

Media Release

Martin Foley MP

Minister for Housing, Disability & Ageing

Minister for Mental Health

Minister for Creative Industries

Minister for Equality



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MENTAL HEALTH, DRUGS REFORM LEFT VULNERABLE IN THE COLD

The number of people able to access mental health and drug-and-alcohol services fell by 20 per cent following botched changes by the former Coalition Government, an independent review has found.

The review, commissioned by the Minister for Mental Health and led by Aspex Consulting, was set up to identify problems resulting from the former Coalition Government's recommissioning of Mental Health Community Support Services and Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services.

Under the recommissioning, the way community-based services were organised, delivered and funded was changed. Many service providers found funding ceased for work they had been doing.

The recommissioning also changed the way the people gained access to community services, through a new intake and assessment process. But reports from the sector highlighted that the changes had made it harder for people in need to get into the system.

Despite increasing demand, the number of people in treatment fell dramatically. Drug treatment service providers in particular reported a substantial fall in their referrals following the changes.

The review concluded that since the recommissioning, vulnerable Victorians who were seeking help have found it more difficult to access treatment and support because the system was harder to navigate.

Other areas of concern highlighted in the report include: reduced help to families and outreach workers; delays and blockages in referral pathways; lack of early-intervention services; and new silos between mental health community support services and drug treatment services, making it harder for people with dual mental health and alcohol-and-drugs issues to get help.

The review highlighted the need to improve access to services, as well as ensure the delivery of high-quality support for people with a mental illness or substance-abuse problem.

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to ensuring Victorians can access appropriate and high-quality mental health and drug treatment that meets their full range of needs. The Government will work with service providers to fix the mess and ensure Victorians who most need help can get it.

The full review is available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/ResearchAndReports/review-of-mental-health-community-support-services-and-drug-treatment-services>

Quotes attributable to Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley

"This independent review confirms many of the concerns that the sector has shared with us in regards to this rushed, botched recommissioning. We must fix this before more people fall through the cracks."

"The Andrews Labor Government is working to improve access to high-quality alcohol and drug and mental health services to ensure no Victorian is left behind, and everyone is able to participate fully in their community."

"Our upcoming ten-year mental health plan will outline our vision and goals for mental health in Victoria."

Media Contact: Karen Kissane 0428 657 076 | karen.kissane@minstaff.vic.gov.au