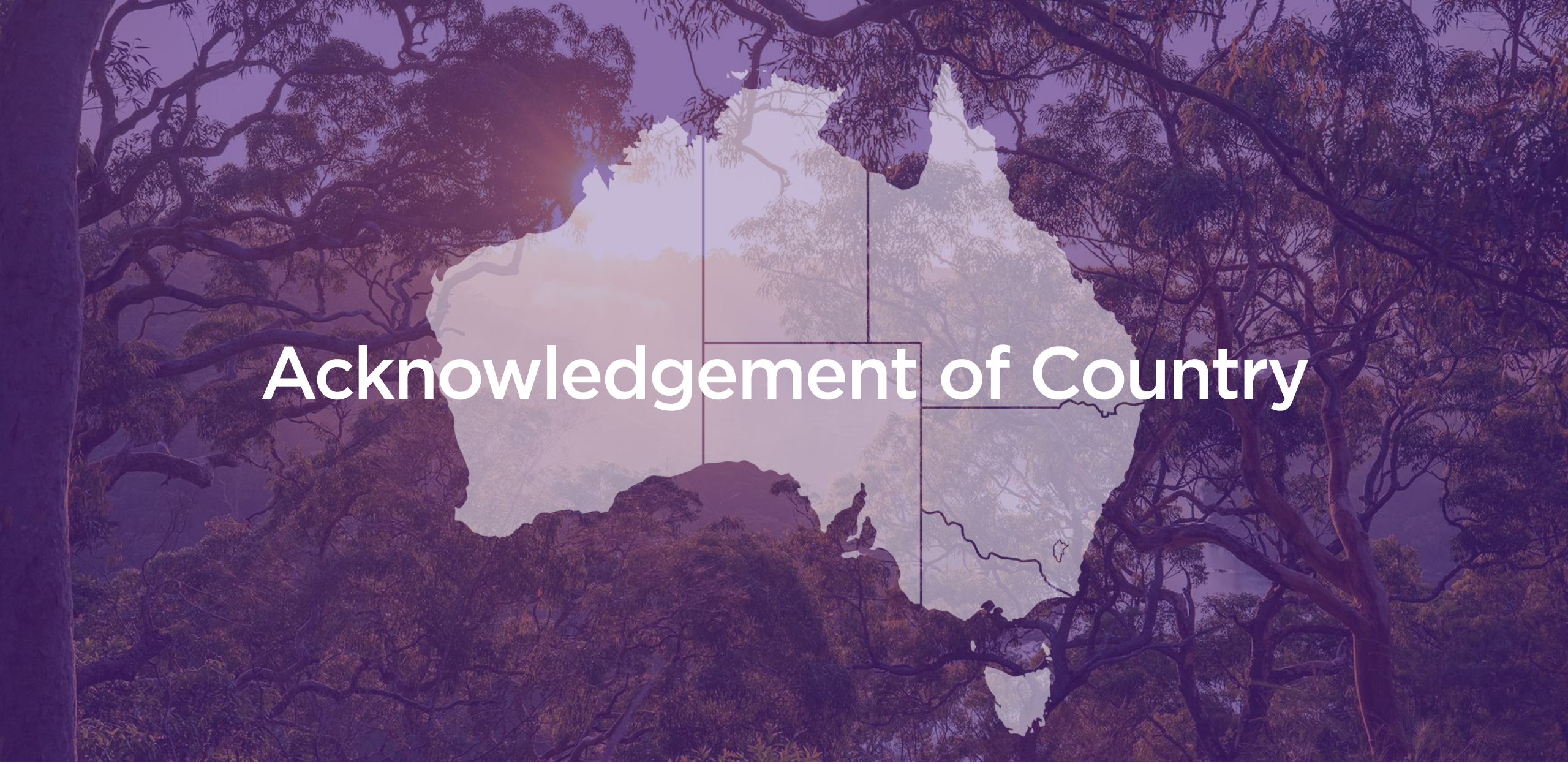
Care Beyond Crisis: The case for community-based mental health care

Tuesday, 22 September 2026
10:30am – 11:30am



Acknowledgement of Country

mhcc
mental health coordinating council

Recognition of Lived Experience

mhcc
mental health coordinating council

The case for change

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THE OPPORTUNITY

Why this campaign, why now

NSW has an opportunity to strengthen the whole mental health system by investing earlier and sustaining care beyond crisis.

The Australian Productivity Commission found that investing up to $4.2 billion a year in mental health reform could generate:

- **annual savings of $1.7 billion**
- **quality-of-life benefits of up to $18 billion** (approximately $23 billion in March 2026 dollars)
- **$1.3 billion through increased economic participation and productivity**.

80%

of people who need psychosocial support in NSW are not receiving it.

This equates to more than 166,000 people.

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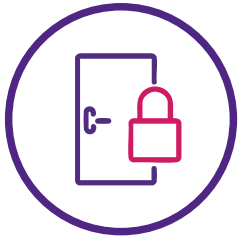
WHAT OUR COMMUNITY IS EXPERIENCING

The challenges facing NSW



- 1 in 5 adults in NSW experienced high or very high psychological distress in 2024
- Mental health-related **emergency department presentations** in NSW have continued to rise, reaching 130,151 in 2024-25, whilst the proportion of people triaged as urgent or with higher needs increased to 18%.
- Psychological distress among young people (16-24yrs) increased **threefold** from 2013 to 2024
- NDIS approval rates for people with psychosocial disability have fallen by 62% over the past five years, reaching a national low of 25% **before recent legislative amendments.**

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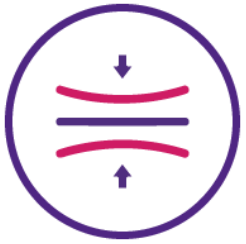
Workforce pressures are increasing



- Despite representing **one-quarter of NSW's mental health workforce**, the community-managed mental health sector employs only 3,435 full-time equivalent workers.
- A national study found **84% of psychosocial support staff identified recruitment challenges**, 77% identified retention challenges, and 74% reported that burnout contributed to poor staff retention.

Rising costs and inadequate funding

- Workers compensation premiums have increased by an average of 63% between 2021-22 and 2023-24, in addition to the new 1.7% Portable Long Service Leave Levy.

- Operating costs continue to rise:
  - SCHADS (Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services) Award wages increasing by 4.75% in 2026-27.
  - Commercial rents forecast to rise by around 6% per year.
  - Water and electricity costs expected to increase by around 5% (excluding inflation) and 3% per year respectively.

Reference list
See our Election Priorities Brief for full references to all statistics and more:
mhcc.org.au/election-priorities-brief

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WHAT WE ARE HEARING

Top 3 sector challenges

Based on the last three years of member surveys, community-managed mental health organisations have consistently identified three key challenges:

01

Demand is outstripping capacity

02

Workforce pressures are increasing

03

Funding is not keeping pace

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THE EVIDENCE

Community-based supports work

Evidence from established NSW programs shows what is possible when people can access sustained support in the community.

Bondi Prevention and Recovery Centre

$146k

around a third of the cost of inpatient care ($467k) and reduces ED visits by 33–44%.

Resolve Program

54%

reduction in hospital admissions and reduction in time spent in hospital by 66%

Community Living Supports

74%

reduction in hospital admissions and average length of stay decreased by 75%, $86k in net saving per person over 5 years

HASI +

33-85%

of program costs offset through fewer and shorter hospital admissions

Have evidence to contribute?
Visit: mhcc.org.au/evidence-base-submissions

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Priorities for change

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PRIORITY 1

Service Access

Strength care before and beyond crisis

- Expand evidence-based prevention, early intervention, recovery and psychosocial supports.
- Improve care-coordination between inpatient, outpatient, primary care and community-based services.

PRIORITY 2

Workforce

Build a sustainable community-managed workforce to meet growing demand

- Develop and implement a long-term workforce strategy for the community-managed mental health sector based on recommendations from MHCC's Mental Health Workforce Solutions paper.
- Invest in workforce to deliver co-designed psychosocial Foundational Supports.

PRIORITY 3

Sustainability

Secure the viability of community-managed mental health organisations

- Ensure government investment keeps pace with the true cost of delivering services through appropriate indexation.
- Accelerate implementation on actions specified in the NSW Secure Jobs Funding Certainty roadmap.

Building momentum together

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From here to March

SEP 2026
Launch sector priorities

OCT-DEC 2026
Take the case to decision-makers

JAN-FEB 2027
Party positions and commitments

FEB-MAR 2027
Publish scorecard

13 MAR 2027
Election Day

How you can be involved

Share the campaign with your team and your networks
→ Supporter toolkit
→ Take a photo with the #CareBeyondCrisis sign (tag us on socials)

Engage with your local MPs and candidates
→ Resource: *How to connect with your MP*
→ Ask your MP to show their support by taking a photo with the #CareBeyondCrisis sign

Contribute to the sector's evidence base
→ Submit relevant evaluations, research and reports to MHCC.

Contribute to the sector's evidence base

We're building a growing evidence base to demonstrate the impact and value of community-based mental health services.

We're particularly interested in evidence demonstrating:

- Cost-effectiveness
- Reduced hospital and acute service use
- Recovery and wellbeing outcomes
- Reduced demand on other public services

Share your research or report via mhcc.org.au/evidence-base-submissions or email communications@mhcc.org.au

CARE BEYOND CRISIS

Election Scorecard

Put forward our priorities

Ask major parties to respond

Review party positions

Consider responses and public commitments

Share with the sector

Publish a scorecard ahead of the election

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Keep the momentum going

mhcc.org.au/care-beyond-crisis

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