



Annual Report 2011-12

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia has had another great year. Many of MIFA's key activities have focussed on ensuring the voices of people affected by mental illness, including families and friends, are heard in the places where decisions are being made about how services and supports will develop in the future.

Preparing to deliver the national service guarantee

One of the most significant activities of the year has been the development and launch of the national network backed by the national service guarantee now launched nationally as Mi Networks.

A Project Team led by Tony Stevenson at MIFQ developed and successfully supported MIFA members across Australia to launch Mi Networks. A local champions' network, a media campaign and the release of videos and printed material saw 80 front doors across Australia begin to deliver the Mi Networks promise. A partnership with SANE Australia allows every Mi Networks location to use the SANE information sheets, which are regularly reviewed and updated for accuracy.

David Meldrum made several television appearances, there were more than 60 radio interviews featuring the MIFA members and social media contributed to making sure that the news about Mi Networks was widely known.

MIFA member organisations reported an increase in calls to their offices via the 1800 985 944 national toll-free number, including calls from hard to reach people as exemplified by MIFSA receiving calls from men in rural SA following an early morning radio appearance by David Meldrum.

There are still several local launches to occur as organisations synchronise their launch with local events. MIFA is happy to report that our newest member, Aftercare, will also join Mi Networks bringing as many as 40 additional front doors to the network.

Raising our profile as Australia's national provider, focused severe mental illness

The Executive Director, David Meldrum has been involved in the development of the Department of Health and Ageing initiative 'Partners in Recovery'

initiative addressing the needs of people with severe and persistent mental illness for whom local processes have proven to be inadequate. Later, David was invited to join one of a series of working groups to contribute to the development of the national Mental Health Service Planning Framework which is describing mental health services for the purpose of funding. The latest opportunity has arisen out of the Commonwealth's announcement of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and David is involved in the area of workforce, where we have a lot to offer in the development of peer based services and the interface between the clinical and community sectors.

As the year developed our attention to the issue of the physical health of people with mental illness has been maintained and some unique relationships have begun to develop. MIFA's work with Diabetes Australia (DA) has led to a collaborative approach in developing a policy for DA which reflects the importance of the needs of people affected by mental illness in relation to the risk of type 2 diabetes and information aimed at our specific audience. MIFA and DA will continue to explore opportunities to bring resources and assistance to people at risk of or affected by mental illness and diabetes.

SANE Australia has worked with MIFA again this year on the Parliamentary Friend of Mental Illness. Two breakfasts presided over by the co-chairs and a series of newsletters that summarise the events were successfully completed. MIFA and SANE will meet at the end of 2012 with the co-chairs and the funder, Janssen Australia to plan for 2013.

Schizophrenia Awareness Week

The physical health of people affected by mental illness also featured prominently in members' activities during Schizophrenia Awareness Week (SAW) in 2012 (May 14 to 21). A working group of member organisations, led by Sandra Vidot at MIFWA, successfully concluded the development and delivery of the SAW 2012 program with the support of a peer project officer and our funders, Janssen Australia and Eli Lilly.

The edited highlights of two webinar presentations aimed at people affected by mental illness – one about smoking and the other about improving physical – activity--are available on MIFA's YouTube site. In support of these activities, there are three personal stories related by people with mental illness about their personal struggles with the physical issues exacerbated by their mental illness. These are also available on the MIFA YouTube site.

During the development of activities for SAW 2012 it became clear that there was limited information about the physical health needs of people with mental illness, and that what information could be found was spread across several organisations. MIFA conducted a survey to identify the key information that people were searching for and revised its own website to bring information and resources together in a single place. The new page within the website received a good response from users on its publication. Twitter users gave the page good reviews and recommended it to their followers.

An unexpected highlight of Schizophrenia Awareness Week was an online petition that stated that "People

with mental illness do not have to die early". Close to 1,000 people (mostly from Australia, but also from NZ and occasionally from other countries) took the time and effort to sign the petition and more than half left comments about how they felt about the issue. These comments have been used effectively in lobbying and advocacy activities.

Doubling our current collective income from all sources

Some activities have been affected by delays in the release of tenders for Commonwealth and other contracts and a reduction in the availability of project funds from philanthropic and other sources.

Members have supported the work of the national tendering working party, led by Natasha Miliotis from MIFSA who review available tenders to recommend the path that MIFA should take. The group leads MIFA in supporting members in bids, making good partnerships with local organisations or responding to opportunities on behalf of MIFA. There are currently several bids under consideration at the national level including in the areas of suicide prevention, NDIS and tobacco use

The National Tobacco and Mental Illness program will complete its current funding period in January 2013 and MIFA is still confident of making resources available to ensure that people affected by mental illness get the best opportunities to contribute to their own well-being by working toward quitting.

MIFA successfully completed a contract on behalf of the National Mental Health Commission to coordinate the collection and completion of stories about people affected by mental illness for inclusion in the first

NMHC Report Card. MIFA continues to offer support to the Commission as a good choice when seeking to ensure that the voices of people affected by mental illness are heard.

Strengthening MIFA governance

At a special meeting of members on 9th July 2012 the Constitution of MIFA was revised to more adequately reflect the changing landscape of MIFA's organisational reach while offering our founding members the unanimous approval of new memberships. This cleared the way for the decision to admit Aftercare as a member, the first time MIFA has moved away from its 'one member per region' policy. Several other matters were addressed simultaneously including improving the achievement of a quorum of the Board and the appointment of alternates for each Board member.

The MIFA Board has approved a number of policies this year, highlighting the shared vision of the members. These are available on the MIFA website and include, working with the whole family, recovery principles, physical health and well-being and peer work, with a new policy under consideration about suicide prevention and support.

MIFA has sought to continuously improve its governance, and the Board has approved the recently reviewed governance policies.

