

Media Release

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BUILDING A WORLD-CLASS MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM FOR ALL VICTORIANS

Since the *Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System* handed down its findings, the Andrews Labor Government has opened new services, delivered hundreds of new mental health beds and recruited thousands of dedicated professionals into the mental health workforce.

Commencing today, the groundbreaking new *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022* comes into effect – resetting the state's mental health system and enshrining the recommendations from the Royal Commission into law.

The Labor Government's landmark legislation paves the way for a redesigned, world-class mental health and wellbeing system that has human rights and lived experience expertise at its core.

The Act focuses on a system of early intervention and community-based services to ensure people are involved in decisions about their treatment and importantly, incorporates a statement of recognition and acknowledgement of treaty process.

Guided by Victorians with lived experience of mental illness, the new Act establishes a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria and Regional Mental Health and Wellbeing Boards.

Formally commencing today, the Commission will lead a new independent statutory authority with a dedicated focus on transparency.

It will monitor and publicly report on performance, quality and safety of Victoria's mental health and wellbeing system, handle and investigate complaints about service delivery, and elevate the leadership of people with lived experience.

A new governing board and advisory body, Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria, recognises the need to address the emerging mental health issues facing young people. Similarly, the Regional Mental Health and Wellbeing Boards will advocate for the unique and distinctive challenges faced by regional and rural Victorians.

The Act also enables a new 'opt out' model of access to non-legal advocacy services for people who are subject to compulsory treatment, helping connect them with advocacy support when they need it.

Led by Victoria Legal Aid's Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA), the service will ensure people can participate in decisions about their treatment and understand and exercise their rights.

The Labor Government has been working closely with the sector to assist transition to the Act, with a focus on delivering information, training, and resources to help service providers and the workforce understand new requirements.

To ensure the new system continues to provide the best support for all Victorians, a review of the *Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022* will take place in five to seven years.

It comes at the same time as another significant milestone, with the new \$5.3 million emergency department mental health, alcohol and other drugs (AOD) hub at the Royal Melbourne Hospital now complete – the result of another key recommendation from the Royal Commission.

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The hub is located within the hospital's existing ED and will treat people needing immediate, specialised crisis care for mental health and AOD use when it becomes operational in September.

Featuring six mental health beds and six behavioural assessment cubicles, the new facility will work to free up the general ED so it can focus on caring for other patients.

Patients will be assessed by a team of psychiatrists, mental health nurses and social workers, before being referred to other services as required – providing them with the right support, sooner.

It is one of six hubs being delivered across the state as part of a \$32 million investment, including St Vincent's Hospital, Barwon Health University Hospital, Monash Medical Centre, Frankston Hospital and Sunshine Hospital.

The Labor Government is also investing a further \$10 million to deliver ED mental health and AOD hubs for regional Victorians, including Traralgon, Ballarat, Bendigo, and Shepparton.

The *Victorian Budget 2023/24* delivered \$776 million for mental health and AOD initiatives, as we build a responsive and compassionate mental health and wellbeing system for all Victorians – bringing the overall investment into the system to more than \$6 billion since the Royal Commission report was handed down.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Mental Health Gabrielle Williams

“Everyone deserves the right to compassionate care and support – the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Act underpins the delivery of a transformed system centred around responsiveness, human rights and lived experience.”

“We know there is increased pressure on emergency departments to treat people with psychological distress or AOD-related issues – that's why our hubs are delivering vital, specialised care and driving down system demand.”