



Responding to eating disorders: Victorian Election Statement

Eating Disorders Victoria



Eating disorders are disabling and costly mental illnesses affecting at least one in 20 Australians [1]. The rapid increase in eating disorder cases over the past 10 years [2,3] combined with historic underinvestment in eating disorder services calls for significant and urgent action.

Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV) seeks two key commitments during the 2022 Victorian election to ensure eating disorders are addressed as a priority in our mental health system:

1. Commitment to fully fund the implementation of the Victorian Eating Disorders Strategy.

2. Commitment to fund EDV to meet community need through a long-term, stable funding model.

Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV) represents those with lived and living experience, carers and support people. We call on the Victorian Government to recognise that eating disorders are a priority area for investment to address the significant and increasing burden on the Victorian population with the following election commitments.

1. Commitment to fully fund the implementation of the Victorian Eating Disorders Strategy

The development of the Victorian Eating Disorder Strategy, currently being undertaken by the Dept of Health, is an essential first step in addressing the persistent and growing eating disorder crisis in our state.

The prevalence of eating disorders has increased significantly over the last 10 years [2,4]. It is now estimated that more than 16%, or 1 in 6 Australians aged over 15, are experiencing a sub-clinical or clinical eating disorder [5]. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded and accelerated incidence rates of eating disorders [6].

- The average wait time in both the public and the private sectors was reported to have increased by 50% from 2019 to 2021, with individuals waiting four to six months to be assessed or receive treatments [7].
- The number of Victorians with eating disorders presenting to Victoria's emergency departments increased by 44% from 2019 to 2022 (18.5 per week in 2019 to 26.5 per week by 2022) [8].
- The number of outpatient services to CAMHS eating disorder programs increased by over 31%, from 696 per week in 2019, to 916 per week in 2021 [8].

Current Victorian public health data continues to demonstrate this upward trend, highlighting sustained pressure on the public health system [8].

The Victorian Eating Disorder Strategy will provide a clear, evidence-based roadmap for **strategic investment** to address current and future demand for services, as well as opportunities for prevention and early intervention. We call on both major parties to honor the process of robust consultation, research and lived experience contributions by committing to **fully fund** the implementation of the Strategy.

2 . Commitment to fund EDV to meet community need through a long-term, stable funding model

EDV calls for \$4 million per year for 3 years.

Funding will scale proven programs, increase early intervention, support broader system training and development and provide organisational certainty that is vital for staffing and service planning.

EDV is the only state-wide, eating disorder specific organisation providing trusted guidance and support services to the 334,000+ Victorians with eating disorders and their carers and families. Current funding arrangements allow EDV to reach **just 4%** of the eating disorder affected population, highlighting significant underinvestment in EDV services.

Despite this, EDV has developed scalable services that are well positioned to connect and support all levels of our eating disorder system of care. This includes:

- The **EDV Hub** and **Telehealth Nurses**, improving consumer, carer and health professional help seeking and navigation of treatment
- **Telehealth Counselling**, providing accessible first-step psychological support
- **Peer Mentoring** for adults in recovery, providing structured, step-down support via the peer workforce
- **Online Support Groups**, enabling peer-to-peer connection
- **Carer Coaching** and **skill development**, activating families early and reducing eating disorder severity and duration in young people
- **Severe and Enduring Eating Disorders Program**, enabling those with chronic eating disorders to re-engage with supports

Increased investment in EDV is a prudent step in scaffolding Victoria's reformed mental health system. EDV can work with Local and Area Mental Health Services to support referral pathways, workforce capability (including peer workforce development), and to trial and innovate novel responses to eating disorders.

We are calling for EDV's current fragmented funding model to be replaced by **stable, multi-year investment** that adequately meets the needs of our system and our community. Without this stability, EDV is unable to build the workforce and organisational capacity required to deliver effective community services that relieve and support the broader system of care.

References

- [1] EDGI (Eating Disorders Genetics Initiative). (April 23 2020). '1 in 20 Australians are living with an eating disorder'. EDGI. Retrieved from <https://edgi.org.au/1-in-20-australians-are-living-with-an-eating-disorder/>
- [2] Morris, A., Elliott, E., & Madden, S. (2022). Early-onset eating disorders in Australian children: A national surveillance study showing increased incidence. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*. 1-5, <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23794>
- [3] da Luz, F. Q., Sainsbury, A., Mannan, H., Touyz, S., Mitchison, D., & Hay, P. (2017). Prevalence of obesity and comorbid eating disorder behaviors in South Australia from 1995 to 2015. *International Journal of Obesity*. 41, 1148–1153, <https://doi.org/10.1038/ijo.2017.79>
- [4] Mitchison, D., Mond, J., Bussey, K., Griffiths, S., Trompeter, N., Loneragan, A., Pike, K.M., Murray, S.B., & Hay, P. (2019). DSM-5 full syndrome, other specified, and unspecified eating disorders in Australian adolescents: prevalence and clinical significance. *Psychological Medicine*. 50, 981–990, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291719000898>
- [5] Hay, P., Girosi, F., & Mond, J. (2015). Prevalence and sociodemographic correlates of DSM-5 eating disorders in the Australian population. *Journal of Eating Disorders*. 3,19, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-015-0056-0>
- [6] Miskovic-Wheatley, J., Koreshe, E., Kim, M., Simeone, R., & Maguire, S. (2022). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health response on people with eating disorder symptomatology: an Australian study. *Journal of Eating Disorders*. 10, 9, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-021-00527-0>
- [7] Hanifie, S. (28 November 2021). 'Australians waiting months for eating disorder support as referrals double across the country'. ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), accessed 20 September, 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-28/increase-in-australians-with-eating-disorders/100295842>
- [8] VAHI (Victorian Agency for Health Information). (June 2022). Mental health and alcohol and other drug treatment services in Victoria. Victorian Government, Department of Health. [Publication]

Need help?

Eating Disorders Victoria help Victorians understand and recover from eating disorders.

PH: 1300 550 236

E: hub@eatingdisorders.org.au

W: www.eatingdisorders.org.au

