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## **MENTAL HEALTH MUST BE A GREATER PRIORITY IN THIS ELECTION**

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the major parties must announce better and more comprehensive mental health policies before election day on 18 May.

Dr Bartone said the AMA wants to see bold, well-funded strategies to meet the complex mental health needs of all Australians.

“The incidence of mental health in the community is growing, across all age groups, yet mental health remains grossly underfunded when compared to physical health,” Dr Bartone said.

“As a GP, the number one priority I see every day in my practice is access – access to appropriate, properly-funded, sustainable mental health care delivered by qualified mental health professionals.

“There has been a lot of talk about mental health, but not much genuine action.

“We have to move beyond the current formulas.

“A one-size-fits-all approach will not work. The uniqueness of mental illness means we need specific and detailed measures appropriate for all people, no matter their age or where they live.

“We need to give hope to the millions of Australians with lived experience of mental illness, along with their families, friends and carers.

“The mental health workforce is being let down by the lack of an overarching mental health ‘architecture’ or agreed national design that facilitates prevention or proper care for people with mental illness.

“The extent of mental health conditions in the community is extensive, with almost a majority of adult Australians experiencing a mental health condition in their lifetime.

“Some of these people have significantly worse levels of morbidity, or premature mortality, than the general population.

“Yet the mental sector receives less than half the funding of the comparable burden of disease funding.

“The AMA acknowledges that the Coalition and Labor have made funding commitments and investments, but the reality is that there is still no leadership in funding evidence-based policies across Australia that help people access the services and supports they need,” Dr Bartone said.

The AMA calls on the major parties to:

- take a leadership role in managing the distribution of ongoing evidence-based funding across the States and Territories to ensure there are no gaps that leave vulnerable Australians without access to mental health care;

- base mental health policies and funding on sound research, and enhanced by input from practising clinicians and from consumers and carers;
- increase consistent capacity across the country for Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to coordinate and deliver mental health policies;
- fund and resource an appropriately sized, skilled, and resourced mental health workforce – addressing workforce gaps should be a priority;
- invest in initiatives that will build up workforce capacity and service delivery for those living in regional and remote areas;
- commit to a level of funding that allows for a mix in the range and level of mental health care available for all Australians, regardless of their geographical location, level of income, and ethnic background;
- provide increased access to e-health and telemedicine for service delivery;
- the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) must be properly and adequately resourced so that patients are not left without support or care for their mental health issues;
- properly fund NDIS providers; and
- commit to using any NDIS underspends on improving staff capabilities and IT systems used by the NDIS.

The AMA's complete health policy wish list - *Key Health Issues for the 2019 Federal Election* - is available at <https://ama.com.au/article/key-health-issues-2019-federal-election>

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