

## Community Statement:

# **Mental Health Royal Commission Final Report**

**1<sup>st</sup> April, 2021**

Mental Health was named a top priority in my very first Statement of Intent in 2018-19. This was in part thanks to the people of Latrobe, who continued to tell me mental health and wellbeing was both a concern and aspiration for many.

The people of Latrobe said they were ready for change. They wanted to participate in the design and delivery of a mental health system that meets their needs. People with lived experiences of mental illness, their families and carers wanted to be met where they are.

I was able to meet with the Royal Commission in May 2019, and facilitated a roundtable discussion with the Latrobe Health Assembly and community members in a bid to ensure the voices of people living, working and studying in Latrobe were heard and considered. People spoke about their mental health concerns and aspirations - many of which echoed sentiment from others within the Latrobe community about the need for improved service delivery and accessibility, prevention, connectedness and social prescribing - and all of which helped shape my own submission to the Royal Commission.

I was also invited to contribute to the terms of reference of the Royal Commission and was 1 of 99 people invited to provide evidence at the Royal Commission Hearing.

I welcome the news that all 65 recommendations handed down last month will be adopted. Many of them address precisely what I was hearing from the people of Latrobe about their mental health and wellbeing concerns and aspirations, and – once implemented – will have a direct impact on the very people who contributed to their design.

The creation of new local mental health and wellbeing services will be designed to increase accessibility and be delivered based on a philosophy of 'how can we help?'. I have consistently been told that mental health concerns are often impacted by other determinants such as violence, alcohol and drugs, employment and education. Everyone has a story to tell and no two stories are the same. A key component of my submission to the Royal Commission involved the adoption of place-based approach, just like this, which specifically addresses the concerns of people in Latrobe. These services will ensure every person is supported and heard throughout every stage of their unique health and wellbeing journey.

I also continue to hear from the Latrobe community about a collective desire to redefine mental health and wellbeing; to reduce the stigma of crisis care and expand perceptions to include proactive prevention and wellbeing management. The recommendation that a Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission be established speaks to this aspiration.

The Commission will implement initiatives to address and prevent stigma - all designed by people with lived experiences.

Through my engagement with local Aboriginal communities in Latrobe, I observed numerous examples where people can come together to celebrate who they are, where they have come from and to support each other to enjoy good health and wellbeing. The recommendation to resource Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations to deliver culturally appropriate, family-oriented, social and emotional wellbeing services for children and young people acknowledges the importance of connection to land and community in improving health outcomes for Aboriginal people.

I also want to acknowledge and commend the strength of our local mental health and wellbeing workers, who have demonstrated resilience under the constraints of the current system. Our workforce is committed to helping drive change and will be a key enabler for realising the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

Following the release of the final report, Latrobe has been identified as one of six priority locations for establishment of a new *local Adult and Older Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Service*. Construction of a 20-bed youth drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre in Traralgon is also underway and scheduled to be fully operational by the end of 2021.

As the Latrobe Health Advocate I will continue to listen to the people of Latrobe about their health concerns and aspirations, and work with government and services to implement changes to benefit all of Latrobe.

If you are interested in meeting with me to share your experiences surrounding mental health and wellbeing, please phone the office on 1800 319 255 or email [info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@lhadvocate.vic.gov.au) and we'll get in touch to organise a time to catch up.

