



WAPHA
WA Primary Health Alliance

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PERTH NORTH, PERTH SOUTH,
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An Australian Government Initiative

Media Release

New primary Mental Health Portals open up across WA

6 July 2017

Western Australians on low incomes will be able to access better, more targeted primary mental health treatment from today, after the roll-out of Mental Health Portals.

Commissioned by the WA Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA), which operates WA's three Primary Health Networks, the Mental Health Portals fundamentally change WA's approach to mental health treatment for vulnerable people within the community.

The \$12.8 million initiative is funded by the Australian Government and Member for Tangney Mr Ben Morton said with 3.6 million Australians likely to experience mental health issues every year, there is a growing need for more effective primary mental health care.

"This innovative new service will go a long way to addressing that need and will be of great benefit not only to my electorate but to all of WA, thanks to the state-wide rollout of the program," Mr Morton said.

The changes came into effect on 1 July, with the new approach including a shift to a stepped care model for mental health, enabling GPs to access early intervention for some of the most vulnerable of the 20 per cent of Australians who experience mental ill health.

Stepped care refers to a system of care in which there is a range of staged treatment options available. People are matched with the right care for their level of need which is explained in a simple animated video goo.gl/pZyUrC

WAPHA Chief Executive Officer Learnie Durrington said the changes would provide GPs with a greater range of options to connect eligible patients to a more integrated system of care.

"The new model is designed to ensure vulnerable people can more easily access mental health support at the right level and at the right time, wherever they are in WA," Ms Durrington said.

As part of the roll out of the new model, WAPHA has commissioned new services and providers right across WA – from regional communities to the metropolitan areas – to offer a greater range of services to support GPs and provide more targeted care to meet individual patient needs.



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The move to a stepped care model comes after a review in 2014 by the National Mental Health Commission that looked at every aspect of Australia's mental health response. The review found the system was poorly planned and badly integrated.

"While one in five Australians experience mental ill health at some time, most with mild to moderate severity, fewer than half of people with common needs such as anxiety or depression get treated at all," Ms Durrington said.

"Traditionally, access to mental health support has been uneven. Some areas have good access to a range of services while others, particularly in outer-suburban, regional or rural areas, have had fewer options for treatment.

"The newly commissioned services are designed to encourage early intervention and easier access to appropriate treatment."

Services have been commissioned to treat mild to moderate mental illness as well as to help GPs manage patients experiencing severe symptoms who have other complex social or physical needs.

Treatment options can include face-to-face counselling, online therapy supported by phone sessions, and other forms of care including group and community support.

Health care card holders will be able to access the new services at no cost and in regional areas, the service is also available to anyone who is financially disadvantaged or who lives in an area where no other services are available.

Ms Durrington said WAPHA was continuing to commission services and the stepped care model would become more developed over time.

"That means a healthier WA for us all."

For more information visit the website at: www.wapha.org.au/mental-health-portal

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About WAPHA: WAPHA oversees the strategic commissioning functions of the Perth North, Perth South and Country WA Primary Health Networks (PHNs). The WA PHNs are three of 31 PHNs established by the Australian Government nationally to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. We work across the WA healthcare system with doctors, allied health professionals, Area Health Services and service providers to improve the coordination of care for people who are at risk of poor health outcomes. Visit www.wapha.org.au for more information.

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