The Aim
To improve the lives, wellbeing and positive mental health of all Australians; from birth to old age, for all cultural groups and indigenous people.

The Current Situation
People experiencing mental health problems and mental illness don’t get a fair deal. They face funding shortages, limited access to services, discrimination and services struggling to cope with demand.

The Vision
We need a comprehensive mental health system that can respond better to the needs of those with mental illness and their families. A system that reduces the burden of mental health problems across the community.

Australians deserve a clear vision, a commitment and a strong plan for access to effective treatment and support services.

The 4th National Mental Health Plan sets out a broad framework for quality services. However, we must do much more to ensure equitable services for all Australians.

The Facts
One out of every five people in Australia (about 20%) will experience some form of mental illness each year.

Approximately two-thirds of people with a mental illness do not receive any treatment in a 12 month period. 9% of Australian children have a long term mental health problem and most do not receive treatment.

People with a mental disorder average three days out of role (i.e. not undertaking normal activity because of health problems) every four weeks. This compares with one day out of role for those with no physical or mental condition.

Poor mental health increases the incidence of heart disease, stroke and cancer, and is associated with a range of risk factors such as smoking, alcohol misuse and obesity. It can lead to social isolation, including inability to work, and homelessness.

Up to 30% of the burden of adult mental health problems are linked to adverse experiences in childhood such as child abuse and neglect. Investing in childhood is an investment in the future of the nation.

Up to 75% of people presenting with alcohol and drug problems also have additional mental health problems.
The Call to Action

Mental health must be integral to any health strategy\(^1\). To address Australia’s mental health needs we need to:

1. Increase mental health funding - mental health funding deserves a better deal
2. Improve treatment and care for all people with mental disorders throughout their lives – all Australians deserve a better deal
3. Resource, extend and support mental health centres and staff better - our mental health services deserve a better deal

The Steps

**Mental health funding deserves a better deal; increase mental health funding**

Funding of mental health services and research must increase. It should more fairly reflect the cost of mental health problems to society and the need for improved knowledge of mental disorders. We deserve services and treatments that are evidence based and effective. Mental health is the third major contributor to burden of disease, but receives only 8% of the health budget and 3% of the research budget. Mental health needs to develop innovative evidence informed approaches. Mental health needs a fair share of the health budget - there is no health without mental health.

We recommend:

1. All governments in Australia commit to equivalent access to care for people with mental health needs that is consistent with that of physical health needs by 2020. Mental health funding must reflect the burden of disease, with at least 12% of the health budget
2. Establish an Australian Institute of Mental Health Institute to promote and coordinate research, develop interventions and mental health service modelling
3. Recognise and take action to ensure equitable and accessible mental health services across all parts of Australia. Consider the establishment of integrative commissioning authorities similar to those in New Zealand and the United Kingdom and the development of national benchmarks for regional health service provision
4. Prioritise funding support for the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for effective and accessible mental health care, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health nurses

\(^1\) This paper is prepared on the assumption that state governments will retain responsibility for bed based and rehabilitation services. It is critical that there is better interlinking for adults with psychiatric disorders with community mental health care.
Improve treatment and care for all people with mental disorders throughout their lives – all Australians deserve a better deal

(1) Invest in improved treatment and care: Improving treatment and care for Australians with a mental health problem is vital. GPs, who provide most of the primary mental health care, are under pressure; we need to enhance the capacity of our care and effective treatment services. All of our mental health services are under pressure. Our family welfare, hospital and justice systems are under pressure. Strengthening our mental health system will reduce pressure in other areas; it will save money and improve lives. Increasing investment in prevention, early intervention and treatment across all ages makes sense.

Discrimination and stigma need to be tackled throughout society. This will promote greater awareness of mental health issues and assist in the prevention of mental illness.

We recommend:

1. Establish targeted treatment programs for vulnerable and socially excluded groups including the aged and indigenous Australians
2. Improve access and effective treatment programs for common mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and childhood attention and developmental problems
3. Seek out and nationally implement effective affirmative action programs for those with mental health problems and substance abuse, intellectual disabilities, forensic complications, homelessness and/or physical health needs
4. Seek out and nationally implement effective programs that integrate physical and mental health services. Forge stronger links between education and health sectors
5. Investment in a national three year anti-stigma campaign. We can learn much from the New Zealand campaign
6. Investment in a national mental health literacy campaign to promote recognition of early signs of illness, the need to seek help and the value of early action

(2) Establish Kids Life Centres – Growing Healthy Minds: Infancy and childhood is too important to mental health to be addressed piecemeal. We need early intervention mental health centres for children 0-12 that co-locate family supports, parenting interventions and mental health assessment and treatment for child mental health problems including attachment and developmental problems, neuro-developmental problems, anxiety problems and behavioural problems. These would be staffed by child mental health experts including child psychologists, psychiatrists, paediatricians and developmental specialists. Mental health improves school attendance, social functioning, and reduces rates of contact with the police and justice system and substance abuse.

We recommend:

1. Establishment of Kids Life Centres to provide targeted services for 0-12 year olds to intervene early, especially in conduct and anxiety disorders; to provide diagnostic and treatment services to those in need; and to support and increase the capacity of parents and carers to meet the needs of their children
2. Invest in internet based treatment programs for children and their parents to ensure access to services across Australia
(3) Strengthen old age mental health and support services: Our population is ageing and we will face a rapid increase in people with dementia in the next 20 years. These Australians will bring pre-existing and new mental illnesses into old age and dementia. It is essential that the service system reconfigures and expands to meet the known need.

We recommend:

1. Australian and State Governments must implement a stepped model of care for dementia
2. Bolster the training for staff in residential aged care in dementia management
3. Develop integrated care packages that take a holistic approach to care for older Australians; effective packages take account of physical and mental health needs

Our mental health services deserve a better deal; resource, extend and support mental health centres and staff better

(1) Retool the ‘engine room’ of community mental health: Australia wide community mental health services (CMHS) are desperately underfunded. These centres are the public sector engine providing acute care, assertive outreach and continuing care for chronic disorders. Psychological therapies should be equitably implemented across all ages and patient groups. Rethinking, reorganising and renewing these services is a good investment.

We recommend:

1. Broaden the range of services to provide psychological therapy in community clinical settings; better integration with primary care and expansion of the range of service linkage programs, for example, housing and return to work programs
2. Institute assertive community treatment to ensure more effective services for all Australians and disorders including those impacted by intellectual disability, ante and post natal depression, relational and personality disorders
3. Improve access for early treatment, early childhood interventions and to prevention programs
4. Improve integration and alignment of mental health services and housing, rehabilitation, drug and alcohol services. Resource these support services to effectively provide care

(2) Support and resource the mental health workforce: Whether in the public or private setting, mental health workers undertake particularly demanding work. It is essential that the workforce is nurtured, supported and renewed. It is critical that creative ways to support mental health professionals working in rural and remote communities are found.

We recommend:

1. Support psychiatrists to provide assessment of complex patient care, secondary consultation to fellow practitioners, teaching trainees and supporting GPs. A more flexible MBS will do this
2. Articulate a clearer, better defined and resourced role for psychiatrists in actively monitoring the availability of psychological therapies and assisting the training and supervision of others
3. Bring mental health into the 21st century with new funding models that support care in the virtual environment. A more flexible MBS will do this

4. Better integrate in-patient mental health services with community services and supports

The Summary

All people in Australia, of all ages, deserve a better deal in mental health:

- Mental health that is future focused
- Mental health that is nestled in evidence and research
- Mental health that supports everyone – from infancy through to old age
- Mental health that is integrated with physical health

We can do better; all people in Australia deserve more for their mental health.

For further information

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