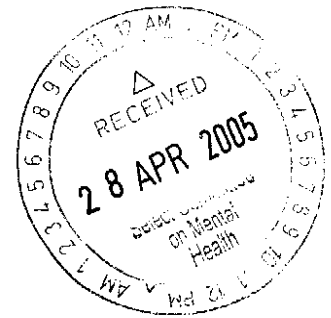


Ian Holland
Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Mental Health
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



26 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.

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.

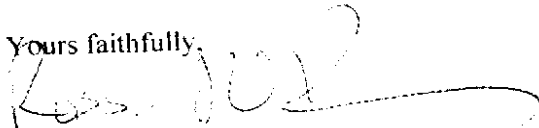
With appropriate support in community settings, rehabilitation and recovery is often possible for people with mental illness. However, the expansion of community-based and non-government mental health services will be required to achieve this goal.

In regards to appropriate support in community settings I would like to draw your attention to a current proposed project in Cairns. It is called the Residential Rehabilitation Service and is currently being developed through a working party comprising of Cairns Integrated Mental Health Services Staff and an alliance of NGO's. Although the proposal and the current commitment to funding by the Qld Health Dpt appears generous on paper, the process of engaging and valuing the views of these NGO's and the local Consumer Advisory Group is far from adequate. Qld Health here in Cairns appears to pay lip service to their input and are progressively isolating themselves from any relationship of trust and respect. Partnership and 'Ownership' by the community of the Mental Health service is deteriorating rapidly.

And finally I'd like to express with frustration and dissatisfaction in how the Qld Consumer Advisory Group (QCAG) was disregarded and eventually disbanded mid 2004. Qld Health has talked of further consultations 'early 2005' to propose an alternative model. As this has yet to occur again Qld Health is eroding any good will it may have had amongst the local Consumer Advisory Groups.

It saddens me to see how other States such as Victoria are able to move forward in Partnership with NGO's and Consumer Groups and yet Qld seems to lack the ability to successfully engage, respect and honestly work with the community sector.

Yours faithfully,



Ross O'Donovan
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Cairns
4870