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## Inaction weighs on our minds

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**Carly Dober**



**W**here is the plan for improving our mental health? Like so many people across

Australia, we are growing increasingly alarmed at the state of mental health access in this country. For months, we have been appealing to the government to work with us and to make immediate decisions that could benefit Australians in the here and now.

Sunday's Courier Mail article "Dire mental health support for people in regional Qld can no longer continue" regarding the alarming lack of support available to Queenslanders, especially in regional areas, strikes a chord.

We have been sounding the alarm loudly for some time about the lack of support in regional areas, and the increasing demand in metropolitan areas, with waitlists blowing out to an average of six months to see a psychologist.

As psychologists on the front line, we know that Queenslanders living in remote and regional areas are more likely to die by suicide than those in cities. We also know that early intervention, increasing workforce capacity, encouraging allied health workers to study and live in the regions to serve regional needs, raising the Medicare rebate to an affordable

and sustainable rate, and supporting the economic and emotional needs of contemporary Australia is absolutely necessary.

A month after the federal government cut access to subsidised mental health Medicare sessions by half earlier this year, it invited peak bodies like ours to a round-table discussion to plan a new way forward for our mental health system, considered to be in a state of complete crisis. Almost seven months on, nothing of promise has been delivered.

Now we find ourselves in a cost-of-living crisis that is making it incredibly difficult for Australians to pay for rent, food, utilities and health services.

With housing and rental distress, mortgage rates rising, school refusal and youth mental health rates on the rise, domestic violence rates still at unacceptable rates, peri and post-natal trauma experienced by too many birthing parents, and regional communities continuing to fall behind, there needs to be some serious investment in planning towards a better mental health support system.

**Carly Dober is a director of the Australian Association of Psychologists**