

beyondblue  
the national depression initiative  
www.beyondblue.org.au



9 October 2008

The Executive Officer  
Family and Community Development Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Executive Officer

**Re: Inquiries into Supported Accommodation for those with Disability and Mental Illness**


*beyondblue: the national depression initiative* is pleased to have the opportunity to present this Submission to the Family and Community Development Committee on Supported Accommodation for those with Disability and Mental Illness. While the inquiries are being held concurrently, *beyondblue* provides comment on mental health issues, in particular, those relating to the high prevalence disorders of depression, anxiety and related drug and alcohol disorders. In saying this, however, these comments should also be applied to strategies relating to people with disability, due to their increased risk of mental health problems.

*beyondblue* recommends the following be considered as urgent and pressing needs:

- **Increase SAAP Client and SAAP Worker access to information on depression, anxiety and related disorders** through a range of materials, resources, fact sheets. These are offered by *beyondblue* free of charge;
- **Delivery of training to SAAP Workers on depression, anxiety and related disorders** to increase understanding, knowledge and awareness and decrease stigma. This is offered by *beyondblue* to be provided by the *beyondblue* National Workplace Training Program;
- **Delivery of training on mental health programs and service system** to increase linkages between SAAP workforce and secondary care services to increase access and pathways to mental health care for SAAP clients.

I trust our Submission will enhance the Committee's understanding of issues for Victorians with mental health issues in the supported accommodation sector. Thank you for the opportunity to participate.

Yours faithfully

  
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Chief Executive Officer

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# Submission to Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for those with Disability and Mental Illness

October 2008

## About *beyondblue*: the national depression initiative

*beyondblue*: the national depression initiative is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related disorders in Australia.

*beyondblue* works in partnership with health services, schools, workplaces, universities, media and community organisations, as well as people living with depression and their carers, to bring together their expertise. Specific population groups that *beyondblue* targets are young people, Indigenous peoples, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living in rural areas, and the elderly.

*beyondblue* has five priority areas that it structures its work around. These are:

1. Increasing community awareness of depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders;
2. Providing people living with depression and their carers with information on the illness and effective treatment options and promoting their needs and experiences with policy makers and healthcare providers;
3. Developing depression prevention and early intervention programs;
4. Improving depression training and support for general practitioners and other healthcare professionals;
5. Initiating and supporting depression-related research.

## Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for those with a Mental Illness

*beyondblue* welcomes the Victorian Government's commitment to addressing the issue of supported housing issues for those with disability and mental illness and appreciates the opportunity to formally respond via the submission process.

### Key points regarding housing and mental illness

- Mental illness represents the third highest burden of disease in Australia, behind all cancers and cardiovascular disease, but has the highest number of years lost to disability.<sup>1</sup>
- Mental illness is a major risk factor for becoming homeless.
- Mental illness can be evidenced as both a *contributing factor* for homelessness and as an *effect of* homelessness.
- People with a mental illness are 'less likely than other homeless people to receive the type of support they need'.<sup>2</sup>
- People who are homeless experience mental illness at a much higher rate than the general population.<sup>3</sup>

Homelessness occurs for a multitude of reasons including social, economic, cultural and health related reasons. *beyondblue* agrees there is a need for a multi-pronged strategy to improve the provision of services to people in the SAAP sector with mental health problems.

It should be recognised that people with a disability may also experience mental health problems and that their risk for developing depression may be greater than the general

health care.<sup>5</sup> This initiative has provided key changes to Medicare aimed at improving community access to quality primary mental health services and providing more support to GPs from psychologists, psychiatrists and allied health professionals. Under the *Better Access* program, mental health care is now more accessible and affordable for people living with mental illness. Medicare rebates are now available for up to 12 individual and/or 12 group-based mental health services within a calendar year. This involves a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician referring a person to a psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist or a specially trained GP. The area of significance for SAAP clients is that a rebate of 100% is available on a number of items through the Better Access Program.

See below "Skilling up the SAAP workforce to understand mental health programs and services".

## Workforce issues

### Skilling up the SAAP workforce to understand depression, anxiety and related disorders

We believe it is essential to educate, support and 'skill up' SAAP staff to effectively assist clients with and beyond their housing needs. *beyondblue* commits to working closely with the homelessness and housing sector to address gaps in the area of depression and anxiety awareness and knowledge.

To support the Victorian Government and SAAP workers in addressing this need, *beyondblue* is offering to provide workers in the SAAP service sector:

- (1) information, materials and resources on depression, anxiety and related disorders, and
- (2) delivery of the award-winning *beyondblue* National Workplace Training Program to the SAAP workforce.

### *beyondblue* National Workplace Training Program

The *beyondblue* National Workplace Program educates employers, managers and general staff about depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders. It also increases the confidence of staff to assist a person in getting help.

The National Workplace Training Program:

- is delivered by a national network of *beyondblue*-accredited trainers who have tertiary qualifications in mental health and clinical experience;
- has been presented to over 300 organisations across a range of industries and sectors to over 25,000 employees;
- has been extensively evaluated with proven outcomes for organisations and employees;
- provides organisational access to *beyondblue*'s information and referral line, website, fact sheets and resources and assistance with workplace-based mental health promotion campaigns.

Evaluation has shown the program significantly increases knowledge, decreases stigma, improves attitudes, and increases confidence to assist someone to seek help.

## References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Australia's Health 2008*. 2008, Cat no. AUS 99. Canberra: AIHW.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Housing Assistance in Australia*. 2008, Canberra: AIHW.
3. Department of Health and Ageing, *Homelessness and Mental Health Linkages: Review of National and International Literature*. 2005.
4. Herrman, H., et al., *Disability and service use among homeless people living with psychotic disorders*. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 2004. **38**: p. 965-974.
5. Department of Health and Ageing. *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) program*. 2008 [cited 2008 6 October 2008]; Available from: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-ba>.
6. Herrman, D.B., et al., *Homelessness among individuals with psychotic disorders hospitalised for the first time: findings from the Suffolk County mental health project*. American Journal of Psychiatry, 1998. **155**(1): p. 109-113.
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Bulletin 51. Homeless SAAP clients with mental health and substance use problems 2004-05. A report from the SAAP National Data Collection*. March 2007, AIHW: Canberra.