12 April 2019

The Hon Stephen Wade
Minister for Health
Government of South Australia

Dear Minister Wade,

Re: South Australian Mental Health Governance Review recommendation to integrate the Mental Health Commission into the activities of the proposed Wellbeing SA.

We are writing to you out of concern for the future of the South Australian Mental Health Commission (SAMHC), following recommendations by the SA Health Mental Health Governance Review to integrate the SAMHC into the activities of the proposed Wellbeing SA.

The South Australian branch of the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) firmly believe that there is a need for the trusted, independent platform of the SAMHC to ensure the voices of the community are heard. The SAMHC represents South Australia on the national and international stage, and is a signatory to the recent Memorandum of Understanding between Australia and New Zealand to formalise the collaboration to mental health reform between the two countries.

The evidence indicates that 45% of South Australians will experience a diagnosable mental illness at some time in their life. Despite this, the recent SA Health Mental Health Governance Review did not include consultation with people with a lived experience of mental health issues. The SAMHC acknowledges and incorporates the value of the lived experience, and is informed by its youth and community advisory groups. In doing so, the SAMHC puts the needs of the people at the core of strategy, policy, and planning for the promotion, prevention, and early intervention for mental health and wellbeing.

The tangible outputs of the SAMHC to date, such as the SMS4dadsSA pilot for expectant fathers, reflect the ability of the commission to advocate for and impact mental health and wellbeing in South Australia. We believe that removing the independence of the SAMHC will contribute to removing the voice of the community and those with lived experience from mental health and wellbeing planning in South Australia. Furthermore, there is potential for the loss of the vast expertise that comes from the youth and community advisory groups and the likelihood of a loss of transparency, should the commission not remain independent.
Minister, we would ask you to strongly consider retaining the independence of the SAMHC, such that it may continue to represent the lived experience of the community, and advocate for improved promotion, prevention, and early intervention for mental health and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Kate Kameniar  
President, South Australian Branch  
Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA)  
Telephone: 0431 976 104  
Email: sapres@phaa.net.au