



MEDIA RELEASE

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PMs plan on mental health: a step in the right direction, a long way to go

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) has today welcomed Prime Minister Rudd's commitment to reform mental health, including accepting greater responsibility for community mental health, but is disappointed that the Commonwealth did not go further.

According to David Crosbie, MHCA CEO, "the measures outlined by the Prime Minister today are good first steps, but mental health reform clearly remains unfinished business. The case for mental health reform is very compelling. This package can only be seen as a first step towards addressing the inadequacies of current mental health services across Australia."

Mr Crosbie pointed out that the majority of the recommendations of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission have still not been responded to, and that the amount of money being invested in these initial steps falls well short of what is required.

The positive initiatives in this package include:

- an acknowledgement that mental health reform is a crucial part of any health reform package;
- a commitment for the Commonwealth to take a bigger role in mental health care;
- a commitment to working with mental health experts including consumers, carers and others on further reform;
- increased funding to 'headspace' and early psychosis programs (up to 20,000 new places);
- enhancing the mental health nurses program;
- increased access to sub acute care;
- more flexible community based packages.

It is important to acknowledge that the Rudd Government's commitment to take full responsibility for community mental health will need significantly more work and investment if it is to be realised.

Without wanting to sound too much like a state Premier, the ideal outcome might have included much more money and more details, but what we see within these announcements is a commitment to improving mental health services and that needs to be supported.

The MHCA endorses these positive steps to improving mental health, but only as an initial starting point for ongoing mental health reform.

The MHCA hopes to work with governments into the future to ensure the implementation of these programs is grounded in good practice, and that there is the capacity to further enhance mental health programs and services.

The bottom line remains: there is no health reform without mental health reform, and we have a long way to go on mental health reform.

Media Contact: Simon Tatz on 02 6285 3100 or 0402 613 745