

MEDIA RELEASE – NOVEMBER 13, 2020

Mental health funding welcome, but more postvention funding needed

The Victorian Government's \$868.6m investment into fixing the state's mental health system, announced ahead of the Victorian State Budget 2020/21, will improve outcomes for millions of Victorians according to Jesuit Social Services.

"The Victorian Government has shown a strong commitment to transforming our mental health system, including the establishment of the Royal Commission which will lead to significant systemic reform. We also welcome this funding announced as part of the 2020/21 Budget," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"This funding will improve our mental health system and by extension, the mental health and wellbeing of millions of Victorians. This is particularly important as we continue to navigate our way through the COVID-19 pandemic, which is placing even further demand on our mental health system."

The funding will support, among other initiatives, new mental health and acute treatment beds, a statewide expansion of the HOPE program, early intervention support for young people and addressing workforce shortages and providing specialist training.

Ms Edwards says that while all of these initiatives are welcome, it is disappointing that there has been no increased funding towards vital postvention services to support people left behind after suicide.

"Family members and loved ones of people who have taken their own lives are themselves at increased risk of suicide themselves. It is vital that postvention services – which function as both bereavement support and suicide prevention services – are recognised and adequately funded as a crucial part of the service delivery mix."

Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program provides services including counselling, group work and peer support to those left behind after a loved one has ended their life. It does not receive any Victorian government funding.

Support After Suicide recently published a report drawing on the experiences of 142 former and current participants of the program's counselling services. It found that almost half (47 per cent) of people who took their lives were known to have attempted suicide in the past, and that almost three quarters (70 per cent) of people who died had previously sought help from the mental health system.

"This leaves behind parents, siblings, partners, friends and other loved ones who experience feelings of grief, sadness and anger. It is vital that all of these people have access to the necessary support they need to navigate the trauma associated with suicide," says Ms Edwards.

"We will continue to advocate for secure, long-term funding for postvention programs including Support After Suicide. An investment of just \$1m from the Victorian Government would allow Support After Suicide to service immediate demand and increase access to services in regional and rural Victoria."