

Chronic pain – a critical factor in addressing mental health

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The release of the Productivity Commission Inquiry Report into Mental Health has again highlighted the fundamental need for a shift towards well targeted and innovative solutions to reach those who fall through the cracks of mental health services, including the 3.37 million Australians living with chronic pain.

‘We have seen unprecedented levels of spending on mental health in the past few years, with an increase in the burden of disease and costs of mental health problems. If we are to change this trajectory, we must look to find new solutions to old problems that continue to rise exponentially despite record investments,’ said Painaustralia CEO, Carol Bennett.

‘Chronic pain is a major contributor to mental health that has not been adequately addressed. Almost half of those living with chronic pain experience significant mental health problems including depression, anxiety and increased suicidality. It’s time to look at how we target those who live with pain and mental health problems, a population that seems largely invisible within existing mental health services,’ Ms Bennett said.

The Productivity Commission Report found that around one in five Australians has experienced a mental health problem, reporting that many do not receive the treatment and support they need, resulting in preventable physical and mental distress.

Mental health problems affect an individual’s education opportunities and employment, relationships, stigma, and loss of quality of life. The similarities in prevalence and impact between mental health problems and chronic pain are striking, with many Australians currently living with chronic pain also experiencing similar effects on their opportunities and quality of life.

Painaustralia’s [submission](#) to the Productivity Commission Inquiry highlighted the need for federal mental health policies to specifically address, and adapt resources for, chronic pain and mental health comorbidities.

The Inquiry Report into Mental Health estimated that the direct economic costs of mental health problems and suicide in Australia were \$43–70 billion in 2018–19. The [Cost of Pain in Australia report](#) estimated that the total financial cost of chronic pain in Australia in 2018 was \$73.2 billion, including health system costs, productivity costs and other financial costs.

‘The Productivity Commission Report highlights similar solutions to those advocated for managing pain conditions, such as a biopsychosocial approach and the importance of early intervention. If we are serious about addressing mental health in this country, we must address the key comorbidities that impact on mental health outcomes,’ Ms Bennett said.

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About Painaustralia

Painaustralia is Australia’s peak national pain advocacy body working to improve the quality of life of people living with pain, their families and carers, and to minimise the social and economic burden of pain on individuals and the community.

Media enquiries

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