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MEDIA RELEASE

New reports show need for national leadership in Mental Health

Disturbing reports on conditions in mental health facilities highlight the need for the Rudd Government to put in place the national structures needed to deliver real leadership in mental health.

In Western Australia, the Council of Official Visitors revealed that patients in mental health units are being cared for on mattresses on floors and accommodated in conditions that are more akin to prisons.

In Victoria, perhaps Australia's leading state in terms of delivering community mental health services, a report by Community Visitors (on behalf of the Office of the Public Advocate) revealed unacceptable levels of bed shortages for mental health patients; that too many mental health patients are waiting months in acute psychiatric settings because there were no community accommodation and that people with mental illness and acquired brain injury are being inappropriately accommodated.

Mr Crosbie, CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia said today: 'These reports highlight what mental health consumers and carers continue to report - many areas within the mental health system need major reform if they are to be able to respond to the level of mental health needs within the Australian community.'

In the past 18 months, mental health made some significant breakthroughs as a priority issue for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The MHCA is committed to working with the Rudd government to build on this platform and translate commitments into real reforms.

The MHCA particularly welcomes the new emphasis on social inclusion in the Rudd Cabinet and sees real potential to improve the inclusion of people with a mental illness. Good mental health means not only access to clinical and other health services, but also access to an income, good housing, employment, education, recreation and other needs. Many of these issues are across portfolios and across governments, but are the basis of delivering positive change to people with a mental illness.

Another key issue for the MHCA is managing the clear linkage between mental health and alcohol and drug problems which commonly occur together. The Commonwealth government have allocated almost \$100 million to improve the links between mental health and drug treatment services. State governments around Australia have recognised the benefit of aligning ministerial and departmental responsibilities for these co-existing issues. The MHCA would like to see the Rudd Government adopt this more inclusive approach and co-locate the two areas.

According to Mr Crosbie: "We would be concerned if the new Rudd government replicated the disjointed approach of the previous government, who grouped mental health with foods standards; and put alcohol and drug issues in the Ageing portfolio."

With the new reports indicating very clearly that there are unacceptable conditions and a lack of access to proper mental health care and treatment, the MHCA is keen to work with the Rudd ministry to deliver the national leadership required to increase access to better coordinated services, and deliver real reforms. Without this leadership, the recent gains in mental health risk degenerating into piecemeal activities.

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