AUSTRALIA

Written Statement

Item 18: Mental health preparedness for and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia thanks the Director-General for developing the mental health and preparedness report. Minimising the mental health impacts of COVID-19 is of critical importance, and is a key element to strengthening health system resilience for future public health emergencies.

Australia supports the Decision to endorse the updated comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2030. Promoting mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, and building mental health services and psychosocial supports are important strategies to consider as we continue our recovery from the pandemic.

The mental health and wellbeing of all Australians remains one of the Australian Government’s highest priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on the mental health of Australians, particularly for those who were also affected by the unprecedented bushfire season in 2019-2020. We support the recommended actions for minimising the mental health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and have ensured that mental health is at the forefront of our disaster preparedness, response and recovery planning.

As part of our response, targeted supports have been increased for persons who may be particularly vulnerable in the current environment, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, young Australians, older Australians, individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and frontline health workers.

In addition, we have seen the value of using digital and telehealth services to allow for continuity of care. This shift has also provided flexibility in how and when individuals interact with services, and limits the potential for COVID 19 exposure for both health professionals and patients.

Australia also recognises the need to respond proactively to reduce pandemic-related adversities, such as isolation. We have dedicated additional funding for
grief and trauma support services to aged care recipients, their loved ones and staff who have been impacted by COVID-19. We have also provided outreach services for people living with dementia and their carers who may be experiencing social, emotional, or physical isolation.