



Help to weave our social fabric plea

GROWTH councils around Australia could face social breakdown without federal help to bridge the widening infrastructure funding gap, Victoria's peak social service body has warned.

Speaking at last week's Fund the Gap summit in Melbourne, Victoria Council of Social Service chief executive Cath Smith said youth problems, drug and alcohol addiction and social isolation could escalate in growth areas without key infrastructure such as community houses, libraries, recreation facilities and child and aged care services.

"Social infrastructure is the social fabric of our communities," Ms Smith said.

"We've already got very high levels of unmet need in early intervention services for children with disability, family violence services, housing and homeless services, and drug and alcohol counselling.

"Without federal assistance, we are likely to see bigger gaps in the support for struggling families."

"That could lead to increases in mental illness, youth problems

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and people's perception of safety.

"Funding this social infrastructure gap is critical. Without it we could see social breakdown."

The Municipal Association of Victoria also has joined the council's campaign.

Association president Cr Dick Gross warned the Federal Government that ignoring the campaign would be at its peril.

"Much-loved community infrastructure must not be taken for granted," he said. "Community pride, spirit and resilience benefit from access to services and facilities. Without them there could be devastating social impacts, and consequential financial and employment losses.

"The Prime Minister's recent announcement of a fund targeting renewal projects used by local communities is a step in the right direction, but firm policy commitments are now needed."