

Committee Secretary,
Community Affairs Committee,
Department of the Senate,
P>O> Box 6100,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. A.C.T. 2600,
AUSTRALIA

To Whom It May Concern,

Dear Sir/Madam,

I understand there has yet again been another Mental Health Inquiry? For what purpose was this Inquiry conducted?

The only inquiry that I can recall government readily welcomed was the Richmond Report in 1982 where they stood to gain millions of dollars by the closure of the big mental hospitals and the deinstitutionalisation of the inmates who have suffered ever since. Many big hospitals were sold. Money the government gained at that time was never reinvested back into mental health. Community mental health networks that were to be set up to treat the mentally ill within the community were never enough, poorly implemented, underfunded and understaffed.

Over more than two decades the care of the mentally ill has fallen to an all time low where the mentally ill face a new type of institutionalisation: homelessness and imprisonment. Judges, Magistrates have little choice to place them anywhere else.

How can any government believe, or even consider, gaols a suitable substitute for mental health hospitals for the mentally ill? We are told more gaols are needed. Is it because the majority of inmates are mentally ill? Gaols are for criminals not sick people.

Consecutive governments over the past two decades have ignored the predicament of the mentally ill. Leaving them to exist on the streets, or demoralise them further by leaving them in prisons. These are the most vulnerable people in society and are now appear to be denied human rights. Governments have done nothing but continually cut mental health funding during these years.

Many professionals and carers now believe the big mental hospitals should be refurbished and re-opened as it is the only responsible and humane way to treat and care for the mentally ill; caring for them in the community clearly has not worked.

I believe these big hospitals can be made into sanctuaries and can be made partly self supporting by establishing large market garden areas, flower gardens, all tended by clients. Various crafts can be introduced such as woodwork, pottery, painting, basket weaving etc. Clients would gain therapeutic benefits from these activities greatly helping them recover. Everything produced to be sold to the public on certain nominated days.

The mentally ill are mostly intelligent and very creative if they are given the chance to express themselves.

The 2002 Select Committee Mental Health Inquiry strongly recommended saving Rozelle Hospital for the care of the mentally ill. However, it is very alarming to know the present government because they are unable to sell Rozelle Hospital is leasing various parts of this hospital for as little as one dollar for ninety nine years to other government departments but not for the mentally ill?

The definition of mental illness has broadened so much it is difficult to determine what mental illness really is? Care for the mentally disabled, and those with disabilities should not be confused with mental illness as these areas of health have no association with mental illness and should be funded separately.

Lately mental health funding has been increased but little is making its way to mental health services. Recently more people are claiming mental health services for 'mental illness' which is not mental illness in the true sense, and can be very effectively treated by doctors within the community.

From what I understand mental health funding is determined by public servants instead of mental health professionals who would or should understand what true mental illness is, and would know what areas mental health funds are needed most.

NGO's claim mental health funding and need to be thoroughly investigated to ensure their services have a positive input and are necessary in caring for the mentally ill. Otherwise their funding should be cut.

The mentally ill do not choose mental illness it chooses them generally in the early years of their life (in late teens to their 30's maybe older and is not pre-empted by substance or alcohol abuse. Starting with depression it can in some cases progress to become a true mental illness i.e. schizophrenia, bi-polar etc. or it can be inherent? Given time, appropriate care and medication some of these people can recover to go on and resume a normal life. Some will never recover and always need care.

Children who have a parent with mental illness have a greater propensity of developing mental illness themselves, although determination and percentages differ.

In my sixteen years experience with the public mental health system time, care and appropriate medication, does not happen and depends largely on the doctors involved. In sixteen years I came across **one** doctor who I cannot praise enough in my lifetime, who achieved amazing results for the family member in my care. Unfortunately the good doctors move on quickly and the mediocre remain. It is the same with councillors and case managers.

In the public mental health system today, thirty bed wards are being built in hospitals to treat the mentally ill. In my opinion they are only suitable for short term stays. They have no occupational therapy services, are confining and clients have no space to move without bumping into others. Many clients smoke cigarettes (or learn to smoke) profusely to ease sheer boredom.

Clients are discharged in the midst of treatment before any effective treatment has taken place because any prolonged treatment in such a confining space would be detrimental for them. The result is that they are never effectively treated and constantly relapse.

Governments over these past years have effectively put the care of the mentally ill on to families and carers. Families and carers have been so burdened with responsibilities that family homes have been

split up by divorce, nervous breakdowns, financial worries and more. Their lives are being totally destroyed.

Most families and carers are stressed at the thought that they are growing older and may not be able to continue with the care of loved ones. They are petrified if they should die - who would care for their loved ones then and where would they go??

In my opinion it will take a very strong, compassionate government to change the plight of the homeless and forsaken mentally ill, as to date, I believe, prior governments have only thought of Votes and self promotion. The mentally ill have no voice. For the past two decades governments have failed in their responsibility for the most unfortunate, neglected, misunderstood people in society. I can only hope that the present government will have the fortitude to bring about changes for the better.

Governments have always denounced stigma against the mentally ill yet themselves have perpetuated this stigma (possibly unintentionally) by leaving the mentally ill homeless, to wander the streets begging, unkempt and unwashed, sleeping in parks or doorways, eating from garbage bins, and this is all very visible to the public.

Yours faithfully,
Patricia Bayley