



The peak organisation representing the non-government mental health sector in Tasmania at a state and national level

## **Response**

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# **Tasmanian Homelessness Charter**

**August 2011**



**The Mental Health Council of Tasmania has a vision for a vibrant and effective mental health sector in Tasmania.**

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The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) is the peak body representing the interests of consumer, carer and community mental health sector organisations, providing a public voice for people affected by mental illness and the organisations in the community sector that work with them.

The MHCT advocates for effective public policy on mental health for the benefit of the Tasmanian community as a whole and has a strong commitment to participating in processes that contribute to the effective provision of mental health services in Tasmania.

The MHCT appreciates the opportunity to respond to the *Draft Tasmanian Homelessness Charter, Service User and Service Provider Rights and Responsibilities Explained* circulated by consultants Youth Development Australia.

Overall the MHCT commends the document as it clearly outlines the seven rights and responsibilities for service users and service providers.

The MHCT would like to make specific comment on several aspects of the document.

On page seven '**Which services does the charter apply to?**' The document states:

'In Tasmania, generalist services include but are not limited to:

- Police
- Primary Health Care Services (including GP's)
- Schools and Child Care Centres
- Community Health Centres
- Employment and Training Programs'

The MHCT recommends you also include hospitals/health system in the generalist services section.

On page eight the document reads:

'In Tasmania, specialist services include:

- Counselling services
- Mental Health Services
- Disability Services

The MHCT recommends the document also include the Alcohol and Other Drug Service, Justice Service and Police Service in this section.

On page 12 '**Health and Safety**', **(2) The right to have access to accommodation, which is safe.** The document states:

- *Service staff will be trained in first aid, OH&S, managing difficult behaviour, AOD and mental health awareness and safe food handling.'*

The MHCT applauds the inclusion of staff training in mental health. To align with best practice the MHCT recommends the training content has a 'recovery' focus and is designed by people with a lived experience of mental illness.

On page 14 '**Equity and Fairness**', **(1) The right to services that will provide secure, stable, crisis, transitional and long term accommodation based on fair policies.**' The document currently outlines that service users will assist service providers to explore all appropriate long term housing options, which may include public housing, community housing, private rental or transferable properties. To align with contemporary practice the MHCT suggest that this area also include affordable and social housing.

Also on page 14 the document outlines service users will be supported to maintain their tenancies through service providers assisting with payments, modifications and negotiating with landlords. The MHCT recommends that in order for service users to maintain their tenancies they also require assistance from service providers through appropriate and timely support services.

On page 15 '**Equity and Fairness**', **(2) The right to transparent and fair decision making by services and access to advocacy services.**' The document states:

*'It is the service user's responsibility to respect and abide by reasonable and fair decisions. All fair and reasonable decisions should be adhered to by service users.'*

The MHCT would like an expansion/definition in this area of what determines a fair and reasonable decision. The MHCT would also like to see outlined a process on how to measure and/or determine a fair and reasonable decision.

On page 16 '**Equity and Fairness**', **(3) The right to be treated fairly and without prejudice by community support systems.**' The document currently reads:

*'Drug abuse and mental illness – often associated with homelessness are often a symptom caused by the extreme situations many homeless people find themselves in.'*

The MHCT finds this information to be misleading, and thus recommends it be reworded to the following:

*'Drug use and mental illness are often associated with homelessness. This is an extremely complex situation, with uncertainty if mental illness can result in homelessness and whether homelessness can cause mental illness.'*

On page 17 '**Equity and Fairness**', **(4) The right to make a complaint or appeal a decision together with getting a meaningful response, without fear or reprisal.**' The document outlines service users can expect to have access to information about how to raise issues, make a complaint or appeal a decision made by a service. Currently the service user is informed of the process to follow when an issue, complaint or appeal arises. The MHCT would like to see this section expanded to include informing service users prior to an issue, complaint or appeal being raised.

On page 18, '**Non-Discrimination**', **(1) The right to have ones cultural background and religious preference respected.**' The MHCT is pleased to see written into the document that service users will have access to interpreters, which will be made available by services. The MHCT notes that service providers will need to ensure access to funding for the provision of timely and appropriate interpreting services for service users.

On page 20, '**Choice and Self Determination**', **(2) The right to make informed decisions about one's own situation.**' The MHCT has a concern with the language used in this section. It currently reads:

*'Service staff will provide service users with support and information to make good decisions and to understand the consequences of these decisions.'*

The MHCT recommends replacing the word 'consequences' with 'outcomes' in this section.

The MHCT would also like to add an extra dot point following on from:

*'Services have a duty of care to service users, staff, volunteers and the general community.'*

We suggest:

*'Service staff will adhere to privacy/confidentiality policies and legislation.'*

The MHCT congratulates Youth Development Australia on the *Draft Tasmanian Homelessness Charter* and looks forward in contributing to future consultations of the Framework.