

Budget 2018-19 – devil is in the detail

Liz Crowther, Community Mental Health Australia President welcomed measures in the 2018-19 Federal Budget but noted that how they will work in practice is the devil in the detail.

‘There are positive - if not unexpected – measures in the budget for mental health. There is a welcome increase in funding for the National Mental Health Commission, a focus on suicide prevention and the funding for a rural health strategy. The expansion of a comprehensive rural health strategy needs to include all aspects of the workforce, particularly those professions that are more likely to be the ones doing the work on the ground, which often is the community sector’.

‘The most significant measure for our sector is the inclusion of funding for Continuity of Support arrangements for people currently in federal programs who won’t be eligible for the NDIS. What we need to know now is what happens next - how this will be administered, which will be via the Primary Health Networks (PHNs); what will be the eligibility criteria, for example do people have to be existing clients or can they have been clients in the past; and what does a continuity of support service will look like’.

‘There is an argument that people have to test their eligibility to access the support. CMHA has stated strongly and will continue to do so that people should not have to test their eligibility and that the intent of the Continuity of Support policy must be applied in that people must be provided with the same level of access to services. People shouldn’t have to go through an expensive and stressful test of NDIS eligibility in order to access the services they need and are entitled to’, Ms Crowther said.

‘There are some concerning aspects in relation to welfare recipients – many of whom will be people living with a mental health condition. The measure titled ‘Encouraging Lawful Behaviour of Income Support Recipients’ establishes a scheme for the Commonwealth to make compulsory deductions from the welfare payments of fine defaulters with State and Territory court-imposed fines’.

‘This measure is against practices being undertaken in states and territories, which allows people to develop fine repayment schemes that don’t impact on their ability to travel and work. It is likely that a measure to take money from people’s welfare payments will have the opposite effect and impact on people’s ability to be contributing citizens’, Ms Crowther said.

‘We shouldn’t be making savings by targeting people who are most vulnerable. Anything we do for people living with a mental health condition should be about their recovery and being included as contributing members of their community, not the opposite’.

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