



## MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020

### **CATHOLIC HEALTH AUSTRALIA WELCOMES PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT ON MENTAL HEALTH**

Catholic Health Australia commends the Productivity Commission's mental health report and its expansive range of recommendations that could provide far greater support for the vulnerable in our communities.

CHA says the report identifies a myriad of challenges that need to be overcome – including gaps in service provision and wasteful overlaps.

It is calling on the Federal Government to begin implementing the report's recommendations, including permanently subsidising telehealth services which have proved crucial during the COVID-19 epidemic, and a greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

Pat Garcia, CEO of Catholic Health Australia, said: "At some point during their life half of all Australians will experience mental health issues. However at a time of crisis many people are being let down by the system, left bewildered and unable to access treatment they desperately need.

"Not only is this having a huge impact on their own mental health, collectively the financial cost to the country is an astonishing \$220 billion a year.

"This report is confronting reading but it lays out a pathway that could transform the way we deliver mental health services, both in the short and long term."

Mental health was the centrepiece of this year's [statement](#) by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's Office for Social Justice which encouraged faith communities, governments and individuals to make mental health a priority, a goal fully endorsed by CHA.

CHA supports the report's recommendations to expand access to perinatal support and universal screening for all new parents. It also welcomes calls to equip employers to make their workplaces healthier.

It also says the expansion of telehealth services that have been embraced by both patients and clinicians alike during the pandemic must remain in place permanently. Currently funding for the expansion is due to end in March 2020.

But, CHA says other recommendations including requiring hospitals to ensure patients have access to both community-based support and transitional housing are not realistic in the current setting.

Mr Garcia said: "In an ideal world anyone leaving hospital should be going to a safe place. But the reality is that many people who require mental health provision are homeless, and it's just not practical, fair or economically viable to keep people in hospitals indefinitely.



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“We need more social housing to address this very real problem but this cannot be done overnight and will require significant funding and commitment from the Government.”

CHA also says the recommendation to better support those with both mental health and substance abuse issues will also need far greater investment and service co-ordination, particularly in regional and rural areas.

CHA also welcomes recognition that a whole of government strategy is needed to ensure better co-ordination across both primary and local health care provision. It also says services that are available in the private sector, including expertise in eating disorders, substance abuse and depression must be better taken into account.

Mr Garcia said: “We want to ensure that every patient in Australia receives the very best, but also the most appropriate care, whether that’s in a private or public hospital. That should be achieved through clinical evidence and patient preference and not due to budget constraints or because of what a health fund might dictate. This is no easy task but it has to be done.”

Ends