

Psychiatrists call on Federal Government to restore mental health funding

National Association of Practising Psychiatrists

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President of the National Association of Practising Psychiatrists, Dr Gil Anaf, has raised concerns about a drastic reduction in funding for mental illness contained in the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services Corporate Plan 1997-98.

An analysis of the Sub-Program Resource Summary as of today shows a decline in the mental health budget from \$68 million in 1997 to \$16 million in 1998, \$11 million in 1999, and \$8 million in 2000 (shown as 1900-01). This is a decline of 88%.

"The Government's own figures show that even at \$68 million mental health makes up only 0.3% of the 1997-98 Governments Program outlays. Any plans to cut this figure would mean that that mental health budget would shrink to nothing" Dr Anaf said

"The mental health budget is the only area to show such a massive decline. I find it hard to believe that provisions have not been made for such a crucial area of need."

"On Tuesday it was reported that Dr Wooldridge planned to spend up to \$500,000 of taxpayers money setting up his own doctors trade union to be called the Australian Medical Academy to rival the Australian Medical Association" Dr Anaf said.

"It is extraordinary that the Minister can find money to build his own empire when there are plans to cut mental health funding."

"NAPP has been unsuccessful at trying to get an explanation of these cuts" Dr Anaf said.

Dr Wooldridge states in the Corporate Plan that "The Plan reflects the Government's ongoing commitments across the health and family services sector."

Department Secretary, Mr Andrew Podger, also writes in the Plan that "We must focus positively and seriously on our Vision to become the leader in promoting, developing and funding world class health and family services for all Australians."

"Unless mental health funding is restored the Federal Government's credibility to maintain Medicare will be shot to pieces" Dr Anaf said.