



Submission to DoHA re: Draft 10 Year Roadmap for National Mental Health Reform (Feb 2012)

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society. We do this by giving a 'hand up' to people in need, respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny. The Society assists people through home visitations, Migrant and Refugee Assistance, Hospital Visitation, Aged and Special Care Services, Retail Centres, Sheltered Workcentres, Hostels for Homeless Men, Women and Children, Overseas Relief, Disaster Recovery, Budget Counseling and Youth Programs.

Our mission resonates strongly with the intention of the National Mental Health Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, articulated in the Roadmap as the *promotion of social justice, equity, access and a compassionate society, with mental health as its primary goal*. We know from our work that the relationship between social exclusion, trauma and poor mental health is complex and mutually reinforcing. Social justice and social inclusion must be part of a national mental health agenda. This assertion is supported by a large and growing body of international literature on the Social Determinants of Mental Health¹.

¹Freidli, Lin. Dr. (2009) *Mental Health, Resilience and Inequalities*. World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe; Saraceno, B., & Barbui, C., (1997) Poverty and mental illness. *Can. J. Psychiatry*, Vol 42, April. 285-290; Patel, V., Araya, R., de Lima, M., Ludermir, C.T. Women, poverty and common mental disorders in four restructuring societies *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 49, Issue 11, Pages 1461-1471; Wilkinson, R. and Marmot, M. (2003) *The Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts, 2nd Edition*. Geneva: World Health Organisation; Marmot, M. & Seigris J. (2004) 'Health inequalities and the psychosocial Environment' *Social Science and Medicine*. 58:1461; Lynch, J. Kaplan, G. & Shema, S. 1997 'Cumulative Impact of Sustained Economic Hardship on Physical, Cognitive, Psychological and Social Functioning'. *Massachusetts Medical*

The *Draft 10 Year Roadmap for Mental Health Reform* suggests the Government is fully aware that addressing social and economic disadvantage is an important aspect of the broader mental health agenda. Further, the Roadmap notes the importance of social policy in prevention and the role of government in “*developing environments that foster good mental health and protect against known risk factors*”. This points directly to the need for an approach to all social policy that does not simply add on ‘mental health’ considerations after the fact, but that seriously engages with the social inclusion and mental health implications of the policy as a whole. We acknowledge the hard work of advocates both within and outside of Government who continue to push for an increasingly holistic approach to mental health reform that takes seriously the Social Determinants of Health and Well Being.

We emphatically plead that the Social Determinants perspective on mental health not be subsequently be sidelined in the detail of the *10 Year Roadmap for Mental Health Reform*. The implications of confronting tough policy issues in a genuinely interdepartmental, systemic manner are far less daunting than the implications of ignoring the mental health (and other health) outcomes of housing instability, poverty and other factors that contribute to social exclusion. Successfully addressing the crisis of mental health in Australia and globally requires nothing less than a paradigm shift.

In order for these issues to remain on the agenda it is important that the development of the Roadmap is not rushed and that there is a considerable depth and breadth of consultation with all stakeholders, particularly non-clinical service providers, consumers and others who have historically been excluded in mental health policy development.

We are concerned that without targets and timeframes the most progressive aspects of the plan are destined to fade into irrelevance. This is too good an opportunity to waste. In light of these concerns and the historically significant opportunity the Roadmap presents, the St Vincent d Paul Society recommends-

- That the Mental Health Commission engage in a thorough consultation and co-design process and oversee the further development of the Roadmap. This cannot be rushed.
- That all Actions and Key Performance Indicators in the Roadmap are tied to specific timeframes and targets.

The Society recommends the Roadmap include-

- Stronger actions (including timeframes and targets) relating to housing, poverty and social exclusion to reflect a paradigm shift in the Government's acknowledgment of the Social Determinants of Mental Health ; and the extent of the social and economic cost of mental illness and mental ill-health resulting from disadvantage and marginalization;
- Actions (with timelines and targets) to support mainstreaming evidenced based Social Determinants of Health and Well Being approaches to policy development across sectors and departments;
- Actions (with timelines and targets) that will facilitate interdepartmental co-operation in regard to the role of social policy in *"developing environments that foster good mental health and protect against known risk factors"*.