

Mental health nursing lobby calls for action on MBS to support Australia's mental health

Tuesday 24 March 2020

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) has called on the Government to act on behalf of the mental health of Australians and fund the services of mental health nurses through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).

"Our members are dealing with a high volume of patient cancellations in the current climate due to costs of services, and we are concerned about the number of Australians who are now trying to navigate COVID-19, self-isolation and sickness on their own," said ACMHN President, Professor Eimear Muir-Cochrane.

A very simple solution could be rolled out – to provide qualified, experienced and credentialed mental health nurses with MBS item numbers for the provision of mental health services directly related to COVID-19.

There is currently a Government Review of all items under the MBS being conducted, including all items relevant to mental health but for the sake of timeliness, we need some action immediately.

"An interim report, based on stakeholder consultations, was released in 2016. Four years ago, this review identified mental health services and nursing services as two areas that are underutilised in the MBS. It is time to rectify this."

"Mental health nurses, both in primary care and private practice, currently have very limited access to MBS. This means the system is not set-up to support mental health nurses working with people with mental health conditions, nor those who develop mental health conditions. In unprecedented times like this, Australians are facing a very daunting reality – not being able to support their family financially, not able to secure new work, and not able to have the social support they need."

"At this crucial time we need to support Australia's mental health needs before it spirals downwards. A qualified and experienced mental health nursing workforce can provide essential support for people in need. The more people that we can get to – that can see a mental health nurse during this time (or talk to them on the phone or video) – the more we can provide case management, preventative support and support those at risk."

"Let's do something proactive for the mental health of Australians and make a positive impact on how this pandemic plays out," Professor Muir-Cochrane concluded.

For further comment, please contact ACMHN President, Professor Eimear Muir-Cochrane on 0434 374 573 or at president@acmhn.org.

About

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is the pre-eminent and authoritative voice of the mental health nursing profession in Australia. It provides leadership to, and advocacy for mental health issues across the mental health sector and nursing, as well as setting national standards of practice in mental health nursing.