A message from the Commissioner

Having been in the role of Commissioner for a couple of months during which my focus has been to listen, I have managed to meet a broad range of people and get a better idea of the big issues facing the sector. A big issue we need to increase awareness of is the fact that on average, someone with a mental illness can expect to live 16 years less than the average Australian. Around one person dies by suicide every day in Western Australia. In 2012, suicide was the leading cause of death for Australians aged between 15 and 44 years. This should be a call to action for individuals, business and the community as a whole.

I am very keen to move forward with a number of key initiatives, including the merger with the Drug and Alcohol Office, the development of the WA Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan, and improving the way in which we conduct our business. To that end, I have set a target date for the merger of 1 July 2014, subject to the passage of relevant legislative amendments through Parliament. Co-locating is high on the agenda to enable relevant areas to work closely together as soon as possible.

What follows is a snapshot of some of the initiatives the Commission has been working on over the past few months. While I may not have met all of you yet, I hope to continue making the rounds, hearing of successes, and listening to your concerns and priorities. Feedback is always welcome!

WA Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Service Plan 2015 – 2025

Work to develop a ten-year plan for mental health and alcohol and other drug services for Western Australia is progressing on schedule to be available for Government consideration in mid 2014.

The project is being delivered in two stages:

- Stage One was completed in December 2013 and included the development of a services framework for both mental health and alcohol and other drug services.
- Stage Two will deliver an integrated Western Australian Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan (WA MH&AOD SP) 2015 – 2025. The plan will provide the blueprint for the reform and development of WA’s mental health and alcohol and other drug system over the next ten years and provide guidance as to how this can be achieved.

A balanced approach to investment in services will see an expanded and strengthened role for community managed organisations and an increase in the capacity of public mental health and AOD services.

For further information visit the Mental Health Commission’s website at www.mentalhealth.wa.gov.au

Implementation of Stokes Review recommendations

Implementation of the Stokes Review recommendations continues to progress well. One initiative developed, Western Australia’s first Mental Health Inter-Hospital Patient Transfer Service (MHIPTS), has now commenced. The aim of the two-year pilot MHIPTS is to provide a safe, respectful and timely transport service for people who have been placed on a transport order under the Mental Health Act 1996.

Under the current Act, only police officers are authorised to transport people who have been placed on a transport order, however, the WA Commissioner for Police has recently endorsed specifically trained North Metropolitan Health Service staff to act as ‘special constables’ to undertake the role.

The two-year pilot service will be delivered by the North Metropolitan Health Service across the Perth metropolitan area, transferring people from Emergency Departments to authorised mental health facilities. The Police will continue to conduct mental health escorts from community to hospital or in between hospitals in high risk situations.
Some of the benefits that consumers, families and carers can expect to see from the pilot MHIPTS are:

- People will be escorted by transport officers who are trained in mental health and are experienced in interacting with people with mental illness.
- Less time waiting in Emergency Departments for the transfer to an authorised mental health facility.
- The reduction of stigma (i.e. no or minimal involvement of police and police vehicles).

With the new Mental Health Bill being discussed in Parliament, consultative work will soon commence on the development of a long-term model for mental health patient transfer that will apply under the new legislation.

**Independent Quality Evaluations – Pilot Commenced**

The Mental Health Commission’s independent quality evaluation process is now being piloted with six organisations. The intent of these evaluations is to focus on how an organisation is supporting people to meet their individual goals/outcomes and meeting the National Standards for Mental Health Services.

All evaluations will involve a minimum of two independent evaluators with at least one of them being a person with lived experience or a family member/carer.

Evaluators will assess the organisation by seeking evidence of the quality of the services provided through:

- direct feedback from individuals, family members, carers and other stakeholders;
- observing services in operation;
- meeting with Board members, management and staff; and
- reviewing documentation, systems and management processes.

It is anticipated that the pilot will be completed in June 2014. Feedback from all stakeholders who have participated in the pilot will then inform any refinement to the evaluation process before it is implemented across all Commission funded organisations.

For more information contact the Quality Team on 6272 1273 or email quality@mentalhealth.wa.gov.au

**Mental Health Bill**

After a number of years of consultation and development the Mental Health Bill 2013 is currently being debated in the WA Parliament, and when passed will replace the current Mental Health Act 1996. The Bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 10 April 2014. The Bill had now progressed to the Legislative Council for review. The passage and implementation of the Bill will be a significant milestone in the state’s mental health reform program, and is part of a larger shift towards person-centred mental health services.

The very high level of stakeholder involvement in the development of the Bill is being carried through into the work for its implementation over the coming 12 months before it is expected to come into operation. This work is overseen by the Mental Health Bill Implementation Reference Group (MHBIRG), which is independently chaired by Dr Judy Edwards, and has broad representation from clinicians, consumers, families and carers, the Mental Health Commission, the Department of Health, including Area Health Services, the Chief Psychiatrist, the Head of the Council of Official Visitors, the President of the Mental Health Review Board and the WA Association of Mental Health. A number of working groups progress the different areas of the implementation.

The MHBIRG and the working groups are informed by a range of specialist stakeholders, including the Lived Experience Advisory Group, an NGO and organisational roundtable group, a group of indigenous stakeholders and a clinician reference group. A range of multi-stakeholder thematic forums are planned (with one held already) to deal with issues arising in the implementation, including advocacy, older adults, transcultural issues, and child and adolescent issues. Another important project now in development is piloting several of the key changes in the Bill for mental health services, to evaluate the impacts on individuals and services. This includes new requirements around the notification of families and carers when a person is made involuntary.

Timothy Marney
COMMISSIONER