



Response to the Model of Care (MOC) for the Adult Acute Mental Health Inpatient Unit (AAMHIU)

Carers ACT welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the development of best practice support for mental health consumers through the development of a Model of Care (MOC) for the Adult Acute Mental Health Inpatient Unit (AAMHIU) currently under construction at the Canberra Hospital.

Carers ACT would like to thank Mr Kevin Kidd, Director of the Capital Asset Development Program within the ACT Health Directorate, for his commitment to consultation with the community as a fundamental aspect of developing mental health services and models.

Preliminary Comments

In developing a response to this important document, Carers ACT has consulted with carers and the mental health community through a number of processes including by convening an open forum in which a group of interested parties across the carer, consumer, peak, advocate and service provider spectrum participated in a discussion of the draft MOC.

Carers ACT notes that the AAMHIU is a hospital based mental health service. While recognising that the facility represents the acute arm of mental health care, Carers ACT is keen to see ACT Health working towards mental health services which are genuinely focused on mental health as an issue in its own right and one which is not always tied to hospitalisation. To this end, Carers ACT understands that community based services are undergoing their own MOC development process and looks forward to the outcomes of that process. Ensuring that the MOCs operate effectively in a coordinated and comprehensive manner will be an essential contributor to successful outcomes.

The role of private clinicians and allied health professionals in coordinating diagnosis and treatment is essential, particularly when a private psychiatrist has lengthy patient history to bring to the discussion. Carers ACT was pleased that Mr Kidd was able to confirm that private clinicians, as with general practitioners under current models of care, will be included in these processes.

Recognising Carers as Part of the Treatment Response Team

Carers ACT welcomes the inclusion of carers in the MOC as key contributors to the assessment of need and development of treatment options for mental health consumers. Their role at the point of discharge is also critical as there can be duty of care considerations upon the discharge of a mental health consumer who may represent a risk to his/her carer/s.

Carers ACT considers that carers are well placed to add value to all these processes as they are the ones who provide care and support, often of an intensive nature, to individuals with health care needs. Carers are able to advise clinicians of the treatment history of a mental health consumer when that person is not able to do so themselves. They can provide detailed observational comment to support accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment responses.

To give appropriate and formal recognition to the role of carers in this regard, Carers ACT recommends that the MOC document reference legislation (National Carer Recognition Act) and the ACT Carers Charter specifically. This should also clearly flow through to any policy statements linked to the MOC.

The inclusion of a Quality Improvement Consumer Carer Feedback Committee as part of the AAMHIU Governance Structure is welcomed. Selection of appropriate carer representation should be based on a clear and transparent process to encourage the involvement of carers with appropriate experience in this important forum.

Carers ACT supports the commitment to "more open visiting arrangements and greater opportunities for families to visit and provide support hours" as many carers are not able to visit during standard visiting hours. As carers play such a key support role for mental health consumers, flexible access to the facility is important.

Balancing Consumer Choice with the Reality of Care Relationships

While recognising the importance of respecting the rights of the individual to make choices, Carers ACT has some reservations about the operational statement that "staff will work with the consumer and **those persons that the consumer establishes as appropriate** to clearly define the purpose of treatment and the development of a supportive therapeutic program."

In some cases, where a mental health consumer has reached the stage of requiring admission to a managed facility such as the AAMHIU, they may feel a degree of resentment, often misplaced, towards the carer and the part which they perceive that carer to have played in the events leading up to and including admission. They may therefore seek to exclude the carer from the treatment process despite the carer being well placed to add value to the process. This is a problematic area and one which must be managed with a balance between the right of the consumer to privacy and choice and the importance of accurate and realistic assessment of need based on lived experience.

Carers ACT notes that ACT Health has consulted with the Human Rights Commission on this issue and would welcome greater clarity regarding stage consumer choice considerations should be impacted by accuracy in diagnosis and treatment. Carers ACT recognises that this may come at the point of policy development and may not be included in the MOC document.

Continuous Improvement as an Ongoing Focus

Carers ACT welcomes the development of the AAMHIU as a ground breaking facility with great potential to advance mental health services for acute care consumers. However, as this facility will be the only one of its kind in Australia, Carers ACT encourages an ongoing focus on reviewing and evaluating performance and outcomes. As with any “firsts”, Carers ACT recognises that the AAMHIU and its MOC will not be perfect and will require some adjustment to policies and procedures following lived experience.

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