



31 March 2010

MEDIA RELEASE

31 March 2010

More flexibility in primary care welcomed

The Mental Health Council of Australia has welcomed the Government's announcement today that people experiencing diabetes will be able to opt into a program that can provide more responsive primary care services through their GPs.

The advantages to many people with diabetes may include better access to support ranging from dieticians and Occupational Therapists through to group support programs for both individuals and their carers.

This type of increased flexibility and capacity to be responsive is exactly what the mental health sector has been calling for at a primary care level. Many people with a mental illness also need a range of supports to increase their health and well being. These supports may include allied health services (psychologists, social workers, OTs, etc.) but may also include ensuring key health determinants such as housing, Centrelink, peer support groups, etc.

Perhaps just as importantly, the MHCA acknowledges that the performance based approach to primary care is a real step forward. In the case of the Better Access to Mental Health Services program we know more services are being claimed through Medicare and more people are seeing psychologists, but we remain uncertain about the extent to which the program has actually reduced hospitalisations or achieved real health outcomes.

The MHCA has also argued that the Australian Government needs to take a strong lead on mental health issues especially given the way most state and territory governments have depleted real community based services. We have had years of hospital-centric responses to mental illness, despite the fact that most people who need mental health care never get to hospital, let alone get a hospital bed.

Strengthening primary care responses to diabetes offers some hope that a similar flexible approach to mental health primary care may be possible.

As the leaders begin their first election debate, millions of Australians will be hoping that the words 'mental health' are not only mentioned, but real commitments are made to change the ongoing tragedy and desperation facing many Australian families.

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