

MEDIA RELEASE



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National lived experience peak body welcome, but key details needed

VMIAC CEO Craig Wallace welcomed the Commonwealth's commitment to lifting the voices and expertise of people with lived and living experience of mental illness to reform the national mental health system, but called for more detail on key aspects of the announcement.

Speaking from the Mental Health Equity and Access Forum in Canberra yesterday, Mr Wallace looked forward to greater clarity on how \$7.5 million will be split to establish and operate two peak bodies – one representing consumers, and the other carers, families, and kin.

Critically, he called for more detail on the role peak bodies in states and territories are to play in the reform process, adding, "Peak bodies in the states and territories must be made integral to co-designing the governance for, and guiding the establishment of, the national peak.

"The national peak body needs to be an alliance of voices from the state and territories peaks because national reforms will flow down to affect people in each state or territory, potentially in different ways, and these people will be connected to their respective state or territory peak.

"This reality must be built into the implementation funding for the national reform," he said.

Mr Wallace noted that, having closely informed the reforms in Victoria flowing on from the Royal Commission into the state's mental health system, VMIAC was uniquely positioned to share the lessons learned from driving a major reform program in mental health.

"From being deeply embedded in the Victorian reforms over the past 18 months, VMIAC has learnt significant lessons and we hope to share our learning with the Commonwealth to inform how the reforms into mental health can be done well nationally," Mr Wallace said.

Mr Wallace also acknowledged that mechanisms to engage communities become more complex at a national scale where the diversity of cohorts and communities increases significantly.

He said, "We need community engagement that is smarter. We must prioritise cultural inclusion, disability access, and incremental and ongoing models of engagement to ensure we hear from those who face the highest social and economic costs from any service failures.

"Many participants have found government consultation methods inaccessible, requiring levels of technological skill and policy understanding that are beyond their capabilities. Inadvertently, these requirements exclude people with disabilities, or facing digital or language barriers."

Reflecting on how peak bodies get stretched during reform, Mr Wallace also said, "We need to be properly resourced, both in funding and staffing, to engage with diverse communities and to build capacity for people to participate and add their voices to the reform processes.

"The Commonwealth must also set realistic and sensitive timelines for projects and activities to invite and absorb input from those affected by the reforms, especially those in hard-to-reach and marginalised cohorts who have higher service and advocacy needs," he said.

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