



29<sup>th</sup> April 2010

The Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Re: Inquiry into mental health and workforce participation**

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I refer to your letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> March 2001, regarding the inquiry into mental health and workforce participation and thank you for the opportunity to respond.

TEAMhealth would like to offer the following comments in response to the Terms of Reference:

Barriers to participate in Education, Training and Employment for people with mental illness include the following:

1. Safe secure and affordable housing is often limited, not available or not adequate to meet peoples basic care needs. Therefore people with mental illness often live in poverty. So to even think about work readiness is not practical, when their basic needs are not being met.
2. Access to public transport is a challenge for many people with a mental illness. It either does not exist, or is limited. If it is available it can often be overwhelming for a person with a severe and persistent mental to negotiate the system.
3. Non-government mental health services need to be funded to support people with mental illness back into the workforce. The job networks often work with all kinds of disability and psychosocial rehabilitation for people with a metal illness is a specialist field.
4. The terms of reference refers to *mental ill health*. TEAMhealth believes that is it important to acknowledge the difference between mental health issues, a diagnosed mental illness and/or a resultant psychiatric disability (which results from a severe and persistent mental illness). We think it is important to understand these terms to then assess the level of disability someone experiences as a result of a mental illness to be able to successfully support people into paid employment.
5. Stigma around having a mental illness is our biggest challenge in the provision of training, employment and education so we need to include the broader community in education and awareness training.
6. TEAMhealth has concerns about the newly developed qualification for the Peer Support Workforce. We believe that once a person has disclosed they have a

- mental illness there is no turning back, and they can be discriminated against or at least labelled in the workplace. We need to look at ways to combat this.
7. Our view is that all Australians should be treated equally, regardless of having a mental illness or physical illness. We believe that all workers in Australia should have Health Care Plans in the workplace which support a person's overall health and well-being, without a specific focus on mental health. Employees can disclose what support they require and privacy will be protected.
  8. Work readiness is a further concern. People are often set up to fail because they are not job ready. We have lost many Peer Support Workers as they have not been well enough to work and have thus been difficult to support. The fact that their workmates are aware that they either have a mental illness or have been affected by a mental illness often adds to their stress.
  9. There is a lack of staff training and support within the training, education and employment areas around how to support people with a mental illness.
  10. Flexibility within the work environment is needed to support people with a mental illness as this is often not available within the sector itself let alone the broader workforce.
  11. Education, training and employment agencies require education on how to support people with different disorders as symptoms and required supports vary. Beyond Blue is a good example of a media campaign which has allowed the community to understand Depression and has successfully reduced stigma around that disorder. Many employers may be more open to employing a person with Depression compared to more debilitating disorders such as Schizophrenia, where there is still so much fear and stigma.

Please contact me if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Bradley AM  
Chair, Committee of Management