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COVID-19: \$48.1 Million for National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan

The Australian Government is continuing to take action to help Australians whose mental health and wellbeing is being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic by providing an additional \$48.1 million to support the Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan presented to the National Cabinet this morning.

This investment builds on approximately \$500 million for mental health and suicide prevention announced by the Government since 30th January, including \$64 million for suicide prevention, \$74 million for preventative mental health services, and a significant proportion of the \$669 million telehealth package to support MBS subsidised treatments provided by GPs, psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals.

The Government recognises that many Australians are experiencing fear, anxiety, loneliness, financial and family stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures needed to contain it.

Supporting mental health and suicide prevention remains one of the Government's highest priorities.

The package supports the three immediate priorities of the Plan:

- Data and modelling
- Outreach
- Connectivity

Enabling early and effective action

Through the Australian Government's contribution to support the Plan, we will be focusing on the need to help people as early as possible if they are feeling the impacts of the pandemic, and make sure that people in need of support get the right care at the right time.

A \$2.6 million investment will boost national capability in monitoring, anticipating and reacting to the mental health impacts of the pandemic. This will be used to enhance and expand the National Self-harm and Suicide Monitoring System that was established at a cost of \$15 million over three years in the 2019-20 Budget, and will support the provision of expert guidance for proactive decision making in mental health service deployment.

\$4.7 million will be provided to continue investment in suicide prevention research through the National Suicide Prevention Research Fund administered by Suicide Prevention Australia, and to support the work of the National Suicide Prevention Taskforce.

Reaching Vulnerable Groups in Community

The Plan also recognises that a number of groups have been disproportionately impacted by the Pandemic, and that it is essential for all jurisdictions to support care in homes, workplaces and schools.

Older Australians have experienced high levels of social isolation and anxiety about illness and death from COVID-19. They have also experienced a reduction in mental healthcare services as a result of restrictions and lower uptake of digital technologies. The Government will provide \$19 million to Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to deliver in-reach mental health services provided by mental health nurses.

As many people with ongoing mental illness have not been seeking face-to-face care due to the pandemic, a greater proportion of their day-to-day care has fallen on their carers. The Government will support carers by providing \$3.5 million additional funding to Carers Australia and Carers Gateway to provide targeted assistance and information.

Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities have also been impacted by the pandemic, but have had lower access to linguistically diverse mental health supports relevant to the Australian context. We will therefore provide \$3.5 million for specific supports and to ensure that health information is available from current service providers in languages other than English.

Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander communities, especially those in remote areas, experienced complete lockdown and have been impacted by reduced access to mental health and wellbeing services, education and employment opportunities. \$3.5 million will be provided to PHNs to work with local communities to bolster existing services as restrictions are lifted.

The Government also continues to work with states and territories and Beyond Blue on the rollout of the Way Back Support Service, which provides aftercare services following a suicide attempt. Bilateral agreements are now in place with New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory to support the provision of assertive aftercare in their regions.

Connecting People to Care

The National Plan recognises that many individuals, particularly those with ongoing or more complex mental illness, have had their usual care arrangements disrupted as a result of the pandemic and may find the mental health system challenging to navigate.

To make it easier for Australians to reach the care they need, the Australian Government will work with service providers and states and territories to create a system which will guide the onward care of people contacting federal digital and telephone support services by connecting them to appropriate local services that provide outreach care in the home.

In addition, a \$10.4 million national mental health communications campaign will provide Australians with the confidence to reach out for help and the information they need to better support their mental health.

Now, more than ever, it is important for all Australian governments to contribute to building a seamless mental health system to make sure that everyone gets the care they need, regardless of where they turn to for help.

The National Plan has been prepared under the leadership of the National Mental Health Commission, and Victoria and New South Wales, working with state and territory governments and key stakeholders. It is a critical step forward in combatting the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. We thank everyone involved.

The Government is making record investments in mental health services and support – with expenditure estimated to be \$5.2 billion this year alone.

The Federal Government has demonstrated its commitment to the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians through this contribution to the Plan. We encourage other states and territories to contribute to this national action to keep Australians safe and well, now and into the future.

-ENDS-

Anyone experiencing distress can seek immediate advice and support through Beyond Blue (1300 224 636), Lifeline (13 11 14), the Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800), or the Government's digital mental health portal, Head to Health (www.headtohealth.gov.au).

Supporting the National Pandemic Mental Health Plan		Total = \$48.1 million	
Data, modelling and research			\$7.3 m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection of up to date evidence and modelling of impacts of mental health impacts of COVID19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$2.6 million for up to date social and economic data and to commission modelling by relevant experts. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suicide Prevention Research and Service Improvement so that we have the best evidence-based support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$4.2 m to Suicide Prevention Australia for research \$0.5 m for National Suicide Prevention Taskforce. 	
Reaching Vulnerable Groups			\$29.5 m
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older Australians (\$19 m) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand mental health services provided by PHNs. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (\$3.5 m) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$1.9 million for FASST programme. \$1.1 million for PHNs to deliver culturally appropriate services. \$0.5 million for translation of current supports. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carers of people with mental illness (\$3.5 m) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$0.5m for Carers Australia to deliver communications and engagement activities \$3.0m for the Carer Gateway service providers to deliver targeted services 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Communities (\$3.5m) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PHNs will work with local communities to expand existing programs. 	
Connected Mental Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System to enable a direct transfer of between different mental health services, ensuring they receive the care they need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health 	\$0.9 m
Communications Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecting those in need with mental health support services through a clear and consistent communications campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health 	\$10.4 m