Head start on mental health

Government ministers responsible for mental health services in all Australian jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, will meet in Melbourne tomorrow to review achievements under the National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006-2011 and discuss future initiatives in this key social area.

Minister for Health Kon Vatskalis will represent the Northern Territory at the high-level meeting and outline progress made on mental health service delivery by the Henderson Government.

“The Government’s investment in mental services has more than doubled since 2001, with $37.3 million spent in the last budgetary year,” Minister Vatskalis said.

“In recognition of the vital role played by NGOs in delivering mental health support, the total funding for NGO services has been increased five-fold to $4.4 million in this Government’s term of office.”

“Of course there is still more work to be done, with significant demand in child and adolescent mental health services, suicide prevention and early intervention services and increased support for people with severe mental illness. There is also a need to increase access to mental health services provided by GPs and other primary health practitioners.

“Mental illness is more widespread that people may think, with one in five Australians experiencing a mental illness in any given year, and many people will experience more than one mental illness at one time.

“In fact, mental disorders are the third leading cause of disability burden in Australia, accounting for an estimated 27 per cent of the total years lost due to disability. Major depression accounts for more days lost to illness than almost any other physical or mental disorder.”

“A key part of the challenge in dealing with this issue is eliminating the stigma many people still attach to mental illness.”

“We can all do our part to reduce stigma and make life easier for people struggling with mental illness,” Mr Vatskalis said.

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