



MEDIA RELEASE

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH

STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES – FEMALE IN MALE PRISON

MONDAY 9 DECEMBER 2002

“When the Select Committee on Mental Health visited Long Bay Prison Hospital and Mulawa women’s prison, during the course of the inquiry, I was shocked and appalled at the conditions which forensic patients face, particularly the conditions which the women at Mulawa are forced to endure” the Chair of the Committee, the Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti MLC, said today while launching the Committee’s final report.

“It was a particular situation was brought to the Committee’s attention earlier this year, it is one that should concern everyone. The Committee is aware of at least one female prisoner who was, and I am told still is, detained at Parklea male prison. This is after a Judge recommended the woman be transferred to a hospital within the meaning of the *Mental Health Act 1990*. The fact is there exists no appropriate facility in NSW. I cannot emphasise enough, the inappropriate nature of this situation. I am told the woman, while segregated physically, is subject to threatening taunts and abuse. As a forensic patient, you don’t have to be Einstein to work out that this is potentially doing more harm to the woman.” Dr Pezzutti said today.

“Forensic patients are subject to the terms and conditions of Corrective Services and locked in their cell for eleven hours a day. NSW is the only mainland State to incarcerate forensic patients and, as far as I can determine, only one of a few in the Western World.”

The Chair of the Select Committee on Mental Health released the Committee’s final report *Inquiry into mental health services in New South Wales - Final Report* in Parliament today. The report is a comprehensive analysis of mental health services in NSW based on the evidence received by the Committee.

The Chair of the Committee, the Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti MLC, said today “Since the inquiry was announced in December 2001, we received 303 submissions from private citizens, mental health professionals, government and non-government organisations. The Committee heard evidence from 91 witnesses. I was almost overwhelmed by the detail and quality of the submissions and the high calibre of the witnesses. The submissions to this inquiry were some of the most comprehensive and considered documents that I have read since becoming a Member of Parliament. The evidence presented demands revolutionary change in mental health services in NSW”

One of the major recommendations of the Final Report concerns the imprisonment of people found not guilty by reason of mental illness. The Committee recommends that as a matter of urgency the NSW Minister for Health should construct maximum and medium security forensic mental health units outside prison.

Dr Pezzutti said “Many of those found not guilty or unfit to plead by reason of mental illness are sent to gaol anyway – it’s a case of ‘not guilty, proceed to gaol’. The Report recommends that the Attorney General and the Minister for Health cooperate to expedite the establishment of a State Institute of Forensic Science, and include forensic mental health within its responsibilities.”

The Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti RFD MLC (Chair)

A copy of the Committee’s Final Report is available on the NSW Parliament’s website at:

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au

For further information and comment please ring the Hon Dr Brian Pezzutti MLC,
Chair of the Committee, on 02 9230 2322