

Research finds people living with mental illness don't want favours – just a fair go

People living with a mental illness are missing out on key services and support to get them into the workforce, according to new research by SANE Australia, the national mental health charity.

A national survey on social inclusion released today shows that more than half of 559 people surveyed said their education had been cut short by their illness and they had not received help to resume study.

In addition, two in every three respondents who accessed Centrelink said they were dissatisfied with the help provided by Centrelink and the disability employment services to which they were referred.

'Prime Minister Julia Gillard says she believes in "the dignity of work" and yet one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in our community is not being sufficiently helped to find work and then to keep it,' explains the Executive Director of SANE Australia, Barbara Hocking.

'Many people living with on-going and disabling mental illness reported feeling frustrated by the lack of staff training and resourcing in government-funded employment agencies. They said employment staff often had difficulty understanding their needs and they had unrealistic expectations.

'The government has made significant changes in recent years to improve job creation, but access is still the major stumbling block -- the government needs to join the dots to achieve real employment.

'Work is fundamental to our wellbeing. It promotes self-esteem, provides social contacts and helps us to contribute to society,' says Ms Hocking. 'Work is also a key element in the Federal Government's *Social Inclusion Strategy*. So if the government is genuine about its commitment to social inclusion, it must *include* people living with a mental illness.'

Ms Hocking says that with an election imminent, all political parties must lay their cards on the table and say what they will do to improve the mental health of all Australians, and when.

Using the four areas identified in the *Social Inclusion Strategy*, SANE Australia's **Research Bulletin 12: Social inclusion and mental illness** reports that among those surveyed:

- **Learning** - 54 percent have had their education cut short by their illness and have not received help to resume study;
- **Work** - 75 percent were Centrelink clients and two in every three Centrelink clients were dissatisfied with the help provided by Centrelink and the disability employment services to which they were referred;
- **Engagement** - 52 percent said they did not feel part of their local community, and 42 percent reported that they had been treated disrespectfully at some time because of their mental illness;
- **Having a voice** - 69 percent had experiencing discrimination at some time, because of their mental illness. While other groups in society are protected from vilification (eg, on grounds of religion or race), this protection does not extend to people with a mental illness or other disability.

'To address these inequities, we need to invest more in education, job access and support. We also need all levels of government to help people living with long-term mental illness to play a bigger part in their local community.

'We must improve the process and laws around discrimination, and we need to enable disadvantaged groups, such as people experiencing mental illness, to have a voice.

'Elections are about having a say, and people affected by mental illness want their voices to be heard,' Ms Hocking concludes.

To view *Research Bulletin 12: Social inclusion and mental illness*, [click here](#)

SANE Australia

A national charity working for a better life for people affected by mental illness.

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