

August 2021

Hello to the many alcohol and drug (AOD) and mental health families and friends in Tasmania.

I welcome you to the first Mental Health Families and Friends Tasmania (MHFFTas) CEO Communique; a space to share the advocacy activities of MHFFTas with our community. Over the time I have been CEO of MHFFTas, families and friends have asked me how we share their voice with Government and the services and supports they access. I plan to share this Communique with you, once every quarter, to start a conversation about the work we do, across Tasmania, to speak up about your needs.

I would like to start by talking about the term **systemic advocacy**. For those who are new to this concept, systemic advocacy is about speaking up for change that can impact groups of people at the 'systems level' - that is, at the policy, practice and legislation level. When people work together around similar issues, they often have a stronger voice which is more likely to be heard and can lead to reforms that benefit whole communities. The role of a peak body is to bring these voices together, identify concerns and needs and represent them. MHFFTas is funded by the Tasmanian Government to provide systemic advocacy on behalf of AOD and mental health families and friends in Tasmania. We are the peak body for the AOD and mental health family and friend voice across the State. In practice, our systemic advocacy work looks like this:

We talk with family members and friends

[through phone calls, conversations at training and events, peer support groups, emails, submissions and responses to MHFFTas papers and news].

We gather information and record themes

[for example when lots of families and friends talk about the need for more financial support for support people or service gaps they experience.]

We share themes and stories with the public

[through meetings with Government, other peak bodies and service providers, education and training sessions, our communications materials, mental health and AOD representative groups.]

We are able to share your stories because we work hard to build relationships with people who make change. I'd like to share some of the ways we are working with change makers to advocate for families and friends in this Communique.

State Reforms

For the past six years, the State Government has been considering the best way to offer integrated and person-centred mental health and AOD services in Tasmania. We have seen Government reports released in both sectors, each with recommendations about how our services can be improved. You can view each sector's reform agenda here:

- [Reform Agenda for the Alcohol and Drug Sector in Tasmania, 2020](#)
- [Government Response to the Mental Health Integration Taskforce Report and Recommendations, 2019](#)
- [Government Response to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Review and Recommendations, 2020](#)

The reforms are overseen by the Mental Health Reform Program and the Mental Health, AOD Directorate within the Tasmanian Department of Health. These teams have been working hard to get the ball rolling on change in Tasmania and it has been positive to see the time allocated within this context to working with peak bodies to hear the views of the people who will be most affected by the reforms. We are representing you on high level reform steering committees and meeting regularly with program managers, executive teams, and community managed services to make sure we get things right. We are advocating for families and friends to be considered as equal care partners across reforms. You can keep up to date with our success and the progress of each reform program here:

- [Latest News – Tasmanian Mental Health Reform Program](#)
- [AOD Reform Agenda Homepage](#)

Our Family and Friend Representatives (FFRs) have also been having their say on mental health and AOD reform activities. Over the past three months, our FFRs have sat on selection panels for the appointment of new government staff members to support the reforms and represented you on control groups for key reform initiatives (for example, to determine the Operational Service Models for the Safe Haven and Acute Treatment Unit which are part of the Government's Hospital Avoidance Program – find our more [here](#)). If you would like to become a [FFR](#) and have a say too, please get in touch.

Going forward, I would like to introduce you to the collaborative mental health reform work happening between the State and Federal Government and our advocacy in action at a Federal Level via our national body, Mental Health Carers Australia. For now, I wish you well for the months ahead.

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