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Dear Frank,

Thank you for your correspondence. The Greens stand with Mental Health Australia and your core goals of working towards more and better mental health services, improving policy outcomes for the community, building mental health awareness and ensuring that we include all stakeholders, including consumers and carers, in the process. We've attached our response and public commitments to the key issues you raised in your letter below:

A reduction in the national suicide rate by 10% by 2020 and 50% by 2026, compared to 2014 levels

The growth in the number of suicides in Australia is now at the point where we should be declaring a national emergency. Data released in March shows that we now have the highest suicides rates since 2001. There were 2,864 deaths in 2014 from intentional self harm, and suicide is the leading cause of death for young Australians.

The Greens are committed to working with stakeholders and the community to develop and meet targets for reducing suicide over the next 5, 10 and 20 years. This will require substantial resources focused both on prevention through interventions in the mental health space, and particularly through addressing the underlying social determinants of suicide. This is particularly true for communities who face specific disadvantage and experience higher rates of suicide, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However we believe that with adequate resourcing and focus, the targets of 10% reduction by 2020 and 50% reduction by 2026 should be able to be met.

The Greens have committed to funding all the recommendations of the National Mental Health Commission on the roll out of twelve, large regional trials over three years as the first wave of a nationwide introduction of sustainable, comprehensive, whole-of-community approach to suicide prevention.

We have also announced a \$38.3 million National Suicide Campaign over the next four years to build community engagement and education around suicide and improve data collection.

More details can be found at:

- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/mental-health>
- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/news/vic/greens-back-new-approach-suicide-prevention>

And in regards to social determinants:

- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/housing>
- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/inclusive-communities>
- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/atsi>

A reduction in the mortality gap for people with a mental illness

The Greens are committed to reducing the unacceptable mortality gap between the 20% of Australians who experience or have experienced mental illness and the rest of Australia. Our strategy to reduce suicide rates, as outlined above, would play a significant role in bringing the size of the gap down. There is also a role for addressing and responding to the high degree of correlation between those living with mental illness and poor physical health. Those with mental illness are much more likely undertake other harmful activities including smoking, risky levels of alcohol consumption and other drug use, and are more likely to be physically inactive.

The Greens' commitment for an additional \$1 billion over the next four years for primary mental health services will provide additional treatment services and support, as will our commitment to a fairer and more evidence based alcohol and other drugs harm reduction regime. Further, our plan for improved chronic disease management would see an investment of \$4.3 billion over four years. The plan will introduce voluntary enrolment for those with chronic disease and provides incentives to GPs to work with patients to maintain health and quality of life. As a portion of the \$4.3 billion, we will also invest \$2.8 billion to provide access to allied health professionals to enrolled patients. While not targeted at Australians with a mental illness specifically, this program will greatly benefit the many Australians with a mental illness who are also at a high risk of other chronic illnesses.

Further our commitment of \$250 million each year for cycling and walking infrastructure is designed to result in a significant increase in levels of cycling and walking for transport and recreation. This encouragement of physical activity which is accessible to all, particularly people on low incomes and people who don't drive, would be of particular benefit to the wellbeing of people with a mental illness. Our \$10 billion investment in public transport will similarly improve transport options and reduce social isolation for people with a mental illness who are on low incomes and don't drive or own a car.

More details can be found at:

- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/mental-health>
- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/primary-care>
- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/public-transport>

An increase in the proportion of mental health consumers and carers in employment

It is essential that pathways to employment exist for all Australians. In the National Mental Health Report 2013 it was shown that 62% of working age Australians with a mental illness were employed, compared to 80% of those without a mental illness. Although the Greens understand that many people with a mental illness are unable to work, for those who wish to work there is role for Government to play.

We know that Work for the Dole is not effective and the existing employment services are not sufficient. We need a less punitive and better funded pathway to employment, especially for those that are already dealing with a mental illness. We will have more to announce on this in the coming weeks.

For mental health consumers and carers, another struggle is the need to balance work commitments with caring duties and self-care. This requires flexibility in working situations. The Greens would give people who have been in their job 12 months enforceable rights to request

flexible working arrangements, including the number of hours they work, the scheduling of those hours and the location of work.

For carers in particular, employers may refuse flexible arrangements only where there are serious countervailing business reasons.

The transition to the Primary Health Networks also brings with it the opportunity of providing a more holistic service model, which not only treats mental illness but provides social support, housing support, employment support and legal assistance for people with multifaceted needs. By committing an extra \$400 million to the Primary Health Networks mental health flexible fund over the next four years, the Greens would provide significant additional support to see these services realised which will result in increasing people's employment prospects .

Finally our support (see below) for developing and implementing a national mental health and psychosocial support Peer Workforce Development Framework would also increase opportunities for consumers and carers to gain employment as a peer worker.

More details can be found at:

- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/mental-health>

An increase in the mental health consumer and carer participation and choice in national policy design and implementation

The Australian Greens have committed to supporting the recommendation from Mental Health Australia to invest \$6.5 million in consumer and carer involvement in mental health reform including:

- ▲ ongoing and additional funding for the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum, the National Register, mental health consumer and carer representatives and the national mental health consumer organisation;
- ▲ funding a scoping study on the establishment of a new national mental health carer organisation;
- ▲ developing and implementing a national mental health and psychosocial support Peer Workforce Development Framework
- ▲ consumer and carer representation at all levels of planning and decision making, including the Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Principal Committee;
- ▲ routinely surveying and reporting consumer and carer satisfaction with all aspects of the mental health system

More details can be found at:

- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/mental-health>

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

The Greens would support the major funding recommendation from the National Mental Health Commission Review in 2014, which was to increase spending on primary mental health care by \$1 billion over the next four years. The current position of both the Government and the Australian Labor Party is that this funding should come from within current mental health funding levels. However the Australian Greens believe that we shouldn't rob Peter to pay Paul. Instead of depriving hospitals and health services of the money they need to provide for patients with severe mental illness, the Greens would instead fund this \$1 billion increase through the increased revenue of a fairer tax system that puts people first.

With this additional \$1 billion we would invest:

- ▲ \$400m in the Primary Health Network mental health flexible fund;
- ▲ \$280m in mental health nurses;
- ▲ \$280m in rural mental health workforce development and services;
- ▲ An 50% funding boost to the KidsMatter program and the restoration of full funding to Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI)

We would also spend \$40 million on preventative mental health, restore the six extra sessions for Better Access and invest \$150 million in mental health research towards evidence based treatment and policy settings.

More details can be found at:

- ▲ <http://greens.org.au/mental-health>

Thank you once again for the opportunity to present the Greens' ongoing commitment to improving mental wellbeing.

Regards,

Senator Janet Rice