

# Minority Report

## Senator Rachel Siewert, the Australian Greens

The Australian Greens welcome the intent of the inquiry and the Committee report. There is near universal agreement in the evidence submitted to the inquiry that the new funding for health is significant and is much needed in the health system. However, the degree to which this could be described as reform is debatable. It is not within the scope of this inquiry to determine how the proposed new structure will work but the relationships between the authorities, local hospital networks and Medicare Locals remains unclear. There is insufficient detail on how this will evolve. The inquiry process has made clear that those outside of government service delivery, especially consumers, must be involved in the design of the system.

The Committee's conclusions reiterate a number of the issues the Greens have identified since the reforms were announced. In particular, the Greens have noted the inadequacy of funding for community based mental health services and called for increased funding for this important health area and a universal dental scheme. The inadequate response to mental and dental health reform issues is noted in submissions by The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance, Catholic Health Australia, the AMA, SARRAH and the Consumers Health Forum of Australia.

The following comments by the Committee are strongly endorsed by the Australian Greens:

- *Leadership on mental health was promised by the Commonwealth but what has emerged with the announced reforms is a small, incremental change to the system which will do very little to address inequity in access to services and decrease unmet need for mental health services.*
- *The Committee notes the comments by Professor Patrick McGorry who pointed to the excellent evidence-based programs which are available in this country that, if provided with adequate funding could have a tremendous, positive impact for those Australians with mental illness. In particular, expanded funding for the Headspace and EPPIC programs would see many more young people access services.*
- *The Committee also notes that there is overwhelming evidence that the benefits of providing increased access for young people far outweigh the additional cost to the health budget. The reduction of disability, the improvement in survival rates, the decrease in use of services and improved outcomes point to the high cost effectiveness of early intervention programs.*

*Professor McGorry stated that the costs are three times as much over an eight-year period if a person goes through the normal late intervention system.<sup>1</sup>*

- *The Committee considers that the Commonwealth has not delivered on its promise of reform of mental health services. Rather, the rhetoric continues and inadequate levels of mental health services remain.*

In addition the Committee's conclusions on aged care reiterate issues the Greens have long championed.

*1.0 The provision of care for Australia's ageing population poses significant challenges. The Government's proposed reforms do not address those challenges. They have been formulated before the Productivity Commission has completed its inquiry. The Productivity Commission is not due to report until December 2010.*

*1.1 In the meantime, the aged care sector is still underfunded and still lacking in certainty about capital funding to ensure that new beds are actually constructed and maintained. The complex funding arrangements remain.*

*1.2 It is doubtful that the measures to address the issue of long stay older patients will in fact see older people move out of public hospitals. To do so, there needs to be beds for them to go to and more importantly, staff to look after them.*

*Given that the Government is to redirect \$276.4 million funding over three years from high-care residential aged care beds to the states and territories to provide 'similar levels of care' for LSOP in public hospitals, this seems unlikely any time soon.*

**Senator Rachel Siewert**

**Senator for Western Australia**

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1 Professor P McGorry, *Committee Hansard*, 8.6.10, p. 12.