

## **Foreword to the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health's First Report**

This inquiry by the Select Committee on Mental Health has been a unique opportunity to meet with people in the mental health sector, be they consumers, carers, health professionals or administrators. The committee has been given enormous community support, received the results of many peoples' hard work, and been shown great hospitality wherever it has gone. I want to thank everyone who has assisted the committee and its work.

This is the committee's first report. It provides a wide-ranging review of many aspects of mental health care in Australia, and delivers a set of important, unanimous recommendations. In a few weeks the committee will deliver a second, shorter report.

The decision to divide its report into two parts was the result of a particular confluence of events. As it conducted its inquiry, the committee was inundated with submissions and other evidence about the need for change in the field of mental health. Fuelled by this evidence, and by the hard work of others including the Mental Health Council of Australia and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, mental health reform is now rightly at the top of the policy agenda for governments around the country.

In February 2006 the Council of Australian Governments agreed to initiate a rapid process of discussion and policy development on mental health. The committee was committed to ensuring that its inquiry and findings had a significant influence on this important reform process. It therefore decided to report to the Senate the bulk of its work and a suite of recommendations that the committee believes should be addressed in the CoAG policy reform discussions.

In the coming weeks the committee will table a brief second report. This will set out some more detailed recommendations that arise from the committee's findings in particular areas of concern. These recommendations will be no less important than those set out in this first report, but the committee wanted to ensure that there was no delay in providing vital input to the CoAG process.

The committee looks forward to CoAG's adoption of the recommendations included here, and to all governments, agencies and organisations responding to the recommendations that will be included in the second report.

Senator Lyn Allison  
Chair

