

media monitoring

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The Mercury – Saturday

Too cautious for battlers

THE delivery of a “cautious” state Budget is a missed opportunity to make adequate long-term investment in public housing and mental health. It risks leaving low-income Tasmanians behind.

We welcome a number of Budget initiatives, including strategies to address the cost of living, literacy rates and elder abuse, as well as to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students. The funding for community transport initiatives is also particularly welcome, as transport costs are a huge problem for people on low incomes.

But while the economy is stable at present, there are predictions that we may be coming into a difficult time. Large manufacturing plants are continuing to close and our real unemployment rate has been hidden by low labour force participation rates and a shift to part-time employment, often involuntary.

As fiscal stimulus funding ends, low-income Tasmanians could be left increasingly vulnerable to unemployment and poor health and educational outcomes.

In terms of housing, there are houses being built but these are mainly for low to middle income earners rather than people experiencing the worst housing stress. Also, much of this spending comes from federal funds rather than investment by the state. We desperately need to increase the supply of public housing.

Anglicare calls for further spending on mental health initiatives, including a social marketing strategy to address stigma and discrimination.

Dr Chris Jones
CEO, Anglicare

Mental health:

The federal government needs to spend an extra \$5 billion over five years on mental health, the Greens say. Greens senator and health spokeswoman Rachel Siewert says the resignation of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's top mental health adviser is indicative of the "tokenistic" approach the federal government has taken on a problem affecting millions of Australians. National Advisory Council on Mental Health chairman John Mendoza quit on Friday, after accusing the federal government of a lack of vision and commitment.

Mental health

A REMARKABLE result for the Tasmanian budget (The Examiner, June 18).

We have been through a global financial crisis, and everything it affected, plus that crazy state election, and Tasmania has posted a surplus.

The federal government's economic stimulus package in response to the global financial crisis has put us in a much better position than we ever could have imagined.

My only concern is mental health.

There is no sign of urgent funding in this budget, nor was there in the federal budget.

When will government get it that one in five Australians will suffer from a mental health illness?

— DAVID BARNES, Howrah.

Despair over lack of services

By VERONIKA COX

ISOLATED. Helpless. Desperate. Alone.

That is the plight of mentally ill North-West Coasters, according to mental health workers and volunteers.

Following the frustrated resignation of Kevin Rudd's top mental health advisor John Mendoza on Friday, Tasmanian



Ms Leslie

mental health professionals have voiced their despair at the government's neglect of some of the country's most vulnerable people.

Devonport Choose Life Services (CLS) chief executive Louise Leslie said a lack of service provision along the Coast, coupled with the fragmentation of the services that were available, was particularly isolating.

"People just give up on the system when they are pushed from one service to another with no outcome," she said.

"They become locked into hopelessness and suicide or suicidality becomes a far greater risk."

Ms Leslie said a broader approach was urgently required.

"The whole focus on mental

Funding suggests mentally ill are bottom of the pile

INADEQUATE funding means mentally ill patients are not being admitted to hospital until they are so unwell they may harm themselves or others, according to Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI) president Kate Shipway.

"It is an area that has traditionally struggled, particularly recently with industries closing and increased pressure on families," said Ms Shipway, whose organisation has recently applied for funding to launch a North-West support centre.

At a recent ARAFMl schizophrenia awareness conference in Devonport the group was overwhelmed by the

number of attendees.

"It is a clear indication people are desperate to know more and understand more," Ms Shipway said.

"There is clearly not enough support and it seems to be an area the government has decided is just too hard to deal with."

Ms Shipway said mental health was a terribly important and complex area, which required a serious overhaul.

"The mentally ill see themselves as the bottom of the pecking order and the lack of funding allotted to their care seems to reinforce that."

health of late has been on mental care plans — but the waiting periods to get into a psychologist is usually about six to eight weeks.

"There is no funding available for essential services like counsellors. There are a lot of people who don't require medical intervention but do need support."

Mental Health Council of Tasmania chief executive Michelle Swallow backed the claims, saying both state and federal mental health care were

dangerously inadequate.

"That is our frustration. We just don't get it. Why hasn't the government listened to us? Why haven't they listened to the community, the families, the patients?"

"The Federal Government absolutely has to take it on and put a significant investment into the health and wellbeing of communities."

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\$5b extra needed for mental health: Greens

PERTH — The Federal Government needs to spend an extra \$5 billion over five years on mental health, the Greens say.

Greens senator and health spokeswoman Rachel Siewert says the resignation of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's top mental health adviser is indicative of the "tokenistic" approach the Federal Government has taken on a problem affecting millions of

Australians.

National Advisory Council on Mental Health chairman John Mendoza quit on Friday, after accusing the government of a lack of vision and commitment.

Just \$175 million was allocated to new funding for mental health in last month's \$7.2 billion federal health budget.

In his resignation letter to fed-

eral Health Minister Nicola Roxon and fellow council members, Professor Mendoza said the government was trying to take credit for Howard-era spending on mental health.

He said there was no evidence of any new investment in mental health, and described the money set aside for new services as "appalling".

Speaking to AAP in Perth yes-

terday, Senator Siewert said she was not surprised by Prof Mendoza's resignation.

"We're disappointed, but not surprised at John Mendoza's resignation given that it's well known that he's extremely disappointed with the government's lack of response to calls for greater investment in mental health," she said.

Mental health revolt

THE Rudd government is facing revolt over the omission of mental health as well as dental and aged-care from its reform plans, despite its claims to the contrary.

The government's chief mental health adviser, John Mendoza, resigned after Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner reputedly said there was "no money" left for further spending on mental, dental or aged-care services.

In his resignation letter to Health Minister Nicola Roxon, Professor Mendoza said Labor had "no vision or commitment" for the sector and was claiming credit for increases in mental health spending instituted by the Howard government. He told Ms Roxon it was "clear... you have lost confidence in the council" appointed two years ago.

FULL REPORT P4

Resignation creates health credibility crisis for Labor



John Mendoza has accused the federal government of losing confidence in the advisory council he chaired

LYNDON MECHEISEN

Ministers are under pressure after their top mental health adviser quit in disgust

ADAM CRESSWELL
HEALTH EDITOR

THE Rudd government is facing revolt over a key omission from its health reform plans with Labor

Roxon, National Advisory Council on Mental Health chairman John Mendoza said it was "clear... you have lost confidence in the council" appointed only two years ago.

Professor Mendoza declined to elaborate on his decision yesterday, but the walkout is a sign that simmering dissatisfaction among mental health experts with the government's performance has reached boiling point.

Professor Mendoza's departure was a report through a Labor source within the past week that Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner had revealed privately that there was "no money" left for further spending on mental, dental or aged-care services.

A spokeswoman for Mr Tanner last night said the minister "absolutely denies saying any such thing", but other mental health experts agreed the source

last night said they were also "disappointed" and "frustrated" by the reported comments.

One senior mental health expert last night told *The Australian* it was believed the government had between \$6 billion and \$10bn to spend in the run-up to the next election, and even since the May budget the sector had hoped to benefit.

"I certainly was of the view that with the right approach mental

health was "a straight-out lie" and the advisory committee was "a charade".

A spokesman for Ms Roxon last night rejected the criticisms, saying the government "has been absolutely frank with the Australian people that when it comes to mental health, more will need to be done in the second term of a Rudd government".

"This is exactly what the Prime

Ministers are under pressure after their top mental health adviser quit in disgust

ADAM CRESSWELL
HEALTH EDITOR

THE Rudd government is facing revolt over a key omission from its health reform plans, with Labor accused of having no intention of finding extra funds for mental health, despite claims to the contrary.

The government was last night battling a credibility crisis, following the resignation of its top mental health adviser who accused it of having "no vision or commitment" for the troubled sector.

In a blistering resignation letter to Health Minister Nicola

Roxon, National Advisory Council on Mental Health chairman John Mendoza said it was "clear... you have lost confidence in the council" appointed only two years ago.

Professor Mendoza declined to elaborate on his decision yesterday, but the walkout is a sign that simmering dissatisfaction among mental health experts with the government's performance has reached boiling point.

On Thursday, 60 mental health organisations and experts will travel to Parliament House to present Kevin Rudd with a letter protesting at the lack of action in mental health policy, although it is understood no senior government figure has yet agreed to receive it.

The turmoil seems likely to widen to other health sectors, amid claims that the trigger for

Professor Mendoza's departure was a report through a Labor source within the past week that Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner had revealed privately that there was "no money" left for further spending on mental, dental or aged-care services.

A spokeswoman for Mr Tanner last night said the minister "absolutely denies saying any such thing", but other mental health experts agreed the source was highly credible — and the comment, if true, shredded the credibility of the Prime Minister's claims that mental health was on his agenda.

Just on Friday, Mr Rudd appeared on Seven's *Sunrise* to declare that mental health and aged care were "the two big areas still to be done, and we're determined to get on with it".

Dental and aged-care experts

last night said they were also "disappointed" and "frustrated" by the reported comments.

One senior mental health expert last night told *The Australian* it was believed the government had between \$6 billion and \$10bn to spend in the run-up to the next election, and even since the May budget the sector had hoped to benefit.

"I certainly was of the view that with the right proposals put in front of them, we would see a sensible move," the expert said.

"Other people in that circle of government had given some inkling that our turn was next. But he has formed the view there are no votes in mental health and he's not going to fund it."

The expert said Mr Tanner's reputed comment showed the government's line that it planned further spending on mental

health was "a straight-out lie" and the advisory committee was "a charade".

A spokesman for Ms Roxon last night rejected the criticisms, saying the government "has been absolutely frank with the Australian people that when it comes to mental health, more will need to be done in the second term of a Rudd government".

"This is exactly what the Prime Minister said on Friday and what minister Roxon has been saying for some time," he said.

"The government's COAG investments are important in laying the foundations for our health system and setting the system up for further investments in mental health into the future."

Other mental health experts, including Australian of the Year Patrick McGorry, have backed Professor Mendoza's stand.

Actions speak louder than hollow words

ADAM CRESSWELL
COMMENT



DID he or didn't he?

It's a question usually associated with the ABC's Friday night crime shows, but in this case the mystery is whether Lindsay Tanner did or didn't tell an unknown Labor figure the government had "no money" for mental, dental or aged-care services.

The Finance Minister flatly denies it, but in a sense it hardly matters. The Rudd government has already shown its utter lack of commitment to mentally ill people through its actions.

Kevin Rudd was at it again on Friday, telling the hosts of Seven's *Sunrise* the "two big areas of future health reform" were mental health and aged care. Great, but while he was happy to chat about Australian of the Year Patrick McGorry, the Prime Minister could barely remember the name of the Headspace youth

mental health network of which McGorry is founding member, and memory failed altogether over how many extra places his government had allocated it in the May budget.

The answer is 20,000, which McGorry dismisses as "tokenistic" in light of the unmet need and Australia's stubbornly high youth suicide figures.

The response of Rudd and Health Minister Nicola Roxon is that further mental health spending is planned in a putative second term, but that's hardly the timeframe mental health experts, workers and patients were led to believe was on the cards.

Back in March, unveiling the hospital financing elements of the government's health reform plans, Rudd cited mental health among a list of specific areas such as bed numbers, doctor numbers, primary care and electronic health as matters the government would be addressing in due course.

In the context, most observers assumed that meant this year, and most of those other areas have received some attention, but not mental health.

It's another area where Rudd's style of over-promising is proving more problematic than had he simply said "there's no money".

'No votes' in changing system

LANAI VASEK

JO Buchanan knows all too well how devastating the impact of mental illness can be.

The 69-year-old has been a mental health carer for nearly 40 years. Her son, nephew, and sister have all battled severe psychotic illnesses.

Ms Buchanan's nephew committed suicide in 1987 at the age of 19 suffering from schizophrenia, and her sister — who was also a diagnosed schizophrenic — died eight weeks later.

Her son, Miles Buchanan, 43, has suffered from Bipolar II disorder — an illness that results in extreme mood swings — for more than 20 years.

Mr Buchanan is the older brother of actresses Simone and Beth Buchanan — of *Hey Dad!* and *Neighbours* fame — and is also a former actor himself. He was originally incorrectly diagnosed with depression until just four years ago.

Ms Buchanan, who is her son's primary carer, said she believed help for the mental health sector had decreased.

She said she supported the move by Kevin Rudd's top mental health adviser, John Mendoza, to quit and agreed with his assessment that the government was participating in the "shameful neglect" of Australia's mentally ill.

"I don't blame him, I understand why he would resign, the frustration must be terrible," Ms Buchanan told *The Australian* yesterday.

In his resignation letter to Health Minister Nicola Roxon on Friday, Mr Mendoza — head of the National Advisory Council on Mental Health — said the Rudd government had "failed" the mentally ill, and accused them of claiming credit for the work of the Howard government on mental health reform.

"It is now abundantly clear that there is no vision — or commitment — from the Rudd government to mental health," Mr Mendoza said.

Ms Buchanan said she believed an "ingrained stigma in government and society" was the main barrier to enacting change on mental health. "I'm positive that this government truly believes there are no votes in mental health... reform," she said.

"For years, I have watched my son try to commit suicide, present to hospital and then be (denied) help. It's just not good enough."

Ms Buchanan said more money was desperately needed for assisted accommodation and community after-care services.

If you are depressed or contemplating suicide, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.



STUART McEVROY

Bipolar sufferer Miles Buchanan with his mother, Jo, his carer