

NGO Development Strategy: Update

February 2005

As we reported in the previous edition of *View from the Peak*, the Mental Health Co-ordinating Council has commenced the NGO Development Strategy. The purpose of the Strategy is to enhance the capacity of NGOs who provide mental health services.

During the period from November 2004 through to January 2005, the three NGO Development Project Officers consulted with NGOs and Area Health Services. The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Seek the views of NGOs and Area Health Services about the key issues currently facing NGOs who provide mental health services.
- Understand the key issues with respect to NGO development.
- Use information gathered from the consultations to help determine the priorities for the NGO Development Strategy. This is particularly important as the priorities of the NGO Development Strategy should reflect the priorities of the NGO sector.

We met with approximately 17 NGOs including those specifically funded to provide mental health services (such as supported accommodation, employment support and clubhouses) and other NGOs (such as those providing services to families and migrants) who respond to clients with mental health issues. We also met with 14 representatives from Area Health Services, including Area Directors of Mental Health Services, NGO Liaison Officers/Grant Coordinators and others involved in rehabilitation development groups.

Consultations with NGOs and Area Health Services have raised a number of important issues with respect to the development of NGOs. These are briefly explored below.

Identity – the identity and role of an NGO is closely tied to the types of services it provides and what it is seen to be doing. Most staff working in NGOs do not see the sector as having a clear identity (some would like to be part of a clear community based mental health sector while for others this is not an issue). Area Health Services sometimes see a clear identity for the sector, but this tends to be illuminated by and associated with the services provided by a small number of NGOs who are closely linked with the Area Health Service.

Funding – there was a strong consensus that NGOs who provide mental health services require a significant injection of funds. NGOs and Area Health Services spoke of a sector considerably under-funded compared to other states and territories. Linked to this was the concern expressed by NGOs of the difficulty of attracting new funds in a system where funding is largely tied to historical grants.

Outcome measurement – both NGOs and Area Health Services highlighted the need for NGOs to measure outcomes. Measuring outcomes was regarded as an important step for NGOs to demonstrate the effectiveness of their work.

Training and workforce development – those consulted for this report largely focused on the education and training aspect of workforce development. Particular attention was paid to the necessary steps to improve the skills and capacity of the mental health workforce. Discussion focused on the training needs of staff employed by NGOs, the needs of managers and the requirements of NGO boards of management.

Future directions

At the time this edition of *View from the Peak* went to press, the project's key tasks were being developed. These will be considered by the advisory committee considering the consultation report's recommendations. Future editions of *View from the Peak* will keep you up-to-date with the progress of the NGO Development Strategy. We will be issuing a newsletter approximately every three months, which we hope will reach a wide audience. In the next one (in late February) we will be able to provide more information about the future direction of this work. If the first (November 04) edition has not reached you, please do not hesitate to ask for a copy and be added to the distribution list (by emailing sarah@mhcc.org.au or by phoning her at MHCC: 02 9555 8388). We welcome your interest in and comments on The NGO Development Strategy.