

MEDIA RELEASE

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Public housing rents must not increase

WESTERN Australia's peak body for community mental health, the WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH), together with WA mental health services and carer support organisation, HelpingMinds, call upon the state government to reverse the recently announced changes that will increase rents for 77 percent of public housing tenants, and further disadvantage people with mental illness, their families and carers.

The changes will mean that commonwealth government allowances, previously not counted as assessable income, such as the carers' allowance and pharmaceutical benefits payments, will now be included as income when calculating rents.

WAAMH's President, Alison Xamon, said the allowances soon to be included as assessable income were meant to support people with the additional costs of living associated with having a mental health problem or disability, rather than hinder their ability to afford housing.

"Mental health consumers often have increased health, support, medication and carer costs and increased public housing rents will only add to the financial challenges of managing their circumstances.

"Safe, secure and affordable housing is one of the most important things we can provide to support people with mental illness to recover and lead a positive, contributing life," said Ms Xamon.

Debbie Childs, Chief Executive Officer of HelpingMinds, said that while the state government recognised the important role of carers in supporting people with mental illness in the recently released Mental Health Act 2014, it seemed unfair to then classify carers' allowance as assessable income for public housing tenants.

The state government also recognised that affordable housing for mental health consumers was at crisis point in the recently released WA Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 that called for a system wide, multi-agency strategy to address the housing needs of people with mental illness.

"One hand needs to speak to the other – on one hand they are looking at solutions – on the other they are adding to the poverty experienced by many mental health consumers," said Ms Xamon.

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About WAAMH

The Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) was incorporated in 1966 and is the peak body representing WA's community-managed mental health sector and around 100 organisational and individual members. Our vision is that as a human right, every one of us who experiences mental health issues has the resources and support needed to recover, lead a good life and contribute as active citizens. WAAMH advocates for effective public policy on mental health issues, delivers workforce training and sector development, and promotes positive mental health and wellbeing. In 2016, WAAMH is celebrating 50 years of involvement in the community mental health sector.

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