



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

The Australian Government is investing \$89.2 million to grow the mental health workforce and to strengthen governance across the sector as part of the Workforce and Governance pillar of the *Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan - Stage 2*.

This investment builds on the \$2.3 billion initial phase of the Plan announced in the 2021–22 Budget. Together with other mental health and suicide prevention commitments worth \$648.6 million in the 2022–23 Budget, it takes the total value of the Plan to nearly \$3 billion.

Since 2012–13, the Australian Government’s investment through the Health portfolio in mental health and suicide prevention has more than doubled (106% increase), growing from \$3.3 billion to an estimated \$6.8 billion in 2022–23.

Since 2012–13, the Australian Government has driven significant developments in mental health and suicide prevention workforce and governance, including:

- successful negotiation of a new *National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement*
- significant investments in growing, upskilling and supporting the mental health workforce including targeted funding for psychologists, allied health workers, nurses, GPs, psychiatrists, lived experience (peer) workers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, and
- conducting the Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study, beginning with the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, to provide the measured rate of diagnosable mental illness in the community for the first time since 2007.

### Implementing the 10 year Mental Health Workforce Strategy

Central to the Government’s commitment is \$60.7 million to implement the *10 Year National Mental Health Workforce Strategy* to deliver a sustainable, skilled, supported and equitably distributed mental health workforce to meet Australia’s current and future needs.

Immediate action is being funded through the 2022–23 Budget to implement key priorities and enablers of the Strategy including:

- \$18.3 million to build a contemporary workforce and optimise the existing workforce through developing and piloting the National Mental Health Pathways to Practice Program -
  - \$10.8 million for the Allied Health and Nursing Stream, providing up to 660 supervised nursing and allied health student and graduate mental health placements across rural, remote and metropolitan areas over three years
  - \$6.6 million over three years for the Psychology Stream, which will provide 75 internships for provisional psychologists in a range of settings, support the safe use of the provisional psychologist workforce to deliver services, provide 150 free Psychology Board of Australia endorsed supervisor training sessions, and identify and address barriers to psychology registration, and
  - \$917,000 for evaluation of the program.
- \$28.6 million to sustain growth in the psychiatry workforce and build on existing investments to:
  - support up to 30 additional training posts and supervisors from 2023 to 2026, with a salary contribution similar to the funding through the Specialist Training Program
  - develop a rural and remote psychiatry training pathway and network, and
  - encourage more medical graduates to pursue psychiatry through the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists' (RANZCP) Psychiatry Interest Forum (PIF).
- \$6 million to optimise the existing workforce by enhancing workforce capabilities and allow them to work to the top of their scope, including:
  - trialing a free national support line service for GPs to access clinical advice and support from psychiatrists, and
  - building the capacity of the mental health workforce to respond to co-occurring substance use and mental health conditions.
- \$2.2 million to further support the mental health of the health workforce, through the *Hand-n-Hand* program to provide peer support to the healthcare sector, and the extension of the the Black Dog Institute's *The Essential Network (TEN)*
- \$409,000 for stigma reduction and career promotion activities to encourage students to choose a career in mental health
- \$904,000 to establish a mental health workforce strategic coordination and distribution mechanism with an appropriate mix of expertise in health, employment and education policy, to facilitate coordinated activity between governments and industry, and across sectors, and
- \$725,000 for more effective workforce planning by enhancing workforce data and tools.

The Strategy aligns with the *National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021–2031* and the vision for a dynamic, responsive and supported workforce that meets our country's needs now and into the future.

The Government is providing \$4.2 million to support headspace centres in regional, rural and remote areas to attract and employ GPs, enabling headspace services to deliver the complete model of enhanced primary care.

The Government is also investing \$3.5 million to permanently establish the APS (Australian Public Service) Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Unit in the Australian Public Service Commission with funding over four years.

The Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Unit currently drives whole of APS uplift in mental health and suicide prevention literacy and capability.

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

The *Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Mental Health* highlights that a well-functioning mental health system capable of delivering timely, high quality care depends upon an effective workforce.

The Government recognises that we need to strengthen and optimise the existing workforce, while working to build a larger workforce for the future.

The Government is committed to the immediate and ongoing implementation of the Strategy by:

- taking immediate action to fund key mental health workforce priorities aimed at building a sustainable workforce that is skilled, supported and equitably distributed so that it can deliver mental health care that meets current and future population needs, and
- partnering with jurisdictions, industry, peak bodies and professional colleges to ensure investment in the mental health workforce is coordinated, and remains a long-term priority area of reform over the life of the Strategy.

APS staff are often providing services to Australians facing adversity and/or recovering from disaster. A strong APS mental health and suicide prevention capability means staff have the necessary knowledge and skill to interact in ways that support community resilience and recovery.

### **Who will benefit?**

All Australians will benefit from improved access to mental health services.

The Strategy will provide additional workforce support for mental health services, many of which have experienced substantial increases in demand throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and will consequently help reduce wait times and pressure on emergency departments.

State and territory governments, peak bodies, the lived experience (peer) workforce and broader sector, healthcare professionals, students, provisional psychologists, allied health and nursing professionals, and Primary Health Networks will also benefit.

The Government's investment in the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Unit will build APS capability in this priority area, and benefit the organisations and individuals who interact with the public service to receive programs, payments and services – particularly those experiencing crisis or distress.

### **How much will this cost?**

The Australian Government is investing \$89.2 million over five years, 2021–22 to 2025–26.