

Media Release

Ingrid Stitt MP
Minister for Mental Health
Minister for Ageing
Minister for Multicultural Affairs



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VICTORIA'S FIRST COMMUNITY-BASED DISTRESS SUPPORT SERVICE

The Albanese Labor Government and Allan Labor Government are delivering a new free community-based service to support Victorians experiencing psychological distress.

Victorian Minister for Mental Health Ingrid Stitt and Federal Assistant Minister for Social Services and the Prevention of Family Violence Ged Kearney today launched the Distress Brief Support program trial in Darebin and Shepparton.

A recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and a key part of the *Victorian Suicide Prevention and Response Strategy 2024-2034* – the two-year pilot is designed to help people manage distress early and connect them to the right local supports.

The program supports people experiencing distress to develop skills to manage their circumstances and access non-clinical, short-term support as an alternative to hospital-based care.

The Victorian trial is a jointly funded initiative, with the Albanese Labor Government contributing \$2.4 million and the Allan Labor Government contributing \$2.6 million.

It is specifically designed for people who are not in crisis and do not require emergency care – filling a critical gap in the system by offering earlier, community-based help.

The free service will be delivered by ermha365 in Darebin in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and Switchboard Victoria, and by Mind Australia in Shepparton in partnership with Primary Care Connect.

This strong partnership model ensures the service is inclusive, trauma-informed and grounded in lived and living experience – with peer workers at its core.

Once referred to the service, people will be connected with non-clinical support including peer workers who will work with them and equip them with the tools and skills to manage their distress over a two-to-three week period.

Following that, there is the option of referral into longer-term services such as Victoria's network of Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals.

Mind Australia and ermha365 worked closely with people with lived and living experience, diverse communities and local services to co-design the program for adults who could benefit from early, non-clinical support.

Quote attributable to Minister for Mental Health Ingrid Stitt

"This is Victoria's first program giving people who aren't in crisis a safe, compassionate space to manage distress early – while easing pressure on hospitals and connecting them to vital community support."

Quote attributable to Federal Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Emma McBride

"We're breaking down barriers to care and putting services in the heart of communities. This offers Victorians who are in distress critical early intervention."

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Quote attributable to Federal Assistant Minister for Social Services and the Prevention of Family Violence Ged Kearney MP

"If we can meet people with compassion at the right moment, even for just a 21-day period, we have the opportunity to change their whole life course."

Quote attributable to Member for Northern Victoria Jaclyn Symes

"This service in Shepparton will give local people a safe and supportive place to manage distress early, with connections to the right community supports when they need it most."

Quote attributable to Member for Northcote Kat Theophanous

"This new service in Darebin will give local people the chance to get help early in a safe, supportive and welcoming environment close to home."

Quote attributable to Member for Preston Nathan Lambert

"Having engagement points to this service in multiple locations across Darebin means people and their families can get the compassionate support they need sooner while also easing pressure on our other local health services"