



## The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education  
Minister for Mental Health

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Sarah Macdonald  
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Dear Ms Macdonald

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 May 2021 regarding Canine Comprehension's therapy dog programs. I would like to acknowledge your dedication and commitment to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students through Canine Comprehension.

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all Victorians, which is why we are investing \$217.8 million through the 2021-22 State Budget in new support for schools, ensuring our children and young people receive the mental health support when and where they need it most.

This will create a new \$200 million Schools Mental Health Fund to support Victorian Government schools to select programs, staff and other support from an evidence-based menu that best meets their students' mental health and wellbeing needs. The Menu will provide schools with opportunities to purchase support for initiatives that promote mental health and wellbeing, enable schools to intervene early to support students, and provided targeted support for individual students.

Schools will be able to draw from a range of evidence-informed measures proven to work, from the 'Positive Education' model to therapy dog programs to mental health first aid training. Schools will also be able to use their funding to engage more mental health and wellbeing staff to further support their children and young people.

The Fund will be rolled out in all government regional and rural schools as a priority from Term 3 2022, and all government metropolitan schools by 2024. The first round of the Menu will be released to schools in September 2021.

A full Expression of Interest (EOI) process will run in 2022 with providers across the mental health and wellbeing sector invited to apply to be included on the 2023 Menu. To register your interest for updates on the EOI process including details of how to apply, please complete this form (<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-menu-eoi.aspx>) on the Department of Education and Training's website.

The new funding will also continue and expand the Mental Health in Primary Schools pilot to reach 100 schools in 2022. A partnership with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, the pilot enables schools to employ a Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead, while also supporting staff to better understand and respond to mental health and wellbeing issues affecting their students. Evidence produced through the Pilot is informing larger-scale research and development of what works to support primary school students' mental health and wellbeing.

This investment delivers on the Government's commitment to implement all 65 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System's (Royal Commission) recommendations including Recommendation 17: Supporting social and emotional wellbeing in schools.

Of course, you are also welcome to approach individual schools at any time to ascertain their interest in Canine Comprehension's therapy dog programs. A list of Victorian schools can be found on the Department's website at: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au) (search: find a service).

If you would like further information, please contact Emma Gilbert, Manager, Mental Health Reform Unit, Department of Education and Training, on (03) 8688 7786 or by email: [emma.gilbert@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:emma.gilbert@education.vic.gov.au)

Thank you for your work in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of Victorian students. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



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