

GREENS SA MENTAL HEALTH POLICY



1 Background

- 1.1 Greens SA mental health policy should be read in conjunction with the Greens SA Health policy. Mental Health policy operates within this context and should not be marginalised or stigmatised. Funding for mental health needs to be equitable, and reflect the scope of this health problem and the need for services.
- 1.2 Mental health issues affect a large section of the community. Almost 1 in 5 South Australians aged over 18 years will have a condition such as depression or anxiety in any 12 month period¹. Three to four percent of South Australians will experience a disabling mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar mood disorder, some forms of depression, anxiety disorders and dementia². Mental health issues account for about 13% of demand for health services, yet only receive about 6% of the health budget.³ This has led to a situation where services cannot meet current demand for crisis care. Ongoing care is almost absent and there are insufficient services for early intervention. The lack of ongoing support creates excessive demand for crisis care, which is the most expensive form of care. There is a crisis in mental health care in South Australia that urgently needs to be addressed, and a significant increase in funding will be required in order to address it.
- 1.3 The Greens SA approach to mental health is focussed on prevention and effective early intervention, as well as comprehensive ongoing support. For those who face chronic problems, high quality ongoing community-based treatment and support is then required.

2 Principles

- 2.1 No mental health facility should be closed down unless an appropriate alternative is already in place;
- 2.2 Greens SA seeks to promote a supportive, inclusive, accepting society that is conducive to positive mental health;
- 2.3 Greens SA recognises the rights of people with mental illness to be supported to live well in the community and to access the full rights of citizenship available to all other citizens;
- 2.4 In recognition of the social contribution made by those who care for people with mental illness, Greens SA will ensure that adequate support and respite services are available.

¹ ABS, Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 1999

² ABS, Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 1997

³ MHCA Not For Service Report, section 2.5, 2005

- 2.5 Mental health services need to be very accessible and include early intervention, so that people can be accurately diagnosed before they reach crisis point and can receive ongoing treatment for their particular issues;
- 2.6 Greens SA recognises that, in addition to treating people with mental illness when they face an acute crisis, ongoing support for the person affected and their family is needed to promote long-term wellness;
- 2.7 To ensure that quality support services are provided, independent monitoring is required. We support the Mental Health Coalition's call for a community senate to monitor reform and for regular human rights reviews;
- 2.8 Education within the community is fundamental to promoting an inclusive society, overcoming stigma and addressing the issues, especially within sectors likely to be in contact with people experiencing mental illness;
- 2.9 Any person in South Australia must be able to have access to a full range of mental health services, including people in regional areas, Aboriginals, children and adolescents, elderly people and people in detention;
- 2.10 People being treated for mental health issues should receive culturally sensitive support and treatment with readily accessible language services available;
- 2.11 We need to ensure that the criminal justice system is not used inappropriately to arrest, sentence or refuse parole to someone who should be receiving mental health treatment;
- 2.12 Crisis care needs to be undertaken by specialised services staffed by people who have accredited training;

3 Goals

- 3.1 Support neighbourhood and state-wide programs to directly address and improve the social conditions that contribute to mental health problems, including social isolation, exclusion, bullying and violence in homes, schools, and workplaces, insecure employment, unemployment and discrimination;
- 3.2 Actively manage risk factors for poor mental health such as drug abuse, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Coordinate drug and alcohol rehabilitation services with mental health services;
- 3.3 Conduct major public awareness campaigns to reduce social stigmas associated with mental illness;
- 3.4 Increase funding for research in medical and community/social aspects of mental well-being;

- 3.5 Provide adequate funding for early detection and intervention programs;
- 3.6 Increase consultation, support services, advice and funding for carers/families who bear the burden of caring for people with mental illness. This would include establishing more respite programs and filling other needs that are identified by families;
- 3.7 Provide enough beds to meet the current demand for crisis care;
- 3.8 Increase options for medium-term and long-term accommodation and supports to maintain accommodation for people with mental illness. While public housing needs to be available, it needs to be accompanied by these services;
- 3.9 Develop a comprehensive array of support services available in each community, to assist people with mental illness and/or psychiatric disability to live well in the community through rehabilitation support and access to education, employment, accommodation and accommodation supports;
- 3.10 Ensure that all persons involved in crisis care have received quality training. Create a dedicated and trained service to provide emergency transport to hospital when this is required;
- 3.11 Develop programs to produce high quality and well-trained staff to work for organizations such as ACIS in the mental health area;
- 3.12 Ensure that police, teachers, doctors and other professionals likely to have contact with people experiencing mental illness receive comprehensive training providing an understanding of different types of mental illness and how best to provide assistance;
- 3.13 Ensure that consumer networks currently funded and auspiced by government mental health services maintain autonomy from the health services that fund them;
- 3.14 Ensure independent advocacy services are available to all South Australians who experience mental illness.