



Secretary

Department of Health

50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000
Telephone: 1300 650 172
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
www.health.vic.gov.au
DX 210081

BAC-CO-22790

His Honour Judge John Cain
State Coroner
Coroners Court of Victoria

Sent via email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Judge Cain

Re: COR 2019 003231 - Investigation into the death of Daniel Richards

Thank you for your letter dated 8 December 2021 regarding your findings into the death of Daniel Richards.

I was saddened to read of this tragic situation and extend my sincere condolences to Mr Richards' family and loved ones.

I note that you have made two recommendations to me, one through the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division and one via the Chief Psychiatrist. I am committed to implementing both recommendations.

1. ***Recommendation to the Secretary of the Department of Health, through the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division:***
 - i. ***Consistent with the recommendation I made in the finding into the death of Adam Laufer, recommendations 8, 9 and 10 arising from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System be prioritised and implemented in their entirety as recommended by the Royal Commission.***
 - ii. ***That in implementing Recommendation 10 of the RCMHS Final Report that where a person is being assessed in the community by a mental health service and police and paramedics are involved, that specific consideration be given to:***
 - a. ***The circumstances in which the mental health service had instigated the involvement of police and paramedics.***
 - b. ***Inter-service planning that ensures a mutual understanding of the onsite response across all onsite services.***
 - c. ***The principles of trauma-informed care.***
 - d. ***Identification of best practice.***
 - e. ***Practical guidance to all onsite services.***

The recommendation will be implemented.

The Victorian Government has committed to implementing all recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The Government is taking a staged approach to implementation, recognising that a balance must be struck between the scale of reform and the urgency with which many recommendations need to be implemented.

In collaboration with sector agencies and other government departments, my department has commenced detailed planning and consultation for implementation of the recommendations. This planning is being guided by the Royal Commission's recommended timelines.

In that regard, the Royal Commission called for recommendations 8, 9 and 10 to be implemented in the short to medium term. We will prioritise these in the early stages of reform. The Department of Health will work collaboratively with other departments and agencies, including Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria, for a consistent whole-of-government approach to be taken in responding to mental health crises. This will mean effective communication among all services and that principles of trauma informed care are applied.

2. Recommendation to the Secretary of the Department of Health, via the Chief Psychiatrist, that:

i. The Chief Psychiatrist alert Area Mental Health Services to the risks associated with restraint of people with a mental illness and cardiovascular, respiratory, and metabolic diseases that in circumstances where a community mental health service involves police and paramedics and where restraint could possibly be used, that an assumption of physical disease is reasonable. In response, mental health services include in their planned response:

- a. Where possible, identification of physical health risks as part of collateral information gathering, including from family members.***
- b. Communication to police and paramedics prior to engagement with the person any established physical illness risks or if it remains unknown.***
- c. Consideration be given to mitigating strategies by all onsite services if physical illness risks are identified or remain unknown.***

The recommendation will be implemented.

The Chief Psychiatrist will alert Area Mental Health Services to the risks associated with restraint of people with a mental illness and cardiovascular, respiratory, and metabolic diseases in the *Chief Psychiatrist's Quality and Safety Bulletin*. The bulletin will also highlight the specific risks associated with situations when a community mental health service involves police and paramedics, and restraint may be required. It will include important considerations when planning for this situation, including identification of physical health risks as part of collateral information gathering (including from family members), communication with police and paramedics, and any mitigation strategies that could be adopted by onsite services.

Equally Well in Victoria: Physical health framework for specialist mental health services highlights the high levels of cardiovascular disease experienced by people with mental illness. It uses the principles underlying the *Mental Health Act 2014* to provide a framework for mental health services for improving their response to the physical health needs of their consumers. It sets out domains of care including physical health needs, collaborative planning and therapeutic interventions, the healthcare setting, workforce considerations and supporting safety. It recommends that healthcare settings undertake an organisational assessment to identify the likely physical health risk profiles of consumers in each setting. The Chief Mental Health Nurse and mental health team, Safer Care Victoria, are leading the implementation of the Equally Well framework and working directly with Area Mental Health Services.

I hope this has provided reassurance that the intent of the coronial recommendations will be addressed. Your office may wish to contact the Office of the Chief psychiatrist on 9096 7571 or via email at ocp@health.vic.gov.au for further information and clarification.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Euan M Wallace', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Euan M Wallace AM
Secretary