

PLATFORM



- MEDIA RELEASE -

It's time for district health boards to stop covering over the cracks

The families of people in Canterbury District Health Board's (CDHB) Princess Margaret Hospital mental health facility are absolutely justified in their dissatisfaction with conditions there. Toni Gutschlag, CDHB mental health services general manager, has reportedly agreed that the building is not appropriate and further advised that new DHB facilities will be a long way from being available for use. However, instead of covering over the cracks with more new hospital beds at a good deal of expense, there is an opportunity for proven community providers to deliver a substantially better alternative, removing the reliance on sub-standard DHB facilities.

Platform believes that along with the dated physical environment at the facility, CDHB's approach to mental health and addictions support might benefit from an update by its refocusing attention on ensuring people have access to more appropriate services, such as those contemporary community-based options available through the area's non-government organisations (NGOs). Local NGOs have a proven history of partnering with CDHB to provide comprehensive support to people experiencing mental health and addictions issues. In fact, CDHB has been commended in recent years for its work with NGOs in transforming its previously cumbersome mental health support services referral process. The DHB partnered with service providers in the community to design an efficient, effective system based on what NGOs knew about clients' and families' needs. This work has resulted in the single point of entry model, more coordinated service delivery, reduced referral wait times and significantly more service. Which raises the question of why these obvious and proven supports are not being utilised to transform the system into a modern and more effective mental health service system. Why would the DHB consider replacing old facilities with another newer version of the same type of service that was designed more than 40 years ago?

"This is a fantastic opportunity for the DHB to partner with community organisations to resolve this issue for the people and families involved and to refresh the service system altogether," says Marion Blake, CEO of Platform Trust. "NGOs are well equipped to support almost all members of the community that experience mental health or addiction issues – they're more than simply a soft alternative or a backup to DHB services."

The New Zealand Health Strategy calls for a one team approach and for the sector to take a wider view of health and wellbeing. Non-government community organisations offer almost all of the services available in DHB services, including acute alternatives. The DHB could take this unexpectedly public opportunity to build on the positive relationships already established with community providers to improve the level of care and support for Cantabrians.

Platform Trust is the national network of community organisations that support New Zealanders by providing a wide range of mental health and addiction services and creating a positive place for people experiencing mental health and addiction issues to live and work.

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