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Church leaders committed to providing psychological treatment services

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President, Archbishop Philip Wilson today confirmed that the Bishops and Religious Leaders remain firmly committed to providing appropriate clinical services to priests, religious and Church personnel in need of psychological treatment.

Archbishop Wilson said a Sydney Morning Herald article today (Friday) gave a misleading impression that the Encompass program for treating psychosexual and other mental health issues, had been wound up because of a cash shortfall.

He said that in fact a new model of providing these services was being explored because referrals to Encompass had fallen in recent years to an unsustainable level.

“Encompass was a structure that served well during a period when its services were in higher demand,” Archbishop Wilson said.

“In recent years the number of referrals to Encompass fell and it became clear that the structure was no longer viable.

“The Bishops and Religious Leaders remain firmly committed to ensuring that priests, religious and Church personnel have access to treatment services to assist them and to ensure the safety and well-being of the whole Church community.

“In light of this, we have moved immediately to implement a system of referral to appropriate clinical services, the costs of which will continue to be met by the Church.”

Archbishop Wilson said that the trend of falling referrals to Encompass in recent years meant that a complete restructure of service provision for the future was needed, rather than a short-term rescue package.

In the meantime, a phone referral service is meeting the needs for the few referrals that have come forward, ensuring that there is no gap in services, he said.

“It is always difficult to make change, but circumstances have forced a re-examination of the situation and we are confident that this restructure will deliver the best way forward for the Church and to protect the community,” Archbishop Wilson said.