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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW MEDICARE DATA ON MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES RELEASED

The Australian Government has today released Medicare figures on mental health services – figures that the previous Liberal Government repeatedly refused to release – and announced important reforms in mental health.

The release of the data will help the Government, states and territories, health professionals and the community to determine which services are working and which need to be improved.

The data reveals a mixed picture – access to primary care mental health services has certainly increased since the new Medicare items were introduced in November 2006, but some areas are faltering, including access to mental health services for people in rural and remote areas. Seventy-nine per cent of Medicare claims for mental health services under the new items are in urban areas.

Working from this data, the Rudd Labor Government can announce further steps in improving access to mental health services:

- a trial of telephone-based support through rural and remote services
- more support for GPs engaging in suicide prevention activities
- an increased focus on areas and populations in need
- total funding for Access to Allied Psychological Services will be increased by \$20 million over five years
- the creation of a National Advisory Council on Mental Health, to provide the Rudd Government with independent advice from experts on mental health reform.

This scrutiny will help ensure that all Australians have better access to quality mental health services.

For more information on the program, refer to the fact sheet and the Access to Medicare Subsidised Primary Care Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia paper at www.mentalhealth.gov.au

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