

Monday, 16 November 2020

Productivity Commission Inquiry supports major reform for mental health consumers

The National Mental Health Consumer Alliance welcomes the recommendation from the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health for lived experience representation at a national level.

Irene Gallagher, CEO of BEING - Mental Health Consumers (NSW) stated, "this is a significant step forward for the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance, and a big win for our consumer/survivor movement who have been advocating for a national consumer peak body."

In an enormous step forward, the report states "...the rights of consumers, in conjunction with the individuality of the consumer experiences, create a case for there being a peak body for consumers at a national level that is separate to the representation of carers.

While the report acknowledged there are already various state and national organisations which advocate for mental health consumers and carers, it specifically noted the importance of these voices being acknowledged and heard as separate.

The report goes on, "While consumers and carers often share similar experiences, this is not always the case. And even where they have similar experiences, consumers and carers bring different perspectives and perceptions to those experiences."

The report states: "The recognised rights of consumers, in conjunction with the individuality of the consumer experiences, create a case for there being a peak body for consumers at a national level that is separate to the representation of carers."

Australia's adoption of the *UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability* in 2006 has supported efforts for consumers to be able exercise autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices on an equal basis with others. Australia's National Standards for Mental Health Services recognise the right for consumers to involve or not involve carers and to independently determine who represents their view.

"The need for a national peak consumer organisation has been called for by the consumer movement for many years, and the recognition of the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance in the report is significant progress toward this goal" said Shauna Gaebler, CEO of Consumers of Mental Health WA.

The role of the Productivity Commission was to provide independent research and advice to the Government on economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians, the Productivity Commission's inquiry report into Mental Health was publicly released today. The final report was handed to the Australian Government on 30 June 2020 and publicly released on 16 November 2020.

The report discusses some key influences on people's mental health, examines the effect of mental health on people's ability to participate and prosper in the community and workplace, and implications more generally for our economy and productivity.



It should be noted there is an existing national peak organisation focused solely on the needs of carers (Mental Health Carers Australia), however there has not been a government supported or funded national mental health consumer peak organisation. The National Mental Health Consumer Alliance operates solely as a result of the generosity of each member organisation to fund its activities.

Ellie Hodges, Executive Director of LELAN in SA says, "The establishment of a national peak consumer body must be led by, with and for consumers in each state, and the state mental health consumer peaks are key to bringing this lens together through the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance".

The National Mental Health Consumer Alliance does welcome the suggestion to allocate 5-year funding to the state peak organisations and will assist in the longer term richness of advocacy that the current mental health consumer peaks currently do.

Media enquiries can be directed to Leonie Fraser, Marketing and Communications Officer on 1300 234 640 or leonie.fraser@being.org.au.

About the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance

After many years of discussion and at the request of consumers across Australia, in November 2019 a National Mental Health Consumer Alliance was formed between CoMHWA (Consumers of Mental Health WA), VMIAC (The Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council), BEING – Mental Health Consumers NSW, and South Australia Lived Experience Leadership and Advocacy Network (LELAN). Led and owned by these state peak bodies the National Mental Health Consumer Alliance was established to influence, lead and advocate on behalf of people who experience mental health issues. This media release has been formulated by BEING – Mental Health Consumers (NSW), CoMHWA (WA), LELAN (SA), and VMIAC (VIC).

