

## Hon Stephen Wade MLC Minister for Health and Wellbeing

Friday 20 December 2019

### Three new Mental Health Commissioners for South Australia

Support for, and awareness of, the 25 percent of South Australians experiencing mental health issues, and their loved ones, is being boosted by the strengthening of the Mental Health Commission.

The skills base of the Commission has been broadened with the appointment of three new Commissioners.

Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Stephen Wade, welcomed Professor Sharon Lawn, Heather Nowak and David Kelly to their new Commissioner roles at the important half-way mark of the implementation of the State's Mental Health Strategic Plan 2017-2022.

"The Commissioners will work in partnership with people with lived experience of mental illness and their families and carers to promote whole-of-government and whole-of-community strategies to support the mental health and wellbeing of the South Australian community," he said.

Previously, there was only one mental health commissioner, but the Marshall Liberal Government is engaging three part-time Commissioners and has boosted funding by 25% to enable the increase.

Minister Wade thanked former Commissioner Chris Burns CSC for his work in prioritising and incorporating the voices of South Australians as he led the development of the Strategic Plan as well as in work undertaken by the Commission. Mr Burns has taken up the role of the Chief Executive of the Hutt Street Centre.

Last month, the Marshall Government released a new mental health services plan, which builds on the extensive consultation undertaken in the development of the SA Mental Health Strategic Plan 2017-2022, and provides a foundation for the commissioning and delivery of high quality mental health care for South Australians.

"The new Commissioners will continue this work in implementing both the Strategic Plan and the recently released Mental Health Services Plan. To do this, they will continue to reach out to South Australians again," Minister Wade said.

The State Liberal Government, in collaboration with the Morrison Federal Government, has invested about \$100 million towards new initiatives and mental health services for South Australia.

There are 690,000 interactions with our mental health services each year, with 20,700 emergency department presentations and 9,200 acute admissions to hospital beds.

### BACKGROUND

**Professor Sharon Lawn** has been involved in the mental health sector for 34 years in diverse roles ranging from clinician working with veterans, mothers and babies, the community and aged care to researcher and educator.

Sharon is currently Professor and Director with the School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, Flinders Human Behaviour and Health Research Unit at Flinders University.

Sharon has lived experience of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as well as being a carer which she says entrenches her commitment to improving mental health care, improving mental health systems and services and reducing stigma and discrimination.

**Heather Nowak** is a TAFE Lecturer in Certificate IV Mental Health Peer Work and an advocate for people living with mental ill-health on a state and national level.

Heather is an Applied Suicide Intervention Skills trainer and Assessor and a member of the National Mental Health Commission Peer Workforce Development Guidelines Steering Committee and past member of the SA Mental Health Services Plan Steering Committee and the SA Mental Health Commission Community Advisory Committee.

She also brings her lived experience to the role and a determination to ensure people living with mental ill-health, their carers and families have the best opportunity to live a life that is full and meaningful.

**David Kelly** is a project lead who delivers coaching and training for a trauma-informed wellbeing program for people who have disengaged from education, people who are homeless, refugees and new arrivals and worked with Baptist Care on its new Health and Wellbeing Centre for people who are homeless. David was formerly senior manager with the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, Wellbeing and Resilience Centre.

As Deputy Chief Executive Officer with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) for two years, he led a range of projects in the ageing, disability and caring sectors and is a strong advocate for the co-design of services for mental health and wellbeing.