



**Who's minding Victoria's
mental health system?**

MIND AUSTRALIA

**Policy proposals for the
Victorian state election in 2010**



WHY WE SHOULD ALL MIND

One in five Australians experience some form of mental illness every year.

Some 3 to 4% face such severe mental health challenges that their lives, and the lives of their families, friends or carers, are seriously affected.

Mind Australia (Mind) is a major non-government organisation specialising in the provision of services to people facing serious mental health related challenges in Australia. We have operated in Victoria for 30 years and in South Australia for 6 years, and currently provide services to over 3000 people each year. This history and experience give us great confidence in our commitment to helping people recover from severe mental health illness and be active participants in social and economic life. At Mind, we know that people can recover from mental illness with effective treatment and support and when offered the opportunity to live life well in an accepting community.

The upcoming election in Victoria provides the political parties with the opportunity to state their policies on mental health for the next term of government. Mind believes that urgent additional policy and program reforms are required to address the growing mental health problems in Victoria and that additional government funding is essential for the implementation of these reforms.

Mind believes that there are six key mental health areas that must be given priority in the next four years:

1. housing and support
2. youth-specific services
3. family and carer support
4. engagement with peers
5. community inclusion
6. service and system improvement.

The major political parties have an opportunity to show commitment to the overall health of the Victorian community through a reform agenda for mental health with clear policy goals and funding targets over the next four-year term of government.

This document outlines the focus required for the next Victorian government to deliver in these key areas and provides a resource for Victorian political parties to assist them in the development of their party platforms on mental health services.

Victorians with serious mental health challenges need a better go, and Victorians statewide agree. We urge you to recognise the demand within the community for better services for people with mental illness and their families and put forward policies and investment to meet the unmet needs in this area.

Mind would be pleased to provide you further information and advice, if you require it.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD

Recent policy and new investments have attempted to provide some assistance to people facing serious mental health related challenges. However long term failures in Victoria and indeed in other states make this issue one that requires strong leadership, significant reforms and equivalent investment. Improving the health outcomes for these Victorians has a ripple effect that reaches far and wide within the Victorian community.

Policy and investment leadership will be absolutely critical to the wellbeing of these individuals and their ability to contribute to society and the economy.

Equally important is the impact that such leadership will have on their families and carers and on the creation of a fair and inclusive community.

Case study

“I was begging people to help us. She couldn’t have gone any further down or she would have been dead.” Sarah’s Mum

Sarah used to be so overcome with fury and frustration that she lost control. It was as though a demon was living inside her as she succumbed to violent and suicidal behaviour at various times during her teenage years.

Sarah, now 21, could not understand what was wrong. She knew that she had a problem with depression but thought that this meant she would feel sad, not angry. She would flee her Bendigo home, roam the streets and even sleep out at night.

The target of her anger was usually her mother, Christine, who knew that Sarah wasn’t a naughty girl.

Recent policy initiatives, such as Because Mental Health Matters, have made a promising start to addressing the issue of mental illness in Victoria, but much more is needed. Strategies have focused on acute health services, with some investments in prevention and early intervention. At Mind, we know that to address the issues appropriately and maximise outcomes, future investments must strengthen the social and economic infrastructure and services to meet the recovery needs of people facing long-term and significant challenges related to their mental health.

There is an opportunity for the next Victorian government to make an unprecedented commitment to mental health and develop a policy initiative that focuses on:

- Improving the capability of existing services to deliver effectively and efficiently and promote recovery and social inclusion
- Improving housing, education and employment outcomes for people with serious mental health related challenges

- Ensuring a more integrated approach between PDRS and acute mental health sector services
- Providing adequate funds for the effective implementation on the new Mental Health Act
- Supporting families and carers in their support roles.

With this level of investment and resourcing of mental health services, the next Victorian government would be ideally positioned to actively advocate for national policy and strategies that support provision of training and employment and improved housing opportunities for people facing serious mental health challenges.

This is an opportunity for the next Victorian government to lead in an area that has long been undervalued. The major political parties have an opportunity to show commitment to the overall health of the Victorian community through a reform agenda for mental health with clear policy goals and funding targets over the next four-year term of government.

There is much to be done.

1. HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Housing and support

Case study

Guy is only 22 but finds it difficult to estimate how many houses, flats, boarding and rooming houses, backpacker and other transitional homes he has lived in. Guy, who was born in Sydney, can list 11 Melbourne suburbs in which he has stayed. He also went to boarding school on the Gold Coast and Armidale (NSW) and lived in Britain. His parents separated when he was about two, and his father moved to Scotland. About six years ago, his mother went to England. Before she left, it was not uncommon for them to shift house every few weeks. “She moved around to get away from things,” he says.

At 18, when he was old enough to look after himself, Guy moved to transitional housing, but because of the temporary nature of this accommodation, it only consolidated his cycle. Guy remembers moving every three months, and it was during these times that he thinks he developed psychotic symptoms. Some of the contributing factors were probably isolation and poverty and as he withdrew from society his symptoms intensified.

When Guy arrived at Richmond Fellowship’s (now Mind’s) Denham House in May 2006, he was withdrawn, lonely and showing marked symptoms of psychosis.

On any one day, there are in the order of 7000 people facing serious mental health challenges without a suitable place to live.

We know that stable and appropriate housing is a fundamental requirement for recovery. And that people facing serious mental health challenges can recover and live in the community and actively participate in social and economic life. But they need support.

The next Victorian government must:

- **Invest in social supports**

Victoria’s social-housing strategy has invested in new housing, but people with serious mental illness will not get their fair share of this new social housing. Housing providers are reluctant to allocate housing to this group of residents unless support services are available – and the funding for these social supports is just not there. The Parliamentary Inquiry into Supported Housing highlighted the chronic lack of funding in this area and the need to urgently address this.

NSW and South Australia have adopted a more integrated approach to housing and support to ensure that social housing is accompanied by properly resourced support services. They are investing substantially in housing and support and starting to see good results. The next Victorian government must follow their leads and invest in this area to see the same improvements to outcomes.

- **Encourage a system-wide approach**

To help get more people facing serious mental health challenges into suitable housing and living a normal life, the next Victorian government must support more Prevention and Recovery Care (PARC) programs to ensure availability of mental health services across Victoria. Continuing Care Units, residential rehabilitation programs, and housing and support services must work together so that people facing serious mental health challenges can move through the system, be supported by the appropriate services, recover and ultimately find a place in the community to live life well.

2. FOCUSED ON OUR FUTURE

Youth-specific services

Case study

Bree's first experience with mental illness was her own.

She was 18, confused and embarrassed, and when she looked in the mirror she saw somebody else: a person with a physical illness and limited time to live.

Now, three years later, she knows that she was in the grip of depression, and understands the causes of a sudden psychotic episode that changed her life forever.

The episode led to her being hospitalised and placed on medication.

It is estimated that one in seven children and young people between four and 17 and close to one in four 18-to 24-year-olds are affected by mental illness. Many do not receive the level of support they require. Recent state and national investments have made a difference but they remain too focussed upon coordination and reform of existing services and inadequately invest in additional services.

At Mind, we know that there are many factors that contribute to the vulnerability of our youth and greatly influence the growing number of young Victorians with a serious mental illness, including poor mental health, substance abuse, homelessness and family breakdown. The next Victorian government must support youth-service development by recognising and dealing with these multiple factors through:

- **New multi-skilled area teams**

Victoria's mental health services urgently require a new approach to supporting young people with mental illness. These new multi-skilled area teams will focus on the specific areas of support required by today's youth and be built on an integrated model designed to provide long-term sustainable support to highly vulnerable young people. They will include a range of professionals focused on addressing the factors that contribute to vulnerability and have the

capacity to provide specialist services not delivered through current service providers and initiatives. They'll leverage holistic practice and reshape youth services, not just be 'added to' existing service systems.

- These investments are required in the near term and need to be commenced in advance of the evaluation of the two major pilots of integrated youth mental health established in recent years.

- **Complementary youth-service networks**

There is currently a range of youth residential services for mental health, drug-related or child-protection purposes that are fragmented and operating separately one another. In order to create complementary service networks, the next Victorian government must redevelop these services, maximise investment and provide a holistic approach to supporting Victoria's most vulnerable youth.

- **Intensive recovery support**

Some young people require intensive recovery support and are not able to receive this while living in the community or with their family. We recommend that funding be continued for a contemporary approach to residential recovery services for our youth to help develop for them the most appropriate and effective road to recovery.

3. WE ARE FAMILY

Family and carer support

Case study

In March 2005, Sarah was diagnosed with severe depression. She was referred to a Richmond Fellowship (now MIND) rehabilitation program for young adults in Bendigo, and her young son, Jack, went to live with his grandmother. It proved to be the turning point of their lives.

“You suddenly realise that you’re not the only one suffering mental illness; that you’re not on your own” – Sarah says.

The staff helped Sarah develop strategies to release her frustration for example, by exercising or talking about the triggers for her violent feelings. Fairly soon, she began to control the demons within, rather than the other way around, and to set goals for herself.

She returned to school to complete Year 12, Jack joined her at the program, and she obtained her driver’s licence and her Victorian Certificate of Education. Now she is studying for her Bachelor of Education at La Trobe University, Bendigo.

Sarah and Jack are now living with her younger sister in Bendigo, and Sarah is loving being a mum.

Sustained support from family is a critical aspect of recovery and living a valued life. Mind recognises the great strain that mental illness places on families and how it too often contributes to loss of connection and social isolation, and significantly damages the opportunity for recovery. Too little has been done to support families in these situations.

The next Victorian government must expand the range and availability of services for families by offering programs that:

- Engage at as early a stage as possible with the families of those who face serious mental health challenges
- Provide them with information, skills and support to reduce the likelihood that the stress of their mental health challenges will damage relationships within the family

- Work with families in which stress has diminished connections to address the issues and enable continued or renewed supportive relationships to be developed.

There are existing programs that could be developed into state-wide initiatives. These would increase the effectiveness of state-supported interventions and could be integrated into the mental health service system.

This includes establishing a small team in each health area to work collaboratively with mental health services to provide and resource family-strengthening interventions and integrate them with other services, including respite.

4. OTHERS LIKE ME

Engagement with peers

Professional services are an essential ingredient in supporting recovery from mental illness; however, engagement with and support from others with similar conditions and life experiences are also critical to recovery – whether from mental health challenges or other chronic or life-changing health events.

Current strategies do not provide real and genuine opportunities for people facing severe mental health challenges to meet, discuss and learn from their peers and from those who have undergone similar experiences. The next Victorian government must introduce a proactive and systemic way to build peer-support services for people with mental illness, including:

- Independent organisations “owned and operated” by people who face serious mental health-related challenges

- Hubs and access points where people facing serious mental health related challenges can meet, connect and gain access to support services in an integrated and safe environment
- Structures and requirements intended to ensure that service providers working with these consumers provide meaningful and substantial opportunities for peer engagement through the design of their services
- Ongoing provision of training and research specifically focused upon building the effectiveness of peer support. Training efforts should focus upon peer skill building and working with other staff in mental health related services to enable them to work in collegial ways with others who bring differing skills and approaches. Development of stronger peer-based strategies cannot be fully effective in the absence of change in existing service models and approaches.

5. TACKLING THE MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES

Community inclusion

We know that there is a lack of understanding of what mental illness is and agencies that can support people facing serious mental health challenges.

People dealing with serious mental health related challenges continue to experience the negative consequences of our historical efforts to exclude and isolate people with mental illness. Effective services for these people depend, in large, on societies and communities becoming more inclusive, accepting and supportive.

Significant gains in this area have been achieved, but more is needed. The next Victorian government needs a strategy that addresses social and economic exclusion factors, with an emphasis upon:

- Local area-based community development that deals with the specific issues of access, participation and respect. This could include addressing area-based issues regarding usage of community facilities, openness of employers and media coverage
- Strengthening the responsiveness of mental health services to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and funding specific strategies for CALD communities
- Resourcing Aboriginal communities to better respond to the needs of members with serious mental health challenges.

6. A CHANGING DYNAMIC

Service and system improvement

The report *Improving Mental Health Outcomes in Victoria: The Next Wave of Reform* estimated that around 50% of people with mental illness are not receiving appropriate care for various reasons relating to complexity of the system as well as gaps and weaknesses.

Mental illnesses account for some 24% of the burden of chronic disease in Australia. Resources and the service system, however, lag far behind.

Many changes have significantly influenced the need for service and system improvements to the mental health system. The nature of mental illness and mental health issues have changed in the last 10 years, and so has the population. Victoria needs a more integrated service system that delivers quality and stability to consumers, families and carers, and reflects the issues relevant today. Victoria needs a system that ensures equitable access to services and resourcing, and recognises that population growth is driving the need for increased and redistributed effort.

The next Victorian government has the opportunity to design the new service system of the future and see the benefits from substantial and valuable service improvement. This system will focus upon service-delivery enhancement, evidence translation and capability to individualise and customise services.

It must:

- Focus on the individual by ensuring that service-delivery organisations have the scale and range of competencies to address a suite of individual needs rather than single services
- Be designed to resource recovery, not just provide services, by reducing the distinction between clinical and recovery services, including consolidating residential services
- Be focused upon delivery of services in people's homes and communities – not facilities
- Be coherent and comprehensive at an area level with little distinction between clinical, recovery and primary-care delivery
- Develop shared client information management capacity
- Increase the cultural competencies of organisations to work with Aboriginal people and their community-controlled organisations
- Build skills within the workforce.

Governance reform is also necessary and more likely to be effective if the service-delivery arrangements are streamlined.

FINANCING REFORM

The initiatives outlined above will require resourcing. Mind has limited capacity for detailed budget analysis and proposes the following resource requests as the baseline for development in the next term of government.

Housing and Support				
Housing	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Recurrent	\$7m	\$7m	\$7m	\$7m
Capital	\$35m	\$35m	\$35m	\$35m
PARC	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Recurrent	\$5m	\$5m	\$5m	\$5m
Capital	\$35m	\$35m	\$35m	\$35m

This level of investment will enable modest expansion in support for people living in the community and the redevelopment of some residential rehabilitation and Continuing Care Unit programs to enable provision of contemporary services, flexible support and opportunities for people to live in stable housing with support.

Youth Specific Support				
Housing	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Recurrent	\$10m	\$15m	\$20m	\$25m
Capital	\$3m	\$4m	\$4m	\$4m

The requested investments will:

- Resource one multi-skilled area team in each region with the configuration of these resources to be adapted to the circumstances and needs of each region
- Support priority investments in improving the existing services.

Family and Carer Support				
Housing	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Recurrent	\$3m	\$5m	\$6m	\$7m

This investment will support small teams to be established in each health area.

Engagement with Peers				
Housing	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Recurrent	\$3m	\$5m	\$6m	\$7m

It is proposed that peer-support services, including hubs, be progressively introduced. These services would be linked to and coordinated by a central service, but would be auspiced locally.

Community Inclusion				
Housing	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Recurrent	\$3m	\$4m	\$6m	\$8m

The requested investment will support developmental initiatives across all regions.

Service and System Development				
Housing	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Recurrent	\$18m	\$19m	\$20m	\$21m
Capital	\$10m	\$12m	\$12m	\$14m

Additional funding is also required to address increased demand through population growth. With population growth at 2% (approx), additional capacity required will be as outlined above.



CONCLUSION

One in 5 Australians experience some form of mental illness every year.

Some 3 to 4% face such severe mental health challenges that their lives, and the lives of their families, friends or carers, are seriously affected.

But we know how we can help them. With over 30 years experience, we know there is a pathway to recovery that enables people facing severe mental health challenges to actively participate in social and economic life. And we know that this results in significant benefits to the whole Victorian community.

There is a real opportunity for the next Victorian government to do more than any one before it. This is an opportunity for the next Victorian government to lead in an area that has long been undervalued; to show commitment to the overall health of the Victorian community through an innovative reform agenda for mental health; to set an unprecedented commitment to mental health and make a difference to recognise the support within the community for better services for people with mental illness and their families.

We urge you to make the difference.