



Mental Health
Australia

Vision Statement: A mentally healthy Australia

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The upcoming Federal election is a vital opportunity to prioritise mental health in Australia. With 81% of voters concerned about mental health and 75% demanding greater government action, mental health is a pressing, bipartisan issue. Nearly two thirds of voters say they are more likely to back parties committed to increasing mental health funding, with only 1 in 5 believing current mental health services in their community are adequate.

Mental health conditions among young people have surged by 50% in the past decade, and these issues now lead GP visits and the 'non-fatal health burden' in Australia. Today, only 7% of health funding goes to mental health, far below the 15% of health burden it represents. This election is our next opportunity to correct this imbalance and deliver the bold action our nation desperately wants and needs.

We have world-class practitioners working in our services every day; an ever-growing knowledge base of lived experience expertise; younger generations champing at the bit to lead the way. We have the community will for reform, and within Australia the resources we need to transform our approach to mental health. This is a challenge we can meet together.

The solutions are clear: align funding with need, embed lived experience leadership, strengthen the workforce, and expand prevention and access to care.

We have a plan to guide the next government and make simple the task ahead.

We are standing on the shoulders of generations who have bravely shared their stories to get us here.

Australians are calling for change – what we need now is political commitment to deliver.





2025 and Beyond: The plan for improving Australia's mental health

Mental Health Australia stands ready to work with the next Australian Government to reform our mental health system. We need to tackle underlying drivers of mental ill-health and improve access to effective support. Below is our plan of action to achieve this vision and together create a mentally healthy Australia.

Overhaul the system foundations to build a world-class system of mental health care and support

At its best, our mental health system should be greater than the sum of its parts. While successive Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments have tried to create a more cohesive mental health system, the recent Productivity Commission Inquiry and Victorian Royal Commission have both highlighted the service fragmentation and shaky foundations that still exist. These reports also point to the missed opportunities and problems that arise when people with lived and living experience are not involved in reform.

Creating a thriving, unified system requires us to listen to service users and their family and carers, and focus on the connections and infrastructure that brings together and strengthens the system as a whole. Investment in these critical system enablers, while often overlooked, will ultimately strengthen how our frontline services operate and the outcomes they can achieve, delivering a greater return for our investment. It's time we finally got these foundations right.

Mental Health Australia therefore calls on the next Australian government to:



Embed the views and expertise of people with lived experience and their family, carers and supporters across the system from leadership and planning to service delivery and evaluation.



Prioritise a collaborative approach between Commonwealth, State/Territory governments, and the sector by strengthening national governance arrangements, progressing areas of joint responsibility through the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and Bilateral Agreements, and consulting regularly with peak bodies.



Expanding the scope and purpose of the next National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (and associated bilateral agreements) to **provide co-funded and co-designed mental health services which bridge primary and tertiary care**, and focus on ongoing, community-based mental health and wellbeing services accessible to all people and communities.



Include mental health priorities across all relevant settings – especially schools and workplaces – and across relevant health and social service policy agendas and utilise intergovernmental mechanisms such as the National Health Reform Agreement and the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement to deliver integrated funding and reform solutions.



Prioritise **a coordinated, person-centred approach** by implementing initiatives that promote better connections between mental health and other intersecting systems – such as health, disability, alcohol and other drugs, suicide prevention, and social and community services – to enable a more holistic and seamless service experience.



Strengthen safeguards and checks and balances by seeking lived experience and sector input to continue to implement and evolve the National Safety and Quality Mental Health Standards for Community Managed Organisations and National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards, and by enhancing national data collection, monitoring and accountability through an independent National Mental Health Commission.



Commit to **growing and strengthening the mental health workforce** by fully implementing the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy, building the peer and community managed workforces, and leveraging the skills and availability of non-clinical and emerging workforces in recognition of the critical importance of having a skilled and well-distributed workforce.



Help **make Australia a world leader in mental health research** by implementing the National Mental Health Research Strategy, increasing the funds available through the Medical Research Future Fund Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission and the National Health and Medical Research Council, and by co-investing with philanthropic funders.

Match funding to the scale of the problem and community expectation

The Australian community understands that governments have many competing priorities, and that they do not have unlimited resources. But they also know that governments can respond when a pressing issue requires it. We saw that during the COVID-19 pandemic. We've seen that in response to natural disasters, and we're now seeing escalating government responses to the current cost of living and housing affordability crises.

Good governments know when to meet urgent needs or fix things that are failing – like our mental health system. In recent years, both the Productivity Commission and The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health Services have described the system as “failing” and “broken”. The cost and negative impact of this dire situation on individuals, families, workplaces and the community are enormous. Underinvestment in mental health is a false economy, and it's clear we have more to gain than lose if we focus on actually “fixing” the system. Ultimately, the problems, the need and the solutions are well documented and Australians experiencing mental health difficulties should no longer be asked to patiently wait in a queue that never grows shorter, while governments attend to other matters.

Mental Health Australia therefore calls on the next Australian government to:



Increase the focus on 'upstream' investments by providing **appropriate levels of funding for mental health promotion, preventive mental health, and early intervention** programs and services.



Progressively increase spending to **ensure that mental health expenditure represents between 10–15% of the total health budget**, a level that is commensurate with the level of psychosocial disability and mortality caused by mental ill-health, and that recognises the return on investment fixing the mental health system will produce – which the Productivity Commission estimates could be around \$21 billion per year.



Review current funding models and implement new mechanisms that build the sustainability and security of the sector, and that incentivise good community outcomes as well as activity and outputs.



Address the structural flaws that have created the 'missing middle' in the service system between the scope of primary and tertiary care and fund services for the massive gap in the availability of **psychosocial support outside the NDIS**.



Increase funding, subsidies and incentives to stem the rise in out-of-pocket costs for service users and to grow and redistribute the workforce to **ensure that people on a low income and those in rural and remote communities do not miss out** on the services and treatments that they need.

Embed an equitable, inclusive, human rights-based approach to care and support

Many people receive caring, effective support through Australia's mental health system, however **poor experiences of care** and **feelings of stigma and discrimination** are still common, and certain treatment approaches are **restrictive or coercive**. Further, the lack of relational and holistic approaches is limiting and family members and **carers too often feel overlooked or excluded**.

Governments have a key role to play in creating the social and economic conditions that support people to flourish in life, and in ensuring availability of mental health support when needed. Further, services need to be safe and non-discriminatory and treat people with respect and compassion. As a signatory to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, Australia has committed to upholding the rights of people experiencing mental ill-health and their family, carers and supporters. This isn't always happening, and people want and expect change.

Mental Health Australia therefore calls on the next Australian government to create a mental health system that is:



Founded on a human rights-based approach, and involves, listens to, and responds to the needs and preferences of service users and their family, carers and supporters. A system that is trauma informed, physically and psychologically safe, and that actively works to do no harm.



Compassionate, person-centred, and relational, and that **recognises the key role played by family, carers and supporters**, involves them, and meets their needs for support.



Culturally safe and willing to embrace and respond to the unique needs and perspectives of First Nations peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the LGBTIQ+ community, and other diverse groups in Australia who may experience discrimination or exclusion.



Comprehensive and encompasses a focus on mental health promotion, preventive mental health, early intervention, recovery and psychosocial support, and suicide prevention, and that acts beyond the service system to **address the social and cultural determinants of mental health** and improve people's life.



Affordable and equitable, and based on people's need not their capacity to pay. A system that can effectively support people with 'mild' or temporary difficulties, right through to people whose support needs are complex and enduring and who need holistic, multi-disciplinary supports and services over the long term. A system that provides people with what they need, when they need it.



Modern and continually improving - that leverages insights from data and harnesses new opportunities such as digital technology, while giving people choice and guaranteeing their privacy, confidentiality, and safety.

