

MHCC MEDIA RELEASE – 6 April 2004

NSW Government's mini budget responds to deficits in mental health care system

The government's mini budget handed down today dedicates a much needed \$241 million to mental health funding in NSW.

'Recent criticism of the governments handling of mental health care in NSW has been heeded in this announcement', stated Jenna Bateman, Executive Officer of the Mental Health Coordinating Council. 'This Minister has listened to concerns and complaints expressed and has comprehended the need to respond to the systems failure detailed in the NSW Legislative Council's Mental Health Inquiry Report'.

The targeted areas for mental health spending detailed in the governments announcement indicate that NSW Health Minister Morris Iemma has recognized the necessity to fund community supports for people with mental health problems and disorders and not simply supply more and more acute beds.

'The mental health system in NSW has been increasingly lopsided with an emphasis on acute care and inadequate access to a range of services designed to keep people well in the community', stated Ms Bateman. 'People want to be supported in the place they live with access to a range of services when they need it so a return to acute care in hospital is prevented'.

'The funding allocations in this announcement are aimed at strengthening the mental health system across the board and this is very welcomed at a time when there is so much despair around access to mental health care in this state,' stated Ms Bateman.

Exact details on key areas for funding are scant at this stage but the broad identification of priority areas are supported by peak bodies such as the Mental Health Coordinating Council and the Consumer Advisory Group of NSW. Particularly welcomed are additional funds for supported accommodation places; an additional boost for the court liaison program aimed at reducing the numbers of people with mental health problems inappropriately placed in the criminal justice system and funds for special needs groups including aboriginal people, older people and children.

For further comment contact:

Jenna Bateman, MHCC Executive Officer

(02) 9555 8388 mb: 0411 609 870