



Prioritising Mental Health and telehealth – COVID-19 pandemic response

The Australian Government is providing unprecedented support to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians is protected during and after the pandemic. Since March, the Australian Government has invested \$165.9 million in mental health as part of the COVID-19 response. Telehealth has been a landmark reform and has underpinned mental health support as part of the \$2.4 billion investment.

As part of the response, and in addition to further funding for additional psychological therapy sessions and support in Victoria, the Government has provided:

- \$74 million to deliver immediate support and bolster key mental health services, including funding for:
 - A dedicated coronavirus support line delivered by Beyond Blue, additional capacity for Lifeline and Kids Helpline, and specific support for frontline health workers.
 - Support for socially isolated older Australians through the Community Visitors Scheme, young people through headspace, and for new parents and Indigenous Australians.
 - Further support for people with severe mental illness who require psychosocial support services to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
 - Targeted mental health services commissioned by Primary Health Networks.
- \$48.1 million to assist implementation of the first three priorities of the National Pandemic Mental Health Plan, including:
 - Collecting evidence and modelling mental health impacts of COVID-19, strengthening research into suicide prevention and promoting a nationally coordinated, strategic approach to suicide prevention.
 - Supporting particularly vulnerable groups including providing additional in-reach mental health services for older Australians; support for carers of people with or at risk of mental illness; and extra mental health services for indigenous Australians.

- Improving connections with and between services by developing a system to provide patients with more direct transfers between different mental health services, and delivering a national communication campaign in more than 20 languages, and providing parents with information to support discussions with their children about their mental health and career options.

The Government is closely monitoring mental health service usage and predicting where increases in demand may happen so it can respond quickly and lessen the mental health impacts of the pandemic and the recovery phase.

Why is this important?

The COVID-19 pandemic has put pressure on the mental health and wellbeing of many Australians. Providing the right support at the right time for people experiencing impacts of the pandemic is essential to respond to and reduce anxiety, distress and other mental illness.

Boosting the capacity and responsiveness of key services is an essential immediate requirement for ensuring that all Australians have access to support, and are able to receive vital advice and assistance to manage increased distress and anxiety.

More specific challenges to mental health and wellbeing associated with each phase of the pandemic are identified in the National Mental Health Pandemic Response Plan. In particular:

- Monitoring demand for mental health services and modelling the impact of the pandemic is important in shaping the COVID-19 response. It helps us to understand service need, workforce requirements, and impacts on key groups, including the rate at which patients are recovering from mental health challenges.
- Providing enhanced support for the most vulnerable groups to help protect the mental health of people most at risk and most affected by COVID-19 and the restrictions in some areas.
- Improving connection with and between services to ensure people can receive mental health support when and where they need – seamlessly.

The plan will ensure the mental wellbeing of all Australians is protected during and after the pandemic, and the effects on social and economic prosperity are limited.

These measures are informed by, and support, the Government's Coronavirus National Health Plan and the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan, to ensure Australians have the mental health support they need throughout this pandemic and that we remain prepared across the country.

Who will benefit?

All Australians will benefit from the Government's comprehensive approach to tackle mental health issues during and after the pandemic, with particular focus on high risk and vulnerable groups and Victorians.

How much will this cost?

This will cost \$165.9 million from 2020–21 to 2021–22.