

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**MENTAL HEALTH – GREATER AWARENESS AND MORE FUNDING
NEEDED**

On the eve of World Mental Health Day, AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said there needs to be greater community awareness and education about mental health and a significant boost to mental health funding and services.

Dr Pesce said mental health problems are common in the community and that the Australian Bureau of Statistics has estimated that nearly half of all adult Australians will experience a mental disorder at some point in their life.

“These disorders range from anxiety and depression, to substance-related disorders and personality disorders,” Dr Pesce said.

“The World Federation for Mental Health has predicted that major depression will soon be the second leading cause of disability worldwide.

“Mental illness is a major issue and the demands on mental health services are growing.

“The community needs to be better educated and informed about mental illness and how to support people who suffer from it, and there clearly needs to be greater funding allocated to support mental health services.”

Dr Pesce said GPs are the face of primary care for most Australians and they are skilled to provide support and appropriate referral to people with mental health concerns.

“It is estimated that around 10 per cent of GP encounters are mental health-related.

“GPs are highly trained professionals who can provide sensitive and timely care to those affected by mental illness and are a source of support and advice for their families and carers.

“Treating mental health concerns in general practice is an important opportunity to intervene early and prevent more disabling disorders.

“People who are concerned about their own mental health, or the mental health of loved ones, are encouraged to seek advice from their GP.

“A causal link between mental illness and physical ill health is now widely recognised, emphasising the need for people with mental health concerns to seek advice from their doctor.

“The families and carers of people suffering from mental illness also need more support and acknowledgement of their important role.”

The theme for tomorrow’s World Mental Health Day is *Mental health in primary care: Enhancing treatment and promoting mental health.*

Mental health is a key element of the AMA's *Priority Investment Plan for Australia's Health System*, which was released last month. The mental health section of the plan appears below

Mental health

While the NHHRC identifies a number of important initiatives to improve care for people with a mental illness through expanded early intervention for young people, more sub-acute care, better links between acute care and community care, including through rapid response teams working from acute care settings in the community, the report is silent on the continuing unmet need for acute care, often required on an inpatient basis for patients with mental illness.

There are many patients requiring acute inpatient care during initial diagnosis, stabilisation of their condition, or while they are under clinical supervision during a change in their medication to avoid a relapse in their condition.

The Government needs to undertake an analysis of the number of new psychiatric inpatient beds required in the public hospital system as part of the AMA's proposed stocktake on public hospital bed capacity.

*The additional psychiatric acute care beds identified in the stocktake should be formally agreed with State and Territory Governments, with the establishment and funding of these beds monitored through the proposed **Bed Watch** monitoring arrangements for public hospital beds.*

There also needs to be an expanded integration of the role for psychiatrists in the provision of community-based care for people with mental illness.

This should include targeted funding for psychiatric nurses and psychologists to be able to work under the supervision of private psychiatrists, linked closely to the current referral system from GPs to private psychiatrists.

9 October 2009

CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Peter Jean 02 6270 5464 / 0427 209 753