

No sustainable path for mental health in the State Budget

WESTERN Australia's peak body for mental health, the WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH), is concerned there is no sign of progress in yesterday's State Budget towards the sustainable mental health system set out in a 10-year mental health plan in 2015.

WAAMH CEO Rod Astbury said the Government's budget, focused on improving the State's bottom line, has delivered some increased funds to mental health but their lack of investment in prevention and community-based recovery supports showed short-term thinking and would lead to continued increased health system costs.

"The *WA Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Service Plan 2015-2025* laid out a roadmap for reform, showing how to rebalance WA's broken mental health system away from expensive, crisis-driven services to prevention and keeping people connected and closer to home," Mr Astbury said.

"But while the budget shows a steady increase in funding for hospital bed based and treatment services over the forward estimates, funding for community support services flatlines and investment in prevention declines sharply from 2018/2019," he said.

"Funding for public mental health services grows in line with population and CPI over the forward estimates, but funding for community services has no provision for population growth. It is essential that the funding formula for community services reflects population growth, otherwise the community will fall further behind."

Among the concerns are that \$5.8 million in cuts have been made to community support services as savings measures.

"The Government has a responsibility to ensure vulnerable people are protected from cuts to these services" said Mr Astbury.

He also noted that no other area could potentially deliver bigger savings to the State than to address mental health issues in the WA community.

"Vital community-based supports work to keep people living well in the community – reducing the demand for acute, expensive beds – and improve their mental health outcomes," Mr Astbury said.

WAAMH welcomed the investment in Step-Up, Step-Down services in the regions, but pointed out these services would provide transitional support only and that long-term investment is required in rural and remote communities, and for high needs populations such as Aboriginal peoples and children.

Mr Astbury said the increase in family and domestic violence services and the reinstatement of financial counselling were also welcomed, recognising the value of these services to many people with mental health issues and going some way improving the social and economic determinants of mental health.

“Good mental health is built. It is strengthened by prevention for our children and young people, recovery supports in our communities, and safe and stable homes” Mr Astbury said.

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