MEDIA RELEASE

Mental health care dependent on diagnosis

The recently released Better Access evaluation highlights the difference a diagnosis can make as people with less common mental illnesses struggle to access mental health services.

Over two million people with a diagnosis of depression or anxiety have received mental health treatment through Better Access. But there is no ‘Better Access’ for people with bipolar mood disorders, personality disorders eating disorders, schizophrenia and other less common mental illnesses.

“The unfortunate side effect of Better Access and other Government investment has been to entrench the stigma associated with these less common mental illnesses”, claimed Ms Kim Ryan, CEO of the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses.

“People with these illnesses need appropriate ongoing treatment but many can’t access that treatment and fall through the gaps between specialist mental health services and private mental health care”, said Ms Ryan.

The Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program is an alternative program that is meeting the needs of people with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. The Government has committed $80 million to this program, compared with the $1.45 billion spent on mental health treatment for depression and anxiety through Better Access.

“Through the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program people receive ongoing treatment and care coordination. As a result, people with these less common but disabling mental illnesses are able to lead full and productive lives.

Increased investment in this program is needed so that people with illnesses such as schizophrenia, eating disorders and bipolar mood disorders have the same access to care as people with depression and anxiety" said Ms Ryan.

Facts about mental illness:

• About 3% of Australians are affected by illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.
• Approximately 2% of Australians will experience some type of eating disorder in their life, with 90% of people affected being women.
• Approximately 6% of the adult population will meet the criteria for a personality disorder over their lifetime.

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