



5 April 2006

MEDIA RELEASE

PM TAKES WELCOME FIRST STEP ON MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS – TWO STEPS TO GO

“The Prime Minister’s announcement today of \$1.8bn over five years in new funding for mental health is a very welcome first step towards addressing Australia’s mental health crisis”, said John Mendoza, CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia.

“The recent Senate Inquiry report called for a 50 to 100% increase in total expenditure on mental health and the Commonwealth’s announcement today is a first step. The next critical step is for State and Territory governments to come forward with their ideas and their money to at least match the Commonwealth’s leadership. The third and final step must be a comprehensive review and reorganisation of Australia’s system so that no matter where you live in Australia, you can get access to high quality mental health services” Mr Mendoza said.

There are several elements in the announcement which are particularly welcomed.

“Increasing access to allied health services, particularly psychology, is critical. We need to ensure that this is achieved without creating a system in which people face large out of pocket expenses for services. The emphasis on new workforce training places is an excellent initiative, as are new positions for practice mental health nurses in rural areas.

“The initiatives designed to improve mental health and employment services for young people are also welcome. This is vital to ensure that our youth can complete study, get a job and become full citizens in our community. The Prime Minister has also demonstrated a good appreciation of the increased role that community organisations can play in providing quality mental health services”, Mr Mendoza said.

The Prime Minister’s announcement pre-empts consideration of mental health by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in June. The Mental Health Council is most concerned that the response to Australia’s mental health crisis is collaborative and systematic — the Commonwealth and State governments must work with non-government and private organisations. This is the type of holistic and strategic approach required in mental health to address the mental health crisis.

The Mental Health Council welcomes the Prime Minister’s acknowledgment that this announcement is only part of a process and that there will be a requirement for the ongoing involvement and financial investment of Commonwealth and State Governments.

The Mental Health Council will soon be launching its own blueprint on how to end the mental health crisis, designed to inform COAG as it builds on the Prime Minister’s announcement and develops a more comprehensive package to meet the mental health crisis.

“The Mental Health Council welcomes the Prime Minister’s acknowledgement of the role of the Mental Health Council in representing the mental health sector and looks forward to continuing to work closely with government to end the mental health crisis in Australia.”

Media Contact: Deborah Nesbitt 0417 289 111/ (02) 62853100

The Mental Health Council of Australia is the independent, national representative body of the mental health sector in Australia. MHCA members include representatives of mental health service consumers, carers, special needs groups, clinical service providers, public and private mental health service providers and state/territory mental health peak bodies.

Ph: (02) 6285 3100

Fax: (02) 6285 2166

E-mail: admin@mhca.com.au

www.mhca.org.au