

Mental Health Policy

Meeting of Legislative Council Panel on Health Services Special Meeting on 22 November 2007

~ Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission ~

Purpose

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is invited to give views on mental health policy in Hong Kong. This paper sets out EOC's view on the subject matter.

Background

2. Latest World Health Organisation estimates of global burden of disease indicate that mental health and behavioural disorders represent five of the top ten leading disease burdens. The economic and social impact of this burden on society is tremendous. Health and social service costs and loss of production due to high unemployment rates among people with mental illness and their families are some of the more obvious and measurable costs. However, mental health is not accorded appropriate priority considering the burden they caused and the facts that affordable and effective treatments exist. To improve the mental health of our population, it is essential that the Government formulates and invests in a coherent and comprehensive strategy.

Mental Health Council Proposal Declined

3. Since 2003, EOC has been advocating for establishment of a Mental Health Council to coordinate policy formulation, programme delivery, research and promotion of mental health in Hong Kong. The proposal was considered by the then Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) and its position was that the Department of Health (DH), the HWFB and the Hospital Authority (HA) worked closely together to provide the necessary services and support for the treatment and rehabilitation for persons with mental illness. It considered the existing system worked effectively and saw no strong need for the establishment of a Mental Health Council.

4. The EOC noted the HWFB's consideration and urged the Government to formulate a more comprehensive strategy on mental health in consultation with users and stakeholders under the Rehabilitation Programme Plan (RPP) Review.

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5. It is noted in the recently released Report of Rehabilitation Programme Plan that the RPP Review Working Group acknowledged the importance and need of adopting a multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach in the provision of medical care and rehabilitation services to the mentally ill. The Working Group suggested the then HWFB (currently Food and Health Bureau) to set up a working group to work in collaboration with stakeholders concerned to develop a sustainable mental health strategy (or policy) for Hong Kong.

EOC's Position

6. The EOC welcomes the suggestion of the Working Group. However, the EOC considers that the pace in formulating a sustainable mental health policy for Hong Kong is too slow, which needs to be speeded up. The EOC would also like to draw support from the obligation introduced by the newly adopted Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which China is one of the first signatoriesⁱ. Under Article 4(3) of the Convention, it is a general obligation of State Parties to:

“In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.”

7. In this connection, while awaiting extension of the Convention to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the EOC urges the Government to involve, as far as possible, users of mental health services directly in the policy formulation process.

Equal Opportunities Commission

16 November 2007

ⁱ Currently, awaiting ratification by the Nation People's Congress.