



UNDER EMBARGO—strictly not for publication before 1.00am Friday 13 October 2017

Access to mental health services through Medicare on the rise with almost 1 in 10 Australians accessing government-subsidised services

Close to 10% of the Australian population accessed Medicare-subsidised mental health services in 2015–16, according to a report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

The report, *Mental health services: In brief 2017*, shows that 2.3 million people (9.5% of the Australian population) received Medicare-subsidised mental health services in 2015–16—an increase from 1.6 million (7.2% of the population) in 2011–12.

‘Overall, 1.8 million people received Medicare-subsidised mental health services from a GP and more than 1 in 10—or 12% of GP consultations were for mental health reasons,’ Mr James said. Australian Government spending on Medicare-subsidised mental health services increased from \$0.9 billion in 2011–12 to \$1.1 billion in 2015–16.

‘A further \$564 million was spent on over 24 million subsidised prescription medications, a decline from \$852 million in 2011–12,’ said AIHW spokesperson Matthew James.

In total, there were 36 million prescriptions for mental health-related medications in 2015–16, with over two-thirds (69%) of these being for antidepressants.

Updated data has also been released for state and territory government operated community mental health care services, which involve specialised mental health teams that operate in the community.

After Medicare-subsidised services, these services are the most common, with 9.4 million services provided to around 410,000 people during 2015–16, which is almost 23 services per client. These services, paid for by state and territory governments, cost a total of \$1.9 billion in 2015–16.

The report also looks at services provided in other settings—such as public hospitals and residential facilities—and examines the use of mental health care provided to people with a legal status allowing treatment in an involuntary capacity.

‘Nearly half—or 48%—of all overnight mental health-related admissions to public hospitals involving specialised psychiatric care were for people who had an involuntary mental health legal status at some point during their admission,’ Mr James said.

The proportion of care provided to people with an involuntary mental health legal status was lower for residential mental health care (19%) and community mental health care (14%).

Today’s release builds on the AIHW’s existing data about [the use of restrictive practices in mental health facilities](#).

October 10 was World Mental Health Day, and this week is National Mental Health Week. To learn more: <https://1010.org.au>

Canberra, 11 October 2017