

# MENTAL HEALTH

Any caring community must provide support systems for vulnerable citizens. This is most important in an area like mental health. Mental illness doesn't just affect an individual, it affects family members, friends and ultimately it touches all of us.

Statistically, one in five people in the community will experience a mental illness at some stage of their lives. Mental illness is emerging alongside cancer and heart disease as one of the leading burdens of disease facing our community into the future.

ACT Labor understands the challenges ahead in ensuring that we are able to provide a responsive, caring and well-resourced mental health system. We understand that resources need to be shared between the public system and those non-government providers who do so much to care for individuals and support them to live independent and meaningful lives in the community.

Over the past four years we have committed to real engagement with consumers of mental health services and carers, established new services and have funded the non-government mental health sector at the highest rate in the country.

ACT Labor is committed to creating an innovative and consumer driven mental health system. To achieve this we know that it will require additional investment and that the reforms currently underway must be completed.

**Jon Stanhope**  
Chief Minister

**Katy Gallagher**  
Deputy Chief Minister and  
Minister for Health

### Our record

ACT Labor inherited a mental health system chronically underfunded that was letting our community down. We have responded with unprecedented investment and reform.

Spending on mental health has progressively increased under ACT Labor from \$27.4 million in 2001-02, to \$66.7 million. We have risen from one of the lowest per capita spenders under the previous Liberal Government to the second highest and rising.

We have:

- Increased mental health funding by 143% to \$66.7 million.
- Allocated \$37.6 million in capital funding for new adult mental health in-patient facilities at The Canberra Hospital, along with funding for the design of a Young Person's mental health unit.
- Allocated \$8.5 million in the latest budget to provide greater support for people with a mental illness
- Aimed to achieve 12% of the health budget to be spent on mental health by 2012
- Invested \$1.75 million recurrent to provide a new 24-hour step-up, step-down innovative model of mental health facilities for both adults and youth. The youth facility was the first of its kind in the country.
- Engaged with consumers of mental health services, carers and key stakeholders to review the *Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act*, reflecting the ACT's position as a human rights jurisdiction.
- Worked with key stakeholders to develop a Mental Health Services Plan, to set the future direction of mental health services, both in the government and non-government sectors.
- Ensured 80% of ACT mental health funds are spent in community-based government and non-government services, against the national average of 51%
- Invested in the mental health Non Government Organisation (NGO) sector. Funding to NGOs, as a percentage of total spending on mental health services in the ACT, has increased from 2.5% in 1992-93 to 13.0% in 2004-05. This is compared to the national average of 6.3%.
- Committed to real engagement with consumers and carers, with the ACT continuing to employ the highest level of consumer carer consultants employed per 1000 clinical staff.

### **Moving forward**

Improving services for people with a mental illness and their families and carers takes more than just additional money. It's about involving consumers of mental health services in decision making, about engaging with carers and family members and ensuring the system is responsive to our community's needs.

ACT Labor will provide an additional \$53.1 million over the next four years for increased community support, to provide additional services and to employ more specialist staff across the service system.

This funding will continue ACT Labor's policy of increasing our focus on early intervention, prevention and a greater role for community based services - an area where we are leading the country with the highest proportion of mental health funding allocated to mental health community services

The funding will also provide for the staffing of a number of new hospital-based services that provide the best environments and services for people suffering from acute phases of mental illness, and will add over 100 new mental health specialist doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to the system.

### **Better community based mental health services**

(\$14.544 million over four years)

Almost 30% of new funding will be allocated to supporting community-based services and will be allocated in consultation with consumers, carers and service providers to provide for the best possible integrated mental health services for our community. These services will be increasingly provided by community sector agencies supported by specialist clinicians. This funding will be split between Mental Health ACT services and community based services on a 50/50 basis.

A priority of this funding will be to action those areas of need already identified in the draft Mental Health Services Plan, particularly in the emerging area of community-based accommodation services.

This will include:

- The provision of community based residential and home based support options and graded support packages for consumers with high and complex needs.
- Establishing community based recovery and rehabilitation services. This would include the enhancement of supported accommodation services, particularly for persons with chronic and enduring mental illness, ranging from high level (offering 24 hour non-clinical on-site support) through to low level support (offering support to an individual residing within their own accommodation).
- Building on our innovative new youth and adult step-up/step-down facilities by commissioning a range of step-up/step-down services targeting identified high needs groups. These services will be run by community agencies with clinical outreach support from Mental Health ACT, and will target individuals with acute care needs who otherwise may require acute inpatient admission.

- The development of a community education and health promotion campaign aimed at normalising the experience of mental illness, and improving community awareness and understanding.
- Extending the scope of home based treatment and day treatment programs for those who require high level support during the course of an acute episode of illness, reducing the need for more invasive inpatient treatments.
- Increasing access to respite services through stronger links with community agencies to ensure that age-appropriate support is available to consumers of mental health services and their carers.
- Additional support for community agencies to expand the level of available services to deliver acute care, including fostering and supporting the development of peer-led services providing acute support options.
- The enhancement of crisis intervention services.
- Exploring the option of establishing specialist teams for identified groups at risk of falling through the cracks, such as those with dual disabilities, dual diagnoses, forensic mental health needs, transcultural needs, those with significant sensory deprivation and the homeless.

### **Mental health assessment unit**

(\$10.742 million over four years)

The Mental Health Assessment Unit (MHAU), to be operating in 2009—10, will be a specialised six-bed unit that provides for the quick transfer of mental health clients who present at the emergency department. With the MHAU, mental health clients will get fast access to specialised mental health clinicians who will be able to assess and treat acute symptoms in a more timely fashion.

Quick access to specialised mental health professionals is essential for people who present at hospital with major mental health symptoms. Timely access to care can reduce the length of the acute phase of an illness and reduce the deterioration in a person's condition.

### **A new mental health inpatient facility**

(\$10.423 million over four years)

The new 40-bed state-of-the-art mental health inpatient facility will be operational by early 2011. This funding will provide Mental Health ACT with the capacity to adequately staff and operate the new facility. The new facility will be purpose-built to provide a more appropriate, human rights-focused and safer environment for clients experiencing acute phases of their illness.

The care provided at the new facility will be fully integrated into the entire ACT mental health system to provide a continuum of care that includes step-up and step-down care, crisis intervention services and community based services.

### **A new secure adult mental health unit** (\$17.403 million)

This funding will provide for the running of a secure mental health facility from mid 2011 to meet the needs of forensic and non-forensic consumers of mental health services who require additional safeguards to ensure their safety and that of the community during a period of inpatient care.

### **Ministerial Council on Mental Health**

ACT Labor in Government has worked in partnership with carers, consumers and the non-government service sector to undertake unprecedented reform of our mental health sector. ACT Labor will continue this collaborative work by establishing a Ministerial Council on Mental Health to ensure consumers of mental health services, carers and the non-government sector are able to provide continuous advice to Government on mental health policy and services.

The Council will comprise consumers, carers and representatives of the non-government mental health sector, and will provide advice directly to the Minister on mental health.

This Council will advise on the completion of existing reform, including the review of the *Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act*, finalisation and implementation of the draft Mental Health Services Plan, and planning of new mental health facilities. Beyond this, this group will provide on-going advice on service reforms, mental health policy and legislative change, as well as monitoring the application of human rights and anti-discrimination provisions relevant to mental health consumers and carers.

This Council will also be enshrined in legislation, as part of the new Mental Health Act.

### **Charter of Rights for Consumers**

ACT Labor introduced Australia's first Human Rights Act to foster a culture of equality, tolerance and human rights in the ACT.

Complimenting this Act, and building on the work of the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network in developing Principles for a Mentally Healthy Community, ACT Labor will develop a Charter of Rights for Mental Health Consumers. We will work with key stakeholders, such as the Consumer Network, ACT Mental Health Community Coalition and the Human Rights Commission to develop this Charter and the new Ministerial Council on Mental Health.

This will build on ACT Labor's existing commitment to develop a Charter of Rights for Carers.