

MEDIA RELEASE

COAG PAVES WAY FOR MENTAL HEALTH REFORM

15 February 2011

The CoAG health agreement paves the way for the Gillard Government to deliver on its promise to invest in and reform mental health care in Australia.

Approximately two-thirds of people with mental health care needs are not receiving the treatment and support they need. The Government must invest in new clinical and non-clinical services that ensure all Australians can access a quality mental health service.

The Gillard Government promised to make mental health a major agenda of their second term, and with the CoAG announcements on funding and responsibilities of health care agreed to in principle, the Government can now start the process of delivering urgently needed reform to mental health care.

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) recently facilitated 14 national forums across Australia where the Minister for Mental Health, Mark Butler, heard directly the concerns of mental health consumers and carers. While there were a number of issues raised, including both what is working now and what is not, there were issues that were consistently raised at session after session, regardless of location. These included (in no particular order):

- Stigma and discrimination against people with mental illness and their carers;
- Minority group issues, including Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), and others;
- Dual diagnosis, co morbidity, physical and mental illness;
- Integrated services, including housing, employment, disability services, and others;
- Workforce needs;
- The need for a mental health consumer peak body, and a carer counterpart; and
- Enhancing community capacity.

The Government is well aware of what is needed to improve Australia's mental health system.

The May 2011 budget is the time for the Government to meet its promise to address the neglect in mental health.

The CoAG health agreement will deliver substantial improvements in hospitals and primary care with almost \$20 billion guaranteed for public hospitals. The Government must now commit to a similarly substantial investment in mental health.

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