



24 July 2025

Aditi Das
Productivity Commission

mentalhealthreview@pc.gov.au

Dear Aditi

**Response to the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement
Review Interim Report**

This letter has been prepared by the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) in response to the invitation from the Productivity Commission for feedback on the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review Interim Report (the Report).

The Network welcomes the general findings of the Report as well as the considered inclusion of consumer lived-experience in both its method and presentation. The Network agrees with the Report's primary finding that the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (the Agreement) is not fit for purpose and that a coherent federal strategy with measurable outcomes is needed if Australia's mental health system is to be improved and suicide rates reduced.

It is the Network's view that achieving these goals will require substantial work to reduce financial barriers to access across the health and mental health systems. Consumers with co-occurring and long-term support needs are heavily disadvantaged by economic marginalisation operating in tandem with the Medicare rebate system. For such consumers, the need to access multiple services is gated by

up-front costs which disincentivises early intervention and sustained engagement with recovery supports. One result of this is that many consumers who are economically marginalised due to their mental health challenges cannot afford to access services that would aid them in their recovery and thereby reduce their economic marginalisation.

Herein, it is a perverse feature of our health care system that consumers who need the most support have the fewest resources to access services while also facing the greatest upfront expense. Accessing care becomes a vicious cycle in which the task of financially affording necessary care and support exacerbates stress, economic marginalisation and, ultimately, the consumer's mental health challenges. Yet, affordability is just one of many barriers to access that consumers face.

In view of this, on 18 June 2025 the Network released *Access Denied: A consumer-led study into barriers to accessing mental health services in the ACT* (*Access Denied*). This study was undertaken across 2023 and 2024 and utilised consumer focus groups to understand the types and dynamics of barriers to access that consumers face. While focused on the ACT, *Access Denied* constitutes an in-depth case study of how federal and territory structures and policy combine to create a mental health system that fails to support people who are most in need.

This letter, then, serves as a prefacing statement for the recommendations, insights and consumer perspectives contained in *Access Denied*. It represents, not just the voice of consumers in the ACT, but a wide array of problems that the Network sees as vital for the Productivity Commission to understand and address in the course of concluding its review of the Agreement. To this end, a copy of *Access Denied* has been included with this letter as a supporting attachment.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this feedback, please do not hesitate to contact us on (02) 6230 5796 or executive@actmhc.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Dalane Drexler
Chief Executive Officer