



Media Release

Consumers deserve mental health care that helps them recover, not care they fear

The ACT Mental Health Consumer Network is deeply concerned by issues raised in recent reporting about experiences within the Adult Mental Health Unit at Canberra Hospital. While individual circumstances vary, the themes described are consistent with concerns consumers have raised over many years about safety, dignity, trauma and continuity of care.

As the peak body for mental health consumers in the ACT, our focus is not on any single case. Our concern is whether the mental health system is consistently delivering care that is safe, therapeutic, recovery-oriented and centred on the rights and experiences of consumers.

No person should leave an acute mental health service feeling more traumatised, less safe, or reluctant to seek help in the future. When people present in crisis, they are often at their most vulnerable. The way they are treated can have a lasting impact on their recovery and on their willingness to seek support again when they need it.

The concerns reported about restrictive practices, experiences of coercion, premature discharge, and young people being admitted to adult settings are issues that consumers, families and advocates have raised repeatedly over time. These concerns should not be viewed in isolation. They point to broader systemic challenges that require sustained attention and action.

Mental health services must be more than places of containment. They must be environments that promote safety, respect, healing and hope. Consumers consistently tell us they want to be listened to, involved in decisions about their care, treated with dignity, and supported through discharge and recovery.

The Network acknowledges the dedication of many frontline mental health workers who operate under significant pressure. Systemic concerns are rarely the result of individual staff members. Rather, they often reflect broader issues such as workforce pressures, capacity constraints, service design, and the need for greater investment in consumer-centred models of care.

The experiences reported also highlight the importance of genuine consumer leadership in service planning, delivery and evaluation. Services are more effective when they are designed with consumers, not simply for consumers.

We welcome ongoing scrutiny of the mental health system and encourage government, health services, consumers, families and advocacy organisations to work together to address longstanding issues. Consumers deserve confidence that when they reach out for help, they will receive care that supports their recovery and upholds their rights.

The ACT Mental Health Consumer Network calls for:

- Continued investment in trauma-informed, recovery-oriented mental health care;
- Greater transparency and accountability around consumer experiences and outcomes;
- Stronger consumer participation in service design, governance and evaluation;
- Safe, age-appropriate care for young people experiencing mental ill-health; and
- Improved continuity of care before, during and after discharge from acute services.

Every person seeking mental health support deserves compassionate, safe and effective care. We owe it to consumers, families and the community to ensure the ACT mental health system delivers nothing less.

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