



NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc
ABN 82 549 537 349

Wednesday 30th September 2009

Premier Nathan Rees
GPO Box 5341,
SYDNEY NSW 2001
Email thepremier@www.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Rees,

Re: NSW State Plan 2009 Review: Consultation Draft

The NSW Consumer Advisory Group – Mental Health Inc. (NSW CAG) is the peak, independent, state-wide organisation representing the views of mental health consumers at a policy level, working to achieve and support systemic change. Our vision is for all mental health consumers to experience fair access to quality services that reflect their needs.

NSW CAG is pleased to have the opportunity to review and comment on the NSW Government's State Plan 2009 Review. We are pleased to see some continuing commitment to the needs of mental health consumers. NSW CAG is concerned, however, that the Priority F2 targets for community participation and employment for people with disabilities are no longer part of the NSW State's plan, and Priority F3 has been downscaled to an immeasurable target. NSW CAG strongly recommends the reinstatement of all Priority F2 targets, and amendments to Priority F3 so that the success of the Government's targets can be adequately measured.

Please do not hesitate to contact me regarding any queries you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Oakley
Executive Officer

CC: Mr. David McGrath, Director, Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Programs
The Hon. Barbara Perry, Minister assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health)
Ms. Regina Osten, A/Manager Prevention and Community Partnerships

Basis of this advice

NSW CAG exists to ensure that policy makers hear from the perspectives of mental health consumers across NSW. The basis of this advice derives from information obtained through our core work, including regular interaction and consultation with people who use mental health services across NSW including:

- Over 900 people on our Network who are accessible via the internet;
- Face to face consultations with consumers in each Area Health Service across NSW; and
- Our knowledge base derived from consulting with consumers of mental health services in NSW over the last 17 years.

General Comments

Firstly, it is unclear whether the *NSW State Plan 2009 Review* (herein referred to as the 2009 'Review') is a 'redraft', a 'review', or an entirely new plan from the original document, '*A new direction for NSW: State Plan (2006)*' (herein referred to as the 'State Plan'). As a result, the Review's reporting against the State Plan has not been as transparent as was expected, with many of the targets relating to mental health and disabilities discarded (Priority F2) or downscaled (Priority F3). In NSW CAG's view, the explanations for abandoning priorities set out in the original plan (see 2009 Review pg 1, 3) fail to explain why the NSW Government is neglecting its commitments to closing the gap between people with mental illness and other disabilities, and the general community and ensuring social inclusion. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) estimates that the annual cost of mental illness in Australia is around \$20 billion which includes the cost of lost productivity and labour force participation. An investment in reducing the burden of mental illness, as identified in the State Plan priorities, has the potential to decrease the impacts and costs in the long term, in addition to having enormous personal and social benefits for people whose lives are affected by mental illness.

Priority F2: Increased employment and community participation for people with disabilities

Priority F2 Targets in the NSW State Plan (2007)

- Close the gap in the unemployment rate between people with a disability and the overall community by 50 per cent by 2016. This is equivalent to around 6,000 jobs
- Increase the out of home participation rate of people with a severe or profound disability to at least 85 per cent.

NSW CAG is concerned about the abandonment of Priority F2 targets in the 2009 Review. Mental health consumers and people with disabilities are among the most socially and economically marginalised people in our community, and social exclusion often leads to deterioration in physical health and increased stress and anxiety, causing an increase in hospitalisation rates.

For many people living with mental illness and disabilities, the opportunity to engage in employment and the community is vital to their mental health and wellbeing, and their recovery journey. It is therefore essential that consumers are provided with effective assistance to establish and re-establish their career pathways, to reduce exclusion from mainstream society, and to increase their prospects of meaningful social and economic participation.

“Work is one of the most important defining aspects of who we are, our sense of meaning, value and belonging. The therapeutic value of work cannot be overstated”

(Let’s get to work: A National Mental Health Employment Strategy for Australia 2007)

Further, the targets addressed in priority F2 are consistent with national initiatives such as the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy (2009).

NSW CAG strongly recommends that the Government reinstate its commitment to community participation and employment of people with disabilities, so that people living with mental illness can achieve similar aspirations and goals as those held by the rest of the community.

Priority F3: Improved outcomes in mental health

Priority F3 Targets in the NSW State Plan (2007)

- Reduce readmissions within 28 days to the same facility
- Increase the percentage of people with a mental illness aged 15-64 who are employed to 34 per cent by 2016
- Increase the community participation rates of people with a mental illness by 40 per cent by 2016

Priority F3 Targets in the NSW State Plan Review (2009)

- Reduce admissions within 28 days to the same facility
- Increase the rate of community follow-up within 7 days from a NSW public mental health unit
- Increase the employment of public mental health service clients

Reducing admissions

NSW CAG strongly supports the priority F3 target to reduce admissions within 28 days to the same facility, and we are pleased to see that this has remained a focus for the 2009 Review. However, this target can not be achieved without providing strong support in the community for consumers and their quest for recovery. The success of this target will depend on the reinstatement of the other targets for this priority area.

Employment and community participation rates

Firstly, as noted, NSW CAG is unsure why the targets for increasing employment and community participation rates have been removed from the 2009 Review. Considerable effort has gone into the development of the Activity and Participation Questionnaire (APQ6) by the APQ6 Steering Committee, which was designed to measure the participation in work, study and social activity of people with mental illness. As a member of the APQ6 Steering Committee, NSW CAG recognises the value of this tool in providing an effective measurement of employment and participation, and can see no reason why this target should be abandoned.

We are not only concerned that the targets have been discarded, but that the scope has now changed from people with mental illness broadly, to those accessing public mental health services. The State Plan should be looking to adopt a holistic approach which includes all consumers who experience mental illness accessing services (including those by the non-government and private sector) who wish to engage in employment. The new targets are also absent of a measurable target. For these reasons, NSW CAG strongly recommends that the original target be reinstated to include all mental health consumers and that a measurable target be provided as part of the plan.

The NSW Government's commitment to community participation and employment for people with mental illness and disabilities needs to be addressed in the 2009 Review.

Summary of recommendations

Priority F2 Targets:

Reinstate the following targets:

- Close the gap in the unemployment rate between people with a disability and the overall community by 50 per cent by 2016. This is equivalent to around 6,000 jobs
- Increase the out of home participation rate of people with a severe or profound disability to at least 85 per cent.

Priority F3 Targets:

Reinstate the following targets:

- Increase the percentage of people with a mental illness aged 15-64 who are employed to 34 per cent by 2016
- Increase the community participation rates of people with a mental illness by 40 per cent by 2016

Reword the 2009 Review target on community follow-up to read the following:

- Increase the rate of community follow-up within 7 days from a NSW public mental health unit by a minimum of 50 per cent.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) 'Mental Health', *Australian Social Trends*, Cat. no. 4102.0, viewed 9th September 2009, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30March%202009>

Australian Government (2009) *National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy*, Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Mental Health Council of Australia (2007) *Let's get to work: A National Mental health Employment Strategy for Australia 2007*, November 2007, MHCA.