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# Experts call for more help to combat 'youth mental health crisis' as suicides increase

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Mental health advocates are calling for action to help young Victorians following an 85 per cent increase in youth suicides in the past year.

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**Rebecca Borg**

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Mental health advocates are calling on the state government to provide more support to improve the wellbeing of young

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Victorians, following an 85 per cent increase in youth suicides in the past year.

The Coroners Court of Victoria found 26 people under the age of 18 committed suicide in the past 12 months, an increase of 12 people since 2022 and also the highest figure in five years.

Meanwhile, a record number of Victorians died by suicide last year with 801 people taking their own lives, including 73 people aged between 18 and 24.

Despite the 2021 Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, counsellors say these figures show there's still an ongoing "youth mental health crisis" that needs to be addressed immediately.



The Coroners Court of Victoria found youth suicides have increased by 85 per cent in

the past year.

Orygen executive director Patrick McGorry said the latest figures on youth suicide were “heading in the wrong direction” post-pandemic.

The psychiatrist added factors such as intergenerational inequality, education barriers, employment insecurity, climate change and social media were some of the “megatrends” driving poor mental health.

“Youth mental health disorders in 16 to 24-year-olds have risen by 50 per cent (between 2007 and 2021),” he said.

While Prof McGorry welcomed the Royal Commission’s recommendations, he said young people’s wellbeing should have been of greater importance.

“Looking across the whole state (youth mental health) should be the number one priority ... and Victoria is the one state that can do this very well,” he said.

“Any new investment should be channelled into that 18 to 25 age group and needs to go towards specialised research.”

Meanwhile, Tracy Adams, chief executive of Yourtown – which operates Kids Helpline – called for more government

funding to go towards wellbeing services for primary and secondary-aged children.

“Most of the funding is currently going to the tertiary end (or) hospital care, however if we don’t apply focus to prevention and early intervention, we are doing little to offset longer term impacts,” she said.

Ms Adams said government funding should also be allocated to services which operate on a 24 hour basis, with 64 per cent of children contacting Kids Helpline outside traditional working hours.

Her calls for extra funding come amid Kids Helpline opening its first Melbourne Counselling Centre, which was funded by charity Bupa Foundation.



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Youth mental health groups and counsellors are calling on state and federal governments to invest more into wellbeing services for primary and secondary students.

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Leading psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg said children were experiencing increasing levels of depression and anxiety post-Covid, consequently affecting their learning in the classroom.

“Youth mental health significantly impacts (students’) ability to learn, concentrate, and lead healthy lives,” he said.

“By investing in youth mental health, governments can support the resilience and wellbeing of future generations, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more productive society.”

Australian Association of Psychologists executive director Tegan Carrison said the increase in the number of suicides is clear evidence the mental health system is not doing enough to support vulnerable people.

“The continued lack of mental health funding has meant that too many people are financially locked out from receiving the help and treatment they so desperately need,” she said.

“This data should act as a wake-up call for urgent reform. Raising the rebate to \$150 for a psychology appointment

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would give patients improved access to the mental health care they need

“The government could also ease this ongoing crisis by allowing the 8000 provisional psychologists around the country to offer a rebate to their clients; and by giving those with complex mental health needs access to 20 rebated sessions.”

A Victorian government spokesman said more than \$6bn was invested to establish new mental health services and recruit more specialists since the Royal Commission was handed down.

“The causes of suicide are complex and loss of life to suicide has long-lasting and far-reaching impacts – that’s why we’re making sure all Victorians can get the support they need, when they need it and close to home,” he said.

“This includes funding to provide a mental health practitioner in every single Victorian Government

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secondary and specialist school – and in the next four years, every primary school will have a dedicated mental health and wellbeing leader to support kids as soon as they need care.”

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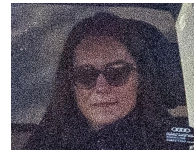
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