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Report highlights level of stigma from health professionals

A study by the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) has revealed that the levels of stigma experienced by mental health consumers seeking treatment from mental health and other health professionals are similar to the levels of stigma reported in the general population.

Consumer and Carer Experiences of Stigma from Mental Health and Other Health Professionals identified the scope and nature of stigma experienced by mental health consumers seeking treatment from mental health and other health professionals. This revealing and groundbreaking research shows that the views held by health professionals providing mental health services may not differ to those of the wider community.

While it may seem unthinkable that health professionals would stigmatise Australians with a physical condition such as cancer or a heart condition, mental health consumers often encounter stigmatising attitudes from health professionals. This stigma is likely to have a profoundly negative effect on consumers, limiting treatment and recovery.

The Mental Health Council of Australia report shows the results of a quantitative and qualitative survey of stigma and discrimination as experienced by Australian mental health consumers who have sought help from health professionals and as it is perceived by their carers. The report finds that many consumers are subjected to stigmatising attitudes from various health professionals. Some of the key findings show that:

- across diagnostic categories, almost 29% of consumers reported that their treating health professional had shunned them;
- these figures rose to over 54% and 57% for consumers with post-traumatic stress disorder and borderline personality disorder respectively;
- over 34% of consumers had been advised by their health professional to lower their expectations for accomplishment in life; and
- over 44% of consumers agreed that health professionals treating them for a physical disorder behaved differently when they discovered their history of a mental illness.

As Kathleen Griffiths, the Director of Depression and Anxiety Consumer Research unit and the ANU said of this report: "This level of stigma is dangerous and unacceptable."

"The MHCA is calling on all health professions to examine their approach to mental illness and ensure people experiencing mental illness and their carers receive the same level of non-judgemental care and concern as people with any other health condition," said Frank Quinlan, CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia.

"The attitudes of health care providers can have a direct impact on the recovery and resilience of people experiencing mental illness and these results suggest we have a long way to go," Mr Quinlan said.

For a copy of *Consumer and Carer Experiences of Stigma from Mental Health and Other Health Professionals* go to www.mhca.org.au or contact the MHCA.

Media Contact: Simon Tatz on 0402 613 745 or 02 – 6285 3100

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