

Submission  
No 70

**INQUIRY INTO EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND  
APPROPRIATE DELIVERY OF OUTPATIENT AND  
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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Partially  
Confidential

## Mental Health Care Inquiry

The focus of this submission is the **NSW hospital discharge structure, psychologists' services, police duties, and sexual assault services wait lists.**

I am grateful that the NSW Parliament is dedicated to improving people's lives by investigating the state of mental health services. I would like to share my experiences of navigating mental health services in NSW and the changes I think would be the most impactful. This submission might be hard to read, but my story explains why I will suggest certain changes.

### Background:

In 2012, when I was 20 years old, I was raped by someone I knew. I didn't tell anyone for years because the person who sexually assaulted me was in my friendship circle. I didn't want to make trouble for my friends and I thought it best to pretend it didn't happen and continue living my life. But I was left feeling empty and broken. I fell into depression but did not have the strength to go to a GP and get a mental health care plan. I attempted to take my own life.

Over a few years in my early 20s, I did a few stays at a public mental health hospital in Wollongong when things got too much. Each hospital stay helped me, but no one asked why I was so sad. I was instead diagnosed with 'depression' and put on antidepressants. Deep down I knew the reason I was so sad was because of what happened to me, but I was too ashamed and scared to speak about it. I blamed myself. When I was released from the hospital visits, a community mental health team would come to check on me, but there was **never a psychologist lined up for me to see after coming out of the hospital.** I was left to find one myself which was very difficult given the long wait times and my poor mental state.

When I was about 25, I finally had the strength to look for a psychologist to dedicate some time to therapy. I knew I needed to work on how to trust people again, but when I opened up to a psychologist about the rape, she told me she did not do therapy for sexual assault. I was devastated. I had kept the rape a secret for so long because I believed no one would want me, and when I finally had the courage to tell someone I thought was qualified to deal with my situation, she turned me away.

She gave me the number of a sexual assault helpline, but I was re-traumatised. It had affirmed the fears I had about being a rape victim - that **no one would know what to do with me**.

I eventually found a sexual assault counsellor who helped me reclaim my life (**the waitlist to see the counsellor was 4 months long**). I also reported the rape to the police. The police officer who worked on my case made me feel supported. However, he did not offer to help me find a sexual assault counsellor. Luckily, I had already found one by that time, other people are not so lucky.

### Recommendations:

It took me about 10 years to move on from what happened. I believe my recovery could have been much better with just a few changes. I hope you can move to legislate on the following:

1. When a mental health patient is discharged from hospital, it should be the hospital's responsibility to set up the patient with a psychologist to see outside hospital - it should not be left to the patient.
2. Psychologists must advertise what services they provide and if they do or don't see sexual assault victims. Victims are re-traumatised when they are turned away from services they have been led to believe will help them.
3. Given that sexual assault creates such horrible mental health issues for victims and their families, registered psychologists should have mandatory training in sexual assault. It should perhaps also be legislated as discriminatory if they refuse to see sexual assault victims.
4. A police officer should have a duty to contact a sexual assault counselling service for someone who is reporting sexual assault. The process of reporting a rape to the police is really hard. Many victims commit suicide during this time - they must be supported during this time by mental health professionals.

Thank you for reading. Please move to make these legislative changes. They are simple changes that could save someone's life.