



Minister for Health

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19 OCT 2005

Ms Karin MacDonald MP
Chair
ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Disability
GPO Box 1020
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Dear Ms MacDonald

Thank you for your letter of 15 September 2005 in which you requested information on mental health and housing support programs in Victoria.

The development of these programs is based on the view that people with serious mental illness have difficulty in securing and maintaining housing and this can lead to homelessness and relapse of mental illness.

The enclosed document outlines a number of programs, which rely on an interface between two divisions of the Department of Human Services, the Office of Housing and Mental Health Branch.

I am aware that your committee recently met and visited services with representatives of the Mental Health Branch and the Housing and Community Building Division of the Department of Human Services. I hope this assisted you in considering policy and service development related to this important area.

If you would like further information on any of the programs please contact Bernadette Pound at the Mental Health Branch, Department of Human Services. Bernadette is contactable via telephone on (03) 9616 7891 or by email at Bernadette.Pound@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Thank you for your inquiry and I wish you well with the ongoing work of the Standing Committee on Health and Disability.

Yours sincerely

Hon Bronwyn Pike MP
Minister for Health

Encl.

Mental Health and Housing Interface

The Office of Housing and Mental Health Branch of the Department of Human Services have jointly developed a number of programs to facilitate access to public housing and secure tenancy for people with a serious mental illness

Mental Health

The Victorian public mental health service system comprises both clinical and psychiatric disability rehabilitation and support services (PDRSS):

- Clinical mental health services are managed by public hospitals and provide assessment, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and clinical case management services to people with a serious mental illness and include both residential and non-residential components.
- PDRSS have a different focus and are designed to complement clinical services. PDRSS provide psychosocial assessment, rehabilitation and support and are managed by community non-government organisations. PDRSS workers assist clients to live as independently as possible in the community. Of particular relevance to the Housing program interface is the home based outreach support program which aims to reduce isolation, assist with learning or relearning the activities of daily living, develop social skills and enable access to community services.

Public Housing

Office of Housing is responsible for managing a range of housing assistance program which includes SAAP, affordable housing, direct tenure public rental housing, community managed housing, financial assistance to people in the private rental sector and home ownership assistance.

Joint Programs

Housing and Support Program

This program commenced in 1991. The key features of the program are:

- Recognition that the house is a home not a residential treatment service;
- Housing is matched to individual client needs and the client exercises some choice;
- Control of the environment is with client not the mental health staff;
- Support occurs in the persons home rather than in a transitional environment;
- Support varies according to the clients' needs rather than the clients having to change homes to get the level of support they need as in a 'transitional' designed system;
- The PDRS support agency have tenant nomination rights to the property;
- The PDRS agency is granted nomination rights to another property when the person no longer requires support.

Up to 800 properties have been allocated under this program with approximately 1200 mental health clients assisted. Although pre- existing housing tenancies have been maintained, there have been no new allocations made since 1998/1999.

Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) THM (Transitional Housing Management) Mental Health Pathways Project

Based on some of the principles established in the Housing and Support Program, the THM Mental Health Pathways project key features are:

- PDRSS provide flexible intensive home based outreach support to people with a serious mental illness who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Mental health Branch provides approximately \$4 million annually for the outreach support.
- PDRSS have nomination rights to transitional properties through THM;
- Approximately \$145,000 per annum is available as brokerage. These funds are used for one-off purchases to assist the client to obtain or maintain their housing.

One program (Flagstaff/Salvation Army) operates a Forensic Home Based Outreach service to clients who are preparing to be discharged from mental health forensic facilities.

144 properties have been made available through the Pathways Project.

The Office of Housing is currently evaluating the project.

Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) Discharge Pilots

These pilot projects are designed to reduce the risk of homelessness for people with a mental illness when leaving hospital, by improving discharge planning and access to appropriate housing and support options. Project features are:

- PDRSS in-reach into three acute mental health facilities to support clients at risk of homelessness upon discharge;
- Housing resources include a Transitional Housing Manager and access to transitional properties or crisis property;
- Small brokerage component to assist in meeting individual needs on discharge.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the pilots are highly valued and effective in linking people with housing options post discharge.

The Office of Housing is currently evaluating the pilots.

PDRSS Youth Residential Rehabilitation Program

The Mental Health Youth Residential Rehabilitation Program is an example of an initiative where the Office of Housing spot purchased or purpose built properties in consultation with nominated PDRS providers. The initiative has access 16 sites across the state (9 metropolitan and 7 rural) and PDRSS provides support to approximately 160 young people aged 16 to 24 years with serious mental illness at any one time.

The environment is home like, with accommodation being in modern home unit clusters in the community. The accommodation is integral to the program as participants are able to practice living independently in a supportive environment.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this program has provided opportunities for early intervention, allowed participants to enhance and maintain life skills and improved the quality of life in a group that would be expected to have difficulty in maintaining tenure if unsupported.

Rooming House Plus

Rooming House Plus is a joint initiative between, Office of Housing, Mental Health Branch and the Aged Care Branch and is aimed at providing suitable long term housing for people with low incomes and complex needs due to disability or challenging behaviour and who would have difficulty maintaining tenure in less supported environments.

The initiative has been made possible through Office of Housing providing the capital to convert an existing government owned building to a 67 unit rooming house. A community housing service will provide the property and tenancy management.

The support component, which is jointly funded, by Aged Care and Mental Health will be provided by a non government organisation with experience in the homelessness sector. The service model will provide an on-site visible presence to assist tenants who require support due to limited living and self-care skills to maintain tenancy and improve health and well-being.