FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MEDIA RELEASE

Fuel and cost of living pressures deepen mental health crisis in NSW

Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) warns that while Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has urged Australians that they "can and should, go about your business and your life as normal", for many people living with mental health challenges, this is already out of reach.

Fuel shortages, rising transport costs and broader cost of living pressures are sharply intensifying mental health challenges across NSW, placing people with lived and living experience of mental health challenges, the workers who support them, and community managed mental health services under growing strain.

As the peak body for community-managed mental health services in NSW, MHCC is hearing widespread reports of people missing critical appointments, becoming increasingly isolated, and presenting in later stages of crisis due to transport barriers and financial stress. Carers are also reporting greater difficulties visiting and supporting those they care for. These impacts are particularly acute in regional, rural and remote communities, where services often cover vast geographic areas and public transport options are limited.

These pressures are already disrupting care and pushing more people into crisis.

At the same time, mental health workers are under significant financial and psychological pressure. Many rely on their own vehicles or diesel dependent fleets to deliver outreach and community-based support. Rising fuel costs are forcing some workers to absorb expenses personally, limit face to face care, or shift to remote service delivery where on the ground support is most needed, compounding fatigue, burnout and workforce retention risks.

Community-managed mental health services are part of the critical workforce keeping people safe and connected, particularly for those who have no choice but to travel to access care or deliver support.

Service providers report they are being pushed to reduce outreach, limit new client intakes, or temporarily subsidise costs to maintain continuity of care, an approach that is unsustainable. Demand is rising rapidly, with a clear shift from early intervention to crisis driven support, while funding models have not kept pace with rising operational costs or the growing complexity of need.

MHCC is calling on governments to act urgently by:

- Providing immediate, short term supplementary funding to manage increased demand, fuel and transport costs

- Formally recognising community managed mental health workers as essential, including psychosocial, allied health and support staff
- Embedding the community managed mental health sector into future emergency, fuel and infrastructure planning

Dr Evelyne Tadros, CEO of MHCC, says, “This is a crisis serious enough to warrant a national address, but the message of ‘business as usual’ does not reflect the reality for many people we support.”

“We are facing a polycrisis where fuel instability, cost of living pressures and insufficient resourcing to meet existing demands, are all colliding, and the human cost is being carried by people with mental health challenges and the workforce that supports them.”

“Community managed mental health workers keep people safe, connected and minimise the risk of crises. They must be recognised as essential workers, with government stepping in now to stabilise services through targeted supplementary funding and planning.”

MHCC warns that without immediate intervention, reduced access to care today will translate into significantly higher social, health and economic costs in the near future.

-ENDS-

About Mental Health Coordinating Council

Mental Health Coordinating Council is the peak body for community-managed mental health organisations in NSW. MHCC provides policy leadership, promotes legislative reform and systemic change, and develops resources and training to assist community mental health organisations to deliver quality and effective services underpinned by best practice principles. Visit mhcc.org.au

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