

Monitoring the performance of  
Australia's mental health system

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# National Report Card

## 2023

*Environmental Scan (Expanded)*



**Australian Government**

**National Mental Health Commission**

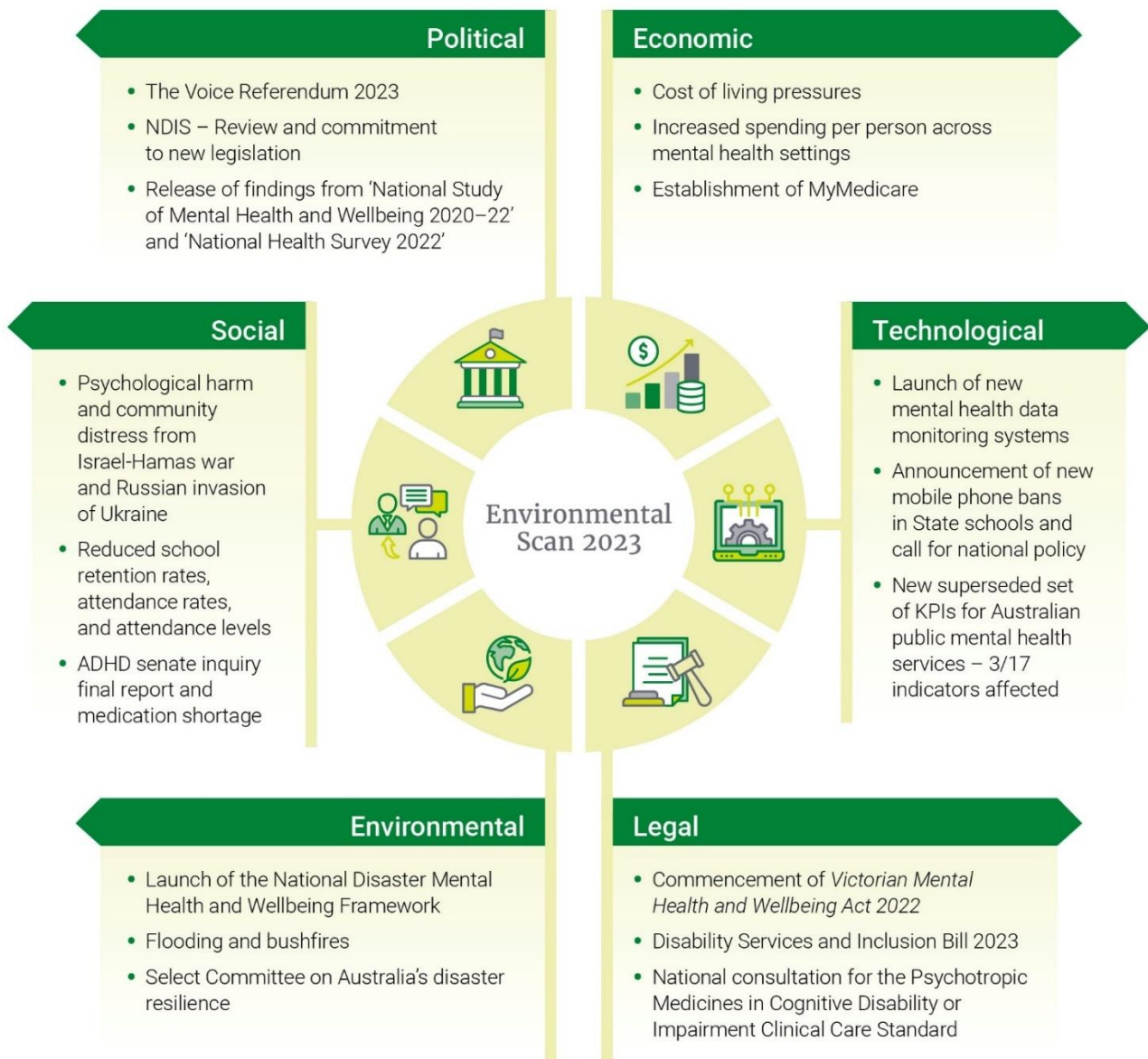
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## 2023 in Review: Environmental Scan (Expanded)

The [National Report Card 2023<sup>1</sup>](#) presents an overview of environmental shifts of major events or trends that may have influenced the mental health of people in Australia between 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. The following tables are intended to provide a more fulsome summary of the identified political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal shifts, with links to further information. This summary helps to contextualise the data presented within the National Report Card 2023. Further information on the methodology is provided within the National Report Card 2023 [Main Report<sup>2</sup>](#).





## Political

### The Voice Referendum 2023

- Announcement of constitutional amendment and question (March 2023).
- Parliament passes the Constitution Alteration Bill (19 June 2023) and [referendum<sup>3</sup>](#) is held (14 October 2023) with 'No' result.
- Lifeline, the provider of 13YARN, [cited<sup>4</sup>](#) a 108% increase in the number of calls from people reporting abuse or trauma, with 7573 calls answered between October and December in 2022. This comprised 31% of the total calls taken for the 2022/23 financial year. Those numbers coincide with the commencement of the proposal conversation for the referendum.
- The federal government provides \$10.5 million to increase [mental health supports<sup>5</sup>](#) for First Nations people during the referendum period, including \$500,000 to the Australian National University's Mayi Kuwayu research team to monitor the wellbeing of communities.

### NDIS – Review and commitment to new legislation

#### [Release of the final report of the Independent Review into the NDIS \(7 December 2023\)<sup>6</sup>](#)

- The report makes 26 recommendations with 139 actions to change the system that supports people with disability.
- The report recommends introducing a new approach to NDIS supports for psychosocial disability, focused on personal recovery, and development of mental health reforms to better support people with severe mental illness.
- In December 2023 the Prime Minister and state and territory governments [agreed to an initial response<sup>7</sup>](#) to the final report of the NDIS Review. This included introducing legislation changes in the first half of 2024.

#### [Analysis of unmet needs for psychosocial supports outside the NDIS<sup>8</sup>](#)

- Work continued on the analysis, which will inform future arrangements for providing psychosocial support outside the NDIS.
- The first national virtual workshops with stakeholders to test the analysis method were held (18 August 2023).
- The project group expects the analysis to be completed in 2024.

#### [2023-24 Budget measures to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the NDIS<sup>9</sup>](#)

- \$732.9 million was committed over four years to support participant outcomes and the effective and sustainable operation of the Scheme. Initiatives will be developed with the National Disability Insurance Agency in consultation with the NDIS Review Co-Chairs.

### Release of findings from National Surveys

Release of findings from the:

- [National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2020-22<sup>10</sup>](#) (released 5 October 2023).
  - This study assesses mental disorders against diagnostic criteria from the World Health Organization International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10). It is a robust source of information on the prevalence of mental disorders among adults in Australia.
- [National Health Survey 2022<sup>11</sup>](#) (released 15 December 2023).



## Economic

### Cost of living pressures, increased financial stress, interest rate rises, and declines in bulk billing

#### Cost of living pressures<sup>12</sup>

- Over the 12 months to the December 2023 quarter, all Living Cost Indexes<sup>13</sup> rose between 4.0% and 6.9% and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 4.1%.

#### Increased financial stress<sup>14</sup>

- In August 2023, an estimated 10.1% of Australians reported that their household was finding it 'very difficult' on their present income and 20.2% of Australians were finding it 'difficult'.
- Since April 2023, financial stress has been at a higher level than at any time since February 2020, when 26.7% of Australians were finding it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' on their present income.

#### Interest rate rises<sup>15</sup>

- Resulting in a decrease<sup>16</sup> of a household's disposable income
- Rising interest rates and high household expenses weighed disproportionately on renters, first home buyers and those on lower incomes.

### Increased spending per person across mental health settings

- Increases in spending per person<sup>17</sup> have occurred for mental health-related services from \$439 per person in 2017-18 to \$472 in 2021-22.
- Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services spending increased from \$56 per person in 2018-19 to \$58 in 2022-23.
- Spending on mental health-related subsidised prescriptions under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme increased between 2017-18 and 2021-22, from \$611 million to \$662 million.
- Introduction of new MBS items<sup>18</sup> to improve access to multidisciplinary mental health care and facilitate family and carer participation:
  - Mental Health Case Conferencing - 21 new MBS items for eligible providers to organise and coordinate or participate in case conferences to discuss a patient's mental health care (from 1 July 2023).
  - Family and Carer Participation under the Better Access Initiative – 48 new time-tiered MBS items available to deliver sessions to a patient's family and carers under the Better Access Initiative (from 1 March 2023).

### Establishment of MyMedicare

#### Establishment of MyMedicare<sup>19</sup>

- MyMedicare is a voluntary patient registration model and was introduced in October 2023.
- It aims to formalise the relationship between patients, their general practice, general practitioner and primary care teams.



## Social

### Psychological harm and community distress from Israel-Hamas war and Russian invasion of Ukraine

- The Russian invasion of Ukraine escalated through 2023, alongside the beginning of the Hamas-Israel conflict in October, resulting in exposure to potentially harmful content and discourse.
- Australia [announced](#)<sup>20</sup> \$72.5 million (19 October 2023) in humanitarian assistance for civilians affected by the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in response to the protracted refugee crisis in the region.
- A range of funding was delivered by the Australian Government to Jewish, Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities.

### Reduced school retention rates, attendance rates, and attendance levels

- In 2023, the Year 7/8 to 12 full-time apparent [retention rate](#)<sup>21</sup> for Australia decreased to 79.1%, down from 80.5% in 2022, and 83.1% in 2021.
- [The attendance rate](#)<sup>i</sup> in 2023<sup>22</sup> was 88.6% (compared to 86.5% in 2022 and 90.9 in 2021).
- The attendance level<sup>ii</sup> in 2023 was 61.6% (compared to 49.9% in 2022 and 71.2 in 2021).

### ADHD senate inquiry final report and medication shortage

- The Senate referred an inquiry into the barriers to consistent, timely and best practice assessment of ADHD and support services for people with ADHD (28 March 2023).
- [Final report delivered](#)<sup>23</sup> with 15 recommendations (8 November 2023).
- The report identified various barriers including lack of services, high costs of services, poor consumer experiences and lack of supports in schools, out-of-home care and correctional facilities.
- In late 2023, the Therapeutic Goods Administration advised it was aware of [shortages of Vyvanse medication](#)<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>i</sup> Attendance rate refers to the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in years 1-10 in Semester 1 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended in Semester 1.

<sup>ii</sup> Attendance level refers to the proportion of full-time students in Years 1-10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90%.



## Technological

### Launch of new mental health data monitoring systems

- [Mental Health Services Activity Monitoring system<sup>25</sup>](#) launches (late December 2022).
  - This system provides interactive dashboards that allow more efficient visualisations, presentation, and sharing of mental health service insights.
- [Mapping Mental Health Care<sup>26</sup>](#) released (4 October 2023).
  - These maps represent a novel approach highlighting areas of concern within Australia, where psychological distress is high and there is limited access to mental health services.
  - Unique visual representations according to different geographical designations, will help to highlight areas of concern across Australia.

### Announcement of new mobile phone bans in state schools and call for national policy

- NSW announces mobile phone ban in public high schools from Term 4 2023.
- South Australia [announces<sup>27</sup>](#) mobile phone ban in public high schools from Term 3 2023.
- Northern Territory implements mobile phone ban in high schools from Term 1 of 2023.
- Australian Capital Territory [announces<sup>28</sup>](#) mobile phone ban in high schools from Term 1 2024.
- Mobile phone bans already in place for high schools in Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania (since 2020).
- Federal Education Minister Jason Clare brings proposal of a [national policy<sup>29</sup>](#) on mobile phone bans in high schools to state and territory counterparts.

### New superseded set of KPIs for Australia Public mental health services

- Indicators reported on the [METEOR website<sup>30</sup>](#) are updated as part of ongoing data development, in order to ensure that indicator specifications facilitate the supply and publication of jurisdictional level data, which are then compiled to form a national view



## Environmental

### Launch of the National Disaster Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework

- The Framework seeks to provide evidence-based guidance that promotes a well-functioning, integrated service system that ensures appropriate responses to the mental health needs of communities affected by disaster.
- [The Framework<sup>31</sup>](#) was endorsed by the former Prime Minister in early 2022, and all Premiers/First Ministers by May 2022.

### Flooding and Bushfires

- [Significant bushfires<sup>32</sup>](#) in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.
- [Significant flooding<sup>33</sup>](#) in North Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria.

### Select Committee on Australia's disaster resilience

- The [Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience<sup>34</sup>](#) was appointed by resolution of the Senate on 30 November 2022 to inquire into Australia's preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, as well as alternative models to disaster recovery.
- The committee will consider the role of the Australian Defence Force, volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services, and the support required to improve Australia's resilience and response to natural disasters.



## Legal

### Commencement of Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022

- [The Act<sup>35</sup>](#) commenced on 1 September 2023 and sets the foundations for the reformed mental health and wellbeing system envisioned by the Royal Commission.

### Disability Service and Inclusion Bill 2023

- [Launched 14 September 2023<sup>36</sup>](#) and commences on 1 January 2024.
- [Expands service categories<sup>37</sup>](#) to cover accessibility, accommodation, advocacy, capacity building, carers, community inclusion, counselling, education, employment, independent living, information, recreation, research and evaluation, and respite care.
- Seeks to repeal and replace the current Disability Services Act 1986, with stronger and more fit-for-purpose safeguards, while also ensuring continuity of existing supports under a new Act.

### National consultation for the Psychotropic Medicines in Cognitive Disability or Impairment Clinical Care Standard

- The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care is developing a clinical care standard to reduce the inappropriate use of psychotropic medicines in people with cognitive disability or impairment, particularly when used for managing changed behaviours or behaviours of concern.
- [Consultation for this closed on 8 May 2023<sup>38</sup>](#). The standard is due to be launched in 2024.



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