



Private Mental Health
Consumer Carer Network (Australia)
engage, empower, enable choice in private mental health

National Secretariat
PO Box 542, Marden, SA 5070
Phone: (08) 8336 2378
Email: jmcmahon@senet.com.au
Web: www.phmccn.org

The Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs,
PO Box 6100,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. ACT 2600

Sent via: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

We thank the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs for the opportunity to provide input into this Inquiry.

The *Private Mental Health Consumer Carer Network (Australia)* (hereafter Network) represents Australians who have private health insurance and/or who receive their treatment and care from private sector settings for their mental illnesses or disorders and their carers. As our title implies, the Network is the authoritative voice for consumers and carers in private mental health settings.

The Network is committed to working with the Parliament of Australia and relevant others in addressing the needs of people with a mental illness and their family or carers. We bring to this Submission, a mental health consumer and carer perspective.

The Network is very concerned about the proposed amendment to the Social Security Act 1991 which if passed, will be implemented from 1 July 2015. This is a cost cutting initiative of the Australian Government with the amendment to the Bill proposing to save \$29.5 million.

The result of this amendment will see consumers undergoing psychiatric confinement ineligible for social security payments. A person may be undergoing psychiatric confinement after being charged with an offence and their fitness to stand trial assessed, or where they have been found unfit to stand trial or have been found not guilty because of their mental impairment. Whilst the Bill provides a period of integration back to their community where social security payments are provided, any time spent outside of the psychiatric facility that are not considered part of the reintegration process will render the person ineligible to receive the payments.

The impact of no income for any person reflects on their basis rights of citizenship, which effectively means they become a non-citizen. This in itself pushes the

Australian Government's intent on mental health recovery focussed services back many years.

What has not been taken into consideration is that consumers more often than not, have their rental payments taken directly from their social security payment in order to maintain housing. These public housing options are very hard to obtain, and every effort is taken to ensure that housing is maintained. Should the amendment be successful, the Network is very concerned that they will not have a house to return to after the period of confinement is lifted.

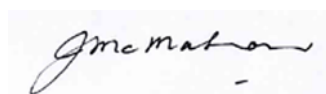
It is the Network's understanding that clothing is not provided in high security settings and the question is also raised about basic human needs, for example simple toiletries, mobile phone charges, gifts for children etc all the things that normalise life for psychiatric consumers.

This further burdens the carer or families of people in this situation. Carers of people with a mental illness find coping with this situation challenging without the added grief of financial burden. Carers and families already contribute financially in many situations, and to find themselves needing to cover rental for housing is particularly worrying

Further, would we ever see a Government proposing amendments to social security payments for people whose lifestyle choices impact on illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, bowel and/or lung cancer, etc. This would see public outrage, and people with mental illness do not choose to have it.

Homelessness is already rife with people with significant mental health issues and the Network is concerned that this proposed amendment will simple release people out of confinement into homelessness.

We thank the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, for the opportunity of providing this Submission. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned on jmcmahon@senet.com.au or 1300 620 042.



Ms Janne McMahon OAM
Chair and Executive Officer
25 May, 2015