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Media release

## **ALP investment in youth mental health should extend to children**

Australia's peak psychology body has welcomed the Australian Labor Party (ALP) plan to invest in youth mental health services, as announced at its federal election campaign launch on 5 May.

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) said the ALP's commitment to fund the trial of headspace Plus and allow access to 20 additional Better Access sessions for youth was welcome, however the additional sessions should extend to children under 12 years.

APS President Ros Knight said there is a growing mental health crisis among young people in Australia and additional services and policies are urgently needed.

The ALP's plan provides \$197 million over four years to trial headspace Plus sites in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and regional Tasmania. The ALP also plans to provide young people with access to up to 20 additional Medicare funded Better Access sessions.

Ms Knight said the Headspace Plus services would be a welcomed provider of services for young people aged 12 – 25 years with moderate to complex mental health issues.

"An increase in the number of sessions from 10 to up to 30 per calendar year is critical for the clients of headspace who have more serious and persistent mental health conditions.

"The evidence strongly supports the need for more than 10 sessions for people with more serious conditions or when there are multiple issues going on in a young person's life.

"We know state and territory mental health services are only able to see the most acutely unwell, so many people with moderate and complex conditions are not able to get the evidence-based treatment they need," she said.

However, Ms Knight said while the ALP's announcements are very good news for people aged 12 – 25 years, children under twelve can still only access 10 sessions per year and this is a barrier to care.

"An estimated 1 in 7 children and young people are affected by mental health issues, and 50 per cent of lifelong mental health issue start before the age of fourteen," she said.

"We are increasingly concerned about high levels of anxiety and even suicidality in children much younger than twelve, so it's very concerning that children don't have access to more than 10 sessions if needed."

Ms Knight said although the ALP proposes trialling headspace Plus in regional Australia it has failed to address rural and regional mental health workforce development.

"We need investment in growing the rural mental health workforce. Properly qualified mental health workers are needed to deliver services to sick people in regional areas."

Ms Knight welcomed the ALP's plan to invest \$29.6 million to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth suicide and poor mental health. "We particularly support the plan to deliver this through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services,' she said.

**For more information, or to arrange an interview call Rebecca Matthews on 03 8662 3358 or 0435 896 444, or email [media@psychology.org.au](mailto:media@psychology.org.au). Find the APS Media team on Twitter: [@AustPsych](https://twitter.com/AustPsych).**

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