

Moowooga Street Fact Sheet

INTRODUCTION

The Cairns Integrated Mental Health Program is currently developing a range of services that aim to help people with mental illness make a more successful recovery after being unwell.

One part of this overall program is the provision of some places for transitional accommodation in the Cairns community.

This will be provided in a normal house environment in a community setting. It is proposed that a property, previously operated as a Bed & Breakfast in Moowooga Street, Earlville, be considered for this purpose. An application for 'a material change of use' for the property is currently before the Cairns City Council.

The transitional accommodation house is planned to provide a supported residence where people may stay for short periods (up to about six weeks), in a setting where there is trained support staff available 24-hours a day. The staff will be there to maintain a stable, supportive residential environment, and to provide a level of assistance with day-to-day activities.

Other than the presence of the support staff, the house is intended to remain as a normal residential home.

Q. Who will be staying in the house?

A. It is intended that people may stay between two and eight weeks in the house. They will be people whose conditions have stabilised enough for them to be living in the community, but who may for a variety of everyday reasons, need some extra support to make the transition back into their normal life.

For example, someone who may have lost a job and a relationship due to depression will be helped access work opportunities and to make some meaningful social connections to enhance their recovery.

The following types of people would NOT be considered suitable for the Moowooga Street residence:

- Someone who committed a crime while mentally ill (these people are transferred to secure facilities in Townsville and Brisbane)
- A person who is considered at risk of committing suicide.

Q. Should people who stay in this residence really be in hospital because they are unwell with mental illness?

A. No. People staying at the proposed residence would otherwise be living in the community. Each person will have been assessed by psychiatrists and other experienced clinical staff as being well enough to live in the community. Assessments and reassessments will continue regularly while people stay at the Moowooga Street residence.

Q. Where would these people be otherwise?

A. They would be staying in Cairns suburbs in everyday homes with friends and family, or other short-term accommodation like backpackers and B&Bs.

Research has shown that sometimes people benefit from extra support to make the transition from being unwell to being fully back into life.

Mental illness is actually common in our society (one-in five people may experience it), and by far the large majority of people live successfully in the community.

Q. Is this a 'Mental Health Facility' in my suburb?

A. No. The proposal is more akin to respite houses we have in our community now for other groups of people who need assistance to reorient their lives (e.g. women's respite homes, respite care places for aged people or people with disabilities, etc). Many of these exist peacefully and successfully (and largely invisibly) in residential settings throughout Cairns.

Queensland Health will do everything possible to provide accurate, realistic information about the proposed operations and to be available and open to your input and suggestions.

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Q. Will this be run as a clinical facility?

A. No. Planning is still being finalised, but the intention is that people living there will have a high level of independence and will be on a planned program to return to their normal homes. Residents will receive in-home support to ensure that things go smoothly in the house, but no hospital-style clinical services.

The clinical support and treatment available to people staying in the residence will be the same as for anyone who has left hospital and may be living at home and who benefits from ongoing follow-up.

Q. Will this place be 'supervised'? Will Queensland Health be there if there are problems?

A. Yes. The Moowooga Street property is planned primarily as a residential home with 24 hours a day, in-home support from workers trained to interact with people recovering from mental illness.

They will also have access to one of the best resourced, in-home rehabilitation teams in Queensland Health. This team will provide them with regular assessments and any additional care they may need. Much of this will be provided by off-site appointments or home-visits. This is somewhat similar to the 'Blue Nurses' model, with which you may be familiar.

As a safeguard, it is also intended to provide 24-hour on-call medical and clinical back-up to this residential home. Experience in other places with similar residential facilities has shown this is rarely needed.

Q. What will it look like? What will be its public profile?

A. Queensland Health proposes that the property will retain its current street appearance and it will not be signed in any obvious way.

From a neighbourhood perspective, the use of the Moowooga Street property is to be normal and discreet. Many existing features retained from its use as a B&B are appropriate for its proposed use, for example, there are off-street parking areas for residents and two linked houses on the site already.

Q. Are there any modifications planned for the site?

A. No major structural changes are planned, but there may be additional landscaping to enhance the privacy of residents and neighbours. The proposed residential facility will look like a well-maintained large house (which it is now).

There will be some refurbishment of the building and minor improvements that should contribute positively to the quality and amenity of the street. Cairns City Council may require other modifications as a result of their planning process.

Q. Will my property values be affected?

A. This is an understandable concern. This type of residential home is operated successfully for people recovering mental illness in many other parts of Australia. Generally, the experience has been that property values have not been significantly affected.

Organisations operating these houses have become responsible members of a community, who maintain and manage properties very well and operate them with appropriate respect for the privacy and amenity of the neighbourhood. This is also our aim for the Moowooga Street proposal.

Where property values may have been temporarily affected, there has been significant levels of negative publicity, often based on misconception, fear or misunderstanding - not by the reality of a residential home's operation.

Even in these cases, once the residential home started operating and people saw the minimal impact it had, property values returned to normal levels.