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Mental Health Council of Tasmania Media Release

MHCT calls on government to fulfill long standing commitment to community mental health sector

The Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) has called on the state government to demonstrate its commitment to the vital community mental health sector, as it starts drafting the 2025-26 State Budget which is due to be announced in May.

MHCT's submission to the State Budget Community Consultation process highlights the uncertainty faced by community mental health organisations, which is borne from a combination of short-term (often only one-year) contracts, and minimal renewal notice periods.

MHCT CEO, Connie Digolis, said, "One of the biggest challenges our member organisations face is a direct consequence of short-term contracts. Without the certainty that five-year agreements afford, it's impossible for them to forward plan. This lack of certainty makes it very difficult to attract and retain staff."

In a forum hosted by MHCT prior to the March 2024 election, Minister Barnett reiterated the government's long-standing commitment to transition community mental health organisations to "five-year contracts commencing as existing terms expire and with the handing down of the 2024-25 budget".

More recently, during budget estimates in September, the government appeared to scale back their commitment, saying five-year agreements would only apply to "some contracts", and that many community mental health organisations "don't quite fit the category".

"Community organisations are the backbone of Tasmania's mental health system. The supports they offer help prevent people becoming unnecessarily unwell. They also assist people with more severe mental health issues live their best lives in the community and stay out of hospital. Without suitable funding arrangements, organisations will struggle to provide the same level of support, which will lead to a significant and unsustainable increase in the number of people requiring acute care," said Ms Digolis.

MHCT is also calling for contracts to be reviewed six months prior to their end date. Under the current process, many organisations are left waiting until the last minute to find out if funding for crucial programs will be renewed.

"Imagine if the supports you rely on could cease to exist with only a couple of weeks' notice. Or not knowing if you'll have a job in a fortnight. This continues to be the reality for many across the community mental health sector as the end of financial year approaches. The government has an opportunity to put an end to this uncertainty - to demonstrate they are committed not only to the sector, but also to the thousands of Tasmanians who rely on the supports."

With the prevalence of situational distress and mental health issues increasing, Ms Digolis said the community mental health sector was the key to empowering Tasmanians to access the right support early, while taking pressure off more acute supports and ensuring they are accessible when people need them.

She concluded, “The success of the mental health system in Tasmania should be measured by the number of people we can help to stay out of our hospitals, not by the number of people we can fit into them. That’s why it’s imperative that the Tasmanian Government ensure the ongoing viability and sustainability of the community managed mental health sector by fulfilling their commitment to fair and sustainable contracts for organisations across the sector.”

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Mental Health Council of Tasmania Budget Priority Submission: [PDF](#)

Please include the following crisis support services for any story regarding mental health or suicide:

A Tasmania Lifeline: 1800 984 434 atasmanianlifeline.com.au/

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or Text 0477 13 11 14 lifeline.org.au

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 kidshelpline.com.au/

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 suicidecallbackservice.org.au

More information on safely reporting on mental illness or suicide can be found at:

mindframe.org.au/ and lifeinmind.org.au/the-charter