



MEDIA RELEASE

16 April 2010

Roxon sets the mental health challenge

Health Minister Roxon's announcement that the Commonwealth plans to take a more active role in community mental health is welcomed by the Mental Health Council of Australia.

Last night on *Lateline*, Minister Roxon acknowledged that people with a mental health disorder are often falling through the gaps of current health services. She accepted that there is real work to be done in mental health reform, that it is important work and that it is part of her agenda. Perhaps most importantly, the Minister committed to putting a proposal on the table at Monday's COAG meeting for the Federal government to take full responsibility for community mental health services.

According to David Crosbie, CEO of the MHCA, these statements provide evidence that the Federal government has been listening to the experience of mental health consumers, carers and those who advocate for more substantive mental health reform. "The Minister has highlighted how the current system leads to people with a mental health disorder presenting to hospital in situations when better community mental health could have made a difference. These statements suggest the Minister understands what is actually happening to mental health consumers and their carers."

Mr Crosbie also noted the commitment of the Minister to *'put our own house in order'* – a reference to the need to improve current Commonwealth funded mental health programs. He supported calls for State and Territory leaders to not only work with the Commonwealth on mental health, but to ensure there was genuine community and expert input into any implementation of proposed changes to mental health programs and services.

"The key questions now are: whether the States and Territories will support proposals for mental health reform, how the increased role of the Commonwealth in community mental health is to be implemented, how we can ensure States and Territories maintain their current commitments in these areas, and how to make sure any changes result in real benefits to mental health consumers and carers? In answering these questions, we are keen to not only see a mental health agreement emerge on Monday, but also an implementation strategy that actively involves experts like Patrick McGorry and groups like the MHCA. We do not want the implementation of any proposed new mental health agreement left entirely to bureaucrats and others who have consistently demonstrated a strong interest in increasing resources to current services rather than engaging in real mental health reform."

The MHCA has consistently argued for fundamental changes to mental health services across Australia including: increased accountability for mental health programs and services, greater investment in key areas such as youth mental health services, early intervention, sub acute care, better linkage with community support programs, increased roles for consumers and their carers, more investment in health promotion and prevention programs, and increased funding for research.

We are eager to see to what degree the key elements of mental health reform are included in any announcement on mental health emerging from Monday's COAG meeting. We are not expecting that the Federal Government will immediately 'fix' mental health, but we do want to see real investment in mental health reform. We look forward to further announcements from the Health Minister and her colleagues, and to working to make mental health reform part of the broader health reform agenda.

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