

Consumers CAN

Mr David Barr MP of Manly hailed the incorporation of the Consumer Activity Network (Mental Health) Inc (CAN), a 'declaration of independence for consumers' at the official launch, which he hosted at Parliament House on 6 June with sponsorship from Eli Lilly.

Those who braved torrential rain to attend, were warmly welcomed and given time to mingle to the sounds of live saxophone, whilst enjoying a light supper in the Jubilee Room. Julie McCrossin, CAN Patron and MC for the evening unequivocally praised the tireless work of CAN participants.

CAN is a non-government, independent, entirely consumer-run organisation promoting and enhancing mental health wellbeing and recovery for those with a mental illness. The organization, formerly known as the Northern Beaches Mental Health Consumer Network, operated for 12 years from Manly Hospital. The newly incorporated CAN continues to manage and run the Pitane Recovery Centre for mental health consumers, and hosts a broad range of activities including: creative writing, information, education and training, and discussion groups. Pitane operates as a mobile service hosting recovery activities in other centres such as the WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) Groups.

The evening included announcement of the NSW Mental Health Consumer of the Year (2006) Award winner Semmy Sciclua, an industrious volunteer and handyman who provides a wide range of services to consumers at the Fairfield Mental Health Service.



Julie McCrossin with NSW Mental Health Consumer of the year award winners, Semmy Sciclua, Alma Denton and Faye Jackson

The Hon. Cherie Burton, MP, Minister for Housing, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health) attended the launch and commended CAN, describing this organisation as a strong effective network, successful in lobbying government and working together to produce positive outcomes. Ms Burton restated the Premier's recent funding announcements and affirmed her belief, that if people with a mental illness get proper services in the community they can function very well outside of clinical settings.

CAN is currently without funding and is appealing for an office space from which to operate. Please contact 1300 135 846 if you have any suggestions or offers.

Community Housing finding solutions

Community Housing Associations (CHAs) are NGO's who provide secure, affordable housing to low income tenants in their local community. Funded by the Office of Community Housing (OCH) CHA's are the largest provider of community housing in NSW. Forty three housing associations across NSW provide client focussed tenancy management to support over 11,000 sustainable tenancies. HAs are experienced in working with applicants and tenants and a range of partner agencies to find housing solutions for clients with a diversity of need.

CHA's manage properties headleased from the private market as well as properties owned by the Department of Housing. To be eligible for community housing, an applicant should already be eligible for housing with the Department of Housing.

CHA's are independent, autonomous organisations, managed by a board of management and regulated by the OCH. Accredited housing associations meet national Community Housing Standards. Housing Associations are also subject to a registration process. Registered CHAs meet performance indicators set by the government to demonstrate their capacity for high level service delivery, managing government assets and meeting stringent financial targets.

Sixteen Housing Associations are currently partners in the HASI program to support approximately 100 tenants with mental health

problems. This is a three way partnership which in many cases builds on existing local agency relationships.

CHAs are not directly funded from HASI funds to provide tenancy management for HASI clients, but manage the leasehold subsidy and asset provided through OCH. The relationship with a HASI client is a legal one as HASI tenants sign a residential tenancy agreement, so the onus is on CHAs to ensure the tenancy works well. CHAs have welcomed the additional support provided by Accommodation Support Providers through HASI, and value a partnership which can assist in supporting high needs tenancies. The HASI partnership by its nature requires ongoing and regular communication between all partners so the CHA can provide appropriate tenancy management to complement the Accommodation Support Provider.

The NSW Federation of Housing Associations (NSWFHA) are the peak agency for community housing associations, providing resources, training, policy advice and advocacy for community housing. NSWFHA is a registered Training Organisation, providing accredited training in social housing, as well as Mental Health First Aid training and a range of seminars for assisting support partnerships. The NSW Community Housing Conference will be held in Newcastle on 16 -17th August. For more information about the conference, community housing in general and /or your local CHA visit: www.communityhousing.org.au.