

# ACT Mental Health Advisory Council

## Public Communique - Meeting of 11 July 2019

The ACT Mental Health Advisory Council (the Council) convened on 11 July 2019. The meeting was chaired by Chair, Ms Sue-Ann Polden.

The topic for discussion at the meeting was Workforce in the ACT Mental Health Service System. The Council welcomed representatives from the Mental Health Community Coalition (MHCC), ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) and Canberra Health Service's Mental Health and Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Services (MHJHADS).

### Public mental health services workforce

The Council heard about the challenges and successes in recruiting vacant positions. It was also noted that national and international recruitment is being undertaken. Nationwide workforce shortages are impacting the ability to recruit.

Nursing is a large part of the workforce and post-graduate mental health nursing training is being enhanced. As an example, the Australian Catholic University and University of Canberra's one-year postgraduate program has been expanded to enable more nurses to gain post-graduate qualifications. The transition to practice program for new graduate nurses through Canberra Health Services also offers more mental health rotations.

There is a need for ongoing targeted recruitment as well as academic and/or other career development opportunities was identified.

### Non-government mental health sector

It was noted that workforce planning, recruitment and retention, and workforce development are challenging issues across many areas of health and community services. The commencement of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has provided some opportunities and many challenges for providers delivering services for people with psychosocial disability.

Pre-NDIS the minimum qualification in the mental health community service sector was a Certificate IV. The fees paid under the NDIS mean that providers find it difficult to pay staff at commensurate rate for this level of qualification.

Whilst there are limitations with the data, the workforce profile has a higher level of older workers and part-time / casual work. It was noted that there is a general perception that this is a sector with low pay and poor conditions. MHCC is building opportunities for workforce development including enhancing skills, increasing leadership capability and professional development, attraction and retention and growth in workforce

There is an ongoing need for improved data for service planning across the whole sector.

### Peer Workforce

It was noted that the peer workforce in the ACT is less well developed than in other states of Australia. The Network is undertaking PeerZone training to further develop the peer workforce in the ACT. It will involve a four day train the trainer and courses being run over 6 months. The resources focus on the formal evidence as well as lived experience perspectives.

The potential development of a peer work framework and enhancing support for peer workers was discussed. The need to give greater priority to opportunities to expand peer work was noted.

### The Council recommended the following for further consideration by the ACT Government:

- Enhancing career development opportunities across the sector
- Addressing workforce culture and adopting peer workforce inclusive practices
- High level workforce planning across the whole sector.

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