# Australian Government Announces Major Mental Health Investment in Federal Budget



The Australian government has announced a substantial investment in mental health within the federal budget, eliciting a mixed response from stakeholders. Key among the measures is an $888 million allocation over eight years to establish a national online mental health service, offering up to 10 free sessions annually for "low intensity" issues. This initiative aims to fill gaps in the current system and provide early intervention.

Professor Patrick McGorry, a prominent youth mental health advocate, has welcomed the investment but emphasized the need for rapid implementation. He highlighted the urgency due to a "surge" in mental health needs, particularly among young people.

In addition, the budget includes enhancements for the Head to Health centers, which will be renamed Medicare Mental Health Centres. These centers are slated to house psychiatrists, psychologists, and GPs, with plans to expand from the current 20 to a total of 61 centers. Health Minister Mark Butler acknowledged the need for more support for individuals with complex mental health needs, promising imminent openings of additional centers.

The online service, planned for 2026 and expected to serve 150,000 people yearly, will be accessible directly or through GPs. It seeks to alleviate pressure on the Better Access scheme, which currently offers capped Medicare-backed sessions.

Reactions from various bodies, including the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc and Beyond Blue, ranged from cautious optimism to calls for more detailed planning and implementation speed. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists expressed disappointment over the lack of commitment to workforce expansion.

McGorry, leading researcher at Orygen and professor at the University of Melbourne, stresses that while the budget's directions are correct, greater urgency and comprehensive investment in youth mental health are crucial.