

The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon. Mike Baird MP
Premier of New South Wales
Parliament House Sydney NSW 2000

The Hon. Daniel Andrews MP
Premier of Victoria
Parliament House East Melbourne VIC 3002

The Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk MP
Premier of Queensland
Parliament House Brisbane QLD 4000

The Hon. Colin Barnett MLA
Premier of Western Australia
Parliament House Perth WA 6837

The Hon. Jay Weatherill MP
Premier of South Australia
Parliament House Adelaide SA 5000

The Hon. Will Hodgman MP
Premier of Tasmania
Parliament House Tasmania TAS 7000

Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister
Australian Capital Territory
Legislative Assembly Canberra ACT 2601

The Hon. Michael Gunner MLA
Chief Minister
Northern Territory
Parliament House Darwin NT 0800

20 December 2016

Dear First Ministers

We write to draw your attention to the alarming gaps between previous commitments by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on mental health and the consultation draft for the *Fifth National Mental Health Plan* (the draft plan).

The Prime Minister captured the importance of mental health to the whole nation when he said:

We have to recognise mental illness is a huge cost in every respect, whether you measure it in dollars or whether you measure it in human happiness. And all of us have a vested interest in the mental health of all Australians. It is part of the mental wealth of our nation – a critical concept.

In 2012, when releasing *The Roadmap for National Mental Health Reform 2012-2022*, COAG indicated “All Governments are committed to reducing stigma and discrimination in society; significantly reducing suicide rates; and ensuring that people affected by mental health issues and their families have access to appropriate services and supports, stable and safe homes, and are able to participate successfully in education and employment”. To honour that commitment, we urge you to revisit the scope of the draft plan to put in place necessary conditions for successful whole-of-government action on mental health.



Mental health stakeholders are united on the key features of a world leading mental health system that supports consumers and carers to live contributing lives. These elements have varyingly appeared and disappeared from government documents on mental health reform. Critically, they were at the heart of the National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services, commissioned by the Coalition Government in 2014.

To achieve lasting reform, governments need to:

- Commit to meaningful improvements in the lives of consumers and carers. *Yet the draft plan is absent of whole-of-life targets and indicators, which in 2012 COAG committed to developing. This absolves governments of any accountability to implement reforms that will truly make a difference.*
- Assign specific Ministerial responsibilities across portfolios, including health, social and community services, employment and education. *Yet the draft plan is singularly focussed on health services and will only be considered and signed by Health Ministers.*
- Reorient investment towards early intervention and prevention. *Yet the draft plan is silent on how we can give consumers and carers the support they need in the community as early as possible.*
- Expand and embed services in the community, close to need. *The draft plan provides for integrated regional planning and service delivery, but only within existing expenditure. It makes no provision for growth in the community mental health sector, yet this is where future investment priorities must lie.*

It appears from the draft plan your governments intend to renege on past COAG commitments.

Early but consistent sector-wide feedback on the draft plan indicates it reflects old modes of thinking and does not reflect a changing world. It does not explain how governments will meet the aspirations that consumers, carers, service providers and other experts have put to government over many years. The National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum has already described the draft plan as 'everything about us without us.'

A world leading mental health system can only be achieved by moving away from an agreement between Health Ministers to continue the status quo, to a whole-of-government and whole-of-community plan that embeds and integrates work across portfolios, empowers the community sector, and is accountable for consumer and carer outcomes.

It is not too late. As the draft plan is rewritten ahead of its presentation to Health Ministers in 2017, there is an opportunity for you, First Ministers, to lead mental health reform by fundamentally reconceptualising the Fifth Plan's vision in line with the principles above.

In so doing, you can reset the course towards a world leading mental health system in Australia. We stand ready to assist you in this important leadership role.



Sincerely

**Mental Health
Australia**



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Mental Health Australia



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Patrick Hardwick

Patrick Hardwick President
Mental Health Carers Australia



A proven program for mental wellbeing

Leonie Young

Leonie Young
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