

MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSIONER CALLS FOR DECISIVE ACTION TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Media release

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The country's independent Mental Health Commissioner, Kevin Allan, called for decisive action to improve the country's mental health and addiction services when he appeared before Parliament's Health Select Committee today.

The Committee is considering the petition of Corinda Taylor on behalf of the Life Matters Suicide Prevention Trust and 1,740 others. The petition calls for a Parliamentary inquiry into mental health services to determine if current services meet requirements and if future planning is adequate to meet demand.

Mr Allan, who considers over 200 complaints a year and monitors the mental health system, told committee members there was an urgent need for action rather than another inquiry.

"The fastest way to improve services for consumers and the best use of time and money is to develop an action plan and to move swiftly to implement it," Mr Allan said.

Mr Allan's assessment of the country's mental health system is that services are under significant pressure, service quality needs to improve, and there is inadequate planning to meet growing demand. However, it is also important to note evidence that many consumers report a positive experience of services. The Mental Health Commissioner's consumer and family experience survey, with 13,000 voices so far, is finding that over 80 percent of consumers would recommend the service to others.

"In my view many of the issues within the system are sufficiently understood so I want to see a focus on solutions rather than a further review of the problems. Consumers and the wider community deserve that."

The watchdog Commissioner wants an action plan developed by people with a lived experience of the mental health system working with representatives of the Ministry of Health, district health boards, and non-government organisations including primary health organisations. He believes it should take 12 months to complete, with some fast deliverables to follow.

At the Select Committee, Mr Allan also urged government to adopt the World Health Organization target to reduce suicides by 10 percent or more by 2020.

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The Mental Health Commissioner assists the Health and Disability Commissioner to ensure the rights of consumers are upheld. This includes decisions on complaints about mental health and addiction services, and monitoring and advocating for improvements to those services. Kevin Allan began his term in February 2016.

Notes

An action plan to improve mental health and addiction services would address:

- Growing demand — including prevention and early intervention
- Access — ensuring people needing access to services get access
- The right mix of services — services for mild/moderate needs through to high and acute needs
- Capacity — sufficient people and service capacity
- Quality — including a focus on recovery — living well in the community with natural supports — and building resilience — helping people to cope well under adversity
- Leadership — ensuring there is collaborative leadership in place to deliver on the action plan.