2025 Australian Federal Election Priorities

Healing a broken system: Change is possible

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

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Your Health in Mind

Australia's demand for mental health care has never been greater.

Mental health presentations in emergency departments and overnight admissions have surged, with people arriving in crisis, their conditions more acute than ever, and wait times for admissions stretching beyond 30 hours in some states.

Meanwhile, numerous private hospitals providing critical psychiatric care have closed, leaving even fewer options for those in need.

The mental health system is in crisis. Australians are waiting months for care, which is delaying their recovery and putting them at greater risk. Some people are missing out on treatment altogether due to financial inequities.

The mental health workforce, despite its dedication to the community, is burning out under unrelenting demand and rising stress. Driving this is a workforce shortage.

At the current level the psychiatry workforce only meets 56% of the demand and that impacts families, communities and livelihoods. We need more psychiatrists and to upskill more general medical professionals with psychiatry skills to ensure every Australian is afford equitable acute mental health care.

Change is possible.

Mental ill-health is treatable. Improvement and recovery are possible.

The RANZCP is calling on the incoming Federal Government to invest in the workforce, match the level of funding with the level of need, and make mental health a genuine priority in 2025 and beyond.

Only then can we help Australians recover well, stay well and live well.

We ask that the incoming Government considers our priorities.

Support the workforce

Australia has a critical – and growing – shortage of psychiatrists. Not only are there not enough, but they're unevenly distributed across the country. Access to the best mental health care is becoming increasingly inequitable, especially for priority populations and those in rural, regional and remote areas. A plan and a roadmap to grow the workforce through the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy and ensure equitable access to mental health supports has already been committed to by previous governments. That Strategy has clear solutions for attracting, training and retaining a sustainable workforce. It just needs to be enacted.

If we don't invest in growing the mental health workforce and expanding its professional capability, Australians will continue to miss out on life-saving and life-changing mental health care.

Priority 1:

Enact the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy with progress published annually

Priority 2:

Invest $1m in subsidising 100 medical professionals to undertake the Certificate of Postgraduate Training in Clinical Psychiatry

Priority 3:

Invest $7.06m to extend the Psychiatry Interest Forum program until 2032 to continue to attract new doctors into the workforce

Commit to prevention

More than 4.3 million Australians experience mental illness each year, including 800,000 people who have a severe or complex mental health condition. Investing in early intervention, community services and addressing the underlying social determinants of mental ill-health will reduce the prevalence of mental health conditions. Not only will this lead to better public health and help to lessen the strain on the psychiatry workforce, but it will also have a positive economic impact. In anxiety conditions alone, each dollar spent on prevention results in a return of up to $3.06 within 10 years. Committing to reducing the prevalence of mental health conditions through prevention targets is what is best for public health, the mental health workforce and the economy.

Priority 4:

Introduce and commit to a target to reduce the prevalence of mental health conditions and severe mental illness in all age groups in Australia

Match funding with need

Demand for mental health services has grown, but funding hasn't. According to the [Australian Burden of Disease Study 2023](#), mental and substance use disorders were estimated to be responsible for 15% of the total burden of disease, placing it second as a broad disease group after cancer (17%).

Mental ill-health costs Australia over $220 billion annually, or $627 million a day.

The Productivity Commission estimates an additional $2.4 billion is required each year to meet the mental health needs in the community. The only way we can improve Australia's mental health is if we match the level of funding with the level of need.

Priority 5:

Ring-fence a percentage of the annual health budget for mental health services, proportionate to the burden of disease mental health has on Australians

Remove financial barriers

Hundreds of thousands of the sickest and poorest Australians are missing out on healthcare because of gaps in Medicare coverage. Under the current billing system Medicare only covers 85% of psychiatry fees, leaving the patient out of pocket. With lower-than-average incomes and higher-than-average healthcare needs, people with mental illnesses are at a significant disadvantage compared to the general population.

This financial inequality is unfair, and all Australians deserve better.

Fully funding psychiatry fees through Medicare will ensure all those needing mental health care during some of the most vulnerable times of their life are afforded equitable access.

Priority 6:

Increase the Medicare rebate to 100% from 85% to reduce out of pocket costs for Australians who need to see a psychiatrist

Australians will elect a new government this year. The RANZCP urges candidates to make mental health a priority so that all Australians get the care they need, when they need it, where they need it.