

ACT Mental Health Advisory Council

Public Communique - Meeting of 27 March 2019

The ACT Mental Health Advisory Council convened on 27 March 2019. The meeting was chaired by Chair, Ms Sue-Ann Polden. The topic for discussion at the meeting was Housing.

The Council welcomed representatives from ACT Shelter and ACT Housing, Community Services Directorate.

Housing options and issues for people with mental illness

Ms Sue-Ann Polden spoke about the key trends being observed in the ACT specialist homelessness sector in relation to people with mental illness. The specialist services provided by CatholicCare include Reconnect ACT, ASSIST, Youth Housing Support Service, MINOSA House and The Lodge. She noted that CatholicCare has experienced a marked increase in the number of people with diagnosed mental illness accessing their specialist homelessness services between 2012-13 and 2017-18.

The impact on the changes to community based support for people with psychosocial disability with the introduction of the NDIS was discussed. Concerns about the impact of these changes on the number of people in crisis and the increased need of homelessness was highlighted.

The Council heard that there is a direct relationship between mental illness and homelessness or insecure housing, as mental illness is exacerbated by homelessness and insecurity of housing is exacerbated by mental illness. In 2017-18, 39.4 per cent of the 4,026 people who sought assistance from the specialist homelessness services in the ACT experienced mental health issues¹.

ACT Shelter highlighted the important role of social housing in a person's recovery. It was noted that private rental has both higher costs and less stability which often means that it is less appropriate for people with severe mental illness. Social housing offers greater security of tenure and reduces anxiety for tenants. The benefits in a proactive approach to identifying and supporting tenants at risk were identified.

In October 2018, the new ACT Housing Strategy was released. The goals of the strategy include reducing homelessness, strengthening social housing assistance and increasing affordable rental housing. The Strategy acknowledges the need for a range of different housing models and the need for support to maintain tenancies. The strategy also aims to intervene early and reduce the intergenerational impacts of homelessness including action to prioritise young people.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2017-18

The benefits of community sector partnership to test ideas, address gaps and understand lived experiences was discussed. It was noted that there are a number of people who need complex support arrangements and ongoing support.

There was discussion on how to make it easier for people to engage with supports that are available, to simplify access to supports and to join up all parts of the service system. There was also discussion on a number of successful models of housing from other jurisdictions and internationally. This included Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI), Common Ground, HousingFirst and the Vanguard City model.

Other items

Recovery College

It was noted that the Recovery College will be opening in April.

Australian College of Mental Health Nurses

It was agreed to make a connection with the Australian College of Mental Health Nursing and engaging with them about participating in a future discussion of mental health workforce.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 9th May 2019 and the topic will be Mental Health and Wellbeing in the LGBTIQ Community.

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