

SENATE MENTAL HEALTH

INQUIRY

May 9, 2005

Thank you for allowing me this submission into your very important inquiry.

I have been involved in mental health since the early 70's after a high number of admissions to various mental health institutions.

I have been involved with various consumer mental health group, such as, CAPIC (Citizens of Psychiatric Injustice and Coercion), a founding member of the VMIAC, (Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council), GROW, AMHCN Australian Mental Health Consumer Network, Townsville Consumer Advisory Group and various Government organizations, since then I have been employed by Queensland Health as a consumer consultant.

In addition to this I have been heavily involved in a number of conferences including TheMHS (The Mental Health Services Conference) since 1989.

I am also a carer of two boys who have ADD.

My objectives is to improve the services for consumers and carers whilst in hospital and within the community, my current observations are that although there is much goodwill been mooted for Mental Health Services throughout Australia, The services particularly in community services (Government run) are at their lowest ebb in many parts of Australia in particular rural and remote areas.

The Non Government Sector whilst coping with low budgets does supply excellent services in many areas.

There are many improvements in line with the National Mental Health policy, I find that in many cases the improvements are only tokenistic to comply with the standards, as for real consumer involvement they are usually regulated to part time consumer consultant who, in many cases) are system compliant or hand picked in the knowledge that they are compliant with the services. (how can a service expand and deliver a good services with compliant feedback?).

In 1994 the implementation of CAGS (consumer advisory groups) was a large step forward in involving consumers in the shaping of policies and involvement in decision-making. The CAG's however disempowered by the current government in 1998 when. The then health minister dismantled the National CAG in favour of an advisory group that had very little consumer focus.

Since then many states have followed the Federal lead and have either dismantled or seriously weakened the effect of consumer CAG's.

Another area in which present Mental Health services and governments are neglecting is prevention. Except for STAR in Victoria and a small number of NGO's, prevention appears to be in the '*to hard basket.*' Also these prevention groups are mainly focused on child and adolescent groups. It seems to me, that most governments and services sadly neglect adult prevention

Areas of support when a person leaves hospital (especially in rural and remote areas) are almost non-existent in many areas through out Australia.

The support for drop-in centers and consumer run services appears to be frowned upon or totally ignored despite much supporting evidence from overseas as to the huge benefit such organizations have shown.

Although many people who receive Mental Health services (both private and Government) move on there are also many that need supporting services and empowerment from these services, while in reality many of these services tend to disempower the individual and as a result they become institutionalized.

Sorry for the brevity of this submission but time at present does prevent a more detailed submission. If you require more detail please feel free to contact me.

If possible would you be able to keep this submission anonymous, as I am a government employee.

Thank you.
Yours Sincerely