

NSW Consumer Advisory
Group - Mental Health Inc

Contact: Karen Oakley

Executive Officer
NSW Consumer Advisory Group - Mental Health Inc
501/80 William Street
Sydney NSW 2000

02 9332 0200 Phone

02 9332 0299 Fax

0400 519 624 Mobile

koakley@nswcag.org.au Email



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Break Down the Barriers: Deliver on Anti Stigma Programs

The NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc (NSW CAG) calls on federal parties to make a commitment to delivering on a national anti stigma program.

The NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc. (NSW CAG), the peak body representing people who use mental health services in NSW, calls on the federal parties to make election commitments to implementing a national anti-stigma campaign to challenge negative images of people living with mental illness.

NSW CAG Executive Officer, Karen Oakley said “Stigma and discrimination are still a reality for many people who experience a mental illness. People who experience a mental illness have been crying out for a national program similar to that conducted in New Zealand that seeks to break down attitudes and systems that result in discrimination. Such a comprehensive program is a critical component to dispelling the myths and fears surrounding mental illness that prevent true social inclusion.”

People who experience a mental illness often relate stories to NSW CAG about how stigma and discrimination have prevented them from being employed, being included

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in social activities with colleagues, neighbours or the community, securing accommodation, accessing health services, and having their views and opinions heard and taken seriously in a range of settings. The New Zealand anti-stigma program, Like Minds Like Mine, is a broad program encompassing media campaigns, educational strategies aimed at mental health staff, people in training to enter the health field, education, and other related professions, employers, journalists, and the general public. It also involves examination and amendment of national policies that inhibit equal participation and may lead to discrimination. Evaluations of this program demonstrate that it has resulted in a reduction in negative attitudes about mental illness and in discriminatory practices.

“Such anti stigma initiatives surrounding all mental illnesses are essential if we are going to be a socially inclusive nation, and commitments must be made to the delivery of a mental illness anti-stigma program in Australia” said Ms Oakley.

“Stigma, discrimination and a lack of understanding about mental illness also prevent people from seeking help when they need it. A comprehensive national anti-stigma and educational program therefore not only works to achieve greater social inclusion of people who experience a mental illness, but also to enhance accessing of services at an early stage, thus working towards two of the national priorities for mental health” Ms Oakley said.

More information about the *Like Minds Like Mine* campaign can be found at www.likeminds.org.nz and <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/like-minds-like-mine-national-plan-200713>.

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FOR ENQUIRES OR FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Karen Oakley

Executive Officer

NSW Consumer Advisory Group - Mental Health Inc (NSW CAG)

Phone 02 9332 0200

Mobile 0400 519 624

Fax 02 9332 0299

Email koakley@nswcag.org.au
www.nswcag.org.au

ABOUT THE NSW CONSUMER ADVISORY GROUP – MENTAL HEALTH INC

The NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc (NSW CAG) is the statewide, incorporated, non-government peak body that represents people who use mental health services (mental health consumers) to all levels of the NSW Government. In this way NSW CAG acts as a bridge between mental health consumers and the government.

An essential part of our role is to encourage mental health consumers to provide input into decision making at all levels concerning mental health service provision.

NSW CAG is funded by the Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Office, NSW Department of Health.

WHO IS A MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER?

A mental health consumer is a person who has used mental health services. NSW CAG also hears from people who do not have this experience, but who have the experience of mental illness.