



7 June 2016

Mr Frank Quinlan  
Chief Executive Officer  
Mental Health Australia  
PO Box 174  
DEAKIN WEST ACT 2600

Dear Mr Quinlan

Thank you for your letter presenting Mental Health Australia's (MHA) 2016 election platform.

A Shorten Labor Government will ensure that mental health is a national priority.

Labor supports the objectives outlined by MHA of:

- A reduction in the national suicide rate by 50 per cent over the next ten years.
- A reduction in the mortality gap for people with a mental illness.
- An increase in the proportion of mental health consumers and carers in employment.
- An increase in mental health consumer and carer participation and choice in national policy design and implementation.
- The maintenance, at a minimum, of overall investment in mental health, with measures that support full reinvestment of cost efficiencies and savings back into mental health programs and services.

Labor agrees that mental health reform is not finished. We have only just begun a journey that will take years if done properly.

Labor generally supports the National Mental Health Commission's recommendations to devolve mental health service delivery to a regional level through the Primary Health Networks to allow better targeted and local approaches.

However, Labor has been concerned about the Abbott-Turnbull Government's cuts to mental health funding and the uncertainty that its rushed implementation process has created throughout the sector.

The speed at which the Abbott-Turnbull Government has been rolling out the changes has created stress and confusion for mental health consumers, carers and staff and has risked undermining the quality of services and achieving the longer-term benefits of the reforms.

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A Shorten Labor Government will take action to give certainty to those who experience mental illness, those who care for them and the staff that deliver critical services and programs.

A Shorten Labor Government will:

- Outline the priorities for implementation of the National Mental Health Commission recommendations within our first 100 days.
- Lead the negotiation on the development of the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, based on the principles of national leadership and regional integration that have been recommended by the National Mental Health Commission.
- Task the National Indigenous Health Equality Council to work with the National Mental Health Commission to develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Plan.
- Restore the independence, integrity and transparency of the National Mental Health Commission.

Unlike the Turnbull Liberal Government, which is cutting funding to Early Psychosis Centres and creating funding uncertainty for Headspace centres, Labor will provide funding certainty to these successful programs.

Importantly, if elected, Labor will ensure those living with mental illness, and their carers, who will not receive a package of support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are not forgotten and we will work with state and territory governments to ensure that services for those who fall outside of the scope of the NDIS are provided.

Specific responses to the objectives identified by the MHA are below.

### **1. A reduction in the national suicide rate by 50 per cent over the next ten years**

Labor is committed to the National Mental Health Commission's recommendation to reduce suicides by 50 per cent over the next ten years.

Labor will:

- Develop and implement a National Suicide Prevention Framework which establishes clear incremental targets and measurable outcomes.
- Establish 12 suicide prevention initiatives – six urban, four regional and two remote – for place-based initiatives tailored to local community need. Recognising the high rates of suicide in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, Labor will ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are prioritised in at least one of each of the urban, regional and remote suicide prevention initiatives.
- Establish the first national minimum data set on deaths by suicide and suicide attempts to build an accurate picture of the problem and the effectiveness of prevention initiatives.

### **2. A reduction in the mortality gap for people with a mental illness**

Labor created Medicare, our unique universal health insurance scheme that has seen Australians achieve some of the best health outcomes in the world.

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However, evidence also shows that people with a mental illness experience poorer general health outcomes and die on average 16 years earlier than the general population.

Labor understands the critical importance of access to primary health care for vulnerable groups, including those who have a mental illness.

A Shorten Labor Government will:

- Restore indexation of the Medicare Benefits Schedule from 1 January 2017.
- Reverse the Abbott-Turnbull Government's increases to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme co-payments and thresholds.
- Legislate to ensure Medicare remains in public hands.

### **3. An increase in the proportion of mental health consumers and carers in employment**

Labor believes that people with a mental illness and their carers deserve the same opportunities as any other Australian to participate in our economy.

Workplaces must be more flexible, supportive of and responsive to the mental health and wellbeing of employees.

Employers should also be encouraged to provide suitable employment and career advancement opportunities for people with episodic or ongoing mental illness, and for carers.

A Shorten Labor Government will actively support and promote the activities of the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance and task the Alliance with improving mental health safety and wellbeing, self-help at work, and with reducing stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

Established by the National Mental Health Commission, the Alliance aims to make sure all people in the workplace, including those who experience mental health difficulties, their families and those who support them, are supported.

A Shorten Labor Government will work with industry organisations to establish a new Heads Up award for excellence in attaining a mentally healthy workplace, as part of our recognition of the best employers in Australia.

### **4. An increase in mental health consumer and carer participation and choice in national policy design and implementation**

Labor understands the need for consumer and carer involvement in policy development and implementation.

Consumer and carer involvement should be actively pursued at the outset of policy formulation and not as an afterthought once policies are determined.

Labor believes there is merit in establishing a national body for consumer and carer involvement and advocacy and will consider this in government.

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**5. Maintain, at a minimum, overall investment in mental health, with measures that support full reinvestment of cost efficiencies and savings back into mental health programs and services**

A Shorten Labor Government is committed to maintaining current investments in mental health programs.

Labor will continue to progress agreed recommendations of the National Mental Health Commission and if any efficiencies are identified, these will be reinvested back into areas of need within the primary mental health system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to outline Labor's policies and to respond to Mental Health Australia's 2016 election platform.

Labor will have more to say on mental health during the election campaign.

Sincerely,

**ALP Information Services Unit**

Australian Labor Campaign Headquarters

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