



**MEDIA RELEASE**

PA 10/03

29 October 2010

## **Performance Audit Report**

### **Delivery of Mental Health Services to Older Persons**

The ACT Auditor-General, Mrs Tu Pham, has today presented a Performance Audit report titled '**Delivery of Mental Health Services to Older Persons**', to the Speaker for tabling in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The audit examined ACT Health's ability and capacity to deliver mental health services to older persons in the Canberra community (through Mental Health ACT), and the relevant policies, guidelines and processes.

Mental Health ACT is responsible for the provision of a wide range of services for various mental health issues across the whole ACT. The number of older persons requiring mental health services has been growing. ACT Health's Older Persons Mental Health Services has recorded a 400 percent increase in the number of consumers who had occasions of service since 2000-01. Audit acknowledges the complex working environment within which Mental Health ACT staff is delivering services and observed that staff are committed and conducted themselves in a professional manner.

#### **Audit Conclusions and Key Findings**

Mental Health ACT has delivered a complex range of mental health services against a growing ageing population and complex multifaceted mental disorders. There is scope for improvement in various aspects of Mental Health ACT's operations by addressing the following deficiencies:

- The Older Persons Mental Health Services do not have well defined screening guidelines (i.e. entry and exit criteria). Guidelines on the current exemption to the age criteria and issues of ageing are vague.
- There was inadequate communication and engagement with consumers, carers and other external stakeholders in relation to dementia-related illnesses that can be assessed and treated. A strong view was expressed by key community groups that acceptance of consumers with dementia was arbitrary and inconsistent.
- Older Persons Mental Health Services does not have a good feedback mechanism to provide information, when permitted, to referrers about a consumer's status after the consumer was referred to ACT Mental Health Services. Such information is important to referrers, such as the community organisations, for the ongoing care of their consumers.

- Mental Health ACT has not communicated or collaborated effectively with relevant stakeholders to determine the extent of ‘unmet needs’ of older persons with mental health illnesses in the community.
- The timeliness of response by the Older Persons Mental Health Services to demand for services was good, but there was no clear process to monitor cases where the response was delayed, or where needs of at-risk groups were not met.
- Policy and guidelines on suicide prevention, while being comprehensive, were not well implemented. For example, Mental Health ACT did not conduct suicide risk assessments in all relevant cases as required by its policy. In the sample of cases Audit examined, only 52 percent of cases had the required risk assessments done.
- There was no clear strategy to address the impact of *admission blocks* in the Older Persons Mental Health Inpatient Unit on staffing requirements and on other potential consumers.
- The Older Persons Mental Health Services did not consistently conduct the required three-monthly reviews of long term consumers.

### **Recommendations**

The audit made sixteen recommendations to address the issues raised. ACT Health agreed to all the recommendations.

### **Further Information**

For further information, please contact Rod Nicholas, Director, Performance Audits and Corporate Services on 6207 0827. Copies of the report are available from the ACT Auditor-General’s Office (Level 4, 11 Moore Street, Canberra City) and from its website, [www.audit.act.gov.au](http://www.audit.act.gov.au).