

# Media Release

Friday 10 February 2006

## Recommendations from COAG meeting

As a result of the Council of Australian Government (COAG) meeting today with state and territory leaders, an expert taskforce is to deliver an action plan by mid-year to increase spending by over \$1 billion on new mental health initiatives.

As part of the strategy for dealing with improvements in mental health, the COAG meeting has decided to boost the number of medical places at universities as a way of overcoming doctor shortages.

The Prime Minister, Mr Howard said, "We need to involve psychologists and the medical profession generally, we need as part of the campaign on mental health to address cannabis and amphetamine abuse which is a key but of course not the only ingredient in the problem".

Most importantly, the Prime Minister has stated that, "We need to address the particular challenges of people who are without adequate support in the community."

Whilst the Mental Health Coordinating Council supports workforce development for psychiatrists and GPs, the lack of support for people with a mental illness living in the community is a crucial issue. MHCC is hopeful that there will be a focus on the role of NGOs in delivering mental health services in the community.

MHCC Chairperson, Leone Crayden congratulates New South Wales Premier, Morris Iemma on his commitment to the promotion of a national action plan, which provides a vision for the future of mental health services delivery in NSW.

It is hoped that the national action plan will provide a strong focus on supporting people with a mental illness to live well in the community. This will involve a recognition that providing accommodation support, employment assistance and social engagement is all part of the recovery path and that acute medical care is only half of what is required in a balanced mental health system.

MHCC believes the plan must include the recognition that increased community support services provided by the NGO sector will enhance people's ability to live in the community with less stigma, hospitalisation and better quality of life.

MHCC looks forward to working with the government to achieve shared aims and ensure improved access to care, rehabilitation and support in the community.

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