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Mental Health Council of Tasmania Media Release

Mental Health Council of Tasmania release Federal Election wishlist

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) has today released its wishlist ahead of the upcoming Federal Election.

MHCT's asks the next Federal Government to reflect on and uphold commitments made as part of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement at both State and Federal levels, calling on political leaders to:

- Commit to driving national mental health, suicide prevention and stigma reduction reform across Australia.
- Respect each jurisdiction's deep and inherent understanding of their own region's mental health and suicide prevention needs.
- Fund place-based, person-centred, equitable and affordable mental health care.
- Prioritise comprehensive state-based mapping of services and demand for psychosocial supports as outlined in the National Agreement.

The MHCT campaign also calls on the Federal Government to invest in a number of specific initiatives that would benefit Tasmania, and the rest of the country.

One initiative is a stigma reduction pilot campaign that can be tailored to other parts of Australia following a successful implementation in Tasmania. Such a campaign would help to reduce discrimination against people experiencing mental ill-health, and encourage people to seek help early for their mental health, a goal which is set out as part of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement which the Federal and State Government's agreed to in late 2021.

MHCT CEO, Connie Digolis, said that Tasmania provided the perfect opportunity to develop a stigma reduction and mental health literacy campaign. "Tasmania's unique and varied demography and geography makes it the ideal place to develop a campaign designed to eliminate stigma and encourage people to seek help early for mental health concerns. We must help educate people to better understand their own mental health, and identify the things that have both positive and negative impacts on it, and how and when to reach out for help if they notice a dip in their wellbeing."

This stigma reduction initiative would enhance a preventative approach to mental health, empowering people to take charge of their own mental health and wellbeing, and live happier and healthier lives. It would also reduce the demand for clinical and acute mental health care, which the Productivity Commission's 2020 Inquiry Report on mental health estimates would save Australia billions of dollars annually.

MHCT has also called on the next government to reinstate Medicare rebates for telepsychiatry services, which were removed in early 2022. Tasmanians accessed Medicare rebates on telepsychiatry services over 8000 times in 2021, with the removal of those items from Medicare leaving many people struggling to afford the services they rely on to stay well.

"We've heard from many Tasmanians about the impact that these recent changes to Medicare are having on their ability to access the services they need. Without affordable access to these services many of those people are missing on the help and support they rely on to stay on top of their mental health. This is especially concerning for Tasmanians – many of whom rely on telehealth services because face-to-face supports are increasingly difficult to access"

Rounding out the wishlist is the call for a commitment from the Federal Government to guarantee ongoing funding for psychosocial supports for people who are not eligible for the NDIS. Psychosocial supports provide assistance to people with low level, often intermittent, mental health concerns.

“There are many people living with mental ill-health that don’t require ongoing and intensive care and support. They do however still need occasional, interim support to help them live their best life. Without commitment from the Federal Government to continue funding these community based supports, there’s a very real and worrying risk that the people who access these supports will see a serious deterioration in their mental health and quality of life.”

MHCT challenges the incoming Federal Government to demonstrate their commitment to all Australians by working with State Governments to prioritise investment in mental health and wellbeing, ensuring we can all live happy, healthy, and productive lives.

More information about MHCT’s election advocacy campaign can be found via www.mhct.org/election2022

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Please include the following crisis support services for any story regarding mental health or suicide:

Lifeline: 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

beyondblue: 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

More information on safely reporting on mental illness or suicide can be found at:

<https://mindframe.org.au/> and <https://www.tascharter.org/>