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Beyond Blue welcomes Commonwealth long term commitment to mental health reform

Beyond Blue today welcomed Commonwealth Health Minister Greg Hunt's commitment to mental health reform in Australia.

In his National Press Club address today, Minister Hunt outlined his blueprint for mental health system change as part of the Federal Government's Long Term National Health Plan.

The blueprint includes a strategy for children's mental health, a major new Australian Bureau of Statistics survey into the nation's mental health and wellbeing and a push to drive down suicide rates.

Beyond Blue Chair The Hon Julia Gillard AC welcomed Minister Hunt's emphasis on early intervention, suicide prevention, and better integration between state and territories.

"I was particularly pleased to hear Minister Hunt's commitment to addressing Australia's mental health needs by expanding efforts beyond crisis care and focusing on prevention and early intervention. This means starting with children and young people," Ms Gillard said.

"We know that half of all adult mental health issues emerge by age 14 and that the first 1000 days of a child's life have a profound impact on their mental health and wellbeing throughout their life," Ms Gillard said.

"This is not about clinical services or medicalising childhood, it's about supporting children and their families and understanding that these supports look very different from adult services."

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said co-operation across all levels of government was the key to creating a system that put people first.

"The New National Mental Health Partnership acknowledges that mental health reform is about all governments – Commonwealth, states and territories – rolling up their sleeves to undertake structural change, accepting their roles and responsibilities and committing dollars for the long term, where they matter most," Ms Harman said.

"We welcome the Minister's announcements and look forward to a stronger focus on the social determinants of mental health, too," she said.

"This is because mental health is not only an issue for the health system. It's about people having safe, affordable housing, a good education and access to meaningful work."

Ms Harman welcomed the announcement of the Children's Mental Health Strategy, to be developed by an expert working group steered by Professor Frank Oberklaid and Professor Christine Middeldorp.

“Adverse childhood experiences and trauma have lifelong effects – child maltreatment accounts for between 16 percent and 33 percent of depression, anxiety and self-harm in Australian adults so it makes sense that we address these issues early.”

Ms Harman said Beyond Blue was supporting schools and early learning centres to create mentally healthy learning environments through its Be You initiative, working with delivery partners headspace and Early Childhood Australia.

“Be You is a national framework that gives schools and early learning centres the tools they need support the mental health of every Australian child, from the early years to the end of secondary school,” she said.

“This is important because 40 percent of parents say schools are the first to detect the fact a child might need support.”

She said experts agreed that building resilience from an early age was an important way to equip young people with the skills they needed to handle life’s ups and downs.

“There is strong and growing evidence that resilience can be learned and that if we teach it to our young people, and support parents, and create environments that encourage them to thrive we are setting them up for their best start in life,” Ms Harman said.

Key statistics:

- Half of all lifelong mental health problems begin before the age of 14
- Suicide continues to be the biggest killer of young Australians
- Over 75% of mental health problems occur before the age of 25
- One in seven young people aged 4 to 17 years experience a mental health condition in any given year

Source: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/statistics>

For interviews with Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman, please contact Beyond Blue media manager Carly Crawford on 0487 800 065.