

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## Extend the options to combat mental health crisis

More Australians will benefit from measures announced last night to address mental disorders, but more needs to be done to protect our health, the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) announced today.

Congratulating the federal Government on its \$1.5 billion plan to tackle the nation's mental health crisis, the APA contends that broadening Medicare to provide psychology services through family medical clinics is a critical step in reforming Australia's health system to ultimately give Australians access to the health care they need.

"The proposal to introduce more Medicare rebates for psychology consultations is a great start, and will give ordinary Australians more immediate access to crucial mental health services," said APA president, Cathy Nall.

"However, the federal Government is in a position to put people with mental illness on a better path to recovery by offering Medicare rebates for additional relevant allied health services such as dietetics and physiotherapy," said Ms Nall.

Physical fitness in people with mental health problems is considerably worse than the general population. The benefits of exercise and physical activity for people with schizophrenia, depression and anxiety are well documented; patients who exercise show greater social interest, increased self-esteem and improved behaviour. Physiotherapists are specially trained to provide exercise programs customised to the needs of each individual patient.

Similarly, there is a tendency for people with mental illness to neglect good eating habits or develop eating disorders. Advice from dietitians can help establish healthy routines for people whose overall health is being compromised by poor diet.

Pointing to a report by the Productivity Commission released earlier this year, the APA is urging the federal Government to consider the more wide-ranging reforms that sign-post improvements to health care for all Australians.

"Implementing the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's report on Australia's Health Workforce will comprehensively address the needs of people with mental illness, or with any other health care need," said Ms Nall.

"One of the Government's first priorities should be to establish a body to independently review the range of services covered by Medicare. Health care services that are shown to be successful *and* cost effective should be considered for inclusion to the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS), such as certain treatments delivered by psychologists, physiotherapists and other allied health professionals.

"This is a reasoned approach to reduce pressure on scarce medical resources and allow people to access the health services that best meet their needs," said Ms Nall.

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