



Senate takes another look at mental health crisis

The crisis in mental health services in Australia will be investigated by the newly established Senate Select Committee on Mental Health, chaired by Democrat Leader Senator Lyn Allison with a report due by 6th October 2005. The Committee will investigate the provision and adequacy of mental health services in Australia, and will be particularly referring to the Commonwealth's National Mental Health Strategy. The inquiry was spurred on by the case of Cornelia Rau, an Australian resident with a mental illness who spent 10 months in immigration detention after authorities failed to identify her schizophrenia. The inquiry has since been widened to examine the case of Australian woman Vivian Alvarez, who was deported to the Philippines in an immigration department bungle.

MHCC has made a submission to the Inquiry addressing a range of key issues which highlight major service gaps and a widespread dissatisfaction with mental health services. We have stressed the need for more resources in the community and a greater emphasis on facilitating rehabilitation as well as acknowledging the importance of the availability of in-patient beds for acute mental health care.

Other issues addressed include the need for:

- a “whole-of-government” approach to mental health service provision
- expanded early-intervention programs, interagency collaboration of community services for the co-management of people with complex needs
- consumer and carer participation at all levels of policy, planning, treatment and recovery
- equitable access to services for people with a mental illness who encounter the criminal justice system
- attention to education and training programs for GPs to emphasise long-term functional outcomes
- enhanced services to rural and regional areas
- investment in medical research and innovation

The MHCC submission is accessible on our website: www.mhcc.org.au

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View from the Peak**