



ACT Mental Health Consumer Network and Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT Joint Statement on Canberra Hospital ED incident

The ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) and the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT (MHCC ACT) extend their support and concern to the staff who were involved in the recent serious incident at Canberra Hospital's emergency department on 22 April 2026. No one should feel unsafe at work, and incidents of this kind are distressing for staff, consumers and the wider community.

We acknowledge Minister Stephen-Smith's recent announcement of a joint review into how the incident occurred. We look forward to engaging with the process, as appropriate, so that consumers and providers can be assured appropriate measures are put in place to protect all.

We are particularly concerned to hear that staff were once again placed at risk in an environment where known safety issues remain unresolved. Staff have been requesting a second exit from the staff area for some time. This is a practical safety measure and should be addressed by the ACT Government as a matter of urgency.

We are also concerned by reports that the person involved was still in possession of a weapon despite arriving at the emergency department under police escort. Ensuring that people entering acute clinical settings are safely searched is not about punishment or humiliation. It is about protecting staff, consumers and others present. While a strip search would not have been appropriate, existing search procedures need to be consistently and thoroughly applied so that incidents such as these are prevented.

At the same time, it is critically important that this incident does not add to stigma around mental illness. The overwhelming weight of evidence shows that people with mental health issues are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. While it is essential to protect staff and consumers from violent incidents, it is equally important that people experiencing mental distress are not unfairly targeted with pre-emptive, punitive or overly coercive responses.

It is important to further stress that addressing the rise of workplace incidents in ACT health settings requires more than just improving staff safety and capacity within the hospital and emergency services. Rather, the growing pressure on our health system needs to be better managed and alleviated through the proper provision and funding of community supports that can respond to individual needs before a person's circumstances escalate into crisis. Without proper resourcing for Canberra's community organisations and preventative supports, we are neglecting our most vulnerable and exposing our emergency services and hospital system to insurmountable demand and avoidable situations.

We are also concerned about sensational language used in public reporting. The reference to police using "a grenade" risks inflaming fear and misunderstanding. It is our understanding that a flash-bang device was used, which is materially different to an explosive grenade. Precision matters, particularly in reporting incidents that intersect with mental health, policing and public safety.

Public discussion about safety in mental health settings must be careful, accurate and balanced. It should acknowledge real risks and system failures, address long-standing workplace safety issues, and at the same time avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes about people with mental health issues.

The Network and MHCC ACT call on Canberra Health Services to urgently address known infrastructure and safety concerns, to ensure appropriate protocols are followed to protect everyone, and to continue working towards responses that are safe, respectful and grounded in human rights.