



Media Release  
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## **Health Announcements Galore, but is Mental Health still the poor cousin of health spending?**

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) today raised concerns that while all parties during this election campaign have made comments or commitments on health, particularly in relation to hospitals, there has been an appalling lack of announcements on what the parties will do to address mental health issues in the Tasmanian community.

In any year 1 in 5 people have a mental illness – we cannot ignore this important community health issue. As well as this, the 2009 report of the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing states that at some point in their lives 13.3% of Australians aged 16-85 years experience suicidal ideation.

MHCT Executive Officer, Michelle Swallow said today “Those who have a lived experience of mental illness and their families and carers appear to have missed out again”.

“The MHCT is the peak body representing the interests of non-government mental health consumer organisations, carer organisations and service provider organisations, and our membership acknowledges that while there have been some funding announcements to ensure dedicated mental health services for people experiencing acute mental distress when presenting at public hospital emergency departments, there has been no commitment to money for promotion and prevention”, Ms Swallow stated.

Ms Swallow said “The Department of Health and Human Services’ Statewide and Mental Health Services in partnership with the community sector has led the development of an excellent Tasmanian Mental Health and Wellbeing approach – *Building the Foundations for Mental Health and Wellbeing*”.

However, the rate of people experiencing mental distress accessing Tasmanian public hospital emergency departments indicates gaps in current service provision, and further emphasises the importance of dedicating more funds towards prevention and early intervention. The Tasmanian Government needs to make investment in the promotion, prevention and early intervention of mental illness to ensure that less people need to access emergency and acute services.” Ms Swallow said.

Suicide is a community health issue, not only a public health issue. Broad community involvement is essential, therefore we need a strong community sector approach, not just government and hospital services with a focus on medical

responses. Suicide is the leading cause of death of Australians under 34 and Tasmania has one of the highest rates of suicide per capita within Australia.

There is a need to have a funded community based Suicide Prevention Strategy to address these issues as a matter of urgency as soon as government resumes business after the election.

The MHCT calls on all candidates to state what funding is to be committed on an ongoing basis to ensure the continuation of promotion, prevention and early intervention activities in the mental health sector, and to commit to funding a community based suicide prevention strategy.

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