



NMHCCF Advocacy Brief

Issue: Employment and Mental Health

Background

Australia's current employment policy settings actually make it harder, not easier, for people with a mental illness to find work and stay employed. Less than 30% of people with a mental illness are employed in Australia. This policy failure means we have a large group of untapped skills and human resources that our economy simply cannot continue to waste. More importantly, every person in Australia has a right to work and be a valued employee.

Key Points for Mental Health Consumers and Carers

- Australia is well behind other countries when it comes to employing people with mental health issues - despite many documents and targets stating our commitment to improving the rate of employment amongst people with a mental illness.
- The evidence on employment policies and practices that work is based on an understanding that if someone does not want to participate in a particular job or particular setting, their chances of sustained employment are greatly diminished. Consumers and carers must be at the centre of decision making on their employment.
- Unemployment can be detrimental to all people and there is a known link between unemployment and mental health problems. Research has shown that long-term unemployment is associated with depression, low self-esteem, and social isolation, and contributes to poverty.
- There is also a strong link between good mental health and workforce participation.
- There are significant social and economic costs – to the individual, the community and governments – when people with a mental illness and/or carers are not employed.

*Prepared by National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum
A combined national voice for mental health consumers and carers*
Tel: 02 62853100 **Email:** nmhccf@mhca.org.au **Website:** www.nmhccf.org.au

- Using specialist mental health employment services can improve the quality and accessibility of employment opportunities and outcomes for people with mental illness. They help people find and keep suitable work by looking at the individual and the work environment.

Recommendations for change and Key Issues for the Future

The National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum (NMHCCF) believes that all people, especially those with a mental illness and their carers, have a right to employment and employment opportunities.

The NMHCCF supports:

- Increasing the employment rate for people with a mental illness from its present rate of 29% to at least 50% by 2015.
- The federal government/public service increasing its rate of employment of people with a mental illness from its current level of 3.8% to at least the 1986 level of 6.6%.
- Regular collection of appropriate data that accurately monitors the employment status of people with a mental illness, including a publicly available annual report.
- Ongoing investment in the independent evaluation of different employment models, including integrated employment services for people with a mental illness, transitional employment and Social Firms¹; and independently reviewing and publishing the data on the performance of all employment services.
- The development of a workforce plan in every employment service which specifically takes account of the needs of the mentally ill.
- Employment service providers having access to resources necessary to encourage and support businesses in employing people with a mental illness.
- A genuine commitment to providing ongoing funding and support to psychiatric specialist employment services.
- The provision of a nationally available suite of tools specifically designed to assist employers and Human Resource managers to attract, retain and support employees with a mental illness.

¹ A social firm is a not-for-profit business enterprise with the purpose to create accessible employment for people with a disability.

Other Resources

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has developed a National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy which is looking to 'address barriers to employment faced by people with disability, including mental illness. The objective of the Strategy is to increase the employment of people with disability, promote social inclusion and improve national economic productivity.' Copies can be provided by phoning 1300 363 079 or email employmentstrategy@deewr.gov.au

Name of Nominated NMHCCF contacts on this issue

Patrick Hardwick and Judy Bentley

Please contact NMHCCF Secretariat (details below)

*Prepared by National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum
A combined national voice for mental health consumers and carers*
Tel: 02 62853100 **Email:** nmhccf@mhca.org.au **Website:** www.nmhccf.org.au

14 January 2010