

Media Release

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Ministers fail to step up against backdrop of overwhelming community concern on mental health

Following a disappointing Health Ministers meeting on Friday, new national polling released today by Mental Health Australia shows governments are failing to meet community expectations on mental health.

The nationally representative Essential Media research found two in three people (68%) believe governments should invest more in mental health support. The findings come as the national peak body calls on governments to get mental health reform back on track, following last Friday's meeting of Commonwealth and State and Territory Health Ministers, which failed to deliver meaningful progress on a new National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement.

The [Ministers' Communique](#) offered little certainty about the pathway forward, despite the National Agreement already being extended by 12 months. Mental Health Australia is very concerned that this latest Ministerial delay may have cost the National Agreement its chance at finalisation before the new deadline of 30 June 2027.

"There were high expectations that Friday's Health Ministers meeting would provide a clear pathway forward. Instead, it left the sector and the community facing continued uncertainty."

"Health Ministers are dropping the ball on an issue that matters deeply to people across the country," Ms Nikoloski said.

"Governments have already delayed the next National Agreement by 12 months. At a time of increasing mental health challenges and pressures, communities cannot afford further delays and ongoing uncertainty."

The new National Agreement between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories will set the direction for national mental health reform, guide how governments work together, and shape how people access support across the country.

"This Agreement represents around \$1.7 billion in investment in community mental health services and supports. Every delay creates uncertainty for the services, workforce and communities relying on those investments," Ms Nikoloski said.

"On a practical level, delayed reform means children and families will wait longer for services, people experiencing mental health challenges will miss out on timely support and early intervention, and critical suicide aftercare services remain under pressure."

"It also means a significant missing piece of our mental health system remains unaddressed: psychosocial support. Nearly 500,000 people living with psychosocial disability are unable to access the support they need either through the NDIS or through the broader mental health system.

"Governments have known the extent of this unmet need since August 2024. Two years later, communities are still waiting for governments to come together and deliver a solution."



"The cost of delay is being borne by people going without support, families carrying more responsibility for care, and community services being asked to do more with insufficient resources."

"The message from the community is clear: stop the delays to mental health reform and treat it like the national priority it is."

The Mental Health Australia/Essential Media research found:

- More people (41%) would rather pay more tax to fund free or low-cost mental health support than accept the current state of mental health funding (32%).
- More than two in five people (43%) say governments are handling mental health poorly.
- Two in three people (65%) believe there is a gap between the mental health support people need and what is currently available.
- Fewer than half (49%) of people believe they could afford mental health care if they needed it.
- Four in five people (81%) agree cost should not prevent people from accessing mental health support.
- There is strong concern for mental health and wellbeing of families and younger generations (64%).

Support for action on mental health spans the political spectrum, but concern is particularly strong among voters outside the traditional political centre.

Mental Health Australia Chief Executive Officer Carolyn Nikoloski said the results demonstrate a clear public mandate for governments to prioritise mental health reform.

"They tell us mental health is an urgent community priority and that governments need to do more to improve access to support and address the factors that increase the likelihood of mental health challenges in the first place," Ms Nikoloski said.

"Willingness to pay is one of the strongest measures of public support. This data shows more people would rather pay higher taxes to improve access to mental health care than accept the inadequate system as it stands.

"It tells us people are willing to do their part, but they expect governments to do theirs."

Ms Nikoloski said the polling underscores the urgent need for governments to restore momentum to mental health reform and negotiations for the new National Agreement.

"We need governments to work together to improve access to mental health supports and address the societal factors that influence mental health, recognising the diversity of needs, experiences and outcomes across communities.

"Investing in mental health services is essential. Governments need to both boost our mental health support system and ensure their broader policy and funding decisions support people's wellbeing, rather than deepens disadvantage and vulnerability." Mental Health Australia is calling on all governments to return to the negotiating table for the next National Agreement with renewed urgency and deliver concrete commitments that improve access to affordable, quality mental health care, that people need to live well in their communities.

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Mental Health Australia-Essential Media polling report: *A public mandate for mental health action* can be [read here](#).

Mental Health Australia is the national, independent peak body for the mental health sector. We unite the sector and advocate for policies that improve mental health. www.mentalhealthaustralia.org.au