



Department of Health

Secretary



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Our Ref: e3381881

Your Ref: COR 2011 000097

11 JUN 2014

Mr Dylan Martin
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street,
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Martin

Re: COR 2011 000097

I am writing in response to your letter dated 11 March 2014 relating to State Coroner Judge Gray's recommendation to the Department of Health in his finding into the deaths of Ms Kylie Fowler and her children Samantha Fowler, Melanie Maher and Matthew Maher.

The Department acknowledges the tragic death of Ms Fowler and her children, and has consulted with the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist in preparing this response.

Recommendation

1. *To improve the access to programs specific to improving mental health literacy for children, teenagers and young adults of parents with a mental illness, the Department of Health, Mental Health, Drugs and Regions review the scope of the FaPMI strategy rollout across all public mental health services and regions in Victoria, including:*
 - *Access by public mental health service families to peer support programs such as CHAMPS and PATS, regardless of where they live in Victoria*
 - *Access by families from other services that come into contact with families where a parent has a mental illness or significant mental health issue such as alcohol and drug services, family support services, child and youth services, community health, Child Protection, and schools.*

Response

The Department is committed to supporting parents with mental illness and ensuring their children receive the care and support they need. As part of this commitment, the Department:

- has developed policies and resources such as the *Families of Parents with a Mental Illness (FaPMI) Strategy* and the *Families and mental health – A parenting resource kit* to better support families and the services that work with them. This latter resource, updated and reprinted in 2011, is of use to service providers as well as families, providing information about parenting, support services and other resources, and including stories from people who share their own life experiences;
- provides ongoing funds for regional FaPMI coordinator positions in mental health services to implement the strategy and build capacity for family inclusive practice in mental health services and partner agencies and sectors. Regional coordinators are currently embedded in mental health services across twelve Area Mental Health Service (AMHS) catchments across Victoria. As part of their work they strive to improve access to programs specific to improving mental health literacy for children, teenagers and young adults of parents with mental illness. They also foster collaborative practice approaches with participating cross-sector agencies, such as Mental Health Community Support Services (previously Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services), Alcohol and Other Drug, Child FIRST/Child Protection, and family services through the development of joint practice protocols, agreements and training; and
- provides ongoing funds to the Bouverie Centre to deliver training in family inclusive practice to build capacity in the mental health workforce to support practice change and to embed family focused practice within organisations. It also employs a statewide FaPMI coordinator to support implementation of the FaPMI Strategy.

This work complements the role of the COPMI (Children of Parents with a Mental Illness) national initiative, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, which has developed extensive information for parents, their families and service providers. This includes the delivery of online training courses, such as 'Keeping families and children in mind' and 'Let's Talk' developed by COPMI for mental health workers to support families either individually or through community services and programs. These online resources are open to anyone and freely available. Many mental health services and their workers are using these resources to improve their capacity to respond to the needs of their clients' dependent children.

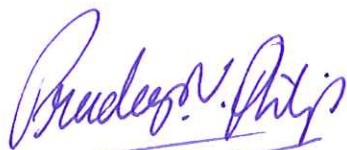
In addition to the Department's ongoing commitment to Victoria's FaPMI program, the needs, wellbeing and safety of children and dependents of people receiving mental health services will continue to be recognized and protected by the Victorian Government's new *Mental Health Act 2014*. The mental health principles enshrined in that Act are designed to guide the implementation of the Act in mental health services and will deliver improvements to practice and the way services are delivered across the mental health system. Three of the principles outlined in section 11(1) of the Act relate directly to children and dependents of people receiving mental health services:

- 11(1)(j) children, young persons and other dependents of persons receiving mental health services should have their needs, wellbeing and safety recognized and protected;
- 11(1)(k) carers (including children) for persons receiving mental health services should be involved in decisions about assessment, treatment and recovery, whenever this is possible; and
- 11(1)(l) carers, (including children) for persons receiving mental health services should have their role recognized, respected and supported.

The *Mental Health Act* will commence operation on 1 July 2014.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pradeep Philip', with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Dr Pradeep Philip
Secretary

cc: Mark Oakley-Browne, Chief Psychiatrist, Department of Health