



## **An open letter to candidates and political parties - Mental Health Services**

As we head towards the Victorian State Election in November, Murrindindi Shire Councillors and Chief Executive Officer call on all political parties standing for election to urgently fix the significant gaps in mental health services for our community.

There are two main issues we need to resolve quickly:

### **1. Inadequate Mental Health Services**

Council continues to hear from our community about significant issues in the provision of appropriate mental health services and support in Murrindindi Shire. The few services that are provided by the State Government to our community are not easily accessible and are not able to meet the growing demand.

- The basic services available to support community members and their families are often based outside our Shire, with limited time spent in communities directly. Accessing specialist mental health services requires significant travel which disadvantages an already vulnerable group and can prevent effective support.
- Services are under resourced and with the competing needs of growth corridors and regional centres, Murrindindi Shire residents are experiencing significant inequities in mental health service access.
- Recent increased funding to improve mental health services in Victoria has not addressed the issues in our Shire, it seems to have been focused on regional cities and peri urban growth corridors.
- We hear far too often of community members being turned away from local hospitals in their time of greatest need. Despite their good intentions and best efforts, service providers in our Shire do not have the resources to be able to respond to our community's mental health needs.

### **2. Bureaucratic Boundaries Preventing Access**

Our communities are repeatedly frustrated by the bureaucratic geographic boundaries which further limit their access to mental health and other health services.

For example, a community member in the Kinglake Ranges needing acute or inpatient mental health services cannot access the services available in neighbouring Whittlesea just 15 minutes away, which is serviced by a bus route. Current restrictions mean that this person is required to travel to either Seymour, or more likely Shepparton some two hours away. There are no direct public transport services between the Kinglake Ranges (or anywhere in Murrindindi Shire) and Shepparton, with the Public Transport Victoria website showing the fastest public transport connection being via Melbourne and taking 5.5 hours.

This issue is not new and has been raised a number of times at Regional Partnership forums and with State Government over the past 10 years. Some provisions to allow access to services outside our region was provided in the aftermath of the 2009 Bushfires, however these no longer exist. Many promises have been made to address this issue for our community and yet the situation remains unresolved.

It is simply not acceptable to let our community's health needs be impacted by administrative boundaries. With a number of our communities close to the urban fringes of Melbourne, allowing access in the regions that match their preferred path of travel makes sense and will significantly improve service choice and access.

**A Call to Action!**

Wednesday 10 October is World Mental Health Day. In the run-up to the Victorian State election on 24 November 2018, Murrindindi Shire Council calls on all parties to commit now to take direct action to address these issues critical to the wellbeing of our community.

Signed,

Mayor, CEO and Councillors of Murrindindi Shire