It's our birthday!

It is hard to believe that just two years ago the Mental Health Commission, the nation’s first, was established in Western Australia. This was a key step towards creating a modern, effective mental health system with individuals and their recovery at the centre of its focus.

For a long time mental health issues were a taboo subject, but to us silence is not acceptable. We are leading mental health reform and placing it at the forefront of the social reform agenda.

Establishment of the Commission puts WA among leading world nations in terms of the importance it places on mental health. Mental health is everybody’s business - no family, community or business is immune from the harmful consequences that mental distress and illness can cause.

Since it was formed, the Commission has played an important role in strengthening the voice of people with mental illness, as well as their families, carers, friends and the community; engaging them in the consultation process every step of the way. Our vision is for a mentally healthy WA where everyone works together – government, industry and the community – for the mental wellbeing of all.

In October 2011, the Premier Hon Colin Barnett MLC launched the State Government’s 10-year strategic policy Mental Health 2020: Making it personal and everybody’s business, which sets out three key directions to drive decisions relating to mental health policy, planning and funding. These directions include person centred supports and services, connected approaches and balanced investment. Under this new strategic direction, people with mental illness and those who love and care for them will be given more choice, flexibility and control of services they receive.

The Mental Health Commission has a dedicated budget of more than half a billion dollars to deliver mental health services and drive the mental health reform agenda in WA. Whilst not an exhaustive list, some important and relatively recent funding initiatives include:

- the State-wide Suicide Prevention Strategy - $13 million over four years
- recruitment and training of additional Lifeline WA telephone counsellors - $500,000
- suicide prevention in the Kimberley - $1.28 million
- assistance to 100 people for a successful transition from hospital inpatient care to living in the community - $25.18 million over four years
- 100 social housing homes for people with mental illness - $46.5 million
- two subacute (step-up/step-down) facilities to be built in Joondalup and Rockingham - $12.8 million
- sustainability funding for not-for-profit mental health service providers - $6 million
- recently established WA Association of Mental Health Consumers - $1.25 million over five years
- initiatives delivering improved services to children and young people in WA – $6.5 million.

In December the Minister for Mental Health launched the draft Mental Health Bill that was opened for public comment until 9 March. We received a number of submissions that are now being reviewed, and we hope the Bill will be introduced to Parliament in mid 2012.

The Commission has continued to develop strong partnerships with the Commonwealth agencies, such as Departments of Health and Ageing, Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to ensure better support for people with mental illness and to explore future initiatives for Western Australia. The Commission supports the national mental health agenda by working with the Commonwealth and other partners across Australia to develop a vision for longer term reform at the national level, prevent suicide and improve the mental health system.
While it is reassuring to look back and see how much has been achieved already, we know we are only at the beginning of this important journey. Our focus is on the future and the people who are relying on the mental health sector to collaborate and deliver better outcomes.

I am proud to be in a sector that values innovation, embraces reform and works together to enable a good life for all Western Australians. With the tabling of the Mental Health Bill in Parliament, focus on outcomes for people and service reform in the sector and individualised funding becoming a reality I look forward to the next year ahead, as I hope you are.

**Draft Mental Health Bill Consultations**

The Mental Health Commission has been running consultation forums in metropolitan and regional centres to ensure that people understand the proposed changes and are able to make informed comment. A range of stakeholders submitted comments in response to the draft Mental Health Bill and I would like to thank all those who made submissions. All submissions will be published on our [website](#) with authors’ permission. Organisations, not individuals, will be identified.

As a general practice, all proposed changes to the current Mental Health Act, contained in the proposed Bill, are directed towards increasing individual rights and protections, as well as increasing the role of families/carers.

**Putting the Public First: Partnering with the Community and Business to Deliver Outcomes**

The Mental Health Commission established and led the Mental Health Outcomes Working Group to address recommendations outlined in the Economic Audit Committee’s report *Putting the Public First: Partnering with the Community and Business to Deliver Outcomes*. The final report prepared by the group is now available on the Commission’s website.

The Working Group included representatives from community mental health sector organisations, State Government agencies and consumers and carers and sought to better understand performance monitoring and the concept of outcomes in mental health from a broad system wide perspective.

Key findings that emerged highlighted:

* the importance to stakeholders to maintain a focus on good practice e.g. process and inputs, as well as agency level and collective outcomes; and it reinforced that outcomes for individuals should drive the performance of all providers in the system.

* the need to discuss concepts with different groups to ensure there is a common understanding of priorities so that a wise investment is made in the development of a performance system that actually makes a difference in peoples lives.

* the importance of the Commission ensuring good practice and standards in services purchased and how these can translate into good outcomes for individuals, their families and the wider community.

To find out about the project and read the full report, please visit our [website](#).

**Supported Accommodation Program Evaluation**

The Commission has engaged external consultants Sankey Associates to evaluate the *Supported Accommodation Program* between February and June 2012.

The evaluation will involve nine service providers that provide on-site accommodation support for people with a severe and persistent mental illness; people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, in unsuitable accommodation or residing for long periods in inpatient units. The evaluation will look at the effectiveness of seven different service delivery models of transitional and longer term supported accommodation.
For the Commission, this is an opportunity to learn where adjustments might be needed, to clarify thinking around how to better integrate services and, importantly, to hear directly from consumers about the impact that services have on their quality of life.

A sample of 18 sites involving 200 consumers has been selected for the in-depth evaluation activities. Questions that will guide the dialogue with service providers include:

- How satisfied are consumers and their carers/family with the accommodation as well as the non-clinical and clinical support provided?
- To what extent do referral processes and transition plans effectively support consumers and their needs, and lead to a client mix that is suitable to the provider’s capacity to deliver support?
- To what extent does the length of tenure reflect consumer expectations and the intent of the service delivery model?

The final evaluation report is expected to be finalised in June 2012. For more information please contact Lisette Kaleveld, Senior Program Officer on (08) 6272 1200.

**National Mental Health Commission visit**

The Chair of the National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) Mr Allan Fels AO and the CEO Robyn Kruk AM visited Perth on 1 and 2 March 2012. During their visit they met with a number of mental health service providers, the Consumers’ Association of WA, Carers Association of WA, and the WA Association for Mental Health.

The Commission hosted a morning tea for approximately 60 guests on Friday, 2 March at Pagoda Hotel in South Perth, where Mr Fels and Ms Kruk talked about the NMHC plans, goals and priorities and also invited questions.

It was fantastic to see a good crowd of people come along and get better understanding about the National Mental Health Commission and its agenda.

**Senior Appointments**

Appointments to the executive roles within the Mental Health Commission have now been finalised.

Eric Dillon has been appointed Director of the Strategy, Policy and Planning Division, Dr Lesley Van Schoubroeck has been appointed Director Organisational Reform, Ken Smith is the new Acting Director Corporate Services and Governance and Elaine Paterson is Acting Director Purchasing and Development. Ms Danuta Pawelek continues in her role as Director Performance and Reporting.

Mr Michael Hawkins, commences on 5 March 2012 as the interim President of the Mental Health Review Board. I am sure the sector will join me in thanking Murray Allen for his time as President over the last seven years and wish him all the best.

Eddie Bartnik
Mental Health Commissioner