

Sub. No. 5

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HEALTH AND COMMUNITY
SERVICES COMMITTEE

Submission regarding Queensland Mental Health Commission Legislation.

The Elanora Carers Group (ECG) was established by the then Schizophrenia Fellowship Queensland (now MIFQ) some seventeen years ago to provide mutual support activities for people who care for someone living with a mental health condition.

Throughout that time the Group has been involved in gaining recognition for the rights of carers, the improvement and upgrading of services to those we care for, and over recent years in providing carer representation where needed on forums, committees and working groups in Queensland Health, Non-Government service providers and with the private sector. ECG has provided information and assistance to many carers, particularly on the southern end of the Gold Coast.

Members of the group have shown particular interest in, and have been involved in consultation at all stages of the proposal for a Mental Health Commission for Queensland. In principle, the Group strongly supports the formation of the Commission and its associated Advisory Council.

While there is no doubt that the present administration is putting forward the draft legislation with the best interests of consumers and carers in mind, the ECG believes the legislation has deficiencies that could limit its effectiveness in the long term. Requests to strengthen the legislation are outlined below:

- 1) **Transparency:** The legislation should be amended to make it a requirement for at the least - the QMHC annual report and all of the Advisory Council reports to be tabled in Parliament and published on the QMHC website. The Advisory Council should also have the opportunity to present a special report to Parliament where the Council deems it necessary and appropriate.
- 2) **Commission Staff:** The Commissioner or a senior member of staff should have experience as a Consumer or a Carer, as specified in the NSW legislation.
- 3) **Advisory Council:** A significant pre-determined proportion of the members of the QMHC Advisory Council should have or have had an overt lived experience as consumers and carers and this should be legislated.
- 4) **Support for Council Members:** Consumer and Carer appointees should be provided support to maintain regular contact with Consumers and Carers across the State, to ensure they are able to obtain their views, represent them appropriately and report back to them in a comprehensive and consistent manner.

The Elanora Carers Group is mindful that genuine recovery is unlikely to occur without the full engagement of consumers in their own treatment and care. Similarly, the consumer's journey to recovery is likely to be significantly enhanced by the thorough understanding and support of their families and personal support network with their involvement being necessary at all levels.

It is in all of our interests to support the recovery of our fellow Queenslanders, and it is the right of every consumer in Queensland to receive appropriate treatment and care. As outlined in the 2012 National Report Card of the Australian National Mental Health Commission, *A Contributing Life*, best practice requires the involvement of the service user, their professional providers and their supporting care group.

Our own consultations have confirmed that, to gain the trust, respect and involvement of Consumers and Carers, their representation needs to be enshrined in the legislation. Further, the workings of the Commission and the Council require a higher level of transparency if they are to gain the interest and respect of the community.

The Elanora Carer Group welcomes the formation of the Commission. It is a long awaited, and much appreciated opportunity to move the Mental Health, Alcohol and other Drugs sector forward in a co-ordinated and effective way.

We would appreciate your consideration of the proposed amendments to the legislation to bring about the improvements outlined above.

The contents of this submission were discussed and approved at the meeting of Elanora Carers Group held on Tuesday 15 February 2013.

Yours sincerely

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