Having a place where you belong, can contribute, and feel accepted is fundamental to everyone’s mental health, including people with a mental illness.

Background

- The State Government is committed to dramatically improving mental health services in Western Australia and has invested significant funding.
- Community Options is one of the new initiatives to provide more community-based accommodation for people living with a mental illness.
- Around 274,000 Western Australians with a mental illness live successfully in the community.
- The service has been developed in response to an identified need for long-term residential accommodation options for people who are currently in open hospital wards.
- In many cases, these individuals don’t require hospital care, but because of a lack of suitable residential housing, they remain in a hospital setting.
- Evidence from Australia and overseas indicates that the benefits of supported community-based accommodation include improved physical and mental well-being, increased community, social and vocational participation, greater independence of residents and decreased hospitalisation.

Community Options

- Community Options provides an accommodation alternative to long-term hospitalisation, which is homelike, for people with a mental illness and high support needs.
- Community Options provides an opportunity for people with mental illness to develop skills, increase social and recreational options and access support and information. The homes offer an environment to develop friendships and trust, increase skills, be accepted by and connect with the community.
- The Community Options homes are aligned with international best practice, and the model is endorsed by the Senate Select Committee on Mental Health (2006) and meets the Australian National Standards for Mental Health Services. The Community Options model builds on successful programs in other states and sectors.
- Community Options will be constructed in the metropolitan areas of Bentley, Kelmscott, Mt Claremont and Stirling.
- Two self-contained residential homes will be constructed on each site and have purposely been designed to complement existing homes in the community.
- Each home will have 24 hours a day, seven days a week in-home support provided to residents, as well as ongoing clinical support which will be delivered by public mental health services.

Mt Claremont Community Options

- Two residential-style Community Options homes are being constructed on the corner of Mooro Drive and Pine Tree Lane in Mt Claremont.
- The project is expected to be completed by early 2009 and will house a total of seven residents, as well as full-time on-site staff.
This site has been selected after careful consideration of needs such as access to community services and amenities, the location of residents’ families, proximity to existing mental health services and the service model requirement of integration with a residential area.

The units are expected to generate the same amount of traffic as generated by two new residential homes. Sufficient onsite parking will be provided.

Residents

Residents will have a diagnosed mental illness and high support needs.

Residents of the Mt Claremont group homes have been chosen by experienced mental health clinicians, who have carefully assessed their suitability for community living. The residents had previously been living in open inpatient units.

Residents will be regularly assessed by the clinical rehabilitation team to ensure the units remain the best accommodation option for each individual.

While the residents will be single, there will be the opportunity for them to have visitors. This will help them strengthen their connections with their families and the community.

Management and staff

Community Options homes will be operated by Southern Cross Care, a not-for-profit, non-government organisation with experience in the provision of accommodation support.

The services will be provided under contract with the Department of Health. Southern Cross Care currently operates nearly 500 high and low care beds in residential facilities throughout Western Australia, including a growing focus on people with a mental illness.

Southern Cross Care will provide individualised care programs and support to the residents.

Southern Cross Care will be responsible for the maintenance of the units and will be the ongoing contact point for the community.

There will be formal monitoring of the accommodation service by the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist and the Licensing and Standards Review Unit, with monthly visits by the Council of Official Visitors.

Southern Cross Care must also meet the WA Service Standards for Non-Government Providers of Community Health Services.

In addition to identified clinical support services provided by public mental health services, non-clinical staff providing accommodation and psychosocial support 24 hours a day, seven days a week will support the Mt Claremont Community Options residents.

There will be a minimum of two staff on site at all times. This equates to a minimum staffing ratio of 1:4, compared with up to 1:30 in other existing community-based accommodation services in the area (e.g. psychiatric hostels).

General health needs will be provided by local general practitioners and other primary health services.

After hours support will be available through the North Metropolitan Area Health Service Community Emergency Response Team and the Mental Health Emergency Response Line.
Clinical Support

- Clinical support will be delivered by mental health professionals trained in nursing, social work, occupational therapy, psychology and psychiatry.
- Mental Health Clinicians will provide intensive case management and be responsible to monitor, implement and review the clinical and rehabilitation supports for each resident. This will include ensuring a prompt response in the case of any change in residents’ wellbeing.
- Mental Health Clinicians will also work with accommodation support staff to develop social and support networks with community groups and other organisations.
- Detailed care management plans will be developed for each resident, including rehabilitation programs and intensive ongoing clinical assessment.

Community briefing

- Ahead of seeking formal planning approvals, the Department of Health undertook a comprehensive community briefing program, including:
  - Meetings with the City of Nedlands, local Members of Parliament, service providers, community groups and local general practitioners;
  - Briefings with representatives from local schools and P&Cs;
  - Doorknocking of neighbours and distribution of information;
  - Appointment of a community contact point
  - A community forum was held on the 14 June 2006. Written responses to issues raised at the forum were provided to all attendees and other stakeholders; and
  - Distribution of project updates to stakeholders.
- The Department of Health has also provided updates on the project to all stakeholders throughout its development.

Project status

- The construction of the Mt Claremont CO buildings has been completed and final commissioning is being undertaken by Southern Cross Care.
- Southern Cross Care and North Metropolitan Area Mental Health Services are developing a local service agreement to inform the management and operation of the services, including clinical support and emergency procedures.
- Residents who have been identified as suitable to move into Mt Claremont CO are currently preparing for their transition into community based accommodation.

Further information

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