

**2019**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**TABLING STATEMENT**

**MENTAL HEALTH OFFICIAL VISITOR ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19**

**Presented by  
Shane Rattenbury MLA  
Minister for Mental Health  
November 2019**

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to table the Mental Health Official Visitors Annual Report for the 2018-19 year. I am tabling this report in accordance with my obligations under the *Official Visitor Act 2012*.

The role of Official Visitors is an important one. Official Visitors aid in the protection of the human rights of vulnerable people by facilitating their access to an independent complaints process, reporting on systemic issues to government and providing oversight of the accommodation and services vulnerable people are dependent on.

Official Visitors are valued and trusted people in the community who are carefully selected for their role due to their experience and qualifications in the area of in which they are appointed.

Most importantly, an Official Visitor is not subject to the direction of anyone else in relation to the exercise of a function under the *Official Visitor Act*. This level of independence allows Official Visitors to safeguard standards of treatment and care and advocate for the rights and dignity of people being treated under the *Mental Health Act*.

In carrying out their functions, Official Visitors are required to identify and report issues of concern. Official Visitors provide independent oversight of visitable places, thus increasing transparency by reporting to government about conditions and concerns they identify.

The Report that I table today identifies that the primary concern raised by Official Visitors during the reporting period has been the acuity, demand and subsequent impacts on services at the crisis end of the service system, and the related challenge of suitable exit points for

mental health consumers. The report also notes occupational and consumer on consumer violence as a significant concern within the mental health service system.

The ACT Government is aware of the challenges being faced in the acute mental health system. I confirm that the demands on the mental health system are well known and my response as the Minister is that we are strategically planning and working to address some of these issues through a variety of projects and pathways:

These include:

- The trial of a patient flow coordinator to support management of demand for inpatient beds across the public health system;
- A dedicated consultant psychiatrist in the emergency department of CHS;
- The creation of a five bed sub-acute pod located in the adult rehabilitation unit at the University of Canberra Hospital (UCH) to better utilise capacity at the UCH. This setting provides care in a less-restrictive environment to the Adult Mental Health Unit and provides patients with additional options for suitable exit points
- The creation of a four-bed area within Ward 7B at Canberra Hospital, has also contributed to reducing some of the pressure and demands in the mental health system. This ward is suitable and can also accommodate patients with physical health conditions that are concurrent to their mental illness.

To meet the demand issues we face, a key component is to increase our non-acute beds to help avoid a person requiring acute care. At a whole

of system level, investment has been made in infrastructure such as the southside Step Up Step Down Unit which provides additional support for people to live in their community. The objective of this investment is to divert people from a hospital admission and provide less-restrictive care in a community-based environment. This is a leading priority for any mental health system.

Across the board mental health services provide consistent, high quality care for patients seeking treatment and I am proud to report that the official visitors receive very high praise for the staff and support at the facilities. Mental health systems rely on these highly skilled and caring individuals and I commend these workers for their effort and ongoing commitment to patient care.

Madam Speaker, in accordance with my obligations under the Mental Health Act, I commend the Mental Health Official Visitor Annual Report 2018-2019 to the ACT Legislative Assembly.