

MEDIA RELEASE

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Mental Health in Victoria: A new beginning?

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA), welcomes the release of the final report of the Mental Health Royal Commission. We also look forward to learning more about the detail contained in the voluminous report and the staged implementation of its many recommendations.

The Final Report of Royal Commission into Mental Health contains 65 recommendations spanning five volumes. The Victorian Government has committed to implementing all recommendations. This will be evident throughout future budget cycles.

While there are a number of recommendations that will interface with the AOD treatment sector, recommendations 35 and 36 specifically relate to AOD issues:

Recommendation 35: Improving outcomes for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction.

The Royal Commission recommends that the Victorian Government:

1. by the end of 2022, in addition to ensuring there is at least one highest-level emergency department suitable for mental health and alcohol and other drug treatment in every region (refer to recommendations 3(3) and 8(3)(c)), ensure that all mental health and wellbeing services, across all age-based systems, including crisis services, community based services and bed-based services:

- a. provide integrated treatment, care and support to people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction; and*
- b. do not exclude consumers living with substance use or addiction from accessing treatment, care and support.*

Recommendation 36: A new statewide service for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction

The Royal Commission recommends that the Victorian Government:

1. establish a new statewide specialist service, built on the foundations established by the Victorian Dual Diagnosis Initiative, to:

- a. undertake dedicated research into mental illness and substance use or addiction;*
- b. support education and training initiatives for a broad range of mental health and alcohol and other drug practitioners and clinicians;*

c. provide primary consultation to people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction who have complex support needs; and

d. provide secondary consultation to mental health and wellbeing and alcohol and other drug practitioners and clinicians across both sectors.

2. as a matter of priority, increase the number of addiction specialists (addiction medicine physicians and addiction psychiatrists) in Victoria.

3. work with the Commonwealth Government to explore opportunities for funded addiction specialist trainee positions in Victoria.

Mr Sam Biondo, EO VAADA says, ‘the Royal Commission into Mental Health has recommended fundamental changes to the way that AOD treatment services will support people with co-occurring mental health and AOD issues. It will seek to install a number of reforms to progress these changes.’

‘Central to the program of reform is the integration of care; however, the Final Report has not dictated a specific model of integration. We look forward to consultation with the sector and discussions with Government on the progression of this reform.’

The report has also recommended uplifts across various areas of support for people experiencing co-occurring mental health and AOD issues, centered on the establishment of a state-wide service to progress earlier work of the VDDI. While we await further details on this service, we understand that it will progress research and training as well as primary and secondary consults in certain cases.’

‘The Final Report has also called for additional addiction medicine and psychiatry capacity; this is a long awaited need for Victorians, given that Victorian addiction medicine capacity lags well behind other states.’

‘We welcome the recommendation to ensure that at least one emergency department in each region can provide integrated AOD and mental health support; for too long, emergency departments have presented missed opportunities for the provision of support. We note that this reform will likely generate a surge in demand for AOD treatment services and therefore we look forward to engaging with the sector and government on ensuring that there is adequate capacity within the sector.’

‘There are a range of other recommendation which interface with AOD service users, including the development of two healing centres to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, content in the forensic space and the development of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission.’

VAADA looks for to working with the sector and government in progressing this vital work.

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VAADA is the peak body that represents over 80 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Sam Biondo 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.