



MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 6 December 2024

Australia's mental healthcare system failing those who need it most: AMA warns

Australia's mental healthcare system is failing some of the most vulnerable people in our community, with the system increasingly difficult to navigate and experiencing critical workforce issues.

The Australian Medical Association's [position statement on mental health and wellbeing](#), released today, calls on all governments to work together to invest in mental health and address the severe workforce shortages plaguing our mental healthcare system.

Speaking ahead of a meeting of health ministers, AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen warned Australia's mental healthcare system is underfunded, fragmented, and a nightmare to navigate for those who need it most.

"Many Australians will experience a mental illness at some time in their lives, and almost every Australian will experience the effects of mental illness in a family member, friend, or colleague," Dr McMullen said.

"But for patients with mental illness and their families, navigating Australia's mental health system and finding the right care at the right time can be fraught.

"Mental healthcare is already chronically underfunded, but severe workforce shortages and inadequate staffing, the complexity of presentations, and increasing patient loads are further contributing to a system reaching breaking point.

"It is vital the key areas of the mental health workforce, including psychiatry and general practice, are adequately resourced and structured to be able to provide the best possible care for people who desperately need help."

Dr McMullen said GPs are at the front line in supporting patients with mental illness with successive Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' Health of the Nation reports showing it is now the number one reason for patients visiting their GP.

"There is a critical need for governments to ensure GPs are properly supported in this role, including investing in longer consultations, GP-led multidisciplinary care and accessible referral pathways."

Dr McMullen said all levels of governments, and non-government organisations, need to work together to design and properly fund a mental healthcare system that is patient-centred, needs based, and informed by evidence.

"Our mental healthcare system is under more strain than ever, and we need to take this crisis seriously. We need all governments to work collaboratively to improve the function, size and distribution of Australia's mental healthcare workforce to ensure care is available for some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

"We also need additional investment to support dedicated, flexible and sustainable regional, rural and remote training pathways for GPs, psychiatrists, and other mental healthcare professionals to improve access to care for those living outside urban areas.

"Mental illness is one of the most prevalent chronic diseases facing Australians today and it should be given the same care and attention as other chronic diseases. We owe it to our patients and society to get this right."

Contact: AMA Media: +61 427 209 753 media@ama.com.au

 [@ama_media](#)

 [@amapresident](#)

 [@medicalassociation_au](#)

 [AustralianMedicalAssociation](#)

 [@medicalassociation_au](#)

 [@medicalassociation_au](#)