

The Hon Joe Hockey MP

Treasurer  
Budget Policy Division  
Department of the Treasury  
Langton Crescent  
PARKES ACT 2600

6 February 2015

Dear Treasurer

In response to your invitation for submissions regarding priorities for the 2015-16 Budget, Mental Health Australia is pleased to submit our *Blueprint for Action on Mental Health*.

The *Blueprint* is the culmination of our work to inform the National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Services and Programmes, and is based on extensive consultation with our 132 members, representatives of consumers and carers, professional groups, community mental health providers, researchers and educators and many more.

While the *Blueprint* lays out some very clear directions for government this must be just the beginning of a decade-long reform process if we are to avoid the failings and disappointed hopes of previous reviews. We identify some critical first steps, but we also need commitment from Government to the whole journey.

The Australian Government's most important contribution will be to drive reform by:

- Adopting national, long-term, whole-of-life targets for improving mental health outcomes, backed up with indicators to demonstrate the pace of improvements (Recommendation 1).
- Developing a National Mental Health Agreement which acknowledges cross-portfolio and inter-governmental linkages, boosts development of the community mental health sector, and defines optimal roles and responsibilities for Commonwealth, state and territory governments, as well as for community-managed and private-sector organisations (Recommendation 2).

The right set of targeted changes will, in time, generate net savings for governments. However, we also accept the need to get better outcomes from current spending on mental health.



In implementing a response to National Mental Health Commission's Review's findings, the Australian Government should be guided by the following principles:

- There should be no net reduction in investment in mental health
- Existing arrangements which make a positive contribution to mental health outcomes should be retained
- Existing arrangements which undermine mental health outcomes should be dismantled
- Where evidence is lacking about the contribution of existing arrangements to mental health outcomes, Government should proceed with caution
- Where the Commonwealth intends to remove funding for existing programs, it should only do so after developing strategies to retain and use any infrastructure, human capital and intellectual property developed through those programs
- Regardless of whether funding continues for any particular program, government should provide certainty to community-managed organisations about their long-term future funding to assist with workforce planning and retention of existing staff
- Any service gaps likely to emerge through the discontinuation of services should be identified and communicated to those affected, including state/territory governments and service providers.

Building on these principles, there are several areas of transition where risk management strategies are needed immediately, and which are directly within the Commonwealth's sphere of influence. These are discussed in the introduction to the *Blueprint*.

Mental Health Australia and its membership stand ready to embrace reform, and to assist in the change required to achieve it.

Sincerely



**Frank Quinlan**  
CEO

