

## Victoria's COVID-19 State Budget is a chance to help Melbourne's outer suburbs catch up, experts say

By outer suburban reporter [Nicole Asher](#)

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Katie Lindsay Fuimaono had big plans for her Point Cook maintenance business. Then COVID-19 came along. (ABC News: Nicole Asher)

Essential cleaning kept Katie Lindsay Fuimaono's head above water during Melbourne's second wave.

She had been nearly a year into expanding her maintenance business, based in Point Cook in Melbourne's west, to include concreting when the pandemic hit.

"We tried really hard to save the concrete side, but even coming out of the wave we found that we just had to let it go," Ms Lindsay Fuimaono said.

Letting the fledgling side of the business go also involved letting staff go.

Ms Lindsay Fuimaono, her husband and their three remaining staff were among more than 3,700 people kept afloat by JobKeeper in the 3030 postcode, on Melbourne's south-western fringe.

"It didn't feel real," she said. "No-one ever saw this coming either. It was hard."



In suburbs like Truganina, there are concerns infrastructure development is well behind population growth. (ABC News: Gemma Hall)

As Melbourne entered its second lockdown in July there were 7,303 JobKeeper applicants in the CBD — the most of any postcode in Victoria.

Next in line, with between 3,000 and 4,000 JobKeeper applicants each, were five postcodes forming a ring around the city's fringe — taking in Truganina, Dandenong, Werribee, Craigieburn and Cranbourne.

These areas, which already had high levels of financial and social disadvantage, are where experts say targeted assistance in Tuesday's State Budget is needed to help cushion the impacts of the pandemic.

## **The big issues on the other side of COVID**

Melbourne's Interface Councils group — which represents the 10 councils on Melbourne's fringe — is calling for spending on local infrastructure projects and boosts to social services in those areas.

"There's a lot of projects already in the planning stages, so having the money to actually get those started, that will increase job opportunities and business opportunities," said Karen Egan, a spokesperson for Interface Councils.



Karen Egan represents outer suburban communities with large numbers of residents on JobKeeper.

"We've had the greatest losses of jobs, also the greatest impacts on businesses and we've got the most reliance on JobKeeper.

"Coming out of post-COVID, there's going to be significant issues."

Ms Egan said there was already a shortfall in the availability of community and health services.

Demand for those services had only been made worse by an increase in family violence and mental health issues during the lockdown.

The availability of health and community services is an area of concern shared by National Growth Areas Alliance executive officer Bronwen Clark.

"Vulnerable communities in the outskirts of Melbourne really need access to family violence support," she said.



Bronwen Clark says families need help with hospitals and family violence support services. (ABC News: Nicole Asher)

"So we're calling for Orange Door hubs [a free referral service for family violence victims], for example, to be placed in the north and south-east of Melbourne," Ms Clark said.

"We need a hospital in Melton — the population in Melton is bigger than Ballarat and has no hospital of its own."

The National Growth Areas Alliance is also keen to see spending go towards co-working spaces, so people can continue to work from the suburbs where they live after working-from-home restrictions are lifted.

"Between three and five people working from home in the outer suburbs would like to continue that way, at least part of the time," she said.

"They've also been shown to be the home of the industries and the people who've kept Victoria running during the pandemic.

"Further investment in the transport and freight and logistics infrastructure that's needed is really crucial when it comes to supporting people to get working in the neighbourhoods."

### **A unique opportunity to play catch-up**

With population growth slowing due to closed borders, transport and logistics expert John Stanley said there was an opportunity in this Budget for infrastructure and service spending to catch up in these areas.

#### **JobKeeper applications by postcode**

- 3000 Melbourne — 7,303 applicants
- 3029 Truganina, Hoppers Crossing, Tarneit — 4,202 applicants
- 3175 Dandenong — 3,884 applicants
- 3030 Werribee, Point Cook — 3,711 applicants
- 3064 Craigieburn, Roxburgh Park, Mickleham — 3,340 applicants
- 3977 Cranbourne — 3,304 applicants

*Figures supplied by Treasury*

"You've got municipalities growing 3 per cent per annum and faster over [the past] decade, which adds a huge number of people to your population base, but the expenditure hasn't anywhere near kept up," Professor Stanley said.

"One of the benefits of COVID will be that it's given us an opportunity to play that catch-up without also having to struggle at the same time with the growth that would otherwise have occurred over the last 12 months and the next 12 months."



The pause in population growth after the pandemic means councils can catch-up on infrastructure, Professor Stanley says. (ABC News: Darryl Torpy)

Professor Stanley has spent years consulting governments on infrastructure planning, including for the development of a long-term land use strategy Plan Melbourne.

He said there were two main areas where spending was needed in this year's Budget: local public transport, and the development of 20-minute neighbourhoods, where people can get everything they need close to home.

"My expectation is that there'll be a very small increase in funding for bus services in the State Budget in the outer suburbs and I think that would be an opportunity missed," Professor Stanley said.

"Local bus services should be running at at least a 20-minute frequency. That means about 55 services a day. There would be very few parts of outer Melbourne that would be anywhere near that.

"If you were to spend an extra \$200–300 million in capital terms it's worth about \$4 billion, which is peanuts relative to what we're spending in heavy rail and in major road projects at the moment — but the returns to the local community would be very significant."