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GP CO-PAYMENT MUST NOT BE A BARRIER TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Mental Health Australia has today welcomed the Australian Medical Association's (AMA) proposal that people treated under mental illness Medicare items be exempted from GP co-payments.

"This is an important first step in encouraging people concerned about their mental health to see a GP, but protections must go further," Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan said.

"We know that up to 70% of people with a diagnosed mental illness are not seeking help.

"Even so, there are still more than 1.5 million GP services provided to Australians per year for mental health conditions. These services often represent the start of a recovery journey for many people and must not be discouraged.

"GPs are often the first point of call for people experiencing mental illness. It can be an opportunity for early intervention, when people can change the trajectory of their lives for the better.

"We remain concerned that not all services to people with mental illness will show up in the specific Medicare items. This is an area that requires further consideration and negotiation.

"We don't want anyone with concerns about their mental health putting off visits to their GP.

"By removing financial barriers to seeking help, especially in those early and important stages of mental illness, we can help to significantly reduce the overall burden of disease for mental health in this country.

"That's why we welcome this sensible start from AMA."

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