Dear Minister Butler and Minister Wooldridge

Expert Reference Group on Mental Health Reform

Thank you for your recent letter, received on 3 April 2013.

The Expert Reference Group on Mental Health Reform (the ERG) held its first meeting on 10 April 2013. I was pleased to see that the members of the ERG welcomed the opportunity and challenge to provide independent advice to governments on a small set of aspirational and achievable national targets and indicators that will drive transformational change.

At your invitation, the ERG reviewed and finalised its draft Terms of Reference and I enclose a final copy of these. Members made some changes to make clearer that the ultimate purpose of the ERG’s work in recommending a set of indicators and targets is to improve outcomes for people, to enable the ERG to focus on the whole of life and to utilise members’ expertise and advice in the short timeframe available. The final Terms of Reference, recommended to you by the ERG are:

‘In making recommendations on national, whole of life, outcome based indicators and targets for mental health, the ERG should consider:

- the range of needs of all Australians with mental health issues and their family and supporters - from having a home to employment, education and health supports, to social connections – and how this range should be reflected in national indicators;
- the range of relevant Australian and comparative international mental health performance indicators and targets, and relevant indicators from other sectors and what indicators will be most influential in achieving systemic change to improve people’s lives;
- if the performance against the indicator should be static, increasing or decreasing;
- listing in order of priority indicators for development that currently do not have sufficiently robust or regular data available; and
- the availability of relevant indicators that may be disaggregated by Indigenous status.’

While the ERG notes the Heads of Treasuries (HoTS) Framework it acknowledges that the ERG does not have time or resources to undertake a detailed analysis of the proposed suite of indicators and
targets against the HoTS Framework and hence reference to it has been removed from the Terms of Reference.

I have considered the membership of the ERG and discussed with the members any additional expertise required to support the work of the ERG. I would ask that Mr Jack Heath, CEO SANE Australia, be included as a member. Mr Heath brings extensive experience in the not-for-profit sector which is a crucial component of the mental health field. I have also noted the need to co-opt expertise in other areas, such as through the existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Advisory Group (ATSIMHAG).

Members agreed to make public via the National Mental Health Commission’s website the Terms of Reference, membership and outcomes of ERG meetings. At this stage I envisage holding two further meetings of the ERG – in early June and in July – with out of session work, to ensure we are able to provide advice to the COAG Mental Health Reform Working Group in a timely manner.

The National Mental Health Commission has planned a number of consultations with key groups, including a special workshop of the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum on 6-7 May and a dedicated meeting of the Council on Non-Government Organisations on 21 May to seek broad input for the ERG’s work. Additional consultations will also be undertaken by ERG members with key individuals, organisations and government agencies to ensure broad information gathering to inform the group’s work.

The National Mental Health Commission is in negotiations with the Department of Health and Ageing to agree funding to support the work program and the provision of secretariat support to the ERG.

I look forward to working with the ERG to progress this important task.

Yours sincerely

Allan Fels AO
Chair, National Mental Health Commission
Chair, Expert Reference Group

16 April 2013

Encl. Final Terms of Reference of the Expert Reference Group