



5 August 2025

**Re. Letter of Support for Consumers Health Forum's (CHF) submission to the Final Review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement**

**Dear Productivity Commission Commissioners**

COTA Australia welcomes the opportunity to support for CHF's submission to the Productivity Commission's Final Review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (the Agreement), and a response to the Interim Report.

We corroborate CHF's support for the key findings and recommendations of the Interim Report. More particularly we strongly endorse CHF's unequivocal policy position that for the new Agreement and National Mental Health Strategy – inclusive of the implementation of the proposed Workforce Strategy – to be *set up for success*, they must be grounded in **meaningful, inclusive co-design** – that is, with those with lived experience, their families, carers, kin and the broader mental health sector. This inclusivity must also be embedded across the Agreement's governance mechanisms. Further, we confirm that to ensure transparency and effective data collection, use, reporting, as well as the Agreement's evaluation, the criticality of the national approach being underpinned **by clear objectives and achievable, measurable outcomes**. We also concur on the importance of the implementation plans and reports being clear, plain language documents.

We strongly endorse the submission's call for a significantly **increased focus on promotion, prevention and early intervention**. This approach is well supported by a growing body of evidence and is essential to improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes across the lifespan– not only, as suggested in CHF's submission, *particularly amongst children and young people*. This slight deviation from the position put forward by CHF, is one that is vitally important to people aged 50 years and older. As our engagements with older people have consistently shown, **older people often face unique mental health challenges with many that could be proactively managed** with improved chances of recovery if treated through an age-appropriate lens.

Our research has consistently flagged that ageist attitudes and behaviours often inhibit older people's engagement with the formal mental health system. Plus, they are more likely than any other population cohort to be prescribed medications rather than offered alternative therapies. To address these inequities, **older Australians must have a seat at the decision-making table** - bringing their lived experience and diverse needs to inform a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of mental health and wellbeing in later life.

**COTA Australia's** goal is to support the 9 million Australians who are aged 50 years or older, and influence policy so Australia becomes an equitable, just and inclusive society in which the voices of older Australians are respected and strong. We achieve this goal through our advocacy, engagement and policy development.

We are a **CHF member organisation**. We see this relationship as providing an extra advocacy arm for ensuring the voices of older Australians are heard as a vital segment Australia's healthcare consumer population and for ensuring healthcare is accessible, affordable and safe. As a vital and diverse segment of the healthcare consumer population, it is imperative that older people are meaningfully included in sharpening the Agreement.

Our policy development is largely influenced by our engagement with older people. As shown on our website [mental health](#) is continually identified by older Australians as an important health policy area, and space in which we have an active presence.



Our [Mental Health Policy Statement](#) asserts that although mental health care is a pillar of Australia's publicly funded health system:

- few mental services are designed to address older people's mental and psychological health concerns
- there is minimal focus on prevention, early detection or early intervention
- many older people are reluctant to access mainstream mental health services and/or initiatives such as Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) and Better Access programs,<sup>6</sup> as well as Government-subsidised mental health services delivered in residential aged care homes due to affordability and ageist attitudes

As COTA Australia's CEO, at the April 2023 launch of our research report [Mental Health and Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic: the Lived experience of Australians 75 years and over](#), I said:

*... our findings back up the Government's own progress report and highlighted the urgent need to fund and measure older persons mental health and wellbeing supports. ...The mental health needs of older Australians are so often forgotten about.*

*This research shows that older Australians were doing it incredibly tough throughout the pandemic and ... how crucial and effective proactive, early intervention strategies can be when we're looking at mental health, but there are very few proactive [initiatives/services] put in place to support older Australians and that needs to change.*

COTA Australia supports the positions outlined in CHF's submission, which align closely with our own health policy priorities. We commend the CHF for its clear emphasis on areas of the mental health and suicide prevention systems that require urgent attention, greater prioritisation and investment.

COTA Australia welcomes CHF's support for the recommendations identified in the Productivity Commission's Interim report. We believe the **current consultation provides a solid foundation for the development of a National Agreement** on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention which is **inclusive, responsive and effective**.

However, it is critical that older people are recognised as healthcare consumers and, in their own right, vital contributors to the design, delivery and evaluation of mental health services. If co-design is to the cornerstone of the new Agreement, then meaningful inclusion of older Australians is essential.

Once it has been considered by the Australian Government, we look forward to the publication of new Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and, most particularly, the translation of the commitment to co-design into practice at all levels of the system.

Yours sincerely

**Patricia Sparrow**  
Chief Executive Officer