



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.

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GP network solutions to national mental health service gaps

As Cabinet gears up to consider an Australian government plan for mental health next week, the Australian Divisions of General Practice is calling for increased investment in the established network of psychological services delivered through general practice.

Kate Carnell, ADGP CEO said "There are a number of pre-requisites for any new national mental health plan to be effective. First and foremost, we must recognise and support the crucial role of frontline workforces such as GPs and other members of practice teams.

"The established network of access to psychological (ATAPS) services delivered in all regions of Australia by Divisions of General Practice are fast becoming a crucial part of the mental health care landscape.

"In their first 2 ½ years, these services have already supported well over 26,000 consumers in the primary health care setting. The good news is that 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.

"It is amazing to think that these services have gone from supporting an average of 11.5 consumers per day, to an average of 46.1.

"Unlike many mental health services which concentrate in major urban centres, the level of uptake of these services in rural areas has been proportionally higher than in urban areas. This highlights just how important they are to communities that would otherwise be facing an even more serious mental health service gap.

"It is smart public policy to continue to invest more in initiatives like ATAPS that are proven, well established and delivering results.

"But the extreme demand pressure resulting from capped funding for ATAPS is a threat to community access to mental health services.

"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.

"Australia has not got the current mix of mental health investments right. We don't need more acute care beds – we need more accessible community-based care options for people with mental illness and their families.

"A significant expansion of ATAPS is a key solution to the mental health workforce issues flagged by COAG. And a rapid expansion can occur quickly and cost effectively boosting the number of psychologists and other allied mental health workers available right across the country.

"We have put a primary mental health care plan to the government which calls for a minimum additional investment of \$220 million over 4 years in ATAPS.

"We have an unprecedented opportunity to put in place a comprehensive and ambitious new national direction for mental health. A vital part of the mix is the health care setting where people first go for care – general practice - and boosts in the service systems already in place to support quality, GP-led primary mental health care."

ADGP's submission is available at our website at www.adgp.com.au

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