

It's time to care about ... **mental health**

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is calling on the Federal Government to help GPs and the patients they care for

Did you know?



Australia is in the midst of a **mental health crisis**. GPs deliver the majority of mental health services in Australia and **need more support** to provide the additional care required.

Suicide is the **leading cause of death** for Australians aged **15–44** years, with **9** Australians taking their own lives every day. Approximately **two-thirds** of all suicides recorded each year involve one or more psychosocial risk factor.

The RACGP is calling on the Federal Government to:

1 Support regular and continuous general practice care for people with a mental health condition

Establishing a new service incentive payment would better support general practice services that help patients with mental health issues through earlier identification and ongoing management of conditions. Services may include a General Practice Mental Health Treatment Plan with at least one review and physical health assessment.

People with mental illness are twice as likely to report having a physical health condition. This can be due to a variety of factors associated with poor mental health, including a combination of lifestyle, socioeconomic and system-level factors.

- When a person sees their GP for mental health issues, they benefit from whole-of-person care, covering both mental and physical health.
- A physical health assessment would help to prevent poor physical health outcomes for people with mental health conditions.

2 Increase the value of a patient's Medicare rebates for longer consultations by 10%

Mental health is a sensitive and complex area and providing care for people with mental health issues takes time, so these consultations can take longer. The Medicare rebate per minute decreases significantly the longer a patient spends with their GP, meaning people with mental health conditions are likely to pay higher out-of-pocket costs.

3 Reinstigate Medicare rebates for long phone consultations

Poverty or income disadvantage is directly related to psychological distress and mental health, and is also directly linked to technology access. People with mental health conditions may have reduced access to the necessary technology or skills to consult with their GP via video conferencing.

- Phone consultations can create a safer environment for people to talk about their mental health issues.

4 Introduce a GP follow-up appointment within seven days of an emergency department presentation or unplanned hospital admission

The number of hospitalisations relating to mental health issues could be significantly reduced by formal follow-up care provided by a GP. Patients who have a post-hospital GP visit within seven days of an unplanned hospitalisation have a significantly lower risk of readmission with 30 days.

- Each year, more than 330,000 hospital separations and 310,000 emergency department presentations are related to mental health.