

MEDIA RELEASE
Wednesday 8 October 2003
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WA Mental Health Service Cuts A National Crisis

Leading figures from the mental health sector will attend a press conference today to address the impact of the WA funding cuts on all States and Territories.

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) will be represented at a press conference today, 8 October, at 10:30am, at the West Australian Association for Mental Health offices (Lotteries House, 2 Delhi St, West Perth).

In response to the WA Government's funding cuts to non-government mental health services, key figures from across the mental health sector, and from across Australia, are flying to Perth to attend the press conference.

The WA State Government has withdrawn substantial funding to NGO mental health services as well as funding promised to key initiatives in the election. The result will force NGOs to close.

MHCA Chair Mr Keith Wilson said the ramifications of these funding cuts are not limited to West Australians. There is a real danger other States could follow this same path.

"As a result of the cuts, WA will be placed in a position where there will be far fewer programs to prevent people from becoming unwell," he said.

"We must call on the WA Government to re-think these drastic and inhumane cuts and illustrate to all State and Territory Governments the severity these funding cuts will have on consumers, carers and mental health services providers," Mr Wilson said.

WA RANZCP Chair Dr John Penman, representing Professor Philip Boyce, President of the College, raised concerns for the impact these funding cuts will have on Derbal Yerrigan, which offers services to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who tend not to access mainstream mental health services.

"The withdrawal of funding from NGO mental health services will grossly disadvantage an already disadvantaged group of people," he said.

"The ability of these organisations to meet the social and cultural complexities of their client groups will be minimised because of the WA Government's appalling decision," Dr Penman said.

Prof Ian Hickie, Director, Brain and Mind Research Institute, University of Sydney and MHCA Board Member said the direction in which the WA Government is taking mental health care is the direct opposite to World's best practice.

"Effective community based care is the corner stone of high quality mental health services," Prof Hickie said.

MHCA, CEO, Dr Grace Groom said the WA State Government's argument that these funding cuts are a result of being short changed by the Commonwealth is ludicrous.

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“The Commonwealth has never been responsible for mental health care. This responsibility has always rested with the State Governments. This is nothing short of buck passing by the West Australian Government, and it is absolutely reprehensible” Dr Groom said.

“The West Australian Government has made a mockery of the recently signed National Mental Health Plan 2003-2008” she said.

Those available for interview include:

- MHCA Chair Keith Wilson on 0417 289 040
- MHCA CEO Dr Grace Groom on 0417 289 461
- Director Brian & Mind Research Institute, University of Sydney and MHCA Board Member Prof Ian Hickie on 0438 810 231
- WA RANZCP Chair Dr John Penman on 0419 923 389

For further inquiries or to assist with arranging interviews contact Gabrielle Crowe, Communications & Policy Officer on (02) 6285 3100 or 0415 415 153