

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Shifting the Balance: Investment priorities for mental health in NSW is a public policy report about the state of community mental health services in NSW. Four years ago, MHCC produced a similar report - at that time the Productivity Commission had not begun its mental health inquiry, COVID 19 was unheard of, and the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention agreement did not exist.

The landscape has significantly changed since our last report in 2018 and it is timely to revisit investment priorities for community mental health services. People with mental health conditions can live well in the community when they have the right mix of services, including psychosocial rehabilitation and support.

The National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement recognises that psychosocial supports are an important part of a well-equipped mental health system. Unfortunately, far too many people who would benefit from these services miss out, and emergency departments across NSW become the default access point into the mental health system.

This gap in psychosocial supports is felt in real time by people experiencing mental health distress who cannot get the support they require, by families and carers who battle to navigate the service system on behalf of their loved ones and by service providers increasingly stretching their workforce to cover ever-growing demand. Despite increased resources being provided by governments - the NSW Government is investing \$2.9 billion annually in mental health services - people remain unable to get mental health support when and where they need it.

With an expected increase in people living with a mental health condition to 1.96 million people in NSW by 2041, the time to address this demand is now.

MHCC have collaborated with member organisations, including consumer and carer organisations, to highlight key areas that require additional investment and present a compelling case for change. The report identifies priorities which would both improve outcomes for people living with a mental health condition and be more cost effective. KPMG has undertaken research for the report to demonstrate the economic arguments in support of the additional investment.

MHCC recognise there are many other areas that would benefit from funding including suicide prevention, rural and remote access, specialist services to meet the needs of diverse cultural groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTQI+ communities, and migrant and refugee groups, as well as people living with co-existing conditions.

This report does not attempt to cover the entire field of mental health reform and investment, which has been expertly and comprehensively addressed in the Productivity Commission's Mental Health Report. What it does is, identify priorities for action which would significantly improve outcomes for people living with mental health conditions across NSW and utilise scarce resources more effectively. To achieve this, we require service design and system reform that puts consumers and carers at the centre and Governments willing to commit to funding which will shift the balance to community-based services and supports.