

Ian Holland
Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

18 April 2005

Dear Mr Holland,

I am writing to convey two major concerns to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health. The first is the lack of funding made available to mental health organisations from all levels of government. The second concern is the over-representation of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system.

I believe more funding is required for education programmes at all levels of society. Such education reforms, unfortunately, must also extend to professionals who already think they “know everything” there is to know. My particular concerns are with Depression and Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder.

There are still many doctors, other health care professionals, educators and others in positions of power who deny the existence of such problems. When a federal parliamentarian says in the media that people with Depression should “just get over it and get on with their lives”, it shows the appalling lack of understanding of mental health in the community as a whole. Without proper education of people who come in contact with people with mental health problems, particularly when they are young, mental health in Australia will continue to plague the community in a negative way that is not necessary.

The *SANE Mental Health Report 2004: 'Dare to Care'* states that Australia spends less than 8% of its national Health Budget on mental health. The same report asserts that comparable OECD countries spend upward of 12% of their health budgets on mental health. This is of particular concern for Queenslanders because according to the *National Mental Health Report 2004*, Queensland spends the less per capita on mental health than any other Australian state or territory.

Both the level of funding and the frameworks in which funding is made available to mental health organisations are inadequate. A significantly increased investment is required, particularly in housing and supported accommodation for people with mental illness. Additionally, more needs to be done to progress the aims of the National Mental Health Strategy with regard to moving toward a community-based system of care (including increased outreach services, psycho-social rehabilitation, residential support and services provided by non-government organisations).

The unavailability of community-based and non-government health and human services has resulted in many people remaining untreated, homeless and at great risk of offending or coming to the attention of police. As a result, Australian prisons seem to have become catchment areas for people with mental illness. This is unacceptable – mental illness is not against the law.

With appropriate support in community settings, rehabilitation and recovery is often possible for people with mental illness. However, the expansion of community-based and non-government mental health services will be required to achieve this goal.

Yours faithfully,

Margaret Burton