

Mental health concerns among the most common in Aged Care Royal Commission

Mental Health Australia has today welcomed the much-anticipated release of the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and thanked the Commissioners for listening to people with lived experience of the system, either as service users or their families.

The release of the Final Report signals the time to act, and no longer neglect mental health service delivery and reform in aged care.

Mental Health Australia CEO, Dr Leanne Beagley says we know changes to the way we deliver aged care can improve the mental health and wellbeing of older people receiving care — and that this has to be one of the first priorities for action to flow from this report.

“The report itself highlights the importance of mental health reform when it states ‘The most common areas of substandard complex care we heard about involve dementia and challenging behaviours, mental health, and palliative care,’” said Dr Beagley.

“We need a more comprehensive, permanent and nationally consistent approach to providing mental health support — including access to clinical and psychosocial supports across both residential and community care.

“We know there has been neglect in the system, and failure to identify and appropriately treat mental health problems amongst older Australians previously.

“And we know that as this Royal Commission was underway, the system-wide Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health declined to focus on any aged care mental health reform pending the release of the Royal Commission report. The onus is now on the government to fundamentally address the mental health needs of older Australians.”

While the report outlines 148 recommendations, Mental Health Australia says an overarching increased focus on mental health care is essential, and needs to be acted on now.

“We agree with the fact that there needs to be greater clarity on the role and responsibilities of residential aged care providers to maintain mental health of residents,” said Dr Beagley.

“We agree that in the short term there needs to be increased access to mental health assessment and care through changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule, and increased outreach and access to supports from older persons mental health teams.

“We agree there needs to be provision of care management, social supports and a review of aged care training to include mental health care.



“We agree in the long-term the Australian Government must coordinate an integrated system for the long-term support and care of older people, reflecting 'the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health'.

“And on top of these recommendations we also further recommend the government implement a cap on user fees to ensure mental health services are accessible to every older Australian, and support increased access to lived experience (peer) professionals as part of the workforce supporting the mental health needs of older Australians.”

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