

MEDIA RELEASE

Poor cousin no more: Mental Health Victoria applauds historic Victorian Government mental health reform investment

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Mental Health Victoria (MHV), the independent peak body for mental health, has welcomed the Victorian Government's historic commitment of \$3.8 billion over four years to kick start reform of the mental health system.

MHV CEO Angus Clelland said the funding was the single biggest investment in mental health of any government ever in Australia – and it is just the first instalment in a decade-long program of mental health reform, as recommended by the Royal Commission.

Significantly, the Victorian Government's funding commitment is \$1.5 billion more than the Federal Government's record \$2.3 billion mental health budget announced on 11 May.

"Today's budget represents the culmination of more than two decades of advocacy efforts from individuals, carers, families, peak bodies, and mental health professionals from across Victoria," Mr Clelland said.

"On behalf of the mental health sector, we commend the Victorian Government for calling the Royal Commission, committing to implementing all recommendations, providing funds in the interim to begin reform activities and respond to the devastating impacts of COVID-19, as well as today's historic funding package," he said.

"We often refer to mental health as the poor cousin of the health system. The funding announced today – and the budgets that will follow – will address this historic imbalance," he said.

"Victoria has raised the bar. It is now time for the other jurisdictions, including the Federal Government, to dig deeper and invest more in mental health and suicide prevention. The new national mental health and suicide prevention agreement is needed without delay," he said.

Mental health and suicide prevention campaigner and Chair of MHV's Lived Experience Advisory Group, Ingrid Ozols AM said the funding announcement showed that mental health and suicide prevention was being taken seriously by government and that this would help greatly decrease stigma, shame and discrimination, and improve help-seeking.

"It is clear that consumers, carers and families have been listened to and that Lived Experience is now enshrined as a central tenant in Victoria's mental health and suicide prevention policy reform agenda," Ms Ozols said.

Services in the community

MHV commends the budget's emphasis on the provision of mental health and suicide prevention services in the community, and initiatives to address access issues for people in regional Victoria, as well as initiatives for key population groups including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Critically, the budget includes funding for the first 20 of the 60 adult and older adult local mental health and wellbeing centres that were recommended by the Royal Commission, as well as child, youth and adult area mental health and wellbeing services which are to be delivered through partnerships between public health organisations or hospitals and NGOs.

“The funding announced today will help fast-track the expansion of services across Victoria, making it easier for people to get the help they need closer to home. It is no exaggeration to say that lives will be improved, and lives will be saved,” Mr Clelland said.

Thousands of jobs to be created

Mr Clelland said that just as people were the focus of the reforms, people will be key to sustaining the new mental health system.

“The reform process will create thousands of new jobs across Victoria and across all mental health disciplines including peer workers, nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and community workers. Growing the workforce will be a critical early priority. We are therefore really pleased to see substantial investment in workforce development,” he said.

“With borders closed and in the face of existing workforce shortages, we hope that today’s announcement encourages workers who have left the sector to return as we need them urgently. For people at school, TAFE or university, and for those thinking about a career change, we hope you consider working in mental health,” he said.

“We are particularly pleased to see the recognition in the budget of the importance of the Lived Experience workforce, and the critical role they will play in the development and delivery of a modern, effective and compassionate mental health and suicide prevention system,” Ms Ozols said.

Broader economic payoff from the reforms

While the focus is on improving the lives of individuals living with mental health issues, their families and carers, Mr Clelland said it was also important to remember that spending on mental health will create additional benefits for Victoria.

“For anyone who has concerns about the scale of funding – or how the funds will be raised – we need to remember that, as the Productivity Commission has confirmed, there is a very large economic return from supporting people living with mental health issues to be safe, well, housed and employed in the community. Spending on mental health and suicide prevention is an investment in Victoria’s economic future,” he said.

For further information or to arrange an interview with Angus Clelland or Ingrid Ozols AM, please call Clare Callow on 0410 147 988.