

22 December 2004

R J Sendt
Auditor-General
The Legislature
Parliament House
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Sendt

We would like to comment on the Auditor-General's Performance Report on the Home Care Service of NSW (HCS). Whilst we do welcome this Audit we would like to express our concerns regarding a general lack of clarity provided in the recommendations prepared for the Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare (DADHC).

The report's observations about high levels of unmet need, inconsistency across the State and inadequate assessment and referral regimes match our own views about HCS however we hold the following concerns:

- In particular, there is an ambiguity in the recommendations which leaves us feeling uncertain about the future of HCS in the provision of services to those with a mental illness. Whilst there is no specific reference to how changes will impact people with mental health issues there is no mention of how the service will assist them either.
- The report seems to focus on the needs of the increasing aged population without also addressing the needs of younger people with a disability. In many cases, younger people with a mental illness may only require shorter periods of assistance whilst experiencing periods of disability but this assistance is essential if they are to live effectively in the community.
- Whilst we support a process for client review, we are unclear about the recommendation for an 'exit policy' as clients are said, *to remain with HCS till they choose to leave, move to full-time residential care or die*. Our experience is that people with a mental illness only receive HCS for short periods of time and do not have the choice to remain with the service. Is meeting certain assessment criteria implied here?
- We are unclear about the meaning of: the need for '*clear eligibility criteria*' and the recommendation that 'within the continuum of care DADHC needs to *determine 'service types and intensity'* that HCS will continue to provide. These terms raise concerns for us that the Audit Office are recommending specialisation on a narrower target group – of this we are opposed.



*Working For
Mental Health*

Mental Health
Co-ordinating Council

PO Box 668
Rozelle, NSW 2039

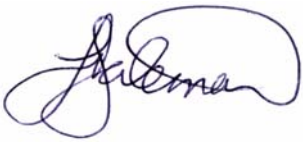
Phone: (02) 9555 8388
Fax: (02) 9810 8145
Email: info@mhcc.org.au
Website: www.mhcc.org.au

*MHCC is the peak
body for mental health
organisations in NSW*

- We understand that HCS does not have a common approach to determining consumer fees-for-services provided under the HACCC program. However, we are concerned that the Executive Summary particularly states the need for the development of a 'fees policy'. We do not agree with any increase in the 'user pays' approach to public services.

Thank you for taking our comments into consideration to ensure that the recommendations of the report and DADHC are open to the value of community feedback. We would very much appreciate you addressing our concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jenna Bateman', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Jenna Bateman
Executive Officer
Mental Health Co-ordinating Council