

Mental health report finds system reform still a hope, not a reality

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A landmark report co-authored by researchers from the University's Brain and Mind Research Institute (BMRI) into mental health in Australia has found that despite 30 years of reform, people with a mental illness are still treated like second-class citizens.

The "Obsessive Hope Disorder: Reflections on 30 years of [mental health](#) reform in Australia and visions for the future" [report](#) is a groundbreaking examination of the journey of mental [health reform](#) over the last 30 years, a look at the present state of the system, and a proposal for a better way for the future.

Adjunct Professor John Mendoza, a BMRI researcher and former Chair of the National Advisory Council on Mental Health, instigated the report in 2012.

"Australians have been hearing from their governments for a long time about mental health reform," he said.

"Yet they continue to hear reports of almost daily failures of care - too many people falling through the cracks. They are entitled to know why this is still happening.

"Why are there still hundreds of people in institutions which were supposed to have closed decades ago?"

The report also had significant input from BMRI senior lecturer,

Sebastian Rosenberg and BMRI Executive Director, Professor Ian Hickie.

Professor Hickie said: "What is absolutely clear from the evidence in this report, is that Australia talks a good game when it comes to mental health reform, but in practice what we see repeatedly is inadequate planning, poor implementation and constraints in our system of government.

"We can't afford to sit back and repeat the waste evident in many of the reform initiatives over the past 30 years and obsessively hope that they work. As a nation we can't afford the cost - in personal, social and economic terms - of business as usual.

The report's release marks the 30th anniversary of David Richmond's "Inquiry into Health Services for the Psychiatrically Ill and Developmentally Disabled," which provided a blueprint for mental health reform in 1983.

The 'Cinderella' of [health services](#) was the 1983 description of the then mental health system through the eyes of my report into services in NSW. "Obsessive Hope Disorder" clearly demonstrates the continued relevance of this comment in 2013," David Richmond said.

"This report throws up challenges which urgently require vigorous advocacy and broadly based community and political leadership."

The report's findings and recommendations are informed by research including over 1000 responses to community surveys on experiences with mental health services and reform priorities, a detailed analysis of 32 reports from statutory offices on mental health services across Australia, and detailed analyses of critical issues such as the workforce and research.

"Despite the failures, this report shows that mental health reform is possible and that we can address the problems of the past and plan a better future for mental health," John Mendoza said.

"We strongly believe that "Obsessive Hope Disorder" can be cured. From the evidence and the analysis presented in this report and by addressing governance, quality of care, the workforce, research and funding, Australia can achieve the reform that the community has so long hoped for."

Provided by University of Sydney

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