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# **About this Communique**

The Department of Education and Training (DET) – Community Sector Organisation (CSO) Governance Group is a quarterly forum for communication, consultation, engagement and collaboration between the department and the community sector. Meetings are co-chaired by the department and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and reflect topics of mutual interest to DET and the sector. You can read more about the partnership agreement that underpins this work on the [VCOSS](https://vcoss.org.au/projects/edu-partnership/) and [department](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/partnerships.aspx) websites.

This Communique has been prepared by VCOSS to increase the visibility of this forum.

# **What was discussed in the September 2022 meeting?**

The focus of this meeting was mental health and wellbeing.

# **Prevention and wellbeing**

**Gail McHardy**, **CEO, Parents Victoria** spoke about the importance of family engagement to support student wellbeing.

Gail noted that relationships that are not transactional are crucial to positive school experiences, managing and preventing conflict, and building trust. However, not all schools have the time or capacity to proactively check-in with families, particularly when they note that there is ‘nothing wrong’. Family engagement officers could enable schools to embed quality relationship building with families.

# **Mental health in schools**

**Joseph, Year 11 Student, Student Executive Committee, Victorian Student Representative Council** noted that more can be done to normalise help seeking to change perceptions that students should be able to deal with everything on their own. Joseph highlighted stigma as a key barrier to accessing mental health supports and noted that this mindset often starts at home. Students with diverse experiences can face additional challenges such as homophobia. While there are supports available, the system can be hard to navigate. A mix of service delivery options is important – for example, some students are reluctant to speak with a mental health professional they don’t know via an online platform. Joseph also spoke about the importance of representation in supporting positive mental health because students need to see role models that reflect their experiences.

**Justin McDonnell, Executive Director, Mental Health Reform Division, SEPS, DET** provided an update on the work underway in the school system as part of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. Significant changes are underway, including the new Framework for Improving Student Outcomes 2.0 that places wellbeing as an outcome of schooling in and of itself. The department’s mental health response includes the Schools Mental Health Fund, which has recently launched its full menu with 56 items across three tiers of support; the expansion of the Mental Health in Primary Schools program, which has a staged roll-out with final schools joining in 2026 and the Mental Health Wellbeing toolkit, which provides relevant information for schools and school staff, parents, and students.

**Marcelle Mogg, CEO, Mental Health Victoria** noted there has been an increase in demand for support services and an increase in prevalence of mental health issues across the community, but particularly in young people over the last two years. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 will come into effect in mid-2023 and will see the establishment of Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria. This agency is intended to coordinate existing services and identify gaps across the community. Marcelle noted that while there are many great initiatives and programs to support youth mental health, it’s important that we partner with young people, keep equity and access front of mind and promote existing resources.

# **Child Information Sharing Scheme**

**Daniela Kavoukas, Services Manager, Community Child Care Association** (CCC) provided an update on the implementation of the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) from an early childhood education and care perspective. Daniela spoke positively about the scheme and the highlighted the department’s work in implementing it across the education, health care and community sectors.

However, the Community Child Care Association has identified that workforce exhaustion and mental fatigue due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and high staff turnover continue to present as challenges at this stage of the reform implementation. For example, CCC has identified low levels of awareness of existing resources that can assist services to embed the CISS. This underlines the importance of the department’s ongoing investment in sector capacity building.

Lisa Gandolfo, Executive Director and Stuart Cardell, Director, CISS provided an update on the sector capacity building grants which aim to increase the awareness and take-up of the CISS across the community sector. The team has also developed a wide range of high-quality tools and resources to help services embed the CISS.

# **Mental health support in TAFEs and Learn Local providers**

**Xavier Csar, CEO, Office of TAFE Coordination and Delivery** spoke about the importance of supporting mental health and wellbeing for students studying at TAFE and Learn Local providers to remove barriers to beginning and completing their qualification, and successfully transitioning to further education, training and employment opportunities. TAFEs have streams of funding to support students, staff and the institutions and networks, however each TAFE has discretion in how their use their funding to meet its goals. TAFEs are required to partner with Learn Local providers but there is no one model to do this. Supporting transitions between school, TAFE and Learn Local providers continues to be an area that requires additional attention.

# **Next meeting**

The theme of the Term 4 meeting will be disability. Please contact VCOSS if there is something you would like to share with us, to guide our planning for future meetings.

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