



Speaking Notes

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Venue Strangers Dining Room, NSW Parliament
Delivery 02 June 2016

The Duty of Kindness - Schizophrenia Fellowship of New South Wales

Acknowledgements

- Distinguished guests

- Ladies and gentlemen

- I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Gadigal and Eora peoples, and pay my respect to their Elders—past and present.

- I would also like to thank the Schizophrenia Fellowship of New South Wales for inviting me to speak today.

Introduction

- I hope you're all surviving the longest election campaign in almost half a century.
- Elections are always a reminder of the gulf that exists between good intentions and good outcomes.
- At times like this much is said about what might be—about what should be—but how often are those words backed up by actions?
- I'm not just speaking of our political leaders, either.
- As a society, we rarely bridge that gulf between good intentions and good outcomes.
- We rarely come to grips with the kind of people we are—and the kinds of people we want to become.
- We rarely come to grips with the nation we are—and the nation we want to become.

- All too often, we fail to put our words into action.

- And, frankly, words are just not enough.

- They just cannot fully convey how it feels ...
 - To fall in love,
 - Live the lives we live,
 - Lose a loved one.

- They cannot.

- But—when backed up with intent—words are powerful.

- Take ‘community’ for example.

- Here is a word that has been worn thin by misuse.

- We probably wouldn't have a deficit by the end of this election campaign if Treasury received a dollar every time a candidate uttered the word 'community' in a speech, an interview or a media release.
- Despite that misuse, community still contains powerful meaning.
- I learned the true meaning of community when I was a teenager.
- My parents separated while I was studying for the Higher School Certificate.
- It was a disaster.
- We had never been financially well off.
- In fact, my family had long been plagued by financial insecurity.
- But I had experienced nothing like the catastrophe of that separation.

- Financially, we hit rock bottom.
- Socially, we felt isolated.
- Emotionally, my mother fell into a state of despair and hopelessness.
- And then there was a knock on the door.
- It was Canon Houston, the minister at Christ Church in Gosford.
- Canon Houston came inside and just talked to us.
- There was no judgement and almost no religion—just gentle and quiet reassurance that was later backed up with practical support.
- I'll never forget that visit.

- Nor will I forget the people who helped us ...
 - ... people like, Norman, our neighbour who used to jump over the fence and help me mow the lawn.

- And that's why I will never forget the true meaning of words that bind people together—words like community.

- For me, community is all about those unprompted, unsolicited and often unheralded acts of kindness that preserve our individual and collective dignity, ...

- ... and are the essence of our humanity.

- The point I am making is this:
 - Community is about the duty of kindness.

- And, ladies and gentlemen, it is time we extended that duty to the one-in-five Australians who experience mental illness every year—and it's time we took collective and individual responsibility to do so.

- And that's what I want to talk to you about today.

'Potential is Squandered'

- Now, I'm not going to hit you over the head with statistics.

- I'm not going to lecture you on future policy positions.

- And I'm not going to get political—there's enough of that around at present.

- Instead, I want to talk about the ways things are—and talk about the ways things could be.

- Anyone with a passing interest in the mental health system knows that, currently, we are facing a crisis—and that crisis is deepening.

- To be an Australian citizen with a mental illness often means being treated as a second-class citizen.
- Australians living with a mental illness find it harder to get a job, harder to find a place to live and harder to live the kind of life their fellow citizens take for granted.
- They are often refused treatment until their health reaches a crisis point.
- They are discriminated against in the community and in the workplace.
- And they are served by a system that—despite the best intentions of governments of all persuasions—is fragmented and dysfunctional.
- In short, as a society we are failing Australians with mental illness.
- Given that almost half of us personally experience mental illness during our lifetime, this failure just doesn't make sense.

- It is a complex issue and, no doubt, the reasons for our failure are equally complex.
- Whatever the case, the consequences of that failure are almost too unbearable to contemplate.
- For instance, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics suicide has now overtaken the road toll as the leading cause of death for men and women aged under 45.
- Think about that.
- The road toll is the cause of immense trauma across the country—touching every city, suburb and town ...
- ... but the traumas caused by suicide are even greater.
- So colleagues, addressing the failings of the mental health system must be a national priority.

- I want to make it excruciatingly clear that this responsibility cannot be laid at the feet of governments alone.
- It's our collective failure—driven by the wrong mindsets, by stop-start approaches to reform, by poorly executed change and by stigma and discrimination.
- We must confront these shortcomings honestly.
- We must be willing to take the time to do the painstaking work to make the system better.
- Because, no matter how complex the systemic failure, no matter how complicated the architecture of reform might be, that failure is personal.
- It is personal for the four people who died by suicide this morning, and will be personal for the four people who will die by suicide this afternoon.

- Individually and collectively, we have failed to extend that duty of kindness that we share to those of us who are living with mental illness.

- We have failed to set a target for the kind of mental health outcomes we are prepared to accept as a community and a nation.

- We have failed to turn our words into action.

- If we were committed to more than words ...
 - We would be constantly assessing the system to find out what works and what doesn't,
 - We would be focused on prevention and recovery and participation, and
 - We would be investing in research.

- If we were committed we would be setting meaningful targets like ...
 - Reducing the national suicide rate by at least 50 per cent over the next decade;

- Bridging the life expectancy gap for people with a mental illness—who currently die 20 years earlier than the general population;
 - And significantly increase the employment rate of people with a mental illness.
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- Help people stay healthy, live a good life and get a job—surely those are targets worth aiming for.
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- The Federal Government’s response to the review of mental health is an important step.
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- We need to keep taking those important steps—strengthening our collective resolve to create a truly world-class 21st century system.
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- Don’t get me wrong: I know people within the existing system do wonderful work.
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- Carers ... Clinicians ... Community workers ... Peer workers ... countless individuals make that personal connection with people experiencing mental illness—and make a difference.

- But, too often, they achieve successes despite the system.
- And those successes are too often due to extraordinary individual efforts.
- That's the wrong mindset.
- We don't want it to be a heroic effort for a person with a mental illness or their carers to be receiving the help they need to improve their lives—we want it to be routine.
- But that cannot occur while consumers, carers and workers are captive to a system that works against their individual and collective efforts.
- We have to do better.
- And I have to ask, are those good people the exceptions to the rule?

- Are those good people outnumbered by what is becoming a systemic crisis of mental illness in this country?
- Unfortunately, the answer has to be yes.
- The answer has to be yes because there are too many stories of disastrous encounters with the mental health system to ignore.
- There is a need for a mindset change.
- After all, as too many people in this room know from personal experience, when the system fails, people suffer.
- Lives are ruined. Lives are lost. Potential is squandered.

‘Mental Reform is in the National Interest’

- I’d like to dwell on that last point—the squandering of potential—for a minute.
- Mental illness does not discriminate.

- It strikes Australians in every walk of life.

- It doesn't care what you do for a living ... where you work ... or what your gender is.

- Mental illness is bipartisan, too. It doesn't choose between political parties.

- The point I am making is that for mental illness every part of the community needs to take action—including the business community.

- Besides being the Chair of Mental Health Australia I am also the Chief Executive of the Business Council of Australia.

- The BCA is a community organisation.

- After all, what is business? It is ...
 - A community of 10 million people who work,

- A community of 5 million shareholders,
 - And every single person who has superannuation in the country.
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- Essentially, our job is to help ensure Australia remains one of the most prosperous places in the world.
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- And although our focus is on the business side of that equation, we understand the connection between the community and the economy ...
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- ... that you need a strong economy to support the community, and a strong community to drive the economy.
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- This is delivered by helping every single Australian reach their potential.
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- The importance of that connection is driven home when you realise the size and scope of the social, technological and economic challenges we face as a country.
 - Social challenges such as our ageing population.

- Technological challenges such as the creation of an economy that is increasingly global, digital and mobile.
- Economic challenges such as the emergence of a skills-driven services economy—as well as the creation of an Asian middle class of more than 3 billion people that will increasingly drive global markets.
- With that in mind, with so much at stake for us all, this much is clear:
 - We must unlock the potential of every single Australian. And we cannot afford to waste the talent of its citizens with a mental illness.
- And, yet, we do.
- I promised I wouldn't hit you over the head with statistics, but there are a few points that need to be aired.

- First point: Australia has one of the lowest employment participation rates for people with mental illness of all the nations that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

- Second point: Mental illness among men aged between 12 and 25 costs the Australian economy more than \$3 billion a year.

- Third point: Mental illness costs Australia around \$20 billion a year.

- By any measure, mental health reform is in the national interest.

- We cannot afford to keep squandering the potential of many of our citizens.

- And one of the ways that we can begin to achieve that end—and meet our duty of kindness—is to embrace the true meaning of another word worn thin by misuse:
 - Innovation.

- It's a word that, at times, is thrown around too freely—but, like community, contains powerful meaning.

- In essence, innovation is about people. And potential.

- It is about giving people the opportunity to improve—learning from the experience—and helping people keep improving.

- It's about finding ...
 - New ways of working,
 - New ways of living,
 - New ways of being.

- The good news is that governments are increasingly embracing innovation.

- For instance, we can all take pride in New South Wales' Black Dog Institute partnership with Amazon Web Services to create a twitter analysis tool that measures our national mood in real time.

- Similarly, it is encouraging that Facebook is developing algorithms to identify suicide risk amongst its customers.

- It's also encouraging that the Commonwealth is investing in a Digital Gateway in response to the National Mental Health Commission's review of programs and services.
- But we cannot stop there—as a nation we have to go much further.
- We must use digital disruption to transform the way every part of the system works—from professionals to consumers to carers.
- That's why there is an urgent need to be more innovative and ambitious in mental health.
- After all, here is an area that has been at the mercy of the best intentions and the worst executions for the best part of four decades.
- I'm not going to go over old territory and relay the sorry story of inadequate planning and funding that has plagued the mental health system since deinstitutionalisation, but I would ask a question:

- Digital disruption is revolutionising every other part of our community and economy—why can't we use it to revolutionise mental health?
- Why can't we use technology to make services meet the individual needs of individual people?

- Individualised or personalised service is, without a doubt, the next big thing in the corporate world ... it should be in the mental health system as well.

- Innovation of course if more than technology.

- So, if we are to transform mental health in Australia we should adopt an innovation mindset.

- That mindset ...
 - Would put the consumer at the centre of the system;
 - Would focus on the language of potential—rather than deficit;
 - Would use technology—including Big Data—to give consumers and carers more control over their lives;

- Would give people who work in the system the flexibility to actually make the system work;
 - Would accept trial and experimentation as a cornerstone of securing improvement;
 - Would set the targets for improved mental health outcomes that we want to see as a nation—rather than targets that are easy to achieve;
 - We would ruthlessly and honestly measure performance;
 - And—by codesigning services with consumers and carers—we would remove the pain points from the consumer and carer journey.
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- If the future of mental health just becomes the refinement of programs without a fundamental mindset shift we will make little progress.

 - Of course, we should do policy work.

 - Of course we should implement the government's plan.

 - But for lasting change, for real change, ...

- We need to adopt that innovation mindset,
 - We need to uphold that duty of kindness,
 - We need to, in short, help people reach their potential.
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- It can be done. It must be done.

Conclusion

- Before I finish, I'd like to come back to the duty of kindness.

- Mental Health Australia has been very fortunate to work with actor and director Steve Bastoni.

- Steve has made a powerful short film called The Gift that conveys more powerfully than words ever could the importance of human connection.

- Let's watch The Gift.

For further information contact:

Business Council of Australia

www.bca.com.au

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) brings together the chief executives of 100 of Australia's leading companies. For almost 30 years, the BCA has provided a unique forum for some of Australia's most experienced corporate leaders to contribute to public policy reform that affects business and the community as a whole.

Our vision is for Australia to be the best place in the world in which to live, learn, work and do business.