

Inquiry into Social Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform) Bill 2017

Community Mental Health Australia (CMHA) is writing to support the submission from the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) to the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare Reform) Bill 2017* (the Bill).

CMHA is particularly concerned with the following provisions in the Bill:

- establishment of drug testing;
- removal of exemptions for drug and alcohol dependence;
- changes to reasonable excuses; and
- targeted compliance framework.

These are all measures which are likely to impact people with a mental illness and particularly co-occurring mental health and drug or alcohol dependency issues. As per the recommendation of ACOSS in their submission to this inquiry, there must be a proper review of the compliance system for people who are unemployed before any changes to the existing compliance framework. Any changes that are not first tested are likely to have unintended consequences, particularly for people who experience episodic conditions and will be impacted by these changes and compliance matters.

Regarding mental health and drug and alcohol dependency, CMHA would draw the Committee's attention to the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Mental Health Services in Brief 2016*. This found that the most commonly reported special needs group for the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PhaMs) was alcohol and/or drug misuse. PhaMs focus is to increase recovery for people who are severely affected by mental illness.¹ As the Committee may be aware, PhaMs funding is being transferred to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

This information is relevant as it demonstrates that people with mental illness and drug or alcohol dependency are not uncommon, and that such information must be taken into account when making proposed changes around welfare where these groups are likely to be impacted.

CMHA supports ACOSS' recommendations regarding the Bill.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2016) Mental health services – in brief. Canberra: AIHW