

## Continuity of Funding Survey – At a Glance

In late November 2014 Mental Health Australia conducted a survey of non-government organisations in the mental health sector about the impact of uncertainties over funding from the Australian Government. A summary of the survey findings is provided below.

87 organisations nationally filled in the survey; the findings below are based on the 75 organisations who are in receipt of Commonwealth funding. The great majority of these (85%) were service providers, with the remainder being training, community development and advocacy organisations.

The survey results demonstrate the very real impact that funding uncertainty is currently having on organisations and underscores the urgent need for government to clarify funding arrangements as soon as possible.

### What is the impact of current uncertainty?

- 40% report they have already experienced loss of staff
- 46% report a difficulty attracting new staff
- 53% report a reduction in services to clients
- 81% report a decline in staff morale
- 85% report a loss of trust in government amongst management and staff
- 56% report having no communications regarding the future of their Commonwealth funding after June 2015
- 91% of organisations said it is highly likely that they would need to reduce staff if funding does not continue, while 88% said it is highly likely they would need to reduce services
- 73% said that that it is highly likely that local choices would be reduced for consumers if their funding does not continue
- Uncertainties about funding last year saw 41% of organisations reducing services and 40% losing staff
- 68% of respondents said they needed to have certainty on their funding before 1 Feb, and 90% before 1 March, to avoid these negative impacts



## Detailed findings

Q. Has the Commonwealth Government provided your organisation with an assurance that your funding from them will continue beyond 30 June 2015?

Yes, strong assurance	3%
Positive discussions but nothing definite	8%
Indications that funding will not continue	17%
No communication yet	56%
Unsure	16%
Total	100%

Q. What do you anticipate will happen if this funding does not continue beyond 30 June 2015?

	Highly likely	Fairly likely	Possible but not very likely	Highly unlikely	N/A	No response/ Unsure
Reduction in staffing levels	91%	4%	1%	-	3%	1%
Reduction in the services or activities your organisation carries out	88%	7%	1%	-	3%	1%
Reduction in the diversity of services available locally	80%	3%	1%	1%	8%	7%
Reduction in choices available locally to consumers	73%	9%	3%	-	8%	7%
Subsidising services/activities (from other funding sources or financial reserves)	32%	15%	27%	15%	5%	7%
Your organisation will cease operating and/or go into administration	27%	11%	15%	29%	7%	12%
Diversification into other markets	19%	20%	24%	17%	4%	16%
Merger with another organisation	3%	11%	27%	35%	7	19%



Q. Please cast your mind back to earlier this year. Did any of the following things occur due to uncertainty about your organisation's Commonwealth Government funding beyond 30 June 2014? Select any that apply.

Loss of trust in government among our staff/management	79%
Reduction in staff morale	77%
Loss of trust in government among our consumers/clients	56%
Difficulty attracting new staff	47%
Diversion of resources to secure alternative funding	43%
Reduction in the services or activities our organisation carries out	41%
Loss of existing staff	40%
Loss of trust in our organisation among our consumers/clients	35%
Other negative impacts	25%
None of the above – we didn't experience any negative impacts from our uncertainty about Commonwealth funding last year	3%
Not applicable – we didn't have any uncertainty about our Commonwealth funding last year	7%
No response (left blank)	3%

Q. Please now think about your current situation. Have any of these things already started to occur due to uncertainty about your organisation's Commonwealth funding beyond 30 June 2015? Select all that apply.

Loss of trust in government among our staff/management	81%
Reduction in staff morale	77%
Loss of trust in government among our consumers/clients	61%
Reduction in the services or activities our organisation carries out	51%
Difficulty attracting new staff	44%
Loss of existing staff	39%
Diversion of resources to secure alternative funding	39%
Loss of trust in our organisation among our consumers/clients	33%
Other negative impacts	27%
None of the above – we didn't experience any negative impacts from our uncertainty about Commonwealth funding last year	3%
No response (left blank)	4%



Q. In order to avoid such potential impacts as these (eg loss of service, program or project continuity, staff or financial stability), when is the latest you would need a decision from the Commonwealth about your funding?

1 December 2014	21%
1 January 2015	17%
1 February 2015	25%
1 March 2015	25%
1 April 2015	4%
1 May 2015	1%
Not applicable	1%
No response	4%
Total	100%

### Respondent characteristics

Q. How many does your organisation employ?

1-5	17%
6-19	19%
20-49	19%
50-199	35%
200+	9%
Unsure	1%
Total	100%

Q. Does your organisation do any of the following? Select all that apply.

Provide mental health services	85%
Training or professional development	64%
Community development	61%
Consumer and carer representation	48%
Systemic advocacy	41%
Individual advocacy or representation	37%
Stakeholder/professional representation	35%
Other	20%



## Direct quotes from respondents

Staff are looking for new work. Clients are worried to the point of affecting their mental health - in some cases the progress made has gone backwards from fear of no future services.

No longer accepting new referrals. Organisations have an obligation and liability to fully service a client not partially therefore the continuity of funding affects intake of new referrals. It also affects the trust and reputation in programs from referrers to refer future patients.

Everything is on hold.

I'm a fan of the Commonwealth Government and I like both parties but there needs to be some clear commitment (mediation?) between both to sure up social investments made in health and social services (which equates to the health dollar anyway) to keep Australians well and out of hospitals. Enough handball already, one unified policy direction for a 10 year roadmap - or is that task too hard for our elected Government representatives?

Funding decisions are left until way too late for appropriate commissioning and tendering processes to take place. Funding cycles should be for a minimum of three years and announced at least six months prior to commencement, but preferably 9-12 months, to allow for community consultation and market stimulation.

Waiting to find out disrupts services to clients and delays the provision of new/ongoing support to clients in need. Funding uncertainty stunts program growth and development, and greatly affects staff wellbeing and job security.

Left in the dark last year, we did not know we had funding, or a job, until April, two months before our contract expired.

The decision making is slow, when funding is withdrawn by one Commonwealth funding agency and transferred to another there is no communication about where to apply for the funding to retain programs, even though funding for the program may be available.

Year upon year, we transition through changing times. Programs are affected and ultimately the consumers. Consumers are fatigued and particularly in rural and remote areas do not have a stable workforce to rely on. We are increasing mental health illness not reducing it by making change for change sake.

