

## **New opportunities for mental health nurses**

A new and rewarding career option for mental health nurses wishing to work in the community is now available thanks to the Federal Government's Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program. The Program has been welcomed by the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, who hail it as an opportunity for nurses to "fully utilise their highly developed clinical skills as well as co-ordinating clinical services".

The Australian Government is providing \$191.6 million over five years to enable community based general practices, private psychiatrist services and other appropriate organisations (such as Divisions of General Practice) to employ or contract mental health nurses to assist in the provision of coordinated clinical care for people with severe mental disorders. These new arrangements commenced on 1 July 2007. In practice, this means that psychiatrists or GPs can employ a nurse to work from their clinic and/or conduct home visits to provide specialist care and coordination. MHCC would expect that the nurses will liaise with all relevant services, including NGOs, to provide optimum coordination of care for each client.

According to the President of the College, Dr Stephen Elsom, this program enables community-based care for people who would not have been able to access it previously, and has the potential to prevent crises and deteriorating mental health through coordinated care in the person's home or in their GP's clinic.

From 31 December 2008, mental health nurses engaged under the initiative must be nationally credentialed by the College. In the meantime, there are interim arrangements in place to enable the initiative to start while nurses are becoming credentialed. The credentialing process will ensure that nurses have specialist qualifications, experience and a commitment to ongoing professional development. Further information about credentialing is available on the College website at [www.acmhn.org](http://www.acmhn.org).