

Media Alert



Expert comment: Mental health workers unite to call for urgent action on state's mental health crisis ahead of NSW election

14 March 2023

An alliance of peak bodies representing mental health practitioners, consumers and carers is calling on **all parties** to commit to making reform of, and investment in, mental health care in NSW a priority in the next parliament.

NSW is languishing. Productivity Commission data shows NSW lags behind other states in per capita mental health spending and we're seeing the very real impact of this underfunding play out at the frontlines.

The Alliance has surveyed over 1300 mental health practitioners, including psychiatrists, GPs, mental health nurses, psychologists, community mental health workers and peer workers in NSW who overwhelmingly outlined several issues in the state's mental health system that need urgent attention.

Quotes attributable to Dr Angelo Virgona, Chair, RANZCP NSW:

"In talking about reform, policy, systems and investments, we cannot forget that we're talking about people: The frontline mental health workers and the people they're there to help - the people of NSW. The consequences of inaction are dire.

"These are complex problems requiring innovative solutions, and we stand ready, willing and able to work with the Government at every point. Other states are showing it can be done. It's our turn."

For comment: Lex Guider – 0423444907 – lex.guider@ranzcp.org

Quotes attributable to Carmel Tebbutt, CEO Mental Health Coordinating Council

"Far too many people are missing out on vital mental health services that could be delivered in the community by community-managed organisations. Instead hospital emergency departments across NSW become the default access point into the mental health system.

"We need systemic and structural change that increases investment in community mental health services to meet the needs of people experiencing mental health distress, to supports families and carers who battle to navigate the service system, and to boost the increasingly stretched workforce in the face of ever-growing demand."

For comment: Lara Cole – 0421 202 643 - lara.c@mhcc.org.au

Quotes attributable to Professor Charlotte Hespe, Chair, RACGP NSW & ACT

“By boosting investment in mental health, bridging the gaps that currently exist, and improving access and effectiveness we can do more to improve mental health outcomes in communities across New South Wales. We can’t get it wrong this time. We must have the right framework and systems in place backed by long-term funding commitments.”

For comment: John Ronan – 0428122357 - john.ronan@racgp.org.au

Quotes attributable to Dr Catriona Davis-McCabe, President, Australian Psychological Society

“Mental illness is our leading chronic condition and is increasingly putting pressure on GPs, hospitals and healthcare workers. All parties need to show leadership and commit to more mental health funding to protect our frail health system.

People with serious mental illness live between 10 and 32 years less than those who don’t. Business as usual is cutting too many lives short and traumatising families. Enough is enough.”

For comment: Dylan Foote – 0435 896 444 – d.foote@psychology.org.au

BEING - Mental Health Consumers

Quotes attributable to Joel, NSW Resident:

“I live with Schizoaffective Bipolar Disorder. I presented to an ED and was locked in a small room for several hours due to staff shortages and the lack of specialist mental health facilities. I was then sent home in an Uber because there were no mental health beds available. I have been unable to get onto the books of either a psychiatrist or psychologist after moving house 6 months ago, and I’ve been told to expect to wait several more months.

I went to my GP who was unable to recommend a psychologist and instead asked me to Google one for my care plan, for which I was charged \$121. Money is always an issue and at times I have foregone my medication because I couldn’t afford it, which led me to be admitted to hospital again.”

Quotes attributable to Priscilla Brice, CEO:

“While this survey did not include a consumer perspective (aside from Peer Workers), feedback from our members who use mental health services illustrates the urgent need for reform and investment. 54% of people stop treatment prematurely because they can no longer afford it and 83% said unacceptably long wait times are a barrier to treatment.

“If we want an efficient and effective mental health system, we need one that puts people with lived experience at the centre of decision-making. Take Joel’s experience as a first-hand example of the impact of an underfunded system.

“People like Joel cannot afford to wait for appropriate and affordable treatment from sufficiently qualified professionals.”

For comment: Julian Clarkson – 0401318632 – julian.clarkson@being.org.au

Quotes attributable to Prof Michael Hazelton, President, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses

“Mental Health Nurses in NSW are heavily committed to working to provide the best mental health care they can, but prior to and certainly during the Covid years, this was very difficult, given the state of mental

health services in NSW. The ACMHN urges the next state government to commit a similar level of resources to improving mental health care as the Victorian and Queensland governments. The people of NSW deserve no less than those in other states.

For comment: Sophie Howard - 02 6285 1078 - Sophie.howard@acmhn.org

Quotes attributable to Jonathan Harms, CEO, Mental Health Carers NSW

“Delayed access is causing the most vulnerable to slip through the cracks of poorly coordinated, underfunded and consequently ineffective mental health services.

“It is the families and carers that often have to bear the costs and risks of supporting people with demanding and complex needs, with little training or support, and no overtime or holidays.

“People experiencing a mental health crisis or serious, long-term mental distress, and their families and carers need immediate access to a simple, safe and effective mental health system.”

For comment: Laura Knight - 0412 650 719. - laura.knight@mentalhealthcarersnsw.org

Quotes attributable to Dr Michael Bonning, AMA (NSW) President

“All sectors of the health workforce are experiencing workforce shortages, but the greatest workforce gap currently exists in psychiatry.

“Many mental health issues are going untreated, and people are suffering as a result.

“Immediate action is needed if the State is going to meet current and future demands of the population.”

For comment: Andrea Cornish – 0450 129 502 – andrea.cornish@amansw.com.au

ENDS

For all other expert mental health information visit [Your Health in Mind](#), the RANZCP’s consumer health information website.

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

In Australia: 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.

In Aotearoa New Zealand: If you or someone you know needs help, [1737 is here to help, for free - Mental Health](http://www.lifeline.org.nz). You can also contact Lifeline NZ on 0800 543 354 or www.lifeline.org.nz or the Suicide Crisis Helpline on 0508 828 865 or www.lifeline.org.nz/suicide-prevention.

