



NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc  
ABN 82 549 537 349

4<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Senator Moore  
Chair  
Senate Community Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Senator Moore,

**Re: Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Australia – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2008**

I am writing in response to the questions raised during the evidence given by myself (Karen Oakley) on behalf of the NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc. (NSW CAG) to the Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry into Mental Health Services in Australia on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2008. I apologise for the delayed response, which is due to staff changes at NSW CAG.

**NSW CAG's representation on the COAG Mental Health Group in NSW**

I confirm that NSW CAG is not represented on the COAG Mental Health Group (NSW). NSW CAG was also not involved in the initial consultations this Group held. On 28<sup>th</sup> December 2006, Dr. Gillian Malins, Executive Officer, NSW CAG wrote to Ms D'Adam (Deputy Director-General, and Chair of the Group), expressing concern about the limited consultation with consumers regarding the *National Action Plan on Mental Health* and on the COAG Mental health Group (NSW). In this letter it was noted that NSW CAG would be able to provide consumer representation on this Group if requested. However, no response was received to this letter.

NSW CAG is still keen to represent mental health consumers on the COAG Mental Health Group (NSW) and will follow up with the NSW Department of Health about this.

**Consultation with consumers regarding the establishment of a hospital at Lismore, and upgrades at Concord and Sutherland**

Email contact was made with the Consumer Consultants located in the Area Health Services where the Lismore, Concord and Sutherland hospitals are located to determine

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NSW CAG is the peak body for mental health consumers and carers in New South Wales  
NSW CAG – funded by the NSW Health Department

the level of consultation undertaken with consumers regarding the establishment of these hospitals. Consumer Consultants are employed by the relevant NSW Area Health Service.

Through the local Consumer Consultant, NSW CAG received a letter from the Director of Mental Health Services for the North Coast Area Health Service informing us that consumers have been consulted through various phases of the Lismore hospital's development. However, we have also heard anecdotally that there was no real level of consumer consultation in the development of the Mental Health Unit at the hospital.

Consumer Workers from the Sydney South West Area Health Service reported that there has been both discussion amongst and consultation with consumers at various meetings and on committees regarding the development of the Mental Health Unit at Concord hospital. There has also been a degree of consumer involvement in the planning of the hospital.

While NSW CAG has attempted to contact Consumer Consultants about the hospital upgrades in Sutherland, no response has been received thus far. We are therefore unable to comment on the level of consumer involvement in the planning for the Sutherland hospital.

NSW CAG will continue to work with, and lobby the NSW Department of Health to ensure that consumer participation in hospital and other service planning and development is standard practice.

### **Gender composition of NSW CAG's consultations**

Analysis of available information regarding attendees at NSW CAG's consultations held in 2007 and 2008 to date revealed fairly even distribution of males and females. It should be noted that it is not compulsory for people attending NSW CAG consultations to provide information about their self and where this is not offered, NSW CAG does not record this.

### **Psychiatric Emergency Care Centres (PECCs)**

In order to determine the setup of PECCs in NSW we have communicated through email with the Consumer Consultants on our database from each of the eight Area Health Services in NSW. We have been informed that PECCs are generally an area within or next to the Emergency Department of a general hospital, but they can also be set-up externally from an Emergency Department. In the case of the new Blacktown PECC we have been informed that the PECC is roughly 500 metres away from the Emergency Department, which can pose problems for transporting people from one unit to another.

PECCs have beds for overnight stays, but many have maximum lengths of stay ranging between 24 and 48 hours. The number of beds available at PECCs is limited. We have been informed that the PECC in Wyong has four beds, as will the PECC currently being built in the Hunter New England Area Health Service.

Despite some initial concern from consumer groups about segregation from mainstream health services, consumers report to us that they continue to be impressed with the services and care they receive at PECCs. People who have used PECCs report finding

them a less stigmatising option, where they get strong support and understanding from staff. PECCs provide quick access to specialist mental health care and play an important role in providing adequate responses to people in need of emergency mental health care.

NSW CAG would like to see PECCs become part of the continuum of care available right across NSW. We also encourage consumer consultation into the development and setup of PECCs to ensure services that are meeting consumers' needs.

We would again like to thank the Senate Community Affairs Committee for the opportunity to represent mental health consumers in NSW to the inquiry into mental health services in Australia. We look forward to continuing to be involved in the process of reviewing mental health services in Australia.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss this information or if any further information is required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Oakley', written in a cursive style.

Karen Oakley  
A/Executive Officer

