

New money for wish lists

Summer 2007: View from the Peak

MHCC is pleased to be administering the Infrastructure Grant (IGA) Program on behalf of NSW Health, as it is the first grant for mental health and funded NGOs to do some of those projects that are on ever-growing wish-lists. John Hatzistergos, Minister for Health, announced that \$2 million was allocated to the IGA Program, providing a significant opportunity for NGOs to improve the quality of existing services and progress towards accreditation with nationally recognised service standards. Projects funded under the IGA Program will be monitored by MHCC, and should be completed by December 2007.

The December/ January period was busy for MHCC as it needed to commence the IGA Program as soon as possible. A consultant, Edwina Pickering, was engaged to develop the administration processes. An Expression of Interest was widely advertised in early December 2006, and by the closing date of 25 January 2007, 29 NGOs had submitted applications relating to 32 proposed projects.

Many NGOs took the opportunity to identify infrastructure improvements, and the proposed projects were very diverse, including –

- Upgrading premises, e.g. painting, carpeting, and air-conditioning
- Purchasing office equipment, e.g. photocopiers, vehicles, computers, and software
- Employing temporary staff or consultants for specific projects, such as progress the organisation towards accreditation, develop a new strategic plan, review policies and procedures, train staff and Board members, improve data analysis systems, and/ or improve accessibility for ATSI consumers.

MHCC convened an assessment panel including representatives from NSW Health, service and consumer organisations, and the majority of applications were considered eligible for the grant. These NGOs were immediately recommended to the Minister for Health to avoid potential delays relating to the forthcoming NSW election. In a small number of cases, the panel is seeking supplementary information about the proposed projects before finalising assessments. The outcome for all applications under the IGA Program is unavailable at time of printing.s

Although fewer applications were received than expected, MHCC considers that this is due to the tight timeframe over the Christmas/ New Year period. It is likely that many more mental health NGOs will take up the offer to apply when the second round of funding commences shortly.