

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Making Mental Health a Priority in the 2019 NSW election**

Community Industry Group is calling for candidates to prioritise services to support people living with mental health conditions in the upcoming NSW election.

“Too many people are reaching a mental health crisis before they can get access to the services they need in NSW,” said Nicky Sloan, CEO of Community Industry Group. “As excellent as public hospital accident and emergency services are, they are not the most appropriate service for people experiencing a mental health episode.”

Community Industry Group is calling for more investment in community mental health services. Currently NSW allocates only 7% of its health budget to mental health, representing about half of the national average. “We also need investment in Specialist Mental Health Crisis services,” Ms Sloan said. “Instead of relying on Police and Ambulance, these specialist services would be able to respond more effectively, reducing stress and trauma for the person, for their loved ones, and for the general public.”

Furthermore, given the complexity of the mental health system, better information services and clearer referral pathways are required. The adoption of a Stepped Care model, together with sufficient clinical care, rehabilitation services, and ongoing wellness support would reduce strain on the hospital system, and improve outcomes for people with mental health issues.

“Too often we hear that family or friends notice a decline in someone’s mental health, but have nowhere to turn to for help. Often they must reach a crisis, such as experiencing a psychotic episode before they receive help, but this is frightening and distressing for them and their loved ones, and often results in extended and unnecessary residential stays,” Ms Sloan said.

NSW needs community based support services that focus on assisting people to participate in community life, as well as peer support workers who can draw on their own lived experience to provide support and help for people on the road to recovery.

“Too often disadvantage and mental health issues combine to overwhelm individuals,” Ms Sloan said. “People with mental illness are often victims of harrassment and violence, often struggle to maintain healthy relationships, and are more likely to experience homelessness. A robust mental health system will bring about better outcomes for individuals, families, and for the whole of NSW.”

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### **About Community Industry Group**

Community Industry Group (CI Group) is the peak body working for community services and organisations in South East NSW. It supports community organisations, promotes expertise and innovation in community development, fosters industry development and provides advocacy for social justice.

The CI Group represents the non-government community services industry and works closely with numerous organisations which provide support to vulnerable people across the region including:

- social housing providers
- homelessness services
- home and community care services
- people with disability
- individuals and families with multiple layers of social and financial disadvantage
- victims of domestic violence and sexual assault
- youth work programs
- community health services, including mental health and drug/alcohol services
- community legal centre services
- community development and community capacity building.

Visit our 2019 NSW Election virtual forum, available [here](#) for information and resources. We will be collating questions from our stakeholders and sending them to candidates for comment. Responses will be shared on our website.

We will also be updating our 'Promises Calculator', which will record commitments from candidates and parties, which are relevant to community organisations and their clients. This calculator will remain on our website after the election, and enable our elected representatives to 'tick off' their completed commitments.