



An Australian Government Initiative

Mental health nurse incentive program

A program to enable psychiatrists and general practitioners to engage mental health nurses

Media Fact Sheet

Mental health is a significant issue facing Australia. At any one time, there are some 500,000 Australians living with a severe mental disorder.

Close and effective collaboration between mental health nurses, general practitioners and psychiatrists in the delivery of clinical support and services in the community will :

- improve levels of care for people with severe mental disorders;
- reduce the likelihood of unnecessary hospital admissions and readmissions for people with severe mental disorders; and
- assist in keeping people with severe mental illnesses well, and feeling connected within the community.

The Australian Government is supporting this collaboration through the provision of financial incentives to eligible organisations to engage mental health nurses through the \$191 million *Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program*.

This program represents 10% of the Australian Government's \$1.9 billion *Better Mental Health Services for Australia* package. It is a significant component of the *Care Coordination* flagship of the *COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006-2011*, and links with various complementary Australian Government initiatives, such as the *Mental Health Personal Helpers and Mentors* program.

The *Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program* will provide a non-MBS incentive payment to community based general practices, private psychiatrist services and other appropriate organisations (such as Divisions of General Practice) who engage mental health nurses to assist in the provision of coordinated clinical care for people with severe mental disorders.

The *Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program* will help community based patients with a severe mental illness get the right services at the right time, assisting to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions/readmissions.

Mental health nurses will work in collaboration with private psychiatrists and general practitioners to provide services such as:

- periodic reviews of patients' mental states;
- medication monitoring and management;
- information on physical healthcare to patients; and
- integrated services from GPs, psychiatrists and allied health workers (such as psychologists) including arranging access to interventions from other health professionals when these are required.

Services will be provided in a range of settings, such as in clinics or patients' homes, and are to be provided at little or no cost to the patient.

The *Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program* will help alleviate pressure on privately practicing psychiatrists and general practitioners, allowing them increased time to see more patients and deal with patients with complex health care needs.

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The program will also expand the roles and responsibilities for community based mental health nurses in Australia, and create an alternative career pathway for mental health nurses within the community sector.

To be engaged under this initiative, mental health nurses must be nationally credentialed by the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses from 31 December 2008, with interim arrangements in place prior to this date. Information on credentialing can be found on the College's website: www.achmn.org.au

A payment of \$240 (GST inclusive) per session is available to eligible organisations through this initiative. This figure is inclusive of all on-costs and overheads associated with engaging a nurse to provide services under 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 travelling 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.

This program will commence on 1 July 2007, however applications for eligible organisations to participate are available now on the Department of Health and Ageing's website: www.health.gov.au/coagmentalhealth

Hard copies of the application package will also be mailed to general practices, private psychiatry practices and Australian Government funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care services in the near future.