



Legislative Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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MAJOR REFORM NEEDED IN MENTAL HEALTH LAWS

A call for comprehensive reform of Tasmanian laws that protect people with mental illness and other disabilities is among key recommendations of a report tabled in State Parliament today.

The report from the Legislative Council Select Committee into Mental Health Legislative Measures, also calls for a review of statewide mental health services and the establishment of a dedicated mental health in-patient facility for children and adolescents.

The Chair of the Committee, Ruth Forrest MLC, said that whilst the prevalence of mental illness is significant, only a small percentage of those who experience a mental illness are subject to the provisions of the current protective legislative framework and this area is complex and at times confusing.

“Many of those who gave evidence to the Committee raised concerns that the current legislative framework did not adequately protect the rights and well-being of those requiring protection, nor did it provide certainty and clarity for police, family members, carers and medical practitioners,” Ms Forrest said.

“While the current legislation may be regarded as adequate, it is far from being ideal and there is no doubt that a generic, capacity-based legislative framework is needed.

“A broader definition of mental illness and the development of a legal test of capacity are important aspects of this reform and should be supported by clear practice guidelines,” she said.

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“It is also imperative that a dedicated in-patient facility for children and young people be established, particularly given the significant demand and high incidence of mental illness experienced by young people and the total absence of an appropriate facility anywhere in the State.”

Ms Forrest said the inquiry was both challenging and disturbing for the members of the Committee who received much of the evidence with great sadness and much compassion for the witnesses and their families.

“The Committee was conscious of the frustrations and anguish experienced by those involved in the many and varied aspects of care and support of people experiencing mental illness,” she said.

“Their stories saddened, challenged and at times disturbed Committee members and have contributed significantly to the content of this report.”

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FURTHER INFORMATION: Ruth Forrest MLC on 0419 879 524