Mental Health and Drugs Branch

Mental Health Reform Victoria

COVID 19

**Important message for Victorian mental health consumers and carers**

The COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted the lives of all Victorians, affecting virtually every aspect of how we live. This includes the way in which mental health care and treatment is provided by state-funded mental health services.

COVID-19 has created additional challenges to a system which was already under pressure. The purpose of this message is to provide assurance that ensuring services continue to be available is a priority for the department and all providers.

All health services have adapted to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infection and ensure safety for all persons using health services, their families and the workforce. This includes physical distancing, and ensuring people who are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 are tested.

Hospital and community providers will continue to deliver services including clinical care, peer support, therapeutic programs, community residential services and psychosocial support. Services may however need to temporarily change the way they are delivered, for example using telephone, videoconference or online approaches.

While there has been disruption to certain programs, all possible effort is being applied to ensure these are kept to an absolute minimum. All people currently employed within services continue to be considered essential and valued, and this, critically includes the lived experience workforce.

The department is in regular contact with the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC), Tandem, clinicians, consumer and carer consultants and peer workers to understand how best to minimise the disruption caused by the global pandemic. We are also working with Victorian Legal Aid, the Independent Mental Health Advocacy Service and the Mental Health Tribunal to support them to continue services.

As part of this, a communique is being sent regularly to mental health services to provide an update and guidance about a range of aspects of delivering services in this unprecedented time. Copies of communiques are also being sent to VMIAC and Tandem to publish on their websites:

<https://www.vmiac.org.au/information/>

<https://www.tandemcarers.org.au/information-updates.php>

Please also see below a link to first round of general mental health supports released on the DHHS website:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/mental-health-resources-coronavirus-covid-19>

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