

October 2024



The Royal  
Australian &  
New Zealand  
College of  
Psychiatrists



Queensland Branch



# The RANZCP Queensland Branch Election Priorities 2024

*Improving access to mental healthcare  
for Queenslanders*

# Acknowledgement of Country

The RANZCP Queensland Branch acknowledges the Turrbal People and Yuggera People, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land. We honour and respect the Elders past and present, who weave their wisdom into all realms of life.

# Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

We acknowledge the significant contribution of all people with lived experience of mental illness, and the people who care and support them, to the development and delivery of safe, high-quality mental health services.

# About The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) is a membership organisation that prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises governments on mental healthcare. The RANZCP is the peak body representing psychiatrists in Australia and New Zealand and as a bi-national college has strong ties with associations in the Asia-Pacific region.

The RANZCP has over 8,500 members, including more than 5,800 qualified psychiatrists (Fellows) and more than 2,400 members who are training to qualify as psychiatrists (trainees). The RANZCP Queensland Branch represents 1098 Fellows and 471 trainees.

## Support Services

If you or someone you know needs help, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) or the Suicide Callback Service on 1300 659 467 or [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au).

# Message from the RANZCP Queensland Branch Committee Chair

We want to work with the Queensland Government to fix the cracks in our mental health system. Queenslanders deserve mental healthcare when they need it and close to home.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Queensland Branch strongly urges the Queensland Government to **fund three (3) priority areas**:

- develop a workforce plan to attract, train and retain the **psychiatry workforce** in Queensland
- invest in **2000 community-based mental health staff**
- commit to deliver **374 new psychiatric inpatient beds**, and **urgently refurbish 250 beds**

The Queensland Branch welcomed the unexpected [windfall from the mental health levy](#) following this year's State Budget in June 2024. The mental health levy was expected to raise \$1.6 billion over five years, but State Budget papers revealed Queensland's mental health levy would raise \$2.3 billion. This is \$768 million more than expected.

In 2024-25 alone, the mental health levy is expected to raise \$533 million.

The RANZCP Queensland Branch calls on the incoming Queensland Government to:

- **maintain the mental health levy**, with levy funds ring-fenced for improving mental health services across Queensland
- **commit to invest \$830 million per year** (we are calling for an **additional investment of [\\$300 million a year](#)**, on top of the over **\$500 million already announced**), based on our previous advocacy for [\\$750 million](#), adjusted for inflation and [State Budget papers 2024-25 projections](#)
- provide **full transparency on how and where mental health levy funds will be spent**
- **continue with the [Better Care Together](#) plan**, with any funds available over and above the plan ring-fenced for mental health, alcohol and other drug services, mental health initiatives and projects as they emerge.

Yours sincerely



**Professor Brett Emmerson AM**  
*Chair, Queensland Branch Committee,  
The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists*

# Priority 1:

## Fix the mental health workforce crisis

We call on the Queensland Government to implement recommendations from the Parliamentary Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders [Final Report](#) to attract, train and retain a robust mental health workforce.

Queensland Health is undertaking a Medical Workforce Mapping Project, which will examine vacancy patterns and workforce gaps within the psychiatry workforce. We understand the project aims to:

- result in a profile of the entire medical workforce across all 16 hospitals and health services, including clinical placements, interns, resident medical officers, Principal House Officer (PHOs), registrars and consultants (by specialty)
- explore capacity to expand training opportunities in Queensland, including partnering with the medical specialist colleges to increase accredited medical specialist training.

[Queensland's mental health workforce is the state's "biggest challenge."](#) The current workforce strategy offers a \$30,000 financial incentive for Queensland Health workers relocating to Brisbane and \$70,000 for regional and rural areas (with another \$20,000 after one year of service, and a further \$20,000 after the second year).

While we welcome the State Government's financial incentives for interstate doctors to relocate to Queensland, we have to ensure we can keep them.

That is why we strongly push the Queensland Government to take real action to train and retain the best talent from interstate, especially to fill regional and rural mental healthcare gaps.

The state mental health workforce requires growth in capacity to meet current and future demand and address geographic maldistribution. An interstate workforce attraction scheme will likely entice more frontline healthcare workers to communities across Queensland. However, to facilitate long-term workforce planning, there is a need for support initiatives to grow the local mental health workforce in our state, particularly in rural and remote areas of Queensland.

To meet the current and growing mental health needs of Queenslanders, we need to attract locally grown workers to a career in mental health, train enough high-quality practitioners, and retain the current workforce by preventing against burnout and moral injury. This state-wide workforce plan must be underpinned by high-quality data that tells us how many mental health workers are needed, where, when and in what capacity.

### Queensland Government Action

Commit to continue to develop the Medical Workforce Mapping Project.

# Priority 2:

## Improve access to community-based mental healthcare

For many Queenslanders, mental healthcare is too far away, too costly or not available where they live. Accessible community-based mental healthcare is critical to ease the pressures on public hospital emergency departments and [mental health units](#) in Queensland.

Community-based mental health services across Queensland are not adequately staffed. They operate with skeleton staff evenings and weekends. Community mental health centres need to operate seven days a week, so that people with mild to moderate conditions can receive timely treatment where they live, preventing their illnesses from becoming more complex and harder to treat.

In its [submission](#) to the *Parliamentary Inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health outcomes for Queenslanders*, Queensland Health estimated that we need 1,300 community mental health staff.

But we need more than that. We need approximately [2,000 more community healthcare staff](#) across the state, to enable staff to work seven days a week, and we need more funding to take into account penalty rates for overtime and weekend shift work.

Queenslanders should be able to access the help they need within their community, without necessarily distancing themselves from their homes, loved ones or carers. For community mental healthcare to be successful, there is also the need for more public housing and funding for non-governmental (NGO) disability support services.

### Queensland Government Action

Commit to investment in 2,000 community-based mental health staff, including addiction and mental health doctors, nurses and other allied health staff.

# Priority 3:

## Provide more beds, and modernise ageing mental health units

The [National Mental Health Service Planning Framework](#) has found Queensland needs around 2000 beds. There are currently 1658 beds across the state.

We previously advocated for 500 new mental health in-patient beds. The Queensland Government committed to [126 new mental health and alcohol and other drug beds by 2027](#), and so we now need an additional 374 new inpatient beds.

We also need to urgently refurbish 250 beds of the existing 1658 public hospital beds, including three wards at Royal Brisbane, one ward at Caboolture, and the Princess Alexandra psychiatric unit, which are all 25 to 30 years old.

[ABC News](#) reported that, since 2018, 19 adult mental health inpatients ended their lives while in Queensland mental health units. An independent review found that two psychiatric wards at The Prince Charles Hospital were [beset with staff shortages, increasing demand and aging facilities that are “no longer fit for purpose”](#). The Prince Charles will soon get a new \$14 million Crisis Stabilisation Unit following the independent review, staffed with an additional 60 health workers including medical, nursing and allied health professionals. But elsewhere in the state, staffing levels and psychiatric bed numbers are not keeping pace with the rise in complex mental health presentations across Queensland public hospitals, necessitating further investment in psychiatric beds, along with the staffing that they require.

Concerns have been raised around the safety of frontline workers and patients inside Cairns' troubled mental health unit, given earlier [reports of children](#) and [prisoners](#) from Lotus Glen correctional facility receiving treatment in the adult inpatient unit. For months, burned

out mental health workers have been [campaigning to stop incidents of assault](#), illicit drug use amongst patients and the use of weapons inside their ward.

Ageing facilities must be modernised, and we need 374 new psychiatric beds across Queensland mental health units. Any expansion in capacity must be matched by more staff to look after more patients. Without significant funding from the Queensland Government for more mental health inpatient beds and to rebuild and refurbish ageing mental health facilities, Queenslanders will continue to miss out on the inpatient mental healthcare that they need. Contemporary mental health units are needed to provide a modern and therapeutic environment to support the rehabilitation and optimal recovery of people with complex mental health presentations. The design of inpatient psychiatric facilities, and the quality and safety of the work environment is important for both staff and patient safety.

We need clear direction from the Queensland Government on how many psychiatric beds we can expect, noting our call for 374 new psychiatric beds, along with the staffing needed.

### Queensland Government Actions

1. Provide an additional 374 new mental health inpatient beds, along with the required staffing.
2. Urgently refurbish 250 beds of the 1658 public hospital beds.



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