



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Premiers must include mental health in reform agenda

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) has today written to the state Premiers urging them to include mental health in any negotiated health reform plan with the Commonwealth.

“In recent weeks there has been a great deal of discussion about health reform, but precious little discussion about *mental* health reform,” said MHCA CEO David Crosbie.

“I have written to the state Premiers urging them to include mental health in their discussions with the Commonwealth. Until now, mental health reform has been all but ignored in the health reform agenda.

“Prime Minister Rudd’s Health and Hospitals Reform Commission was asked to review health reform options and they devoted a whole chapter to mental health – the only illness specific chapter in the report with the exception of oral health. We are yet to see the Federal Government’s response to the 12 mental health specific recommendations made in this report.

“There have been at least five other major reports into mental illness in the last five years that have all called for similar approaches – primarily, increased investment in community based responses to mental health to alleviate pressure on acute hospital services.

“It is critical that any health reform includes mental health reform. More of the same will not alleviate the crisis being experienced by many individuals and families around Australia desperate to receive the mental health services they need.

“If governments are genuinely interested in freeing up hospital bed block, then mental health should be the priority,” Mr Crosbie said.

The facts reveal the extent of the problem:

- There were over 6 million hospital bed days for people with a mental health disorder in 2008.
- Over 40% of people currently in hospital mental health beds would not be there if appropriate community options were available.
- There were over half a million presentations of people with mental health problems to hospital Emergency Departments and specialist psychiatric units in 2006.
- Less than a third of these presentations result in admission – most are turned away with little or no treatment.
- For those lucky enough to gain a hospital mental health bed, one in seven is likely to be readmitted within 28 days.
- States and territories have halved the number of community based mental health treatment beds over the last 15 years.
- In the last 50 years states and territories have reduced the number of acute inpatient mental health beds from 30,000 to less than 7,000. While closing the asylums may have been a step forward, leaving people languishing with very limited community based options has been a disaster.

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