

Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program

Background

The Australian Government will provide funding of \$191 million over five years, through the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program. This initiative will give a non-MBS incentive payment to eligible community based general practices, private psychiatrist services and other appropriate organisations (such as Divisions of General Practice or Aboriginal Medical Services) who engage credentialed clinical mental health nurses to coordinate treatment and care for people with serious mental illness and complex needs. Services under this initiative will be provided at little or no cost to the patient.

People with serious mental illness are most at risk of failing to access an appropriate range of services because of their persistent psychiatric symptoms, their level of disability and/or their isolation from family and other social support networks. For the majority of people with mental illness, effective community-based support will reduce their need for acute hospital services, leading to improved health outcomes and reduced costs of care.

Benefits to and role of the Mental Health Nurse under the initiative

The initiative will provide mental health nurses with a new career path and greater job opportunities – expanding the scope and autonomy of their clinical practice.

Mental health nurses engaged under this initiative will work with general practitioners and psychiatrists to provide mental health clients with a more integrated treatment plan, improved continuity of clinical care and increased access to other health care professionals. It is envisaged that mental health nurses will provide a range of client-focused services, including but not limited to, periodic mental state review, monitoring of medication, provision of health promotion information, undertaking home visits and enabling access to interventions from other health professionals and support networks when these are required.

How do you find employment under this initiative?

Practices and organisations eligible for funding under the new initiative will be required to engage the services of a mental health nurse who holds a *Mental Health Nurse Credential* with the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN). The ACMHN is the peak professional mental health nursing organisation in Australia and its Credential for Practice Program (CPP) is a formal but voluntary process, which recognises that an individual nurse has met the standards of practice set by the ACMHN.

Credentialing requirements for the new positions

Mental health nurses eligible for engagement under this new initiative must be credentialed by the ACMHN. However, as it is recognised that it may take some time for eligible nurses to achieve this, until 31 December 2008 interim arrangements will apply. Under these interim arrangements, Registered Nurses with current registration who have obtained, or are working towards obtaining, specialist qualifications in mental health nursing, and who have 3 years recent experience in mental health nursing, will be eligible to be engaged under the program.

All nurses working under the Initiative will need to be credentialed by 31 December 2008.

Specialist qualifications in mental health

Specialist qualifications in mental health can be at Graduate Diploma or Masters level and are available at most universities where postgraduate nursing programs are offered. Each State and Territory Department of Health offer scholarship opportunities. A list of scholarship contacts can be obtained from the ACMHN website (www.acmhn.org).

Questions and Answers

I am a member of the ACMHN. Do I meet the eligibility criteria?

No. You must hold a Mental Health Nurse Credential from the ACMHN or meet the interim eligibility criteria.

What is Credentialing?

Being a credentialed mental health nurse identifies you as having achieved a particular standard. It indicates to employers, professional peers, consumers, and other stakeholders, what might reasonably be expected from you and that an evaluation of your individual performance against the relevant practice standards has been undertaken.

How do I become a Credentialed Mental Health Nurse?

The ACMHN website (www.acmhn.org) contains all the information you will require, including a PDF application form and guidelines for you to download. You will need to provide evidence of post-graduate studies in mental health nursing and of ongoing professional development and education within mental health.

Will the ACMHN assist me with my application?

Yes, the ACMHN can advise you on what you need to do and put you in touch with other credentialed mental health nurses to assist you if necessary.

How can the ACMHN assist me to get work under the new initiative?

The ACMHN will add your name to a special list which may assist general practitioners, psychiatrists and other relevant organisations to engage mental health nurses.

Will the ACMHN support the nurses who undertake these positions?

Yes, the ACMHN is looking at establishing a support network for nurses who undertake these new roles.

What if I am asked to do jobs that are not related to mental health, such as vena puncture?

The new initiative only provides funding for specialist mental health nurse positions. As such, your scope of practice should be that of a mental health nurse and you should not be required to undertake any duties unrelated to mental health nursing. If you have any queries regarding the type of duties you may legitimately be required to perform, please refer to the program guidelines or contact the ACMHN.

What are the pay rates for these nurses?

The ACMHN advocates nurses who take up the new positions are to be paid at a rate no less than a clinical nurse specialist (NSW) or state equivalent. These arrangements will need to be made with the service that engages or retains the nurse.

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses www.acmhn.org 1300 667 079

