



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP**  
**Minister for Health and Ageing**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**\$50 million to strengthen mental health**

The Rudd Government will invest almost \$50 million in strengthening mental health services, including \$20 million to help prevent suicide.

In any year, nearly 1 in 5 Australians will experience some form of mental illness. These measures will help ensure that people coping with mental illness can get the care they need.

The Government is also establishing the National Advisory Council on Mental Health, to provide the Government with independent, expert and balanced advice to help drive national mental health reform.

The funding includes:

- \$20.6 million in 2008-09 to better target the National Suicide Prevention Strategy
- \$5.72 million in grants of up to \$40,000 to help 209 community-based mental health organisations manage demand for their services
- \$1.8 million for a mobile tracker system to help people manage their mental health through mobile phones and the internet
- \$1.55 million for Anxiety Online, an online program to help manage anxiety
- \$4.8 million to support the KidsMatter suite of activities, to encourage mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention activities in primary schools and early childhood settings
- \$12.3 million for MindMatters, to promote mental health in secondary schools

**Suicide Prevention**

The Australian Government is refocusing the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) to ensure that it better targets areas and groups at highest risk of suicide.

There were 1,799 suicides recorded in Australia in 2006 and more than 25,000 people admitted to hospital as a result of self-harm. From 2008-09, the Government will:

- Fast-track additional psychological services for people who have attempted suicide or self-harmed;
- Boost the capacity of organisations in rural areas to provide allied and nursing mental health services;

- Support the development of bereavement response services for families and friends who have lost someone due to suicide; and
- Build the capacity of Indigenous communities to provide culturally appropriate suicide prevention activities.

### **Using technology to tackle mental illness**

The Black Dog Institute will receive \$1.8 million for a mobile tracker system to help people better manage their mental health and wellbeing.

The system uses the internet and mobile phones to help people track their wellbeing in areas including mood, appetite, sleep, medication, physical activity, and drug and alcohol use.

Information is fed back to the users on how they are going, and alerts are sent when things aren't going well, along with links to appropriate self-help tools.

For example, if a user reports that she has been feeling anxious and not sleeping well, she would receive an alert pointing to tools for managing anxiety and giving tips for sleeping better. The alert may also recommend discussing the issues with a GP or clinician. The system will also allow people to print off reports so they can take them to their clinicians.

Funding of \$1.55 million is being provided to Swinburne University of Technology for Anxiety Online — an online program helping people with anxiety disorders work through a module of cognitive behaviour therapy, either independently or with the assistance of a trained therapist.

Both these initiatives will be available across Australia and may be particularly helpful for people in rural and remote areas who face barriers in access to services.

### **Helping kids improve their mental health**

The Australian Government is providing \$4.8 million to support the KidsMatter activities, which focus on mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention activities in primary schools and early childhood settings.

The Government is also providing \$12.3 million to support the continuation of the secondary school MindMatters initiative until 2010.

As well as providing mental health initiatives in primary schools and preschools, KidsMatter will provide programs for parents whose children show early signs of mental illness, or who have been diagnosed with a condition. This important program is also supported by mental health pre-service training for early childhood and primary teachers and workers.

### **Non-government organisations**

Non-government organisations are pivotal in the delivery of mental health services. The Government is providing \$5.72 million in grants to help community-based mental health organisations manage demand for their services. This funding will help organisations to make improvements in areas like governance, information technology and financial management. A list of the 209 successful grant recipients will be available at the Mental Health Council of Australia website at [www.mhca.org.au](http://www.mhca.org.au).

### **National Advisory Council on Mental Health - members**

- Chair: John Mendoza, former CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia, and author of the seminal *Not for Service* report;
- Michael Burge, consumer consultant/advocate for the Toowoomba District Mental Health Service;
- Neil Cole, Associate Professor in the Monash Medical School, who has had bipolar disorder, and is a former Victorian Member of Parliament;
- David Crosbie, current CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia;
- Alan Fels, Dean of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, whose daughter has schizophrenia;
- Ian Hickie, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Sydney and Executive Director of the Brain & Mind Research Institute;
- Lyn Littlefield, Executive Director of the Australian Psychological Society;
- Helen Milroy, descendant of the Palyku people in the Pilbara, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Associate Professor and Director for the Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health at UWA;
- Dawn O'Neil, Chief Executive Officer of Lifeline Australia; and
- Rob Walters, GP and former chair of the Australian Divisions of General Practice.

The Rudd Government is committed to improving mental health in the community, and these measures will play an important role in doing just that.

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