



18 November 2020

PUBLIC STATEMENT: NSW Budget 2020-2021 – Impacts on Mental Health

With the cloud of the COVID-19 pandemic cast over us all, this week the NSW Government delivered their 2020-2021 state budget. While they have shown an encouraging level of attention towards mental health (services, availability, access, prevention and distribution), we can't help but wonder if the intended positive impact of these proposed measures will be able to outlive the pandemic and form the foundation of a stronger mental health system moving forward.

Whilst the budget outlines funding towards critical needs, BEING – Mental Health Consumers have concerns with the weight of funding allocated to hospital and telehealth services, managed by clinical interventions. Similarly of concern, is the broad approach taken which eliminates much needed specific services for a diversity of communities such as people from CALD and LGBTI communities, people who are homeless or who have housing issues and older adults. Further n no way does the budget recognise the critical needs of people who experience post-traumatic stress disorder or trauma background and histories.

Whilst we acknowledge that the budget addresses a number of key areas of concern in relation to mental health. However, the overall focus is quite clinical, and it fails to outline a targeted vision or offer much-needed community injected funds.

For many years, our consumer and survivor's movement who have accessed mental health services, have strongly been advocating for reform in our mental health system. While peer workers have been mentioned in the context of community mental health services, what is lacking is real support and funding for community-based peer support services and peer-led initiatives such as the BEING Supported Warmline. This non-crisis free mental health peer support service is unlike any other currently available and has shown resounding success during its pilot phase.

We have attempted to snapshot the key points below, and hope that the resources will be allocated towards different services rather than more of the same. We need to ensure that the injection of funds meet the needs of the community and expands to initiatives and programs which assist people to heal and recover in the communities of their choice.

Listed below is an overview of some of the key items:

OUTCOME 2: People can access care in and out of hospital settings to manage their health and wellbeing

\$66.5 million to support mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic

This includes:



- providing additional mental health clinicians and peer workers to enhance community mental health services and support vulnerable populations
- expanding the Police Ambulance and Clinical Early Response model to 10 Police Area Commands and two Police Districts
- enhancing therapeutic activities in acute inpatient units
- increasing capacity and responsiveness of the Mental Health Line and expanding virtual mental health services to improve access to care

BEING – Mental Health Consumers welcomes the increase in the availability of mental health services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, however we also hope that consideration will be given to assisting people to heal and recovery in their community. Critical to this approach is an injection of funding required into peer support and peer led initiatives.

We welcome the provision of more mental health specific services within the police force and the ambulance service. There has long been a need for more mental health awareness and training required in both of these groups.

\$66.2 million to continue the work of community-based mental health clinicians, including expanding youth mental health services.

This funding will be delivered over three years from 2021-22 to continue the additional specialist mental health clinicians to significantly enhance the capacity of community mental health services to appropriately manage people with mental health issues to live in the community. This will include specific expansion of youth mental health services, with a particular focus on urgent assessment and suicide prevention.

\$50.4 million to expand virtual mental health services – enabling greater access to support for people in immediate crisis.

This includes providing technology-enabled workforce support options, including remote video conferencing and expanding telehealth services and related infrastructure, to enable more access to mental health support for people in immediate crisis.

BEING – Mental Health Consumers welcomes the allocation of further funds to the provision of technology enabled therapeutic options that will allow people living with mental health issues to receive the best possible mental health support, however we must not forget the digital divide that has been made more apparent by the onset of the pandemic and the necessary move to online service provision.

Many people living with mental health issues do not access to the necessary technology or resourcing, nor the skills needed to engage online. Moving forward it will be vital to ensure



that those who are most in need are sufficiently equipped and provided with support and education in this regard.

\$46.8 million over four years to support student wellbeing by recruiting an additional 100 wellbeing and in-reach nurses in vulnerable regions to provide wellbeing and health checks and referrals in schools

Being – Mental Health Consumers welcomes the injection of funding to support student wellbeing, however, has concerns with the approach of utilising in reach nurses rather than trained and skilled peer support specialists. The proposed provision places a direct correlation back to clinical services rather than community-based support and initiatives.

\$6 million over three years to establish 12 Mental Health and Community Wellbeing Collaboratives in communities across the State.

The provision of this funding will be a positive step towards establishing new alternatives to traditional service provision models, particularly in rural areas.

BEING – Mental Health Consumers particularly welcomes the commitment of this model to developing services that are codesigned and sensitive to local needs and challenges, however would like to see funds which involve peer led in such collaboratives.

OUTCOME 4: Keeping people healthy through prevention and health promotion

Towards Zero Suicides

BEING – Mental Health Consumers strongly supports the Towards Zero Suicides initiative and has partnered with the NSW Ministry of Health on the strategic direction and implementation of this scheme. We are looking forward to further collaboration and will soon be delivering peer support group programs across NSW.

OUTCOME 5: Prepared for disasters and emergencies

\$36 million for a new first responder mental health strategy for emergency services staff

Many people in rural and remote areas have faced significant challenges during the recent bushfires and droughts, and BEING – Mental Health Consumers welcomes investment to boost resources for the bushfire season.

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.