

Australians for Mental Health

Attn:

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MENTAL HEALTH MUST BE A PRIORITY

The crucial issue of mental health has not received the attention it deserves. I'm writing on behalf of the millions of Australians who experience mental illness every year, many of whom reside in your electorate, to strongly urge you to make mental health a priority this term of government.

Mental health in Australia is now in a state of crisis. The suicide rate has increased to almost nine people a day, a 42% rise in the past decade, with 90% of those lost having experienced a mental illness. Comparatively, the national cancer death rate has dropped 24% over the past 30 years. With the same political will, we can achieve a significant reduction in the rate of suicide in Australia.

Over a sixth of Australian adults are psychologically distressed, up over 60% since 2013. There is widespread stigma. Australians with a mental condition report experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment at 1.6 times the rate of those without a mental condition. Australians with mental illness also report lower rates of community participation, volunteer work, political participation and educational attainment, and report lower life satisfaction than those with moderate to good mental health.

Australian governments have repeatedly failed to prioritise mental healthcare spending. For too long, mental health and psychiatric care has been underfunded when compared to physical health, despite the enormous economic, social and emotional costs. This must change.

Funding commitments, when they do occur, focus on hospital networks at the expense of critical mental health investment where it would have the greatest impact – in the community.

Here's how to solve it:

Fix the waitlists

We need to bring our waitlist management into the 21st century. We can track Ubers, our pizzas and our Amazon orders more effectively than access to crucial and life-saving mental healthcare. How can we create change if we can't even measure how long people are waiting, or how many are locked out of our system?

With a system upgrade, we can dramatically reduce wait times, and readily link people to alternative services such as telehealth appointments if local services are fully booked. In four years, we want a system where every Australian knows how long it will take to access the care they need for their mental illness.

Double the mental health workforce by creating 50,000 new jobs

We need to double the number of workers – from psychiatrists to community-based peer workers, if we are to deliver accessible, timely and affordable mental health support services to every Australian, in every corner of the country. When someone reaches out for help, these extra workers will mean there is someone on the phone to talk to, or to book an appointment with.

Establish one mental health centre in each federal electorate

We need at least 50 mental health hubs around the country that people can drop into to readily access immediate support. In 2020, Australia trialled eight of these centres and proved them to be a model we should scale for nation-wide delivery. These centres would be safe spaces, offering everyone bulk-billed care with multi-disciplinary teams to support someone through their illness and into recovery.

The time for your action is now.

Resources:

Australians for Mental Health website: www.afmh.org.au

National Mental Health Commission, 2020 National Report Card:
<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/monitoring-and-reporting/national-reports/2020-national-report>

Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, final report:
<http://rcvmhs.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/>

AIHW, Mental Health Services in Australia: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/mental-health-services/overview>