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**MENTAL HEALTH FRAMEWORK WELL-INTENTIONED BUT
 LACKS DETAIL ON NEW FUNDING AND SERVICE DELIVERY**

The AMA has welcomed the overall intent of the Government’s new mental health framework, but questions remain over new funding, on-the-ground service delivery, and the ongoing role of the Federal Government in the mental health sector.

AMA President, Professor Brian Owler, said the framework appropriately focusses on the varying needs of people in different stages of mental illness, and rightly highlights the need for local service planning and delivery.

“The success of this new direction in mental health service delivery will depend very much on the capacity and capability of Primary Health Networks (PHNs),” Professor Owler said.

“Funding for mental health services will sit with the PHNs, which will work in partnership with Local Hospital Networks to commission services that are better targeted for people with mental health needs.

“The AMA hopes that this model will deliver genuine patient-centred care and not the opposite, whereby the PHN decides what package of care people can have, based on the services it has chosen to organise.

“It is particularly important for people with mental illness that the system neither reduces nor compromises the patient's choice of health care provider, and their ability to plan and manage their care with their GP.

“It is equally important that the system does not lock people into a package of care provided or commissioned by the PHN with predetermined providers, with limited or no ability to change providers once the package has commenced.

“GPs must remain at the centre of care. GPs are usually the first point of call in the health system for patients with mental illness, with BEACH data estimating that around 13 per cent of GP encounters are mental health-related.

“GPs play a key role in treating patients with mental illness, and refer to other services where appropriate.

“Patients who have concerns about their mental health should talk to their usual GP, who is well placed to help them.”

Professor Owler said an underlying concern of the new framework is the withdrawal of the Federal Government from funding and program delivery to assume a ‘strategic leadership’ role.

“The AMA will be closely watching the Government’s reviews of primary care and private health insurance to see if this approach is going to be replicated, with greater responsibilities going to the States and Territories and the private sector,” Professor Owler said.

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