

POSITION STATEMENT

JULY 2009



PRIMARY MENTAL HEALTH

Mental ill-health is currently one of the biggest challenges facing countries in the western world, with mental health problems affecting at least one in four people at some time in their lives.

In February 2006, the Council of Australian Government (COAG) formally recognised that mental health is a major health issue for the Australian community and therefore developed a National Action Plan on Mental Health. This plan details a series of initiatives to the value of \$4 billion over five years, to improve mental health and facilitate recovery through a greater focus on promotion, prevention and early intervention.

Some of the main initiatives developed by the Australian Government for the primary mental care sector include Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care (2001), Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and the General Practice Medicare Benefit Schedule Initiative (2006) which includes the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program.

The General Practice Tasmania Network recognises that:

- GPs are the first point of call for the majority of the population seeking health care and are therefore ideally placed for the early detection, intervention and possible prevention of mental health issues.
- GPs manage whole-of-patient care through assessing both the physical and mental health needs of patients.
- There is a role for a range of health practitioners in mental health care which should include GPs as the central component in conjunction with psychiatrists, psychologists, nurse practitioners, mental health nurses and other allied health practitioners.
- Mental ill health may be associated with a dual diagnosis or co-morbidity such as drug and alcohol dependency.
- Mental health services are provided through a range of interventions across the health sector including primary, secondary and tertiary health care in both public and private facilities. This creates difficulties for integrated care and referral pathways. Adequate investment in information systems to support clinical communication between service providers is therefore essential.

It is the position of the GPT Network that:

- GPs play an essential and fundamental role in the care of the mental health and well-being of their patients and it is often the GP who is required to diagnose mental ill-health and make decisions about the need for therapeutic treatment.
- Increased and simple linkages between the various mental health services, general practice and others in the primary health sector are required. Importantly, simplification of the complex system of mental health funding provided through a wide range of programs and funding sources is required.
- Adequate resources for health promotion and prevention strategies are required.

The General Practice Tasmania Network has developed position statements on various issues relevant to the operation of the health services system and relating to general practice across the State. These position statements reflect the views of Tasmanian GPs and the primary care community.

Each position statement is based upon research and the analysis of relevant literature as well as an assessment of the broader health sector environment. The position statements are developed collaboratively between the State Based Organisation, the three Divisions of General Practice and the Workforce Support Agency within Tasmania. During the development of each statement the Divisions and Workforce Agency consult with their Tasmanian GP members and Boards respectively. Prior to release the statements are ratified by the Boards of each of the organisations that constitute the General Practice Tasmania Network.

Collaboration with other general practice organisations (eg General Practice Training Tasmania, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, etc) is also a feature in the development of some position statements. The co-endorsement of position statements maximises the effectiveness of these statements and represents a strong collective view.

It is expected that position statements will evolve to reflect the ever-changing health and general practice environment. Accordingly feedback and comment is invited to ensure that the position statements continue to be relevant and accurately reflect the views of the Tasmanian general practice and primary care community.

To provide feedback on any position statement please contact any of the organisations that constitute the General Practice Tasmania Network:



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