



# **NEWS RELEASE**

**Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.**

4 July 2005

## **Call for investment in GP-led mental health initiatives**

Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP) called for accelerated action on mental health today when it presented its submission to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health.

Appearing before the committee, ADGP Chair Dr Rob Walters and ADGP CEO Kate Carnell called for a serious investment in mental health, including:

- funded programs to train and support GPs delivering mental health care under the *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* initiative;
- policies and programs to encourage prevention and early intervention;
- action to address community stigma and attitudes to mental health;
- primary care services to cater for high-need groups such as children, young people, and Aboriginal communities; and
- increased funding for allied health services to help GPs manage mental health.

ADGP recommends a number of practical solutions, such as:

- additional expansion of the *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Initiative*;
- new Medicare item numbers for child and adolescent health checks;
- incentives aimed at increasing the number of primary mental health care teams; and
- dedicated funding under Australian Health Care Agreements to ensure better links and cooperation between public mental health and general practice.

Ms Carnell said the *Better Outcomes* initiative was one of Australia's mental health success stories.

"Through Divisions of General Practice, more than one in five GPs have been trained with additional skills in mental health and are better remunerated for taking the time to deliver mental health consultations," Ms Carnell said.

"In the 18 months to December 2004, almost 13,000 consumers had been referred by their GP for subsidised psychological care under Division-run services.

"These services are not only reaching high-need consumers, such as those on low incomes, but are also providing services to those that would have otherwise fallen through the primary health care safety net."

Ms Carnell said the national network of Divisions of General Practice was, "uniquely placed to deliver better mental health outcomes".

"Through Divisions, we have been able to introduce primary mental health services into rural and regional communities. In many of these areas, public mental health services either don't exist or are under considerable strain, so general practice and Division-run services are often the only port of call for people with mental health problems or disorders.

"These services are critically important, especially with the drought reminding us of the vulnerability of rural and regional communities."

Dr Walters said mental health training and support for GPs was paramount because of the importance of early intervention.

“We have to support GPs if we want to ensure early diagnosis and ongoing patient care.”

Dr Walters expressed concern about the capping of funding for the initiative.

“Some GPs are only able to refer four or five patients before their quota is used up. Without extra funding they are very quickly left with no one to support them in the management of patients with mental health problems,” Dr Walters said.

“While the 2005-06 Federal Budget makes welcome additional funding pledges to expand the initiative, these still fall seriously short of meeting existing demand for mental health services in general practice.”

The ADGP submission can be downloaded at <http://www.adgp.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=458> or at [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/mentalhealth\\_ctte/submissions/sublist.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/mentalhealth_ctte/submissions/sublist.htm)

**For more information call Jane Castles, National Communications Coordinator, on 02 6228 0822 or 0412 392 577.**

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#### **WHAT IS ADGP?**

- ADGP is the peak body representing 119 Divisions of General Practice and eight State-based offices (SBOs) around Australia. The Divisions Network supports general practice and their practice teams and drives the implementation of innovative health strategies.
- ADGP, through the Divisions Network, works to integrate general practice with other sectors of the health system, both government and non-government, to deliver high quality care to the Australian community.
  - ADGP is committed to promoting the health of all Australians by supporting the role of Divisions in the nation's primary health care system.

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