



13 August 2021

PUBLIC STATEMENT: COVID-19 in Mental Health Facilities

The recent announcement regarding COVID positive cases at a NSW mental health facility highlights there are some NSW residents who are subject to greater restrictions than those in lockdown areas – people who are detained under the NSW Mental Health Act.

Whilst we acknowledge the multitude of challenges we all face in relation to the spike in COVID cases across NSW and under the current lockdown, we highlight the human rights of those who are often forgotten – the people who are involuntarily held under the NSW Mental Health Act in declared mental health facilities.

NSW Health Minister, Brad Hazzard, addressed reporters at Wednesday’s public COVID announcement, identifying the “balancing act” needed for specialised mental health staff to continue working in mental health facilities despite the COVID positive cases.

We must ensure that COVID designated areas of the hospital system are equipped to care for people experiencing mental health issues. Ideally, this would include infectious diseases personnel as well as clinical staff to support people as they recover, both physically and mentally.

People detained under the NSW Mental Health Act often report being stripped of basic human rights such as the use of mobile phones and being able to connect with their friends and family members during their inpatient stay.

CEO of BEING – Mental Health Consumers, Irene Gallagher, says “People detained against their will, under the NSW Mental Health Act, deserve the same rights as anyone else to receive appropriate treatment in safe environments”.

Particularly in this COVID environment, there is an urgent need for appropriate processes and policies to be put in place to ensure the highest possible standard of care, including for people who are subject to involuntary treatment. This is fundamentally a healthcare rights issue.

BEING – Mental Health Consumers will maintain a strong advocacy position and continue to highlight the needs and basic human rights of our community and for people living with mental health issues.

For further information on BEING – Mental Health Consumers' work and our programs please visit being.org.au or contact Leonie Fraser, Marketing and Communications Manager, on 1300 234 640 or leonie.fraser@being.org.au.