

MEDIA RELEASE

Budget fails to tackle longstanding mental health need

Wednesday 20 September 2023: Mental Health Coordinating Council welcomes initiatives announced in the 2023 - 2024 NSW Budget that address gaps in our current mental health system but is disappointed mental health has not been made a priority in this Budget.

Key mental health announcements include:

- \$20 million reserved in Restart NSW for dedicated mental health housing
- \$34.3 million for 20 Women's Health Centres providing health and mental health services for women
- 250 additional school counsellors to support students with mental health needs and disabilities
- \$25 million committed to promote health and wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including access to culturally appropriate mental health services
- Pay increases to recruit and retain more health workers and improved incentives for healthcare workers moving to regional and remote areas

Mental Health Coordinating Council CEO Dr Evelyne Tadros welcomes this investment but flags that the Budget falls short of recognising the urgent need for significant systemic reform to address identified gaps. These gaps are particularly evident in the limited number of psychosocial services available for people living with severe and long-term conditions.

“We need to shift the balance to gear investment in mental health towards supports and services we know work. The community sector has proven it can deliver great outcomes for individuals, while also reducing inpatient admissions and pressure on emergency departments,” Dr Tadros said.

MHCC is disappointed that despite extensive planning, a significant project (Pathways to Community Living Initiative) aimed at getting long-term patients out of mental health facilities has not received sufficient investment and ongoing funding.

“What this means is over 200 people who have progressed through their recovery journey remain stuck in inpatient settings, at huge expense, when they should be enjoying life in the community. The infrastructure funding provided in this Budget will not meet the need as originally identified,” Dr Tadros said.

Mental Health Coordinating Council has **four key recommendations** to shift the balance towards a better distribution of the mental health budget.

- 1) Expand 'Step-Up Step-Down' services** to 2,000 places around the state for people to avoid crisis and hospital admission. **Cost \$18.2 million per year**
- 2) Increase mental health support in the community** by an additional 10,000 packages for people with long term and severe mental health conditions. **Cost \$91.25 million per year**
- 3) Improve access to youth supports** including 10 specialist, face-to-face youth services around the state. **Cost \$12 million per year**
- 4) Invest in workforce** by providing adequate indexation for community-based organisations and moving to five year rolling contracts.

For media queries or to request an interview with MHCC CEO Dr Evelyne Tadros, contact Communications and Advocacy Manager Lara Cole on lara.c@mhcc.org.au or 0421 202 643