



Letter from the NSW Mental Health Commissioner, October 2012

To the NSW mental health community,

I am privileged to write to you as the first Mental Health Commissioner of NSW. The Mental Health Commission Act commenced on 1 July 2012 and I was appointed from 1 August 2012 for a 5-year term. The Commission's purpose under the Act is to monitor, review and improve the NSW mental health system and in fulfilling this task we will be driven by the lived experience of people with mental illness.

I can assure you the Commission will strive for a system that supports people who experience mental illness to pursue their own recovery goals and live full and rewarding lives. In doing so, we will work cooperatively and collaboratively with people with mental illness, their families and their carers, and with stakeholders across all levels of government and non-government sectors, including housing, employment, health, education and justice. The Commission will operate in an independent, transparent and accountable way, reporting regularly on its activities to the Minister for Mental Health and the NSW community.

With this letter I hope to give an overview of the Commission's progress since our establishment in July 2012 and to provide a snapshot of what the final months of 2012 have in store for us.

A Fresh Start: First Steps

Setting up any new organisation such as the Commission takes time. We are currently operating with a small interim team who have been working hard to get things off the ground. This has included everything from ordering stationary to setting up IT systems, consulting on a logo, to the development of our organisational structure. We are working towards finalising our administrative arrangements, which includes human resources, records management, finance and accounting processes.

By the end of 2012, I hope to have the Commission's senior staff recruited and the part-time Deputy Commissioners and Community Advisory Council appointed. The role of the Council is to advise the Commission on mental health issues. Applications for the Deputy Commissioners and the Council closed recently. The response has been remarkable with over 150 potential candidates reflecting the diversity of the community.

Meeting the Mental Health Community

Since my appointment I have spent much of my time around NSW meeting with consumers, carers and their families, as well as the organisations that represent them or provide services. I have had liaison meetings with many NGOs, clinicians, service providers, Commissioners from other states and abroad and other local and international experts. I have also met with state and national government agencies, members of parliament and academics. The purpose of these meetings has been to begin the process of working together to achieve positive and sustained change for NSW mental health.

I have attended the Mental Health Coordinating Council regional forums as well as other metropolitan and interstate mental health conventions and forums. I also recently attended the first of eight community consultation forums being held across NSW as

a member of the Mental Health Act Review Community Consultation Panel. Along with the other panel members, Sebastian Rosenberg (Facilitator, Academic in Mental Health Policy), Rob Knowles (one of the ten National Mental Health Commissioners) and Dr Lynne Lane (New Zealand Mental Health Commissioner), I will be providing feedback on the community consultation forums and providing advice on the review.

Over these early months I have been greatly assisted by many community groups and organisations. I would like to make special mention of the NSW Consumer Advisory Group and also thank them for their report 'Border to Border: Visions of Hope', which is the result of extensive consumer consultation about the role and priorities of the Commission. I would also like to thank the Mental Health Association, the Mental Health Coordinating Council and the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI) for their support and for their assistance in making this letter available to the community during Mental Health Month.

What else is happening?

The end of 2012 will see the beginnings of refurbishing the Commission's offices in the grounds of Gladesville Hospital, including improved disability access. We will also launch the Commission's website which will keep the community up-to-date with our activities, and begin the development of the strategic plan for the NSW Mental Health system. The strategic plan is a key task required of the Commission under the Mental Health Commission Act. The Commission is also discussing opportunities for research partnerships with various stakeholders.

In conclusion I am honoured to have this opportunity to contribute to improving the mental health system in NSW for consumers and their families and carers. I am acutely aware of the challenges ahead but I am also buoyed by the public support for change and the extraordinary depth of experience within our NGOs and government agencies driving innovation in many locations in NSW. Changing the mental health landscape to support people to remain well in the community is now a NSW Government and national priority and the Mental Health Commission of NSW aims to be a leader in contributing to innovation and sustained change. I look forward to working with you on these reforms in a measured and meaningful manner over the ensuing years.



John Feneley
Commissioner
Mental Health Commission of NSW