

Compulsory Counselling Sessions in Secondary Schools Bill 2022

A Bill for an Act to implement compulsory counselling sessions in Victorian secondary schools. This Bill will provide an initial counselling session to gauge students' mental health. It will ensure all students are receiving equal opportunities to combat their mental health issues, therefore providing a steppingstone to encourage further mental health initiatives. This Bill will also prevent students from mental distress as well as physical harm, and provide them with a safe space in school to access help. By providing mandatory counselling sessions within schools, students with financial barriers who cannot afford counselling from an external third party will receive mental health support.

This Bill acts in response to the prominent issue of mental health within secondary schools, especially in regards to the recent events of COVID-19 and lockdowns, where students' mental health has been identified as an important topic due to the issues caused by isolation. By making counselling sessions mandatory, schools can address the issues of suicide, self-harm, and other mental conditions that occur within this age group. This Bill will decrease the stigma around mental health as more people will be able to talk about the topic freely, and access mental health support. This Bill will ensure mental health aides and resources are shared fairly and equally amongst all students, ensuring barriers such as socio-economic backgrounds, do not hinder a secondary student's ability to receive support to further improve their mental health.

A Bill for an Act relating to Compulsory Counselling Sessions in Secondary Schools to be enacted by the YMCA Victoria Youth Parliament;

PART I—Preliminary

Clause 1 Purpose

The main purposes of this Act are—

- (a) To ensure equity for all Victorian secondary students in accessing mental health support;
- (b) To prevent the experiences of mental distress and physical harm for Victorian secondary students;
- (c) Provide Victorian secondary students with a safe space in their school where they can access help with mental health support.

Clause 2 Commencement

This Bill shall commence upon receiving assent from the Youth Governor of Victoria.

Clause 3 Definitions

In this Bill—

- (a) ***Mental health*** means a person’s condition regarding their psychological and emotional wellbeing;
- (b) ***Counsellor*** means a trained adult to give guidance to students on personal or psychological issues;
- (c) ***Psychologist*** means a professional that practises psychology and is able to study mental states;
- (d) ***Dangerous*** means there is a present possibility of suffering harm, both physical and mental, due to mental health issues;
- (e) ***Risk*** means the possibility of the student harming themselves or others;
- (f) ***Teacher*** means the person that teaches the secondary students;
- (g) ***Confidentiality*** means information that the student presents to counsellor or psychologist which stays primarily with the counsellor or psychologist.

PART II—Establishment

Clause 4 Implementation of Mandatory Counselling Sessions in Secondary Schools

- 4.1 Semesterly mandatory counselling sessions shall be provided by all secondary schools for all students in the state of Victoria.

Clause 5 Counselling Sessions

- 5.1 Every secondary student shall be allocated one counselling session per semester.
- 5.2 Each session shall be at least 45 minutes in length.
- 5.3 Sessions shall be conducted on campus and within school hours;
 - (a) In the case that a session cannot or should not be conducted within school hours, it shall be conducted after school hours, subject to the availability of the counsellor or psychologist.
- 5.4 Counsellors and psychologists who conduct sessions with students shall hold a current Working with Children’s Check.

5.5 Sessions shall be scheduled subject to the availability of the school.

Clause 6 Consent, Permission and Confidentiality for Students in Sessions

- 6.1 Information shared during a counselling session shall not be shared with teachers, unless;
- (a) The student and their guardian have provided consent to have information disclosed to teachers to whom the information is relevant;
 - (b) It has been identified that the student poses risk or danger to themselves or others.
- 6.2 Students and guardians shall give permission to their school if the student chooses to continue with future counselling sessions outside of the mandatory semesterly sessions.
- 6.3 Confidential records of counselling sessions shall be documented and shall not be accessible by teachers.
- 6.4 In the case that a counsellor or psychologist identifies that a student poses risk or danger to themselves or others, they shall be allowed to distribute the student's record with the student's consent.

Clause 7 Post-Session Follow Up

- 7.1 In the aftermath of a session, students shall be contacted by an appointed counsellor or psychologist, through the use of a school email service. This shall include;
- (a) An option to book further sessions with the appointed counsellor or psychologist;
 - (b) An option to confirm sessions scheduled for the oncoming semester;
 - (c) A survey for feedback, consisting of;
 - (i) A 1 to 10 rating about how beneficial the counselling session was for the secondary student;
 - (ii) A 1 to 10 rating about the level of security felt within the counselling session;
 - (iii) A 1 to 10 rating about how comfortable the secondary student felt with their appointed counsellor or psychologist;
 - (iv) A section for 'other comments' shall be left for secondary students to leave other comments if needed.

Clause 8 Recommendations to School Graduates and Early Leavers

- 8.1 A secondary student's compulsory counselling sessions shall conclude when;
- (a) The secondary student has graduated from their final semester of school;
 - (b) Secondary students who are early leavers have indefinitely concluded attending school before graduating.
- 8.2 Secondary students who are leaving school shall be provided with individual recommendations by their counsellor. which shall include but not be limited to;
- (a) References to further counsellors, psychologists and or psychiatrists;

- (b) Contacts of support groups;
- (c) Further resources.