

## **Mental Health, let's fix it**

No doubt there are problems with the delivery of mental health services in Australia ('Age' Opinion, 25/10/05). The publication of the Mental Health Council of Australia's report 'Not for Service' makes this abundantly clear, and they are to be congratulated for publicising the nature and extent of the failure of mental health services across Australia.

However, it must be recognized that there have been significant improvements in the past ten years with increased knowledge of what works, increased availability of home-based treatment and high quality inpatient facilities in general hospitals. We must support and encourage the legions of people committed to further improving the service system. We can do this through focusing on what is immediately achievable and insisting that our politicians take action.

For example, there is an urgent need to expand the mental health workforce and improve access to evidence-based treatment. This could be done at the stroke of a pen by making the services of clinical psychologists reimbursable under Medicare.

For the comprehensive amelioration that can be achieved, we must understand that ill health, especially mental ill-health, while borne by individuals, is not their sole responsibility. Rather, it is very much affected by social, economic and environmental factors, all of which are influenced by public policies. Until these policies, such as the industrial relations changes, are examined for their impact on mental health, we will continue to fail to protect the mental health and well-being of Australians.

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