

BEING

2019 ELECTION PLATFORM

Australia's political parties' commitment
to mental health support on a state and
federal level

Acknowledgements

Being would like to thank all people with lived/ living experience of mental health issues for their strength and courage to challenge and face each day. You are the driving force of the work we do at **Being**. Your voice matters and is greatly valued.

In particular, we would like to thank each individual who attended the election platform meetings, and who generously shared with us their experiences and perspectives which shaped **Being's** election platform.

We would also like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the land where our election meetings took place.

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Warning for a graphic depiction of mental health.

Individuals with lived/living experiences of mental health issues are warned that the following document contains information that may be distressing. Mental health, suicide and self-harm are topics that are discussed in the document.

If you are feeling distressed by the content of this material, support is available through the following channels:

Support is available from 24-hour crisis support lines:

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** 1300 659 467
- **Mental Health Line:** 1800 011 511
- **Kids Help Line:** 1800 55 1800
- **Mensline Australia:** 1300 789 978
- **Domestic Violence Line:** 1800 656 463
- **NSW Rape Crisis Centre:** 1800 424 017

Being | Mental Health & Wellbeing Consumer Advisory Group

Being | Mental Health & Wellbeing Consumer Advisory Group is the independent, state-wide peak organisation for people with lived/living experience of mental health issues. We work with this core population of people to achieve and support systemic change.

Being's vision is for all people with a lived experience of mental health issues to participate as valued citizens in the communities they choose. Participation is a fundamental human right as enshrined in Article 25 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR). We work from the premise that the participation of consumers results in more effective public policy and facilitates individual recovery.

Our work is guided by six principles:

- Creating space for people with lived / living experience of mental health issues to have their voices heard
- Ensuring that recovery-oriented and trauma-informed practice underpins all aspects of **Being's** operation
- The belief that services and a life free of stigma and discrimination are the human rights of every person
- Providing capacity-building opportunities for all people with lived / living experience to grow
- Ensuring that everything that **Being** does is led by persons with lived/living experience of mental health issues.

Being is an independent non-government organisation that receives core funding from the Mental Health Commission of NSW.

Executive Introduction

A big thank you to everyone who attended and contributed to both of our election platform meetings. We would also like to thank the many who joined us and participated in the Facebook live streaming event, which was a first for Being

In this election platform, we have brought together an overview of the commitments made by the major NSW and federal political parties in relation to mental health and listed key issues that were discussed during the election platform meetings.

The table on pages 6 and 7, lists some of the key areas raised at the election platform meeting and the Facebook live streaming event and aligns key topics with the positions of the major political parties. Further information on key areas is explored in the later part of the document.

We hope that this document will provide a clearer picture of the current political climate in relation to mental health and the key political parties positioning in this area.

Being's platform at a glance

Issues	Liberal	Labor	Greens	Independents
Trauma-informed care and training for all	NO	NO	NO	NO
Increase the number of lived experience workers across the mental health sector	NO	NO	YES	NO
Protecting mental health advocacy and access to justice	NO	YES	NO	NO
Awareness training across specific group needs for LGBTQIA+	NO	YES	YES	NO
Awareness training across specific group needs for Aged	NO	NO	YES	YES
Awareness training across specific group needs for Youth	YES	YES	YES	YES
Awareness training across specific group needs for CALD	NO	YES	YES	NO
Improved mental health training for General practitioners	NO	NO	NO	NO
Diversity Treatment Options are made readily available	NO	NO	NO	NO
Implementation of mental health check-up systems	NO	NO	NO	NO

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Issues	Liberal	Labor	Greens	Independents
Better Community follow-up systems	NO	NO	YES	NO
Increased training for first responders/emergency workers engaging with the community	NO	YES	YES	NO
Elimination of Seclusion and Restraint	NO	NO	YES	NO
Alternatives to forced medication	NO	YES	YES	NO
Alternatives to Crisis Care Models	NO	NO	YES	
Changing the language of the NDIS to be more inclusive of persons living with a psychosocial disability	NO	NO	NO	NO
Improve the NDIS transition processes	NO	NO	NO	NO
Improve the accessibility of administrative and appeals processes	NO	NO	NO	NO

Trauma-informed care and training for all

Participants of Being's election platform meetings highlighted the need for all staff across the mental health sector to have trauma-informed care and training if the best possible support is to be provided to for people living with mental health issues. In our member discussions, it was evident that all persons, including service providers, would be assisted if incoming governments made stronger commitments to ongoing trauma-informed care training and implementation.

At present, continual trauma-informed care training requirements have not been explicitly committed to by any of the major parties at either a state or federal level.

However, on the federal agenda, Labor and the Greens have acknowledged trauma-informed care in their commitments to bridge gaps within the community mental health sector. Federal Labor has also recognised that trauma-informed approaches are imperative to reducing the discrimination against vulnerable communities such as the LGBTQIA+ community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Australian Labor Party, 2018). Although the Federal Liberal party makes no mention of trauma-informed care as a concept, they have made a promise of \$4.7 billion dollars to increase mental health services (Liberal Party of Australia, 2019).

Being will continue to advocate future Governments on the importance of trauma-informed care and the need for compulsory and continual training for mental health clinicians.

Increase the number of lived experience workers across the mental health sector

The Peer Workforce has expertise and understanding that comes from having a lived/living experience of mental health issues (Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, 2014, p. 100). We recommend that all parties include targets for increasing the lived experience workforce. This includes developing strategies to train and certify the lived experience workforce and to provide career pathways for lived experience workers.

Unfortunately, none of the Federal or State major parties has explicitly committed to a specific employment or training targets for lived experience workers. However, the Federal Greens acknowledge the value of the peer workforce and aim to boost funding support, as well as assisting those who are struggling with addiction to have better access to peer support programs (The Australian Greens, 2018)

Protecting mental health advocacy and access to justice

Being is aware that there are many aspects of the mental health system where people fall through the gaps and do not receive adequate treatment. When situations like this arise, it is important for consumers to be able to access avenues of justice. To better support mental health consumer rights, **Being** believes that New South Wales should have an independent mental health complaints commissioner along similar lines to the model already adopted in Victoria. At present in NSW the complaints of people living with mental health issues are not addressed with the specialist understanding required. **Being** would like to see a separate Mental Health Complaints service be implemented in New South Wales.

Further to this **Being**, in alliance with the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC) and Consumers of Mental Health Western Australia (CoMHWA), is advocating for a representative national peak body for all mental health consumers that can address issues of concern to people with lived/living experience across Australia, such as the challenges of accessing NDIS funding for people with psychosocial disabilities.

Federally the Labor campaign has made election promises about safeguarding advocacy for disability services (Australian Labor Party, 2019 (a)), but not explicitly expressed support for mental health advocacy. **Being** believes that this support should be inclusive of psychosocial disability advocacy organisations to ensure the protection of the rights of people with lived experience within the policy development process. Comparatively, The Hon. Greg Hunt MP has stated that the Liberal party's \$4.7 billion-dollar federal funding commitment made for 2019 will include community mental health. But the federal liberal party does not expressly state that it will cover support for advocacy. **Being** believes mental health funding should cover an organization's ability to represent and protect the rights of its constituents (Liberal Party of Australia, 2019).

For the coming state election, the NSW Greens have committed to a range of protections around persons with disabilities which include persons with psychosocial disability (The NSW Greens, 2019 (b)).

Awareness training around specific group needs

Being understands that there are many elements which make up a person's individual recovery journey and identity and that specific groups within the community have specific needs which must be acknowledged and addressed. Mental health care cannot be a one size fits all approach and it is important that services have a clear understanding of individual needs to support individual recovery journeys.

LGBTQIA+

Both Labor and the Greens parties have made attempts to develop inclusive mental health policies that acknowledge that LGBTQIA+ people have a greater need for mental health services than many other sections of the population and respond to these facts by delivering targeted services and appropriate education for health care providers.

Regarding awareness training around the specific needs of the LGBTQIA+ community, the NSW Greens acknowledge that social inequalities exist and therefore that mental health experiences differ for different groups within the population. Their commitments include the training of health care, community and aged care services to better understand 'diverse sexualities, gender identities and intersex variations' (The NSW Greens, 2019 (d)). This will also include tailored support for intersex people in rural areas.

The Australian Labor Party plans to develop a federal LGBTQIA+ National health care plan to address this communities' particular needs, and support those mental health bodies which require support to properly understand the communities' specific health issues, as well as creating more mental health support programs and better access for LGBTQIA+ people in rural areas (Australian Labor Party, 2018). It would also ensure that Medicare and PBS continue to implement anti-discrimination policies (Australian Labor Party, 2018). The ALP has also committed to implementing the NDIS in a way that is fully accessible to the LGBTQIA+ community. Unfortunately, the Liberal Federal and State policies make no specific mention of LGBTQIA+ mental health issues.

Culturally and linguistically diverse.

The Australian Labor Party in their National Platform acknowledges that Aboriginal and CALD individuals have specific health care needs. Aged care is a central policy issue, with culturally appropriate approaches to health care a priority for the ALP. It is also recognised that culture and country must be acknowledged as important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as they age (Australian Labor Party, 2018). The ALP has also committed to implementing the NDIS in a way that is accessible and beneficial to members of the CALD community.

The National Greens acknowledge that the existence of detention centres allows for a perpetuation of psychological torture, and vows to close the camps to achieve better wellbeing for refugees (The Australian Greens, 2019 (b)). Unfortunately, the Liberal Federal and State policies make no mention of CALD communities' specific needs for mental health services.

NSW Labor policies commit to cultural accessibility for all state services including but not limited to mental health care (NSW Labor Party, 2018). It is also recognised that out of home care has had a negative impact on Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants, two groups

with specific needs within the mental health care system, and the Labor party have committed to ensuring that state services provide aged care appropriate for these experiences.

The NSW Greens mental health policy platform commits to a plan to ensure delivery of culturally sensitive services across NSW and to promote these services to the point where they reach CALD communities in rural areas and boost their participation in social life.

Youth

Being, in accordance with the *Living Well Strategic Plan for 2014-2024* believes that an incoming New South Wales Government should build on developing prevention and early intervention initiatives for vulnerable children. A youth alliance should be established. The alliance would target ' - the risk factors affecting children, young people and their families at different life stages and how these risks are responded to within the present system' (Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, 2014, p. 35). It would also investigate the current services and systems in place to eliminate gaps and to ensure an earlier impact is made. 'The real goal with young people must be to develop holistic early interventions that address their needs to improve their quality of life.' (Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, 2014, p. 78)

Where possible **Being** believes that young people themselves and young peer workers should be part of the process of developing and implementing mental health policies that will have a significant impact on their lives.

The Greens at both state and federal levels have dedicated policies in relation to engagement with youth mental health services. At a state level, they aim to reduce youth suicides and increase school counselling services (The NSW Greens, 2019 (a)). The Federal party has committed to reducing suicide rates as well but will also focus on the funding of services around disability care provisions (The Australian Greens, 2019 (a)).

The NSW Liberal Party have committed to employing '100 additional school counsellors or psychologists and an additional 350 student support officers to ensure every NSW public high school has access to these vital supports, as part of an \$88 million boost into mental health programs in schools' (Liberal Party of Australia, NSW Division, 2019).

The State and Federal Labor party have not made specific commitments in relation to youth-mental health within their education campaign (Australian Labor Party, 2019 (c)).

Aged Care

Being, in line with the Living Well Strategic Plan suggests strengthening local action to empower 'government agencies and community organisations to work together at local levels guided by the participation of consumers, carers and families.' (Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, 2014, p. 17). To assist older Australians with accessing online services, 'Initiatives like the national eSmart Libraries project can help build community knowledge' (Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, 2014, p. 30).

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Both the Federal Liberal and Labor parties have dedicated Aged care policies which address some concerns around elderly persons and their access to services but does not expressly address mental health care (Australian Labor Party, 2019 (b)). The federal Liberal Party also wish to increase funding for General Practitioners to be able to visit elderly persons at their homes, which may have flow-on effects as an entry point to mental health services (Liberal Party of Australia, 2018).

General Practitioners and Mental health

Improved mental health training for General Practitioners.

In 2017 and 2018 people visited their GP's for mental health advice more than any other health concern (Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2018). **Being** understands the importance of General Practitioners as a point of entry and a support system for people living with mental health issues. For this reason, we believe that general practitioners must have better mental health training, but it is also imperative that General Practitioners should have some understanding of recovery focussed and trauma-informed care principles.

Diverse treatment options are made readily available.

Being believes that Australia should follow the example set by the United Kingdom in connecting consumers of mental health services with social, community and peer-run services as part of a holistic treatment plan. 'Social prescribing' is the methodology utilised in the UK to link an individual with social and community-based activities which may help to reduce their isolation and increase their social and emotional empowerment.

Social interaction and increased activity have been linked strongly to better physical and mental health for individuals living with mental health issues. 'Social prescribing' has had positive impacts on those who have received it in conjunction with the bio-medical treatments primarily utilised in the United Kingdom and continues to play a part in the United Kingdom's National Health Service treatment options.

In recommending the development of a model for social prescribing in Australia, **Being** believes that it is integral to include the valuable assistance of lived experience workers as a connection point between services and where appropriate as alternatives to biomedical models of care. In developing the scheme lived experience workers would be able to create meaningful bonds with both the person accessing social prescribed services but also the community and council groups that facilitate such endeavours. Alternatives to biomedical models could include peer-run drop-in centres as alternatives to current crisis management models, such as emergency room visits.

Implementation of mental health check-up systems.

Being believes that there should be a system integrated into all community medical facilities that provide regular and routine emotional health checks for adults. Creating and implementing a mental health check will strengthen early intervention and preventative assistance.

Community mental health care

Better Community follow up systems

Being, in agreement with the principles of the *Living Well Strategic Plan for 2014-2024*, believes that more needs to be done to support people with lived experience of mental health issues to live productively in their communities. Developing social prescribing and initiatives such as the current Federal Governments' Head to Health digital platform are steps in the right direction.

From our discussions, many people returning to the community after inpatient stays feel they are falling through the gaps. The current lack of a more stringent follow-up system in-particular has significant impacts.

The NSW Greens policy argues that a statement that improving collaboration between hospitals and community services will lead to greater follow-up for patients (The NSW Greens, 2019 (c)). However, this is only listed as a health principle and does not specifically address the issue that people experiencing significant levels of distress just after discharge need follow-up services since many people attempt suicide just after discharge (Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, 2014).

The Liberal and Labor parties at state and federal levels do not currently have policies which address post-discharge follow-up processes for people living with mental health issues.

Increased training for first responders/emergency workers engaging with the community.

The Federal Labor Party commits to enriching the health workforce in Australia by streamlining training across the board; this would include providing access to current training practices in rural areas. They also note the importance of supporting the mental health of health workers (Australian Labor Party, 2018).

The Federal Greens commit to funding more training for the health workforce as well as making a commitment to reducing the stigmatising beliefs some health workers still have in relation to people living with mental health issues (The Australian Greens, 2018). The Federal Liberal party mentions a plan to assist in suicide prevention and better community mental health, but

no explicit mention of emergency mental health is made (The Liberal Party of Australia, 2019 (b)).

Neither the Labor party nor the Liberal party in their state or federal campaigns has made mention of training first responders to mental health care emergencies, or about training emergency clinicians about the differences between self-harm and suicidality.

Being believes that emergency responder training in relation to mental health issues is of vital importance for people living with mental health issues to improve the quality of service provision. Better training will also ensure that first responders are better able to care for their own psychological wellbeing despite the psychological challenges and risks of their own work.

Inpatient mental health care

Elimination of Seclusion and Restraint.

Being believes that any future government must continue the work to reduce seclusion and restraint, with the goal of ultimately eliminating the use of seclusion and restraint against people with lived experience of mental health issues. Many of **Being's** constituents are strongly supportive of moving towards the goal of eliminating seclusion and restraint in favour of other alternatives such as sensory stimulation rooms.

The NSW Green party have acknowledged the need to support and develop alternatives to coercive measures and restraint within all disability services (The NSW Greens, 2019 (b)). Unfortunately, both State and Federal Liberal and Labor policies do not make mention of this practice. **Being** hopes that this will form part of their mental health strategies in the future.

Alternatives to forced medication where possible

Mental Health service consumers have the same human rights as every other individual, however, when accessing such services, consumers can be exposed to 'unbounded discretionary power to force vulnerable patients to take medication whenever staff believe it is appropriate.' (Justice Action, 2018).

Being believes there is an increasing need for consumer autonomy and the development of alternative practices that follow a human-centred approach, such as broader usage of supported decision making in mental health contexts. These would supplement the work already done within the NSW mental health system to support and protect the rights of people with lived/living experience, such as the NSW Official Visitors Program.

The Federal Liberal party has focused on increasing funding for mental health research, and 'Investment in medical research is critical for providing new treatments and improving the quality of life for Australians.' (The Liberal Party of Australia, 2019 (c)). The Federal Labor party

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largely supports the National Mental Health Commission's recommendations and has committed to clarifying key priorities for implementation within the first 100 days of a Shorten Labor Government (Australian Labor Party).

Unlike the two major parties, the NSW Greens party has directly focused on non-consensual treatment. The state Greens believe that services should 'enable people with mental health problems to have a significant say in their individual treatment and care, including the opportunity to give informed consent for their treatment' (The NSW Greens, 2019 (c))

Alternatives to current crisis care models

The Federal Liberal campaign is focusing on funding health care services for patients. 'The \$1.25 billion Community Health and Hospitals Program will fund projects and services in every state and territory, supporting patient care.' (The Liberal Party of Australia, 2019 (a)). This includes mental health. Services that are being funded cover the entire spectrum of support, from low-intensity services to crisis care, and suicide prevention.

The Federal Labor party have also made commitments to provide funding for services and hospitals, however, they do not focus on alternative crisis care models. (Australian Labor Party, 2019 (d)).

The Federal Greens have targeted crisis care model alternatives as they aim to focus on 'providing an appropriate and adequate mix of community-based and inpatient clinical treatment services that deliver a broad range of culturally appropriate care options including crisis, acute, non-acute and ongoing care' (The Australian Greens, 2018).

Being believes that there is a need to develop alternatives to the current crisis care models as these have had significantly traumatic results for individuals. One example of the sort of model that could be helpful in this context is the Safe Haven café model which originates from Britain and is currently being trialled by St Vincent's Melbourne.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme

Changing the language to be more inclusive of persons with psychosocial disability.

In the *Mind, the Gap* report the language and application processes of the National Disability Insurance Scheme were found to be confusing and at times even distressing for people with lived/living experience of mental health issues (The University of Sydney, 2018). **Being** has been advised by numerous people who experience mental health issues that the definition of

persistent disability used by the NDIS has made it challenging for people with severe and episodic psychosocial disabilities to access funding support.

Being are advocating for a change in the language used, including making the definition of disability more recovery orientated and trauma-informed. Because the language of the NDIS focuses on 'life-long' or permanent disabilities; many people with psychosocial disabilities either don't apply for or are refused NDIS funding.

Improving NDIS transition processes.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is only available to persons who are between the ages of 7 and 65 years old. This leaves a gap of service and funding specifically for people over the age of 65, who are just as entitled to such services as the age range population. There are further concerns for people over 65 who are transitioning into Aged Care facilities. Transition periods and challenges negotiating them are confusing to many NDIS recipients who live with mental health issues.

Being believes that there needs to be clearer communication on what is and is not covered by the NDIS and that those who are receiving NDIS funding are adequately assisted with transitioning into and out of services.

Improving the accessibility of administrative and appeals processes.

In providing improved access to NDIS funding for people living with psychosocial disabilities it is also integral that appropriately skilled staff and funding are made available to support users of NDIS funded services to advocate for themselves when service standards are inadequate. This is also a key context in which skilled peer workers would be invaluable.

Many people accessing NDIS funding have experienced long time delays between application and acceptance, and then further time delays between acceptance of a funding offer and an initial planning meeting. Due to time delays, and issues with the services provided to individuals, many find themselves not receiving the care and support they initially required and requested. This has been shown in the increased level of complaints being brought against the NDIS.

With an increased number of complaints within the service, it is also important that complaints processes, which are often challenging for people with psychosocial disabilities to access are made as accessible as possible. Apart from increased staffing and funding for the proper provision of service, there also needs to be a clear definition of the rights which persons wishing to complain are entitled to. Advocacy services linked to the NDIS on consumer rights should be welcomed by the NDIS and supported by future Governments.

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