

SACOSS supports call for continuing mental health reform

The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) acknowledges the importance of the Mental Health Coalition of SA's open letter published in today's *Advertiser*.

"SACOSS wholeheartedly supports the MHCSA's call for a balanced and effective mental health system. In particular a system that emphasises supporting most people with mental illness where they live – in the community" said SACOSS Executive Director Ross Womersley.

"While there has been much recent progress in the development of new models of care, and the renovation or replacement of facilities, SACOSS believes that there is a continuing need to provide more support to people with mental illness actually in the community where they live" said Womersley.

"Mental disorders comprise thirteen per cent of the total burden of disease and injury in Australia. This is the third highest, behind only cancers and cardiovascular disease."

"In reforming current service practices, South Australia has adopted long overdue recovery and social inclusion approaches that aim to support people to live well in the community despite the disabling impacts of mental illness."

"Whichever government takes the reins after 20 March, it is critical that they commit to appropriate and adequate investment in community supports for people with mental illness." said Womersley.

"SACOSS agrees that key priorities in particular include early intervention initiatives and affordable, suitable housing."

"All evidence, locally and internationally, points to the effectiveness, both socially and economically, of early intervention programs in any field" said Womersley. "Early intervention in mental health reduces reliance on acute and crisis services, enhances an individual's capacity to actively contribute to community, delivers service to people in their community, supports families and carers, and makes good economic sense."

"As the MHCSA's own report details, around 80% of South Australians with mental illness are on a low, fixed income: disability support or Newstart benefit. Affordable, safe and stable housing is essential to recovering from mental illness and maintaining mental health. The growing housing affordability crisis requires specific focus on support initiatives for people already disadvantaged in the housing market".

"SACOSS supports the Mental Health Coalition's call for more effort from government in building strong supports in the community for people with mental illness."