allows individuals to actively contribute to causes that make a difference, while also gaining a diverse range of skills, experiences, and potential pathways to employment—particularly for those looking to enter or re-enter the workforce.

More significantly, members offers volunteers meaningful social connections, a sense of purpose, and a strong sense of community.

The support of volunteer staff is essential for members to effectively address community need. However, there has been a concerning trend over the past five years, with a approximate 30% decline in volunteer numbers across the membership. This decline has had serious consequences, leading to the closure of some agencies that relied solely on volunteers, and challenges for other members in attracting new volunteers.

Several reasons have contributed to this decline. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many older volunteers discontinuing their volunteering, leading to a loss of experienced volunteers. Additionally, attracting new volunteers, particularly from a younger demographic, has become more challenging due to the general economic downturn. With more individuals prioritising paid work over volunteer opportunities.

**After 5 years volunteering with local government, I had a chance meeting with an acquaintance who suggested I contact Casey North Community Information Support Service (CISS) to see if they needed volunteers. Fortunately for me they had a need for an additional person to do data entry and because of my love of typing I felt this would be ideal.**

**Little did I know at the time, this would lead to me also becoming involved in the No Interest Loan program and a member of the Board!**

**I have found my time with Casey North CISS to be so fulfilling, allowing me to utilise my skills and put back into the community. Along this journey, I have been fortunate to work with some wonderful volunteers and staff. Volunteering has been one of the best decisions I have made.**

**Pat- Volunteer at Casey North CISS**



## 2. Paid Staff

Of the 52 members, 35 (64%) have paid staff. This can range from just one paid staff member in smaller agencies, to 110 at larger agencies such as Whittlesea Community Connections. Across the membership, there are over 486 paid staff members in total. The majority of paid staff are employed part-time, with less employed full-time and some employed as casual staff.

## 3. Students

Twenty-five members offered opportunities for 460 students to engage in placement at their agencies in the 2023-24 financial year. The diverse and generalist nature of the services available at member agencies provides a rich learning environment for students, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge to practice and gain real-world experience and confidence in working with clients with complex issues.

Student placements not only prepare students for the workplace but also offer members a valuable staffing resource through their meaningful contributions. Courses undertaken by students in the last year ranged from Certificate (59), Diploma (188) and Degree (213) level, and included courses such as Social Work, Financial Counselling and Community Development.

Placements generally require an on-site supervisor who has qualifications in the area the student is studying. Therefore, it is generally easier for agencies with paid staff to host student placements. All members that supported student placements, except one, reported that they had paid staff at their agency.

**In 2020, during the pandemic, my sister and I, started our studies in a Diploma of Community Services to pursue our passion and careers in a new country as newly arrived migrants.**

**During my work placement at Community Information and Support Cranbourne (CISC), I got to practice the theories I had learnt while enhancing my communication skills with both clients and staff. I also appreciated acknowledging the individual differences and values of others. The staff always ensured my mental wellbeing, by checking if I'm okay to do a certain task or having regular debriefing sessions and supervision meetings.**

**Overall, I always loved and looked forward to my next day at CISC. I secured full-time employment before finishing my placement and I believe that I was successful in this because I had polished my skills during placement at CISC.**

**I will always cherish the memories and learnings that I had from CISC and would love to be back and volunteer with the staff at some time.**

**Kayenat – Student at CIS Cranbourne**

**Overall, the information shared by the CISVic membership offers a comprehensive collection of data that reflects the remarkable efforts carried out by the Community Information and Support sector for the benefit of the communities they support.**

The report serves as a valuable resource, providing a detailed overview of the sectors collective work, detailing the funding, staffing and insights into the way members respond to the needs of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our communities with the resources available.

CISVic members contributing to the 2023-2024 membership data, include:

### Community Information and Support Services

Banyule Support & Information Centre  
 Bayside Community & Information Support Service  
 Bendigo Family & Financial Services  
 Camcare (Access Health)  
 Casey North Community Information & Support Service  
 Chelsea Community Support Services  
 CityLife Community Care  
 Cobram Family and Financial Services  
 Community Information & Support Cranbourne  
 Community Information & Support Glen Eira\*  
 Community Information & Support Merri-bek\*  
 Community Support Frankston  
 Darebin Information, Volunteer & Resource Service  
 Diamond Valley Community Support  
 Doncare  
 Endeavour Ministries (the Andrews Centre)  
 Knox Infolink  
 Laverton Community Integrated Services  
 LinC Church Services Network Yarra Valley  
 Maroondah Community Assist  
 Mentone Community Assistance & Information Bureau  
 Monash Oakleigh Community Support & Information Service  
 Monash Waverley Community Information & Support  
 Mornington Community Support Centre

\*Branch of CISVic

Port Phillip Community Group  
 Shepparton Family and Financial Services  
 South East Community Links  
 South Gippsland Citizens Advice Bureau  
 Southern Peninsula Community Support  
 Stonnington Community Assist  
 Uniting Victoria & Tasmania (East Burwood)  
 Western Port Community Support  
 Whitehorse Emergency Relief & Support  
 Whittlesea Community Connection

### Specialist Community Support Services

Council of Single Mothers and their Children  
 Bellarine Community Support Register  
 Indian Care  
 Somali Australian Council of Victoria  
 Sunraysia Information & Referral Service  
 Melbourne East Disability Advocacy  
 North East Citizen Advocacy  
 Eastern Emergency Relief Network

### Food Shares

Bendigo Foodshare  
 Diamond Valley Foodshare  
 Regional Foodshare Alliance  
 Albury Wodonga Regional Foodshare  
 Shepparton Foodshare  
 Geelong Food Relief Centre

### Volunteer Resource Services

Ballarat Foundation Uniting Way  
 Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre  
 Volunteering Geelong

### Other Community Support Services

Make a Difference Dingley Village  
 Countrywide Community Missions Victoria  
 Friends for Good



Community Information  
& Support Victoria



Community Information  
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**Community Information and Support Victoria**

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