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## **FURTHER UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION FOR NSW**

Since I last wrote to you in October much has been achieved towards establishing the NSW Mental Health Commission. The Taskforce held its sixth meeting on 17 October when it reviewed and provided advice to Government on the draft Mental Health Commission Bill 2011. In this newsletter I wish to report back on the progress of this new and important legislation.

### **Mental Health Commission Bill 2011**

I am proud to have introduced the Mental Health Commission Bill 2011 to Parliament on 24 November, which clearly delivers on the Government's commitment to establish an independent Mental Health Commission that will be a champion for mental health, ensure better accountability of mental health services and the use of mental health funds, and nurture innovation in our approach to mental health. I believe this will be one of the most important mental health reforms in the history of New South Wales.

The Bill sets out the internal structures, principles, functions and powers that will govern the work of the Mental Health Commission. It also sets out responsibilities that will apply to the range of government agencies providing services that people with mental illness, their families and carers want to use. The Bill makes the Mental Health Commission an integral part of enhancing mental health outcomes in this State.

The Bill provides for an independent Mental Health Commission that:

- focuses on systemic mental health issues including those that relate to co-morbidities associated with mental illness such as drug and alcohol use and disability;
- consults and engages with the community and stakeholders, in particular people with mental illness, their families and carers;
- has a strategic focus across the mental health system including all levels of government, non-government and the private sector, and across all service providers that have an impact on the lives of people with mental illness;
- works in cooperation with government agencies in the exercise of their respective functions, including in the development of a draft strategic plan for the Government's approval;
- reviews and advises on mental health and support service provision;
- promotes and facilitates the sharing of knowledge and ideas, prevention and early intervention strategies, and the mental health and wellbeing of the community; and
- informs the broader community about mental illness and mental health issues.

Importantly, the key messages from the community and stakeholder consultations were heard and captured within the Bill. The views of community members, stakeholders and other experts have been essential to ensure that as many issues and concerns as possible of relevance to the Mental Health Commission's establishment were identified and considered. As a result the Bill establishes a Mental Health Commission that, in addition to the attributes listed above, includes in its leadership someone who has or has had mental illness.

You may wish to read the Bill and my parliamentary speech of 24 November, which are able to be accessed through the webpage at [www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhdao](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhdao).

### **Next steps in the establishment of the Mental Health Commission**

Following the Bill's passage through Parliament, the Government will turn its attention to appointments and other implementation issues to ensure that the Mental Health Commission is fully operational from 1 July 2012. Subject to approval of the Bill by Parliament, advice on the appointments will be made available in due course at the webpage noted above.

At this milestone in the establishment of a Mental Health Commission, I would like to thank the people with mental illness, their families and carers who shared their experiences during consultations. The Bill has been strengthened significantly through their courage in sharing what they have encountered in the system of care in New South Wales.

HON. KEVIN HUMPHRIES MP  
Minister for Mental Health  
Minister for Healthy Lifestyles  
Minister for Western New South Wales