

National Mental Health Consumer Alliance



National Mental Health Consumer Alliance Welcomes Government's Mental Health Funding Commitments and Calls for Further Action on Lived Experience Engagement

Budget Summary from the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance

10 May 2023 - For Immediate Release

The National Mental Health Consumer Alliance (the Alliance) acknowledges the Australian Government's 2023-34 budget announcement and support for mental health.

The Budget confirmed funding of \$7.8 million over three years for the establishment of two national peaks (one for Consumers and one for Carers). While we welcome this commitment, we are concerned the funding and timing of these peaks may be insufficient to provide appropriate input of lived experience expertise in the proposed investments, with each peak being allocated an estimated \$1.25 million per year. We believe future funding arrangements for the consumer National Peak may need review into the future to ensure consumer voice and leadership is carried into the implementation of longer-term mental health investments.

We welcome the government's commitment to a \$91.3 million package over 5 years for training for psychologists. This will go some way to addressing the issue of long waiting lists for consumers to access psychological support. Additionally, designated funding should be put aside for non-clinical mental health staff such as counsellors, social workers and lived experience (peer) designated roles to ensure consumers have a choice in who they consult with about their mental health. There is an absence of consideration for what this will look like to account for geographical spread and people who live in regional, rural and remote areas who have even less access to supports.

We also welcome the \$17.8 million commitment to upskill the health workforce with mental health training. We emphasise that the development of the new training packages must be led by the lived experience voice in their design, delivery and evaluation.

We note that the government has committed \$260.2 million over two years to extend Commonwealth psychosocial supports for people who are not in the NDIS, and we look forward to seeing more details about this.

The Alliance is pleased to see that \$10.5 million has been committed to support the mental health of First Nations people around the referendum to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres

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Strait Islander Voice in the Constitution. This suggests that lessons were learned from the same sex marriage plebiscite in 2017. This funding acknowledges that there has already been hurtful commentary, hate speech and racist attacks.

The Budget documents note an unspecified funding commitment to future mental health priorities in response to the Better Access evaluation. The Alliance strongly recommends that any reforms must embed lived experience at the heart of any Better Access reforms and to do this by undertaking structural engagement and partnership with our community.

Finally, the Alliance notes that although the increases to Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, AusStudy and Rental Assistance are welcome, the ongoing issue of cost of living has broader effects on people's mental health and lives. The Alliance notes an increase to the JobSeeker payment in recognition of the impacts of poverty on wellbeing, however, we agree with ACOSS that the increase should better align with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee's recommendation of a rise of \$128 a week. To bring about sustainable enhancements in mental wellbeing, it is imperative that governments tackle the fundamental structural, environmental, and social determinants of mental health.

BEING – Mental Health Consumers, as the NSW member of the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance, has collaborated in developing this response to the 2023 Commonwealth Budget announcements.

As member-based organisations representing people with personal lived experience of mental health issues around Australia, we call upon the Australian Government to embed lived experience involvement and leadership at the heart of any and all mental health reforms by undertaking structural engagement with our community.

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