

Commonwealth Government delivers innovative Strategic Plan for Mental Health

The Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC), the NSW peak body for mental health not-for-profit non-government community-managed organisations (NGOs/CMOs), applauds today's announcement by Commonwealth Government of a new Strategic Plan for Mental Health.

Key Points

- Innovative reform is required to achieve integrated health and social care responses to people affected by mental health issues
- Opportunities for regionally based reforms require consumer, carer and community co-design strategies
- Targets must be set with detailed public reporting to ensure the change happens

Innovative Strategic Plan

MHCC's CEO, Ms Jenna Bateman, welcomes the Government's announcement of a Commonwealth strategy on mental health which has an emphasis on providing 'individualised care packages' for people with severe mental illness.¹ The strategy is the Government's initial response to the National Mental Health Commission's November 2014 report reviewing, and making 25 recommendations for restructuring, the Commonwealth's \$10 billion investment in mental health.

Community programs to be enhanced

Ms Bateman commends the Commonwealth Health Minister, Ms Sussan Ley, and her team.

"This national mental health strategy has all the ingredients required to improve how people with mental health conditions get the help they need when and where they need it."

Ms Bateman went on to say "The community sector is an essential partner in implementing the strategic plan. We stand ready to partner with the Primary Health Networks (PHNs) as they embark on a program of recontracting and expanding the services they will purchase from non-government community organisations. The community sector has a proud history of delivering people-focused community support, promotion, prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation services".

The strategy indicates that pooled funding will be incrementally redirected to local level PHNs, of which there are ten in NSW, over the next three years. The opportunities presenting through this new approach are numerous and include:

- Local/regional level planning in responding to the individual and community needs of people affected by mental health conditions
- Better integration of health and social services to address people's physical and mental health needs
- Strengthened approaches to mental health promotion, mental illness prevention and early intervention for people struggling with mental distress.

Ms Bateman said "It is critical that these opportunities are pursued and maximised with the participation and representation of people with lived experience of mental health issues and their families, friends and carers front and centre; this must include valued and meaningful roles in the

¹ Commonwealth of Australia (2015). Australian Government Response to Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities – Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services.

design of innovative approaches to mental health care. It is only through the strategic and accountable involvement of consumers, carers and the community sector in the co-design of innovative regional approaches to mental health care that the aspirations of the Commonwealth strategy on mental health will be met.”

Community sector organisations are key partners in mental health reform

Historically, community organisations have been the champions of person-centred, recovery-oriented and trauma-informed approaches to providing valued services and supports to people, families and communities in need of help with problems related to mental health. This expertise and experience contributes to the overall intention of the Government’s strategy to design approaches that afford better integrated treatment and psychosocial approaches to mental health care and support.

PHNs and other treatment focused service providers are being challenged to better understand people’s experience of mental illness/distress through a social frame. It is evident that the philosophy and practice of recovery oriented and trauma informed service provision has not yet been comprehensively adopted by primary health care practitioners.

PHNs are directed by Boards that are typically comprised of health practitioners. The operations and governance arrangements of PHNs require them to establish separate Clinical Advisory Councils and Community Advisory Councils. It is critical that consumer, carer and community sector representatives with interest and experience in mental health participate widely across these structures to ensure that the voice of lived experience is heard and helps to shape this potential generational change for renewed approaches to community-based mental health service delivery.

Ms Bateman said, “Delivering more services through community sector partnerships, as has been the case with the innovative Partners in Recovery initiative and other programs such as the NSW based Housing and Supported Accommodation Initiative (HASI) will provide better flexibility and shared accountability in the Government’s mental health reforms.

Community-based mental health accountability

Shared Commonwealth/ state accountabilities for community-based mental health care have been lacking since the advent of deinstitutionalisation from the early 1980s. The complementary directions of the Commonwealth strategy on mental health and NSW Mental Health Strategy aim to place consumers, carers and communities at the centre of service delivery. This is something that our national mental health strategy has been aiming to do since the early 1990s. MHCC’s 100 strong membership welcomes the opportunity to work with all PHNs in NSW to realise the opportunities for responsive, effective and co-designed community-based mental health services and supports.

Ms Bateman also highlighted the need for clear targets and detailed reporting to ensure that the strategic plan is fully implemented. She added that accountabilities need to also ensure we are building innovative integrated and coordinated health and social care systems that complement the services and supports being provided to people with a psychosocial disability related to a mental health condition through the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

MHCC once again commends the Turnbull Government on its commitments and congratulates them on their innovative plan for Australia’s forthcoming mental health reforms”.

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About the Mental Health Coordinating Council of NSW

MHCC is the peak body for community mental health organisations in NSW. 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 health wellbeing of people with mental health problems and organisations that support carers and families of people with a mental health problem.