



Left: MHACA Chair, Trish van Dijk opening the launch



Right: Acting Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Lisa Coffey, officially launching the Housing Report

MHACA Launches Housing Report ...

IN MID 2008, MHACA commissioned a Housing & Support Model research project to determine:

- ◆ the housing and support options available in Alice Springs for people with a psychiatric disability; and
- ◆ the housing and support needs from the perspective of participants, carers and service providers.

The aim of the research project was to become more informed of the issues facing people with a psychiatric disability, and also to provide the findings to the NT and Commonwealth Governments to inform policy development in this area.

The outcome of the 18-month project is the report, *There's No Place Like Home—There Is No Place*. It is based on extensive research—some of which was kindly provided by the Schizophrenia Fellowship of Queensland and the Northern Adelaide Housing project—and other data collected through consultation and surveys with participants, carers, government and non-government agencies.

The report was publicly launched at MHACA on Wednesday, 31 March by the Acting Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Lisa Coffey. Around 50 people attended including workers from a wide range of government and non-government services, participants, carers and staff.

While the research and findings are owned by MHACA, the information is also readily publicly available, and MHACA is determined to ensure that the recommendations are acted on over ensuing years. (See also *Messages of Support for the Report on page 24.*)

MHACA is proud of the contribution this report will make to the knowledge-base and potential solutions to the problem of housing and support options available for people with a psychiatric disability living in Alice Springs. ❖



Right: General Manager, Claudia Manu-Preston presenting Housing Project Consultant, Joyce Bowden, with 'Thank You' flowers

“With often poor rental histories and a lack of support to obtain housing and maintain tenancies, and the stigma or discrimination associated with mental illness, people frequently find themselves ‘prioritised out’ of whatever accommodation is available.”



Above: Mayor Damien Ryan presenting Reference Group member, Judy Clisby, with a Certificate of Appreciation

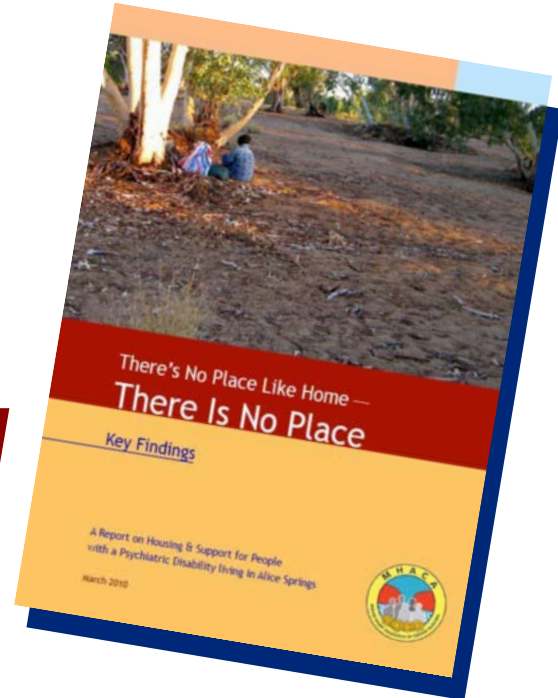
Below: Speakers Trish, Sacha and Joyce at the launch



Right: Some of the 50 guests at the launch

Urgent Action Needed on Housing People With a Mental Illness

FINDING and keeping housing is a major problem for people with a mental illness. People are often forced to live in short-term or unstable accommodation and, without a place to call home, people have no sense of security or stability upon which to regain their mental health and build their lives.



There's No Place Like Home—There Is No Place has researched the housing needs of people with mental illness in Alice Springs and confirmed that people who experience mental illness are considerably disadvantaged in their efforts to find suitable housing and maintain tenancies, resulting in many being homeless.

One third of the people surveyed for the report live in short-term or unstable accommodation, frequently moving from place to place. Two thirds of the people surveyed are uncertain how long their current arrangements will last. The impact of homelessness for people with a mental illness results in their health getting worse, with more time spent in the mental health unit and possible time in prison through lack of treatment.

In Alice Springs, the housing difficulties for people living with a mental illness are overlaid by the critical shortage of housing currently affecting all sections of the community. While both the Federal and NT Governments allocate resources for social housing and several organisations provide valuable services to support people with

mental illness, the resources available simply do not meet current needs.

With often poor rental histories and a lack of support to obtain housing and maintain tenancies, and the stigma or discrimination associated with mental illness, people frequently find themselves “prioritised out” of whatever accommodation is available. Without appropriate support, tenancies—when they are found—are at risk of failure, perpetuating the cycle of ill-health and homelessness.”

What people want most ...

CEO of the Mental Health Council of Australia, David Crosbie, said in his message of support for MHACA’s Housing Report, “When mental health consumers or their carers are asked what they most want to improve their lives, the most common response is not better access to psychiatrists, more hospital beds or more drug treatments, what they most want is access to stable and secure housing”.

This is also the experience in Alice Springs. People are often forced to live in short-term or unstable accommodation,

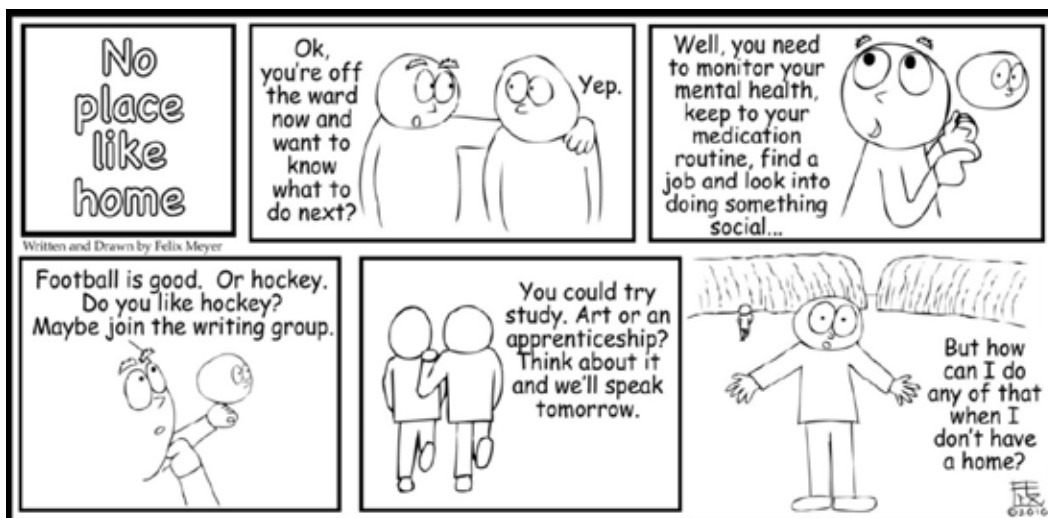
moving frequently between hostels, shelters, caravan parks, camps, staying with friends or relatives, or living on the streets or in the riverbed. Without a place to call home, people have no sense of security or stability upon which to regain their mental health and build their lives. Instead, they face the daily reality of finding shelter.

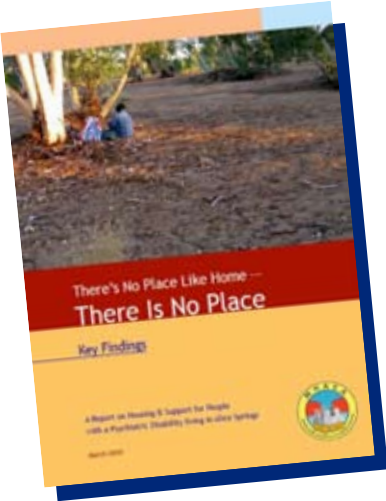
The Report revealed that people with a mental illness “want to live in affordable housing suited to their individual domestic situation as part of the general community, with support as and where needed, to enable them to get on with their lives and live as independently as possible”.

The Report calls on Government to recognise that people with mental illness are a priority group at very high risk of homelessness and put in place a policy framework and systems to address this. It calls for immediate practical action in Alice Springs to establish 24 additional beds, across a range of accommodation types: short-term, crisis, respite and supported accommodation, and long-term housing.

In addition the report calls for 15 individual care packages to assist people to help develop their skills to live independently and for improved support for carers and accommodation services by strengthening the capacity of clinical services to provide timely community-based response, including after hours. ✕

To view an Executive Summary or the full report of *There's No Place Like Home—There Is No Place* visit the MHACA website at www.mhaca.org.au/reports





MHACA Housing Report — Messages of Support from Peak Bodies

NT Mental Health Coalition— Phil Dempster, Program Coordinator

“The Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition applauds the Mental Health Association of Central Australia (MHACA) on the production of their new report, ***There's No Place Like Home—There is No Place***. The findings and recommendations of this report are consistent with the huge evidence base already demonstrated across Australia. However, in looking at the issues from a local level, we also see that vast differences exist in Central Australia and indeed in the whole of the Northern Territory compared to the rest of the country.

This report is not about ‘government bashing’: it is about partnerships—the community partnering with Government to make a difference to people not currently in stable living conditions; it is about providing people with their basic human rights—stable, appropriate and sustainable accommodation options. This alone will alleviate many of the problems facing our emergency services, our often over-taxed hospital system and prison systems. This report goes a long way to providing some of the answers we need to improve this situation throughout the Northern Territory.”

“In the Alice Springs population, the general rate of homelessness is estimated to be more than four times the national average.”

NT Shelter—Toni Vine Bromley, Executive Officer

“NT Shelter welcomes the MHACA Report ***There's No Place Like Home—There is No Place***. This piece of research clearly identifies the housing and support needs of people suffering with a mental illness and their inability to secure adequate accommodation in Alice Springs.

In the Alice Springs population, the general rate of homelessness is estimated to be more than four times the national average. Homeless people are 3–4 times more likely to have a mental illness than people in the general population.

NT Shelter have long advocated the need for people with mental health problems to have access to stable, secure and affordable housing and support relative to their specific needs.

We urge Government to act upon the solutions in the report for addressing the specific accommodation requirements of people with a mental illness in Alice Springs.”

NT Council of Social Service— Jonathon Pilbrow, Central Australian Policy Officer

Spokesperson for the Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS), **Jonathan Pilbrow** stated: “MHACA's Housing Report comes at a time when the over-representation of people with mental illness among those who are homeless is receiving national attention. Some estimates indicate that up to 75% of homeless people have a mental health condition.”

Mental Health Council of Australia —David Crosbie, CEO

“The Mental Health Association of Central Australia is to be commended for its new report ***There's No Place Like Home—There is No Place***. Both the findings and the recommendations are consistent with what evidence across Australia and around the world has already demonstrated.

Homelessness and mental illness are inter-related. Mental illness can lead to homelessness and homelessness can lead to increased mental illness. Access to stable and secure accommodation is one of the most fundamental measures needed to reduce the impact of mental illness on individuals, carers and the community.

When mental health consumers or their carers are asked what they most want to improve their lives, the most common response is not better access to psychiatrists, more hospital beds or more drug treatments, what they most want is access to stable and secure housing.

We all pay a price when we fail to meet the fundamental human need for a safe and secure place to call our own. Sometimes that price is counted in police call outs, court appearances and prison beds. Sometimes it is counted in hospital beds, frequent emergency department visits, or ongoing physical health problems. Sometimes it is simply counted in lost human potential. Either way we all pay the price that is much greater than simply providing appropriate and sustainable accommodation options for people with a mental illness.

Again let me congratulate the Mental Health Association of Central Australia and commend both the author and her subjects for being so generous in sharing their experiences. I hope this report is widely read and its recommendations heeded.”

