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## MEDIA RELEASE

### NT MENTAL HEALTH - LEGACY OF NEGLECT BIGGEST CHALLENGE

"Mental health services in the Northern Territory have historically been neglected, particularly in the rural and remote regions and specifically for Indigenous people," Chair of the Mental Health Council of Australia, Keith Wilson said today following the launch of *Not For Service: Experiences of Injustice and Despair in Mental Health Care in Australia*, the most significant report into mental health in Australia for over a decade.

"In recent years the Northern Territory Government has brought a stronger commitment to improving mental health; however the results are not yet evident and there remains serious gaps in the delivery of services", Mr Wilson said.

*Not For Service* exposes the persistent and distressing experiences of Australians dealing with mental illness that result from the systemic deficiencies of our the mental health systems twelve years after all Australian Governments initiated the National Mental Health Strategy to tackle decades of neglect.

The Report states that from a mental health perspective, Indigenous people living in the Northern Territory are one of the most at-risk groups in the nation and that the Northern Territory reports the lowest number of total inpatient and 24-hour staffed residential beds.

Marilyn Starr from the Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition said, "In remote regions of the Northern Territory there is a lack of access to even basic assessment and treatment services. Throughout the Territory, during periods of crisis, there is a tendency to rely heavily on police and other emergency and custodial services, rather than complying with the least restrictive practices which have been enshrined in Northern Territory legislation. The Northern Territory Government faces a significant challenge in confronting the prevalence of a high rate of substance abuse alongside mental illness and cultural issues."

Professor Ian Hickie, a co-author the report stresses that Australia urgently needs all governments to commit to a process of genuine and well-resourced mental health reform. "What we do not need is continued blaming of those who use the services, those professionals who provide the services or those independent bodies who report on them," Professor Hickie said.

*Not For Service* calls on all Australian governments to increase expenditure on mental health care services by 1% per annum for each of the next five years, bringing expenditure by 2010 to 12% of total health care funding in real terms.

The Northern Territory Government must increase spending on mental health in 2006/7 by \$6.5m based on their 2004/5 health budget.

*Not For Service* has been compiled by the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) and the Brain and Mind Research Institute (BRMI, University of Sydney), in association with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC).

**Copies of *Not For Service* can be found at: [www.mhca.org.au](http://www.mhca.org.au)**

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