



## ADVICE TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR MENTAL HEALTH

### Transiting from Imprisonment to the Community

11<sup>th</sup> May 2023

#### Background

On 11 May 2023 the Mental Health Advisory Council (the Council) received a presentation from Ms Marisha Gerovich, Independent Lived Experience (Consumer) Representative, on her lived experience and her Lived Experience expertise on navigating the transition from imprisonment to the community. The presentation also included Ms Gerovich's experiences of and expertise gained from assisting others to do so as part of volunteer and paid peer roles. Ms Gerovich spoke of the challenges and barriers facing people going into prison, remaining detained for a period of time and transferring back to the community either while on parole or at end-of-sentence. Particularly, Ms Gerovich provided valuable insights into the challenges facing women and mothers with dependent children and young people.

#### Advice/ Recommendations

Given the above presentation, Council provides the following advice/recommendations, including key observations:

- Build capacity for collaboration and collaborative practices through embedding the requirement in funding models to incentivise adaptability and provide genuine person led services.
- Advocate for Lived Experience (Peer) work positions to be part of staffing in agencies and thereby help to alleviate workforce pressures. The embedding of Lived Experience (Peer) Workforces provides short to long-term gains, particularly given that some workforces require a development period of 4 to 6 years.
- Recognise increased pressure and impact on mental health when change happens in prison environments, particularly when transferring between prisons or remaining in detention for prolonged periods of time. The situation for the growing number of people on remand (30.6% in 2021) is particularly problematic given that there are few, if any, programs available to people on remand and the period of time spend on remand can currently be excessive.
- Acknowledge the positive impact of continuity of care through prolonged connections with organisations when transiting from detention. The importance of maintaining healthy, supportive relationships in encouraging stability and motivation must be formally recognised in contractual and model-of-care processes.
- Support the development of Mental Health Peer Support Workers in prisons by supporting training programs on mental health peer support in addition to the existing prison peer support program. The Mental Health Peer Support program could also be used to develop and establish qualified and experienced peer workers, creating further opportunities for



employment pathways for people in prison when returning to the community. This is a population which finds employment difficult to obtain given the barrier created by imprisonment itself and a criminal record.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'M Doherty'.

**Ms Margaret Doherty**  
Mental Health Advisory Council Chair  
Mental Health Advisory Council