

NSW Family and Carer Mental Health Program

Since 2002 NSW Health, Centre for Mental Health (CMH) has undertaken a strategic development process to establish appropriate statewide service planning and delivery for families and carers of people with mental illness. The CMH, in partnership with the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI) NSW, other NGOs, Area Health Services (AHSs), consumers, families and carers has developed a comprehensive model for service delivery for NSW called Family and Carers Mental Health Program.

Through this Program, the CMH is developing policy and implementing strategic changes to strengthen and improve mental health services, access to these services and supports for families and carers of people with mental health problems and is working in a collaborative approach with AHSs and NGOs to provide the following services:

- * specialist clinical advice and a comprehensive range of support services for families and carers
- * education and training for families and carers
- * information for carers about their rights and responsibilities
- * involvement of families and carers in assessment, care planning and discharge planning of a loved one
- * better access and referrals for families and carers to other community support services

By suitably supporting carers and providing them with information we can achieve:

- * Improved assessment, treatment and care in the community for people with a mental illness
- * improved resilience and coping skills in families and carers
- * increased understanding of the mental illness affecting a loved one

Phase One of Program implementation

As part of Phase One of the Program a model of care has been developed and is being implemented across NSW AHSs. The model has two main components:

The first component being the implementation of the “family sensitive mental health services” component by all the Area Health Services across NSW. Approved funding for this component to the AHSs is \$1.7 million per year.

The second component is the provision of support services for families and carers, through four NGOs, selected through a tendering process to provide education and training and provide individual support services across NSW. Funding for this component is \$1.9 million per year. Funds to NGOs will be provided on a triennial bases through the NGO Grant Program.

Congratulations to the successful NGOs listed below, which have been partnered to an AHS and will be working in a collaborative approach under the banner of the

Family and Carers Mental Health Program to provide a comprehensive range of support services including education and training and individual support services for families and carers of people with a mental illness across the State:

- Schizophrenia Fellowship – Sydney South West AHS, Hunter/New England AHS & Greater Southern AHS
- Parramatta Mission - Sydney West AHS
- ARAFMI NSW - North Sydney/Central Coast AHS
- Carers NSW - South Eastern/Illawarra AHS, North Coast AHS & Greater Western AHS

The CMH has met with the Directors and other Officers involved in the Family and Carer Program in each of the Area Mental Health Service together with the Chief Executive Officers and other relevant staff from the NGOs selected to discuss and establish a working plan to implement the Program and to ensure that steps are taken to tackle any transitional issues so that there is a seamless transition period in the regions where the community has been receiving support services through the Program's one-off demonstration projects. Both AHSs and NGOs will work in partnership under the banner of the Family and Carers Program and will inform current groups in the community, involve and work with them in the implementation process.

Other NGOs supporting families and carers across the community are encouraged to contact the selected NGOs to continue supporting families together with the Family and Carers Mental Health Program.

A statewide Family and Carers Mental Health Program Steering Committee will be formed with representation of Mental Health Directors from AHSs, NGOs, consumers, families and carers to continue the development, implementation and monitoring the Program.

The CMH clearly appreciates the value of building good associations with NGOs and this Program is another example of the Centre's commitment to working in effective partnerships to deliver good value for money services to the community.

Another update on the implementation of the Program will be available in the Winter edition MHCC's quarterly newsletter, *View from the Peak*.

