

Foreword

One in five Australians continue to experience a mental illness in a given year. Confirmation of this comes at a time when significant investment and effort has been made by all governments to improve outcomes for people with mental illness, their families and carers. There has been significant reform in where and how mental health services are delivered—especially in recent years through growth of services in the community and in primary care.

Australia's leadership in mental health service development has been recognised internationally. Reform into the future must maintain the effort and build on the successes of the past, but recognise that new challenges require innovation and new ways of working together across systems and sectors.

A new *National Mental Health Policy* (the Policy) was endorsed by health ministers in December 2008. The Policy provides an overarching vision and intent for the mental health system in Australia and embeds the whole of government approach to mental health reform that formed the centrepiece of the *COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health*.

The Policy gave a vision for mental health in Australia:

... a mental health system that enables recovery, that prevents and detects mental illness early and ensures that all Australians with a mental illness can access effective and appropriate treatment and community support to enable them to participate fully in the community.

This *Fourth National Mental Health Plan* (the Fourth Plan) has been developed to further guide reform and identifies key actions that can make meaningful progress towards fulfilling the vision of the Policy. The whole of government approach articulated within the Fourth Plan acknowledges that many of the determinants of good mental health, and of mental illness, are influenced by factors beyond the health system.

On behalf of the Australian Health Ministers' Conference I would like to extend our appreciation to the Ministerial Advisory Councils outside of Health who have contributed their time and expertise to developing a Health Plan that is truly built within the whole of government partnership approach. Further, I encourage these councils to take up this Fourth Plan and use it as a basis for further work in their areas of responsibility. With the commitment of other sectors to progress the actions, indicators and outcomes identified in the Fourth Plan, we can make a real difference for people with a mental illness, their families and carers. Health ministers are committed to working with our cross sectoral colleagues towards this outcome.

The Fourth Plan comes at a time where there is significant focus on the roles and responsibilities of governments within the health system. We acknowledge this and accordingly have adopted a flexible approach to enable the Fourth Plan to respond to a rapidly changing environment. This will be achieved by monitoring and responding to developments in the broader health system and whole of government reforms over the next five years.

Advancing many of the actions related to service reform will require consideration of funding and governance arrangements, operational issues, and cross portfolio and cross government structures. Some of the actions will require commitments of time and effort rather than financial investment to navigate the shared issues within and across sectors.

Robust accountability for both mental health reform and service delivery is central to the Fourth Plan, and progress in implementation will be reported annually. The Fourth Plan explicitly outlines indicators against which to measure progress. For some of these indicators, data are already available; for others, collaboration with other sectors and further developmental work may be required to achieve a suite of cross sectoral indicators that will robustly measure how progress in implementation of the Fourth Plan has changed the lived experience of people with a mental illness.

Specific targets have not yet been set for any indicators, but this will be given priority during the first year of the Fourth Plan. Collaboration between governments will be needed to fill data gaps and develop appropriate targets for data collection and reporting.

Health ministers are pleased to lead the implementation of the Fourth Plan and to work in conjunction with the Ministerial Advisory Councils outside of Health to progress the actions, indicators and outcomes identified in the Fourth Plan. The actions in the Fourth Plan will be progressed by governments both independently and nationally under the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, but with the commitment of other sectors we can make a real difference for people with a mental illness, their families and carers.

The Fourth Plan has been built from an extensive national process of consultation and the time, effort and advice of the many people who have contributed to this Fourth Plan is acknowledged and appreciated. I encourage all of you to embrace and take forward this Fourth Plan and its actions towards a better mental health system for all Australians.



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