

Presentation given by Joy Said as Chairperson of MHCC to the Mental Health Inquiry Forum on 24 January 2003 at Parliament House, Sydney.

The Report

The MHCC strongly supports the thrust of the recommendations in the report and is ready to work with Government and the sector towards its implementation.

Member groups of MHCC have waited too long to see equity of access to services across the State that provide responsive, supportive, seamless treatment options and rehabilitation services when required.

If we stop speaking up for policies that create a culture of inclusion the result will be a law and order approach that has real costs in both monetary and human terms.

Opportunities

MHCC recommends the Premier seize this opportunity to provide an integrated system of mental health services in NSW through an Office of Mental Health guided by his leadership. MHCC further recommends that the Committee of Eminent People identified in Recommendation 8 whose role it is to plan, monitor and evaluate services would be better placed under the Office of Mental Health.

The opportunity to set a direction and achieve the goal of an integrated system of mental health care and support is one too good to miss for any government. A commitment to the Report and its Recommendations must be part of our election platform

Coordinated Services Would Achieve

- Improved quality and growth in community mental health and other community-based services
- Reduction in the use of acute services
- Reduction in Police transportation to hospitals
- Reduction in suicide among people with mental illness
- Reduction in homelessness due to poverty and societal issues
- Reduction in criminal activity and the need for forensic services

It is vital that supported housing and accommodation is seen as an essential part of the rehabilitation model particularly as over two million Australians live in poverty and there are one in seven unemployed for every job vacancy.

The community we represent faces stigma and community resistance when trying to access mainstream services, accommodation and employment.

Accountability

- MHCC supports the initiative of a performance plan and annual audit to be carried out by the Auditor General (Recommendation 27) across Health and affiliated health organisations.
- MHCC further recommends the auditing of other government departments to determine the real cost of mental health service and support provision throughout NSW

Rehabilitation

- The role of MHCC and its member groups is vital in the provision of care, support and rehabilitation services in NSW
- MHCC members provide services that are flexible, recognising the role of the carer and that each person is an individual
- MHCC recommends that the NSW Department of Health funding to the non-government sector be immediately increased to the level of the national average.

A rehabilitation process should mean a decrease in risk factors and an increase in resilience. Resilience can be understood as connectedness, confidence and competence. Recovery from mental illness must incorporate the community context as well as treatment of the immediate symptoms.

Five Year Outcome for the Premier

- Fully funded integrated mental health and other community-based services across Government
- Integrated non-government services accepted as an integral part of service provision in the community sector and not external to government and other services
- Well-trained and supported multi-disciplinary teams working across all sectors
- A broad range of treatment and rehabilitation options

People with a mental illness can feel stigmatised by the social constructs of the illness. Many are without family, friends or any ongoing support structures. Many live on a low budget. Some have trouble building connections with other people. Many people feel that there is not a place for them in their community and that what they experience is not appreciated. With all of us working towards building the right structures their place in community will be found.

Barriers to Excellence in Outcome

- An Office of Mental Health lacking in power to implement government advice and coordination of mental health services
- The existing lack of transparency in reporting roles and funding streams within the mental health system.
- Unwillingness of all Government Departments to participate in a meaningful way with new directions of service provision.

A failure to act will see an insidious erosion of the social fabric which will affect us all.

Risks & Rewards

Risks:

Recommendations are not accepted through a Bi-Partisan approach results in an unwell community and greater use of Hospital, Police and Corrective Services

Rewards:

A community confident that responsive, supportive, seamless mental health and community-based services are available when needed.

Key Issues

- Bi-Partisan acceptance of the Report
- An Office of Mental Health to coordinate future directions
- Provision of hospital and community-based services to meet the needs in each geographical area to ensure equity of access to all communities in NSW

To coin a popular phrase, we need to see a “sea change” in the way we run our services. We have to be expansive and outward looking, form coalitions and look to sustainable solutions to prevent more marginalisation of the population of people with a mental illness.

- Increased and fully-funded community services
- Demolition of silo mentalities and funding structures between and within services
- Urgent review of re-admission rates and implementation of discharge planning in Acute Inpatient Units

Agencies must constantly evaluate and question what they do and reflect on whether they are part of the solution or, by default, part of the problem.

- Commitment to lessening the weight of care provided by carers through the provision of timely and effective response to requests for support
- A definitive decision about the future of Rozelle Hospital so that patients and staff can have access to a modern and therapeutic environment

We have to consciously look for solutions that do create hope for the individual, families and communities to avoid irreparable damage in the future.

- An allocation of funding for community-based services to support the aims and objectives of the Court Diversion Program.
- Complete physical separation of prison hospital facilities from Corrective Services facilities and their surrounds

We must not allow government to adopt a “quick-fix” solution to a very complex issue. When viewed retrospectively the irreparable damaged will be all too evident.

- Commitment by Government and Community Service organisations to capacity building which achieves a multi-disciplinary workforce skilled in mental health intervention.
- Planners and leaders with the vision to inspire staff to achieve excellence in the quality of and accessibility to all levels of service provision

Problems can seem all consuming of our energy but when we get a glimpse of how things can be, our energy will be transformed into creating a new