

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education
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GROWING VICTORIA'S MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING WORKFORCE

The Andrews Labor Government is delivering the pipeline of skilled workers our state needs as we rebuild the mental health system – and more Victorians than ever are signing up for education and career opportunities in the booming sector.

Since the Labor Government added the Certificate IV in Mental Health to its signature Free TAFE program, the course has seen a 427 per cent surge in commencements, as Victorians are drawn to the growing career pathways the state's mental health reform is delivering.

Since the Certificate IV course in Mental Health Peer Work was added to Free TAFE in mid-2020, responding to the *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System's* interim report recommendation to put people with lived experience at the centre of the mental healthcare system, commencements have already grown by 87 per cent.

In December 2021, the Government released *Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021-2024*, which outlines the steps needed to grow, retain and properly support the workforce to keep pace with the huge investment in extra mental health services in every corner of the state.

The Strategy is backed by the creation of 1,000 full-time positions across the mental health workforce, and 2022 will see the launch of a new campaign to attract even more workers to Victoria – both from within the state and from key international markets like Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The Strategy is delivering new scholarships to attract new people to the workforce and upskill existing mental health workers to make sure they have the skills they need to build their careers – with up to 70 postgraduate scholarships for Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) practitioners and allied health clinicians working in mental health.

The scholarships will support social workers, occupational therapists, psychologists and AOD practitioners working in state-funded services to complete postgraduate study that will broaden their skillset, support them to treat more Victorians with a wider range of mental health concerns, and develop their skills as leaders in mental healthcare.

The Labor Government is also delivering a new \$290,000 Lived and Living Experience Workforces scholarship program – giving Victorians who have navigated the mental health system and are now sharing their expertise in the workforce the educational and training options and formal qualifications they need to build their careers.

Around 20 scholarships will be available to support lived experience workers in mental health or alcohol and other drug services, and applications for both programs are now open at acn.edu.au/scholarships.

These workforce programs are part of the Labor Government's \$269 million dedicated investment in mental health workforce in the past two years – building a bigger, better-skilled and well-supported workforce that offers opportunities for Victorians to embark on a rewarding career in the reformed mental health system.

To enrol in a Free TAFE Mental Health course and join the workforce, visit www.vic.gov.au/free-tafe.

Quote attributable to Minister for Mental Health James Merlino

"There's never been a better time to consider a career in mental health as we invest in jobs and training to deliver better care for Victorians – and people are responding, signing up through Free TAFE to join the sector."

Quote attributable to Minister for Training and Skills Gayle Tierney

"This is Free TAFE at its best – delivering fantastic training and career opportunities for Victorians and delivering on the workforce demands as we build a better mental health system for our state."

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