



**THE HON MARK BUTLER MP
MINISTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND AGEING**

Mr Geoff Lyons MP
Member for Bass
PO Box 5035
LAUNCESTON TAS 7250

Dear Mr Lyons *Geoff*

Thank you for your representations of 4 November 2010 on behalf of Mr Peter Jacobson of Launceston, regarding the likely closure of the Lifeline office at Launceston.

I am advised that the single Lifeline telephone line at Launceston is to be relocated to a more central location between Launceston and Burnie. This consolidation is part of a wider strategic business improvement exercise, initiated in North West Tasmania by Lifeline, which will allow multiple telephone counsellors to be rostered on together for overnight shifts when caller demand is highest and to maximise peer support. These shifts are currently not attracting Launceston based telephone counsellors. A car pooling arrangement is being established for any Launceston telephone counsellors wishing to continue to volunteer on the 13 11 14 helpline. Meetings have been conducted with Lifeline volunteers from Launceston to work through all the benefits and implications of the improvement project.

Lifeline acknowledges the consolidation may cause some inconvenience for volunteers living close to the current location of the Launceston line, but has advised it is very confident that this consolidation will result in significantly more Lifeline callers being answered in North West Tasmania.

On 27 July 2010, the Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, indicated that mental health will be an important second term agenda for the Government announcing the Taking Action to Tackle Suicide strategy. Under this strategy, \$274 million will be invested over four years to:

- provide more services to those at greatest risk of suicide - including psychology and psychiatry services, as well as non-clinical support to assist people with severe mental illness and their carers with their day-to-day needs;
- invest more in direct suicide prevention and crisis intervention, including through boosting the capacity of counselling services such as Lifeline and providing funding to improve safety at suicide 'hotspots';
- provide more services and support to men - who are at greatest risk of suicide, but least likely to seek help; and
- promote good mental health and resilience in young people, to prevent suicide later in life.

The national measures announced in July 2010 build on existing reforms already underway.

On 20 April 2010, the Australian Government and the state and territory governments, with the exception of Western Australia, reached a historic agreement at the Council of Australian Governments, on health and hospitals reform. The establishment of the National Health and Hospitals Network (NHHN) represents the most significant reform to Australia's health and hospitals system since the introduction of Medicare.

Under the NHHN Agreement, the Australian Government will take full funding and policy responsibility for primary mental health care services for common disorders such as anxiety and depression of mild to moderate severity, including those currently provided by the states and territories.

The Government has also signalled its determination to improve services for people with severe mental illness. As part of the 2010-11 Budget, \$175.8 million was allocated to improve our mental health system as part of the NHHN. This includes:

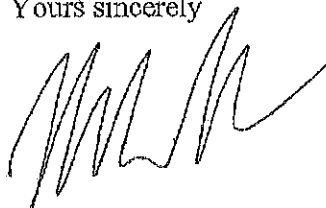
- \$78.8 million over four years to deliver up to 30 new **headspace** youth friendly services, provision of extra funding for the existing 30 **headspace** sites, and improvements to telephone and web-based support services for young people;
- \$25.5 million over four years to expand the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre model in partnership with interested states and territories;
- \$13 million over two years under the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program; and
- \$58.5 million over four years to deliver flexible care packages to better support up to 25,000 people with severe mental illness through the Access to Allied Psychological Services arrangements.

In addition, \$5.5 million has been allocated to extend the existing Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities initiative to June 2011.

Services for people with severe mental illness will also be improved by the Government's \$1.6 billion investment to expand subacute care facilities, including extra community-based residential mental health beds.

I trust that the above information is of use.

Yours sincerely



MARK BUTLER

22 DEC 2010