

Media Release

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



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FAST-TRACKED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR VICTORIANS IN NEED

Victoria's mental health system will receive nearly \$60 million in an additional boost to get more Victorians support when they need it – now and after the pandemic is over and its effects are still being felt – as we continue to work together to fight this deadly virus.

Building increased system capacity – whether that's in our hospitals or out in the community – will be vital to the wellbeing of all Victorians as the challenges of the global pandemic hit hard for some, especially those people already living with mental ill health.

The \$59.7 million in new funding will strengthen the surge capacity of clinical and community mental health services across Victoria to cope with additional presentations and reduce pressure on hospital emergency departments – ensuring Victorians can get the care they need, even as demand for services spikes.

This funding will also fast-track delivery of more new public acute mental health beds recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria's mental health system, boost community mental health services and accelerate the state-wide roll out of Hospital Outreach Post-Suicidal Engagement (HOPE) program.

In the face of the current crisis, opening hours in mental health community clinics will be extended to enable face-to-face sessions and assessments to be conducted in accordance with physical distancing requirements – taking pressure off busy emergency departments, focusing on prevention and providing support to those who need it.

More mental health staff will be embedded within Ambulance Victoria's RefCom service to support paramedics and ensure the right advice and information is provided to frequent callers, including developing care plans as needed.

Community mental health services and all 15 Melbourne based headspace centres will be provided funding to do more proactive outreach throughout the pandemic – reaching out to known mental health clients to check that they are ok and have the support they need.

We're also providing additional mental health and wellbeing support for our police and paramedics with Phoenix, the Centre of Excellence in Trauma, providing support to employment assistance programs. \$250,000 will also be provided to the Nursing and Midwifery Health Program to ensure additional mental health counselling and support for nurses, midwives and personal care workers.

The successful HOPE post-suicide prevention program will be rolled out to seven new sites at Box Hill, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Monash Clayton, Heidelberg and Broadmeadows, Warrnambool and Mildura – completing the state-wide roll-out. Additional clinical capacity will also be added to existing sites in Albury Wodonga and Ballarat.

The interim report from the Royal Commission recommended an additional 135 beds, but further conversations with health services have identified additional capacity at some sites allowing the overall figure to increase 144 new beds – at Geelong, Epping, Sunshine and Melbourne. Planning for these new beds will now be fast-tracked to help cope with additional demand, and the beds will be available long after this pandemic is finished.

This new funding builds on the almost \$135 million the Victorian Government has already invested in mental health during the pandemic.

There are plenty of ways to support other people or be supported if you are feeling anxious or uncertain. If you or someone you know needs help, you can call Lifeline Australia (13 11 14), Beyond Blue (1800 512 348), or Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).

Quotes attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

“We know Victorians are resilient, but we have never faced a crisis quite like this one and I know there are a lot of people out there doing it tough right now. We want them to know that they are not alone.”

“We’ll stand by all Victorians as we get through this – by delivering more beds, more community services and more specialised help for those in need.”

Quotes attributable to Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley

“Coronavirus is hitting everyone hard – but some much harder than others. This package will provide further support for people from all walks of life experiencing anxiety and distress during this unprecedented period of uncertainty and isolation.”

“We were already well on our way to implementing some of the key recommendations from our Royal Commission and this massive funding boost will fast-track this work to ensure we have the infrastructure and support systems in place as demand on our mental health system increases.”