

Australia now at first base for mental health reform

The Gillard government's announcement of increased mental health funding in the Federal Budget has been welcomed by SANE Australia, with the national mental health charity saying the commitment matches the government's promise to make mental health a second-term priority.

SANE Australia's Executive Director, Barbara Hocking, said the Budget demonstrated that the government has heard concerns held by the community and mental health sector and has now committed the down-payment required to address shortfalls in Australia's mental health services.

'Plans to establish a Mental Health Commission and to develop a 10-year roadmap for mental health reform are positive moves which will encourage federal, state and territory governments to develop and implement policy for all Australians with a mental illness' Ms Hocking said.

'We especially welcome a Mental Health Commission to oversee reform and report directly to the Prime Minister. This accountability process, which has been missing to date, is long overdue.'

However, as with all budget announcements, the devil is in the detail. There are many challenges ahead including bringing states and territories on board, refining the proposed models of integrated community care and ensuring that there are enough trained mental health and other workers to deliver these programs.

SANE Australia also welcomes moves to encourage more people into work including extra investment in the Personal Helpers and Mentors program and specialist disability employment services, new wage subsidies and the increase of working hours from 15 to 30 under the disability support pension. However, it is critical that people with mental illness are also provided with support to enable to keep their job, that there are workplace education programs and incentives for employers to create more flexible part-time jobs.

And of course, none of this will be truly effective without a strong, national stigma reduction/social inclusion campaign to ensure that people with mental illness are welcomed and supported at work and in their local communities.

'We are now at first base, and well positioned to make a real difference to the lives of people with mental illness and their families, but we still have a long way to go. This is a great opportunity and we must make sure that people affected by mental illness receive the maximum benefit from this 1.5 billion new investment,' Ms Hocking concluded.

SANE Australia

A national charity working for a better life for people affected by mental illness.

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