



NEWSLETTER

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MHCA Newsletter is published by:

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▪ Chair's Report

Welcome to the latest addition of the MHCA newsletter.

National Mental Health Working Group

The National Mental Health Working Group (NMHWG) is comprised of the Directors of Mental Health Services in each State and Territory and the Assistant Secretary of the Health Priorities and Suicide Prevention Branch (Department of Health & Aging).

Other members include Helen Connor (representing a consumer perspective), Keith Wilson (Chair of the MHCA and representing a carer perspective), a representative of the private psychiatry sector, the Chair of the Better Outcomes in Mental Health program and the Deputy Director of the Mental Health Directorate in New Zealand Health.

The Chair is Dr Tony Sherbon who is ACT Health Chief Executive Officer and is appointed as a member of Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Committee (AHMAC).

The working group is charged with monitoring the implementation of the National Mental Health Plan and Policy. It meets three times each year with the most recent meeting on the 7th of March 2005, having been held in Auckland, New Zealand.

High on the agenda was a report on the implementation of the 2003-2008 Mental Health Plan. No doubt every one in the sector feels as frustrated as Helen and I are about the fact that we are still talking about how to implement the Plan nearly 2 years after it was signed by Ministers in July 2003.

At all meetings of the group since then, the MHCA has called for real actions and a clear comprehensive set of performance measures and reporting requirements. We have pressed for accountability with public reporting and real budget measures as an appropriate percentage of the health budget.

At the meeting in Auckland our voice seems to have been heard and the implementation plan is to be reworked, discussed out of session and be ready for adoption at the July meeting.

The MHCA continues to press for an evaluation of the 3rd Plan to begin mid term with a steering group chaired by an independent person and having consumer and carer representatives.

In this way we hope to avoid the rushed last minute reviews of the past two plans and superficial assessments by overseas experts.

Senate Inquiry

The Senate Inquiry into Mental Health services in Australia as a result of the shocking treatment of Cornelia Rau presents our sector with a great opportunity for focusing public and government attention on the deplorable state in the mental health services.

The MCHA Board has endorsed a proposal to take on a short term consultant to assist in developing a high powered submission. This will be carried out in collaboration with consumer representative groups and a consumer consultant to work alongside the contracted consultant.

Disability Support Payment Reforms

The changes to pension entitlements to encourage more people receiving Disability Support Payment (DSP) to enter the workforce are being strenuously pursued by the Government.

CEO John Mendoza has met with the Minister, Kevin Andrews to discuss concerns about the impact these reforms may have on people with a mental illness that are dependent on a DSP. The Government has assured the Council that they are aware of the concerns and needs of these people and that the reform process will take some time.

The Council intends to remain actively engaged with Government on the reform process. It has moved to appoint a consultant to co-ordinate our dealings with the Minister in order to ensure that the implementation of reforms may be in the interests of people with mental health problems seeking to find and maintain themselves in real jobs.

Again we will be establishing consumer reference groups and a consumer consultant to ensure that our submission reflects the concerns of consumers.

- **Upcoming Events**

Australian New Zealand College of Mental Health Nursing Sub Branch.

Please find attached a flyer for a conference being held by the Australian New College of Mental Health Nursing Sub Branch in May 2005.

- **Other**

Appointment of a MHCA Communications Manager

The MHCA welcomes Deborah Nesbitt who joined the Secretariat on the 7th of March 2005 as 'Communications Manager'. A few words from Deborah by way of introduction below....

After finally completing my first degree I packed up my meager belongings, said goodbye to Redfern and bought a one-way ticket for Alice Springs. I had a strong hunch that there was a huge story in my own backyard about human rights, land and the meeting of a very old and very new culture. I also figured I would be well placed to get a job and it wasn't long before I began working as a stringer producing current affairs radio and television for the ABC NT, with a big focus on Indigenous affairs.

My relationship with the ABC lasted close to 14 years. Over the years I was privileged to work with some of our finest broadcasters and journalists in Radio National's Science and Talk Unit's and later in the Parliamentary Press Gallery. In between I had loads of fun working for Triple J where I produced live programs and documentaries, on-air campaigns on HIV/AIDS and refugees, and discovered the joys of night shifts.

Feeling the need for some serious intellectual stimulation, in 1995 I moved back to Canberra, my home town, to study for a Masters in International Law. Around 1997 I moved into public affairs, working mainly in Australian

Government Departments where I learnt a lot more about parliamentary, legislative and administrative processes and the value of my media experience in dealing with my former colleagues.

Now, after a couple of years of working for myself, I'm really pleased to be back to full-time work with a non-government organisation. The next few months look particularly exciting for the Council and I'm looking forward to putting all my skills and experience into lifting our national profile and getting our message across clearly and with passion.

National Consumer and Carer Forum Report

Another busy year is ahead for the National Consumer and Carer Forum, with a number of key issues on the agenda for the group's first meeting of year, which will be held in Melbourne on 15 April 2005. Likely issues to be discussed will include the Senate Inquiry into Mental Health, Welfare Reform and changes to the Disability Support Pension, Consumer Operated Services and the results of an external review of the NCCF.

Consumer and Carer Participation Policy: A Framework for the Mental Health Sector

The NCCF is also pleased to announce that work is now completed on production of the *Consumer and Carer Participation Policy: A Framework for the Mental Health Sector*. The National Consumer and Carer Forum (NCCF) has developed this policy as a guide to be used by all participants involved in mental health within the public, private and non-government sectors for the development and / or implementation of consumer and carer participation policies.

The policy aims to cover all levels of participation, and includes consumer and carer input at individual, local, state, and national levels. The NCCF's hope is that all those involved in the mental health sector will either adopt in full or adapt this document to suit their local needs. The document is intended as an example of best practice for a consumer and carer participation policy.

Many thanks to all the consumers, carers and others in the sector who have contributed to the development of the policy, and to the State, Territory and Australian Government Mental Health Directors who have funded this work.

The NCCF has produced 10,000 copies of this policy and distribution has begun. If you would like to order free copies, please email admin@mhca.com.au with your name, address and the number of copies requested or ring 02 6285 3100. Electronic copies can be downloaded at www.mhca.com.au (look under 'Publications').

The NCCF would appreciate any feedback you may have (positive and negative reactions) regarding the participation policy. Please send your

feedback to Ms Janet Meagher AM, Co-Chair of the NCCF, at janet.m@pra.org.au.

The Development of a New Consumer and Carer Participation Model Based on the NCCF

An external review of the NCCF conducted by Craze Lateral Solutions has been completed as is awaiting final endorsement by the NCCF. The report's recommendations will be reviewed by the NCCF at its upcoming April 2005 meeting. The report and the NCCF's response will be presented to the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Group National Mental Health Working Group (AHMAC NMHWG) for discussion at its 1 July 2005 meeting.

Meeting Dates

NCCF meetings will be held on the following dates:

Face-to-face:	10am – 5pm (EST), Friday 15 April 2005, Hilton Melbourne Airport
Teleconference:	3pm – 4pm (EST), Friday 24 June 2005
Face-to-face:	10am – 5pm (EST), 30 September 2005, Hilton Melbourne Airport
Teleconference:	3pm – 4pm (DEST), Friday 28 November

The MHCA Newsletter is a forum to provide information to people interested in mental health matters in Australia. Contributions are sought on any topic relevant to the Australian mental health sector. Please contact the MHCA on 6285 3100 or admin@mhca.com.au. Some articles published within the MHCA Newsletter are provided by third parties and the contents do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the MHCA. [Home](#)