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The mental health costs that come with increases to the cost of living

As many Australians work out what an increase in interest rates will mean for their weekly or monthly budget, on top of the already increasing costs of food, petrol and more, Mental Health Australia is calling on all parties and candidates in the Federal Election to consider what these increased financial pressures mean for people with a mental illness, and for those who love and care for them.

Mental Health Australia CEO Dr Leanne Beagley said mental health and money problems are often intricately intertwined and for these pressures to constantly increase, seemingly week on week, only adds to the strain and challenge for thousands of Australians with a mental illness.

“We know that more than 21% of the poorest Australians experience mental ill-health compared to 15% in the highest socio-economic group,” said Dr Beagley.

“We also know that even before these current and compounding cost of living pressures, that the cost of mental health care, and access to it, has been a barrier to those who need it most.”

“These constant rises in the cost of living only add further pressure to those already experiencing financial difficulty, those individuals and families finding it hard to make ends meet, and especially for those high proportion of people accessing Disability Support Pension payments living with mental ill-health.”

During the 2022 Federal Election campaign Mental Health Australia has been calling on the Government, the Opposition, and all candidates to realise that every issue discussed, and every policy promised, has the potential to impact the mental health of thousands, and clearly the cost of living is one of those.

“All governments need to act to ensure the cost of living does not increase inequality in Australia on access to health care, housing and employment outcomes of people with a lived experience of mental illness and the people who love and care for them,” said Dr Beagley.

“For more than a decade now at Mental Health Australia we have consistently called for income support payment rates to be set at a level to meet reasonable costs of living. And as these cost-of-living pressures increase, so too does our call for increased payment rates,” said Dr Beagley.

“Insufficient rates for these payments mean many people reliant on them, many of whom have a mental illness, are living below the poverty line, unable to meet housing, utility, transport and other basic costs of living.”

“Introducing improved unemployment supports is one of the most immediate actions the Government can take to address Australia’s mental health crisis, and if people vote with mental health in mind later this month, then perhaps our vision of mentally healthy people, and mentally healthy communities is achievable - even in these times of constant increases to the cost of living.”

What does it mean to vote with mental health in mind? It means to vote knowing that every issue, every announcement, every debate, every election promise made, has the potential to impact our mental health, and our mental health system. To see how the cost of living impacts our mental health or to find out more go to <https://mhaustralia.org/2022-election-vote-mental-health-mind>

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