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# MEDIA RELEASE

## **Better Access for whom? Mental health evaluation shows too many Australians missing out on care**

A long awaited evaluation into the mental health Better Access initiative shows that while the Commonwealth's billion dollar outlay through the Medical Benefits Schedule has increased the rates of treatment for some, too many Australians in need of services are still missing out.

The report shows that in 3 years (2007-2009) there were 11.1 million mental health services provided, yet young people, men and those living in rural and remote regions were not able to access mental health services at the same level as the broader population. The uptake rates were 10% lower for people living in the most disadvantaged areas. This is a stark picture given the research showing that the need for mental health services for this group is critical.

It is disturbing to note that this evaluation was unable to assess whether Better Access had reached groups who are traditionally disadvantaged, due to their being "no data" available for people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) is most concerned that these two key groups were not specifically included in this evaluation.

The MHCA welcomes the release of this evaluation but it raises more questions than it answers. The report lacks solid evidence about a way forward and there is little information on the type of care provided or whether increased access has led to an increase in mental health and well-being. There is no information on collaboration between mental health professionals.

This report is also based on a very small sample size of mental health consumers who used Better Access. Out of 1.1 million people who used Better Access only 1413, or 0.1%, were surveyed.

Releasing the report today, the Minister for Mental Health, Mark Butler, conceded that "there are still some groups who are not accessing the services they need."

The MHCA agrees with Minister Butler that this evaluation has some encouraging and positive findings, however the report also brings to the fore the geographic disadvantage that continues in terms of mental health service access in rural and remote areas.

This evaluation shows that Better Access is not able to provide a quality mental health service for all Australians and that Government needs to seriously restructure the system to get services to people in the greatest need.

The Government's commitment to making mental health a second term priority must now include better outcomes for mental health, not just Better Access.

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