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Australia launches new COVID-19 mental health clinics

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Victorians will have access to additional mental health support with 15 new dedicated mental health clinics opening to the public.



The Australian government has announced that Victoria province now will have access to additional mental health support with 15 new dedicated mental health clinics opening to the public.

The clinics, announced on 17 August as part of a $31.9 million federal government mental health package to support Victorians during the COVID-19 pandemic, have been rapidly rolled out across the state at a cost of $26.9 million.

There will be nine HeadtoHelp clinics located in Greater Melbourne and six in regional Victoria. The locations are:

- **Greater Melbourne:** Berwick, Frankston, Officer, Hawthorn, Yarra Junction, West Heidelberg, Broadmeadows, Wyndham Vale, Brunswick East.
- **Regional Victoria:** Warragul, Sale, Bendigo, Wodonga, Sebastopol and Norlane.

The government recognizes that the ongoing restrictions are having a significant impact on the wellbeing and mental health of individuals and communities in Victoria, and is committed to ensuring that support is available.

These new clinics, branded with the HeadtoHelp logo, are a free service and, over the next 12 months, a place will be provided within the community for people to access mental health care as early and as conveniently as possible.

The clinics are staffed by multi-disciplinary teams of mental health professionals which may include GPs, mental health nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and/or other allied health workers.

The HeadtoHelp clinics will provide on-site mental health support, and will also connect to other mental health services in their region, including intensive mental health care or social supports, to ensure people get the help they need when they need it.

The clinics will play a key role in supporting GPs, emergency departments, and hospitals by providing easily accessible mental health care.

The rapid establishment of the clinics has been overseen by a joint federal and state Mental Health Pandemic Response Taskforce co-chaired by Dr Ruth Vine, the Australian Government Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Mental Health, and Pam Anders, CEO Mental Health Reform Victoria.

This collaboration between the Commonwealth and Victorian governments is ensuring that the new clinics will be integrated with local services and will support other enhancements to Victoria's mental health system.

The clinics are being delivered by the Commonwealth Government's Primary Health Networks (PHNs) which play a critical role in commissioning mental health services at a regional level.

In addition to the clinics, $5 million in funding is being provided to enhance existing digital and phone services for specific groups that are experiencing significant challenges during the restrictions in Victoria.

These services providers include The Butterfly Foundation, Eating Disorders Families Australia (EDFA), Q-Life, Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia (PANDA), and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) Yarning SafeNStrong helpline.

This new support builds on the more than $500 million additional funding provided by our Government for mental health and suicide prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic, including 10 additional Medicare subsidised psychological therapy sessions for people subject to further restrictions.

Australia estimates annual federal expenditure on mental health services and suicide prevention to be a record of $5.7 billion in 2020-21 alone.