

MEDIA RELEASE

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Stronger mental health commission must drive improved coordination

A strengthened Australia Mental Health Commission should drive the collaboration and coordination between governments that is desperately needed to improve the delivery of mental healthcare, the Australian Medical Association said today.

The AMA's submission to a Department of Health and Aged Care consultation on strengthening the commission, says true reform of the mental health sector requires all governments working together.

AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen said the AMA has been advocating for many years for a co-ordinated whole-of-government approach for both mental and public health.

"A co-ordinated whole-of-government approach with integrated data systems is needed to avoid jurisdictions working in silos," Dr McMullen said.

"We need to transform how mental healthcare and suicide prevention is managed in Australia and this starts with the right systems in place," Dr McMullen said.

Dr McMullen said the [Productivity Commission recommended in 2020](#) that an interjurisdictional, special-purpose mental health council be created that included federal, state and territory government health (or mental health) ministers, plus ministers of selected social policy portfolios on 18-month rotations. The commission recommended that the council report regularly to health ministers.

"However, this body was never established with mental health ministers rarely meeting," Dr McMullen said.

"Mental health ministers came together after the Westfield Bondi tragedy, and following the meeting promised to work together to improve access to mental health services through a re-affirmed commitment to delivering the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement.

"While that's a good step in the right direction and ministers committed to meeting twice a year, this is not nearly enough to ensure continued transparent and coordinated efforts to address the crisis in mental healthcare in Australia."

The AMA's submission also says accountability standards are essential to ensure Australia's mental health system is robust and equitable.

"We would like data reported from the jurisdictions to the NMHC so that patient wait times can be tracked and reported," Dr McMullen said.

"The ability to track patient waiting times for access to mental health services will help ensure programs can be adjusted so that patients are getting the help they need when they need it."

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

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