



Mental Health  
Australia

# HOW A LACK OF NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH REFORM IS IMPACTING OUR MENTAL HEALTH



The year 2020 was a turning point for mental health in Australia. The Productivity Commission handed down the final report of a once in a generation Inquiry into Mental Health. This report shone an uncompromising light on the flawed and fragmented nature of the current mental health system and highlighted the need for sustained multi-billion-dollar investment to fix the problems.

The Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health told us that the cost to the Australian economy of mental illness and suicide is estimated to be about \$70 billion per year. It estimated implementation of its recommended priority reforms would cost governments (both Australian and State and Territory) an additional \$2.4 billion per year. It estimated implementation of all its recommendations would cost between \$3.5 and \$4.2 billion per year. In the context of the current cost to the Australian economy of mental illness, this size of investment seems like a drop in the ocean. Yet it is still to be delivered.

Mental Health Australia had placed great emphasis on the National Agreement for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention being 'THE'

platform for transformational mental health reform, and we believe the first cut of this Agreement has fundamentally failed to address almost all of the advice provided by the mental health sector in our [Advice to Governments on the Proposed National Mental Health Agreement](#) paper.

We also lament a lack of external engagement and consultation in the Agreement's development and believe that what we have in its current form is insular structures and processes that shield governments from much needed commitments and accountability.

There is a distinct missed opportunity to embed lived experience across the Agreement, and we hope this does not reflect a lack of federal, state and territory government commitment to consumer and carer leadership in the mental health sector.

If 2020 was a watershed year for mental health in Australia, then in 2022 and beyond, we must do better to reform our system with the many recommendations we already have in place.

#EveryElectionIssue

#MentalHealthInMind



## How can a National Agreement improve our mental health?

The National Agreement for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention does have some positive aspects and shared principles to which we can all aspire to, and which are very welcome.

If federal, state and territory governments can activate and implement these there will be incremental change and that can only be good. But after four years of waiting, and decades of searching for genuine and lasting reform, incremental change is too slow.

The lack of detail on deliverables in the National Agreement, and the absence of any implementation framework such as Vision 2030 or a Sixth National Mental Health Plan, and no external oversight will potentially translate into continued tick the box service enhancements, rather than the mental health reform that Mental Health Australia and many others in the sector have been strongly advocating over the past four years and more.

Fortunately, outside of the National Agreement, innovation, consumer and carer led design and leadership, integration for outcomes, evidenced-based decision making, and accountability are alive and well in the wider mental health service system. And while for many it will seem like a merry-go-round or a game of snakes and ladders at the moment, as a sector we have to keep advocating for lasting change and reform to the improve our mental health ecosystem.

**#EveryElectionIssue**    **#MentalHealthInMind**



# WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO?

Mental Health Australia has called on the Australian Government to invest in four key priorities to sustain momentum in mental health reform.

These priorities have been identified through analysis of yet-to-be implemented recommendations from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health and prioritised through consultation with Mental Health Australia members.

The Australian Government should invest in:

**Lived experience leadership** - including formal national structures to represent the views of people with lived experience of mental ill-health and carers.

**Government leadership and accountability** - including outlining funding that will be committed by the Australian Government through the impending bilateral agreements with the State and Territory Governments and the structures which will support accountable leadership across jurisdictions to deliver an integrated end-to-end system

**Co-designed implementation of a community focussed mental health system** - including the following:

- The co-design of an effective integrated system of community-focussed mental health treatment and support
- The establishment of a national community mental health dataset
- Growing psychosocial supports to match need, and
- Addressing the social determinants of mental health.

**Development of the mental health workforce**, including the following:

- Addressing urgent mental health workforce gaps, and
- Establishment of a national centre for evidence-based workforce development.

#EveryElectionIssue

#MentalHealthInMind



# LOOKING FOR MORE DETAIL OR RESOURCES?

**March 2022 - The National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement**

[The National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement | Federal Financial Relations](#)

**March 2022 - Mental Health Australia comments on the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement**

[Mental Health Australia comments on the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

**December 2021 - Mental Health Australia's Pre-Budget Submission**

[2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

**Ongoing - Vision 2030 for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention - The National Mental Health Commission**

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/mental-health-reform/vision-2030>

**November 2020 - Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health - Final report to Government and release**

<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health#report>

**August 2019 - Australia's Long Term National Health Plan - to build the world's best health system**

[https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-s-long-term-national-health-plan\\_0.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-s-long-term-national-health-plan_0.pdf)

**August 2017 - Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan**

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/monitoring-and-reporting/fifth-plan/5th-national-mental-health-and-suicide-prevention>

Mental Health Australia would like to thank its member organisations and key stakeholders for contributing to this extensive body of work. If you are a member of Mental Health Australia and would like to add to these resources, please contact [info@mhaustralia.org](mailto:info@mhaustralia.org)

#EveryElectionIssue

#MentalHealthInMind