

Increased Access to Living in Regional Victoria Bill

2023

A Bill for an Act to increase access to living in regional Victoria through establishing the Increased Access for Regional Living Board (IARLB); whose scope is to facilitate and increase support for food pantries, public transport, education, community centres and housing.

This Bill strives to create a sense of community among regional Victorians through increased opportunities for connection in regional and rural areas, as well as more access to stable housing, public transport, education opportunities and basic local support. Having increased access to education in a range of areas encourages young people to stay in the area, resolving the gap in the demographic, and fostering a sense of community. This Bill also provides the community opportunities to communicate more efficiently on areas of deficit with the government to collaborate on solutions.

Regional and remote areas suffer increasing disadvantages which this Bill aims to remedy. These issues include lack of affordable housing, food security, opportunities, and access to transport. The solutions offered in this Bill should also ease those issues, easing the process for individuals and families in metropolitan or urban areas to move to regional and rural areas. It would also provide increased incentive for people to move to those regional and rural communities, creating benefits for all.

Bill for an Act relating to Increased Access to Living in Regional Victoria.
To be enacted by the Y's Victorian Youth Parliament.

PART I—Preliminary

Clause 1 Purpose

The main purposes of this Act are;

- (a) To provide an understanding on the current and potential needs of individuals, groups and communities that are currently and/ or planning to live in and around regional Victoria;
- (b) To identify current and potential ways for access to goods and services to be increased;
- (c) To outline any potential risks or challenges in solutions suggested in this Bill;
- (d) To identify ways different groups, such as the people, their communities and the government, can work together to ensure positive outcomes for the region.

Clause 2 Commencement

This Bill shall commence upon receiving assent from the Youth Governor of Victoria.

Clause 3 Definitions

In this Bill;

- (a) ***Regional and rural*** means areas defined by the Australian Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area (RRMA) classification as belonging to RRMA zones 3 to 7;
- (b) ***Residents*** means a person who resides in the area permanently or on a long-term basis;
- (c) ***Pantry*** means a collection of food items that are stored at a designated place and looked after by volunteers and community centres;

- (d) ***Social housing*** means not for profit housing provided to those who require it by the Increased Access for Regional Living Board;
- (e) ***A young person*** means a person that is under 25 years of age;
- (f) ***Community*** means a group of people with a common characteristic of living together within a larger society;
- (g) ***Dependents*** means a person who is substantially financially dependent on another, including a spouse, child, or any other person that one is in an interdependent relationship with.

PART II—Establishment

**Clause 4 Establishment of the Increased Access for Regional Living Board
(IARLB)**

- 4.1 The Increased Access for Regional Living Board (IARLB) shall be established and be responsible for the following;
- (a) Advocating for regional funding, prioritising;
 - (i) Transport;
 - (ii) Housing;
 - (iii) Education.
 - (b) Establishing & overseeing the implementation of Community Centres in regional areas;
 - (i) Community centres shall be developed in partnership with already established charities and organisations.
- 4.2 The IARLB shall be composed of;
- (a) 3 representatives per 50,000km squared of regional & rural Victoria;
 - (b) A treasurer;
 - (c) A young person from regional or rural Victoria;
 - (d) A representative from a non-government organisation;
 - (e) Elders of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities.
- 4.3 The IARLB shall be a board under the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions sector of the Victorian Government;
- (a) Management of the Board is to be conducted by the Department, including;
 - (i) Reviewing & updating the scope of the legislation and the work of the IARLB.
 - (b) The IARLB shall report to the department annually.

Clause 5 Community Centres

- 5.1 The IARLB shall establish, have oversight of, and implement community centres across regional and rural areas of Victoria that provide;
- (a) Education classes, life skills and employment resources;
 - (b) Learning resources and a study space;
 - (c) Community and cultural opportunities;
 - (d) Resources and assistance for those new to the area and those taking the next step in life.
- 5.2 Accessibility to community centres shall be prioritised through;
- (a) Choice of locations;
 - (b) Opening hours;
 - (c) Cooperation with existing services within the region;
 - (d) Integration into the local community.
- 5.3 Community centres shall focus on education, and equipping young people for job opportunities and personal development, including, but not limited to;
- (a) First aid training;
 - (b) Mental Health First Aid training;
 - (c) Pool lifeguard training;
 - (d) Hospitality & barista training;
 - (e) Defensive Driver courses;
 - (f) Personal finance & budgeting;
 - (g) Career facilitation resources, including;
 - (i) Information for TAFE courses;
 - (ii) Apprenticeships;
 - (iii) Part time work.
 - (h) Computer, digital & cyber literacy;
 - (i) English literacy & ESL classes.

Clause 6 Pantries

- 6.1 The IARLB shall establish pantries in designated locations to ensure;
- (a) Access to perishable and non-perishable food items;
 - (b) Access to personal care items that promote healthy living;
 - (c) Connection to community and its residents;
 - (d) Work experience for youths, residents, and stakeholders in the area;
 - (e) Volunteering opportunities for the community.
- 6.2 The pantries shall contain items which have been identified as an essential food and care item.
- (a) Items in the pantries shall be reviewed every 3 months by the IARLB.
- 6.3 An individual must meet the following conditions to be eligible to access pantries;
- (a) The individual must have an income less than \$50,000;
 - (b) The individual must provide proof of residency which can be in the form of one of the following:
 - (i) Legal identity showing their residency in the area;
 - (ii) Proof of enrolment into an education institution in the area;
 - (iii) Proof of employment within 40kms of the area.
- 6.4 The IARLB shall establish pantries accessible to all residents in the area. This includes but is not limited to;
- (a) Pantry location being within 500 metres of public transport;
 - (b) Provision of support for persons identified with a disability.
- 6.5 The IARLB shall select items in the pantries through discussion with groups that involve;
- (a) Youths;
 - (b) Elders;
 - (c) Community leaders;

- (d) Council members;
 - (e) Churches;
 - (f) Other stakeholder bodies.
- 6.6 The IARLB shall provide opportunities for the following groups to monitor the pantry operations under the direction of a member from the IARLB;
- (a) Youths;
 - (b) Community leaders;
 - (c) Residents;
 - (d) Elders;
 - (e) Supporting stakeholders of the designated area.
- 6.7 The IARLB shall source items for the pantries through;
- (a) Donations;
 - (b) Purchases of items;
 - (c) Government programs;
 - (d) Collaboration with other food banks and pantries in the designated area.

Clause 7 Access to transport

- 7.1 The IARLB, in collaboration with the Department of Transport and Planning, shall provide more consistent and accessible transit connections to;
- (a) Link regional areas together;
 - (b) Connect to major centres.
- 7.2 Accessible transit connections shall include, but is not limited to;
- (a) More bus routes that service little connected areas;
 - (b) More bus stops on existing routes and more stops within towns;
 - (c) More frequent timetabled services on existing routes;
 - (d) Increased convenience on timetabled services and routes, including;

- (i) USB ports on trains;
 - (ii) Improved shelter at bus stops;
 - (iii) Better connections to other routes and services.
- (e) The addition of new train stations on existing regional rail lines;
- (f) The expansion of the regional rail network.
- 7.3 On demand 'FlexiRide' Public Transport bus options shall be established in regional centres and regional areas that lack transport services.
- 7.4 The Myki contactless smart card ticketing system shall expand across all public transport in regional and rural Victoria.

Clause 8 Housing

- 8.1 The IARLB shall provide safe social housing, in collaboration with not-for-profits, within 9 months of an application;
- (a) Housing shall be within 50 km in a regional or rural area of the applicant's specification.
- 8.2 An individual shall select one of the following:
- (a) A joint application;
 - (i) A maximum of 6 can apply in a joint application;
 - (ii) The relationship between each individual must be listed;
 - (iii) Priority shall be given to those with dependents.
 - (b) If they are willing to live in a shared house;
 - (i) The IARLB is required to accept this request.
- 8.3 An individual shall meet the following to be eligible for social housing;
- (a) Be over the age of 16 years at the time of application;
 - (b) The individual shall not have an income of over \$50,000;
 - (c) Proof of plan to reside in their given area. This shall include;

- (i) An employment status or a student status within 50 km of the area;
 - (ii) Current residence in the area.
- 8.4 The rent of the housing shall aim to recoup the cost to the Government within 25 years, as well as accounting for maintenance;
 - (a) The rent shall be adjusted to match inflation and maintenance;
 - (b) The rent shall be readjusted every 6 months.
- (c) The rent shall not include utilities;
 - (i) Utilities are to be paid for directly by the individual.

Clause 9 Review

- 9.1 The IARLB shall be reviewed after 12 months of operation and every two years subsequently to determine;
 - (a) The effectiveness of the IARLB;
 - (b) The meeting of objectives & analysing improvements;
 - (c) Assessment of current Board Members to encourage diversity;
 - (d) A renewal of the board;
 - (i) Members are required to re-apply;
 - (ii) Applications shall be open to the public.
- 9.2 The community centres shall be reviewed every 12 months to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of meeting its objectives.
- 9.3 The pantries shall be reviewed every financial year to determine whether;
 - (a) The IARLB is ensuring effectiveness and efficiency of the pantries;
 - (b) The perishable and non-perishable item supply and demand is being met.

- 9.4 Transport access shall be reviewed every 12 months to determine;
- (a) Reliability;
 - (b) Usage of new services;
 - (c) Potential expansion of services.
- 9.5 The housing scheme shall be reviewed every 12 months to determine;
- (a) The success rate of securing housing within nine months;
 - (b) Any recommendations.