



MEDIA RELEASE

3 March 2010

Health Reform – Next Step Must be Mental Health Reform

Today's announcement of major changes to the way we fund and administer hospitals shows that the Rudd Government is committed to reforming the health system, however, hospital reform is only one part of the health system reform Australia desperately needs.

According to David Crosbie, CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA): "We have long argued for greater accountability and transparency in mental health services, particularly empowering health consumers to have access to better information and choice. This is undoubtedly a step forward, an important step that is the basis of ongoing reform. At the same time it is important to remember that the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) also identified the need for significant reform to dental services, primary healthcare, preventative health and mental health services.

"One of the important points to remember is that hospitals are not islands in the health service system. In the area of mental health, we know that over 40% of people currently occupying acute mental health beds in hospitals would not be there if community based sub acute care and other options were available.

"We also know that Emergency Departments turn away most people who seek help for their mental health disorder.

"Fixing hospitals is very important. Fixing the systems that feed into hospitals and leave people marooned with no other options is also critical.

"We look forward to working with the government on these broader challenges," Mr Crosbie said.

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission final report made 12 recommendations in relation to mental health including:

- a youth friendly community-based service, which provides information and screening for mental disorders and sexual health, be rolled out nationally for all young Australians.
- the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre model be implemented nationally so that early intervention in psychosis becomes the norm.
- every acute mental health service have a rapid-response outreach team for those individuals experiencing psychosis, and subsequently have the acute service capacity to provide appropriate treatment.

- every hospital-based mental health service should be linked with a multi-disciplinary community-based sub-acute service that supports ‘stepped’ prevention and recovery care.
- greater investment in mental health competency training for the primary health care workforce, both undergraduate and postgraduate, and that this training be formally assessed as part of curricula accreditation processes.
- each state and territory government provide those suffering from severe mental illness with stable housing that is linked to support services.
- increase investment in social support services for people with chronic mental illness, particularly vocational rehabilitation and post-placement employment support.
- governments must collaborate to develop a strategy for ensuring that older Australians, including those residing in aged care facilities, have adequate access to specialty mental health and dementia care services.
- state and territory governments recognise the compulsory treatment orders of other Australian jurisdictions.
- health professionals should take all reasonable steps in the interests of patient recovery and public safety to ensure that when a person is discharged from a mental health service that:
 - there is clarity as to where the person will be discharged; and
 - someone appropriate at that location is informed.
- a sustained national community awareness campaign to increase mental health literacy and reduce the stigma attached to mental illness.
- there must be more effective mechanisms for consumer and carer participation and feedback to shape programs and service delivery.

“The MHCA looks forward to continued dialogue with the Government as they move to further reform of the health system. In particular, we will be urging the Government to provide a clear direction for reducing the unacceptably high costs of poor access to mental health treatment, address limited investment in prevention and community based interventions, ensure greater engagement with consumers and carers, and generate the sound information and evidence-base critical to developing effective policy,” Mr Crosbie said.

Media Contact: Simon Tatz on 02 6285 3100 or 0402 613 745