

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sydney, NSW, 15th December 2014



NSW Government delivers visionary strategic plan for community mental health; \$115m in new funding

The NSW peak body for mental health non-government organisations (NGOs), the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC), applauds today's announcement by the NSW Government that it refocus the state's mental health system toward modern, evidence-based community responses to mental illness.

Key Points

- NSW Government has delivered on its promises by:
 - Establishing and supporting the NSW Mental Health Commission
 - Publishing and committing to fund a strong stakeholder-led strategic plan
 - Prioritising help for people with mental illness to get well and stay well in the community
- New funding of \$115m is a good first step toward addressing the vast shortfall in community-based alternatives to hospitalisation.
- New innovative programs will pave the way to a mental health system that people will feel safe and supported by, without coercion.
- Long overdue closure of stand-alone psychiatric hospitals welcome so long as asset sales are re-invested in to the mental health system.
- Targets must be set with detailed public reporting to ensure the change happens.

NSW has lagged behind the rest of the country in providing support for people with severe mental health problems outside of a hospital environment. By endorsing the Mental Health Commission's ten year strategic plan and committing \$115 million of new money to primarily community-based mental health services, the NSW Government has shown good sense and leadership. The commitments announced are a good step toward addressing the hospital-centric service planning that has plagued Local Health Districts over the last two decades.

Visionary Strategic Plan

MHCC CEO Jenna Bateman commended Commissioner John Feneley and his team.

"The Mental Health Commission of NSW led an outstanding consultation process across the broad mental health community, meeting with NGOs, their clients, families and carers across the state. This is the most comprehensive investigative reform process since the Richmond Report and the Commission ensured that everybody's voice was heard" Ms Bateman said.

NGOs to be key in mental health reforms

"We all have stories of family and friends who felt let down by the services they received. The mental health system is made up of good, hard-working people. Unfortunately services have been under-resourced and some people are stuck in old ways of doing things. This is costing us, both in terms of poor personal outcomes and in economic productivity."

"The NGO community-managed sector is an effective solution to this problem as it ensures high quality services are delivered in the community. We stand ready to get behind the Ministry of Health as it embarks on its program of recontracting and expanding the services it purchases from NGOs.

We have a proud history of delivering people-focused community support, early intervention, rehabilitation and mental illness prevention services. Delivering more services through NGO partnerships will provide better flexibility and accountability in the Government's mental health service response."

Innovative community programs enhanced

Ms Bateman also commended the announcement of new innovative programs such as the LikeMind integrated community mental health service hubs.

"One of the biggest problems is that people don't know where to go to get support, and the services available differ greatly. Our hope is that hybrid and co-located services such as the Government's LikeMind service hub pilots will bring in a new era of fully integrated community-based mental health service treatment and recovery support. For the large number of people who experience severe mental illness but are of no danger to themselves or anybody else, they should be able to go to one place offering everything they need in an open friendly environment."

"The Housing Accommodation and Support Initiative (HASI) is rightfully being expanded. This flagship home-based outreach program the NSW Government has proven through multiple evaluations that collaborative partnerships between public mental health workers and the NGO sector lead to robust outcomes, reducing demand to hospital beds across the state. Outcomes have been so positive that the program has been replicated across the country."

Closure of psychiatric hospitals

"The MHCC support the closure of the old psychiatric institutions, however we must caution that the mental health community will be watching to see what happens to the money from those closures. Revenue from sales or redistribution of these sites must result in equivalent spending on better community-based mental health services."

Accountability will require clear targets and detailed reporting

Ms Bateman also highlighted the need for clear targets and detailed reporting to ensure that the Strategic Plan is fully implemented.

"Hopes are very high for the success of the Strategic Plan. To ensure that these reforms have the best chance of achieving their ambitious goals there must now be clear targets set so that government departments, Local Health Districts, NGOs and other stakeholders are working together to make this a reality."

"The people of NSW may not know it yet, but Premier Baird has given them an extraordinary Christmas present. However, he has also thrown down the gauntlet to the decision-makers of the mental health system to commit to ten years of working hard to build a better mental health system."

"The MHCC once again commends the Baird Government on its commitments and congratulates the Mental Health Commission on a fantastic result for the people of NSW."

For any further information contact:

Jenna Bateman
Chief Executive Officer

Tel: (02) 9555 8388

About the Mental Health Coordinating Council of NSW

The Mental Health Coordinating Council is the peak body for community mental health organisations in New South Wales. Our membership is primarily comprised of not-for-profit NGOs whose business or activity is wholly or in part, related to the promotion or delivery of services for the wellbeing and recovery of people with mental health problems and organisations that support carers and families of people with a mental health problem.