

Budget moves for youth health welcome as a first step

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The \$2.3 billion investment in mental health and suicide prevention is a welcome first step on the road to much needed mental health system reform, the Youth Health Forum says.

“It is promising to see a number of the Productivity Commission’s priority recommendations addressed in this budget,” the spokesperson for the Youth Health Forum, Roxxanne MacDonald, said.

“For young people in particular, this includes the \$158.6 million investment in care for people discharged from hospital after a suicide attempt, investment in developing the peer workforce, and targeted funding to involve family and carers in treatment provided under Better Access.

“While the budget talks about mental health care reform, it largely invests in strengthening current models of care for young people. We know that headspace is a great doorway to mental health care, but its only meeting the needs of a handful of young people, with many of the most vulnerable falling through the gaps. For the young people who fall into the ‘missing middle’ we often talk about, this budget is more of the same.

“It is time to look at how we can get maximum benefits from the current headspace model and invest in more sophisticated solutions to address

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the complexities of rising youth mental ill-health rates, such as digital platforms and ensuring headspace and state services are well-integrated.

“With such significant investments into current mental health structures, we will be looking at how these services are integrated into mental health system reform without further fragmenting an already difficult-to-navigate system.

“Once again, the focus remains on clinical care with little attention paid to social determinants of health. We know how important financial stability and a sense of belonging are in preventing and treating mental illness in communities. These things must be at the centre of mental health care for young people if we are to achieve our goals for mental health system reform.

“We welcome the investment in the Head to Health adult mental health treatment centres. Many young people who need ongoing mental health care but are unable to cover the cost themselves are often left high and dry when they age out of youth-specific services like headspace.

“Expanding adult mental health treatment centres will ensure continuity of care for young people as they transition out of youth-specific services.

“Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people. The measure to provide every Australian who is discharged after attempting suicide with appropriate ongoing care in the community is very welcome. Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people and we know that the risk in the first month after discharge from hospital is especially high. If effectively implemented, ensuring the young people are provided appropriate care in their community will assist in reducing these rates.

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“The lack of funding for climate change is disappointing, particularly given the impact of last year’s bushfires. We know it is affecting the physical and mental health of Australians now, and addressing the causes of climate change remains a top priority for young people.

“Ensuring these initiatives are implemented effectively and with consumers at the heart of decision-making will be crucial in their success. Young people must be involved in all levels of this implementation, from having a seat at the decision-making table, to co-designing the services and how they’re delivered,” Ms MacDonald said.

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