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MEDIA RELEASE

10 October 2008

World Mental Health Day

To mark World Mental Health Day, the Rudd Government will take several important steps to improve mental health services, including:

- Establishing a new National Centre of Excellence in Suicide Prevention
- Investing \$30.5 million in improving rural and remote mental health services
- Applications for postgraduate scholarships in mental health have now opened, following a \$35 million boost to the Mental Health Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme

Mental health is an issue for all Australians. Around 20 per cent of adult Australians, or one in five people, will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives. Many will live with more than one mental illness at a time. Mental illness not only impacts on the individual sufferer, but also has an impact on their families and friends and communities.

The Rudd Government supports World Mental Health Day and has a strong commitment to supporting people with mental illness, by developing and enhancing services and programs for people living with mental illness.

Today the Government is announcing three mental health initiatives which are targeted at helping to address some of the most pressing issues affecting mental health, including the needs of people in rural and remote Australia, strengthening the mental health workforce, and helping people at risk of suicide.

Mental health services in rural and remote areas

\$30.5 million will be provided to enhance rural and remote mental health services under stage two of the Government's *Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas* program.

This funding, over three years, will help ease the barriers faced by people living in rural and remote areas accessing mental health services. Under this stage of the program, 24 organisations will be funded to provide mental health services for people living in 25 rural and remote areas, with a focus on drought-affected areas and areas of high need.

Allied and mental health nursing professionals – including social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, mental health nurses, Aboriginal health workers and Aboriginal mental health workers – will be engaged through Divisions of General Practice, Aboriginal Medical Services and the Royal Flying Doctors Service.

Mental Health Postgraduate Scholarships Boosted

Applications have opened for 230 new postgraduate scholarships in mental health nursing or clinical psychology for the 2009 academic year. An existing 75 full-time-equivalent scholarships will also be available.

The Rudd Government has boosted funding for the Mental Health Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme by \$35 million to increase the number and value of scholarships.

The new scholarships will assist new and continuing postgraduate students in meeting their accommodation, living and travel costs while at university, with up to 50 of the new scholarships dedicated to students from rural and remote areas.

Eligibility criteria and application forms are available from the Australian Psychological Society (www.psychology.org.au) and the Royal College of Nursing Australia (www.rcna.org.au).

National Centre of Excellence in Suicide Prevention

Having a history or current symptoms of mental illness, such as depression, increases the risk of suicide. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) promotes suicide prevention activities across the Australian population, as well as for specific at-risk groups. The strategy also aims to develop and enhance existing services and programs with governments, business, non-government and community organisations that support people at risk of suicide and self-harm.

Under the strategy, there has been an increasing emphasis on funding research in order to strengthen the evidence base for suicide prevention and intervention activities. As part of this, the Government has committed almost \$1.5 million to establish a National Centre of Excellence in Suicide Prevention. The Government is currently finalising negotiations with a major Australian university to host the Centre.

The work produced by the Centre will help to ensure that suicide prevention initiatives are evidence based, effective and supporting the most high-risk groups amongst the population.

National Advisory Council on Mental Health

As I announced in June 2008, the Government has established a National Advisory Council on Mental Health, chaired by Mr John Mendoza and consisting of 9 other individual experts. The Council is providing the Government with independent, confidential and balanced advice, to help improve Australia's mental health system and drive mental health reform. I attended the Council's inaugural meeting in August, and the Council will meet again next week.

Other initiatives

These latest initiatives build on other work the Government is undertaking in the mental health area:

- under the National Perinatal Depression Initiative, Commonwealth funding of \$55 million over five years including an additional \$20 million in funding for the Access to Allied Psychological Services program (ATAPS), \$5 million to *beyondblue* for information and community awareness activities, and \$30 million through States and Territories for screening, workforce training and development and support, care and treatment;
- \$5.7 million in grants to 209 community-level organisations that help support people with mental health conditions;
- the refocusing of ATAPS to better complement other fee-for-service programs and to address service gaps for people in particular geographical areas and population groups. This includes a trial of telephone-based therapy in rural and remote areas and increased support and referral pathways for GPs to manage patients at risk of suicide.

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