



News Release

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

04/39

Sunday September 26, 2004

Divisions of General Practice urge greater investment in mental health

Australia's Divisions of General Practice have called for the expansion of a world leading mental health initiative.

The Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative has provided training and specialist support to almost 4,000 GPs across Australia for the past three years.

Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP) Chair Dr Rob Walters said the Initiative had been overwhelmingly successful. Almost one in five GPs are participating and, for the first time, mental health care is more accessible in general practice.

ADGP has worked with Australia's mental health stakeholders to release a joint statement calling for the expansion of the initiative.

The statement calls for the continuation and expansion of *Better Outcomes*, which is run through Divisions of General Practice across Australia. It will be presented to the incoming Federal Government for action.

"While both sides of politics have pledged to continue the Initiative, more is needed," Dr Walters said

The groups that have joined ADGP in endorsing the document are: Australian Psychological Society, *beyondblue*, the National Depression Initiative, Mental Health Council of Australia, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia.

"Divisions have invested heavily in supporting the program and recognise that it has allowed access to quality primary mental care for many Australians for the first time," Dr Walters said.

"To continue and expand our efforts we need adequate funds for the infrastructure support of Divisions of General Practice.

"We believe the Initiative should not only be refunded, but expanded to include specific services for children, young people, Indigenous and rural and remote communities.

"This is why ADGP has worked with these national mental health stakeholders to develop this Joint Statement, which we will be presenting to the incoming government."

The release of the joint statement coincides with the national Divisions of General Practice Forum being held at the Adelaide Convention Centre from Thursday, September 23 until today (Sunday, September 26).

The Forum has brought to Adelaide more than 900 delegates from around Australia to discuss and debate the key issues in general practice and primary health care.

THE JOINT STATEMENT FOLLOWS.

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EXPANDING THE BETTER OUTCOMES IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE INITIATIVE

A JOINT STATEMENT BY AUSTRALIA'S MENTAL HEALTH STAKEHOLDERS

- Good mental health is a community priority. Poor mental health affects individuals, families, relationships, and workforce participation, and has an enormous impact on quality of life and community economic burden.
- While many affected people go without treatment, those who do seek help for mental health problems usually see their general practitioner (GP) first. Every day GPs deal with people with mental health problems. In many cases, these patients have co-occurring conditions such as chronic illness or substance misuse problems.
- Community consultations by the Mental Health Council of Australia confirm that supporting the increased role of GPs in mental health care remains an underdeveloped national mental health goal.
- For too long general practice has struggled without support. It is vital that we build capacity and boost the support available to the primary health care setting to deliver quality mental health care. Yet Australia has only recently begun to take primary mental health care reform seriously in the form of the *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative* – one of Australia's most significant recent mental health reforms.
- Almost 1 in 5 GPs have undertaken further training in quality mental health care delivery in the past 2 ½ years.
- The *Better Outcomes* Initiative has become an established primary mental health care system that is working well. It integrates mental health specialists with GPs to deliver services to the 1 in 5 Australians with mental health problems.
- For the first time, quality care is available to many of the people with mental health problems who may be inappropriately managed in the stretched public mental health system and who cannot afford private care.
- However, *Better Outcomes* is a lapsing program and its future is not secure. The Australian Government will consider its continued funding in the 2005 federal budget.
- Primary mental health care must continue as a key policy priority for health. The *Better Outcomes* initiative is the ideal platform from which to build a sustainable primary mental health care system for Australia. But serious ongoing investment is required.

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- The *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* initiative must:
 - ✓ Feature funding of \$100 million a year to expand allied health services to better meet community mental health care needs – an increase from the current \$11 million per annum.
 - ✓ Include appropriately funded, dedicated child and adolescent allied health services to intervene earlier and better respond to the development of mental health problems in children and young people.
 - ✓ Include new funding for much needed primary mental health services appropriate to indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
 - ✓ Include allied health service models that are appropriate to rural and remote communities.
 - ✓ Be broadened to provide an integrated primary care response to mental health and substance misuse comorbidity through targeted training for both GPs and allied health workforce and enhanced capacity in existing allied health services.
 - ✓ Include measures such as new MBS item numbers to encourage psychiatrists to act as consultants to GPs and to enhance collaborative care between GPs and psychiatrists.
 - ✓ Offer targeted education and training programs, including peer support, to consolidate skills and improve access to appropriate training for GPs in rural and remote communities.
 - ✓ Build in evidence-based psycho-education and self-management programs as an adjunct to clinical practice.
 - ✓ Include incentives for GPs to carry out physical health checks on people with mental health disorders.
- The vital infrastructure of the Divisions of General Practice Network and the General Practice Mental Health Standards Collaboration must be maintained and include allied health infrastructure to support systematic and coordinated implementation of primary mental health care reform in Australia.

Endorsed by:

Australian Divisions of General Practice
Australian Psychological Society
beyondblue, the National Depression Initiative
Mental Health Council of Australia
Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
Rural Doctors Association of Australia

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