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Private psychiatric hospitals will step up for young people

Australian private hospitals stepped up to support the public sector manage COVID-19 and private psychiatric hospitals are ready to meet the increased demand for support from those suffering the mental health effects of lockdowns and restrictions, particularly young people.

New data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) suggests young Australians have suffered higher rates of psychological distress than their older counterparts, which will lead to more demand on mental health services.

The AIHW data – the ‘Australia’s youth’ report shows experiences of severe psychological distress among 18-24 year olds increased from 14 percent in February 2017 to 22 percent in April 2020.

APHA CEO Michael Roff said private hospitals have a key role to play in supporting young Australians.

“Private psychiatric hospitals are ideally placed to provide care to these young Australians. It can be challenging to access mental health care in the public system unless you are very unwell. In contrast, private hospitals offer access to a wide range of services for depression, anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” he said.

Mr Roff said young people may not be aware that new legislation that has just passed the Senate means they can stay on their parents’ health insurance until they are 31 years old and that this insurance can be immediately upgraded to include psychiatric hospital services if required.

“The option to immediately upgrade health insurance to access private psychiatric hospital care has been a popular option since it was introduced in April 2018. Private health insurers report that more than 13,500 Australians upgraded their insurance cover between April 2018 and December 2020 to access higher benefits for in-hospital psychiatric care without having to serve a waiting period.*

“Since the pandemic started we have seen an increase in mental health issues presenting across the health care system. As young people continue to struggle with restrictions, isolation from family and friends and loss of casual work, it’s good to know there are options available to them to access the mental health support they need.”

AIHW report: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-youth/contents/about>

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*The majority of health insurance products only provide limited cover for mental health services which can result in large out-of-pocket costs for consumers. For most services (e.g. most surgery, joint replacements, rehabilitation etc)), consumers wanting to upgrade from low cover (e.g. Bronze, Basic, Silver) to a full cover product have to serve a two month waiting period to access the higher level of cover. However, in April 2018, the Federal Government introduced reforms to allow a once-only instant upgrade for mental health services, so consumers can upgrade to a product that provides full cover for mental health without serving any additional waiting period.