MEDIA RELEASE

Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program funding frozen

The Government has delivered an unconscionable freeze on funding for the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP) in the 2012-13 Budget. This highlights that having a budget in surplus is more important to the Gillard Government than the needs of some of the country’s most vulnerable people.

The Treasurer says the surplus years are here, yet the Budget Papers allocate just $17 million in additional funding to the MHNIP for 2012-13. This means that no new nurses and no new organisations will be able to deliver vital services to thousands of people with complex and serious mental illness.

Through this program, people with severe and persistent mental illness receive specialist nursing support and care coordination through the Medicare system. The services are provided in a range of settings, including patients’ homes or clinics, at little cost to the patient.

“This program is about supporting people with complex conditions. Mental health nurses working under MHNIP keep people connected and stop them falling through the gaps of the health system” says Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan, CEO of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses.

“The program supports GPs and psychiatrists to provide more effective and targeted mental health care to their clients, and helps keep people from hospitalisation – which saves money throughout the health system”.

“Mr Swan says this is a budget for battlers, yet it stigmatises and marginalises some of Australia’s most vulnerable – those living with complex mental illnesses”.

“How can you deliver a mental health services without access to mental health nurses? They are the backbone of the mental health system. This government is ignoring mental health nurses and the vital role they play in assisting those with mental illness in Australia”.

Adj. Assoc. Professor Ryan is appalled by the decision to recklessly freeze MHNIP funding before a full evaluation of the program has even been completed. “We know the program is working, we know from nurses and we know from clients. We know from the National Advisory Council on Mental Health’s case studies project report, which highlighted its effectiveness”.

“We’re not going to sit idly by and accept this freeze. We’re going to fight for funding to be reinstated so that mental health nurses working under MHNIP can continue to provide vital services to those with mental illnesses”. Ms Ryan said.

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