

Wednesday, 14 December 2022

### **Better access report highlights need for new mental health investment**

The Australian Medical Association has welcomed the release of the final report of the Better Access evaluation, showing that it is helping to improve health outcomes for people with mental illness but that other programs are needed to complement the initiative to support hard-to-reach populations.

Temporary COVID-19 arrangements that allowed extra Better Access funded sessions will end on 31 December and while these have provided vital support to patients during the pandemic so far, we need more durable and long-term arrangements in place to support patients with the most need.

“The AMA supports the ongoing revision of mental health services to ensure they are reaching those who need them the most and we welcome a greater emphasis on directing resources to those patients who suffer complex or more severe mental health conditions,” AMA President, Professor Steve Robson said.

“The AMA agrees with the evaluation’s emphasis on the importance of multidisciplinary team engagement for community care led by GPs. We also recognise the need for the mental health system to be resourced to reach people in rural and remote areas, and those experiencing other barriers to accessing the care they need.”

Professor Robson said there is a need now to focus on the mental health workforce which underpins mental health care, urging the government to prioritise strategies to ensure workforce growth keeps pace with service demand, particularly in higher-needs areas with limited services.

“At the moment there are waitlists to see psychologists and psychiatrists, so this remains a barrier to mental health care, especially for children and adolescents.”

Professor Robson added that general practice remains the hub of all community mental health treatment, and complex mental health consultations should receive the appropriate rebate.

“This would allow patients to receive responsive and comprehensive care and afford GPs the time to develop treatment plans and arrange for follow up.

“The AMA maintains that general practitioners should review patients at key milestones along their mental health treatment pathway. This will reduce fragmentation of care across the system and support stronger linkages across care teams for people who are seeking mental health care.”

The AMA also welcomed a greater emphasis on directing resources to those patients who suffer complex or more severe mental health conditions.

“We are committed to working closely with the federal government to improve access to mental health care services and ensure services are accessible and affordable,” Professor Robson said.

Follow the AMA Media on Twitter: [twitter.com/ama\\_media](https://twitter.com/ama_media)

Follow the AMA President on Twitter: [twitter.com/amapresident](https://twitter.com/amapresident)

Like the AMA on Facebook [facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation](https://facebook.com/AustralianMedicalAssociation)