



Private Mental Health
Consumer Carer Network (Australia)

engage, empower, enable choice in private mental health

National Secretariat

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The Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Economics
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Sent via: economics.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

BUDGET SAVINGS (OMNIBUS) BILL 2016 PSYCHIATRIC CONFINEMENT

We thank the Standing Committee on Economics 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.

We refer to our previous Submission of 25 May, 2015 to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, in which we detailed our perspectives and response to their previous Inquiry into the 'Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2015'.

We believe that this proposed legislation for listing in the House of Representatives very shortly is much the same as for the previous Legislation of 2015. If this is so, then our concerns have not changed and remain the same as we articulated previously.

The Network is concerned that the result of any legislation put to the Parliament and if agreed, will see consumers undergoing psychiatric confinement ineligible for social security payments. These people 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 Legislation 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. This in itself has significant impact on mental health recovery.

What seems not to have been previously taken into consideration or now, 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 sometimes with waiting periods years long, and every effort needs to be 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.

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

We thank the Standing Committee on Economics, 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J McMahon', is centered on a light-colored rectangular background.

Ms Janne McMahon OAM
Chair and Executive Officer
5th September, 2016