



Better outcomes for families, governments and communities

***Building a strong mental health service system through
investing in primary mental health care***

**SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT
MENTAL HEALTH INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE**

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Executive Summary

Mental health is a national government and community priority.

The Australian Government and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is interested in practical solutions to making the system work better.

It is vital that services are linked to where people go for care and where those at risk are first identified – in schools, communities, families and primary care.

This submission for a 4 year \$450 million package is made by the Australian Divisions of General Practice. It is a primary care agenda that could form part of a revitalised national mental health policy and plan.

It has three inter-related planks that will work together to deliver:

- Prevention in schools and families
- Early intervention and evidence-based treatment through expanded primary mental health care teams
- Relapse prevention, increased education and workforce participation, and reduced hospital-based care through new arrangements to ensure regular GP contact, facilitate access to housing and employment and promote family and community connectedness for people on discharge from hospital or community-based mental health services.

It is evidence based, outcomes-driven, systems-oriented and leverages further gains from existing Australian Government investments that are already delivering results.

It will be implemented through an established, well-tested infrastructure – the Divisions of General Practice Network.

Specific recommendations are:

Prevention and Early Intervention: \$194 million over 4 years

- Continuation and expansion of *MindMatters* in Australian secondary schools and introduction of a primary schools program
- A national initiative to support parents of children and young people

Expansion of *Better Outcomes*: \$220 million over 4 years

- Increased capacity and flexibility for access to psychological services (ATAPS)
- A primary care placement scheme for GPs and intern psychologists and other allied health professionals

A Co-ordinating Infrastructure: \$35.4 million over 4 years

- A regional network of Community Co-ordinators to link people leaving hospital and community mental health services with their GP, employment and housing and other social supports.

Introduction

There is interest at the highest level within the Australian Government and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in mental health reform.

Most importantly there is interest in better buys and practical solutions to making the system deliver better outcomes for consumers and their families and carers.

Solutions need to be long-term, whole-of-government and intersectoral.

It is vital that the general practice setting, as the first port of call for so many in the community, and a prevention and early intervention agenda are cornerstones.

It is also vital that we invest in measures to prevent relapse, support workforce participation, encourage family and social connectedness, and encourage quality community-based care, otherwise the net result will continue to be ever increasing demand on specialist health services and social support programs.

It is also important that we build on and add value to existing investments that are showing promise, rather than invent something new.

This submission to the Australian Government's Mental Health Interdepartmental Committee is a primary health care contribution to the current policy discussions on behalf of the Divisions of General Practice Network.

It contains a five year plan for a primary mental health care agenda that could form part of a revitalised national mental health policy and action plan for Australia.

ADGP is the national peak body representing the Divisions of General Practice Network. The network links 95 per cent of GPs across Australia and facilitates and drives change in the primary health care sector and comprises eight state-based organisations (SBOs) and 118 Divisions of General Practice.

Mental Health: A national priority

Mental health is a national government and community priority.

Mental health disorders and problems are common in the community and have profound effects on quality of life, productivity and workforce participation.

The economic burden on the community through the demands on health and social services and the costs of lost productivity is also profound.

Numerous reports highlight the need to reform our mental health service system and to address the social and economic costs of failing to intervene early and respond appropriately to mental health problems and disorders.

Health care systems which rely more on primary health care and general practice than on specialist and hospital care deliver improved population health outcomes, improved equity, access, continuity of care and lower costs (*Starfield 1998 & Health Evidence Network, 2004*)

The same applies to mental health.

To build a strong overall system of care for people with mental health disorders and problems and their families we must:

- engage and support general practice in reform partnerships
- invest seriously in quality care and early intervention in the primary health care setting
- integrate primary and specialist systems of care.

While we know that many people simply do not access any mental health care at all, 75% of those who do seek help go to see their GP first.

GPs are the main providers of mental health care (*AIHW, 2004*) – over 10 million visits in general practice compared to just under 5 million services in community mental health services and public hospital outpatient clinics (*AIHW, 2005*).

A continued and expanded investment in mental health care at the primary care level is vital if people are to get better and lead productive lives and if we are to reduce admissions and readmissions to limited mental health services.

Building on existing investments

There are flagship Australian Government programs which can be cost-effectively expanded:

- *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* – the beginnings of a system of primary mental health care supporting GPs with education and training and access to primary mental health care teams.
- *MindMatters* – Australia’s comprehensive national mental health promotion and prevention initiative for Australian secondary schools delivered in unique partnership between the health and education sectors.
- *National Youth Mental Health Foundation* – to support innovation in services for young people with mental health and drug and alcohol problems.

We also have unique health infrastructure through which we can act:

- The Divisions of General Practice Network through which we can implement programs and bridge the Commonwealth-state divide for integrated service delivery.
- The National Primary Mental Health Care Network through which we can support primary mental health care innovation.

Priorities for Action

ADGP’s five year vision contains practical solutions across the full spectrum of prevention, early intervention, treatment and relapse prevention.

Prevention and Early Intervention: Getting In Early

Childhood is a critical time to promote good health and development and identify problems early. Investing in a population-based approach to children’s health provides high returns and positive outcomes for children, their families, governments and communities.

The teenage years are a critical time for intervention with prospects for increased return on investment with greater expectations for education completion and entry to workforce - at least 75% of mental disorders among adults commence before age 25 years and up to 50% of alcohol and substance abuse problems are preceded by mental disorders in youth.

Promoting adolescent and youth health lies in the development of successful programs in the social settings where young people live and work (schools, families, communities) and in the health care settings where most young people are likely to be seen (primary care) (*Patton, 1999*).

ADGP recommends:

- Continuation and national expansion of *MindMatters* into all Australian secondary schools and introduction of a primary schools program
- A national *Parenting Initiative* to provide information and support to parents of children and teenagers based on the successful Teen Triple P and *Every Family* programs

Measure	2006-07 \$million	2007-08 \$million	2008-09 \$million	2009-10 \$million
MindMatters primary and secondary	12.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
National Parenting Initiative	29.0	36.0	36.0	36.0

Expansion of *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care: Strengthening The Primary Mental Health Care Team*

GPs are the main providers of mental health care but struggle to access the specialist support they need to provide early intervention services.

The *Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care* Initiative is an initial investment in building primary mental health care teams. It provides GPs with access to mental health education and training and specialist support.

Well over 25,000 consumers have received care for the first time ever through allied psychological services (ATAPS) run Australia-wide by Divisions of General Practice. 88% of these clients have got better (Kohn et al, 2005). At an average of 4 visits and costs of around \$400, the value of this initiative speaks for itself when compared to the costs of hospital-based care.

ATAPS services have become a crucial part of the mental health care landscape (Kohn et al, 2005). But they are facing growing waiting lists. We must ensure these vital primary mental health care services are embedded as a critical part of Australia's system of primary mental health care.

ADGP recommends:

- Further *expansion of the access to psychological services (ATAPS)* to increase the capacity and flexibility of the services
- A *primary care placement scheme* for GP registrars/interns to do clinical attachments in community mental health services and for intern psychologists and other allied health to do a placement in the primary care setting

Measure	2006-07 \$million	2007-08 \$million	2008-09 \$million	2009-10 \$million
Expansion of ATAPS	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0
PMHC placement scheme	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

A Coordinating Infrastructure: Optimising Care in the Community

The Australian Government's National Primary Mental Health Care Network has supported primary mental health care innovation in general practice for the last five years.

Change agents like this are needed at the local level to bring together the Australian Government's existing and future investments as well as to integrate state and territory programs.

This will result in smoother transitions between levels of care, improve early discharge to community care, reduce the likelihood of relapse and readmission to hospital care, and ease the burdens on the high cost tertiary system.

ADGP recommends:

- A Commonwealth-State collaboration to phase in a cost-shared regional network of appropriately clinically qualified *Community Co-ordinators* employed locally through Divisions of General Practice to support discharge into primary care and promote shared care; deliver psycho-education and skills in self management for people who are managed in general practice or are discharged back to general practice; coordinate placements and supervision of psychology/allied health interns in general practice under the proposed primary care placement scheme; broker and support Divisions and schools wishing to implement *MindMatters*; and broker referrals to other community services such as Lifeline, support groups, housing and supported accommodation, vocational assistance, and return to work programs.

Measure	2006-07 \$million	2007-08 \$million	2008-09 \$million	2009-10 \$million
Community Coordinators	5.9	5.9	11.8	11.8

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