



## **Strategy for cross government approach to mental health in NSW**

The recently released, *Interagency Action Plan for Better Mental Health*, is a significant document representing the NSW Government's plan to improve mental health services through collaboration and partnership across government departments.

This Action Plan is a major outcome of activities of the Senior Officers Group on Mental Health which was set up in response to the 2002 Mental Health Inquiry. The importance of developing a cross-agency focus on mental health was identified by the Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry into Mental Health Services which reported to the NSW Parliament in December 2002. The outcomes of the Inquiry provided the impetus for establishing mental health as a standing agenda item on the Human Services CEO Forum.

It is encouraging to see that for the first time the NSW Government has set out a strategic whole-of-government approach to mental health policy. The Action Plan recognizes that a number of government agencies have a role to play in responding to the needs of people affected by mental illness and sets out a coordinated plan to managing these needs. The Action Plan is seen as a companion plan to the NSW Mental Health Plan 2005-2010 which will provide a framework for the development and enhancement of mental health services delivered through Area Health Services and partner organisations in NSW

The Interagency Action Plan recognises that to improve mental health a clear direction and structure for ongoing coordination of responses to mental illness is required in the three strategic areas where specialist mental health services intersect with other agencies.

### **Strategic Directions**

#### **1. getting in early: prevention and early intervention**

The aim is to assist people at risk of developing mental illness or in its early stages by bringing together clinical services, child, youth and family services, education, disability services and juvenile justice.

#### **2. breaking the cycle: community support services**

This strategy recognizes the need for stronger links between mental health, primary care and a broad range of government and non-government agencies so that people with a mental illness can have a good quality of life in the community. The intention is to also break the cycle of re-admissions, social exclusion, homelessness and unemployment. Strategies include; providing the appropriate service at the right time; timely coordination of supports; improved education

#### **3. coordination of emergency responses**

This strategic direction focuses on ensuring people experiencing acute mental illness or behavioural disturbances are safe and receive appropriate care. The role of mental health crisis or acute community outreach teams is addressed, as well as the responsibility of a range of other services including the police, ambulance, emergency departments (EDs) and telephone counselling lines.

### **Implementing the plan**

The Plan identifies priorities associated with each of the particular strategies as well as identifying relevant partners under each of the strategies. Hopefully this direct approach will encourage and enforce participation and accountability across all government departments and NGOs.

Implementation of the priorities for action set out in this five year plan will be monitored in yearly reports to Cabinet. It will involve two main working groups (already in operation), one focusing on emergency care and the other focusing on prevention, early intervention and community care. These working groups will progress the specific activities identified in the Action Plan, engaging relevant stakeholders as required, before beginning to explore other issues. Progress will be reviewed by the Human Services Chief Executive Officers Forum which will report annually to the Cabinet Committee on Human Services.

The Government has acknowledged that the actions set out in the plan can only be achieved through engagement with non-government organisations, families, carers and people who experience mental illness. Regional planning will be carried out at the local level which will target key population groups.

MHCC is impressed with the makings of the plan and sees it as a positive first step that has been taken by the NSW Cabinet's Senior Officers Group on Mental Health. Obviously the promise of interagency collaboration and partnerships between the government and community sector relies on all the players cooperating; with specific responsibilities and a range of processes and outcome measures in place we must be optimistic. The intention is for the plan to be an active document with further initiatives flowing from the development of partnerships between agencies and services, and we look forward to its unfolding.

**The *Interagency Action Plan for Better Mental Health* is focused on improving the coordination of services to realise three key aims:**

- 1. prevent or intervene early in the onset of mental illness**
- 2. improve community support to those who need continuing care, and**
- 3. improve responses to mental health emergencies.**

**'View from the Peak'  
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