



# australian nursing federation

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Committee Secretary

## **Senate Inquiry – Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services. The Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) has welcomed the Australian Government's additional \$1.5 billion budgetary commitment to Australia's mental health services. The raft of new initiatives announced in the 2011/12 Budget will help provide much-needed social and clinical support for mental health across the country. The ANF recognises that many of the new initiatives require direct support and involvement of the nursing profession, including robust workforce strategies, in order for such reforms to be successfully delivered to all communities. The announcement of \$32 million for the establishment of a Mental Health Commission will bring a whole of Government approach to addressing mental health, which will work towards providing greater accountability and transparency to the sector.

With a membership of over 200,000 the ANF is the largest professional and industrial organisation in Australia for nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing. Members of the ANF are employed in a wide range of settings in urban, rural and remote locations in both the public and private health and aged care sectors. The ANF mental health nurse members work in public and private specialist mental health services, alcohol and drug services, rehabilitation and sub-acute care, prisons and the justice system, primary and secondary schools, maternal and child health programs, primary health including general practice clinics and Headspace Centres, district nursing and community health centres and hospitals' inclusive of emergency departments with and without Psychiatric Emergency Care Centres.

The core business of the ANF is industrial and professional representation of our members and of the professions of nursing and midwifery.

The nursing and midwifery professions form more than half the health and aged care workforce in Australia, providing healthcare to people throughout their lifespan, and across all geographical areas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's Health 2010, p448). Nurses and midwives, as part of self-regulated health professions, are autonomous providers of nursing and midwifery care and are regulated in accordance with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA). This means that they have independent authority to act within their scope of practice and are accountable for their own clinical decision-making and the outcomes of their actions when providing healthcare.

Registered nurses and midwives undertake a minimum three year undergraduate education program in the university sector which leads to registration. Following this initial preparation, additional qualifications specific to mental health nursing are offered as postgraduate studies commencing from certificate level to doctorate qualifications. All nurses and midwives must also engage in continuing professional development activities relevant to their area of practice under the NMBA Continuing Professional Development Registration Standard for the purposes on ongoing annual registration.

Mental health nursing is one of the specialties of nursing, with a focus on mental, physical and spiritual health utilising therapeutic, pharmacological and social interventions. ANF mental health nurse members report that this specialty has moved beyond the traditional work practices, where the focus was on psychiatric symptoms, to encompassing the totality of an individual's mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan. Mental health nurses have specific qualifications and expertise directly related to the provision of clinical mental health care. Modern mental health nursing care must be evidence based, therapeutic and purposeful to the consumer, and can fall into a continuum ranging from psychiatric illness to mental health. It incorporates collaborative evaluations of interventions, ensuring that therapeutic change and recovery can be achieved. In clinical practice, mental health nurses are required to utilise nursing theory, inclusive of the psychiatric/mental health paradigms when commencing individual assessments, formulating mental health care and recovery plans and initiating and providing specialist nursing interventions. Mental health nurses also utilise approaches that may be targeted towards health promotion, illness prevention, early intervention (across all age groups) and acute intervention and recovery.

The ANF supports the Australian Government's decision to move funds from the Better Access Initiative to the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) Program. This change sits well with the ANF's social justice stance as groups targeted for improved access to mental health services under ATAPS are the disadvantaged, Indigenous peoples, those in rural and remote communities and other hard to reach sub-groups within all communities. In so doing the new funding arrangement goes beyond the scope of the Better Access Initiative.

A further identified limitation to the Better Access Initiative is that mental health nurses are not among the health professions that are eligible to provide mental health services under this program. The ANF contends that qualified mental health nurses have the requisite knowledge and skills to provide treatment for diagnosed mental health conditions and are well placed to deliver this care within the Initiative.

The ANF welcomes the expansion of ATAPS, a program that offers improved flexibility as it includes more groups of health professionals than the Better Access Initiative, including mental health nurses. It is the view of the ANF that **all** qualified mental health nurses, not just those that are credentialled, are able to deliver the range of focused psychological strategies listed under the ATAPS Program. Mental Health Nurses working to the full scope of their practice and funded under these programs are critical to the implementation of the national mental health reforms. ANF members currently working under ATAPS initiatives seek for ANF to be directly involved in the National Project related to implementation of this expanded funding.

The ANF supports the submissions to the Senate Inquiry made by the ANF Victorian Branch and the New South Wales Nurses Association (NSWNA), ANF NSW Branch. Should you require any additional information or wish to discuss this matter further please contact Julianne Bryce, Senior Federal Professional Officer, on (03) 9602 8500 or [julianne@anf.org.au](mailto:julianne@anf.org.au).

Yours sincerely,

**Lee Thomas**  
Federal Secretary

The industrial and professional organisation for nurses and midwives in Australia

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