

Mental health stigma blocks jobs

MPs call for awareness and action.



STANDING OUT: Stigma isolating job seekers with mental illness

A national education campaign is needed to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and help sufferers into education and employment.

In its latest report, *Work wanted*, the House of Representatives Education and Employment Committee has called for a comprehensive, multifaceted campaign in schools, businesses and communities to raise awareness of mental ill health and break down discrimination.

One in five Australians has experienced a mental illness in the past 12 months and the employment rate for people with such a disability is around half of the general population.

Tabling the report in the House of Representatives, committee chair Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) said such a campaign is needed as stigma is consistently rated as the key barrier to entering the workforce by people with a mental illness.

“This is not the first report to note the entrenched stigma surrounding those with a mental illness,” Ms Rishworth said. “Nonetheless, the committee was struck by how pervasive stigma remains.”

The report found the stigma associated with mental illness is often based on incorrect assumptions that people with mental ill health have limited capacity or will to participate, or that they will be disruptive and dangerous.

Witnesses to the inquiry reported that disclosing mental ill health lowered the likelihood of selection for interview or appointment to a position.

“When you have a mental illness, employers think of you as a liability,” New South Wales Consumer Advisory Group CEO Julie Hourigan-Ruse said. “Some of them think that you’re likely to be an axe-murderer.”

The committee called for government support of social enterprises that assist people with a mental illness into the workforce, the extension of the primary school mental health program KidsMatter into high schools, and better

LATEST

NEW CHARITIES COMMISSION

A new national regulator for the charity and not-for-profit sector is set to become fully operational from 1 October 2012, replacing a number of overlapping state, federal and territory oversight bodies.

The Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) will provide a central point for the registration of Australian charities, determine charitable status and public benevolent institution status, and provide a free, searchable charities register to the public.

It will also investigate allegations of misconduct and inappropriate activities by charities.

The ACNC will begin by only overseeing the operations of

Australia’s charities, but is intended to extend across the entire not-for-profit sector from 2014.

However decisions about what tax concessions are available to a charity or not-for-profit organisation and the collection or enforcement of taxes in the sector will remain the responsibility of the Australian Taxation Office.

The House Economics Committee is inquiring into the exposure draft legislation establishing the new regulator and is expected to report back following the parliament’s winter break. •

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