

mental health crisis

LRH fights for funds

LATROBE Regional Hospital (LRH) will fight for a good share of funding from the State Government's mental health reform strategy.

LRH director of mental health Coyte Hoppner said the strategy, released last Friday, had given the hospital a "sense of direction" and plans were underway to develop the hospital's own reform to fit with the government's new direction.

"Our aim is to have a safe service for this region... we will be very active in trying to get funding in conjunction with all stakeholders," she said.

"The reform will assist us to make some changes... no system is perfect but we certainly have a vision for us to have a high quality mental health service."

LRH's Flynn Ward provides 25 acute care mental health beds for adults and two acute care beds for children and is the only acute care mental health unit in Gippsland.

There have been concerns during the past few years services at the Flynn Ward were stretched.

Ms Hoppner said she could not comment on claims in a recent case study by Barrier Breakers, that a man presented to the emergency department three weekends in a row for psychiatric assessment but was not admitted and took his own life. She did not comment on claims in the case study a woman felt unsafe when in the Flynn Ward

Gippsland's current mental health system continues to be described by local advocacy groups and support agencies as grossly inadequate.

The Victorian Government has recently released its strategy on mental health reform across the state.

Today Express journalist STEPHANIE CHARALAMBOUS takes an in-depth look into the issue.

What is the State Government doing?

THE Victorian Government's mental health reform strategy 'Because mental health matters' was launched last Friday.

In order to reach its goal of improving mental health services over the next 10 years the government plans to:

- Immediately appoint a chief child psychiatrist to put children's needs first in establishing clinical standards in the treatment and care of mental illness.

- Establish an advice and referral phone service available to the public 24 hours a day to start at the end of 2009.

- Implement 'Renew', a program to assist families traumatised by the bushfires, including \$1.8 million of programs to identify emerging mental illness, support community workers and hire more experts in post-traumatic stress disorders.

- Promote positive health and wellbeing in schools and workplaces.

- Focus heavily on early intervention.

- Provide better mental healthcare for Aboriginal people and migrant and refugee communities.

- Allow quicker access to specialist care and build an integrated emergency service system to respond to people in urgent need.

- Improve access to stable and affordable housing that is linked to rehabilitation support.

- Support the participation of people with mental health problems in the workforce and community.

- Reduce the involvement with the criminal justice system of people with mental health problems as victims or offenders.

- Possibly establish mental health boards or committees to sit under health service boards.

- Possibly establish a state-wide Mental Health Reform Council.

as there was no privacy for males and females.

Ms Hoppner said the government's reform package was "a good vision for mental health".

"There is a big focus on early intervention and prevention and we know if we can intervene early, we reduce the need for intervention later on," she said.