

Victorian Government Response to the Evaluation

The Victorian Government is committed to continuing to improve suicide prevention activity based on the best evidence available.

The Government continues to provide \$23.9m to fund services identified in the Evaluation and is improving local access to essential health, aged care and community services, particularly in rural and regional communities through a range of new Government commitments announced in 2002 under the following policies:

- Healthy Communities;
- Rural Health;
- Aboriginal Affairs;
- Knowledge and Skills & Excellence for All;
- Building for Tomorrow; and
- Stronger Justice Systems.

There is still much to learn about the complex interaction between available evidence, the development of services and the potential outcomes in relation to suicide prevention. The Evaluation is another step in the continued development of the Government's suicide prevention response.

The completion of the Evaluation and the Government's response to its recommendations is not the conclusion of work in this area but is part of a range of activity that is being progressed across Government by the Inter Departmental Suicide Prevention Committee and its Working Group in collaboration with other stakeholders.

The Evaluation of the Victorian Suicide Prevention Response has provided Government with additional insights into the way services have performed and identified areas that may require improvement. Each of the recommendations identified in the Evaluation is responded to in the following table.

Evaluation Recommendation	Government Response
<p>1. <i>That the Victorian Suicide Prevention Strategy continues to be progressed as a whole-of-government approach overseen by a high-level cross-departmental committee.</i></p>	<p>The Victorian Government has established the Inter Departmental Suicide Prevention Committee that will continue to progress suicide prevention as a whole of Government strategy.</p>
<p>2. <i>That the Victorian Suicide Prevention Strategy adopts the national model for intervention to guide future directions in suicide prevention under the National Life is for Everyone Framework (LIFE).</i></p>	<p>The LIFE Framework continues to receive the support of the Victorian Government with ongoing collaboration and cooperation between the Commonwealth and State representatives.</p>
<p>3. <i>That in the development of an integrated approach to the suicide prevention strategy across departments and agencies, consideration be given to collaborative initiatives with other strategies at the state and commonwealth levels.</i></p>	<p>The Victoria Government works collaboratively at the state level through the Interdepartmental Committee and associated Working Party on Suicide Prevention and with the Commonwealth on the implementation of suicide prevention initiatives through membership of the Victorian Suicide Prevention Working Party, National Advisory Committee for Suicide Prevention State and Territory Forum and National Suicide Prevention Victorian Evaluation Reference Group</p>
<p>4. <i>That a long-term prevention or social inclusion meta-strategy be developed to address the range of issues (including youth suicide) faced by young people in Victoria, as part of an overarching whole-of-government approach.</i></p>	<p>The Victorian Government's framework strategy for youth policy and program development RESPECT provides the broad framework within which the policy and program issues faced by young people in their safe transition from adolescence to adulthood will be addressed. This framework includes measures to demonstrate progress and along with measures included in the Government Growing Victoria Together will underpin any future meta strategy.</p>

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<p>5. <i>That an evaluation framework be developed to support the Framework of Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools incorporating both formative monitoring and feedback at various levels, and a summative end-of-funding-cycle evaluation</i></p>	<p>The Framework of Student Support Services is being evaluated by the Department Of Education and Training.</p>
<p>6. <i>That awareness about suicide issues and prevention for School Welfare Coordinators and counsellors be supported through a system-wide approach to enhancing student resiliency and well-being.</i></p>	<p>The Department of Education and Training is providing Statewide Teacher Professional Development on suicide intervention, volatile solvents and transitional issues to provide teachers with appropriate strategies and referral procedures to deal with students who may present as at risk of self-harming or suicide.</p> <p>A new student wellbeing website is being developed that will provide additional materials for student wellbeing staff working in schools.</p>
<p>7. <i>That the recommendations arising from the School Focused Youth Service evaluation be implemented as a priority.</i></p>	<p>These recommendations are currently being implemented</p>
<p>8. <i>That an implementation audit of the ECAT Program review be undertaken to ensure that there is a state-wide 24-hour outreach response available.</i></p>	<p>A review of the ECAT program focusing on the 24 hours outreach response capability will be undertaken by Mental Health Branch</p>
<p>9. <i>That intensive services targeting young people leaving psychiatric care be further developed on the basis of the findings and learnings from the relevant research and practice projects undertaken as part of the Victorian Suicide Prevention response.</i></p>	<p>The findings from research and practice projects undertaken as part of the Victorian Suicide Prevention response will inform initiatives for young people being implemented as part of the New Directions in Victoria's Mental Health Services. These include the expansion of existing services for young people with dual diagnosis and new services to support young people with conduct disorder.</p>

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<p>10. <i>That learnings from the projects funded under the Taskforce be incorporated into services across Victoria to improve access for young and older men.</i></p>	<p>The learnings from these projects will be provided to the Interdepartmental Suicide Prevention Working group for dissemination to other stakeholders and will inform ongoing program development.</p>
<p>11. <i>That issues for target groups that have been identified through recent research as significantly 'at-risk' of suicide (i.e. children of Vietnam Veterans, post-prison release, comorbidity) be incorporated in future service development.</i></p>	<p>This research will be made available to the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist for consideration in relation to future clinical practice, and to the Mental Health Branch and the Inter Departmental Suicide Prevention Working Group for their consideration for future service development.</p>
<p>12. <i>That prevention and early intervention projects, particularly those with young people, develop consistent and complementary approaches.</i></p>	<p>The Office for Youth's RESPECT document provides the Government's vision for young people that includes a framework for policy and program development that will assist in the consistent and complementary development of service provision. The RESPECT Framework is available at www.youth.vic.gov.au</p>
<p>13. <i>That further investigation and development of rural initiatives targeting mental health service delivery and access to services for younger and older men be undertaken and that such initiatives take into consideration the special needs of rural and remote communities.</i></p>	<p>The New Directions in Victoria's Mental Health Services policy identifies the appropriate development of rural initiatives as part of its Rural Mental Health Strategy. This Strategy is currently under development. The New Directions document is available at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth</p>
<p>14. <i>That the Coroner's Office be further supported to continue research into suicide causality and 'at risk' populations</i></p>	<p>Funding will continue to be provided to the Coroner's Office to fulfil its research agenda. In addition, closer links will be developed between the Department of Human Services, The Inter Departmental Suicide Prevention Committee and the Coroner's Office to support this work.</p>

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<p><i>15. That a policy project investigate the barriers at various levels in the service system to provide a more effective coordinated response to young people exhibiting comorbidity, particularly mental health issues, drug abuse and homelessness.</i></p>	<p>The New Directions in Victoria's Mental Health Services policy identifies the expansion of existing dual diagnosis programs for young people with co-existing mental illness and substance abuse in metropolitan and rural Victoria as a priority.</p>
<p><i>16. That the Department of Human Services further investigate and support mainstream services in developing effective links and collaborative efforts with Indigenous and CALD communities to increase accessibility and culturally sensitive service provision.</i></p>	<p>The Victorian Government has announced a number of new initiatives in Aboriginal Affairs across Justice, Education, Human Services including a whole of Government reporting and Community Capacity Building Program. The Government continues to support strategies for CALD communities through its Multicultural Affairs portfolio. This recommendation will also be further considered by the Interdepartmental Suicide Prevention Committee.</p>