

CRISIS NOT OVER

By STEPHANIE CHARALAMBOUS

GIPPSLAND'S mental health advocacy group has slammed the Victorian Government's mental health strategy released Friday, claiming it does not go far enough to help mental illness sufferers.

Barrier Breakers secretary Derek Amos said the announcement made no mention of Gippsland specifically and some of the issues raised in the government's Green Paper had been "put in the too hard basket".

He feared there would still be a shortage of acute care beds and supported accommodation for Gippslanders with a mental illness.

Barrier Breakers has lobbied the government to improve mental health services for more than three years and has made several submissions to its recent review of mental health services across the state.

The group believes the Gippsland region is in desperate need of more acute care beds and

supported accommodation for people living with a mental illness.

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

Mr Amos said while the group welcomed mental health reform, the announcement by Mental Health Minister Lisa Neville, did not address "the most fundamental of issues".

"All this is, is a roll out of the White Paper which is stuff we already knew anyway," Mr Amos said.

"What they're talking about is a 10 year program and this announcement will cover the next four years, but there's nothing that deals with some of the more immediate needs like homelessness."

Mr Amos said he was disappointed Ms Neville had not committed to increasing the number of

Continued on page 5

Mental health concerns

Continued from page 1

mental health beds in her announcement.

The government's reform strategy 'Because Mental Health Matters 2009-2019' features a focus on early intervention and assistance for people

traumatised by the Victorian bushfires. There will be \$1.8 million of programs for bushfire-affected communities and a chief child psychiatrist appointed to put children's needs first.

Two demonstration projects in the Grampians and Melbourne's southern suburbs will be conducted to transform child and youth mental healthcare in Victoria.

Ms Neville said mental illness cost the Victorian economy \$5.4 billion every year, including more than 4.7 million sick days taken due to depression and anxiety.

"We are determined to achieve better health and economic outcomes for people with mental illness, their families, carers and friends," Ms Neville said.

More on Gippsland's mental health crisis will be in Thursday's edition of *The Express*.