

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Federal election candidates urged to commit to five key mental health reforms

WESTERN Australia's peak body for community mental health, the WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) is calling for candidates to make clear and accountable commitments to five key mental health reforms in the lead up to the federal election.

WAAMH has written to the 165 Western Australian candidates for the upcoming federal election seeking their commitment to the following objectives ([view the letter here](#)):

- Reducing the national suicide rate
- Improving the physical health of people with a mental illness
- Increasing employment rates for people experiencing mental illness and their carers
- An increase in mental health consumer and carer participation and choice in national policy design and implementation; and,
- Maintaining current overall levels of investment in mental health, while ensuring that capacity to deliver services is not reduced.

WAAMH's President Alison Xamon said it was critical that candidates clearly committed to maintaining overall investment in mental health with measures that supported full reinvestment of cost efficiencies and savings back into community-based mental health programs and services.

"Political changes have left mental health services with uncertain funding and shifting priorities, creating a complex and ever-changing system for people with mental illness, their carers and families to navigate," Ms Xamon said.

"This election, we want candidates to commit to long-term mental health reforms that drive more investment and spending into prevention, early intervention and community-based services, which will lead to savings in downstream expenditures.

"A lack of adequate, preventative, community-based supports for people with mental health issues increases the likelihood of reoccurrence, unemployment, homelessness, hospitalisation, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, and coming into contact with the justice system. This increases the financial strain on clinical mental health, hospital emergency and other government services, increasing overall system-wide costs," Ms Xamon said.

Ms Xamon said that while WAAMH supported the commonwealth's focus to improve local mental health services through the Primary Health Networks (PHN's), they remained concerned that PHN's had been issued with guidelines that required these supports to be

Peak body representing the community-based mental health sector in WA.

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purely clinical and did not include community-based services that kept people living well in the community. Community-based services complement the role of GP's by connecting people to housing, education, employment and training, and by providing personalised support, family and carer support, counselling, advocacy, mutual support and self-help.

“To achieve real mental health reform in this country, political leaders need to abandon a short-term, reactive approach and instead commit to creating long-term investments in community-based supports and services that enable people with mental health issues to live fulfilling, contributing lives as valued members of the community,” Ms Xamon said.

## About WAAMH

The Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) was incorporated in 1966 and is the peak body representing WA's community-managed mental health sector and around 100 organisational and individual members. Our vision is that as a human right, every one of us who experiences mental health issues has the resources and support needed to recover, lead a good life and contribute as active citizens. WAAMH advocates for effective public policy on mental health issues, delivers workforce training and sector development, and promotes positive mental health and wellbeing. In 2016, WAAMH is celebrating 50 years of developing, promoting and representing the community mental health sector in Western Australia. Further info at [www.waamh.org.au](http://www.waamh.org.au)

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