

25 April 2005

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

## SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

### BUDGET

I strongly urge the Federal Government to increase its spending on Mental Health. As I understand it, the current spending is 7% of the total health budget and this is far from sufficient. At the very minimum, this spending should be doubled to 14% of the total health budget within the next twelve months. I believe the funding should then be further increased over three years until it represents the actual demand for Mental Health services which I believe is about 20%.

What is the basis for my concern about funding for the Mental Health area? My brother has suffered from Schizophrenia since he was in his early twenties. You will no doubt hear many times that it would be far preferable to have some illness that is physically observable. If you have a broken arm, there is no question that you will be provided with treatment to repair the broken arm.

### CRISIS CARE

One area in need of increased availability is that of Crisis Care. My brother's last stay in hospital was in 2000. My parents, one of my sisters and myself had to stay with him while he was in an acute episode waiting for several hours for the Crisis Assessment Team. He was hallucinating and extremely agitated. He went out for a few hours and we didn't know if he would be safe. This was a similar pattern to other times he has had an episode. There is either a shortage of staff to attend to him or a shortage of hospital beds.

### SUPPORT FOR THE CARERS

The families of those with Mental Illness are the ones providing the care for them most of the time. They do this without training or expertise in the area. They need help. Availability of support, training and respite is essential. I would find it far easier listening to a stranger talk about their hallucinations than my own brother. The one thing families are expert in is knowing when their family member with a mental illness is in need of hospitalization.

## EMPLOYMENT

The greatest thing which has happened to my brother is that he has been employed part time for the past three years. He had been unemployed for close to thirty years and the few attempts which had been made to get him into the workforce had failed. They had all been attempts to get him to work full-time which he found too demanding. He usually lasted at these for one to three weeks. The Salvation Army employment program eased him back into a routine of part-time work starting with only a few hours two days per week. He was able to stay in the program where he was learning some new skills in factory work for over twelve. He then was able to move into a part time job in a supermarket again starting with a few hours a couple of days a week. He now works five or more hours four days per week. The greatest thing is that his health has never been so good as it is now. Therefore, I strongly support such employment programs. These should be available for all people with a Mental Illness and the Employment Officers who conduct these should be specially trained to provide realistic assistance.