

# Media Release (NCOSS/MHCC)

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## The Right to Treatment - Forensic Mental Health

People with mental health problems and disorders are substantially over represented in the NSW Prison system. Recent research indicates that 46% of males in prison reception and 38% of sentenced males suffered a psychotic, affective or anxiety disorder in the previous 12 months with figures even higher for females. The incidence of psychosis in the NSW Prison population is thirty times higher than in the general population.

"The high number of people with mental health problems in NSW Prisons reflects the impact of under funding of community services for people with mental illness," stated Jenna Bateman, Executive Officer of the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC).

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) and the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) have combined voices on this issue calling on the Government to make a greater commitment to people with mental illness. NCOSS Director, Gary Moore states, " We call on the Government to increase spending on mental health services particularly on programs to keep people out of prison and into treatment and support services."

In response to the increasing number of people with mental health problems and disorders within the criminal justice system, NCOSS in consultation with MHCC and other peak bodies, has sought additional funding and an expansion to the Court Liaison program in its soon to be released 2004-05 NSW Pre Budget Submission- "Fair Taxes and Better Services"

The Court Liaison program provides the opportunity for people with mental health problems to be diverted out of the criminal justice system and to obtain necessary treatment. Forensic psychiatrists and nurses work with magistrates, lawyers and police to assess people with suspected mental health issues and divert them from the criminal justice system into mental health services, hospitals, community settings or in some cases clinical care within the prison system.

"A report released in 2003 shows that in the first seven months of the service of the 800 people screened, 64% were identified as having serious mental health problems and approximately 50% of these were diverted into mainstream community or inpatient mental health services", commented Gary Moore, NCOSS Director.

"Unfortunately, at the moment there are limited treatment opportunities in the community. Similarly, supported accommodation is inadequate. This is an essential part of the care and rehabilitation of this group of people to prevent repeated cycling through a revolving door of incarceration," stated MHCC EO Jenna Bateman.

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