



Mental Health Australia

2023 Member Policy Forum – 11 May 2023

Kurrajong Room, Hotel Kurrajong

8 National Circuit Barton

Speech for Matt Berriman, Chair, Mental Health Australia

Thank you everyone, and on behalf of the Mental Health Australia Board I welcome you all to our 2023 Budget Members Policy Forum... to those here in the room today, and to those 30+ Members joining us online.

Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to Elders past and present and extend that to those of you online wherever you are joining us.

I would also like to acknowledge others like myself, those here or online today who bring with them their lived experience.

I'd like to acknowledge the Co-Chairs of the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum:

- Shannon Calvert
- Kerry Hawkins

Today we'll hear from the Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Emma McBride and from the Department of Health and Aged Care, Bronwyn Field and Caitlin O'Brien.

Today's agenda also includes presentations and discussions on lived experience leadership and psychosocial services.

Complementing this, we welcome and look forward to hearing from Dr Gerry Naughtin OAM and James MacIsaac on the NDIS review.

As Chair, I want to recognise and acknowledge the incredible hard work that happens across the sector every single day.

Thank you for your work and your input into ours. It doesn't go unnoticed.

There is no way to dance around it – we need to address the gross inadequacy in mental health care in this country.

As Chair, I share some of the feelings you may have of there being another missed opportunity with Tuesday's budget. Our country faces a critical juncture to get a mental health system the people of this

great country deserve in the face of being in a silent pandemic. This must be at the top of our national priority list.

Having had many personal conversations with Ministers and especially recently leading into the budget with the Minister for Health Mark Butler, who's been open for me to discuss our conversations, I am confident that Labor promises of a brighter future for reform for Mental Health is real, and is on our doorstep. This budget has delivered the necessary building blocks to improve primary care. But now, it's critical that we act on mental health reform, which after many conversations with Mark and his team I'm confident they will, and that it is a national priority.

When reading media budget reviews in the recent days, outlining the "winners and losers" and continuing to see Mental Health in the losing category did disturb me.

Coming from a professional sporting and business background, I'm used to winning and losing but this is so much more. Losing in this respect means loss of health, wellbeing, and even life. And no part of that is ok!

The country is at a cross road..... but I am taking the Government and Health Minister on their word that future reform will come, in a staged approach, starting by more reform by the end of 2023.

Having built many technology businesses, solving complex problems – I know things don't happen overnight. But with the right talent, commitment and a unified approach it is possible to solve large problems – it's what us entrepreneurs do. But it doesn't happen overnight and we need to be realistic that there is no quick fix.

But it would be remiss of me to also not tell you as Chair of Mental Health Australia I take this responsibility personally on behalf of the sector to ensure it does. There is no more time for false hope or promises, PR spin or kicking the can down the road or bite sized band aid solutions.

But also, we need to allow and back the government to do the work – so I call on you all to be unified to support not only the Government, but also Mental Health Australia as your peak, me as your Chair, our Board, and our new amazing CEO who you'll hear from shortly and her team, to work closely with the Government as we have been doing recently.

The Government needs and is committing to real reform. But as a sector and individual non-profits, so do we. We need to stand united. We need to put aside vested interests and focus on what is best for the whole of the community, not just those that we represent.

I'll be doing everything in my and our power to ensure we are acting as a cohesive and united sector. I will also do all I can to hold Government to account now, to the mid term reform plan, and into the future, as we continue to build out a world class mental health system and ensure they live up to their words... unfortunately as an outsider sometimes words in Canberra, can be just that. Words. As you've probably noticed since I've started as Chair - I stand for action and outcomes and I've appreciated the frank and direct conversations with Mark, Emma, and their teams and I'm now confident we are on a positive path forward!

There is just too much at stake for our community not to stand strong, tall and united together. And if need to lean into challenging the powers to be – which we hope not to – we will, until the job is done. We need current and future generations to have a system that caters for them being mentally healthy.

As you've seen over the last 18 months, Mental Health Australia has taken a very different strategic approach to our work than historically as we look to make this country more mentally healthier. Although an advocacy body we are taking a stronger stand in the sector and demanding a rightful seat at the table for the important decisions that need to be made. This will only continue to strengthen as we move forward, one that the Government has made clear they want us to do, as a primary partner moving forward, which is great to hear.

After a robust and wide search for our new leader and CEO that would continue to lead our organisation in that vein, that will carry that torch in what is our most critical juncture, it is now my great privilege to shortly introduce Mental Health Australia's new CEO, Carolyn Nikoloski.

Carolyn has significant experience in mental health policy development and reform, strategy development and execution, and service delivery. She has a track record of leading through transformations and change.

Prior to Mental Health Australia, Carolyn was the Chief Strategy Officer of Beyond Blue, where she led the development of Beyond Blue's 2023 – 2028 strategy; the development and execution of its policy reform agenda; the development and implementation of its brand strategy; and the design and initial implementation of its business transformation.

Carolyn also serves as a Director of Prevention United, a national mental health promotion charity.

Carolyn is driven by a determination to improve mental health and wellbeing through innovative approaches, and bold policy reform.

In closing – as I've always said coming in to take on this important role as Chair it's about making a difference to people's lives on the ground every day and I'll continue to do whatever that requires without fear or failure even to the highest power in office, as per my communications with various ministers across all parties to gather bi-partisan support of Labor's future plan for mental health and more recently communications with the Prime Minister to ensure Australians get the support and care they truly deserve and need.

Thanks everyone and I look forward to your commitment and faith and support in us as your Peak Body, to work with the government to get the best mental health outcomes for all.

Anyway, enough from me, I'm super excited to introduce you to our new CEO – Carolyn who will be leading the charge with me moving forward in what I can honestly see as an inflection point in this countries future.