



MEDIA RELEASE

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Desperate need for community mental health beds

David Crosbie, CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), told the *7.30 Report* last night that greater investment is needed in community-based treatment options for people with a mental illness.

Speaking about how best under resourced services can prevent suicide, Mr Crosbie said emergency departments around the country are spilling over with patients seeking treatment for mental illnesses.

Mr Crosbie pointed to statistics showing that out of over 75,000 people who sought mental health treatment in NSW hospital emergency departments in 2006, only 22,000 were admitted.

"We could create another 1,000 acute hospital beds tomorrow and they'd be full within a month and it would still be really difficult for people to still get access to acute mental health beds," Mr Crosbie said.

"The latest research suggested over 40 per cent of people in acute mental health beds would not be there if we could discharge them to appropriate communally-based beds.

"The availability of mental health services in rural and remote regions is a real problem that we have yet to really address. Many of these kinds of communally-based bed options, though, don't require really expensive investment and can be done on a small scale, even in a suburban house. So I think we can provide options at a regional level that's going to be closer to where people live.

"The Commonwealth has made billion-dollar investments in mental health, but what's still missing are options to keep people at risk out of the hospital system.

"I think it's time that we seriously thought about a Commonwealth takeover of community-based treatment options for people with a mental illness. Because the kinds of services that we desperately need are currently largely a state responsibility and the states are saying they either don't have the resources or the capacity to provide the number of community-based treatment beds we need in this country," Mr Crosbie said.

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