22 October 2026

Mental Health Australia

Brief: National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement uncertainty and risks for the Northern Territory

Governments are risking critical mental health supports at a time of increasing community need and demand for action, with ongoing uncertainty about the future of the next National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement.

Ask: As Mental Health Month comes to a close, we are seeking your support to raise the importance of delivering mental health supports for your community through securing the next National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement. You may wish to raise this important issue in Parliament, raise directly with The Hon Minister Butler MP and your territory government, and through your social media channels.

Supports at risk in the Northern Territory

- **This is a decisive moment: the next National Agreement must be negotiated before the current Agreement lapses on 30 June 2027.** Any delay will leave the sector without the certainty it urgently needs and put mental health support for individuals and their families at risk.
- **We are concerned that governments are delaying progress on the National Agreement.**
- The current Agreement delivers **$44m** in mental health and suicide prevention supports for the NT community, with $31m from the Australian Government, including**:**
    - 2 Medicare Mental Health Centres
    - child and youth mental health services, including a Kids Hub
    - perinatal mental health screening
    - joint regional planning and commissioning for mental health and suicide prevention services
    - aftercare services (for people who have made a suicide attempt), and postvention supports (support following a suicide).
- Further, **8,140** people aged 12–64 in Northern Territory **need psychosocial support**[i] but are unable to access it. Governments have committed that addressing unmet need for psychosocial support will be a central priority for consideration in the next Agreement[ii]. Individuals, family, carers and kin have waited long enough for access to these essential services – with changes to NDIS eligibility from 1 January 2028, action cannot be further delayed.

Need for Government action

- **Mental health is a collective responsibility**. Health and Mental Health Ministers have so far failed to provide a pathway forward to secure the next Agreement and its essential community services.

Ministers are expected to meet again in December 2026 and must return to the negotiating table for the next National Agreement with urgency to deliver the mental health reform and service certainty communities need.

- **The community is demanding action**. Recent nationally representative polling commissioned by Mental Health Australia found that:
    - two in three people (68%) believe governments should invest more in mental health support
    - more than two in five people (43%) say governments are handling mental health poorly
    - fewer than half (49%) of people believe they could afford mental health care if they needed it
    - there is strong concern for mental health and wellbeing of families and younger generations (64%)[iii].
- **Mental health challenges are widespread—and need is especially acute among young people**. Each year 1 in 5 people in Australia (aged 16-85) experience mental health challenges, and nearly 1 in 2 people (43%) experience mental health challenges at some time their life[iv]. Latest research indicates one in seven children and adolescents (4-17yo) experience mental health challenges[v].
- **Cost-of-living pressures are impacting mental health and making it harder to access supports.** In 2024-25**,** 20% of the population did not see a mental health professional due to cost[vi].
- **The health system is under pressure.** Mental health concerns are now the leading reason people visit a general practitioner (GP)[vii], while mental health presentations to emergency departments are rising again after a decline in 2021–22[viii].
- **The cost of inaction will fall hardest on communities already facing disadvantage**. People who cannot afford private care, people in areas where services are scarce, and people already carrying the weight of multiple, compounding pressures are most impacted.

Background

- The National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement is the foundation for an effective, integrated national mental health and suicide prevention system. It sets out the shared intention of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work in partnership to improve the mental health of all Australians, reduce the rate of suicide towards zero, and ensure the sustainability and enhance the services of the Australian mental health and suicide prevention system.
- **The mental health sector has provided advice to governments on our priorities for the new National Agreement**: priorities include support for **children and families**, better access to **psychosocial supports**, boosting Australia's mental health **workforce** and improving system foundations.
- **We acknowledge the essential role of all Australian, State and Territory Governments in delivering the next Agreement.** In the current social and economic climate, mental health and suicide prevention cannot be deferred, deprioritised or ignored; lives and community wellbeing depend on action now.

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[i] Final Report - Analysis of unmet need for psychosocial supports outside of the National Disability Insurance Scheme

[ii] Health Ministers Meeting (HMM) – Special Communique 13 June 2025

[iii] Mental Health Australia - Essential polling report: A public mandate for mental health action | Mental Health Australia

[iv] Prevalence and impact of mental illness - Mental health - AIHW (February 2024)

[v] Prevalence and impact of mental illness - Mental health - AIHW (February 2024)

[vi] National Mental Health Commission 2025 Report Card national-report-card-2025_0.pdf

[vii] General Practice Health of the Nation 2025, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Health-of-the-Nation-2025.pdf

[viii] Emergency departments - Mental health - AIHW (26 May 2026)