The National Mental Health Commission is encouraged by the outcomes of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting, held on Friday 7 December.

COAG is made up of the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. COAG’s role is to initiate and monitor the implementation of nationally significant policy reforms that require cooperative action by all Australian governments.

The COAG communique points to a new approach and a new process to develop a set of national targets and indicators for mental health reform focussed on a whole of life – a contributing life – view. This may hold more hope for the establishment of genuine and meaningful targets and reporting than other processes have yielded to date.

Read the communique from COAG HERE

COAG decisions on Mental Health Reform cont...

Last Friday, COAG agreed to a number of actions which include:

• COAG welcoming the release of A Contributing Life: 2012 National Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and reaffirming its commitment to mental health reform as an
ongoing national priority

• COAG agreeing to jointly respond to the our first Report Card

The Report Card reflected the community’s and sector’s call for the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers to continue to directly support mental health reform.

Without strong leadership from the top and strong links between housing, employment, education, health, family and child support, justice and corrections we will never give people the best chance of recovering and living contributing lives. As such we welcome that all governments have agreed to work together on a joint response to the Report Card’s findings and recommendations.

• Significantly, COAG agreeing to include national indicators and targets for mental health reform in its formal response to the Report Card, something the sector has been calling for, for a long time

This advocacy culminated in an open letter to COAG signed by over 30 leaders and organisations last week urging COAG to commit to mental health reform and to set specific targets to measure progress. This was an incredibly important letter that showed unity and a shared vision across the many different sectors that support people with mental health issues and their families.

Our Report Card also reflected these views and challenged governments to be brave enough to set goals and targets for improving mental health and reducing suicide, and be judged by the community on their results. These indicators and targets must be based on helping people and families to achieve contributing lives.

As Commission Chair Allan Fels said in The Australian newspaper last week, “Without a set of national indicators and clear targets, that properly show Australia’s “mental wealth” – whether we are promoting wellbeing and preventing illness, whether people’s lives are improving – and give all Australians a proper picture of progress, we will continue to limp along. If we can do this for homelessness and HIV, why not mental illness and suicide?”

• COAG releasing a Ten Year Roadmap for National Mental Health Reform 2012-2022 which sets out next steps and a process to: improve access to data, develop indicators and targets and develop a successor to the Fourth National Mental Health Plan

COAG will set up a new working group on Mental Health Reform co-chaired by the Commonwealth Minister for Mental Health, Mark Butler, and a Minister appointed by the states and territories.

The Roadmap also gives the Commission a role in bringing together people with lived experience of mental health issues, their families and support people, and other experts from around the country to work alongside and assist the working group. An Expert Reference Group, which the Commission has been asked to chair, will be formed. Right now we don’t have any further details about the group, but will make these available as soon as possible in 2013.

Read the 10 Year Roadmap for National Mental Health Reform HERE