MEDIA RELEASE
Thursday, 26 November 2015

Mental Health Services in Far West NSW Mapped

NSW Mental Health Commissioner John Feneley will today launch the Integrated Mental Health Atlas of Far West NSW in Broken Hill, providing a region-wide view of local services and support available to people living with mental distress.

The Atlas, developed by researchers at the University of Sydney’s Brain and Mind Centre and funded by the NSW Mental Health Commission, reveals the region has good availability of mental health services but is vulnerable due to workforce issues.

The project is part of an international effort which for the first-time provides a consistent way to classify and geo-locate the range of mental health services on offer across health, social care, education, employment and housing.

Professor Luis Salvador-Carulla, Head of the Mental Health Policy Unit at the University of Sydney, said the biggest challenge facing the region was the fragility of services which relied on one or two qualified health professionals.

“While the amount of services is good when comparing to similar areas internationally, it is clear that we need a more skilled and qualified workforce. Otherwise there is risk of staff attrition, lack of supervision and inability to provide intensive care when required.”

“Identifying this at the local level however means we can now plan for incentives and promote opportunities to encourage more health professionals to come to the area.”

Key findings from the Far West Atlas Mapping project:

Strengths
- Overall good availability of mental health and support services based on population
- Successful partnerships and innovations resulting in enhanced services such as the local NEAMI National and Far West Local Health district delivering the PARC* model of care.
- Despite 85 per cent of the services being located in Broken Hill (where 61 per cent of the population resides), there are substantial efforts to increase accessibility to the surrounding areas through services such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Gaps
- Lack of specific mental health services for older people
- Low capacity in the workforce, in particular a shortage of skilled/qualified workers, including psychiatrists
- Consistent with other areas mapped in NSW there is an absence of day care, where clients spend the day at the facility but sleep at home; and long term accommodation for people with lived experience of mental illness
Mr Feneley said the Atlas provides a valuable source of information about the services on offer in one of the most sparsely populated areas of the state.

“We know that the mental health system can be difficult to navigate for consumers and families, and this is often also the case for service providers and decision makers trying to plan services, particularly with areas as vast as the Far West,” he said.

“The Atlas allows us to identify local level strengths and gaps in the system through a rigorous classification and mapping system, and to feed this understanding into local service planning to improve mental health services across NSW and we welcome the availability of this resource.”

ENDS

Event details:  
Date: Thursday 26 November 2015  
Time: 10:00am – 12 noon (Media interviews available from 12 noon)  
Venue: Musician’s Club, 276 Crystal Street, Broken Hill NSW

Mr Feneley and Professor Salvador-Carulla will be available for interview

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*PARC service (Prevention and Recovery Care) is short term recovery focused residential service for people who are either leaving acute mental health care, or who would benefit from 24 hour support to avoid a hospital admission.

About the Mental Health Commission of NSW
The Mental Health Commission of NSW was established under the Mental Health Commission Act 2012 and came into operation on 1 July 2012. www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au
The Commission is an independent statutory authority established with the purpose of monitoring, reviewing and improving the mental health system and the mental health and well-being of the people of New South Wales. In all its work the Commission aims to reflect the experience of people who live with mental illness, their families and carers.