

An early positive signal: A message to CMHA members on the 2026-27 Federal Budget

On the day after the budget was handed down, Kerry Hawkins attended a prearranged meeting in person at Parliament House in Canberra with one of the advisers from Minister Butler's office. The meeting was called to discuss mental health in Australia and specific elements of the budget, including NDIS reform and the pathway for the community mental health sector.

The fact that this meeting was planned in advance, and held the day after a major budget announcement, is itself a positive signal. It reflects the relationships CMHA has built with government and the regard in which our sector's voice is held. Advisers indicated clearly that psychosocial are the next mental health priority focus for this government, and that the \$3 billion commitment in the budget is the beginning of a serious body of work.

"To be in Canberra, at Parliament House, in a prearranged meeting with one of Minister Butler's advisers the day after the budget is not something we take for granted," said Kerry.

"The message from that meeting was clear: psychosocial supports are the priority, and this government intends to get the design right. That is what we have been asking for, and it is promising to hear it said directly," she said.

"We will continue to be present in those conversations, and we will make sure our members and the people they support have a voice in what comes next," Kerry added.

The \$3 billion commitment to Foundational Supports outside the NDIS is the headline announcement for our sector. We see this as a genuine opportunity for reform, and for CMHA members and the Australians you support every day. Community mental health is exactly where this work belongs. The people who have been waiting for support that neither the NDIS nor the private system could reach are the people our member organisations were established to serve.

We will be watching carefully as the detail unfolds. Co-design must mean co-design, with people with lived experience, their families, carers and kin, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples genuinely involved. The National Mental Health Commission has a critical and independent role to play in holding government accountable as this reform takes shape. CMHA will be pressing for that at every stage.

On NDIS reform, our position has not changed. We welcome reform done well. We remain clear-eyed about the risks for Australians with psychosocial disability, and we will continue to be vocal about the need for a proper safety net and safe transitions before changes take effect.

This budget is an announcement. The policy is in the detail that follows, as psychosocial supports are negotiated with states and territories, as commissioning processes take shape, and as the NDIS reforms bed down, CMHA will be engaged at every stage.

We will share information with you as it emerges. We encourage you to read this alongside what you are seeing in your own state or territory and in the communities you operate. You are closest to what is working and what is not, and that knowledge is part of what we bring to these conversations on your behalf.

"The opportunity in this budget is real. So is the work that lies ahead of us," concluded Kerry.