



## Prioritising Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (Pillar 5) – Workforce and governance

In response to the Productivity Commission and the National Suicide Prevention Adviser's reports, the Australian Government is investing \$202 million to support Australia's mental health system and workforce as part of a record \$2.3 billion whole-of-government mental health and suicide prevention package. This will ensure it has the capacity and capability to provide quality and compassionate care to those who need it.

Critical measures include:

- \$58.8 million for growing and upskilling the mental health workforce, including:
  - \$11 million to boost the psychiatrist workforce by increasing the number of training places available, including in regional and remote areas
  - \$27.8 million to increase the number of nurses, psychologists and allied health practitioners working in mental health settings through 280 scholarships and 350 clinical placements
  - \$3.1 million to sponsor up to 390 peer workers to undertake vocational training
  - \$0.3 million to identify opportunities to boost the skills of those who work with children and families, and
  - \$1 million to reduce the stigma associated with mental health among health practitioners, and promote mental health as a preferred career option.
- \$2.6 million to support the mental health of Australia's wider health workforce, including:
  - implementing *Every Doctor, Every Setting*, a national framework to deliver a coordinated approach to support the mental health of doctors and medical students
  - continuing *The Essential Network (TEN)* project, a multifaceted e-health hub for healthcare professionals, delivered by the Black Dog Institute

- continuation of the *DRS4DRS* service which provides mental health consultations for doctors and medical students, and
  - an evaluation of the mental health and wellbeing services targeted at health practitioners to inform future measures to support this critical, yet vulnerable group.
- \$15.9 million to support general practitioners (GPs) and other medical practitioners to provide primary mental health care by providing specialised training and resources to enhance their capacity to address the mental health concerns of their patients. This will include:
  - training subsidies for approximately 3,400 GPs to undertake training to provide focused psychological therapies under the General Practice Mental Health Standards Collaboration
  - reviewing, improving and developing new training options to embed and promote a person-centred approach to mental health and wellbeing
  - developing a nationally recognised Diploma in Psychiatry for medical practitioners
  - reviewing prescribing practices and developing new prescribing guidelines for appropriate and safe use of antidepressants in young people and children, and
  - delivering the *Equally Well program* to support improvements to the physical health of those living with a mental illness.
- \$7.3 million towards additional staff resources for the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) to support the Australian Government's mental health and suicide prevention reform agenda
- \$0.3 million to work with mental health stakeholders to investigate and co-design future national peak body arrangements to provide consumers and carers with a greater say in the future of the mental health system, and
- \$117.2 million to establish a comprehensive evidence base to support real time monitoring and data collection for our mental health and suicide prevention systems, enabling services to be delivered to those who need them, and improving mental health outcomes for Australians. This includes:
  - enhancing national data systems and fill information gaps
  - monitoring population risk of suicide and self-harm
  - funding to enhance forecasting of population mental health need, and to develop a nationally agreed framework for mental health regional planning

- developing a national evaluation strategy and evaluation fund
- funding for a longitudinal child mental health and wellbeing study, and
- measuring, for the first time, the prevalence of mental health in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

Funding from a number of these measures will be used to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workforce, building the capacity of culturally safe support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Why is this important?**

The mental health workforce, and the wider health workforce are the most critical component of Australia's mental health system. The Government is committed to strengthening and upskilling the mental health workforce to deliver services to those who need them.

Australia's health care workers generally have a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress than the population average, due to the inherently stressful nature of their jobs. The Australian Government's investment will provide avenues for tailored mental health supports and reduce the stigma associated with health practitioners seeking help.

Australia's GPs are often the frontline and first point of contact for people with a mental illness. Enhancing the capacity of GPs to address mental health in primary care, including around the prescription of medications, is important in increasing the high quality care available to Australians.

The input, feedback and assistance of Australians who access the mental health system, their families and carers is important in shaping the future system to be more responsive and targeted towards their needs. Existing stakeholders and the public will have an opportunity to contribute towards new national peak body arrangements to better advance their interests.

The NMHC plays an integral role in providing independent support and advice to ensure the delivery of the government's mental health and suicide prevention agenda. The new staff will enhance the NMHC capacity in community and stakeholder engagement and development of policy and national reform priorities.

Comprehensive and up-to-date information is essential to assess whether population and mental health consumer outcomes, and program and service cost effectiveness are improving, and to inform policy and targeting of mental health services.

These investments are in response to the National Suicide Prevention Adviser's Final Advice (Recommendations 2, 3 and 4) and the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Mental Health (Recommendations 8, 14, 16, 22 and 24).

### **Who will benefit?**

All Australians will benefit from the growth of the mental health workforce, particularly in areas of unmet need, as well as the upskilling of more practitioners within the workforce to deliver high quality mental health services.

Australians who access mental health support and their carers will also benefit from increased capacity to engage and co-design mental health supports within the system through better national peak body arrangements.

GPs will directly benefit from enhanced training, mentorship and online training offerings to improve their mental health care and treatment. This will also reduce the burden on other parts of the mental health system and increase availability of early intervention supports.

The collection of new data on mental health services will benefit all levels of government, mental health stakeholders, service providers and clinicians.

There will also be flow on benefits from improved data collection on mental health services, which may inform better, more targeted mental health service provision, which in turn will benefit all Australians.

**How much will this cost?**

The Australian Government is investing \$202 million over 4 years, from 2021–22.