

Our Agency Project Launched

Victoria will have a new place and space for people with lived experience of mental illness and psychological distress to support mental health and wellbeing.

With the working title *Our Agency*, it will be run by people with their own lived experience of mental illness and psychological distress and is an essential part of responding to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

The project to establish *Our Agency* is now in place and is being led by a partnership between VMIAC and SHARC - two leading lived experience organisations in mental health and addictions in Victoria. Working in partnership with the Department of Health, the project is part of a larger area of work to advance lived experience organisations and services in Victoria, and *Our Agency* will play an active role in leading and supporting this.

A big part of *Our Agency* will be talking with people and communities about what needs to happen now and into the future to make things better. Plans are underway to take the findings of the Royal Commission and work collaboratively to make sure they have the best chance of succeeding.

"*Our Agency* has been the dream of many of us working in mental health for many years," says Craig Wallace, CEO of VMIAC. "We're getting ready to continue conversations we started through the Royal Commission to make the most of this exciting opportunity."

Our Agency will have a physical location and work towards having a presence in our rural communities and online. It will have three areas of work based on the Royal Commission findings.

New services led by people with their own lived experience will offer personal support from those who know what it's like. Training will also be offered to other organisations with lived experience staff and services to support best practice and good outcomes. There will also be a focus on bringing all Victorians together in this time of reform and, as the Royal Commission wrote, "celebrate and foster appreciation of the diversity of people with lived experience of mental illness or psychological distress".

This is a chance to share the similarities and differences in our journeys for all Victorians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally diverse Victorians, people living with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and older Victorians. It will also see the mental health and addictions sectors working more closely together.

"This is a profoundly significant time in our history of mental health and addictions" says Heather Pickard, CEO of SHARC "*Our Agency* is a vision of many, working together to enable people with lived experience to have leadership opportunities and a place to grow and nurture innovation and brave thinking outside the square. It is also an opportunity to experience people with psychological distress as more than just a diagnosis of mental illness or addiction and the coming together of this partnership, which includes the Department of Health, is a poignant reflection of that intent."

Links:

For more information about the partnership organisations, please visit:

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

SHARC: <https://www.sharc.org.au>

For more information about the Department of Health, please visit:

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health>

For information about the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, please visit:

<http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au>