



Federal Budget delivers on mental health but misses the mark on employment

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) has warmly welcomed the Federal Budget announcements on a range of mental health initiatives, which mark a new beginning in the way Australia provides services to people with mental health issues. Funding a national mental health commission and a national mental health consumer peak body will change and improve mental health services in this country.

AASW CEO Kandie Allen-Kelly said, “The AASW is delighted that many of the budget announcements echo the messages that we gave the Government during our campaign to overturn last year’s decision to exclude social workers from the Better Access program.”

Some of the highlights on mental health funding include:

- An ongoing commitment to the Medicare funded *Better Access* program;
- An expansion of *Access to Allied Psychological Services* with particular focus on the needs of low income and disadvantaged people, rural and regional areas, Indigenous communities and children. This program will be doubled over the coming 5 years;
- The 30% increase to the Personal Helpers and Mentors program;
- A massive investment in services for people with severe and persistent mental illness;
- The expansion of *headspace* and Early Psychosis Prevention and Early Intervention Centres.

Social work is central to all of these programs and their expansion will enable far more Australians with mental health issues to receive the services they need.

“The AASW looks forward to working with the government to ensure that these programs are accountable, flexible, integrated and client-centred,” said **AASW President Professor Bob Lonne**.

Turning to issues of employment and income support, while there are modest initiatives that will benefit some, social workers are concerned about counter-productive measures that stigmatise and unfairly target some income support recipients.

“There is no justification for cutting payments to some of the poorest people in our community, such as single parents with teenage children and young people on New Start Allowance,” said **AASW CEO Kandie Allen-Kelly**.