

The Australian Association of Social Workers' submission to the House of Representatives Select Committee inquiry into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention has called for government to seize the opportunity to build a more cohesive system of mental health support that will radically reform Australia's mental health system.

AASW CEO Cindy Smith said the AASW's extensive submission draws on decades of experience of its members working with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society and this submission and its recommendations for improvements to the mental health system are consistent with previous submissions.

"Social workers have been talking about the failings of the mental health system for decades and here we are in 2021, still beset by long waiting lists to access publicly funded services, inadequate rebate amounts under Better Access, and a shortage of mental health professionals across the country."

"Among our recommendations is that all sectors of the current service system be restructured into a person centred and community based system and that government provide incentives for mental health professionals to work outside of main city centres and increase the amount of mental health support available to people who live regionally, rurally or remotely."

Ms Smith said one of the terms of reference for the Select Committee Inquiry is to report on the findings of numerous inquiries into mental health over the years, including the Productivity Commission and Victoria's Royal Commission, among others.

"We call on the Federal Government to combine all the recommendations from these Inquiries to inform the development of the sixth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy."

"Through the development of the sixth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Strategy we have an opportunity to radically reform the mental health system and address the social determinants of mental health, including overturning mental health stigma and discrimination currently experienced by many people."

"As we recover from the impacts of natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic we are provided with a unique opportunity for immediate investment and improvement to the system that better meet the mental health needs of Australians," she said.

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