

## **Mental Health Promotion - Your Time has Come**

The Mental Health Association NSW (MHA) continues to advocate for a significant mental health promotion strategy and is involved with the NSW Centre for Mental Health in devising such a strategy or plan.

In 2004 the MHA commissioned the Mental Health Promotion Feasibility Study to look for available evidence for effective health promotion campaigns, national and international. It strongly recommended a multi-strategy approach with both social marketing and community development components, over a five-year period.

The social marketing component included a statewide campaign, with a mass media campaign to support the community development aspect. The study had found such combined campaigns effective but less evidence of the usefulness of social marketing campaigns alone.

At the national level, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) will consider a Mental Health Action Plan at its June meeting. Although it discusses “promotion, prevention and early detection and intervention”, we remain concerned that “mental health promotion” is not fully understood, is confused with prevention, and while there is overlap, it is used synonymously with mental illness awareness. We saw something of this in the Community Awareness Program in the mid-nineties where the campaign was too broad, didn't target specific groups and the effects on lessening of stigma, raising awareness of mental illness and its treatment were transient.

We advocate a population health approach embracing the whole community and also targeting specific groups, to achieve and maintain mental health rather than focus on mental illness. As with physical health, it is a concept that applies to everyone.

We note the value of a prior initiative, which other states and territories can learn from, in Victoria's VicHealth mental health promotion program, which initiated its first five-year plan in 1999. Also, the Commonwealth has developed excellent documents on Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention For Mental Health (2000). We believe the time is now ripe to implement those policies on a large scale. It can be a difficult argument to make to governments as the major population effects of mental health promotion are medium to long-term. We hope that SIG members can be alert to opportunities to contribute to this debate and to advocate for a mental health promotion strategy: we urge you to take advantage of this most opportune time.

The Mental Health Promotion Feasibility Study, 2004, can be downloaded from the MHA's website. Go to: <http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au/campaigns/index.htm>

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