

Carers Representation Program E Bulletin: 2 June 2011

Welcome to the fortnightly Carer Representation Program E-Bulletin
Informing you of Mental Health committee updates, news, events and more. This issue:

News

Talk is not cheap at \$9.7 million or \$23 million

GP groups call for reinvestment into successful mental health program

College urges government to engage with profession regarding GP mental health funding cuts

Mental Health sector backs getup campaign, christian kerr article: "Unfair and Inaccurate"

People with mental illness experience discrimination when buying and claiming insurance

What's on in the ACT that might interest you

National Disability Insurance Scheme - Public Forum

Diversity Health Network ACT - Public Forum

Chronic Conditions seminar series

NEWS

Federal

Most of the mental health sector news this fortnight, inevitably, arises from the budget and responses to it. The Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, founds questions to ask in Senate estimate hearings:

Talk is not cheap at \$9.7 million or \$23 million

The new Mental Health Commission does not even exist but is already suffering from an identity crisis. In questioning at Senate Estimates on 23rd May from the Senator, Ben Rimmer, Deputy Secretary Strategic Policy and Implementation with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, said there was \$23 million for the Commission. However, the Treasury document Budget 2011-12 Delivering better hospitals, mental health and health services released on Budget night, shows only \$9.7 million over the forward estimates, Senator Fierravanti-Wells said.

The Mental Health Commission is to be an executive agency which will concentrate on providing data, advice to government and an annual report on mental health and suicide. It will also be involved in mental health promotion.

GP groups are also responding to the budget, especially with concerns about the removal of some services from the Medicare Benefit Scheme:

GP groups call for reinvestment into successful mental health program

United General Practice Australia - the coalition of the peak groups representing Australia's general practitioners - has issued a statement calling on the government to expand the Better Access to Mental Health program in order to meet the demand for mental health care in the community. In the 2011/2012 Budget, the government has reduced funding for mental health support delivered by GPs, by announcing cuts to funding for Medicare items delivered under the Better Access program. These items were originally created to facilitate the delivery of quality mental health care in general practice. The cuts include both face-face consultation time and time taken to coordinate mental health care services.

While welcoming the budget's significant focus on mental health, particularly the expansion of the Access to Allied Psychological Services program, GPs are particularly concerned about the potential negative impact on patient access to GP services where GPs have undertaken specific mental health skills training. To read the full media release, go to: <http://www.racgp.org.au/ugpa/42563>

College urges government to engage with profession regarding GP mental health funding cuts

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) continues to receive feedback from some of its 20,000+ members about the implications of the government's budget cuts for mental health support which is delivered by GPs. The College urges the government to talk with them specifically about cuts to GP mental health assessments, planning and referrals. Professor Claire Jackson, RACGP President, said that many GPs have expressed concern at the government's decision to remove the GP mental health care plan rebates and the number of psychologist appointments available to their patients (from a possible 18 to 10). The College is both surprised and disappointed with the government's decision to cut funding from general practice mental health care planning, as about 70% of patients with mental health issues approach their GP when they first notice symptoms reappearing. GPs are concerned about the impact on their communities. To read this media release, follow up: <http://www.racgp.org.au/media2011/42563>

Others are concerned about an apparent lack of respect for the Get Up Mental Health campaign:

Mental Health sector backs getup campaign, Christian Kerr article: "Unfair and Inaccurate"

Leading mental health advocates rose to defend GetUp's mental health campaign, following a story in The Australian: "Mental health sector pans the GetUp 'locusts'." Former Australian of the Year Professor Patrick McGorry wrote a Letter to the Editor of The Australian, seeking to correct the record. The letter was not published. "Christian Kerr's article claiming the mental health sector is hostile towards the mental health reform campaign is neither fair nor accurate," Prof McGorry wrote. "By mobilising over 100,000 Australians - many of them consumers and carers - to support mental health reform, GetUp played a crucial role in securing this first success in what will be a ten year campaign to achieve the same access to quality care for Australian minds and for Australian bodies."

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To look at the campaign (and maybe add your own vote, if you're interested) check out: <http://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/mental-health/petition/sign-the-petition>

And now for something completely different!

People with mental illness experience discrimination when buying and claiming insurance

A survey looking at insurance and discrimination, conducted by beyondblue: the national depression initiative and the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), has revealed people with mental health problems face difficulties when applying for insurance or making claims. The survey - Mental Health, Discrimination and Insurance: A survey of consumer experiences 2011 - is the first of its kind in Australia and has revealed that people who have mental health conditions experience significant difficulty and discrimination when applying for insurance products and making claims against their policies. Over 35 per cent of respondents strongly agreed that it was difficult for them to obtain any type of insurance due to them having experienced mental illness. This almost doubled, increasing to 67 per cent for life and income protection insurance.

This survey is to be launched this week, at the annual MHCA Grace Groom Memorial Oration on Thursday 2nd June 2011. Copies of the report are available at www.beyondblue.org.au and www.mhca.org.au

ACT

Carers ACT has received an email from the Coordinator of Consumer & Carer Participation Service & Sector Development of the Division of Mental Health, Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Services informing us about their re-structure and that this will result in changes to their committee structures. Carers ACT has requested a summary of the proposed changes from the division and hopes to publish the information in the next E-Bulletin.

Carers

Back to the budget . . . Mary Reid, Acting CEO of Carers Australia, has written a letter to Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, in response to the budget. In it she applauds the priority given to mental health, and offers some points that may make it easier for Carers to enter or return to the workforce.

WHAT'S ON IN THE ACT THAT MIGHT INTEREST YOU

Public forum NB! Very short notice!

What: National Disability Insurance Scheme
Where: Building 1, Pearce Community Centre, Collett Pl, Pearce ACT
When: Friday 3rd June
Time: 9.30 - 11.30am
RSVP: daniel.kyriacou@ndis.org.au
and also:
Where: Holt Community Hub,
80 Beaufort Cres, Holt ACT
When: Friday 3rd June
Time: 1.30 - 3.30pm
RSVP: daniel.kyriacou@ndis.org.au

The forum will report back on the draft report of the productivity commission inquiry in to a disability life time care and support scheme. The forum will also discuss how we together can build a campaign in your community to make the dream of an National Disability Insurance Scheme a reality. There will be opportunities to discuss the issues for people with severe mental illness.

PUBLIC FORUM

What: Diversity Health Network ACT
Where: Companion House, 41 Templeton St, Cook
When: Wednesday 22nd June 2011
Time: 3.30pm - 6pm
Topic: Target 2020: Setting the Agenda for Canberra's Diverse Community.
Envisioning the systems, services and supports that are needed to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of Canberra's culturally diverse community into the future.
RSVP: Monday 6th June 2011, ruth.kinlyside@act.gov.au or phone 6207 6867.
Submit questions for the panel: ruth.kinlyside@act.gov.au
Refreshments provided

Chronic Conditions seminar series

Where: SHOUT Meeting Room, Building One
The Pearce Centre, Collett Pl, Pearce
When: Thursday 16 June 2011
Time: 7pm - 8:30pm
Topic: Medicines
Speaker: Tony Lamb, Pharmacist
RSVP: Not required