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Mental Health Peak – It's about capacity, not disability

Mental Health Australia has called for a complete rethink of the way the welfare system treats people with psychosocial disabilities associated with mental illness.

Responding to the Interim Report from the current Review of Australia's Welfare System, Mental Health Australia has rejected the Review's proposal that the Disability Support Pension be provided only to people who have 'a permanent disability with no capacity to work'.

"Why would we re-build a system that is based on people continuously proving how sick they are, rather than a system focussed on assisting people to fully realise their potential?" Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan said.

"Forcing people to demonstrate that their disability is 'permanent', effectively that they will never recover, undermines hope, optimism and opportunity. A welfare system built on the idea of recovery will yield significant economic benefits to the whole economy."

"Even where people are living with permanent conditions, capacity to participate is likely to vary significantly over time."

In addition, Mental Health Australia has called for the Review to reconsider its position on carers. "Caring is work, it's that simple. But at the moment people who care for someone with mental illness frequently find it difficult or impossible to receive carer payments. This can be because their caring role is not constant – reflecting the episodic nature of mental illness. This needs to change."

Mental Health Australia's submission also calls for the Federal Government to abandon their plan to deny Newstart or Youth Allowance payments for six months to people under 30 living with mental illness, noting the detrimental effect this would have on the wellbeing of people already experiencing a significant health issue.

"We need policies that are based on the best evidence, and the evidence suggests that if people are left without support the struggle to find social connection and employment becomes harder," Mr Quinlan said.

"If mutual obligation relies on arbitrary, punitive measures, then the evidence suggests we are likely to see many people with mental illness slide into a worse situation – with predictable consequences for their health. Not only is this unfair, but it will also cost government more in the long run. We should instead seek to build the capacity of individuals to participate economically and socially in a positive way."



At the same time as the Welfare Review is taking place, the National Mental Health Commission is conducting a Review of Existing Mental Health Programs and Services.

“We need to see a close alignment between the welfare system and the services that people with mental illness and carers need to lead a contributing life.”

Read our submission [here](#).

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