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The Hon. Jai Rowell, MP  
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Subject: The NSW Mental Health Commission's Strategic Plan, and services for people with coexisting mental illness and intellectual disability

Dear Minister Rowell,

The Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC) has for many years worked collaboratively with the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability (CID) on matters of mutual interest. We write this letter in support of their concerns, which are of equal concern to our members and the sector more broadly.

So often people with intellectual disability experience co-existing mental health difficulties, and in some circumstances a person's intellectual disability will be assessed as their primary difficulty. However, a person, particularly if they have a diagnosis of mental illness, will have that assessed as their principle disability. This frequently leads to poor service access and practice, and unfortunately, all too often, people with these coexisting difficulties fall through services gaps, and experience scant access to the advocacy and supported decision making support that might otherwise assist them. Many of these people become homeless or have interactions with police and the criminal justice system.

MHCC respectfully bring to your attention the absence of action as it relates to this group of consumers in the NSW Government's response to its Mental Health Commission's Strategic Plan. Whilst the Strategic Plan clearly identifies actions on behalf of people experiencing intellectual disability and mental health conditions, the Government's commitment of an additional \$115m does not specifically address the complex mix of mental health and disability services required for people with intellectual disability.

The Mental Health Commission has demonstrated clearly the fundamental problems facing people with intellectual disability in obtaining mental health care, and provided practical steps for action. The Commission's approach is consistent with the outcomes from the National Roundtable on the Mental Health of People with Intellectual Disability which NSW CID led in 2013. The Roundtable was attended by leaders in mental health and disability from around Australia, including key people in NSW Health.

MHCC welcome the Minister's announcement of the new \$115m to be focussed on the five key areas; however people with coexisting intellectual disability and mental illness seem to have been forgotten in the mix.

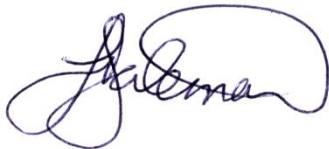
MHCC ask that the Minister consider this matter as one requiring urgent attention and additional funding. MHCC assume that the Government is anticipating that the NDIS will provide for the needs of this group of consumers; however, we emphasise that the NDIS will not be able to appropriately address the complex mental health needs of people with intellectual disability. This is particularly concerning in the light of the closure of several residential facilities, necessitating that these individuals will require particular support and care in the community, including clinical care. It is vital that this group of people have access to a diversity of services that may represent an overlap between a NDIS package and NSW Health funded services available through community mental health organisations and programs.

MHCC ask the Minister to make clear how the Government intends to address this problem and ensure that the five key areas identified in the MHC Strategic Plan will also apply to this particularly vulnerable group of people, without compromising the funding targeted to other areas of critical need.

Vital to these considerations is the provision of appropriate workforce training and education needs as part of the planning process, especially in the context of the NDIS. There is an urgent need for capacity building in cross sectoral assessment and practice skills that must be supported to ensure that this group of people do not continue to fall through the knowledge and service gaps.

We thank you for your interest and look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jenna Bateman', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

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