



Media Release

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Many voluntary mental health patients under pressure to accept treatment - or else...

Many people who voluntarily admit themselves to hospital mental health units are being coerced to accept treatment under threat of being made involuntary.

This was a key finding of this year's Community Visitors Annual Report for the state's mental health services tabled in State Parliament today.

Public Advocate, Colleen Pearce, who chairs the Community Visitor (Mental Health) board, said that a number of the regional reports from the volunteers around the state found that many mental health consumers were not being told their rights when admitted to care.

This included their rights to information about the medication and treatment being provided including their right to reject electroconvulsive therapy (ECT); their carers also complained.

Community Visitors reported that consumers often admitted themselves to hospital voluntarily and then were not advised about their planned discharge date. [**Eastern Metropolitan Region** p. 46]

In **Northern Metropolitan Region** [p. 54], it took three staff to establish a consumer's status as a voluntary or involuntary patient.

Voluntary consumers complained of insufficient advice from staff about their legal rights, while involuntary consumers complained of delays in obtaining a second opinion, to which they were entitled. [**Lodden Mallee**, p. 50]

Community Visitors also reported on inordinate delays and obfuscation around involuntary consumers' right to a Mental Health Review Hearing. [**Northern Metropolitan Region**, Case study, p. 52]

Voluntary and involuntary consumers are able to call the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) Advice Service and request a Community Visitor to visit, and many of the examples in the report relating to rights came to the visitors' attention this way. This year, the OPA Advice Service received 168 calls from consumers in mental health units.

Community Visitors (Mental Health) are volunteers empowered under the *Mental Health Act 1986* to visit consumers in mental health facilities to ensure their human rights are being met.

During the year, 60 Community Visitors in the mental health steam undertook 1466 visits to mental health facilities throughout the state.

The value of the volunteer work of all the Community Visitors has been estimated at \$3.6 million annually. This year, a total of 323 Community Visitors were supported by OPA.

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