



*1<sup>st</sup> of April*

Hi there,

Every Australian can welcome the unprecedented progress the Federal Government's budget will help forge on one of our most widespread and costly health scourges, yet one of the most unrecognised.

Part of an allocation of close to \$60 million will add to Victorian Government funds to create Australia's first specialised treatment and research centre for endometriosis and other pelvic pain in Melbourne.

This will be the culmination of a campaign I have long waged to reduce the personal suffering and economic costs of a debilitating inflammatory disease – in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows in other parts of the body – that strikes as many as one in nine women and gender-diverse people.

In the days before the federal budget, the Victorian Government indicated its support, amid community momentum behind the campaign.

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## **Victoria will lead the way to better women's health**

It is my hope and expectation that other states will follow, and that the Federal Government will partner with them to establish a national network of specialist centres.

I received many hundreds of harrowing first-hand stories. They're stories told too rarely; endo is shrouded in stigma because people can be uncomfortable talking about menstrual issues, painful sex, and reproductive health complications, all common impacts of the condition.

Many sufferers have been told debilitating period pain is just a normal part of life.

It's not. Endo needs proper attention and can be treated. But today diagnosis, which requires laparoscopic surgery, takes an average of 6.5 years.

That's a hell of a lot of unnecessary pain. The economic cost is close to \$10 billion a year.



## **Listening – and hearing**

This funding will ultimately save taxpayers a fortune in lost productivity and acute healthcare.

I thank and applaud the Federal Government for acting, and Health Minister Greg Hunt for hearing our argument for rational, evidence-based change. It should appeal to social progressives and fiscal conservatives alike and deserves bi-partisan support.

The centre will train world class surgeons and nurses, provide interdisciplinary and holistic care, and partner with research organisations to evaluate the best treatments and training. It will also help those with any kind of persistent pelvic pain and disease.

There are 35,000 endometriosis-related hospitalisations each year in Australia. Endo is as common as asthma and rheumatoid arthritis. It is more common than breast and prostate cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. It also hits transgender and gender-diverse people.



## **New order in the court, please!**

Speaking of bi-partisan support for economic and social reform, there's been another cause for enthusiasm and optimism on an entirely different front in recent days.

I'm particularly personally encouraged by this one, too. I tabled in the state Senate the ground-breaking report on the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System by the Legal and Social Issues Committee, which I chair.

It's a massive report, and will take time to consider, but it was created with bi-partisan co-operation that augurs well for change.

It presents more than 100 recommendations. The committee held more than 50 public hearings, involving individuals with lived experience and representatives from more than 90 organisations.

And like the campaign for endo reform, it involved heart-wrenching, tragic evidence. The need for change is amplified by stories from victims of crime who have survived wrenching loss and grief.

I urge the Government and the Opposition to carefully consider implementation of this evidence-based, community informed reform document. It can improve the lives of many, and better use scarce resources.



## The big picture

I encapsulated key themes in my speech:

- The evidence showed building more prisons will not make Victorians safer – and may well do the opposite.
- The priority should be on supporting victims of crime, rehabilitating offenders, circumventing recidivism, ending over-representation of Aboriginal people in our jails and ensuring early intervention for those who are disadvantaged.
- The evidence showed various forms of social disadvantage compound to increase the risk of criminalisation and victimisation.
- The committee urges early intervention. We must identify individuals at risk and provide those social supports to divert them away from the system. This includes lifting the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14, and improved use of cautions and court-based diversions.
- There is an urgent need for trauma-informed practices; the criminal justice system needs to be more accessible and less adversarial process for victims of crime.
- We need to look at the bail system. Unsentenced prisoners now account for 87 per cent of prison receptions. The purpose of bail is to keep the community safe from high offenders but denying bail has had negative effects on so many people who have been charged with an offence, and it has disproportionately impacted women, Aboriginal Victorians, children, young people and people living with disabilities.
- The same goes for parole. We are now releasing people without parole, and that does not necessarily make the community safer.

You can read or watch my full speech [here](#). I'll keep you posted on this one, too.



## Fiscal festival

It's a fiscal fest, a budget bash. The Victorian Budget is only weeks away. I look forward to the Government fleshing out the endo centre strategy, and welcome Health Minister Martin Foley's support for action.

He, too, has listened and heard, which helped his federal counterpart step up. It's something that can and should be implemented quickly.

There is several other policies and ideas from me and Reason Party that I'm pushing to have in the state budget and beyond, including:

- A trial of hydromorphone at Melbourne's Safe Injecting Room as a drug replacement therapy for 50 clients to break the nexus between heroin addiction and criminal offending.
- A Medical Cannabis Driving Trial Fund for evaluation and safety assessments of 100 selected medicinal cannabis patients driving on Victorian roads.
- Investment to support ministerial-level representation, as is occurring in more and more places around the world, of a massive social and economic issue, loneliness, which is as big a health risk as smoking and obesity.



## We the people

The massive media and community response to the endo win and the justice system reform proposals is encouraging.

People are hugely engaged with political issues but, the numbers show, not so much with mainstream political parties.

The community wants proper action on global warming, better responsibility and accountability in public spending, affordable childcare, access to housing, greater personal liberty, gender equality, an end to discrimination in all its insidious forms, robust healthcare, decent education... the list goes on and is long.

It's a list that reflects shared values of fairness, freedom, compassion, and enterprise. They are among my values, and they can be summarised by something every member of society, including and especially members of parliaments, can and should support – equality of opportunity.

I've much more to say on that, on my record, and on my agenda as we head through the fiscal fest but 2022's election extravaganza.

There is much work to do.

Until next time, go well.

**Fiona.**

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