



WAAMH

Western Australian Association
for Mental Health

MEDIA RELEASE

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Budgets still leave Mental Health wanting

Despite growing awareness of the need to seriously address decades of underinvestment in mental health, and despite some gains, the impact of both the Federal and State budgets fail to address the fundamental and ongoing problems in the mental health system, says the peak body for mental health, the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH).

There have been some welcome inclusions. The growth in funding for public mental health services activity to meet rapidly increasing demand included in the **state** budget is necessary and welcome.

There is also good news that key initiatives including the Statewide Aboriginal Mental Health Service, the Court Diversion Program and the Suicide Prevention Program will continue, though only the Aboriginal service is secure beyond 2014/15.

But the recently publicised Coroners inquests into the suitability of Graylands and the wide ranging Stokes Review of 2012 both concluded that WA's mental health system is over-stretched and crisis-driven and needs substantial investment and fundamental reform after decades of chronic underinvestment.

According to the budget papers, the ten-year WA Mental Health and Alcohol and other Drug Services Plan that the current state government committed to following the Stokes Review, will not be completed until mid-2014.

"It is disappointing the state budget didn't include the first stage of investment in the ten year plan," WAAMH president Alison Xamon said.

"Many stakeholders in mental health have contributed to the extensive consultations on the plan and will be deeply disillusioned if there isn't a commitment to strong and sustained investment in it by both the Government and the Opposition on its release."

While the **federal** budget included funding for youth mental health, headspace, the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program and a twelve month extension of the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program, changes to primary care and income support and withdrawal of programs threaten long term damage to people with mental health issues and their families, as well as imposing unnecessary long term costs to the community.

The government's response, the National Mental Health Review, due to be released later in the year now becomes a critical test of its commitment to mental health.

GP and Emergency Department co-payments are likely to discourage people with early signs of poor mental health from seeking assistance and will be a disincentive for those needing ongoing support from staying on top of their conditions. This may result in people being in a much worse state before they receive support, with reduced prospects of recovery and greater long term community costs. Co-payments are also likely to impede progress in addressing the broader health needs and reducing the lifespan gap for people with poor mental health as they will discourage people seeking assistance with other health needs.

The withdrawal of income support for some young unemployed people and some people on Disability Support Pensions also threaten long term damage to people with mental health issues who consistently report financial stress as their number one issue of concern.



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“The mental health of the most vulnerable members of our community is at real risk from the cost of living impact of both the state and federal budgets,” Ms Xamon said.

“Both governments must provide the comprehensive action on mental health that will result in real improvement in the health, housing, employment and income security of people with mental health issues and their families.

“While we acknowledge and welcome those gains that have been included in both budgets we still have a long way to go.”

About WAAMH

The Western Australian Association for Mental Health is the peak body representing the community-managed mental health sector in WA. Through our members, our vision is to lead the way in supporting and promoting the human rights of people with mental illness and their families and carers, with inclusive, well-governed community-based services focused on recovery. More at <http://www.waamh.org.au>

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