



## Talking Point: Why keep picking up the pieces?

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THE stories that we've seen reported this month about people not getting the care and support they are seeking is a tragic reminder that we still have so far to go in providing better mental health care in Tasmania.

Having people coming into our emergency departments distressed and unwell, seeking help, care and support, when more could have happened sooner, has to stop. Now.

We have called for a refocus on what we can do to keep people well and to build a quality mental health service, a service which has prevention and community-based intervention at its heart, and that measures success not by how well our hospitals are meeting demand, but by seeing people's needs being met before they are acutely unwell in the first place.

The failure in our mental health service is in not doing more sooner.

We have been circling around the same issues for far too long — we need more to show for it, and now is the time to get on and do what needs doing, in order to transform the system and experiences for Tasmanians.

Imagine leaving someone at risk of diabetes with no support or intervention until they needed a limb removed? That would cause an outcry — because we know what can be done to prevent the onset of diabetes.

The same can be said and has been proven for mental health care.

We must not allow a person to become acutely unwell before offering them a range of support options to facilitate recovery and maintain their health. It is quite simply unacceptable.

We must change the way we deliver mental health care in our state.

We know there is bipartisan support for it from all sides of government — now, as a community, we must act.

Nobody wants to land in a hospital emergency department.

Individuals and families do want, however, to be cared for in a safe and supportive environment.

We want to see more beds for people in community-based care, where people can be close to family, friends and able to focus on their recovery — and with access to the full range of supports to aid their recovery.

Transformation isn't something we can achieve in isolation of each other. We must put an end to all divisions and work together.

From individuals to government ministers, this is something that impacts all of us.

The reality of mental illness is sobering, and we do not doubt the commitment of everyone involved in wanting to improve the lives of people who are living with the impacts of mental illness.

We have seen politicians from all sides talk about the need for community-based support and integration, and we agree with this thinking. However, this needs to move from statements into action.

This requires change — significant change.

It will involve services and staff working together in ways they haven't before.

Changing practice isn't easy when you're busy doing the best you can, but we can't continue going on this way. This isn't about demanding more than we deserve, this is about demanding what is right and what we have a right to expect.

Whilst we can point to much progress, this past few weeks have shown us all that we must move faster.

What we must applaud is the incredible work of our frontline clinical and non-clinical teams around the state, who are also calling for change.

Should we look at this as a challenge or an opportunity?

Adversity isn't new to Tasmania and we've proven time and again that for a small state, big things can happen.

We have a choice — to do more of the same or make the brave move and show the rest of Australia what can be achieved when you have universal support and commitment to redesign our mental health system to one that is totally geared towards keeping people well and out of hospital. We want a Tasmania that can boast reduced suicide rates, lower hospital admission and readmission rates — and support delivered to individuals when, where and how they need it. We want a Tasmania where hospital may be a part of someone's journey, but not their destination — to move away from a system that treats people when they're unwell and build one that supports people to be well.

For the sake of every Tasmanian's mental health and wellbeing, we need to do all we can right now to transform the way we care for each other.

**Connie Digolis is chief executive of the Mental Health Council of Tasmania.**

*Lifeline 13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)*

*Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)*

*beyondblue: 1300 22 4636 [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)*