



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health**

Communique 19 June 2020

**National Mental Health Workforce Strategy Taskforce**

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On 19 June 2020, the fourth meeting of the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy Taskforce (the Taskforce) was held by video conference.

Key Themes and Issues Arising from the 8 May 2020 Taskforce Meeting

Taskforce members noted the final version of the key themes and issues paper developed from the 8 May 2020 Taskforce meeting on the mental health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper outlines the following key themes:

- Telehealth and online mental health service delivery
- Access to online and telephone mental health services
- Responding to emergencies and disasters / preparation
- Community and local responses
- Training and skillsets of the mental health workforce
- Ideas to improve and support the workforce

The paper can be found on the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy (the Strategy) web page [here](#).

The Mental Health Stepped Care Model

Members discussed the role of the mental health stepped care model in the delivery of mental health services, the mental health workforce required, how the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework (the Framework) aids in the regional planning of services and the feedback received from the Primary Health Network (PHN) stepped care workshop held in November 2019.

A presentation on the mental health stepped care model and the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework was provided by Mark Roddam, First Assistant Secretary of the Mental Health Division, Department of Health.

While members are supportive of the stepped care model, a number of challenges implementing the model were discussed:

- The model is focused on clinical care and could further incorporate:
  - the wide range of non-clinical mental health services or workforces, and
  - broader health needs and services including, social care, housing, and physical health care.
- The model is a point in time. Workforce understanding and requirements have changed since the model was developed.
- The representation of the stepped care model containing individualised and separated levels does not reflect how it is implemented in practice with a limited workforce.
- There is a generalisation of the required skills and qualifications of the workforce at each level. The model does not anticipate how the mental health workforces operates across each of the stepped care levels, especially for those professions that provide care across the severity continuum.

Taskforce members noted the importance of workforce values and care and how they can be incorporated into recruitment and service delivery.

#### Feedback from the PHN Stepped Care Workshop

Members noted the challenges and issues that PHNs are facing in the delivery of mental health services and the mental health workforce. The feedback received from PHNs at the Fifth National PHN Stepped Care Workshop, held over the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> of November, reflects what Taskforce members are seeing such as difficulties attracting and retaining staff with the appropriate level of skills in rural and regional areas.

The feedback obtained from PHNs will be valuable information when developing the Strategy.

#### Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Taskforce will be held during the week of 20 July 2020 and will involve a presentation from the University of Queensland on their progress of the literature review of workforce strategies and mental health reviews and inquiries.

Previous Taskforce meeting communiques are published [here](#).