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MEDIA RELEASE

Premiers must back up their rhetoric with action on mental health

State and Territory leaders should demonstrate their commitment to mental health reform by allocating at least half the promised new sub-acute care beds to mental health consumers.

Under Mr Rudd's proposed New Beds Guarantee National Partnership, the Government has pledged to create 1300 new sub-acute beds over the next four years, however the allocation of these beds is to be split between palliative, rehabilitation, geriatric and mental health care.

"The Premier's and Chief Minister's need to demonstrate their commitment to mental health is genuine by assuring the community that at least half of these new sub acute beds will be mental health beds," said the CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), David Crosbie.

"Providing more mental health sub-acute beds will clearly relieve the pressure on public hospitals, which is one of the stated aims of the Government's health reform plans. Over 40% of people currently in mental health acute hospital beds would not be there if appropriate sub acute and community based care was available. Half a million presentations are made to hospital emergency departments and psychiatric units in any 12 months – over two thirds of these presentations are turned away with little or no treatment.

"As the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission highlighted, mental health is a neglected area of health care and there is a critical demand for more community based beds outside of the hospital system.

"The states and territory's all have wonderful mental health policy statements. They have all said that improving mental health care is a priority issue. They need to back up their rhetoric by delivering better community-based mental health care, not just putting more money into hospitals. An investment in community mental health care beds will significantly reduce the current pressure on acute mental health care beds in hospitals.

"The MHCA believes that the New Beds Guarantee National Partnership should commit at least 650 new sub acute mental health beds and wants State Premiers and Chief Minister's to back up their fine sets of words about mental health reform with action that will make a real difference in their communities," Mr Crosbie said.

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