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Via email: ctcommunications@communities.tas.gov.au

Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT)

Response to the consultation on the draft Housing Tasmania Bill 2022

MHCT welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the consultation on the draft *Housing Tasmania Bill 2022*. MHCT is the peak body for community managed mental health services in Tasmania. We represent and promote the interests of our members and work closely with government and agencies to ensure sectoral input into public policies and programs.

Appropriate housing is a critical factor to support people in recovery of mental ill health.¹ However, many people experiencing mental illness live in unsuitable housing that can negatively affect multiple aspects of their lives, including the recovery and management of their mental illness. Furthermore, in some cases, lack of suitable housing results in people being placed for extended periods in hospital or residential care. The *Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Mental Health* identified that approximately 30% of mental health hospital inpatients could potentially be discharged if appropriate clinical and accommodation services were available in the community.² Currently, Tasmania has a much higher proportion of people experiencing mental ill health who are accessing homelessness services than the national average (clients per 10,000 population: Tasmania - 62.3 clients, National - 34.3 clients).³ With over 46 people per day turned away from specialist homelessness shelters in Tasmania, people with mental health conditions are particularly vulnerable.

Additionally, access to appropriate housing is a critical protective factor in supporting people to maintain their mental health and wellbeing and avoid distress. The *Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health* indicates that people living in less secure housing (such as renters and social housing tenants) disproportionately experience higher levels of psychological distress.^{4 5} Yet, as of April 2022, there were 4,382 applications for social housing in Tasmania.⁶

MHCT is particularly concerned that the housing support needs of people experiencing mental ill health and those who may potentially experience psychological distress due to a lack of secure housing are not adequately and overtly reflected in the new *Housing Tasmania Bill*.

MHCT recommends that the powers and functions for the new housing authority includes the following objectives:

- Reducing homelessness
- Reducing housing stress
- Improving access to housing, assistance and support for people living with mental ill health.

Additionally, MHCT recommends that the powers and functions for the new housing authority include in its core functions the capacity to:

- Support and fund the delivery of social and affordable housing
- Conduct research and develop strategic housing and homelessness policy
- Manage social housing, specialist homelessness services and home ownership assistance programs
- Build the capacity of the housing and homelessness sector
- Maintain the commitment to consultation with housing and homelessness services, including tenants and service users

Furthermore, MHCT recognises that the 'Minister's Statement of Expectations' is an essential mechanism in guiding the direction and outcomes of the new housing authority. MHCT recommends that the Minister's Statement of Expectations includes a clear mandate to deliver energy efficient and environmentally friendly homes that both make the development of new homes liveable and affordable. Additionally, MHCT proposes that Section 14 of the Bill includes an additional board member with skills and expertise in homelessness services, housing support and tenancy management for vulnerable and very low-income clients.

For further discussion on any aspects of this response, please contact MHCT.

Yours sincerely,



Connie Digolis
CEO
Mental Health Council of Tasmania

References

¹ Mental Health Australia (2021) Housing and Mental Health
https://mhaustralia.org/sites/default/files/docs/mental_health_australia_position_statement_-_housing_and_mental_health_-_april_2021_-_final.pdf

² Productivity Commission (2020) Mental Health: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report
<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report/mental-health-volume3.pdf>

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) Specialist homelessness services 2020–21: Tasmania
https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c6e374d2-f9b6-4c69-a491-2a9e9857b441/TAS_factsheet.pdf.aspx

⁴ Productivity Commission (2020) Mental Health: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report
<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report/mental-health-volume3.pdf>

⁵ National Suicide Prevention Advice (2021) Executive Summary
<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/04/national-suicide-prevention-adviser-final-advice-executive-summary.pdf>

⁶ Tasmanian Government (2022) Housing Dashboard April 2022
https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/225471/Housing-Dashboard-April-2022.pdf