



Secretary

Department of Health

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 650 172
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.health.vic.gov.au
DX 210081

BAC-BR-31045 LEX 72137

Ms Kate Sanderson
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria

Via e-mail: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Sanderson

COR 2023 0213 - Finding into death without inquest

Thank you for providing the findings of Coroner John Cain dated 11 March 2025 in relation to the death of Stephen O'Brien, who died in January 2023. I offer my condolences to his family and loved ones.

Judge Cain made three recommendations to the Victorian Government. In consultation with Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), it was determined that the Department of Health (the department) would lead a response to Recommendation one, with input from DFFH. After carrying out the necessary investigations, it was agreed that DFFH would respond to Recommendations two and three, and that the department did not have any information to contribute. Recommendation one and the department's response is as follows:

That the Victorian Government implement the recommendation from Mind Australia in their submission to the RCVMHs by developing mechanisms that assist in identifying 'hidden' mental health carers and families that do not rely on self-identification. This could be through GPs, community health centers, My Aged Care, primary health networks, schools and other educational settings and workplaces

Judge Cain noted in his findings that the department has fully acquitted recommendation 31 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (RCVMHS) which called for the government to commission the establishment of a family and carer-led centre in each of the eight regions with consistent branding (known as 'Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect Centres').

Following a competitive procurement process, the department engaged Impact Co. and Lively Collective to conduct an evaluation of the eight Connect Centers, which commenced in January 2025.

The department has directed the evaluators to include a dedicated line of enquiry into the targeting and identification of 'hidden' mental health carers in the evaluation. The final evaluation report will be delivered in September 2026 and its results will be made publicly available.

The department's response to the Mind Australia submission to RCVMHS

Please see below the department's position regarding each proposal contained in Mind Australia's submission to the RCVMHS relating to identifying 'hidden' carers:

a. 'a carer checklist or carer assessment tool'

The department does not support the introduction of a formal carer checklist or assessment tool. Access to Connect Centre services does not require service users to satisfy any formal threshold. An individual need only indicate they support someone experiencing mental illness, psychological distress or substance abuse. It is not considered that implementing an assessment tool would add value. Additionally, the department does not consider it feasible to expect clinicians or practitioners to undertake additional checks or screening for non-self-identifying carers, noting the considerable time and resource constraints that clinicians and practitioners face. The department also considers it would be inappropriate to refer this task to non-specialist staff, who may not have the requisite training or experience to make such determinations.

b. 'a flyer listing current and relevant mental health carer supports'

The department confirms it has designed a brochure outlining the supports offered by the Connect Centres to those caring for people experiencing mental ill-health. The brochure includes wording that:

"Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect is dedicated to those who are supporting people living with mental health issues or psychological distress, with or without substance use challenges. This could include family, carers, supporters, or anyone else who has someone in their life experiencing mental health challenges".

The department intentionally uses broad language in these materials to widen the target audience and reach non-self-identifying carers. These brochures are distributed through community education initiatives, local network meetings, waiting rooms and service foyers. A copy of a brochure has been annexed to this response. In addition to brochures, each Connect Centre develops its own local promotional materials, websites, printed materials and branded merchandise (pens, banners, branded outreach vehicles etc.) to generate awareness of the Connect Centres. A link to each of the Connect Centres can be found below:

- [Gippsland](#)¹
- [Grampians](#)²
- [Hume](#)³
- [Loddon Mallee](#)⁴
- [Barwon Southwest](#)⁵
- [Southeast \(metro\)](#)⁶

¹ <https://www.wellways.org/our-services/mental-health-wellbeing-connect/>

² <https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/services/grampians-mental-health-and-wellbeing-connect>

³ <https://gatewayhealth.org.au/services/hume-family-and-carer-led-centres/>

⁴ <https://www.mindaustralia.org.au/services/loddon-mallee-mental-health-and-wellbeing-connect>

⁵ <https://www.wellways.org/our-services/mental-health-wellbeing-connect/>

⁶ <https://www.bhn.org.au/south-east-metro-mental-health-and-wellbeing-connect/>

- [Northeast \(metro\)](#)⁷
- [Western \(metro\)](#)⁸

- c. *'a series of questions that don't use the word 'carer' at all but talk about supports and what their rights to support might be.'*

The department is considering this proposal. The department sees merit in developing a set of questions using inclusive language to inform people about services which may assist them. Connect Coordination Victoria (CCV) - a department-funded team within Tandem, the family carer peak body that led the co-design of the Connect Centres - is well placed to lead this work. The department has commenced discussions with CCV to determine if a list, as described, could be developed and implemented by the Connect Centre workforce within existing funding.

Other initiatives to support unpaid carers in Victoria

Refreshing the Victorian Carer Strategy

The Victorian Carer Strategy 2018-2022 is the first whole-of-government strategy in Victoria dedicated to supporting carers. It outlines five priorities to improve carer health and wellbeing, access to services, and ensure carers are acknowledged and recognised. Details on the strategy are available [here](#).⁹

The government has committed to refreshing the strategy. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has undertaken consultation with a diverse range of peak bodies, service providers, and unpaid carers (including those supporting people with mental health needs) to inform this review. The renewed strategy, which is due to be released in late 2025, includes targeted actions focused on ensuring carers are identified and supported early in their caring journey within service systems, and supporting stronger social and community connections that can recognise and sustain them in their care role.

Key programs supporting unpaid carers

The Support for Carers Program is a key initiative under the Victorian Carer Strategy and receives \$22 million per annum (plus indexation) in funding from the Victorian Government, on a recurrent basis. A further \$9.5 million is provided annually through the Additional Respite for Carers initiative through to June 2027.

These initiatives deliver tailored support for unpaid carers across Victoria, including those who are hidden or under-recognised. Funded services include the provision of information and advice, counselling (either one-to-one or in a group setting), and financial assistance.

There are currently 60 Support for Carers Program providers and 50 Additional Respite for Carers providers across Victoria, who work in partnership with local councils, health services, and community organisations to identify and support carers. This is primarily achieved through jointly planned and delivered activities that build awareness of carer services – allowing individuals to be linked to appropriate services. Examples include:

⁷ <https://accesshc.org.au/northeast-wellbeing-connect>

⁸ <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/disability-mental-health-wellbeing/mental-health-and-wellbeing-connect-western-metro/>

⁹ <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/recognising-and-supporting-victorias-carers-victorian-carer-strategy-2018-22>

- Brimbank City Council have worked in partnership with peak body Carers Victoria to deliver 'Carer Aware' training to council staff in service delivery roles. This training allows staff to better identify carers to connect them with appropriate supports and services.
- Additional Respite for Carers provider 'Different Journeys' has supported a significant number of isolated, diverse and at-risk carers. The organisation arranges peer support carer gatherings in community venues to provide connection and access to their trained carer peer support team. The aim of these sessions is to identify, engage and build rapport with hard-to-reach carers, build trust, and increase their capacity to navigate service system and available supports.

The 2025-27 Additional Respite Carers program guidelines explicitly prioritise improving access for marginalised and non-self-identifying carers. The guidelines:

"seek to improve access and remove barriers to respite for unpaid Victorian carers. This includes carers who may be experiencing exclusion, isolation and marginalisation ... The program also seeks to reach carers who do not self-identify as carers".¹⁰

Discounts

The Victorian Government has made available a range of discounts to unpaid carers via the Victorian Carer Card to assist with the additional financial burdens those with caring responsibilities often face. With a focus on improving accessibility for unrecognised or under-recognised carers, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is working to:

- Make changes to improve uptake of the Victorian Carer Card including, but not limited to, making it easier for primary carers to apply for the Card and demonstrate their eligibility.
- Collaborate with key stakeholders and other government departments to increase awareness and uptake of the Victorian Carer Card. As an example, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing is working with Department of Education to increase awareness and uptake of the Card in government schools for young people with caring responsibilities who are "hidden".

I trust that this information is of assistance to the court.

Yours sincerely



Jenny Atta PSM

Secretary

10/06/2025

¹⁰ <https://www.vic.gov.au/additional-respite-funding>

About Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect

Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect is dedicated to those who are supporting people living with mental health issues or psychological distress, with or without substance use challenges.

This could include family, carers, supporters, or anyone else who has someone in their life experiencing mental health challenges.

We know that being there for people facing mental health challenges plays an important role in their recovery. We also recognise you as someone with your own wellbeing needs.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect centres provide a warm and welcoming space to improve your health and wellbeing and are open to all ages in Victoria.

Contact us



Location and contact details for other Mental Health and Wellbeing centres currently open are listed on the Better Health Channel website.

Scan the QR code or visit the URL below to find out more.



<<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-connect>>

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government,
1 Treasury Place, Melbourne. © State of Victoria, Australia,
Department of Health, October 2024.
Printed by Gunn + Taylor, Glen Waverley (2405761).



mental health & wellbeing connect

Free for family, carers and supporters



Department
of Health

Connecting you with someone who gets it

Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect centres are designed by people with lived experience of supporting someone with mental health challenges.

This means our staff get it. They understand what it takes to support someone with these challenges.

We understand caring for someone with mental health challenges can be a complex, sometimes lifelong commitment.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect centres are designed to support you in whatever way you need.

Your wellbeing is just as important.

Types of support available

Support is **FREE**.

You do not need a referral or Medicare card.

Each centre provides support and services tailored to your needs, including:

- peer worker support
- psychological and wellbeing supports
- help navigating the mental health and wellbeing system
- access to hardship funds
- education and practical support.

Crisis support

Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect is not a crisis service.

For crisis support, please contact the following:



Triple Zero (000)

In an emergency which is life-threatening or where there is immediate risk of harm to anyone.



Lifeline 13 11 14

For 24-hour crisis support.



13Yarn 13 92 76

Crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Kids Helpline 1800 551 800

Support for youth aged 5–25.