

The RANZCP Queensland Branch 2025-26 Pre-Budget Submission

February 2025



The Royal
Australian &
New Zealand
College of
Psychiatrists



Queensland Branch



Acknowledgement of Country

The RANZCP Queensland Branch acknowledges the Turrbal People and Yuggera People, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land. We honour and respect the Elders past and present, who weave their wisdom into all realms of life.

Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

We acknowledge the significant contribution of all people with lived experience of mental illness, and the people who care and support them, to the development and delivery of safe, high-quality mental health services.

About the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) is a membership organisation that prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises governments on mental healthcare. For information about our work, our members or our history, visit www.ranzcp.org.

The RANZCP has over 8,800 members, including more than 5,900 qualified psychiatrists (Fellows and Affiliates of the College) and more than 2,600 members who are training to qualify as psychiatrists (trainees). The RANZCP Queensland Branch represents 1112 Fellows and 495 trainees.

Support Services

If you or someone you know needs help, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au or the Suicide Callback Service on 1300 659 467 or www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au.



Better mental health outcomes for Queenslanders

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Queensland Branch

priorities for the 2025-26 Queensland Budget include investment in the psychiatric and broader mental health workforce, as well as more psychiatric beds in public hospitals.

Our first priority is to ensure that the significant \$1.64 billion investment announced in 2022 following the Parliamentary Inquiry into state mental health services is utilised to support strong growth in the psychiatry and broader mental health workforce.

We are calling for a comprehensive and transparent workforce data gap analysis, a statewide health workforce plan and immediate funding of the most critical gaps in the Queensland mental health system identified in that gap analysis.

The RANZCP is asking all governments to commit to prioritising and fully funding the [National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022-2032](#). The Strategy's pillars align with, and complement, those of the [National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021-2031](#), and highlights that we must address critical workforce shortages to attract, train and retain a robust mental health workforce and maximise, distribute and connect its reach and capacity.

We are three years into a five-year mental health plan. We need clear direction from the Queensland Government now on how many psychiatric beds are planned to be delivered over the next four years of the Government's term, noting our call for 374 new psychiatric beds, along with the staffing that they require. The RANZCP Queensland Branch also advocates for state-funded inpatient beds for new alcohol and other drug rehabilitation and withdrawal beds, to support vulnerable Queenslanders in crisis. Demand for acute mental health services in Queensland has increased over the last decade. This, in addition to a lack of alternative options for individuals experiencing mental distress and/or suicidality, has resulted in an increase in Emergency Department (ED) presentations for mental health [crisis](#). We welcome the Government's announcement of 126 new beds. But many more are needed. The Branch has previously called for an additional 500 beds, along with the staffing that they

require. This means that the delivery of 126 beds still leaves a critical shortfall of 374 inpatient beds across the state. The RANZCP Queensland Branch also advocates for state-funded inpatient beds for new alcohol and other drug rehabilitation and withdrawal beds, to support vulnerable Queenslanders in crisis.

In addition to more inpatient beds to provide hospitals with greater capacity, Queensland also needs more community-based mental health staff. The Branch notes that Queensland Health, in its submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry, estimated the state needs around 1300 additional community-based mental health staff. We are yet to see delivery of those.

The experience of mental distress is not confined to business hours. We estimate needing an additional 2000 community-based mental health staff over the next four years, 700 more than Queensland Health's 1300 estimate, so that Queenslanders can access the help they need seven days a week. Accessing treatment in the community when needed prevents mental health conditions deteriorating and becoming more complex and more costly to treat. Staffing needs to include addiction and mental health doctors, nurses and other allied health staff.

The mental health levy was expected to raise \$1.6 billion over five years, but State Budget papers revealed Queensland's mental health levy will actually raise [\\$2.3 billion](#) in the five years since its inception in 2022. Implementing these three priorities will require \$830 million per year, an additional \$230 million than the roughly \$600 million that the mental health levy is anticipated to raise each year. We urge the Government to continue the [Better Care Together](#) plan and provide full transparency of spending from revenue collected via the mental health levy.

The RANZCP Queensland Branch will continue to collaborate with the Queensland Government to support inpatient care services and community-based mental health staff, and work with Government on solutions to grow the domestic psychiatry and broader mental health workforce.

Yours sincerely

Professor Brett Emmerson AM
Chair, RANZCP Queensland Branch Committee



Recommendations

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls for significant funding across three priority areas.

Priority 1: Develop a workforce plan to attract, train and retain psychiatrists in Queensland

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls on the Queensland Government to:

- continue to develop Queensland Health's Medical Workforce Mapping Project
- undertake a comprehensive and transparent workforce data gap analysis, and immediate funding of the most critical gaps in the Queensland mental health system identified in that gap analysis
- engage with the Branch in developing a nationally coordinated workforce plan to attract, train and retain a robust mental health workforce of local and overseas-trained psychiatrists.

Priority 2: Invest in 2000 community-based mental health staff

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls on the Queensland Government to:

- commit to 2000 more community mental health staff over the next four-year Government term, an increase from the Government's own estimate of a requirement for 1300 more, so that community-based mental health services can operate seven days a week.

Priority 3: Deliver 374 new psychiatric inpatient beds and refurbish 250 existing beds

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls on the Queensland Government to:

- deliver, over the next four years, a total of 500 new psychiatric inpatient beds, consisting of an additional 374 beds on top of the 126 announced, along with the staffing that they require
- refurbish 250 existing beds over the next four years
- support all new beds with the requisite increase in mental health workers to staff them, including clinicians, nurses and other health workers on the ground
- refurbish main wards at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Caboolture Hospital and the Princess Alexandra Hospital
- invest in frontline staff safety issues, including solutions to occupational violence and the use of illicit drugs and weapons inside the mental health ward at Cairns Hospital.

Priority 1:

Develop a workforce plan to attract, train and retain psychiatrists in Queensland .

Demand for mental healthcare services across the country outstrips supply. There is escalating nation-wide concern over a system that operates at crisis point across the country, especially given the current [psychiatry workforce crisis](#) in New South Wales. We need to address workforce shortages in psychiatry and the broader mental healthcare workforce as a matter of priority, to improve access to mental health support for all Australians.

The RANZCP is asking all governments to commit to prioritising and fully funding the [National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022-2032](#). The Strategy's pillars align with, and complement, those of the [National Medical Workforce Strategy 2021-2031](#), which emphasises that we must address critical workforce shortages to:

- **attract and train** the mental health workforce
- **maximise, distribute and connect** its reach and capacity
- **support and retain** people by creating positive workplace cultures
- improve workforce governance through better **data, planning, evaluation and technology**.

It is critical that the work that is happening across the jurisdictions and federally aligns and that there is mutual agreement across all jurisdictions. That is why the RANZCP Queensland Branch is calling for a Federally-led and comprehensive workforce strategy to grow, train and retain mental health workers across the country. With mental health services stretched across all states and territories, only a national approach can ensure Australians everywhere receive the mental health care that they need. The RANZCP Queensland Branch would be pleased to engage with the Queensland Government on progressing work on this.

We are encouraged to note that, similar to Federal data modelling and workforce planning that is underway in other States, Queensland Health is also currently undertaking a Medical Workforce Mapping Project, which will examine vacancy patterns and workforce gaps within the psychiatry workforce locally. We understand that the project aims to:

- profile the entire medical workforce across all 16 hospitals and health services, including clinical placements, interns, resident medical officers, Principal House Officers (PHOs), registrars and consultants (by specialty)
- explore capacity to expand training opportunities in Queensland, including partnering with the medical specialist colleges to increase accredited medical specialist training.

We look forward to the development of Queensland Health's Medical Workforce Mapping Project, which we anticipate will result in a profile of vacancy patterns and workforce gaps within the Queensland medical and psychiatry workforce.

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls on the Queensland Government to:

- **continue to develop Queensland Health's Medical Workforce Mapping Project**
- **undertake a comprehensive and transparent workforce data gap analysis, and immediate funding of the most critical gaps in the Queensland mental health system identified in that gap analysis**
- **engage with the Branch in developing a nationally coordinated workforce plan to attract, train and retain a robust mental health workforce of local and overseas-trained psychiatrists.**



Priority 2:

Invest in 2000 community-based mental health staff

For many Queenslanders, mental healthcare is too costly or not available where they live. Accessible community-based mental healthcare is critical to ease the pressures on public hospital emergency departments and mental health units across Queensland. Adequately resourcing specialist community-based mental health services acts to reduce the complexity and severity of illness, risk of suicidality and burden on our public health system. Our vision is for a mental health system that meets the needs of Australians primarily within their local community.

There is unfortunately a substantial gap in services across the country for persons living with severe, moderate and complex mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression and anxiety and eating disorders. Too often the needs of individuals living with these mental health conditions cannot be met within the community. Too frequently people living with mental health conditions are assessed as 'not unwell enough' for admission to an overburdened public mental health system, but at the same time 'too complex' to be managed by primary care.

In its [submission](#) to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders, Queensland Health estimated that we need 1300 community-based mental health staff. But we need more than that. We are asking the Government to commit to 2000 more community-based mental health staff over the next four years, which is 700 more than Queensland Health's 1300 estimate.

We need approximately [2000 more community-based mental healthcare staff](#) across Queensland, to enable staff to work seven days a week, and we need more funding to take into account penalty rates for overtime and weekend shift work. It is important that people with mild to moderate conditions access timely treatment close to home, to prevent conditions from deteriorating and becoming more complex, more difficult to treat and more costly.

Queenslanders should be able to access the mental healthcare services that they need within their community, without necessarily distancing themselves from their homes, loved ones or carers.

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls on the Queensland Government to:

- **commit to 2000 more community mental health staff over the next four-year Government term, an increase from the Government's own estimate of a requirement for 1300 more, so that community-based mental health services can operate seven days a week.**



Priority 3:

Deliver 374 new psychiatric inpatient beds and refurbish 250 existing beds

The [National Mental Health Service Planning Framework](#) has found Queensland needs around 2000 psychiatric inpatient beds. There are currently 1658 beds across the state.

We previously advocated for 500 new mental health in-patient beds. We were pleased with the announcement of [126 new mental health and alcohol and other drug beds by 2027](#). While we do not know how many of these beds have at this stage been delivered, 126 new inpatient beds still leaves a critical shortfall of 374 across the state. The RANZCP Queensland Branch also advocates for new alcohol and other drug rehabilitation and withdrawal beds across the state, to support vulnerable Queenslanders at crisis point.

The RANZCP Queensland Branch is pleased that the Prince Charles Hospital will soon get a new \$14 million Crisis Stabilisation Unit, staffed with an additional 60 health workers including medical, nursing and allied health professionals. But elsewhere in the state, staffing levels and psychiatric bed numbers are not keeping pace with the rise in complex mental health presentations across Queensland public hospitals, necessitating further investment in psychiatric beds, along with the staffing that they require. We need clinicians on the ground, or we will not be able to use the beds to treat the patients who need them.

Another issue is that a significant number of mental health wards across Queensland were built over 25 years ago and many mental health beds do not meet contemporary standards. The RANZCP Queensland Branch estimates that 250 of these existing beds need urgent refurbishment. Refurbishment of main wards is also required, particularly at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Caboolture Hospital and the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane.

Frontline staff safety concerns also need to be addressed. At [Cairns Hospital](#), in particular, problems with the hospital's mental health unit have included patient violence, drug use and the treatment of Lotus Glen prisoners alongside children presenting major challenges to patient care and safety within the ward.

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls on the Queensland Government to:

- deliver, over the next four years, a total of 500 new psychiatric inpatient beds, consisting of an additional 374 beds on top of the 126 announced, along with the staffing that they require
- refurbish 250 existing beds over the next four years
- support all new beds with the requisite increase in mental health workers to staff them, including clinicians, nurses and other health workers on the ground
- refurbish main wards at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Caboolture Hospital and the Princess Alexandra Hospital
- invest in frontline staff safety issues, including solutions to occupational violence and the use of illicit drugs and weapons inside the mental health ward at Cairns Hospital.

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