

CALL TO ACTION

Victoria State Election 2006

responses

mental illness fellowship Victoria ACN 093 357 165 ABN 93 093 357 165
for people with mental illness, their families and friends
Formerly Schizophrenia Fellowship Victoria

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Country Alliance

Response Russ Bate, Country Alliance Spokesperson

Country Alliance (CA) will be contesting the three regional upper house seats at next month's election. CA is based on a set of common values around which our candidates will be able to campaign rather than attempting to develop a finite set of policies. The benefit of this is that they will have flexibility to support positions and proposals put forward by the Government or other entities that are beneficial to their electorates, and oppose those which are not. Their primary responsibility is to give primary priority to the interests of their constituents.

We have posted some basic health policies on our website (www.countryalliance.org <<http://www.countryalliance.org>>) which among other things support proposals which will have a positive impact on access to healthcare for regional Victorians.

While our policies do not extend into specific areas such as mental health care, it goes without

saying that our candidates will support any proposal that satisfies the values we stand for and which are beneficial for their electorates.

Should you wish to discuss these specific proposals with our candidates in their respective regions please let me know and I will put you in contact with them.

Democratic Labor Party

Response from John Mulholland, Secretary, Democratic Labor Party (DLP)

On behalf of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) candidates, who will be contesting Upper House seats in the coming State election, thank you for your letter and invitation to respond to the Mental Illness Fellowship 'Call to Action'.

Even as a small party with one or two representatives in the parliament we could exercise a positive influence on governments and draw to their attention proposals such as those you have identified in your 'Call to Action'. This we undertake to do.

The Democratic Labor Party and our endorsed candidates are in principle agreement with each of the sets of measures you have proposed in the 'Call to Action'.

We recognize that the practical benefits of the measures you urge would be best appreciated by those who suffer mental illness themselves, by their families and friends and by the people who provide the treatment, rehabilitation and support services they need, often on a continuous basis, to participate fully as members of the wider

community. This being so, DLP candidates elected to the Upper House will give priority to maintaining consultation with 'hands on' support organisations like MI Fellowship and with the professional organisations representing people in the health and helping professions.

In the context of the measures you have proposed and based on our belief in the benefit to all communities, of decentralisation, it is a matter of no small importance to Democratic labor Party candidates that any steps taken to improve the well being, status and participation in the community, of those who suffer with a mental illness, be steps taken to the greatest extent practicable across all local communities, be they metropolitan, suburban, regional or remote.

People Power

Response from Robyn Allcock, Chair, Policy Committee, People Power

The following is an edited excerpt of People Power's Mental Health Policy:

The closure of mental health institutions over the past twenty years has not been followed by the development of appropriate service models to assist people with mental illness.

Families and carers are struggling to cope with the aftermath of the State government's retreat from responsibility; and when crises occur, there is increasing reliance on police intervention – often with disastrous consequences.

Moreover, a national survey of mental health and well-being has found that fourteen percent of children and adolescents suffer with mental health problems; and the death rate from suicides is growing – it is now higher than the road accident toll.

The Government's response to these crises has been piecemeal and lacking in vision. There is an urgent need to reform current practices.

The People Power Mental Health Plan

People Power will:

- Include an entitlement to supports in Victoria's mental health legislation
- Establish a population-based benchmark for the provision of bed-based services
- Introduce a treatment model based on assessed needs
- Increase funding for the delivery of evidence-based, peer-led education and support programs for carers and consumers
- Conduct a pilot of the Crisis Intervention Team model used in Memphis, USA

- Create new Secure and Extended Care packages
- Expand the scope of the mental impairment defence
- Establish an independent Living and Supported Accommodation Authority to develop new models of independent living and supported accommodation
- Expand home-based outreach services
- Increase the number of Registered Training Organisations providing supported education programs for people with mental illness who wish to return to study
- Establish an independent Human Services Ombudsman
- Review the role of the Office of Chief Psychiatrist to ensure its independence
- Establish a position of Chief Nurse within the Office of Chief
- Require the Coroner to conduct psychological autopsies for people who suicide while in treatment in mental health system
- Establish an all-stakeholder working party to review the objects of the Mental Health Act

Budgetary Implications

The changes proposed in this policy will increase spending on mental health to 12% of the total health budget.



Australian Labor Party

Response from
the Bracks Labor
Government

The Bracks Government recognises the valuable role that mental health organisations play in improving the health and wellbeing of people living with a mental illness. We appreciate the dedication of the Mental Illness Fellowship to improving the health status of Victorians and for articulating, on behalf of its members, issues of concern and areas for improvement within our mental health service system.

Bracks Government – Record on Mental Health

Since 1999 the Bracks Labor Government has invested significantly in mental health, boosting funding for mental health services and programs by 73 per cent, or \$329.5m. Victoria is now recognised nationally as the state with the most developed mental health service system. The Bracks Government has led the national debate on mental health reform. In 2006, mental health has featured prominently on the agenda of the Council of Australian Governments. Victoria committed \$472m over the next five years in additional funding towards the COAG National Action Plan on Mental Health - more than its population share when considered against the Commonwealth's \$1.8b commitment.

Under the National Action Plan on Mental Health the Bracks Government committed:

- \$80.4m towards expanding and improving Victoria's promotion, prevention and early intervention programs, including \$16.9m towards early psychosis programs for young people aged 16 to 25 years; and \$6m for specific programs for women including postnatal depression support and a New Centre for Women's Mental Health;
- \$284.9m towards integrating and improving the mental health system, including:
- \$47.3m towards expanding Child and Adolescent, Adult and Aged Specialist Community Services;

\$8.9m towards expanding dual diagnosis services; \$39.9m towards increasing acute mental health bed capacity; and \$25.1m towards additional PARC sub-acute places;

- \$102.7m towards community participation, employment and accommodation programs, including \$8m towards homelessness mental health initiatives; and
- \$4.4m towards increasing workforce capacity. The Government provided funding for new acute inpatient mental health beds at Maroondah, Casey, Box Hill, the Austin, and the Alfred. New community beds have recently opened in the Latrobe Valley and more are under development in Shepparton. There is also an acknowledged need for appropriate care for people moving in and out of hospitals, and to this end the Government has developed Prevention and Recovery Care centres in Springvale, Box Hill and Flemington, with more under development in Bairnsdale, Geelong, Bendigo and South Yarra.

ALP Policies

We appreciate that the Mental Illness Fellowship is seeking answers to it's survey, however specific ALP policies will be announced during the course of the campaign. When policy documents are released they will be available on the ALP website at www.vic.alp.org.au

Liberal Party

Response from
Ted Baillieu
Leader of the
Opposition

Mental Illness remains a hidden disease, an affliction compounded by social stigma. The Liberal Party is firmly focused on the hidden burden of mental illness. Earlier this month I had the pleasure of announcing the Liberal Party's plan for mental health care in Victoria.

A Liberal Government's policy is a \$226 million Australian first in mental health care:

- We will commence the state-wide rollout of first episode services—intensive treatment lasting up to 18 months, starting when the first signs of mental illness appear. The focus of first episode services is treating each person for the whole of their illness—not just the visible symptoms. It is a system which is widely recognized as providing every person with their best chance of recovery and eases the short-term and long-term pressure on the health system
- a Liberal Government will establish three pilot youth mental health services across Victoria, aimed at providing continuous care to Victoria's youth between the ages of 12 and 25— when the incidence of mental illness is at its highest
- We will build four new Prevention and Recovery Centres to provide bed-based care in the community, a closer connection between clients, their families, psychiatric staff and employment, housing and counseling services. As well as providing additional bed-based care, these Centres will ease pressure on the demand for hospital beds

We have also committed to creating new Mental Health Acute Care Teams to provide inhome care, training police and ambulance officers on dealing with people with a mental illness and providing dedicated facilities in five major emergency departments to deal with the influx of people suffering mental illnesses.

Mental illness is one of our greatest challenges – and this policy is about addressing that challenge before it becomes a crisis.

For more information:

The full policy document is available on the Liberal Party's website on http://www.vic.liberal.org.au/default.cfm?action=policies_2006.

Australian Democrats

Excerpts from a letter sent from Craig Beale, Candidate, Eastern Region Upper House, Australian Democrats

See our Election Commitment on Mental Health which we will take to the election this November. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss our policy and I would also like to offer extra copies of our policy which are available upon request.

With the vast array of services that are still needed and current ones that are under resourced we are calling on the state government to increase spending by at least 50%. This would enable:

- 85 community based mental health centres, one per 60,000 people
 - Establish 5 youth specific mental health services (3 metro and 3 rural)
 - Substantially increase short, medium and long term supported accommodation, based on successful Shepparton model
 - Negotiate with the federal government for more training places and incentives to work in country areas
 - Screen all prisoners for mental health illness as prisons have become modern day institutions (*more of our objectives can be found on our commitment sheet*)
- The Democrats commitment is (also) to:**
- Provide mental health first aid training for those routinely in contact with people with mental illness, starting with those working in general health services, teachers and police
 - Conduct evidence-based public education programs to reduce stigma and promote preventive strategies
 - Create specialised environments within emergency departments to accommodate people presenting with dual diagnoses
 - Train clinicians in screening people for co-occurring substance use and mental illness
 - Set up specialist short term crisis accommodation services for people with dual diagnosis and complex conditions
 - Increase the number and staffing of Crisis Assessment Teams (CAT)
 - Foster greater collaboration between CAT teams and the police force
 - Establish a specialised forensic mental health unit for seriously ill female prisoners
 - Commit to measurable benchmarks and targets eg reducing the necessity for hospital admission, reducing suicide rates, achieving higher rates of employment and lower levels of medication, for people with mental illness
 - Increase public funding for research into nonpharmacological treatments and possible factors that may be implicated in mental illness
 - Establish a hotline providing information for consumers and carers

Australian Greens

Response from Colleen Hartland, Spokesperson on Mental Health & Lead Candidate - Western Metro Region, Australian Greens, Victoria

Thank you for your "Call to Action". You make a compelling case for better care and treatment planning; better crisis response; better housing options; more education about coping strategies; and helping people to get back into education and training after a mental health episode.

We aim to extend services to presently neglected areas of the state; to assist community psychiatric services; to increase support for carers; to improve crisis response times; to improve follow-up services; to provide a sustainable funding base for self-help groups; to promote continuity of case-management; and to expand specialist mental health programs and make sure GP's know about them.

We also aim to improve early intervention, believing this will save both resources and suffering. We propose to train teachers in early detection and to give priority to assisting children and young people, and especially to identifying those at risk

of suicide. We call for mental health promotion campaigns, focused particularly on rural and outer-metropolitan areas.

We aim to integrate community and hospital-based psychiatric services, and to integrate mental health services generally with other services such as housing, dental, employment, education, financial counseling, police and justice. We are particularly concerned about the high rates of homelessness and incarceration of the mentally ill. We suggest spot-purchasing of houses near mental health facilities, and providing supported accommodation for mentally-ill people released from jail.

The National Party

Response from Hugh Delahunty, The Nationals Spokesperson for Health, Aged Care & Aboriginal Affairs, Victoria

We believe all Victorians, including those living in country Victoria, are entitled to access top quality health care within their community and a range of specialist medical services within their region.

The Nationals will:

- Take a very proactive approach to mental health prevention supporting community based programs
- Ensure young Victorians with mental health problems are able to seek treatment in a specialized publicly-funded mental health service that focuses on meeting their unique needs
- Recognise the interrelationship between mental illness and drug and alcohol abuse
- Develop strategies and incentives to attract psychiatrists and mental health nurses to work in country Victoria
- Provide funding to ensure there is a significant increase in the number of psychiatric beds in country Victoria
- Provide additional resources for programs addressing depression in adult and aged populations and boost programs tackling the serious problems of pre and post natal depression
- Enhance support for country general practitioners who are in the front-line dealing with mental health problems in the country with a specialist psychiatric referral service

Maintaining the mental health and well-being of Victorians is as important as addressing physical health needs. The Nationals are with you in wanting to achieve better outcomes for people with a mental illness, their families and friends.