Mental Health Nurses: The front line of mental health reform

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) welcomes this morning's announcement by the Prime Minister to deliver $174 million to begin the process of developing equitable, accessible and sustainable mental health services in Australia.

CEO Kim Ryan says, “We are happy to see these initial investments in developing mental health services, but from a funding perspective, there is a long way to go if we are to meet the need of the Australian community. This really is just the beginning”.

Ms Ryan also welcomes the acknowledgement by the Government of the vital role that mental health nurses (MHNs) play in providing holistic care for people with mental health problems. The Commonwealth funded Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP), which is based in primary care, has been “a wonderful program that has provided thousands of people with a comprehensive service - people who were falling through the gaps in the system,” Ms Ryan said.

However, Ms Ryan points out that the scope of practice of MHNs is broad and that by limiting MHNs to a funding model focused on people with ‘serious mental illness’ is to under-utilise a cost effective and accessible form of mental health care for the community. “Mental health nurses provide care across the whole spectrum of mental health - prevention, health promotion, early intervention and treatment. The skill base of our profession is not limited to the ongoing care required for people who experience chronic mental illness.”

Providing comprehensive primary mental health care would require MHNs to be allowed to undertake their full scope of practice. “The Australian community must have access to a broad range of services and professional groups – not just GPs. At present, people are missing out on the skills and experience mental health nurses are able to provide”.

The ACMHN urges the government to consult with the organisation in developing detail around how this additional mental health funding is to be best utilised. “As in other areas within health, nurses form the backbone of the mental health system. Without nurses, there is no system – there’s no way you can develop a better service if there is no-one there to provide the care that is required,” Ms Ryan said.

Contact:
Ms Kim Ryan
Chief Executive Officer
Australian College of Mental Health Nurses
Ph: 0471823723