

COVID-19 Mental Health Response

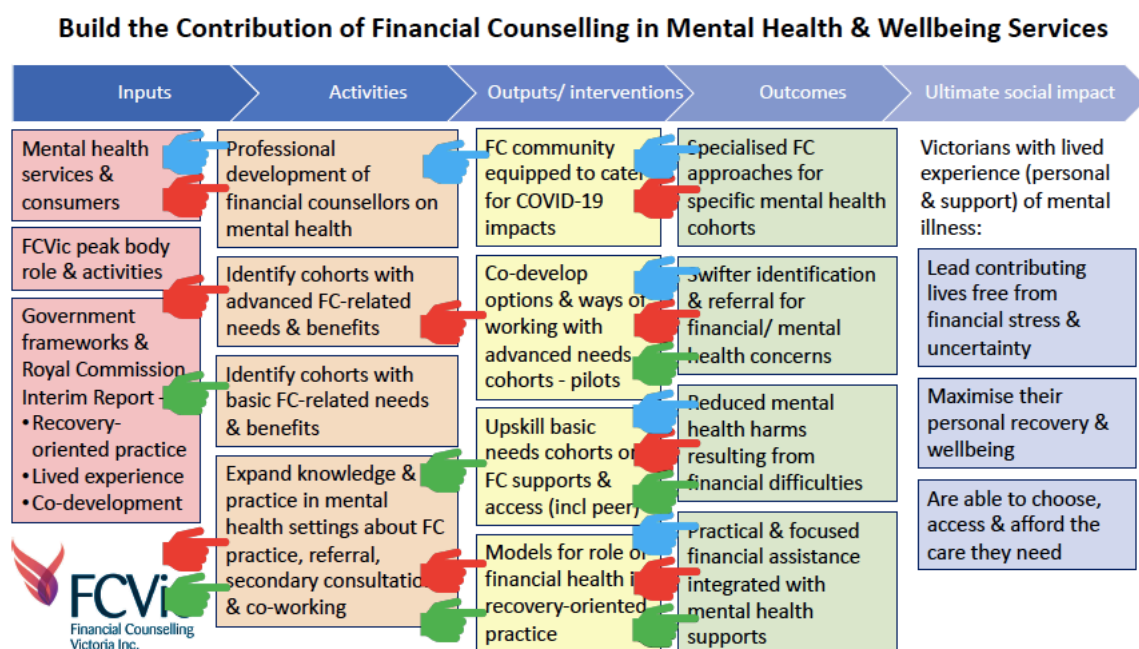
Financial Counselling Victoria, June 2023

In June 2020, Financial Counselling Victoria (FCVic) was funded by Consumer Affairs Victoria on behalf of the Victorian Department of Health as part of the Victorian Government’s COVID-19 response. The purpose of this funding was: ‘Training financial counsellors and developing integrated approaches with mental health services targeted to the needs and characteristics of client cohorts.’

A program logic was developed, see Figure 1. The contribution of each of three distinct sub-programs to the overall program logic is illustrated in Figure 1 according to the colour scheme shown:

- Professional capacity building – blue
- ‘On Track with My Money’ pilot – red
- ‘Money Check-Up’ – green.

Figure 1 – Financial Counselling and COVID-19 Response – Program Logic



Each of the three sub-programs is described in detail in the attached separate report.

Each was successful in the timeframe and objectives set. Each generated a range of new insights that should inform future investments in the financial counselling and mental health sectors. Recommendations from all sub-programs are summarised below.

We recommend that:

Professional Capacity Building

1. Top-up funding is provided to support ongoing professional development programs adapted to suit financial counsellors' practice. These sessions require specific funding to enable co-design and delivery by subject matter experts. This continued funding will support new entrants to the profession as well as 'refreshing' incumbents' knowledge.
2. Funding is provided to support small group reflection for financial counsellors facilitated by experienced mental health practitioners.
3. Funding is provided to enable intensive trauma-aware training of the kind accessed for the 'On Track with My Money' program to be made available to support an increase in co-working between financial counsellors and the Victorian Government funded acute adult mental health supports and new Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs and Locals. This recommendation complements the recommendations of the 'Money Check Up' and 'On Track with My Money' components of the COVID-19 mental health response program.

On Track with My Money Pilot

1. The 'On Track with My Money' pilot informs a three-year full-scale trial at the Shepparton PARC and EIPSR services operated by Wellways, that:
 - a. Builds on the established successful co-working arrangement that has been developed by Shepparton Family and Wellways
 - b. Is supported by a comprehensive human research ethics approval, enabling widespread sharing and publication of outcomes
 - c. Incorporates a simple mental health-related quality of life instrument that can be administered by both Wellways and Shepparton Family team members
 - d. Incorporates tracking of all PARC and EIPSR participant outcomes, in conjunction with Goulburn Valley Health, to understand the extent to which the intervention provides an enduring improvement to participants' situations
 - e. Supports liaison with Goulburn Valley Health and sharing of outcomes with other adult health mental health services across Victoria.
2. A parallel three-year full-scale trial is funded at the Bendigo PARC and EIPSR services operated by Mind Australia, that:
 - a. Builds on Shepparton Family's experience through their parent organisation, Bendigo Family and Financial Services
 - b. Leverages Bendigo Family's existing strong co-working relationships and co-location with Mind Australia
 - c. Strengthens the conclusions that can be drawn from data analysis by engaging with a comparison organisation and location, as well as a comparison mental health service, Bendigo Health.
3. The findings from the 'On Track with My Money' trials are utilised to inform enhancement of FCVic's 'Money Check Up' program (strengthening connections

between Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs and Locals and local financial counselling agencies), including:

- a. In-depth engagement and co-development with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals operating in the Goulburn Valley Health and Bendigo Health regions, learning from the 'On Track with My Money' program, with a particular focus on the potential for earlier intervention
- b. Co-develop outcomes tracking including appropriate mental health-related quality of life instruments, human research ethics approvals and data analysis

Sharing the tools and approaches with statewide Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and statewide financial counselling agencies to enable wider adoption.

Money Check Up

1. Funding is provided to support continued engagement, cross-referral and service co-development as the Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals and Family and Carer-Led Centres continue to establish.
2. A 'pilot' funding provision enables the first tranche of Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals (currently six locations) to host a financial counselling clinic, say one half day each week, at their location. The embedded clinic would lower the barrier for participant engagement with financial counselling. Separate funding would enable a greater emphasis to be placed on prevention and mitigation work as the clinic would not come under the existing, and heavily pressed, intake triage.
3. The clinic pilot be accompanied by a carefully designed and implemented evaluation exercise to inform the potential for a wider rollout as more Locals become established.