

Mental health services in Australia
Submission for Senate enquiry into mental health in Australia

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Mental health services are given about 7% of the total health budget to deal with 20% of the burden of disease. The result is that services are stretched to breaking point and so are often crisis driven. Rehabilitation services are developing waiting lists, leaving people in no-man's land, discharged from hospital, but without adequate care.

Statistics say that people suffering from one mental illness, schizophrenia, have an 80% unemployment rate. Many are homeless or existing, but not really living, in Supported Residential Services. This does not need to happen and should not be allowed to happen in a developed country.

Services need to move from just keeping people alive, to really encouraging and eliciting recovery. Recovery involves a person having:

- An understanding of her/his illness and an ability to deal with it. This requires psychoeducation for each person in understanding her/his illness and the warning signs of its reemergence. To provide this, services need to be funded to have the time and expertise to deliver education to each and every person.
- An understanding of the medications or treatments (s)he has to take and how to monitor their usage. This also requires psychoeducation, not just dispensing medicines in a routine and impersonal manner.
- Accommodation. People with mental illness often live in Supported Residential Services, or are homeless. Accommodation is the right of each person. That accommodation needs to be stable, secure and affordable. People providing SRS services should be adequately trained and resourced to care for those with a mental illness. Other services should be available and promoted for residents in SRS's. The

community should not lose sight of the goal of most people, with or without mental illness, to own their own home.

- Education. People with mental illness should be allowed to fulfil the same aspirations as every other citizen. This involves developing the skills to build a career. This requires mentoring and support to return to and be successful in study.
- Employment. People with mental illness as noted, are often unemployed. Specialist disability employment services need to be better funded so that each person with an illness can be supported to return to a level of employment that is sustainable, worthwhile and enjoyable.
- Recreation. People need funds and skills for recreation. The low rate of the disability support pension means that people often find it hard to become involved. Clubs and recreational providers often need education to change perceptions of mental illness and welcome people with mental illness.
- Stable income. People with a mental illness often do not have an income that allows them full participation in our society.

While current services meet some of these needs and are often very creative in providing needs, they are under-resourced. The result is that people with a mental illness are deprived their basic human rights and often discriminated against by members of the community. The OECD recommends that countries spend 16% of their health budget on mental health. It is a worrying part of our national psyche that we do not adequately support people who are mentally unwell. We need to change if we are to become a more mature and caring society that values all people, regardless of their abilities, disabilities or needs.