



## *Caring About Housing*

### **Housing and Support Needs of People with a Mental Illness Position Paper of the Mental Health Carers Housing Group**

The Commonwealth's substantial investment in mental health is being undermined by the increasing failure to provide enough of the right **Housing** and the right **Support Services** for every person with mental illness. When people with mental illness live in housing stress they live with a greater risk of not achieving recovery.

The number of housing programs and support services are not keeping pace with social policy and community expectation that people with mental illness benefit from and have the right to live as independently as possible in the community. Housing and Support Services are critical building blocks for people with mental illness to get well, stay well and build a good life in the community.

People with mental illness live in all tenures and housing types but for periods of their lives have special needs. Also, for them housing is a journey that needs support as they move from varying levels of care to greater independence. Good housing programs give Carers hope.

Despite a range of programs that provide housing and support for people with mental illness and psychiatric disability, it is becoming increasingly obvious there is an acute shortage of both.

This acute shortage has developed over many years as the Commonwealth has failed to put in place an appropriate housing policy and investment strategy to address problems and build more effective Commonwealth-State responses.

A snapshot survey of inpatients in mental health beds across the country showed that around 50% of patients were still in hospital because they had no suitable place to be discharged to.

Community housing providers in South Australia have long waiting lists of people with mental illness. Three of the larger agencies have over 500 people with mental illness on their list. Two of these agencies have closed their waiting lists.

There are over 24,000 people on the waiting list for public housing in South Australia of whom over 2,000 self-reported mental illness (as at 30 June 2006). During 2005/6 around 7,700 people applied for public housing of whom around 10% self-reported mental illness. Less than half of the people self-reporting mental illness (331) received public housing during that year.

There are approximately 1,000 people in supported residential facilities and boarding house type accommodation with varying degrees of complexity and need. Many of

these people are living without any hope of moving to better accommodation, achieving greater independence or reaching a higher quality of life.

People who live with their Carers continue to “fall through the gaps” of services and supports, because of the fact that they are receiving support from their families and, therefore, are not considered as “urgent” cases. This is a huge concern to aged Carers who fear what will happen to their loved ones when they are no longer around to provide the essential support they need.

The dramatic trends in reduced housing affordability will continue to reduce the range of options accessible to people already disadvantaged in the market.

Increasing concern from consumers and Carers regarding lack of access to housing is being reported as a major issue across the country, eg via the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia survey.

The available evidence suggests that a minimum of 3,000 people in SA with mental illness are currently in severe housing stress.

## What do we need?

1. A **‘Housing and Support Plan for People with Mental Illness’** that responds to the urgent basic needs for greatly increased access to safe, secure, affordable housing with supports (where necessary). This needs to occur both at the State and Commonwealth level including via more specifically targeted and resourced approaches to agreements on housing, disability, mental health and welfare.
2. Core components of the solution will require **increased access to social housing** - public and community housing - and a realistic allocation to a specifically targeted assistance program to make private rental or other housing options affordable for people with mental illness/psychiatric disability .
3. Coordination, targeting and tailoring of support programs (using evidence-based practices such as psychosocial rehabilitation) that assist people with mental illness to live in their community: retain suitable housing options that provide ongoing support to people with an ongoing psychiatric disability to manage their wellbeing in the community.
4. Consumer and Carer input into the development, monitoring and reporting framework regarding the effectiveness of the **‘Housing and Support Plan for People with Mental Illness’**.

This Position Paper has been prepared by the Mental Health Carers Housing Group, a working group of Carers SA.



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