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MEDIA RELEASE

18 April 2008

Improving mental health services

The Australian Government today announced funding to improve the mental health workforce, by providing training to around 24,000 mental health professionals and encouraging mental health nurses to stay in the workforce.

This announcement follows the Government's release of the National Mental Health Report 2007, which clearly underlines the need to do more in mental health.

The report shows uneven access to mental health services; a shortage of mental health workers; and uneven distribution of the existing workforce.

The Government's mental health policies will be based on a solid foundation of evidence, including reports like this and the Medicare mental health data released last Friday.

There are no quick fixes in mental health. Tackling these challenges requires a long-term, co-ordinated effort from all governments to ensure better mental health services across the country.

Training mental health professionals

Effective treatment of mental health problems often requires care from several health professionals. One patient may need to see a GP, a psychologist, a social worker and a mental health nurse, or any other combination of professionals.

The Australian Government is committing \$15 million to train about 24,000 mental health professionals in multidisciplinary care, to help them deliver better team-based mental health care.

The Mental Health Professionals' Association (MHPA) will deliver about 1,200 workshops nationwide.

Encouraging mental health nurses to stay in the workforce

The Government will also improve the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program. This program provides an incentive payment to community-based general practices, private psychiatrist services and other organisations that engage mental health nurses.

At present, mental health nurses who work in the private system cannot access incentives if they also work in the public system.

To encourage more nurses to work across both sectors, these incentives will now be available in situations where nurses work in both the public and private sectors.

This is likely to encourage more mental health nurses to stay in the workforce.

It will also allow sharing of mental health nursing resources between state and territory health organisations and participating practices.

This change will increase the capacity of public and private primary mental health care services to work together for better outcomes for patients.

The National Mental Health Report 2007 can be found at:

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-n-report07

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