

Mental Health Coordinating Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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Will a new Minister for Mental Health get the balance right ?

The Mental Health Coordinating Council welcomes the Opposition's appointment of a Minister for Mental Health, as announced by NSW Liberal Leader John Brogden in his annual State of the State address today. He addressed the vast unmet need for mental health services in NSW and plans to develop an integrated mental health policy agenda for the 2007 State election.

Gladys Berejiklian, Member for Willoughby will be appointed to this nation first portfolio which plans to confront the enormous challenges of mental illness and address the lack of advocacy by the State government to increase funding and address the major issues. Extensive consultation is planned with people with a mental illness, their carers and industry professionals to determine better methods of prevention and care.

Brogden recognises that mental health services in NSW are in a state of decay and urgent action is required across a range of social policy areas. He stated that prisons have become the dumping ground for the mentally ill and cited NSW Corrections Health Service statistics that 78% of men and 90% of women experienced a psychiatric disorder in the year before they were imprisoned. He was particularly concerned over the massive unmet need for mental health services for young people and announced that he will open 60 new adolescent mental health beds in its first term of Government.

Jenna Bateman of The Mental Health Coordinating Council is pleased that the Opposition has recognised the despair around access to mental health care in this state and commends the appointment of a Minister for Mental Health to the Shadow Cabinet, however stated,

"We hope the Government also recognises the necessity to fund community supports for people with mental health problems and disorders and not simply supply more and more beds- we would not support the reopening of institutions as a way to address the need in this area of health care".

Brogden acknowledged the gaping difference in funding to the non-government sector which receives only 2.4% of the mental health budget compared to the National average of 5.5%.

"To be successful in strengthening the mental health system across the board, Mr Brogden would need to understand that the mental health system in NSW has been increasingly lopsided with an emphasis on acute care and inadequate access to a range of services designed to keep people well in the community", said Ms Bateman.

'People want to be supported in the place they live with access to a range of services when they need it so a return to hospital care is prevented'.

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