



NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH
CONSUMER ALLIANCE

FEDERAL ELECTION PLATFORM

A national agenda for mental health consumer advocacy

The National Mental Health Consumer Alliance (NMHCA) is the national peak body for people with lived experience of mental health challenges. Our state and territory member organisations work together to represent the voice of mental health consumers on national issues.



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

The social and economic determinants of mental health – from poverty, housing and loneliness to industry practices in tobacco and gambling – impact wellbeing and deepen inequalities. Mental health challenges correlate with risk factors such as unemployment, domestic and family violence, social isolation, and loss of living independently in the community, increasing the risk of homelessness.

Action is needed to address the root causes of mental health challenges nationwide.



Address housing affordability and homelessness



Adequate housing is an essential human right, yet over 120,000 Australians are homeless, with mental health issues exacerbating housing security, and vice versa. Home ownership has declined, renting has increased, rental and housing affordability has worsened, and access to social housing has decreased.

The next Australian Government must address housing affordability and homelessness by looking to housing and tax reform, growing public and social housing, and implementing strategies such as Housing First which prioritises stable housing as a foundation for preventing mental health challenges.

Improve employment, income support and welfare



Many people with psychosocial disability rely on the Disability Support Pension (DSP), however this does not meet the basic costs of living, let alone the additional essentials that people with psychosocial disability must cover such as mental healthcare and access to specialist services.

Further, many people with mental health challenges do not qualify for the DSP and are overly reliant on even lower JobSeeker or Youth Allowance payments.

The next Australian Government must raise the rate of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, the DSP, and other income support so that people with psychosocial disability do not live in poverty.

Increase rural and remote access to mental health support



Rural communities face significant access barriers to mental health support, including a lack of support services, as well as social stigma and isolation.

The next Australian Government should address rural mental health access issues through:

- expanding and developing place-based mental health supports in locally run centres
- enabling mental health peer support vocational training for local people
- resourcing First Nations communities to identify and design their own Social and Emotional Wellbeing solutions and responses
- providing financial assistance to consumers unable to access services that provide bulk billing.

The next Australian Government should ensure that telehealth remains available but not central to strategies to address rural and remote access to mental health services.



MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER LEADERSHIP

Nothing about us
WITHOUT US



“Nothing about us, without us” has been a cornerstone of mental health consumer advocacy for decades in Australia, and globally. This is in response to the absence of a consumer voice, and consumer choice and control in the mental health system since its inception. The current mental health system too often produces culturally unsafe, coercive and inadequate mental health services and responses to distress and crisis.

The absence of mental health consumer leadership positions in the Australian Government means:

- service funding is prioritised towards clinical and coercive services rather than community-based and lived experience-led services
- lived experience-led services are not part of service modelling and planning, and
- inpatient care service models are funded despite limited evidence, while alternative models remain untrials.

As a result, decisions made by government often lack an understanding of their impacts on consumers.



ELECTION PRIORITIES



Create a National Chief Consumer Officer

The next Australian Government should establish a National Mental Health Chief Consumer Officer to sit alongside equivalent officers within the Australian Government.



Rebalance Commissioning to Community and Lived Experience-Led

The next Australian Government should rebalance commissioning of mental health services towards community-based and lived experience-led services through the next National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and National Mental Health Plan.



Create a cross-departmental mental health lived experience advisory structure

The next Australian Government should establish an interdepartmental government advisory structure to advise on cross-cutting issues impacting people with mental health lived experience in Australia. The membership would include government and lived experience community members.



HUMAN RIGHTS AND MENTAL HEALTH



The contemporary mental health system in Australia remains incompatible with human rights. Mental health, guardianship and administration laws all transgress human rights and fail to comply with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Public mental health services still contain inadequate oversight despite Australia ratifying the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). Beyond this, the mental health system fails to uphold human rights by failing to provide voluntary, safe and effective supports that meet peoples' needs in the community, leading to an over-reliance on biomedical approaches that can unnecessarily breach human rights. This sits within a broader lack of action on human rights by various state and territory governments and the Australian Government.

ELECTION PRIORITIES



Establish a Human Rights Act within the Term of Government

Human rights are central to mental health consumers' rights. The next Australian Government should introduce to Parliament a Human Rights Act within the first term of government and designate a specific taskforce for implementation in areas of mental health.



Further, as an immediate and supporting measure, the Government must remove Australia's interpretative declarations on Articles 12 and 17 of the CRPD.



Governments can and must act now to make mental health a national priority.

By addressing the social and economic factors that shape mental health, ensuring access to safe and effective support, and embedding lived experience leadership at every level, we can build a system that truly meets people's needs.

The future of mental health must be shaped by the voices of those who live it.



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