

## Measures to respond to mental health during COVID-19 crisis are welcome, says AASW

The AASW welcomes the measures the Government announced on Sunday, 29 March. The Association is working with members to implement the government's new measures to respond to mental health concerns during the COVID-19 crisis. It includes a \$1.1 billion package to support mental health and family violence, the bulk of which is \$669 million to Medicare-subsidised telehealth services and \$150 million towards family violence supports. Australians are now able to access most Medicare services via telehealth, regardless of where they live. These include those delivered by Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs) with a Medicare Provider Number and includes non-directive pregnancy counselling. If a client has a mental health care plan via Better Access and wants to use telehealth due to the impacts of COVID-19, allied health providers can use the new COVID-19 items instead of the usual Better Access items, to a maximum of 10 sessions under their current mental health plan. If clients had already begun treatment prior to the COVID-19 crisis, it will include those sessions also. National President Christine Craik said, "Social workers know only too well that emergency circumstances such as these lead to a surge in the incidence of mental health issues and family violence. The population has been directed to largely stay at home, which means that, not only are perpetrators likely to feel a sense of a loss of control over many aspects of their life at the present time, they will also have greater access to those who they feel entitled to abuse and control. Those living with family violence and abuse will also have a sense of fewer choices being available to them in terms of alternative living arrangements. "Social work is in the frontline service category, with social workers still providing supports and services under these circumstances. A lot has been said about our heroic health services workers and social workers are an integral part of that team." The AASW also welcomes government support for residential tenancies. "We cannot allow homelessness to dramatically increase during a time when there is a surge in family violence cases and increased unemployment as a direct result of COVID-19," Ms Craik said.

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