

media release

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AUSTRALIA

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National push for inquiry into Australia's mental health services

Organisations across the country today join mental health charity SANE Australia calling for a comprehensive Senate inquiry into a mental health system in 'crisis'.

A wide range of organisations including ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Services), the Mental Health Council of Australia and the Australian Drug Foundation, support SANE's push for a national solution.

Democrat's Senator, Lyn Allison, also supports the call. 'In 1993, the HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) found that services for people with mental illness were grossly inadequate. Almost a decade later, little real progress appears to have been made and it's time to explore a national approach,' she said.

'Four states, including NSW, have now announced state-wide inquiries into mental health services in recognition that the system is failing too many people affected by mental illness,' said SANE's Executive Director, Barbara Hocking. 'Such inquiries, although a step in the right direction, are sadly only a 'band-aid' solution to a much broader problem that only an inquiry at a Federal level can truly address.'

Despite a 30% increase in funding during the 1990s, Australia still spends significantly less funding on psychiatric services than many other OECD countries. Comparable countries such as New Zealand and the UK spend around 12% of their health budget while Australia spends only 6.5%. Research estimates that an alarming 62% of Australians with a mental disorder are not receiving treatment.

Ms Hocking said: 'Rapid deinstitutionalisation during the 1980s and 1990s – when people were shifted from care in psychiatric hospitals to the community – is now seen as the era when governments 'delegated' responsibility to poorly-funded charities and community support organisations. While we strongly support community care, it must be adequately resourced to provide effective treatments and support programs.'

Access to, and orders to accept treatment, differ widely from one state or territory to another with eight different Mental Health Acts across the country – often leading to tragic situations.

Family and other carers are not routinely provided with education and support. There are few programs to address growing numbers of people who experience both a drug problem and a mental illness.

For people with a psychiatric disability there is no Australia-wide system of rehabilitation, leaving 80% receiving no support to recover. Accessing a disability allowance is made difficult with assessment forms designed for those with a constant disability rather than those with an episodic illness whose level of disability fluctuates.

SANE Australia
a national charity
helping people affected
by mental illness

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Inquiry supporters include:

- ACOSS
- ACROD
(National industry association for disability services)
- Australian Drug Foundation
- Colony 47 Incorporated
- RANZCP
(Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists)
- Transcultural Mental Health Centre
- Mental Health Council of Australia
- Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association