

Psychologists inundated while mental health nurses are sidelined due to red tape

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The ABC have released concerning statistics that highlight the failures of Australia's healthcare system. Psychologists have highlighted that they are struggling to meet demand amid the coronavirus pandemic as waitlists blow out. Meanwhile, qualified, willing and able mental health nurses are sitting on the bench due to the limitations of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).

This further demonstrates that mental health is one of the greatest social issues currently facing Australians, as a result of the pressures of 2020, and the peak body for mental health nurses and its members is looking for answers as to why there are still no MBS Item Numbers to enable mental health nurses to provide help to the many people in need in the community.

"It is frustrating to read quotes about the failure to meet the community's mental health needs," said ACMHN President, Dr Mike Hazelton.

"We have been raising this issue for the best part of 2020, since the bushfires hit, and have consistently been lobbying the Government to the present time. Red tape has created an environment that is life-threatening to Australians who may not be able to access the mental health care they desperately need," Dr Hazelton continued.

"A very simple solution could be rolled out – to provide qualified, experienced and credentialed mental health nurses with MBS Item Numbers for the provision of mental health services directly related to COVID-19," he said.

The ABC article references clinical research fellow Peter Baldwin who says that, ordinarily about 50 per cent of Australians would be experiencing mental health symptoms – including anxiety and depression – but only about half of them would seek care.

Mr Baldwin also goes on to say, for 80 per cent of people to be noticing that they're struggling with their mental health and thinking about seeking care, it's quite a substantial increase.

There is a significant, numerous, skilled and well prepared workforce who are largely prevented from adequate engagement with the problem. Mental Health Nurses are a specialist workforce with skills in both psychological therapies and the physical comorbidities often simultaneously encountered, particularly among those with more severe and complex presentations. Our capacity to deliver our unique and valuable contributions to Australian mental health care is currently limited to employment in the already overtaxed state government services and paltry and often poorly understood and ineptly administered roles in Primary Health Network provision.

"At this crucial time we need to support Australia's mental health needs before it spirals downwards. A qualified and experienced mental health nursing workforce can provide essential support for people in need. The more people that we can get to – that can see a mental health nurse during this time (or talk to them on the phone or video) – the more we can provide case management, preventative support and support those at risk," Dr Hazelton concluded.

The ABC article can be found at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-03/psychologists-report-huge-demand-surge-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/12622836>

For further comment, please contact ACMHN President, Dr Mike Hazelton on 0448 121 012 or at president@acmhn.org.

About

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is the pre-eminent and authoritative voice of the mental health nursing profession in Australia. It provides leadership to, and advocacy for mental health issues across the mental health sector and nursing, as well as setting national standards of practice in mental health nursing.