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BEYOND BLUE WELCOMES ELECTION PROMISES ON MENTAL HEALTH

Beyond Blue has welcomed promises of significant investment in mental health from both the Federal government and the Opposition, saying each plan represents genuine steps towards access to mental health support.

Labor and the Coalition have outlined plans to invest heavily mental health should they win government.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese last night announced plans to invest \$1 billion towards filling service gaps in Australia's mental health system, including an expansion of the headspace youth services, half a million dollars towards specialised care for young people with complex mental health needs and new Medicare Mental Health Centres that offer free, public mental health care, as well as workforce expansion. In his Budget reply, the Leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton announced that in addition to doubling to 20 the number of Medicare-subsidised mental health sessions, a Coalition government would invest an additional \$400 million in youth mental health services, including regional mental health services and a National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health.

Beyond Blue CEO Georgie Harman said she looked forward to the timely implementation of these announcements post-election, in collaboration with the community and the sector.

"These commitments, from the major parties, are considerable investments that will make a real difference to the mental health of all people in Australia, particularly young people who we know are really doing it tough right now," Ms Harman said.

"These promises will help stem the immediate critical reform needs, especially for young people, and they should be commended. Australian politicians, from many sides of politics, are listening and responding to the community's demands for affordable, available, contemporary mental health support. We're also seeing plans that start to address the bigger picture, and the need for meaningful structural change that supports both young people and the adults in their lives," she said.

Beyond Blue also welcomed the Federal government's existing commitment for a National Early Intervention Service. Ms Harman said long-term structural reform required a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention.

"If we are to truly shift the dial on mental health in this country, future investments from all sides of politics must recognise that the reform effort doesn't end with stemming immediate critical needs, as welcome as this is," Ms Harman said.

"Because Australia's mental health system really isn't a system at all. We're long overdue for thoughtful, meaningful reform that distributes funds carefully across the entire mental health continuum, from effective prevention and early intervention approaches to specialist support for people with more severe and complex needs. As well, we must expand the breadth of skills, backgrounds and attributes of the mental health workforce because there will never be enough counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists to meet growing demand," she said.

"Beyond Blue looks forward to seeing the tender for the National Early Intervention Service, which will offer free, early mental health support for 150,000 from January 2026."

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“Supporting people before they reach crisis point or their condition snowballs means they’re getting help before they require more intensive and expensive interventions. Peer workers and psychosocial community supports are a key part of the picture. So are efforts to prevent and intervene early in emerging mental health problems,” Ms Harman said.

Australia’s 2024 Mental Health and Wellbeing Check, a representative survey of 5000 Australians undertaken by Australian National University’s Social Research Centre on behalf of Beyond Blue, found that almost half (49 percent) of those who sought professional mental health support last year had waited until they were “very distressed” or “extremely distressed” before they reached out. Some people waited up to ten years before seeking support. The top barriers to taking action included waitlists, affordability of treatment and people thinking their problem wasn’t serious enough to seek support.

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