



MEDIA RELEASE

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Homeless shelter visits will inform Labor about mental health problems

Prime Minister-elect Kevin Rudd's edict that all Labor members of parliament visit a homeless shelter in their area and deliver a report on the numbers of people turned away each night will give the new government a first hand lesson in the mental health crisis in Australia.

There is considerable evidence which shows that those who are homeless have a much higher prevalence of mental illness than the general population.

A 2004 study of homeless persons in Sydney found that in a 12 month period, 73 per cent of men and 81 per cent of women met criteria for at least one mental health disorder. This study also found the prevalence rate of schizophrenia among men and women was 23 per cent and 46 per cent respectively. This report found the 'prevalence of *any mental disorder* is four times higher among homeless men and women in inner Sydney than within the Australian general population.¹

"We can prevent a high level of homelessness among people with a mental illness," MHCA CEO David Crosbie said today.

"Members of the Rudd Government will see people being turned away from homeless shelters because of a lack of community services, lack of treatment options and lack of flexibility in the system to adapt to the needs of those experiencing mental illness, homelessness and drug problems.

"Kevin Rudd has shown in his first week that he is serious about tackling the health problems in Australia. Homelessness and mental health is a major problem in this country, and we hope all Government MPs can see the extent of the problem first-hand," Mr Crosbie said.

Media Contact: Simon Tatz on 02 6285 3100 or 0402 613 745

The Mental Health Council of Australia is the independent, national representative body of the mental health sector in Australia.
Ph:(02) 6285 3100 Fax:(02) 6285 2166 E-mail: admin@mhca.org.au www.mhca.org.au

¹ Teesson, M, Hodder T, Buhrich N, 'Psychiatric disorders in homeless men and women in inner Sydney' Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 2004; 38:162 – 168.