



Department of Health and Human Services

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Craig Marchant
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Dear Mr Marchant

Thank you for your email of 25 August 2020 addressed to the Minister for Mental Health, Martin Foley MP, regarding the support services available for Victorians who are experiencing a mental health crisis but who are not suicidal. Minister Foley has referred your email to me for my consideration and response.

The Victorian Government is committed to improving mental health outcomes and is especially focused on getting more Victorians mental health support when they need it – now and after the COVID-19 pandemic is over and its effects are still being felt.

As you may be aware, the Victorian Government has established a Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System – the first of its kind in Australia. The Royal Commission is tasked with identifying gaps in access and support for people with lived experience of mental illness, family members and carers. From this, we will know what needs to be done to improve the system and achieve better outcomes.

The Royal Commission delivered an Interim Report in November 2019. This report identifies that, as you outline in your letter, there are shortfalls in services for people whose illness is too complex to be treated by primary care services alone, but who are 'not sick enough' for specialist clinical mental health services. The Victorian Government has committed to implementing all the Royal Commission's recommendations and work has already commenced to implement the nine recommendations for immediate action contained in the Interim Report. The Royal Commission's final report is due to be delivered in February 2021.

Since April 2020, the Victorian Government has invested almost \$200m in additional mental health and wellbeing supports as part of its coronavirus response. This funding recognises the psychological, social and economic impacts of physical distancing and isolation measures on the mental health and wellbeing of Victorians. The funding is being used to provide vital surge capacity for hospital-based and community mental health services and to accelerate the delivery of the essential reforms recommended by the Royal Commission.

I acknowledge your concern that it is difficult to get access to support services outside of business hours. As part of the \$59.7m mental health funding package announced in August, clinical mental health services are receiving funding to extend community mental health clinic operating hours (to evenings and weekends), to provide more outreach assessment and early intervention services and to support GPs and other primary health professionals to provide high-quality mental health care to people in the community.

The Victorian Government is also working closely with the Commonwealth Government on the 15 newly established HeadtoHelp mental health clinics designed to support Victorians during the COVID-19 pandemic. People can access the HeadtoHelp services by attending a clinic in person or by phoning 1800 595 212 to talk to a mental health professional about their needs. Information on the locations of the HeadtoHelp clinics is available at <https://health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-new-mental-health-clinics-to-support-victorians-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to Minister Foley about this matter, and I can assure you we are working to address the issues across the mental health system.

Yours sincerely



Matthew Hercus

Executive Director, Mental Health and Drugs
Health and Wellbeing

09 / 10 / 2020