

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Mental Health.

I live in Canberra, ACT. Recently my family provided temporary accommodation to a person with a mental health problem. Mary (not her real name) stayed with us for a week. During that time I attempted to find urgent alternative accommodation for Mary by phoning all the refuges and Canberra Emergency Accommodation on a daily basis, all to no avail. Mary is a single woman in her 40s with no children. Backpackers accommodation was also not available because they refused to take in someone who might possibly harm themselves.

Mary stayed with us on the understanding that she had to leave by the end of the week because we did not have a spare room (a member of our family was already sleeping on the couch). At the end of the week after about 50 fruitless telephone calls, Mary left my house with nowhere to go. I don't know where she is and it is a concern to me. Mary's family do not live in Canberra and we were not able to contact them before Mary left our house last week.

Why could no agency help Mary? Why did Mary end up with no where to live before coming to us? Why hasn't someone been appointed her support worker and been in touch with her on a regular basis?

Recommendations:

1. There needs to be more crisis accommodation available for single people with mental health problems.
2. There needs to be proper case management and support for people with mental health problems.
3. Crisis accommodation could include "foster" families who would be willing to take in a person with a mild or manageable mental health problem on a temporary basis.
4. Some people with mental health problems need a friend who can be their constant companion in times of need. A "constant companion", buddy or friend could be a last resort point of contact - a lifeline for these people who find themselves alone.
5. People with manageable mental health problems should all be given mobile phones and a list of contact numbers.

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