



MEDIA RELEASE

Mental Health Slashed?

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Despite some reports to the contrary, the Rudd Government's first budget will be welcomed by the mental health sector.

According to David Crosbie, CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia, *"the savings in mental health are mainly from dropping a proposed campaign about the linkages between illicit drug use and mental health. Many in the mental health sector had concerns about how such a campaign might be executed without further stigmatising people with a mental illness as illicit drug users."*

In summarising the budget Mr Crosbie said, *"the Rudd Government has continued to build on the COAG initiatives and support the strengthening of the mental health sector with a number of new initiatives that will be welcomed by those concerned about mental health in Australia."*

The Budget establishes a National Advisory Council on Mental Health. The Government will spend \$2.4 million over three years to create this new Council. Although details of the Advisory Council are yet to be announced, the MHCA has been advocating for the establishment of an independent, direct advisory body of this type and we welcome the Government's initiative.

In other welcome policy announcements, the Government will provide \$55.0 million over five years to address perinatal depression and has committed funding for the National Perinatal Depression Plan, It will also provide additional funding for mental health training places and workforce development. There are also a range of other initiatives that will improve mental health services, including new funding in Veterans' Affairs for suicide intervention skills training and support services, new funding to address alcohol and drug abuse, and funding for the RecLink program which works with many people who experience mental illness.

Significantly, there are no changes to the MBS Better Access scheme. The MHCA also notes the extension of DEN and VRS service contracts until February 2010 to take into account the outcomes of the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy currently being developed.

Mr Crosbie said *"Many in the mental health sector will be interested in whether the new Health Future Fund can be used for capital works and new research within mental health service providers. In particular, there are many smaller non-government organisations that are in desperate need for capital renewal funding and would be delighted with access to a capital renewal fund."*

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