



STRONG, FLEXIBLE, COMPASSIONATE QUALITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE

The Greens' plan for better mental health services for all Australians

A caring society looks after everyone. Our mental health system is under pressure to provide care for all who need it. The Greens' mental health plan supports people with mental illness to live full, healthy lives.

The Australian Greens understand the importance of quality mental health care for all Australians. A caring society provides better access to mental health services across the country, and recognises that mental health policy cuts through politics to the very heart of our nation's wellbeing.

Our mental health policies reflect the reality that 45% of Australians will experience mental ill-health at some stage during their lives.ⁱ Decades of under-investment in the mental health system has left thousands of Australians without access to the services and treatment they need.

The Greens are standing up for better access to quality mental health services for all Australians. Our plan is people-centred and designed to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The key features of our \$547.4 million mental health package include:

- **Investing \$150 million, over 3 years**, to establish a National Institute for Mental Illness Research.
- **Increasing funding for the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program** by \$70 million per year, on top of current budget commitments.
- **Reinstating the option of six extra sessions of psychological treatment** in exceptional circumstances under the Better Access initiative, costing \$141.6 million over 3 years.
- **Providing grants of up to \$50,000 to mental health NGOs** through re-establishing the NGO Capacity Grants Program, worth \$7.5 million.
- **Establishing a National Suicide Prevention Campaign** and improving the collection of data relating to suicide with an investment of \$38.3 million over 3 years.

> INVESTING IN RESEARCH

There is a desperate need for the development of new treatments for mental illness. Mental illness is the third highest cause of disability and premature death.ⁱⁱ It costs the Australian community billions of dollars each year in direct and indirect costs. Despite this, only 3.5 per cent of Australia's total medical research budget is spent on research in depression and psychosis.ⁱⁱⁱ

The mental health sector recognises the treatment of mental disorders has not progressed sufficiently, particularly when compared with treatments for cancer and heart disease. The Greens want to see more research, translated into new, effective treatments for people with mental illness.

The Greens will invest \$150 million, over three years, to establish a National Institute for Mental Illness Research (NIMIR) as an overarching supervisory body for mental illness research in Australia. Based on a proposal from the Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre^{iv}, the NIMIR will be a virtual institute comprising a series of collaborating centres across Australia and will coordinate the development of innovative clinical treatments and provide expert advice to government.

We want to see coordination in the development of new, proven treatments for people of all ages with all types of mental illness. We want to see the rapid evaluation and trial of emerging and promising treatments to reduce suffering and improve outcomes.

Fostering a coordinated approach to research and development has the potential not only reduce the burden of disease associated with mental ill-health but also improve the quality of life for thousands Australians.



> MORE MENTAL HEALTH NURSES

The Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP) plays an integral role in mental health service delivery across Australia, but there is scope for a much greater role. The program involves engaging mental health nurses in primary health care services through non-Medicare incentive payments.

Despite being highly regarded by health professionals and consumers alike, the program remains seriously under-funded and many communities continue to miss out on the vital mental health support and treatment provided by mental health nurses. There is an urgent need for the program to be better resourced as it continues to grow in importance and reach.

The Australian Greens recognise the pivotal role for mental health nurses in improving access to appropriate primary mental health care and promoting mental health and wellbeing in the communities they serve.

That's why we will increase the funding to the Mental Health Nurses Incentive Program by \$70 million per year to enable more Australians to access mental health support and services at the primary health care level, promoting early intervention, assisting GPs and taking the pressure off emergency services.

> ENSURING BETTER ACCESS

It is estimated more than 30,000 Australians were affected by the removal of the six extra 'exceptional circumstances' sessions included in the Better Access program in January 2013.^v Our plan is to ensure these Australians can once again receive the care and assistance they need to function well in everyday life.

Mental health professionals and consumers have spoken about the importance of the extra sessions for Australians with mental ill-health.

The Greens are committing to re-introducing the option of six extra sessions, while retaining the existing ten-session allowance and refining the 'exceptional circumstances' criteria. This will involve an investment of \$141.6 million over three years and will ensure those with mental ill-health can continue to access effective and cost-efficient psychological treatment under the successful Better Access Initiative.

> GROWING MENTAL HEALTH NGOS

Our mental health plan includes \$7.5 million over three years, for grants to mental health non-government organisations (NGOs). We will re-establish the NGO Capacity Grants Program, enabling NGOs working across the mental health field to apply for up to \$50,000 through a one-off competitive grants round.

These grants will help NGOs manage operations like governance, financial management, IT, business planning, or a specific area of organisational enhancement.

Working at the grassroots level, mental health NGOs provide crucial recovery-focused and community-based care. We are committed to increasing and supporting the capacity of these organisations to promote wellbeing and recovery and enable consumers to participate in their own goals for living and self-care.

The grants program will benefit at least 150 NGOs operating within the mental health sector.

> SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide Prevention Australia explains that suicide 'attracts a unique kind of stigma, which impacts on people with lived experience of suicide by damaging social relationships and removing help-seeking avenues for those in need.'^{vi}

Our mental health policy includes an investment of \$38.3 million for a suicide prevention campaign which will address the stigma and lack of awareness surrounding suicide. The campaign will seek to educate the Australian public about the complexity of suicide and how communities and organisations can work together to reduce suicide rates and the incidence of suicidal behaviours.

We believe that all Australians need access to advice on how to seek and provide help for those experiencing suicidal feelings. As recommended by the Senate Community Affairs Committee in its 2010 report *The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia*, our plan also includes funding for implementing reforms which will improve the accuracy of suicide statistics. The 2010 Senate Inquiry showed that suicide is underreported because current reporting systems are complex and different across states and territories.

The accurate, timely provision of data is crucial in notifying public health authorities of emerging suicide clusters while ensuring the true extent of suicide rates are not being 'masked' by inaccurate reporting.

> FOCUSING ON PEOPLE

Investment in a robust, people-centred plan for mental health means better outcomes for Australians.

The impacts of mental ill-health are far-reaching and can affect many aspects of a person's life: education, employment, relationships, housing and general health.



Decades of under-investment and fragmented services in the mental health arena have left many Australians unable to live the kind of life we would all like to lead.

Strong mental health policy makes good economic sense. But most importantly it protects some of the most vulnerable members of our society. The Greens' plan will enable people to receive the most effective treatment available for their mental health, and access services to help them live full, healthy lives in our community.

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), *National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results*, <[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/6AE6DA447F985FC2CA2574EA00122BD6/\\$File/43260_2007.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/6AE6DA447F985FC2CA2574EA00122BD6/$File/43260_2007.pdf)> (7).

ⁱⁱ Kulkarni J (2010), *To defeat mental illness, you can't short-change the research*, Sydney Morning Herald, <<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/society-and-culture/to-defeat-mental-illness-you-cant-shortchange-the-research-20100615-yd61.html#ixzz2d1wNTy7>>

ⁱⁱⁱ Kulkarni J (2010), *To defeat mental illness, you can't short-change the research*, Sydney Morning Herald, <<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/society-and-culture/to-defeat-mental-illness-you-cant-shortchange-the-research-20100615-yd61.html#ixzz2d1wNTy7>>

^{iv} Monash Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre <<http://www.maprc.org.au/>>

^v Australian Psychological Society (2013), *Better Access Survey: Preliminary Data*, <<http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/2013-APS-Better-Access-survey-preliminary-data.pdf>> (1).

^{vi} Suicide Prevention Australia (2013), *Stigma and Suicide Statement*. <<http://suicidepreventionaust.org/statement/stigma-and-suicide/>>