



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

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Investment in GP Commitment to Mental Health Care Needed

As the Council of Australian Governments gears up to look at Australia's mental health system at its February meeting, the Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP) is calling for stronger investment in the *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* Initiative.

Kate Carnell, ADGP CEO said "We must ensure that vital services and referral options are available where people go for care and where those at risk are first identified – in schools, communities, families and in primary care.

"The *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* initiative was developed by the Australian Government to address the key support issues raised by GPs over many years and includes:

- **Education and training for GPs** – to familiarise them with the initiative and to build their mental health assessment and treatment skills
- **The 3 Step Mental Health Process** – effective management of mental health problems that includes an assessment, a mental health plan and a review
- **Access to Allied Health Services** – to enable GPs to access psychological and other allied health services to support their patients with mental health disorders."

Ms Carnell added "*Better Outcomes* is delivering results and can be cost effectively expanded.

"Under *Better Outcomes*, well over 26,000 consumers have already received care for the first time ever through allied psychological services (ATAPS) run Australia-wide by Divisions of General Practice.

"Most significantly, 88 per cent of these clients who are typically on low incomes, aged around 40 and been diagnosed with depression or anxiety, have got better

"ATAPS services have become a crucial part of the mental health care landscape. But the extreme demand pressure resulting from capped funding is a threat to both community access to mental health services and to GP enthusiasm for the Initiative.

"To cope with the demand for psychologist services, Divisions are being forced to set up waiting lists, impose strict limits on the number of GP referrals and, in some cases, shut down services altogether"

"We must not forget that GPs are the main providers of mental health care – over 10 million visits annually in general practice compared to just under 5 million in community mental health services and public hospital outpatient clinics."

ADGP Chair, Jenny Thomson said "GPs have made an enormous commitment to *Better Outcomes* and to working with allied health professionals to deliver quality, team-based mental health care to the community. This commitment includes doing a minimum of 8 hours of extra training to better identify early signs of mental illness.

"This all helps to take the pressure off stretched community and hospital based services – but we risk GPs walking away if the Initiative does not receive more adequate funding so that psychological services are available when patients need them" Dr Thomson added.

"This situation needs the urgent attention of governments.

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“The evidence is clear: a better overall mental health service system is more likely if we invest more in mental health care at the primary care level.”

For more information please call Kate Carnell, ADGP Chief Executive Officer, on 0415 662 266.

WHAT IS ADGP?

- ADGP is the peak body representing 119 Divisions of General Practice and eight State-based organisations (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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