

## **The Summit for a mentally healthy Coast: a catalyst for regional community action across Australia.**

On 24-25 June 2010, leading mental health experts, researchers, consumers, carers, practitioners and concerned community members gathered at the National Mental Health Summit to create a blueprint to address this neglected sector.

The Summit congratulated Prime Minister Gillard on her appointment and advised that the new Government cannot afford to waste any time – outlining a 6-point plan (see Appendix I) to prevent a new generation of Australians from succumbing to mental illness. The Summit also welcomed the 42 recommendations contained within Senate Report, “The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia”, released today.

Mental illness affects over four million Australians every year. Mental illness is estimated to cost the Australian economy around \$30b each year.<sup>1</sup> Most families are touched by mental illness in one way or another.

Every day:

- 330 Australians presented to Emergency Departments with serious mental illnesses are turned away with less than 1 in 15 referred to any other service
- Over 1,200 Australians are refused admission to a public or private psychiatric unit
- At least 7 people die as a result of suicide in Australia, with more than a third involving people discharged too early and/or without care following hospitalisation
- Another 180 Australians attempt suicide and of these 84 are hospitalised.<sup>2</sup>

Services to provide effective mental health care to Australians are critically lacking. While close to 90% of those people with the clinical need for care with conditions such as asthma, cancer and diabetes get the care they need, people with a mental illness and their families are struggling to find any service.

Conscious that COAG (Council of Australian Governments) is still to finalise future governance arrangements for mental health the Summit contends that a key solution is to be found in enabling regions to build high quality, connected and effective mental health services. Not all communities are the same. Effective mental health services engage local communities in planning responses to local mental health needs and are assessed by their local communities as meeting those needs.

Effective mental health services will:

- Have a recovery focus as assessed by the consumer
- Ensure early intervention and prevention, education and community awareness
- Have leadership and governance arrangements that encourage collaborative care and continuity of care so that people do not “slip through the cracks” between services
- Ensure there are strong connections with stable housing, employment, education, and community participation to enable a person with mental illness to live well in the community
- Help people who already have mental health problems. This may mean clinical services from a local general practitioner, or access to psychology or psychiatric care without undue disincentives arising from large out of pocket costs.
- Actively seek feedback from their consumers about the services they provide and devise quality improvement initiatives accordingly.

Investing in effective local and regional services is a key to creating mentally healthy communities.

The statement was endorsed by the attendees at the Summit released by Australian of the Year Patrick McGorry at the Summit’s conclusion on Friday afternoon.

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<sup>1</sup> Boston Consulting Group, The Next Wave of Reform 2006, Victoria

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3302.0>

## APPENDIX I: THE SUMMIT'S SIX POINT PLAN

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Consistent with the recommendations made by the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission and the subsequent Health Reform Agenda announced by the Federal Government, the Summit urged the Federal Government to fulfill its stated commitment to take over full funding responsibility for community mental health, including all primary, preventative and early intervention mental health services.

In recognition of the high economic, personal and community cost of mental illness the Summit identified the urgent need to provide more equitable services for those people managing the effects of mental illness, including young people in need of preventative services, carers, families and communities and calls for the following immediate investments to be made annually, in addition to already committed funds:

1. \$250m for the national rollout, with equitable distribution across Australia of early intervention, rehabilitation and preventative programs through centres each comprising community health, early psychosis and Headspace integrated services;
2. \$100m to fund major mental health research centres to translate research breakthroughs into new and innovative services for people with a mental illness;
3. \$20m for e-mental health services to provide access to information and therapeutic programs via the Internet;
4. \$30m for a sustained, integrated and comprehensive national mental health promotion (anti-stigma) campaign;
5. \$100m for suicide prevention, including community education, mental health first aid training, local programs and a national suicide 'hotspot' program;
6. \$100m for Social Housing Programs, consistent with the Government commitment to reducing homelessness, to provide stable housing with community support services for people with severe and persistent mental illness.

This expenditure should be accompanied by a commitment to and resources for the establishment of a robust and independent accountability framework to monitor outcomes.

There are services and programs ready to be implemented in all of these six areas, which the Summit has identified as the immediate priorities in an ongoing process of mental health reform.