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Acting Premier
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BETTER MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR REGIONAL VICTORIA

Right now, too many people living in rural and regional Victoria cannot access care in their own communities. Instead, often when they're at their most vulnerable, they're forced to travel away from their home, families and support networks.

The Andrews Labor Government is investing an estimated \$700 million in new and expanded regional mental health support services to make sure help is available in every corner of our state.

This dedicated regional funding comes as part of the Labor Government's record \$3.8 billion investment in mental health to transform the way care is offered across Victoria – with more early intervention, more focus on wellbeing and prevention, more support available in local communities and the creation of a dedicated system for our kids.

The total package will deliver the first 20 of up to 60 new local services across both metropolitan and regional Victoria, providing a 'front door' for care that's embedded in local communities. This includes our first six fast-tracked sites, with locations in Benalla, Greater Geelong and the Latrobe Valley, set to open by the end of 2022.

Providing a step up from these 'front door' sites, this Budget also invests \$954 million in 22 reformed area mental health and wellbeing services, replacing existing services across our state. Critically, these services will be set up to respond to Victorians in need 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

This includes crisis outreach teams or emergency service responses which can be deployed as needed to ensure people no longer fall through the gaps. These services will provide support to Victorians experiencing more complex mental health challenges, without requiring them to travel to the city.

The *Victorian Budget 2021/22* delivers continued support for the successful HOPE (Hospital Outreach Post-suicidal Engagement) program, with three regional sites receiving ongoing funding, including South West Healthcare in Warrnambool, Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton and Mildura Base Hospital.

We are investing \$17.4 million in sub-regional follow-up care across the state – in Bairnsdale, Bass Coast, Central Gippsland, West Gippsland, Hamilton, Horsham, Echuca, Swan Hill, and Wangaratta. Delivering care after a hospitalisation, these services will help make sure regional Victorians are no longer falling through the cracks.

The Budget also invests \$141 million for five new Youth Prevention and Recovery Care Units (YPARCs), including locations in the Barwon South-West, Gippsland and Grampians regions, specifically designed for young people aged 16 to 25 years.

This investment will deliver 50 beds across the state, offering a 'step up' from community care or 'step down' from hospital, with 24-hour support delivered in a home-style setting. Bendigo's existing YPARC will also be upgraded.

Our Youth Mobile Targeted Assertive Outreach teams will also be expanded, providing support to young people in their homes or other settings where they may feel more comfortable.

The Budget invests \$5.1 million for improving non-government helplines and connections with mental health and wellbeing services, which includes funding for Beyond Blue and Lifeline.

Two dedicated streams of support – one for children and infants, and one for young adults – will also help families in regional Victoria, with the creation of 13 area-based services across our state.

Last year, we experienced new and innovative ways of delivering care. It's why a further \$2.3 million will trial two new digital services, enabling rural and regional Victorians to access care from their very own homes.

We are also providing funding to continue the Live 4 Life and Be Well in the Ranges programs – bespoke regional mental health programs that work closely with young people and those affected by bushfires.

Collectively, our efforts to build a new mental health system will support around 3,000 jobs – many of them in our regional communities. It's why an additional \$11 million will deliver a Rural and Regional Workforce Incentive Scheme, attracting, training and recruiting more mental health professionals to our country communities.

This Scheme will be developed alongside a Statewide Mental Health Workforce Strategy, for delivery by the end of 2021.

To oversee our investments, and make sure we're meeting the needs of local communities, eight Interim Regional Bodies will also be established, providing on-the-ground insight and expertise.

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.

Together, these investments will give people in regional Victoria a pathway to recovery in their own community, and close to home.

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

“Every Victorian deserves the same level of mental health support – no matter where they live. The current ‘postcode lottery’ that defines who gets care and who doesn’t ends now.”

“We’re building our mental health system from the ground up – investing in the services Victorians need, and the Victorians needed to deliver them, right across the state.”

Quotes attributable to Minister for Regional Development Mary-Anne Thomas

“When you’re sick or scared, the last thing you should have to do is leave home and the people you love. And yet, that’s the experience of too many regional Victorians.”

“Making sure care is available in local communities will make all the difference when it comes to people’s recovery.”