

Information for Residential Aged Care Facilities

The Commonwealth Government has provided funding through regionally-based Primary Health Networks to commission new mental health services for older people with mental illness who reside in Residential Aged Care Facilities. This will help to address a current gap in services for this group of people and offer access to psychological services which are similar to those available to people with mental illness in the community under Medicare arrangements.

Mental health professionals including psychologists, social workers, and mental health nurses, will be able to deliver these services to residents. Access to the new services will generally require a diagnosis of a mental illness. The new services are intended to target the needs of residents with mild to moderate mental illness.

They will complement, and are not intended to substitute for, specialist Older Persons Mental Health Services provided through State and Territory Governments for people with severe and complex psychiatric problems. The services will also complement, and not substitute for, dementia support services.

The new services will not duplicate services currently provided by RACFs in providing aged care services to residents. Nor will RACFs be required to undertake additional duties, or be directly funded to implement the services.

The benefits for RACF residents from accessing needed psychological services are expected to include mood improvements, reduction in anxiety and stress, and increased ability to cope with life changes. Residents with mental illness will be more likely to engage in activities and social connections at the facility if they receive treatment appropriate to their needs.

PHNs will be commissioning these services locally in consultation with stakeholders including RACFs, building on their broader program of primary mental health care services. PHNs will also ensure that the new services are adapted to the particular needs of their region. Flexibility in implementation arrangements will enable PHNs to target community needs within their region.

The new services will be rolled out incrementally, starting from 1 January 2019 and gradually ramp up to full implementation in 2023. PHNs will start by commissioning a small number of services to test and further develop local models of providing care to this group.