

23 March 2006



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



Dear Senators,

Senate enquiry to Mental Health Services

We would like to bring to your attention our concerns regarding mental health services for people with intellectual disability. People with intellectual disability comprise nearly 3% of the Australian population and suffer poor health. For those with more severe disabilities life expectancy can be about 20 years less than for other Australians, comparable to that for Indigenous Australians.

As reflected by your inquiry, mental health and mental health services are important issues for Australia. People with intellectual disability suffer higher levels of mental illness than other Australians. Barriers to accessing psychiatric and other health services compound this. Mental and physical health cannot be separated. Mental illness undoubtedly contributes to poorer physical health and lower life expectancy because it may prevent the provision of adequate physical health care. People with mental illness and intellectual disability have poorer access to the full range of medical services including specialist medical services. Some aspects of treatment, for example the use of psychotropic drugs may also worsen physical illness.

The Fellowship of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians comprises consultants and specialists across adult medicine, paediatrics and child health, public health medicine, rehabilitation medicine, occupational medicine, addiction medicine, palliative medicine, sexual health medicine and community child health. Many aspects of specialist patient care involve the provision of associated mental health care, at the secondary care level.

Throughout Australia our consultant and specialist physicians and paediatricians experience an acute shortage of mental health services available to people with intellectual disabilities.

We suggest that the Senate committee should consider including the matter of mental health services for people with intellectual disability within the scope of the enquiry. The provision of these services clearly falls within the terms of reference for the committee, as it was appointed "to inquire into and report...on the provision of mental health services in Australia, with particular reference to....the special needs of groups such as children, adolescents, the

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aged, Indigenous Australians, the socially and geographically isolated and of people with complex and co-morbid conditions and drug and alcohol dependence."

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Carnie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr John Carnie
President
Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Sewell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

A/Prof Jill Sewell, AM
President
The Royal Australasian College
of Physicians