

# Foreword

Most Australians will be directly or indirectly touched by the impact of mental illness at some point in their lives. Mental illness is common, with 3% of us experiencing severe or recurrent illness and up to 45% of us experiencing mental illness at some time in our lives. The impact on those affected, for their families and carers, and for the Australian community, can be profound.

This revised National Mental Health Policy represents a renewed commitment by all Health Ministers and Ministers with responsibility for Mental Health to the continual improvement of Australia's mental health system.

The Policy works towards ensuring Australia has a mental health system that detects and intervenes early in illness, promotes recovery, and ensures that all Australians with a mental illness have access to effective and appropriate treatment and community supports to enable them to participate in the community fully. A system that supports efforts to prevent mental ill health, promotes resilience and lessens the stigma so often attached to mental illness.

The Policy embeds a whole of government approach to mental health, first agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments in July 2006, within the National Mental Health Strategy. Through the Strategy, reforms into the future must maintain the effort and build on the successes of the past, but recognise that new challenges require innovation and new ways of working together across systems and sectors to achieve better outcomes. Health Ministers embrace the challenge of leadership in mental health reform and the need for greater collaboration and commitment across governments to realise and sustain change.

All Governments have increased their mental health reform efforts in recent times, with many significantly investing in clinical and community support services and a number creating new Mental Health Ministerial Portfolio positions, reflecting a strengthened commitment to mental health as a national health priority area. This Policy is the next step towards creating a better mental health system. It is the actions and outcomes to flow from this Policy that will ultimately make the difference.

In commending this Policy to you, Ministers acknowledge the evident commitment, expertise and experience of all those involved in the revision process, in particular the contributions of the Review Committee responsible for the review. We call on all levels of Government, the private, community and non-government sectors to embrace the Policy and to forge an improved service system to improve the lives of all Australians affected by mental illness.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katy Gallagher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Hon Katy Gallagher MP  
Chair  
Australian Health Ministers Conference  
March 2009