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AMA WELCOMES COMMITMENTS TO INVEST IN MENTAL HEALTH

AMA President Dr Michael Gannon has welcomed commitments from both the major parties to invest in frontline mental health services to support suicide prevention programs.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has announced that, if re-elected, his Government would invest \$192 million to help implement a National Suicide Prevention Strategy, including \$24 million to fund an extra eight Suicide Prevention Trial sites in regional areas. Labor leader Bill Shorten, meanwhile, has said a Labor Government would commit \$72 million to fund 12 regional suicide prevention projects.

Dr Gannon said the election campaign focus on mental health services was welcome.

“There is widespread recognition that the nation needs to do better in caring for people with mental illness,” he said. “The commitment by both the Coalition and Labor to increase investment in suicide prevention and youth mental health services is recognition that this area of care needs significant investment.”

The announcements by both major parties comes against the backdrop of Government plans, outlined in its response to the National Mental Health Commission report on the mental health system, to transition Commonwealth mental health program funding to [Primary Health Networks](#) (PHNs), which would have the lead role in planning and integrating mental health services.

Dr Gannon said the focus of the Government’s strategy on tailoring care to individual need and local service planning and delivery was important, but much depended on the capacity and capability of individual PHNs.

The AMA has also flagged the need for PHNs to work closely with the private specialist mental health sector in order to ensure there was no fragmentation of services and care.

Dr Gannon said although the Coalition’s promise to increase spending on mental health was welcome, he was disappointed it had not matched Labor’s commitment to unfreeze Medicare rebates.

“Many general practices are at breaking point as a result of the Medicare rebate freeze, and many GPs have said that if the freeze continues they will have no choice but to abandon bulk billing and begin charging patients, or increase the out-of-pockets they already charge for some patients.

“We know that, faced with an out-of-pocket charge, some patients will delay seeing their doctor, putting their health at risk and potentially leading to much more expensive hospital treatment down the track.

“For the sake of patients, and for the sake of the health budget, the Coalition must join with Labor and the Greens in committing to reinstate Medicare rebate indexation,” Dr Gannon said.

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