

Media Release

ST LUKE'S BUDGET RESPONSE – TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

Bendigo, Thursday, 5 May 2010: There was some very good news in the state budget announced yesterday (Tuesday 4 May) and in real terms, that is adjusted for inflation and population growth, there have been several areas see increased spending in ways that address the needs of people experiencing disadvantage and hardship.

We know that to address disadvantage we must intervene early, and we must particularly address the safety and developmental needs of children. Child protection and family services have seen a real funding increase of 4.4%. The government is to be complimented on this. Funding will see improvements in services to support families before they reach crisis point, through counseling, parenting advice, in home support and respite. Expanding out of home care to meet the increasing need and improve quality of placements of children in residential care has also increased. A new and very positive outcome from the budget is the early childhood development workers to strengthen links between children services such as childcare, maternal and child health, Child First and the child protection system. Youth Justice and youth services spending has also increased in real terms.

However closer analysis identifies several negative funding outcomes, in real terms, which are difficult to account for given community needs. This budget, while having some positive commitments in mental health, sees an actual decrease, accounting for population growth and CPI, in overall mental health expenditure. We also note a slight decrease, in real terms, in funding for Drug Services, Early Childhood Services, Education, and Concessions for Healthcare Card holders.

These decreases in real funding mean that many of the truly vulnerable in our community, including children, people with mental health issues and substances misuse issues are not receiving the support they need to get their lives back on track. The “real terms” reduction in support for people qualifying for concessions also puts new pressures on households who are having trouble making ends meet. The \$872 million budget surplus when there is so much need in the community must be discouraging to those who are waiting for support and certainly is for the agencies who work with these community members every day.

The Loddon Mallee makes up approximately 7% of the Victorian population. We would gladly spend our approximately \$70 million share of the surplus on improving support for community members who have mental health issues, who need help completing schooling or who need additional support to live with dignity despite their disability. St Luke's will continue to lobby the State Government in the run up to the election to ensure these community members are not forgotten.

David Pugh
St Luke's CEO