

Dear Sir/ Madame,

In my role as a physiotherapist working in Older Mental Health I have become aware of the paucity of services available for those older individuals who are cognitively intact or with only mild to moderate impairment with mental illness. I work out of a service which has since inception operated as an acute care service. People who come to us immediately post discharge as an inpatient or from the community are treated until stable and then discharged to the community. Our goal is to assist them into community services on discharge. However, there are very few if any services in the community that provide a supported environment for older people with a mental illness. Many of these people would benefit from long term programs including structured exercise with trained staff.

Furthermore if the client is in a hostel because of difficulty caring for themselves they are not eligible for HACC funding or if there are services available they are HACC funded and therefore not accessible to our clients who are often the young elderly. Aged Care Hostels do not provide appropriate programs for mentally ill clients. I have seen clients wander the streets for something to do as the hostels do not provide any programs suitable for them. Alternatively I have seen them become socially isolated at home as they are not able to cope with social situations without continued support. When this occurs they inevitably rebound and are re-referred and may require admission to an inpatient facility or intensive input from the team. To conclude there are insufficient programs available in the community for the older person with a mental illness who may require long term ongoing support to remain an integral part of our community.

Richelle Etchells