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## Social workers win Government reconsideration

Following productive discussions yesterday with Minister for Health and Ageing's senior staff on the Medicare mental health program, the AASW welcomed the Government's announcement to defer changes to the program until 1 April 2011.

The AASW will work closely with the Government to shape and develop the new funding arrangements delivered through the GP networks, to ensure that social workers' clinical expertise is utilised to deliver services to Australians with mental health issues, especially those from disadvantaged and low income backgrounds, Indigenous people, those with multiple needs and those in rural and regional areas.

In particular, the AASW is pleased that all relevant professional groups will, for the first time, assist to review the Better Access (Medicare) program and to help shape the delivery of mental health services to those Australians who need them.

Thousand of people who received services from over 1,100 specialist mental health social workers were facing the prospect of losing access to Medicare rebates on July 1.

AASW members have been actively voicing their opposition to the announcement made in last week's Federal Budget by visiting and writing to constituency MPs, appearing in local press and radio, and gaining broad community and sector support.

"Thousands of social workers, supported by the professional staff of the AASW, have shown that as well as being experts at clinical practice, we are also a formidable campaigning force in the interests of social justice, human rights and low income and disadvantaged people," said **AASW President Professor Bob Lonne**.

"The AASW welcomes the decision to treat all allied health professions equally, and is confident that the Government has begun to understand the significant clinical and practice expertise offered by specialist social workers. The AASW will work hard to build the new mental health program to meet clients' needs," said **AASW CEO Kandie Allen-Kelly**.

The AASW is looking forward to working with the Government to ensure that:

- The development of the care packages takes place through consultation with clients and professionals to ensure they are client-centred, flexible, coordinated, and responsive to individual and community needs;
- The tier 3 funding outlined in the new program in the Budget is coordinated with existing community mental health services;
- All clients and specialist mental health social workers are supported to smoothly transition from the current Medicare program to the new program and other programs.