

## **Comments on the mental health aspects of the Sydney Westfield tragedy, attributable to Carly Dober, Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) director**

AAPi sends our condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives in this tragedy, and our best wishes for a speedy recovery to those who were injured. We must remember that the impact of this incident goes beyond those who suffered physical wounds. This is traumatic for everyone in the centre, our brilliant first responders, those who have been fearful for loved ones, and many who have been following the news and feeling powerless to do anything about what they are seeing unfold.

We remind people that being witness to a traumatic event like this and hearing about it can lead to a stress response that includes prolonged crying and sadness, fear, nightmares and anxiety, difficulty sleeping and concentrating, confusion and unease. These symptoms usually resolve within days or weeks of the event. Please seek out support if you are struggling to cope. Keeping up with your usual routines, such as eating, exercising, rest, and seeing friends and family, are crucial after an event like this.

AAPi would also like to recognise the psychologists who have taken immediate action to support the survivors in the short- and long-term, as well as those struggling to seek support.

Initial media reports have indicated that mental illness may have been a factor leading up to the horrific attack on Saturday; the police say an investigation will take [“many days and perhaps weeks”](#).

Last week AAPi revealed in our [analysis of Productivity Commission data](#) that western Queensland, where the assailant was brought up, is an area of high concern when it comes to mental health shortages in rural, regional and remote areas. Many areas across Australia have an extreme shortage of mental health care services. Your postcode or income bracket should not dictate if you can receive vital mental health care.

AAPi is urging state, territory and federal governments to take immediate action to address the mental health crisis impacting our nation. We must immediately work together to ensure that mental health care is more accessible to all those who need it.

Public hospitals are in crisis all over Australia, and triage means that if patients aren't in immediate danger to themselves, they are sent home due to widespread workforce and resource shortages.

Medicare Better Access sessions have been halved from 20 to 10 sessions per year, which is woefully inadequate and not in line with evidence-based practice for complex mental illness conditions. Furthermore, inadequate government funding of Medicare has led to the lowest bulk billing rates and highest out-of-pocket expenses on record, continuing to make mental health care inaccessible for too many Australians.

In short, accessing appropriate mental health support can be like trying to run in thick mud. And this weekend is a reminder that the price of inaction is too high to pay.

We urge people to make use of the services that are available and, through our collective grief, demand action for systemic and beneficial change to our mental health care systems.

A list of national crisis resources can be found [here](#).

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