

Media Release

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More power to the consumer; NSW mental health services respond to feedback from people experiencing mental illness

A new report being presented to the NSW Minister for Mental Health today states that consumers of inpatient and community mental health services in NSW want more time with doctors and staff, more information about their own mental illness, and more choice about the treatments they receive in care.

The report, *Action and Change in NSW Mental Health Services*, provides an overview of the most comprehensive Australian project ever conducted to gather the perceptions and experiences of people who have used the public mental health system; with the aim of working with service providers to improve it.

“We’ve worked closely with 104 mental health service providers in the NSW public system and gathered feedback from over 3500 people who’ve used those mental health services, to identify what needs to be improved from a consumers’ perspective.” said Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc. CEO, Dr Peri O’Shea.

The report details the findings from the first six months of consultation with people who have experienced an acute mental illness and received services from inpatient or community mental health services in the public system.

“What is particularly ground-breaking about this project is that consumers and staff are now working together to develop practical solutions, thus establishing a collaborative culture within the mental health system,” said Dr O’Shea.

“We’ve seen some really positive results, for example, the feedback about a particular service provider highlighted that the consumers didn’t understand their rights and responsibilities.

“The consumers and staff at that facility have formed a working party to create a booklet articulating what to expect from the service provider, as well as their rights and responsibilities.

“This booklet is now offered to all consumers upon admission to inpatient and community services in that region. Simple things like this can make the whole experience less daunting, particularly for an inpatient.

“The process has also improved relationships between staff and consumers and we’ve witnessed a building of trust and mutual respect,” said Dr O’Shea.

People who are consumers of mental health services have also complimented service providers on things like: the level of respect that staff show them, the sense of hope that staff convey, the feeling of safety within the hospital, their information being kept private and confidential, and the opportunity for family and carers to be involved.

The Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc. (CAG) was commissioned by NSW Health to establish a project that would improve inpatient and community mental health services across the state.

The project, named Mental Health Consumer Perceptions and Experiences of Services (MH-CoPES) is a response to the review of mental health services in 2001, which exposed that mental health services were only being measured in terms of their clinical outcomes, and not from the perspectives of the people using these services.

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