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Minister for Health
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MEDIA STATEMENT

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Abbott Government plans national approach on Mental Health

The Abbott Government is working towards the revival of a national approach to improving mental health outcomes and access to support services long-term.

The National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services paints a complex, fragmented, and in parts, disturbing picture of Australia's mental health system.

I acknowledge there are clear failures within both the mental health sector and governments and we must all share the burden of responsibility and work together to rectify the situation.

We cannot continue to place band-aids on the mental health system and expect it to heal itself.

This is why the Government has been working closely through the Review's 700-plus pages in recent months to develop a considered, and most importantly, unified strategy to ensure the next steps we take actually deliver a genuine national approach.

A consultative and collaborative approach is essential to achieving this and I intend to seek bipartisan agreement to revive a national approach to mental health at tomorrow's COAG meeting of Health Ministers.

I am conscious of the damage Labor did in Government by walking away from the fourth National Mental Health Plan with the states and territories, as well as the discontent in the sector with their alternative National Road Map for Mental Health Reform 2012-2022 that has clearly led nowhere.

However, the Review shows that fragmentation in the system is seeing far too many people still slipping through the cracks.

I see the COAG process as essential to developing a co-ordinated, binding national approach long-term and therefore the Abbott Government will seek to establish a dedicated COAG Working Group on Mental Health Reform to coordinate the process.

The mental health sector must also play a direct part in the development of any policies and work hand-in-hand with Governments to develop a national approach.

Therefore, I can confirm the Abbott Government is currently finalising the establishment of an Expert Reference Group to inform the entire process, including the development of short, medium and long-term strategies in four key areas based on the findings and recommendations presented in the National Mental Health Commission's Review in four overarching mental health areas:

- Suicide Prevention;
- Promotion, prevention and early intervention of mental health and illness;
- The role of primary care in treatment of mental health, including better targeting of services;
- National leadership, including regional service integration.

The ERG will also be supported by:

- Broad stakeholder workshops to ensure mental services and organisations at the frontline can have direct input into this process;
- An NDIS Mental Health working group;
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group;
- Setting better access to mental health services as a priority for the Government's new Primary Health Networks;
- And an inter-governmental approach to ensure Commonwealth agencies respond to the report's concerns about fragmentation of payments and services and better co-ordinate future systems and policies.

This further work is necessary because, ultimately, there is no easy fix to this problem.

It's also important to acknowledge this is a report to government, not of government, and while many recommendations offer positive ideas, others are not conducive to a unified national approach or require further investigation by experts, which these COAG and ERG processes will be best to co-ordinate.

For example, the Government does not intend to pursue the proposed \$1 billion shift of funding from state acute care to community organisations, as we want to work collaboratively in partnership with other levels of Government.

Exact timings for the delivery of work will be finalised in consultation with the states and territories.

The Abbott Government also recently announced a \$300 million extension of funding for frontline mental health services while this work is undertaken.

I have been consulting continually with mental health stakeholders in recent months and they all acknowledge this a once-in-a-generation opportunity for serious reform mental health in Australia for the long-term and I am determined to secure national support.

The National Mental Health Review report can be downloaded here:
<http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/our-reports/review-of-mental-health-programmes-and-services.aspx>

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