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Later this year the Victorian Government will release the whole-of-government Victorian alcohol and drug strategy. The strategy will describe how we will work with all Victorians to address the challenges posed by the misuse of alcohol and pharmaceutical drugs and the use of illegal drugs. It will also set out how we will improve treatment, healthcare and social support for people with alcohol and drug problems. Reform of Victoria's alcohol and drug treatment services is a crucial part of the strategy and this bulletin sets out our treatment reform program.

The case for reform

Reform of the alcohol and drug treatment system is overdue. The last significant reform was undertaken by the previous Coalition Government over a decade ago. We know from client and community feedback that the system is hard to access and use. A number of government reviews have concluded that it needs to change.

The alcohol and drug treatment system needs to be transformed from a series of multiple, complex and episodic transactions to one that supports people to make positive changes in their lives when they decide to seek help for an alcohol or drug problem.

Alcohol and drug workers are passionate, dedicated and committed to making a difference for their clients, but they are working within a fragmented system that hinders rather than facilitates their work.

We need to get the most effective treatment for clients and best value for the Victorian taxpayer. Treatment should be of a high quality, based on evidence and integrated with the other services that people need. Treatment needs to help people to recover and get on with their lives.

Integrated reform

Reform of the alcohol and drug treatment system will be integrated with reforms occurring across government and in health and welfare services more generally.

Treatment system reforms contribute to the key directions in *Victoria's vulnerable children: our shared responsibility*. We need to make sure children whose parents have alcohol and drug problems don't experience violence or neglect as a result of those problems or become our next generation of service users.

Alcohol and drug treatment needs to consider the wider context of a person's family and social relationships and their economic, health and other needs. Treatment programs will need to collaborate, coordinate and integrate with other programs and services so people with alcohol or drug problems also get help to find stable housing and employment, support with their parenting, access to primary or mental health services they need, help resolving financial or relationship issues and so on.

Service expansion

Over the last two years the Victorian Coalition Government has invested more than \$200 million in new funding for improved alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services. A key focus has been on expanding services and effective harm minimisation programs in areas of significant need.

We will spend \$11 million over four years redeveloping the pharmacotherapy system so that people can access pharmacotherapy treatment more easily, particularly those living in regional and rural areas. New training programs for general practitioners and pharmacists will be available later this year.

Our key aim in reforming Victoria's alcohol and drug treatment system is to make the system work better for the people who need to use it. People come to alcohol and drug treatment because they want to make a positive change. Treatment needs to help people achieve that change. The treatment system should be centred on the person, and be family and culturally inclusive. It should be oriented towards helping people to recover, to reconnect with their families and to reintegrate into their communities. Our workforce, our culture and our systems should support people in their individual journey towards recovery.

Other service expansion initiatives underway include:

- \$3.7 million for 24-hour needle and syringe pilot programs in the west and south east of Melbourne
- \$11 million for new therapeutic counselling services for people living in the City of Casey, Knox and Maroondah, in the Shire of Yarra Ranges and in the Barwon-South Western Region
- \$3.1 million to extend the award-winning Catalyst day program providing a strong response to alcohol issues in the community and improving access to treatment
- work with the Department of Justice to deliver better treatment options for forensic clients
- a new web-based self-assessment tool to help people consider the risks associated with their drinking.

Building the foundations of reform

The Victorian Government has already made a significant commitment to kick-start reforms in alcohol and drug treatment services. The 2012 Victorian State Budget funded alcohol and drug treatment services on an ongoing basis, providing a solid foundation from which to improve and expand. The budget also delivered new funding of more than \$20 million over the next four years to seed reform in critical areas.

Building on the service expansion which incorporates the redevelopment of Victoria's pharmacotherapy system, new funding of \$2.7 million will create a central intake service to ensure better access to treatment. We will improve our response to people with alcohol and drug issues who present at hospitals and emergency departments through new funding of \$12.5 million over four years, which will provide early intervention as well as treatment and diversion where appropriate to community-based treatment services.

The government has allocated over half a million dollars to drive change and achieve system-wide reform. This includes funding for consumer and service provider engagement in the change process, establishment of a central bed vacancy register, development of a common screening and assessment tool, and workforce initiatives to improve the response to children and families.

Reform priorities

Our reform priorities are to:

- build models of care that are focused on recovery and family inclusion, particularly taking into account the needs of children
- streamline treatment programs from over 20 types down to six, and redevelop the funding model so that services can provide individualised responses to clients
- develop consistent, standardised assessment and needs identification to achieve an appropriate and comprehensive response to clients
- foster effective treatment pathways by recommissioning alcohol and drug treatment services at an area level and connecting into a full range of services
- build a workforce that recognises the current skills and expertise of employees in the sector and promotes the development of clinical, relationship and care-coordination capability.

New directions for alcohol and drug treatment services: A roadmap is available on the Department of Health website at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/aod/sectorreform>

Timeframes

Redevelopment of Victoria's alcohol and drug treatment system is now under way. In 2012 we will focus on redeveloping the pharmacotherapy system, introducing a bed vacancy register and central intake and expanding access to needle and syringe programs and counselling services in growth corridors and regional areas. We will also release a new workforce strategy and implementation plan.

In 2013 we will begin recommissioning adult treatment services. In 2014 we will begin redeveloping the youth treatment system.

Change can be challenging and difficult, however these reforms set a new and exciting direction for alcohol and drug treatment services.

Throughout this program of change, government and stakeholders will work together to design and implement improvements that make the alcohol and drug treatment system better for clients, better for families and better for communities.



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