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Government agrees to Mental Health Inquiry

The federal government has called for a wide-ranging Senate inquiry into the poor state of mental health services in Australia, including state-federal divisions over funding responsibility. It will investigate the lack of hospital and community care, chronic shortages in crisis services and the growing demand for care of the young, homeless and prisoners.

Liberal senator John Tierney drafted the terms of reference for the Senate inquiry which is currently under review. He said the government's notice of motion to set up a select committee would be put to the Senate when it next sat on March 7, after it took submissions on the terms of reference from community and health groups.

NSW Premier Bob Carr says he welcomes the federal government's call for reform in the mental health sector and supports the inquiry which will investigate ways of reforming overlapping federal and state responsibilities for health.

The inquiry comes amid rising concerns about the failure of governments to manage mental health issues in the community. The well publicised case of Cornelia Rau, the mentally-ill Australian resident who spent 10 months in immigration detention after authorities failed to recognise her mental illness, is currently undergoing a closed-door investigation.