



**Australian
Nursing &
Midwifery
Federation**
VICTORIAN BRANCH

ANMF House
540 Elizabeth Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
ABN 80 571 091 192

Box 12600 A'Beckett Street PO
Melbourne Victoria 8006

www.anmfvic.asn.au

t 03 9275 9333

f 03 9275 9344

e records@anmfvic.asn.au

BC: CdeG

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Mr Andrew Chow
Director Transport
Local Government Rates Capping and
Variation Framework Consultation Paper
Essential Services Commission
Level 37, 2 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Email: localgovernment@esc.vic.gov.au

Dear Andrew

Thank you for consulting ANMF (Vic Branch) regarding the *Local Government - Rates Capping and Variation Framework Consultation Paper*.

ANMF (Vic Branch) is cognisant of cost of living pressures faced by our members and is therefore broadly supportive of objectives within the *Local Government - Rates Capping and Variation Framework (the Framework) Terms of Reference* to ensure greater accountability and transparency in local government budgeting and service delivery.

At a recent meeting at the Victorian Trades Hall Council on 29 April 2015, ANMF members welcomed the advice of the Hon Natalie Hutchins when she advised that the Framework is not intended to result in reduced services, contracting out of services, job losses and redundancies and the introduction of a user pays approach. Notwithstanding the Minister's advice, ANMF members remain concerned that capping Local Government rates may adversely impact on the essential delivery of Maternal and Child Health and Immunisation Services to local communities throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria. In view of these concerns, it is critical that the Framework contain specific measures and incentives that will ensure the Framework achieves its desired aims without resulting in the detrimental and unintended consequences outlined above.

There is a plethora of research indicating the first three years of a child's life are a critical period in a child's physical, social and psychological development, and that these early years set the foundation for health outcomes and behaviours into adulthood. It is also well recognised that strategies aimed at the early years of a child's life – which promote prevention or early intervention – have the most enduring outcomes and are the most cost effective. The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Immunisation Services provided by Local Government play a critical role in this formative period. This pivotal role was recognised by the Honourable Philip Cummins, Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott and Mr Bill Scales in their *Report to the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry [the Report]* January 2012) where it was identified that:

Victoria's antenatal and maternal and child health services are a cornerstone of its universal, early intervention and prevention program covering all children and are particularly important in the early care of vulnerable children. These services must be better resourced to meet the specific and demanding needs of Victoria's vulnerable children and their parents (Page xxxiv).

The MCH and Immunisation Services are required and determined by the State Government and delivered in collaboration with Local Government. Further, the MCH Service Framework is detailed in the *Maternal and Child Health Service Guidelines* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/professionals/health/mchsguidelines.pdf> and other relevant Department of Education and Training MCH Service Guidelines and Standards.

It is imperative that the Framework :

- Ensures funding is quarantined to implement the Victorian MCH Service Framework as stipulated by State Government and as detailed in *Maternal and Child Health Service Guidelines* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011) and other relevant Department of Education and Training MCH Service Guidelines and Standards
- Contains mechanisms to ensure Local Government sets aside adequate funding to meet its obligations arising from within the *Memorandum of Understanding between Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Municipal Association of Victoria In relation to Maternal and Child Health Services July 2012 – June 2015*
- Contains incentives for Local Government to continue to allocate funding to implement additional important public health initiatives such as opportunistic immunisations provided by MCH nurses
- Contains measures to ensure that MCH and Immunisation Nurses continue to provide Immunisation Services within Local Government. This is an essential public health measure required by the State Government
- Does not lead to an erosion or disparity of wages and conditions of employment, or loss of employment opportunities for council employees when Local Government is required to renegotiate new enterprise agreements with the unions

Finally, ANMF (Vic Branch) looks forward to contributing to the development of the Framework through our involvement in the Fairer Rating System - Local Government Sector Reference Group.

Yours Sincerely



Ms Lisa Fitzpatrick
Branch Secretary, ANMF (Vic Branch)