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GP groups call for reinvestment into successful mental health program

United General Practice Australia – the coalition of the peak groups representing Australia’s general practitioners – has issued a strong united statement calling on the government to expand the *Better Access* program to meet the demand for mental healthcare in the community rather than reducing Medicare patient rebates for vital mental health services.

In the 2011/2012 Federal Budget announcement, the government reduced funding for mental health support delivered by GPs, by across the board cuts to funding for MBS items under the *Better Access* program. These items were originally created to facilitate the delivery of quality mental healthcare in general practice, including both face-face consultation time and the coordination of mental healthcare services.

General practice remains the universal access point for healthcare nationally and is ideally placed to deliver mental healthcare with over 17,000 GPs having undertaken additional mental health skills training. These cuts are very likely to negatively impact on patient access to high quality primary mental healthcare.

While United General Practice Australia welcomes the significant focus on mental health, including Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) funding, the current health reform initiatives reduce resources from successful programs now and do not invest in resources in the near future.

The profession has long called for an investment in mental health, however, this budget makes a saving within the program rather than investing to expand services and meet demand.

United General Practice Australia comprises the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), the Australian Medical Association (AMA), the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN), General Practice Registrars Australia (GPRA), the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), and the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA).

All UGPA members are keen to work with the government to ensure the budget meets the needs of our communities.

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