




# Key issues for the 2016 Federal election



Level 13, 257 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000  
PO Box 38  
Flinders Lane VIC 8009  
T: (03) 8662 3300  
F: (03) 9663 6177

[psychology.org.au](http://psychology.org.au)

The Australian Psychological Society Limited  
ABN 23 000 543 788

**T**he Australian Psychological Society is the premier professional organisation for psychology with over 22,000 members. Psychologists represent the largest mental health workforce in Australia. As their representative body, the Australian Psychological Society has access to a vast pool of psychological expertise from both academic and professional service delivery perspectives. The Australian Psychological Society is represented on a number of Federal Government advisory groups involved in the planning, implementation and ongoing monitoring of Government policy initiatives.

Through their work with many Australians, from young infants to the elderly, communities and organisations, psychologists and the Australian Psychological Society are acutely aware of the need to continue to invest in reforms to improve health care and community wellbeing.

In this election, the Australian Psychological Society has identified 10 areas where there are real opportunities to bring significant benefits to the Australian community by increasing access to effective psychological care and knowledge. The Australian Psychological Society believes these initiatives have the potential to influence the voting of various segments of the electorate.

# Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

- 1 Increase access to evidence-based psychological interventions for people with more complex high prevalence mental disorders
- 2 Improve access to psychological services in regional, rural and remote Australia
- 3 Improve access to evidence-based psychological interventions for the management of chronic disease
- 4 Improve the quality of care for older people with psychological and/or neurological conditions
- 5 Address the gap in the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a matter of national priority
- 6 Improve access to appropriate psychological care for people affected by institutional child sexual abuse
- 7 Ensure comprehensive, flexible and long term access to psychological care for survivors of domestic violence and child abuse
- 8 Ensure the mental and physical welfare of asylum seekers in detention
- 9 Commit to continued reduction of global warming through a range of strategies to prevent the most significant physical and mental health effects of climate change
- 10 Ensure that natural disaster funding takes into consideration the impacts of natural disasters on the health and psychosocial wellbeing of individuals, and their families, as well as whole communities

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 1

### Increase access to evidence-based psychological interventions for people with more complex high prevalence mental disorders

#### Reinstate the Better Access “exceptional circumstances” sessions.

Funding cuts to the highly successful Better Access initiative have had a marked impact on the thousands of Australian who can no longer access the appropriate length of effective and cost-efficient psychological treatment. There is evidence that the sessions of psychological treatment under “exceptional circumstances” that were cut from 1 January 2013 are effective and necessary for a substantial number of Better Access consumers. The cuts have primarily affected people requiring additional treatment under “exceptional circumstances” for severe depression or anxiety disorders with significant additional complexities, and for people with more complex conditions such as eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. These additional sessions should be available for individuals who meet defined and objective criteria.

*The Australian Psychological Society seeks support from all political parties for the permanent reinstatement of the six Better Access “exceptional circumstances” sessions that were removed. Reinstatement of the sessions would enable many thousands of Australians with serious but common mental health disorders to access the appropriate length of effective psychological treatment in a timely and effective manner. These many thousands of Australians are currently denied access to effective psychological treatment, with a concomitant impact on family stress, productivity and hospital admissions.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Dr Louise Roufeil, Executive Manager, Professional Practice (Policy)  
l.roufeil@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 2

### Improve access to psychological services in regional, rural and remote Australia

**Support the implementation of a 'grow-your-own' pipeline for the regional, rural and remote psychology workforce that would entail the APS facilitating access to rural internships, supervisors and centralised coordination, supported by rural practice incentive packages.**

In the context of high demand for a well-trained health workforce, the psychology profession is considered by Government to be in shortage and the discipline is facing a serious situation with regard to supply in rural areas. This situation must be addressed to ensure sufficient workforce to address the mental health and chronic disease burden of health in rural areas of Australia.

The supply of psychologists in Australia is via postgraduate professional education and training, or tertiary education followed by an internship. Currently, there are constraints on both pathways. Although a large number of people enter first year undergraduate psychology programs across Australia, very few of these individuals are able to go on to become a registered psychologist.

Organisations are increasingly reluctant to employ psychology interns because of the significant and increasing demands on the organisation with regard to supervision. The decline in internship places is of particular concern with regard to the rural and remote workforce because psychologists who obtained registration through the internship route have traditionally been over represented in rural Australia.

*The Australian Psychological Society is seeking the support of all political parties to support the implementation of a "grow-your-own" pipeline for the regional, rural and remote psychology workforce, including facilitating access to rural internships, supervisors and centralised coordination, support by a rural practice incentive package.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Dr Louise Roufeil, Executive Manager, Professional Practice (Policy)  
l.roufeil@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 3

### Improve access to evidence-based psychological interventions for the management of chronic disease

#### Support access to psychological interventions for behaviour change.

The Australian community requires interventions to lower the incidence of obesity and reduce the burden of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, respiratory disease and cancer. These health concerns are listed in the top eight National Health Priority Areas. Current public health, medical and nursing programs impact on these health priorities, but do not address the human behaviour factors that underpin these lifestyle-related health problems.

Many Australians find lifestyle change difficult and would benefit from the support of psychologists, who are health behaviour change experts. Self-determined health behaviour choices could be significantly enhanced through access to cognitive behavioural interventions delivered by the health psychology workforce.

*The Australian Psychological Society seeks a commitment from all political parties to provide flexible Government-funding to psychologists to enable the delivery of evidence-based interventions targeting behaviour change for people with chronic illness that enables the right dose of treatment to be given to the right person at the right time. These services need to be accessible to all people with a diagnosed chronic disease, whether or not they elect to enrol in a Health Care Home.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Dr Louise Roufeil, Executive Manager, Professional Practice (Policy)  
l.roufeil@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 4

### Improve the quality of care for older people with psychological and/or neurological conditions

**Provide access to psychological and neuropsychological assessment and treatment for older people, both those in the community and those residing in aged care facilities.**

The prevalence of dementia in Australia is expected to treble by 2050. Early diagnosis and intervention has been demonstrated to keep people with dementia living in the community longer. The primary care sector would be better equipped to undertake early diagnosis if they had access to the diagnostic contributions of clinical neuropsychologists under Medicare. Managing people with dementia in the community is also hindered by the absence of a mechanism under Medicare for psychologists to develop and implement behaviour management programmes for this cohort.

The incidence of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety is much higher among people living in residential aged care facilities than in the wider community. Mental illness and disruptive behaviour among people residing in such facilities are frequently treated with psychoactive medication which has undesirable side effects and is expensive to provide and monitor. Psychological assessment and interventions for members of the aged community have been shown to be effective in managing mood disorders and disruptive behaviour, and to improve quality of life for residents as well as reducing costs for the facility by decreasing the need for pharmacological interventions. However, there is currently extremely limited access to psychological assessment and treatment for people living in aged care facilities.

*The Australian Psychological Society seeks a commitment from all political parties to:*

- *Provide medical practitioners with the ability to refer people with suspected symptoms or significant risk factors for dementia to receive Government-funded clinical neuropsychological assessment and treatment planning*
- *Implement a 12-month trial of supervised placements in residential aged care facilities for professional psychology postgraduate students to provide, under supervision, psychological assessments, and mood and behaviour management interventions for residents as well as training for facility staff on behaviour management.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Dr Louise Roufeil, Executive Manager, Professional Practice (Policy)  
l.roufeil@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 5

### Address the gap in the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a matter of national priority

**Implement the recommendations of the National Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services that pertained to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

There is a significant gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians that includes higher rates of psychological distress, more hospitalisations for mental illness, and higher rates of death from self-harm. Despite the significant need, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have greater difficulty accessing appropriate mental health services.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities need to be empowered to help oversee, manage and support the delivery of these services within their own communities.

*The Australian Psychological Society is seeking the support of all political parties, as a matter of priority to fully implement the recommendations of the National Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services that pertained to the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These include:*

- *Making the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples a national priority*
- *Integrating mental health and social and emotional wellbeing services*
- *Fostering culturally responsive and accountable mainstream mental health services*
- *Sharpening the role of dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services*
- *Developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workforce.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Mr Harry Lovelock, Senior Executive Manager, Strategic Development and Public Interest  
h.lovelock@psychology.org.au



## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 6

### Improve access to appropriate psychological care for people affected by institutional child sexual abuse

**Implement Recommendations 9 and 10 of the Redress and Civil Litigation Report (2015) released by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.**

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse concluded that redress should include psychological care as needed by survivors across their lifespan and this should be provided according to established principles. The Royal Commission also concluded that there is currently insufficient public funding allocated to meet the needs of survivors and that this would be best addressed by making changes to the existing Better Access program. In addition to the provision of sufficient psychological services, the Royal Commission stated that action must be taken to ensure that survivors have access to appropriately trained and experienced health practitioners to deliver these services.

*The Australian Psychological Society is seeking the support of all political parties to implement recommendations 9 and 10 in the Redress and Civil Litigation Report (2015) that would improve access to appropriate psychological care of people affected by institutional child sexual abuse as follows:*

- *Amending the Better Access program to meet the needs of survivors, including removing the limit on the number of allowable sessions*
- *Funding the Australian Psychological Society to lead the design and implementation of a public register of health practitioners who are appropriately qualified and experienced to work safely and effectively with this cohort.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Dr Louise Roufeil, Executive Manager, Professional Practice (Policy)  
l.roufeil@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 7

### Ensure comprehensive, flexible and long term access to psychological care for survivors of domestic violence and child abuse

**Ensure that survivors of domestic violence and child abuse have comprehensive, flexible and long term access to psychological care delivered by appropriately experienced and qualified practitioners.**

Family violence is a critical social issue that severely impacts on the welfare of women and children in particular, and can have major mental health ramifications – predictable consequences of abuse include anxiety, hypervigilance, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Health and welfare professionals involved need to be upskilled in responding to family violence, and in understanding and recognising these predictable consequences.

Children or adolescents who are assaulted, or witness assaults toward family members, are at increased risk of developing mental health problems, substance abuse and involvement in abusive relationships as adults. The APS applauds the Victorian Royal Commission's attention to their rights and needs for counselling and support.

*The Australian Psychological Society seeks support from all political parties to ensure that survivors of domestic violence and child abuse have comprehensive, flexible and long term access to psychological care which is delivered by appropriately experienced and qualified practitioners.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Dr Louise Roufeil, Executive Manager, Professional Practice (Policy)  
l.roufeil@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians



### Ensure the mental and physical welfare of asylum seekers in detention

#### **Reinstatement of the Immigration Health Advisory Group.**

The Australian Psychological Society calls for the reinstatement of the Immigration Health Advisory Group (IHAG) that was abolished in 2013. IHAG was established in 2006 after recommendations made in the Palmer and Comrie Inquiries. The Advisory Group was made up of members of the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Medical Association, The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioner and the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses and was instrumental in the formation of a healthcare model for asylum seekers. This model has been diminished significantly since the demise of the Advisory Group.

The negative impact of long term detention on people's health and mental health is well documented. Considering recent events, the absence of independent oversight of the delivery of appropriate health and mental support is a major gap that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

*The Australian Psychological Society seeks the support of all political parties to reinstate the Immigration Health Advisory Group, and thus ensure the continued provision of independent advice on the mental and physical welfare of asylum seekers in detention.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Mr Harry Lovelock, Senior Executive Manager, Strategic Development and Public Interest  
h.lovelock@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 9

### Commit to continued reduction of global warming through a range of strategies to prevent the most significant physical and mental health effects of climate change

Climate change is regarded as a serious global health threat. The major threats, both direct and indirect, come from changing patterns of disease, water and food insecurity, vulnerable shelter and human settlements, extreme climatic events such as more catastrophic bushfires, droughts, floods and cyclones, and population growth and migration.

The main categories of risks to physical health in Australia come from health impacts of extreme weather events, temperature extremes, vector-borne infectious diseases, food-borne infectious diseases, water-borne infectious diseases and risks from poor water quality, diminished food production, increased urban air pollution.

The main mental health consequences of climate change will come from direct impacts of extreme weather events, disruptions to the social, economic and demographic determinants of mental health (e.g., from impaired rural livelihoods, increased costs of basic services), and emotional stresses and mental health problems in response to perceptions/fears of climate change and family stresses.

The most severe impacts of climate change will fall on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities who have played the smallest part per capita in contributing to the rise in greenhouse gases. Variations in vulnerability to climate change impacts are evident across nations and communities, and also across social class, age, and gender, with women, children, the elderly, and future generations more vulnerable.

*The Australian Psychological Society seeks the support of all political parties to commit to the continued reduction of global warming to prevent the most significant physical and mental health effects of climate change.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Mr Harry Lovelock, Senior Executive Manager, Strategic Development and Public Interest  
h.lovelock@psychology.org.au

## Election opportunities to improve the health and wellbeing of Australians

# 10

### Ensure that natural disaster funding takes into consideration the impacts of natural disasters on the health and psychosocial wellbeing of individuals, and their families, as well as whole communities

Natural disasters in Australia affect millions of people. Current predictions of extreme weather events in a warming climate forecast more frequent and severe disasters from extreme weather events in the coming decades. Mental health following disasters is a key economic and public health issue, and includes not only the direct psychological impact of the disaster itself, but also managing the emotional difficulties arising from confronting the secondary stressors that disasters generate.

The APS Disaster Response Network (DRN) is a national network of psychologists who have a special interest and expertise in working with individuals and communities affected by disasters and emergencies in Australia as well as those working to assist them. There are currently about 1700 members in the DRN, and the numbers increase each year as different States are impacted by a major disaster.

Governments continue to plan their disaster responses based on the immediate physical and health needs of the affected communities, which is entirely appropriate. Unfortunately the mental health of that population is generally an afterthought which can lead to inappropriate engagement of well-meaning people that can delay the overall recovery of these communities.

All governments need to include strategies to address the psychosocial wellbeing of people affected by disasters and fund these accordingly.

*The Australian Psychological Society seeks the support of all political parties to ensure that natural disaster funding takes into account the need to address the psychological impact of natural disasters on individuals, their families and whole communities and the involvement of appropriately trained workers.*

For further details of this proposal, please contact the Australian Psychological Society.

Professor Lyn Littlefield OAM, Executive Director  
l.littlefield@psychology.org.au

Mr Harry Lovelock, Senior Executive Manager, Strategic Development and Public Interest  
h.lovelock@psychology.org.au