

## RESTORE MENTAL HEALTH

# THE GREENS' PLAN TO FUND THE GAP IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN VICTORIA

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Victoria now has the lowest per capita expenditure on mental health in the country. The Liberal and Labor Governments have created a massive gap in public, community-based support services. The Greens will reinvest in this sector, ensure youth have dedicated services, and women are kept safe.

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Successive Victorian Governments have rolled the funding for public community-based mental health services into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), creating a massive gap in services for people without a permanent disability, which is the vast majority of people who suffer mental illness.

Victoria now has the lowest per capita expenditure on mental health in the country (13 per cent below the national average) and access to mental health services is nearly 40 per cent below that of the national average.

Tens of thousands of Victorians with serious and complex mental health needs receive no support services. This means people are ending up in our hospital emergency departments before they have proper care.

Once in mandatory care, women face appalling rates of sexual abuse, with approximately 45 per cent of women sexually assaulted and two thirds sexually harassed.

There are also limited youth-specific services. Youth in Victoria receive clinical mental health services at a rate of 50 per cent less than the national average.

## OUR PLAN

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The Greens are passionate about public health care and about supporting people to stay healthy. We will:

- **provide \$200 million over four years to restore funding to Community Mental Health Services to provide care to people who are not NDIS eligible.**
- **provide \$10 million to embed sexual safety practices and reforms in our mental health services.**
- **invest \$12 million to construct new youth dedicated clinical prevention and recovery care facility.**
- **provide \$48 million over four years for dedicated youth clinical services.**

With this investment, we will begin the process to bring mental health funding up to standard. We will also continue to advocate for federal investment in the mental health sector.

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## FUNDING THE GAP IN COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

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In the past, Victoria was a leader in providing public, community-based mental health services. These services aid recovery and maintain the health of people suffering episodic but severe mental illness.

The NDIS eligibility criteria means only people with a permanent disability can get a funding package. The nature of mental illness is that in most cases the aim is recovery, not permanency, so the NDIS can only ever cover a small proportion of people with mental illness. 91 per cent of Victorians with severe mental health needs are not eligible for the NDIS.

When the NDIS began, instead of increasing investment to mental health like every other state and territory in Australia, the Victorian Liberal Government simply rolled its community mental health funding into the NDIS, creating a massive gap in services for people with episodic mental illness. Over the past four years, the Andrews Government has done nothing to fix this situation, deepening the crisis.

Mental health admissions at emergency departments have jumped over 19 per cent in the past four years, putting an incredible strain on an already over-burdened system.

Further, hundreds of people imminently stand to lose their jobs from the community mental health sector. Funding is required now to ensure we keep these skilled workers.

The Greens have strongly supported the Fund The Gap in Mental Health campaign for many years. We believe sustained, long-term investment is needed. We will restore \$50 million per annum funding to community mental health. This will ensure people have the support they need to stay well and rehabilitate when their health deteriorates. Coupled with the NDIS scheme, this will significantly improve access to care.

Within this, specific funding will be set aside for the Aboriginal community, the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community and LGBTI+ community to ensure culturally safe and tailored care is provided for these groups.

## WOMEN'S SAFETY IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE

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Women must be safe from sexual abuse, particularly when their mental health is poor and when they are at their most vulnerable.

Yet women are at significant risk of sexual violence in compulsory mental health care. A 2013 survey by the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council found that 45 per cent of women treated in psychiatric hospitals had been sexually assaulted in state care. The study found more than two-thirds had been sexually harassed and 85 per cent reported feeling unsafe.

This year, the Mental Health Complaints Commissioner released a comprehensive report on this terrible situation, which included a raft of recommendations. While the Department has committed to creating a sexual safety strategy, there has been no matched funding by the government to ensure sexual safety policies and strategies are actually operationalised in hospitals.

The Greens will ensure hospitals create a safe environment by providing \$10 million in dedicated funding to develop proper safety plans, train staff, and provide implementation oversight.

## DEDICATED YOUTH SERVICES

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Youth mental health services are also woefully underfunded in Victoria. Here, youth receive clinical mental health services at a rate of 50 per cent less than the national average.

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Mental ill-health is the leading cause of disability in people aged 10–24 years, contributing 45 per cent of their overall burden of disease.

Research shows that early intervention in mental health can have a positive impact on people's lifelong health.

The Greens understand that youth receive better care, feel safer, are more supported, and get better health outcomes with youth-dedicated services. Orygen Youth Health is a leading example of dedicated youth clinical services that should be rolled out across the state. The Greens will invest in building a new youth-dedicated service, in addition to the two currently planned and under construction. The location of this service will be determined on a needs basis.

We will also boost youth mental health funding by \$12 million per annum to operate these services and other youth-specific services in areas without dedicated youth facilities.

## OTHER PARTIES

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The Liberal and Labor Governments have decimated the mental health sector. The Liberal Government created this funding mess and the Labor Government has allowed it to continue, letting Victoria become the worst-funded state in the country for mental health.

De-funding the community health sector has already caused hardship for people and will ultimately place more burden on expensive hospital care, which is where people end up when community care isn't provided.

Victoria was a leader in providing public, community-based mental health services but now we are lagging behind the rest of the country.

The Greens will reinvest in the mental health sector, ensure youth have dedicated services, and women are kept safe.