

MEDIA RELEASE
14th October 2016

Western Sydney increases Mental Health Services to disadvantaged communities

A recent evaluation of primary mental health services in western Sydney has discovered an increase in accessibility for the region's most vulnerable and at risk groups.

WentWest, the Western Sydney Primary Health Network (WSPHN), is responsible for the commissioning of primary care services across the region, among which Mental Health is a key core focus. The commissioning role is a substantial one which sees the organisation working with stakeholders to identify areas of need and services gaps before developing a comprehensive plan for the procurement of services accordingly.

Among those identified priorities areas for western Sydney has been the need to enhance access to primary mental health services (such as psychology services for mild to medium mental health conditions) for such populations as low income earners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people; and those with low English language proficiency.

In evaluating the commissioning process the University of Sydney reviewed three (3) years of data from primary mental health services. The results indicated that the implementation of the commissioning process has covered more population and decreased the unmet needs throughout the three years of assessment, and at the same time increased its horizontal equity in the region.

Among the findings, the evaluation reported a 24% increase for lower income earners, 90% in referrals to mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and a 204% increase for those with lower levels of English proficiency.

Supporting the increased referral rates throughout the period, the evaluation showed that the referrals were also coming from western Sydney's most disadvantage communities including Mount Drutt and Auburn.

WentWest CEO Walter Kmet said of the evaluation: "The encouraging results are reflective of an ongoing and targeted approach undertaken by Western Sydney Primary Health Network in its commissioning role for primary care and specifically mental health services in the region."

"We continue to work with consumers, carers, health professionals and the broader community to see that mental health services across western Sydney meet the needs of those most at risk," said Mr Kmet.

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About WentWest

WentWest's focus on providing better health care in the community was strengthened with its appointment as a Tranche 1 Medicare Local in July 2011 to now operating as the Western Sydney Primary Health Network. WentWest has built on its experience as a Division of General Practice in supporting GPs and their practices, connecting health services to meet local needs, and striving for better health outcomes for western Sydney.

The population living in western Sydney is culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse, and we also have the largest urban Aboriginal community in Australia. WentWest works closely with doctors, allied health professionals, the Western Sydney Local Health District and many others to improve the coordination of local health services for patients and their families