



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

Inquiry into Disability Care and Support

Easy English
version

17 May 2010

A better way of helping people with a disability



The Australian Government wants to help people who are living with a disability.



To do this, we need your ideas on how we can make things better.



Please answer the questions on the following pages.

If you don't have enough room on these pages, you can write your answers on the back of the page or on another piece of paper.

We have written the questions in a way that is easy to read.



Some of the words are written in **blue**. We tell you what these words mean.

Are you using any **services** to help with your disability? There are a lot of different services available to help people with housing, activities, transport, work or doing things at home.

This submission is writing on behalf of CAN (Mental Health) Inc. an independent, not for profit, consumer run organisation for people living with mental illness.

CAN (Mental Health) Inc. provide peer support services for people living with mental illness (mental health consumers) these being:

- 🚦 Hospital to Home service – providing practical assistance and peer support within the first 6 weeks of discharge from 2 Sydney metropolitan psychiatric inpatient units.
- 🚦 Phone Connections service – a national telephone peer support line for mental health consumers 4 evenings per week i.e. Friday & Saturday and Monday & Thursday evenings.

CAN (Mental Health) also manages and runs Pitane Recovery Centre which provides a range of recovery activities within the general community i.e. Art Alive is hosted at a local Arts Centre; lunches; fortnightly walking group etc.

Would you like more help to find a job? Or do you already have a job?

Many mental health consumers express the desire to find paid employment. CAN (Mental Health) Inc. employs mental health consumers i.e. as peer support workers, administration workers, website administration, cleaner and management positions.

Would you like more help to take part in activities, such as sports, being with other people or doing new things?

In many respects our Hospital to Home service can and does at times assist mental health consumers to access community activities, including sporting activities. On a monthly basis a Saturday Culture Club is hosted in partnership with PRA (Psychiatric

Rehabilitation Australia) – a very unique partnership which sees 2 NGO's each providing a staff member to run this weekend social activity. Such is the success of this activity that quite a number of other mental health NGO's in the area also attend and participate.

The Hospital to Home service also host a monthly Hi Network morning teas for mental health consumers in the Liverpool and Campbelltown areas.

Pitane Recovery Centre as already stated provides a range of community activities for consumers from the Northern Beaches and across Sydney to attend.

Are there other kinds of help that you need?

In many respects mental health consumers require a broad range of supports to assist them undertake their recovery journeys of choice. The Community Connections peer support services (i.e. Hospital to Home and Phone Connections) are such services which are funded by the Department of Health & Ageing, Suicide Prevention Branch to provide peer support services for mental health consumers.

Peer support services are the wave of the future, working in partnership with public mental health services i.e. Sydney South West Area Mental Health Services, and having strong partnerships and linkages with a range of mental health non-government organisations.

If you could change any service right now, what would you do?

What mental health consumers would like changed is the lack of accessibility to clinical mental health services when they are becoming unwell rather than have to wait until they are so sick they require acute mental health services. It is like winning the lotto to receive community mental health services.

There needs to be more investment by government/s into funding community services both public mental health services and for non-government organisations such as CAN (Mental Health) Inc. Our organisation has proved that by delivering cost effective peer support services this can indeed make a huge difference to mental health consumers' lives and their recovery journeys of choice.

It would be fantastic if government/s ceased the thinking of "Australia is the land of projects" and actually fund innovative services such as CAN (Mental Health) Inc. delivers on an ongoing basis subject to relevant performance indicators being met – rather than simply fund for 23 months (as is the current funding round) and leave the organisation and its staff wondering whether any further funding will be available.



Do you have some ideas about what your life will be like when you get older? What sort of services do you think you will need then?

Many senior mental health consumers either access our Hospital to Home service and/or Phone Connections service. They are an important group of citizens where in our experience there are not really a lot of activities and/or services available to them which meet their needs.

The Phone Connections service especially talks to quite a number of senior mental health consumers, especially those who reside in rural areas who really find it difficult to access either services or activities they are interested in and which assists them with their recovery journeys of choice.

Do you think that things could be fairer? If so, what would you change?

Yes. Please fund innovative mental health consumer organisations to deliver a broad range of recovery activities, peer support services for mental health consumers. CAN (Mental Health) Inc. has no ongoing funding and there is an expectation that the Philanthropic sector will fund such services, which in many respects they do not as they view mental health as a health issue and therefore should be funded by government/s.

CAN (Mental Health) Inc. also has no Secretariat funding, therefore is limited in what can be undertaken.

If a person with a disability living on the DSP obtains works and also resides in public housing – 3 government departments take a slice of the gross wage – the ATO (the legitimate department via tax), Centrelink decrease the pension based on the gross wage/s and public housing increase the rent based on the gross wage/s. Therefore a person can be worse off undertaking paid work than if they sat at home and didn't work at all. This really does need to change. Centrelink and public housing should be basing either the payment or the rental on the "nett" wage/s rather than the "gross" wage/s for a person living with a disability.

This would then bring people with disabilities receiving the DSP who undertake paid work in line with people in the general community who do not have a disability. The only government department people in the general community really have to deal with is the ATO in relation to their wage/s and they also have the opportunity to rent property based on their nett income rather than their gross income.



Would you like more **choices** about the services you use? Having choices means that you can pick what you want.

Many mental health consumers discuss having a broad range of choices which meets their individual needs. From being involved in the decision making processes when they are unwell and being asked and/or informed about their clinical treatment regimes to what type of community services are available to them not only when they are discharged from hospital but also when they are well.

What is becoming apparent is that the NGO funding is so small, that it is like existing on a shoestring budget that some mental health NGO's are creating eligibility criteria which can exclude a person because they are considered "too sick" to attend the rehabilitation service being provided (even though the consumer is not in hospital).

If so, what other choices do you want?

Many consumers express the desire that their full rights as Australian citizens are upheld especially their right to access services when they require them ie.

- + Community clinical services
- + Community acute services
- + Inpatient services
- + Mental Health Non-Government Organisations
- + Recovery activities of their choice
- + Peer Support services (as delivered by CAN (Mental Health))
- + Employment opportunities in the general community
- + Access to user friendly employment services to prepare for work roles.
- + Education and Training courses in the community, including training as Peer Support Workers
- + The right to access advocacy services of their choice to assist them to advocate on their own behalf.
- + Private mental health services, including private psychiatrists who bulk bill.
- + Access to community psychologists to assist them with their recovery journeys of choice and live with mental illness.
- + Access to other Allied Health Professionals on an as need basis.
- + Access to affordable GPs who bulk bill.

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- ✚ Centrelink to be more user-friendly and support consumers' efforts to obtain and maintain paid work.
 - ✚ Access to affordable housing including public and community housing.
 - ✚ Any as many activities and services accessed by the general community that individual consumers consider they either would like to access or participate in.

Please tell us any other ideas you have about how we can make disability services better.

- ✚ Ensuring there is a major injection into mental health and fully funding mental health NGO's instead of expecting them to exist on shoe string budgets.
- ✚ By establishing a National Mental Health Commission as like New Zealand and Canada. (and have a position for a mental health consumer commissioner.) We understand that WA is establishing the very first Mental Health Commissioner for their State. This needs to be national.
- ✚ The National Standards for Mental Health Services needs to be legislation that this is the minimum standard of care, treatment and services – like the national Disability Service Standards. It is appalling in 2010 mental health does not have a legislated set of national standards for which mental health services must operate and be accountable to.

How to send us your ideas



You can write to us.



You can send us your answers in the mail.

Our address is:

**Disability Care and Support
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601**



You can send us your answers by email.

Our email address is:

disability-support@pc.gov.au



You can phone us if you want to ask us any questions.

Call us on:

02 6240 3221



June

Please give us your answers by 30 June 2010.

We would like to put your ideas on our website for others to read. Do you want us to put your ideas on our website?

Please tick yes or no.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Thank you for your ideas!

This paper benefited from the interpretation services of the Information Access Group (Victoria).