

Media Release

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Caring about Housing

Increasing housing pressures on ageing carers and their families has led to the formation of a new group to raise awareness of their plight to increase the availability of public housing and appropriately supported accommodation options for people with serious mental illness.

The *Mental Health Carers Housing Group*, supported by Carers SA, consists of a core group of eight members, who are all caring for a family member with mental illness. The group is seeking more members to apply pressure on governments over public housing with adequate support.

In 2005/06 less than half of the people with self-reported mental illness who applied were granted public housing. Additionally, a survey of inpatients in mental health beds across the country showed that around 50 per cent of patients were still in hospital because they had no home to go to.

Rosemary Warmington, CEO of Carers SA, points out that the current situation not only puts the mentally ill under housing stress, but also makes caring more difficult for the parents, especially as they grow older and their own health starts to deteriorate.

"Many ageing carers have cared for and supported their adult children with a mental illness for many years, but with the carers' own advancing years they are struggling to continue to carry the extra load. The *Mental Health Carers Housing Group* is now calling for action to improve the current situation," Ms Warmington said.

One of the group's founding members, Pat Sutton, 60, has cared for her two adult sons with husband Keith, 63, since 1992. Currently one son lives on his own close to the family home, receiving intensive support from his parents. The other is living temporarily in a community rehabilitation unit, with the prospect of returning to live with his brother. But their future is uncertain.

"My husband and I are finding it increasingly difficult to give our sons the support they need, and we are concerned about who will look after them once our health starts to deteriorate and we can no longer care for them," Ms Sutton said.

Another founding member, Bob Burke, 68, and his wife, 64, are caring for their daughter, who suffers from schizo-affective disorder. She has been living in a supported residential facility in the past and is now ready to live independently, but affordable housing with sufficient support is hardly available.

"People who live with and are supported by their family, as was the case with our daughter, are hidden cases slipping through the gaps of the system. Because the family cares for them they are considered to be less urgent cases, and it seems are even less likely to receive the support and housing they need to achieve recovery," said Mr Burke.

The *Mental Health Carers Housing Group* has developed an action plan outlining the steps needed to improve the situation, both for people with mental illness as well as the families caring for them. This plan includes:

- A Housing and Support Plan for People with Mental Illness that responds to the various levels of needs of people with mental illness.
- Coordination of suitable and appropriate housing options with the varying levels of ongoing support required to meet the needs of people with serious mental illness and associated psychiatric disability to enable them to live well in the community.



- A targeted assistance program to make private rental or other housing options affordable for people with mental illness.
- Ongoing input by Carers and Consumers to develop, monitor and report on the effectiveness of the Housing and Support Plan for People with Mental Illness.

“Housing and Support Services are critical for people with mental illness to get well, stay well and build a good life in the community. Despite a range of programs providing housing and support, it is becoming increasingly obvious there is an acute shortage of both,” said Ms Warmington.

“This action plan, supported by the State and Commonwealth Government, would ease the housing stress many South Australians with mental illness are experiencing, and assure ageing carers that their children are receiving the care they need.”

If you are caring for your daughter or son with mental illness, or you know someone who does, contact Carers SA on 1800 815 549 to join the *Mental Health Carers Housing Group* and support their call for better housing solutions.

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