



Secretary

Department of Health

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Coroner Paresa Antoniadis Spanos
Coroners Court of Victoria

Via email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Coroner Spanos

Re: COR 2019 005247 – Investigation into the death of Cody Watson

Thank you for your letter of 23 February 2023 providing me with the finding without inquest into the death of Cody Watson.

Any death by suicide is a tragedy. My deepest condolences go to Cody's family and loved ones. I sincerely hope that this finding will assist with preventing further deaths occurring in similar circumstances.

The two recommendations directed to the Department of Health have been carefully considered and my response is provided below.

Recommendation One:

That the consortium of service providers designing and delivering the Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service consider the specific needs of child sexual abuse victim survivors who are receiving care from public mental health services.

The coroner's recommendation will be implemented.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System's final report acknowledges that individuals benefit from early mental health support for trauma and trauma-informed care. To better address the impacts of trauma across the lifespan, the Royal Commission recommended establishment of a new Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service with the aim of delivering the best possible mental health and wellbeing outcomes for people of all ages with lived experience of trauma.

As the lead organisation for the Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service, Phoenix Australia (the Australian National Centre for Excellence in Posttraumatic Mental Health) has committed to ensuring that the Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service consider the specific needs of child sexual abuse victim survivors, who are receiving care from public mental health services.

The Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service is currently in its design phase and is expected to be fully operational by June 2025. The consortium will consider Recommendation One when designing and developing the following core functions of the service:

- development of education and training to support the mental health and wellbeing workforce to deliver trauma-informed care
- peer-led support platforms and networks

- the coordination and facilitation of access to specialist trauma expertise for mental health practitioners and peer workers

The consortium will work in partnership with people with lived experience of trauma in the ongoing coproduction and codesign of systems, services, and processes of the Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service.

Recommendation Two:

As part of its planned initiatives responding to recommendations of Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Services [sic], that the Department provides the following development and capabilities to mental health and wellbeing professionals:

- (a) trauma-informed skills and competency;*
- (b) education that is specific to the needs of clinicians working with children and adolescents and young adults who have experienced or been exposed to child sexual abuse; and*
- (c) education that is specific to the workforce providing the first response (including emergency departments, psychiatric triaged and access teams) to victim/survivors who are in crisis following disclosure or in the context of already disclosed child sexual abuse/trauma.*

The coroner's recommendation will be implemented.

Recommendation 2(a)

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Capability Framework includes outcome statements, key knowledge and skills for the entire mental health and wellbeing workforce, with additional areas for technical specialists and those in leadership roles. The principle of being trauma-informed underpins all skills and knowledge, and the specific domain of providing trauma responsive care sets out the evidence-based practices for providing support for people who have experienced trauma.

Implementation of the framework is underway, with the trauma-informed workforce development component being provided as a priority function of the Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service.

Recommendation 2(b)

The foundational training for infant, child and youth mental health clinicians is the 12-month Developmental Psychiatry Course (DPC) delivered through Mindful at the University of Melbourne. The department has funded 280 additional places over three years to support the expansion of these services, as recommended by the Royal Commission. The DPC includes modules focused on trauma, specifically abuse, neglect and maltreatment, childhood trauma, child sexual abuse and family violence.

Recommendation 2(c)

A core function and immediate priority of the Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service will be the development of education and training (non-accredited) to improve how the entire mental health and wellbeing workforce recognise and respond to trauma. Trauma education and training will better equip the workforce to ask about trauma and respond appropriately if trauma is disclosed.

The Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service will consider Recommendation 2 (a, b and c) as it develops the specifications of the service and, in particular, the education and training component. The final specifications of the service are expected to be completed by the end of 2024, for departmental review and decision making in the first half of 2025.

Additionally, Ambulance Victoria's frontline workers (paramedics) receive trauma-informed mental health education, which captures:

- reflective practice on paramedic's exposure to traumatic events
- definition and examples of traumatic events including symptoms, prevalence rates and risk factors
- practical strategies for patients in distress, including body-based strategies and grounding for trauma symptoms (highlighting the need to be compassionate, collaborative and ask for consent, wherever possible)
- optional further learning on trauma-informed care for cultural and linguistically diverse populations

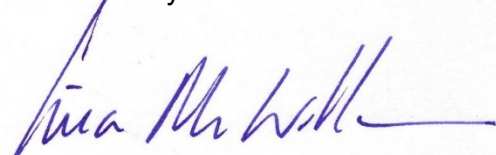
Ambulance Victoria's Clinical Practice Guidelines are focused on providing a trauma-informed response including expressing belief and reassurance, validating the experience, providing information on where to get support and gaining consent for further support or referral. In addition, the Child Safety Clinical Practice Guidelines specify responses to sexual abuse and provide guidance to ask the child if they are ok, thank them for sharing, providing reassurance and vocalising that abuse is not their fault.

Paramedics also receive family violence training under the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework, which includes information on sexual abuse. Noting, however, that the MARAM training is focused more on identifying current family violence and abuse risk, and less so on responding to the long-term impacts of complex trauma.

Should you wish to discuss these matters further, please contact Bailey Nation-Ingle, State Suicide Prevention and Response Adviser, [REDACTED]

Thank you once again for providing the finding. The Department of Health will continue to work with the Coroners Court of Victoria to reduce the incidence and impact of suicide in Victoria.

Yours sincerely



Professor Euan M Wallace AM

Secretary

24/04/2023