The Australian Psychological Society: 2013 Federal Election Response

The Rudd Labor Government is committed to helping Australians receive the right health care, in the right place, at the right time.

Federal Labor has declared mental health to be a priority, and appointed this country’s first federal Mental Health Minister. We have backed this with action, delivering a record $2.2 billion investment in mental health reform over five years from 2011-12, Australia’s largest ever mental health package.

Importantly, this investment provides a major boost to services for people with a mental illness, their families and carers, as well as a structure to continue reform over the long term.

This investment includes:

- $220.3 million to strengthen primary care and better target services to those most in need through Medicare Locals and subsidised psychological services, which includes $205.9 million for the Access to Allied Psychological Services program. This is provided to Medicare Locals to target hard to reach groups.
- $37.4 million over four years (2013-14 to 2016-17) for the National Perinatal Depression Initiative to continue to build on improved screening, support, treatment and psychological services.
- $111 million for our commitment to e-mental health which has already delivered e-headspace, MindSpot (Australia’s first national and free ‘virtual clinic’) and mindhealthconnect.org.au (e-mental health information portal linking clients to dozens of other services). We are investing so that services are accessible when and where people need them, and using the National Broadband Network to connect people to services no matter if they live in the regions or the city.

Already, these reforms are delivering on the ground. We have expanded Australia’s youth mental health services providing extra services such as accommodation and better support for people when they move in and out of hospital, and expanding critical support services like Lifeline and Kids Helpline.

Last year, the Federal Labor Government’s newly established National Mental Health Commission released its first National Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention – to expose service gaps in Australia’s mental health services and shine a spotlight on best practice services.

The Rudd Labor Government acknowledges and supports the vital work allied health professionals provide in Australia.

Federal Labor is establishing the Commonwealth’s first Chief Allied Health Officer to support the work of thousands of important health professionals. The Chief Allied Health Officer will provide advice to the Federal Government on how best to strengthen their role, with a key focus on the supply of health services and medical professionals in rural, regional and remote areas.

We know the changes Australia needs will not happen overnight, but these long-term sustainable investments are bringing about real improvements in the lives of millions of Australians experiencing mental illness and their families.
1. **Reinstate the Better Access ‘exceptional circumstances’ sessions**

The Rudd labor Government is committed to improving treatment and management of mental illness within the community.

Federal Labor has declared mental health to be a priority, and appointed this country’s first federal Mental Health Minister. We have backed this with action, delivering a record $2.2 billion investment in mental health reform over five years from 2011-12, Australia’s largest ever mental health package. Implementation of this investment is being informed by extensive engagement with experts, service providers and consumers and carers. Importantly, this investment provides a major boost to services for people with a mental illness, their families and carers, as well as a structure to continue reform over the long term.

As you would be aware, from 1 January 2013, the standard number of allied mental health services for which an individual can receive a Medicare rebate is 10 services per calendar year. Individuals continue to be eligible for Medicare rebates for 10 Better Access group therapy services per calendar year, on top of their individual allied mental health services available under this initiative. GPs can also continue to refer those people with more severe ongoing mental disorders to Medicare subsidised consultant psychiatrist services (where 50 sessions can be provided per year), or state/territory specialised mental health services.

In addition to this, many private health insurance general treatment or extras policies also provide benefits towards psychology services and counselling. The Federal Labor Government is continuing to assist individuals to access these services, with most Australians with private health insurance currently receiving a rebate to help cover the cost of their premiums.

The changes to Better Access enable the Government to deliver a package of mental health services that better targets and supports some of the most disadvantaged people in our community. We have rebalanced investments across new and innovative services that address mental illness at all stages of life. So far the Government’s key achievements include:

- Our youth mental health services, Headspace – 55 headspaces are already operational and we have committed to build a total of 100 headspaces by 2015. The average funding each headspace site receives has also been almost doubled.
- Partners in Recovery program – under Stage 1, 49 Medicare Local regions will facilitate a better response to people with severe and persistent mental illness. Stage 2 will commence in 2013-14 with the remaining 12 Medicare Local regions. Once all services are operating, up to 24,000 people with severe and persistent mental illness will benefit.
- KidsMatter Primary initiative, a mental health and wellbeing framework for primary schools and early childhood education and care services – achieved in over 1,200 participating schools.
- Support for Day to Day Living - organisations provided with additional funding of $19.3 million over five years for structured activity programs to assist with psychosocial rehabilitation.
- $200 million to States and Territories under the National Partnership Agreement Supporting National Mental Health Reform to benefit people with severe and persistent mental illness.
- Mental Health Consumer Organisation – the Consumer Reference Group is working together with its auspice body, the Mental Health Council of Australia, to establish the organisation.
We’ve also responded to the need for new and innovative service delivery mechanisms with our e-mental health strategy - including by establishing e-headspace, MindSpot (Australia’s national, free ‘virtual clinic’) and mindhealthconnect.org.au, an e-mental health information portal linking clients to dozens of other services. We are investing so services are accessible when and where people need them, and using the National Broadband Network to connect people to services no matter if they live in the regions or the city.

The allied mental health services available under the Better Access initiative are not intended to provide long term and comprehensive care for patients who require intensive ongoing treatments. Rather, these Medicare services complement services provided by state and territory governments and increase access to private allied health services by improving their affordability.

While some people with more complex needs may use the services provided under the Better Access initiative for care and support, people whose condition is not only severe but also persistent generally require specialist and longer term treatments from a multidisciplinary state based mental health service or psychiatrist.

Medicare subsidised mental health services under Better Access provide a universal service platform, but are not designed to, and therefore have no capacity to, target specific groups such as low income people and those at risk of suicide or homelessness.

The Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program is a targeted scheme designed to allow Medicare Locals to give priority to hard to reach groups who continue to miss out on other services. These include people who are less able to pay fees, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and people in rural and remote locations.

Funding under ATAPS is allocated to Medicare Locals on a population needs based formula which is adjusted for socioeconomic disadvantage. Medicare Locals utilise a range of demand management strategies such as careful monitoring of the type and number of referrals received, triage and prioritisation of referrals, and working with GPs to ensure appropriate referral pathways throughout the year.

2. Support access to psychological interventions for behavioral change.

A re-elected Rudd Labor Government would be happy to discuss these issues with the Australian Psychology Society.

3. Address the decline in access to rural psychology internships and extend telehealth initiatives.

The Rudd Labor Government is committed to delivering better health outcomes for Australians who live in rural, regional and remote Australia – better access to services, infrastructure and more health professionals on the ground.

The Rudd Labor Government is committed to increasing the health workforce in rural areas – including allied health professions such as psychologists.

Federal Labor has expanded training programs and are supporting GPs, rural nurses and allied health professionals through locum support. We are also committed to continuing to deliver training and incentive packages to attract high quality health care professionals to regional areas.
Rural and Regional Health Australia has been established within the Department of Health and Ageing to provide a senior advocacy and engagement role across the Commonwealth Government on rural and regional health, mental health and aged care matters, as well as information to the public on needs, policies and service delivery in rural, regional and remote Australia.

The Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program also increases access to specialist services in rural and remote regions of Australia by increasing visiting specialist services in areas of identified need, supporting medical specialists to provide outreach medical services in rural and remote areas, facilitating visiting specialist and local health professional communication about ongoing patient care and increasing and maintaining the skills of regional, rural and remote health professionals in accordance with local need.

In 2012 the Federal Labor Government commissioned the Mason Review of Australian Government Health Workforce Programs to review our health workforce programs to ensure that Australian communities have access to a highly qualified health workforce now and into the future.

Earlier this year the Federal Labor Government accepted the Mason Review’s recommendations to provide a more advanced system for classifying rural locations and areas of workforce need to determine eligibility for support and funding through many Commonwealth workforce programs to build on and update the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas system, to provide customised enhancements to current methods of determining eligibility for program support.

Federal Labor also announced the formation of the Rural Classification Technical Working Group to guide the implementation of the improved classification system.

The Rudd Labor Government is also committed to developing a model for a new and more integrated rural training pathway for medical graduates, with the potential to extend this approach to other health disciplines.

This model was a key recommendation of the Mason Review and will be designed to build on the Federal Labor Government’s existing rural health training initiatives so that students who are interested in a career in rural health have a more seamless transition between their education, training and employment. The training model will be designed to improve the distribution of health professionals to rural areas, and if successful it will help deliver new doctors to areas of significant workforce shortages.

The Federal Labor Government has also significantly increased the use of telehealth, investing $620 million to bring rural patients and doctors together regardless of distance. Since July 2011 more than 90,000 telehealth services have been provided to around 38,000 patients. During 2011-12 alone over $34 million was spent in Medicare rebates and incentives for telehealth.

We have also provided Medicare rebates for specialist video consultation for people living remote areas, residents of aged care facilities and patients at eligible Aboriginal Medical Services.

To take advantage of the benefits the National Broadband Network (NBN) is delivering around the country, we have provided $20.3 million to support nine telehealth pilot programs in homes for aged care, cancer and palliative care for up to 2,500 people in 50 NBN communities.

The primary objective of support for telehealth through Medicare is to provide access to specialist services for patients for whom distance is a genuine barrier to accessing specialist care.

Medicare arrangements should support the provision of face-to-face services as the gold standard, supplemented by targeted availability of telehealth where there are service deficits.
The introduction of telehealth items is a major change in Medical service delivery. Telehealth has assisted some patients to access specialist care without the time and expense involved in travelling to a major city.

More than 10 per cent of specialists have provided an MBS telehealth service, which was the target for June 2015.

Recent international evidence supports the Government’s approach to rolling out telehealth in areas where telehealth is likely to improve access to high quality services.

4. Address the decline in postgraduate professional psychology training programs.

The Rudd Labor Government is committed to a strong university system and has made record investments in recurrent and capital funding for universities.

Under Federal Labor, funding for students to go to university has increased by over 70 per cent from $3.5 billion in 2007 to $6.1 billion in 2013. The number of Commonwealth supported students has risen by around one third over this time (190,000 extra students).

The Federal Labor Government responded to the Base Funding Review Report on 28 January 2013. The Government agrees with the review’s finding that funding levels should ideally align with the relative costs of different courses. However, in the current fiscal climate, and in the absence of sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the current system of discipline funding is significantly misaligned, the Government has decided not to revise the current funding clusters.

A re-elected Rudd Labor Government will continue to monitor the extent to which course offerings meet labour market needs and how funding levels are impacting on course offerings.

5. Fund access to neuropsychological services for early dementia

The Federal Labor Government is committed to supporting Australians living with dementia. Under Federal Labor spending on dementia is set to reach $80 billion in the future, outstripping that of any health condition. Our Living Longer, Living Better has a significant focus on dementia with $268 million to be invested to tackle the epidemic. The plan includes a new Dementia Supplement in home and residential care, as well as improving hospital and primary care for people with dementia and reducing the time between symptoms and diagnosis.

The Rudd Labor Government believes it important that we continue to improve the support available to people with dementia, including best practice medication management in aged care. That’s why we have invested $378 million in funding through the Aged Care Service Improvement and Healthy Ageing Grants Fund over four years.

Recently funded initiatives focused on better dementia support include:

- Continuation of the Dementia Behavior Management Advisory Services including the National Coordination Network and National Helpline activities and the expansion of DBMAS into acute and primary care.
- Flinders University in Adelaide will seek to build the capacity of residential aged care providers to deliver person centered care to people with dementia in aged care.
• Alzheimer’s Australia will receive funding for the national roll-out of evidence based programs and services to benefit people with dementia, their families and carers.
• The University of New South Wales will run a project which aims to reduce the inappropriate use of antipsychotic medication in aged care.
• The University of Tasmania will deliver a project to reduce the inappropriate use of sedative medications in aged care.

A re-elected Rudd Labor Government will continue to work with organisations and researchers including the through programs such as the Aged Care Service Improvement and Healthy Ageing Grants Fund to ensure we are adequately supporting people living with dementia, and would be happy to engage with the Australian Psychology Society on these issues.

6. **Provide access to psychological assessment and treatment for people residing in aged care facilities.**

The Federal Labor Government is investing $3.7 billion in a new aged care system fit for the 21st century. In the single biggest investment in aged care in a generation, *Living Longer, Living Better* is a ten year strategy for reform of our aged care system, designed to provide older Australians with the aged care they want and need, no matter where they live and what their financial means.

The Rudd Labor Government believes it important that we continue to improve the support available to people with as they age, including best practice medication management in aged care. That’s why we have invested $378 million in funding through the Aged Care Service Improvement and Healthy Ageing Grants Fund over four years.

Also under the *Living Longer Living Better* reforms we have provided additional funding to aged care homes to help them better care for older Australians with severe behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia.

It is important that older Australians who need aged care are able to access high quality, person-centred, innovative health care. Labor is committed to supporting the health and aged care sectors to work together to adopt a culture of innovation and best practice. That is why we provided $80.2 million over five years to strengthen the interface between the health and aged care sector. This measure ensures that innovations to aged care practice in residential aged care and in the community will be shared and promoted.

Under the *Living Longer Living Better* aged care reforms the Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) and Extended Aged Care at Home Dementia (EACHD) packages assist older Australians with complex care needs to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible. Federal Labor’s aged care subsidies enable care recipients to receive individually tailored packages of care, including personal assistance with daily living activities, clinical care and other home support services.

7. **Coordinate services to ensure children with mental health problems are appropriately assessed and treated.**

The Rudd Labor Government is committed to ensuring that support is provided to families and children to help children develop well, avoid behavioural issues, and to get ready for preschool and primary school.
That’s why the Federal Labor Government introduced the Medicare Healthy Kids Check in 2008 and in 2011 committed an additional $11 million over five years (to 2015-16) to include emotional wellbeing and development and lower the age target for the Medicare Healthy Kids Check from four to three and a half years.

The Medicare Healthy Kids Check is one of several checks available, with all states and territories also offering checks.

We know that prevention and early intervention in health makes sense across the board - for families and for the economy. This is especially the case with mental health, where evidence shows that early intervention and supportive treatment can help our young people grow up to live happy, healthy lives.

Labor believes that our young people are our greatest asset, and that they deserve special, dedicated support to help ensure they remain mentally healthy and able to lead contributing lives. Our young people need a bit of help whether they’re at school, in training, going to university or in paid work.

headspace is the Commonwealth’s key mechanism for ensuring our young people are getting the help they need, and already 55 sites are operational and we have announced 30 more, and by 2015 90 headspaces will be operational Australia wide. We have also doubled the average funding provided to each centre to ensure they are sustainable into the future. Along with additional funding to develop eheadspace this commitment will provide the population coverage young Australians deserve.

8. Provide access to psychological and other services to improve educational outcomes for children with developmental learning disabilities.

The Federal Labor Government believes that every child in Australia deserves a world class education and targeted support to achieve their full potential.

The Rudd Labor Government’s $15 billion Better Schools Plan will give every student in every Australian school the best possible opportunity to succeed. If all States and Territories sign up, the Better Schools Plan would mean, on average, around $1.6 million extra for every school over the next six years.

Better Schools is about more one-on-one, individual attention including more support for kids with disability or learning difficulties.

The additional investment in schools could go towards a range of measures including:

- Literacy and numeracy specialists to work one-on-one with students who need extra help.
- Learning and support staff such as educational psychologists, speech pathologists or social workers.
- Classroom modifications and new assistive technology for students with disability.

Under the Better Schools Plan, Federal Government funding for schools will be calculated according to a new Schooling Resource Standard, comprising a per student amount of $9,271 per primary school student and $12,193 per high school student. There will also be extra money through loadings for school and student needs such as students with disability.

Due to the diverse range of disabilities, there are significant differences in the educational needs of students with a disability and the level and type of specialist teachers and equipment they need. Importantly, the Better Schools Plan gives individual schools the flexibility to decide how their funding can best be spent to meet the needs of their students.
The Better Schools Plan will see students with disability properly funded in every school for the first time and will provide:

- Additional funding to support an inclusive school culture and improved results for students with disability.
- Teachers who are trained to ensure they meet the needs of every child with disability so they are able to reach their potential.
- Funding available regardless of the type of school the child attends.

The Better Schools Plan builds on Federal Labor’s More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) initiative, which is providing $300 million of additional funding over the 2012, 2013 and 2014 school years. This funding goes to both government and non-government education authorities to support schools and teachers in their work with students with disability and/or learning difficulties.

9. Capitalise on existing expertise to provide a national psychosocial response to disasters.

On 13 February 2011, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience – Building the resilience of our nation to disasters (the Strategy). The Strategy marked a positive shift in Australian emergency management policy, moving towards rebalancing a ‘response and recovery’ approach to one more heavily focused on ‘preparation and mitigation’.

The purpose of the Strategy is to provide high-level guidance on disaster management to federal, state, territory and local governments, business and community leaders and the not-for-profit sector.

The Strategy focuses on priority areas to build disaster resilient communities across Australia and recognises that disaster resilience is a shared responsibility for individuals, households, businesses and communities, as well as for governments. Endorsement of the Strategy is the first step in a long-term, evolving process to deliver sustained behavioural change and enduring partnerships.

Once disasters hit, there is the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA), which have paid out several billion dollars over the past few years. There is also the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP). The AGDRP is activated when the impacts of a disaster are considered so severe that further Commonwealth assistance, in addition to that provided under the NDRRA, is warranted. The AGDRP is a once off, non means tested, payment of $1000 for eligible adults and $400 for eligible children.

Each disaster is different and, as a result, the timing and nature of additional levels of assistance varies from disaster to disaster and community to community.

The Commonwealth Government works closely with the States and Territories to continually monitor a disaster situation as it unfolds. This collaboration assists in building a longer term view of the recovery needs of a community, particularly when an event is considered severe or catastrophic.

Medicare Locals are provided funding through the Access to Allied Psychological Services program to make purchasing decisions to deliver appropriate mental health support for the needs of their community. In addition we have delivered innovative e-mental health services available to all Australians in the form of MindSpot, a free virtual clinic delivering online counseling services, and mindhealthconnect.org.au which links users to dozens of other online mental health services or locally to face-to-face services if they’re needed.
10. Support the Australian Psychological Society Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program.

The Rudd Labor Government believes that the health and wellbeing of people at work is important.

We provide funding to beyondblue to support their programs for anxiety and depression, which includes their workplace and workforce program. There are a range of resources that beyondblue has developed and are available to workplaces and workforces. beyondblue raises awareness of mental illness in the workplace, and reduces stigma associated with anxiety and depression.

Labor is also funding stigma reduction and awareness raising activities of the Mental Health Council of Australia, which includes support for World Mental Health Day each year.

In addition under the National Suicide Prevention Program we funded the development of the Suicide Prevention and Recovery Guide, which is a resource targeted at people working in mental health to support a person who is at risk of taking their own life. The Guide was developed through the Mental Illness, Bereavement and Suicide Prevention Project.

The development of the Guide was done with input from a variety of organisations including beyondblue and the Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria and is an example of organisations in the mental health and suicide prevention sectors working cooperatively in order to further meet a workforce training need with the longer term goal of improving care outcomes.

A re-elected Rudd Labor Government will continue to support the work of the National Mental Health Commission and organisations in mental health and suicide prevention to ensure Australians remain healthy in the workplace and to reduce stigma.