

Cuts to mental health services to have significant consequences for Queenslanders

More than 200 people living with mental health concerns in Queensland will be significantly affected by the cuts to the National Partnership Agreement (the Agreement) as a result of the 2016 Federal Budget handed down by the Treasurer on 3 May.

The Agreement currently provides funding to organisations to deliver critical community mental health supports. This funding is essential as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will be rolled out as a staged process over the next three years in Queensland. There will be more than 200 people with complex needs including institutionalisation, intellectual disability, alcohol and other drugs, acquired brain injury in addition to mental health issues without funding and service provision, who may not be eligible for a package under the NDIS.

Queensland Alliance for Mental Health (QAMH) is the peak body for Queensland's community mental health sector, representing 132 member organisations, 34 of which receive funding for Housing and Support Program (HASP) and Personalised Support Services (PSS). Ms Kris Trott, QAMH CEO, was very concerned to hear of this decision due to the impact it will have on the community mental health sector post 30 June this year.

"The decision to not extend the Agreement will result in a loss of \$10.4 million dollars in Queensland and \$45.2 million dollars nationally" Ms Trott commented.

Cathy O'Toole, QAMH State Council President reflected on the impact to regional and rural communities. "These cuts will see people with significant mental health concerns left without support and at risk of losing their homes or being readmitted to a hospital. The funding reduction will have a devastating effect, particularly in regional and rural Queensland where organisations not only provide critical services to vulnerable people but also provide jobs in areas with a high unemployment rate", said Ms O'Toole.

"QAMH are calling for both State and Federal governments to clarify how the effects of this cut will be managed before any vital services and supports are affected. Our member organisations are extremely concerned", Ms Trott commented.

For many organisations that provide services in regional Queensland, these cuts will see a significant number of employees potentially lose their jobs with little other employment prospects available to them".

Ms Trott explains, "a member reported to QAMH that this funding improved health outcomes for clients with an extensive inpatient history. The loss of funding will impact a number of clients with pervasive and persistent mental illness, some of whom require twice daily support to ensure that they can live a quality, independent life of their choosing in the community, thus maintaining a positive mental health status.

QAMH will be closely monitoring sector response and feedback through this transition, and will continue to advocate for the community mental health sector.

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Enquiries regarding this media release can be directed to the Manager, Communications, Engagement and Training, Amy Zeegers on 0403 302 992 or email azeegers@qamh.org.au.

To arrange an interview with Ms Cathy O'Toole, QAMH State Council President, Ms Kris Trott, CEO of QAMH or one of our member organisations, please call our office on 07 3252 9411.