

Media Release – Embargoed Until Friday 4th October, 2019

At least 225,000 Australians with a severe and complex mental illness who are not eligible for Australia’s National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are getting inadequate support warns the not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA).

MIFA’s CEO Tony Stevenson says unquestionably – because of this - a huge number of people are very clearly at risk of escalating mental illness issues leading to hospital admission.

MIFA says whilst 25% of people with a severe and complex mental illness are getting some support from the NDIS, a huge 75% are being left out in the cold. Tony Stevenson says the current situation is totally unacceptable.

MIFA highlights 3.8 million Australians now live with mental illness. 690,000 of them live with a severe mental illness, including 290,000 with added complexity with their recovery

The not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) says it is deeply alarmed that a huge 225,000 people across Australia who have a severe and complex mental illness, are not eligible to get support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

MIFA CEO Tony Stevenson highlights just 25% of all people who have a severe and complex mental illness are eligible for the NDIS. The NDIS provides funds directly to individuals and is Australia’s first national scheme for people with a disability. The Federal Government estimates 4.3 million Australians now have a disability. He highlights MIFA is especially worried about the 225,000 people not getting help.

Tony Stevenson says it is critical that all governments are clearly held to account for the huge inadequacy of our current mental health system. MIFA says it is estimated that 3.8 million Australians now live with a mental illness.

Tony Stevenson said, “Governments simply cannot afford to ignore these big issues because otherwise taxpayers will be funding bigger and bigger costs of acute mental health services, homelessness, prisons and lost productivity.”

MIFA warns bluntly that it is very clear 75% of people with a severe and complex mental illness are getting no help at all from the NDIS. Tony Stevenson says without proper support, this massive number of people is very clearly at risk of escalating mental illness ... which will then require hospital admission.

He added, “Right now mental health in Australia is very fragmented. The NDIS has definitely brought some positive change. So much more is desperately needed.”

“A big part of the problem currently is that to fund the NDIS, the Federal Government shut down many critical programs – such as Personal Helpers and Mentors, Partners in Recovery and Day to Day Living. Numerous State and Territory programs were also axed. Governments have brought back some funding to replace this, but this is inadequate and poorly planned”.

Tony Stevenson says a huge number of experienced staff were lost to the system and many people with mental health issues are now clearly struggling to know where to go to get practical support.

Tony Stevenson said, “Latest data reveals 65% of all GP presentations are for mental health issues. 690,000 people across the nation live with a severe mental illness.”

“We urgently want a national recovery program with significant financial investment in a wide range of recovery focused community-based supports. At one point there is no question Australia had a world class recovery model. We should be building on that, not going backwards.”

“There can be no question that we need a staggering number of additional community managed services right now to help the 690,000 Australians with a severe mental illness. Severe mental illness can be episodic. Sometimes people need a high level of support. At other times, less support is obviously needed.”

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia says regional requirements need to be more clearly identified so that existing gaps can be dealt with. Tony Stevenson says regional analysis is needed to identify how best to support people across Australia’s diverse communities.

He highlights people should get the appropriate level of help they need, when they need it, and there should be a clear facility to step the support up or down depending on the need. MIFA warns people need greater support to get housing when they are being discharged from hospital and greater support to get a job if their mental health has been stable.

Tony Stevenson added, “We estimate at least \$500 million a year is needed right now to support people with severe mental illness. People with mental health issues have highly complex needs. They require special targeted support, delivered in the right way at the right time. We want people to live well in the community for as long as possible. There can be no doubt that there are many people who have a mental illness and function well in the community.”

“We ask everybody to be aware that people with severe mental illness can actually live successfully in the community and will recover if the right support is there. We want people to be aware that there are very clear benefits to the community and our economy when people with severe mental illness are actually supported. That way they are kept out of possibly acute mental health care facilities.”

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia urges people everywhere to reach out for help. People can either call Mi Networks on 1800 985 944 ... a free service which offers guidance on mental health issues ... or people can go to www.minetworks.org.au.

Media enquiries to Media Key on 03 9769 6488 or 0409 420 112