

Position Paper: Advocating for Mental Health Nurses as a Workforce Solution.

Background

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is the peak professional body for Mental Health Nurses (MHNs) in Australia. The ACMHN is committed to positive consumer outcomes and advocates that specialist qualified MHNs are essential to achieving this. This position paper outlines initiatives to improve outcomes for our communities. The ACMHN advocates that:

- MHNs are best positioned to resolve short and medium term shortages in specialist trained mental health professionals across community and in-patient settings in Australia.
- MHNs and Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (MHNP) scope of practice across community and in-patient settings includes but is not restricted to:
 - Risk assessment and intervention for suicide, self-harm and aggression;
 - Psychotherapy, counselling and focussed psychological interventions;
 - Psychopharmacology, including medication prescribing by MHNPs;
 - Physical health assessments and treatments with MHNPs having extended roles;
 - Care coordination and multi-disciplinary team working; and
 - Clinical treatments delivered across urban, regional and rural settings with psychological, physical and social treatments available via a single appointment, through outreach and home visitation.
- MHNs are well positioned to meet the needs of the 'undertreated one third' consumer population. The ACMHN advocates for a revised Mental Health Nurse Incentive Programme to be re-launched as the 'MHN Access Programme' (MAP). MAP funding to be for: *People who are, or at risk of, experiencing severe and complex but non urgent mental health issues.*
- Better Access funding be opened to credentialed MHNs and MHNPs with equitable rates of remuneration to other disciplines. Better Access and MAP funding would attract MHNs back into the community-based workforce and increase access to care from highly qualified, knowledgeable MHNs and MHNPs.
- Formal recognition be given to mental health nursing through nurse registration and career employment and advancement opportunities in public, primary and secondary health settings for all specialist trained MHNs.
- Direct entry undergraduate MHN education be restored with funded post graduate scholarships for those wanting to continue toward comprehensive Registered Nurse status.
- Funded scholarships be provided for a Post Graduate Certificate (MHN), which the college would formally recognise. Nurses currently working in mental health settings without specialist training are a priority group.

- All employers should only advertise for and employ specialist trained MHNs and that all position descriptions should state is requirement.