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Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System

On 2 March 2021, The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down its final report. The Victorian Government has committed to implementing all 65 recommendations in the report.

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Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System Final Report

On October 24 2018, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews committed to implementing a Royal Commission into Victoria’s mental health system, the first of it’s kind in the country.

Following the government’s re-election, the Governor of Victoria issued letters patent, which include the terms of reference for the Commission’s inquiry.

The Premier cited the overwhelming pressure the system is under and the high rates of suicide as evidence that a Royal Commission was necessary to overhaul the current system.

Penny Armytage AO was appointed Chair of the Royal Commission while Professor Alan Fels AO, Dr. Alex Crockram and Professor Bernadette McSherry served as Commissioners, they were assisted by an expert advisory committee.

Last year 698 Victorians took their own lives, and one-in-five Victorians experienced mental illness.

In its interim report, the Commission estimated that the economic cost of poor mental health to Victoria is approximately \$14.2 billion a year.

Last November the Victorian Government acknowledged the interim findings of the Royal Commission; pledging \$870 million to implement a number of recommendations including additional hospital beds, training extra staff, and to commence design on a \$2.2 million Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

The Commission was appointed to inquire and report into how to effectively:

- Prevent mental illness and suicide, and support people to recover from mental illness, early in life, early in illness and early in episode, through Victoria’s mental health system, and in close partnership with other services.
- Deliver the best mental health outcomes and improve access to and the navigation of Victoria’s mental health system for people of all ages.
- Best support the needs of family members and carers of people living with mental illness.
- Improve mental health outcomes, taking into account best practice and person-centred treatment and care models, for those in the Victorian community, especially those at greater risk of experiencing poor mental health.

- Support those in the Victorian community who are living with both mental illness and problematic alcohol and drug use, including through evidence-based harm minimisation approaches.
- Any other matters necessary to satisfactorily resolve the matters set out above.

Royal Commission Final Report Recommendations

Premier Daniel Andrews is committed to implementing all 65 recommendations in the more than 3000-page report, which he said would “serve as our blueprint for the biggest social reform in a generation”.

Key Recommendations from the Royal Commission’s final report into Victoria’s Mental Health System include:

- The roll out of sixty ‘front door’ mental health services across the state to provide support earlier, specialised and closer to home for those experiencing mental illness. The Premier has announced the fast-tracking of 6 priority centres in regions where rates of suicide and self-harm are higher than state average. These services will be open by the end of 2022.
- The creation of a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Act, a new independent authority, The Mental Health Wellbeing Commission and a Chief Officer for Mental Health. The Commission will be led by people with lived experience of mental illness and be given powers to hold the government to account and investigate complaints about mental health services.
- A substantial increase in investment through a new levy or tax and dedicated capital investment fund. The State Government are reluctant to introduce this tax now due to the economic impacts being felt by COVID-19.
- Ensuring that, wherever possible, emergency services’ responses to people experiencing time-critical mental health crises are led by health professionals rather than police.
- The elimination of restraints and seclusion in mental healthcare within 10 years.

Mental Health Initiatives: Funding Announcements

Last November following the findings from the interim report the Victorian government pledged \$869 million to commence reform on the system which was being put under additional strain following the pandemic.

This included:

- \$492m for 120 new mental health beds in Geelong, Epping, Sunshine and Melbourne
- \$18.9m for 35 additional acute treatment beds for mental health patients in public and private hospitals
- \$21.4m to expand the Hospital Outreach Post-Suicidal Engagement Service (HOPE)
- \$2.2m to commence design on the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing
- \$7.7m to hire more mental health staff
- \$3.1m to support nurses retrain as mental health nurses

The Premier has not committed to a specific amount of funding to implement all the recommendations, saying the money required to fix the system would be ongoing over many budgets.

The Department of Health has commenced investigations to establish how to best establish services within the priority regions.

Further Information

Further Information For more information, please contact your Hawker Britton consultant, Victorian Director, JP Blandthorn on +61 407 366 304, Policy and Business Analyst, Raphael Mengem at rmengem@hawkerbritton.com or Policy and Business Analyst, Millie Boag at mboag@hawkerbritton.com.

Further Hawker Britton Occasional Papers on the activities of the Victorian Government are available [here](#). For further coverage of Labor Government Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic see Hawker Britton Briefs [here](#). For further coverage of Liberal Government Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic see Barton Deakin Briefs [here](#).