



Media Release – Embargoed Until Thursday 23rd May, 2024

The key not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) says millions of dollars are desperately needed to boost mental health care services and help people in Australia.

MIFA’s CEO, Tony Stevenson, says 154,000 people with a severe and complex mental illness are missing out on support and says it is time to do better.

A recent report found Australia’s current mental health system is fragmented, disjointed and utterly dysfunctional. Tony Stevenson says people with severe mental illness – including schizophrenia – have been woefully neglected by governments for decades.

The not-for-profit Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) says it is critical the Federal, State and Territory Governments release millions of dollars to boost mental health care services in the State and help people in Australia.

MIFA CEO Tony Stevenson says the neglect of mental health care services for people with severe mental illness is on a huge scale – and has been going on for far too long.

Tony Stevenson says a financial boost to cash starved services means much more can be done to meet the huge demand for mental health assistance for people with severe mental illness.

Tony Stevenson says it is vital priorities change dramatically because a huge number of Australians with severe mental health issues are desperately wanting to reach out and get assistance.

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia highlights a recent report has clearly found across Australia 154,000 people with a severe and complex mental illness are missing out on support.

The funding needed to help this group is at least \$610 million per year.

The theme of this year’s MIFA campaign is “It’s Time To Do Better”.

Tony Stevenson says the recent productivity commission report clearly found that Australia's current mental health system is fragmented and disjointed ... and is utterly dysfunctional.

Tony Stevenson said, "Sadly people with severe mental illness – which includes schizophrenia – have been woefully neglected by successive governments for decades. It is just not acceptable. Obviously, it is no surprise people are falling through the gaps and failing to get the right support when they actually need it."

"Half the people currently living with schizophrenia get absolutely no community support. This is despite the promises made 35 years ago that de-institutionalisation would clearly be replaced by community support."

Tony Stevenson said people living with severe and complex mental health conditions experience much poorer life outcomes and can die up to 23 years earlier than the general population. He points out a massive 50% of people with the most severe mental illness attempt suicide compared to 3.7% of the general population. Tony Stevenson says this is utterly shameful.

Tony Stevenson said, "If people don't receive the support they need early in their mental illness, there is an increased likelihood of prolonged distress and life-long disability. This leads to bigger costs for the health system and increased dependence on social services. It also increases the risk of unemployment, homelessness and interactions with police, justice and corrections."

Tony Stevenson says up to 200,000 people are impacted by schizophrenia and it is more common in men to a small degree. He highlights people who have schizophrenia may experience delusions, hallucinations, disorganised thinking and more.

Tony says the vast majority of violence in the community – around 96% - is carried out by people who do NOT experience a complex mental health situation such as schizophrenia. He points out that it is vital that people impacted by the condition get the clinical treatment and community support they need.

Tony Stevenson added, "People with schizophrenia are not intellectually disabled. They do not have split personalities and they are generally not dangerous when they are receiving appropriate treatment."

MIFA says its latest campaign will highlight families need more support too because there are significant impacts on families and carers when people are not getting the help they need.

Tony Stevenson highlights unpaid or informal carers have clearly become a hidden workforce in Australia, currently saving governments a massive \$13.2 billion per year. He says this is quite ridiculous. He highlights there are an estimated 240,000 mental health carers around the nation, supporting loved ones.

Tony Stevenson said, "The Prime Minister has said we can always do better when it comes to mental health. We call on all governments to create a new national program which will clearly close the gap for the massive 154,000 Australians with severe and complex mental illness who are getting no community support at all. Now is the time to do better."

The Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia has a key not-for-profit network called Finding North which has become a growing community on the internet, to link people with mental health issues with others in a similar situation so they can share their experiences. To get more information, just go to www.findingnorth.org.au

**Media enquiries to Media Key on 0409 420 112 or 03 9769 6488
Tony Stevenson is available for interview.**