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MEDIA RELEASE

Mental health funding a welcome relief but crisis not averted

Australia's peak not for profit body representing psychologists says it is a welcome relief that mental health is finally a priority, with \$2.3billion for the largest single mental health and suicide prevention investment in Australia's history.

The Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) says while this level of funding acknowledges the mental health crisis across the country, more is needed in key areas to heal and recover.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said she was pleased the Government recognised that the system needed to support people early in their experience of distress, before mental health conditions deteriorate.

"Psychologists play a key role in this early intervention so they need to remain affordable and accessible to everyone in the community. We also need to ensure psychologists remain in the workforce and do more to support students and provisional psychologists to reach full registration," she said.

Ms Carrison said AAPi's areas of concern were:

Telehealth: The government has only funded telehealth for another six months. Telehealth must be made a permanent part of healthcare and is crucial in rural Australia.

Mental health hubs: The taxpayer cost of mental health hubs can be 400% greater than the cost of attending a private psychologist. New facilities will also take time to build, refurbish and recruit staff. Our mental health workforce is already overwhelmed. More evidence is needed regarding their effectiveness for such a huge investment. The hubs divert funding and the workforce away from small businesses (private practice psychology and allied health) whereas small business and private practices are embedded long term in a community. Properly investing in private practice through increasing the MBS rebates is a more cost-effective, long term solution.

Workforce growth and retention: The mental health initiatives are mostly a reshuffling of an already stretched workforce (rather than increasing services). The government needs to address why psychologists are leaving the profession, the barriers to attaining registration and mobilise the 5,500 provisional psychologists, which would immediately provide more psychologists in the community *today*.

Supporting rural allied health: While the investment in supporting rural GPs is welcome, the same investment is also required for allied health and psychology. Given the disparity in mental health for those in rural and remote communities and reduced access to services,

surely supporting psychologists and allied health professionals requires urgent and immediate attention. Rural psychologists play an essential role in their communities and we need to do more to support them.

Ms Carrison said AAPi was pleased to see \$14.2 million for new MBS items for allied health professionals who participate in case conferences which are organised by a patient's GP. This will support increased allied health participation in multidisciplinary, coordinated care for patients with chronic and complex conditions.

AAPi is also keen to see more detail on the \$111.4 million to support the take up of group therapy sessions and participation of family and carers in treatment provided under the Better Access initiative. If set up correctly, this would be a very welcome initiative that starts to address the overlooking of people who share in the pain of someone experiencing poor mental health.

We urgently need to improve the current processes in accessing a psychologist and reduce the red tape and administrative burden. AAPi looks forward to working with the Select Committee into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to reform and transform our mental health system.

Ms Carrison said AAPi would continue to advocate for the raising of the Medicare rebate to \$150 per session and implementing the Productivity Commission's recommendation to provide up to 40 rebated psychology sessions per year.

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Further information

Tegan Carrison is the **Executive Director of the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi)**, a not-for-profit peak body for psychologists in Australia.

About Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi)

The AAPi is a not-for-profit peak body for psychologists that aims to preserve the rich diversity of psychological practice in Australia. Formed in 2010 by a group of passionate grassroots psychologists, the AAPi's primary goal is to address inequality in the profession and represent all psychologists and their clients equally to government and funding bodies. Its primary mission is to lobby for equitable access for the Australian public to professional psychological services funded under the current Medicare Better Access Scheme.

About Tegan Carrison, Executive Director, AAPi

Tegan has spent over 15 years in public health promotion and is passionate about advocating for the rights of health care professionals and improving access for the community. After studying Nutrition and Health Promotion at Deakin University, Tegan went on to become an experienced clinical educator, supervisor, and mentor, including starting a student-led interprofessional clinic with the University of Queensland's not-for-profit UQ Health Care. Tegan also brings a wealth of experience in business management, administration and human resource management. She is passionate and dedicated to

improving access to mental health services and creating the leading members association for psychologists in Australia.