

# Mental Health & Drugs Update



23 December 2008



The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Dear friends and colleagues,

Welcome to the first edition of the Mental Health & Drugs (MH&D) update newsletter. In the period that I have had responsibility for Mental Health, Drugs and Alcohol as the Minister for Mental Health, it has been a privilege to meet with many of you and hear your issues, concerns and ideas.

It has been a big year, and I'm delighted with the progress we've made in a number of key policy areas and I'd like to thank you for your partnership and support.

## Mental Health Reform Strategy

This year has seen extensive work on a new vision for mental health services in Victoria. In May 2008, I released the green paper *Because mental health matters*. It proposed a significant reform agenda involving a whole of government approach. Prevention, early intervention, recovery and social inclusion were recognised key elements for change.

The release of the green paper heralded a period of extensive consultation with approximately 1,200 people attending consultation events, 9 public forums and 19 policy roundtables bringing together diverse viewpoints on specific issues. Over 240 written submissions were received from a variety of stakeholders.

Many devoted considerable time and thought to addressing challenging issues and identifying untapped opportunities. I sincerely thank all contributors - consumers, carers, service providers, academics, peak bodies, professional bodies and unions.

I look forward to the release of Victoria's Mental Health Reform Strategy early in the New Year, and to continuing to work with you in building a better system of mental health care.

The *Because mental health matters* green paper is available on the Mental Health Reform Strategy website: [www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/reformstrategy](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/reformstrategy).

## Mental Health Act Review

In May 2008 I announced a review of the *Mental Health Act 1986* (the Act) to examine whether it provides an effective and contemporary legislative framework for the treatment and care of Victorians with a serious mental illness. The Act imposes obligations on government, enshrines protections for people subject to it and regulates the provision of involuntary treatment and other practices.

An independent panel comprising Mr Julian Gardner (Chair) Ms Dominique Saunders and Mr Wayne Schwass has been appointed to lead the public consultations across Victoria. These consultations commenced in December and will continue until the end of February 2009.

The consultation paper will promote high levels of input into the review and I encourage all interested Victorians to make their views on the future shape of the Act known to the independent panel.

Copies of the consultation papers may be obtained by contacting the review enquiry line on 1300 656 692 or may be downloaded from the review website at: [www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/mhactreview/](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/mhactreview/)

## **A New Blueprint for Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services 2009-2013**

I am delighted to announce the release of the new blueprint for the alcohol and other drug treatment sector following extensive consultation with agency staff, consumers of our treatment services, and other key players. This document is currently being mailed out to services in the drug and alcohol sector.

The new blueprint provides a new framework that will guide the key reforms and directions of alcohol and other drug service delivery in Victoria for the next five years. Meeting the needs of consumers with more complex conditions, as well as considering the impact on children, families and carers are key considerations. Another priority of the new blueprint is to intervene earlier with young people and young adults to reduce the uptake and harms from alcohol and drug use. By promoting timely access to evidence-based and high quality services we can assist people to address their alcohol and drug use and get their lives back on track.

The Blueprint will be the primary focus for discussion at the Alcohol and Drug Service Providers' Conference scheduled for Friday 6 March 2009.

By working in partnership to improve outcomes for the individual, their family, carers, and the community we can make a real difference. A copy of the Blueprint is available on: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/drugsttopics>

## **Restoring the Balance: Victoria's Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013**

In 2008 the Government took decisive action to reduce alcohol related harm in Victoria.

I convened a Ministerial Taskforce which led the development of a whole of government strategy to reduce alcohol related harm. On 2 May 2008 the Premier launched '*Restoring the Balance: Victoria's Alcohol Action Plan 2008-2013*'. Its objectives are to reduce risky drinking and its impact on families, young people, health; productivity and public safety. The plan is available at [http://www.health.vic.gov.au/drugservices/pubs/action\\_plan.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/drugservices/pubs/action_plan.htm).

Both Restoring the Balance and the national policy debate on alcohol demonstrate government leadership of a long term process of cultural change within our community. In particular, patterns of drinking among young people and young adults are a major concern. In early 2009 I will be convening a roundtable forum with young people as part of a broader youth engagement strategy to help understand young people's perspective on drinking, and inform how Governments can encourage less risky drinking among young people.

## **Some final words.....**

I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank you all for your professional and dedicated work this year and I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with you over the coming year.

Wishing you and your family all the best for the upcoming festive season and have a good and safe New Year!

Yours sincerely,



**Hon Lisa Neville MP**  
**Minister for Mental Health**

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