

Media Release

The Hon Jaclyn Symes MP

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



Thursday, 20 October 2022

REBUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AFTER FLOODS

As flood-affected towns across Victoria begin relief and recovery efforts, the Victorian Government is working to minimise the risks floodwaters can cause to human health, and investing to support communities to rebuild and recover together.

Communities across the state are still experiencing major flooding, with more rain in the coming days set to risk higher water levels and flash flooding – both of which pose threats to people's health.

An investment of \$6.5 million will deliver important health protection initiatives, with a dedicated monitoring and control system to prevent and control mosquitoes that are drawn to flooded areas, as well as making the vaccination for Japanese Encephalitis Virus – a serious mosquito-borne disease – free in flood-affected areas.

This funding will also deploy an Environmental Health and Field workforce to flooded regions to provide communities with advice on waste disposal, septic tank repair and the safest way to clean up homes and businesses, as well as boost resourcing in the worst-affected Local Public Health Units to keep communities safe and healthy.

The floods have affected healthcare staffing levels in the affected areas – with some staff unable to get to work. Pharmacies in flooded areas, many of which have just a single pharmacist, are processing extremely high levels of scripts with many people displaced.

Flooded sewers or septic tanks often contaminate floodwater before it inundates properties and clean drinking water sources, while flooded areas are subject to mosquito invasions. As flood clean-up and recovery begins, mould growth can also pose a serious risk to the human respiratory system.

A \$13.4 million package will deliver 200 hospital staff to flood-affected areas for three months, ensuring they can be backfilled if they are coming from larger hospitals in other parts of the state, 20 locum pharmacists to support small local pharmacies, and extra air ambulance transfers for patients and staff while roads are inaccessible.

An investment of \$2 million will support the health of Aboriginal Victorian communities affected by the floods, many of which have been inundated. The funding will make sure Aboriginal Health Services in Shepparton, Swan Hill, Kerang and Echuca have appropriate GP, nurse and health outreach worker coverage while they are isolated.

A further \$1.4 million will make sure flood-affected communities know exactly what they need to do to stay safe following an inundation of floodwaters – with targeted communications to warn people of the risks of mosquito-borne illnesses and flood-related health issues, and support to get critical information into CALD communities.

During the pandemic, the Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership has connected multicultural communities with emergency services, helping diverse Victorians access the services they need in times of crisis and stress – and an investment of \$500,000 will support this program to continue throughout the flood efforts.

Community sport facilities are at the heart of regional communities across Victoria – promoting good physical health as well as community connection, but many local sporting clubs have been damaged or completely destroyed by floodwater.

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A \$5.2 million *Community Sport Emergency Flood Assistance Program* will deliver an initial payment of \$5,000 to directly-affected sporting clubs across the state, helping them meet some initial upfront costs of item and equipment replacement to help communities get back out on the field as soon as possible.

Clubs can apply for the grants from Friday, 21 October by visiting sport.vic.gov.au/grants-and-funding/our-grants/Community-Sport-Emergency-Flood-Assistance-Program.

Quote attributable to Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes

"Inundation isn't the only risk a flood brings – it poses a serious threat to human health, so we're supporting our flood-affected communities stay safe now and in the months of recovery to come."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"While communities band together to recover and rebuild after the floods, we're looking after people's health – I encourage everyone in affected areas to come out and protect themselves with a free Japanese Encephalitis vaccine in the coming weeks."

Quote attributable to Minister for Community Sport Ros Spence

"Our country communities revolve around their local sports clubs, who have lost so much as a result of these floods. We'll help them kickstart the recovery as quickly as possible to get local teams back out on the field."