

Coronavirus

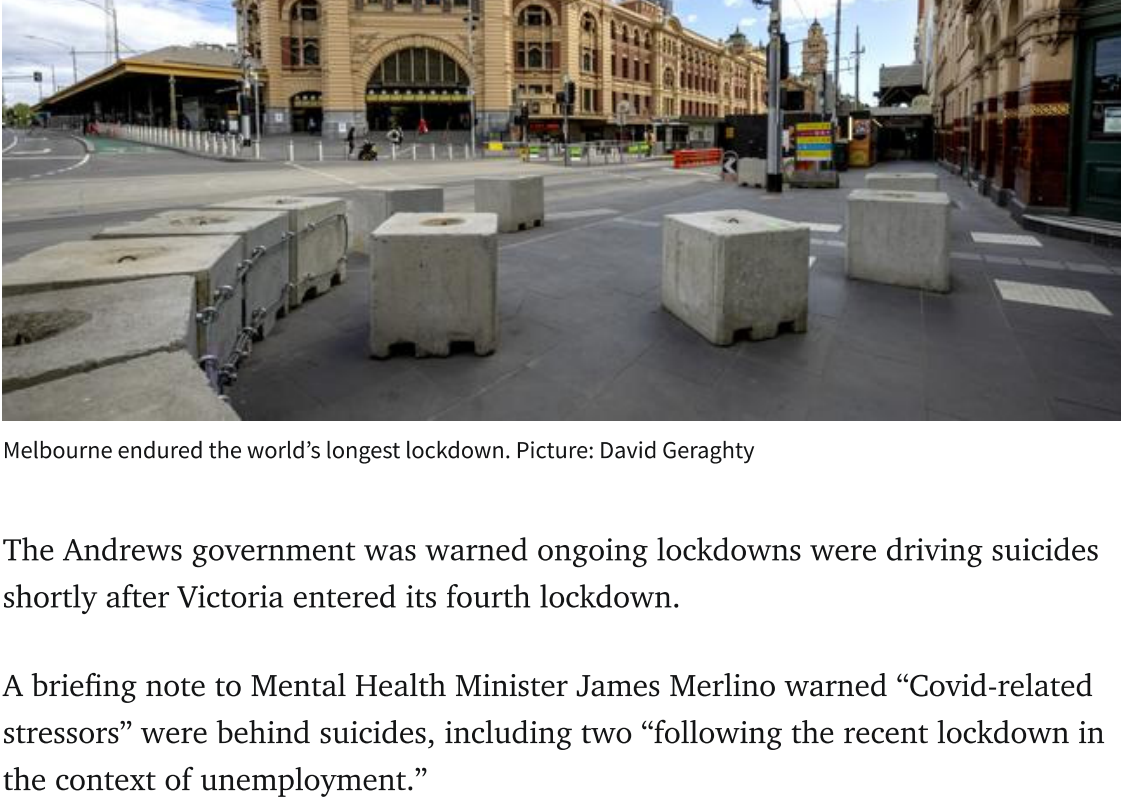
Andrews government warned of suicide spike triggered by lockdowns

The Andrews government was warned that lockdowns were driving a mental health crisis, with nearly one in 10 suicides linked to Covid "policy decisions".

Shannon Deery @S_deery 2 min read December 7, 2021 - 11:14AM

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Melbourne endured the world's longest lockdown. Picture: David Geraghty

The Andrews government was warned ongoing lockdowns were driving suicides shortly after Victoria entered its fourth lockdown.

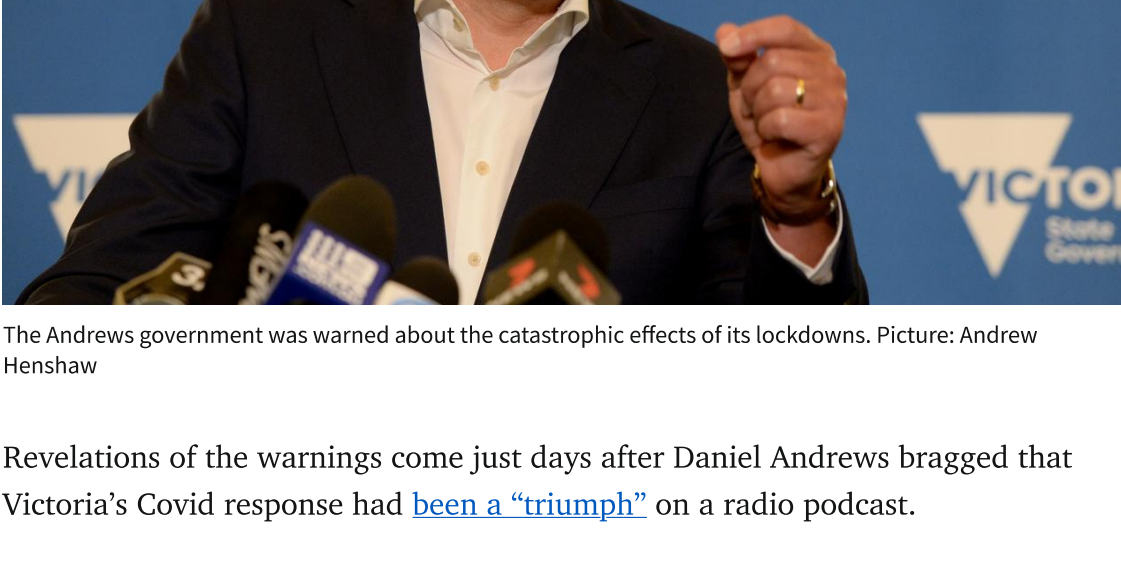
A briefing note to Mental Health Minister James Merlino warned "Covid-related stressors" were behind suicides, including two "following the recent lockdown in the context of unemployment."

The June 2021 ministerial briefing also cited Coroners Court data that nearly 10 per cent of suicides in the first 12 months of the pandemic were linked to Covid "policy decisions".

And it warned that "lockdown measures" were having an "adverse impact on mental health".

Shadow minister for mental health Emma Kealy, who obtained the note under Freedom of Information laws, accused the government of gross negligence for failing to act on the advice.

"These revelations are a disturbing reflection of the gross negligence of a Premier and minister who knew the impact Labor's Covid response was having on Victorian lives, but chose not to act," she said.



The Andrews government was warned about the catastrophic effects of its lockdowns. Picture: Andrew Henshaw

Revelations of the warnings come just days after Daniel Andrews bragged that Victoria's Covid response had been a "triumph" on a radio podcast.

"The Victorian families who lost loved ones in Daniel Andrews' lockdowns or those who are still struggling to live with the mental health impacts today will be sickened by the Premier bragging that Labor's Covid response is a "triumph," Ms Kealy said.

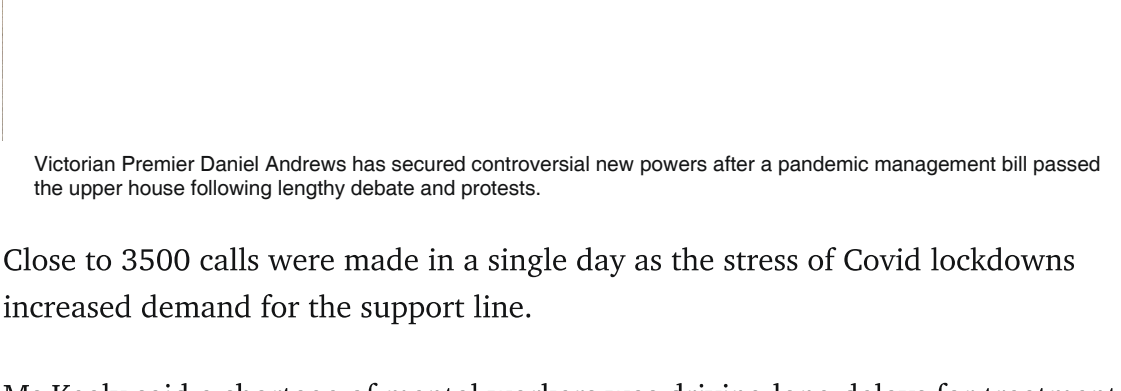
The FOI also revealed government warnings that an "elevated" number of youths were presenting to emergency departments because of self-harm, and cited an increase in eating disorders.

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Victoria entered its fourth lockdown on May 27, just weeks before the advice was issued. Two more lockdowns followed, with Melbourne spending a world record total 262 days locked down before restrictions were eased in October.

In August, suicide prevention charity Lifeline recorded the most calls received in its 57 year history.



Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews has secured controversial new powers after a pandemic management bill passed the upper house following lengthy debate and protests.

Close to 3500 calls were made in a single day as the stress of Covid lockdowns increased demand for the support line. Ms Kealy said a shortage of mental workers was driving long delays for treatment.

"Victorians can't afford to wait for a change in Government to get the help they need," she said. "The Liberals and Nationals will continue to push for immediate reforms that will unlock 4000 workers for the mental health sector so Victorians can recover and rebuild."

In its May budget, the state government announced a \$3.8bn overhaul of mental health services. To be funded by a levy on big business, the unprecedented \$3.8bn spend dwarfed the \$869m mental health funding in 2020-21 — then a record.

The mental health system overhaul's major focus is on younger people, with \$842m split into two streams of funding for services focusing on those aged 0-11 and another on those 12-25 — the years in which 75 per cent of all psychiatric conditions are diagnosed.

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