

\$3.6 million for the NSW Family and Mental Health Carer program

23 June 2005

NSW Minister for Health, Morris Iemma today announced an extra \$2.6 million would be dedicated to a program to support the families and carers of people with a mental illness.

The increase for the NSW Family and Carer Mental Health Program adds to the \$1 million allocated to mental health carers from the NSW Government's Caring for Carers Program.

"There are around 800,000 carers in NSW, and it is estimated that around 10 per cent of carers look after a person with a mental illness," Mr Iemma said.

"The role of family and carers is absolutely vital to the treatment and recovery process of a person with a mental illness and can never be overstated.

"But without an adequate community support network, families and carers themselves are at risk of feelings of isolation and helplessness.

"There is a wealth of information to show that better support for families and carers with information and skills training has long-term benefits for the health and well-being of patients, families and carers alike.

"This funding and resource boost is aimed at doing just that by strengthening existing partnerships between families and carers, non-Government organisations and mental health services."

Mr Iemma said the Family and Carer Mental Health Program was aimed at:

- Reducing the rate of hospital admissions, readmissions and psychotic symptoms for people with a mental illness;
- Reducing the stress, tension and isolation often associated with caring for a person with a mental illness; and
- Increasing the adherence to medication regimes.

More specifically, the \$3.6 million to support the Program would provide:

- Specialist clinical advice and support for families and carers;
- Information for carers about their rights and responsibilities;
- Mechanisms to involve families and carers in the discharge planning of a loved one;
- Better access for families and carers to other community services;
- Improved co-ordination of Area Health Service and non-Government sector supports and services; and
- Community mental health workforce development.

Mr Iemma said that approximately half of the funding for the NSW Family and Carer Mental Health Program would be allocated to non-Government organisations through a tender process.

An Access Economics Report in 2002 analysed the cost burden of schizophrenia and related suicide in Australia. It quoted a 1995 American study that demonstrated cost savings for mental health services of \$34 for every dollar spent on a family education program over a two year period.

Mr Iemma said that while the prospect of saving money at the acute treatment end by strengthening support for families and carers would clearly be welcomed, the real benefit will be in improving the quality of life for thousand of families in NSW.

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