



The Hon James Merlino MP

Acting Premier

Minister for Mental Health

Thursday, 20 May 2021

BUILDING OUR MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM FROM THE GROUND UP

The Andrews Labor Government is delivering the biggest social reform in our state's history, investing in the mental health system Victoria deserves – and the Victorians we need to deliver it.

We all know someone who has struggled with their mental health. If it's not our own personal experience, it's that of someone we love. And when they suffer, we suffer with them.

Yet this issue hasn't been taken seriously enough. Overburdened and understaffed, our mental health system is failing Victorians.

It's why with the *Victorian Budget 2021/22*, the Labor Government will begin work on our state's new mental health system – building it from the ground up – as we deliver on every single recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

This Budget invests \$3.8 billion towards this decade-long reform, delivering more community-based services, more help for those with acute needs, more early intervention and a new dedicated system to support our kids.

All of this will be underpinned by a massive boost to our mental health workforce, supporting around 3,000 jobs – ensuring Victorians can get the care they need, while also giving thousands more Victorians the security of a job.

The Royal Commission told us we that when it comes to accessing care, Victorians don't know where to turn, or who to turn to. This Budget invests more than \$1.5 billion in community-based care, providing a 'front door' for those needing mental health support – with the first 20 of up to 60 new local services across Victoria.

Embedded in local communities, these services will be a recognisable entry point for support, with a focus on prevention, early intervention and wellbeing.

If you're in need of urgent mental health support, an emergency department shouldn't be the only place to turn – but right now, that's the experience of thousands of Victorians

Providing a step up from these front door services, this Budget invests \$954 million to establish 22 reformed area mental health and wellbeing services to replace existing services.

Critically, these services will be set up to respond to Victorians in need 24 hours a day, seven days a week – including with crisis outreach teams or emergency service responses which can be deployed as needed to ensure people are no longer falling through the gaps.

The Labor Government will also invest \$310.8 million in acute care – including \$101.8 million for 104 new beds and ongoing funding for a further 96 beds. This includes 35 acute mental health beds specifically for Victorian women.

A \$349.6 million investment will build 82 forensic mental health beds at Thomas Embling Hospital, including a dedicated 34-bed women's precinct, and \$10.9 million will deliver five additional acute mental health beds at South West Healthcare in Warrnambool. This investment builds on the 179 additional beds delivered in last year's Budget.

The Labor Government is also making sure we're properly supporting young Victorians, investing \$842 million in mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people. This investment will see two dedicated streams of support – one for children and infants, and one for young adults – with 13 area-based services across our state.

It will also deliver five new Youth Prevention and Recovery Care units, with 50 beds specifically for young people, and the expansion of the Hospital Outreach Post-suicidal Engagement (HOPE) with four new youth sites.

An estimated \$700 million of this landmark package will flow to the regions – making sure Victorians no longer have to travel away from their homes, communities and support networks in order to get care.

The Budget includes \$92.6 million in dedicated support for families and carers, including eight family and carer-led centres across the state – providing a point of support families and carers.

We know that delivering this support will require a massive boost to our mental health workforce. Together, these investments will support around 3,000 jobs – from support staff to nurses, doctors and allied professionals.

The Labor Government will make sure Victorians are ready to fill these roles, investing \$206 million to build our mental health workforce, including training and scholarships, with \$41 million to expand Victoria's lived experience workforce.

Through the Royal Commission, Victorians told us that it wasn't enough to just build a new mental health system – this transformational change needed to be protected. It's the reason the Royal Commission recommended the introduction of a new revenue mechanism to protect the long-term funding and future of our mental health system.

A Mental Health and Wellbeing Levy will apply to businesses with more than \$10 million in wages nationally, less than 5 per cent of employers, from 1 January 2022.

By introducing a dedicated revenue stream to fund mental health, we can continue to improve our mental health system and protect this reform well into the future.

These investments will be at the heart of Victoria's recovery. Changing lives, saving lives – and getting more Victorians back to work.

Quotes attributable to the Acting Premier and Minister for Mental Health James Merlino

"This represents the biggest social reform in our state's history. Most importantly though, these investments will change lives and save lives."

"Everyone of us has experienced it directly or knows someone who has – and yet mental health and wellbeing has never been given the priority it deserves. We're changing that."

"We're ensuring Victorians have the mental health support they need, when they need it – while at the same time giving more Victorians the security and certainty of a job."