

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



Sunday, 12 April 2020

SURGE FUNDING HELPING OUR MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM DURING CRISIS

The Victorian Government has announced a funding boost to support Victoria's mental health system and ensure Victorians get the care they need, as demand for services spikes during the coronavirus crisis.

Premier Daniel Andrews and Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley today announced a \$59.4 million package to help meet demand as Victorians reach out for help with stress, isolation and uncertainty.

While staying at home and limiting physical interaction is vital to slowing the spread of the virus, it can be difficult for people's mental health and wellbeing – particularly for those already experiencing mental health conditions.

Today's investment will provide vital surge capacity for key services, which have seen a significant increase in people seeking help. Almost a quarter of people calling Lifeline in the last few weeks have been seeking support due to coronavirus, and BeyondBlue predicts demand for their services will increase by nearly 30 per cent by June.

This package is designed to assist those who already struggle with mental illness, as well as those who are experiencing it for the first time due to measures that are protecting the health system from being overrun by coronavirus – measures that are confirmed to continue with today's extension of the State of Emergency in Victoria.

To help protect our health system during coronavirus, the Government will provide \$17.8 million to begin the first phase of the roll out of 170 extra youth and adult acute mental health beds – a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

Nearly \$7 million will help mental health services deliver supports for people with severe mental illness via phone and video, to prevent relapse and emergency department presentations.

Another \$6.7 million will expand online and phone counselling services through BeyondBlue, Lifeline, Kids Helpline and Suicide Line Victoria. This funding will boost the capacity of the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council and Tandem helplines, which are also experiencing a large increase in calls.

Phones and extra data will be provided to vulnerable and high-risk clients of public mental health services, so they can stay engaged with treatment and services, and equipment and IT grants will be provided to community managed mental health services so they can offer their services remotely and respond to increased demand.

The package includes a range of support for children, young people and parents including \$6 million to fast track Orygen Youth Health's new eOrygen platform, which will provide online therapy and peer support for young people.

There is funding for intensive case management for victims of significant trauma or violence, youth engagement programs, and digital resources to help parents manage anxiety and promote emotional wellbeing.

To combat loneliness and social isolation, the state-wide coronavirus phone line will be expanded to proactively reach out to people known to be isolated or vulnerable – including senior Victorians. They will be provided emotional and practical support and referred to appropriate services to keep them connected.

Training, support and resources will be offered to frontline mental health workers – so they can better care for themselves and their clients in this new environment – as well as mental health first aid training for financial counsellors, so they can detect potential mental health issues refer people to appropriate services.

The state-wide rollout of Hospital Outreach Post-Suicidal Engagement (HOPE) program will continue in Shepparton, Epping and Bairnsdale – another key recommendation of the Royal Commission.

For information on coronavirus, please visit www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au or phone 1800 675 398

The package also includes funding for a range of specific initiatives to help veterans, seniors, new mums, Aboriginal Victorians, multicultural and faith groups, and the LGBTIQ community, as well as vulnerable cohorts including people with eating disorders and victims of family violence.

For more information about managing stress and support options, call the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Services on 1800 512 348 or visit [coronavirus.vic.gov.au](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au).

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

“Staying home and away from friends and family is vital right now, but it can be really difficult emotionally – particularly if you’re already struggling with mental illness. That’s why providing extra support is so important.”

“We want to keep people connected to the treatment and services they need while taking pressure off our hospitals – which need to be focussed on the fight against coronavirus.”

Quotes attributable to Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley

“This is an anxious and uncertain time for everyone – that’s why this support is vital.”

“This investment in people’s mental health and wellbeing will save lives and is critical to our social and economic recovery after this crisis is over.”