



**WAAMH**

Western Australian Association  
for Mental Health

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**MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Co-payments bad for our Mental Health**

The proposed co-payment for GP and emergency department visits carries high risks for the mentally unwell, says the peak body for mental health, the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH).

Up front charges for visits to the GP and for visits to emergency departments with 'minor ailments', where triage doctors and nurses will decide who can see a doctor for free and who will have to pay, could discourage distressed and vulnerable people with mental illness from accessing critical care.

The Australian College of Emergency Medicine has warned that those vulnerable to poor health would be dissuaded by the co-payment from staying on top of their conditions and end up in emergency departments in a worse state. This is a particular risk for those with mental illness who consistently report financial stress as being their number one issue of concern.

People are increasingly presenting at emergency departments with mental health problems, with the Stokes Report identifying a 25% increase over five years. The report also indicated that one third of people with mental illness accessed mental health care through their GP. It is vitally important that people seek early assistance with mental health problems and many do so through their GP.

"There is a serious risk for people with mental illness and for the mental health of the community in the imposition of co-payments for these critical services," WAAMH president Alison Xamon said.

"The Commonwealth and State government must provide clear evidence that they will not result in people being dissuaded either from seeking early assistance with mental health issues or from accessing critical emergency care."

#### **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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