

31 January 2014

The Senate Select Committee into the Abbott Government's Commission of Audit
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members,

SANE Australia welcomes the establishment of the Senate Select Committee into the Government's Commission of Audit.

For more than 27 years, SANE Australia has been championing mental health reform and better services for all Australians affected by mental illness. We have worked hard to reduce stigma and we've always done that in partnership with people with lived experience. Reducing stigma leads to people accessing services earlier and that means better outcomes for individuals and reduced costs for governments.

In light of the unequivocal pre-election commitments by the Coalition to maintain health funding, and the statement by Health Minister Dutton that mental health was a major priority of the new Government, it is essential that mental health funding is quarantined from consideration by the Commission of Audit.

As Committee members will be aware, the National Mental Health Commission has been tasked with a review of the mental health system. This is further reason why the Commission of Audit should not consider mental health services or their funding.

We acknowledge and welcome the increased funding support to mental health in recent years and the strong cross-party political support for mental health at the Federal level to date. We are concerned however about the very real risk of both mental health falling down the priority list of government and cross-party support fracturing.

The reality remains that almost two thirds of Australians with a mental disorder are still not accessing services. Too many Australians are dying from suicide. Too many Australians are not getting the mental health services they need. Investing in mental health benefits everyone and reduces costs for individuals, communities and governments.

But over and beyond the need to maintain our investments in mental health, SANE Australia asserts that Australia has the very real potential to lead the world in mental health services, programs and outcomes. Australia already has a number of mental health initiatives where we do lead the world. We have a responsible media, a relatively strong economy and high levels of community interest. Mental health is probably the one area, more than any other, where could set and achieve a national goal to lead the world.

We need to focus on more and better investment in mental health – not reductions – so it is essential that the Commission of Audit not touch mental health.

Kind regards

Jack Heath
Chief Executive Officer

Helping all Australians
affected by mental illness
lead a better life

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