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Mental health needs a national plan to guide reforms

Tonight's Budget includes a number of welcome new initiatives for mental health, but leaves ongoing uncertainty about how current reforms will be coordinated and integrated.

"Following tonight's Budget, Australia still has no comprehensive plan to guide the very significant reforms changing the shape of mental health services," said Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan.

"Programs like the NDIS, Primary Health Networks, and Health Care Homes are welcome measures, but urgent work is required to link these reforms to ongoing mental health reforms, and to services providing psychosocial support to people who experience mental illness."

Welcome initiatives in tonight's Budget include:

- New \$40m investment in veteran's mental health and suicide prevention
- \$800K for an online service to address perinatal depression
- \$750m investment in Youth Jobs PaTH services to train and employ vulnerable young Australians
- \$100m for trials in innovative programs aimed at reducing long-term welfare dependency

Measures in tonight's Budget that could negatively impact people who experience mental illness and their carers include:

- Cuts to payments for new welfare recipients accessing NewStart, Disability Support Pension (DSP) and Carer payment
- Uncertainty regarding the re-assessment of 90,000 DSP recipients
- Ongoing pause in indexation of the Medicare Benefits Scheme affecting GPs and allied health professionals
- Cuts to Health Flexible Funds, with details to be confirmed in the future

Mental Health Australia has renewed its call for a ten-year plan for mental health reform.

"The National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services identified better coordination and integration as key priorities for reform. A failure to address this will place ongoing reforms at risk," Mr Quinlan said.

"Without a clear plan to guide complex reform, our responses on mental health will remain at best ad hoc, and at worst fragmented and uncoordinated. This places services at risk, and ultimately means people in need may not get access to them."



In the lead up to the 2016 Federal Election, Mental Health Australia is calling on all political parties to publicly commit to:

- A reduction in the national suicide rate
- Improvements in the physical health of people with a mental illness
- An increase in employment rates for mental health consumers and carers
- Improvements in mental health consumer and carer participation and choice
- No net reduction in overall investment in mental health

“We must do all we can in the months ahead to ensure the unprecedented uncertainty in mental health program funding is resolved once and for all.”

“Mental health reform is not finished. In fact, we have only just begun a journey of many years.”

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