



**Allied Health
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MEDIA RELEASE

Productivity Commission report overlooks mental health opportunities in allied health workforce

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The Productivity Commission's report to the Australian Government on mental health is timely recognition that mental health reform is urgently needed. Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) commends the commission for recognising the need to expand access to psychological care. However, the focus of the Commission's final report remains too narrow and neglects the potential of the allied health sector to make a significant contribution to the community's mental health and wellbeing.

"Increased access to psychologists through videoconferencing, smaller groups, inclusion of family and carers in consultations and greater consumer choice with referrals is important and welcome", said Claire Hewat, CEO of Allied Health Professions Australia. "However, opportunities to make a real difference by capitalising on the expertise of the broader allied health workforce have been missed."

Occupational therapists and social workers with specific mental health training are, along with psychologists, recognised as allied health professions with a role in mental health care. The Productivity Commission's report refers to these professions only as 'other allied health mental health professionals' that are eligible to provide Medicare funded services. The report also fails to consider the contributions of other allied health professions in mental health and the difference these could make if harnessed strategically.

"Greater access to allied health services could have an enormous positive impact on the mental wellbeing of so many people, particularly those needing low-intensity services. The solution is to expand our thinking around who can and does provide mental health support", she said. "By maintaining a narrow definition of 'mental health services', the role of professions providing primary and preventive physical health care in supporting mental health appears to have been overlooked."

"The report recognises the link between mental illness and poor physical health outcomes, and also that physical disorders, such as chronic pain, chronic medical conditions and communication difficulties, can contribute to mental illness. But there are no recommendations on the role of allied health professionals who can provide education or treatment to manage physical health for mental wellbeing, or the side effects of medication."

There is growing evidence of the preventive and treatment value of interventions targeting physical health and lifestyle. Creative interventions such as music and arts therapy and interventions in speech and language disorders are also important proactive approaches to support mental health and wellbeing.



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AHPA is concerned that the skills and value of the allied health sector continue to be poorly understood. Allied health professionals don't just work in health care. They also work in education, the justice system, social services, disability and aged care, where they also make significant contributions to mental health. There are major opportunities to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Australians through better and more consistent access to allied health services.

"Although this report acknowledges that a wide range of factors contribute to ill health, the perception of what mental health services look like is still quite limited and treatment-focused. Person-centred mental health care means thinking about what people need rather than what we have traditionally provided. Allied health professionals have the knowledge and expertise to support a truly proactive and multi-sector approach."

CEO Claire Hewat is available for comment

Please direct media inquiries to Karen Farrar – Communications and Policy Officer

About Allied Health Professions Australia

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) is a collegiate body consisting of 19 national allied health association members and a further 11 affiliate members with close links to the allied health sector. AHPA's members collectively represent over 130,000 allied health professionals, including many who support the mental health and wellbeing of Australians across a range of settings such as health, disability, social services, education and justice.

AHPA believes it is vital that allied health professionals are recognised for their work alongside the medical and nursing communities and for their potential to help shape and implement the health care system of the future. Supporting allied health professionals and making allied health services accessible will ensure that Australia has an integrated, comprehensive health care system which delivers world class care.

Please visit www.ahpa.com.au for further information about us.

Audiology Australia, Australian Chiropractors Association, Australian Podiatry Association, Australasian Society of Genetic Counsellors, Australian Association of Social Workers, Australian Society of Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy, Australian Music Therapy Association, Australian Orthotic Prosthetic Association, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Psychological Society, Australian New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association, Australian and New Zealand College of Perfusionists, Exercise and Sports Science Australia, Occupational Therapy Australia, Optometry Australia, Orthoptics Australia, Osteopathy Australia, Rehabilitation Counselling Association of Australasia, Speech Pathology Australia.