



7 October 2020

**PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM BEING – MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMERS:
FEDERAL BUDGET 2020-21
IMPACTS ON MENTAL HEALTH**

On the 6th October, the Australian Federal Government released the 2020-2021 Annual Budget.

As might be anticipated during such difficult times, funding commitments relating to mental health have been primarily inspired by the bushfires through last summer, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing challenges of providing adequate mental health services to all Australians. We have summarised some of these key commitments below and noted some of BEING – Mental Health Consumers' areas of concern.

Doubling Better Access Initiative Sessions

\$100.8 million has been provided as a pandemic support measure to increase the number of therapy sessions available to people who have a Mental Health Treatment Plan, increasing the number of therapy sessions from the current 10 to a maximum of 20 per annum. The additional funding to expand the Better Access Initiative sessions will be funded through to 2022.

Our thoughts - This is a positive step for people who live with mental and emotional distress that require longer term psychotherapeutic support. However, as this funding has been provided in relation to the mental health pressures of COVID-19, it suggests that although this is a step forward there is a need for further advocacy for people who need long term psychological support to live well beyond this pandemic.

Read the government fact sheet [here](#).

Prioritising Mental Health and Telehealth – COVID-19 pandemic response

\$165.9 million to be provided through to 2022 to extend mental telehealth services.

Our thoughts # 1 - We welcome this extension of funding; however, we also note that the new telehealth measures have led to greater inclusion for some consumers and less inclusion for others.

Our thoughts # 2 - We ask the Federal Government to acknowledge the digital divide that makes it harder for some to access telehealth than others. Some of this funding needs to be spent on ensuring that consumers have the hardware and software needed and to build digital literacy for consumers.

Our thoughts # 3 - We encourage the Federal Government to consider extending further funding for peer-run mental telehealth and online support services such as BEING – Mental Health Consumers new program, BEING Supported – Mental Health Peer Support Line which is a warm line service staffed by trained and experienced Peer Support Specialists all with their own lived experience of mental health issues. Currently a six-month pilot program, BEING Supported offers a non-clinical



peer support option for people living in NSW who are feeling isolated, alone, or just need someone to talk to.

Read the government fact sheet [here](#). Find out more about BEING Supported [here](#).

Prioritising Mental Health – Suicide Prevention

\$65.2 million in funding allocated.

Our thoughts # 1 - We especially welcome the \$7 million dollars committed to aftercare for people who have experienced a suicidal crisis and the \$4.6 million dollars for provision of youth support and peer support. We also welcome the provision of enhanced mental health services in Port Hedland, Karatha, Roma and Emerald, particularly as accessing mental health support in rural and remote areas continues to be more challenging than accessing such services in urban areas.

Our thoughts # 2 - We also encourage the government to consider funding further peer support options when allocating funds. Peer support provides hope and understanding that is not always forthcoming within the medical psychiatric system. The availability of peer support also provides consumers with choice when it comes to therapeutic and support options. The mental health system should enhance autonomy and choice, rather than limiting it.

Our thoughts # 3 - We note the failure of the Federal Government to recognise the close links between suicidality, poverty and unemployment in their broader social security strategy, and the need for a better understanding the social determinants of suicidality and mental health issues.

Read the government fact sheet [here](#).

Prioritising Mental Health – Bushfire Response

\$76 million dollars from 2019 to 2022 has been allocated to provide continued mental health support for those affected by the 2019-2020 bushfires. The bushfire recovery initiative will be providing up to ten additional face to face and telehealth and Medicare subsidised psychological therapy sessions under the Bushfire Access Initiative. Headspace services will also be expanded in those areas that have been significantly impacted.

Read the government fact sheet [here](#).

For further information on BEING – Mental Health Consumers' statement, please contact our Marketing and Communications department on 1300 234 640 or email communications@being.org.au.