



25 June 2016

Ms Lyn English
Consumer Co-Chair
National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum
PO Box 174
DEAKIN WEST ACT 2600

Dear Ms English

Thank you for your email presenting the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum's (NMHCCF) 2016 election platform.

A Shorten Labor Government will ensure that mental health is a national priority.

Labor agrees with your premise that mental health reform is not finished. We have only just begun a journey that will take years if done properly.

Labor generally supports the National Mental Health Commission's recommendations to devolve mental health service delivery to a regional level through the Primary Health Networks to allow better targeted and local approaches.

However, Labor has been concerned about the Abbott-Turnbull Government's cuts to mental health funding and the uncertainty that its rushed implementation process has created throughout the sector.

The speed at which the Abbott-Turnbull Government has been rolling out the changes has created stress and confusion for mental health consumers, carers and staff and has risked undermining the quality of services and achieving the longer-term benefits of the reforms.

A Shorten Labor Government will take action to give certainty to those who experience mental illness, those who care for them and the staff that deliver critical services and programs.

A Shorten Labor Government will:

- Outline the priorities for implementation of the National Mental Health Commission recommendations within our first 100 days.
- Lead the negotiation on the development of the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, based on the principles of national leadership and regional integration that have been recommended by the National Mental Health Commission.

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- Task the National Indigenous Health Equality Council to work with the National Mental Health Commission to develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Plan.
- Restore the independence, integrity and transparency of the National Mental Health Commission.

Labor will provide funding certainty to Early Psychosis Centres and headspace centres that are currently providing vital help to young Australians around the country.

Importantly, if elected, Labor will ensure those living with mental illness, and their carers, who will not receive a package of support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are not forgotten and we will work with State and Territory governments to ensure that services for those who fall outside of the scope of the NDIS are provided.

Specific responses to the objectives identified by NMHCCF are below.

1. An increase in mental health consumer and carer participation and choice in national policy design and implementation

Labor understands the need for consumer and carer involvement in policy development and implementation.

Consumer and carer involvement should be actively pursued at the outset of policy formulation and not as an afterthought once policies are determined.

Labor believes there is merit in establishing a national body for consumer and carer involvement and advocacy and will consider this in government.

2. An increase in the proportion of mental health consumers and carers in employment

Labor believes that people with mental illness and their carers deserve the same opportunities as any other Australian to participate in our economy.

Workplaces must be more flexible, supportive of, and responsive to, the mental health and wellbeing of employees.

Employers should also be encouraged to provide suitable employment and career advancement opportunities for people with episodic or ongoing mental illness and for carers.

A Shorten Labor Government will actively support and promote the activities of the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance and task the Alliance with improving mental health safety and wellbeing, self-help at work and with reducing stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

Established by the National Mental Health Commission, the Alliance aims to make sure all people in the workplace, including those who experience mental health difficulties, their families and those who support them, are supported.

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A Shorten Labor Government will work with industry organisations to establish a new Heads Up award for excellence in attaining a mentally healthy workplace, as part of our recognition of the best employers in Australia.

A Shorten Labor Government will also create a New Jobs Tax Cut to reward small businesses that invest in jobs and provide opportunities for young people, carers and older Australians who are struggling to get back into work after becoming unemployed or taking time out of the workforce.

Eligibility to claim the New Jobs Tax Cut will be targeted to employing those Australians who face real barriers to joining the labour market, including parents or carers returning to work after more than six months away.

3. A reduction in the national suicide rate by 10 per cent by 2020 and by 50 per cent by 2026, compared to 2014 levels

A Shorten Labor Government will target a 50 per cent reduction in suicides over the next 10 years.

Labor's National Suicide Prevention Strategy will provide a strong national commitment to reduce the suicide toll, and coordinate a focused effort across Australia.

Suicide affects far too many Australians. In 2014, 2,864 Australians lost their lives to suicide. Approximately seven Australians die from suicide every day, and for every person who dies from suicide, 30 attempt it. We have to do better than this.

Australia must do more, and under Labor, we will.

A Shorten Labor Government will commission Australia's first national data-set of suicide deaths and work with the States and Territories to establish a national suicide register, helping experts identify vulnerable groups in our community.

A Shorten Labor Government will provide \$72 million over three years for 12 regional suicide pilot projects. These projects will be in places with higher-than-average rates of suicide deaths, using a whole of community response to reduce suicide deaths in the most effective way.

Suicide is the fifth leading cause of death for Indigenous Australians. Labor will take action to reduce suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by working with communities to implement the recommendations of the University of Western Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project. Labor will also ensure that at least three of the regional suicide pilot projects are in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A Shorten Labor Government will provide \$9 million towards a National Suicide Prevention Fund. The Fund will support research into reducing suicide deaths, and programs which reduce the stigma around suicide and seeking help when contemplating suicide.

Labor's reforms will deliver \$83.7 million over four years to provide national leadership on an issue that impacts on far too many in our community.

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4. A reduction in the mortality gap for people with a mental illness

A Shorten Labor Government will maximise its influence to help close the avoidable life expectancy gap for people with severe mental illness.

Labor created Medicare, our unique universal health insurance scheme that has seen Australians achieve some of the best health outcomes in the world.

However, evidence also shows that people with mental illness experience poorer general health outcomes and die on average 16 years earlier than the general population.

Labor understands the critical importance of access to primary health care for vulnerable groups, including those who have mental illness.

Labor will provide an additional \$100 million over two years to strengthen the frontline of Australia's health care system – primary care. Building a stronger primary care system will provide greater day to day health care for tens of thousands of Australians, meaning fewer people end up in hospital.

Labor's investment will help develop new models of integrated primary care including the development of a unique Australian model of patient-centred medical homes – Your Family Doctor. Part of the patient-centred medical home model is to reward the provision of holistic and ongoing care, especially, but not exclusively, for patients with complex and chronic illnesses.

All Australians should be able to access to affordable health care when and where they need it.

A Shorten Labor Government will also:

- Restore indexation of the Medicare Benefits Schedule from 1 January 2017.
- Reverse the Abbott-Turnbull Government's increases to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme co-payments and thresholds.
- Reverse Malcolm Turnbull's cuts to bulk-billing incentives for pathology and diagnostic imaging.
- Reduce waiting times for elective surgery and emergency departments and invest in hospitals.
- Legislate to ensure Medicare remains in public hands.

Chronic diseases are the leading cause of illness, disability and death in Australia and a Shorten Labor Government will tackle Australia's chronic disease crisis through a preventive health package that helps keep Australians healthy throughout their lives.

Labor's five-point plan for preventing chronic disease includes an additional \$300 million to:

- Invest in 50 Healthy Communities nationwide, to help communities at the greatest risk of chronic disease to stay well.

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- Tackle obesity through Australia's first National Physical Activity Strategy and a National Nutrition Framework.
- Expand the successful Better Health Channel into a nationwide platform for health information.
- Continue the push to reduce smoking rates, particularly in at-risk communities.
- Address harmful use of alcohol through a National Alcohol Strategy.

A Shorten Labor Government will help vulnerable groups stop smoking.

Smoking disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Australians with mental illness, people living in rural or remote areas and those in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Based on expert advice, a Shorten Labor Government will invest \$20 million in a scaled-up National Tobacco Campaign. Labor will also invest \$30 million in targeting at-risk populations including Australians with mental illness through Primary Health Networks.

5. Maintain, at a minimum, overall investment in mental health, with measures that support full reinvestment of cost efficiencies and savings back into mental health programs and services

A Shorten Labor Government is committed to maintaining current investments in mental health programs.

Labor will continue to progress agreed recommendations of the National Mental Health Commission and if any efficiencies are identified, these will be reinvested back into areas of need within the primary mental health system.

A Shorten Labor Government will restore funding cut by the Liberals from six early psychosis centres, which support young people with serious mental health problems.

Labor will also provide funding certainty to the 95 headspace centres around the country so they can stay open.

A Shorten Labor Government will provide an additional \$83.7 million over four years to provide national leadership on suicide prevention.

Labor will also provide \$20 million to establish a universal perinatal depression screening program for every expectant woman and new mother across Australia.

Thank you again for the opportunity to outline Labor's policies and to respond to NMHCCF's 2016 election platform.

Sincerely,

ALP Information Services Unit
 Australian Labor Campaign Headquarters

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