

## **ALP mental health: two steps in the right direction, a long way to go**

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) has welcomed ALP mental health commitments announced by Prime Minister Gillard and Health Minister Roxon.

According to David Crosbie, MHCA CEO, 'the measures outlined by the Prime Minister today are real steps forward, particularly in relation to increased accountability for mental health services through a national mental health report card, and increased investment in anti-suicide measures.

Possibly the most pleasing aspect of the ALP mental health policy is the increased focus on the experiences of mental health consumers and carers as critical measures of mental health service provision. The funding for suicide programs, workplace, community support, child, youth and prevention measures are all positive initiatives.'

At the same time, Mr Crosbie said it was disappointing the package did not go further, highlighting that, 'there is a desperate need to address decades of neglect from all levels of government. The reality is that mental health needs a massive investment and this package falls short of what most experts (including the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission) see as necessary to address the major service gaps currently experienced by mental health consumers and carers.'

Mr Crosbie pointed out that 'most Australians who experience a mental health disorder do not get treatment. Most people who present with a mental health problem at a hospital emergency department are turned away. Australia's response to young people experiencing mental health problems remains inadequate and our commitment to prevention is very limited. Just as importantly, community mental health services have been starved of funding for decades despite having to pick up the load from diminishing numbers of mental health beds across Australia.'

In summarising the MHCA response Mr Crosbie said, 'the ALP mental health policy is grounded in improved accountability including the experiences of consumers and carers, and a commitment to improving mental health services over time. This approach needs to be supported, but it is not the complete package the MHCA and many other experts and groups have been calling for.'

The MHCA remains committed to working with governments into the future to support the implementation of new mental health policies that are grounded in good information and good practice, particularly in terms of ensuring the experiences of consumers and carers remain the touchstone for mental health reform.

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