



**AMA Family
Doctor Week 2019**

YOUR FAMILY DOCTOR AND YOU:
PARTNERING FOR HEALTH



GPs - THE FIRST PORT OF CALL FOR PATIENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

AMA FAMILY DOCTOR WEEK, 21-27 July 2019

Your Family Doctor and You: Partnering for Health

Australians are increasingly going to see their family doctor about their mental health care, with GPs the first destination for families and individuals in need of care.

This week is AMA Family Doctor Week, celebrating the compassion and dedication of Australia's 37,000 GPs.

"Mental health issues being experienced by one member of a family can affect others, as well as colleagues and friends," AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

"Australia's mental health system allows family doctors to provide the necessary direct help or collaborative referral.

"Mental health problems are common. About one in five of us will experience a mental health problem at some point in our lives.

"Talking with your GP about your mental health and wellbeing is so important. Doctors' visits are confidential, and your family doctor is appropriately trained about the management of mental health.

"GPs can diagnose medically definable mental health disorders, order tests to eliminate physical causes of symptoms, prescribe medications, and provide coordinated care, including collaborative referrals to psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers.

"GPs can also help patients with personalised GP Mental Health Care Plans, providing a structured management approach to their care. This personalised managed approach is particularly valuable in a fragmented and poorly resourced overall health system, with access difficulties essentially enshrined.

"The AMA supports measures that reinforce the central role of GPs in mental health care. Investments in primary mental health care will improve the ability of GPs to undertake assessments and make sure their patients see the most appropriate specialised service to best meet their needs.

"Health Minister, Greg Hunt, has made mental health a priority, and Australians are now seeing unprecedented levels of investment in primary care, youth mental health, and telehealth.

"But there is still more that we can and must do to ensure all Australians have access to the best care possible.

"The AMA is calling on the Government to fund a dedicated general practice-based mental health program that allows GPs to provide coordinated care and case management, and deliver improved health outcomes for patients."

The AMA Position Statement on Mental Health is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/mental-health-2018>

Background

- It is estimated that about one in seven children and adolescents aged between four and 17 years of age (13.9 per cent) experiences a mental illness each year. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is the most common mental illness.
- In 2014-15, one in nine Australians (11.7 per cent) reported having high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- GPs provide the most Medicare-subsidised mental health services.
- In 2015-16, almost 18 million GP encounters (12.4 per cent of all GP encounters) were mental health-related, up from 10.8 per cent in 2007-08.
- In the same year, about 3.2 million Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific GP services were provided.
- For patients seeing their GP, depression was the most commonly managed problem during a mental health-related encounter (32.1 per cent).
- Medications prescribed by GPs was the most common management of mental health-related problems (61.6 per 100 mental health-related problems managed).
- The proportion of estimated GP mental health-related activity billed as Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific GP services increased from about 10 per cent in 2007-08 to about 18 per cent in 2016-17.

Follow all the action on Twitter: #amafdw19 and Family Doctor Week [website](#)

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