

22 October 2014 | For immediate release

MENTAL HEALTH FOCUS NEEDED - CHILDREN'S WEEK

Children's Week provides an opportunity for the country to consider a mental health and wellbeing focus at each stage of early life development, according to Mental Health Australia.

"Mental health should be a serious consideration alongside other health concerns, throughout the life cycle of children from birth to adolescence and beyond," Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan said today.

"We want people thinking about mental health and wellbeing as they prepare to welcome a newborn child, through to early childhood development, their interaction with the education system and early employment.

"By having an early focus on good mental health we can help ensure a solid foundation for people throughout their lives.

"Around one-in-seven children will experience a mental illness in Australia. It's how we deal with it as a community that will set their future mental health pathway."

Many factors can have an impact on mental health and wellbeing for children, including:

- Ensuring a safe and nurturing environment at home
- The education of parents, including their understanding of issues like prenatal depression
- The child's access to health services that have a understanding of childhood mental health, including early detection and intervention
- The education system and how it integrates mental health into the curriculum and responds to mental illness, and
- Discrimination and how the community responds to mental illness.

"The mental health system in Australia is not adequately geared to look after the mental health and wellbeing of children," Mr Quinlan said. "That's why we need a ten-year program of reform, looking at the entire system, including how it responds to children, and how we can make it work.

"We have released a seven point plan that outlines the steps we need to reform the mental health system in Australia. This plan should be implemented over ten years, following a commitment from all levels of government to fund it beyond election and budget cycles."

The seven point plan can be viewed here <http://mhaustralia.org/publication/seven-point-plan-action-mental-health>

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