

PLATFORM



– MEDIA RELEASE –

Welcome to all the commentators about the sad state of the NZ mental health and addictions system. This is an obstacle course littered with blame, hurt and not much accountability.

Duncan Garner in his opinion piece on Saturday observed that “the Government says funding has increased over the years but no-one can say where it's gone. No-one has any idea what sort of mental health system we have” and sadly, we agree with him. Our system is so inefficient that the 20 district health boards (DHBs) that both deliver and buy these services only know what is going on in their own patch. Getting a nationwide view is frustrated because of the hands-off impact of the decentralised health services that came with the creation of DHBs. Government appears to continue to let DHBs off the hook, not demanding to know where all the mental health and addictions money, new or old, is going, let alone if it is making any difference.

The recent People’s Mental Health Report was initiated out of a shared sense of frustration and the completed review report is an excellent and moving companion to the ever-growing mountain of evidence of system failure. The frustration is shared by those who use, manage and work in the system. There are so many bureaucratic obstacles to scale and no one who is foolhardy enough to knock them down. We have a clear and compelling picture of failure, but we also have possibilities, many of which were detailed in the Productivity Commission’s comprehensive report on social services that identified systems issues and potential solutions. However, this report also appears to have been filed away in the basement with the many other mental health reports and inquiries that have taken place across the country in recent years.

As a result of the Mason inquiry (1996) a Mental Health Commission and a financial ring-fence were created - the function of both are relics of another time. Our current mental health and addictions services were also created for a different time and on the whole have served us well; but those days are over and it’s time for total redesign to suit modern New Zealand society. There are now more opportunities, ways of helping people and ideas about what could work, far beyond the domain of medical staff, such as housing, employment, counselling and other support. We need to go forward, not backward, starting with acting on what the people whose lives are impacted tell us about what they want and when.

“It’s certainly not all about money,” says Naomi Cowan, Chair of Platform Trust. “This requires the highest levels of leadership to acknowledge that the next stage of investment is needed to genuinely put people first and to meet them where they need support – early and in their communities before things get worse.”

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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