Mental Health Nurse Incentive Programme: Update

On 26 November 2015 the Australian Government announced its response to the National Mental Health Commission’s review of Mental Health Programmes and Services. The reforms outlined in the response will transform Commonwealth mental health funding and programme delivery over the next three years to achieve a more efficient, integrated and sustainable mental health system and to improve mental health services for Australians. Details of the reform package are available at http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-review-response

A key component of the reform package is the transition of primary mental health programmes, such as the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Programme (MHNIP), to Primary Health Networks (PHNs) from 1 July 2016. PHNs will be responsible for planning and integrating services at the regional level and better targeting services to meet individual and local need. The role of the mental health nurse in the new primary mental health care model will continue to focus on providing and coordinating clinical care for people with severe mental illness, in collaboration with GPs and psychiatrists.

Continuity of services to the MHNIP client population is paramount. In 2015-16, MHNIP will continue to operate under the existing guidelines, and PHNs will commence regional needs analyses and planning activities to guide implementation from 1 July 2016. In 2016-17, MHNIP funding will transition to the PHN primary mental health flexible funding pool. However, it will be quarantined and PHNs will be required to commission mental health nursing services from the current network of MHNIP providers. The emphasis will be on ensuring service continuity and bedding down the role of mental health nurses within a team based approach to providing clinical care to people with severe and complex mental illness.

From 2017-18, mental health nurse funding will fully transition to the flexible funding pool. PHNs will undertake needs analysis to inform their commissioning processes including for the provision of mental health nursing services.

There is currently significant disparity in the distribution of MHNIP services across regions. From 2016-17, growth funding will be provided to PHNs in regions where service levels are currently lower than the national average. The Department will work closely with relevant PHNs to support the effective management of the impacts.

The Department is providing PHNs with a variety of information to support their new role. Grant Programme Guidelines are being established to provide the overarching parameters of the primary mental health care funding. Guidance material is also being developed to provide advice on the implementation of specific streams within the primary mental health flexible funding pool, including mental health nursing services. The Department has provided MHNIP Organisation contact details to PHNs, so they are aware of the network of MHNIP providers in their regions and know who to contact to commence discussions regarding the delivery of mental health nursing services from 1 July 2016.

MHNIP organisations and relevant health professionals are encouraged to contact their relevant PHN to discuss service planning and commissioning and ongoing opportunities to contribute to the delivery of mental health nursing services within their region.