

# Media Release

**The Hon James Merlino MP**  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education  
Minister for Mental Health



Monday, 4 October 2021

## STATEWIDE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Every government secondary student in Victoria can now access vital mental health support at school with the roll out of mental health practitioners to every Victorian government secondary and specialist school now complete.

Minister for Education James Merlino today announced the roll out of the \$51.2 million Mental Health Practitioners initiative will be finalised by Term Four – a year earlier than originally committed to, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The last phase of the roll out will see more than 50 secondary and specialist schools in Goulburn, Brimbank/Melton and Wimmera South West receive funding to recruit a mental health practitioner from the start of Term Four.

The support will enable schools to employ a practitioner for up to five days a week – with more than 250 suitably qualified and registered mental health practitioners already working across the state’s secondary schools.

The mental health practitioners can include psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists and mental health nurses delivering the unique needs of each student cohort.

Supporting around 188,000 students, these practitioners offer counselling and early intervention services, support students with complex needs, connect students to broader allied and community health services and deliver whole-school mental health promotion and prevention activities – including during periods of remote learning.

In August 2020, additional support for this critical program helped boost a further 51 mental health practitioners to specialist schools across the state, catering to the mental health needs of some of Victoria’s most vulnerable students. Around 4,300 secondary-aged students with disabilities currently have access to a practitioner in their school.

The Mental Health Practitioners initiative is in addition to the Government’s \$28.5 million package to ensure that all Victorian government school students have continued access to professional mental health and wellbeing support during the pandemic.

The *Victorian Budget 2021/22* has also invested \$217.8 million in new support for schools, including \$200 million for a new School Mental Health Fund – allowing schools to select and implement mental health and wellbeing programs that best meet the needs of their students, while also connecting with specialist services.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

*“Students, teachers, families and school communities have been incredibly resilient throughout this pandemic – but we know it’s been incredibly difficult for many of our kids, and we’re making sure they’re supported while studying.”*

*“We’ve delivered the Mental Health Practitioners initiative a year ahead of schedule – giving students in secondary and specialist schools the direct support they need during and well beyond this pandemic.”*

*“We’ve laid out our plan to get students back into the classroom this term, but we know some kids will need more support – and this program will make it easy for them to reach out and get the mental health care they deserve.”*

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