FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MEDIA RELEASE

Crisis management is not the answer to fixing a mental health system at breaking point

Fixing the NSW mental health system at breaking point requires more than confronting images of emergency departments and stigmatising portrayals of people experiencing mental health challenges in distress – it demands investment in the community-based mental health services that prevent crisis in the first place. The ABC's Four Corners program on 2 June 2025, 'Emergency', overlooks the most effective and underfunded part of the solution that Mental Health Coordinating Council has reiterated repeatedly - that unless we invest in community-based mental health care, a continued over-reliance on emergency and acute services will perpetuate a system in constant crisis. The NSW mental health system is in crisis not because we lack solutions, but because we continue to underinvest in the parts of the service system that works – community-managed mental health models such as 'step-up step-down' (SUSD) that focus on people's recovery before crises occur.

We need multi-disciplinary community care teams to engage with people prior to crisis that facilitates their transition back into the community. SUSD models that provide short-term, residential mental health programs to help people avoid or reduce hospital stays or transition safely back into the community after inpatient care. These voluntary services offer a safe, supportive space focused on recovery and independence. CEO of Mental Health Coordinating Council, Dr Evelyne Tadros, advises, "The Prevention and Recovery Centre (PARC) operates within the SUSD model and has shown to **reduce emergency departments presentations by 33-44%** and **cost one-third** of inpatient care.[i]"

Community-based mental health programs such as the Housing and Support Initiative (HASI) and Community Living Support (CLS), which support people out of hospital to appropriate community-based living environments, show a **74% reduction in hospital admissions** and length of stays in hospital decreases by 74.8% over two years.[ii]

Dr Tadros advocates, "Targeting prevention and early intervention, rather than relying principally on emergency services, will build capacity for the existing hospital workforce to meet the needs of people in crisis and keep them safe until they are stable and have plans in place to support long-term recovery."

Mental Health Coordinating Council continues to advocate for a 30% increase in community-based services working alongside public outpatient care. Only with such a meaningful realignment of investment can cost savings be realised, and resources freed up in public inpatient settings to better meet a reduced need for inpatient access.

As our joint statement with consumer peak bodies BEING – Mental Health Consumers and Mental Health Carers NSW states, we remind the media to be accountable for their representations of people living with mental health challenges and the stigma and

discrimination they will experience as a result of their portrayal and stereotyping. Majority of people living with mental ill health are not violent. Studies show that individuals with mental ill health are far more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence[iii]. Only a small number of individuals with severe mental ill health, such as psychosis, may have an increased risk of violent behaviour but this is often when they are not receiving adequate care and support and reach a crisis point. When people have effective support, they can manage their conditions with minimal risks to themselves or others.

“Let’s stop prevaricating and get behind a different kind of service system that meets people’s needs before they deteriorate into crisis”, says Dr Tadros.

-ENDS-

About Mental Health Coordinating Council

Mental Health Coordinating Council is the peak body for community-managed mental health organisations in NSW. MHCC provides policy leadership, promotes legislative reform and systemic change, and develops resources and training to assist community mental health organisations to deliver quality and effective services underpinned by best practice principles. Visit mhcc.org.au

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[i] Gendera S, Blaxland M, O’Shea P, Fisher KR. 2025. Bondi Prevention and Recovery Centre (PARC) Model Evaluation. Sydney: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre. DOI: https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/30933

[ii] Purcal, C., O’Shea, P. Giuntoli, G., Zmudzki, F., Fisher, K.R. (2022). Evaluation of NSW Community-based Mental Health Programs: Community Living Supports and Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative. CLS-HASI Evaluation Report. Sydney: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre.

[iii] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release