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MEDIA RELEASE

9 May 2006

COAG MENTAL HEALTH

The 2006-07 Budget delivers on the Government’s commitment of $1.9 billion to improve services for people with a mental illness, their families and carers. These measures are the Commonwealth Government’s contribution to the COAG Mental Health package, as announced by the Prime Minister on 5 April 2006.

These practical measures will provide families, schools and health professionals with more support in recognising and addressing mental illness and new assistance to people who are living with mental illness and their families.

A national information campaign will raise awareness of the links between illicit drug use and mental illness.

- **Better access to psychiatrists, psychologists and general practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Scheme**

New Medicare rebates will be introduced for people with mental illnesses to access improved services from appropriately trained GPs and psychiatrists and, on referral, from clinical psychologists.

It is expected that, in the fifth year of the initiative, an additional 35,000 people with severe mental illness will be able to obtain access to a psychiatrist. Also in the fifth year, approximately 400,000 Medicare-funded services will be provided by clinical psychologists.

It will encourage team-based mental health care in the community with psychologists working alongside GPs, psychiatrists, mental health nurses and other allied mental health professionals. GPs will be provided with training to improve their detection of mental illness and quality of services.

- **Mental health services in rural and remote areas**

People living in rural and remote Australia are no exception to the “one in five” rate of mental illness in the population. However, for people in these locations, distance and availability of appropriate services can complicate treatment and management of common mental disorders.
$51.7 million over five years will see people living in rural and remote Australia having better access to mental health services. Complementing the new MBS mental health items for GPs and psychiatrists, this measure will allow more people in rural and remote locations to access services from appropriately trained social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists and Aboriginal health workers.

- **New funding for mental health nurses**

People with severe mental illness often have complex service needs and can benefit from access to support provided by a suitably trained nurse.

Nurses can play a crucial role in better managing the treatment needs of the mentally ill. Funding of $191.6 million over five years will be provided to enable eligible private psychiatry practices, general practices and other appropriate organisations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Care Services, to employ specialist mental health nurses to provide support services to patients with severe mental illness.

These specialist nurses will coordinate the clinical care needs of patients with severe mental illness, taking pressure off privately practising psychiatrists and GPs. This measure will ensure that mentally ill people get the services they need, which may prevent unnecessary hospital admissions.

Within five years, more than 36,000 patients with severe mental illness will receive support from specialist mental health nurses each year.

- **Improving the capacity of workers in Indigenous communities**

Identifying the need for improved access to mental health services in Indigenous communities, the Government will also deliver specialised training for health workers in these communities to ensure that Indigenous people with mental health problems and related substance abuse issues receive early help and treatment before their illness worsens and becomes more difficult to treat.

Funding of $20.8 million over five years will provide around 1,200 Indigenous health workers with the skills and expertise to recognise and treat people with mental illness, including those with drug and alcohol problems, and refer them to appropriate pathways for care where it is needed.

- **Improved services for people with drug and alcohol problems and mental illness**

Mental illness and drug and alcohol abuse often go hand in hand. Drug use can exacerbate psychotic illness and symptoms of schizophrenia as well as mood swings, panic attacks, delusions, hallucinations and paranoid thinking. This is called co-morbidity.

Drug and alcohol workers need specialist training and resources to assist them to recognise mental illness in those engaged in drug abuse.

The Government will provide $73.9 million over five years to non-government organisations working in this area to provide this training, enabling them to offer new, best practice services to address drug and mental health co-morbidity.
• **Alerting the community to links between illicit drugs and mental illness**

The Government will invest $21.6 million over four years in a national information campaign to alert the community to the links between illicit drug use and mental health. The campaign will also encourage individuals and families who are affected to seek help or treatment.

• **Funding for telephone counselling, self-help and web-based support programmes**

Round the clock telephone counselling services are very important in helping people in emotional or mental health crises.

The Budget provides an additional $56.9 million over five years to boost the capacity of the telephone and web-based counselling services. In addition to this outlay, an extra $2.4 million has been provided to Lifeline for expansion of its network to provide national coverage.

The additional funding will enable these counselling services to help up to 260,000 individuals with common mental disorders or crises who do not currently receive treatment.

In addition, the Commonwealth, states and territories will provide funding of up to $20 million to ensure that mental health services are an integral element of the National Health Call Centre Network.

• **Support for day-to-day living in the community**

Living with a mental illness can make it difficult to maintain healthy social interaction.

The Government will provide $46 million over five years to build upon the role of the non-government sector in providing structured social activity programmes which can improve health outcomes and quality of life for individuals with severe mental disorders. The funding will provide 7,000 additional places in programmes designed specifically to increase community participation for people with a mental illness.

• **New early intervention services for parents, children and young people**

Early detection and treatment of mental health problems can help to ease their long-term effects.

Parents and teachers will be given access to information and training to recognise early signs of mental illness, through a new programme to be introduced in up to 3,200 primary schools and pre-schools. This programme will receive $28.1 million over five years from 2006-07.

The measure will support early intervention for young people with signs of mental illness in their early school years. Teachers will gain access to information and resources to enable them to identify, support and refer children at risk of mental illness. Parents are also a vital influence on the development of young children and will be provided with support through evidence-based parenting skills training and high quality parent resources.
• **Increased funding for the Mental Health Council of Australia**

An additional $1.0 million over five years will be provided to the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), assisting the council to respond to an increased focus on mental health issues.

**In other measures:**

- Australia’s mental health workforce will be boosted by 420 extra mental health nursing places and 200 postgraduate clinical psychology university places, 75 additional scholarships for nursing and psychology and increased clinical exposure for junior medical officers.
- From 2008, up to 2,500 students in health related disciplines and 1,000 registered and enrolled nurses will have specialist skills and knowledge in the management and care of people with mental illness.
- The Government will also expand the National Suicide Prevention Strategy by extending funding to provide more locally based prevention activities to address the specific needs of individuals and communities at risk, as well as mainstream initiatives to raise awareness and encourage people to seek help.

These clinical, support and information services form part of a broader whole-of-government approach to the mental health issue that includes additional respite places, personal carers and mentors, and the expansion of employment and education options for people with a mental illness.

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