

Media Release

Jaclyn Symes MLC

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



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BACKING OUR SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS TO RECOVER

The Victorian Government is making sure flood-affected communities still get the local education and healthcare they deserve, with an investment to kickstart the recovery of damaged schools and health services.

The \$77.3 million *Health and Education Recovery Fund* will support the estimated 320 schools and 28 health services affected by the floods – alongside a support package to give TAFE students training continuity, fund replacement uniforms and equipment for school students and set up temporary infrastructure to keep health services operating.

Health services like Rochester, Elmore Health and Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-Operative have seen significant and extensive inundation of water. The Fund will support initial repair works to the services, alongside others that may have suffered more mild damage or are yet to be assessed.

Any temporary facilities that hospitals, public sector aged care and health services need to keep providing quality care to the community will also be supported – like marquees, emergency generators, water pumps or storage facilities.

Every affected government school will see its immediate remediation costs covered – with works like repairing roofs, drying out inundated buildings, replacing floors and restoring utilities across school grounds. Grants of \$10,000 will also help schools clean up their outdoor equipment like playgrounds.

The Fund will also deliver extra relocatable buildings for schools that have lost classrooms, getting students back to learning as soon as possible, alongside support to replace classroom items like tables, chairs, books and TVs.

Importantly, this investment will also deliver direct relief to students and families from both government and non-government schools who have lost so much in the floods – with support for new uniforms, shoes and stationery packs, as well as USB internet dongles and other digital devices to replace things families may have lost.

Students in Rochester, which has been badly damaged and is expected to endure more flooding in the coming days, will also receive a laptop and USB dongle to help them stay connected and keep learning despite the effects of the floods.

Other schools that are closed for a longer period of time, with students moving to another nearby school to complete Term 4, will be supported with a bus service to make sure no child misses out on education.

Eleven TAFEs – campuses of GOTAFE, Wodonga TAFE and BKI – have also suffered damage or been cut off after the floods, and \$8.3 million from the Fund will support site assessments and immediate equipment replacement, as well as securing extra work placements for students to make up for any delays.

The investment will also deliver targeted support to the 500 staff and 8,000 students at the affected TAFEs, from technology and internet access to replacement study equipment, counselling for staff and students, and flood leave for staff as required.

The package builds on an investment of more than \$23 million to support local public health efforts, including deploying more healthcare staff to affected health services, and support to make sure VCE students can still complete their schooling successfully and deliver Free Kinder in flood-affected areas for the rest of Term 4.

In addition to the *Health and Education Recovery Fund*, and in recognition of the evolving impacts of the floods on communities across Victoria, the Government will add a further 12 LGAs to its *Council Flood Support Fund* – an initial payment of \$500,000 to the local government areas with the most profound flood damage.

Ararat Rural City, Ballarat City, Colac Otway Shire, Glenelg Shire, Golden Plains Shire, Indigo Shire, Moorabool Shire, Moyne Shire, Swan Hill Rural City, Warrnambool City, Wodonga City and Yarriambiack Shire councils will all receive the payment to support their initial relief and recovery efforts.

Quote attributable to Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes

"Flood-affected communities just want to get back on their feet quickly – this investment in the critical health and education services people rely on will make sure they can keep serving their community while they recover."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"Many of our health services in regional Victoria have suffered profound damage over the past week – we're investing to make sure communities don't lose access to their trusted healthcare providers."

Quote attributable to Minister for Education Natalie Hutchins

"Whether it's repairing school buildings, providing families with school supplies they've lost or keeping isolated school communities connected, we're doing everything we can to support students and staff to get back to learning and teaching."

Quote attributable to Minister for Training and Skills Gayle Tierney

"We're investing \$8.3 million to deliver targeted support for staff and students at flood-affected TAFEs, from providing technology and internet access to replacing study equipment and offering counselling and flood leave for staff as required."