

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers



Thursday, 11 November 2021

NEW MENTAL HEALTH LIVED EXPERIENCE LEADERSHIP

The Andrews Labor Government has appointed its first Executive Director of Lived Experience to help build Victoria's new mental health and wellbeing system, ensuring those with experience of the mental health system are at the centre of its reform.

Mary O'Hagan, an internationally recognised lived experience executive and advocate will take on the leadership role after dedicating her passion and expertise to the lived experience movement for more than 35 years. She is also a former Mental Health Commissioner of New Zealand, where she advocated as a strong voice for change.

This appointment delivers on a key recommendation from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System to employ people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress in leadership positions within the Department of Health.

This new leadership role will work to ensure that mental health and alcohol and other drug services respond to the needs of consumers and their carers by engaging their views and expertise in the development of policies and programs.

Born in New Zealand, Ms O'Hagan experienced psychological distress as a young woman and felt trapped in services that exacerbated her distress without considering her preferences for treatment and support.

Since this time, she has championed the insights and voices of people with lived experience to be embedded in mental health services and is passionate about transforming the mental health system from the inside.

A record \$3.8 billion was allocated in the *Victorian Budget 2021/22* to start the critical mental health and wellbeing reform and to support the system now – to ensure all Victorians can get the treatment, care and support they need, when they need it.

Quote attributable to Minister for Mental Health James Merlino

"Mary O'Hagan has worked tirelessly for decades to change the way services respond to people living with mental illness or psychological distress – we're thrilled to have her on board to support our huge system-wide reform."

Quote attributable to Executive Director, Lived Experience Mary O'Hagan

"I see so much hope for mental health reform here in Victoria. It won't be easy, but there's never been a more important time for people with lived experience – consumers, carers, families and supporters - to take on leadership roles to bring real changes to the new system and new services."