

TIME FOR MENTAL HEALTH TARGETS

Dear **Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers,
Treasurers and Australian Local Government Association representatives,**

We write to you today, ahead of Friday's COAG meeting, to implore you to renew your joint commitment to Australia's mental health by setting real and measurable targets for National Mental Health Reform.

We fear that without real and measurable targets, any Roadmap for Mental Health will fall well short of what the recent Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention suggests Australia needs to support what it calls "a contributing life" for people affected by mental illness. Can we really have a Roadmap that does not specify a destination?

In August 2011, the Mental Health Council of Australia accepted a generous invitation to present to COAG, alongside Professor Patrick McGorry and Monsignor David Cappo, on the challenges of addressing Australia's mental health.

At that time we asked that all Australian Governments endorse the principle that Australia should have the same access to quality care for mental ill-health as for physical ill-health and commit to making substantial progress towards this goal as part of a national partnership in mental health reform.

The subsequent announcement that COAG would commence work on a Ten-Year Roadmap for National Mental Health Reform was a moment of great optimism for those people who live with mental illness, who care for a family member or friend with a mental illness, or who provide services to people in need of professional support.

It was a moment of great optimism because those people believed that light was being shone on a dark place, and that Australia's political leaders might be ready to set aside their political differences to advance the needs of some of Australia's most vulnerable and needy citizens.

To release a Roadmap which does not do justice to the findings of Australia's first ever Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention would represent a grave setback.

The first Report Card has identified the tremendous gulf between our aspirations for people living with mental illness and the reality of their day-to-day lives. At the same time, the Report Card has reignited the hope of the sector that COAG's reform processes might lead to a better future.

TARGETS MUST MEASURE AND ADDRESS:

Early intervention and prevention

What proportion of our overall investment will be made in early intervention and prevention activities?

Timely access to necessary and effective services

What do we determine is a reasonable waiting time for people who need access to services?

Poor physical health and low life expectancy of people living with mental illness

How quickly do we intend to close the gap in life expectancy between people living with mental illness and the rest of the community?

Access to affordable, and stable housing

How many people do we intend to house in stable and secure housing in the next ten years?

Participation in worthwhile and supportive employment

How many people living with mental illness will be assisted to find meaningful and productive employment over the life of the Ten-Year Roadmap?

Participation in education

How many people experiencing mental illness will be supported to complete education?

Suicide

By what percentage do we intend to reduce the annual number of suicide deaths over the ten year life of the Roadmap?

Levels of stigma and awareness

To what degree will we reduce stigma and discrimination in the community related to mental illness?

Levels of social participation

What is our expectation of social participation for people who are living with mental illness?

The mental health and social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

How quickly do we intend to close the gap in mental health and suicide prevention outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the community?

We stand ready to assist you in the journey ahead, but we implore you to set targets that will guide that journey. Setting targets is a task that only governments working together can achieve, but we cannot guide the efforts of our services and programs without them.

Friday's Council of Australian Governments represents another critical moment in Australia's mental health history. Please seize that moment.

Sincerely,

The undersigned

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Professor, *Centre for Youth Mental Health, University of Melbourne*



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The Hon. Rob Knowles
Chair, *Mental Health Council of Australia*



Dr Tom Calma AO
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Mental Health and Suicide
Prevention Ambassador and
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Kasey Chambers
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Jane Hayden
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Healing Foundation
Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

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