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In the 10 years since Professor Ian Hickie was appointed the inaugural CEO of beyondblue, there have been many changes in the world of mental health. But through the various program launches and changes, funding cuts and boosts, Hickie has remained an unwavering champion for the sector.

Highlights of Hickie's resume, which spans more than 42 pages of achievements, include several years at beyondblue and now the Brain and Mind Research Institute in Sydney, as well as numerous appointments to government mental health advisory boards, where he was instrumental in creating the Better Outcomes in Mental Health program.

It's been nine years since the program launched and throughout that time he has done his best to keep mental health at the forefront of the political and clinical agenda. He has also been unafraid to rattle a few cages when the need arises, often using the media to get his message out.

A case in point was the federal budget in May, after which Hickie took to the airwaves warning that the government was leaving the mental health sector to rot. From newspaper columns to radio reports, his opinion was hard to miss.

Fearless is an accurate description of the professor of psychiatry, says Associate Professor Grant Blashki, a GP academic involved in the mental health sector for many years, and the man Hickie nominated as his pick for 'most influential'.

"He always puts the patient first, above any vested interest of the various groups," says Blashki, who worked with Hickie during a sabbatical in 2003. "He's always thinking, 'What does this mean for the punter?'"

Barbara Hocking, executive director of the mental health charity SANE Australia, describes Hickie as "undaunted, energetic and honest".

"He's highly intelligent, he's articulate and he's accessible to the media – and the latter is probably the number one way he's different," she says. "There are psychiatrists who are intelligent and articulate, but they're not always accessible."

When *Australian Doctor* asked Hickie what he believes has been his greatest influence on general practice, he nominates his involvement with the Better Outcomes for Mental Health Program. He says it is was the first time a Federal Government had provided direct



PROFESSOR IAN HICKIE

AGE: 50
TITLE: Executive director of the Brain and Mind Research Institute, Sydney, and professor of psychiatry at the University of Sydney
HIS CHOICE OF MOST INFLUENTIAL: Associate Professor Grant Blashki, associate professor in global health at Melbourne's Nossal Institute for Global Health.

All in the mind

Ian Hickie has always been prepared to go the extra mile for mental health. By Rebecca Jenkins

funding for psychological services provided by GPs.

"It recognised the key need to keep mental health and physical health together and not develop separate services," he says via email.

Hickie feels GPs have a vital role in advocating for mental health at a time when he worries the sector is in crisis. The new health reform agenda is "simplistic and hospital-centric", he says.

Essentially, he fears the new period of health reform has not recognised the vital importance and impact mental health has on society, he says, before signing off with a phrase that seems to sum up his entire raison d'être: "There is no real health without good mental health care."

Mental health advocate and Australian of the Year, Professor Patrick McGorry, (see below),

simply wishes there were more people like Hickie working in Australian mental health.

Once again, the word "fearless" comes up when describing Hickie.

"The thing I most admire is he's very courageous. He's not afraid to say to anyone what needs to be done and he's able to do it with a fair amount of charm and humour," McGorry says. "I think he's an absolutely outstanding person and a wonderful leader in Australian mental health."

Judges' comments

If mental health is in the news, Ian Hickie is usually there too. A fearless champion of mental health reform, he has been involved in key government initiatives, such as the Better Outcomes in Mental Health program.

DR NOLA MAXFIELD



NEW ENTRY

Rural force

The quietly spoken head of the RDAA has been an active force in rural medicine for two decades. Whether it's campaigning for hospital services in her community of Wonthaggi, Victoria, or arguing for solutions to the rural workforce crisis, the procedural GP has won the respect of colleagues and other stakeholders. While not as outspoken as some of her predecessors, Maxfield is seen as a calm and measured voice in the sometimes fraught world of rural medicopolitics.

PROFESSOR PATRICK MCGORRY



NEW ENTRY

Mental health innovator

Australian of the Year Professor Patrick McGorry has been a global trailblazer in youth mental illness. The Melbourne psychiatrist has long argued young people need dedicated services that can step in before mental health problems become entrenched. The Federal Government's headspace program, a national network of mental health centres for young people, is largely based on the model McGorry developed at Orygen Youth Health. Headspace now has 30 centres around the country and received funding for up to another 30 in the latest federal budget. McGorry is also known for his controversial support for pre-emptive strikes against schizophrenia.