MEDIA RELEASE

Government delivers a slap in the face for nurses in International Nurses week

In International Nurses Week, the Gillard Government has delivered a slap in the face for nurses with Budget freeze on funding for the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP).

Nurses play an important role in the delivery of primary health care. Both the International Council of Nurses and the World Health Organisation have emphasised the importance of primary care, and the need to strengthen the nursing workforce in primary health care.

International Nurses week celebrates the contribution nurses make to health care across the world.

In Tuesday's Budget, the Minister for Mental Health, Mark Butler announced a freeze on an innovative and effective program delivering nursing services in primary care; the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program.

At the same time the Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek has been promoting the Government’s commitment to better integration in primary health care through support for nurses in general practice.

Adjunct Associate Professor Kim Ryan, CEO of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses said “the Australian Government has seen the wisdom in supporting nursing in general practice to the tune of $390 million over four years, yet fails to see the benefit of mental health nurses in the same setting.”

Health Workforce Australia has forecast Australia will need an extra 109,490 nurses in 2025. In the area of mental health nurses, there will be a shortfall of over 25 percent. Better retention of nurses is through more flexible work arrangements, alternative career pathways and roles that use nurses full professional skills are integral to addressing the shortfall.

“The Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program ticks all the boxes to attract and retain nurses in the area of mental health. But the Gillard Government’s decision to freeze the program undermines the confidence of the nurses to leave the security of the public sector and be part of the growing workforce in primary health care.”

International Nurses Day is celebrated on 12 May each year – the anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s birth. This year’s theme, Closing the Gap: from evidence to action, explores the idea of using evidence to inform actions and decisions, and improve the performance of the health system through this evidence.

“We call on the Government to show their support for the vital work done by nurses across Australia by allocating an appropriate level of funding to the MHNIP. This is a slap in the face for nurses, but it is a shocking blow to the lives of people living with severe and complex mental illnesses”, said Adjunct Associate Professor Ryan.

Media contact: Kim Ryan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, 0417 289 189