

The Mental Health Nurses Incentive Program

The Australian Government has provided funding of \$191.6 million over five years from July 2007 through the Mental Health Nurses Incentive Program. This program provides a non-MBS incentive payment to general practices, private psychiatrist services and other appropriate community providers (**including Divisions of General Practice**) to engage or retain mental health nurses to assist in the provision of coordinated clinical care for people, in the community, with severe mental health disorders.

What services will be provided?

Mental Health Nurses engaged under this initiative will provide a suite of services that will enhance continuity of care and be tailored to each patient's needs. Services will include:

- A periodic review of the patient's mental state.
- Medication monitoring and management.
- Provision of information about physical healthcare to clients.
- Improving patient links to other health professionals and clinical service providers including arranging access to interventions from psychiatrists and allied health professionals when required (including Better Access and ATAPS).
- Close liaison with family and carers as appropriate (including family interventions if needed).
- Provision of patient services in a range of settings, such as in clinics or patients' homes.

How can Divisions be involved?

Under this initiative Divisions of General Practice can engage one or more Mental Health Nurses to assist in managing community-based patients with a severe mental health disorder and complex needs, as defined in the departmental guidelines.

What are the benefits for Divisions of General Practice?

Divisions engaging Mental Health Nurses under this initiative will be able to:

- Provide a service to GPs, and their patients with severe mental health disorders, when this may not be otherwise possible. For example where general practices have difficulty meeting eligibility criteria, such as sufficient caseload, or simply choose not to access the initiative directly.
- Increase the capacity of existing divisional mental health services by directly providing and coordinating services to patients with severe mental illness whose care is managed in the community by their general practitioner.
- Provide a service that will potentially reduce workloads of their GPs members, and other practice staff, allowing GPs to spend more time on complex care issues.
- Have flexibility to develop service models best suiting their stakeholders and community

What are the benefits for patients?

Benefits to patients receiving a mental health nursing service under this initiative include:

- Access to clinical care by a mental health nurse in the community setting.
- Continuity of care provided by a single person coordinating both clinical care and co-ordination with other agencies and service providers.
- Provision of multidisciplinary, community based care through one general practice.
- additional assistance with medication.

How are these services funded?

Payments to eligible organizations will be administered by Medicare Australia quarterly and will be based on the number of sessions that the mental health nurse is engaged for (minimum 2 individual patients per 3.5hr session per week and a maximum ten sessions per week)

Payments of \$240.00 (GST inclusive) per session, inclusive of all on-costs and overheads associated with engaging a mental health nurse, are available through this initiative.

For services in rural and remote areas of Australia, a loading of 25% will be applied to the sessional payment to take into account factors such as the difficulty of engaging mental health nurses and the increased traveling distances for mental health nurses to attend and support patients in rural and remote locations. Rural and remote services are those located in Very Remote, Remote and Outer Regional areas as defined by the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC) remoteness classification.

Recruiting Mental Health Nurses

From 31st December 2008 eligible mental health nurses need to be credentialed by the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses. Until 31st December 2008, interim arrangements will apply. Under these arrangements, eligible organisations can engage registered nurses with current registration who have

obtained, or are working towards obtaining, specialist qualifications in mental health, such as a Graduate Diploma in Mental Health Nursing or a Masters in Mental Health Nursing, and 3 years recent experience in mental health nursing

Advice on recruiting mental health nurses can be obtained from the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses

www.acmhn.org.au

Eligibility

For information and definitions of eligibility criteria for organisations (including divisions of general practice), mental health nurses and patients, visit:

www.health.gov.au/coagmentalhealth

Further information

AGPN's designated mental health care website has information, and useful links to other stakeholders involved with the Mental Health Nurses Incentive Program:

www.primarymentalhealth.com.au

or contact Australian General Practice Network

Phone: 02 6228 0800

Fax: 02 6228 0899

Email: mentalhealth@agpn.com.au



An Australian Government Initiative