

## **Eastern Area Interagency group pushes for action**

Senior staff from the Eastern Suburbs Mental Health Program (ESMHP) accepted the invitation and faced an inquisitive group of local service agencies at the “Facing the Challenges” Forum on the 28 July.

The Forum was organised by the Eastern Area Interagency network including B.Miles Women’s Housing Scheme to address critical service delivery issues for people living with mental illness, including homeless people within the Eastern area. In particular, agencies claim to have been experiencing strong resistance from the ESMHP to work with them in a direct and open partnership as they try to address inadequacies, create better outcomes for consumers, their families and friends, and the community generally.

Over 100 stakeholders attended the forum held at the Eastern Suburbs Leagues Club including local Members of Parliament and local councillors. Consumer Advocate, Leonie Manns hosted the event and managed to keep tempers at bay and encourage healthy discussion.

Members of the Eastern Area Interagency had developed a number of questions addressing matters concerning:

- systematic and strategic approaches to early intervention;
- patient care including treatment and care issues;
- carer participation;
- Memorandum of Understanding – Police and Health
- the implementation of National Standards for Mental Health Services;
- transparency of budgetary issues and strategic planning;
- the practice of minimal assessments by the Acute Care Team and a lack of openness in collaborating with agency staff;

Eastern Sector Mental Health Director, Dr Charles Doutney acknowledged and agreed with most of the issues raised including ingrained inflexible attitudes by some staff and a lack of appreciation by many professionals in the value of collaboration. He also explained that ESMPH has funding constraints which make it difficult to address the wide range of service demands and priorities.

A commitment to work with the community was given by Dr Doutney. It was suggested that a Working Group be developed for the purpose of collaboration between the area health service and the local community. Budgetary transparency was also promised with reports possibly given at the new Working Group meetings.

Local politicians gave brief speeches supporting the work done in the mental health sector and promised ongoing support.

MHCC supports ESMHP’s re-commitment to healthy collaboration and transparency of information with community sector agencies, consumers and carers in the area. Other sectors may benefit from similar forums in their respective areas where collaboration has been strained.