



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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MEDIA RELEASE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH

FINAL REPORT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN NSW

FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER 2002

The *Inquiry into mental health services in New South Wales - Final Report* by the Select Committee on Mental Health was tabled in Parliament today. This report is a comprehensive analysis of mental health services in NSW based on the evidence received by the Committee.

The Chair of the Committee, the Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti MLC, said today "Since the inquiry was announced in December 2001, we received 303 submissions from private citizens, mental health professionals, government and non-government organisations. The Committee heard evidence from 91 witnesses. I was almost overwhelmed by the detail and quality of the submissions and the high calibre of the witnesses. The submissions to this inquiry were some of the most comprehensive and considered documents that I have read since becoming a Member of Parliament. The evidence presented demands revolutionary change in mental health services in NSW"

The Final Report recommends that an Office of Mental Health be established within the Premier's Department to ensure coordination of service delivery and inter-governmental communication. "All too often people with a mental illness are being refused treatment or services because they also have a drug and alcohol problem. Since the deinstitutionalisation of mental health services, community care is focused on home care, however, a reliance on this is clearly deficient considering that a high percentage of the homeless also have a mental illness. People with a mental illness who seek services must not encounter service discrimination. There must be '**no wrong door**' when people with a mental illness attempt to access health services" the Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti MLC said today.

"The State and Commonwealth Governments must allocate additional resources to the mental health sector in NSW as a matter of urgency. For adequate treatment and care of people with a mental illness in the community, funding, staff skill mixes and facilities must all be substantially increased. Its almost 20 years since the Richmond Report and the community sector is still yet to see the resources they were promised" Dr Pezzutti said today.

One of the major recommendations of the Final Report concerns the imprisonment of people found not guilty by reason of mental illness. The Committee recommends that as a matter of urgency the NSW Minister for Health should construct maximum and medium security forensic mental health units outside prison. Dr Pezzutti said "Many of those found not guilty or unfit to plead by reason of mental illness are sent to gaol anyway – it's a case of 'not guilty, proceed to gaol'. Forensic patients are subject to the terms and conditions of Corrective Services and locked in their cell for eleven hours a day. NSW is the only mainland State to incarcerate forensic patients and, as far as I can determine, only one of a few in the Western World. The Report recommends that the Attorney General and the Minister for Health cooperate to expedite the establishment of a State Institute of Forensic Science, and include forensic mental health within its responsibilities."

The Report also recommends that more long-term and supported accommodation mental health beds be provided. The Report analyses and makes recommendations about the mental health sector, service delivery, treatment and care, mental health and police, forensics, prison, privacy, co-existing disorders, young people, older people and funding issues.

The Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti RFD MLC (Chair)

RECOMMENDATIONS ATTACHED

A copy of the Committee's Final Report is available on the NSW Parliament's website at:

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au

For further information and comment please ring the Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti MLC,
Chair of the Committee, on 02 9230 2322