



Mental Health Council of Australia Slams Inconsistencies and Inappropriateness in Media Reporting of People with Mental Illness

The Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), the peak, national, non-government organisation established to represent and promote the interests of the Australian mental health sector, today supported the statement by the Queensland Alliance of Mental Illness and Psychiatric Disability Groups in response to the reporting of people with mental illness and the recent events relating to patients in Queensland psychiatric facilities.

The Chief Executive Officer of the MHCA, Mr Des Graham, stated:

'The reporting of recent events in the media is in direct contradiction to the Commonwealth's Media Monitoring Project which aims to assist the media in the reporting and portrayal of suicide and mental illness. Of particular concern to the MHCA is the language media use to portray events relating to mental illness. Such language stigmatises mental illness and perpetuates discrimination through sensationalising events.'

'Research clearly illustrates that people with mental illness are no more violent than any other person in the community. Media reports emphasising the violent actions of people with mental illness discount this fact.'

Media reports portraying people with mental illness as "violent killers", as reported in Queensland papers recently, has the potential to raise fear in the community and further encourage community stigmatisation and discrimination of people with mental illness— issues which the *National Mental Health Strategy* is trying to address. Providing care in the community facilitates reintegration back into the community, and provides people greater opportunities to access mental health services, which is of particular importance given that in 1997, only 38% of people with mental illness accessed health services.

The Chair of the MHCA, Mr John McGrath, added:

'The events of the past week occurring in Queensland raises the urgent need for consistency in mental health legislation across States and Territories. Consideration must be given to uniformed national mental health legislation that allows people with mental illness to be provided treatment in the least restrictive environment within their social and geographical areas, which may include, where necessary, inter-State/Territory transfers.'