



20th August 2022

# Inquiry into the Legislative, Workplace Governance and Clinical Frameworks of DHULWA

MHCC ACT Submission

Mental Health Community Coalition ACT

Peak Body in the ACT for the Community Mental Health Sector

Room 1.06, Level 1, Griffin Centre

20 Genge Street, Canberra City, ACT 2601

**t:** (02) 6249 7756 **e:** [admin@mhccact.org.au](mailto:admin@mhccact.org.au)

**w:** [www.mhccact.org.au](http://www.mhccact.org.au) **abn:** 22 510 998 138

## About MHCC ACT

The Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT (MHCC ACT) is a membership-based organisation which was established in 2004 as a peak agency. It provides vital advocacy, representational and capacity building roles for the Not for Profit (NFP) community-managed mental health sector in the ACT. This sector covers the range of non-government organisations (NGO) that offer recovery, early intervention, prevention, health promotion and community support services for people with a mental illness.

The MHCC ACT vision is to be the voice for quality mental health services shaped by lived experience. Our purpose is to foster the capacity of the ACT community-managed mental health services to support people to live a meaningful and dignified life.

Our strategic goals are:

- To support providers to deliver quality, sustainable, recovery-oriented services
- To represent our members and provide advice that is valued and respected
- To showcase the role of community-managed services in supporting peoples' recovery
- To ensure MHCC ACT is well governed, ethical and has good employment practices.

## MHCC ACT Members

A Gender Agenda	CatholicCare	Perinatal Wellness Centre
Access Lifecare	Connections Case Management	Quest Group
ACT Shelter	EveryMan Australia	Richmond Fellowship ACT
ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS)	Focus ACT	Rubies Nursing Care
ACT Mental Health Consumer Network	Grand Pacific Health (headspace)	SiTara's Story
Advocacy for Inclusion	Koomarri	Stride (previously Aftercare)
Anglicare	Livability Australia	Think Mental Health
ATODA	Making Connections Together	Toora Women
Avenue Counselling	Marymead	Wellcare
Barnados Australia Canberra	Menslink	Wellways
BPD Awareness ACT	Mental Health Foundation ACT	Woden Community Service
Capital Health Network	Meridian ACT	Xtend Yourself Life Coaching
Capital Region Community Services Ltd	Mental Illness Education (MIE) ACT	Youth Coalition ACT
Carers ACT	Nexus Human Services	YWCA Canberra

## Introduction

MHCC ACT welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission into the inquiry on the legislative, workplace governance and clinical frameworks of Dhulwa Mental Health Unit ('Dhulwa') in the ACT (the Inquiry).

In preparing this submission, MHCC ACT has liaised with other organisations that have also provided submissions to the Inquiry, including:

- ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)
- Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI)
- Canberra Mental Health Forum (CMHF)
- Carers ACT

MHCC ACT supports the submissions of these organisations and acknowledges the significant lived experience and expertise that informs their work.

MHCC ACT understands the serious safety concerns of staff that led to this Inquiry being initiated and of course acknowledges the importance of a safe and respectful environment for staff, consumers and carers within Dhulwa.

In order to achieve this, MHCC ACT believes there needs to be dedicated and supported consultation with consumers and carers to ensure that their input is considered alongside the vital input from Dhulwa staff. The views of consumers and carers should be considered essential to all decision-making processes on an ongoing basis.

Along with greater inclusivity in decision-making, greater transparency around policies, processes and procedures should assist in promoting constructive relationships between all stakeholders. All documentation should be published, ensuring accessibility and ease of comprehension. More generally, MHCC ACT supports the inclusion of people with lived experience, including carers, in the design of all mental health services. In addition, a diversity of voices should be heard, including people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and LGBTIQ+ people.

## Workforce Issues

The provision of holistic, person-centred forensic mental health care requires a multidisciplinary workforce, with the right mix of skills and experience, adequate resourcing, and ongoing training and support. Given the current context of historically low unemployment, the training, recruitment and retention of the workforce required to achieve best practice across the mental health sector is likely to be challenging for some time, particularly for a facility as specialised as Dhulwa.

MHCC ACT therefore believes that the publication of a mental health workforce strategy for the ACT will provide a much-needed framework within which the important task of workforce development can take place.

A mental health workforce strategy for the ACT should include:

- a road map on building a robust, skilled and well-resourced mental health workforce, with a strong focus on the NFP community mental health workforce; and,
- a plan to support the mental health and wellbeing of all ACT workers.

With an ACT strategy in place, a plan specific to the forensic and secure mental health workforce should then be developed to ensure that the appropriate skills and experience are available for the Dhulwa facility

### **Recovery-oriented, trauma-informed care**

Based on experience within the community-managed mental health sector, MHCC ACT believes the Inquiry should consider the principles of recovery-oriented, trauma-informed care.

A recovery-oriented approach is based on the principles of personal choice, self-determination, responsibility and advocating alternatives to coercive practices.<sup>1</sup>

Trauma-informed care describes a way of working with people that acknowledges the likelihood of trauma, the lasting impact of trauma and promotes awareness and sensitivity to its dynamics. Trauma-informed approaches seek to not inflict any additional harm on individuals and to avoid reactivating past traumatic experiences. It is based on the principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment.<sup>2</sup>

These principles are considered contemporary best practice in mental health support and are incorporated into the National Standards for Mental Health Services<sup>3</sup>, the National Mental Health Core Capabilities<sup>4</sup>, and are increasingly included in Australian mental health statutes.<sup>5</sup> It is important these principles are not simply espoused in high-level model of care policies, but are actually embedded and enabled through appropriate resourcing, training and support for staff, the physical environment, connections and linkages with community services and supports, and with active involvement of people with lived experience, both consumers and carers.

It is particularly important that family members and carers be actively involved as much as possible as they are able to provide vital emotional, practical and financial support, as well as providing essential input into day-to-day decision making and ongoing quality improvement.

In addition, MHCC ACT supports the implementation of the Safewards Model of Care at Dhulwa to reduce the use of restrictive practices and to promote an environment that is safer for staff, consumers and carers.

### **Connection to community services**

MHCC ACT encourages the Inquiry to consider the opportunities for connection between Dhulwa and community-managed mental health and advocacy services.

Such connections, particularly when they occur early and continue throughout a stay, can ensure continuity of care before, during and after a stay at the facility, maintaining connectivity with the wider community and reducing the likelihood of re-admission.

Sufficient funding will be required to ensure that organisations providing these elements of care are able to do so consistently to support the needs of consumers in the Dhulwa facility.

## References

---

<sup>1</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, (2017). *Inside Outside: Recovery research project*, page 3.

[https://www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/old/uploads/paper\\_-\\_inside\\_outside\\_recovery\\_research\\_project2.pdf](https://www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/old/uploads/paper_-_inside_outside_recovery_research_project2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, (2017). *Inside Outside: Recovery research project*, page 4.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government, (2010). *National Standards for Mental Health Services 2010*, Commonwealth of Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Health Workforce Australia, (2014). *National Mental Health Core Capabilities*. Department of Health.

<sup>5</sup> For example: *Mental Health Act 2007 (NSW)* and *Mental Health Act 2015 (ACT)*.