

5 June 2012

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email to: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senate Committee

Re: Australian Human Rights Commission Amendment (National Children's Commissioner) Bill 2012

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to the establishment of a National Children's Commissioner under the auspices of the Australian Human Rights Commission and supports the establishment of a National Children's Commissioner to promote and protect the rights and well being of vulnerable children.

As the Commonwealth has stated that mental health is a government priority, it is imperative that the social and emotional well being of children is given prominence. The establishment of a National Children's Commissioner within the Australian Human Rights Commission should ensure all children can access appropriate mental health care in a timely manner that safeguards their rights.

The RANZCP agrees that the role of the National Children's Commissioner should be to:

- Actively engage and consult with experts, representative groups and medical specialists regarding issues related to children and children's social health and their emotional well being (including mental health);
- Actively engage and consult with children;
- Provide advice and recommendations to the Commonwealth, regarding children's mental health problems (0 – 18 years);
- Monitor and oversee the application of Commonwealth legislations, programs and policies in relation to children's social health, emotional well being and their mental health;
- Conduct research and undertake inquiries into issues that affect the rights, well being and development of children;
- Promote co-operation between the Commonwealth, States and Territories on issues and policies related to children;

- Work with States and Territories Children's Commissioners to ensure uniform high quality standards in the role of the Children's Commissioners and the services they provide.

In addition to the responsibilities stated above, the RANZCP makes the following recommendations on how the National Children's Commissioner could promote improved social and emotional well being of children.

The National Children's Commissioner should:

- collaborate with the National Mental Health Commission to ensure that the rights of children and adolescents receiving mental health care are protected and that appropriate services for them are available and accessed equitably;
- Identify children who may be vulnerable and disadvantaged and identify services that could assist them;
- Oversee the development of issues raised as a consequence of the impact of media on vulnerable children and adolescents. The College has published a Position Statement on the adverse effects of media on vulnerable children that can be accessed on the College website (see http://www.ranzcp.org/Files/ranzcp-attachments/Resources/College_Statements/Position_Statements/ps72-pdf.aspx)
- Ensure compliance with the UN Convention of the Rights of Children, with respect to the promotion of prevention and early intervention strategies for all those who receive treatment;
- Promote public education and community awareness of children's rights, well being and development, particularly to parents;
- Promote education and community awareness for parents who, themselves have a mental illness, a drug or alcohol problem or a disability.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues in regard to this letter, or would like any further information, please contact Dr Anne Ellison, via _____ or by phone on _____.

Yours sincerely

Dr Maria Tomasic
President

Ref: 2453