FROM THE MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

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BABY BOOM MUMS AND DADS GET MORE SUPPORT

Thousands of more families will get expert advice from specialist nurses around the clock as part of a $6.2 million investment in early childhood services to support Victoria’s baby boom, the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development, Maxine Morand, said today.

Ms Morand said the package of parent support programs and services included a $3.2 million injection to expand the Maternal Child Health Line by 40 per cent as well as specific programs targeting single mums, dads, newly arrived migrants and vulnerable families.

Ms Morand was speaking at the official launch of Children’s Week at Melbourne’s Zoo.

“Victorian birth notifications have soared in the last seven years,” Ms Morand said.

“Last financial year, there were 70,158 births recorded across Victoria – the highest number of births in 35 years – and a 10 percent increase from 2004-05.*

“This is why the Brumby Government is investing in early childhood, education and health services.

“Today I am announcing an extra investment of $3.2 million over four years to expand the capacity of the Maternal Child Health Line allowing it to take 30,000 more callers each year.

“The Maternal Child Health line is a seven-day a week helpline for families with children from birth to school age.

“Qualified experienced maternal child health nurses staff the line and provide invaluable information to parents, including support and advice about child health, nutrition, breast feeding and general parenting.

“Since the line started operating as a 24-hour service in 2000, it has become a key part of the State Government’s maternal child health service - and very popular with new parents.

“The extra investment will mean new parents will be able to get expert advice quicker and easier.”

Ms Morand said a further $3 million will fund initiatives including:
• A “dad’s kit” to provide information to new fathers about parenting, including baby care, support for partners and how to balance work and family;
• Parenting resources for single mothers and parents with a disability or mental illness;
Parent assistance for recent immigrants and indigenous; and
Support programs for parents including early parenting centres, play groups and parent groups.

Ms Morand also released the State Government report *A Preliminary Investigation into the Recent Increase in Birth Notifications in Victoria*.

"This data indicates that the Brumby Government has indeed made Victoria a great place to live, work and raise a family," Ms Morand said.

"Near record birth rates is a great reflection of families' confidence in Victoria's economy and this Government's investment in early childhood services and education.

“The skilful management of the Victorian economy over the last 10 years has created jobs and given couples the confidence to both start and grow their families.”

Ms Morand encouraged local families to get involved in Children’s Week events and celebrations that will be held across Victoria from until Sunday 28 October.

She said the Brumby Government had provided $65,000 to local councils and community organisations to sponsor Children’s Week events as part of festivities to mark Universal Children’s Day next Wednesday.

Events include films, puppet shows, story telling, dance demonstrations, fairs, teddy bears picnics, free children's concerts and face paintings.

Children’s Week was proclaimed in 1954 by the United Nations. This year’s theme is *A Caring World Shares*. More than 20,000 people took part in last year’s activities including 8,500 people who attended the Melbourne Zoo launch.

This year’s events have been organised by a range or groups, including local councils, kindergartens, schools, libraries and museums.

The Office for Children’s website has an Events Listing page and a search function to select activities by date, local government area, target age group and event type. To find out more about events in your local area, visit [www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/childrens-week](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/childrens-week).

*The highest number of births recorded on record in Victoria was 75,394 in 1971*