

The Victorian Government Response to the Community Visitors Annual Report 2022-23



Families,
Fairness
and Housing

The Victorian Government Response to the
Community Visitors Annual Report 2022-2023

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Introduction

The Victorian Government welcomes the Office of the Public Advocate's Community Visitors Annual Report 2022-23 and its recommendations.

The Office of the Public Advocate's Community Visitors Annual Report (the Report) provides insights into a range of issues critical to the safety, treatment, care and human rights of Victorians living in disability supported accommodation, mental health units and Supported Residential Services (SRS). The report details systemic challenges as well as good practices across the three streams.

The Victorian Government acknowledges Community Visitors' ongoing commitment to safeguarding and protecting Victorians and remains dedicated to considering the observations and recommendations made in the report in pursuit of positive outcomes for Victorians.

The Victorian Government's response is provided following the release of the final report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). In their final reports, the Disability Royal Commission issued 222 recommendations and the NDIS Independent Review issued 26 recommendations which require the Commonwealth Government and the States and Territories to work collaboratively to consider, plan and implement reforms to the current disability systems and processes to ensure that supports and services provided to people with disability are safe and inclusive. Some of the recommendations and findings concern the scope and operation of outreach visitation and community visitor schemes nationally. The Victorian Government will continue to engage with the Commonwealth Government and other jurisdictions to work on these reforms, including the recommendations which relate to the Community Visitors Program.

This response is also provided in the context of ongoing work relating to the implementation of recommendations relating to the previous Royal Commissions into Victoria's mental health system and into aged care, quality and safety.

The Report notes that in 2022-2023, 357 Community Visitor volunteers made 3793 visits to 1270 facilities across Victoria. The Report makes 24 recommendations – six relating to disability services, seven relating to SRS, and 11 related to mental health services. The Victorian Government's response addresses each recommendation and the actions underway to address them.

Key themes

The key themes identified in the Report include:

Reducing the risk of abuse, neglect and violence

Community Visitors continue to report on the persistent abuse, neglect and violence experienced by individuals in settings where they should be safe. The negative impact of congregation and segregation of people with disability and mental health issues are noted. Community Visitors advocate for accessible, affordable and safe housing options, improvements in mental health inpatient units and other therapeutic environments, and assistance with urgent and last resort options while alternative arrangements are made.

Improving and expanding services and increasing collaborative work

Community Visitors continue to report cases of residents cycling back and forth between mental health services and SRS, and receiving inadequate and disjointed care. They recommend acknowledgement of an increase in numbers of individuals presenting with dual diagnosis and recommend expanding facilities and upskilling staff. They advocate for collaboration with other

government departments to improve access to suitable and affordable housing and support across the care trajectory. They also recommend developing a suite of information for individuals accessing services, including up to date pandemic preparedness plans specific to mental health facilities, and sharing good practice across the sectors. They recommend addressing environmental issues, tackling staffing shortages through various strategies, and expanding specialised services especially in regional and rural areas.

Addressing service provider challenges to deliver positive outcomes

Community Visitors note the importance of increasing service provider skill levels and recommend the funding and provision of regular education and training, including mental health training and de-escalation of violence, to staff in supported residential services and mental health services. Community Visitors also advocate for proactively educating services providers on their obligations including on the legislated functions and powers of Community Visitors.

Working with the Australian Government to manage intersections with the National Disability Insurance Agency and the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission

Community Visitors continue to observe unsatisfactory practices by National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers which impact resident wellbeing, choice and control. Community Visitors continue to advocate for the implementation of effective information-sharing agreements with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission) so that Community Visitors can perform their statutory duties and make informed assessments with access to an up-to-date list of all visitable properties to the Community Visitors Program.

Regulatory and legislative change to improve safeguarding and continue supporting the work of the Community Visitors

Community Visitors continue to advocate for legislative reform and funding support so that they can undertake their important independent safeguarding work. Access to required documents and information is essential. Community Visitors also have high expectations that that the new Social Services Regulator will maintain an effective successful relationship with Community Visitors.

Work underway to address recommendations

Table 1: Government response to the Community Visitors Disability Services Board Recommendations 2022-2023

Community Visitors Annual Report Recommendations for Victorian Government from Disability Board	Government Response
<p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>Advocates for legislative reform to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Community Visitors are formally recognised in the NDIS Act 2013 and related safeguarding rules and frameworks; and b. Community Visitor programs remain independent of other NDIS safeguarding arrangements; and c. Community Visitors have easy access to required documents including electronic incident reports, are empowered to take photos, and to conduct remote visits where necessary; and d. Information can be shared between the Community Visitors Boards and other relevant federal bodies (e.g. the NDIA, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission) and state bodies (e.g. Social Services Regulator, the TAC and Workcover) to the extent necessary to ensure people with disability have access to strong, effective and cooperative safeguarding. 	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) continues to advocate for the important safeguarding role that Community Visitors play for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants.</p> <p>The Victorian Government's submission to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission) advocated for the role of Community Visitor schemes to be recognised in the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework, and the department advocated this position to the NDIS Review.</p> <p>The Disability Royal Commission's Final Report was released in September 2023, and included recommendations that the role of Community Visitor schemes as a safeguard for people with disability should be formally recognised in the <i>National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013</i> (NDIS Act), and that nationally consistent principles and standards should be developed.</p> <p>The Victorian Government will continue to engage with the Commonwealth Government on improvements to safeguards and oversight arrangements, including advocating for formal recognition of the role of Community Visitors under the NDIS.</p> <p>Key mechanisms to support this work include the Community Visitors Board Disability Liaison Meetings, and operational meetings with Disability Homes Victoria and Forensic Disability Services. The department will also continue to work with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (the NDIS Commission) to ensure that NDIS providers are aware of their obligations under Victorian legislation, including the functions and powers of Community Visitors.</p> <p>The department recognises the need for effective information sharing between the NDIS Commission and Community Visitor schemes. The Disability Royal Commission's Final Report recommended that amendments to the NDIS Act should be made to provide the authorising environment for information sharing between the NDIS Commission and Community Visitor schemes. The department will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth Government for the barriers to information sharing under the NDIS Act to be urgently addressed.</p>

Community Visitors Annual Report Recommendations for Victorian Government from Disability Board	Government Response
	<p>The Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Act 2023 (DSSRA Act) became law in Victoria on 23 May 2023. The DSSRA Act amends the Disability Act 2006 (the Disability Act), Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (RTA) and other relevant Acts to strengthen rights, protections and safeguards for people with disability in Victoria.</p> <p>The DSSRA Act amendments update, clarify and consolidate provisions for sharing information under the Disability Act. The changes will ensure that protected information can be shared by relevant persons for specified purposes under the Disability Act, subject to safeguards and an offence for unauthorised disclosure. The changes provide for a list of persons and bodies who can receive protected information from a relevant person. Importantly, this includes the Transport Accident Commission and the Victorian WorkCover Authority, and additional people and bodies can be prescribed in regulations.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>Proactively educates disability service providers operating in Victoria on their obligations to Community Visitors including right of entry, facilitating access to documents, and responding to Records of Visit within prescribed timeframes, and enforces the requirements where necessary.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>The department will continue to work with the Office of the Public Advocate to support the provision of education on the legislated functions and powers of Community Visitors and the obligations of providers.</p> <p>Amendments to the Disability Act and RTA made by the DSSRA Act expand the range of accommodation that Community Visitors can visit. This now includes accommodation approved by the Minister for Disability as visitable by Community Visitors and accommodation approved by the Senior Practitioner as suitable for the purposes of compulsory treatment. From 1 July 2024, Community Visitors will be able to visit certain permanent long-term accommodation where daily independent living support is provided to one or more people with disability and funded by a specified entity or program.</p> <p>The department has partnered with National Disability Services Victoria (NDSV), as the peak body for the disability sector, to undertake broad sector engagement and education to ensure service providers understand the changes made by the DSSRA Act and are aware of their obligations.</p> <p>As part of this program, NDSV will partner with the Office of the Public Advocate and the Victorian Senior Practitioner to deliver a workshop focused on the changes made by the DSSRA Act, including the expanded scope of visitable properties and the role and responsibilities of both Community Visitors, and providers when engaging with Community Visitors.</p> <p>Forensic Disability Services currently have a Community Visitors Practice Instruction which provides direction for staff, specifically in Forensic Residential Services on the role of Community Visitors and the obligations of disability service providers. This practice instruction will be updated by 30 June 2024 to reflect the legislative changes made by the DSSRA Act.</p>

Community Visitors Annual Report Recommendations for Victorian Government from Disability Board	Government Response
<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <p>Advocates for information sharing agreements between the Community Visitors program and the NDIA and any other relevant agency to ensure an up-to-date list of all visitable properties is available to the program.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>The Victorian Government has continued to advocate for appropriate information sharing between the National Disability Insurance Agency, the NDIS Commission and persons and bodies with statutory powers under Victorian legislation, including Community Visitors.</p> <p>The Victorian Government has also raised this issue in its submission to the Disability Royal Commission in October 2022. The final Disability Royal Commission report was released in September 2023, and specifically recommended that the National Disability Insurance Act 2013 should be amended to provide the authorising environment for information sharing between the NDIS Commission and Community Visitor schemes. The Disability Royal Commission also recommended that Community Visitor scheme legislation enable relevant information to be shared between Community Visitor schemes, the NDIS Commission and the National Disability Insurance Agency.</p> <p>The Victorian Government will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth Government on addressing barriers to sharing information with Community Visitor schemes, including amendments to the NDIS Act in keeping with the Disability Royal Commission's recommendation.</p> <p>Actions for four of the recommendations from the NDIS Review final report also refer to enabling improvements in information sharing. This includes platforms to encourage digital innovation. The Victorian Government is carefully considering the recommendations of the NDIS Review and the Disability Royal Commission.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p>Establishes processes to provide urgent and last resort assistance to ensure all Victorians with disability, including people with complex support needs, are provided with suitable, safe and dignified supported accommodation while alternative arrangements are made.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>Forensic Disability Services have regular liaison meetings with Disability Homes Victoria to discuss housing issues. Forensic Disability Services operate residential treatment services and accommodation support to support people with cognitive disability involved with the Justice system who otherwise do not have appropriate support and accommodation. The department funds Australian Community Support Organisation and Jesuit Social Services to provide Specialist Forensic Disability Accommodation to support people with a cognitive disability in contact with the Justice System.</p> <p>The department notes that the Disability Royal Commission's Final Report includes a specific recommendation (rec 10.10) related to provider of last resort arrangements. The department continues to work with the NDIA, and the Commonwealth more broadly, to advocate for improved accommodation responses to people with disability including people with complex needs. The Victorian Government is carefully considering the recommendations of the NDIS Review and the Disability Royal</p>

Community Visitors Annual Report Recommendations for Victorian Government from Disability Board	Government Response
	Commission.
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p>Creates a legislative, policy or operational framework to ensure that supported accommodation is maintained to a standard consistent with landlord obligations under SDA residency agreements and/or residential rental agreements.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>The department recognises the importance of protecting and upholding the rights of people with disability living in supported accommodation. This recommendation relates to residents of supported accommodation occupied under a residential rental agreement (Part 2 of the RTA) or SDA residency agreement (Part 12A of the RTA).</p> <p>Under the Part 12A, SDA providers have legislated duties to ensure that SDA accommodation provided to SDA residents, including any fixtures and fittings, are maintained in good repair. SDA providers must also take reasonable measures to ensure the security of the accommodation and minimise inconvenience or disruption when undertaking repairs or renovations.</p> <p>Where urgent and non-urgent repairs are not actioned by an SDA provider, SDA residents or their chosen person may, in specified circumstances, apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for an order, or apply to the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria to investigate whether an SDA provider is in breach of their duty to ensure the accommodation is maintained in good repair.</p> <p>From 1 July 2024, DSSRA Act amendments to the RTA will extend the enhanced protections available under Part 12A to a broader range of SDA, including permanent long-term accommodation where daily independent living support is provided to one or more residents and funded by a specified entity or program.</p> <p>Providers of SDA enrolled dwellings need to be registered under the NDIS and are subject to the NDIS Practice Standards. The NDIS Commission continues to be responsible for ensuring that registered NDIS providers comply with the NDIS Practice Standards, and that all NDIS providers comply with the NDIS Code of Conduct. Residents of SDA enrolled dwellings provided by registered NDIS providers can make complaints to the NDIS Commission in respect of services provided under the NDIS.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p>Provides adequate funding to ensure Community Visitors can fulfill their functions under legislation, and additional funding so that the Community Visitors program is able to identify visitable facilities and make informed assessments on visit frequency.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>The Victorian Government recognises and values the role of the Community Visitors in safeguarding the lives of vulnerable people and continues to engage with Community Visitors. The operations of the Community Visitors Program are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Office of the Public Advocate, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Department of Families Fairness and Housing, and the Department of Health, which is in place until 30 June 2024.</p> <p>The process for updating the MoU will reflect any changes to functions and scope of Community Visitors in relation to any</p>

Community Visitors Annual Report Recommendations for Victorian Government from Disability Board	Government Response
	changes to the RTA stemming from the DSSRA Act 2023. Any changes to the future funding for the Community Visitor Program will be managed through the Victorian Government budget processes and based on data and evidence provided by Community Visitors and informed by recommendations of the DRC and NDIS Review.

Table 2: Government response to the Community Visitors Supported Residential Services Board Recommendations 2022-2023

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Residential Services Board	Government Response
<p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>Require all proprietors to complete an annual compliance report on the status of their staff to complete mental health training, which is mandatory for all staff in pension-level SRS.</p>	<p>Not Accepted</p> <p>Under section 205 of the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010, the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, has directed that mental health training is compulsory for all support staff in pension-level SRS. This reflects these facilities are more likely to have a higher proportion of residents requiring support with a psychiatric illness or disability. This training may be provided by the department or a registered training provider. Staff who have existing relevant qualifications in nursing, mental health, or equivalent training are deemed to have already met this requirement.</p> <p>The department notes there are already a range of measures in place, and others about to be implemented, to monitor and support compliance with this requirement. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the department conducts staffing audits at SRS to ascertain whether appropriate staffing profiles and qualification requirements are being met, including adherence with the mental health training requirement. • staff who require new mental health training may attend a department funded SRS-specific training module called 'Residents and Mental Health: Better Practice in SRS' through the free SRS training calendar. SRS staff can also access other suitable training opportunities through other education providers to meet the mental health training requirement. Many training providers provide quality free or low-cost training which SRS staff can access. • the department monitors free mental health training attendance numbers and will continue to work with the training provider to promote and target attendance in the sector, noting that staff and proprietors with existing qualifications can benefit from refresher training. • The Social Services Regulations 2023, which commence on 1 July 2024 and will be monitored by the new independent Social Services Regulator, include the Social Services Standards (the Standards) against which all social services, including SRS will be regulated. Standard 6 of the Standards, imposes obligations on service providers regarding having to have a safe workforce in place. This includes, at regulation 41, ensuring that service workers access ongoing training and are supported to deliver safe social services. This regulation will help to ensure that all staff are supported and trained to work with the clients they are supporting in a way that's tailored to the

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Residential Services Board	Government Response
	<p>needs of the client group irrespective of their particular support needs.</p> <p>Given the safeguards these measures already provide, and the regulatory burden that would be created if the additional reporting requirement was implemented, the department does not support the additional reporting obligation proposed.</p> <p>The department is committed to improving outcomes for residents with mental health support needs and will continue to work with the Community Visitors Program to identify improvements in the way SRS can support people with these additional and often complex needs.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>Fund staff training in Supported Residential Services to manage the de-escalation of violence and delivery of Mental Health First Aid Training for all staff.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>The department is committed to improving outcomes for Supported Residential Service (SRS) residents with mental health support needs and acknowledges the valuable advocacy work of the Community Visitors in this space. Currently, the department funds tailored, SRS-specific mental health training for support staff working in SRS. Key learning outcomes of the training include recognising behavioural triggers, responding appropriately when residents require assistance for a mental health issue, and identifying available mental health supports for residents.</p> <p>The Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative (SAVVI) provides funding for SRS proprietors and staff to attend training, including behaviour management and mental health training.</p> <p>In 2023-24, the department introduced a 'Collaborative Planning' process between proprietors and SAVVI agencies as a condition of funding. The Collaborative Plans are designed to continuously identify and action a range of key issues throughout a twelve-month period including the identification and facilitation of training and professional development opportunities for SRS staff.</p> <p>In 2023-24, SAVVI agencies have reported SRS staff attending Mental Health First Aid, harm minimisation, managing challenging behaviours, and occupational violence and aggression training.</p> <p>From February 2024, the department has provided additional one-off funding to SAVVI agencies to procure training to upskill staff across all pension-level SRS. Mental Health First Aid Training is identified as the priority training for SRS staff through this funding. For staff who have already completed this training, other priority training topics are assisting residents with complex behavioural support needs, linking residents into external supports, and supporting tenancy.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3:</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p>

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Residential Services Board	Government Response
<p>Ensure mental health facilities use key performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness and usage of the mental health referral form for discharge and follow-up of consumers to Supported Residential Services.</p>	<p>The department is committed to building strong referral practices from mental health facilities into Supported Residential Services (SRS).</p> <p>This commitment is represented in the following initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An inter-departmental SRS Advisory Committee to advise on improvements and coordination of referrals between services, including mental health services and SRS. • Co-development of guidance for funded and referring services on the Appropriate Use of Supported Residential Services. This guidance assists referral agencies with key considerations to evaluate when referring a client to an SRS. The guidance is available on the Funded Agency Channel. • In September 2023, the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist published the Transfer of care and shared care guidelines for health and wellbeing professionals. Guidance for the transfer of residents to a Supported Residential Service is included in the resource as an area for special consideration by mental health and wellbeing professionals. The guidelines state that if a consumer is being transferred to an SRS, mental health and wellbeing professionals should develop a plan for ongoing treatment, care and support that identifies NDIS, My Aged Care supports, and mental health and wellbeing supports. <p>The department will be monitoring the progress and effectiveness of these referral guides.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p>Ensure that the Homes Victoria Community of Practice shares good practice in:</p> <p>a. the provision of activities for residents within Supported Residential Services especially for younger men</p> <p>b. the preparation of menus which are cost -effective, have high nutritional value and recognise a variety of cultural traditions.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>The Supported Residential Services Community of Practice (SRSCoP) was introduced in July 2023 and includes guest speakers with subject matter expertise to improve SRS proprietor and staff knowledge. As of February 2024 two sessions have been held. Content suggestions for the SRSCoP will be actively sought from a range of sources including proprietors, SAVVI agencies, Community Visitors and the Human Services Regulator.</p> <p>The department is sharing with proprietors a range of free, on-demand, online learning modules, to improve the dining, food, and nutritional outcomes for residents through the Sector Connect Private and Supported Housing newsletter. The resources, developed by the Maggie Beer Foundation through an initiative funded by the Australian Federal Government’s Department of Health and Aged Care, offer a range of videos, recipes and advice to improve the variety and nutritional value of meals and residents dining experience. From June 2024 all pension-level SRS will receive funding to assist with the purchase of fresh food.</p> <p>Since 1 July 2023, Collaborative Plans developed by SRS and SAVVI agencies have begun to proactively capture resident voice including resident preferences in relation to meals and activities. SAVVI agencies are working to action any identified</p>

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Residential Services Board	Government Response
	<p>areas for improvement with proprietors. These areas of improvement will be specific to the particular SRS and the resident cohort. Capturing resident voice means that the individual living at the SRS is at the heart of the planning process and that their needs, preferences, and aspirations are considered.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p>Provide more funding to the Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative Program and the Pension-Level Program to ensure that all existing and any new pension-level SRS are eligible.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>From July 2024, the department will introduce new program updates for pension-level SRS within the existing budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight additional pension-level SRS have been assessed and approved as eligible to participate in the program. • Expansion of Supporting Connections in-reach and resident support by community service organisations to all pension-level SRS, to help an additional 200 SRS residents access the support they need. • Expansion of funding for amenity and safety and fresh food for all pension-level SRS as well as viability funding to assist with operational expenses.
<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p>Seek legislative reform so that Community Visitors have easy access to required documents including electronic incident reports, are empowered to take photos, and to conduct remote visits where necessary.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>The department acknowledges that Community Visitors play vital role in the safeguarding the residents of Supported Residential Services.</p> <p>Community visitors are one element of a broader safeguarding system for social services and it is important their powers are consistent with their function.</p> <p>The department notes that reforms to expand the ambit of Community Visitors' powers in this area would require legislative amendment and agreement between Ministers that are jointly and severally responsible for administering the Act.</p> <p>The department notes consideration of the respective roles and responsibilities of Community Visitors and the new Social Services Regulator is also required, noting that from 1 July 2024, with the new social services regulatory scheme, there will be a more robust regulatory framework with a key focus on service user safety, agency and dignity, and independent Regulator with a comprehensive suite of compliance and enforcement tools. The framework will apply to social services including supported residential services.</p>

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Residential Services Board	Government Response
<p>Recommendation 7:</p> <p>Provide adequate funding to ensure that the Community Visitors Program has the technology and resources needed to effectively fulfill its vital safeguarding role.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>The department recognises the role of the Community Visitors Program in improving the lives of vulnerable people and continues to engage with Community Visitors. The operations of the Community Visitors Program are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of the Public Advocate, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and the Department of Health, which is in place until 30 June 2024.</p>

Table 3: Government response to the Community Visitors Mental Health Board Recommendations 2022-2023

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Mental Health Board	Government Response
<p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>Urgently address staffing shortages by implementing short, medium and long-term strategies that help ease pressures on existing workforce and improve service delivery to consumers.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>In December 2021, Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021-2024 (the Strategy) was released in response to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (RCVMHS). The strategy sets out a clear and actionable plan to attract, train and support a workforce of the appropriate size, skill and composition needed for our future. The Strategy acknowledges that Victoria's mental health and wellbeing workforce needs to grow significantly to deliver the treatment, care and support Victorians need. It estimated a shortage of 2,500 additional mental health workers to 2024.</p> <p>The Strategy has reinforced that supply challenges need to be addressed both to meet increasing demand for mental health services and to prepare for changes to frontline service delivery as RCVMHS reforms are being implemented. The Victorian Government invested more than \$600 million in workforce initiatives since 2020-21, and this investment is funding more than 2,500 new roles across the sector. The newly funded full time equivalent (FTE) positions provide opportunities for nurses, junior medical officers, psychiatry trainees, lived and living experience workers and allied health clinicians to enter the mental health and wellbeing system. This approach and the positions already funded align with Recommendation 1 of the Community Visitor's Annual Report 2022-23.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>Expand specialised services for children and adolescents who are experiencing serious mental health issues by increasing the number of dedicated in-patient beds across the state, with a focus on regional and rural areas.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>The Victorian Government has accepted Recommendation 21 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which called for major reforms to bed-based services for young people. Significant work is underway to progress this recommendation to provide more accessible and age-appropriate mental health treatment, care and support to adolescents and young people.</p> <p>The 2024-25 State Budget provided funding to open 20 new Youth Prevention and Recovery Care (YPARC) beds at newly constructed sites in Heidelberg and Traralgon from 1 July 2025, providing treatment, care and support to young people aged 16-25 experiencing mental health challenges and psychological distress. These facilities are part of a \$141 million capital investment to deliver new and refurbished YPARC beds across the state which will double current system capacity. In 2023, the Department of Health co-designed a statewide service framework for YPARC services with young people and their families, carers and supporters to ensure consistency and high-quality service delivery.</p> <p>Further investment has allowed for the continued delivery of Hospital-in-the-Home (HiTH) beds for young people in north-</p>

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Mental Health Board	Government Response
	<p>west metropolitan Melbourne. These beds will provide more young people with access to specialist mental health care in their own home with their support networks around them.</p> <p>Planning is underway for a new stream of mental health inpatient beds for young people aged 18-25. The Department of Health will work in partnership with young people, their families, carers and supporters to design a new statewide service framework for inpatient care for young people. The framework will support the delivery of consistent and developmentally appropriate treatment, care and support for young people with acute mental health needs in inpatient settings.</p> <p>A formal review of the Youth Residential Rehabilitation program was completed in January 2023. Review findings will inform the design of the future community bed-based system for young people. In response to Recommendation 33.1 made by the Royal Commission, Booboop Narrkwarren Nagarra-jarra-noun (The Family Healing Centre) has been established in Melbourne's north. The new 12-bed centre will allow children and their families to stay onsite while they receive flexible, family-centred therapy and support from child and family mental health specialists.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <p>Support health services to develop a suite of information for consumers, that is available in a variety of formats (online, translated, hardcopy, plain language) and includes information about admission, in-patient, discharge, and post-admission support.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System directed the Victorian Government to create a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Act that reflected the vision for the reimagined mental health and wellbeing system and promoted good health and wellbeing. A number of resources were developed for consumers in preparation for the <i>Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022</i> coming into effect from 1 September 2023. Multiple agencies have developed these resources including IMHA, VMIAC, Tandem and the Department of Health. The Act Implementation Leads, employed by designated mental health services, were also responsible for developing resources for their consumers. The Office of the Chief Psychiatrist will continue to support mental health services to develop local resources. Our expectation is that mental health services will do this with lived experience expertise and through their local governance structures and committees. The OCP will promote this work and remind services of their obligations through the Chief Psychiatrist forums and communications with the sector.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p>Develop and roll-out a comprehensive mental health training package specific for NDIS support workers, that includes topics such as understanding various mental health conditions, de-escalation techniques, and trauma-</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>This is a key action for NDIA to lead as per the Psychosocial Disability Recovery-Oriented Framework, Principle 6 and Actions 12, 13 and 14. This is endorsed by the Disability Reform Ministerial Council. Further work on this is likely to be considered alongside the NDIS review recommendations.</p>

Community Visitors Recommendation for Victorian Government from Mental Health Board	Government Response
informed support.	
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p>Establish communication protocols between key NDIS-funded support agencies working in mental health and health services.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>This is a key action for NDIA to lead as per Psychosocial Disability Recovery-Oriented Framework Principle 3 and Actions 7 and 8. This is endorsed by the Disability Reform Ministerial Council. Further work on this is likely to be considered alongside the NDIS review recommendations.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p>Review and update relevant pandemic preparedness plans specific to mental health facilities. These plans should acknowledge the impact on consumers - particularly long stay consumers - outline strategies for continued availability and expansion of telehealth services and provide for the creation of more flexible staffing models that are adaptive to emergency situations.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>The department agrees that mental health facilities need to have plans in place to deal with the impact of pandemics and infectious diseases, particularly regarding the impact on consumers.</p> <p>The department will consider these recommendations in light of other work being undertaken regarding pandemic effectiveness.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7:</p> <p>Acknowledge there is an increasing number of consumers presenting with a dual diagnosis, by further expanding facilities across Victoria and providing sustainable funding for these facilities to have skilled trained staff in this area.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>In its final report, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (RCVMHS) recommended that all mental health and wellbeing services across all age-based systems, including crisis services, community-based services and bed-based services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide integrated treatment, care and support to people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction • do not exclude consumers living with substance use or addiction from accessing treatment, care and support. <p>This RCVMHS recommendation has been implemented along with the opening of the Hamilton Centre, Victoria's new statewide service for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction (Recommendation 36 of the RCVMHS). The Hamilton Centre works to improve outcomes for people with co-occurring conditions by providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Helpline (1800 517 383) open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm, for practitioners seeking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expert advice from experienced clinicians, for a secondary opinion regarding management of a client's

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	<p>substance use or addiction needs. This may also lead to referral services as outlined below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ service navigation assistance and guidance between mental health and AOD services (warm referrals). ● For clients with more complex needs, clinicians supporting clients of Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services may seek a referral to the Hamilton Centre Clinical Network for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ longer term support (secondary consultation services) regarding the management of a client’s substance use or addiction needs. ○ integrated addiction and mental health treatment, care and support (primary consultations) for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction who have the most complex support needs. ● Workforce training and education targeting practitioners and clinicians across Victoria’s mental health and AOD services to uplift their integrated treatment, care and support capability. Training opportunities will be available both online and face-to-face. ● Dedicated research into co-occurring mental illness and substance use or addiction, including research into optimal ways of delivering integrated care in Victoria, to improve outcomes for people with co-occurring conditions. ● The Hamilton Centre will also work to grow Victoria’s addiction specialist workforce by creating dedicated training and development opportunities and will administer a scholarship program to encourage more new workers to specialise in the field of addiction.
<p>Recommendation 8:</p> <p>Collaborate with other relevant government departments to improve access for consumers to suitable and affordable housing and support upon discharge.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services are being upskilled to register consumers on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) into appropriate priority categories for access to community and public housing. In the future reformed mental health and wellbeing system, treatment, care and support will be delivered through a transformed Area Partnerships model, where public health services will deliver clinical mental health treatment in collaboration with a partner NGO provider, who will deliver wellbeing supports. A core function of the NGO provider will involve assisting consumers to access and engage with a range of supports, including housing services, and to develop skills to sustain tenancies once housed.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9:</p> <p>Urgently address the environmental issues at Monash Health’s P Ward to ensure the environment is hygienic and comfortable for consumers.</p>	<p>Accepted in Full</p> <p>Planning is underway to upgrade P Block as part of the Project ICA (gender-based separation work) led by the Victorian Health Building Authority (VHBA). Monash Health has submitted its design documents for the upgrade works, which seek to reconfigure the existing HDU to include ensembles and consumer-controlled access for each bedroom and create dedicated</p>

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	<p>lounge and courtyard areas to accommodate different consumer cohorts. Individual health services are responsible for ensuring hygiene standards are maintained within acute care settings.</p> <p>The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (RCVMHS) recognised that prompt access to high-quality clinical and therapeutic treatment, care and support is vital if people living with mental illness are to improve their health and life outcomes. The Department of Health and VHBA are urgently responding to the RCVMHS recommendation for targeted acute mental health service expansion. Since 2019, funding has been provided to deliver 179 new acute mental health beds and to refurbish existing acute inpatient units to ensure consumers can access care in contemporary and safe settings, the vast majority of which are already in operation.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10:</p> <p>Commit funding for further roll-out of training and support that ensures the Safewards program continues to make a positive difference.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>Safewards and the interventions are embedded into the work being undertaken by services engaged through the Mental Health Improvement Program by Safer Care Victoria. A Community of Practice continues to meet with services to share resources including education. The Chief Mental Health Nurse in Safer Care Victoria supports this Community of Practice.</p>
<p>Recommendation 11:</p> <p>Provide adequate funding to the ensure that the Community Visitors program has the resources and technology required to effectively fulfill its important safeguarding role in all visitable facilities.</p>	<p>Accepted in Principle</p> <p>The Department of Health recognises the role of the Community Visitors Program in improving the lives of vulnerable people and continues to engage with Community Visitors. The operations of the Community Visitors Program are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Office of the Public Advocate, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and the Department of Health, which is in place until 30 June 2024.</p>

Government Response to Recommendations

Table 4: Disability Services Recommendations

The Community Visitors Disability Services Board recommends that the State Government:

No	Recommendations	Victorian Government Response
1.	Advocates for legislative reform to ensure that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Community Visitors are formally recognised in the NDIS Act 2013 and related safeguarding rules and frameworks; and b) Community Visitor programs remain independent of other NDIS safeguarding arrangements; and c) Community Visitors have easy access to required documents including electronic incident reports, are empowered to take photos, and to conduct remote visits where necessary; and d) Information can be shared between the Community Visitor Boards and other relevant federal bodies (e.g. the NDIA, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission) and state bodies (e.g. Social Services Regulator, the TAC and Workcover) to the extent necessary to ensure people with disability have access to strong, effective and cooperative safeguarding. 	Accepted in principle
2.	Proactively educates disability service providers operating in Victoria on their obligations to Community Visitors including right of entry, facilitating access to documents, and responding to Records of Visit within prescribed timeframes, and enforces these requirements where necessary.	Accepted in full
3.	Advocates for information sharing agreements between the Community Visitors program and the NDIA and any other relevant agency to ensure an up-to-date list of all visitable properties is available to the program.	Accepted in full
4.	Establishes processes to provide urgent and last resort assistance to ensure all Victorians with disability, including people with complex support needs, are provided with suitable, safe and dignified supported accommodation while alternative arrangements are made.	Accepted in principle
5.	Creates a legislative, policy or operational framework to ensure that supported accommodation is maintained to a standard consistent with landlord obligations under SDA residency agreements and/or residential rental agreements.	Accepted in principle
6.	Provides adequate funding to ensure Community Visitors can fulfill their functions under legislation, and additional funding so that the Community Visitors program is able to identify visitable facilities and make informed assessments on visit frequency.	Accepted in principle

Table 5: Residential Services Recommendations

The Community Visitors Residential Services Board recommends that the State Government:

No	Recommendations	Victorian Government Response
1.	Require all proprietors to complete an annual compliance report on the status of their staff to complete mental health training, which is mandatory for all staff in pension-level SRS.	Not accepted
2.	Fund staff training in Supported Residential Services to manage the de-escalation of violence and delivery of Mental Health First Aid Training for all staff.	Accepted in full
3.	Ensure mental health facilities use key performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness and usage of the mental health referral form for discharge and follow-up of consumers to Supported Residential Services.	Accepted in principle
4.	Ensure that the Homes Victoria Community of Practice shares good practice in: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the provision of activities for residents within Supported Residential Services especially for younger men b. the preparation of menus which are cost -effective, have high nutritional value and recognise a variety of cultural traditions. 	Accepted in full
5.	Provide more funding to the Supporting Accommodation for Vulnerable Victorians Initiative Program and the Pension-Level Program to ensure that all existing and any new pension-level SRS are eligible.	Accepted in full
6.	Seek legislative reform so that Community Visitors have easy access to required documents including electronic incident reports, are empowered to take photos, and to conduct remote visits where necessary.	Accepted in principle
7.	Provide adequate funding to ensure that the Community Visitors Program has the technology and resources needed to effectively fulfill its vital safeguarding role.	Accepted in principle

Table 6: Mental Health Recommendations

The Community Visitors Mental Health Board recommends that the State Government:

No	Recommendations	Victorian Government Response
1.	Urgently address staffing shortages by implementing short, medium and long-term strategies that help ease pressures on existing workforce and improve service delivery to consumers.	Accepted in full
2.	Expand specialised services for children and adolescents who are experiencing serious mental health issues by increasing the number of dedicated in-patient beds across the state, with a focus on regional and rural areas.	Accepted in full
3.	Support health services to develop a suite of information for consumers, that is available in a variety of formats (online, translated, hardcopy, plain language) and includes information about admission, in-patient,	Accepted in full

No	Recommendations	Victorian Government Response
	discharge, and post-admission support.	
4.	Develop and roll-out a comprehensive mental health training package specific for NDIS support workers, that includes topics such as understanding various mental health conditions, de-escalation techniques, and trauma-informed support.	Accepted in principle
5.	Establish communication protocols between key NDIS-funded support agencies working in mental health and health services.	Accepted in principle
6.	Review and update relevant pandemic preparedness plans specific to mental health facilities. These plans should acknowledge the impact on consumers - particularly long stay consumers - outline strategies for continued availability and expansion of telehealth services and provide for the creation of more flexible staffing models that are adaptive to emergency situations.	Accepted in principle
7.	Acknowledge there is an increasing number of consumers presenting with a dual diagnosis, by further expanding facilities across Victoria and providing sustainable funding for these facilities to have skilled trained staff in this area.	Accepted in principle
8.	Collaborate with other relevant government departments to improve access for consumers to suitable and affordable housing and support upon discharge.	Accepted in full
9.	Urgently address the environmental issues at Monash Health's P Ward to ensure the environment is hygienic and comfortable for consumers.	Accepted in full
10.	Commit funding for further roll-out of training and support that ensures the Safewards program continues to make a positive difference.	Accepted in principle
11.	Provide adequate funding to ensure that the Community Visitors program has the resources and technology required to effectively fulfill its important safeguarding role in all visitable facilities.	Accepted in principle